Huh, Fighters Are Pretty Awesome  
Nightbringer’s Guide to the Pathfinder Fighter

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**Introduction**

Years ago Rogue Eidolon wrote an excellent guide to the Pathfinder Fighter, but seeing as he now works for Paizo it is unlikely that he’ll have the time to update it again. This is a shame as the class has received an enormous amount of love from Paizo in the past couple of years. These new rules help boost the Fighter into one of the best classes for its titular role while also granting it additional gameplay options beyond the realm of combat.

I’m writing this guide to help present all of these new rules and options to the community. Did you know that the Fighter has the option to pick up spell casting? How about picking up any bonus combat feat you need as a swift action? Would you like your fighter to have the same skills per level as a Bard? These options and many more are available to you!

Throughout this guide I will be using N Jolly’s color coding system. As a quick reminder:

**[\*] Red**: indicates an option or feature which I will never recommend taking.

**[\*\*] Orange**: indicates an option or feature that you should examine carefully before picking up. Sometimes these are weak, sometimes they are highly situational.

**[\*\*\*] Green**: indicates options and features that are good choices which you should feel comfortable picking up.

**[\*\*\*\*] Blue**: options and features are very good options and should be some of the first things you look at.

**[\*\*\*\*\*] Pink:** the best options available to you. These are feats you should always grab.

**[--] Black**: If you see this rating the option has a variable rating. This usually means that the usefulness of the option is depends on other choices you make. It might also mean that the option is simply unratable.

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**Class Features**

Let’s start by reviewing core class features as your various options will involve trading these away. Many of these core features are quite good but even some of the blue features can be traded away for equally good or stronger options!

[\*] Class Skills and Skills Per Level: You only get 2 skills per level and have a very limited set of class skills, the best of which are Intimidate, Knowledge (Dungeoneering) and Survival. Luckily, if skills are important to you there are several ways for a Fighter to gain additional skills per level and better class skills, particularly through Advanced Weapon Training and Advanced Armor Training (described below). If you don’t care about making many skill checks then you can just ignore this problem.

[\*\*\*\*] Weapon and Armor Proficiencies: You’re proficient with all simple and martial weapons, all types of armor and all shields. The only way this could be better would be if you also had free access to Exotic Weapons.

[\*\*\*\*\*] Bonus Feats: You get 11 extra combat feats which is amazing considering how many great feats are labeled as Combat Feats. Additionally every four levels you can trade a bonus feat you’ve picked for another one, letting you take advantage of feats which don’t scale well during early levels and trading them for better ones at later levels. If you’re looking at class features that replace bonus feats always first ask yourself, “Is this better than a feat I could pick?”.

[\*\*] Bravery: A weak bonus on will saves against fear which increase every 4 levels. I used to rate this as a red ability and suggest trading it away, but with a feat tax this becomes an untyped bonus to all will saves as early as level five. If you’re willing to pick Advanced Weapon Training (Armed Bravery) then this becomes a [\*\*\*\*] blue feature. Alternatively, there are a series of feats that expand the uses for Bravery that make the feature more useful (these are described below).

[\*\*\*] Armor Training: This is great for strength-based builds or for dexterity builds wanting to grab a bit more armor. The extra mobility is also great, though waiting until level 7 for full mobility in heavy armor is rough when you consider that most games end by level 15. I rate this green primarily because you can trade it away for stronger options.

[\*\*\*\*] Weapon Training: This is great as you’re gaining untyped bonuses to attack, damage, CMB and CMD against disarm or steal attempts. Like Armor Training though, you’re blessed with choice for better options. At the very least, starting from level 9 you’ll want to forgo picking up additional weapon training groups in favor of grabbing advanced weapon training options.

[\*\*\*] Armor Mastery: You can’t say that DR 5/- is bad, but you don’t get it until level 19 which means you’ll rarely see this class feature. It's significantly better with the Armored Juggernaut option of Advanced Armor Training, as it allows this DR to stack with adamantine armors, which was one of the main flaws of the feature before, allowing it to stack up to DR 11/-.

[\*\*\*\*] Weapon Mastery: You probably won’t ever see this for more than one or two sessions at the very end of a campaign, but it is a significant damage increase if you do get to play with it. Underwhelming when considered along other class capstones, but if you wanted immortality you should have been a wizard I guess.

**Advanced Weapon Training**

The advanced weapon training options are basically powerful feats which are available to anybody with the Weapon Training class feature. Starting at level 9, a Fighter can pick up an ability from this list instead of getting an extra weapon group to have weapon training bonuses. When picking an ability he must also pick a weapon group he has selected via weapon training and the selected option usually applies only to weapons in that group.

You can also pick one of these abilities via the Advanced Weapon Training feat, which is available starting at fifth level. This feat can be selected multiple times, but only once per 5 fighter levels. Overall, these options are really locked down to the Fighter and should be considered as additional class features.

Other classes and archetypes may be able to pick up some of these abilities via the Martial Focus feat, which gives you +1 damage to weapons in a particular weapon group and counts as having weapon training for feat prerequisites. Note that you cannot boost this bonus via Gloves of Dueling and the bonus does not increase as you level, so only a few of the options will stand out. This is also useful for the Fighter who has traded away weapon training via an archetype and still wants to pick up one or two of the advanced weapon training options.

[\*\*\*\*] Abundant Tactics (Ex): You add your weapon training bonus score to the number of times per day you can use combat feats with limited daily uses. This is pretty good if you’re grabbing many of the monk feats like Stunning Fist or Punishing Kick. It can be really good with Barroom Brawler or Critical Versatility, giving you the ability to swap out feats on a daily basis.

