

Sometimes a campaign will have special needs for archetypes or character options not found in the existing official material. If you're in this situation, you might want to modify one or more of the classes in the game in order to provide options for players looking for a unique twist on their characters' abilities. However, modifying a class is not something that should be undertaken lightly, and the job requires some serious effort, playtesting, and revision to get it right. The two best ways to modify a class are to swap out some class features for different ones, and to add new to an existing class. These methods allow you to use existing mechanics as a model, while drawing upon features of other classes for inspiration.

Creating New Class Options

Each class contains at least one major decision point, referred to here as a class option. Clerics choose a divine domain, fighters choose a martial archetype, rogues choose a roguish archetype, wizards choose an arcane tradition, and so forth. If you want to create a different version of one of these major decision points (such as a new primal path for the barbarian), examine the existing examples to see how they are built. As with anything in class design, be prepared to playtest your ideas and then make changes if things aren't turning out the way you want them to.

The first thing to do when creating a new class option is to figure out what that option's unique aspect is, both in terms of the class's underlying story and the option's place in the campaign world. Figuring out the story behind the class option, and what kinds of characters you want to enable your players to create with it, is the most critical step in the process because it will serve as a guiding example for you.

Once you have a unique concept for your class option in mind, it's time to get down to the design process. Take a look at the class's existing options and see what they provide, and then use those as examples or building blocks for the features that your class option will provide. It's perfectly fine for two class options in the same class to share some mechanics, and it's also appropriate to examine other classes for mechanics you can draw upon for inspiration. At every step along the way, you can compare what you are designing with your original concept, and, if the design is helping to define and establish that concept, you know you're on the right path. On the other hand, if your design for a mechanic isn't somehow helping to reinforce the theme of the new class option, it might be worthwhile to reconsider that mechanic.

As you consider which class features to include in your new class option, address the following questions:

- What kinds of abilities do the other options for this class provide at comparable levels?
- Do the features improve a character's combat ability directly, make the character better at exploration or interaction, or provide alternatives that aren't about a pure increase in power?
- How do the features at a given level reinforce the story of that class option?
- Does an existing mechanic already accomplish something that the new class option also needs to do?

Class-Specific Guidelines

As it says in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, no formula exists that can be used to perfectly design a new or replacement class feature, but some guidelines do apply for each of the eleven classes. While this advice is by no means comprehensive, it should provide a few points to ponder and get you thinking about how a class's features should work together.

Often, as you'll see, the best advice is to leave things as they are. Many classes have deeply ingrained qualities, such as how they receive and cast spells, that don't lend themselves to being tinkered with. Even if some parts of the class descriptions are off limits for our purposes here, there are still plenty of opportunities for you to develop variant features within each class.

Barbarian

- Though the barbarian's Rage class feature grants the class a significant increase in defensive strength, be aware of how other class features interact with Rage to boost the character's offensive potency. For example, the primary drawback of Reckless Attack is largely offset by the damage resistance provided by Rage, and the berserker's Frenzy feature gives the barbarian a lot of attack power for at least one combat.
- Note that Fast Movement serves three important purposes: getting the barbarian to the front line of a battle quickly, preventing the barbarian's rage from ending because an enemy is not nearby, and encouraging the barbarian to stay out of heavy armor.
- The 10th-level features of both Primal Paths speaks more to the interaction pillar of the game than to combat; be wary of replacing or altering them to add combat potency.
- The 6th-level benefit of the Path of the Totem Warrior generally speaks to the exploration pillar of the game, so think twice before changing it, for the same reason as above.

Bard

- Bards have the full spellcasting progression; any changes to the Spellcasting feature will have a big impact on the class.
- Bards know a limited number of spells, which is a restriction on their versatility that should be modified with care when making changes to the class. Bards of the College of Lore receive an expansion of their number of spells known as a full class feature.
- Font of Inspiration, gained at 5th level, helps encourage the bard to continue along the class's path for at least five more levels in order to make better use of Bardic Inspiration. Be wary of developing similar mechanics for other classes, because a feature that hands out a true increase to a numerical result (instead of advantage and disadvantage) should be rare.

