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DnD 2024 Classes And Subclasses: Character Optimization

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DnD 2024 Illusionist Wizard Subclass Guide



Introduction

Would you like to entertain your friends and dazzle your foes? Blur the lines between real and fake? Pull a rabbit out of your hat, and have it tear your enemies limb from limb? You might enjoy being an Illusionist. A Great and Powerful master of manipulation and misdirection. If you enjoy shenanigans and a little bit of summoning magic, you're going to love the Illusionist Wizard.

Don't take my enthusiasm for the stage magician angle to mean that's the only way to play an Illusionist. It's all about trickery and misdirection, which has far more applications than theatrics and parlor tricks. Perhaps a bit of espionage is your forte or you fancy yourself a bit of a con artist. Subtlety is just as valid an approach to the School of Illusion as flashy in your face bravado.

Leaning into the stage magician aesthetic, I've got a few Tricks Up My Sleeve with our example build. Leaning into the ideals of showmanship and theatrics we discuss the fun tricks one might pull off with the powers of Improved Illusions. Enhance the look and feel of your magic in Great and Powerful ways no other Wizards can by following our stage directions.

This article is for the 2024 DnD rules. For the 2014 rules, see our 2014 DnD 5e School of Illusion Wizard Subclass Guide.

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Disclaimer

RPGBOT uses the color coding scheme which has become common among Pathfinder build handbooks, which is simple to understand and easy to read at a glance.

- Red: Bad, useless options, or options which are extremely situational. Nearly never useful.
- A Orange: OK options, or useful options that only apply in rare circumstances. Useful sometimes.
- ‡ Green: Good options. Useful often.
- Second Street Street

We will not include 3rd-party content, including content from DMs Guild, in handbooks for official content because we can't assume that your game will allow 3rd-party content or homebrew. We also won't cover Unearthed Arcana content because it's not finalized, and we can't guarantee that it will be available to you in your games.

The advice offered below is based on the current <u>State of the Character Optimization Meta</u> as of when the article was last updated. Keep in mind that the state of the meta periodically changes as new source materials are released, and the article will be updated accordingly as time allows.

Illusionist Features

- 3. 🎇 Illusion Savant: Free spells in your spellbook. Always nice, but not massively impactful.
- 3. Timproved Illusions: Minor Illusion can be incredibly powerful in the hands of a smart caster, and adding both effects on one casting makes it considerably more useful. Creating an illusion of a pot lying on the floor accompanied by the sound of a pot falling, or an illusion of a small animal accompanied by appropriate sounds (I'm fond of chickens for this purpose) can be excellent distractions, and creatures don't get a save or a skill check to disbelieve the illusion until they spend an Action to do so.

While it's primarily a non-combat utility, the ability to cast Minor Illusion as a Bonus Action makes it an exciting tool in combat, too. Creating visual cover to break lines of sight can have a huge impact. Depending on how your DM handles illusions, you may be able to hide yourself inside an object like a crate or a barrel to make yourself untargetable.

Don't overlook the range increase, either. 60 feet of additional range means that you can do illusory nonsense from a safe distance, such as leading enemies far away from you and your party in order to avoid violent encounters.

6. ☼ Phantasmal Creatures: This is complicated.

Changing the spells' school to Illusion has no mechanical benefit on its own, but remember that Improved Illusions increases the range of your Illusion spells by 60 feet, allowing you to cast these spells from up to 150 feet away.

Two free summon spells is pretty nice. Summon Beast and Summon Fey both offer some appealing options, and

upcasting summon spells to boost their stats and number of attacks keep them relevant for your whole career.

The two free castings (one for each summon) are a nice convenience, giving you low-cost canon fodder that can absorb a few hits that might otherwise target you and your allies. The summons won't last long in combat with half hit points, but both spells have a 1-hour duration, so you can precast them and wander around outside of combat with a pet ready to go. Even as you gain levels and a level 2 or level 3 summon stops being a threat, they can still be useful as a scout or as a distraction.

- 10. Tillusory Self: Infallibly ignore one attack against you for free, once per Short or Long Rest. Very good for a squishy Wizard. Combined with other defensive measures like hiding and using cover, you may even be able to forgo Shield, especially since you can use this again at the cost of a level 2 spell slot.
- 14. Tillusory Reality: This turns your illusions into creation spells, which means that any tool that you can imagine is available for the low cost of casting Silent Image. Sadly, Malleable Illusions likely doesn't let you change the object which you've chosen to make real because Illusory Reality only applies when you cast the spell.