[\*\*\*\*\*] Armed Bravery (Ex): You apply your Bravery bonus to all Will saves. That adds up to a total +5 bonus to Will saves and makes the Advanced Weapon Training feat a serious contender for your 5th level feat. The fact that you also now double your Bravery bonus and add it to your DC for Intimidate checks is icing on the cake.

[\*] Combat Competence (Ex): Pick a weapon group and reduce your penalties for non-proficiency with any weapons in that group by an amount equal to your weapon training bonus. When the penalty hits 0 you’re proficient with those weapons. The problem here is that you’re basically just waiting until level 17 to pick up a bunch of Exotic Weapon Proficiency feats. This comes online way too late.

**Ashiel** has reminded me that this is another option which benefits heavily from Gloves of Dueling. Those gloves become affordable shortly after 9th level, at which point you’ll have a total weapon training bonus of +4. That means that in the mid levels you could quickly pick up proficiencies in several exotic weapons.

[\*\*\*] Combat Maneuver Defense (Ex): When wielding a weapon in a chosen weapon group your weapon training bonus is applied to your CMD against all weapons. Basically a feat for +4 to CMD or +5 when playing a Weapon Master.

[\*\*\*] Dazzling Intimidation (Ex): Add your weapon training bonus to intimidate checks, you can intimidate as a move action and use Dazzling Display as a standard action. Good for an intimidate build but not a first-choice.

[\*\*\*\*] Defensive Weapon Training (Ex): Gain a +1 shield bonus to AC and add half your weapon’s enhancement bonus to this shield bonus. When your weapon training bonus totals +4 increase the base shield bonus to +2. You lose the bonus if you’re immobilized or helpless. This basically scales up to +4 shield bonus without wearing a shield so all. Good for a number of builds.

[\*\*\*] Fighter's Finesse (Ex): Pick a weapon group. All weapons in the group gain the benefits of Weapon Finesse. This is basically how you get to make any weapon eventually qualify for dexterity-to-damage.

[\*\*\*\*] Fighter's Reflexes (Ex): Apply your weapon training bonus to your Reflex saving throws, this benefit is lost if you’re flat-footed or denied your dexterity bonus to AC. Not quite as good as Armed Bravery but still a great way to shore up your other weak save.

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[\*\*\*\*] Fighter's Tactics (Ex): Treat all of your allies as if they had the teamwork feats you know, but only for determining if you get to apply the bonuses. This is stolen entirely from the Inquisitor is basically required if you want to enjoy a variety of teamwork feats.

[--] Focused Weapon (Ex): Pick a weapon group, and then one weapon from that group for which you have Weapon Focus. This weapon’s base damage now scales as if you were a Warpriest of the same level as your current Fighter level. This is amazing if you’ve running with kukris or a whip and nearly useless if you have a greatsword or a scythe. Keep it in mind when planning your builds.

[\*\*] Inspiring Confidence (Ex): A small number of times per day you can spend a swift action to allow an ally to reroll a save to end an ongoing fear effect. If you have psychic casters in your party then this is a good ability. Otherwise it is too situational to pick up.

[\*\*\*\*] Trained Grace (Ex): This one is interesting. If you are using weapon finesse to get dexterity to attack rolls but still using strength for your damage rolls then you get to double your weapon training bonus to damage. That’s a flat +8 or +10 (with certain archetypes) to damage when all’s said and done. This could make for some devastating two-weapon fighting builds. Combine it with Focused Weapon for even more fun.

[\*\*\*\*\*] Trained Initiative (Ex): So long as you are wielding or can draw a weapon from the chosen weapon group you get to add your weapon training bonus to your Initiative score. If you have Quick Draw you can draw a weapon as a free action during an initiative check. This eventually scales up to a +4 untyped bonus to your Initiative. That’s awesome, though you’ll want to pick this up at later levels.

[\*\*\*] Trained Throw (Ex): If you are dealing strength damage with thrown weapons you double the damage bonus from weapon training. You have to pick the Thrown weapon group unless you have Throw Anything as a feat. Combine this with the various feats like Two-Handed Thrower or Startoss Style for some effective damage on a somewhat rarely used build.

[\*\*\*\*] Versatile Training (Ex): This ability is awesome. You pick two skills from a list which always includes Bluff or Intimidate but also have two other options specific to each weapon group. You gain skill ranks in those skills equal to your BAB and they become class skills. If you already had ranks in those skills you can retrain them. You can only pick this ability twice, but doing so is effectively an extra 4 skill ranks per level. With the right archetypes you’re gaining the same skills per level as a rogue.

[\*\*] Weapon Mastery (Ex): You gain a weapon mastery feat and can apply to a weapon not covered by one of your weapon training groups. This is a really situational ability. It isn’t bad but not worth spending one of your limited uses of advanced weapon training on.

[\*\*\*] Weapon Sacrifice (Ex): When damage would cause you or an ally to be knocked unconscious or killed you and spend a swift or immediate action to instead direct the damage to your weapon, with your weapon only having half its normal hardness. This is a good way to save a party member, but you’ll probably break that weapon. If you can find a way to make your weapon unbreakable or swiftly repairable then this is abusable.

**Thank you TiaC** for pointing out that you can pick gauntlets as a weapon, preventing your primary weapon from getting broken. A fun little trick.

[\*\*\*] Weapon Specialist (Ex): Pick a number of combat feats, equal to your weapon training bonus, which apply to a single weapon (such as Weapon Focus). The weapon must be in the weapon group you chose to apply this benefit to. Apply those feats to all weapons in the chosen group. Usually not an amazing option, this could be fun if you focus on a weapon which exists in multiple groups like a dagger (light blades, thrown).

