

FEATS AND FEATURES **UNLOCKED**



EXPANDED SYSTEMS FOR 5E

- POINT BUY FEATS SYSTEM
- CUSTOM FEATS FOR EXTRA CHARACTER OPTIONS



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Introduction

I've always been a fan of modularity and characterization in TTRPGs, especially when it expands upon the options provided by the class structure. It's been the bread and butter of every gaming system I've built and it's usually an option I try to shoehorn into other systems so my players can make the cool characters they envision without as many limits. I also like point buy systems that give players control and choice over character growth. Combining those two concepts gave me the point buy system for feats that I use in my current games. It lets the players pick from a large array of options and opens up the door for feats of differing costs that have minor and major effects.

The system changes I'm presenting here modify how players acquire feats and also offer a few custom options. The person running the game will have to make some decisions on which of the custom feats to allow and also make some on the fly decisions for the variable cost feats - if they allow them in the game. There is definitely the chance for throwing things off balance with this system, but then again I've always believed that pure balance is a myth. Hopefully this system gives you and your players some cool options to play around with.

- John Arcadian

A Simple Point Buy Feats System



The actual point buy feats system is incredibly simple in its execution. There are two pieces to it. First, you as the Game Master have to assign point costs to the feats you are going to use and how many extra feat points you want players to have at character creation. As the players level up, they'll gain feat points at every level rather than set levels. They can spend these points on feats as they level up.

Assigning Costs to Feats

- ☞ As the game master, determine a point cost for the stock feats or any feats you are allowing in your game. By default, I make most core feats cost 3 points with more powerful feats - like those that grant luck points or change passive scores - costing 4 points.
- ☞ Optional - Feats that come with an attribute bump can be acquired for 1 point less without the attribute bump.

Gaining and Spending Feat Points

- ☞ Characters no longer get feats or Ability Score Improvements (ASI) as they level up.
- ☞ Characters are given 3 points for purchasing feats at character creation. If they would gain a free feat from some other source, they instead gain 3 feat points.
- ☞ Every level a character gains +1 feat point.
- ☞ Players can spend their available feat points at any time or save them for larger purchases.

- ☞ An ASI can be purchased for 3 feat points.

That's it, the core of the system is super simple. My games tend to be a bit higher power, so I actually give out 5 feat points at character creation. I also sometimes give out ASI at the regular intervals alongside feat points, but then I ramp up the challenges and deadliness of combat encounters. The amount of points you give out is definitely season to taste. Other changes I make for more open options are to remove racial or class limitations on feats. This allows players to pick interesting options. I ask them to come up with narrative reasons for their feat choices. Maybe a blessing from a fae is what lets them disappear from sight after making an attack, rather than their race.

With the standard feats setup, characters will generally get 1 feat at character creation and then usually get 5 more feats that are spread out every 4 levels for a total of about 6 feats. That number is very contingent on whether or not they stick with just one class or have other options that give more feats. One of the benefits of this system is that characters get feats more consistently across any distribution of classes. With 3 points at character creation and 20 points across leveling up, the characters are going to be getting around 7 standard feats total, so it's a bit more powerful if you get to the highest tiers of play and keep all feats at 3 points exactly. If you want to balance things out in terms of feat points, you can skip gaining feat points at levels 1 - 3 and only start them with extra points once they get to level 4.

Integrating Custom Feats



Let's talk about what this system really gets you in terms of character options - custom feats of varying costs that allow for many more options. You can easily integrate custom feats from any other source just by assigning them a point cost, but opening up feats to different capabilities and power tiers becomes much easier.

Cheap Feats

With variable costs for feats, something like a simple "Trait" feat becomes possible.

Trait (1 point)

You have a "trait", some capacity that makes you better at certain actions in some way. Whenever this trait is relevant you gain +2 on the roll. Only one trait can ever be active at a time. Traits can also act as narrative devices, providing mechanical justification for a primarily narrative benefit. Example: A trait of Iron Stomach would help when a character would have to roll to resist very hot food or prevent being sick from overindulgence in alcohol, but the Game Master may allow the character to not even make the roll because of their trait.

