

# Ability Scores

Methods of Generation



# DUNGEON BREW



# Introduction

Choosing how to generate ability scores is one of the most consequential decisions for a new campaign. The method used sets the baseline for party power level and balance, and is a frequent source of debate at the table. This guide serves as a resource to make that debate unnecessarily complicated and tedious. It breaks down the most common methods of ability score generation to help your group argue more obnoxiously during Session 0.

- **Array:** A list of six ability scores.
- **MAD:** Multiple Ability Dependent
- **SAD:** Single Ability Dependent
- **Set:** A set of dice used to generate a score (e.g., 3d6).

To provide a consistent measure of an array's power level, this guide uses a metric called Point Buy Equivalent (PBE) and classifies arrays into four tiers based on the Method I Point Buy system, allowing for the extended Point Costs:

- **Average Array:** A low-powered array, equivalent to a PBE of 15.
- **Elite Array:** The standard array, equivalent to a PBE of 27.
- **Heroic Array:** A high-powered array, equivalent to a PBE of 39.
- **Mythic Array:** A top-tier array, equivalent to a PBE of 51.

**Average**  
9-21  
PBE 15

**Elite**  
22-33  
PBE 27

**Heroic**  
34-45  
PBE 39

**Mythic**  
46+  
PBE 51

With those terms in hand, the big choice really comes down to two different approaches: **Randomness** or **Determinism**.

- Randomness is about discovering a character through the unpredictable luck of the dice.
- Determinism is about having total control to create a character to your exact specifications.

This guide will break down the methods for each approach to help you decide which is right for your game.

## Method I: Point-Buy

In the Point Buy system, all ability scores start at 8. The player is given a budget of points to spend on increasing these scores, with the default usually being 27 points for an Elite Array. For scores of 13 or lower, the cost is on a 1-for-1 basis, with the cost increasing for scores of 14 or higher.

| Ability Score | Point Cost | Ability Score | Point Cost |
|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| 9             | 1          | 14            | 7          |
| 10            | 2          | 15            | 9          |
| 11            | 3          | 16            | 12         |
| 12            | 4          | 17            | 15         |
| 13            | 5          | 18            | 19         |

## Alternatives

- A maximum ability score can be set, which prevents players from purchasing scores that are too high. The maximum is typically set to 15, but could be set to any value.
- The point budget can be configured to create different power levels suitable for a variety of game types. A budget of 15 points can be used for an Average Array, 27 points for an Elite Array, 39 for an Heroic Array, and 51 points for a Mythic Array.
- The cost of ability scores can vary significantly between game systems. An alternative point cost table is presented below.

| Ability Score | Point Cost | Ability Score | Point Cost |
|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| 9             | 1          | 14            | 6          |
| 10            | 2          | 15            | 8          |
| 11            | 3          | 16            | 10         |
| 12            | 4          | 17            | 13         |
| 13            | 5          | 18            | 16         |

- To reintroduce an element of randomness, the point budget itself can be determined by a dice roll.

| Array Type           | Points      |
|----------------------|-------------|
| <u>Average Array</u> | <u>4d6</u>  |
| <u>Elite Array</u>   | <u>8d6</u>  |
| <u>Heroic Array</u>  | <u>11d6</u> |
| <u>Mythic Array</u>  | <u>14d6</u> |

## Analysis

- **Design Philosophy:** Point Buy defaults to being deterministic, allowing players to control their preferred outcome. The random point budget reintroduce randomness, but ultimately still results in a deterministic outcome
- **Mechanical Profile:** The default 27-point budget produces an Elite Array. The alternatives alter the power level, including Average, Elite, and Mythic.
- **Impact on Gameplay:** Point Buy focuses on equity, as no player is disadvantaged by luck unless an individual random point budget is used.



## Method II: Standard Array

The Standard Array method provides a pre-determined list of six scores. The player allocates these scores to their abilities as they see fit. The document provides the following standard arrays.

- **Average Array:** 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8
- **Elite Array:** 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8
- **Heroic Array:** 17, 15, 14, 13, 11, 8
- **Mythic Array:** 18, 16, 14, 14, 12, 10

### Analysis

- **Design Philosophy:** This is the most deterministic method, eliminating all randomness from score generation. Every player begins with the same resources.
- **Mechanical Profile:** The provided arrays are pre-balanced based on tier: Average (PBE 15), Elite (PBE 27), Heroic (PBE 39), and Mythic (PBE 51). Unlike Point Buy, these static scores prevent players from creating extreme statistical builds, which helps to reduce min-maxing.
- **Impact on Gameplay:** This method is the fastest way to create a character and guarantees equality, but not equity. The arrays can be restrictive for MAD classes, while being highly effective for SAD classes.

