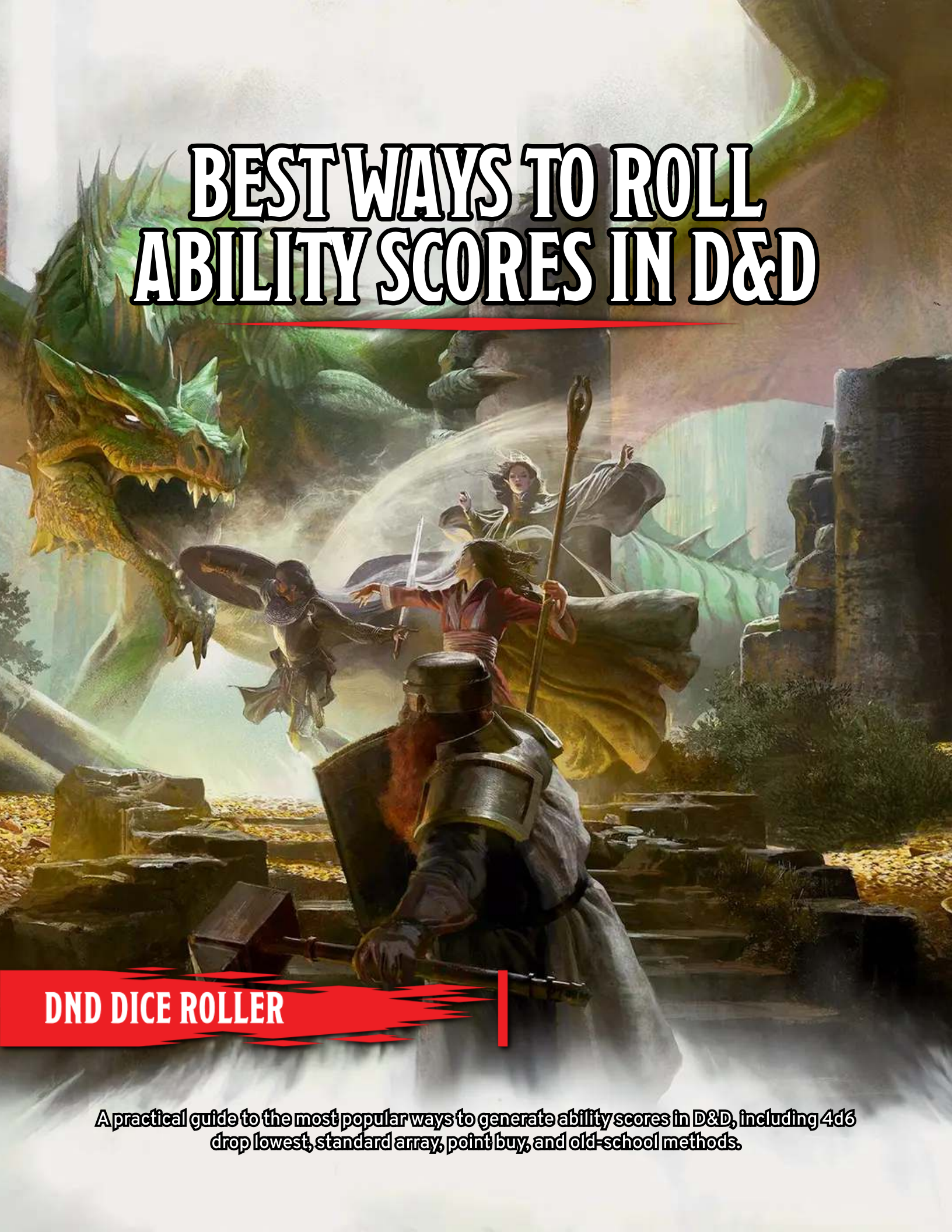




BEST WAYS TO ROLL ABILITY SCORES IN D&D

DND DICE ROLLER

A practical guide to the most popular ways to generate ability scores in D&D, including 4d6 drop lowest, standard array, point buy, and old-school methods.

BEST WAYS TO ROLL ABILITY SCORES IN D&D

ABILITY SCORES SHAPE ALMOST EVERYTHING YOUR character does. They affect combat, spellcasting, skill checks, survivability, and often the entire feel of a build. Because of that, the method your group uses to generate those scores matters more than many players realize.

Some methods create wild heroes with obvious strengths and weaknesses. Others keep the party balanced and predictable. Some reward risk. Others reduce drama but make character planning much easier.

There is no single perfect method for every table. The best way to roll ability scores depends on what kind of campaign you want, how much randomness your group enjoys, and how important party balance is to the Dungeon Master.

THE SHORT ANSWER

If you want the best all-around rolling method for most modern D&D groups, **4d6 drop the lowest** is usually the sweet spot.

