

Pathfinder 1e introduction for 5e players

In Pathfinder 1e you'll find many of the concepts you're familiar with from D&D 5e, but they tend to have a few quirks or additional components. D&D 5e is a pretty streamlined game, and Pathfinder does some things in a slightly more complex way, but once you get your head around it it's pretty simple.

What this guide is:

- Details of basic similarities and differences from D&D 5e
- A pathway to creating your first Pathfinder character
- Notes on Pathfinder systems that are important for playing your first character
- Advice on some of the most common playstyles

The similarities and differences outlined below are the most obvious and are things you need to know for character creation. Don't worry about getting everything right at first, we'll go through it all together to make sure.

Similarities and differences to 5e

Similarities

Dice system: The standard die is still the d20, and most of your rolls are d20 + modifiers. The numbers you're adding will vary a bit, but that's mostly just a change in arithmetic.

Hit points and hit dice: You still have hit points and you're still in danger of dying when you run out. You also have class-based hit die in pathfinder just like you do in 5e, but you don't use them to heal, instead they're a more abstract measure of power and you don't need to worry about them other than record how many you have.

Classes: All your old friends are here, fighter, cleric, rogue etc. but there are lots of new friends to play with too! Witch, psychic, inquisitor, slayer, arcanist, magus, and lots more.

Races: Same story as with classes really, lots of old favourites plus a bunch more.

Ability scores: The same six core ability scores, strength, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, wisdom, charisma. When making a first level character you don't need to think about these any differently than you would in 5e. Also, modifiers are calculated the same way, 10-11 is 0, 12-13 is +1, etc.

Differences

Proficiency bonus: In 5e you have a static modifier, the proficiency bonus, that represents how good you are at the things you're good at. Pathfinder doesn't have the concept of proficiency bonus, and is more fine-tuned with where you are good at things. For example, you add a stat called base attack bonus (BAB) to your attacks instead of proficiency bonus. BAB varies by class, so a fighter will have a higher BAB than a Wizard, because they're

generally better at attacking with physical weapons. By decoupling this generic "goodness stat" from different systems, pathfinder can differentiate between classes and characters by having some classes have better or worse saving throws or attacks. Speaking of...

Saving throws: Rather than having a saving throw for each stat, there are only three; Fortitude (con), Reflex (dex), and Will (wis). Rather than proficiency, you add a base number defined by your class, as well as your ability score modifier, and any other bonuses.

Skills: Pathfinder has a bunch of skills similar to 5e, but the way they work is slightly different. For example, a typical stealth check might be; $d20 + dexterity\ bonus + number\ of\ skill\ ranks + other\ modifiers$. Skill ranks are basically how you decide which skills to get better at. You get a certain amount based on your class and Intelligence modifier and can distribute them into any skill, but you can never have more ranks in a skill than you have character levels.

Feats: While feats do exist in 5e, it's definitely an optional part of the game. Feats in Pathfinder are much more expansive and complex, with feats requiring other feats requiring other feats. At level one you don't need to worry too much. Just remember that you gain a feat every odd-numbered level, including level one.

Rests: There's no concept of a short rest in Pathfinder. You get long rests, and that's it. However, magical healing is much more common in Pathfinder than it is in 5e.

Healing: In Pathfinder you don't get to spend your hit dice to heal yourself. Hit dice are just a measure of rough power, and are used in some niche spells to determine how many creatures you can affect, e.g. a spell might specify that it affects up to 10HD of creatures. Instead the majority of magical healing is done with wands or spells.

Rules and restrictions: Pathfinder has a lot more detail in its rules than 5e, but often there are class features or feats that let you get around it. The joy of the system is in the customisation that it affords you.

Character creation steps

I'm committing the cardinal information architecture sin of all RPG devs and putting character creation before you know what the rules are. If I mention a concept that you're not sure about, feel free to ask me, or read into the [Playing the game](#) section of this guide and see if I've explained it there.

Step Zero: Get your ingredients

In order to follow along with these steps you'll need some form of character sheet, here are the ones I recommend:

- [Ed's Character Spreadsheet Template](#) - This is the spreadsheet where I keep all my characters. I have a template sheet here that can be copied if you want to keep your character sheet online.

- [Official Interactive Character Sheet](#) - A form-fillable character sheet that does some calculations for you. I've not used this but I've seen it recommended.

It will also be useful to have the available classes and races somewhere to hand. Here are the two best places to get those:

- [d20PFSRD](#) - A repository of the rules and character options for Pathfinder. Really good for looking up the rules for things, and decently good for character options.
- [Archives of Nethys](#) - The fullest repository of pathfinder character options, some people hate the UI but honestly I'm a skill for this website.

Step One: Character concept

Have a read of the introduction to the campaign and the races and classes and try to find a character vibe that you like. Are you a priest of erastil looking to guide a fledgling community in the wilderness? Perhaps a mage looking for the strange magic of the Azlanti? Or maybe a rogue enticed by rumours of hidden treasures, planning to abandon the colony as soon as possible?

For more interesting content and ideas, see the [Ruins of Azlant player's guide](#) I've written.

Example: Thinking about a concept, I want to play a spellcaster, but not one who has studied, someone young and yearning for adventure. I'll have a look at the classes and races and see what's there.

Step Two: Choose a class and race

Once you've come up with an idea you're happy with, it's time to do some reading. Go to either [d20PFSRD](#) or [Archives of Nethys](#) and look at the possible races. Have a read of them and see if any of them sound interesting or work with the concept you came up with already. If you see anything that you don't understand, then let me know and I'll go through it with you. (Generally also there are some races that are very unbalanced and if you happen to choose one we'll talk about steps we can take to keep everything in line.)