Cleric

- Clerics have the full spellcasting progression; any changes to the Spellcasting feature will have a big impact on the class.
- A cleric domain has a strong, defining class feature that fundamentally affects the way that character plays. The 1st-level feature in a domain, whether the domain is one you're creating or one you're modifying, should be something that really makes clerics of that domain stand out.
- Domain spells were typically chosen to expand the cleric's options, while the base spell list of the cleric was kept relatively short. Look to other 'classes' spell lists when searching for spells to add to a new domain. For instance, the Light domain offers a number of spells that aren't on the cleric's list.

Druid

- Druids have the full spellcasting progression; any changes to the Spellcasting feature will have a big impact on the class.
- Wild Shape is used largely for exploration purposes by Circle of the Land druids. For Circle of the Moon druids, Wild Shape offers significant defensive advantages, making such characters very durable.
- As with cleric domain spells, Circle of the Land druids' circle spells are frequently drawn from the spell lists of other classes to increase those characters' versatility.

Fighter

- Fighters gain most of their combat prowess from three characteristics of the class: being able to make up to four attacks per round; using Action Surge to grant quick bursts of combat potency; and having the highest number of Ability Score Improvement features, which allows fighters to strengthen their attacks and saving throws, or, if the DM allows it, select feats.
- The fighter archetypes are largely meant to be different flavors of the base class, in which most of the fighter's combat strength lies. The Champion gains some versatility and a better chance of scoring critical hits. The Battle Master specializes in maneuvers that aren't available to other fighters. The Eldritch Knight's ability to cast spells sets that archetype apart, while being limited enough so that the character still feels like a fighter.
- Note that the 7th-level features for the Champion and the Battle Master lean heavily on the exploration and interaction pillars of the game; the Eldritch Knight gains spells, which contribute to the fighter's competence in the exploration and interaction pillars, and so its 7th-level feature is geared to blending spells and attacks.

Monk

- The monk is one of the most complex classes, with the highest number of unique class features. Be wary of replacing a single feature with more than one new feature, since the class already has a lot of capability.
- The monk's Martial Arts feature was carefully worded to prevent unintended combinations; this is why the feature does not treat unarmed strikes as a finesse weapon, since that could have unforeseen consequences in future material about finesse weapons that is appropriate for, say, a rapier or a dagger but not an unarmed strike.
- Ki points have some subtle guidelines in how they are expended; features that cost 1 ki point usually focus on utility, or are the equivalent of a single unarmed strike. Features that cost 2 ki points should be on par with a 1st-level spell, while a feature that costs 3 ki points should be on par with a 2nd-level spell. Examine the elemental disciplines of the Way of the Four Elements monk for further examples of how to match ki points to spell levels.

Paladin

- Paladins have a spellcasting progression that is half as vigorous as the normal progression. The Spellcasting feature can be tinkered with a bit, but it still needs to be a significant portion of what the class can do.
- Paladins derive a large amount of their combat potency from the Divine Smite class feature. Since the paladin can wait until after determining if an attack hits (or is a critical hit) to use the smite, the character is capable of intense bursts of damage. Be wary of tinkering with this feature, because it is fundamental to the paladin's combat strength.
- Many of the paladin's class features are defensive in nature, protecting both the paladin and his or her allies from harm. Swapping out defensive class features for offensive ones starts to alter the feel of the paladin, perhaps in ways you did not intend.

Ranger

- Rangers have a spellcasting progression that is half as vigorous as the normal progression. The Spellcasting feature can be tinkered with a bit, but it still needs to be a significant portion of what the class can do.
- Much of the ranger's extra potency in combat comes from spells such as *hunter's mark* and from the class features granted by the ranger archetypes. The 3rd-level feature in each archetype usually either provides a raw increase in combat power, or grants the ranger greater combat versatility.
- Favored Enemy was intentionally designed to provide no combat bonus, because the ranger's strength in combat should not rely solely on the discretion of the Dungeon Master or the circumstances of the adventure. Although the Hunter archetype's 3rd-level ability does rely somewhat on the nature of the foes being fought, Favored Enemy is generally useful in the interaction and exploration pillars of the game.