You can't directly harm creatures with Illusory Reality, but the rules say nothing about impeding, restraining, blocking, or even dropping them. Throw up a Silent Image to create a wall of stone between you and your foes, or to put a cage around them. Create an illusory bridge with a convenient trap door (or just time it so that they're on the bridge when the 1-minute duration expires) and drop your enemies into a pit.

Illusionist Backgrounds

We're looking for backgrounds that grant Intelligence and either Dexterity or Constitution.

- Artisan (PHB): Dexterity for additional AC is alright, but Crafter is less useful than other feats.
- Criminal (PHB): With the choice of either Dexterity or Constitution, Thieves' Tools and the Alert feat, this is the strongest option for Wizards in general.

- ♣ Merchant (PHB): This has the Constitution option, which is ok. Lucky is nice but we'll rarely make attack rolls so it's purely defensive for us.
- Sage (PHB): If you want even more first level spells and Constitution then you pick Sage.
- Š Scribe (PHB): For the Illusionist that wants even more skills.

For information and advice regarding Origin Feats, including those granted by your Background, see the SUBCLASS Feats section, below.

Illusionist Species

- Aasimar (PHB): A bit of healing, a little resistance, the light cantrip, Darkvision, and limited Flight. The resistance can be useful sometimes, but most of these features are either replicated by spells, or very minor.
- The Breath Weapon Save DC is based on our Constitution score, which is likely to only be average. Resistance, Darkvision and Flight are useful, but can also be replicated by spells.
- Dwarf (PHB): Extra hit points and Tremorsense are useful. Resistance and Advantage on saves vs Poison can be useful. Darkvision can be replicated by magic.
- Elf (PHB): A few bonus Skill Proficiency options, shorter Long Rests, and access to a few spells not on the Wizard list if you pick Drow or Wood Elf.
- Gnome (PHB): Advantage on Mental saves goes well with our Proficiency in Intelligence and Wisdom saves. The lineage choices grant flavorful utility cantrips and spells.
- A Goliath (PHB): Getting Large isn't all that useful for a Wizard, and most of the Giant Ancestry options require attack rolls.
- * Halfling (PHB): Brave and Lucky can be useful, but Nimbleness and Stealthy aren't going to come up as much for a Wizard.

Human (PHB): Being able to choose Magic Initiate to grab a spell from Cleric or Druid while still getting a background with Intelligence is very useful.

The orc (PHB): Being able to run quickly as a Bonus Action is quite useful for a Wizard if we don't want to Concentrate on Expeditious Retreat.

Tiefling (PHB): Unlike the Elf, the spells we can gain from Tiefling, except for Hellish Rebuke, are already on the Wizard list. The Resistance is nice though.

Illusionist Ability Scores

As a Wizard, we care about our Intelligence first for our Spell DCs and then Dexterity for AC, and Constitution for Hit Points and Concentration. The Backgrounds that grant Intelligence and Dexterity are Artisan, Criminal, and Scribe. The options for Intelligence and Constitution are Criminal, Merchant, and Sage.

Str: We don't need it.

A Dex: Boost our AC and Saves.

🛣 Con: Boost our HP and Concentration.

🗱 Int: Boost our Spell DCs.

热 Wis: Useful for a few skills.

☼ Cha: Useful for a few skills.

	POINT BUY	STANDARD ARRAY	
Str	8	8	
Dex	15	14	
Con	15	13	
Int	15	15	
Wis	8	12	

Cha

8

10

Illusionist Feats

Origin Feats from Suggested Backgrounds

- Crafter (PHB): Crafting tools could be useful, but some of these other options are better.
- ♣ Alert (PHB): Are you familiar with a game called Rocket Tag? A Great and Powerful Wizard would like to go first.
- ‡ Lucky (PHB): We won't generally make Attack Rolls, but using Luck points defensively is still good.
- Magic Initiate(Wizard) (PHB): If you want more Wizard spells, go ahead.
- Skilled (PHB): If you want to be the best at all the skills, this isn't a bad choice.

General Feats

- ♣ Elemental Adept (PHB): If we choose to specialize in one of the 5 standard energy types with our spells, this can be a decent offensive boost. Good for really wowing a tough crowd with a bit of fireworks and pyrotechnic displays.
- ‡‡ Fey Touched (PHB): A Wizard can never have too many spells, and Misty Step is a solid spell to get an extra free casting of.
- ♣ Keen Mind (PHB): A quick mind like ours can glean knowledge in a fraction of the time it might take another less talented individual.
- ‡‡ Lightly Armored (PHB): The world is a dangerous place, so keep yourself safe.
- Searching is more of a Wisdom thing than an Intelligence thing. Refer to Keen Mind above.
- Resilient (PHB): Improving our ability to hold our Concentration has always been regarded as an optimal strategy.
- 🏂 Telekinetic (PHB): We can already Minor Illusion as a Bonus Action if all you're looking for is something to use that

on every round. The Shove isn't bad either way.

