

NARRATIVE-DRIVEN CHARACTER CREATION

Variant rules for Ability Score Improvements based on Class and Background, and alternate Racial Trait Proficiency



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INTRODUCTION

IN DUNGEONS & DRAGONS FIFTH EDITION, characters have traditionally gained an ability score increase trait through their race. Critiques have been raised questioning the narrative this mechanic evokes, and I ultimately agreed that, even with politics aside, race doesn't feel like a pleasing place to put ability score increases. It causes certain race and class pairings to perform notably weaker than others, which may dissuade players from playing a race and class combination they had envisioned.

ADDRESSING LINEAGE & ORIGINS

Though a new Lineage system is being created for *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* that proposes a solution, I'm of the opinion that the system previews we have seen as of writing this material wind up causing a massive shift in the overall balance behind character creation in several races, and min-maxing players will ultimately just see the system as a means to create "optimal" characters instead of compelling ones.

HUMAN & HALF-ELF

These races lost a large amount of mechanical appeal and comparative power as race options by losing the exclusivity on flexible ability score increases. The changes in the Race Changes chapter seek to give these options a little love to compensate for this loss.

KOBOLD

The new lineage system fixes the horrific -2 to Strength for kobold, but still leaves them under par compared to most other race options. This system gives them some love.

MOUNTAIN DWARF

Going off of the previews of the Lineage system, mountain dwarf would now get a +2 to two different ability scores of your choice, on top of the possibility to get 5 tool proficiencies. This seems to be a case of rules as written over rules as intended, as this winds up dramatically increasing the overall versatility and power of mountain dwarf. While I'm of the opinion that any race should be able to pair with any class, this is a case of one race now becoming performatively better than others.

YUAN-TI PUREBLOOD

Already dominating with the strongest racial traits of any of the official races, yuan-ti pureblood was at least somewhat offset by an Ability Score Increase in Intelligence and Charisma. These two ability scores lack synergy for class features, but the flexible +2 and +1 to ability scores of your choice causes them to rise up to even more prominence as the most optimal race for any class.





CHAPTER ONE: RACE

A CHARACTER'S RACE DEFINES SEVERAL GENETIC traits shared between all people of that biological descent. These reflect the abilities that a character has inherited through the course of evolution, or that were bestowed upon them during their creation.

Additionally, the changes to race-based weapon and tool proficiencies were made to avoid prevent redundant race traits and class features, but I don't believe the proposed changes pleasingly hit the mark. Swapping a tool proficiency for a weapon isn't a major issue, but swapping a weapon for a tool suddenly causes major proficiency bloat. Variant Race Traits have been introduced in the Race chapter for all races that gain a weapon proficiency.

RACE TRAIT CHANGES

The following variant rules change the mechanics for Ability Score Increases, clean up alignment, and makes languages and proficiencies gained through your race choice more flexible.

ABILITY SCORE IMPROVEMENTS

Using this system, any changes to a character's ability scores made through a racial trait are ignored. Increases to a character's ability scores are instead given through your character's Background and Class.

ALIGNMENT

Your character's alignment is not determined by your race.

LANGUAGES

You may replace each language in your Languages trait with any other language that is appropriate for your campaign.

PROFICIENCIES

Armor, skill, tool, and weapon proficiencies tend to represent a character's cultural and military traditions. With this in mind, you can replace a given proficiency with other options.

ARMOR

If a race trait gives you proficiency with armor, you may replace the entire trait with either a skill proficiency from the list of proficiencies in your Class Features or a tool proficiency. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses the chosen proficiency.

ARMOR PROFICIENCY CLARIFICATION

Replacing the "entire trait" means replacing all armor proficiencies given through the trait in order to take a different option.

SKILLS

If a race trait gives you a skill proficiency you may replace it with skill proficiency from the list of proficiencies in your Class Features. The only exception to this is for racial traits that specifically give proficiency with Perception checks, which tend to be due to a hereditary trait as opposed to a cultural tradition.

TOOLS

If a race trait gives you a tool proficiency you may replace it with a different tool proficiency, a language that you know, or proficiency with a simple weapon.

WEAPONS

If a race trait gives you a weapon proficiency, you may replace it with a different proficiency depending on whether it is a simple or martial weapon:

Simple Weapons. You may replace proficiency with one simple weapon for proficiency with a different simple weapon or a tool. Alternatively, you may replace two simple weapon proficiencies for proficiency with a skill.

Martial Weapons. You may replace proficiency with one martial weapon for two simple weapon proficiencies or proficiency with one skill from the list of proficiencies in your Class Features or a tool of your choice. You may replace an additional martial weapon proficiency to add double your proficiency bonus to any ability check you make that uses the chosen skill or tool proficiency.

VARIANT RACE TRAITS

The following races gain additional traits to compensate for losing some power with this system.

HALF-ELF TRAITS

Half-Elf characters gain the Diplomatic racial trait.

Diplomatic. When you make a Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Intimidation), or Charisma (Persuasion) check made to influence the decisions and behavior of others, you may treat a roll of 8 or lower as a 9.

HUMAN TRAITS

Human characters gain the Aptitude racial trait.

Aptitude. The gold and time you must spend to gain proficiency with a skill or tool is halved. If you spend 4 hours practicing, studying, or training with a skill or tool that you are proficient with, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses that proficiency until you finish a long rest or use this feature again.