**Advanced Armor Training**

Similar to Advanced Weapon Training, starting at level 7, you can forgo your numeric bonus gained from Armor Training to pick one of the abilities listed below. You will still gain the ability to move at full speed in medium and heavy armor, which is a nice boon. Additionally, you can use the Advanced Armor Training feat starting at third level to pick up these options, and can pick that feat once for every three levels of Fighter you’ve gained.

One thing to note is that the vast majority of archetypes for the Fighter will trade away Armor Training entirely, so you will need to make a choice between using these options and using those archetypes. That being said, with all the options that are available you can now play a very effective Fighter without using archetypes at all.

**[\*\*\*] Adaptable Training**: Pick one of the following skills: Acrobatics, Climb, Disguise, Escape Artist, Intimidate, Knowledge (engineering), Profession (soldier), Ride or Swim. You get to use your base attack bonus in place of skill ranks for that skill and if it isn’t already a class skill it is now. You can pick this option up to 4 times. You don’t get 2 skills like you would with Versatile training, but you do gain the class skill bonus and you can combine the two options. This is an easy way to get Acrobatics as a class skill as well, which is always useful.

**[\*\*\*\*] Armor Specialization**: With a specific type of armor, this ability provides an increase to the armor’s base armor bonus equal to ¼ your Fighter level. This is capped to a +3 increase for light armor and a +4 increase for medium armor. This provides a scaling bonus to your AC and a significantly higher one than any other feat. While “stacking AC” generally isn’t helpful at the highest levels of the game, investing a single feat or AAT rankup isn’t a big deal for a Fighter and this is at the minimum 3x as strong as other AC boosting feats.

**[\*\*\*] Armored Confidence**: You gain a bonus on Intimidate checks to demoralize, +1 while wearing light armor, +2 with medium armor and +3 with heavy armor. This bonus increases by +1 at level 7 and every 4 levels afterwards. You also add half this bonus to the DC for others to demoralize you. This is one of the few ways to boost the DC for others to demoralize you, but that shouldn’t be a mechanic you’re dealing with during every encounter. The bonus on your intimidate checks is pretty nice however, especially since it scales as you level.

**[\*\*\*] Armored Juggernaut**: You gain DR 1/- with heavy armor. At level 7 it becomes DR 1/- with medium armor or DR 2/- with heavy armor. At level 11 it is DR 1/- with light armor, DR 2/- with medium armor and DR 3/- with heavy armor. This bonus stacks with the DR from adamantine armor and at level 19, so long as you have armor mastery, these DR values increase by 5. That’s DR 11/- at level 19 with heavy adamantine armor, DR 9/- with medium armor or DR 7/- with light armor. This winds up being quite good at mid to high levels, but only if you go with something like Adamantine Heavy Armor. If you go that route, consider investing in Armor Material Expertise (Adamantine) in order to negate some lethal damage a few times per day as well.

**[\*\*] Armored Master**: You gain a single Armor Mastery feat or Shield Mastery feat which you qualify for. There are some good feats in this mix, so you’re basically gaining the option to trade your Armor Training bonuses for extra feats at levels 7, 11, 15. None of these feats are game changing however, and the list to pick from is relatively small.

**[\*\*\*\*] Armored Sacrifice**: Once per day, when damage would cause you or an adjacent ally to be knocked unconscious or die you can use an immediate action to direct that damage to a suit of armor or shield that you are wearing/using. The armor or shield takes the damage instead, using only half its normal hardness. This is usable an extra time per day at levels 11 and 19. This is very likely a life-saving ability, though you’ll want adamantine armor to make sure yours isn’t completely destroyed. Keep in mind that you can use this after you find out how much damage you’re taking, that’s pretty rare for a life-saving ability.

**[\*] Armored Sprint**: You gain Run as a bonus feat and if you’re proficient with heavy armor you treat it as medium armor for the purposes of this feat. That really isn’t anything special. You’re unlikely to have the space on your play map to be regularly moving around at 5x your speed, and there are few out of combat situations where this feat is useful.

**[\*\*] Critical Deflection**: You gain a +2 to AC versus critical confirmation rolls, increasing by +1 at level 7 and every 4 levels thereafter to a max of +6. This is a decent defensive option, but not an amazing one. If your GM loves crit-fishing builds then this is much stronger.

**[\*\*\*\*] Master Armorer**: You use your BAB in place of ranks in Craft (Armor) and you gain both the Craft Magic Arms and Armor and the Master Craftsman feats without needing to match the prerequisites for them. This is pretty good utility, especially if you want some of that expensive Adamantine armor. I would seriously consider picking this up at level 3 via the Advanced Armor Training feat if your campaign allows enough downtime for crafting magic items.

**[\*] Quick Donning**: This option provides a number of benefits. First, the time required to equip or remove armor, as well as “don hastily” is significantly reduced. Second, if you’ve hastily donned your armor you can make either a dexterity or strength check to basically shake the armor into place and remove the penalties for having hastily donned armor. Third, you can choose to strip off pieces of your armor to gain a bonus on Escape Artist checks, combat maneuver checks or a Strength check against an effect that restricts your ability to move, gaining a +1 bonus for every -1 penalty you take to your AC. Really… none of these are stellar abilities. The “Hastily Donned” penalties are one of those rules that usually gets ignored by your GM or that you can negate with the Comfort armor property. Reducing your AC for an entire encounter for a small bonus to a single check isn’t a good choice to be making either.

**[\*\*\*] Steel Headbutt**: While wearing medium or heavy armor, this gives you a free extra attack on a full attack, though at a -5 attack penalty with a 1d3 or 1d4 damage dice. You also only apply half your strength bonus to damage as well, though your “weapon” has the same special materials as your suit of armor and can be enchanted separately to gain weapon enchantments. This is basically a free extra attack and will average an extra 3 damage a round at the minimum while providing extra opportunities for a critical hit. Not amazing, but not bad either.

