

Backgrounds

Every story has a beginning, and your background reveals where your character came from, how he or she became an adventurer, and your character's place in the world. Your fighter might have been a courageous knight or a grizzled soldier. Your wizard could have been a sage or a witch. Your rogue might have gotten by as a thief or commanded audiences as a demagogue.

Your background is one of four key decisions you make about your character, providing you with important cues about his or her identity. In addition, your background provides you with several benefits that aid you in your adventures and also gives you a suggested equipment package that goes further to reflect your character's past.

Skills

Each background grants training in three skills. A skill reflects an area of expertise within an associated ability. When you attempt a task or action that involves a skill in which you are trained, you use your skill modifier in place of your ability modifier.

Training: A skill has an underlying ability. Your modifier when making checks using that skill equals 3 + the ability modifier associated with the skill.

If you already have training in a skill and would gain training in that skill again (for example, a skill granted by both your class and background), you instead choose a different skill in which you become trained.

Improving Skills: As you gain levels, you also gain the ability to improve your skills and gain training in new skills. At 2nd level, and at every even-numbered level thereafter, you can increase the bonus granted by one of your skills by 1 (to a maximum of +7).

How Do I Use My Skills?

During play, you describe what your character is doing and, if the Dungeon Master deems it necessary, you make a check using the ability the DM specifies. Since skills point to specific tasks, you simply use your skill modifier in place of the ability modifier when making these checks to perform these tasks. For example, if you describe you would move silently past the orc sentries, the DM might call for a

Dexterity check. In this case, you make a check using your Dexterity modifier. If you have the Stealth skill, however, you use your Stealth modifier in place of your Dexterity modifier since Stealth covers tasks related to hiding and move silently.

As a player, it's up to you to describe clearly the action that you're trying to take. You can incorporate the use of skills in your task description: "Drawing on my knowledge of Forbidden Lore, I study the strange glyph." If the DM calls for a check, you just use that skill, without needing to reference the ability as well. Or, if your DM calls for a check in a situation where you haven't specified a skill, you can offer up the check total with the skill: "I rolled a 16, or a 19 if my Intimidate skill applies." Clear descriptions help your DM realize your intentions and adjudicate the check in a way that both makes sense in the context of a game, and that gives you the chance to take advantage of your character's aptitude.

Traits

Backgrounds also provide you with a trait. A trait is a special ability that describes something you can do, or something you can expect, related to your character's place in the world. Typically, traits are exceptional, and the description of each trait explains how they function in the game.

Equipment Packages

Each background also provides an equipment package. If you take the equipment package, you must also take the equipment package granted by your class. Or you can forgo taking the equipment packages and instead take 150 gp, with which you purchase your starting equipment.

Sample Backgrounds

Most adventurers have one of the following backgrounds.

Artisan

You apprenticed under an artisan until you learned enough to strike out on your own. You have the skills needed to create finished items from raw materials. Additionally, you are well connected to

other artisans in your same field, perhaps as a member of a guild of artisans, and have learned to deal with colleagues and customers alike in good faith.

When you choose this background, choose a profession that is known for its craftsmanship, or roll to determine your particular craft.

1. Blacksmith
2. Bowyer or fletcher
3. Brewer
4. Calligrapher
5. Carpenter
6. Cartographer
7. Cook
8. Goldsmith/Silversmith
9. Jeweler
10. Painter
11. Potter
12. Weaver

Your trait and some of your skills will depend on your particular profession.

Skills: Diplomacy, Local Lore, and Professional Lore.

Trait—Item Crafting: You can craft nonmagical objects related to your craft by expending raw materials equal to one-half of the market price of that item. The object you create can be as plain or ornate as you choose, even replicating down to the smallest detail the look of other similar items that you have seen before. Your DM determines the time taken to craft the object, based on the complexity of the object, and may ask for a check to determine the overall quality of the object you created. (Your Professional Lore skill benefits you on this check.)

From time to time, individuals may seek you out to have you craft such an object for them. As your reputation spreads, more prominent individuals may demand your services.

Suggested Equipment: Tool kit (appropriate to your craft), mirror, autographed or otherwise marked masterwork of well-known artisan (appropriate to your craft), work clothes, 39 gp, and 5sp.

Bounty Hunter

You tracked down and captured fugitives for the bounty placed on their heads. You might have worked on the frontier, where you hunted outlaws, or maybe you sniffed out thieves and other criminals in the city's underworld.

Skills: Spot, Stealth, and Streetwise.

