

HOW TO BUILD AND ADVANCE ADJECTIVES IN ZURN

In the Zurn Roleplay Series, all players have a character who performs actions and makes decisions. Most game systems use a “skill list” to show how skilled a person is in performing a task. As we looked at Zurn, however, we quickly discovered that a skill list would not do: it limits the storytelling aspect of roleplay and hurts the development of characters.

So instead, we use a system where players pay Advancement Points (our universal currency for advancing characters) to purchase and advance adjectives that describe the character, granting bonuses (and penalties at times) to perform rolls. In this pamphlet we discuss how adjectives work, followed by how they are added to the character.

OVERVIEW OF ADJECTIVES

Roleplay characters in Zurn are comprised of three elements: their **race** (and innate talents), their **equipment** (the stuff they own), and their **enhancements** (the things that make their innate talents and stuff awesome).

Adjectives are enhancements: they reflect the learned talents and natural skills of a character. Two persons may have the same base Finesse, but a person with a *Skilled Archer* adjective will roll more dice for Finesse with bows than a person who has no adjectives helping him to shoot a bow. This bonus might overlap with a *Keen Eyed* adjective or a *Steady Hand* adjective, two traits that might also boost Finesse with bows, further increasing his roll.

But the *Skilled Archer* adjective does more than just boost his Finesse with a bow: it helps him see things in the forest (boosting Finesse for **Search** and **Detect** rolls), pulls the string to full extension (boosting his Strength for **damage** with bows), soldiers trust him more (adding Charm bonuses), and he designs bows better as he knows the proper weight and balance (boosting Lore rolls to design bows). So adjectives are more holistic and far-reaching than a traditional skill list where points are independently spent on each of these bonuses.



So all of this raises the question, “How do I build an adjective for my character?” A quick two-step tutorial for you.

STEP 1: DESIGN THE HIGH CONCEPT OF THE ADJECTIVE

As mentioned above, adjectives enhance specific rolls. The adjective’s “high concept” determines which rolls are affected.

The “high concept” of the adjective is a **synopsis of the trait or characteristic** we are conveying to the game master, the party, and the world at large with the adjective. So if a character is a trained archer, a spirited dancer, or scarred (from his time in the wars, or roughing it in the wilderness against manticores), all of these could be adjectives for the character.

So before we think through bonuses, we first need to flesh out what we are trying to convey with the adjective.

Example: Chris is building a durable centaur swordsman. As he considers the nature of the character, he lists the qualities that he sees in him: he’s loyal (which should boost his Willpower, and perhaps give a bonus to actions that protect the party), he has a strong arm (helping to lift things and increasing melee and ranged damage), he has a powerful build (with lots of muscle to stop an enemy arrow or sword), he’s a trained swordsman (boosting his rolls with swords), and loves hearing stories (helping with cultural knowledge and remembering local legends).

Now that Chris has an idea of some of the qualities he wants to portray with adjectives, he moves on to Step 2.

STEP 2: TALK WITH YOUR GAME MASTER

There are a lot of ways to build adjectives, as the system is designed to be a free form to aid with storytelling. This also means that an adjective that you think is acceptable (or another game master may think is acceptable) may not be acceptable to your game master. So when purchasing adjectives, just remember that you should always run adjective ideas past your game master for final approval before writing anything on your character sheet.

Example: Chris shows his adjectives to his game master. The game master likes the direction that the centaur is going, and makes a few recommended changes. Chris had envisioned the centaur’s love of legends as giving him remembrance and cultural knowledge bonuses, but the game master adds that this might also help him with Languages rolls, as he’s likely heard some of these tales in other languages. Chris likes this idea, and gladly adds that to the adjective as well.

Once the game master and player are in agreement as to what the adjective means, the adjective is added to the character sheet. In the event of a disagreement, the decision of the game master is always final.