Rogue

- Rogues rely chiefly on two features for both the class's feel and its strength in combat: Sneak Attack and Cunning Action. These are fundamental to the rogue, and Uncanny Dodge at 5th level is almost their equal in importance to the class. Leave these features as is, unless you have a powerful reason for changing anything.
- The class features granted by the roguish archetypes at 3rd level should fundamentally alter the way the class plays, just as the cleric's Divine Domain features do.
- Rogues are the masters of skills, and the class already pushes the boundaries of what we (and our playtesters) consider to be acceptable in terms of game balance. Giving them more skill potency could push rogues over the line.

Sorcerer

- Sorcerers have the full spellcasting progression; any changes to the Spellcasting feature will have a big impact on the class.
- Like bards, sorcerers have a limitation on the number of spells they can choose from, which is a major restriction on the class.
- The sorcerer does not get many metamagic choices. When you create a new metamagic option, be sure that it is useful enough that a sorcerer could justify using one of his or her precious choices on it.
- Sorcery points and Flexible Casting were intentionally designed so that a sorcerer who does nothing but convert spell slots to sorcery points in order to cast higher-level spells does so at the cost of overall output. Be cautious when altering this balance.

Warlock

- Warlocks have a unique spellcasting method, and they rely on being able to cast a smaller number of spells more frequently. Remember that a warlock automatically increases the spell slot level of spells he or she casts, meaning that even lower-level spells gain potency when cast by a warlock.
- The warlock spell list was carefully cultivated to avoid including spells that might become annoying if cast too often at the table. If you want to grant a warlock access to a new spell, but are concerned that its frequent casting could be disruptive to the game, consider creating an eldritch invocation that enables the use of the same magic on a more limited basis (by requiring a rest between uses, for instance).
- Warlocks derive a lot of their combat potency from the *eldritch blast* cantrip, and already have a lot of invocations to choose from to increase that reliance. Be wary of creating new invocations that make *eldritch blast* even more powerful.

Wizard

- Wizards have the full spellcasting progression; any changes to the Spellcasting feature will have a big impact on the class.
- Wizards have the longest spell list and the broadest selection of spells to choose from each day, thanks to their spellbooks. Anything that further increases their versatility in this respect should be approached with caution.
- The Arcane Traditions serve three purposes, which you should consider when creating new ones: encouraging the casting of certain kinds of spells, providing utility that is unique to specialists of a particular kind of magic and that cannot be found within spells, and subtly altering the play style of the wizard without fundamentally drawing the thrust of the class away from spellcasting.

Example: Rangers with No Spells

As an example of what the class feature replacement process might be like, we will remove spellcasting from the ranger class. Let's say that in your campaign you want rangers to be a little bit more like Strider from the *Lord of the Rings*, and less overtly magical from the outset.

The Spellcasting class feature has a big impact on the ranger class, so this is no small project. Start by evaluating what the Spellcasting feature is contributing to the class. In general, rangers have a more limited spell list (and know only a relatively small number of spells), and operate on the same half-speed progression for spellcasting as the paladin does. Looking over the ranger's spells, you might come to the following conclusions about what the Spellcasting feature contributes to the class:

- Rangers have a lot of exploration utility in their spells, with access to magic such as *detect poison and disease*, *beast sense*, and *conjure animals*.
- Rangers gain a lot of their combat potency from spells, especially *hunter's mark*.
- Rangers get some healing and restoration ability from spells such as *cure wounds*, *lesser restoration*, and *protection from poison*, which stave off the harm an adventurer might suffer while exploring in the wilderness.
- Rangers get some combat control effects from their spells such as *ensnaring strike*, *spike growth*, and *conjure barrage*, all of which give the ranger a magical edge in combat.
- At some levels at which the ranger gains access to new spell levels, this is the only class feature the character receives. As a result, the ranger will need additional class features at those levels to prevent them from providing nothing to the ranger aside from increased hit points.

Given the usefulness of the *cure wounds* spell, and the greater need for healing at lower levels, let's create a healing class feature that allows the ranger to create and apply herbal poultices—an improvement that is on par with drinking a potion at first, but one that will scale up as the ranger gains levels.