A feat like this gives just a tiny benefit, especially as characters become more powerful, but it lets the players define some aspect of their character in a way that has some mechanical relevance. Perhaps they have a Weapons Master trait or a Botanist trait. The small mechanical benefit acts as a justification that their character is good in whatever area they have chosen, and the minimal cost lets them grab it without feeling like they wasted a chance at something more beneficial.

The ability to have "cheap" feats like this also lets you do things specific to a setting. Let's imagine your high fantasy setting has a teleport network that is publicly available if people can afford it. The downside is that the act of teleportation makes people sick for hours afterwards. You could create a 1 or 2 point feat that lets people ignore this sickness - Teleport Sickness Resistant.

If a core component of your campaign is that the PCs pilot some form of "giant steampunk mecha," you could create a feat that lets people have affinity with these mecha. Your rules for piloting them may be as simple as a set of monster stat blocks for the mecha and they can only be piloted in certain areas, but assigning a cheap feat that gives the affinity is a simple way to set the players apart without building entire systems around how the mecha work.

Expensive Feats

Some feats that provide an incredible benefit become possible with a system like this. One example is something like "Dual Spell Focus".

Dual Spell Focus (5 points)

You can maintain one additional concentration spell.

An option like this can be incredibly unbalancing to some games, however you do have the option to allow it but charge a fair amount for it. Feats that open up entire new gameplay loops or provide large narrative boons become viable. Taking our steampunk mecha example from above in the opposite direction, imagine that there is a whole sub-system for leveling the mech with the character, buying extra options, using the mecha in regular combats, etc. Not all players will drive mechs, but the one that does has to pay a large cost for the extra option they have access to. In a scenario like this, the Mecha Affinity feat costs 6 points.

You can also have expensive primarily narrative feats. A “Homebase” feat could be 8 points spread across the 4 PCs and give them access to a location that provides many narrative resources. A “Noble Birth” feat of 4 points might provide narrative outs for various situations, but really show the connections and resources a person has access to.

Variable Cost Feats

Another option point buy feats opens up is the capability to do variable cost feats. One of my favorites is a feat called “Class Feature” that can allow for a partial multi-classing option without actually multiclassing.

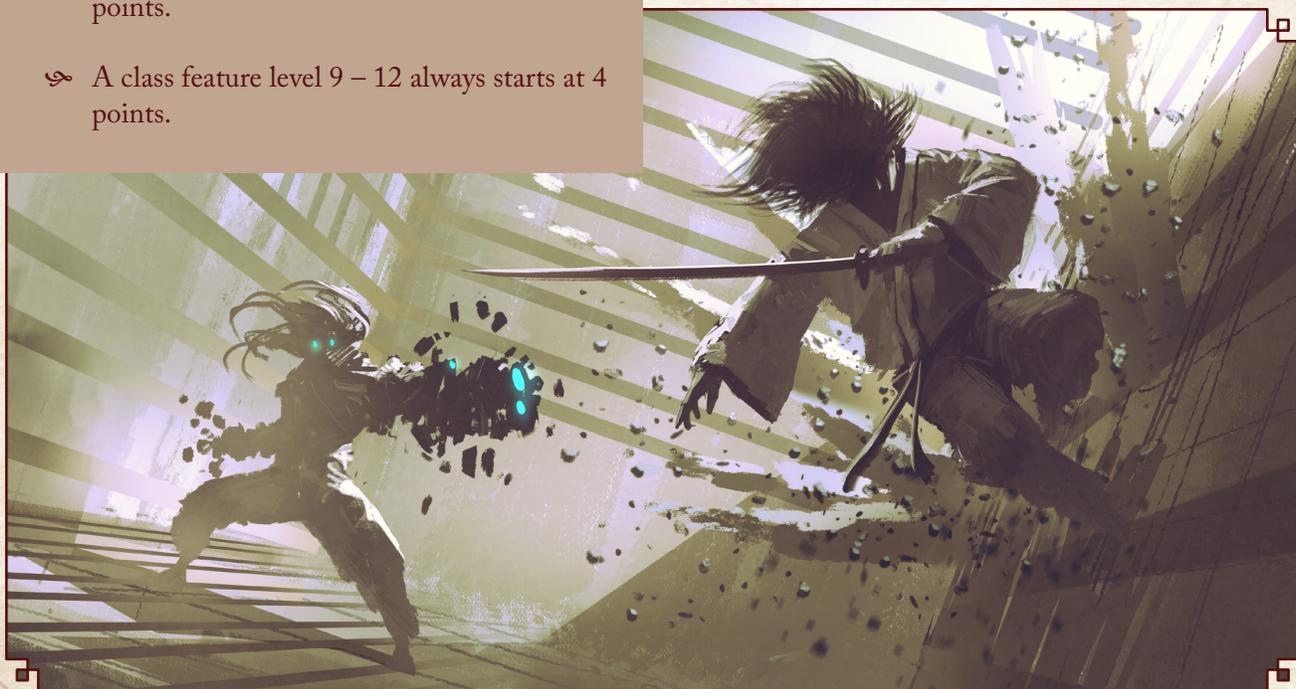
Class Feature (2 – 6+ points)

