

Rogue Eidolon's Guide to Fighters

I will use the same colour-coding as Treantmonk's very well-written guides to make it easier to read for people who have already read some of his guides. That means:

Red--bad option or nearly useless ability

Orange--OK option, or useful but only in rare circumstances

Green--Strong choice

Blue--Must-have

Introduction

Fighters never get enough love. And in Pathfinder they really should. They're an excellent class, and they're the baseline to which I compare all other non-spellcasters. Now, that may have been the case in 3.5 as well, but when I compared them back then, it was always "So let's see how this class is better than Fighter" whereas now, there's a lot of "How can I build this class so that it's doing better than a standard Fighter with a similar build. Can I do it?" Weapon and Armor Training are the reason for this, and they play a big role in this guide.

But the main question is, where do I even begin? The Fighter class is built around getting lots of combat feats, and there's a huge number of ways to combine those feats and get something awesome. So today, I'm going to give you example builds for the most popular Fighter types--Archer, Sword and Board, and Two-Handed. If you want to do Two-Weapon Fighting, I humbly suggest you build a Rogue instead and read my Rogue guide. Why? The math favours Two-Handed over Two-Weapon Fighting unless you have some large non-Strength-based source of damage (like Sneak Attack), and you have to dump a ton of feats into it. That said, you're a Fighter and you have a ton of feats to blow, and it certainly isn't terrible, so I'll include a quick section for the TWF Fighter as well.

The Builds

Archery:

Archery has been buffed in Pathfinder to the point that it is the best option out there for dealing damage for Fighter, Ranger, and Paladin. You get a large number of attacks and you can full attack pretty much all the time while keeping out of reach. What's not to love? The problem comes if you don't have anyone else to take front line.

Pros:

Lots of Full Attacks

Lots of Attacks per Full Attack

Don't have to Engage

Cons:

Can't Take the Front Line

Focus on Dex means less Damage per Hit

Two-Handed:

Two-Handed weapons were the best in 3.5 for most cases. They're still excellent. And for non-math savants, Power Attack will now usually give better payoffs than it could ever do in 3.5. Two-Handed Fighters mix it up in the thick of things while dealing massive blows, eventually surpassing even the mighty Barbarian in expected damage while keeping a better AC than her more primitive counterpart.

Pros:

High accuracy and damage per hit
Best use of non-full attacks

Cons:

On the front line with the lowest AC of the Fighter types

Sword and Shield:

This style can actually be any one-handed weapon with a shield, but Sword and Shield sounds cooler than Any One-Handed Weapon and Shield. It has great defense and holds the front line admirably. This type of Fighter has been much-maligned by optimisers because it presents a difficult challenge. The challenge for the Sword and Shield Fighter is that she wants to protect her friends, but there isn't a 'hate' mechanism in our game like in other popular RPGs involving Sword and Shield characters. This is for the best, I think, because it encourages a lot of creative thinking for the Sword and Shield fighter, and I enjoy creative thinking of all sorts when playing Pathfinder. So what's my solution to that challenge? Too many players of Sword and Board Fighters focus all their effort on turtling up with 52 AC or something. But the Sword and Board Fighter needs to make the enemies fear her. She needs to make them question their judgment and quiver slightly in their boots whenever they have to make the choice to turn their attention away from her due to her high defenses. And then, if they do turn on her allies, she punishes them unmercifully.

Pros:

Excellent defense
Hold the line till the cows come home

Cons:

Lowest offense for any Fighter type

Two-Weapon Fighting:

Two-Weapon Fighting is the Rogue's area of expertise, but a Two-Weapon Fighting Fighter is no slouch. While you won't be as good as the Two-Handed Fighter without heavy feat investment, you can eventually surpass her on damage for full attacks (not counting how many feats you had to burn, though). This build does not include the Sword and Shield Bash Two-Weapon Fighter, which falls in the Sword and Shielded build.

Pros:

Eventually can do the most damage

Cons:

Costs tons of feats to even reach par with Two-Handed
Hurt the most by losing full attack.

Class Features

This is easy, so let's analyse the class features before we split off into guides for the separate builds.

Bonus Feats: Umm, this is why you're playing a Fighter, right? The plethora of bonus feats is enough to keep even the most eclectic character happy. We're going to be making good use of these together, believe me! Important to keep in mind: you can retrain your feats, unlike all other classes, thus letting you take Cleave or other short-term feats and then discard them later. They also forgot to put in any clause against switching into a feat you didn't qualify for at the time you took the original, which I thought should have been a no-brainer. We'll use this to our advantage.

Bravery: This ability is actually pretty insulting considering that 1 level after you get a +1, your Paladin buddy is not only immune to Fear, she's shedding out an aura to the whole team that's better than your Bravery until level 14. I mean, it stacks and all, but still...

Armor Training: Armor Training is an excellent ability, and we're going to be choosing our Dexterity for our builds very carefully with this in consideration. The added speed in heavier armour is also amazing.

Weapon Training: This ability would be great even if it only applied to a single weapon. Getting the bonuses to vast weapon groups is gravy.

Armor Mastery: I don't know anyone who says no to DR 5/-. However, I really wish this would have been called out to stack with Adamantine so that Fighters could wear Adamantine at the highest levels without losing all benefits.

Weapon Mastery: This ability is extremely powerful, though the game is almost over by now anyway. The mechanic of raising crit damage multiplier unbalances the crit system in favour of high crit range, and I have recommended since they first started releasing those sorts of abilities replacing it with +1 crit multiplier on a 20 only (or 19 if you have Improved Critical) regardless of the actual range, which is balanced across weapons, but more complicated. That said, this is level 20, so it won't be that big a deal. If you're already homebrewing your own epic or something, consider my change.

Favoured Class Bonus:

You're a Fighter. You need to be able to fight first and foremost. I recommend that you **put all your Favoured Class bonuses in hit points.**

Skills:

Last thing before we split off, let's take a look at those skills. I'm going to be recommending low Int in just a moment, so you will probably have 1 skill point, 2 if Human, 3 only if you spend a precious Favoured Class bonus on it. So what to pick? The Fighter list itself isn't too inspiring:

Perception: If you're like a Taldan Dwarf merchant and have the trait for it (and even if you don't), Perception is a strong contender. Notice surprises and get into the thick of them.

Survival: If you're only looking on the Fighter skill list, this is the best contender for a single-class Fighter.

Intimidate: If you're planning a Dazzling Display build, potentially to make your local Archery Rogue love you forever, Intimidate is a must. Otherwise, it's Charisma-based and takes a lot of work to be good enough for it to work, so I'd pass.

Ride and Handle Animal: These are not bad skills, but if you're a single-classed Fighter, whatever you're riding is going to instantly die. If you can convince your GM to let you ride on a cohort or something, then these can be useful, particularly Ride, since the cohort probably isn't an animal.

Climb and Swim: You should probably put one rank in these eventually for emergencies, but at high levels, they become less and less important. Obviously take Swim in an aquatic campaign, though.

The Master Archer

Ability Scores:

You'll want Dex to be high for accuracy so you can Deadly Aim every single time, but you're a Fighter, so you can afford to indulge a bit to shore up your low Will save and increase your damage per shot. In general, you'll want Dex > Str > Wis > Con > Int > Cha. Strength, Wis, and Con will probably all be close, and their order is a matter of taste and the differences in individual campaigns. And remember, once you have 8 Int, might as well make it a 7. They're equivalent for you. I'll leave my rant about 7 giving two points for another venue. Here are some examples, assuming you have a +2 to assign wherever you like and you assign it to Dex.

