

Chapter 9 How Can You Get Stronger?

8000 Enjoy Go and Get Stronger!

How Can You Get Stronger in Go? Go is certainly a very attractive game. The author assures you that it can be your life time hobby.

When you take Go as your hobby, you will wish to get stronger and beat your opponents. Beginners often ask skilled players what is needed to be a stronger player. The answer to this question is very difficult. Even the world's strongest professionals are anxious to improve their strength but they do not know how they can do it. Although there is no definite answer to this question, it is true that some people are faster than others to get stronger. There are a certain number of items of advice which are valuable. It would be a good idea to consider them as you enjoy the game of Go.

8010 You should be Interested in Go

Go is a very interesting game. As you learn it and get to know something about it, you will feel that you now know Go better than you knew it some time ago. But as you learn it further, the more you know about it, the more you will feel that you realize how much you do not know about it. A famous professional player, late Mr. Hideyuki Fujisawa, once said that he perhaps knows 3 or 4 out of 100 the God of Go should know. All professionals say that they do not know about Go well enough. The author's view is that Go is interesting as we know so little about it. The first important factor of your key to succeed in improving your Go is that you are interested in it.

8020 Play Many Games

Even if you correctly realize that it is important to be interested in Go, it is not wise to force you to believe that you are interested in Go, if you are really not. In order to reach a stage at which you are really interested in Go, you had better play as many actual games as possible. In early stages, it is more efficient to play games than to read books.

8030 Find a Good Friend to Play Games with

It is a good idea to find a friend whose strength is not too far from you. Play many games. The experience will make you be really interested in Go.

8040 Play with a Stronger Player

It is a good idea to play games with a stronger player. It is ideal if you can find a player with whom it is quite well balanced with 3 stone handicap for example. After a game, it is a wonderful chance to ask him where you made poor moves. Do not be

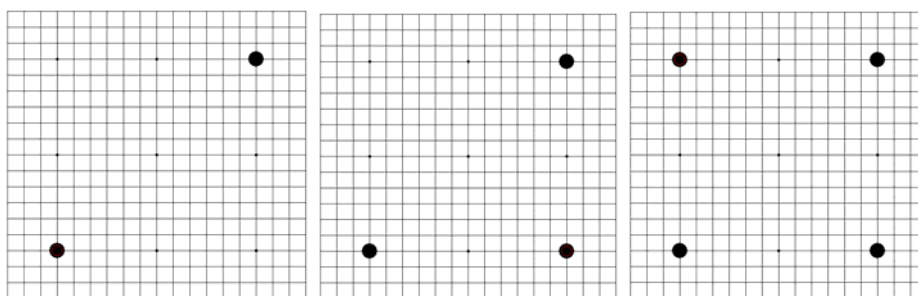
afraid to ask such a player to play a game with you. Stronger players are always happy to play with a little weaker player.

8050 Play with a Very Strong Player

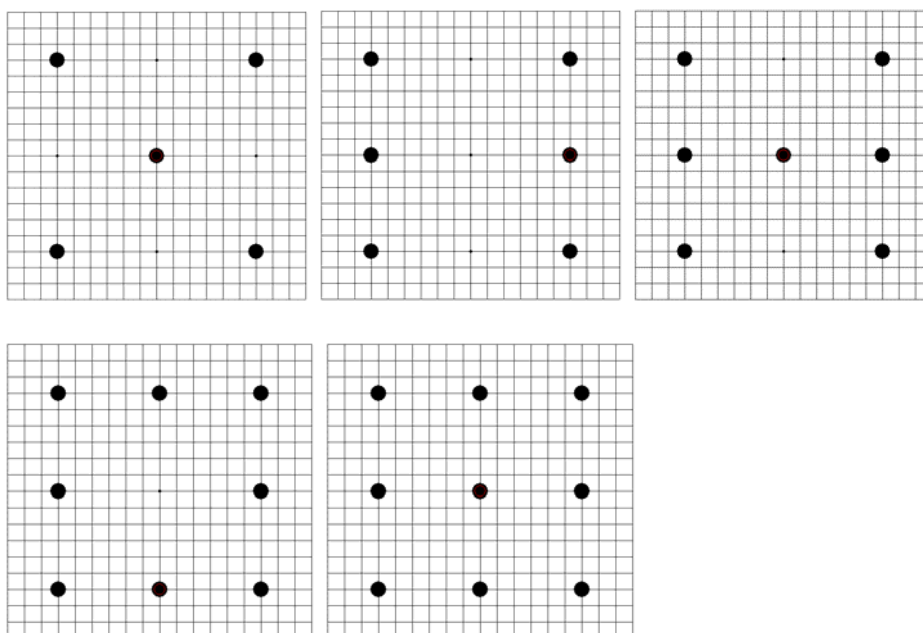
It is also very good to have chance to play a game with a very strong player such as a top class amateur or even a professional Go player. In such cases, the game will be more or less like a lesson game. You should ask many questions to the strong player. Such a strong player can remember the process of a game well. It is a good idea to review a game from the beginning to the end.

