Tetris

June is a window of opportunity to complete my remaining teenage bucket list items on my within my reach, because I know I would most likely have no such periods of spare time in the upcoming 5 years. Right now, I am just sitting in front of my computer and taking a short break from life as an avid gamer (with another few post-DSE tasks still on my plate). I gained initial exposure to Tetris when I was 3 or 4, played passionately when I was in F1/2, and accidentally rediscovered when a friend of mine featured the game on their ig stories.

1 Introduction - A game of placing structures of 4 grids

You may ask, why do I even write a lengthy account on a 1984 old-school nerdy game full of blocky, unlively structures in 2021? Because that I am a primitive nerd living in the 'ancient' times of the 20th century gaming world? Partially true (a painful self-jab here, haha), but I would say the game itself has brought me a lot of inspiration - both within the game and in real life.

In Tetris, players have to rotate and place tetrominoes (dominos with 4 squares) sequentially with meticulous planning to achieve objectives, ranging from scoring the most points in 2 minutes (blitz), clearing lines as quick as possible (40 lines), to sending as most attack output as possible (PVP). The game is over when you top out and can not place blocks anymore. Ways of doing so including achieving perfect clear (PCs), doing back-to-back Tetrises/ T-spins, or 3-/4- widing to achieve as most combo chain as possible (see my gameplay footage on the next slide as an comboing example).

After more than 10 years of playing, I still consider myself an amateur player with low-mid skill levels, I have gained basic insights to the potential skills applicable in the game. The following few paragraphs after the footage are the linkages I found between tetris and real life:

2 Plan ahead

In Tetris, the 7 tetriminos (I, O, T, L, J, S, Z) are typically arranged in randomly ordered batches (bag-style randomizer), and you are given limited flexibility to change the order of one block at once (hold), and could foresee the five subsequent blocks to be placed.

To ensure smooth block placements and desirable structures be successfully built, one has to pay attention to the blocks. In tetris, there are 'perfect clear openers', i.e. clearing the field with the first 5/10 blocks you receive that gives players a good standing at start - achievable only if one plans well on placing the initial blocks.

Tetriminos are just alike to the real-life activities we experience:

- **O, S, Z blocks are less tolerant** (e.g. personally/ socially obligatory events such as early education), and would demand holes of specific shapes (pre-requisites in life),
- **Filler blocks like L and J are more versatile** due to their flat surfaces, and usually used to enable T-spins and fill up 2-block holes (analogy to minor disagreements with others)
- **I and T blocks are enablers**, usually associated with score/attack output (the personal strengths we have in life).

Skilled players know all their blocks well and pay close attention to their upcoming sequences of blocks, as a skilled time manager would respect their upcoming events and assign sensible proportions of time correspondingly. Players respect their blocks' sequences and plan ahead, just like we make envisions and goal-achieving plans of our future with those events that fill up our life. How we place our blocks determines the fate of our game - just like how we assign events into our lives would determine who we would ultimately be.

There is always somewhere we could utilize our strengths well and bring us desired outcomes (DSE: 逍遙遊 - 不龜手之藥), instead of wasting our potentials over trivial matters - just like how skilled players (unfortunately I'm not one of them) would rarely use I and T blocks as fillers, hindering them to gain extra advantages in game.

3 Maintain a solid standing

One issue that tetris players are aware of, but could not solve well, is the formation of holes. Horizontal lines are cleared once all the 10 grids in the row are filled, and holes prevent this from happening (turning the line as 'garbage'). This is potentially fatal as garbage hinders you from clearing lines beneath (and in PVP, garbage lines from others' attacks appears below) - you get topped out and lose.

We all have our personal problems - some of them are spontaneous (others' attacks, accidents, death of beloved), and some are mostly self-created and chronic (bad habits as in both game and real life, ineffective handling of relationships etc.). If you don't tackle them timely ('filling the holes'), they are most likely to develop into costly crises - capable of severely impairing your personal standings in life.

Real life examples? Harvey Weinstein (the Hollywood producer who got exposed in 2017 for sexual harrassment cases decades ago) and China's anti-corruption crackdowns are there to remind you to have your problems tackled or prevented when you still can.

It therefore comes to my mind that we should grant ourselves solid enough standings in life by preventing unnecessary 'holes' - maybe it means to act righteously and humbly to me.

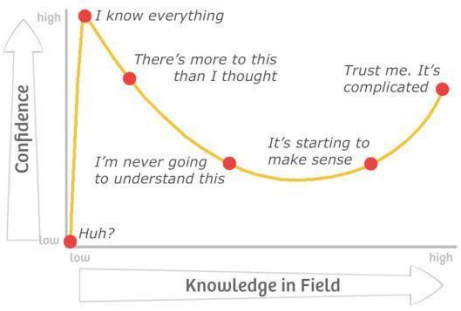
4 No unsolvable problems, just incapable minds

We all hate to make mistakes, but they are manifested as the ***art of Tetris - mistakes can be, paradoxially, transformed to favourable situations***. In Tetris, misplacements can be converted to T-spin set-ups with a professional player's ample game time experience and out-of-the-box thinking.; in real life, mistakes are long term learning opportunities and enablers that help us to question our thinking well - in order to make our convictions clear.

The fact that we are often unable to solve and transform problems is NOT because they are inherently unsolvable - it's just that our minds are inherently not bright enough to come up with a proper solution. Maybe it is that our minds are obstructed without much hands-on experience, maybe it is that our ways of dealing with matters in life would rarely result in such issues, maybe it is that we overly focused on the risks instead of the opportunities. BUT! We can bypass those.

How? One way is to **embrace external inspiration and be open-minded** (another Chinese DSE linkage: 勸學 - making use of boats to cross waters, making use of horse). Maybe it is to talk deep with peers that you value a lot, maybe it is to learn the technicals from online platforms, maybe it is to gain exposure to relevant work experience and problem solving cases. Questioning ourselves from entirely different perspectives does help.

Another good attitude is to **stay humble to learn**. Probably many of us have heard of the Dunning-Kruger curve:



Maybe you are already proficient in handling tetriminos and clearing lines without difficulty, maybe you feel you are academically proficient with above-4 GPA and some DSE stars, maybe you are in advanced positions compared to your peers in many fields. But it is crucially important to realize that alternative, often better, skillsets do exist out there - because as time goes and your peers' levels rise, you would get pushed to the left end of the curve without self-reflection and improvement. We need to consistently improve.

New Tetris block-placing strategies? Learn it. New trading theories? Learn it. Others' seemingly imcomprehensible rationales? Learn to understand them. Peers knowing expertises beyond your scope of knowledge? Learn to learn from them. And in this way, we will enable ourselves to be more capable of solving problems.

I might still be an amateur in both the Tetris game and my entire life, but I know I am improving with external references, all of the valuable minds surrounding me and the alternative points of view or personal criticism that I would humbly accept.

P.S. For tetris enthusiasts, I highly recommend the YouTube channels of *Garbo* and *Doremy* for more footage/ effective learning of the moves.)