## Method III: Matrix Array

The Matrix Array method provides a pre-determined matrix of 36 scores. The player selects an array, in order, from any row, column, or diagonal. These scores can be used either forward or backward, but are intended to be used in order.

### Average Matrix

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 9  | 16 | 7  | 8  | 10 | 13 |
| 15 | 6  | 16 | 6  | 9  | 11 |
| 11 | 14 | 11 | 12 | 8  | 7  |
| 10 | 7  | 10 | 12 | 13 | 11 |
| 10 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 7  |
| 8  | 9  | 8  | 12 | 12 | 14 |

### Elite Matrix

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 11 | 11 | 9  | 18 | 11 | 12 |
| 7  | 14 | 17 | 9  | 13 | 12 |
| 12 | 15 | 8  | 15 | 13 | 9  |
| 18 | 13 | 10 | 9  | 11 | 11 |
| 10 | 8  | 17 | 9  | 15 | 13 |
| 14 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 9  | 15 |

### Heroic Matrix

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 18 | 18 | 8  | 12 | 11 | 11 |
| 16 | 14 | 15 | 6  | 13 | 14 |
| 8  | 18 | 14 | 14 | 12 | 12 |
| 9  | 7  | 15 | 14 | 16 | 17 |
| 10 | 8  | 16 | 18 | 10 | 16 |
| 17 | 13 | 10 | 14 | 16 | 8  |

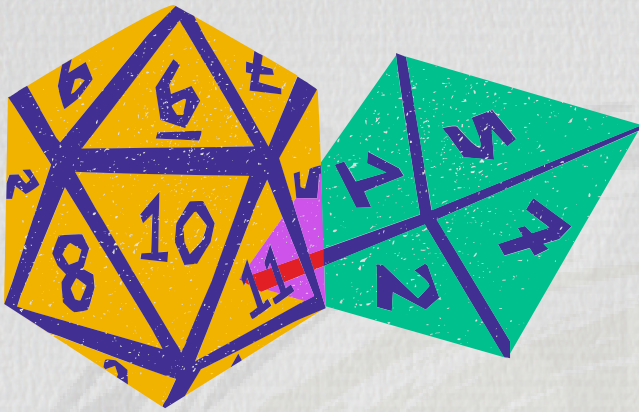
### Mythic Matrix

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 14 | 18 | 9  | 16 | 16 | 11 |
| 16 | 14 | 18 | 6  | 16 | 14 |
| 11 | 18 | 14 | 18 | 8  | 15 |
| 15 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 15 |
| 12 | 10 | 15 | 18 | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 11 | 15 | 12 | 16 | 14 |

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** This method is a compromise for groups who can't agree on rolling versus buying stats. It gives players the feeling of discovery and choice, while the GM keeps mitigates the party's power level and balance.
- **Outputs?** Each matrix produces 28 unique arrays. Every array from a single matrix has the exact same sum total (63, 72, 78, 84). The arrays are designed to fit within their tier and offer a mix of high/low stats and more balanced options.
- **When to use it?** Use this method when you want balance but want to give your players more agency than a single Standard Array. It's ideal for groups that enjoy a puzzle-like character creation process and want to encourage players to build characters around strengths and weaknesses.





## Method IV: Non-Incremental PB

In this method, all ability scores start at 3. The player is given a budget of points to assign to their scores on a 1-for-1 basis; the cost to increase a score does not change. Scores cannot exceed 18. The point budget for each tier is calibrated to match the total points above baseline provided by the Standard Array of the same tier.

- **Average Array: 45 points**
- **Elite Array: 54 points**
- **Heroic Array: 60 points**
- **Mythic Array: 66 points**

### Alternatives

- Minimum or maximum ability scores can be specified. For example, a rule might state that no score can be under 8 or that no score can be raised above 18.

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** This method simplifies the standard Point Buy system by removing scaling costs. It's for groups who want a fast, straightforward character creation process that prioritizes player freedom over the optimization of the standard model.
- **Outputs?** The budget for each tier is calibrated to the Standard Arrays, but the flat 1-for-1 cost creates a huge range of possible PBE outputs. Assigning minimums or maximums can mitigate this range.
- **When to use it?** Use this method when you want a quick Point Buy system that heavily rewards specialization. It's ideal for games where "min-maxing" is an intended feature, but be aware that it can create significant power disparities within the party.

