5e Custom Race-Building Guide
by Thomas Keene

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Introduction

When I started running Dungeons & Dragons campaigns in 2006, I found that roughly one player in every five would have an interesting request. "This is a fantasy setting, so anything goes, right? Can my character be a werewolf?" Sometimes they would also want to play a dragon, or a fairy.

I thought this was a pretty cool idea, but most of the rules for this kind of thing were clunky and didn't work well for low-level characters. So I wrote my own homebrew for my games.

For a decade I kept updating my homebrew PC monster race rules and sharing them online. In 2017 I ran a science fiction campaign, but realized I didn't have a good enough homebrew to accommodate cyborgs, robots, aliens, mutants, or gun-toting genetically modified raccoons. The players definitely wanted to run those as PCs, thanks to some recent science fiction blockbuster films. That's when I wrote the first draft of this book you are reading now.

This book is a supplement to the 5th Edition of the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game. The intent of these rules is to provide flexible, balanced, and interesting species options to player characters. PCs made using these rules can be played alongside core Dungeons & Dragons races without any problems. (In theory. It's likely I made a huge mistake somewhere.)

Even DMs running a standard fantasy setting can take these rules as inspiration for species that populate their campaign settings. The lists of abilities can also be used to quickly build interesting monsters and NPCs.

Thank you for reading. If you modify or homebrew these rules, please let me know what you did and how it worked for your gaming group.

- Thomas Keene, @koboldskeep, eneekmot@yahoo.com

NOTE: This is an incomplete draft of this book. Some chapters have been omitted.

Thanks to @mfisherart for the cover sketch.

Chapter 1: Building Races

Step 1. Choosing A Species

When making a species, the first thing you need is a good idea of what you are making. Is your species another race of humanoids that lives the world? Is your species that of an existing D&D demihuman or monster? Are you a unique humanoid or beast that was mutated by a curse, or arcane experimentation, or bonded with a symbiote, or had new limbs grafted onto their body? Were you constructed by someone?

Make a list of at least six things you think the species should have that ordinary humanoids do not. Pick the ones which are the most important to you. Don't assume that everyone you describe this species to will know what traits they should have.

Choose one or two of the six ability scores (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma) your species is notable for. Some of your less interesting racial abilities may be represented by high ability scores. Scales or tough skin would give you high Constitution, keen vision and hearing could be high Wisdom, or bulk and size may result in high Strength.

If you have time, you should also outline common variations your species has. This could include details like how the species ages, what a typical weight and height, common languages known (written and spoken), and normal colors for skin/hair/eyes/scales/etc. Also work with the DM to determine how your species is typically viewed by other races in the setting, how your species' civilization is viewed by history, what stereotypes (false or warranted) might be applied to your species, etc. See the Character Building chapter for more guidelines for your character's background.

Note: Core Races

The races in the core Dungeons & Dragons rules seem to follow a careful balance formula. Each race has +2 to an ability score, +1 or +2 to a second ability score, three major abilities that are useful, and a couple of minor abilities that are situational or actually harmful drawbacks.

The only Player's Handbook exceptions to this formula seem to be humans and dragonborn (whose scaling recharging breath weapon could count as two major abilities). Additionally, races from other books with more than three major abilities are often considered overpowered.

These rules try to follow this formula for general use, so that only a few members of the party can use these rules while the rest use normal races. DMs are encouraged to balance custom races against the races used in their campaigns.

Step 2. Choosing Ability Scores

You have the following racial ability score bonuses:

- Choose one ability score, it increases by 2
- Choose a different ability score, it increases by 1

Note: Ability Score Bonuses

These rules assume that players will always choose the optimal ability score bonuses for their class and role, so custom races only get a +1 bonus to their second ability score.

Step 3. Choosing Basic Abilities

- You have 3 Basic Abilities from the Basic Abilities list.

Basic Racial Abilities

Agile

You can substitute your Dexterity modifier for your Strength modifier when making Athletics skill checks to jump and climb.

Amorphous

You can move through a space as narrow as one inch wide without squeezing. You have advantage on ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws against anything that would make you be grappled, restrained, or knocked prone.

Aquatic

You have a swimming speed of 30 feet, and you are always proficient in Strength (Athletics) checks to swim. You are also amphibious, and can breathe both air and water.

Armor Training

You are proficient with light and medium armor.

Beast Speech

You can *speak with animals,* as the spell. Once per long rest you may make a skill check to influence an animal with advantage.