Write down all the features you get from your race (ability score bonuses, darkvision, skill bonuses, speed, languages). While it's generally good to want some synergy between your race and class, don't worry about it too much, especially if you're in a group with other new players.

Next is your class, again have a read of the available classes on [d20PFSRD](#) and [Archives of Nethys](#). Hopefully you don't need to read all the class details of every class because there are quite a few. My advice is to look at the summary below and pick a couple that fit your concept:

N.B.: There are 'regular' and 'unchained' versions of the following classes: Barbarian, Monk, Rogue, and Summoner. Use the 'unchained' versions.

Alchemist: Brew potions, throw bombs, you can even do the Jekyll/Hyde thing.

Antipaladin: Paladin but evil.

Arcanist: Half Wizard, half Sorcerer. You use tricks and exploits to bend the rules of magic.

Barbarian (Unchained): Hulk smash. Hulk pick up enemy. Hulk hit enemy with other enemy.

Bard: You know what bards do, but in Pathfinder they have more martial options.

Bloodrager: Half Barbarian, half Sorcerer. Barbarian that shoots lightning. Cool as heck.

Brawler: Half Monk, half Fighter. Adaptable and focuses on combat maneuvers/grappling.

Cavalier: Ultimate horse girl. Badass fighter but with an animal companion.

Cleric: Very good and versatile class, can do almost anything from melee to casting.

Druid: Quite similar to 5e, but also gets an animal companion, wild shape is way more powerful in Pathfinder.

Fighter: Feats. Lots of feats. The classic martial combat expert.

Gunslinger: Always bring a gun to a knife fight. Spend grit points to do cool flips 'n' stuff.

Hunter: Half Druid, half Ranger. Animal companion, spells, but better martial than Druid.

Inquisitor: Cleric but without morals. Can be sneaky or blasty.

Investigator: Half Alchemist, half Rogue. Brew potions and get roided out, but also locate enemy weak spots for sneak attacks.

Kineticist: Then everything changed when the fire nation attacked. Do avatar shit. Cool AF.

Magus: Like wizard, but you put your spells into a sword and then hit the enemy with it.

Medium: Channel the spirits of a place into your own body for new abilities.

Mesmerist: A kind of psychic manipulator wizard.

Monk (Unchained): Get ki powers that let you walk on water and stuff. Also punch people.

Ninja: Basically a rogue but also has special powers. It's for weebz dw.

Occultist: Pick a school of magic and have trinkets associated with it. Big blast potential.

Oracle: Channel mysteries and revelations, but are also cursed and have divine spells.

Paladin: Smite evil creatures, have either a magic weapon or an animal companion.

Psychic: Cast powerful psychic spells. Bend and amplify psychic spells as you cast them.

Ranger: Favoured terrain, martial focus, some spell access, and a delayed animal companion.

Rogue (Unchained): Sneak attack, lots of skills, and trickery.

Samurai: Basically a cavalier for weebz. Less "mounted charge" abilities but more resilience.

Shaman: Channel spirits of the land for different bonuses. Cast spells but also hit in melee.

Shifter: Gain aspects of different animals and eat your enemies. Like a druid but fighty.

Skald: Half Bard, half Barbarian. Sing a song of rage. Cast some spells and hit real hard.

Slayer: Half Ranger, half Rogue. Get sneak attacks, and lots of combat training.

Sorcerer: Be the best magical boy. Tweak your spells on the fly with metamagic.

Spiritualist: Have a ghost friend that you can use to empower you. Cast psychic spells.

Summoner (Unchained): Have a custom companion that you create. Cast weird spells.

Swashbuckler: The melee version of the gunslinger, do cool flips and stab nerds.

Vigilante: Have a secret identity, combo of social and martial abilities.

Warpriest: Half Fighter, half Cleric. A more martially focused caster. Lots of self-buffs.

Witch: Get spells from your patron, and have a familiar to be best friends with. :3

Wizard: Best access to arcane spells, be the biggest nerdiest spellcaster.

When you've found the class that fits your concept best, write down the class features you gain at level one, and mark which of your skills are class skills (it should say on your class page). Also take a note of your hit die (d6/d8/d10/d12), and how many skill ranks you get per level.

***Note:** Each class has a selection of 'archetypes'. Each archetype is a tweaked version of the class that swaps out certain class features for different ones to offer a more thematic and unique playstyle. If*

you're feeling VERY confident you can look at these archetypes, but for your first character I wouldn't worry too much about them.

Example: Going with the young adventurous spellcaster I'm going to choose a sorcerer. I like that their power is innate and they don't necessarily understand it. For race I want someone that maybe struggled to fit in in Andoran, so I'm going to choose Half-Elf. I write down the Half-Elf racial traits: Medium size, 30ft speed, ability score increase, low-light vision, adaptability, elf blood, elven immunities, keen senses, multitalented, and languages.

Looking at the Sorcerer class, I need to write down the hit die (a d6 in this case), choose a Sorcerer bloodline, and get the Eschew Materials feature, as well as noting which class skills I have. I like the idea of something nature-related, to go with the wilderness and settlement theme so I'm going to choose the Verdant bloodline. That gives me a bloodline power, a bloodline arcana, and a new class skill, so I'll note them down too.

Step Three: Choose your ability scores

We'll do this step together at the character creation session but here's the rough guide: We're using a system called Point Buy, with a budget of **20 points**. You can set your ability scores to any number between seven and eighteen, and each number will cost or refund you a number of points as shown in the table below.