10 Point Buy (stop sleeping with the GM's wife):

Str 15 (7) Dex 17 (7) Con 12 (2) Int 7 (-4) Wis 12 (2) Cha 7 (-4)

All increases in Dex

15 Point Buy (standard fantasy):

Str 14 (5) Dex 18 (10) Con 13 (3) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

All increases in Dex unless you are having survivability issues, then stick one in Con

20 Point Buy (average rolling, or PFS):

Str 14 (5) Dex 19 (13) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

All increases in Dex

25 Point Buy (high powered):

Str 16 (10) Dex 19 (13) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

All increases in Dex

Races:

You're going to want a race that gives you Dexterity, and with your long range, vision is important. Let's take a look at what we have available:

Human: The feat is always appreciated, particularly at low levels before your massive Fighter feat advantage really kicks into high gear, as it can buy you Point Blank, Precise, and Rapid Shot all at level 1. The bonus skill point is essentially +3 Int for you if you took 7 Int, and it doubles your skill points available. You're missing out on better vision, though, at least until you can get Goggles of Night.

Half-Elf: A solid option. Low-light vision is often better for archers than Darkvision, since it can extend your vision past 60 feet (and Darkvision can be put on Goggles). The combination of Skill Focus and the racial bonus can really help your Perception. If you make a case to your GM that your half human half elf character was for some reason adopted by Taldan dwarves, I suppose you could also take the trait to have Perception as a class skill, but I have to admit, that's stretching it. +2 to save vs enchantments can help you with your weakest saves.

Half-Orc: Ferocity is OK, but you don't have a great "final round" option available. Darkvision while still getting +2 Dex is the main draw here. Still, that's a legitimate draw.

Elf: Wholly inferior to the Half-Elf for your purposes, but otherwise not a bad choice.

Dwarf: It doesn't get Dex, but it does get both Con and Wisdom, while lowering Charisma, which you weren't using anyway. The lower mobility hurts, but the Darkvision helps, and everyone likes the save bonuses.

Halfling: You get Dex, and the size bonus to hit, but in exchange, you suffer an effective -2 on damage, while having low movement speed and no special vision. Even the nice skill and save bonuses can't salvage the Halfling.

Gnome: Basically like Halfling, only worse because it gets Con rather than Dex. Low-Light Vision is the Gnome's saving grace.

Weapon Choice:

There's a combined section at the bottom for magic equipment and the like, but as befits a guide for Fighters, each of the builds will have a section in which we examine a variety of possible weapons. In this case, the answer is clear:

Mighty +(your Str mod here) Composite Longbow: It has the longest range and the most damage, and you get proficiency for free. A no-brainer.

Backup Melee Weapon-

Low Levels: **Greatsword**

High Levels: **Greatsword**, **Rapier**

Feats:

Point-Blank Shot: This is essential to get pretty much all your best feats except Deadly Aim. This and Precise Shot should be your first two feats, unless firing into melee isn't an issue because you have an unusual group.

Precise Shot: As mentioned above, this will give you a +4 on many of the ranged attacks you make, unless your group doesn't engage your targets in melee, in which case, you will have other problems.

Rapid Shot: An extra attack for a -2 to hit? You're a Fighter, so you can easily make that trade. It's not worth it to take this option if your attack ever needs to roll exactly an 18 to hit an enemy with your full bonus, and the range expands downward slightly as you get more attacks, but because of your Fighter bonuses, if that ever happens to you without using Deadly Aim, everyone else probably needs a 20 to hit, and your GM is probably about to kill you all.

Deadly Aim: This is not an option. It's a commandment handed down from Paizo. A sacred boon to make your ranged attacks much more powerful. Get this as soon as you have Rapid Shot, since the extra attack is worth more at first than the extra damage from this feat.

Manyshot: All your bonus damage except crits applies to the double shot from this feat, so it's actually more powerful than Rapid Shot. The only reason to wait on this feat until level 6 is that you don't qualify until then. Don't let it slip past you for even a single level unless you have a very good reason.

Weapon Focus and Greater: You will always appreciate the extra bonus to hit from these feats.

Combined with Weapon Training, Greater Weapon Focus is part of the "Fighter Advantage" to attack bonus that will let you hit more often than anyone else for an ordinary shot.

Weapon Specialization and Greater: Archers need damage wherever they can find it, so these feats are even more important for you than they are for the Two-Handed Fighter who has fewer attacks that hit for more damage each.

Iron Will and Greater: Your weakest save, so grab these and save yourself the agony of failed Will saves.

Improved Precise Shot: This isn't quite as required for you as for an Archery Rogue, but it's still an excellent feat to have around for a variety of cover situations, and it can save you Seeking Arrows.

Far Shot: Unlike the Archery Rogue, you do quite well at murdering things on open fields hundreds of feet before they can even engage you in melee, or simply flying high above your enemy and peppering them with arrows. This feat can help. It's less useful if you're always indoors or underground.

Improved Initiative: Always a good feat to have, and you're a Fighter, so you have a lot of feats. Initiative order isn't as critical as it is for the Rogue, but it's useful for anyone.

Improved Critical: Everything you do multiplies on a critical, so this is worthwhile to have once you have the main feats out of the way. And how kind of them, they've delayed it for you anyway. If you don't even take this, don't even consider taking Critical Focus or its friends.

Dodge: +1 AC and Touch AC is always good. Take this when you have a free feat.

Toughness: I had you take a relatively low Con for a Fighter because you're going to try to stay out of the fray, but when you're a well-optimised archer, the fray often comes to you. This can keep you alive and shooting, so get it when you have a feat available.

Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, and Greater: Thanks to your Dex-pumping and your class's strong Fort saves, these will be about even, but it's never bad to have more. If you have to pick one of these, do Great Fortitude first--this is because you don't have Evasion, so you usually don't get as much out of a successful Fortitude save as you do out of a successful Reflex save, and failed Fortitude saves tend to be more severe anyway.

Fleet: Useful to help you keep at range and kite things with slightly slower move speed.

Penetrating Strike and Greater: Even if you don't get a +big-bonus bow that penetrates most DRs on its own, if you play it smart, you have an easier time than any other sort of Fighter, as you should be able to penetrate pretty much any DR you encounter except DR/Epic due to having arrows of the correct materials and alignments to bypass DR. The only exception by the time you qualify for this feat? DR/Slashing or Bludgeoning. Not terribly many creatures have that, so you may be best off just letting someone else shine if you encounter such a threat. Still, you're a Fighter and have plenty of feats, so you can grab this just in case if you like. Only pick up Greater if you know that DRs you can't overcome will be featuring strongly enough to warrant two feats (heading off to face the Tarrasque, gearing up to challenge the Lich King and his cabal of Liches and Skeleton Warriors, etc).

Weapon Finesse: Why isn't this green like for the Archery Rogue? The fact of the matter is that your Strength probably won't suck, so you can have a backup two-handed weapon like Greatsword for when you're forced into melee. If you wind up getting an extremely high Dex compared to your Strength and you can't hit without Finesse (and remember to take your backup weapon as secondary with Weapon Training), then get it and use a Rapier.

Mobility: Your Acrobatics won't be great and you'll sometimes have to get out of range. This can at least leave you a graceful option without resorting to withdraw.

Critical Focus and Friends: This chain is worse for you than for any other type of Fighter since your chance to crit is the lowest. Still, the added effect on up to 10% of your attacks can be nice when you fire off five of them a round. If you do pick up this chain, Stunning is the best since it still Staggers them for a while even if they make the save, and Exhausting is an excellent debuff with no time limit.

Blind-Fight: This isn't a bad feat, and you can certainly take it if you can't find anything better, but I would just use Seeking Arrows or even a Seeking Bow if this comes up so much.

Endurance: Unlike other Fighters, you will probably be in Light Armour when everything's said and done, so ability to sleep in Medium isn't as useful. The +4 bonuses can help if you forced march or such a lot.

Diehard: If you have Endurance, might as well grab this and auto-stabilise. Staying conscious is overrated and often will make you Die-Easy instead.

Nimble Moves: Sometimes it's useful to be able to 5-foot step on difficult terrain so you can make a full attack with your bow. Definitely don't take Acrobatic Step, however.