Bite

Because of your powerful jaws, your unarmed strikes can deal piercing damage.

If you are holding nothing in your hands you can make a powerful bite attack described below. This is a weapon attack, not an unarmed strike. You are proficient with this attack.

Choose one:

- Your bite is a martial two-handed heavy melee weapon that deals 1d12 piercing damage.
- Your bite is a martial two-handed finesse melee weapon that deals 1d10 piercing damage.
- Your bite is a martial two-handed heavy melee weapon that deals 1d6 points of piercing damage and 1d6 points of poison damage.

Blindsight

You have echolocation or other senses that allow you to perceive your surroundings without without relying on sight. This ability has a range of 30 feet and you can detect things around corners and behind obstacles.

You still need to make appropriate skill checks to detect secret doors and intentionally hiding creatures, especially if you can't see them with your eyes.

Blink

As a bonus action you can teleport 5 feet per level to an unoccupied space you can see. You can only teleport yourself and your gear. Once you use this ability you cannot use it again until you take a long rest.

Brutal Strike

You are taller and heavier than most creatures of your size. A melee or thrown weapon deals one extra die of its damage when you hit with it. Once you use this ability you cannot use it again until you take a short rest.

Cantrip

Choose a class and one cantrip from its spell list, you can cast it once per round. You use the class's spellcasting ability for this cantrip.

You may take this ability multiple times, each time for a different cantrip.

Claws

Because of your sharp claws, your unarmed strikes can deal slashing damage.

You can treat your claws as two simple light finesse melee weapons that deal 1d6 damage. These are weapon attacks, not unarmed strikes. You are proficient with these attacks.

Climbing

You have a climbing speed of 30 feet, and you are always proficient in Strength (Athletics) checks to climb.

Darkvision

You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Disguise

Choose a specific Small or Medium humanoid disguise. You can shapechange into this form or shapechange back into your true form as an action. If your disguise is a different race, you do not gain any of its racial abilities. Your humanoid disguise looks the same each time you shapechange, and any equipment you are wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (your choice). You revert to your true form if you die.

Energy Resistance

Choose one energy damage type (acid, cold, fire, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, or thunder). You have resistance to damage of that type

Additionally, choose one:

- You have immunity to nonmagical damage of the chosen type.
- You have advantage on saving throws against effects that deal damage of the chosen type.

See the Advanced Abilities chapter for abilities that give a character more resistances.

Extended Arms

You can stretch your arms an additional 10 feet. All attack rolls, ability checks, and skill checks you make outside of your normal reach suffer disadvantage.

False Appearance

Choose one inanimate object of your size, such as a tree, boulder, statue, or suit of armor. While you remain motionless, you are indistinguishable from that object.

Inorganic

You are immune to disease. You have advantage on death saving throws.

You do not need to eat or breathe, but you can ingest food and drink if you wish. Instead of sleeping, you enter an inactive state for 4 hours each day. You do not dream in this state; you are fully aware of your surroundings and notice approaching enemies and other events as normal.

Leaper

Your long jump and high jump distances are doubled, and you do not need to move 10 feet before jumping. When you fall you can use your reaction to land on your feet and treat the fall as though it was 30 feet shorter.

Life Drain

You can drain blood and life energy to sustain yourself. Make a melee attack against a willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by you, incapacitated, or restrained. If you hit you deal 1 piercing damage plus 1d6 necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and you regain hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest.

The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried in the ground rises the following night as a zombie that is indifferent to you.

Magic Resistance

When you fail a saving throw against a spell or magical effect, you may choose to reroll it and use the second result (even if it is worse). You cannot use this ability again until you take a long rest.

Metal Scent

You instantly know the location of metal or ore within 5 feet of you. When examining a metal you can accurately determine its composition and purity. You have advantage on all ability checks and skill checks to appraise and craft metal objects.

Multilimbed

You have four arms. At the start of your turn you choose two of your arms to use, and the unused arms grant you no benefit until the start of your next round. Your unused arms require no action to grasp objects they are already carrying, suspend you from a rope or ladder, or perform other trivial interactions.

Once per short rest you may perform a bonus action with one of your unused arms. You can use this bonus action to wield a

spell focus or component pouch, perform the somatic component of a spell while your other hands are full, use a magic item on yourself, reload an ammunition weapon, ready a shield to gain its AC bonus until your next turn, or pick up an object. You can also use this extra bonus action to make one attack with a light one-handed weapon or shortbow, but you can never add your ability bonus to the attack's damage.