PURCHASING AN ADJECTIVE

Once you've created your adjective, we now decide its tier. The tier of the adjective sets the cost of the adjective (with higher tier adjectives costing more Advancement Points) and the size of its bonuses (with higher tiers granting larger bonuses). The cost for advancing an adjective works like this:

Tier 1: 1 Advancement Point, and grants a +1D bonus (or penalty) to the rolls affected by the adjective

Tier 2: 1+2 = 3 Advancement Points (4 total including the cost for Tier 1), and grants a +2D bonus (or penalty) to rolls

Tier 3: 3+2 = 5 Advancement Points (9 total including the lower tiers), and grants a +3D bonus (or penalty) to rolls

Tier 4: 5+2 = 7 Advancement Points (16 total including the lower tiers), and grants a +4D bonus (or penalty) to rolls

An adjective technically has no ceiling for its tier value; if a player can demonstrate growth in ability, they can continue to advance the adjective. But this brings up a critical rule about adjectives: each time an adjective advances, something should be added to the adjective's high concept to show that the person is progressing in skill and proficiency.

Example: Chris doesn't just want his centaur to be a decent swordsman: he wants an exceptional swordsman. As he builds the adjective, he starts with an *Aspiring Swordsman* adjective (Tier 1) to show he loves using swords. He advances it to *Trained Swordsman* (Tier 2): he actually has training in proper technique. Finally, he advances it to *Veteran Swordsman* (Tier 3), showing he has extensive experience using a sword (beyond book learning and the regular training at the town's muster field).



He's content here, but thinks ahead in case he wants to advance it further.

He could be a *Scar Veteran* at Tier 4 (showing combat experience), a *Local Hero* at Tier 5 (adding reputation), perhaps a *Regional Champion* at Tier 6 (adding greater social standing), and at Tier 7 maybe the *Defender of the Realm*, on-par with the likes of Beowulf, Achilles, or David in Earth's history.

Adjectives must always be purchased starting at Tier 1, and then may be advanced as desired by the player. You can see why this is the case: we want to see how the character is progressing. A player may purchase more than one tier at a time.

The cost goes up steadily, so at a point it is more economical to purchase a new adjective than to advance an existing one. So when an adjective hits **Tier 3 or higher**, the player may take a unique bonus at Tier 3 and each new tier afterwards in addition to increasing the standard bonuses to rolls affected by the adjective. This may include the ability to **reroll the Wild Dice** on an affected roll (so a seer will not get a Wild 1 as often on a Prophecy roll), a **reduced difficulty** for a roll (an *Experienced Blacksmith* may get a -5 to the difficulty to craft metal items), **penalize** opponents (like a -5 modifier to dodge attempts to avoid ranged attacks by the *Eagle Eyed* archer), or a **-1 to an opponent's Wild Dice** on a roll (like a magic user who inflicts a -1 to the Wild Dice on armor rolls to resist magical damage from her spells). These bonuses incentivize investing in high-end adjectives instead of just building a ton of Tier 1 adjectives, and shows proficiency in a skill.

And as mentioned above, overlap is fine among adjectives: a person who is a *Trained Spearman* (Tier 2) with a *Strong Arm* (Tier 1) and a *Sturdy Build* (Tier 1) will probably gain bonuses to damage rolls with spears from all of them. What we want to avoid are **adjectives that describe the exact same thing**: a *Skilled Archer* (Tier 2) adjective and a *Marksman* (Tier 1) adjective that boost the same rolls (Strength and Finesse with bows, Finesse for Search/Detect rolls, and CRM with hunters) should be one adjective, not two. We want to learn new things about the character with each adjective, so while overlap is excellent, they should not be synonymous.

Flesh out the character, and you'll discover that as you build your adjectives your character will come to life. Because you're not just investing in skills: you're creating a person. And that person will more readily come to life through the process of building adjectives.

For a list of what skills you might increase with an adjective, you can find a list of possible rolls and actions on our website at www.zurncentral.com/the-world-of-zurn. We hope that this tutorial is useful to you!