

# How to play Tic-Tac-Toe

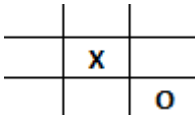
Tic-Tac-Toe is a fun game that you can play anytime, anywhere. To play this game, you just need a 3x3 grid and an opponent. You can even practice it against yourself or a computer, and surprise your friends with unbeatable skills!



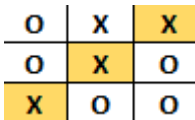
## Rules

The rules of the game are quite simple:

1. You and your opponent select either **X** or **O** as a symbol. If you select **O**, your opponent gets **X**.
2. In alternate turns, draw your symbol in any of the vacant cell in the 3x3 grid. When the game starts, the first player to make a move can draw her symbol in any one the nine cells.

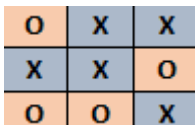


3. The goal is to mark three consecutive cells in a straight line, which can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal.



**The first player to mark three consecutive cells wins the game.**

4. If neither of the players succeed in marking three consecutive cells before the grid fills up, the game ends in a draw.

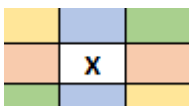


## How to not lose

Tic-Tac-Toe is a zero-sum game, which means if both players make their best possible moves, a draw is inevitable. There are computer games that are programmed based on this principle. You can play those games to practice and improve your odds of not losing.

The real fun is in playing against human opponents because they are prone to mistakes. You can easily win or force a draw against a human, if you adopt the following strategies:

1. In your first move, always try to mark the center (middlemost cell). Such a placement opens up possibilities for a straight-line arrangement in all four directions (horizontal, vertical, and two diagonals).



- If your opponent starts the game at the center, respond by marking any one of the four vertices. This allows you to extend in two different directions (horizontal and vertical).

.		.
	X	
O		.

You can use this tip at any move, provided your opponent is more than two steps away from winning.

- When the opponent has already marked two consecutive cells, immediately block the next cell. Remember that the moment your opponent succeeds in marking three consecutive cells, it's game over!

X	X	O

However, even this might not save the game. If your opponent has two or more options to mark the third consecutive cell, you lose irrespective of your blocking action.

X		
X	X	O
?		

- When you face a blockade, explore other open directions with the aim of maximizing your options. It's also important to take advantage of the cells that you have already marked.

X		X
X	X	O
X		X

As a **complete example**, observe the corresponding moves in a sample game (in the  $i$ th move, your opponent marks  $X_i$  and you mark  $O_i$ ):

O3	X4	X2
X5	X1	O2
O1	O4	X3

If a 3x3 grid is too simple for you, try a 4x4 or 5x5. But always stay alert and **anticipate your opponent's next two moves**. Most importantly, have fun playing Tic-Tac-toe.