

Units Tips

Everything in Age of Empires, of course, depends on what age you're playing in, what race you're playing as, and a thousand other variables. But here's a general, practical breakdown on all the units in the game.

Infantry (Barracks, Academy)

The backbone of your army in the early years, particularly if you begin in the Tool or Stone ages, infantry such as the Axemen or the Clubmen are cheap and...well, they're cheap. The Clubmen are great for protecting your hardworking Villagers from danger in your tribe's very early days, but that's about as far as their usefulness goes--upgrade them to Axemen immediately. Rest assured that your opponents will.

Once you get to the later ages of the game and your crude soldiers get phased out in favor of Broad Swordsmen and Long Swordsmen, standard infantry do become more useful, but there's something meatier you should be concentrating on: academy units such as the Hoplite and his more powerful replacements. These guys are stronger, better armored, and just as fast with the proper Market research. For example, a Hoplite does more damage and has more armor and only slightly fewer hit points than the Legion unit, which is an expensive Barracks upgrade. A string of Academy-trained Centurions is a great defense against invasion--in groups of four or five, these guys are unstoppable.

But in a situation where gold is lacking, or you need it for more important units such as Elephants, the half-the-cost Barracks' units will do in a pinch. But remember, they're nowhere near as effective. In the final age of the game, however, you should be relying on speedier cavalry units much more than infantry.

So how do you take out these pesky suits of armor? With Catapults and Ballistas, that's how. Because infantrymen usually travel in packs, two or three Siege Weapons should be able to take out several of them before they reach your turf.

Cavalry (Stable)

If you're in the later stages of a game, we have one word for you: Elephants. But let's work our way up to the pachyderms from the bottom of the pile, shall we?

In the early stages of a game, you need cavalry units for two uses: exploration and preemptive strikes. As soon as possible in a game, get your Stable constructed in an open area and send one or two Scouts out into the open country to scout around for precious resources, such as gold, and help you find your enemies. And if you do find the enemy, feel free to inflict a little damage--taking out your opponent's feeble-minded Villagers in the early stages of a game can give you a sizable advantage.

Once you research the wheel (through the Marketplace), get your Chariot forces going, unless you have enough gold to build Cavalry, which are stronger and better protected, and get a +5 bonus against infantry units. (Be careful of spending too much gold early, however--you need it to advance your civilizations.) If you can catch your foes with their pants down, a wave of Heavy Cavalry can cause untold damage.

But the whole time you have a Stable, you're basically waiting for one unit: the War Elephant, which comes along in the Iron Age. With 600 hit points and the ability to inflict damage upon adjacent enemy units, War Elephants will probably become the mainstay of your army before long. Yes, they're slower than molasses, and their attack capabilities can't be upgraded, but it takes a long time to wipe out one of these bad boys. Get them as soon as you can and hear your enemies shriek in fear--nothing is more frightening than a row of seven War Elephants in front of five Catapults. One pachyderm warning to the wise: they need a lot of food, so if these ponderous units are in your future, make sure you compensate adequately in the resources department.

One other drawback to these thick-skinned beasts is that they take a long time to build. To counteract this, make sure you have *lots* of Stables built--this way you can crank out War Elephants just as fast. And don't forget the importance of combined arms. Intermingle your Elephants with faster Heavy Cavalry units--they can get in close to Catapults and take them out before they get within range.

So how do you stop charging Elephants? That's a tough question. If you're one of the seven cultures that doesn't have access to these beasts, you're going to need to gang up on them--that's the only way to kill them. Sacrifice your infantry units en masse when you're on the attack, and let your cavalry and Catapults do the good damage. On defense, make sure you have lots of walls and Towers to buffer yourself from these dreaded creatures.

Archers (Archery Range)

Once again, Elephants reign supreme when it comes to long-range units. But let's start at the bottom of the archery ladder first.

The main drawback to Archers is that they are mighty weak. But their lack of armor and minimal hit points are counterbalanced by their ranged fire, particularly if you've controlled their environment properly. Early on in the game, you'll only have access to the Bowman, your basic plain-wrap kind of archer who needs loads of protection. Use these guys only in packs, because on their own, Bowmen are pretty useless. And try to hide these guys behind Houses, Farms, or wherever else you can mask them.

For the most part, we recommend not investing in Improved Bowman or Composite Bowman--they're simply not worth the extra cost if you can build the more mobile Chariot Archers. If you can't build Chariot Archers, it's not even worth bothering with weaker, high-maintenance archery units until you can build Horse Archers and Elephant Archers. And speaking of Elephant Archers, these heavy-duty Archery Range units can be devastating in conjunction with ranged weapon research that turns their arrows into fireballs and increases their range into the double digits. A group of five fireball-hurling Elephant Archers will allow you to strike deep into enemy territory or take out attacking units before they even lay a hand on you.

Much like Stable units, Elephant Archers take a long time to build, so make sure you have plenty of Archery Ranges littered about the landscape to even the score. In addition, it is critical that you research Ballistics if you're going to be using Archery Range units with any frequency over the course of your battle--with it, your units can accurately target moving objects.

Siege Weapons (Siege Building)

Incredible amounts of destructive power are the calling card of the Siege building's units: Stone Throwers, Catapults, Heavy Catapults, Ballistas, and Helepolii. But this destructive power has a price--these units don't have much in the way of protection or hit points. And they can't defend themselves against close-range attacks!