**[\*\*] Unmoving**: Select a combat maneuver and gain a scaling bonus to your CMD against that maneuver. It starts at +1 while wearing light armor, +2 for medium and +3 for heavy while increasing by +1 at level 7 and every 4 levels thereafter. This winds up being just a bit too situational of a defensive bonus to pick up, unfortunately.

**Stamina and Combat Tricks**

Introduced in Pathfinder Unchained, this is one of the few optional rule sets that Paizo has produced which has seen continued (and pretty regular) support. The Stamina and Combat Tricks are a fairly clever way of giving character classes which lack magic a bit of a boost by providing additional abilities tacked onto Combat Feats that require expenditure of a resource called Stamina.

The Combat Stamina feat immediately grants a character a Stamina Pool equal to its base attack bonus plus its Constitution modifier. At this point you can use the Combat Tricks associated with any Combat Feats you’ve taken. Stamina is usually spent as you make some type of action, such as an attack or combat maneuver check, to gain an additional bonus or ability on that action. These do not count as separate actions, though occasionally your Combat Trick will specify that it requires the expenditure of a Swift or Immediate action.

If you drop to 0 Stamina, then you are fatigued until you restore at least 1 point of Stamina. Stamina regenerates at a rate of 1 point per minute that you spend “resting” out of combat. This is not the same rest you get for a full night’s sleep, instead you have to be out of combat, make no more than a single move or standard action per round and avoid Strength, Dexterity or Constitution based skill checks or ability checks. Additionally, you can’t be suffering any of the following conditions: confused, cowering, dazed, dead, disabled, exhausted, fascinated, frightened, helpless, nauseated, panicked, paralyzed, petrified, shaken, sickened, staggered, or stunned.

The rules provide GMs with a number of options for implementing Stamina and Combat Tricks. Note that I suggest that at the minimum you use the “Free for Fighters” option, though I personally just grant the Combat Stamina feat for free to all characters in games I GM. The options for implementation are as follows:

**Feat Access**: You have to spend a feat to pick up Combat Stamina.

**Free for Fighters**: Fighters gain Combat Stamina as a bonus feat at level 1.

**Fighter Bonus Feats Only**: Stamina and Combat Tricks are free for fighters, but you can only use the tricks from feats you’ve picked up as Fighter Bonus Feats. This excludes bonus feats from other classes and the feats you pick up every odd level. In my opinion this rule creates an annoying level of bookkeeping (did I grab this feat at 3rd or 4th level) and it's a bit silly. If you only want Fighters to use Combat Tricks, then only use the Free for Fighters rules.

**Free for Everyone**: Either all martials or all characters gain access to Combat Tricks and Combat Stamina is a bonus feat for all players. This is the method that I recommend using. In practice, your martials will still gain stronger benefit as very few of the Combat Tricks interact with magic systems and your spell casters will be picking up significantly fewer Combat feats.

**A Note For GMS**

The question you’re probably asking is whether or not you should allow Stamina and Combat Trick rules. You’ve probably already guessed that I say yes, but let me provide my reasons as well as a caveat. First, the rules work quite well, with very few Combat Tricks having glaring editing errors. For the most part you can just use the rules as written without having to search for a FAQ or make a GM ruling. Second, many of the tricks provide additional utility to some formerly weak feats or to feats that were considered “taxes”. You may very well find player going for feats they used to avoid, leading to new and interesting builds at your table. Finally, this system has extensive continued support on both companion and primary source books. It is clear that Paizo intends for this system to see common use.

So, when should you avoid using these rules? I actually do suggest you leave these rules out if your players are completely new to tabletop gaming. To be honest you may want to start such players off with a simpler system than Pathfinder, but just keep in mind that the Core rulebook is pretty intimidating at first glance and try not to bombard your players with too many rules all at once.

**Core Races**

Just about any race can be an effective Fighter with an appropriate build but there are a few races which just aren’t as strong as other options. For some of the best races I’m going to go into specific detail, so expect this to be a bit longer than your usual section on races.

Dwarf (+2 Con/Wis, -2 Cha): The ability score changes give you good defensive bonuses and only penalize your dump stat. Dwarves have amazing baseline racial traits and many amazing alternate racial traits. Their alternate favored class bonus isn’t bad but you’ll probably want the bonus skill point instead. Consider some of the following options:

**Slow and Steady**: While your base speed is reduced you don’t take any penalties to movement speed due to armor. Consider trading away your Armor Training if you play a dwarf.

**Weapon Familiarity**: If your GM allows you to use the weapon design rules from *Weapon Master’s Handbook* you can custom craft your own exotic weapon. Consider creating a Spring Loaded weapon, which can activate or suspend the Reach property as a swift action.

**Hardy**: This is a +2 on saves against poisons, spells and spell-like abilities. With the Steel Soul feat you can boost the save against spells and spell-like abilities to +4.

**Fey Thoughts**: Trade away your Hatred trait for two class skills of your choice from a list of most of the best skills in the game.

Elf (+2 Dex/Int, -2 Con): The decrease to your constitution hurts any melee build so they lack a bit of versatility for build options. The alternate favored class bonus isn’t anything special but you have some great racial traits. A few options to consider are:

Weapon Familiarity: If your GM allows you to use the weapon design rules from *Weapon Master’s Handbook* you can custom craft your own exotic weapon. Consider creating a Spring Loaded weapon, which can activate or suspend the Reach property as a swift action.

**Fey Thoughts**: Trade away your Weapon Familiarity trait for two class skills of your choice from a list of most of the best skills in the game.

