

Session Four: Backgrounds and Alignment

We are now onto the very final stages of talking about our characters before we actually build them. First we're going to talk about backgrounds. This is different from the back story you've written for your character as they are choices you actually make from your PHB that add certain skills and gear to your character as well as give you role-playing hooks. Your character's background is what they did before they set out on the adventure you're about to play. Most of them are professions but some are lifestyle choices. We'll briefly go over the backgrounds now:

Acolyte: This person has spent their life in servitude of a temple or God so you'll have to make sure you choose a deity your character reveres. With this background you get proficiency in the Insight and Religion skill. I've said this "proficiency" term a few times now so I'll just briefly explain it. Different races, classes and backgrounds give characters proficiency which means they get to not only add the appropriate stat modifier to their rolls, but also their Proficiency Bonus which is in the top right of your character sheet. Everyone, no matter what class or race, starts with +2 Proficiency bonus and it then increases as they level. Having Proficiency in something means you are particularly good at that thing for one reason or another. So, it stands to reason that someone who has spent their whole life dedicated to a God and its people would be well versed in Religion and Insight (which is the art of reading people). Along with those skill bumps, you also get to choose any two languages aside from the ones you already know from your race choice. Also get some unique equipment including a holy symbol, a prayer book, incense, vestments and 15 gold to start your adventure with.

Charlatan: this person is a swindler and master of manipulation. They typically spend their time running rigged games, selling snake oil products or fraudulently selling property that doesn't belong to them. This Background grants Proficiency in Deception and Sleight of Hand. You also are proficient with the disguise kit and forgery kit (meaning if your DM asks you to make a role to hide yours or another person's appearance or forge a document, you get to add your proficiency to it). The gear you get is a set of fine clothes, a disguise kit, ten tools of the con of your choice (fake items you sell at a high cost, weighted dice, etc.) and 15 gold.

Criminal: this person has a history of breaking the law for one reason or another. Maybe they simply stole from the market or perhaps their work was far more seedy and involved a dangerous gang. Whatever the story, this person has spent their life flouting rules. With this Background you gain proficiency in Deception and Stealth as well as Thieves' Tools and a gaming set (dice, cards, etc.). Criminals also start with a crowbar, a set of dark clothing with a hood and 15 gold.

Entertainer: This person loves the spotlight. Be it through music, dancing or even just inspirational speeches, this person knows how to win the hearts of a crowd. Entertainers get proficiency in Acrobatics and Performance as well as the Disguise Kit and one type musical instrument of your choice. They start with their instrument, the favour of an admirer (love note, kerchief trinket, etc.), a costume and 15 gold.

Folk Hero – Starting off in a mundane life, the Folk Hero rose against adversaries of their home region and became the stuff of legends. Destiny calls for you to defend common folk all over the land. This Background grants proficiency in Animal Handling and Survival as well as one type of artisan's tools and land vehicles (wagons, carts, etc.). The gear included with the Folk Hero background includes a set of artisan's tools, a shovel, an iron pot and 10 gold.

Guild Artisan – this person is skilled in a particular field like wine making or ship building and is well versed in the mercantile market. This Background grants proficiency in Insight and Persuasion as well as one type of artisan's tools. Gear included with this background is a set of artisan's tools, a letter of introduction from your guild and 15 gold.

Hermit - this character has spent their life in seclusion, shying away from society and other people. This person has sought out peace and quiet either out in the wilds or in the home within a town or city. This Background provides Proficiency in Medicine and Religion as well as with the Herbalism kit. The gear includes a scroll case full of notes from studies or prayers, a winter blanket, a herbalism kit and 5 gold.

Noble – This character carries a noble title within their family line and wields significant political power. Working with the DM, you can assign the proper title and how much power it carries. This background grants Proficiency in History and Persuasion as well as with one gaming set (dice, cards, etc.). The gear includes a set of fine clothing, a signet ring, a scroll of pedigree and 25 gold.

Outlander – This character grew up in the wilds far from civilization. They have honed their skills to survive on their own and coexist with nature. This background grants Proficiency in Athletics and survival as well as with one type of musical instrument. It also grants one extra language of your choice. The gear includes a staff, a hunting trap, a trophy from a beast you killed and 10 gold.

