

Pathfinder Quickplay guide

Want to play Pathfinder but don't know where to start and don't feel like reading a 574 page rulebook? This short cheat sheet should give you some helpful tips and guides.

Help! Which dice do I use?



Usually, This one. This is a 20 sided die or a “d20” for short. You use this die for attacks and skill checks, which is almost everything. The other die in the set are used for weapon and spell damage. The weapon or spell description will tell you which die to use.

Help! How do I attack?

To attack, you normally roll a 20 sided die and add your relevant modifiers. This is usually found in the attacks section of your character sheet. Your Dungeon Master (or DM) will let you know if your attack hit or missed.

Some attacks, particularly spells and some special abilities do not require you to make a roll to hit an enemy. In those cases, the enemy has to roll to avoid being hurt or receiving an effect like being put to sleep or given an upset stomach.

Help! How do I make a Skill check?

Whenever you want to do something that is not actively battling an enemy like sneaking around or trying to get information from a Non Player Character (NPC for short), usually your DM will have you roll a skill check.

You make a skill check by rolling your old friend the d20 and adding your stat modifier plus any other numbers that go with that skill. Your DM will tell you whether or not you passed or failed your skill check.

Help! Stats? Modifiers? What are these things?

Ability	Score	Mod
STR	18	+4
DEX	20	+5
CON	14	+2
INT	10	0
WIS	13	+1
CHA	12	+1

Usually at the top or along the side of your character sheet you'll see a series of boxes with two sets of numbers. What are these?

Essentially, your character has a set of six numbers that define who they are as a person and what they are good at. These can be broken down into two pieces of three stats each, Physical and Mental

The Physical stats and what they mean are as follows:

Strength	How physically strong you are
Dexterity	How agile and nimble you are
Constitution	How healthy you are

The Mental Stats are:

Intelligence	How much learning you have, your knowledge of the world and the things in it.
Wisdom	Your ability to perceive and understand what is going on in the world around you.
Charisma	Your personality. Your ability to shape the world around you.

These six attributes usually have a number between 3 and 18 in the box next to them. This is a sliding scale with 10 as average. These tie directly into the modifier.

Remember how I mentioned that 10 is average? If you have a 10 in one of your stats, as in Intelligence in the example stat box, that means you do not have a bonus or penalty to using that stat. If you have to make a skill check with that stat, you roll a d20 and that's that. No other numbers to fiddle with.

The numbers in the box come into play when your score is above or below 10. There's a complicated math formula, but it boils down to:

“For every 2 stat points above or below 10 your modifier changes by 1”

It effectively looks something like this:

Stat	Modifier
1	-5
2-3	-4
4-5	-3
6-7	-2
8-9	-1
10-11	0
12-13	+1
14-15	+2
16-17	+3
18-19	+4
20-21	+5

So how do you use them? Generally when you're asked to make a skill check or attack you will roll your d20 and add the modifier associated with that skill. The skill itself will often tell you which stat it uses, like so:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climb	Str	4	=	4	+	_____	+	_____	+	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Craft (alchemy)	Int	4	=	0	+	1	+	_____	+	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Diplomacy	Cha	1	=	1	+	_____	+	_____	+	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Disable Device	Dex	5	=	5	+	_____	+	_____	+	_____

So for example, Climb is Strength based, and Diplomacy is Charisma Based.

Help! Why do some skills have marks beside them?

Each character has a job or class that represents their abilities and training. This bleeds over into some skills that each class is good at. These are your Class Skills. When you take a rank in a Class skill, you get a special +3 bonus to using it.

Help! How do I know which skill to use and when?

There are a lot of skills, especially in a game as complicated as Pathfinder. It can be super tricky to know which skill to use. Each skill has a specific use at a specific time. Each is also tied into an Ability Modifier that give that particular skill bonuses. Bonuses can also come from the number of points (or Ranks) that you put into a particular skill. These represent practice in using a certain skill. Bonuses can also come from magic items or from your character's race. Hopefully this chart will help you know which skill to use and when.