Trait—Bounty Board: When you are in an area of civilization, you can find and take on bounties, allowing you to legally hunt down and capture or kill the subjects of those bounties. Additionally, as a legally recognized bounty hunter, sometimes the authorities will come to you with bounty hunting needs.

When you attempt to locate the subject of your bounty, if you fail to locate that quarry yourself, you always know where to go and from whom to obtain information on that quarry's whereabouts. Usually this comes in the form of contacts you have cultivated on past hunts.

Suggested Equipment: Mask, collection of "Wanted" broadsheets, two sets of manacles, lock of hair from previous or current bounty, common clothing, 45 gp, and 5 sp.

Charlatan

You can talk your way out of almost any situation and know the right things to say to get the information you seek. You're a swindler, and the use of deception to get your way comes to you as naturally as others tell the truth. You think of yourself as a confidence artist; you can pull off short and long cons, and in a pinch, peddle snake oil.

Skills: Bluff, Insight, and Sleight of Hand.

Trait—False Identity: You have a second identity that includes documentation, established acquaintances, and disguises that allow you to assume a second persona. Additionally, you can forge documents and create disguises (typically an Intelligence check is required).

Suggested Equipment: Two sets of clothes (common and noble), a disguise kit, ten stoppered vials filled with colored water, a set of weighted dice, playing cards, a signet ring of an imaginary duke, 29 gp, and 5 sp.

Commoner

You were a member of the commoner social rank, working as a farmer, servant, or as a laborer. While not as glorious as other backgrounds, you find it easy to blend in wherever you go and have a sort of folksy wisdom that can sometimes help you out of a jam.

When you choose this background, choose a profession that is found among the common folk, or roll to determine your particular craft.

1. Farmer
2. Fisher

3. Innkeeper
4. Merchant
5. Messenger
6. Sailor
7. Servant
8. Stable master
9. Wagon master
10. Woodsman

Your trait and some of your skills will depend on your particular profession.

Skills: Animal Handling, Local Lore, and Professional Lore.

Trait—Hearth and Home: You own a home and a small patch of land. Some of your home or land is dedicated to the practice of your profession. Your home and its adornments are consistent with a commoner's lifestyle, and are comfortable but not lavish. Typically, your home and land are located in the same region you chose for your Local Lore skill. Additionally, you have one helper who can run your business in your absence.

Suggested Equipment: Common clothes, iron pot, spade, flask of rotgut, wagon, draft horse with halter and harness, grooming kit for horses, feed (seven days), a kit with tools required to perform in your chosen profession, 14 gp, and 4 sp.

Knight

You have successfully completed your training as a squire and earned yourself the title of knight. Your title carries many responsibilities, and you are expected to behave in a chivalrous manner, protect the innocent, and mete justice across the land. You might be sworn to a noble house or be a wandering knight, questing for some prize or glory.

Skills: Animal Handling, Diplomacy, and Heraldic Lore.

Trait—Knight's Station: When you are in a location where there is nobility or other groups that would recognize your station as a knight, you can expect to receive accommodations and food for free for yourself and your adventuring companions for the duration of your stay.

Suggested Equipment: Lance, token of affection, signet ring, sealing wax, traveler's clothes, 32 gp, and 5 sp.

Noble

You come from a family who currently or at one time had wealth, power, and influence.

Skills: Diplomacy, Heraldic Lore, and Societal Lore.

Trait—Retainers: You are a member of a noble house and have the service of three retainers loyal to your family. These retainers can be squires, attendants, errand boys, messengers, or even a majordomo. Your retainers can perform mundane tasks for you, but they do not fight for you and will leave if they are frequently endangered or abused.

Suggested Equipment: Fine clothing, signet ring, sealing wax, scroll of pedigree, a pocket clockwork that (roughly) measures time, 29 gp, and 5 sp.

Priest

You have pledged your life to serve a god, pantheon of gods, or philosophy. You represent your chosen power in the mortal world, working to advance the power's aims, spread its teachings, and make converts of those you meet.

When you choose this background, select a deity. Your knowledge and experience is drawn from your time as a priest in the service of that god.

Skills: Diplomacy, Insight, and Religious Lore.

Trait—Temple Services: You belong to a specific temple dedicated to your chosen deity. You have a residence there, and you can perform religious ceremonies and offer sermons drawn from the sacred teachings of your faith. While near your temple, you can call upon acolytes and fellow priests for assistance, provided the assistance you ask for is not hazardous.

Additionally, when you are in a location that has a temple, shrine, or other presence of your faith, you can expect to receive free healing, care, and religious services for yourself and your adventuring companions from others aligned with your faith.