Sage – spending years in study, the Sage has collected a vast knowledge from scrolls, manuscripts and experts. This Background grants Proficiency in Arcana and History and grants two additional languages. The gear includes a bottle of black ink, a quill, a small knife, a letter from a dead colleague posing a question you have not yet answered and 10 gold.

Sailor – you can probably guess what this one is all about. This character spends their time on the open seas. The background grants proficiency in Athletics and Perception as well as with navigator's tools and with water vehicle. The gear included is a belaying pin, 50 feet of silk rope, a lucky charm and 10 gold.

Soldier – this one is also pretty self-explanatory. This character spent their time serving their people and land through some kind of militia. This background grants proficiency in Athletics and Intimidation as well as with one type of gaming set and land vehicles. The gear includes an insignia of rank, a trophy taken from a fallen enemy, a set of bone dice or cards and 10 gold.

Urchin – the final background is the Urchin. This character grew up on the streets alone or orphaned. They learned to provide for themselves, sometimes through less than noble means. This background grants Proficiency in Sleight of Hand and Stealth as well as with the disguise kit and thieves' tools. The gear includes a small knife, a map of the city you grew up in, a pet mouse, a token you remember your parents by and 10 gold.

Backgrounds not only flesh out the role-playing aspects of your character but are important pieces for shaping your specialties and abilities. The next topic however, is purely a role-playing aspect. We're going to talk about alignment. In D&D, alignment refers to how a character acts and the set of morals they hold when faced with decisions but no person is completely black and white so use these more as a guide than a set-in-stone aspect. There are 9 alignments, all falling under a combination of 3 different traits. They are, Lawful Good, Neutral Good, Chaotic Good, Lawful Neutral, True Neutral, Chaotic Neutral, Lawful Evil, Neutral Evil, and finally Chaotic Evil. An alignment will either grant you

permission or prevent you from committing certain acts. You must ALWAYS role play within your alignment or else your DM might consider changing your character's alignment given the circumstances. So, let's start with the average person like you or I. We would most likely be considered Neutral Good; We do our best to follow rules and do well by others, but we're not crazy staunch about it. Each of the alignments have their own specific traits but there's still a bit of grey area between each, as people are complex beings. To make understanding alignments easier, we're going to make some comparisons to the X-Men movie characters. An example of a Lawful Good character would be someone like Cyclops. This person always follows the rules, brings justice to wrong doers and typically belongs to some sort of organization. A Neutral good character would be someone like Professor X. This person does their best to follow rules but under the right circumstances may break them for the greater good. They stand up for what they believe in and try help others to the best of their ability. Wolverine would be a good example of a Chaotic Good character. Their intentions are good but they will result to extreme measures to do what they believe is right. They typically don't align well with organized groups and prefer to work alone. A Lawful Neutral character is someone like Beast. They believe that rules are meant to be followed, period. They tend not to be swayed either good or evil and at times can come across rather unfeeling or robotic. An example of a True neutral character would be Emma Frost. They indifferent to most laws and governments and will act only when timing and conditions are in their favour. Gambit is our example of the Chaotic Neutral alignment. These characters will do pretty much whatever they want or need to with little regard for the consequences. Sometimes they will even stir up drama for their own entertainment. Now we move into the Evil alignments starting with Lawful Evil. An example of this alignment would be Magneto. They are fiercely loyal to an evil corporation or group. They always have an agenda and those plans can easily include eliminating anyone who stands in their way. A Neutral Evil character would be someone like Sebastian King. These types of people are self serving and have little to no regard for the well being of others. They typically don't align with organizations but will if it is favourable to them. Our last and most daunting alignment is Chaotic Evil. These are the true villains like Apocalypse. These types of characters will do bad things simply for fun, has absolutely no regard for others and follows no one, they are their own leaders. Most alignments will fight against this type of character; even Lawful Evil and Neutral Evil characters will fight against Chaotic Evil characters if they feel they are not following the right set of rules or that they threaten their way of life. There are a couple questions you can ask yourself to determine your character's alignment: Who do they work or fight for? How do they feel towards authority figures? Who are the innocent in their eyes? You can also refer to the flaws, bonds and ideals you've chosen to help determine which alignment suits your character best.

Okay, now let's build our characters! Take your character sheet, pencil and note paper out and start by writing on the scrap all the skills and proficiency you get from your class, race and background along with any stat bumps you get from your race. **(continue to explain character building step by step. Easier to do in person than to write a script for)**