Skill name	When should I use this?
Acrobatics	When you want to jump, flip or dive past someone or something
Appraise	When you want to know what something is worth
Bluff	When you want to lie to or trick someone
Climb	When you want to climb something
Craft	When you want to make something
Diplomacy	When you want to get information or want someone to do something by charming them
Disable Device	When you want to open a lock or disarm a trap
Disguise	When you want to change your appearance to look like someone or something else
Escape Artist	When you want to escape from something
Fly	When you want to fly. Only useful if you have wings or magic.
Handle Animal	When you want to train an animal or get it to do something
Heal	When you want to do first aid
Intimidate	When you want to scare or force someone into doing something
Knowledge	When you want information about someone or something. Has specific fields of focus, such as magic and history
Linguistics	When you want to learn a language, decode a secret message, or forge a document
Perception	All. The. Time. When you want to look at or listen to ANYTHING
Perform	When you feel like singing or dancing to earn pocket change
Profession	When you want to earn money by doing a job
Ride	When you want to control a mount, like a horse
Sense Motive	When you want to discern someone's true motives
Sleight of Hand	When you want to pick a pocket or hide an object

Spellcraft	When you want to know what a spell or magic item is
Stealth	When you want to hide
Survival	When you want to track something or survive in the wilderness
Swim	When you want to swim somewhere
Use Magic Device	When you want to activate a magic item like a scroll or wand

Help! There's so many Knowledge Skills! Which do I use?

Knowledge is a unique skill because it has a lot of subskills. Why is this? Because each sub skill represents a different field of study. It can be difficult to know what some things would fall under. Hopefully this table can help.

Name	I should use this when I want to learn about:
Arcana	Spells and general magic
Dungeoneering	Caves, Minerals and underground structures and features
Engineering	Structures and machines
Geography	Regions of the world, natural and manmade places
History	Historical events and people
Local	Local legends, events, people and societies
Nature	Most monsters and the natural world
Nobility	Rulers, Leaders, Heraldry and etiquette
Planes	Other planes of existence and those that live there
Religion	Gods and religions as well as associated mythologies

Help! What do all these numbers and boxes with the weapon mean?

When you go to use an attack, you may see a series of boxes, looking something like this:

WEAPON			ATTACK BONUS	CRITICAL
TYPE	RANGE	AMMUNITION	DAMAGE	

What do all these mean?

Here's a Quick breakdown to make it simpler

Weapon- Name of the weapon

Attack Bonus- This is the total bonus you get to attack with this weapon. This is usually Base Attack Bonus (Which we'll cover later) plus strength for most melee weapons and dexterity for ranged weapons and some light melee weapons like rapiers and daggers.

Critical- A critical hit means that your hit does a bunch of extra damage. This depends on your weapon. The Critical box will tell you when you get a critical hit and how much to multiply your damage.

Type- Weapons in pathfinder normally do 1 of three different types of damage, Slashing, Bludgeoning and piercing. This is where you write what type of damage your weapon does. Some weapons, like swords for instance, can be used to do more than one type of damage. Usually Slashing weapons damage by making cuts, Bludgeoning by blunt force trauma, and piercing stabbing into the target,

Range- This is really only useful for ranged weapons like bows and slings. This is the max distance you can effectively hit a target at with that weapon.

Ammunition- This is also used for ranged weapons. All this is is what kind of ammo your weapon uses, like bullets, arrows, or crossbow bolts.

Damage- This is the damage dice you roll when you do damage with that weapon. This will vary from weapon to weapon. Usually the formula is Damage Die+ Strength mod for melee weapons+ Any additional damage from an enchantment on that weapon.

Help! What is Base Attack Bonus?

Base Attack bonus is a number that gets added to all attacks. This varies by your class and is always found on the table with your class abilities. You may notice as your character, that it transforms into a set of numbers. This means when you make an attack, you can make a second attack roll with that lower number on the same turn.

.Help! What are these Saves and how do they work?

You may notice a set of three numbers grouped in a table like this:

SAVING THROWS	TOTAL	BASE SAVE	ABILITY MODIFIER	
FORTITUDE (CONSTITUTION)	<input type="text"/>	= <input type="text"/>	+ <input type="text"/>	+
REFLEX (DEXTERITY)	<input type="text"/>	= <input type="text"/>	+ <input type="text"/>	+
WILL (WISDOM)	<input type="text"/>	= <input type="text"/>	+ <input type="text"/>	+

These are your saves. They are important to resist or avoid certain magical spells and effects like poisons. Which save you need to roll varies on the situation and what you need to resist. here's a quick breakdown of each save and when you probably will need it.

