# New RPG Players: Everything You Need To Know About Character Building

Getting into RPGs can be overwhelming. Here are some articles that will keep neophytes to RPGing from feeling like they’ve been dumped into the deep end. Creating playable characters is extremely important for new gamers as a character is the portal by which they experience the world in which they’ve stepped in.

* [**RPG Character Tips For Beginners**](http://geekandsundry.com/rpg-character-building-tips-for-beginners/): The most basic advice for the most green RPG player is as simple as playing a slightly more fantastic version of yourself. While it may feel somewhat vanilla, for a first-time player still grasping the basic mechanics of the game and having to wrestle with proficiencies, modifiers and spellslots, keeping it simple means getting to the roleplaying elements with a character you know quite well.
* [**How To Build An Amazing Character For Your Tabletop RPGs**](http://geekandsundry.com/how-to-build-an-amazing-character-for-your-tabletop-rpgs/): Once you’ve got a firmer grasp on the mechanics of a game, building a character from a nuts-and-bolts in terms of rulebook stats and choices is the next level up. Not only will you learn how to read stats and understand what they mean, but you’ll also get a firmer grasp on the lore of the world you’re playing in and how your character fits into it.
* [**5 Steps To Building RPG Characters with Personality**](http://geekandsundry.com/5-steps-to-building-rpg-characters-with-personality/)and its sequel [**5 More Master Tips to Infuse your RPG Character With Personality**](http://geekandsundry.com/5-more-master-tips-to-infuse-your-rpg-characters-with-personality/): These articles give you perfect step-by-step guidance on fleshing your characters from the inside out, letting you both have a clear understanding of what makes your character tick and why. From having secrets and flaws to leaving some room for mystery and exploration within your character, these angles of exploration are the perfect advice to top off charcter-building advice for any player.

# RPG Character Building Tips for Beginners

If you’ve never played a tabletop RPG, building your character can seem as easy as customizing what your Commander Shepard looks like. But building a character that’s both intuitive and enjoyable to play is much more challenging than it seems.

It’s one thing to pick a character class and race – it may affect character stats, but those elements are window dressing to who the character ultimately is.

The fact of the matter is you are tasked with creating and fleshing out a character whose backstory drives their motivations which colour every decision they make. The most interesting and memorable moments in any roleplaying campaign or module are not the times when you roll natural 20s on your checks (though it feels pretty good) but rather in moments when you are truly roleplaying your character. It’s in the interactions of your character with your companions, the environment and trying situations that makes playing an RPG different than playing Yahtzee.

Because of that, having a solid grasp on your character, their motivations and their decision making processes will help keep your character feeling consistent and genuine. And if you’re new to roleplaying, keeping track of a complicated backstory and unintuitive alignment can be especially jarring and difficult. It can detract from the immersive enjoyment.

So here’s a few tips you can use when creating your first RPG characters, or helping your pals out in creating theirs.

**Tip 1: Be yourself.**

Playing yourself in a fictional universe is a lot of fun. How often do you get a chance to be a stronger, faster, more powerful version of yourself?  While you don’t have to literally play yourself in a brand new world, playing a character that is similar to you, with a world-comparable background and a lawful good/neutral good alignment (let’s face it, you’re probably good if you think murder is bad) can give you a chance to wade into the game slowly and focus on getting a handle on the game’s mechanics instead of focusing on juggling complicated elements. It gives you a chance to get those roleplaying synapses built and firing.

Codex is really just Cyd with the confidence and magic powers.

**Tip 2: Be your evil twin.**

Let’s say you’re bored with being good and you know there’s a mischievous version of yourself that wants to get out. Creating an evil version of you let’s you play with something that feels different and new, but also doesn’t complicate the experience of roleplaying with juggling unfamiliar character elements since you get to listen to the devil on your left shoulder instead of the angel on your right.

