

When diving into a new game, especially those sprawling single-player RPGs, open worlds, or even competitive shooters, you often face an important decision: should you use rewards, bonuses, or boosts during your initial “first run experience,” or save them for a “new game plus” or subsequent playthrough? This seemingly cosmetic choice impacts your pacing, difficulty preference, and how much you enjoy the learning curve the developer intended.

In this article, we’ll explore the pros and cons of applying rewards early on versus later, referencing insights from industry voices like **Playoholic**, consumer watchdogs such as **AskGamblers**, and mainstream coverage by **Forbes**. We also take into account platform-specific factors for console and PC users, and provide practical advice for players trying games under €5 (see our *previous article card* for budget picks!).

Why Rewards Matter in Your First Run Experience

At its heart, a “reward” in gaming comes in many forms: in-game currency, powerful gear, experience boosts, cosmetic items, or special consumables that influence combat or progression. Developers use rewards chiefly to:

- Reduce early-game friction
- Offer optional shortcuts to mastery
- Encourage replayability via *new game plus* modes
- Provide motivation to try new content

Playoholic recently pointed to how early-game rewards mitigate the steep learning curve new players face, especially when mechanics are dense or combat unforgiving. While this sounds great on the surface, it raises the tradeoff that some players miss the intended progression pacing and sense of accomplishment.

Learning Curves and Early-Game Friction

Many players experience “early-game friction” when they are forced to learn basic controls, uncover game mechanics, or grind to get powerful equipment before challenging enemies become even remotely manageable. Rewards that reduce this friction might come as:

- Starter kits with rare weapons or items
- XP boosts that speed leveling
- A few consumables to survive early fights
- Consumables or bonuses purchasable for under €5

AskGamblers highlights that deploying these tools—especially in RPGs with crunchy mechanics—can prevent frustration-induced abandonment but warns against masking the intended difficulty. The key playoholic.com is deciding whether you want the full intended experience on your first run or prefer to smooth out bumps early.

Using Rewards in the First Playthrough: Pros and Cons

Advantages Disadvantages

- Less risk of getting stuck or frustrated during your first run
- Faster learning curve due to boosts or starter kits
- Can fully enjoy story and exploration without heavy grinding

- Helpful for casual players or those with limited gaming time
- May reduce sense of accomplishment from overcoming challenges naturally
- Can diminish replay value if game feels “too easy”
- Potentially disrupts pacing developers balanced around gradual power gain

For example, PC gamers using mod-friendly titles or consoles with exclusive early access rewards may find it tempting to use unlocks or bonuses immediately. Forbes recently examined how many popular AAA titles bundle cosmetic and progression rewards, with some priced as low as under €5, tempting newcomers to jump-start their journey but risking diminished satisfaction.

Holding Back Rewards for a Second Playthrough: The New Game Plus Advantage

“New game plus” (NG+) is a mode increasingly common in RPGs and open-world games. It lets you restart the game with some carryover benefits like stats, gear, or currencies while facing tougher opponents or different challenges. NG+ represents an ideal opportunity to deploy rewards because:

- The core story and mechanics are already familiar
- Players can calibrate difficulty preference more consciously
- Replay motivation is higher when testing alternate builds or strategies

Saving rewards for NG+ encourages maintaining the intended progression pacing in your initial “first run experience,” while still enjoying optional boosts that shake up or ease subsequent runs. Playoholic emphasizes that this approach preserves challenge and satisfaction balance, letting players pick their preferred difficulty after mastering fundamentals.

Types of Rewards to Save for NG+

Not all rewards need to be saved, but generally, consider holding back on:

- Powerful gear that trivializes early encounters
- Permanent XP or resource multipliers
- Unlocks that bypass pivotal story or skill milestones

Conversely, cosmetic rewards or vanity items can enhance the first experience without affecting difficulty or pacing and therefore pose little risk when used early.



Difficulty Preference: How It Shapes Your Reward Strategy

Your ideal difficulty preference heavily influences whether rewards should be employed early or delayed:

Difficulty Preference Suggested Reward Use Strategy
Casual / Story-First Players Use early rewards to reduce frustration and enjoy narrative flow
Challenge Seekers / Completionists Save powerful rewards until NG+ to maintain a pure first experience
Intermediate / Balanced Use optional, non-intrusive boosts early; hold back major powerups

On console platforms, players might lean more toward saving rewards for NG+ due to fewer mod options and curated gameplay experiences. PC users, with more customization tools, sometimes mix and match reward usage to tailor difficulty dynamically.

Final Thoughts: Making Rewards Work for Your Playstyle

In the end, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to when you should use rewards on your first or subsequent playthrough. Here's a sanity-check checklist to help you decide:



1. What is your difficulty preference? Do you want challenge or ease?
2. Are you risk-averse or eager to learn mechanics naturally?
3. Do the rewards affect only cosmetics or also progression and power?
4. Does the game support NG+ or other replay incentives?
5. Are you playing on PC or console, and does the platform influence your choices?

Using rewards on your first run can lower early risk and help with tricky learning curves, but it comes with tradeoffs—namely, pacing and achievement satisfaction. Holding rewards for a second playthrough lets you enjoy the full challenge initially and then use them to experiment or reduce grind later.

As our coverage on affordable games under €5 recently shows, even budget titles can offer meaningful reward systems. Whether with Playoholic's community insights, AskGamblers' verification of reward fairness, or Forbes' game economy analyses, informed players make smarter choices that fit their preferred experience.

Related Article: Top Games Under €5 with Great Onboarding Rewards