8060 Use Well-Balanced Handicaps

To play a game with a strong player, a game with a proper handicap is quite common. Go is a game in which handicap system can be very flexible. The most common method to set up a handicap is to allow the weaker player to place a certain number of stones on the board before they start a game. From two stone to nine stone handicaps, the following chart shows you how you set up handicap stones.

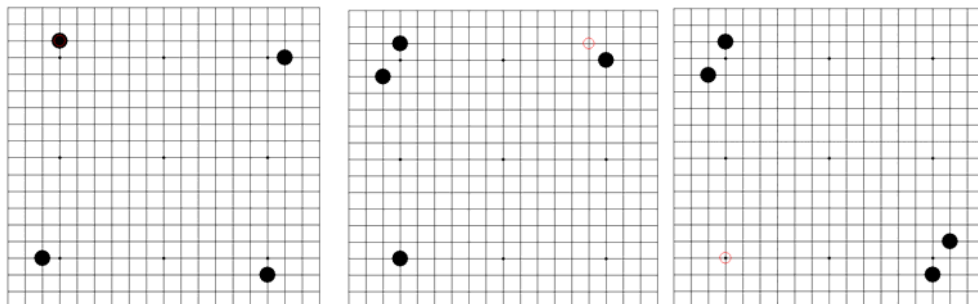


Seen from the black side



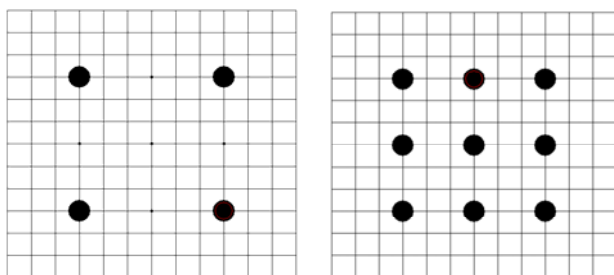
Recently, it is often proposed to place a certain number stones freely at any location of the board for handicap games. The author thinks it is a wonderful idea.

Here are some interesting four handicap stone arrangements.



When a free handicap stone method is agreed on, the black player is also free to choose the standard pattern indicated in the previous charts.

If you are a true beginner and even a nine stone handicap game is difficult, instead of placing more stones than nine, the author suggests that it is a good idea to start training games with 13 by 13 board. Here are examples of handicaps in case of 13 by 13 board.



You will be able to set up 2 to 3 or 5 to 8 stones copying the layout of the 19by 19 board handicaps.

Besides handicap stones, there is another convenient way to give handicaps to the weaker player. That is cash handicap method! In this method, the stronger player simply gives certain fixed handicap points to the weaker player.

Today, the common equal games are played with a handicap points given to the white player when the black player makes the first move (1). If you are to play one game on a 19 by 19 board, it has been experienced that the black (the first move player) has advantages. This handicap was first introduced in Japan with 4.5 points handicap. It was revised to 5.5 points once and today it is set at 6.5 points both in Japan and in China.

