How to play Go

Go is an ancient game where two players do battle to seize and control unoccupied terrain. Thought to have originated at least 2,000 years ago in China, it remains immensely popular throughout the Far East. Go combines simple elements to produce a game of great depth, with rules that can be understood in about half an hour.

This booklet is designed to teach you to play Go, introducing you little by little to the ideas and rules of this fascinating game. After reading the first and second sections - Play and Capture - you will be able to play Duel. This game is fast, simple and easy to understand. By playing it you will begin to master the first rules and tactics of Go. You can then add to your knowledge by reading further, each rule builds upon the last, and each game will apply the ideas previously explained. To learn by doing is the guiding idea. Before you know it you will be playing Go, one of the deepest and most elegant games in the world.

You will need

Two sets of counters, called **stones** - about fifty black ones and fifty white ones.
A **board** marked with a nine by nine grid.

Play

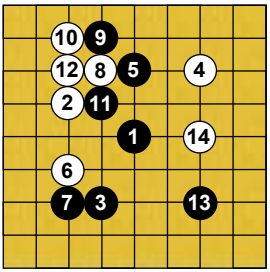
Go is a game for two players. Lets call them Black and White. Black uses the black stones, White uses the white ones.

Anywhere on the board where two or more lines meet is called a **point.** A point with no stone on it is **empty**. At the start of the game all of the points are empty.

The players take turns to place a stone on an empty point. This is called a **move**. Black goes first.

Diagram 1 (D1) shows the first few moves of an example game. The stones are numbered to show the order of moves.

Diagram 1 (D1)



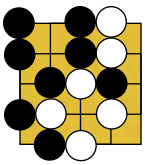
Capture

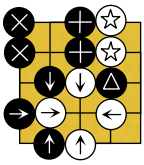
Sometimes after you have played a stone, you can take some stones off the board. To explain how this works there are two ideas to introduce: '**next to**', and '**block**'.

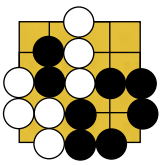
Most points are **next to** four other points - those directly above, below, to the left and to the right. A point on the edge is next to three others, a corner point is next to two others.

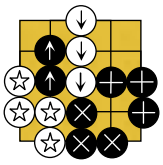
Stones can be next to one another too. A **block** consists of 1 or more stones of the same colour that are next to one another. For example, the stones (2), (8), (10) and (12) in D1 form a block. If a stone in a block is next to any stones that are the same colour as itself, all those stones are part of the same block. Blocks are much easier to spot than to explain!

Here are some examples. To illustrate the blocks, each one is marked with a symbol.



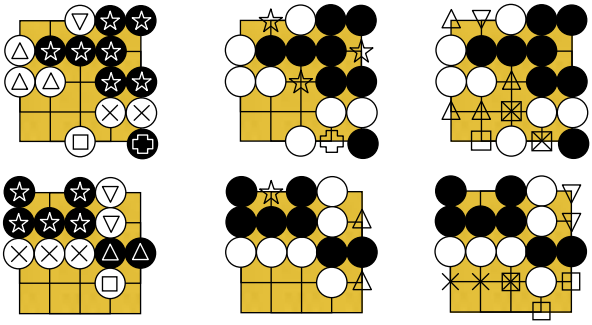






Just like a stone is next to other points, a block is next to other points too. How many of these points are empty is very important, because a block that is not next to any empty points may be removed from the board.

Here are some examples of blocks and the empty points next to them. In the second column, the empty points next to each black block have been marked with that block's symbol. Similarly in the third column, the empty points next to the white blocks have been marked.

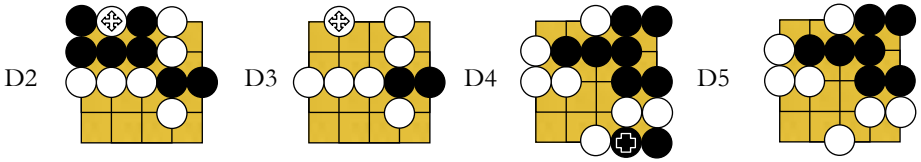


Now lets go through how and when blocks are taken off the board.

