

Creating a Character

Before you can play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, you need to create a character: the persona you play during the game. You record your character's information on a **character sheet**. Your Dungeon Master (DM) might have characters already prepared, or you can create your own.

Creating a character involves a few steps that require you to make important decisions about your character. Before you start, you might find it helpful to think about the kind of character you want to play. You might be a courageous knight, a skulking rogue, a pious cleric, or a studious wizard. Or you might be more interested in an unconventional character, such as a brawny rogue who likes to mix it up in hand-to-hand combat, or a sharpshooter who picks off enemies from afar.

Following these steps in order helps you create the character you want to play.

Step 1: Determine Ability Scores

Much of what your character can do in the game depend on his or her abilities (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma). Each ability has a score, which is a number you record on your character sheet.

Normally, you generate those numbers randomly by rolling dice. Roll four 6-sided dice (the ordinary cube dice found in many games) and total the highest three rolls, writing down that number on a piece of scratch paper. Do this five more times, so that you have six numbers. Later, you will assign these numbers to your character's ability scores (see step 4).

If you would rather not roll the ability scores, you can assign the standard set of scores to your character's abilities: 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8.

Your Dungeon Master might instruct you to generate your character's ability scores by another method.

Optional Rule: Customizing Ability Scores

This method allows building a character with exactly the ability scores you want. Start with an 8 in all six ability scores. Then spend 27 points to improve them. Apply racial and class ability bonuses after spending the points. The cost of raising a score from one number to a higher number is shown below.

Score	Cost
9	1
10	2
11	3
12	4
13	5
14	7
15	9

Step 2: Choose a Race

Every character has a race. The most common playable races in the game are dwarves, elves, halflings, and humans. See the "Races" document for more information. Other races might be available, at your Dungeon Master's discretion.

The race you choose contributes to your character's identity in an important way, by establishing general appearance and natural talents gained from culture and ancestry. Your character's race grants several **traits**, such as adjustments to ability scores, special senses, talent with certain weapons, or access to minor spells. These traits sometimes point toward certain classes (see step 3). For example, the racial traits granted by lightfoot halflings make them exceptional rogues, while high elves tend to be powerful wizards.

Record all the traits granted by your race on your character sheet.

Step 3: Choose a Class

Every character belongs to a class. Class broadly describes what your character does, what special talents he or she possesses, and the tactics he or she is most likely to employ when exploring a dungeon, fighting monsters, or navigating a tense negotiation.

The most common classes include the cleric, the fighter, the rogue, and the wizard. **Clerics** are champions endowed with magic from the gods, **fighters** are tough warriors and weapon specialists, **rogues** are expert in many skills and skullduggery, and **wizards** are masters of arcane magic. See the sections dealing with those classes for more about them. Other classes might be available, at your Dungeon Master's discretion.

Record all the starting character information and features granted by your class on your character sheet.

Optional: Choose a Background

Your character could have a background, a story that describes where he or she came from, his or her original occupation, and the character's place in the D&D world.

Backgrounds are optional, and your DM might not use them in his or her campaign.

The section on each class in the "Classes" document suggests a background, identifying an origin common to members of that class. You can take this background or choose a different one from among those in the "Backgrounds" document. Your DM might offer additional backgrounds beyond the ones included there.

A background grants **skills**, each an area of expertise that can modify certain kinds of checks, and a **trait**, a general benefit. Record these on your character sheet.

Optional: Choose a Specialty

Just as your class tells you what you can do, your specialty tells you how you do it. A specialty further defines your character's preferred combat tactics and investigative

methods, arising from particular studies, inherent talents, or focused training. Specialties are optional, and your DM might not use them in his or her campaign.

The section on each class in the "Classes" document suggests a specialty, identifying common tactics used by members of that class. You can take this specialty or choose a different one from among those in the "Specialties" document. Your DM might offer additional specialties beyond the ones included there.

A specialty grants a **feat**, a special ability, at 1st level and additional feats at higher levels. Record these on your character sheet.