Quick Draw: Pretty much the draw of this feat is to drop your bow and Quick Draw a melee weapon when forced into melee, immediately getting a full attack. You're going to invest enough in bows that I don't think it's worth it.

Pinpoint Targeting: So let me get this straight? You can't move, so discounting the surprise round, they want you to sacrifice somewhere between four and six attacks in order to pretty much auto-hit with one attack? And you're the Fighter? Okay, assuming the enemy has at least +16 to AC from bonuses you will ignore using this feat, this is worth it if you need a 17 or more to hit with your highest attack normally (18 if you have some way to auto-confirm criticals). I just don't think that's going to happen at this level.

Agile Maneuvers: Dex is your stat of choice, but you're not going to be initiating manoeuvres except perhaps to break grapples, and this isn't worth it just for that.

Combat Reflexes: Yes, you'll have great Dexterity, but you're going to be the one provoking the AoOs, not making them.

Mounted Combat and Mounted Archery: This is a great way to get numerous horses killed. You don't have an ability to get a survivable mount, at least unless your GM lets you get something rideable as a cohort. Or you could ride the party Druid I guess.

Improved Unarmed Strike and its Disciples: Leave this to the Monks, Treant or otherwise.

Spring Attack, Shot on the Run, Wind Stance, Lightning Stance: The idea is not to take a move action so you can full attack if possible, so if you're getting good benefits from these feats, something has already gone wrong.

Exotic Weapon Proficiency: And what exotic weapon do you want exactly? Composite Longbow is just fine for your purposes. If Monte Cook releases Pathcana Unearthfinder with an exotic bow at the Swordaxe level of power with 19-20/x3 crits or something, we'll certainly consider this feat.

Rapid Reload: Crossbows don't do as much damage as your Mighty Composite Longbow even with this feat, so don't waste it.

Skill Feats: Not worth it, exception maybe Skill Focus[Perception]. That said, I know it's blasphemy for an optimisation guide, but you have a lot of feats, so you can afford to spend one on something to fit your concept.

The Bruiser:

Ability Scores:

Strength gives you both accuracy and damage. It is your friend, it is your constant companion, and it is your life partner. You also want to live and not get mind-controlled. In general, you'll want Str > (Con, Dex, Wis) > Int > Cha. Like the Master Archer, remember, once you have 8 Int, might as well make it a 7 (though it's possible you may want 13 Int for Greater Trip). Here are some examples, assuming you have a +2 to assign wherever you like and you assign it to Str:

10 Point Buy:

Str 18 (10) Dex 14 (5) Con 12 (2) Int 7 (-4) Wis 11 (1) Cha 7 (-4)

Increase everything in Str, except throw 1 in Wis if Will Saves are too much a problem

15 Point Buy:

Str 18 (10) Dex 14 (5) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 13 (3) Cha 7 (-4)

Increase everything in Str, except throw 1 in Wis if Will Saves are too much a problem

20 Point Buy:

Str 19 (13) Dex 14 (5) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

All increases in Str

25 Point Buy:

Str 19 (13) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

All increases in Str

Races:

You're going to want a race that gives you +2 to any stat, so you can put it in Strength. Move speed will help you engage, and vision is helpful, but once you have a glowing magic sword, it isn't absolutely crucial:

Human: The feat is always appreciated, particularly at low levels before your massive Fighter feat advantage really kicks into high gear. The bonus skill point is essentially +3 Int for you if you took 7 Int, and it doubles your skill points available. You're missing out on better vision, though, but that won't be a big deal for long.

Half-Elf: A solid option. Low-light vision is helpful, and the combination of Skill Focus and the racial bonus can really help your Perception. +2 to save vs enchantments can help you with your weakest saves.

Half-Orc: Ferocity is OK, but you also don't have a great "final round" option available. Darkvision while still getting +2 Str makes this still a nice option.

Dwarf: It doesn't get Str, but it does get both Con and Wisdom, while lowering Charisma, which you weren't using anyway. The lower mobility hurts, but the Darkvision helps, and everyone likes the save bonuses.

Elf: The Dex and Con cancel each other out, but you didn't get Strength. This is still a possibility if you wanted 13+ Int for Greater Trip, but otherwise, just go with the Half-Elf instead, and even then, I still recommend Half-Elf.

Halfling and Gnome: You lose more damage (assuming Falchion or Greatsword) than any other fighting style, you don't actually gain accuracy since you lose Strength, and you can't be Enlarged for reach. For the Bruiser, size does matter.

Weapon Choice:

There's a few good choices for you.

Falchion: When 3.5 was new, Sean K. Reynolds posted math that proved that without Improved Critical and Keen stacking, you needed absurd amounts of Strength to make up for the damage potential lost by choosing Rapier or Falchion over their Longsword and Greatsword counterparts. Well, we're hoping for some rather absurd Strength here, and Weapon Training means you essentially need up to 8 Strength less than Sean calculated. The true reason Falchion is a winner, however, is the Critical Focus chain. If you don't plan on playing high enough level to get that chain, Falchion isn't for you. Elven Curve Blade is not much better, but it is better, so take it only if you're an Elf.

Greatsword: The best damage on a two-handed weapon. Greataxe is only slightly worse, so you can use that too.

Glaive: The strongest choice if you're going a Reach strategy. This sort of strategy is particularly strong at low levels.

Backup RangedWeapon-

Mighty +(your Str mod here) Composite Longbow: It has the longest range and the most damage, and you get proficiency for free. A no-brainer.

Feats:

Power Attack: Don't listen to the people who whine that "Power Attack was nerfed". Power Attack was buffed overall in Pathfinder and simplified at the same time. It was excellent game design. This is because the increased trade-off makes it favourable more often. Now Combat Expertise, there's a feat that was nerfed. Anyway, damage is a good thing, and 3 damage per attack penalty is worth it to you in most cases because you're a Fighter. Stop using this if you're missing with your best attacks even when you roll high numbers, but seriously--the Fighter Power Attacking will have the same to-hit as the Ranger not Power Attacking unless it's her Favoured Enemy, so you're probably going to be hitting.

Weapon Focus and Greater: You will always appreciate the extra bonus to hit from these feats. Combined with Weapon Training, Greater Weapon Focus is part of the "Fighter Advantage" to attack bonus that will let you hit more often than anyone else for an ordinary blow.

Improved Critical: If you took my advice and grabbed a Falchion, this feat is critical. If you're going Halberd, less so.

Critical Focus and Friends: This is once again blue assuming you went Falchion. This will give you nearly a 30% chance of getting a special effect per attack, which means you should expect to see one or two on

most turns. Stunning is the best choice since it still Stagger them for a while even if they make the save, and Exhausting is an excellent debuff with no time limit for when it wears off.

Deadly Stroke: It's like the Vital Strike line except that its good. Very very good. Even without the Con bleed, it's better than Greater Vital Strike (because it doubles everything), and Con bleed is a big deal, plus you can get it 5 levels sooner. If you were even considering the Vital Strike line, get this feat and its prereqs, even if you will never use the prereqs.

Iron Will and Greater: Your weakest save and a bad type to fail, so grab these and save yourself the agony of failed Will saves.

Cleave: This is my feat of choice for when you can't get a full attack until Deadly Stroke. It's blue because you can take it and switch it out later.

Weapon Specialization and Greater: This is an extremely useful feat--it's green to indicate that you might be willing to delay it, unlike the archer, but still get it when you can.

Improved Initiative: Always a good feat to have, and you're a Fighter, so you have a lot of feats. Initiative order isn't as critical as it is for the Rogue, but it's useful for anyone.

Dodge: +1 AC and Touch AC is always good. Take this when you have a free feat.

Toughness: You're in the thick of things and probably dishing out tons of damage. Chances are, monsters will want you dead. Deny them what they want by taking this feat.