After you have placed a stone on the board there are two things to do. First examine the board for any of your opponent's blocks that are not next to any empty points. If you find any, you must take every stone of that block off the board. Then examine the board again for any of your own blocks that are still not next to any empty points. Again, if you find any you must take every stone of that block off the board.

Stones removed from the board are said to have been **captured**, and called **prisoners**. Black keeps the white prisoners, and white keeps the black prisoners.

Suppose White plays on the point marked with a star in the fifth diagram above. Now the ☆ block is not next to any empty points. So White must remove these stones from the board. White's move captures these five stones, and White gets five prisoners.



D2 shows the board after the move described above, but before any stones have been removed. D3 shows the board after the captured stones have been removed. Note that White's move ⊕ is not captured because after white has removed the ☆ block, the ⊕ block is then next to three empty points (although just one would be enough).

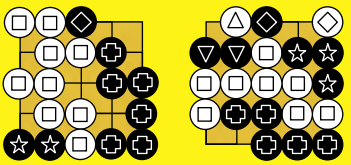
Another example: D4 shows the board position after Black has played ⊕, but before any stones have been removed. D5 shows the board after the captured stones have been removed. Playing moves that capture your own pieces is not a good idea.

Blocks that are next to only one empty point are called **vulnerable**.

Try these questions for both boards.
The answers are on the back page.

1. Which blocks are vulnerable?

2. For Black, a move on which point is a mistake, because Black captures their own block?

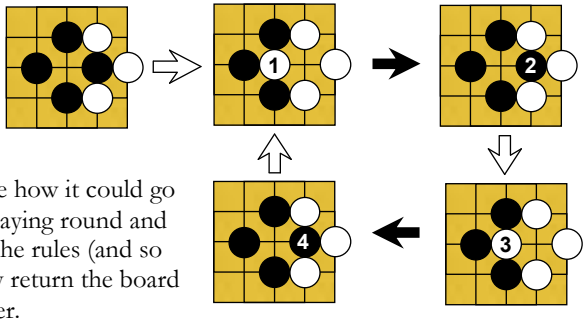


Game 1: Duel!

The winner is the first player to capture some of their opponent's stones, or notice that their opponent has captured some of their own (as in diagrams D4 and D5)

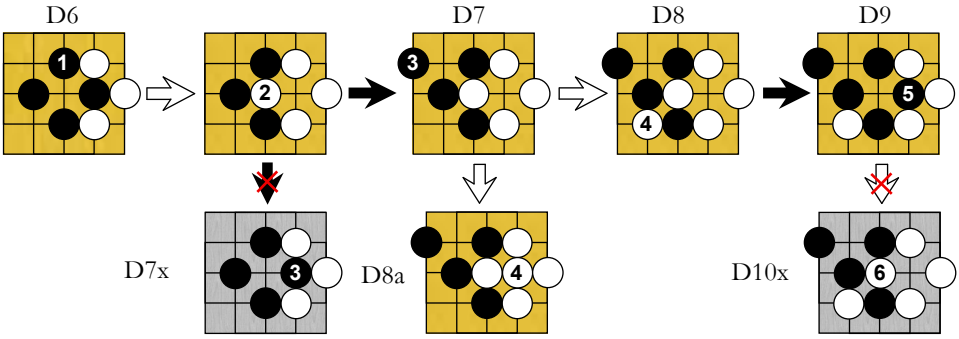
Loops

A loop is a series of moves that go round in a circle, returning to where they started. If they were allowed, it would make the game boring, so they aren't!



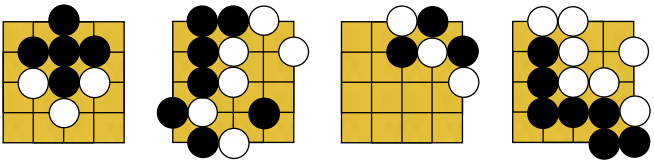
On the right is a loop. Can you see how it could go on forever? To stop people from playing round and round like this, move ❷ is against the rules (and so are ③ and ❹). That's because they return the board position to one that happened earlier.