## Method V: 3d6

This method requires rolling a set of three six-sided dice (3d6) for each ability score. The results are recorded in the order they are rolled and cannot be reassigned.

### Alternatives

- The player may assign the six rolled scores to their abilities as they choose.
- The player rolls between 7 and 12 sets of dice and uses the six highest resulting scores for their array, assigning as they choose.
- Each player at the table rolls one full array, and any player may choose from the resulting pool of arrays for their character, either in order or assigned as they choose.

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** This method prioritizes random character discovery over player control. It is ideal for gritty or low-power campaigns, as its randomness can create challenging and memorable character flaws.
- **Outputs?** The base method typically produces **Average Arrays (PBE ~15)**. The alternatives, by allowing players to select for higher scores, introduce the possibility of **Elite** or **Heroic** arrays.
- **When to use it?** Use the base method for a classic, old-school experience where players must adapt to the character they are given. Use the alternatives when you want the feel of rolling dice but want to give players more control and reduce the risk of creating an unviable character.





## Method VI: 4d6

This method requires rolling a set of four six-sided dice (4d6) for each ability score. The lowest die result from each set is dropped, and the remaining three are summed to produce the score. This is repeated six times to create the full array, and the player may assign the scores as they choose.

### Alternatives

- The scores can be rolled in order as they appear on the character sheet, creating a allowing the player to *discover* their character.
- Roll a set of 5d6 and drop the two lowest dice to result in **Heroic** characters.
- Combined with a set average (such as 10, 11, or 12). If the average of the six scores is below the average, the player may reroll and most often results in **Heroic** characters.
- Reroll the lowest score or two lowest scores to result in **Heroic** characters.
- Roll more than one full array (typically two) and choose which one to keep and most often results in **Heroic** characters.
- The GM, or the group, rolls sets toward a single array that all players in the group must use, assigning scores as they choose and most often results in Heroic characters. and most often results in **Elite** characters.
- Roll seven sets of scores and keep the six highest results to result in **Heroic** characters.
- The GM rolls a secret array. After players roll their own scores, each can choose to either keep their own array or swap it for the GM's unseen array and most often results in **Heroic** characters.

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** This method an evolution of the 3d6 method that helps to smooth the curve. It retains the excitement of random rolls while producing more consistently capable characters than the classic 3d6 method.
- **Outputs?** A GM should expect **Elite Arrays**, leaning toward **Heroic Arrays**, especially when using Alternatives. However the nature of dice means a wide range of outcomes are possible, including both **Average Arrays** and **Mythic Arrays** from time to time.
- **When to use it?** Use this method when you want to have **Elite** or **Heroic** characters and your and your group are okay with power disparities within the party due to luck.



## Method VII: Dice Pool

A pool of 18d6 is rolled for the group and the values of each die is recorded to create a master list of 18 numbers. Each player then creates their 6-score array by partitioning the numbers into six groups of three and summing each group.

### Alternatives

- The size of the dice pool can be increased (**21d6**, **24d6**, **27d6**), but players are still limited to 3 values per score.
- Each player can contribute to the pool by rolling 3 or 4d6, with the GM rolling any remainder. This gives the players a more direct hand in creating the shared resource pool.
- Each player can roll their own individual pool of dice. This removes the party-wide balance of the base method, as each player will have a unique set of 18-27 numbers to build their character from.

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** This method is for groups who want the randomness of dice rolling but also want to ensure the party as a whole is balanced. It turns character creation into a puzzle with equal inputs and deterministic outputs.
- **Outputs?** This method produces arrays that default to **Average** or **Elite**, but can reach **Heroic** or **Mythic** depending on the values in the pool and the number of dice used. Additionally, while players start with the same values, a player who optimizes their scores for a SAD class can benefit more from this method than a player who builds for a MAD class.
- **When to use it?** Use this method when you want to balance luck between players, making the final character stats a product of player choice. It is ideal for groups who enjoy a puzzle-like creation process and want to ensure no player has a statistical advantage over another.