Combat Reflexes: It's always useful to have more AoOs. If you are going Reach, Trip, or both, this is blue for you.

Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, and Greater: It never hurts to have better saves. Even though your Fort is already better, if you have to pick one of these, do Great Fortitude first--this is because you don't have Evasion, so you usually don't get as much out of a successful Fortitude save as you do out of a successful Reflex save, and failed Fortitude saves tend to be more severe anyway.

Spring Attack: This is listed as green to represent the fact that a dedicated Spring Attack strategy is viable for you at a certain level range, not because you should ever take this otherwise, so be careful. The idea is that you grab a reach weapon and Spring Attack, Cleaving if possible. They then having to enter your reach and provoke an AoO. This also works with regular weapons if you are Enlarged. You can always switch it out later and eventually switch out Mobility too.

Improved and Greater Trip: It isn't worth it for everyone to get 13 Int and Combat Expertise to get these, but maybe you rolled a lot of 13+ stats. Even if not, this is still an effective strategy. Greater Trip provokes an AoO from everyone, as does standing back up, so be sure to get Combat Reflexes. I like this better than Disarm because it's more useful against spellcasters, and if they don't take Defensive Combat Training, you actually have a strong chance of landing a trip on them.

Intimidating Prowess, Dazzling Display, Shatter Defenses: This is an all-or-nothing investment, but if you have a Rogue, it can pay off big. If you can convince your GM to allow the extremely-powerful Cornugon Smash feat and are from Cheliax, this build becomes even more powerful. It also lets you get Deadly Stroke.

Step-Up: Very useful to have against archers and spellcasters so you can keep getting AoOs against them. Less necessary if you have a wide range of reach.

Disruptive and Spellbreaker: I'll go through the math more in the Sword and Shield section, but Disruptive is going to be very useful for screwing up the enemy's spells. Spellbreaker adds injury to insult, but really, stopping their spells is its own reward. Spellbreaker's still not a bad choice if you face lots of spellcasting foes that you can use Disruptive on.

Stand Still: If you can actually get this effect to stick, it's very very useful, but I worry that it will have low accuracy since it's a bare CMB roll without the ability to take feats that give you a bonus, and in Pathfinder, you're at a disadvantage making bare CMB rolls except against inferior opponents or spellcasters who don't take Defensive Combat Training. If you find that your CMB consistently outclasses the CMD of opponents you are facing, this becomes a strong green instead.

Wind Stance: The Spring Attack strategy can still work at the level when this becomes available. If you are planning to continue with Spring Attack, grab this for sure. Otherwise, it's only helpful for advancing into melee. You can always switch this out later.

Combat Expertise: You can only take this feat if you have 13 Int. It's a nice trick to have up your sleeve, though vastly weakened in Pathfinder by the inability to vary it as you choose. If you have 13 Int, you're probably going for Greater Trip, so you'll need it.

Lunge: This won't increase your AoOs, so it's mostly useful against things that have precisely 10 ore reach than you do. That way, you won't provoke an AoO from them if you go 5 feet into their reach and then use this ability. However, if they have a lot of attacks, few AoOs to spare, or a low chance to hit you, -2 AC may be worse than just provoking the AoO.

Fleet: Useful to get up to the enemy ASAP, but it usually won't make the difference.

Mobility: Your Acrobatics won't be great and you'll sometimes have to manoeuvre right up next to something with reach. Take this for sure if you want to try a Spring Attack strategy.

Blind-Fight: This isn't a bad feat, and you can certainly take it if you can't find anything better or if you face a lot of things that are hard to see.

Endurance: Your endgame armour will probably be Mithral Full Plate, mainly because Adamantine doesn't help you at all. In the interim, you'll probably have other Medium Armours, so this is useful if you constantly get ambushed at night. If your party Wizard is the sort to always prepare Rope Trick, it's probably unnecessary. The +4 bonuses can help if you forced march or such a lot.

Diehard: If you have Endurance, might as well grab this and auto-stabilise. Staying conscious is overrated and often will make you Die-Easy instead.

Nimble Moves: Sometimes it's useful to be able to 5-foot step on difficult terrain so you can make a full attack. I can't recommend Acrobatic Steps, though.

Improved and Greater Sunder: Sunder is more legitimate than in 3.5 because you can leave the item intact and loot it. However, this negates the advantage of Greater Sunder. Still, it can be a nasty surprise for very equipment-focused enemies, and you don't even have to feel bad about completely destroying the enemy Wizard's Arcane Bonded item.

Improved and Greater Disarm: Assuming you have 13 Int already and took Combat Expertise, this isn't a terrible option if you often face weapon-wielding foes, but it's hard to succeed with combat manoeuvres against foes with full BAB and good Str/Dex. I recommend the Trip chain instead.

Great Cleave: Too situational--how often are the enemies going to be all lined up like that?

Vital Strike and Friends: I doubt this will be popular because people seem to like these feats. There is some uncertainty as to what they do, so note that my red recommendation assumes that you only get the extra weapon damage dice. Why do I dislike these feats? Vital Strike itself may occasionally be useful, though it's worse than Cleave whenever you have to choose between the two. However, by the time you could qualify for Improved Vital Strike, you also qualify for Deadly Stroke, which is vastly better than all the Vital Strikes (even if we pretend the Con bleed doesn't exist).

Quick Draw: You can draw your weapon as you move to the enemy if you don't have it out already. It doesn't even help you unless enemies ambush you and start the fight adjacent to you when you have no weapon drawn.

Mounted Combat chain: This is a great way to get numerous horses killed. You don't have an ability to get a survivable mount, at least unless your GM lets you get something rideable as a cohort. Or you could ride the party Druid I guess.

Improved Unarmed Strike and its Disciples: Leave this to the Monks, Treant or otherwise.

Lightning Stance: By the time this becomes available, you're past the point where a Spring Attack strategy is viable.

Exotic Weapon Proficiency: The exotic weapons in the Pathfinder Core Rulebook aren't worth taking for you.

Improved and Greater Bull Rush: You want the enemy near you, not far away.

Improved and Greater Overrun: You want to stay nearby the enemy, not trample past.

Skill Feats: Not worth it, exception maybe Skill Focus[Perception]. That said, I know it's blasphemy for an optimisation guide, but you have a lot of feats, so you can afford to spend one on something to fit your concept.

The Defender of the Weak:

The other Fighter types are straightforward to play, but if you've chosen to be the Defender of the Weak, you have chosen the hardest path out of all Fighters. It also can be the most rewarding. You are going to wear your shield with honour and snicker snidely at all the optimisers who say that Sword and Shield Fighters suck. And you are going to be out there protecting your team. Before I tell you how, let me tell you how you're not going to do it--you're not going to use Combat Expertise and Fighting Defensively to get 52 AC and become unhittable. Batman was also a defender of the weak, and he did it by kicking ass and being awesome. That is what you will do. He did it by striking fear in the hearts of his enemies. You'll do that too. Every time they have to make the choice to break off with you because you're pretty hard for them to kill, the enemy will be sweating, nervous, and horrified that they have to make that choice. That is how you will protect your friends. This is going to take up more of your feats than any other build. But when your Fighter stands up to her foes in her gleaming Mithral Fullplate and breaks the enemy's charge, and she sees the smile and thumbs-up from the handsome sorcerer who is free to unleash eldritch hell upon her foes, it's always worth it.

Ability Scores:

Strength gives you both accuracy and damage. Dex is required for some of your feats, gives AC, and gives you more precious AoOs. Con keeps you alive when nothing else can. Wis strengthens your will to fight in the face of nasty save-or-suck magic. Int can get you Greater Trip. Dump Cha into the sea. It's hard to stat this one out on low point buy. Here's some example builds, assuming +2 to Str from racial and that you aren't going Greater Trip (don't even try Greater Trip until at least 20 PB):

10 Point Buy:

Str 16 (5) Dex 16 (10) Con 12 (2) Int 7 (-4) Wis 11 (1) Cha 7 (-4)

Increase everything in Str, except throw 1 in Dex to qualify for Improved TWF, and take Wis if you're having too much trouble with Will saves. Use Inherent bonuses if you'd like Greater TWF.