MOUNTAIN DWARF TRAITS

Mountain dwarf characters gain the Sturdy racial trait.

Sturdy. You have advantage on saving throws against being knocked prone.





CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

YOUR BACKGROUND IS SOMETHING OF A SUMMARY of your life leading up to adventuring. In this system, your background gives you increases to ability scores based off of the skill proficiencies given in the background. Due to the lack of Strength and Constitution-based skills, some skills allow you to choose multiple abilities.

What ability scores correspond to certain skills are listed in the Skill Ability Score Increases table. The following page contains a table for the Backgrounds that have appeared in official books and details what Ability Score Increases are given through that background's skill proficiencies. If a background allows you to choose to put an increase into your choice of ability scores, you may choose the same ability for both improvements.

SKILL ABILITY SCORE INCREASES

Skill	Ability Score(s)
Acrobatics	Dexterity or Constitution
Animal Handling	Wisdom
Arcana	Intelligence
Athletics	Strength or Constitution
Deception	Charisma
History	Intelligence
Insight	Wisdom
Intimidation	Strength or Charisma
Investigation	Intelligence
Medicine	Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom
Nature	Intelligence or Wisdom
Perception	Wisdom
Performance	Dexterity or Charisma
Persuasion	Charisma
Religion	Intelligence or Wisdom
Sleight of Hand	Dexterity
Stealth	Dexterity
Survival	Strength, Constitution, or Wisdom



BACKGROUND ABILITY SCORE INCREASES

Background	Ability Score Increase
Acolyte	+1 to Wisdom, and +1 to one ability score of your choice from either Wisdom or Intelligence
Anthropologist	+1 to Wisdom, and +1 to one ability score of your choice from either Wisdom or Intelligence
Archaeologist	+1 to Intelligence, and +1 to one ability score of your choice from either Strength, Constitution, or Wisdom
Athlete	+1 to Constitution, and +1 to one ability score of your choice from either Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution
Charlatan	+1 to Dexterity and Charisma
City Watch	+1 to two ability scores of your choice from either Strength, Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom
Cloistered Scholar	+1 to Intelligence and Wisdom
Courtier	+1 to Wisdom and Charisma
Criminal	+1 to Dexterity and Charisma
Entertainer	+1 to Dexterity and Charisma
Faction Agent	+1 to Wisdom, and +1 to one ability score of your choice from either Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma
Far Traveler	+2 to Wisdom
Fisher	+1 to Constitution and Intelligence
Folk Hero	+1 to Constitution and Wisdom
Gambler	+1 to Wisdom and Charisma
Gladiator	+1 to Charisma, and +1 to one ability score of your choice from either Dexterity or Constitution
Guild Artisan	+1 to Wisdom and Intelligence
Guild Merchant	+1 to Wisdom and Charisma
Haunted One	+1 to two abilities of your choice of either Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom
Hermit	+1 to two abilities of your choice of either Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom
Inheritor	+1 to Intelligence and one ability of your choice from either Constitution or Wisdom
Investigator	+1 to two ability scores of your choice from either Strength, Constitution, or Wisdom
Knight	+1 to two abilities of your choice from either Strength, Intelligence, or Charisma
Marine	+1 to Strength and Constitution
Mercenary Veteran	+1 to Strength and Constitution
Noble	+1 to Intelligence and Charisma
Outlander	+1 to Strength and your choice of either Constitution or Wisdom
Pirate	+1 to Strength and Wisdom
Sage	+2 to Intelligence
Sailor	+1 to Strength and Wisdom
Shipwright	+1 to Intelligence and Wisdom
Smuggler	+1 to Strength and Charisma
Soldier	+1 to Strength and Charisma
Spy	+1 to Dexterity and Charisma
Urban Bounty Hunter	+1 to two abilities of your choice from either Dexterity, Wisdom, or Charisma
Urchin	+2 to Dexterity



CHAPTER THREE: CLASS

A CHARACTER'S CLASS SPEAKS MORE ABOUT A specific ideal in how to tackle the various challenges of adventuring. Because of this, one of your ability score improvements is given to you from the class you choose for your first level upon character creation. The ability scores used for this improvement are the abilities used for the class's saving throw proficiencies and the abilities that the class features get the most use out of. The ability score you choose from your class increases by 1.

For example, Monk gains proficiency with Strength and Dexterity saving throws and its features rely on Dexterity and Wisdom, so a 1st-level character can choose to increase one ability score by 1 from either Strength, Dexterity, or Wisdom.

CLASS ABILITY SCORE INCREASE CHOICES

Class	Ability Scores
Artificer	Dexterity, Constitution, or Intelligence
Barbarian	Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution
Bard	Dexterity, Constitution, or Charisma
Cleric	Strength, Constitution, or Wisdom
Druid	Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom
Fighter	Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution
Monk	Strength, Dexterity, or Wisdom
Paladin	Strength, Wisdom, or Charisma
Ranger	Strength, Dexterity, or Wisdom
Rogue	Dexterity, Intelligence, or Charisma
Sorcerer	Dexterity, Constitution, or Charisma
Warlock	Constitution, Wisdom, or Charisma
Wizard	Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom

