

BACKGROUNDS INSTEAD OF RACES

ay you want to do an all human campaign; perhaps you're doing a modern horror setting or your campaign is a sword and sorcery epic. The problem with that is that there isn't a whole lot of variety there. In fact, the necessity for having "races" at all vanishes. Humans either get ability score increases across the board or they're the variant human with two ability score increases, a skill proficiency, and a feat. Yawn. Boring.

However, I think I've come up with a simple solution for this. Instead of picking a "race" as normal, characters pick their backgrounds to start. Then, the background does double-duty. First, it offers up all the usual background elements for the character including personality traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws, as well as starting skills and background features. Then, it offers "racial traits" providing ability score increases and extra features.

If you use this option, character creation follows this pattern:

1. **Choose a background and describe your character.** Pick one of the background variants below, then determine your character's alignment, ideals, bonds, and flaws.
2. **Choose a class.** This stays the same.
3. **Determine ability scores.** Again, this uses the normal rules.
4. **Choose equipment.** Next, choose equipment using either the stock equipment provided by the class and background or through the purchasing method.
5. **Come together.** Finally, your party comes together.

Remember: You're still human, but the only traits you keep in addition to those offered by your background are your **age**, **alignment**, **size**, **speed**, and **languages**.

BACKGROUND VARIANTS

In addition to the skill proficiencies, tool proficiencies, languages, equipment, and features provided by the backgrounds listed in the Player's Handbook make the following adjustments.

Note: some of these variants are intentionally cribbed from other sources, typically racial feats, and non-canonical Unearthed Arcana issues.

ACOLYTE

You have spent your life in the service of a temple to a specific god or pantheon of gods. All acolytes share the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Wisdom score increases by 2, and your Intelligence score increases by 1.

Proper Decorum. Whenever you meet a non-hostile humanoid that is a member of a cult or practices a religion, you can make an Intelligence (Religion) check contested by the creature's Wisdom (Insight). On a success, you have advantage on all Charisma checks directed at that creature for 24 hours.

Strong-Willed. You have advantage on Wisdom saving throws.

Theologian. You learn the *thaumaturgy* and *detect evil and good* spells. You can cast *detect evil and good* once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

CHARLATAN

You have always had a way with people. You know what makes them tick, you can tease out their hearts' desires after a few minutes of conversation, and with a few leading questions, you can read them like they were children's books. Charlatans gain the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 2, and your Wisdom score increases by 1.

Expert Forgery. You can duplicate other creatures' handwriting and craftwork. You have advantage on checks made to produce forgeries or duplicates of existing objects.

Master of Disguise. If you spend 1 hour observing a creature, you can then spend 8 hours crafting a disguise you can quickly don to mimic that creature. Making the disguise requires a disguise kit. You must make checks as normal to disguise yourself, but you can assume the disguise as an action.

Silver-Tongued. When you take the Attack action on your turn, you can replace one attack with an attempt to deceive one humanoid you can see within 30 feet of you that can see and hear you. Make a Charisma (Deception) check contested by the target's Wisdom (Insight) check. If your check succeeds, your movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from the target and your attack rolls against it have advantage; both benefits last until the end of your next turn or until you use this ability on a different target. If your check fails, the target can't be deceived by you in this way for 1 hour.

CRIMINAL

You are an experienced criminal with a history of breaking the law. All criminals have the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2, and your Intelligence score increases by 1.

Criminal Insight. If you spend at least 1 minute observing and interacting with another creature outside combat, you can learn certain information about the creature's status. The DM tells you if the creature is your equal, superior, or inferior in regard to one of the following characteristics of your choice:

- Skill or tool ability (choose one)
- Political influence
- Wealth

At the DM's option, you might also realize you know a piece of the creature's history or one of its personality traits, if it has any.

Stealthy. If you are hidden, you can move up to 10 feet in the open without revealing yourself if you end the move in a position where you're not clearly visible.

ENTERTAINER

You thrive in front of an audience. You know how to enthrall them, entertain them, and even inspire them. You gain the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 2, and your Dexterity score increases by 1.

Master of Disguise. If you spend 1 hour observing a creature, you can then spend 8 hours crafting a disguise you can quickly don to mimic that creature. Making the disguise requires a disguise kit. You must make checks as normal to disguise yourself, but you can assume the disguise as an action.

Mimicry. You can mimic sounds you have heard, including voices. A creature that hears the sounds you make can tell they are imitations with a successful Wisdom (insight) check opposed by your Charisma (Deception) check.

Performer. While performing, you can try to distract one humanoid you can see who can see and hear you. Make a Charisma (Performance) check contested by the humanoid's Wisdom (Insight) check. If your check succeeds, you grab the humanoid's attention enough that it makes Wisdom (Perception) and Intelligence (Investigation) checks with disadvantage until you stop performing.

FOLK HERO

You come from a humble social rank, but you are destined for so much more. All folk heroes share the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 1, and two other ability scores of your choice increase by 1.

Brave. You have advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Public Speaker. Whenever you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check while speaking to a large group, you are considered proficient in the Persuasion skill and add double your proficiency bonus to the check, instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

Relentlessness. If you fail a saving throw, you can reroll the failed save, but you must keep the new roll. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

GUILD ARTISAN

You are a member of an artisan's guild, skill in a particular field and closely associated with other artisans.

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength score increases by 1, your Dexterity score increases by 1, and your Wisdom score increases by 1.