What does this mean in practice? In the first diagram below, ❶ could be the start of a loop. In the next one, White decides to play ②. Now ❸ in D7x is not allowed because this board position is the same as the one in diagram D6. Black must play somewhere else, for example as shown in D7. Next White could play as in D8a, ending the loop, or prolong it with ④ in D8. Now Black can play ❺ in D9, as this board position is new, and it is White who is not allowed to play ⑥ in D10x as this is the same position as in D8.



Loops are also possible on the edge of the board or in the corner, where they look slightly different.

Question 3. Which of the boards on the right contain a potential loop?



Game 2 : Prisoners!

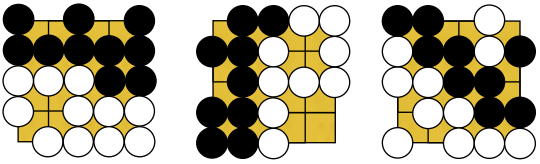
The winner is the first player to capture a total of four or more of their opponent's stones. If you reach a stage in the game when you do not want to play any more stones, you can read the next section and then go on to Game 3 to find out who wins.

Pass

Eventually the board gets so full that any move will make one of your blocks vulnerable. When this happens, instead of placing a stone on the board, you can **pass.** Simply say 'pass' and give your opponent a stone. This stone becomes their prisoner.

Question 4: In which of the following three positions should both players pass?

You can choose to pass or play a stone, no matter what you did on your last turn, but when one player passes straight after the other one, the game ends.

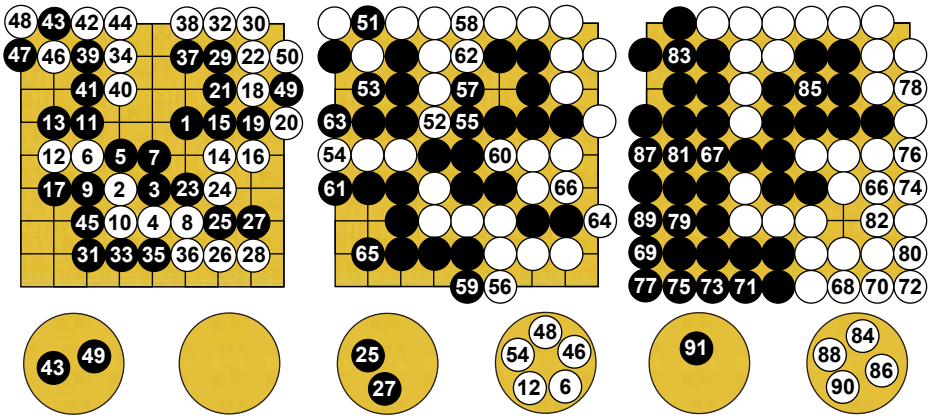


Game 3 : Go!

The winner is the player with the most prisoners at the end of the game.

Example Game from the NHK Women's New Year Tournament 2002

Moves 1 – 50 Moves 51 – 66 Moves 67 – 91



In the example game above, captured prisoners are shown underneath. (90) & (91) are both passes, so the game ends there. Black has 9 prisoners ((84), (86) & (88) are passes) and White has 5, plus 6½ **compensation**, so White wins. In 'serious' games White gets 6½ prisoners as compensation for playing second.

Notes

- Go is usually played on a 19 by 19 board (but its easier to play on a 9 by 9 board at first)
- Different countries use slightly different rules, so be prepared to make minor changes to the rules you have learnt here (you may not be allowed to capture your own stones for example)
- More information can be found at the British Go Association website - www.britgo.org
- Go can be played online, try www.gokgs.com
- Copies of this leaflet are available at www.somegostuff.com

Answer 1: First diagram - ◇ & ☆, second - all of them!
Answer 2: In the first diagram, the empty point above the ☆ stone in the corner.
Answer 3: The second and fourth. Answer 4: First and third.