You have one class feature from another class. The cost of this depends on the strength and level of the feature. You must be at the level where you could unlock the feature if you were playing that class. Spellcasting as a class feature can not be acquired with this.

- ☞ A class feature level 4 or below starts at 2 points.
- ☞ A class feature level 5 – 8 always starts at 3 points.
- ☞ A class feature level 9 – 12 always starts at 4 points.

Depending on the power or utility of the class feature, the GM may determine it is +1 or +2 points. For example, the Extra Attack feature may be considered very powerful in your game. The GM determines it costs 4 points instead of 3. If a class feature would level up, the GM may determine it is only available at the lowest level or that adding the level up feature would raise the cost. For example, the Rogue’s sneak attack feature might cost 2 points if it is only available at the lowest level and 4 points if it progresses in power. The GM may also decide it is capped at 4d6 additional damage to keep it balanced, or may require it to be 6 points if it levels up all the way.

The Class Features feat can change the balance in many ways, but it’s a half way step to multiclassing that might provide better options for a player than dipping in for one or two levels and giving up other options from their core class. In a recent game I ran, a player wanted to pursue their swashbuckler mage class but also dip into the leaping ability of another class. To do so in an effective way for what the character wanted would have delayed many options in their core class. A 2 point Class Feature (Jump Feature lvl 2) allowed the player to grab the base ability and later take another 4 point Class Feature (Jump Feature lvl 5) alongside their core capabilities.



Custom Feats List



Here are some feats I've used with this system that you may find useful, especially if your game runs more high fantasy.

Attunement Master (2 points)

You can attune to one extra magical item.

Class Feature (2 – 6+ points)

You have one class feature from another class. The cost of this depends on the strength and level of the feature. You must be at the level where you could unlock the feature if you were playing that class. Spellcasting as a class feature can not be acquired with this.

- ☞ A class feature level 4 or below starts at 2 points.
- ☞ A class feature level 5 – 8 always starts at 3 points.
- ☞ A class feature level 9 – 12 always starts at 4 points.

Depending on the power or utility of the class feature, the GM may determine it costs 1 or 2 points more. For example, the Extra Attack feature may be considered very powerful in your game. The GM determines it costs 4 points instead of 3. If a class feature would level up, the GM may determine it is only available at the lowest level or that adding the level up feature would raise the cost. For example, the Rogue's sneak attack feature might cost 2 points if it is only available at the lowest level and 4 points if it progresses in power. The GM may also decide it is capped at 4d6 additional damage to keep it balanced, or may require it to be 6 points if it levels up all the way.

Companion (2 - 4 points)

You have a companion of some sort even though your class doesn't have an option for it. It could be a familiar based on the find familiar spell, a steed based on the find steed spell, or a version of a ranger's animal companion. For a simple version, the game master could assign a max CR rating and let the player choose a creature, npc, or monster that falls under that rating. On the player's turn in combat the creature can also act.

Dual Spell Focus (5 points)

You can maintain one additional concentration spell.

Expertise (2 points)

Choose one ability you have proficiency in. You gain expertise in it.

Extra Hit Points (2 points)

Your hit die for your class is one higher than normal (max d12). If you have multiple classes, you must take this twice.

Extra Spell Points (4 points)

(This assumes you are using a spell points variant rule).

Your spell points maximum increases by an amount equal to twice your level when you gain this feat. Whenever you gain a level thereafter, your mana maximum increases by an additional 2 spell points.

Extra Spell Slots (4 points)

Your spell slot total per level is always 1 higher. If you would have 4 level 1 spell slots and 2 level 2 spell slots at level 3, you instead have 5 level 1 slots and 3 level 2 slots.