Additionally, since the ranger is likely to need some extra combat utility that spells would normally provide, let's add a version of the Combat Superiority class feature drawn from the Battle Master fighter. The maneuvers that Combat Superiority grants can provide a nice boost in combat, especially in matters of battlefield control. Looking at the fighter class, we can see that the Battle Master fighter's Combat Superiority is sitting in a similar space as the spellcasting progression of the Eldritch Knight. We don't want the ranger to outshine the Battle Master fighter, so we're going to start the

ranger with fewer maneuvers, scaling up as the ranger gains levels. Since we're going to be replacing a one-half spellcasting progression, this means that we'll need a few other features to bring this ranger up to par.

At 9th and 13th levels are gaps where we can place some exploration-focused mechanics. Let's model the first one on the *protection from poison* spell, and also give the poultice-creating class feature an improved effect. The second one we can model on the *conjure animals* spell, which can be useful both in exploration scenes and in combat scenes.

At 17th level is another gap, which we can fix with an improvement on Combat Superiority. Fortunately, the Battle Master has a class feature that would fit in well in the concept of this ranger, so we can swap in the Relentless feature to make sure the ranger always has at least some ability to exercise control over the battlefield, even in the later part of an adventuring day.

Finally, we need to consider the impact of these changes on other class features, and make adjustments as necessary. For example, the Beast Master archetype for the ranger has a Share Spells class feature at 15th level that will no longer work without a Spellcasting feature. If your non-spellcasting ranger decides to play a Beast Master, you will need to create a substitute class feature for Share Spells as well, perhaps something to help keep the ranger's beast companion alive longer. Additionally, since Primeval Awareness requires the ranger to expend spell slots to activate the class feature, we can modify that feature to allow the ranger to use it once and regain its use after finishing a short or long rest.

Here are the full descriptions of the new class features for our spell-less ranger:

Combat Superiority

At 2nd level, you learn maneuvers that are fueled by special dice called superiority dice.

Maneuvers. You learn two maneuvers of your choice, which are chosen from the list of maneuvers available to fighters with the Battle Master archetype. Many maneuvers enhance an attack in some way. You can use only one maneuver per attack.

You learn one additional maneuver of your choice at 5th, 9th, 13th, and 17th levels. Each time you learn a new maneuver, you can also replace one maneuver you know with a different one.

Superiority Dice. You have four superiority dice, which are d8s. A superiority die is expended when you use it. You regain all of your expended superiority dice when you finish a short or long rest.

You gain another superiority die at 9th level and one more at 17th level.

Saving Throws. Some of your maneuvers require your target to make a saving throw to resist the maneuver's effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Maneuver save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength or Dexterity modifier (your choice)

Poultices

At 3rd level, you can create special herbal poultices that have healing power comparable to some potions. You can spend 1 hour gathering herbs and preparing herbal poultices using treated bandages to create a number of such poultices equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum 1). You can carry a number of poultices at one time equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum 1). The poultices you create cannot be applied by anyone but you. After 24 hours, any poultices that you have not used lose their potency.

If you spend 1 minute applying one of your poultices to a wounded humanoid creature, thereby expending its use, that creature regains 1d6 hit points for every two ranger levels you have (rounded up).

Natural Antivenom

Starting at 9th level, you have advantage on saving throws against poison and have resistance to poison damage. Additionally, you can use one of your poultices to cure one poison effect on the creature you are applying it to, in addition to restoring hit points.

Call Natural Allies

Starting at 13th level, when you are in an area of your favored terrain, you can call natural creatures from that terrain to fight on your behalf, using your attunement to the natural world to convince them to aid you. The DM chooses beasts appropriate to the terrain to come to your aid from among those that could hear you and that are within 1 mile of you, in one of the following groups:

- One beast of challenge rating 2 or lower
- Two beasts of challenge rating 1 or lower
- Four beasts of challenge rating 1/2 or lower
- Eight beasts of challenge rating 1/4 or lower

These beasts approach you from their current location, and will fight alongside you, attacking any creatures that are hostile to you. They are friendly to you and your comrades, and you roll initiative for the called creatures as a group, which takes its own turns. The DM has the creatures' statistics.

After 1 hour, these beasts return to their previous location. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again in the same general area for 24 hours, since the same animals will not repeatedly heed your call.

Relentless

Starting at 17th level, when you roll initiative and have no superiority dice remaining, you regain 1 superiority die.

