

VARIANT BACKGROUND RULES FOR 5E

This supplement provides optional rules for assigning character background proficiencies in **Dungeons and Dragons** 5th Edition. The reasoning behind creating these variant rules is twofold; to provide more players with more options for customisation during character creation, and to help balance out the six ability scores by giving the Intelligence score a new mechanic to interact with – skill points.

This supplement takes the background system as described in *Chapter 4* of the **Player's Handbook** and expands upon it. It allows players to pick and choose the skills, tools, or other proficiencies granted to their characters through their background while keeping the rest of the benefits intact. These new rules are designed to replace the rules used in the **Player's Handbook**.

To use these rules, start by picking a background for your character as normal. However, only record the name, starting equipment and unique feature of your chosen background on your character sheet (if you wish to forgo your starting equipment in favour of gold, you can do so using the rules provided in *Chapter 5* of the **Player's Handbook**).

SKILL POINTS

Your aptitude for learning is measured by skill points, which are based off your character's Intelligence score. You can use these points to 'buy' skill, tool and other proficiencies during character creation as shown on the Skill Point table. These proficiencies replace any proficiencies you would ordinarily gain from your background.

You have a number of skill points equal to $6 +$ your Intelligence modifier. You can spend as many of these skill points as you like during character creation. Any unspent skill points are recorded on your character sheet and may be spent when you gain a level in any class, or at any point the DM chooses (such as after completing a period of downtime).

Some proficiencies have two costs; a standard and an expert cost. Purchasing a proficiency for a standard cost allows you to add your proficiency bonus to checks using it. Purchasing a proficiency for its expert cost allows you to add double your proficiency bonus to checks using it. To purchase a proficiency for its expert

cost, you must first buy the proficiency for its standard cost, or already be proficient with it through another source.

To purchase proficiency in medium armour or shields, you must first be proficient in light armour, either from another source or by purchasing it for its standard cost.

To purchase proficiency in heavy armour, you must already be proficient in medium armour, either from another source or by purchasing it for its standard cost.

SKILL POINT TABLE

Proficiency	Standard Cost	Expert Cost
One skill in your class list*	1	3
One Language	1	-
One Tool	1	-
One Musical instrument or Gaming set	1	2
One Vehicle	1	2
One simple weapon	1	-
One martial weapon	2	-
Firearms	2	-
One skill not in your class list*	2	3
Light Armour	2	-
Medium Armour	3	-
Shields	3	-
Heavy Armour	4	-

**Skills on your class list are only the skills listed under the Class Features heading of your class, and do not include any skills granted to you by features of your class or subclass.*

Once you have spent skill points on a proficiency, you cannot change your choice, even if you later gain more skill points. If your character's Intelligence modifier permanently increases due to a feature of your class, a feat, a magic item, or a boon, you gain 1 additional skill point for every increase of 1 to your modifier. The effects of potions, spells or magic items that grant temporary or conditional increases to your ability scores (for example a *headband of intellect*) do not increase your number of available skill points.


You can purchase an option from the skill point table multiple times, but you can only purchase a maximum of 3 skills for their standard cost and 1 skill for its expert cost, regardless of if those skills are on your class list or not.


As always, the DM decides what is and isn't allowed in their campaign. Some of the options provided by these rules, such as being able to add double your proficiency bonus to skills, have the potential to shift game balance. They are provided here to allow for greater variety of character concepts and specialisation, but it is ultimately the DM's decision whether or not these options are used.


WHY USE INTELLIGENCE?


The Intelligence score is intended to represent your character's mental acuity and education. While this doesn't always represent how a character came to learn the skills provided by their background, the choice to tie this system to the Intelligence score was made to place a greater focus on the score within the game. The Intelligence score in 5th Edition D&D has practically no mechanical bearing outside of your class features, should they require it. As a result, many players choose to "dump" their Intelligence score and face no repercussions for it. Additionally, Intelligence has been historically tied to skill-based classes like the Wizard, Artificer and Rogue, as it represents a character's aptitude for learning.



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