

# Action points, Item & Spell XP, and Raising in the Savage Tide

For this campaign, we will be using a variation on the Unearthed Arcana Action points system. (UA page 122)

Action points give character the means to affect game play in significant ways, by improving important rolls or unlocking special abilities. Each character has a limited number of action points, and once an action point is spent, it is gone for good. A beginning (1st-level) character starts the game with 5 action points. A character above 1st level starts the game with a number of action points equal to  $5 + 1/2$  his current character level.

- PCs end up with  $5 + 1/2$  level Action Points per level. The 5 points are kept track of separately from the others. Action Points can be used as per the rules on the SRD (see below); in general, an Action Point can be spent to add 1-6 points to a d20 roll or break the rules in some small, interesting way. I plan to be flexible with this, and if the PCs have other good ideas on the fly, that's fine. APs usually only apply to one die roll or one action.
- APs other than the 5 automatic ones can be turned in at 1000 xp/AP to form a xp pool. This pool can be used to power xp-draining spells, make magic items, and the like. In order to power such things, one character may donate his xp pool to another character at a conversion rate of 3 per 1. The two (or more) characters must be touching when this occurs. The supporting character may donate all of the required xp if he has enough APs. Be aware that when making items, the item being made may reflect the supporting character in some way (more relevant for intelligent items, but anything is possible)

*Example 1:* Mara and Galthia wish to help Agar cast *wish*. Agar spends 3 APs for 3000 xp, and Mara and Galthia each spend 3 AP to help him; those APs from Mara and Galthia convert to a pool of 1000 xp each. With 5000 xp to fuel it, the *wish* goes off.

*Example 2:* Eve wishes to manifest the psionic equivalent of *limited wish*. She burns 1 AP, giving her 1000 xp in her xp pool. She uses 300 of that xp to manifest, and has 700 xp left over for future powers or item creation.

*Example 3:* Malachite wants to donate the xp required to make a +4 belt of strength. Velendo will make it, but Malachite donates 2 AP. This creates an xp pool of  $(2000/3=667$  xp). The belt requires 640 xp to construct, so Velendo spends no xp and Malachite has a measly 27 xp left over in his pool. It still costs the normal amount of GP to make.

- At the end of a level, all remaining APs and xp pools disappear and are fully renewed. (I expect that folks will use up their remaining APs in the final battles, or make magic items before they train. That's just fine.)
- PCs are responsible for tracking their own APs and xp pools.
- If a PC dies and is *raised*, they suffer a negative level from the death until they complete a quest that is mandated by the God whose power raised them. There is no way to circumvent this negative level, other than using magic like *true resurrection* in the first place. The negative level has physical and spiritual signs, and there may be societal implications to having returned from the dead.
- NPCs don't generally get any Action Points. Cohorts get 3 action points: enough to save their butt in times of crisis or pull the fat out of the fryer when really needed, not enough to be cooler than the hero. A player decides when a cohort uses their Action Points, not the DM, and the player is responsible for tracking them.

## Metagame Analysis: Action Points

Action points give character the means to affect game play in significant ways, by improving important rolls or unlocking special abilities. Each character has a limited number of action points, and once an action point is spent, it is gone for good. Action points give players some control over poor die rolls. Although this has little effect in an average encounter, it makes it a little more likely that characters will survive extremely challenging encounters and less likely that a single character will fall to what would otherwise be a balanced foe because of bad luck. A reserve of action points lets even careful players expose their characters to more risks, heightening the game's tension and opening the door to even more heroic action. This variant also makes it less likely that an entire adventuring group will fall victim to one powerful effect, such as circle of death or cloudkill.

Action points also make it more likely that the use of a character's most potent abilities will be successful. For example, although its overall effect on an encounter might be minimal, few things frustrate a paladin more than missing with a smite attack—an event that becomes less likely when using action points.

That said, action points can also lead characters to routinely get in over their heads (relying on action points to save themselves), and for GMs to unconsciously increase the difficulty of encounters (since characters are more likely to succeed against foes of equal power). This is as fine as long as the characters have a reserve of such points to spend—but if they run out, encounters that would otherwise be merely challenging can become incredibly deadly. Keep the number of action points available to your characters in mind when approaching encounters.

# Using Action Points

You can spend 1 action point either to add to a single d20 roll, to take a special action, or to improve the use of a feat.

You can spend 1 action point in a round. If you spend a point to use a special action (see below), you can't spend another one in the same round to improve a die roll, and vice versa.



## Add to a Roll

CHARACTER LEVEL	ACTION POINT DICE ROLLED
1st-7th	1d6
8th-14th	2d6
15th-20th	3d6

When you spend 1 action point to improve a d20 roll, you add the result of a 1d6 to your d20 roll (including attack rolls, saves, checks, or any other roll of a d20) to help you meet or exceed the target number. You can declare the use of 1 action point to alter a d20 roll *after* the roll is made, but only *before the GM reveals the result of that roll*. You can't use an action point to alter the result of a d20 roll when you are taking 10 or taking 20.