> **Note: Multilimbed Balance**
>
> Giving a character full use of four arms is like giving them the Extra Attack class feature of a 20th-level fighter. The Multilimbed ability has been broken into several abilities for balance and has heavy restrictions on its use. See the Advanced Abilities chapter for ways to improve the Multilimbed ability.
>
> As an additional reminder, you can benefit from only one shield at a time (Player's Handbook, pg. 144).

Natural Armor

Your thick hide or scales protect you from attacks. When you do not wear armor your AC is 13 + your Dexterity modifier.

> **Note: AC Stacking**
>
> Natural Armor does not stack with any other effect that changes your Armor Class calculation, such as the *mage armor* spell or the monk's Unarmored Defense class feature (Player's Handbook, pg. 14).

Petrifying Gaze

As an action you can gaze at one creature you can see within 30 feet, causing it to gradually petrify as long as you maintain concentration (the same as concentrating on a spell). As long as the creature can see you, at the start of its turn it must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 + proficiency modifier + Charisma modifier). The first round the creature fails the saving throw it is restrained, and the second round it fails the saving throw it is petrified.

This effect ends immediately if anything breaks your concentration or prevents you and the creature from seeing each other. If the creature isn't surprised, it can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of any of its turns, ending

this effect immediately. If the creature averts its gaze in any way, it can't see you until the start of its next turn.

If the creature is petrified, the petrification is permanent until the creature is freed by the *greater restoration* spell or other magic.

Note: Reflecting Gaze Attacks

According to myth, Perseus defeated Medusa by watching her reflection in a mirror while he fought her. This would mean that gaze attacks canonically do not work through mirrors. However, many tabletop games and video games allow mirrors to reflect gaze attacks because it's more fun for players who don't have gaze attacks.

At the DM's discretion, a character holding a mirror can attack a character with Petrifying Gaze with their own reflection. The attacker must maintain concentration and the target can avert their gaze as normal.

Photosynthesis

You have advantage on Constitution saving throws while standing in direct sunlight. If you take a short rest in sunlight, you regain the maximum number of hit points for each Hit Die spent.

Physical Resistance

Choose one physical damage type (bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing). You have resistance to non-magical damage of that type.

See the Advanced Abilities chapter for abilities that give a character more resistances.

Shell

You have a heavy plate of bone on your back. You can use your reaction to protect yourself until the start of your next turn, imposing disadvantage on any ranged attack rolls made against you.

Skill

Choose a skill, you have proficiency with it.

You may take this ability multiple times, each time for a different skill.

Speed
Your base walking speed increases to 35 feet.

Spell I
Choose a class and one 1st-level spell from its spell list, you can cast it once per long rest. You use that class's spellcasting ability for this spell.

You may take this ability multiple times, each time for a different spell.

Sprinter
When you use the Dash action you can move up to three times your speed.

Toughness
Your hit point maximum increases by 1, and it increases by 1 every time you gain a level.

Uncanny Accuracy
When you miss with a finesse or ranged weapon, you may choose to reroll it and use the second result (even if it is worse). Once you use this ability you cannot use it again until you take a long rest.

Weapon Training
You are proficient with simple and martial weapons.

Wild Shape
Choose one specific beast that has a challenge rating of 1/4 or lower that doesn't have a flying or swimming speed. You can wild shape into that beast form once per long rest, as the druid class feature.

Wings
You can use your reaction to glide while falling, slowing your fall to 60 feet per round and taking no damage when you land.

As a bonus action you can fly up to 30 feet, in addition to your normal ground movement. You cannot use this ability again until you take a long rest.

Optional Step: Trivial Abilities and Drawbacks

At the DM's discretion, you may choose a few Trivial Abilities. These abilities should be significantly weaker than a Basic Ability, or highly situational. Examples of good Trivial Abilities are: a bonus language, proficiency with an artisan's tool, proficiency with an instrument, elvish trance, dwarven stonecunning, camouflage in a specific environment, etc.

Some Trivial Abilities may be negative, serving as more of a drawback than a bonus. Drawbacks include traits like Small size, a base walking speed of 25 feet, illiteracy, or lack of opposable thumbs. Drawbacks that can easily cripple or kill a PC should be avoided, such as vulnerability to a damage type or ability score penalties.

Note: Drawbacks For Abilities

Often new D&D homebrewers will make something along the lines of, "this race has +4 Strength and +4 Constitution and they make great Barbarians, but they're balanced because they can't cast magic spells." This demonstrates a staggering ignorance of how gamers min-max.