15 Point Buy:

Str 16 (5) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 13 (3) Cha 7 (-4)

Same advice for advancement as 10 PB, you just have better Con and Wis

20 Point Buy:

Str 18 (10) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 13 (3) Cha 7 (-4)

Same advice for advancement as 15 PB, you just have better Str to start

25 Point Buy:

Str 19 (13) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

Advance Str every time except Dex once to qualify for Improved TWF

Races:

You're going to want a race that gives you +2 to any stat, so you can put it in Strength or Dex. Move speed will help you reach and hold the front line. Special vision is helpful but not strictly needed:

Human: Most of the other Fighters could be complacent about feats, but not you. Human is the strong favourite for this build--bonus feats are a must.

Half-Elf: Applaud Paizo for their work on the Half-Elf, this is still a solid option. Low-light vision is helpful, and the combination of Skill Focus and the racial bonus can really help your Perception. +2 to save vs enchantments can help you with your weakest saves. Feats are more important because this build uses many, but you're not that much weaker than Human at it.

Dwarf: It doesn't get Str, but it does get both Con and Wisdom, while lowering Charisma, which is your only true dump stat. The lower mobility hurts, but the Darkvision helps, and everyone likes the save bonuses.

Half-Orc: Ferocity is OK, but you also don't have a great "final round" option available. Darkvision while still getting +2 Str makes this so-so, but losing the feat hurts you more than other builds.

Elf: The Dex helps more than the Con hurts, but you didn't get Strength. This is still a possibility if you wanted 13+ Int for Greater Trip at lower than the highest PB, particularly if you're willing to get a large inherent bonus to qualify.

Halfling and Gnome: You lose CMB, gain -2 Strength, and can't be Enlarged for Reach. Don't pick these.

Weapon Choice:

There's a few good choices for you. Let me first talk to you, though, about Weapon Training. Please consider getting Close as your first Weapon Training category to benefit your shield. Three reasons why: Eventually your shield will be at your higher bonus to hit, eventually your shield will be cheaper to enhance, and eventually you will have a chance to do a free Bull Rush every time your shield hits, and Weapon Training adds to CMB. The sword will probably still be your best bet, but if those seem like they'll be important for you, it's another option to consider.

Rapier or Scimitar: We're hoping to cause our enemies no end of grief. At high levels, Critical Focus chain will help us do that immensely. If you won't be going past low levels, Longsword is better. You can also ignore the crit stuff to save on feats, and longsword is good in that case too.

Spiked Light Shield: Heavy gives you massive penalties to hit, so take a Light Shield instead.

Longsword: The best damage on a one-handed martial weapon. There's a lot of other weapons that work just fine too--if you don't plan to get high enough to use Critical Focus, consider these.

Punch Daggers: Huh? Punch Daggers? I'm recommending punch daggers as blue? But they suck! Why in the world would I...oh right, Punch Daggers are the best weapon on the "Close" Weapon Training chart, which is shared with Shields, so you can raise both of your weapons at once with Weapon Training. Crit is unfortunately rare, though, but that doesn't matter if you aren't going the crit focus chain..

Backup Ranged Weapon-

Mighty +(your Str mod here) Composite Longbow: It has the longest range and the most damage, and you get proficiency for free. A no-brainer.

Feats:

Improved Shield Bash: This and TWF are your level 1 feats, unless you're a Human. This is absolutely crucial. Without it, you're just a weaker TWF Fighter.

Two-Weapon Fighting: Get this feat. Without it, you can't even use Improved Shield Bash.

Double Slice: Much much better than Specialisation in Shield, though they stack if you somehow have enough feats.

Improved Two-Weapon Fighting: Another shield attack is always welcome.

Shield Slam: This is best for when you can knock them prone against the wall or use it in battlefield control (like pushing them into a wall of fire). It's great because its free, and you were getting it anyway for Shield Mastery. It's probably worth taking Greater Bull Rush so you can succeed more often and make them take AoOs.

Shield Mastery: This is firstly +2 to hit with your shield. Then after that, it gives you your defensive enhancement bonus to attacks. This potentially will allow you to put all sorts of crazy weapon enhancements on the shield (more than +5 equivalent) without running into Paizo's stealth errata of +10 max effective bonus even after GMW.

Power Attack: Power Attack with a defender? Am I crazy? No. Well maybe. But you need solid damage to successfully defend others. You want to be perceived as a true threat. The best way to do that? Be a true threat.

Weapon Focus and Greater: You will always appreciate the extra bonus to hit from these feats. Combined with Weapon Training, Greater Weapon Focus is part of the "Fighter Advantage" to attack bonus that will let you hit more often than anyone else for an ordinary blow. You will want this in both your main weapon and the shield, which is expensive but worth it.

Improved Critical: If you took my advice and grabbed a Rapier or Scimitar, get Improved Critical in that. Don't bother with this for the shield.

Critical Focus and Friends: This is once again blue assuming you went Rapier. This will give you nearly a 30% chance of getting a special effect per attack, which means you should expect to see one or two on most turns. Stunning is the best choice since it still Staggers them for a while even if they make the save, and Exhausting is an excellent debuff with no time limit for when it wears off.

Iron Will and Greater: Your weakest save and a bad type to fail, so grab these and save yourself the agony of failed Will saves.

Improved and Greater Bull Rush: I mean, you get lots of free Bull Rushes. Might as well make them count, right?

Combat Reflexes: It's always useful to have more AoOs. You will need them.

Step-Up: Stay in their face to defend your allies.

Disruptive and **Spellbreaker:** Let's assume the enemy has enough in their casting stat to get two bonus spells of their highest level. This will overestimate low level foes while possibly underestimating the highest. This means, without Combat Casting, here's their chances to cast their best spell defensively, from level 1 to 20: 55%, 60%, 60%, 65%, 65%, 70%, 70%, 75%, 75%, 80%, 80%, 85%, 85%, 90%, 90%, 95%, 95%, 100%, 100%, 100%. You will be lowering those chances by 20%. If they took Combat Casting, you will instead cancel out their feat. That means that even with my overgenerous assumptions in favour of your enemy, you still might have them at a 50/50 chance of losing a spell at level 7 (odds are actually even better for you if they have lower than 26 in their casting stat at level 7). Negating enemy

spells is one way you protect the weak--you're basically a living 20% miss chance against their spells. Spellbreaker's still not a bad choice if you face lots of spellcasting foes that you can use Disruptive on, but stopping the spell is most important.

Dodge, Shield Focus, Greater Shield Focus: +1 AC is always good. Take these when you have a free feat.

Toughness: You're in the thick of things and taking enemy attention. Hopefully, monsters will want you dead. Deny them what they want by taking this feat.

Two-Weapon Rend: This can potentially do a vast amount of damage and is better than Weapon Specialisation.

Greater Two-Weapon Fighting: This is hard to qualify for. If you can, I definitely recommend it.

Weapon Specialization and Greater: This is an extremely useful feat--get it for your Rapier first, then consider it again for the Shield, but you probably don't have enough feats.

Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, and Greater: It never hurts to have better saves. Even though your Fort is already better, if you have to pick one of these, do Great Fortitude first--this is because you don't have Evasion, so you usually don't get as much out of a successful Fortitude save as you do out of a successful Reflex save, and failed Fortitude saves tend to be more severe anyway.

Improved Initiative: Always a good feat to have, and you're a Fighter, so you have a lot of feats. Unfortunately, this build doesn't give much spare room, so you may never get this.