Suggested Equipment: Holy symbol, one flask of holy water, ink, ink pen, ten sheets of paper, vestments, 3 gp, 9 sp, and 8 cp.

Sage

You spent many years learning the lore of the world. You have scoured manuscripts, studied scrolls, and listened to the greatest experts on the subjects that interest you. Your efforts have made you a true master in the fields you have studied.

Skills: Choose three from the following—Forbidden Lore, Geographical Lore, Heraldic Lore, Historical Lore, Local Lore, Magical Lore, Natural Lore, Planar Lore, Religious Lore, Societal Lore, Underdark Lore, and Undead Lore.

Trait—Researcher: When you attempt to learn or recall a piece of lore, if you do not know that information, you always know where and from

whom you can obtain that information. Usually, this information comes from a library, scriptorium, university, or a sage or other learned person or creature.

Suggested Equipment: Robe, ten candles, oddity (enigmatic carving, small fossil, code ring, or the like), tome related to lore specialty, ink, ink pen, ten sheets of paper, 12 gp, 8 sp, and 8 cp.

Soldier

You trained and possibly fought in a war. You studied weapons, armors, basic survival techniques, and how to stay alive on the battlefield.

When you choose this background, you work with your DM to determine which military organization you were a part of, how far through its ranks you progressed, and what kind of experiences you had during your military career.

Skills: Intimidate, Spot, and Survival.

Trait—Military Rank: You have a military rank from your career as a soldier (the exact nature of your rank is determined at the time you select this background). Soldiers loyal to your former military organization still recognize your authority and influence, and they will defer to you if they are of a lower rank. You can invoke your rank to exert influence over other soldiers and requisition simple equipment, horses and vehicles for temporary use. You can also usually gain access to friendly military encampments and fortresses where your rank is recognized.

Suggested Equipment: Lucky charm, souvenir of a previous military campaign (weapon taken from enemy, scar, medal, or similar), rank insignia, bone dice, and 40 gp.

Spy

You can learn information that others attempt to keep secret. You collect rumors, whispers, stories, and hard-won evidence. Then you use that knowledge to aid your own endeavors and, when appropriate, to sell to those willing to pay a premium.

Skills: Bluff, Spot, and Stealth.

Trait—Contact: You have a contact that acts as your liaison to a network of other spies. You know how to communicate with your contact over great distances (including through the use of *sending* spells, for quicker communication, if you have access to that spell) and typically can exchange information you have gathered for information you seek from your contact.

Suggested Equipment: Disguise kit, traveler's clothes, small steel mirror, satchel with secret compartment, ink, ink quill, ten sheets of vellum, 6 gp, 9 sp, and 8 cp.

Thief

You made a living by stealing from others. Necessity might have driven you to this work, having no other means to provide for yourself, or you might have been an orphan taken in by a thieves' guild. Whatever your reasons, you learned how to slip into places where others would prefer you not go, neutralizing traps, locks, and sentries with uncanny skill.

Skills: Find and Remove Traps, Open Locks, and Stealth.

Trait—Thief Signs: You can recognize the common signs and secret markings used by thieves. When you are in an area of civilization, you can make contact with members of the local thieves' guild (if any), as well as fences and informants in the criminal underworld. It usually takes you about an hour of searching to make contact with the individual you are seeking out.

Suggested Equipment: Thieves' tools, lampblack, oil can, breeches with secret pocket, small steel mirror, belt pouch, 18 gp, and 4 sp.

Thug

Years of being a street tough as given you an aura of menace. Your look communicates a basic message to those who annoy you: You'd as soon break their knees as receive an apology. Threats and bullying tactics come easy for you. Your demeanor has landed you jobs with less than reputable organizations in the past, where you've provided both protection and muscle.

Skills: Intimidate, Stealth, and Streetwise.

Trait—Bad Reputation: No matter where you go, people are afraid of you due to your connections to the dangerous criminal underworld or your history of violence. When you are in a place of civilization, you can get away with minor criminal offenses, such as refusing to pay for food at the tavern or breaking down doors at a local shop, since most people will not report your activity to the authorities.

Suggested Equipment: Sap (equivalent to a club), tattoo, piercing, half of a set of manacles, street clothes, 28 gp, and 4 sp.

Skill Descriptions

The skills here are some of the most common in the game. Each skill name is followed by the name of the ability that is associated with the skill.

Animal Handling

Charisma

You can use Animal Handling whenever you would care for, feed, and attend animals. You might make checks to teach a natural beast some tricks, calm down a beast, or domesticate a wild animal. Examples of when you would use Animal Handling include driving a team of horses, teaching a dog to guard, or riding a horse. Animal Handling is like Diplomacy in many respects, except that you use it with beasts, where you use Diplomacy with intelligent creatures.