Elven Battle Focus: While the prerequisite feats aren’t great, this feat lets you use your intelligence modifier instead of your strength for damage when using a rapier, longsword or “Elven” melee weapon. This is very interesting if you plan to multiclass with the Duelist prestige class or if you want to fight with an Elven Curve Blade.

Gnome (+2 Con/Cha, -2 Str): The increase to constitution is nice, but the penalty to strength really hurts. The alternate favored class bonus is lackluster like usual and the racial traits are just ok. Trade out your weapon familiarity for fey thoughts like with other races.

Half Elf (+2 to your choice): Half elves are a great choice for any Fighter build with a +2 to the ability score of your choice. You get your choice of Elf, Half Elf or Human alternate favored class bonuses which is actually pretty nice since you can can provide bonuses to up to 5 different CMD scores. Multitalented is nice if you want to multiclass. While you’ll want to keep most of your racial traits you do have some options to consider:

Ancestral Arms: Trade Skill Focus as a bonus feat for Exotic Weapon Proficiency. Useful if you really want to use an exotic weapon.

Fey Thoughts: Trade out multitalented, you get the idea by now.

Dual Minded: Trade out your Skill Focus bonus feat for a +2 untyped bonus to will saves.

Half Orc (+2 to your choice): Getting to pick your bonus to an ability score is great. Darkvision with no penalty is also great. Grab the toothy trait for a free bite attack and fey thoughts as usual. You also have access the Sacred Tattoo racial trait which grants a handy +1 Luck bonus to all saves. Combo that with the Fate’s Favored trait to boost it to +2 for all saves. A really handy defensive bonus.

Halfling (+2 Dex/Cha, -2 Str): You’re looking at either a dexterity-to-damage build, a ranged build not reliant on strength or a mounted build if you play a halfling. These are effective but you’re a bit pigeon holed, hence the lower rating. While halflings have some great racial traits, race traits and race feats you’ll probably want to play another class if you want to play a halfling.

Human (+2 to your choice): Again, you get to pick your ability score. You also get a bonus skill point per level and a bonus feat at level one. All excellent choices. The alternate favored class bonus is the best of all core races save the half elf. An all around solid choice. You get access to the interesting Martial Versatility feat, which allows you to pick one combat feat which is applied to a specific weapon and apply that feat to all weapons in that group. There are some fun exploits with this feat which we can go into later.

**Other Races**

There are a ton of other races and I will rate them all at another date. Generally, anything with a strength or constitution penalty is a poor choice, though a dexterity bonus can offset those somewhat if you plan on using a dexterity-to-damage build. Any race which grants flight is a great choice. Many races are generally poor choices but have unique features which make them great for particular builds.

**Variant Multiclassing**

Introduced in Pathfinder Unchained, this is an interesting change to traditional multiclassing. With this option you continue to progress with full levels in your primary class but trade out half your normal feats (those gained at levels 3, 7, 11, 15 and 19) to gain a small set of class features from another class. While this is a hard choice to make for most classes, as a Fighter you have twenty-one feats to begin with and can easily trade away five feats if you’re gaining useful class features. Take a look at all the options and see if something appeals to you.

**[\*] Alchemist**

This is a very underwhelming choice overall and I would advise you go with the Mutagen Warrior archetype instead if you want a bit of the Alchemist’s flavor. The abilities you gain from this VMC don’t synergize with each other and you don’t gain any Discoveries. Sad, as this is one of the more interesting classes in the game.

**Alchemy** (3): Gain your character level as a bonus on Craft (Alchemy) checks and you can use that skill to identify potions.

**Bombs** (7): Gain a limited number of bombs per day. The damage scales as an Alchemist of your class level but you don’t get to add your intelligence to the damage.

**Mutagen** (11): You gain the mutagen class feature and can drink one safely. This is nice, but a bit late.  
**Swift Poisoning** (15): You gain poison use and swift poisoning. Way too late to be useful, this should have been your 3rd level ability.  
**Poison Immunity** (19): You’re immune to poisons. Underwhelming at level 19. I am not whelmed.

**[\*\*] Barbarian**

The Barbarian is a decent choice, gaining you the Rage class feature at an early level and a few useful defensive class features. The Viking archetype outclasses a Barbarian VMC however, as you’ll have more rounds of Rage per day and quite a few more Rage Powers.

**Rage** (3): You can rage for rounds per day equal to your constitution modifier + your character level.

**Uncanny Dodge** (7): You get the Uncanny Dodge class feature.

**Rage Power** (11): You can a single Rage Power, counting as half your level for qualifying for it but your full level for determining its effects.

**Damage Reduction** (15): You gain DR 3/-

**Greater Rage** (19): You gain Greater Rage but at a really late level.

**[\*\*\*\*\*] Bard**

A pretty solid choice if you’re looking to add utility to your build. Gaining Inspire Courage and Inspire Competence is quite useful, though you’ll want to pick up Lingering Performance if you plan on using performances on a regular basis. You’ll gain some rather significant boosts to skill usage, this VMC pairs very well with either the Lore Warden or the Tactician.

**Bardic Knowledge** (3): Add half your level to your Knowledge checks and you can make Knowledge checks untrained. Really great for Lore Warden builds.

**Bardic Performance** (7): You can use Inspire Courage and Inspire Competence as a bard of your character level - 4 for rounds per day equal to your charisma modifier + your character level.

**Versatile Performance** (11): You gain Versatile Performance in one Perform skill and can retrain the skills associated with this ability. This is handy way to boost up some of your social skills.

**Lore Master** (15): You can take 10 on Knowledge checks and a few times per day you can take 20.

**Additional Performances** (19): You can also use Dirge of Doom and Inspire Greatness as a bard of your character level - 4.

