

Sprouts Strategy Checklist: From Novice to Tactician

Phase 1: The Opening (Moves 1-3)

- **Dot Placement:** Are your starting dots spread out evenly to maximize space, or are they clustered to force a specific type of game?
- **First Move Matters:** Your first connection can define the entire board. Are you connecting to an outside dot or creating an early loop?
- **Think About Regions:** Your first line immediately splits the playing area. Visualize how this division will affect future moves.
- **Control the Center:** An early presence in the center of the dot cluster often provides more future options.

Phase 2: The Mid-Game (Developing the Board)

- **Isolate and Conquer:** Look for opportunities to create closed-off regions. Trapping even one of your opponent's dots can be a major advantage.
- **"Kill" Dots Proactively:** A "dead" dot (one with three connections) can't be used again. Are you forcing your opponent to use up their dots' lives faster than you are?
- **Count the Liberties:** Before making a move, quickly count the remaining connection spots (liberties) in a region. Don't trap yourself.
- **Create "Chain" Reactions:** Can you make a move that forces your opponent into a predictable and weak response? Set up two-move traps.

Phase 3: The Endgame (Closing Out the Win)

- **Survival vs. Suffocation:** Is the goal to find the last available move for yourself or to completely eliminate all of your opponent's options?
- **The Final Count:** The winner is the last person to move. In the final stages, count the exact number of moves left for each player. Don't guess.
- **Avoid Forced Moves:** Be wary of areas where you only have one possible move. Your opponent will use this to predict and control your actions.
- **Patience is Key:** The most obvious move is not always the best one. Take a moment to scan the entire board for unexpected possibilities before sealing the game.

Golden Rules

- A line can't cross another line.
- A dot can't have more than three lines.
- Every new line must have a new dot on it.