

# Nine Men's Morris

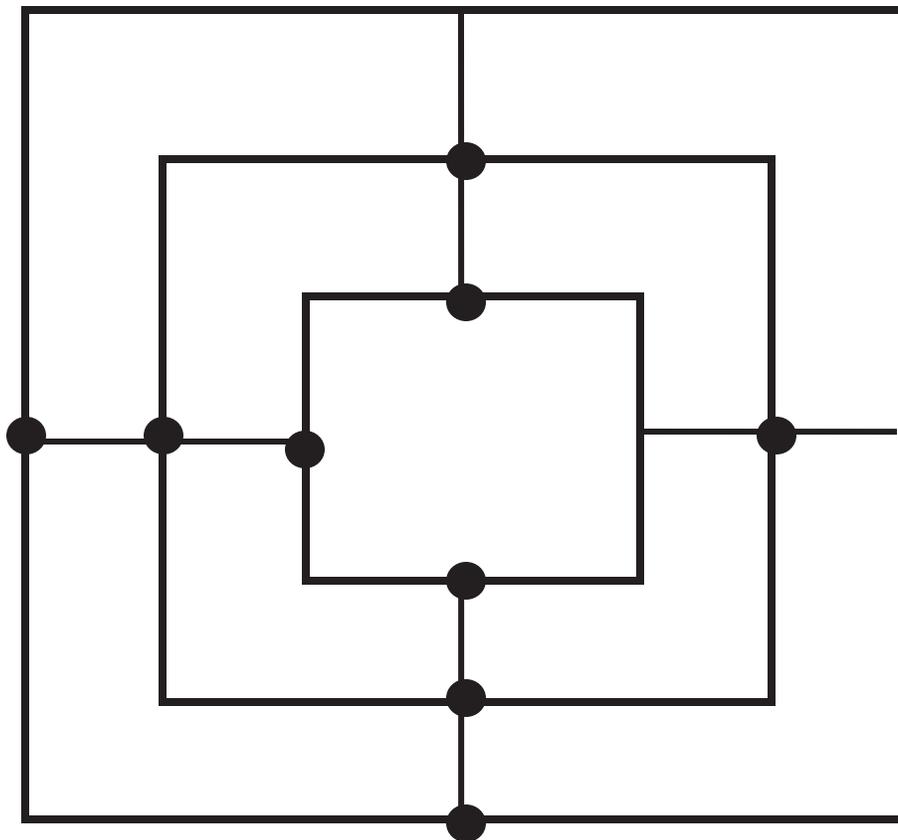
---

## What you need:

- ∞ Sidewalk chalk (or a stick to draw in the dirt)
- ∞ 9 dark pebbles and 9 light pebbles, called “men”

## Historical Stuff:

Nine Men's Morris is a game that dates back to the Roman Empire; just like the game hopscotch, Roman soldiers likely brought this game to Britain during the expansion of the empire, and it spread from there. Here in Upper Canada, it was traditionally played by children in the home, or men would play it at a local tavern. The game represents the building and development of mills. Mills were very important to settlers and early commerce. Mills harnessed water or wind power to do work such as sawing lumber into boards or grinding grain into flour. The board looks like this:



## How to Play:

Nine Men's Morris is the original three-in-a-row game, but with much more strategy than tic-tac-toe. The object is to try to form "mills" by making a line of three of your men, horizontally or vertically. When a mill is formed, the player who made the row of three is allowed to remove one of their opponent's men from the game. You win by reducing your opponent's men to just two.

### Phase 1: Placing Men on Empty Points

1. Draw your board and gather your pebbles.
2. Decide who goes first (you can toss a coin and call heads or tails, or you can let the youngest player start).
3. Take turns placing men on the points on the board – one play per turn.
4. Watch your opponent carefully, and try to prevent her from making a row of three!
5. If a player is able to place three of his men in a straight line, vertically or horizontally, he has formed a "mill" and may remove one of his opponent's pieces from the board and the game. You can choose any man to remove from the game, except a man that is part of a mill.
6. The act of removing your opponent's man is sometimes called "pounding" the opponent.
7. Once all men have been placed on the board, the game moves to the next phase.

### Phase 2: Moving Pieces

1. Now on your turn, you slide a man on the board to a nearby point. But, you may not "jump" another piece, or skip points on the board!
2. Players continue to try and form mills by sliding a man each turn, and removing your opponent's men the same way you did in the first phase of the game.
3. A player may "break" a mill by moving one of his own pieces from an existing mill.
4. If your opponent does not move his man in to keep the mill broken on his turn, you can actually move your man back and form the same mill on your next turn, and still take one of his men!
5. When one player has been reduced to three men, phase three of the game begins.

### Phase 3: Moving Pieces

1. We like to play this game by the rules in a 19<sup>th</sup> century games manual, which means we make it easier for the player who is down to three men.
2. Therefore, when a player is reduced to just three pieces, the way men are moved changes: The player with only three men can make the men "fly", "hop", or "jump" from any point to any other vacant point on the board. No more sliding to the next point! This helps balance out the end of the game, though true Nine Men's Morris players of the 19<sup>th</sup> century called this version "rustic"!

**Variations to Try:**

Try playing without the last phase rule changes, and play as strategically as you can to keep the game going without hopping or jumping. Or check out strategy ideas on YouTube. There are so many tips out there on this old game that is still quite popular.

While you're just learning, we highly recommend a four minute, kid-approved YouTube how-to video on this game. You can find it on our PMV YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/PickeringMuse/playlists> (look under our “Favourites”!)