**[\*\*\*] Cavalier**

This VMC gives you the ability to issue a Challenge once per day, some of the powers from an Order of your choice and at higher levels the Tactician and Greater Tactician abilities. There are some nice abilities to pick up form these Orders and the Challenge is a decent damage boost to use against a particularly tough enemy.

**Order** (1): Pick one Cavalier order, you must follow its edicts.

**Challenge** (3): You issue one Challenge per day as a Cavalier of your character level - 2. You gain the bonuses from your Order.

**Order Ability** (7): You gain the 2nd level ability of your order, using your full character level as your effective Cavalier level.

**Tactician** (11): Gain the Tactician ability using your full character level.

**Greater Order Ability** (15): Gain the 8th level ability of your order, using your full character level.

**Greater Tactician** (19): Gain the Greater Tactician ability using your full character level.

**[\*\*] Cleric**Overall not a strong choice for a fighter. You gain a weakened version of Channel Energy that will gradually improve as you level up, but you aren’t going to be too excited about this. You also get the powers from a Domain of your choice, but they’re generally not worth spending five feats.

**Deity** (1): Pick a deity to follow. You gain the Cleric’s aura, bonus languages, code of conduct and restriction against casting spells of an opposed alignment. You also gain the Cleric’s spontaneous casting ability. None of this helps out a fighter.

**Domain** (3): Pick a Domain granted by your deity and gain the first level power.

**Channel** (7): Channel energy as a cleric 6 levels lower than your character level.

**Improved Channel** (11): Channel energy as a cleric 4 levels lower than your character level.

**Improved Domain** (15): Gain the additional domain power from your chosen domain.

**Greater Channel** (19): Channel energy as a cleric 2 levels lower

**[\*] Druid**

There are two main benefits to Druid Variant Multiclassing. The first is gaining an animal companion and the second is gaining some minimal capabilities to Wild Shape. Unfortunately the wild shaping comes online really late in your character’s life and isn’t very powerful. The animal companion is nice, since you can pick from any of the available animals but alternatively you could just grab the Animal Ally feat at a much earlier level.

**Code** (1): You can speak Druidic and must follow the Druidic code of conduct.

**Wild Empathy** (3): Gain the Wild Empathy class feature.

**Companion** (7): You gain an animal companion, with an effective Druid level of your level - 4. This can only be boosted via the Improved Companion ability you get at level 11.

**Improved Companion** (11): Your effective Druid level for your animal companion is your full level.

**Wild Shape** (15): Wild Shape twice per day, transforming into a small or medium animal.

**Greater Wildshape** (19): Wild Shape three times per day, you gain the 6th level Druid options.

**[\*] Gunslinger**

This VMC was very poorly thought out. The first three abilities can all be gained via feats or archetypes and you need them very early in your career if you’re going to use firearms. The deeds you gain at levels 15 and 19 are the only worthwhile class features, you just get them way too late to matter.

**Firearm Proficiency** (3): You are proficient with firearms.

**Gunsmith** (7): You gain the gunsmith class feature.

**Deed** (11): You gain the Amateur Gunslinger feat… yay.

**Improved Deed** (15): You gain a single 3rd-level Deed.

**Greater Deed** (19): You gain a single 7th-level Deed.

**[\*\*\*\*] Inquisitor**

Inquisitor is a solid choice for many Fighter builds. Stern Gaze is great if you’re working on an Intimidate build. Gaining access to Judgement is great for a variety of combat situations, especially since you eventually get to use it twice and activate two bonuses. Finally, Solo Tactics coming online at level 11 lets you have fun with teamwork feats even if the rest of your team doesn’t want to use them.

**Deity** (1): Pick a deity, follow its code of conduct, don’t cast spells of opposed alignments.

**Stern Gaze** (3): Gain half your level as a Competence bonus on Intimidate and Sense Motive checks.

**Judgement** (7): Use judgement once per day as an Inquisitor of your character level - 3.

**Solo Tactics** (11): You gain the Solo Tactics class feature.

**Additional Judgement** (15): You can use judgement twice per day.

**Second Judgement** (19): You can now use two judgement abilities.

**[\*\*\*\*] Magus**

Another great VMC. This gives you an Arcane Pool for free weapon enhancements, three Arcana of your choice and the ability to Spellstrike. Note, this VMC allows you to qualify for the Extra Arcana feat and there are many great options. Spellstrike is possibly the only wasted ability, but if you want to use it you can pick up the Pool Strike arcana to spend your arcane pool points (APP) to deliver energy attacks through a weapon strike. Think about adding this to a Weapon Master for a character who’s all about charging up his weapon.

**Arcane Pool** (3): You gain an Arcane Pool with a Magus level equal to your character level - 2.

**Magus Arcana** (7): Gain one Arcana using your full character level.

**Spellstrike** (11): You can spell strike with spells on the Magus spell list.

**Improved Arcana** (15): Gain one Arcana using your full character level.

**Greater Arcana** (19): Gain one Arcana using your full character level.

**[\*\*\*] Monk**

This is a good VMC if you’re going with an unarmed fighting build. Thanks to various archetypes, class features and feats you can have an effective unarmed build with the Fighter and this VMC will help you improve that build. It’s a little limited to that concept however, which is the only unfortunate aspect to this VMC.

**Armor** (1)**:** You can’t use your other Monk features if you wear armor, use a shield or carry a medium or heavy load. Basically the standard Monk rules.

**Unarmed Strike** (3)**:** Your unarmed strike damage scales like a Monk, using your character level - 2.

**Evasion** (7)**:** You gain the Evasion class feature.

**Ki Pool** (11)**:** You gain the Monk’s Ki Pool, using your character level -2. Your total ki is equal to half your character level. You only gain the ki pool (lawful) feature if your alignment is lawful.

