

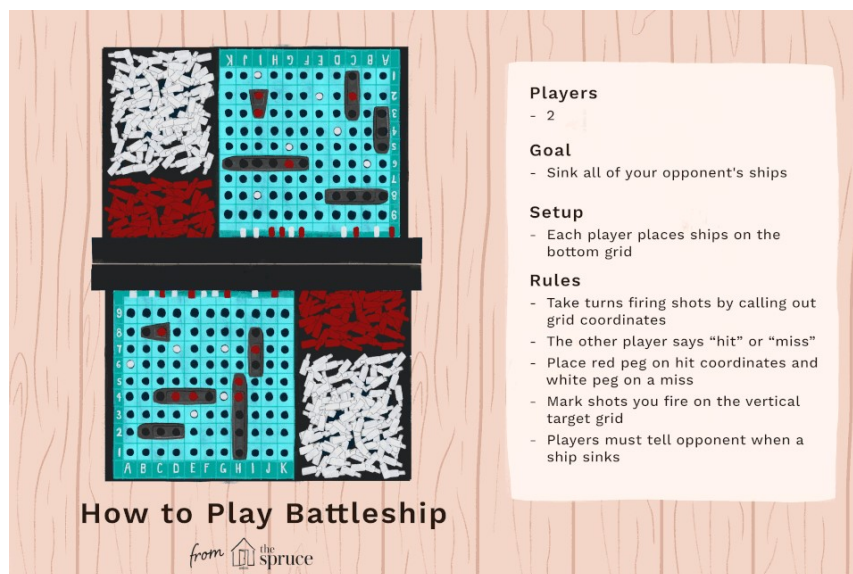
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Popular Board Games Board Games

How to Play the Battleship Board Game

By Seth Brown  Updated 10/28/19



 Nusha Ashjaee / The Spruce

Battleship is a war-themed **board game** for **two players** in which the opponents try to guess the location of their opponent's warships and sink them. A paper and pencil version of the game dates back to World War I, but most people are familiar with the game through the plastic board game that was first marketed by the **Milton Bradley Company** in 1967. Since then, the game has spawned various video games and smartphone app variations. Today, the board game version is produced by **Hasbro**, the company that acquired Milton Bradley in 1984.

Each player hides ships on a plastic grid containing vertical and horizontal space coordinates. Players take turns calling out row and column coordinates on the other player's grid in an attempt to identify a square that contains a ship.



while the upper grid is used to record the shots fired toward the opponent and to document whether those shots were hits or misses.

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Setting up the Game

Each player receives a game board and **five ships of varying lengths**. Each ship has holes where the "hit" pegs are inserted and a supply of hit and miss markers (white and red pegs). The five ships are:

- Carrier, which has **five holes**
- Battleship, which has **four holes**
- Cruiser, which has **three holes**
- Submarine, which has **three holes**
- Destroyer, which has **two holes**

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The **two players should be positioned so they face each other across a game table**. Their **target grids back up to one another vertically** so that neither player can see his opponent's ocean grid and ship locations.

Before the game starts, each opponent secretly positions his own five ships on the ocean grid (lower part of the board) by positioning their ships and anchoring them into the holes on the grid. Each ship must be placed **horizontally or vertically—not diagonally—across grid spaces**, and the ships **can't hang off the grid**. Ships **can touch each other**, but **they can't occupy the same grid space**. You **cannot change the position of the ships after the game begins**.

Basic Gameplay

Players take turns firing shots (by calling out a grid coordinate) to attempt to hit the opponent's enemy ships.

On your turn, call out a letter and a number that identifies a row and column on your target grid. Your opponent checks that coordinate on their ocean grid and verbally responds "miss" if there is no ship there, or "hit" if you have correctly guessed a space that is occupied by a ship.

Mark each of your shots or attempts to fire on the enemy using your target grid (upper part of the board) by using white pegs to document your misses and red pegs to register your hits. As the game proceeds, the red pegs will gradually identify the size and location of your opponent's ships.

When it is your opponent's turn to fire shots at you, each time one of your ships receives a hit, put a red peg into the hole on the ship corresponding to the grid space. When one of your ships has every slot filled with **red pegs**, you must announce to your opponent that he has sunk your ship. In classic



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The first player to sink all five of his opponent's ships [wins the game](#).

Advanced Gameplay

Players who are experienced at playing Battleship sometimes use a variation of the game, known as the [Salvo variation](#). The basic rules remain the same with the following exceptions:

- On the first round of the game, you call out five shots (guesses) and mark each shot with a white peg in your target grid.
- After you have called out all five shots (a salvo), your opponent announces which ones were hits and which ships they hit.
- For hits, change the white pegs on your target grid to red pegs. Meanwhile, your opponent will place red pegs in the holes of any enemy ships that you hit.
- Alternate back and forth in this manner until one of your ships is sunk. At that point, you lose one shot from your salvo. If one of your ships sinks, for example, your salvo is now reduced to four shots; when two ships sink, the salvo is three shots, and so on.
- Continue gameplay until one player sinks all the opposing ships and wins the game.

Pencil and Paper Version

It is also possible to play a game of Battleship in the classic fashion, by drawing ocean grids on paper and labeling horizontal and vertical rows to create coordinates. [It is a do-it-yourself board](#) if you will. For example, for a basic 100-square ocean, label the horizontal rows 1 through 10, and the vertical rows A through J.

As with the plastic board game, each player will need two ocean grids. One to mark the hiding position of your five ships and any hits the opponent makes on those ships. And, a second grid to keep track of the hits and misses you make when you fire shots at the opponent. When a shot hits, mark the corresponding square with an X; document the misses with a 0.

For a more difficult game, you could make a larger grid with more squares, using letters A through Z to label the vertical coordinates and the numbers 1 through 26 for the horizontal rows. The larger the ocean grid, the more difficult the game becomes.