Fortitude- based on your Constitution, this is used to resist being sickened or poisoned

Reflex- based on your dexterity, this is used to avoid getting hurt by spells, traps and the like.

Will- based on your Wisdom, this is used to avoid mental effects like believing illusions or being charmed or controlled by another.

It's important to notice that each class has a different base save. Some classes are better at resisting certain effects than others. For instance, Rogues are good at getting out of the way of traps and spells, but weak to mind effects. In contrast, wizards are bad at getting out of the way of spells, but better at resisting mental effects.

Help! How do I read this spell?

Unless you're playing one of the handful of classes that naturally have no magic, chances are at some point in your game you'll want to cast a spell. Problem is spell descriptions look like this:

Snowball (PRG:UW)

School [evocation](#) [cold, water]; Level [bloodrager 1](#), [druid 1](#), [magus 1](#), [sorcerer/wizard 1](#), [summoner 1](#), [witch 1](#)

CASTING

Casting Time 1 [standard action](#)

Components V, S

EFFECT

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect one ball of ice and snow

Duration instantaneous

Saving Throw none; Spell Resistance yes

DESCRIPTION

You throw a ball of elemental ice and snow at a single target as a ranged [touch attack](#). The snowball deals 1d6 points of cold damage per [caster level](#) you have (maximum 5d6).

That's a lot of information, and it's not really clear what each area means. This breakdown should aid in reading spellblocks. The first part is the easiest. The spell's name is always at the top,

School: Each spell belongs to one of 8 schools of magic. What they are and what they represent is a topic for later discussion. There may also be one or more subschools listed, as in this example

Level: Spells are arranged in tiers, or levels. The higher the level, the more powerful the spell. Not every class is the same in this regard. Some classes like Ranger and Paladin get very few tiers of spells with very limited magic, while other classes like Wizards and Clerics get access to truly world-shattering and reality bending magics. It's also possible for different classes to get the same spell at a different tier.

Casting Time: This is the time it takes for you to cast a spell. In this instance, the spell takes one turn to cast. There are some spells, however that cast take minutes or hours to cast.

Components: In this category, you'll usually see one of 5 letters or letter combinations, these being V, S, F, M, and DF.

These stand for Verbal, Somatic, Focus, Material, and Divine Focus respectively.

-Verbal means that this spell requires you to speak a phrase or command to cast this spell

- Somatic means that this spell requires you to make a movement or gesture

- Focus and Divine Focus means an object is required to channel. For a wizard, this could mean a staff or gem that helps them concentrate. Divine focuses are usually holy symbols that people focus spells through

- Material means that the spell requires a particular object or set of objects.

Range: The distance you need to be in order for the spell to work. Some spells work at hundreds of feet away, while others require a literal touch to use.

Effect: Describes what happens when the spell is created. If the spell is an Area of Effect spell (AoE) this is where the size of the effective area is laid out.

Duration: How long the Desrspell will last. Some spells only last an instant, like our example spell, while some spells can last for minutes or hours.

Saving Throw: If a spell requires the target to make a saving throw, this is where you would find it. It will also spell out what happens if the saving throw is successful or failed.

Spell Resistance: Some monsters are resistant to magical spells. You will need to make a special check to overcome this resistance if you cast certain spells.

Description: This is the meat of the spellblock. Here you will find out all the information you need to know about the spell, such as what happens when it is cast, what it looks like and damage that it does.

Help! It's time for combat! What do I do?

Combat in Pathfinder is turn based. To determine where your turn falls, roll initiative. The Initiative roll is a d20+your dexterity modifier. There are feats and abilities will give boosts to your initiative roll. If you tie with another player, usually the highest dexterity mod goes first. If you have the same dexterity mod, you and the player you tied with decide who's going first.

Help! It's my turn! What can I do?

It can be intense and overwhelming to figure out what to do with your turn. Generally on your turn you can do one of several kinds of action.

Move Action: You can move up to your full speed, which for most Medium creatures is 30 feet or 6 5 foot squares in one turn. If you're a Small creature like a Gnome, Halfling, or Goblin,, you only have 20 feet, because you have shorter legs. You can also use this action to hide, draw a weapon and several others. You can take 2 move actions in a turn if you want to get out of a tough situation.