Homebase (2 - 6+)

You have a homebase of some sort that provides resources and a safe location. The cost depends on the mechanical benefit or narrative scope of the homebase. A large mobile airship may cost more than a small tavern. A small tavern with a secret rebel base underneath would cost more than a houseboat. The cost of a large homebase might get split up amongst multiple characters or be “on loan” and require every other feat point you gain to be spent to pay off the debt.

Lifestyle / Income (2 - 4)

You have a recurring source of income or enough resources to guarantee you a particular lifestyle. At 2 points you may be considered Stable and can handwave many basic living costs. At 3 points you may be considered Well Off and can handwave most mundane equipment costs so long as you are not excessive. At 4 points you may be considered Wealthy and can handwave most large mundane costs, even managing to muster enough wealth to do incredible things like throw massive feasts or outfit a small group of rebels.

Mental Resistance (2 points)

You have advantage against attempts to charm or temper your will through magic or other extranormal means.

Omnilingual (4 points)

You are able to communicate and understand all languages.

A 3 point version of this feat may allow only normal languages and not those used by celestials, demons, or other entities. A 5 point version may allow communication with all creatures capable of communication.

Resistance (2 points)

You gain resistance to one type of damage such as piercing, slashing, or bludgeoning.

Resistance - Magical (2 points)

You gain resistance to one type of damage such as lightning, radiant, necrotic, etc.

Spell () (1 Point)

You are able to cast one cantrip at will. At 3 points you can cast a 1st level spell as a once per long rest ability, at 4 points you can cast a 2nd level spell once per long rest, at 5 points you can cast a 3rd level spell once per long rest.

Trait () (1 point)

You have a “trait”, some capacity that makes you better at certain actions in some way. Whenever this trait is relevant you gain +1 on the roll. Only one trait can ever be active at a time. Traits can also act as narrative devices, providing mechanical justification for a primarily narrative benefit. Example: Trait (Iron Stomach) would help when a character would have to roll to resist very hot food or prevent being sick from overindulgence in alcohol, but the Game Master may decide no roll is needed for the character because of their trait.

Trait, Expert () (1 point)

Prerequisite: Trait

You increase a trait you already have to give you a +2 on a relevant roll. You cannot take this multiple times. The max for a trait is +2 for 2 total points.

Unique Ability (2 – 6+ points)

You have some unique spell-like ability or power that is written up in a custom way. This could be casting a particular spell with a set number of spell slots to use it, a spell functioning as a “permanently on” power, a monster specific ability that is added to your sheet, immunity to poison, or something totally custom. The GM will collaborate with you to determine the final cost.

Some Final Thoughts

The Trait feat is one of my favorite of these custom feats because it allows massive amounts of characterization in ways that are important to the player. Having a certain trait may be important to a player but not really mechanically relevant. “Jorgen is always up before the other members of the party” may not really have any useful mechanical effect, but it’s important to the player’s concept of their character being a strict and dedicated paladin.

Other variable feats like Class Feature and Unique Ability allow almost anything **IF YOU ALLOW THEM**. As the Game Master you don’t have to allow anything you don’t want to include in your game. If you run game settings with lots of interesting options and capabilities in the narrative but no defined way to bring those about mechanically, you have the option to say yes if you want to. Are dragons a big part of the setting? There is a way to allow a Dragon Mount / Companion even if the player doesn’t want to be the class that allows that or it’s written up in a way you don’t really like in the rules.

Balance Issues

I’ve never really believed in game balance as a major component of fun. The game has to be at least somewhat balanced to feel fair, but if the balance tips in the favor of the players (through a system like this or other playstyle options) you can always rubber band it back through changing the challenge presented by the enemies, upgrading the next fight or dungeon, or letting the players have some satisfying wins that make their character choices feel justified.

This system isn’t really for purists, but few homebrew options are. This system brings in more character options and a chance to create unique and personal versions outside of the class limitations. If you need to bring balance to a system like this you can do so by limiting the feats allowed, lowering the feat points you give out, or making feats more expensive by default. The progression of one feat point per level might be a good thing to leave as is. It creates a sense of constant progression and the chance that your next cool thing is available just over the next XP horizon.



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