In playing games with a player who is weaker or stronger than you, it is desirable to set up a well-balanced handicap considered to be objectively fair. It is not wise to try to reduce the handicap stones which is well-balanced. Unbalanced handicap will spoil the interesting and enjoyable part a Go game.

8070 Read Books, Magazines, or Newspapers

Is it beneficial to read books, magazines or newspapers? If you have time, it is always good to read something about Go.

8080 Try Problems on Life and Death

There are a number of Drill Books available. Many teachers say that they recommend beginners to try challenging on Life and Death problems than to read books on Joseki, or established patterns of games, which is of less importance. As for Joseki, they say it is worth learning how they go, but it is not necessary to try hard to remember such patterns.

In studying drill books with Life and Death problems, some teachers say “Don’t look at the answer page too quickly. Think until you get a certain conclusion.” But other teachers say “It is all right for beginners to look at the answer page after thinking for a while. Doing it repeatedly, you will learn basic patterns quickly.”

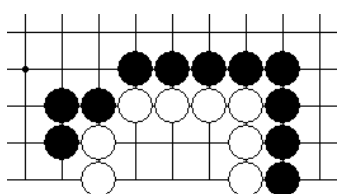


Fig. 1

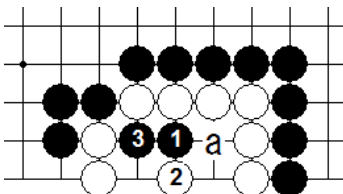
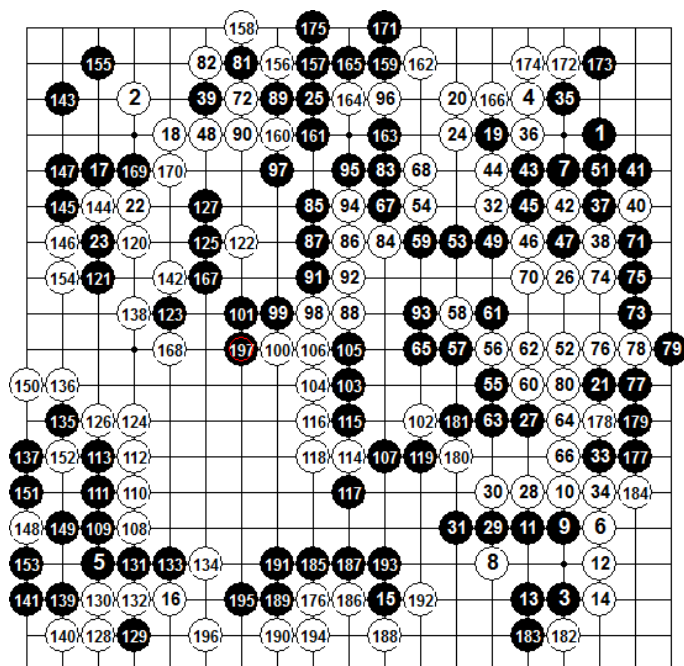


Fig. 2

According to this view, you had better get a book with a number of problems which are not too difficult. If you look at Fig 1 for example, you may guess the answer after a while but you may reach a wrong answer. That is no problem. Here you can see the answer page showing Fig. 2 after a while.

8090 Reproduce Games on the Board

Many teachers recommend people to reproduce a professional’s games on the board. There are books which contain game records. Most professionals make it their habit to reproduce old games. Today, game records are available as computer data as well. Go is a game which is easy to make a full record of it.



50=42, 69=47

Here is an example of a game record showing you a game played between Shusaku (as black) and Gen-an (white) on July 29, 1846. The record contains a hundred percent perfect information of the game played more than 150 years ago. The note of the lower right corner indicates moves which were made at a location a stone had once existed during the game. This form of a record is simple and sufficient as a record of a game. In a board game like chess or checker, the pieces are moved from a place to another. But in case of Go a piece (a stone) is never moved from one place to another. However, stones may leave the board by capture and one of the players may place a stone there again. In this case, more than one stone may be placed at one particular place. Thus a note like "50=42" is convenient showing us that the move (50) was made at the same place as (42) had been made. This record is good enough to allow us to reproduce the game and appreciate it today, more than 150 years after it was actually played. There are a number of books recording games played by old time famous players. This method of study is recommendable to middle class players. But it is just as good for beginners to do it.

