The Settlers of Catan Strategy Guide

DISCLAIMER: Use of the strategies described in this guide do not guarantee winning any specific game of The Settlers of Catan. The dice may not obey the law of averages for any given game.

OVERVIEW

The Settlers of Catan is a popular strategy game made primarily of hex tiles, cards, and dice.

All three of these elements introduce randomness into the game, so your main goal is managing that randomness wisely to increase your chances of winning. The strategies suggested in this guide should apply to games played with any number of players. This includes games played with the 5-6 player expansion.

SETUP - SETTLEMENTS

You have no control over the initial setup of the hex tiles, but once they have been laid out, they deserve a few minutes of study. Your task will be to find the best 2 intersections available at the times you are allowed to choose.

[Image of Settlers of Catan game components]
What should you base your selection on? Using the law of averages, your best bet over time will be to choose the intersection with the highest probability of dice rolls - no matter which resources are associated with those hex tiles.

In the picture above, the red spot is probably the best one on the board. The 5 and 6 are good numbers. The 11 isn’t the greatest, but this position relative to other board features compensates for that. This spot is equidistant from both 9s. It’s not very far from the wood port. It’s not too close too the desert. In fact, it’s not likely that you’ll have competition from your opponents in that direction.

The blue spots are the next best. Two of them happen to have the same adjacent numbers - 5, 9, and 10. All are near ports. All but one of them three provide three different resources.

Resources can always be traded, but you obviously must have some to trade in the first place. Taking high-probability intersections is the best way to get those resource cards.

The 6s and 8s are the most often rolled numbers (not counting the 7s, of course). Scan the board looking for intersections adjacent to those numbers. Any intersection containing two or three of them is a prime target for settlement placement.

If you spot intersections of equal value numerically, look over the neighborhood to determine which is the best choice. Are there other players in the vicinity that are likely to cause problems down the road? How close is the intersection to a port? How close is it to the desert? Ports are
good things to be near; the desert, generally, is not.

If this is your second settlement placement, how close is the intersection to your first settlement? Usually, the closer the better for the purpose of connecting your roads.

You also might want to consider what resources you are building near. While you can always hope to trade for resources you need, the fact of the matter is that the other players may be unable or unwilling to trade with you. If you place your initial settlements at intersections that provide you with opportunities to obtain all or most of the five different resources, you will be in good shape. However, do not do this at the expense of the strategies listed above. It’s not wise to be near all five types of resources if they are all low-probability 2s and 12s. Odds are you won’t be getting very much of anything.

SETUP - ROADS

The edge on which you place your initial roads is nearly as important as the placement of the settlement itself.

Depending on where you are in the turn order for the setup phase and where other players have placed their settlements and roads, you may or may not want to (or be able to) setup your initial roads with the goal of connecting them later in the game. There will be times when the board is just too crowded to attempt the connection.

If you have the option of choosing an intersection close to your first settlement-and-road and an intersection with better probabilities for dice rolls, choose the dice rolls. The longest road is worth a couple of points, but in the long run more resources will serve you better for reasons stated above.

If your edge choices for road placement at first seem roughly equal in value, consider these points. In which direction is the next best resource hex for you? In which direction is a good port? By heading in a given direction, are you likely to hinder an opponent? Or is he more likely to frustrate your efforts? Do you want to pick a fight with your neighbor? He may be less likely to trade with you then. On the other hand, what fun is a game without a little friendly confrontation?

Again, avoiding the desert is normally good practice. After all, there’s a reason it’s called the desert and not the oasis.

Wise placement of your settlements and roads won’t automatically guarantee you a win, but foolish placement will almost certainly hand you a loss. Keep these recommendations in mind when placing additional settlements and roads later in the game.

TRADING RESOURCE CARDS

Never make a resource card trade that doesn’t benefit you. Don’t be emotionally coerced into making a trade you really shouldn’t make. Don’t let beggars and whiners sway your logical assessment of the situation.
If there’s an obvious points leader, especially later in the game, don’t trade with him. If you want to take this a step further by encouraging other players not to trade with him either, go for it. It’s all part of the game. The leader won’t be happy with your tactics, but he should see the reason in them. If the tables were turned and you were the leader, wouldn’t he do the same thing? (He should.)