Cunning Artisan. As part of a short rest, you can harvest materials from your natural surroundings to create an item of your choosing. The item's value must be no more than 1 gp and it must be related to a tool that you are proficient in (DM's discretion). For example, an alchemist could brew a gallon of ale, or a carpenter could fletch 20 arrows. To use this trait, you need the appropriate artisan's tools.

Expert Craftwork. Choose one tool in which you have proficiency. You gain expertise with that tool, which means your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make with it.

The tool you choose can not benefit from another feature, such as Expertise, that doubles your proficiency bonus.

Haggler. Whenever you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check related to negotiating the price of an item that you are trying to purchase or sell, you add double your proficiency bonus to the check, instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

HERMIT

You lived in seclusion—either in a sheltered community such as a monastery, or entirely alone—for a formative part of your life. You gain the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increases. Your Wisdom score increases by 2, and your Constitution score increases by 1.

Focused. You have advantage on Constitution saving throws made to maintain your concentration.

Herbalist. As part of a short rest, you can harvest materials from your natural surroundings to create either a vial of antitoxin or a potion of healing. At the end of the rest, make a DC 15 Wisdom check using your proficiency in herbalism kit. On a success, you create the item. To use this trait, you must be in a wilderness setting that has abundant food and water sources and you must have a herbalism kit.

Patience. You can take the Dodge action as a bonus action on your turn. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you complete a long rest.

NOBLE

You understand wealth, power, and privilege. You carry a noble title, and your family owns land, collects taxes, and wields significant political influence. As a noble, you gain the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 2, and your Charisma score increases by 1.

Cantrip. You know one cantrip of your choice from the wizards spell list. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for it.

Lucky. When you roll a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can reroll the die and use the new roll.

Noble Weapon Training. You have proficiency with longsword, rapier, light crossbow, and shortbow.

Proper Decorum. Whenever you meet a non-hostile humanoid that is a member of nobility or in a position of power, you can make an Intelligence (History) check contested by the creature's Wisdom (Insight). On a success, you have advantage on all Charisma checks directed at that creature for 24 hours.

OUTLANDER

You grew up in the wilds, far from civilization and the comforts of town and technology. You gain the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution score increases by 2, and your Strength score increases by 1.

Fleet of Foot. Your base walking speed increases to 35 feet.

Forager. Whenever you make a Wisdom (Survival) check related to foraging for food and water, you add double your proficiency bonus to the check, instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

Outlander Resilience. You have advantage on saving throws against poison, and you have resistance against poison damage.

Relentless Endurance. When you are reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 hit point instead. You can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

SAGE

You spent years learning the lore of the multiverse. All sages have the following traits in common.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 2, and your Wisdom score increases by 1.

Arcanist. You know the *prestidigitation* and *detect magic spells*. You can cast *detect magic* once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Historian. When you take the Help action to aid another creature's ability check, you can make a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check. On a success, that creature's check gains a bonus equal to your proficiency bonus, as you share pertinent advice and historical examples. To receive this bonus, the creature must be able to understand what you're saying and have an Intelligence score of 10 or higher.

Researcher. Whenever you make an Intelligence check related to performing research you add a +2 bonus to the ability check. You must have access to a library or a sage for this trait to work.

SAILOR

You sailed on a seagoing vessel for years. Your time spent at sea grants you the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength score increases by 1, your Dexterity score increases by 1, and your Constitution score increases by 1.

Hold Breath. You can hold your breath twice as long as normal (minimum of 1 minute).

Knot Expertise. Whenever you make an Intelligence (Sleight of Hand) check to tie or untie a knot, you are considered proficient in the Sleight of Hand skill and you add double your proficiency bonus to the check, instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

Navigator. Whenever you make a Wisdom (Survival) check related to forecasting the weather or to avoid becoming lost at sea, you are considered proficient in the Survival skill and you add double your proficiency bonus to the check, instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

Perceptive. Being in a lightly obscured area doesn't impose disadvantage on your Wisdom (Perception) checks if you can both see and hear.

Sailor Weapon Proficiencies. You have proficiency with javelin, net, spear, and trident.

SOLDIER

War has been your life for as long as you care to remember. You gain the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Fighting Style. You adopted a particular style of fighting as your specialty. Choose one of the following options. You can't take a Fighting Style option more than once, even if you later get to choose again.

- **Archery.** You gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls you make with ranged weapons.
- **Defense.** While you are wearing armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC.
- **Great Weapon Fighting.** When you roll a 1 or 2 on a damage die for an attack roll you make with a melee weapon that you are wielding with two hands, you can reroll the die and must use the new roll, even if the new roll is a 1 or a 2. The weapon must have the two-handed or versatile property for you to gain this benefit.
- **Protection.** When a creature you can see attacks a target other than you that is within 5 feet of you, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll. You must be wielding a shield.

Martial Training. You are proficient with two martial weapons of your choice and with light armor.

URCHIN

You grew up on the streets alone, orphaned, and poor. You gain the following characteristics.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Hidden Among the Crowd. If you are in a crowded area, you can use the Hide action to make a Charisma (Stealth) check contested by a creature's Wisdom (Perception) check. If you are successful, you blend in and disappear in the crowd and can move without revealing your location as long as you remain in the crowd.

Nimble. You can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than yours.

Quick-Fingered. As a bonus action, you can make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to plant something on someone else, conceal an object on a creature, lift a purse, or take something from a pocket.