Creating a Character

You begin playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game by creating a character: the persona you play during the game.

Before you start, you might find it helpful to think about the basic kind of character you want to play. You might be a courageous knight, a skulking rogue, a fervent cleric, or a flamboyant 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.

Step by Step

Follow these steps in order to create any character you want to play.

1. Determine Ability Scores

Much of what your character does in the game depends 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.

To begin, you generate ability scores randomly. Roll four 6-sided dice and record the total of the highest three rolls on a piece of scratch paper. Do this five more times, so that you have six numbers. In step 4, you will assign these numbers to your character's ability scores.

If you want to save time or don't like the idea of randomly determining ability scores, you can assign a standard set of scores to your character's abilities: 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8.

The numbers you determine in this step are only the foundation of your character's abilities, not the full picture. As you make other decisions during character creation, one or more of these numbers will be improved.

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

Optional: Customizing Ability Scores

The method described here allows you to build a character with a set of ability scores you choose individually. Start with an 8 in all six ability scores, then spend 27 points to improve them. The cost of raising a score from 8 to a higher number is shown below.

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

This method of determining ability scores enables you to create a set of three extremely high numbers and three low ones (15, 15, 15, 8, 8, 8), a set of numbers that are above average and nearly equal (13, 13, 13, 12, 12, 12), or any combination between those extremes.

2. Choose a Race

Every character belongs to a race, a species in the fantasy world. The most common player character races 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 particular racial traits, such as adjustments to ability scores, special senses, talent with certain weapons, or the ability to use minor spells. These traits sometimes dovetail with the capabilities of certain classes (see step 3). For example, the racial traits of lightfoot halflings make them exceptional rogues, while high elves tend to be powerful wizards.

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

3. Choose a Class

Every character is a member of a class. Class broadly describes what profession your character pursues, 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 engaging in a tense negotiation.

The most common classes are cleric, fighter, rogue, and wizard. **Clerics** are champions endowed with magic from the gods, **fighters** are tough warriors and weapon specialists, **rogues** are experts in many areas of expertise and skulduggery, 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.

Your character receives a number of benefits from your choice of class. Many of these benefits are class features—capabilities that set your character apart from members of other classes.

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

4. Choose a Background

Your character has 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.

You can select the background suggested in your character's class description or choose a different one from among those in the "Backgrounds and Skills" document. Your DM might offer additional backgrounds beyond the ones included there.

A background gives your character a background trait (a general benefit), as well as training in particular skills. Record your background trait and your trained skills on your character sheet.

Your character has a **skill die**, which represents how adept the character is at performing tasks within his or her areas of expertise. When you make a check involving one of your trained skills, you roll your skill die and add the result to the check. Your skill die starts as a d4 and grows larger as you gain levels (see the Character Advancement table). See the "Backgrounds and Skills" document for more information on your skill die.

Optional: Choose a Specialty/Feat

Your class tells you what you can do, and your specialty tells you how you do it. A specialty further defines your character's preferred combat tactics and investigative methods, qualities that might arise from studies, inherent talents, or focused training. Specialties are optional, and your DM might not use them.

You can select the specialty suggested in your character's class description or choose a different one from among those in the "Specialties and Feats" document. Your DM might offer additional specialties beyond the ones included there.

A specialty gives you a special ability, called a feat, and provides additional feats as you gain levels (see the Character Advancement table). Record your first feat on your character sheet.

5. Assign Ability Scores

Now that you have decided on your character's race and class, you have a good idea where to put your 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 well suited to the wizard class.

Go back to the six numbers you came up with during step 1. Write each number beside one of your character's six abilities to assign scores to Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. Afterward, make any changes to your ability scores as a result of your race and class choices. After these adjustments, a score can be no higher than 20.

This is a good time to determine your ability modifiers. See 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.

6. Choose Equipment

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

You can choose these packages 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.

7. Fill in Numbers

It's a fact of the adventuring life that characters get into trouble. They fight with monsters and other hostile beings, they deal with traps and hazards that threaten to waylay them, and they endure brutal environmental conditions. Several important numbers determine how well your character succeeds in combat and other perilous situations: 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.

Hit points. Your character's hit points define how tough your character is in combat and other dangerous situations. Your character's class description indicates how to calculate this number, which is also your hit point maximum. As you increase in level, this maximum increases too.

Follow the instructions for your class, and record your character's hit points on your character sheet.

Hit Dice. 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). On your character sheet, record the type of Hit Die your character uses and the number of Hit Dice you have. (For a 1st-level character, this number is 1.)

Armor Class. Your character's Dexterity modifier, armor and shield (if any), and other features contribute to your Armor Class, which represents how well your character avoids being hit in battle. If you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 10 + your Dexterity modifier. Otherwise, calculate your AC using the numbers given for your armor or shield in the "Equipment" document, and record the total.