It gives players a real sense of randomness and excitement, but it does not produce characters that are as brutally weak as older methods like 3d6 in order. It also tends to create characters who feel competent enough to survive a long campaign.

If your group cares more about fairness than randomness, **point buy** is usually the better choice.

If your group wants chaos, danger, and old-school charm, **3d6 in order** still has a lot of personality.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ABILITY SCORE METHOD?

A good method should fit the style of your campaign.

Here are the main things that matter:

- **Fairness:** Are all players starting from roughly the same power level?
- **Randomness:** Does the method create surprise, or can players plan everything in advance?
- **Character identity:** Does the method create unusual or memorable builds?
- **Campaign tone:** Does the method support heroic fantasy, gritty survival, or something in between?

- **Ease of use:** Is it quick and simple at the table?

Different tables rank those priorities differently. That is why people argue about this topic so much.

METHOD 1: 4D6 DROP THE LOWEST

This is probably the most popular rolled method in modern D&D.

HOW IT WORKS

For each ability score:

- roll 4d6
- drop the lowest die
- add the remaining three dice
- repeat until you have six scores

Example:

- You roll **6, 5, 3, 1**
- Drop the **1**
- Add the rest
- Final score: **14**

STRENGTHS

- Produces stronger and more playable characters than basic 3d6
- Still gives the fun of rolling
- Creates enough randomness to make characters feel distinct
- Common enough that most players already understand it

WEAKNESSES

- One player can still get much luckier than another
- Can create a party with noticeable power gaps
- Sometimes produces characters with very few weaknesses

BEST FOR

- typical 5E campaigns
- groups that like rolling but still want competent characters
- long campaigns where weak stats would feel frustrating

VERDICT

If your table wants to roll and does not want to overthink it, this is usually the safest recommendation.

METHOD 2: POINT BUY

Point buy is not a rolling method, but it belongs in this discussion because it is one of the best alternatives.

HOW IT WORKS

Players spend a fixed pool of points to build their six ability scores within a defined range.

STRENGTHS

- Very fair across the whole party
- Good for careful character planning
- Prevents one player from starting far ahead of everyone else
- Gives the DM a more predictable baseline

WEAKNESSES

- Less exciting than rolling
- Can make characters feel mechanically similar
- Encourages optimization in a very deliberate way

BEST FOR

- balanced party-focused campaigns
- groups that dislike swingy randomness
- players who want to plan builds carefully from level 1

VERDICT

If fairness matters more than drama, point buy is arguably the best overall system, even if it is less romantic than throwing dice.

METHOD 3: STANDARD ARRAY

Standard array is the simplest structured method.

HOW IT WORKS

Players assign a fixed set of numbers to their six abilities. The usual array is:

15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8

STRENGTHS

- Fast and easy
- Extremely fair
- Good for new players
- No one gets left behind by bad luck

WEAKNESSES

- Very little excitement
- Characters can feel similar
- Less room for happy accidents or strange builds

BEST FOR

- beginner groups
- one-shots
- teaching games
- campaigns where character balance matters a lot

VERDICT

Standard array is not glamorous, but it works. It is especially good when you want to start playing quickly.

METHOD 4: 3D6 IN ORDER

This is one of the classic old-school methods.

HOW IT WORKS

- Roll 3d6 for Strength
- Roll 3d6 for Dexterity
- Roll 3d6 for Constitution
- Continue in order until all six scores are set
- No rearranging

STRENGTHS

- Strong old-school feel
- Fast
- Creates strange, memorable characters
- Encourages players to discover the character after the roll

WEAKNESSES

- Can produce very weak characters
- Some classes become much harder to play well
- Players can feel trapped by bad luck
- Can be frustrating in longer heroic campaigns

BEST FOR

- AD&D-style games
- OSR campaigns
- gritty or lethal adventures
- groups that enjoy adapting to randomness

VERDICT

This method has real charm, but it is not friendly. Use it when your table wants uncertainty and does not mind hardship.

METHOD 5: 3D6, THEN ARRANGE TO TASTE

This is a softer version of the old-school method.

HOW IT WORKS

- Roll 3d6 six times
- Record the six totals
- Assign them where you want

STRENGTHS

- Keeps some randomness
- More forgiving than 3d6 in order
- Still produces more grounded characters than 4d6 drop lowest

WEAKNESSES

- Can still create weaker characters than some players want
- Less dramatic than true in-order rolling
- Less generous than modern heroic methods

BEST FOR

- groups that want a classic feel without full brutality
- campaigns where average characters are welcome
- DMs who want some randomness but not total chaos

VERDICT

This is an underrated middle ground. It keeps the spirit of rolling without punishing players as severely.

METHOD 6: ROLL SEVERAL SETS, PICK ONE

Some groups like a compromise method where players roll multiple full arrays and choose the one they prefer.