8100 Play Games with Weaker Players

If you are a beginner, it may be difficult to find a player weaker than you but the time will come soon where other beginners are joining you. When you have chance to play games with a weaker player, do not try to avoid such games. A game with a weaker player is surprisingly a good experience for a stronger player. Very strong players will also enjoy games with a beginner and learn something from such a game. Beginners tend to make moves which are quite unexpected and usually such moves are poor moves. But for the stronger player, it is a good chance to study the outcome of that unexpected move.

8110 Play with a Computer Software

Today, computer software is very strong. It is a good idea to buy a software and install it in your personal computer. A game with a computer software will not give any problem to other people. You can enjoy games when you have time to spare.

8120 Think a Little for Each Move

When you play a game, it is not good to make moves without thinking like an exercise of your finger. At a beginner's stage, it is not good to think too long, since you have no capacity to think deeply. But think at least a moment. If you need to think further you can do so for a minute.

8130 Losing is as Meaningful as Winning

Go is a game with which you will win or lose. When you win, you are happy. There is no exception to this. When you lose, it is natural for you to feel sad realizing you

were poor. But the important thing is not to think of quitting Go when you lose. When you lose, try another game. Remember that you have more to learn from a game which you have lost. In a winning game, there is less to learn from it. When you lose, the opponent wins. You can interpret that you have succeeded in treating him or entertaining him as your guest.

8140 Be Flexible in Thinking

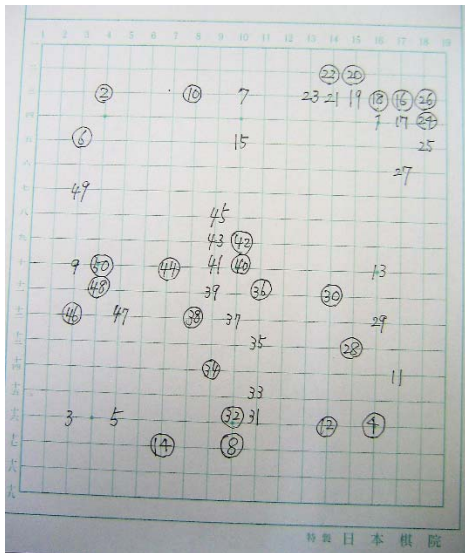
This factor is not often overlooked but the author believes that it is very important to be flexible in learning something about Go. Fixed preoccupation is a negative factor for you to be stronger. The children get strong faster than grown-ups maybe because of this factor.

8150 Record Keeping

In games of Go, a game record is easy to make. During an actual game, there is no chance to keep a record. But when a game is over, you try to remember what you and your opponent did. Try to keep a record of the first few moves if you can. The recording sheets are available from shops. At the beginning, the only move you remember is the first move (1) only. That is fine. Next time you will be able to record your first move (1) and your opponent's move of (2) and perhaps your second move (3). If that is all, that is fine.

If you try keeping records this way, you will begin to try to remember the moves actually played. Then, quite soon, you will be able to keep a record up to (10). In this process, what is beneficial is for you to think and decide what move you are making and with what intention? This process of thinking will make you strong and at the same time the number of moves you can reproduce from the beginning will increase. I can assure you that when you are rated 1 Dan, the first step to measure your advancement, you will be able to record 50 moves. It may mean that 1 Dan player can remember 50 moves, but there is another interpretation, that is, as you think about each of your moves deeply to be able to remember them that process is bringing you up to a level of strength of 1 Dan. Here is a sample of a game record form (1) to (50). Professionals who record games has a tradition to write numbers only in black pen for black stones and in red pen for white stones. However, the author considers it may be better to use only black pen and write numbers for the white moves and circle them as shown in the attached sample.

The reason is that you do not have to change pens for each move.