Initiative modifier. Characters act in combat in a sequence 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 determined your initiative modifier, note it on your character sheet.

Attack modifiers. A character can make two kinds of attacks: melee (hand-to-hand combat) and ranged (attacks made 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. Write down your attack modifiers, using the weapons your character wields, on your character sheet.

Some characters can cast spells. If your character is one, your class description states which ability (usually Intelligence or Wisdom) your character uses for magical attacks. If you cast a spell that instructs you to make an attack, you normally use this **magical ability modifier**. Write down this number on your character sheet.

Some spells instead require the target to make a saving throw; your class description explains how to calculate the Difficulty Class (DC) for this saving throw against the spells you cast. Record this **saving throw DC** 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 number for a 1st-level character to your attack modifier with weapons; if it includes a "Spellcasting Bonus" column, add the number for a 1st-level character to your attack modifier with spells.

8. 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.

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.

Physical Traits

You can decide on your character's height and weight, using the information provided in your race description, as well as hair, eye, and skin color, and age if desired. To add a touch of distinctiveness, you might want to give your character an unusual or memorable physical characteristic, such as a scar, a limp, or a tattoo. Note these details on your character sheet.

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; talking about these details paves the way for the DM to craft adventures that get the players involved.

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.

 Although evil adventurers exist, they tend to cause problems in groups with others who don't share their interests and objectives. Generally, evil alignments are for villains and monsters.

 These brief summaries of the nine alignments describe the typical behavior of a creature with that alignment. Individuals might vary significantly from that typical behavior, and few people are perfectly and consistently faithful to the precepts of their alignment.

Lawful good creatures can be counted on to do the right thing, as expected by society. Gold dragons, paladins, and most dwarves are lawful good.

 Neutral good is about doing the best one can to help others according to their needs. Many angels, some cloud giants, and most gnomes are neutral good.

 Chaotic good creatures act as their conscience directs, with little regard for what others expect. Copper dragons, many elves, and unicorns are chaotic good.

 Lawful neutral individuals act in accordance with law, tradition, or personal codes. Many monks and some wizards are lawful neutral.

 Neutral is the alignment of those that prefer to steer clear of moral questions and don't take sides, doing what seems best at the time. Lizardfolk, most druids, and many humans are neutral.

 Chaotic neutral creatures follow their whims, holding their personal freedom above all else. Many barbarians and rogues, and some bards, are chaotic neutral.

 Lawful evil creatures methodically take what they want, within the limits of a code of tradition, loyalty, or order. Devils, blue dragons, and hobgoblins are lawful evil.

 Neutral evil is the alignment of those that do whatever they can get away with, without compassion or qualms. Many drow, some cloud giants, and grimlocks are neutral evil.

 Chaotic evil creatures act with arbitrary violence, spurred by their greed, hatred, or bloodlust. Demons, red dragons, and orcs are chaotic evil.

For many thinking creatures, alignment is a moral choice; humans, dwarves, elves, and other humanoid races can choose whether to follow the paths of good or evil, law or chaos. Many other creatures, though, have inborn tendencies toward certain alignments. Most gnolls are irredeemably chaotic evil, and gold dragons are innately lawful good.

 Alignment is an essential part of the nature of creatures from the Outer Planes (celestials and fiends). A devil does not choose to be lawful evil, and it doesn't tend toward lawful evil, but rather

it is lawful evil at its core. If it somehow ceased to be lawful evil, it would cease to be a devil.

Most creatures that lack the capacity for rational thought do not have alignments. Such a creature is incapable of making a moral or ethical choice, and acts according to its bestial nature. Sharks are savage predators, for example, but they are not evil; they have no alignment.

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.

9. 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.

Beyond 1st Level

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 advancement is called gaining a level.

When a character gains a level, the character's class might grant additional abilities, as given in the class description. The character might gain 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 twenty levels of experience, 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 at each level.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

XP	Level	Benefit	Skill Die
0	1	Background, specialty/feat (optional)	1d4
250	2	—	1d6
950	3	Feat (optional)	1d6
2,250	4	+1 to two ability scores	1d6
4,750	5	—	1d6
9,500	6	Feat (optional)	1d6
16,000	7	—	1d8
25,000	8	+1 to two ability scores	1d8
38,000	9	Feat (optional)	1d8
56,000	10	—	1d8
77,000	11	—	1d8
96,000	12	+1 to two ability scores	1d10
120,000	13	—	1d10
150,000	14	—	1d10
190,000	15	—	1d10
230,000	16	+1 to two ability scores	1d10
280,000	17	—	1d12
330,000	18	—	1d12
390,000	19	—	1d12
460,000	20	+1 to two ability scores	1d12