Improved and Greater Trip: It isn't worth it for everyone to get 13 Int and Combat Expertise to get these, but maybe you rolled a lot of 13+ stats. Even if not, this is still an effective strategy. Greater Trip provokes an AoO from everyone, as does standing back up, so be sure to get Combat Reflexes. I like this better than Disarm because it's more useful against spellcasters, and if they don't take Defensive Combat Training, you actually have a strong chance of landing a trip on them.

Stand Still: If you can actually get this effect to stick, it's very very useful, but I worry that it will have low accuracy since it's a bare CMB roll without the ability to take feats that give you a bonus, and in Pathfinder, you're at a disadvantage making bare CMB rolls except against inferior opponents or spellcasters who don't take Defensive Combat Training. If you find that your CMB consistently outclasses the CMD of opponents you are facing, this becomes a strong green instead.

Intimidating Prowess, Dazzling Display, Shatter Defenses: This is an all-or-nothing investment, but if you have a Rogue, it can pay off big. It takes a lot of feats, though. If you can convince your GM to allow the extremely-powerful Cornugon Smash feat and are from Cheliax, this build becomes even more powerful (even with just Intimidating Prowess, Cornugon Smash is blue if you have a Rogue with Shatter Defenses).

Deadly Stroke: It's like the Vital Strike line except that it's good. Very very good. Even without the Con bleed, it's better than Greater Vital Strike (because it doubles everything), and Con bleed is a big deal, plus you can get it 5 levels sooner. If you were even considering the Vital Strike line, get this feat and its prereqs, even if you will never use the prereqs. It's not as good for you, though, as it is for the Bruiser.

Cleave: You may actually want this at low levels, but switch it out at level 8 if you get it.

Combat Expertise: You can only take this feat if you have 13 Int. It's a nice trick to have up your sleeve, though vastly weakened in Pathfinder by the inability to vary it as you choose. If you have 13 Int, you're probably going for Greater Trip, so you'll need it.

Lunge: This won't increase your AoOs, so it's mostly useful against things that have precisely 10 or reach than you do. That way, you won't provoke an AoO from them if you go 5 feet into their reach and then use this ability. However, if they have a lot of attacks, few AoOs to spare, or a low chance to hit you, -2 AC may be worse than just provoking the AoO, and you want enemies to end your turn in your threat range, so pass on this.

Fleet: Useful to get up to the enemy ASAP, but it usually won't make the difference.

Mobility: Your Acrobatics won't be great and you'll sometimes have to manoeuvre right up next to something with reach.

Blind-Fight: This isn't a bad feat, and you can certainly take it if you can't find anything better or if you face a lot of things that are hard to see.

Endurance: Your endgame armour will probably be Mithral Full Plate. In the interim, you'll probably have other Medium Armours, so this is useful if you constantly get ambushed at night. If your party Wizard is the sort to always prepare Rope Trick, it's probably unnecessary. The +4 bonuses can help if you forced march or such a lot.

Diehard: If you have Endurance, might as well grab this and auto-stabilise. Staying conscious is overrated and often will make you Die-Easy instead.

Nimble Moves: Sometimes it's useful to be able to 5-foot step on difficult terrain so you can make a full attack. I can't recommend Acrobatic Steps, though.

Improved and Greater Sunder: Sunder is more legitimate than in 3.5 because you can leave the item intact and loot it. However, this negates the advantage of Greater Sunder. Still, it can be a nasty surprise for very equipment-focused enemies, and you don't even have to feel bad about completely destroying the enemy Wizard's Arcane Bonded item.

Improved and Greater Disarm: Assuming you have 13 Int already and took Combat Expertise, this isn't a terrible option if you often face weapon-wielding foes, but it's hard to succeed with combat manoeuvres against foes with full BAB and good Str/Dex. I recommend the Trip chain instead.

Two-Weapon Defense: You're smart enough not to take this feat. You have a frickin Shield for crying out loud!

Great Cleave: Too situational--how often are the enemies going to be all lined up like that?

Vital Strike and Friends: Not enough feats, and it's bad for you.

Quick Draw: You can draw your weapons as you move to the enemy if you don't have them out already. It doesn't even help you unless enemies ambush you and start the fight adjacent to you when you have no weapon drawn.

Mounted Combat chain: This is a great way to get numerous horses killed. You don't have an ability to get a survivable mount, at least unless your GM lets you get something rideable as a cohort. Or you could ride the party Druid I guess.

Improved Unarmed Strike and its Disciples: Leave this to the Monks, Treant or otherwise.

Spring Attack, Wind and Lightning Stance: You want a full attack, so don't get these

Exotic Weapon Proficiency: The exotic weapons in the Pathfinder Core Rulebook aren't worth taking for you.

Improved and Greater Overrun: You want to stay nearby the enemy, not trample past.

Skill Feats: Not worth it, you need too many feats

I Don't Have Enough Feats to Take all Those!

You're right. You'll have to pick and choose, unlike other builds. Here's an example, assuming a Human using my 20 Point Buy suggested build. Note that you have a lot of flexibility from levels 2-10, discounting 6 and 7, and then a bunch of stuff you want becomes available at level 11--this also means that if you're willing to lose an earlier feat, you can have three of those at level 12 (and then take the earlier feat back later). I didn't take Disruptive right away, and when I finally had a pause and take it, my chart of % indicated that enemies would be at 100% level for casting on the defensive anyway:

Level 1: Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Shield Bash, Power Attack

Level 2: Weapon Focus [Scimitar]

Level 3: Iron Will

Level 4: Step Up

Level 5: Combat Reflexes

Level 6: Improved Two-Weapon Fighting
Level 7: Shield Slam
Level 8: Improved Bull Rush
Level 9: Greater Bull Rush
Level 10: Improved Critical [Scimitar]
Level 11: Shield Mastery
Level 12: Critical Focus
Level 13: Staggering Critical
Level 14: Double Slice
Level 15: Two-Weapon Rend
Level 16: Greater Weapon Focus [Scimitar]
Level 17: Improved Iron Will
Level 18: Greater Two-Weapon Fighting (assuming I can get 2 inherent by now)
Level 19, 20: Either Critical Mastery, AC feats, Toughness, or whatever is looking best

The Dual Blade Blender:

Similar to the above build, but with two shortswords or something similar. This also means you have a much lighter feat requirement.

Ability Scores:

Just like Sword and Shield: Strength gives you both accuracy and damage. Dex is required for some of your feats, gives AC, and gives you more precious AoOs. Con keeps you alive when nothing else can. Wis strengthens your will to fight in the face of nasty save-or-suck magic. Int can get you Greater Trip. Dump Cha into the sea. It's hard to stat this one out on low point buy. Here's some example builds, assuming +2 to Str from racial and that you aren't going Greater Trip (don't even try Greater Trip until at least 20 PB):

10 Point Buy:

Str 16 (5) Dex 16 (10) Con 12 (2) Int 7 (-4) Wis 11 (1) Cha 7 (-4)

Increase everything in Str, except throw 1 in Dex to qualify for Improved TWF, and take Wis if you're having too much trouble with Will saves. Use Inherent bonuses if you'd like Greater TWF.

15 Point Buy:

Str 16 (5) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 13 (3) Cha 7 (-4)

Same advice for advancement as 10 PB, you just have better Con and Wis

20 Point Buy:

Str 18 (10) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 13 (3) Cha 7 (-4)

Same advice for advancement as 15 PB, you just have better Str to start

25 Point Buy:

Str 19 (13) Dex 16 (10) Con 14 (5) Int 7 (-4) Wis 14 (5) Cha 7 (-4)

Advance Str every time except Dex once to qualify for Improved TWF

Races:

You're going to want a race that gives you +2 to any stat, so you can put it in Strength or Dex. Move speed will help you reach and hold the front line. Special vision is helpful but not strictly needed:

Human: The feat is helpful, and the skill point isn't bad either.