These rules intentionally do not allow players to take drawbacks in exchange for more Basic Abilities. Almost all drawbacks can be mitigated or worked around by the player, which makes it too easy for a PC to abuse a drawbacks system to make a min-maxxed character.

Racial drawbacks should be treated as role-playing oriented flaws, which supplement the flaws from a PC's background. Drawbacks should not be forced on players who don't want them.

If the DM allows it, Trivial Ability drawbacks can also be tied directly to Basic Abilities to change how they work. For example, a werewolf's damage resistance might work against non-silver weapons instead of non-magic weapons, a drider may have 120' darkvision but suffer disadvantage to attack rolls and Perception checks in direct sunlight, or a fire elemental may have both of the Resistance ability choices but suffer disadvantage on saving throws against cold effects. See the Example Races chapter for how Trivial Abilities could work for common species like tiny pixies or sunlight-hating vampires.

Chapter 2: Character Progression

This chapter will be in the final version of this book. Follow @koboldskeep on Twitter for updates.

Chapter 3: Example Races

This chapter contains examples of common races and monsters that could be built using these rules. Each one has its suggested racial ability score bonuses and three Basic Abilities. Some Basic Abilities have Trivial Abilities noted in parentheses (see the Basic Abilities chapter). Each one also has a list of suggested Advanced Abilities that the character may gain through progression (see the Character Progression chapter).

These are not canonical or full race descriptions. Players may decide that they want different abilities than what is listed here.

Air Elemental
- +2 Dexterity, +1 Intelligence
- 1st-level Abilities: Wings, Amorphous, Cantrip (wizard, *gust*)
- Higher-level Abilities: Wings II, Wings III, Bite (slam attack, 1d10 bludgeoning, finesse), Energy Resistance (lightning), Energy Resistance II (thunder), Blowback, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II, Blowback, Lightning Dash

Bird-Person/Harpy
- +2 Dexterity, +1 Charisma
- 1st-level Abilities: Wings, Claws, Spell I (bard, *charm person*)
- Higher-level Abilities: Wings II, Wings III, Multiattack I, Pounce, Skill (perception), Uncanny Accuracy, Uncanny Accuracy II, Spell II (*enthrall, sleep*), Keen Senses

Cat-Person
- +2 Dexterity, +1 Charisma
- 1st-level Abilities: Claws, Skill (stealth), Darkvision

- Higher-level Abilities: Sprinter, Agile, Scamper, Multiattack I, Furious Charge, Pounce, Climbing, Leaper, Keen Senses

Celestial

- +2 Charisma, +1 Wisdom
- 1st-level Abilities: Wings, Magic Resistance, Spell I (paladin, *cure wounds*)
- Higher-level Abilities: Wings II, Spell II (*detect evil and good, zone of truth*), Spell III (*searing smite, daylight*), Energy Resistance (radiant), Dayburst

Centaur

- +2 Strength, +1 Dexterity
- 1st-level Abilities: Speed (40 feet, must use barding armor), Claws (hoof attacks, 1d6 bludgeoning), Sprinter
- Higher-level Abilities: Speed II, Increased Size I, Skill (athletics), Multilimbed (hoof attacks only, can add Strength to damage), Multilimbed II, Multilimbed III, Pounce, Furious Charge, Uncanny Accuracy, Uncanny Accuracy II

Construct/Golem

- +2 Strength, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Inorganic, Natural Armor, False Appearance
- Higher-level Abilities: Natural Armor II, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II, Toughness, Fortitude, Invulnerable, Bite (slam attack, 1d12 bludgeoning), Magic Resistance, Magic Resistance II

Dinosaur-Person

- +2 Strength, +1 Intelligence
- 1st-level Abilities: Claws, Natural Armor, Speed

- Higher-level Abilities: Bite, Multiattack I, Multiattack II, Natural Armor II, Speed II, Brutal Strike, Increased Size I

Doppelganger

- +2 Intelligence, +1 Charisma
- 1st-level Abilities: Skill (deception), Cantrip (wizard, *message*), Disguise (can't absorb gear, can permanently change the form to a new person after killing them)
- Higher-level Abilities: Spell II (*comprehend languages, detect thoughts*), Darkvision, Claws, Shapeshifter I, Shapeshifter II