Ability Score	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Cost	-4	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	5	7	10	13	17

For example, the ability scores Str 8, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 12, would cost 20 points. Any stat changes from race are added **after** your initial stats. If the above example was an elf (+2 Dex, +2 Int, -2 Con), the final stats would be: Str 8, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 12.

A quick note; your Dexterity isn't added to damage by default in Pathfinder, not even on ranged attacks. Specific classes and feats can give you your Dex modifier to damage, so keep that in mind when choosing your stats.

There are lots of calculators for assigning ability scores, [here's my favourite](#). Remember that you have 20 total points to spend. My character sheet spreadsheet is also set up to calculate your point spend for you if you don't want to use an external calculator.

Bear in mind that you can always tweak these numbers as you go through the remaining steps.

Example: Assigning stats for my sorcerer, my spellcasting stat is Charisma so I want that to be high. I'll set that to 16 for a cost of 10 points, leaving me 10. I want decent AC so I'll set Dex to 14 for 5 points, leaving me 5. I want to be able to make some skill checks, so I'll set Intelligence to 14 as well for 5 points, leaving me with 0 points. I do want to increase my constitution a little, so I'll reduce my Wisdom to 8 and gain two points, and increase Con to 12, costing 2 points. Strength can stay at 10. Final base statline: Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int

14, Wis 8, Cha 16. Because I'm a Half-Elf I can choose one ability score to increase by 2, so I'll increase my Charisma to 18.

This statline represents someone young and adventurous, without much life experience, but with some academic experience.

Step Four: Write down your base attack bonus and saves

Your base attack bonus, or BAB, is the generic stat representing martial ability. At first level it will be either +1 or +0. You add this stat to any attack rolls you make. For now just write it down.

Similarly, you have base save scores. Instead of being proficient in certain saves like 5e, in Pathfinder you have base save scores that vary by class. Some classes get two good saves, others only one. These numbers increase as you level up but don't worry about that for now.

Write down your base save scores, and add the relevant ability score modifiers to get your total save bonuses. Add your Dex modifier to Reflex saves, add your Con modifier to Fortitude saves, and add your Wis modifier to Will saves.

Example: Looking at the sorcerer class page, my BAB is +0 at first level, and my base saves are +0 for Fortitude, +0 for Reflex, and +2 for Will saves. I write all those down and add my ability score modifiers (+1, +2, and -1 respectively), for a final save value of Fort +1, Reflex +2, Will +1.

Step Five: Calculate hit points and hit dice

Your hit points at first level are pretty simple. You get the maximum of your hit die, plus your constitution modifier, just like in 5e. So if your hit die is a d8, and your Con mod is 0, at level one you would have 8HP.

Your hit dice at level one is very simple, it's just the hit dice above, so it would be 1d8.

Example: As I'm first level, and I noted my hit dice earlier is a d6, my total hit dice is 1d6. My HP at first level is the maximum of my hit die (6) + constitution modifier (+1), so my total HP at level one is 7.

Step Six: Calculate skill ranks

Each class gets an amount of skill ranks per level, increased (or decreased) by your Int modifier, for example, if your class gets six skill ranks per level, and your Intelligence modifier is +3, you'll have nine skill ranks to distribute between skills at first level.

At first level it's easy to calculate how many skill ranks you have. Assign them to any of the skills, but you can't have more ranks in a skill than you have levels, in this case just the one.

Example: I noted earlier that sorcerers get two skill ranks per level + Intelligence modifier. My Intelligence modifier is +2, so that's four skill ranks per level. Perhaps this character isn't

quite old enough to come along on this adventure, and has lied about their age? I'll put one rank into Bluff. Thanks to their Verdant bloodline, I want to lean more into the natural theme so I'll put a rank into Knowledge Nature. Lastly, I want them to have some experience with magical devices and spells, so I'll put one rank each into Knowledge Arcana and Use Magic Device.

Step Seven: Allocate your favoured class bonus

This step is a little Pathfinder idiosyncrasy. At every level, you can choose either a bonus HP, a bonus skill rank, or a bonus defined by your race and class (you can find it on your class page, usually at the bottom). Favoured class bonuses are generally quite build specific, so don't worry too much about it. In general I'd recommend you take either a bonus HP or a bonus skill rank, unless you have a particularly juicy favoured class bonus.

Example: I'll choose to take a skill rank instead of a hit point and put it in Knowledge History.

Step Eight: Choose feats

You gain a feat at every odd-numbered level, starting at one. Certain classes get bonus feats (fighters get the most), and Human characters also get one bonus feat at level one. There are absolutely loads and loads of feats to choose from, but we'll probably have a character creation session where I can give some advice on feats for each build.

Example: So far, this character has two feats; Eschew Materials from the class feature of the same name, and Skill Focus from the Half-Elf racial trait Adaptability. To really push the nature theme, I'll choose the skill Knowledge Nature for my skill focus feat, to get an additional +3 at all Knowledge Nature checks. That still leaves the normal feat that all level one characters get. I'll choose Improved Initiative to give me a +4 bonus on all initiative checks, as I think it'll be important for a squishy sorcerer to react quickly.

Step Nine: Choose traits

Think of traits as similar to backgrounds from 5e. They're nice little buffs that help establish your character in the setting, and give mechanical teeth to your backstory. You can take two traits for your character, and you won't gain access to any more at any point.

There are lots of types of traits, and you can only have one of each. Campaign guides have some traits that give you some backstory for each campaign, but you can have free choice of whether you feel any of those are right for you. There are also loads of other traits available [here](#) and [here](#).