Bluff

Charisma

You can use Bluff whenever you attempt to deceive someone, either verbally or through your actions. This can encompass everything from using ambiguity to mislead others to telling outright lies. You usually use the skill in situations when you are trying to do things such as fast-talk a guard, con a merchant, earn money through gambling, pass off a disguise, dull someone's suspicions with false assurances, or maintain a straight face while telling a blatant lie. This skill is the domain of the liar and the trickster, and it comes into play in situations when you attempt to make what is true seem false, and when you make what is false seem true.

Diplomacy

Charisma

You use Diplomacy whenever you would attempt to influence someone or a group of people with your tact, subtlety, social graces, or good nature. Typically, you use this skill when you are attempting to persuade someone and are acting in good faith; you might use this skill to foster friendships, make cordial requests, or exhibit proper etiquette and decorum. Training in this skill means that you know how to negotiate with and influence others, you have knowledge of the formal rules of conduct (including social expectations and proper forms of address), and you can give the right

impression of yourself. Examples of when you might use Diplomacy include persuading the chamberlain to let you see the king, negotiating peace between warring barbarian tribes, inspiring a crowd of onlookers, or convincing the ogre mages that have captured you and your friends to ransom you back to your allies instead of tearing your limbs off.

Find and Remove Traps

Intelligence

You can use Find and Remove Traps to detect, identify, and then disarm or jam a trap. You can also use this skill when attempting to prevent a trap from triggering, or to disarm a trap entirely. To gain the benefits of this skill, you must possess thieves' tools or other implements meant for disabling traps.

Forbidden Lore

Intelligence

You can use Forbidden Lore to recall information about the occult, the weird, and the forbidden including alien creatures, powerful entities from lesser known planes, and unnatural phenomena. Typically, this applies only to knowledge that could be considered taboo to most academia; this might include knowledge about summoning fiends or opening portals to the Far Realm, though general knowledge about the magic used by demons would still fall under Magical Lore.

Geographical Lore

Intelligence

You can use Geographical Lore to determine if you know something about lands, terrain, navigation, and climate. You can use this lore skill to identify landmarks, determine the traits of the landscape, and find your way safely through hazardous natural areas. Geographical lore typically applies only to aboveground environs.

Heraldic Lore

Intelligence

You can use Heraldic Lore to recall information pertaining to the lineages, heraldry, customs, family trees, mottoes, crests, personality, and etiquette related to royalty and nobility. This skill also can be used when recalling knowledge about the actions

and personal histories of nobility and royalty, including scandals and other notable deeds.

Historical Lore

Intelligence

You can use Historical Lore to determine if you know something about royalty, wars, colonies, migrations, and founding of cities. Historical lore covers a broad swath of topics, mostly relating to the civilizations of the world and the events of ages past. Historical lore usually applies only to the nations and peoples of the past, but can provide the same kind of information as Societal Lore about those fallen civilizations. Additionally, Historical Lore can cover events of historical significance, particularly those that had long-lasting repercussions.

Insight

Wisdom

You use Insight whenever you attempt to determine the true intentions of another person, such as when searching out a lie or predicting their next move. You can use this skill in situations where you believe someone is deceiving you and wish to learn the truth, and using it usually involves gleaning clues from body language, speech habits, and changes in mannerisms. You also make Insight checks to comprehend motives, read between the lines, resolve ambiguities, detect the subtleties of an interaction, and decipher the moods and attitudes of someone with whom you are interacting.

Intimidate

Charisma

You use Intimidate in situations where you attempt to persuade someone through overt threats, hostile actions, and deadly influence. You make Intimidate checks when you try to bully or threaten someone, both with words and with threats of physical violence. Examples of when you would use Intimidate include trying to pry information out of a prisoner, convincing street thugs to back down from a confrontation, or convincing a sneering vizier to reconsider a decision with threats and a broken bottle.

Local Lore

Intelligence

You can use Local Lore to recall information about a city or other small region with which you are familiar. You use this skill when you would answer a question related to folklore, legends, personalities, inhabitants, laws, and traditions within a region you select. When you gain training in this skill, you should choose a region with your DM's assistance. As your skill increases, your DM can allow this skill to apply to checks related to knowledge of other regions. Local Lore differs from Societal Lore in that it covers a smaller region, but also provides more detailed information about the events and individuals of that region.

Magical Lore

Intelligence

You can use Magical Lore to recall knowledge about magic-related lore and magical effects, including spells, magic items, arcane runes, magic symbols, ancient mysteries, and magic traditions. Most often this skill is used in conjunction with attempts to recall knowledge of arcane or divine magic.