**Tip 3: Play a familiar fictional character.**

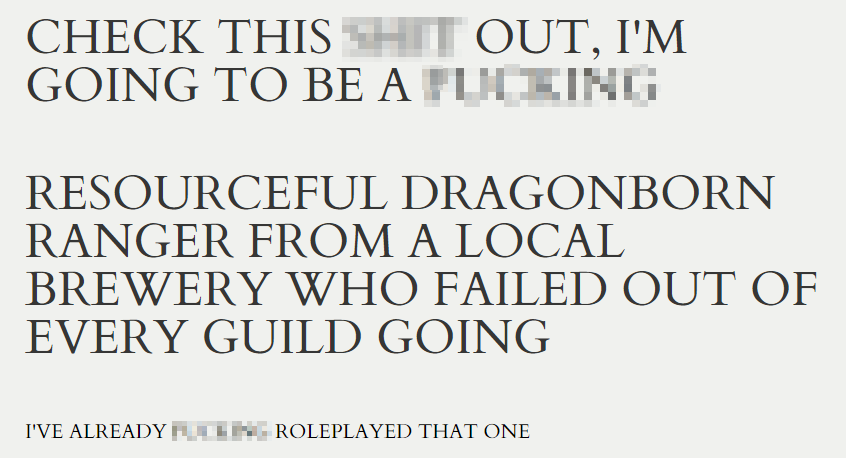
You can also try playing a character that is familiar to you without playing yourself. It’s easy to access an interesting archetype from your favourite comic, book, TV show, or movie.  Need a powerful female wizard? Try Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s Willow. Need a strong but silent-type forest ranger? Think about what Chewbacca would do. And let’s face it: it’s kinda fun to think about how you would play Robocop in a fantasy system (of course, as a paladin).

**Tip 4: Talk to your DM/GM (and not just at character creation)**

I’ve you’re lucky enough to have an experienced DM, you’ve got a an incredible support resource. The best DMs have a vested interest in providing an fun gaming experience and no matter where you are in a campaign, they can help develop your character, finding and developing compelling character hooks to make a stale character suddenly feel vibrant and interesting.

**Tip 5: Grab a catchy and easy to remember archetype and hook.**

While juggling stats, remembering normal social norms in a foreign universe and keeping track of what all your equipment does can be a handful. Formulate a single sentence that describes your character, where they come from and what life event has shaped them.  When you’re forced to make a decision, repeating your character’s elevator pitch will help clarify what kind of decisions they make in that moment.



A great example of this is [*Who the $#@! is my D&D Character?*](http://www.whothefuckismydndcharacter.com/) *(warning: foul language).* This catchy random generator creates memorable characters whose background and motivations are crystal clear.

There’s so much to making a character, but after all is said and done, roleplaying is about being able to slide into a character of your creation, seeing the world through their eyes and acting as them. Slipping in and out of this character  (in for the roleplaying moments and out for the times you need to calculate whether or not your opposed check is a pass or fail) is made far easier if you have less character baggage. And it will make first-time roleplaying experiences more fun.

# How to Build an Amazing Character for Your Tabletop RPGs

So. You’ve decided you want to play [Dungeons & Dragons](http://www.geekandsundry.com/tag/dungeons-and-dragons/). You’ve found a group and have scheduled time next week to start kicking some goblin butt, but there’s one problem. You don’t have a character yet. If you’re getting overwhelmed trying to decide if you should play a half-orc warrior with daddy issues or a gnome rogue with a soft spot for butterflies, never fear! Geek & Sundry is here to walk you through the steps of building your perfect character! Because a role-playing game (RPG) isn’t really until you’ve got a killer backstory.

**Step 1: Determining Your Stats**

Stats determine a lot of what you can do in a game. The most important stats are your Ability Scores. These are Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. There are 3 ways to determine what your ability scores will be: rolling for stats, a standard spread, or point cost. Which method you use will be determined by your GM.

Rolling for stats is very simple. Rolling a d20, you get 6 numbers that you will either assign to your abilities in order or based on your preference. This method can yield some very high or very low starting stats. Alternatively, and perhaps more popularly, you can roll 4 d6, dropping the lowest number for a stat. This can yield stats between 3 and 18.

The standard spread is 6 predetermined numbers (15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8) which you then assign to the ability. It is one of the quickest ways to have a new player figure out their ability scores.

Finally, there is the point cost system. In this system, you have 27 points to spend on scores for all 6 abilities. The highest score you can have is 15 and the lowest is 8. So, you can have an average spread (13, 13, 13, 12, 12, 12), or a wide spread (15, 15, 15, 8, 8, 8), and anything in between.

Normally, stats like ability scores won’t be determined until after you’ve at least decided on a race and class, but it’s important to understand them before diving in as your stats will determine what you can do in a game.

**Step 2: Choosing a Race**

There are many different races in the universe of tabletop RPGs, ranging from the Scanlan-esque gnomes to the Grog goliaths. In DnD 5e there are dwarves, elves, halflings, humans, dragonborn, gnomes, half-elves, half-orcs, and tieflings mentioned in the Player’s Handbook.