However, don’t let this idea prevent you from trading with anyone. Trading is an integral part of this game. If a player manages to obtain the longest road a few turns into the game, he will be the points leader, but he is only two points ahead of the rest of you and still six points away from winning. There is no need to embargo this person. Perhaps you should charge him a higher price for your resources, but you don’t need to abandon trading with him just yet.

If you have sole control (or nearly sole control) of a resource based on settlement (or city) placement on the board, demand a higher price for that resource when trading it away. Ask for two or even three cards in return for your one precious commodity. But be sure what you’re getting in return is really something you need at the time. Filling needs is better than just increasing volume. Don’t forget the hand limit that kicks in when a 7 is rolled.

Trading resource cards wisely won’t automatically guarantee you a win either, but trading foolishly or refusing to trade at all will almost certainly hand you another loss.

**ROLLING A 7**

When you roll a 7, you get to move the robber and steal a resource card from another player. Deciding where to place the robber depends on the number token you cover, the resource hex it’s on, and which players you’ll affect.

The best spot to set the robber is one which affects the current leader (if known), covers a rare resource, and covers a high probability number such as a 6 or 8.
Weigh the pros and cons of each aspect of robber placement keeping in mind which stage of the game you seem to be in.

At the beginning of the game, don’t spend too much time in making a decision, since the robber is very likely to move many more times during the course of the game. Find a 6 or 8 spot that doesn’t affect you and drop him there.

Later in the game you may need to be more selective about robber placement. Is there a resource that the leader (assuming it’s not you) really seems to need? If so, cover the best spot for gaining that card type. If you’re apparently the leader, steal from your closest rival by dropping the robber on one of his best hex tiles.

Consider this example. If there are currently settlements built on grain in only two places, one that you are built on and one that others are built on, you can make your grain more valuable by dropping the robber on your opponent’s grain space thus preventing others from getting it.

UPGRADING

Sooner or later you will almost surely need to upgrade your settlement to a city. So why not shoot for doing it sooner?

This tactic is especially sensible if you have the resources to do so, as opposed to having resources to build roads, construct new settlements, or get development cards. If your resource cards lead you in one of those other directions, that’s fine, but strive to upgrade a city at the same time.

LARGEST ARMY; LONGEST ROAD

Keeping the upgrade strategy (above) in mind, if your resources and board position lead you towards paving the longest road or marshaling the largest army, go for it. It can be a chore to maintain the lead, but it’s often possible to do so, especially if you gain a two-road-segment or two-soldier lead over your nearest contender.
On the other hand, if, in trying to obtain the longest road, you are preventing yourself from building towards useful intersections or ports, it may be more useful to simply focus on building new settlements and gathering additional resources rather than wasting all your resources to get those two points for the longest road.

If you have a choice between going for the longest road or the largest army, take the path to the largest army because every time you play a soldier card, you get to move the robber. (See above for robber placement strategies.)

**DEVELOPMENT CARDS**

Most of the development cards should normally be played as soon as possible. The one exception can be the Monopoly card.

If you acquire a Monopoly card, you should immediately start card counting in your head over the next several turns to determine what cards your opponents are holding. For that matter, if you can card count throughout the game, you can always be prepared for this scenario. You will also have a better idea of what resources are scarce and, therefore, more valuable. When the time seems ripe for snatching a lot of cards or a few valuable ones, play the Monopoly card.

**SUMMARY**

Your chances of winning The Settlers of Catan will rise if you consistently implement these strategies. Take time during setup to place your settlements and roads well. Take a tip from the realty business: It’s all location, location, location. Make wise trades with your resource cards. Be careful where you drop that robber. Upgrade your settlements to cities. If conditions warrant, build a long road and a large army. Know when to attempt to create a monopoly.

Enjoy your advantage! Discover more gaming fun at [Fun Board Games](https://funboardgames.com).