Natural Lore

Intelligence

You can use Natural Lore to recall knowledge about the natural world, including naturally occurring plants and animals, the weather, the seasons, and natural cycles. This includes knowledge of terrain, climate, the habits of natural creatures, identifying plants and animals by sight or tracks, and other natural phenomenon.

Open Locks

Dexterity

You use Open Locks whenever you would unlock a mechanical lock using a method other than the lock's key. You use this skill when making checks to pick padlocks, finesse combination locks, or solve puzzle locks. To gain the benefits of this skill, you must possess thieves' tools or another implement meant for opening locks.

Planar Lore

Intelligence

You can use Planar Lore to determine your knowledge of the known planes and their inhabitants. You can use this skill to identify the

traits and histories of various planes, and to gather information about the activities, attitudes, and traits of otherworldly creatures. Planar Lore is much like a combination of Geographical Lore and Societal Lore, but only relating to the planes.

Professional Lore

Intelligence

Your profession makes you an expert in the lore related to your field of professional expertise. You use this skill on any check related to knowledge of professional techniques, information about master artisans in that field, the quality and value of tools and crafted objects, and the history and cultural origins of objects related to your profession.

Religious Lore

Intelligence

You can use Religious Lore to recall knowledge about religions, gods and goddesses, mythic history, ecclesiastical traditions, and holy symbols. You make checks using this skill when attempting to remember information related to divine powers, their domains, their followers, and the histories of their holy orders.

Sleight of Hand

Dexterity

You use Sleight of Hand whenever you attempt an act of legerdemain or manual trickery, such as palming an object, picking a pocket, or planting something on someone else. You use this skill in association with physical deceptions, usually made to conceal something on your person (whether concealing it as you try to hide it, or keeping it out of sight long enough for you to plant it on someone else). You can also use this skill to draw small weapons without alerting anyone that you have done so, such as when palming a knife or sliding darts out of your sleeve.

Societal Lore

Intelligence

You can use Societal Lore to recall information about cultures and societies and to see if you know something about people, customs, laws, and traditions. You can use this skill in situations where you attempt to determine the correct etiquette and customs when interacting with a foreign or esoteric

culture. Societal Lore differs from Local Lore in that Societal Lore typically offers information about cultures other than those in which you were raised.

Spot

Wisdom

You use Spot whenever you make a check to notice clues, detect secret doors, spot imminent danger, listen for sounds behind a closed door, or locate hidden objects. Typically, you use Spot in situations in which your general perceptiveness and awareness would apply; the skill helps you not only avoid surprises and ambushes, but also covers the amount of information you glean from a quick scan of the area around you. You can apply this skill's benefits whenever you attempt to spot a hidden creature (see the "How to Play" document).

Stealth

Dexterity

You use Stealth whenever you make a check to hide, sneak, or perform an act secretly. You gain the benefits of this skill when you make checks to conceal yourself from enemies, slink past guards, slip away without being noticed, or sneak up on someone without being seen or heard. You can apply this skill's benefits whenever you take the Hide action (see the "How to Play" document).

Streetwise

Charisma

You use Streetwise whenever you would attempt to make contacts in a civilized area, find out local gossip, participate in rumormongering, or collect general information from the locals. You also use this skill in situations where you are trying to navigate a city's locales, discover who is powerful or influential within a settlement, identify the attitudes and general disposition of the populace, and figure out where to go to get what you need and which sections of the settlement to avoid.

Survival

Wisdom

You use Survival in situations related to surviving rugged environments away from civilization. You can use this skill to hunt wild game, guide a party safely through frozen wastelands, identify signs that owlbears live nearby, or avoid quicksand and other

natural hazards. This skill's most common uses allow you to get along in the wild while foraging for food, seeking out water, setting up or finding shelter, avoiding the worst natural hazards, and keeping on a steady course when traveling overland. Survival is related to the Nature Lore skill, but where Nature Lore is more about knowledge of flora, fauna, and climate, Survival is used in situations requiring the more practical application of knowledge earned firsthand in the wilderness.

Underdark Lore

Intelligence

You use Underdark Lore to see if you know something about caves, caverns, Underdark flora and fauna, and the peoples living there. Underdark Lore covers many of the same topics as Geographical Lore and Natural Lore, but only in regard to the Underdark.

Undead Lore

Intelligence

You use Undead Lore to see if you know something about undead creatures, including the various kinds of undead, their general abilities, potential vulnerabilities, how many gather in one place, where they are found, and infamous individual undead.