Standard Action: Standard actions are most of what you do in a turn that isn't moving. Attacking with a weapon and casting most spells are standard actions. You can also attempt a Combat Maneuver, like stealing something, grabbing someone or tripping them as a Standard Action as well. More on those later. Generally you can move and take a standard action in battle.

Free Action/Swift Action: These take no time at all and usually are minor things like shouting to your allies.

Full-Round Action: Some spells and attacks are full round actions. That means that is all you can do that round is that one thing.

If you happen to have an animal companion or summon on the board, you can command them to attack or move on your turn.

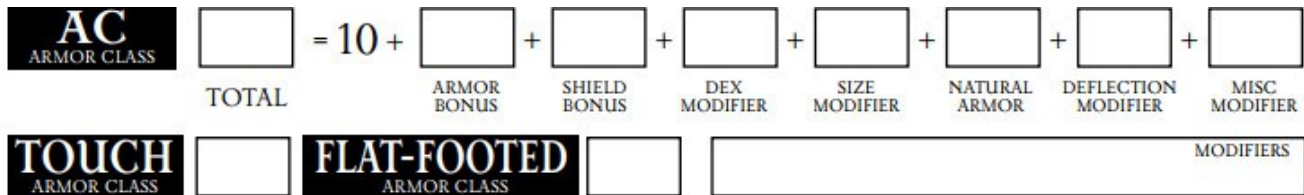
It may also help the flow of combat if you preplan your turn while others are going. Pay attention to what spells are cast, what and who has been damaged, and who is where before it is your turn.

Help! What is an Attack of Opportunity?

Normally, you can only make a single attack on your turn. But there are special circumstances. If you are in melee combat with an enemy, and it moves away on it's turn, you can basically take a swipe at it and make an attack roll. Be forewarned that this works both ways, and if you don't disengage from combat and just move away from a foe.

Help! What is this AC stuff and what does it do?

When you are looking at your character sheet, you may see a series of boxes that look like this:



AC stands for Armor Class. Which is all well and good, but what does it mean? AC is how hard your character is for an enemy to hit. Generally, you want as high an armor class as possible, so you're harder to hit. So, How is it calculated?

For all characters, your AC starts at 10. This is the base that you add numbers onto. What those numbers are, we'll go left to right.

Armor Bonus: This is a bonus based on what you are wearing. This will depend on what class you are, and what you choose to wear. Usually armor comes in three varieties, heavy medium and light. Heavy armor provides better protection, as high as +9 to your AC. This comes with a trade-off, being you can't have a high dexterity with it. You also take massive penalties to climbing, swimming and absolutely can't cast magic. Light armor provides less protection, but doesn't have the same penalties.

Shield Bonus: This bonus you have if you're wielding a shield.

Dex Modifier: You always add your dexterity modifier to your Armor Class, which means that dexterity is an important stat for any character.

Size Modifier: This only applies if you are a Small or Large creature. Medium creatures, which is most PCs, get no penalty or bonus to their AC.

Natural Armor: Some beings have a particularly thick hide either through magic or natural toughness.

Deflection Modifier: There are some spells and magical items that can add a boost to your armor class

Misc Modifier: Some feats and abilities give you an additional boost

So that's regular AC out of the way. What about those two pesky boxes labelled Touch and Flatfooted?

Your **Touch AC** is without your armor bonuses to your AC. Certain spells and weapons such as guns are able to pierce right through your armorers

Your **Flatfooted AC** only really comes into play if an enemy has the the drop on you and catches you by surprise. In that instance, you lose your Dexterity modifier, so your AC is lowered.

Help! What do I put in the AC items box?

At the top of the second page of your character sheet, you'll see a table that looks like this:

AC ITEMS	BONUS	TYPE	CHECK PENALTY	SPELL FAILURE	WEIGHT	PROPERTIES

This can be confusing, but it functions much like the weapons box. First box is for the name of your armor or shield. The rest go as follows:

Bonus: Total bonus your armor or shield adds to your AC. For more information, see the AC entry.

Type: Armor comes in 3 flavors, Light, Medium, and Heavy. Medium and heavy armor provide more protection than light armor, but also severely limit your agility and speed.

Check Penalty: certain skills like Climb and Swim are affected by what armor you are wearing. When wearing medium or heavy armor, you will subtract whatever the check penalty is for that armor before giving your total.