Dragon

- +2 Strength, +1 Charisma
- 1st-level Abilities: Wings, Claws, Spell I (sorcerer, *burning hands*, breath weapon save DC uses Constitution instead of Charisma)
- Higher-level Abilities: Wings II, Wings III, Skill (intimidation), Spell Specialization (breath weapon), Spell Renewal (breath weapon), Energy Resistance (fire), Energy Immunity (fire), Natural Armor, Natural Armor II, Bite, Multiattack I, Multiattack II, Darkvision, Blindsight, Blindsight II, Brutal Strike, Increased Size I, Increased Size II, Disguise, Shapeshifter I, Wild Shape, Wild Shape II

Earth Elemental

- +2 Strength, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Blindsight, Natural Armor, Brutal Strike
- Higher-level Abilities: Burrow I, Burrow II, Brutal Strike II, Siege Monster, Increased Size I, Bite (slam attack, 1d12 bludgeoning), Darkvision, Metal Scent, Inorganic, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II, Attuned Strike

Fiend

- +2 Strength, +1 Charisma
- 1st-level Abilities: Wings, Energy Resistance (fire), Spell I (warlock, *hellish rebuke*)
- Higher-level Abilities: Spell II (*comprehend languages, darkness*), Spell III (*command, fireball*), Energy Immunity (fire), Energy Resistance II (poison), Wings II, Claws, Magic Resistance, Blink, Wild Shape

Fire Elemental

- +2 Dexterity, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Darkvision, Cantrip (sorcerer, *produce flame*), Energy Resistance (fire, both immune and advantage versus fire, disadvantage on saves versus cold damage)
- Higher-level Abilities: Amorphous, Fire Aura, Spell II (*burning hands, scorching ray*), Spell III (*absorb elements, fireball*), Energy Immunity (fire), Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II

Gargoyle

- +2 Constitution, +1 Strength
- 1st-level Abilities: Claws, Wings, False Appearance
- Higher-level Abilities: Natural Armor, Natural Armor II, Inorganic, Darkvision, Wings II, Wings III, Bite, Multiattack I, Multiattack II, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II, Energy Resistance (poison), Energy Immunity

Ghost

- +2 Charisma, +1 Dexterity
- 1st-level Abilities: Inorganic, Energy Resistance (necrotic), Cantrip (sorcerer, *chill touch*)
- Higher-level Abilities: Incorporeal, Darkvision, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II, Life Drain, Wings, Wings II, Spell II (*unseen servant, invisibility*),

Spell III (*silent image, fear*), Energy Resistance, Energy Immunity

Insect-Person

- +2 Dexterity, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Leaper, Claws, Multilimbed (can make claw attacks with Multilimbed)
- Higher-level Abilities: Multilimbed II, Multilimbed III, Weapon Training, Natural Armor, Energy Resistance (poison), Bite, Venom, Multiattack I

Insect Swarm (Hive-Mind)

- +2 Dexterity, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Bite (1d10 damage, finesse), Amorphous (can occupy another creature's square, disadvantage on saves against fire), Cantrip (wizard, *message*, can target multiple creatures, can't speak without telepathy)
- Higher-level Abilities: Climbing, Energy Resistance (psychic), Telepathic Blast, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II, Blindsight

Lizard-Person

- +2 Strength, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Bite, Climbing, Aquatic (swim speed 40, hold breath for 1 hour)
- Higher-level Abilities: Natural Armor, Natural Armor II, Multiattack I

Medusa

- +2 Charisma, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Petrifying Gaze, Energy Resistance (poison), Bite (snake hair, 1 piercing, 1d8 poison)
- Higher-level Abilities: Petrifying Gaze II, Petrifying Gaze III, Venom, Darkvision, Natural Armor, Multiattack I

Merfolk
- +2 Charisma, +1 Dexterity
- 1st-level Abilities: Aquatic, Spell (*command*), Darkvision
- Higher-level Abilities: Spell II (*enthrall, sleep*), Spell III (*hypnotic pattern, charm person*), Spell Specialization

Minotaur
- +2 Strength, +1 Wisdom
- 1st-level Abilities: Darkvision, Brutal Strike, Bite (gore attack, 1d12 piercing)
- Higher-level Abilities: Increased Size I, Brutal Strike II, Multiattack I, Furious Charge, Weapon Training

Mushroom-Person
- +2 Constitution, +1 Wisdom
- 1st-level Abilities: Blindsight, False Appearance, Cantrip (wizard, *poison spray*, spore attack save DC uses Constitution instead of Intelligence)
- Higher-level Abilities: Blindsight II, Energy Resistance (poison), Toughness