Step 4: Assign Ability Scores

Now that you have decided on your character's race and class, you have a good idea where to put the best ability scores. For example, if you created a fighter, you probably want Strength to be your highest score, and if you chose high elf as your race, you get a boost to Intelligence and are probably well suited to the wizard class.

Go back to the scratch paper where you jotted down the six numbers you came up with during step 1. Write each number beside one of your character's six abilities to assign scores for Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma.

Afterward, remember to make any changes to ability scores as a result of race and class adjustments. After adjustments, a score can be no higher than 20.

This is a good time to work out your **ability score modifiers**. You can find this information in the table in the "Ability Modifiers" section of the "How to Play" document. Write down the modifier beside each of your scores, inside the brackets printed on your character sheet.

Step 5: Figure Out Combat Numbers

It's a fact of the adventuring life that characters get into fights with monsters and other hostile beings, so you'll need to know some important numbers for combat. Your character sheet has a number of entries for you to record combat numbers: hit points (hp), Hit Dice (HD), Armor Class (AC), initiative modifier, and attack bonuses. You can find more information about these numbers in the "Combat" section of the "How to Play" document.

Calculate hit points (hp). Hit points define how tough your character is in combat. The section on your character class in the "Classes" document describes how to calculate this number, which is your hit point maximum. As you increase in level, this maximum increases too.

Follow the instructions in your class, and record your character's hit points.

Note Hit Dice (HD). A character who rests can use Hit Dice to recover hit points. A character gets one Hit Die per level. The die's type is determined by class (and sometimes other features). Record the number and type of Hit Dice.

Determine Armor Class (AC). Your character's armor, shield, Dexterity modifier, and other features contribute to Armor Class, which represents how hard your character is to hit in battle. If you choose not to wear armor, your AC equals 10 + your Dexterity modifier. Otherwise, calculate your AC using the numbers given for the armor or shield in the "Equipment" document, and record total.

Determine initiative modifier. Characters act in order in combat according to their initiative. Your character's initiative modifier equals your Dexterity modifier plus any modifiers from class, race, or other features. Once you have worked out your initiative modifier, note it on your character sheet.

Calculate attack modifiers. A character can make two kinds of attacks: melee (hand-to-hand combat) and ranged (shooting or throwing things from a distance). Your melee

attack modifier is your Strength modifier plus bonuses or penalties from other sources. Your ranged attack modifier is your Dexterity modifier plus bonuses or penalties from other sources. (Feats or other character features might let you use a different ability score for either sort of attack.) Write down your attack modifiers, using the weapons your character wields, on your character sheet.

Some characters can cast spells. The class description states what ability, such as Intelligence or Wisdom, that your character uses for magical attacks. If you cast a spell that instructs you to make an attack, you normally use your **magical ability modifier** instead of Strength or Dexterity. Write down this number on your character sheet. Some spells instead require the target to make a **saving throw**; your character class description explains how to calculate this number. Record it on your character sheet.

Your character class might provide a bonus to attack rolls with weapons or with spells. Take a look at the class table in your character's class description. If it includes a "Weapon Attack" column, add the listed number to your attack modifier with weapons; if it includes a "Magic Attack" column, add that number to your attack modifier with spells.

Step 6: Add Finishing Touches

With your race, class, and abilities decided (along with background and specialty, if applicable), you're just about done. The rest of your character sheet is where you write down the little details that help bring your character to life. Other than equipment, all of these choices are optional, but the more time you spend thinking about what makes your character unique, the richer your roleplaying experience can be.

Choose Equipment

Your background and class both suggest packages of starting equipment, including weapons, armor, and other adventuring gear.

You can choose this equipment to get started quickly.

Alternatively, you can purchase your starting equipment. You have 150 gold pieces (gp) to spend. See the “Equipment” document for details. Once you have decided on your character’s starting equipment, record these items on your character sheet.

Describe Your Character

Here’s where you fill in the physical and personality details about your character. Spend a few minutes thinking about what he or she looks like and how he or she behaves in general terms. It’s a good idea to take into account your character’s ability scores and race when making these decisions.