8160 International Games

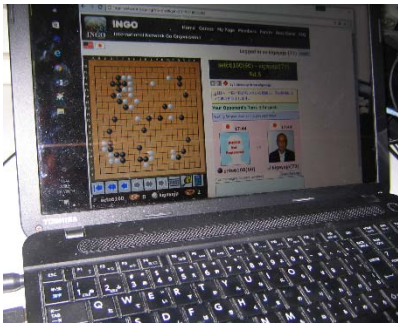
Go became a game enjoyed by people of all around the world today. If you can use your personal computer, it is possible to play games with players in any country of the world.

On internet, there are two types of games that you will be able to enjoy. Various arrangements are available free of charge today.

One type is a real time Go. On a site of this type, you try and find a player who is happy to enjoy a game on real time basis sitting in front of the computer for one or two hours. A great advantage of this system is that you are able to play a game with anybody of any region as if you were facing each other with a board between you two. International games will bring you a lot of fun. You can chat on the site in English or in any languages with which you can communicate with each other.

Another advantage of this system is that you can play games at home. If you are not free to go out from home, this is a very convenient method to enjoy games. You can enjoy it sitting at a desk or even in bed, if you wish.

The second system is an internet version of an old mail Go. In old days, people of one country were able to play a game with other players of another country using post cards. Each move used to be notified using a post card. One game may take months or even a year, but many people used to enjoy such games. Today, it is convenient to do the same thing using internet communication. Perhaps it is sufficient to make one move on one game each day. Then, you are free to make more than one move if your opponent is making moves more often than one move a day. On the contrary, if you are busy or going out traveling a few days leaving home, you are also free not to make a move for a few days. When you open your computer and reach the site, you simply respond to games in which it is your turn to make a move.



The author recommends you to register your name in one of such computer go systems and set us about 10 games simultaneously and start enjoying games. Here is a picture showing an internet Go site, named INGO which is available without any charge. You will be making many Go friends on an international scale and will realize that Go is an international game.

8170 Which would You Choose, Japanese Rules or Chinese Rules ?

When you are to play a game on an international basis, two players need to agree on which common rules you are going to adopt. As it was discussed, there are two popular rules, Japanese rules and Chinese rules. Although the rules define different scoring methods, the two rules are not too different. The author would modestly say that they are the basically the same games. In a game, it is assured that the best move at a phase would be the same for 99.99%. In principle, the major difference of the two rules is the black player's extra one point, if the game ends with the black player's last move in Chinese rules. In Japanese rules who gets the last move does not count.

Today, this difference may be adjusted by the definition of a handicap points given to the white player. (With an assumption that the first move was made by the black player and the second move by the white player and so on.)

Here, we wish to give you examples of patterns where a different scoring system becomes meaningful.

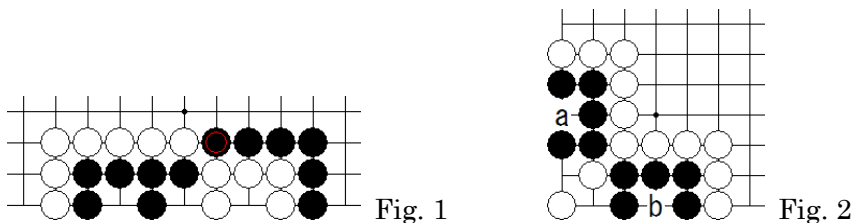


Fig. 1 is a Moratorium pattern we have discussed. In this pattern, there will be no difference in counting scores in the two systems, Japanese or Chinese. Now look at the pattern of Fig. 2. This pattern would be very rare, but if this occurs in actual games, it will be also Moratorium. However, in the Japanese rules, “a” and “b” are not counted as points because it is a portion of Moratorium structure. In Chinese Rules, “a” and “b” are counted as one point each for the black. This pattern would make a difference of two points between the two rules.