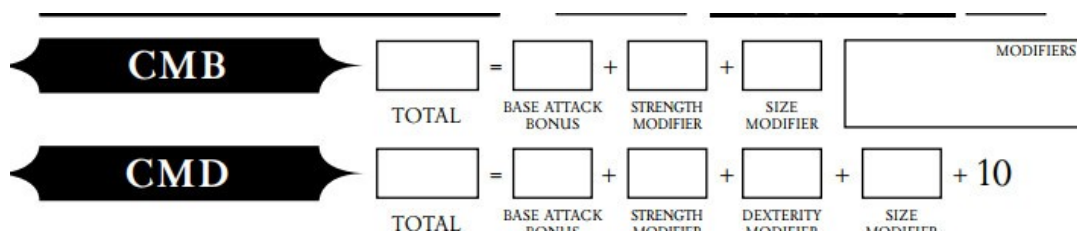
Spell Failure: Armor will interfere with arcane spells, making it so they have a chance of failing or backfiring. Usually, Very few arcane spellcasting classes can wear any kind of armor. Divine casters like Paladins and Clerics do not have to worry about this since they pull their magic from a different source.

Weight: This is your armor or shield's total weight.

Properties: If your armor or shield is magical, this is where that would go.

Help! What is this CMB and CMD nonsense?

Near the Base Attack Bonus box on your sheet, you'll see two boxes



And unhelpfully, unlike some boxes, these aren't labeled. So what are CMB and CMD and when should you use them?

Pathfinder has rules in combat for things that aren't specifically hitting something with a weapon. These are called Combat Maneuvers. And they let you:

- Steal an item from an enemy mid combat
- Trip an enemy
- Disarm an enemy
- Grapple an enemy, making it so they can't move
- Shove an enemy backwards

To do any of those you need to make a Combat Maneuver check.

Your **Combat Maneuver Bonus** or **CMB** is what you roll to attempt any of these. This is simply your Base Attack plus your strength

If someone is attempting to perform a Combat Maneuver on you, they need to hit your **Combat Maneuver Defense** or **CMD**. This works much like your AC in that it starts with a base of 10. But instead of adding numbers from armor, you instead add your Base Attack Bonus, as well as your Strength and Dexterity modifiers, as well as a size modifier if you are small.

Help! What is HP and how does it work?

Near the top of your sheet, you'll see a series of boxes labeled HP or Hit Points. But what are Hit points?

HP HIT POINTS	TOTAL	DR
WOUNDS/CURRENT HP		
NONLETHAL DAMAGE		

HP or hit points is a number that represents your character's total stamina and health. This is decided by your class. Classes that are primarily on the front lines like Barbarians and Fighters often have a lot of hit points. In contrast, all magic casters like sorcerers and wizards have very low hit points. You gain more hit points as you gain levels and get stronger.

How do you calculate your HP? Generally you only have to worry about this when levelling up. Generally you roll the Hit Die in your class description and add your constitution modifier. For example, if you're playing as a Bard, you have a d8 hit die. You would roll that d8 and add whatever your constitution modifier is. For instance if you rolled a 5, but have a constitution mod of +1, your total new hit points would be 6, added to your maximum. You always take the most possible hit points at first level.

What about the other boxes?

DR stands for **Damage Resistance**. Essentially, because of your character race, class, or other features, you get to ignore some incoming damage. As an example, if you're playing a tiefling that has DR 5 to fire, if you get hit with 7 fire damage from an enemy spell, you get to ignore the first 5 points of damage, and only have to subtract 2 hit points from your total.

Non-lethal Damage means that the attack will not hurt you severely. If you are taken to 0 HP, you fall unconscious, but are in no danger of dying, unless you take an additional attack.

Help! My DM just said I took damage! What do I do?

When you take damage, you subtract the damage taken from your current total hit points. For instance, if you have 20 max HP and are hit with 5 damage, you subtract 5 and your current total becomes 15. any further damage comes out of this number. Generally this is not a massive concern unless you hit 0 HP or below.

Once you hit 0 HP, you are considered to be **Dying**. Certain spells and effects can also cause you to start dying. You then must make a constitution check to stabilize yourself. If you don't you continue losing HP. Once your HP is equal to your negative your constitution score, you are dead, and cannot be healed. There are certain powerful magical spells that can cause you to return from the dead, but they are extremely costly.