Example: For traits, I'll look through the campaign traits in the Azlant Player's Guide and choose Azlanti Scholar. I like the idea that this character worked in some kind of family laboratory or their family are arcane researchers. Perhaps the Bountiful Venture Company sponsoring this expedition reached out to the parents and this character intercepted the invitation and has appeared in their stead? For my second trait I'll look through the basic

magic traits [here](#) and choose Dangerously Curious, as it seems to chime with this character's developing personality.

Step Ten: Purchase equipment

Each class has access to a different amount of starting gold which you can find [here](#). You can either take the average or roll. If you roll super low we can sort something out. I don't like the idea of some people being broke as shit.

It won't be super important at level one, but there are some good things to know about equipment in Pathfinder. In general you'll have many more magical items than in 5e, and while there's a lot of choice, there are the 'big six' magical items that almost every character will want eventually:

- Magical Weapon - bonus to weapon attacks and damage
- Magical Armour - bonus to AC and survivability
- Stat-boosting item - increase your stats
- Ring of Protection - increase your defensive stats
- Cloak of Resistance - increase your saving throws
- Amulet of Natural Armour - increase your AC

There are loads more magical items that you can consider, and I encourage you to read through the various items and find something cool to save up for.

Outside of magical items, you'll want to split your items between armour/weapons and adventuring gear. Having rope and chalk can often be more useful than you thought. There are a lot of kits that combine sets of other items that are worth investigating.

Example: I'll take the average of 70gp for a sorcerer. I'll buy a dagger, sling, ammunition, compass, tent, and a Sorcerer's Kit and Dungeoneering Kit, leaving me with 24gp.

Step Eleven: Spells (if you have any)

Spells can be a bit fiddly. Lots of classes do them differently. Either ask me for advice or sit down and read your spellcasting class feature very carefully. It's generally a good idea to have a good mix of spells to support the role you see yourself having in the party.

Make sure you have a good understanding of the number of spells known you have and how many spells per day you can cast. Unlike in 5e, all classes have their spells refresh on a long rest (there aren't any short rests) so you can't rely on a one hour rest to get any spell slots back. However, there are some classes who can spend resources to regain spell slots.

Make sure to note how you prepare your spells, do you have access to all of your spells known, or even to all spells on your spell list, and do you have to prepare a specific number of spells each morning, or can you spend spell slots as you see fit?

Example: As a Sorcerer, my class page says that I know four level-0 spells and two level-1 spells. Level 0 spells are special because you don't have a limit on how many you can cast per day.

For my level 0 spells (also called Cantrips), I'll choose Detect Magic, Dancing Lights, Mage Hand, and Mending for a nice mix of utility spells that I won't want to use spell slots on. For my level 1 spells I only get two, and I don't have any combat spells yet, so I'll choose Magic Missile and Obscuring Mist for a mix of offensive and defensive spells.

Now I've chosen which spells I know, I need to find out how many spells I can cast per day. Level 0 spells can be cast as many times as I want per day, but on my class page I can see that I can only cast three level 1 spells per day, however, spellcasters get bonus spells per day based on their stats, so I'll have a look at [this table](#). As I have 18 Charisma I can see that I get one bonus spell per day for level 1, 2, 3, and 4 spells. However, I don't know any level 2, 3, or 4 spells, so that's largely irrelevant for now, so I just write down that I can cast four level 1 spells per day.

Step Twelve: You're done?

Holy crap I think that's everything. Maybe? Review your sheet and see if there's anything you don't understand.

See the completed example Sorcerer [here](#).

Playing the game

Playing Pathfinder is much the same as playing D&D, the game is largely broken up into three types of gameplay: exploration and research (composed mostly of skill checks), social gameplay (composed mostly of roleplaying), and combat (composed of all your lovely spells and attack rolls).

I'll go over some of the mechanics for each of those and explain how they work and the differences from 5e.

Skill checks, class skills, and skill ranks

How do I make a skill check and which checks can I make?

Skill checks in Pathfinder are always a d20 roll + the appropriate ability score modifier + the number of ranks you have in the skill + any other modifiers. The most common modifier, and likely the only one you need to care about at level one is the class skill bonus of +3.

There are a bunch of skills in Pathfinder, and some of them are *Trained only* skills, that is, they can only be rolled if you have at least one rank in the skill. The trained skills are: Disable Device, Handle Animal, all Knowledge skills, Linguistics, Professions, Sleight of Hand, Spellcraft, and Use Magic Device.

Don't worry if there are skills you can't roll, that's perfectly normal, and don't feel pressured to put skill ranks in any particular place.

What is a class skill and how do I know which ones I have?

Class skills are the skill checks that your class is particularly good at. If you put any skill ranks into a class skill, you get a +3 bonus whenever you roll that skill. Bear in mind that it doesn't matter how many ranks you have in that skill, it's still only ever a +3!

Which checks are class skills for your class is listed on your class page, for example, sorcerers have Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Fly (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Profession (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), and Use Magic Device (Cha) as their class skills.

What are skill ranks and how many do I get?

Skill ranks are how you invest in skills and get better at making skill checks in Pathfinder. When you make a skill check you add the number of ranks you have in that skill to your roll, along with the appropriate ability score modifier and any other bonuses. Once you put a rank into a skill you are considered trained in it for the purposes of *Trained only* skills mentioned above.

Each class gets a flat amount of skill ranks + your Intelligence modifier, found on the class page. Note that this **can** reduce the number of skill ranks you get, to a minimum of 1 per level. For example, a sorcerer gets 2 skill ranks + Intelligence modifier per level. If your Intelligence modifier was -1, you'd only get 1 total skill rank per level.