- ♣ Telepathic (PHB): Reading minds sure does make card tricks easier to perform. I guess it also helps in gathering information while adventuring.
- Shadow-Touched (PHB): More Illusions. A good option for this feat is to always carry a Disguise Self in your back pocket for leaving any sort of awkward situation. An extra Invisibility is always good too. Remember that we cause these spells to be permanently Silenced.
- ★ War Caster (PHB): This is the other half of maintaining Concentration, but unlike Resilient, we can improve our Intelligence with this feat. A quirk of the new text for Attack of Opportunity allows us to trigger the reaction spell on an ally. Get creative and turn someone invisible in a flash on their turn for free Advantage.

Epic Boons

- 禁 Boon of Dimensional Travel (PHB): Casting a spell as a Bonus Action does not count as the Magic Action so we cannot use our Bonus Action Minor Illusion to just teleport for free. This is still good because we'll generally be casting something for an action every turn, but it could have been Greater and More Powerful than it is.
- ♣ Boon of Energy Resistance (PHB): We don't like taking damage, so being able to think ahead to take less damage of a particular type each day is sometimes useful.
- ♣ Boon of Fate (PHB): Changing a roll by between 2 and 8 once per fight or rest can swing a situation in our favor, if the dice are kind to us.
- Boon of Fortitude (PHB): More hit points are never bad. Additional healing is also nice.
- The Boon of Skill (PHB): For the Illusionist that wants to be the best at everything and make sure everyone else knows it.
- ♣ Boon of Speed (PHB): For feats of speed and quick escapes, like many magicians before us, this might be something to consider.

- ★ Boon of the Night Spirit (PHB): Bring down the house lights to vanish whenever we want without using our Concentration.
- 森 Boon of Truesight (PHB): A master of Illusions always knows 'em when they see 'em.

Illusionist Weapons

Just use your spells.

Illusionist Armor

Either cast Mage Armor or get Lightly Armored for a Shield and some Studded Leather.

Example Illusionist Wizard Build – Tricks Up My Sleeve

It might be the same act, Be patient you'll see. You can call it fake but, This is real magic...

Magic – The Living Tombstone

Across the land there is none more Great and Powerful than I. It is your privilege and honor to read these lessons of Illusion. I have such high hopes for your success, so pay close attention, we're about to begin.

Ability Scores

Your mind must be open and expansive to contain all the magic. You must be nimble to avoid the jabs of those who despise you. You must be hearty to survive the cruelty of critics and crowds. We've done a few, unsavory things that we're not proud of but no time to dwell on our Criminal past. It made us smarter (+2 Intelligence) and quicker (+1 Dexterity).

	POINT BUY	BACKGROUND ADJUSTMENT	LEVEL 20	
Str	8	8	8	
Dex	15	16	18	
Con	15	15	16	

	POINT BUY	BACKGROUND ADJUSTMENT	LEVEL 20
Int	15	17	20
Wis	8	8	8
Cha	8	8	8

Background

We didn't choose the Criminal life, it chose us. It chose us by having the Alert feat and the option for both Intelligence and Dexterity. We don't make the rules, those coastal Wizards do.

Species

We're Human. We gain an extra skill and an extra Origin Feat. The feat is Magic Initiate (Druid). The stat we choose is Intelligence. The cantrips we choose are Starry Wisp and Druidcraft. The Level 1 spell we choose is Cure Wounds. Accidents do happen and we'd like to be prepared.

Skill and Tool Proficiencies

From Criminal we learn Sleight of Hand, Stealth, and Thieves' Tools. From the Wizard class we learn Arcana and Investigation. From being Human, we also pick up History.

Feats and Ability Score Increases

Background: Alert – Never give the opposition an inch. Seize the opportunity to go first more often.

Human: Magic Initiate (Druid) – The masses never expect a Wizard capable of such restorative magics. Shock and amaze them as we re-assemble our allies.

At level 4: Keen-Mind – We'll gain expertise in Arcana and the ability to Study as a Bonus Action. The first lesson of the School of Illusion is to discern enemy Illusions. +1 Intelligence from 17 to 18.

At level 8: Resilient (Constitution) – We've got to reinforce our Concentration to hold our magic together when we're in danger, especially if that's the only thing holding together our Summoned Beast. +1 Constitution from 15 to 16.

At level 12: Lightly Armored – Mage Armor is stronger than any Light Armor, but adding a Shield for +2 AC is a great option here, and we'll be setting our Dexterity up for our Epic Boon. +1 Dexterity from 16 to 17.