Ogre/Giant
- +2 Strength, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Brutal Strike, Toughness, Bite (slam attack, 1d12 bludgeoning)
- Higher-level Abilities: Increased Size I, Increased Size II, Brutal Strike II, Siege Monster

Ooze-Person
- +2 Constitution, +1 Strength
- 1st-level Abilities: Amorphous, Blindsight, Extended Arms
- Higher-level Abilities: Bite (slam attack, 1d6 bludgeoning, 1d6 acid), Physical Resistance

(bludgeoning), Multilimbed, Blindsight II, Climbing, Climbing II, Energy Resistance (acid), Acid Blood

Skeleton
- +2 Constitution, +1 Dexterity
- 1st-level Abilities: Inorganic, Darkvision, Physical Resistance (piercing)
- Higher-level Abilities: Phsyical Resistance II (slashing), Energy Resistance (poison), Energy Immunity (poison)

Snake-Person (Four-Armed)
- +2 Dexterity, +1 Wisdom
- 1st-level Abilities: Climbing, Multilimbed, Bite (1 piercing, 1d8 poison, finesse)
- Higher-level Abilities: Multiattack I, Multilimbed II, Multilimbed III, Multilimbed Spellcasting, Natural Armor, Energy Resistance (poison), Energy Immunity (poison), Venom, Blindsight

Sphinx
- +1 Intelligence, +1 Wisdom, +1 Charisma
- 1st-level Abilities: Claws, Blink, Wings
- Higher-level Abilities: Skill (perception), Wings II, Wings III, Blink II, Energy Resistance (psychic), Energy Immunity (psychic), Magic Resistance, Magic Resistance II

Spider-Person/Drider
- +2 Dexterity, +1 Wisdom
- 1st-level Abilities: Climbing, Darkvision, Bite (1 piercing and 1d8 poison, finesse)
- Higher-level Abilities: Web I, Web II, Agile, Climbing II, Energy Resistance (poison), Venom, Life Drain

Sprite/Pixie/Fairy
- +2 Dexterity, +1 Intelligence

- 1st-level Abilities: Skill (stealth), Spell I (wizard, *sleep*), Wings (can hover in place as a reaction, Tiny size, disadvantage to attack with non-light weapons except shortbow, half carrying capacity)
- Higher-level Abilities: Wings II, Spell II (*faerie fire, invisibility*), Spell Renewal (*invisibility*), Magic Resistance, Magic Resistance II

Treant/Tree-Person
- +2 Strength, +1 Wisdom
- 1st-level Abilities: Natural Armor, Physical Resistance (piercing), Photosynthesis
- Higher-level Abilities: Physical Resistance II (bludgeoning), False Appearance, Brutal Strike, Increased Size I, Increased Size II, Brutal Strike II, Siege Monster, Bite (slam attack, 1d12 bludgeoning), Natural Armor II

Troll
- +2 Constitution, +1 Strength
- 1st-level Abilities: Toughness, Claws, Brutal Strike
- Higher-level Abilities: Regeneration I, Regeneration II, Increased Size I, Brutal Strike II, Bite, Multiattack I, Multiattack II, Darkvision

Turtle-Person
- +2 Wisdom, +1 Intelligence
- 1st-level Abilities: Natural Armor, Shell, Aquatic
- Higher-level Abilities: Bite, Multiattack I, Natural Armor II, Shell II

Unicorn
- +2 Wisdom, +1 Strength
- 1st-level Abilities: Speed (40 feet, no opposable thumbs), Bite (horn attack, 1d12 piercing), Spell I (druid, *cure wounds*)

- Higher-level Abilities: Beast Speech, Blink, Blink II, Spell Specialization (*cure wounds*), Spell II (*entangle, lesser restoration*), Spell Weaving, Speed II, Claws (hoof attacks, 1d6 bludgeoning), Multiattack I, Multiattack II, Magic Resistance, Energy Resistance (poison), Energy Immunity (poison)

Vampire

- +2 Charisma, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Life Drain, Speed, Wild Shape (bat, can use Life Drain in bat form, vampire weaknesses in all forms)
- Higher-level Abilities: Darkvision, Life Drain II, Bite (slam attack, 1d12 bludgeoning), Speed II, Energy Resistance (necrotic), Spell I (sorcerer, *charm person*), Spell II (*charm person, spider climb*), Spell III (*charm person, gaseous form*), Toughness, Regeneration I, Regeneration II, Magic Resistance