This means that some classes will get many more skill ranks to spend than others, and that's part of the game balance.

Summing up

Let's say my character is a sorcerer with a Charisma modifier of +4. I'm level one and have one rank in Bluff. When I want to lie to the town guard and bluff my way through the gate, I would make the following skill check:

Bluff = 4 (Charisma) + 1 (rank) + 3 (Class skill) + d20 roll = d20 + 8.

In general, on your character sheet, these bonuses will be calculated for you, so you just look at your total Bluff skill check (in this case 8) and roll a d20 plus that bonus.

Combat and the action economy

What actions do you have in combat?

While broadly similar to 5e, the action system in Pathfinder is subtly different. You have the following actions: standard action, move action, swift action, and free actions. A standard action is most of the things you want to do in combat, an attack, casting a spell, using a magic item, trying to grapple an enemy etc. Move actions cover your movement, but the move action can also be used for other things, for example, standing from prone is a move action.

Swift actions are most analogous to bonus actions. They generally occur because of items, spells, or class features. You get one per turn. Free actions are the same in Pathfinder as in 5e, you can theoretically have as many as you like, until the DM tells you to stop.

Attacks of opportunity don't take an action, but you can only take one per round, although as with most things in Pathfinder, there's a feat for that.

Other action types

There are a few other niche action types: full-round action and immediate actions. A full-round action is an action that requires your standard and move action, and takes an entire round to complete. An immediate action is basically a swift action that you can take *even if it's not your turn*. If you take an immediate action on someone else's turn, it uses your next swift action. Don't worry about this too much, it's quite a rare thing at low levels.

How do I make an attack and how many can I make?

Making an attack is pretty simple and it's the same whether you're shooting an arrow, swinging your axe, or throwing a dart. An attack roll is a d20 + your Base Attack Bonus (BAB) + the appropriate ability score modifier + any other modifiers (feats, magic weapons, flanking).

In 5e, some classes get the 'Extra Attack' class feature at level five. In Pathfinder, when your base attack bonus gets to +6, you'll see it's written as +6/+1. That means that you can make an additional attack using the +1 of your base attack bonus, in addition to your first attack using the +6. When you want to use both of your attacks, it's called a Full Attack. A Full Attack costs a standard and a move action. It's best illustrated as an example. A sixth-level fighter has a BAB of +6/+1. They can either spend a standard action to attack with the +6 bonus, or a standard AND a move action to make a Full Attack, attacking once with the +6 bonus and once with the +1 bonus. Note that this means that classes might get their additional attacks at different levels.

Critical hits and weapon stats

Weapons in Pathfinder are divided into certain categories, Simple and Martial weapons you'll be familiar with from 5e, but there are also Light weapons, which can be either Simple or Martial and are basically weapons which can be wielded with Dexterity if you have the Weapon Finesse feat. When you look at the stat block for a weapon in Pathfinder you'll see something like this:

Name	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range	Weight	Type	Special
Longsword	15gp	1d6	1d8	19-20/x2	–	4lbs	S	–

A lot of this is pretty self-explanatory, but there are some things that are worth explaining. The *Dmg (S)* and *Dmg (M)* fields refer to weapon sizes (Small and Medium). Larger weapons do more damage, although the difference is usually pretty minor. Range and weight are easy

to understand, the *Type* field refers to damage type, slashing, bludgeoning, or piercing, or a combination. The *Special* field refers to any special weapon qualities like the ability to trip opponents, whether it has additional reach, or can be used to disarm.

Weapons in Pathfinder crit differently than in 5e. In 5e you crit on the roll of a natural 20 (or sometimes 19). In Pathfinder each weapon has a 'Critical Threat Range'. If you roll within that range, you are 'threatening' a critical hit. If you are threatening a critical hit, you make a Critical Hit Confirmation Roll, commonly called a Crit Confirm. Your crit confirm roll uses the exact same modifiers as your initial attack roll. If this crit confirm roll would hit your enemy, then your crit is confirmed and you deal your critical hit damage.

In 5e, critical hits double all dice you roll for damage, but don't double your flat modifiers (ability score bonuses etc.) In Pathfinder, each weapon doesn't necessarily double your damage. In the stat block above, the Critical information for the Longsword is '19-20/x2'. This means that the critical threat range for the weapon is 19-20, and that the damage multiplication on a crit is x2. Weapons have varying crit ranges and critical damage multipliers. Some as high as x4. When you crit with a weapon in Pathfinder, you multiply your weapon damage dice and flat damage modifiers by the weapon's crit multiplier. The only thing that is not doubled is additional dice from certain sources, specifically Sneak Attack.

To use the Longsword above as an example:

Rolling a natural 19 on an attack roll (before modifiers) is considered a critical threat. I would immediately make a crit confirm roll, using the same bonuses as the attack roll. If this is successful I would roll my damage, which in the case of a crit would be 2d8 + double Strength modifier + double any other modifiers like Power Attack, magical weapon bonuses etc.

Attacks of opportunity and threatened squares

Broadly similar to how things work in 5e, attacks of opportunity have a couple of tweaks it's important to be aware of. In 5e you have a 'threatened area' that is all around you. In Pathfinder you have 'threatened squares', that is, all squares into which you could make a melee attack are considered threatened by you.