HOW IT WORKS

For example:

- roll six scores using 4d6 drop lowest
- do that three full times
- keep one set

STRENGTHS

- Keeps the fun of rolling
- Reduces the pain of one terrible set
- Gives players more control without removing randomness

WEAKNESSES

- Produces stronger characters on average
- Takes longer
- Can drift toward power inflation

BEST FOR

- heroic campaigns
- groups that enjoy rolling but hate feeling stuck
- tables that do not mind slightly stronger starting characters

VERDICT

This works well when your group wants the emotion of rolling without the cruelty of a bad first result.

SO WHAT IS ACTUALLY THE BEST?

Here is the honest answer.

BEST FOR MOST 5E GROUPS

4d6 drop the lowest

It is random enough to be fun and generous enough to avoid many miserable characters.

BEST FOR FAIRNESS

Point buy

No one gets accidentally punished by the dice.

BEST FOR BEGINNERS

Standard array

It is fast, clear, and easy to teach.

BEST FOR OLD-SCHOOL PLAY

3d6 in order

It produces the right tone for gritty traditional campaigns.

BEST MIDDLE GROUND

3d6, assign as desired

It gives you randomness without being quite as harsh.

MY RECOMMENDATION

If I were recommending just one method to a typical modern D&D group, I would choose **4d6 drop the lowest**.

It has the best mix of:

- excitement
- unpredictability
- decent character power
- broad player acceptance

But I would not call it objectively superior in every situation.

A lot of tables use 4d6 drop lowest by habit, not because they have thought carefully about what kind of campaign they want. In some groups, point buy would actually produce a better experience. In others, 3d6 in order would create far more memorable characters.

The method should serve the campaign, not the other way around.

HOW TO SET UP THESE METHODS IN DND DICE ROLLER

If you want to test different ability score methods in DnD Dice Roller, here are a few easy setups.

4D6 DROP THE LOWEST

- Dice count: **4**
- Dice type: **d6**
- Enable advanced option 1
- Set it to **Drop**
- Set it to **lowest**
- Set the drop count to **1**

3D6 IN ORDER

- Dice count: **3**
- Dice type: **d6**
- No advanced drop option needed
- Roll six times in sequence

3D6 AND ARRANGE

- Dice count: **3**
- Dice type: **d6**
- Roll six times
- Assign the totals where you want

4D6 DROP LOWEST FOR A FULL CHARACTER

Create six lines and label them:

- Strength
- Dexterity
- Constitution
- Intelligence
- Wisdom
- Charisma

Set each line to **4d6 drop the lowest 1 die**, then use **ALL** to roll the whole set at once.

FINAL THOUGHTS

People often treat ability score generation like a tiny setup step before the real game begins. It is not. It quietly defines the power level, fairness, and emotional tone of the campaign before the first scene even starts.

If your group wants heroic competence, use a generous method.

If your group wants fairness, use a structured method.

If your group wants danger, unpredictability, and oddball characters, use a harsher one.

And if you just want a strong default recommendation that works for most tables, **4d6 drop the lowest** is still the best place to start.

ROLL THE VILLAGE TOO

Scores tell you what your character can do. Nobody rolls where they came from, which is why every fighter is from “a small village”. Fix it. Three rolls, one minute.

What the village is famous for (2d6)

2d6 Famous for

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 2 | A murder nobody talks about. Your family talks about it. |
| 3–4 | Cheese so strong the cart horse refuses the road. |
| 5–6 | A bridge that is not, strictly, finished. |
| 7 | Nothing. Painfully, wonderfully nothing. Your ambition explains itself. |
| 8–9 | A festival with a rule against you personally. |
| 10–11 | The best archer in the county, who is not you, and reminds you. |
| 12 | A dragon visited once. It was polite. Everyone is still weird about it. |

The village's problem (1d6): 1 taxes, 2 the well, 3 the mayor, 4 the mayor's daughter, 5 wolves that are not wolves, 6 you — you are the problem, and you left.

The one person who remembers you fondly (1d4): 1 the baker, 2 the priest, 3 the smith's apprentice, 4 the dog. Roll their name too if you like. Now you have a reason to write home, and a reason for the DM to ruin it.



DND DICE ROLLER

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dnddiceroller.com is the free roller that remembers your lists, follows you from laptop to phone, and never asks you to install anything. Six thousand of you a day can't be wrong. Well, you can, but the dice aren't.

UNCURSE YOUR DICE

Convinced your d20 hates you? **True Randomness** cuts every roll from a signed public pulse published by the US National Institute of Standards and Technology, and shows you which one. Blame physics, not the dice. Find it under **Unlock**.

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The **Directory** at dnddiceroller.com/directory lists 59 dice makers, map artists, rules tools and table gear we'd actually use. Sell something for the table? Get listed.

TAKE IT TO THE PUB

Legend Roller puts the same roller in your pocket, iOS and Android, with profiles for every character you've ever loved and lost.