**AC Bonus** (15)**:** You gain a +3 Dodge bonus to AC.

**Improved Evasion** (19)**:** You gain Improved Evasion.

**[\*\*\*] Oracle**

Oracle is a powerful option, but with some severe limitations. You gain a Curse and some Revelations at a very delayed progression. You’re also quite limited in your choice of Revelations and will miss out on access to newer Mysteries. Additionally, you never qualify for the Extra Revelations feat. Finally, you’ll need to invest in your Charisma modifier to gain effective bonuses from many of the Revelations. If you’re willing to put up with all of that you can find some hidden gems for

**Mystery** (1): Pick one Mystery from a limited list.

**Curse** (1): Gain one curse, treating your effective oracle level as ½ your character level. Good choices are: Legalistic, Tongues, Wasting or Wolf-scarred Face.

**Revelation** (3): Gain one revelation from a limited list treating your Oracle level as your effective character level - 6.

**Orison** (7): If you have a charisma of at least 10 you gain a single Orison as a spell like ability, using your character level as your caster level and charisma as your casting stat.

**Curse Focus** (11): Your effective Oracle level when determining the effects of your Curse is treated as five levels higher.

**Improved Revelation** (15): Gain an extra Revelation.

**Greater Revelation** (19): Gain an extra Revelation.

**[\*\*] Paladin**

Another VMC option that is simply OK. The big draw here is that you gain decent self-healing via Lay on Hands and the ability to use Smite Evil once a day. Those are decent abilities, but not amazing ones. There are stronger options if you’re going to use VMC rules and if you want a Paladin alternative you could play a Warpriest.

**Code** (1): Gain the Aura of Good class feature and you must follow the Paladin’s code.

**Detect Evil** (3): You can Detect Evil as a 1st level Paladin.

**Lay on Hands** (7): Use Lay on Hands a number times per day equal to half your character level as a Paladin of your character level - 4.

**Smite Evil** (11): Once per day you can Smite Evil as a Paladin of your character level - 4.

**Mercy** (15): Gain a single Mercy from the list of 3rd level options.

**Divine Bond** (19): Gain a Divine Bond to a weapon as a Paladin of your character level - 3.

**[\*] Ranger**

The Ranger VMC just isn’t all that good. You gain all of the tracking class features from the Ranger, which highly situational abilities which Ranger players often trade away via an archetype. While you do gain a single Favored Enemy, you could gain that same benefit via the Dedicated Enemy feat instead. You should think carefully about your game before setting on this MVC.

**Track** (3): Add half your character level to Survival checks to follow tracks.

**Favored Enemy** (7): Gain a single favored enemy, the bonuses won’t scale as you level.

**Favored Terrain** (11): Gain a single favored terrain. The bonuses won’t scale.

**Expert Tracker** (15): You gain Woodland Stride and Swift Tracker. Yep, at level 15 those bushes don’t give you much trouble anymore.

**Quarry** (19): As a standard action you gain some minor bonuses against a single target.

**[\*\*\*] Rogue**

The Rogue VMC provides some nice overall options. Granting increased damage, decent defensive abilities and a good utility ability at early levels. This is a VMC which can fit in with many builds, though it favors dexterity-based builds and parties with multiple melee characters.

**Trapfinding** (3): Gain bonuses to finding and disabling traps and you can disable magical traps.

**Sneak Attack** (7): You gain Sneak Attack 1d6, it scales up by another 1d6 every 4 levels.

**Evasion** (11): If you succeed on a Reflex save that allows for half damage you instead take no damage.

**Uncanny Dodge** (15): You can’t be caught flat-footed and don’t lose your dexterity bonus to AC if the attacker is invisible.

**Improved Uncanny Dodge** (19): Enemies don’t get to sneak attack you simply from flanking you.

**[\*\*\*] Sorcerer**

The Sorcerer VMC basically just gives you the benefits of a single Sorcerer bloodline. You can gain the same benefits through the Eldritch Heritage feat chain. With Eldritch Heritage you’ll gain the benefits a lot quicker, but at a reduced effective character level. You also can choose to stop going down the feat chain if you only want some of the early level abilities. The VMC does have a huge advantage over the feat chain in that it does not require you to invest into a high charisma score, you’ll need a charisma of 17 for Greater Eldritch Heritage. Overall I rate the feat chain a bit higher than going with the Sorcerer VMC.

**Bloodline** (1): Pick a bloodline. You treat your character level as your sorcerer level for all powers.

**Bloodline Power** (3): Gain your 1st level power.

**Improved Bloodline Power** (7): Gain your 3rd level power.

**Blood Feat** (11): Gain a bloodline bonus feat.

**Greater Bloodline Power** (15): Gain your 9th level power.

**True Bloodline Power** (19): Gain your 15th level power.

**[\*\*] Summoner**

The Summoner VMC gives you the ability to summon powerful creatures, but for a very limited amount of time. You’ll have to choose between using the Summon Monster SLA or an Eidolon. This is a bit of a bookkeeping pain, as you’ll have to build your Eidolon and rebuild it each level but won’t get much use out of it.

**Summon Monster** (3): Gain Summon Monster as a spell-like-ability, it scales up as you level though your effective Summoner level is reduced by 2. You can only use this once per day. The creature you summon sticks around for a number of rounds equal to half your character level.

**Eidolon** (7): Custom build your own summoned creature. Odds are you’ll have a powerful melee beast that will keep pace with your damage, even with your effective Summoner level being reduced by 4. Unfortunately you can only summon it via your Summon Monster SLA.

**Additional Summons** (11): You can use your Summon Monster SLA three times a day.

**Shield Ally** (15): When within your Eidolon’s reach you have a +2 Shield bonus to AC and a +2 Circumstance bonus saves.