In 5e, movement only provokes an attack of opportunity when you leave a creature's threatened *area*. In Pathfinder, you provoke an attack of opportunity every time you leave a threatened *square*. This obviously creates chances for multiple attacks of opportunity as a consequence of a move, if you're moving through multiple threatened squares, however, each creature can only take one attack of opportunity in a single turn as standard (although, as with everything, there's a feat for that).

When you take an attack of opportunity, it doesn't cost you an action, you just get to do it, and you always use your highest attack bonus.

Help! I'm a beautiful soft wizard and a goblin is stabbing me!

So there's a guy all up in your business and he's pretty intent on putting you in the dirt. You're standing in a threatened square so you can't move without taking an attack of opportunity, things are looking pretty bad. Well they're about to get worse, casting spells also provokes an attack of opportunity. So that's it, you're dead right? Well not quite. There are a couple of things you can do to get off this sticky wicket.

Firstly, you can choose to cast a spell defensively. Casting defensively doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity, but requires a concentration check. Concentration checks are a d20 + your caster level + your casting ability score bonus. Don't worry about the target number at this stage. Casting a spell defensively doesn't require an additional action other than the one used to cast the spell, likely your standard action.

Secondly, there's the Withdraw action. When you Withdraw, you spend both your standard action and your move action (also known as a full round action), don't provoke attacks of opportunity from the square you started in, and get to move double your speed. This is pretty handy, but it does mean you won't be doing anything else this turn.

Thirdly, there's the lord and saviour of all Pathfinder players everywhere: the 5 foot step. This is a particular bit of Pathfinder nonsense but it's very good so pretend it makes sense. Moving any distance up to your speed would normally require your move action, *but* if you only move 5ft (one square on the board), you can make the move for no actions and **it doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity**. The uses for this are myriad, but the most common ones are to get out of a threatened square so you can then do something like cast a spell, or to reposition in the middle of a fight so you can spend a full round action making more attacks rather than a single attack as a standard action.

What other cool things can I do in combat?

Whoop boy. Here's where Pathfinder gets real. One feat available to everyone is the simple Power Attack. This gives you a penalty to hit in exchange for bonuses to damage, scales VERY well with Strength and especially well with big two-handed weapons. You can charge as a full action, giving you +2 to hit but -2AC until your next turn. You can hit one guy but try to swing really hard and also hit someone next to them (cleave, it's a feat). You can put all of your strength into one big swing and try and clobber as hard as you can (vital strike, another feat).

There are rules for grappling, pinning, breaking opponents weapons and armour, disarming, tripping, and even more. All of these are available to all characters. There are certain classes that will do it better than others, but there are feats you can take to make up the difference, and they're almost all available to every character.

Stacking bonuses and unfamiliar stats

Stacking and bonus types

As you level up in Pathfinder, you'll accumulate a lot of bonuses to your stats and dice rolls. One difference you'll notice from 5e is that a lot of these bonuses are *typed*. Typed bonuses are written like this: 'receive a +2 *morale* bonus to attack rolls'. In this instance the bonus

type is morale. The only thing you need to remember is that *generally* bonuses of the same type **do not stack**. The exception is dodge bonuses, they always stack.

In practice it's very rare that this becomes a problem, but it does disincentivise having a full party of bards. However, if a bonus *doesn't* have a type, it will stack with everything, including multiple instances of itself, unless specified. Common bonus types include: morale, circumstance, insight, dodge, alchemical, enhancement, armour, shield, deflection, and size.

Types of armour class

In Pathfinder, your AC is calculated in a similar manner to 5e, but with a few differences. Your base AC is 10, modified by your Dex bonus (including negatively). Instead of armour setting your AC to a specific number, it gives you an *armour* (type) bonus to your AC. Similarly to 5e some armour limits the amount of Dexterity you can add to your AC.

Other than standard Armour Class, there are two types of AC in Pathfinder: Flat-footed AC and Touch AC. Flat-footed AC is the same as regular AC, but you don't add your Dexterity bonus or *dodge* (type) bonuses. It's used when you're surprised or restrained and cannot use your dexterity to avoid attacks. Touch AC is the same as regular AC, but you don't add your *armour*, *shield*, or *natural armour* (type) bonuses. It's used when someone doesn't need to penetrate your armour, but only touch you.

Other defensive stats

You might notice a few stats on your character sheet that you're not familiar with. Chiefly, CMD and CMB. CMD is Combat Maneuver Defense, and it represents how good you are at avoiding being grabbed, tripped, grappled and so on. It's fairly easy to calculate and you won't need to refer to it in 99% of scenarios.

CMB is Combat Maneuver Bonus, and it represents how good you are at grabbing, tripping, grappling, etc. When you make an attempt to use a combat maneuver on a target, you roll a d20, add your CMB, and compare to the target's CMD.

Items and armours

Light, medium, and heavy armour

Armour in Pathfinder comes in light, medium, and heavy varieties. On your class page you'll see which types you are proficient with, although you can always become proficient with other types by taking the Armour Proficiency feats.

A typical armour statblock looks something like this:

Name	Cost	Armour bonus	Max Dex bonus	Armour check penalty	Arcane Spell Failure Chance	Speed (30ft)	Speed (20ft)	Weight
------	------	--------------	---------------	----------------------	-----------------------------	--------------	--------------	--------

Chainmail	150gp	+6	+2	-5	30%	20ft	15ft	40lbs
-----------	-------	----	----	----	-----	------	------	-------

The stat block lists how much your AC increases while wearing the armour, and how much of your Dexterity bonus you can add to your AC. Armour check penalty is a modifier applied to all Strength or Dexterity-based skill checks while wearing the armour. It's much harder to climb a cliff face while wearing full plate than a simple robe. If you are not proficient with the armour you're wearing, you'll also apply this armour check penalty (often shortened to ACP) to all of your attack rolls.