Each race has special characteristics. Dwarves are resilient creatures who dislike boats and often desire treasure. Elves are graceful beings with long lives that can be relentless in the pursuit of their goals. Halflings are small, cheerful humanoids that can blend into a crowd. Humans are often dismissed as boring, but are actually the most adaptable of the races (and get some nice stat bonuses). Dragonborn are the proud descendents of dragons. Gnomes are small, but embrace life to the fullest. Half-elves are also half-human, but belong to neither world. Half-orcs are strong, enjoy eating and drinking, but also tend to be short-tempered. Tieflings are the descendents of humans that have made pacts with Asmodeus—overlord of the Nine Hells—and are often mistrusted by the other races due to their heritage.

If you still aren’t sure which race you should play, try starting with step 3 before coming back to step 2.

**Step 3: Choose a Class**

There are 12 classes in DnD 5e. Your character’s class is your character’s calling: it is what they were born to do, not just what they do to get by.

Barbarians are fierce warriors who like to rage. Bards are musical magicians. Clerics use magic to serve a higher power. Druids wield the powers of nature. Fighters are masters of combat. Monks are masters of martial arts. Paladins are holy warriors. Rangers combine nature magic and martial knowledge. Rogues are masters of stealth and trickery. Sorcerers draw their magic from a bloodline or gift. Warlocks were granted magic through a bargain with an extraplanar entity. Wizards are magical scholars.

Choose the character class that is the most appealing to you. Once you’ve got that down and have also chosen your race, you can move on to Step 4!

**Step 4: Personality and Background**

The character’s background determines where they come from, their personality traits, ideals, bonds, flaws, and additional equipment and proficiencies. Character backgrounds include Acolyte, Charlatan, Criminal, Entertainer, Folk Hero, Guild Artisan, Hermit, Noble, Outlander, Sage, Sailor, Soldier, and Urchin. It’s important you research each one before you decide what you want to do.

These backgrounds can be personalized to fit the story you have in mind for your character. Perhaps you want to play a lawful evil human rogue who has spent time at sea. A sailor in itself wouldn’t be the perfect background, but a pirate would fit nicely. Ultimately, you can figure out the story of your character first and then see what background best fits that narrative.

**Step 5: Multiclassing and Homebrews**

Multiclassing means that your character gains proficiencies in more than one class. For example, if your druid is about to become a 6th level character, you can choose to keep them at a level 5 druid and add another class at a level 1. So, your druid could become a level 5 druid, level 1 ranger. This can be done starting at level 2 (if your GM allows it).

If you’re still not satisfied with the character options and want something truly unique, talk to your GM about a homebrew. Grog’s Goliath and Percy’s Gunslinger were both homebrew adaptations when the [Critical Role](http://www.geekandsundry.com/tag/critical-role/) crew switched to DnD 5e from Pathfinder.

**Step 6: Free Resources**

If you are trying out tabletop RPGs for the first time—but aren’t so sure you want to fully commit yet—there are free resources out there so you don’t have to buy a player’s handbook you may never use again. Go [here](https://dnd.wizards.com/products/tabletop-games/trpg-resources) for free resources and the basic rules to help you get started. These PDFs do not contain all the information in the player’s handbook, but they are useful for new players trying to figure out if they like DnD.

Similar resources exist online for other tabletop RPGs so it is possible to build a character and start playing almost any tabletop RPG without spending money first. Take your time, try things out, and don’t be afraid to change it up if it’s not working for you. The point is to have fun so make your character one you want to play!

# 5 Steps to Imbue Your RPG Characters With Personality To Spare

I have a confession to make: I used to hate Dungeons & Dragons.

I played twice during my formative teen years and found it to be incredibly dull. My character was a fighter named Micki M. Annoyus who had a big sword and that was about it. She wasn’t a character. She was a fighter with a big sword. Micki had no story and no personality. I didn’t care what happened to her. Then in college, I heard about my friends’ D&D campaign based on the anime [Slayers](http://geekandsundry.com/anime-recommendations-for-fantasy-lovers/)–which I also hated–but decided to give it a try. I created a barbarian gourmet chef named Haruka who was ridiculous and super fun. Following that game, the characters I created were way more interesting because I built them from the inside out. I knew who they were as people, which allowed me to get in their heads and really act as they would.

Below are my five tips for creating roleplay characters with depth and personality to enrich your RPG experiences.

**The Big Question: Why?**

Image credit: [Joma Cueto](http://forgingmeanings.tumblr.com/post/127220908040/early-days-the-twins-vex-and-vax-feat-trinket)

“Why?” is the most important question behind every good character and plot line. Why does your character need to go on this journey? Why do you want to explore this dungeon even though you know it’s dangerous? When you can understand your character’s “Whys?” then you will have a much deeper understanding of who they are. Why leads to motivations. Motivations lead to actions. It actually becomes easier to make decisions and say what the character would say when you understand why they would do or say those things.