Depending on character level (see table), a character might be able to roll more than one d6 when he spends 1 action point. If so, **apply the highest result and disregard the other rolls**. A 15th-level character, for instance, gets to roll 3d6 and take the best result of the three. So, if he rolled a 1, 2, and 4, he would apply the 4 to his d20 roll.

## Special Actions

A character can perform certain tasks by spending an action point.

**Activate Class Ability:** A character can spend 1 action point to gain another use of a class ability that has a limited number of uses per day. For example, a monk might spend an action point to gain another use of her stunning fist ability, or a paladin might spend an action point to make an additional smite attack.

**Boost Defense:** A character can spend 1 action point as a free action when fighting defensively. This gives him double the normal benefits for fighting defensively for the entire round (+4 dodge bonus to AC; +6 if he has 5 or more ranks in Tumble).

**Emulate Feat:** At the beginning of a character's turn, he may spend 1 action point as a free action to gain the benefit of a feat he doesn't have. He must meet the prerequisites of the feat. He gains the benefit until the beginning of his next turn.

**Extra Attack:** During any round in which a character takes a full attack action, he may spend 1 action point to make an extra attack at his highest base attack bonus. Action points may be used in this way with both melee and ranged attacks.

**Ignore attack of Opportunity:** A character may spend 1 action point to perform an action that would normally draw an attack of opportunity. He must decide whether or not to use this action point before the AoO is resolved.

**Improve feat:** A character can roughly double the effect of any one feat (other than metamagic feats) that they already possess. Each effect requires a free action to activate and lasts 1 round. Work with the nice GM on this one. See below for some examples.

**Skill Tricks:** A character can use two Action Points on leveling up to buy a Skill Trick (Complete Scoundrel). You can save it from the previous level (unlikely) or use them from the new level (risky). Choices, choices....

**Spell Boost:** A character can spend 1 action point as a free action to increase the effective caster level of one of his spells by 2. He must decide whether or not to spend an action point in this manner before casting the spell.

**Spell Recall:** Spellcasters who prepare their spells in advance can spend 1 action point to recall any spell just cast. The spell can be cast again later with no effect on other prepared spells. This use of an action point is a free action and can only be done in the same round that the spell is cast. Spontaneous spellcasters such as sorcerers and bards can spend 1 action point to cast a spell without using one of their daily spell slots. This use of an action point is a free action and can only be done as the spell is being cast.

**Stable:** Any time a character is dying, he can spend 1 action point to become stable at his current hit point total or -9, whichever is higher.

## **Improved Feats**

The use of action points opens up a whole range of possible feats. However, it's easier on characters simply to improve existing feats to take advantage of action points — that way, characters needn't spend their precious feat slots simply to gain the ability to use their action points. Below are a few examples of how action points can be used with existing feats. Unless otherwise stated, each effect requires a free action to activate and lasts 1 round.

**Blind-Fight:** You can spend 1 action point to negate your miss chance for a single attack.

**Combat Expertise:** You can spend 1 action point to double the bonus to Armor Class granted by the feat. For example, if you take a penalty of -3 on your attack roll, you gain a +6 dodge bonus to AC.

**Dodge:** You can spend 1 action point to increase the dodge bonus granted by the feat to +2. The effect lasts for the entire encounter.

**Improved Critical:** You can spend 1 action point to double your critical threat range. Since two doublings equals a tripling, this benefit increases your threat range from 19-20 to 18-20, from 17-20 to 15-20, or from 15-20 to 12-20, including the effect of your Improved Critical feat. This benefit stacks with the benefit from Improved Critical, but not with other effects that increase threat range.

**Improved Initiative:** You can spend 1 action point to double the bonus on initiative checks granted by the feat, from +4 to +8.

**Metamagic Feats:** You can spend 1 action point to add the effect of any one metamagic feat that you have to a spell you are casting. The spell is cast at its normal level (without any level adjustment because of the feat) and takes no extra time to cast.

**Heighten Spell** automatically raises a spell's effective level to the highest level of spell you are capable of casting. For example, if a 7th-level wizard with the Heighten Spell feat casts burning hands and spends 1 action point to heighten the spell, the spell is treated as if it were a 4th-level spell in all respects even though the wizard prepared it normally (as a 1st-level spell).

**Power Attack:** You can spend 1 action point to double the bonus on damage rolls granted by the feat. For example, if you take a penalty of -3 on your attack roll, you add +6 to your damage roll.

**Spell Focus:** You can spend 1 action point to double the increase to save DCs granted by the feat, from +1 to +2.

**Spell Penetration:** You can spend 1 action point to double the bonus on caster level checks granted by the feat, from +2 to +4. The effect lasts for the entire encounter.