Water Elemental

- +2 Strength, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Amorphous, Aquatic, Spell I (cleric, *create or destroy water*)
- Higher-level Abilities: Bite (slam attack, 1d12 bludgeoning), Energy Resistance (acid), Brutal Strike, Increased Size I, Physical Resistance, Physical Resistance II

Werewolf

- +2 Strength, +1 Constitution
- 1st-level Abilities: Disguise (human), Bite, Physical Resistance (slashing, full damage from silver instead of magic)
- Higher-level Abilities: Physical Resistance II, Speed, Natural Armor, Keen Senses, Claws, Furious Charge, Multiattack I, Multiattack II, Brutal Strike

Yeti

- +2 Constitution, +1 Strength
- 1st-level Abilities: Energy Resistance (cold), Natural Armor, Toughness
- Higher-level Abilities: Brutal Strike, Brutal Strike II, Icewalker, Energy Immunity

Zombie/Ghoul

- +2 Constitution, +1 Strength
- 1st-level Abilities: Inorganic, Energy Resistance (poison), Toughness
- Higher-level Abilities: Darkvision, Fortitude, Invulnerable, Energy Resistance (necrotic), Energy Immunity (poison), Life Drain, Life Drain II

Chapter 4: Magic Items

This chapter will be in the final version of this book. Follow @koboldskeep on Twitter for updates.

Chapter 5: Character Building

This chapter has additional details for building and role-playing player characters.

Match The Setting

Learn what kind of campaign your DM is running before you decide what kind of character you are making. The DM has to do less work if your PC fits into the setting well. Read any hand-outs, materials, or player's guides for the setting. Ask the DM follow-up questions about any aspects of the setting you find interesting. Pay particular attention to civilizations, guilds, and political factions, so that you can tie your character's backstory into them.

For example, if your DM is running a standard D&D campaign, the simplest thing to do would be to base your species off of a common demihuman or monster. In a setting based on Greek mythology, species like centaurs, satyrs, dryads, or sirens would be appropriate (as would clockwork automata or someone uniquely cursed by the gods). If your DM's homebrew setting is a post-apocalyptic world, then a heavily mutated human or cyborg should fit in just fine. A high-magic setting where magical marvels are common would allow for exotic things like awakened animals, sentient golems, extraplanar visitors, or humans with magically grafted limbs.

Most campaign settings have a number of far-off nations, ancient civilization, and alternate planes of existence. Some of these could serve as your character's point of origin. Your character could also come from a tribe of nomads or refugees that has only recently arrived in the area. Being from a far-away place can be an easy explanation for why your character is unique and not like other characters in the story. You should have a good explanation for why they came here, how they got here, what they're doing while they're here, whether they came with friends, whether they were brought unwillingly, and whether they intend to stay. If your character is a foreigner, ask

the DM how that will impact your character's background and what you need to know about their homeland.

If your DM has not provided much information about the setting, you may want to come up with a short list of suggestions for interesting political factions and locations related to your character. Steal ideas from official Dungeons & Dragons settings or from other popular media, if you have to. Suggest ways that these could serve as plot hooks for future adventures for the whole party. Let your DM decide which ones are appropriate.

Work with the DM to determine how other NPCs will view your character. Are there any notable or famous people of the same race? How likely is it that someone has seen another creature of your species before? Do you look similar enough to another common species that most people will assume your red-skinned horned devil is just an unusually sexy minotaur?

> **Note: It's Not Weird If Everyone Is Doing It**
>
> Dungeon Masters using these rules should frequently introduce non-human NPCs, so that the PCs using these rules don't seem so weird or stand out as much. It makes sense for a small, isolated village to be mostly one species, but trading hubs and large cities should have lots of different people from different places. If you are using a pre-published adventure or campaign setting, changing the races of important NPCs is quite easy. The exact ratios are up to you and the feel you want for your setting, but we recommend making important NPCs at least 45% demihumans and 5% non-humanoids.
>
> Also, don't feel like you have to follow the full character creation rules for each NPC you introduce. Most stats only matter if the NPC is going to be in a fight.

Background

A character's race and class don't define much more than their combat abilities. Adding a background to your character is a great way to make them unique and more interesting to role-play. Remember that your background represents the skills your character has outside of combat and adventuring.