Sometimes the best thing to do is to write stories about things that have happened in the character’s past because so many of our personality traits come from experiences. Look at [Vax’ildan and Vex’ahlia](http://geekandsundry.com/critical-roles-liam-obrien-talks-his-love-of-dungeons-dragons/) from Critical Role. When Liam and Laura knew their campaign was going to continue, they sat down together and hashed out the twins’ backstory. Where were they from? What did they encounter as half-elves? Laura even has a huge story about how she and Trinket became a pair. By doing this, they created the unbreakable bond that you see play out on screen.

**Secrets and Flaws**

Image credit: Sue Magoo

Secrets and flaws are a huge part of what makes your character interesting. Ever play with that one dude who always has to be great at everything? He’s the annoying one you quickly realize will make the game less fun. Imperfections make your character more real. What do they fear and why are they afraid of it? Perhaps they have an addiction, or they’re downright obsessed with something that is distracting the party from their quest. Flaws allow the other players to see deeper, and sometimes darker, sides to your character.

Secrets create ulterior motives. Is there something about your character, or something in their past, that could destroy your party if it got out? Secrets create mystery and give other players reasons to be interested in discovering what your character is all about.

Bishop is a private investigator in my [Edge of the Empire](http://geekandsundry.com/create-your-own-star-wars-saga-with-fantasy-flights-tabletop-roleplaying-games/) game. She’s usually pretty badass, but she’s also claustrophobic. Why? (There’s that all-important “why”) Because she spent an extended period of time in solitary confinement. This flaw makes her nervous and can even lead to panic attacks. The first time she was stuck in the back of a truck, the group got to see this vulnerability. It made her more than a one-dimensional caricature. Of course, the other players don’t know yet that she spent time in prison, and even if they find out, the reason why is still an intriguing secret.

**Inspiration is everywhere**

Image credit: [bibka9770](http://bibka9970.deviantart.com/art/Elf-witch-425100392)

Literally, it’s everywhere. It’s in books, comics, movies, real life, and everywhere in between. It’s perfectly okay to start with a concept based on another character and then develop them into their own unique persona.

Here are three simple questions to help you start fleshing them out:

1. What is their zodiac sign?
2. Which of the 7 deadly sins represents them best?
3. What song would be playing in the background when they first appear?

One time, I even found inspiration in an episode of Toddlers and Tiaras. (Don’t judge me. I’m dead serious.) Unmei was my prim and proper sorceress in a D&D 3.5 game. She was wealthy and beautiful, but also a nasty bully. Originally, the “parents gave me everything I wanted except love” motive worked, but something felt flat about it. Then I saw an episode of Toddlers and Tiaras where this adorable 3 year-old said, “If I win, then they’ll love me.” It was sad, but inspiring at the same time. I changed Unmei’s background so that her father ignored her, but her mother pushed her to be competitive to the point where she became neurotic about always being perfect and shunning those who would make her less perfect, hence becoming a bully.

**Build Stats Around the Concept**

What is your character’s purpose, and what are the skills that compliment that purpose? Obviously that’s where you should start your skill point allocations. But what other miscellaneous skills might your character have that may not necessarily relate to the plot? More so, should your character be missing any stats?

Bishop is the social character of my EotE group. Her main skill stats are in Coercion, Deception, Perception, and a custom skill called Investigation. The game is set on a neutral planet in the Star Wars universe with plenty of seediness and crime to go around. Bishop seems to know who is who and acts all tough in the cantina, yet she doesn’t have any ranks in the Streetwise or Knowledge-Underworld skills. For a private investigator, that’s a bit strange, isn’t it? This lack of skill hints at a lack of experience. So how does she seem to know what she’s doing if she hasn’t been hitting the streets very long? Perhaps she has experience in a related field. And there, my friends, is that secret aspect I was talking about.

**Leave Some Holes**

It’s wise not to fill out every detail of every day of your character’s life. Sometimes when you leave things obscure, it creates an opportunity for filling in those details with something really cool when an idea hits you later. My Sith character never knew her parents, only that they were both dead. It wasn’t something that I ever really explored. About 3 years into playing her as a bodyguard, The Phantom Menace came out, and it hit me that she could easily be Darth Maul’s granddaughter. So I picked up that thread and ran with it. Goodbye bodyguard, hello Sith trainee!