Half-Elf: Another good TWFer, Low-light vision is helpful, and the combination of Skill Focus and the racial bonus can really help your Perception. +2 to save vs enchantments can help you with your weakest saves.

Half-Orc: Ferocity is OK, but you also don't have a great "final round" option available. Darkvision while still getting +2 Str makes this another possibility for you.

Dwarf: It doesn't get Str, but it does get both Con and Wisdom, while lowering Charisma, which is your only true dump stat. The lower mobility hurts, but the Darkvision helps, and everyone likes the save bonuses.

Elf: The Dex helps more than the Con hurts, but you didn't get Strength. This is still a possibility if you wanted 13+ Int for Greater Trip at lower than the highest PB, particularly if you're willing to get a large inherent bonus to qualify.

Halfling and Gnome: You lose CMB, gain -2 Strength, and can't be Enlarged for Reach. Don't pick these unless you're Finessing, and I really don't recommend that.

Weapon Choice:

Kukri: Two blades, one Weapon Focus feat--breathe the fresh air of not being in the previous build. This is only better than Shortsword if you're going Critical Focus chain.

Some Kind of Double Weapon: Really the only option here is Dwarven Urgrush if you are a Dwarf. The others aren't bad, but they aren't worth a feat.

Shortsword: The best damage overall. Get this if you aren't getting Critical Focus.

Backup Ranged Weapon-

Mighty +(your Str mod here) Composite Longbow: It has the longest range and the most damage, and you get proficiency for free. A no-brainer.

Feats:

Two-Weapon Fighting: Get this feat. This is the point of your build.

Weapon Specialization and Greater: This is an extremely useful pair of feats for you because both your weapons are the same. Grab them when you can.

Double Slice: Not as good as Weapon Specialisation until Strength 26

Improved Two-Weapon Fighting: Another off-hand attack is always welcome.

Power Attack: Doing lots of damage is your role. Some GMs will let Double Slice give you a +2 for both hands, which makes it even better.

Weapon Focus and Greater: You will always appreciate the extra bonus to hit from these feats. Combined with Weapon Training, Greater Weapon Focus is part of the “Fighter Advantage” to attack bonus that will let you hit more often than anyone else for an ordinary blow.

Improved Critical: If you took my advice and grabbed a Kukri, get Improved Critical.

Critical Focus and Friends: This is once again blue assuming you went Kukri. This will give you nearly a 30% chance of getting a special effect per attack, which means you should expect to see two on an average turn at the end. Stunning is the best choice since it still Staggeres them for a while even if they make the save, and Exhausting is an excellent debuff with no time limit for when it wears off.

Iron Will and Greater: Your weakest save and a bad type to fail, so grab these and save yourself the agony of failed Will saves.

Two-Weapon Rend: This can potentially do a vast amount of damage and is better than Weapon Specialisation.

Greater Two-Weapon Fighting: Try to get an inherent bonus in Dex to qualify for this

Dodge: +1 AC and touch AC is always good. Take this when you have a free feat.

Toughness: If you do this right, enemies will want to crush you. This feat can help.

Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, and Greater: It never hurts to have better saves. Even though your Fort is already better, if you have to pick one of these, do Great Fortitude first--this is because you don't have Evasion, so you usually don't get as much out of a successful Fortitude save as you do out of a successful Reflex save, and failed Fortitude saves tend to be more severe anyway.

Improved Initiative: Always a good feat to have, and you're a Fighter, so you have a lot of feats.

Combat Reflexes: It's always useful to have more AoOs.

Step-Up: Follow enemies to get more AoOs.

Improved and Greater Trip: It isn't worth it for everyone to get 13 Int and Combat Expertise to get these, but maybe you rolled a lot of 13+ stats. Even if not, this is still an effective strategy. Greater Trip provokes an AoO from everyone, as does standing back up, so be sure to get Combat Reflexes. I like this better than Disarm because it's more useful against spellcasters, and if they don't take Defensive Combat Training, you actually have a strong chance of landing a trip on them.

Intimidating Prowess, Dazzling Display, Shatter Defenses: This is an all-or-nothing investment, but if you have a Rogue, it can pay off big. If you can convince your GM to allow the extremely-powerful Cornugon Smash feat and are from Cheliax, this build becomes even more powerful. It also lets you get Deadly Stroke. It takes a lot of feats, though.

Deadly Stroke: It's like the Vital Strike line except that its good. Very very good. Even without the Con bleed, it's better than Greater Vital Strike (because it doubles everything), and Con bleed is a big deal, plus you can get it 5 levels sooner. If you were even considering the Vital Strike line, get this feat and its prereqs, even if you will never use the prereqs. It's not as good for you, though, as it is for the Bruiser.

Disruptive and Spellbreaker: As for other builds, useful for enemy spellcasters.

Combat Expertise: You can only take this feat if you have 13 Int. It's a nice trick to have up your sleeve, though vastly weakened in Pathfinder by the inability to vary it as you choose. If you have 13 Int, you're probably going for Greater Trip, so you'll need it.

Stand Still: If you can actually get this effect to stick, it's very very useful, but I worry that it will have low accuracy since it's a bare CMB roll without the ability to take feats that give you a bonus, and in Pathfinder, you're at a disadvantage making bare CMB rolls except against inferior opponents or spellcasters who don't take Defensive Combat Training. If you find that your CMB consistently outclasses the CMD of opponents you are facing, this becomes a strong green instead.

Lunge: This won't increase your AoOs, so it's mostly useful against things that have precisely 10 more reach than you do. That way, you won't provoke an AoO from them if you go 5 feet into their reach and then use this ability. However, if they have a lot of attacks, few AoOs to spare, or a low chance to hit you, -2 AC may be worse than just provoking the AoO, and you want enemies to end your turn in your threat range, so pass on this.

Fleet: Useful to get up to the enemy ASAP, but it usually won't make the difference.

Mobility: Your Acrobatics won't be great and you'll sometimes have to manoeuvre right up next to something with reach.

Blind-Fight: This isn't a bad feat, and you can certainly take it if you can't find anything better or if you face a lot of things that are hard to see.

Endurance: Your endgame armour will probably be Mithral Full Plate. In the interim, you'll probably have other Medium Armours, so this is useful if you constantly get ambushed at night. If your party Wizard is the sort to always prepare Rope Trick, it's probably unnecessary. The +4 bonuses can help if you forced march or such a lot.

Diehard: If you have Endurance, might as well grab this and auto-stabilise. Staying conscious is overrated and often will make you Die-Easy instead.

Nimble Moves: Sometimes it's useful to be able to 5-foot step on difficult terrain so you can make a full attack. I can't recommend Acrobatic Steps, though.

Improved and Greater Sunder: Sunder is more legitimate than in 3.5 because you can leave the item intact and loot it. However, this negates the advantage of Greater Sunder. Still, it can be a nasty surprise for very equipment-focused enemies, and you don't even have to feel bad about completely destroying the enemy Wizard's Arcane Bonded item.

Improved and Greater Disarm: Assuming you have 13 Int already and took Combat Expertise, this isn't a terrible option if you often face weapon-wielding foes, but it's hard to succeed with combat manoeuvres against foes with full BAB and good Str/Dex. I recommend the Trip chain instead.

Two-Weapon Defense: Just get a Ring of Force Shield or an Animated Shield or even an Alchemist with a Shield. You have better things to do at low levels, but if you do take this, eventually switch it out.

Great Cleave: Too situational--how often are the enemies going to be all lined up like that?

Vital Strike and Friends: Not enough feats, and it's bad for you.

Quick Draw: You can draw your weapons as you move to the enemy if you don't have them out already. It doesn't even help you unless enemies ambush you and start the fight adjacent to you when you have no weapon drawn.

Mounted Combat chain: This is a great way to get numerous horses killed. You don't have an ability to get a survivable mount, at least unless your GM lets you get something rideable as a cohort. Or you could ride the party Druid I guess.