## Method VIII: Targeted Rolling

This method allows a player to generate ability scores that are optimized for their intended class. The player chooses a class from the table below and then rolls the set of d6s for each ability score. Only the three highest dice from each roll are kept and to produce the final score.

| Class     | Str | Dex | Con | Wis | Int | Cha |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Artificer | 3d6 | 7d6 | 6d6 | 5d6 | 8d6 | 4d6 |
| Barbarian | 8d6 | 6d6 | 7d6 | 5d6 | 2d6 | 4d6 |
| Bard      | 4d6 | 7d6 | 5d6 | 3d6 | 6d6 | 8d6 |
| Cleric    | 6d6 | 4d6 | 7d6 | 8d6 | 3d6 | 5d6 |
| Druid     | 3d6 | 7d6 | 6d6 | 8d6 | 6d6 | 5d6 |
| Fighter   | 8d6 | 6d6 | 7d6 | 3d6 | 5d6 | 4d6 |
| Monk      | 6d6 | 7d6 | 5d6 | 8d6 | 3d6 | 4d6 |
| Paladin   | 7d6 | 4d6 | 6d6 | 5d6 | 3d6 | 8d6 |
| Ranger    | 6d6 | 7d6 | 5d6 | 3d6 | 8d6 | 4d6 |
| Rogue     | 4d6 | 8d6 | 6d6 | 3d6 | 7d6 | 5d6 |
| Sorcerer  | 5d6 | 7d6 | 6d6 | 4d6 | 3d6 | 8d6 |
| Warlock   | 5d6 | 6d6 | 7d6 | 3d6 | 4d6 | 8d6 |
| Wizard    | 4d6 | 5d6 | 6d6 | 7d6 | 8d6 | 3d6 |

### Alternatives

- Either swap values in the table or simply roll the following sets of dice: 8d6, 7d6, 6d6, 5d6, 4d6, and 3d6, keeping the top three dice from each set, and assign as they see fit.
- Roll the following sets of dice and assign them as desired: 6d6, 6d6, 5d6, 5d6, 4d6, and 4d6.

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** For players who want to roll dice but also want to guarantee their character is optimized for their chosen class. It reduces the risk of rolling a character who is unsuited for their intended role.
- **Outputs?** The large dice pools make it almost impossible not to get a 17 or 18 in a character's primary stat. The method consistently produces [Mythic Arrays](#), and the alternatives are similarly powerful, and unlikely to produce anything less than an [Heroic Array](#).
- **When to use it?** Use this method for campaigns where the characters are expected to be legendary figures from the start. GMs should be aware that this method will produce significantly more powerful characters than those created with almost any other method.

## Method IX: Rolemaster Style

This method creates two values for each ability score: a starting value and a potential maximum. For each of the six scores, roll both a set of 3d6 and a set of 4d6 dropping the lowest die. The lower of the two results is the starting score, and the higher result is the potential maximum. At each new level, the player can increase one ability score by one point, as long as it does not exceed its potential maximum.

### Alternatives

- A variant is to roll 4d6 for each score. The sum of the three lowest dice becomes the starting value, while the sum of all four dice becomes the potential maximum.

### Analysis

- **Why use it?** This method is designed to create a sense of character growth over time that is built directly into the ability scores. It models the idea that characters have inherent potential that can be realized through experience, separate from their class features.
- **Outputs?** The starting arrays from this method are typically low-powered, often resulting in [Average Arrays](#), as they are based on the weaker of two rolls. The "potential" score, which provides a roadmap for character development and can lead to [Elite Arrays](#) or higher at later levels, creating powerful end-game characters.
- **When to use it?** Use this method for long-term campaigns where you want to emphasize gradual character growth and development. It is ideal for players who enjoy seeing their characters overcome initial weaknesses and grow into their full potential over the course of many levels, but be aware that it produces weak starting characters.





## Method X: Dice Point Buy

This method gives each player a budget of 4 points to spend on purchasing their six ability scores. The scores are purchased from a list of options that range from a fixed high score to fully random low scores.

| Cost | Set         |
|------|-------------|
| 3    | 18          |
| 2    | 14+1d4      |
| 1    | 8+1d4+1d6   |
| 0    | 1d4+1d6+1d8 |

### Alternatives

- The tables can be adjusted to fall within other intended tiers, by reducing or removing guarantees.