Your speed is also reduced while wearing some armour. As nearly every PC race starts with either a 30ft or 20ft movement speed, the table lists your speed while wearing the armour. In this case, a human wearing chainmail has their 30ft speed reduced to 20ft.

Casting in armour

The last stat on an armour set is *Arcane Spell Failure Chance*. While wearing some sets of armour, arcane spells have a percentage chance to fail, as the armour gets in the way of properly casting the spell.

There are three basic types of spell, Arcane (Wizards, Sorcerers, etc.), Divine (Clerics, Oracles, Paladins, Druids, etc.), and Psychic (Mesmerist, Spiritualist, Occultist, etc.). This spell failure chance applies **only** to arcane spellcasters.

What gear do I need?

It depends what you want to do, but the standard advice is that having backups is always useful. Even if you're a badass Dwarf Fighter with a huge warhammer, it's good to have a crossbow in your bag that you can pull out if the enemies are too cowardly to get near you. Equally, it's useful to have a backup dagger and/or crossbow as a Wizard, just in case everything is going pear-shaped.

Other than that, a set of armour you're proficient with, a shield if you expect to be using one, and then any adventuring gear you think might come in handy. There's a huge selection of adventuring gear [here](#), but a lot of it is organised into useful bundles called kits [here](#).

Can I crafting items instead of buying them?

You sure can, although there's the standard Pathfinder response of "Yes... if you have the feat for it!". There are many item creation feats for crafting either mundane or magical items, and all magical items also show their item creation costs and requirements.

Item creation is a little complex for a new character (and isn't really feasible at level one), so don't worry too much about it for now. The upshot is that you make skill checks, and a certain amount of progress per day. There are prerequisites to crafting items and ways to get around those prerequisites but I don't think it's worth going in-depth on those systems in a beginner's guide.

Build-specific advice

This section is really just further reading. Nothing here is mandatory. I'd advise you to get the feel of your character from the process above, and then look here for some advice for your playstyle if you're unsure where to start.

One of the beauties of Pathfinder is that there are thousands of ways to succeed. The builds discussed below only cover the simplest and most common ways of building a character. Once you've played your first character, you'll have moved beyond the scope of this advice and can delve into all the weird and wonderful ways of building things in this system.

Ranged combat

When trying to deal damage with a ranged weapon there are a few things to remember. **By default, you do not add your dexterity to damage with ranged weapons.** There are a few class features that change that (Gunslingers notably gain Dex to damage with guns). If you are using a Longbow, you can use a weapon called the Composite Longbow, that lets you add your Strength bonus to your ranged weapon damage.

Given that you don't get to add your Dex bonus to damage, you'll want to maximise the number of arrows you can have in the air at once. Also, bear in mind that shooting into a melee is harder than hitting someone standing alone.

Some useful feats for being a ranged attacker:

- Rapid shot: take a -2 to all your attacks, but make one bonus attack this turn.
- Multi-shot: On your first shot this turn, shoot two arrows at once, each deals damage separately.
- Point-Blank Shot: Get a bonus to attack and damage rolls against enemies that are relatively close to you.
- Precise shot: No longer take a negative modifier for shooting into melee combat.
- Deadly Aim: The ranged version of Power Attack, take a negative modifier to hit for a bonus to damage.
- Rapid Reload: Reload your weapon much more quickly, this is only useful for crossbows and firearms, bows don't need to be reloaded.
- Weapon focus: Pick one type of weapon, get a bonus whenever you attack with it.

Ranged attack rolls: $d20 + BAB + \text{Dexterity modifier} + \text{any other modifiers}$.

See an example ranger character sheet [here](#).

Melee combat

Melee damage comes in a lot of forms, so there are lots of ways that you can achieve it. Most melee damage builds use high strength scores and two-handed weapons, but others use dexterity and two-weapon fighting. There are loads of ways to play melee in Pathfinder, so I'll go over a few here.

Strength builds in melee

Hitting things very hard with a very big weapon is a tried and true method of dealing damage in Pathfinder, and generally requires very few feats to get off the ground. Using a two-handed weapon has several mechanical advantages. Firstly, you add 1.5x your Strength bonus to damage with two-handed weapons, turning that +4 Strength bonus to hit into +6 to damage, which is very achievable even at first level without taking any feats. Secondly, it's just as easy to score a hit with a big weapon as with a small, so if you're hitting you might as well hit big.

When it comes to strength builds in Pathfinder, in general *bigger is always better*.

Generally useful feats for two-handed weapon users:

- Power Attack: Take a negative modifier to an attack roll, in exchange for bonus damage. Power attack can be useful to many builds, but two-handed weapon users will get an even bigger boost.
- Vital Strike: Make a single attack that deals damage as though you hit multiple times.
- Weapon Focus: Pick one type of weapon, get a bonus whenever you attack with it.
- Furious Focus: For your first attack every round, ignore the negative attack roll modifier from Power Attack.
- Cleave: Hit a man so hard that you also hit the man next to him.
- Bribe your spellcaster to cast Enlarge Person on you.

See an example barbarian character sheet [here](#).

Dexterity builds in melee

While a lot of melee builds focus on strength to hit the target and deal large amounts of damage, rogues, ninjas, swashbucklers, monks, and even fighters can do well using Dexterity as their primary stat.

Similarly to ranged weapon strategies, you want to be landing as many hits as possible. For that reason, two-weapon fighting is a common choice, as you can take an additional attack with your off-hand weapon when you do nothing but attack on your turn (this is called making a full attack).

