**A Beginner’s Guide To D&D’s Common Races**

*New to D&D? Intimidated by all the stats, rolls, and roles you have to juggle? Our new* [***Alpha***](http://projectalpha.com/) *show* [***Starter Kit***](http://geekandsundry.com/shows/starter-kit) *can help with that. Its mission is to help new roleplayers get adventuring in the world of Dungeons and Dragons with expert guidance to equip you for your journey.*

We’ve previously covered some good tips and statistic priorities for starting [**every class in *D&D***](http://geekandsundry.com/new-to-dd-heres-how-to-start-every-type-of-character-class/)**,** but we haven’t covered one of the the most important decision you’ll make in the game; what race you choose. A race in *D&D* covers a whole host of things and doesn’t only increase your stats (even though that last part is really nice). The race you play influences how you interact with the world around, your outlook and demeanor, and even how the world treats you.

This isn’t to say that you can’t break the racial mold and play a character the way you want: one of my most fun characters was a half-orc paladin who resented his orcish lineage and sought and struggled with doing the right thing. Despite my character being the only Lawful Good character in the party, being a half-orc subjected him to the prejudices and superstitions of townsfolk who equate orcs with trouble. Regardless of the race you choose, make sure you read through the whole section in *The Player’s Handbook*(a few pages, tops) for all the interesting insights beyond the stat and combat benefits to help you get a handle on the outlook of your chosen race.

This guide will help introduce you to the common races of D&D (read: the ones you don’t need your DM’s permission to play).

**DWARF**

Dwarves are short, stout and as immovable as the Earth they mine. Dwarven craftsmanship is renowned throughout the land and the sight of Dwarves throughout the world of *D&D* is not uncommon (as always, check with your DM. Some regions may be so remote that they’ve never seen Dwarves before and might react with awe or hostility.) They are slow to trust, due to their steadfast nature and long lives.

When selecting Dwarf as a race, you get a host of abilities from darkvision (growing up under the Earth and all) to proficiency with some of the most common Dwarf weapons (pretty much just axes and hammers, they’re kind of predictable). You also gain +2 to your Constitution score. This bonus to your Constitution means that Dwarves are a great choice for any of the fighting classes; Barbarian, Paladin, and Fighter. You must also select a subrace representing the type of Dwarf community you hail from and this confers both an additional ability score increase, as well as an additional ability. Mountain Dwarves gain strength which further encourages a physical combat character, while Hill Dwarves gain Wisdom, making Cleric a good choice as well.

Because these bonuses don’t strongly improve spellcasting attributes (Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma), Dwarves aren’t naturally gifted in this area and as a beginner player, you should consider selecting a different race if your heart is set on lighting the world on fire with your mind.

**ELF**

Elves are…well…elves. There is very little difference in the depiction of elves in D&D and those throughout popular culture. Extremely long-lived, tall, slender and elegant. Elves can be seen as capricious and tend to value beauty and aesthetics, as much as skill. Like the Dwarves, Elves are quite common throughout *D&D* and the sight of one would not be alarming (except for the Drow or Dark Elves). Elves tend to favour diplomacy over reckless combat but this is an opinion that is formed with experience. Young elves (those under 100) may be more temperamental than their elders, but don’t expect an elf to behave like a human.

When selecting Elf as a race, you get a host of abilities from Keen Senses (proficiency in Perception) to Trance (elves don’t need to sleep the way the other mortal races do). You also gain +2 to your Dexterity score, making Elves a great choice for those sneaky Dexterity classes; Rogue, Ranger, and Monk. Like the Dwarf, you MUST select one of the three available subraces. Each of the Elven subraces is dramatically different in their outlook and attitudes from each other. They each increase a statistic score in some fashion, as well as come with a host of new abilities. High Elves increase their intelligence and as a result, make a great choice for Wizards. Wood Elves increase their Wisdom making them strong Druids and some of the best Rangers. Drow increases their Charisma and are a good choice for Warlocks or Sorcerers.

The variation in elves make them excel at almost anything but you might want to look elsewhere for your Barbarian. The idea of an elf flying into an uncontrollable Rage is unconventional, to say the least. Not to mention that elf bonuses favour ranged, sneaky, or magical combat and not taking hits to their oh-so-pretty face.

**A note on Drow:** Drow are one of these subraces and are incredibly uncommon (outside the Underdark) so make sure you check with your DM before selecting it. Drow have a much earned dark reputation with only one Drow being renowned through the land as a hero. Expect open hostility and fear if you take this approach.

**HALFLING**

Halflings are small, even smaller than dwarves. They are naturally cheerful and curious, often blending into the communities of humans, dwarves, and elves. Unlike elves and dwarves, a halfling is likely to be seen as commonplace in even the most remote and isolated regions of the world. Obviously, there are always exceptions but a cheerful race of 3-feet tall halflings isn’t really seen as a threat…anywhere.

When selecting Halfling as a race you gain the incredibly useful ability “Lucky” (seriously, it’s one of the best abilities in the game), a few other abilities, and a +2 to your Dexterity score. The bonus to Dexterity means Halflings lend themselves to the same classes as Elves (Rogue, Ranger, and Monk) but their outlook and general cheery nature means the roleplaying elements of a halfling are very different. The Halfling subraces increase an ability score, as well as grant an additional ability. Lightfoot Halflings increase their Charisma and gain the Naturally Stealthy ability, making them some of the best [Rogues](http://geekandsundry.com/the-complete-beginners-guide-to-starting-a-rogue-in-dd/) in the game. Stout Halflings gain an increase in Constitution and gain resilience against poison.

Without bonuses to strength, and being only 3 feet tall and weighing 40 pounds, Halflings aren’t the natural choice for heavy armor wearing melee combatants as a whole (most blacksmiths generally won’t stock child-sized full plate anyways.)

**HUMAN**

While it may seem like playing a human is easy (since you are one), you need to remember that humans are as diverse in our world as they are in universe of *D&D.*While there are remote cities or strongholds belonging to other races where the sight of humans may be unusual (and result in some impolite staring), being a human in *D&D* is almost a free pass to travel where you will without raising suspicion or getting sideways looks (except the Underdark. Pro tip: do not travel to the Underdark.)

Unlike other races, selecting Human does not confer a large number of bonuses, but rather more across-the-board benefits. You can choose one additional language (other than Common) and receive a +1 to ALL of your statistics. Humans also do not have any subraces as the diversity of humanity is very much baked in. For those of you who are completely new to roleplaying and aren’t comfortable with the other options, starting a human character is a fantastic way to get your feet wet. It’s easier to roleplay a human, [**particularly a version of yourself**](http://geekandsundry.com/rpg-character-building-tips-for-beginners/), so you can also juggle the other aspects of gameplay without worrying too much about how to react in-character in a way true to your character’s race. Generally speaking, your personal values can easily be the values of your human character.