You should decide whether your character received professional training, learned from several people while working, or if they

were self-taught. If you work for a business or faction, have a good idea of what that organization does and what you do for them. Factions like guilds and corporations may offer profitable work for characters of certain species. Bigger and stronger races can easily find mercenary and security work, or be valuable laborers. A character with natural magical affinity may be hired by a mage's guild without looking too closely at their credentials, training, or thirst for blood. A character who is fast or capable of flight would make an excellent courier. Artisan guilds may hire smaller characters to do fine detailed work, or crawl around in machinery. Your character's allegiance to a faction and guild could very well have more social importance than their species.

Note: Stereotypes

Dungeon Masters should be careful about using prejudices in their campaigns, because it's usually not fun on its own. If a PC is on the receiving end of prejudice, make sure that it's happening for a good story reason. It makes sense for a dragon-like PC to be feared if there is a nearby dragon for the party to slay. If the party is going to be involved in an epic war later, it's not a bad idea for a PC from another nation to be suspected of spying to make the political tension apparent. With research and effort a PC might find a way to win people's trust, or at least convince them that they're harmless and their money is good.

A race may be defined by its notable leaders, nobility, and politics. However, large nations should rarely be one race, especially if they conquer new territory or have open borders. This would be based on whether they have a reputation for being benevolent, heroic, artistic, rich, educated, rude, ignorant, or cruel. Famous heroes, adventurers, or criminals (even fictional ones) may color how NPCs perceive characters of the same race or nationality.

Stereotypes for only one species are a limiting and restrictive tool in the DM's toolbox. It's not nearly as interesting as having stereotypes for a nationality or faction affiliation. Drama comes from miscommunications, rumors, political tension, paranoia, and adventure hooks. You can even have vague, broad rumors about whole parts of the globe, such as "a hairy savage from the Frozen Northlands" or "a rich aquatic merchant from the Crystal Isles."

Consider what kind of people you grew up around, and how much of their worldview, philosophy, ethics, and religion you adopted. Were they the same species as you? Did you have any masters or teachers? Did you acquire any friends or rivals as

you learned your background skills? If you grew up away from civilization and other people, the first few NPCs you met may have had a huge impact on you.

Your character may have flaws that make them very hard to be around. This could be relaxed cultural views towards certain taboos such as thievery, violence, nudity, or personal space. These can be potential sources of fun role-playing drama for a few sessions, but can also be annoying to other players if they cause trouble. Tell the other players in the group (out of character) what your plans are for your character's long-term development, and suggest ways that their characters could make your character develop socially acceptable behavior more quickly.

Equipment

How much standard adventuring equipment you can use depends on your species. Some magic items may resize themselves to fit you (or still work but fit poorly), but most of your equipment will need a tailor or blacksmith to resize it. Having gear custom-ordered is probably the best option. Custom-fitted equipment for a non-humanoid can cost up to four times as much as normal gear (the same as barding armor). Likewise, a specially-designed harness rig that allows a tool or weapon to be used without opposable thumbs would cost four times as much as normal.

It's also possible for your PC to eschew equipment altogether. Spells like *mage armor*, the Natural Armor Basic Ability, or barbarian and monk class features can be used for defense. Telekinesis via the *mage hand* cantrip may be invaluable for a character with no thumbs, whether they are a quadruped or a brain in a jar. If you go this route, you should talk to your DM about substituting magic items for abilities using the Race Points variant described in the Advanced Abilities chapter.

You should also consider how your character treats their equipment. Owning tools, domesticated animals, weapons, armor, and clothing may factor into your character's culture or upbringing in an interesting way. This isn't as much of an issue

if you were raised in normal civilization, but it's something to consider if you're from the wilds or an isolated tribe. You might take a dim view of toolmaking and crafts, or not consider them to be valuable. You might come from a culture that trades in favors instead of currency. You may have subsisted on stolen or scavenged equipment and rarely maintained it. You might place a huge emphasis on wearing trophies, religious objects, or expensive and finely-crafted clothing to show your social status. You may also consider civilization to have nothing to do with buildings or commerce or writing, and instead believe that civilization means having an oral tradition of lore and songs. Or you might come from a highly advanced civilization and find most things around you to be primitive and quaint.

Character Optimization

The rules in this book have been balanced on the assumption that you are trying to make the most effective character possible with your three Basic Ability choices. If you are making a custom race and your DM wants you to take an undesired Basic Ability or ability score bonus for verisimilitude, you should insist that you get another Basic Ability of your choice or another +1 to an ability score to compensate.

That said, as long as you make a single-classed PC with good ability scores, you shouldn't have much trouble being effective in your party role. You can always ask the DM if you can re-spec your racial or class features later if they are causing problems. Dungeons & Dragons is a game, and your goal should be having fun.