# 5 More Master Tips to Infuse Your RPG Characters With Personality

Roleplaying isn’t all fighting all the time, so if your character lacks motive to act outside of combat, you’re going to get bored. The other week I shared my [5 Steps to Imbue Your RPG Characters With Personality to Spare](http://geekandsundry.com/5-steps-to-building-rpg-characters-with-personality/), and you guys really enjoyed it. That made me super happy! Now I want to do more for you. Below are some more master tips to help you build characters for your tabletop RPGs and LARPs.  Be sure to check out the previous article in the link above as well.

**Find a Shtick and Shtick With It**

I perform with a LARP/theater show called [Dungeon Master](http://geekandsundry.com/larp-meets-theater-at-dungeon-master/) where audience members can create their own characters and embark on a one-night live action adventure on stage. Many people have asked me for tips on how to make their own character. I tell them “Find a shtick and shtick with it.” Find that one trait, that “one thing,” that makes the character unique and refer to it again and again. This advice applies really well to one-shot games and newly conceived characters where you may not have discovered their backstory and what they’re all about yet.

A friend of mine once played a “muppet man” who was supposed to be two small muppets masquerading as one very tall man. He would talk to himself, directing his “companion” inside the trench coat which way to move his legs. He did this for the entire adventure. It was completely one-dimensional shtick, but it was unique and really darn funny.

**Building Concepts from other characters**

I always liked the idea of starting with a known character and putting your own spin on them. This works surprisingly well when the base character is not going to be in the same setting as your personal character because it forces them to make choices the root character would never need to make.

I once created Star Wars Imperial Officer based on Integra Hellsing of the anime [Hellsing](http://geekandsundry.com/horror-anime-recommendations-to-scare-your-pants-off/). I took the base personality and fashion style of Integra, and let that be my jumping point. My sorceress Unmei, who I mentioned in my last article, was based on a fusion of two characters. She had the water magic of Umi from Magic Knight Rayearth with the snobbery and styling of Nanami from Revolutionary Girl Utena. I even have one character who is “Middle Earth’s answer to Lady Gaga.” You can use these characters as base ideas, but take them on a journey and let them speak for themselves. You’ll quickly discover their originality as you play.

**Create Playlists and Vision Boards**

I love listening to music for inspiration. Certain songs capture the mood of a character or scene. Even if the music reminds you of the setting, that can be enough to kick-start your imagination. I’ll listen to a song, close my eyes, and just meditate on scenes. Lyrics can also give you ideas for where to take your characters. Using music for inspiration is all about feeling and letting your imagination run wild. I’ve put together a playlist of driving music for a pilot character that’s mostly K-Pop, Queen, and 80s classics. I have other playlists that get me in the mood for sweeping epic fantasy and as well as sci-fi.

Vision boards are something that I just tried recently. A friend of mine is starting a Savage Worlds campaign and created a Pinterest board for the players to find images that inspired us. The setting is 1930’s dieselpunk, but World War I never ended. My concept is to create [Hajime Saito](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sait%C5%8D_Hajime), a real historical figure from 19th century Japan, and turn him into some kind of government experiment/killing machine. So I did a Pinterest search for “cyborg,” “samurai,” and “dieselpunk” and discovered many inspiring images. It helped me to get a feel for what Saito might look like in this campaign.

**Make The Journey Together**

You aren’t going to understand your character fully at the start of your game unless you have played them before and have history from which to draw. Perhaps part of your adventure is that your character is also trying to discover who they are. Ever notice how often games start in a tavern, or you’re strangers who recently came to town? It’s because they haven’t settled down to retire into domesticated life. Your character still has a lot to learn about themselves, and that’s a darn good reason to travel the world and go on adventures. You will discover who they are as you play them.

**Be a Little Dumb**

There’s a saying in writing that bad decisions make good stories. Look at the image at the top of this article. Do you remember [that moment from Critical Role where Vax dove headfirst into a trap, nearly got killed, then told Keyleth he loved her and kissed her](https://youtu.be/iP1gylnxfLU?t=4m4s)? It was a great scene because Vax is the type of character who takes those bold risks even though he knows he can get hurt. Allow your character to try something brash or make a decision you know they will regret later.

Why? Because roleplay is boring if there is no conflict. It’s not dramatic if you don’t get your ass handed to you by the villain now and then. Sometimes you have to lock your sense of self-preservation in a crate and put a blanket over it when you go out to roleplay. Your character may be smart, but playing it safe all the time just isn’t fun. And if you’re not having fun while roleplaying, then you’re doing something wrong.