### Average Point Buy

| Cost | Set    |
|------|--------|
| 3    | 12+1d4 |
| 2    | 8+2d4  |
| 1    | 4+3d4  |
| 0    | 4d4    |

### Elite Point Buy

| Cost | Set       |
|------|-----------|
| 3    | 16        |
| 2    | 12+1d4    |
| 1    | 6+1d4+1d6 |
| 0    | 2d6+1d4   |

### Analysis

- Why use it?** This method is designed to give players control over guaranteeing a high prime requisite. It allows players to decide between guaranteed values and gambling for their character's array.
- Outputs?** The outputs depend on player choice, but any build that includes 2 or 3 point costs are more likely to result in an [Heroic Array](#). Relying solely on the 1 point cost will likely result in an [Elite Array](#).
- When to use it?** Use this method when you want to include random generation with some player control over outputs. It's a good middle ground for players who dislike pure randomness but don't want a fully deterministic system.

## Method XI: Table Roll

This method uses a pre-generated table of scores and a coordinate system to generate an array. For each of the six ability scores, the player rolls two six-sided dice (2d6). One die determines the row (1-6) and the other determines the column (1-6) on the table below to find the score.

| d6 | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 13 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 9  | 8  |
| 2  | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 9  |
| 3  | 15 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| 4  | 16 | 15 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 |
| 5  | 17 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 13 | 12 |
| 6  | 18 | 17 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 13 |

### Alternatives

- A weighted rolling method can be used to make the results more consistent and less random. For each score, the player makes two rolls: one 2d6 and one 1d6. The 2d6 determines the row, and the 1d6 determines the column on the grid below.

| d6 | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 13 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 9  | 8  |
| 2  | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 9  |
| 3  | 15 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| 4  | 16 | 15 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 |
| 5  | 17 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 13 | 12 |
| 6  | 18 | 17 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 13 |

### Analysis

- Why use it?** This method uses the familiar process of rolling dice but limits the possible outcomes to a curated table of scores, preventing the extreme statistical outliers that can occur in a purely random roll like 3d6.
- Outputs?** The two versions of this method produce arrays at two distinct power levels. The Base Method is likely to produce [Heroic Arrays](#) and the Alternative is more likely to produce [Elite Arrays](#).
- When to use it?** Use this method when you want the experience of rolling dice but want to keep the results within a pre-approved range. It is effectively at mitigating extreme values during character creation.



## Method XII: Hand of Fate

This method assigns ability scores based on poker hands. Each player is dealt a hand of 9 cards from a standard 52-card deck. They must then form six hands from their draw to create their six ability scores. The quality of the hand determines the score's value. Any leftover cards are discarded.

**Card Values:** Ace=14, King=13, Queen=12, Jack=11. Numbered cards are their face value.

| Hand            | Cards Used | Ability Score |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|
| Straight Flush  | 3          | 18            |
| Three of a Kind | 3          | 17            |
| Straight        | 3          | 16            |
| Flush           | 3          | 15            |
| Pair            | 2          | 14            |
| High Card       | 1          | Face Value    |

### Alternatives

- For a more powerful game, the hand size can be increased to [11 \(Heroic Arrays\)](#) or [13 \(Mythic Arrays\)](#) cards.
- To mitigate the luck of a single bad deal, players may be allowed to draw two separate hands and choose which one to build their character from or discard and redraw a set number of cards as the GM chooses. This increases the average power level and provides a safety net against a poor outcomes.

### Analysis

- Why use it?** This method is for groups who want character creation to be more strategic. Generally, multiple ways of putting hands together can result in unique arrays.
- Outputs?** The power level of this method is affected by the hand size. The base 9-card hand produces [Elite Arrays](#), 11 cards produces [Heroic Arrays](#), and a 13-card hand produces borderline [Heroic Arrays](#) and [Mythic Arrays](#).
- When to use it?** Use this method when you want character creation to be a strategic mini-game rather than a simple roll or purchase. It melds random chance with deterministic outputs

## Method XIII: d20

This method requires rolling a single 20-sided die (d20) for each of the six ability scores. The results are typically recorded in the order they are rolled and cannot be reassigned.

### Alternatives

- The player rolls a d20 to generate a score. If the result is a 1 or 2, the player must reroll the die and keep the second result.
- The player rolls two complete 6-score arrays using the base d20 method. They then choose which of the two arrays to keep.

### Analysis

- Why use it?** This method is designed for maximum randomness and chaos. It embraces the highest possible variance, creating characters with unpredictable and often extreme strengths and weaknesses.
- Outputs?** The output is a completely random array with a flat probability distribution. The base method produces [Mythic Arrays](#) on average due to the possibility of 18s, 19s, and 20s. The alternatives act as safety nets that increase this already high average.
- When to use it?** Use this method to introduce extreme unpredictability into character creation, in which party imbalance is acceptable.