At level 16: ASI - +2 Intelligence from 18 to 20. A bit late, but we believe that surviving was a better plan.

At level 18: Boon of the Night Spirit – By sticking to the shadows, the Resistance helps protect our Concentration by reducing incoming damage. +1 Dexterity from 17 to 18.

Levels

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
1	Spellcasting Ritual Adept Arcane Recovery Alert Magic Initiatie (Druid)	We start with a handful of Cantrips and Level 1 spells. Thanks to Magic Initiate we have a few extras off of the Druid list, including Cure Wounds for emergencies. Redundant healing magic is just a bit of insurance in case things go
	Cantrips – Druidcraft (MI)	wrong. Falling out of a hot air balloon, perhaps.
	LightMinor IllusionRay of FrostStarry Wisp(MI)	With Alert we are more likely to go early in combat, allowing us to stay safer and cast spells which will shape the outcome of the encounter before our melee allies get mixed up with our enemies.
	Level 1 Spells - Color Spray - Comprehend Languages - Cure Wounds (MI) - Mage Armor - Magic Missile	

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
	– Shield – Silent Image	
2	Scholar Investigation Expertise	Expertise in Investigation makes us better able to find hidden things, such as doors and traps, through the use of the Study Action. It is
	New Spells - Detect Magic - Identify	also the primary way to see through illusions which can be disbelieved.
		We are the Great and Powerful master of Illusion magic and we will not be deceived.
3	Illusionist Illusion Savant Improved Illusions New Cantrip	Taking up the mantle of Illusionist, because we already know Minor Illusion we can learn a different Cantrip instead. Toll the Dead is a relatively strong damage Cantrip so long as the target isn't resistant to
	- Toll the Dead	Necrotic damage.
	New Spells - Magic Weapon - Rope Trick	Our Minor Illusion is now castable as a quiet Bonus Action, which allows us to perform a wider variety of tricks and shenanigans.
	Savant - Invisibility - Nystul's Magic Aura	Amp up the theatrics of Toll the Dead with a Minor Illusion Bonus Action (MIBA) of a reaper ringing a bell.
		When casting Rope Trick, make the rope look like a snake with another MIBA. The possibilities are literally endless. Come up with your own as well.
		Nystul's Magic Aura alters the target's nature such that even magic is fooled. A person, for

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
		example, could have their aura changed to appear as a horse and then be immune to Hold Person, as the magic itself no longer believes the person is not a horse.
4	Feat: Keen-Mind Arcana Expertise +1 Int (17 -> 18) New Cantrip	We like to be able to see the unseen, so we're picking up the Dancing Lights, Darkvision, and See Invisibility spells.
	Dancing LightsNew SpellsDarkvisionSee Invisibility	Keen Mind grants us Expertise in Arcana and the ability to Study as a Bonus Action to more quickly disbelieve enemy Illusions or interpret the machinery of a trap we're disarming.
5	Memorize Spell New Spells - Fireball - Fly	We can't possibly put on a show without fireworks! Therefore, Fireball. Mix it with a MIBA to leave sparkling trails and smoky shapes. Really knock 'em dead.
	Savant – Fear	Or pull out spooky ghosts with another MIBA while casting Fear.
6	Phantasmal Creatures New Spells - Hypnotic Pattern - Major Image Phantasmal Creatures - Summon Beast - Summon Fey	Phantasmal Creatures allows us to cast Summon Beast and Summon Fey as Illusion spells. Separately, we can cast each one for free once each day. The free version is always cast at the lowest level, so it's not useful in combat for very long after we get it, but they are useful for utility. Upcast normally, summons are strong, but they do consume our Concentration and our Bonus Action to command them.
		Concentration that could be spent on Hypnotic Pattern. MIBA in some <u>carnival music</u> to entertain your

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
		charmed audience.
		Perhaps use a MIBA to pull a hat out of nowhere and then pull the bestial spirit out of your hat. Make the stage your own.
7	New Spells - Evard's Black Tentacles - Summon Aberration Savant - Phantasmal Killer	Black Tentacles and Summon Aberration are just strong spells I like. We might MIBA up a large Mind Flayer head bursting out of the ground before casting Black Tentacles right on top to make it seem like we summoned some large creature.
		While our Summon Aberration isn't an Illusion spell, nothing says our summoned Mind Flayer can't also be a clown.
		Once a target is under the effects of Phantasmal Killer, drop a MIBA to put a bullseye on their back. Let everyone know who's an easy target.
8	Feat: Resilient +1 Con (15 -> 16)	We're learning Tongues so that we can take our show on the road no matter what the locals speak.
	New Spells - Tongues - Dimension Door	Short range teleportation is far too useful to pass up.
9	New Spells - Synaptic Static - Wall of Stone	Synaptic Static calls for an Intelligence save, a generally weaker save to target. Toss it at people.
	Savant – Creation	With Wall of Stone, use your MIBA