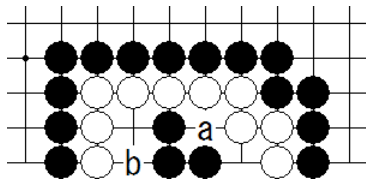


Fig. 3

This is also a pattern which is very rare, but if it occurs in actual game on the board, it brings us difference of scoring. If you check it carefully, you will be able to confirm that this is also a pattern of Moratorium. If you reach the end of the game, each player finds that there is no valid move left on the board. However, you will see that the white player cannot make a move inside this moratorium pattern, but the black can add stones at “a” an “b”. In the Japanese rules, “a” and “b” are not adding any score to the black. But in Chinese rules, the moves “a” and “b” will add points to the black. In this case, only black has two moves to get two points added to the final result.

The difference of score which may occur as shown above is not very important for you to remember but it is worth knowing that there may be such differences.

Finally we will show you a pattern where the best move on the board may vary depending on whether you are using Japanese rules or Chinese rules.

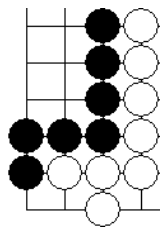


Fig. 4

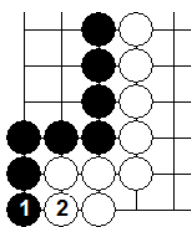


Fig. 5

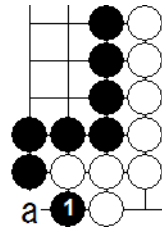


Fig. 6

Let us assume that Fig. 4 is a pattern left on the board and there are no other place where each player can find a move of any value. If you are playing with the Japanese rules, the black will choose (1) and the white will respond by (2) of Fig. 5. The moves (1) and (2) are not adding any points to the black’s score or to the white’s score. Now recall that in Chinese rules, the move of (1) adds one point to the black and (2) adds one point to the white.

Then what will happen if (1) chooses to play (1) of Fig.6. The white will respond at “a” to capture the black’s stone (1). The result of Fig. 6 is a start of a Ko fight, although it is a very small one point fighting Ko. Let us confirm the result of this Ko fight accurately.

Depending on which side has more valid Ko Threats, either black or white will win the Ko fight and connect his own stones. The result when the white wins will be Fig. 7. The result when the black wins will be Fig. 8.

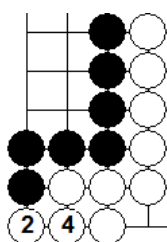


Fig. 7

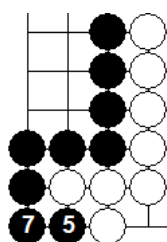


Fig. 8

In Fig. 7, the white captured one stone but the black captured none. Thus in the Japanese rules, this result is one point more favorable to the white than Fig. 2. Now at Fig. 8, the white and the black both captured one stone each. Thus in the Japanese rules, the result is the same as Fig. 2.

$$\text{Fig. 8} = \text{Fig. 5} > \text{Fig. 7}$$

This calculation means that the black's move of (1) in Fig. 6 has no possibility to realize gains to the black while there is a possibility to lose one point for the black. Therefore the conclusion is that it is useless to choose the move (1) of Fig. 6 in Japanese rules. In short, it is clear that there is no better result than Fig. 5 in the Japanese Rules.

But in Chinese rules the story is different. In Chinese rules the number of captured stones do not count in scoring. Instead, the number of existing stones on the board will count. If you get the result of Fig. 7, you will realize that it is one point more favorable to the white compared with the result of Fig. 5. But if you get the result of Fig. 8, you will see that it is one point more favorable to the result of Fig. 5 for the black. In short, the result of three variations will be this formula for the black in Chinese rules.

$$\text{Fig. 8} > \text{Fig. 5} > \text{Fig. 7}$$

This calculation proves that if you are able to expect the result of Fig. 8, you, as the black player, had better choose Fig. 8 instead of Fig. 5. If you are unable to win the Ko fight, it is not wise to try the move (1) of Fig. 6. In that case, the black should choose Fig. 5.

As explained so far, the Japanese and Chinese rules are not very different if we can ignore trivial differences. There is little chance to meet a situation where the difference of rules becomes a serious matter. However, the author thinks that it would be worthwhile to remember that there can be slight differences in scoring and in choosing the best move on the board.

Now let us start enjoying Go together!