**Aspect** (19): You can divert 1 evolution point from your eidolon to yourself.

**[\*] Witch**

This VMC gains a familiar and some Hexes, but unfortunately those Hexes act as if you were at rather low levels, effectively neutering their utility. You might be able to cherry pick a few useful abilities but odds are you’d just be better off using a Wizard VMC instead.

**Patron** (1): Pick a Patron, you don’t qualify for Extra Hex.

**Witch's Familiar** (3): Gain a familiar, treating your character level as which level? Your Witch level.

**Hex** (7): Pick a Hex as a 1st level witch. It’s stuck at first level until you get your Improved Hex feature.

**Cantrip** (11): If you have an intelligence of at least 10 you gain a single Cantrip as a spell like ability, using your character level as your caster level and intelligence as your casting stat.

**Improved Hex** (15): Your first Hex now works as if you were an 8th level Witch. Pick another Hex, it’s stuck at 1st level your first Hex was.

**Major Hex** (19): Gain a Major Hex, only it’s stuck at 10th level. You can’t pick the Ice Tomb Hex.

**[\*\*\*\*\*] Wizard**

Oddly enough this is a very good VMC option for a Fighter. Granting you a familiar, the benefits of an arcane school and even a single arcane discovery. There are some very strong options available here, take a look at the Air, Foresight or Void schools as just a starting point. Familiars can provide nice bonuses and with familiar archetypes they can provide additional utility. Alternatively, an Improved Familiar is always a good option.

**School** (1): Pick a spell school. Your character level counts as your wizard level for determining the effects of your school powers.

**Familiar** (3): Gain a familiar, treating your character level as your wizard level.

**School Power** (7): Gain your first level power from your spell school.

**Cantrip** (11): If you have an intelligence of at least 10 you gain a single Cantrip as a spell like ability, using your character level as your caster level and intelligence as your casting stat.

**Discovery** (15): Gain a wizard bonus feat or arcane discovery. Full character level.

**Greater School Power** (19): Gain your 8th level power from your spell school.

**Equipping Your Fighter**

**Weapon and Armor Enchantments**

Pathfinder offers up a ton of different enchantments, but as a Fighter your gear is going to be one of your primary resources to pay attention to so you should take a little time to review this list. Some of these options are great if you’re specializing in a particular direction, though keep in mind that you’re balancing a +1 to attack and damage against picking up one of these during the early game.

**Note**: As there are quite a few enchantments to work through, for now I’m only going to make note of those that are at least **[\*\*\*] good** quality.

**Melee Weapon Qualities**

**[\*\*\*\*] Generic +1 - +5 (+X)**: Your main job is to deliver damage with your weapon, a +X bonus to boost your attack rolls and damage rolls is always a great bonus. Most other options will be picked up for specific builds. Note, you are limited to maximum +5 bonus and your total weapon budget can reach up to a +10, so eventually you’ll be grabbing some of the below options.

**[\*\*\*] Agile (+1)**: Dexterity to damage with a weapon that can use Weapon Finesse. It’s up to you to choose if you want to use a Feat or Gold for this ability.

**[\*\*\*] Bane (+1)**: Against a specified type of enemy you increase your effective enhancement bonus by +2 and deal an extra 2d6 damage. This is a strong bonus, but the utility of it is dependant on your campaign. If you’re playing in a setting with a heavy focus on a particular type of enemy this is pretty much mandatory.

**[\*\*\*] Benevolent (+1)**: When you use Aid Another to grant an attack bonus, add your weapon’s enhancement bonus to the bonus your ally receives. This is only good for the Tactician, but is a must have for that build. Remember, it’s a late game build.

**[\*\*\*] Corrosive, Flaming, Frost, Shocking (+1)**: Your weapon deals an extra +1d6 elemental damage, which is an average of +3.5 damage per attack and you get to pick the element. Something to remember, you need to spend a Standard Action to activate the effect or end the effect. Most people tend to forget that.

**[\*\*\*] Cruel (+1)**: If you hit a target that’s frightened, shaken or panicked the target is sickened for 1 round. Additionally, if you kill or knockout a creature you gain 5 temporary HP for 10 minutes. This is great for any Intimidate focused build, which is a pretty decent build for the Fighter.

**[\*] Allying (+1)**: As a free action you can transfer your weapon’s enhancement bonuses to an ally’s weapon, though they don’t stack with enhancements bonuses already on that weapon. Fighter’s aren’t buffers (generally) and even if they were this isn’t very good.

**[\*\*] Answering (+1)**: When using Opportune Parry & Riposte this weapon’s enhancement bonus is increased by +4, to a max of +5. Really situational and more for Swashbucklers.

**[\*\*] Shrinking (1000gp)**: When you speak a command word your weapon shrinks to the size of a dagger and deals 1d4 damage, but it is easier to conceal. You can speak another command word to return it to normal size.

**Noteworthy Magic Items**

I will not be listing every magic item as there are simply too many to go over. Many of them aren’t going to be of interesting anyway. I will however be discussing some especially useful items below. These are not going to be rated as they’re all pretty great but whether you want the item or not will depend entirely on your build.

**Gloves of Dueling** (15,000 gp): These provide a +4 to CMD against disarm checks as well as increasing your Weapon Training bonus by +2. A very useful item if you’re taking advantage of weapon training features.

**The Builds**

The Fighter is quite versatile and a surprising number of builds are quite playable. Below you’ll find some advice for various common build ideas in case you’re looking for inspiration.

The Archer

The Commander

The Switch Hitter

The Two-Weapon Fighter

The Two-Handed Fighter

The Tank, aka Sword & Board

The Spear Dancer

X-COM: Medieval Style

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