If someone heals you, either through performing first aid, force-feeding you a healing potion, or casting a healing spell, you return to 0 HP or more, depending on how much you were healed for.

If you already were in positive health, you simply add on to what you have, up to your maximum. For instance, if you were at 13 HP and you have a max of 20, if you're healed for 8 HP, your health caps at 20, not 21.

Help! I was poisoned and took Ability Damage! What do I do?

Poisons and certain spells and abilities in Pathfinder are extremely nasty because they target your actual ability scores, rather than your HP. If you take ability damage, that means that that score as well as all associated modifiers and skills are lowered, if it drops you down a tier. In most cases, if your ability scores are lowered to 0, you will fall unconscious. If it is your Constitution score being damaged or drained, you will die.

This cannot be healed with conventional healing spells. It can however be restored with the Restoration series of divine spells.

Help! I just got hit with a status effect! What does it mean?

Pathfinder has a lot of status effects. The list of what they are and how they affect you can be simply overwhelming. Hopefully this table can help you make sense of the many status effects that can affect you as a player.

Status	What it means
Bleed	Taking auto damage every round.
Blinded	AC drops by 2 and you lose your Dex bonus to your AC. You also take a penalty of 4 to Strength and Dexterity skills. You have a 50% chance to miss your opponents, and you have to make a check to move at full speed or fall down
Confused	You act completely at random
Cowering	Can't act at all, AC drops by 2 and you lose your Dex bonus
Dazed	Can't act, but no AC penalty
Dazzled	Take a -1 penalty to attacks and perception checks to see things
Deafened	take a -4 to initiative and Perception. Spells with the Verbal component have a 20 percent chance to fail
Disabled	You can only take one action, and you can only move at half speed. Taking a Standard action means you take 1 point of damage.
Dying	You can't act. You must make a CON check to stay alive.
Entangled	You can only move at half speed and you can't run or charge, You take a -2 to attacks and -4 to Dexterity based checks. You must make a special check to cast a spell
Exhausted	Half speed, can't run or charge, you take -6 to Strength and Dexterity checks.

Fascinated	Cant' Act. -4 to perception and sense motive. Perceived or actual threats will snap you out of it
Fatigued	You can't run or charge. You have a -2 to Strength and Dexterity checks
Flat-footed	Lose your Dex bonus to AC and CMD. You also can't make Attacks of Opportunity
Frightened	You must run away from whatever caused the effect. You take a -2 to all checks and attacks
Grappled	You can't make AoO, You can't move. -4 to dex, -2 to attack EXCEPT to escape the grapple.
Helpless	Treated as if you had no dex score. Attacks against you have +4.
Nauseated	You can only take a single move action. You can't attack or cast spells
Panicked	Drop everything you're holding and run away. Take a -2 to all checks and attacks
Paralyzed	Strength and Dex are 0 and you are Helpless. You can only take mental actions.
Pinned	Can't Move. You are Flat-footed, your AC drops by 4, you can only make checks to try to escape
Prone	You are flat on the ground. You take a -4 to melee attacks. Your armor also drops by 4 against melee attacks, but goes up by 4 vs. ranged weapons.
Shaken	-2 to attacks, saves and checks.
Sickened	-2 to all checks
Staggered	You can only move or attack in a round. Not both.
Stunned	Drop what you are holding, can't take any actions, your AC drops by 2 and you lose your dex bonus
Unconscious	Knocked Out and Helpless

Help! What goes in Special Abilities on the second page?

Your character has things that aren't simply attacks and spells. Some of these things come from your class. Others may come from your character's race (or species). All of those abilities and things go here.

Help! What is a Feat and how do I use it?

A Feat is something special or unique your character can do or be. It usually changes the way your character acts or what they can do. This is what a feat looks like:

Dodge (Combat)

Your training and reflexes allow you to react swiftly to avoid an opponents' attacks.

Prerequisite: [Dex](#) 13.

Benefit: You gain a +1 [dodge bonus](#) to your AC. A [condition](#) that makes you lose your [Dex](#) bonus to AC also makes you lose the benefits of this feat.

Some feats are Combat Feats. This means some classes give these to you as bonuses. There are other groups of feats too, such as General Feats, which are miscellaneous feats anybody can take, and Metamagic Feats, which change up how certain spells work. Many feats, like the example, have prerequisites. This means that you have to have something before you can choose that feat. This is often a required stat score or another feat.