As a replacement for Share Spells, we could also consider the following feature:

Beastly Coordination

Beginning at 15th level, when an attacker that you can see hits your beast companion with an attack, you can call out a warning. If your beast companion can hear you, it can use its reaction to halve the attack's damage against it.

Example: Favored Soul

As an example of how creating a new class option could work, let's examine a design that was a full-fledged class in the third edition supplement *Complete Divine*: the favored soul. This might be an appealing archetype if you are running a game where the gods are going to have a big impact on the world, and where the Chosen of those gods (individuals bestowed with a fragment of a god's divine power) are prominent players in the campaign. To reflect this tone, let's create the Favored Soul as a new origin for the sorcerer class. This decision reflects the idea that the character is someone who is fundamentally changed by the touch of his or her deity, which awakens powerful magical abilities.

Looking at the existing sorcerous origins, we can determine that, at 1st level, an origin provides not only the explanation for the source of the sorcerer's power, but also a flourish on the way that character plays. Since this sorcerer is going to be gaining its magic by being imbued with divine power, we decide to give the Favored Soul access to some spells normally gained by the cleric. Any time we expand the known spells of the sorcerer, we run the risk of overshadowing the other sorcerous origins, since the limitation on the number of spells the sorcerer knows has a big impact on how the class plays. This indicates that the other class features probably shouldn't all tie closely to the sorcerer's spellcasting, since that aspect of the sorcerer is already getting quite a boost. Since the favored soul class was a little more martial in its previous incarnation, we decide to give our sorcerer some better armor and access to simple weapons, similar to the defensive bonuses gained by the Draconic Bloodline sorcerer at 1st level.

At 6th level, the other sorcerous origins provide features that have an impact on the character's combat abilities. Looking at the bard class, we can see that the College of Valor gains the Extra Attack class feature at the same level, and we decide to give that to the Favored Soul to further enhance its martial bent.

At 14th level, the sorcerous origins provide some measure of utility, with little direct impact on spellcasting or combat capabilities. Here, we choose to model the Favored Soul's feature after the Draconic Bloodline's feature at the same level, reflecting the touch of the divine with some imagery typically associated with divinity: wings.

At 18th level, the sorcerous origins provide options that are both potent and strongly linked to the origin's central theme. Since the sorcerer will have access to higher-level spells at this level, and the feature we gave it at 1st level to provide some cleric spells won't have as much of an impact, we decide to tie this class feature to those cleric spells, both to incentivize the continued use of those spells, and to give the Favored Soul a little more resilience in the face of high-level threats.

When we are done with this initial design, here's what the Favored Soul sorcerous origin looks like:

Chosen of the Gods

At 1st level, you choose one of the cleric class's divine domains. You add that domain's spells for 1st-level clerics to your known spells. These spells do not count against the number of spells you can know,

and they are considered to be sorcerer spells for you. When you reach 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th levels in the sorcerer class, you likewise learn your domain's spells that become available at those levels.

Bonus Proficiencies

At 1st level, you gain proficiency in light armor, medium armor, shields, and simple weapons.

Extra Attack

Starting at 6th level, you can attack twice, instead of once, whenever you take the Attack action on your turn.

Divine Wings

At 14th level, you gain the ability to sprout a pair of wings from your back (feathered or bat-like, your choice), gaining a flying speed equal to your current walking speed. You can create these wings as a bonus action on your turn. They last until you dismiss them as a bonus action on your turn.

You can't manifest your wings while wearing armor unless the armor is made to accommodate them, and clothing not made to accommodate your wings might be destroyed when you manifest them.

Power of the Chosen

Starting at 18th level, when you cast one of the spells you learned from your Chosen of the Gods class feature, you regain hit points equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum +1) + the spell's level.

In the end, the capabilities of our Favored Soul sorcerer are quite close to those of the spontaneous-casting favored soul class from long ago!

About the Author:

Rodney Thompson is a senior designer for the Dungeons & Dragons game. In addition to serving as a designer on the fifth edition of D&D, he is the co-designer of the *Lords of Waterdeep* board game and its expansion. Rodney is a graduate of the University of Tennessee and has worked at Wizards of the Coast since 2007, when he joined the company as the lead designer of the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition*.