Pick a name. You should come up with a suitable name for your character. Your character’s race description includes name suggestions for members of that race.

Decide on alignment. A character’s alignment broadly describes his or her attitude toward the world and other people. See the “Alignment” sidebar; in general, evil alignments are appropriate only for villains, not players’ characters. Once you decide on an alignment, note it on your character sheet.

Alignment

A typical creature in the worlds of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS has an alignment, which broadly describes its moral and personal attitudes. Alignment is a combination of two factors: one identifies morality (good, evil, or neutral), and the other describes attitudes toward society and order (lawful, chaotic, or neutral). Thus, nine distinct alignments define all the possible combinations.

Each alignment description depicts a typical character of that alignment. Individuals vary from this norm, and a given character might act more or less in accord with his or her alignment from day to day. You should use these descriptions as guidelines, not as scripts.

Although evil adventurers exist, they tend to cause problems in groups with others who don’t share their interests and objectives.

Generally, the evil alignments are for villains and monsters. The neutral alignment—sometimes called true neutral— is possible for player characters, but pulling it off is difficult.

Lawful Good (LG): You can be counted on to do the right thing, as expected by society.

Neutral Good (NG): You do the best you can.

Chaotic Good (CG): You act as your conscience directs, with little regard for what others expect.

Lawful Neutral (LN): You act in accordance with law, tradition, or personal codes.

Neutral (N): You seek to maintain the balance between law and chaos, or good and evil.

Chaotic Neutral (CN): You follow your whims.

Lawful Evil (LE): You methodically take what you want, within the limits of your code of conduct.

Neutral Evil (NE): You do whatever you can get away with.

Chaotic Evil (CE): You act as directed by your greed, hatred, and bloodlust.

Unaligned (U): This category describes creatures that are motivated purely by instinct.

Record physical traits. If you wish, you may set your character’s height and weight, considering the information provided in the race description, as well as hair, eye, and skin color, and age if desired. You might want to give your character a distinctive physical characteristic, such as a scar, a limp, or a tattoo. Note these details on your character sheet.

Think about goals and motivations. A backstory, even if it’s brief, can help guide you when roleplaying your character. Background and specialty are good starting points for thinking about your character’s goals, taking into account upbringing, homeland, life-changing events, training, and the like. You might also want to discuss your character’s goals and motivations with your DM; these details are great for helping craft adventures that get the players involved.

Describe your personality. Some notes about your character’s personality can breathe life into your roleplaying. How does your character respond to stress, danger, or

moral crises? Perhaps he or she has an unusual behavioral or personality quirk, such as a nervous tic, a lisp, or a raspy voice.

Step 7: Play!

Once you create your character, you're ready to start playing. Each character plays a role within a **party**, a group of adventurers working together for a common purpose. Teamwork and cooperation greatly improve your party's chances to survive the many dangers you face in the worlds of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Talk to your fellow players and your DM to decide whether your characters know one another, how they met, and what sorts of quests the group might undertake.

The Future: Advancement

As your character adventures and overcomes challenges, he or she gains experience,

represented by experience points (XP). A character who reaches a specified experience point total advances in capability. This is called gaining a level.

When a character gains a level, his or her class might grant additional abilities, as described in the "Classes" document. The character's specialty might grant new feats. Additionally, at certain levels, you choose two of your character's ability scores to increase by 1 each, abiding by the rule that a character's ability score cannot go above 20.

The Character Advancement table summarizes advancement through the first 10 levels, not taking class into account. The table notes how many experience points are required to reach each level. Consult the information on your character's class to see what other improvements are granted for gaining a level.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

XP	Level	Benefit
0	1	Background, feat
160	2	Skill bonus
640	3	Feat
1,480	4	Skill bonus, +1 to two ability scores
3,400	5	
6,520	6	Skill bonus, feat
10,600	7	
18,040	8	Skill bonus, +1 to two ability scores
28,120	9	Feat
41,320	10	Skill bonus