One crucial note about Siege Weapons: it is absolutely critical that you research Ballistics as soon as you can if you're going to be relying on these weapons during your battles. The Ballistics improvement allows your Siege Weapons *and* your missile weapons to accurately target moving enemy units. This is a must-have!

The Catapult and its upgrade, the Heavy Catapult, are more commonly available, so let's start with them first. No attack on a city is complete without a Catapult contingent trailing behind it.

Every civilization can build Stone Throwers, and even if this is all you can build, they're worth it. Inflicting only ten fewer points of damage than their older cousin, the Catapult, these early Siege Weapons can do the job. A preemptive Catapult strike early in the Bronze Age can set your opponent way back in development.

When it's time to upgrade, go all the way to the Heavy Catapult if you can. The difference between Stone Thrower and Catapult is negligible, but the Heavy Catapult has twice as many hit points.

You may be tempted to overlook Ballistas and their superpowered upgrades, the Helepolis, but think twice. These units are quicker to build and do more damage. If properly protected, these overgrown crossbows are great city destroyers or protectors. The Helepolis in particular can cause an amazing 80 points of damage every 3 seconds. They're definitely worth the expensive upgrade if you can afford it. The only drawback of this weapon class is a relatively weak health (55 hit points).

On the attack, it's crucial that you protect your Ballistas and Helepolii from damage. Cavalry charges and Catapults can take out these fragile units in no time. When on the attack, use the Ballistas and Helepolii in large groups and spread them out to prevent area and trampling damage. Also, try to have a few Catapults sprinkled among them--they can hit targets farther away from your Ballistas and can also draw some fire to themselves. Although most players employ Siege Weapons for their primary purpose (taking out enemy walls, structures, and Wonders), they can also be used quite admirably on the defensive. A row of six Catapults behind a two-ply wall is a formidable front to overcome for anyone. And Ballistas and Helepolii, with their quicker fire rate and low trajectory, make for great antipersonnel weaponry. Dig a group of these into high ground and you have a nice, tasty defense set up for yourself.

Naval Units (Dock)

Take this to the bank: any map with a sea in it will see continuous naval combat, because you have to protect your shores in Age of Empires. This is one of the reasons that wood is one of the most critical resources on the map--particularly early on, when War Ships are among the most powerful units in the game.

Here's one tip to always bear in mind: never attack ships that are one class higher than you. You'll waste a ton of time, effort, and wood this way. It's incredibly worthwhile, therefore, to make upgrading your ships one of your first tasks in any given age. Naval superiority can make a huge difference in a game with water in it, and a well-positioned Dock can help you set up an advantageous advance base.

If your opponent is anywhere near the water, mass together ten of your ships and make an attack, sending half your group against any defending Towers or Archery units, and the other half against any Docks and enemy naval units. Even if you can't win, your assault will provide a great distraction for you to attack via land.

Try to position your Docks in groups of two and three. This way you can crank out multiple ships simultaneously--a handy ability when you're on the defensive.

We have mixed feelings about Catapult Triremes. Sure, they're powerful, and they can injure more than one unit at a time, but they're slow, and quite expensive. And they have 80 fewer hit points than Triremes. Put it this way--in ten seconds, a Catapult Trireme will only cause ten more points of damage than a Trireme. Indeed, if you absolutely must have Catapults on your ships, upgrade to the Juggernaut--it's got a lot more hit points. Unfortunately, it doesn't do any more damage.

Keep in mind, however, that naval prowess alone won't win you battles--most islands have center spots where your opponent can get out of range of your Triremes and Catapult Triremes.

Use Transports cautiously--as soon as your opponent sees one of your Light or Heavy Transports approaching, he's going to concentrate his efforts on eliminating it. For this reason, you should try to land these ships away from enemy lines, although an amphibious assault consisting of eight or ten Triremes and two filled-to-capacity Transports can do some serious damage.

Priests

Talk about high maintenance. A pack of Priests can quickly turn the tide of a battle, but you really have to micromanage these guys for them to be successful *and* stay alive. First off, if you can upgrade their conversion range, do so--the farther away from the enemy you are, the better. Of course, even if one of your Priests converts only two powerful units or one building, he's probably worth the money.

Keep Priests in clusters of two or three; this way you can quickly convert enemy units and then get your Priests out of the way. Use them against slow-moving, nonranged weapon units such as War Elephants or Hoplites (or other Academy units)--you can usually pick these units off while keeping your Priests relatively safe. Avoid archery units and Siege Weapons. With their great range, they'll wipe you out before you even get a chance.

One nice tactic to use in a big battle is to bring four or five Priests in while you're attacking, and concentrate each one on a different enemy unit. Usually the enemy will be slow to

change its fire toward your Priests and you'll succeed in converting three or four units this way.

After you've converted enemy troops with your Priests, *always* clear them out of the battle at hand to give them some time to recharge. They're just sitting ducks at this point anyway. On the R&D front, every upgrade is a good upgrade. Take Astrology first in the Bronze Age--it allows you to convert units 30 percent faster. In the Iron Age, take Fanaticism first--it gives you 50 percent faster rejuvenation--and then take Afterlife. *Do not* research the Jihad unless you plan on using your Villagers to attack your opponent's Wonder. Your Villagers will become much less proficient at gathering resources as a consequence.

One final note: buildings are best converted by groups of Priests.