Improved and Greater Bull Rush: You don't get free Bull Rushes that can trip people, so what's the point?

Improved Unarmed Strike and its Disciples: Leave this to the Monks, Treant or otherwise.

Spring Attack, Wind and Lightning Stance: You want a full attack, so don't get these

Exotic Weapon Proficiency: The exotic weapons in the Pathfinder Core Rulebook aren't worth taking for you. The double weapons aren't bad if you get them for free, but not worth a feat.

Improved and Greater Overrun: You want to stay near the enemy, not trample past.

Skill Feats: Not worth it, exception maybe Skill Focus[Perception]. That said, I know it's blasphemy for an optimisation guide, but you have a lot of feats, so you can afford to spend one on something to fit your concept.

Equipment

Armour:

Mithral Fullplate: Yeah, I know you'll need inherent bonuses to get the full Max Dex with Armor Training, but Adamantine is worthless at level 19, and you can move in it at full speed with no ACP, so this is your only good choice for endgame armour unless you're a Master Archer

Celestial Armor: Master Archer's armour of choice. Even that Dex-happy build will have to stretch to get the 34 Dex that hits the Max Dex on this beauty.

Animated Heavy Shield: Obviously useless for the Sword and Shield Fighter, the nerf in Pathfinder was substantial, but it's still useful to raise your AC.

Enhancements of Note:

Bashing: A powerful enhancement for the Sword and Shield Defender of the Weak

Weapons:

When it comes to a Fighter, the weapon makes the warrior. Thus, weapons are in their appropriate sections for each build.

Enhancements of Note:

Speed: Another Sattack per round is superb--if you have a Haste-happy Wizard in your group, though, pass on this.

Seeking: Seeking is an amazing enhancement for the Master Archer (and even for a backup weapon's arrows for everyone else). Even after you have Improved Precise Shot, it's still very useful. If you're trying to save on the cost of your bow, though, consider using Seeking Arrows--it'll be clear when you need to use them (or maybe it will be rather hazy or blurry, but you get my point).

Holy: 2d6 extra damage against many enemy types and bypassing DR/Good? Sign me up.

Energy: 1d6 extra damage is nothing to sneeze at, but beware of energy resistance. Make sure you have some way to get actual enhancement bonuses on your swords before adding these, since hitting at this point is crucial.

Wands and Scrolls:

There's a lot of them that benefit you, but you can't really use them unless you are Dangerously Curious. If so, definitely consider **Shield** for non-shield styles.

Rings:

Protection: More AC is good. More AC to apply to Touch and Flat-Footed both? That's gold.

Freedom of Movement: Your CMD should be fine, but some enemies have a ridiculous CMB, so having this never hurts.

Force Shield: Cheaper and better than upgrading an Amulet of Natural Armor from +2 to +3. Only buy this if you don't have some other way to get a Shield bonus.

Wondrous:

Handy Haversack: It's a staple for a reason--carry your stuff and always find the item you want on top!

Cloak of Resistance: Get this up as high as you can to bolster your saves. It's relatively cheap, too.

Belt of Physical Stats: Get Strength first then Dex, unless you're an Archer, then switch.

Amulet of Natural Armor: More AC? Always useful. Get Ring of Protection first if there's a tie.

Ioun Stone, Dusty Rose Prism: +1 to AC is always good. Get this before upgrading the Amulet of Natural Armor and its friends to +2.

Stone of Good Luck: It's a bit expensive, but it gives +1 to all your saves and skills and stacks with pretty much everything. If you ever start considering upping your +2 Wis headband to +4, I recommend waiting and getting this instead.

Ioun Stone, Pale Green Prism: Stone of Good Luck's more powerful older brother, it's more costly too. If you have a Bard or Bracers of Archery, it's not as impressive, but if not, the 10000 extra is clearly worth it later on when you can afford this for the +1 to hit.

Circlet of Persuasion: If you want to use Intimidate (or UMD), this is the item for you. It cheaply mimics having 6 higher Charisma.

Boots of Striding and Springing: Movement speed is very useful, especially before Armor Training speeds you back up. Get this unless you need Boots of Speed more.

Boots of Speed: Probably a better idea than a Speed weapon if you don't have a Wizard to Haste you, since it won't make your weapon's cost shoot up for other abilities. The limited rounds per day are its only weakness.

Goggles of Night: Switch these on when you need to see in the dark, unless you have Darkvision already. You will probably be loud and have a big glowing sword, so this is less useful for you than it is for many other classes.

Eyes of the Eagle: Hear the door creak open and act on the surprise round with these handy lenses that double as a hearing aid for some reason.

Ioun Stone, Dark Blue Rhomboid: Gaining Alertness gives you eventually +6 to Perception and Sense Motive, which is even better than Eyes of the Eagle, though it costs 4x as much, in part due to being slotless. And of course, its untyped, so it stacks with everything.

Carpet of Flying and its flying friends: Get Carpet of Flying, Wings of Flying, etc eventually so you can actually beat flying archers, particularly if you aren't an archer.

Bracers of Archery: This is very important to archers and nearly useless to everyone else--note that it doesn't stack with Bard's Inspire Courage, making it next to worthless if you have a Bard.

Headband of Mental Stats: This just isn't a very efficient way to get the Will save and Perception bonuses you probably want from the Wis boost. The Int choice is pretty good if it gets you a useful skill--that may even be how you pick up something exotic like Use Magic Device. Avoid Cha like the plague though--far better to just grab a Circlet of Persuasion.

Boots of Levitation / Slippers of Spider Climbing: Good for lower levels before you can afford to fly.

In Conclusion

Fighters kick ass. They can kick ass all day, every day. They can kick ass in a box. They can kick ass with a fox...You get the idea. And this guide is the tip of iceberg. Use your imagination and some of my tips and you can be anything, from a masked wrestler who suplexes her opponents to the ground to a drunken devotee of Cayden Cailean and veteran of so many bar brawls that she can be deadly with just about anything lying around.

But Why Not Play a Fighter?

Well, obviously, because you are a Fighter. The real question is--

But Why Play a Fighter?

Why would you not play a Fighter? Well, Rangers will outclass you against their best favored enemies. Paladins will outdamage you when Smiting and have ridiculous defenses and other abilities. Rogues can hit for more damage if they get off their Sneak Attack. So why the Fighter?

You are *reliable*. Your Paladin may have kicked butt against the Devil Queen of Old Isger, but she doesn't look so pretty when you're fighting Proteans. Your overpowered Color Spray Heavens Oracle may have just ended three fights in a row with enemies 3 CR higher than the APL in one spell, but she's not so hot against the Zombie Horde of the Wight King. The Cleric of Sarenrae with Glory and Sun might help there, but she's stymied by the Red Dragon Tyrant of Lonely Mountain. The point is, it doesn't matter what you're fighting, you will be pretty awesome every time. Sure, you may have to adjust your tactics occasionally when you come up against something that really ruffles your build, but you have enough feats to adapt. In fact, it may be the enemy who has to adjust their tactics to deal with your Fighter!

Even so, it does lead to one sad thing: You're likely not to get as much love as you deserve. Who stood back-to-back with the Paladin and fought together against the Devil Queen? Who impaled the Wight King with her blade so the Cleric could finish her incantation and banish the undead with her goddess's grace? Who stood toe to toe with the Red Dragon Tyrant until the Cold Elemental Sorcerer could shoot out that final barrage of Chilling Rays? It was you every time, but the other guy who was specialised will get the glory. But a good Fighter is a team player. Smile and laugh, praise them on their handiwork, commiserate with the characters who didn't shine as much in that battle, and rest well with the knowledge that your team can always count on you to get the job done.

I hope you enjoyed this guide. Let me know on the Paizo forums if you enjoyed it, if you use it to build a cool character, or if you have any questions.

Cheers and good gaming!
~RE