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
		to shape a false section of the wall that your foolish foes don't realize is illusory.
		Use Creation for all sorts of creative tricks. Like making a quick ramp or a ladder.
10	Illusory Self New Cantrip	Illusory Self is a strong Reaction that we can use when the Shield spell isn't good enough.
	Mind SliverNew SpellsCone of ColdTelekinesis	Cone of Cold is a large cone that does Cold damage based on a Constitution save. Great for hitting large groups of agile opponents.
11	New Spells – Chain Lightning – True Seeing	Chain Lighting for solid damage. True Seeing to see through every Illusion ever.
	Savant - Programmed Illusion	Programmed Illusion is great for leaving a message behind for someone to find. Sure, it could leave an important secret message for an ally to find, but we could also plant these around town to advertise for our upcoming show. Or to welcome new visitors to town with directions and information.
12	Feat: Lightly Armored +1 Dexterity (16 -> 17) New Spells - Disintegrate - Tasha's Bubbling	We're taking Lightly Armored here because a shield will increase our AC even though Mage Armor is better than any mundane light armor. If we do come across magical light armor, we might now wear that instead of having to cast Mage Armor each day.
	Cauldron	Disintegrate does what it says. Disintegrates things.
		Tasha's Bubbling Cauldron can

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
		cook up several doses of uncommon potions each day. The sky's the limit with these.
13	New Spells - Forcecage - Teleport	Put hecklers in a box. MIBA a curtain in front of the box. Teleport away.
	Savant – Simulacrum	<u>Simulacrum</u> is a thing.
14	Illusory Reality New Spells - Mordenkainen's Magnificent	With Illusory Reality, our Illusions can become solid and real. This can cause havoc when a bridge we made real suddenly stops being real.
	Mansion – Plane Shift	Or a ladder. Or stairs. Making people pratfall is funny.
		A magical mansion befitting our Great and Powerful status.
		Plane Shift to put on shows in Sigil.
15	New Spells – Mind Blank – Telepathy	Mind Blank to keep our secrets safe.
	Savant - Project Image	Telepathy to silently give stage directions to volunteers and assistants.
		Project Image to put on shows across town while staying at home.
16	Feat: Ability Score Improvement	20 Intelligence. A bit late, but we made it.
	+2 Intelligence (18 -> 20)	Demiplane is our personal storage closet for props and tools so we can travel light to each show.
	New Spells	ŭ

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
	DemiplaneIncendiaryCloud	Incendiary Cloud will roll across the battlefield and do fire damage the entire time. MIBA in some thunder and lightning to make it look even more dangerous.
17	New Spells - Foresight - Wish	Foresight for Advantage on everything that day.
		Wish is still Wish. Even in 2024.
	Savant - Weird	Weird is the only Level 9 Illusion in the 2024 Player's Handbook, so we'll pick it up with Savant. It's a friendly fire safe psychic damage AoE blast that causes Frightened and does more damage if the targets keep failing saves. We can do it quietly and from 180 feet.
18	Spell Mastery Level 1: Silent Image Level 2: Nystul's	For Mastery Spells, we must choose spells with a casting time of 1 Action.
	Magic Aura	Master Silent Image to provide Illusory Reality with infinite fuel.
	New Spells - Astral Projection - Time Stop	With free Nystul's Magic Aura, we can turn everything upside down in about a month, as the effects become permanent when applied for 30 days. Disguise all of our magical items from those we cannot trust.
19	Feat: Boon of the Night Spirit	In dim light and darkness, we're now resistant to most damage and can just be Invisible.
		A fitting trick for one so Great and Powerful as you.

Levels	Feats and Features	Notes and Tactics
20	Signature Spells - Major Image - Tongues	Having Tongues ready to go whenever we need it is useful in many situations.
		Always having a Major Image ready to go is a true signature of the Great and Powerful Trixie. That's you now. <u>You're a blue unicorn</u> . Thank Nystul's Magic Aura.

About The Author

Rocco Giusto

Hailing from north of Boston, MA, Rocco has been playing TTRPGs since D&D 3.0 back in 2001. Since then he's been playing different systems on and off over the years. Eventually,

he met Random, who then introduced Rocco to Tyler, and together they've been playing TTRPGs over the internet for almost a decade.