An advantage of dex-based melee builds is that your high dexterity can contribute both to your hit chance and to your AC, keeping you safe while you shank the enemy.

Useful feats for dual-wielding:

- Two-Weapon Fighting: Reduce the penalties for fighting with two weapons.
- Weapon Finesse: Use your Dexterity instead of Strength when attacking with light weapons.
- Weapon Focus: Pick one type of weapon, get a bonus whenever you attack with it.
- (Situational) Piranha Strike: This feat is a bit of a trap, because it's just flat worse than Power Attack, but it does a similar thing for Dexterity based builds.

See an example rogue character sheet [here](#).

Tanking in melee

Pathfinder is a little more tactical than 5e when it comes to combat. Specifically, positioning yourself correctly in combat can have a huge impact on the success or failure of your party. While there aren't really any abilities that can *force* enemies to focus on you rather than your teammates, you can position yourself in such a way that it will be costly for your opponents to move away from you.

Being able to stay in the face of dangerous enemies while your allies either flank or deal damage from range is very powerful in Pathfinder, especially if done in concert with buffs from allies or being able to debuff the enemy. Whether you do that by demoralising all enemies around you, grappling, or by tripping or blinding a single enemy at a time, buying your higher damage allies more time to deal damage is invaluable.

Useful feats for tanking in melee:

- Armour Focus: Pick a type of armour, get +1 AC when wearing it.
- Shield Focus: Get +1 AC from your shield.
- Shield Brace: Use a two-handed spear or polearm with a shield.
- Toughness: Get +1HP per level, and continues to scale with level.
- Step Up: When someone steps away from you, you can follow them.
- Dazzling Display: Demoralize and debuff all enemies around you.

See an example warpriest character sheet [here](#).

Spellcasting

The variety of spellcasters available is far too broad to give specific advice that will apply to every possible class. If you're playing a stealth and subterfuge-focused Inquisitor then you'll choose different spells and feats to a bard, a cleric, or a warpriest.

In general, as a spellcaster you have a great variety of tools that can alter the shape of the battlefield, from large area of effect spells like Fog Cloud or Confusion, team buffing spells like Haste, or summon additional allies with the Summon Monster spells.

Regardless of how you play a spellcaster, you generally want to be near the top of the initiative order. Being able to affect the state of the fight before the enemy close in on you is very important.

Utility spellcasting

One thing that spellcasters of (almost) all flavours can bring is utility. Controlling the battlefield, summoning minions, buffing allies, debuffing enemies, and providing magical healing. Given how dangerous it is to be in melee as a caster or ranged combatant, having utility spells is a huge boon to any party.

Utility casters can also be invaluable in non-combat situations, with spells like invisibility, and fly, or hiding campsites, or speeding up travel through the wilderness. A versatile utility caster can fill a lot of gaps in any party composition.

And worst case scenario, if the enemy start to get too close, you can just [put them in a hole](#).

Other useful things to consider:

- Improved Initiative: Get a bonus to your initiative rolls.
- Item Creation feats: Depending on the feat, make some magic items.
- Metamagic feats: Modify your spells to do more damage, be quicker to cast, be silent, etc.
- Combat Casting: Get a bonus to concentration checks when casting defensively.
- Toughness: Get +1 HP per level, continues to scale with level.

See an example cleric character sheet [here](#).

Damage spellcasting

Also known as ‘blasting’, damage focused spellcasters can be a very fun way to play Pathfinder. You give up a lot of potential utility spells, but when played correctly, you can deal truly absurd amounts of damage.

There are many, *many* viable blasting spells depending on your class, spell list, level, and circumstance, from ol’ reliable Fireball to Shocking Grasp to Battering Blast to Mind Thrust to obscure Enervation builds. An advantage of damage spellcasters over martial damage dealers is that spellcasters can more easily change their damage types or approach when faced with enemy resistances.

Some things to consider when playing a blaster caster:

- Improved Initiative: Get a bonus to your initiative rolls.
- Spell Focus: Get a bonus to one school of magic.
- Spell Specialisation: Get a bonus to casting one specific spell.
- Metamagic feats: Modify your spells to do more damage, be quicker to cast, be silent, etc.
- Combat Casting: Get a bonus to concentration checks when casting defensively.
- Toughness: Get +1 HP per level, continues to scale with level.

See an example magus character sheet [here](#).

You read the whole thing?

Wow. I sure hope you didn’t do it all in one sitting. At this point you should have your first Pathfinder character complete and also understand some of the more complex Pathfinder mechanics. Hopefully you’ve found it useful, but if there’s anything you don’t understand, leave it as a suggestion in the list at the bottom. If you’re an experienced pathfinder player, and spot anything erroneous or incorrect, please leave a suggestion or comment where the problem is and I’ll make the change!

Suggest any additions you'd like to see below!

- Specify no dex to damage early in the guide to avoid borked builds.
- Suggest some guides (or link the guide guide) if they want to look more in depth into their character and how to make it function the best
 - **Author's note:** The reason I chose not to link the guides guide is to avoid my newer players grabbing a cookie cutter build off the internet, but I absolutely see the draw in linking it.
- 5 foot step limits further movement.
- Spells scaling by caster level vs upcasting
- This was great didn't need any suggestions except for are you going to do a book like this for dms
 - **Author's note:** I have to say I hadn't considered it, although it's probably a fair suggestion. I'll have a tinker over the weekend and if things end up coming together into something cohesive, I'll link it here.
-