

The Strategy Game Designer's Cheatsheet

Golden Rules

- **Don't offer systems that the player does not interact with**
- **Players should understand the game mechanics**
- **Clear feedback on choices is required**
- **Give the player less variables, more choices**
- **Obvious choices should not be choices**
- **Don't Play Known Outcomes**
- **Offer risk-versus-reward type decisions.**

Ways To Play

- **Inclusive Play** - All players remain in the game until it ends.
- **Exclusive Play** - Individual players drop out of the game when they lose.
- **Cooperative Play**
 - Against the computer
 - Teams
 - Against the clock
 - Common goal
- **Competitive Play**
 - Free-for-all
 - Alliances
 - AI players
 - Temporary or permanent

Strategic Scales

- **Offense VS. Defense**
 - Does your game play well either way or is it weighted towards one side?
 - Is playing defensively a viable option?
 - If defense is not a viable option, consider removing it.
- **Strategy VS. Luck**
 - Luck and strategy are opposites.
 - Give choices between a high-risk and low-risk.
 - Give choices between using a luck element and not using it at all.
 - There is no strategy in subjecting all players to a single luck element in which there is no decision making.
- **Light VS. Heavy**
- **Many VS. Few**
- **Slow VS. Fast**
- **Power VS. Speed**
- **Power VS. Mobility**
- **Efficiency VS. Volume**
- **Diversity VS. Homogeny** (Generalization VS. Specialization)

Considerations

- **Options with drawbacks and benefits**
 - There need not always be a "right" answer, but always clear consequences.
 - Consider making the keys to victory a hindrance during game play.
- **Feedback Loops**
 - Negative Feedback - Reward losers, punish winners. Slows down the game. Creates game balance.
 - Positive Feedback - Reward winners, punish losers. Speeds up the game.
- **Visibility**
 - Knowledge of the playing field
 - Knowledge of other players and their resources
 - Knowledge about the future play of the game itself.
 - Randomized goals, game phases, or expectations of game play.
- **Emergent Strategies**
 - Is there only one right way to play or are there several viable approaches?
 - Strategies emerge when there are interactions between game components.
 - Do the components of the game only do one thing?
 - How can different parts of the game interact with each other in combinations?
- **Keep or Play?**
 - Consider adding reasons to *not* play resources immediately.
 - Penalty or a reward for holding on to something?
 - Resources may be best played at a specific time

Ways To Win

- **Elimination** - Eliminate, destroy, move, or remove opponents, obstacles, targets, or non-playing characters. Consider a percentage of the whole.
- **Acquisition** - Acquire something or a certain level of something: money, resources, cards, tokens, opponents, or items on map.
- **Points** - "Points" are an abstract representation of value. Points can be awarded for anything. Points can be adjusted if the game is unbalanced.
- **Physical Goal** - Get to a location or several locations.
- **Abstinence** - Win by *not* doing something or by doing something efficiently.
- **Riddance** - Get rid of something.
- **Spacial Dominance** - Possess or controll an amount of physical area on a map.
- **Key Target** - Removing, destroy, create, acquire, or convert a key target or targets. Key targets can be per-game, per-player, or inter-player.
- **Diplomacy** - Win by default (lack of other players), resignation of opponents, declaration of a draw or tie, voting for a winner, periodically voting for a loser.
- **Time** - Speed wins
- **Combinations** - Complete multiple simultaneous victory conditions.
- **Variable** - Complete one of several *different* victory conditions.

Ways To End

- **Elimination** - Remove all players or competitive forces from the game.
- **Acquisition** - A specific number or percentage of items or resources have been collected.
- **Points** - Score a number of points.
- **Physical Goal** - One or more players reach a specific physical goal or *all* players have reached the goal.
- **Riddance** - Get rid of something.
- **Spacial Endings** - All space or a specific portion of space is used up, controlled, or owned by players in general or by a specific player.
- **Key Target** - Capture, destroy, or collect specific target(s).
- **Diplomacy** - Players decide when the game is over: popular vote for a winner, a resignation, or a decision to draw or tie.
- **Combinations ("And" Endings)** - Meet two or more ending conditions.
- **Variable ("Or" Endings)** - Allow any number of multiple ending conditions.
- **Exhaustion** - Exhaust an available resource or all resources combined.
- **Inability to Play** - The game ends when one or all players cannot make a legal play.
- **Time** - A time limit expires.
- **Random** - Randomly determined before the game starts.