

BACKGAMMON – RULES

A resource for travellers from www.deanstarnes.com and *Roam: the Art of Travel*

To download this PDF either right click (Windows) or control click (Mac) on this page and choose download from the menu. Otherwise you can print it directly from your browser.

©Dean Starnes 2007

Backgammon.

Backgammon is fairly simple although it can seem confusing at first. These are the basic rules to backgammon. Unlike chess, there is a certain amount of luck involved with the roll of the dice and it won't take you long to realise that certain dice combinations should be played in certain ways.

The objective:

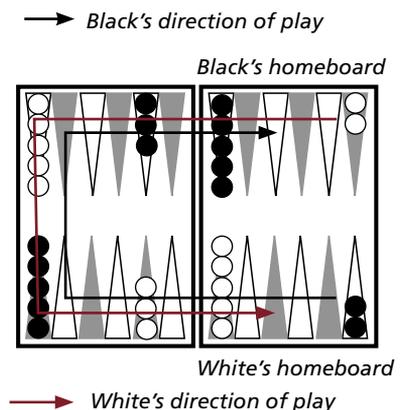
To win by moving all of your checkers to your 'home board' and then 'bear them all off.'

How to move your checkers

Set up

Set up the board like this and figure out which is your 'homeboard' so you'll know where it is that you have to move your checkers to before you can begin to 'bear them off'.

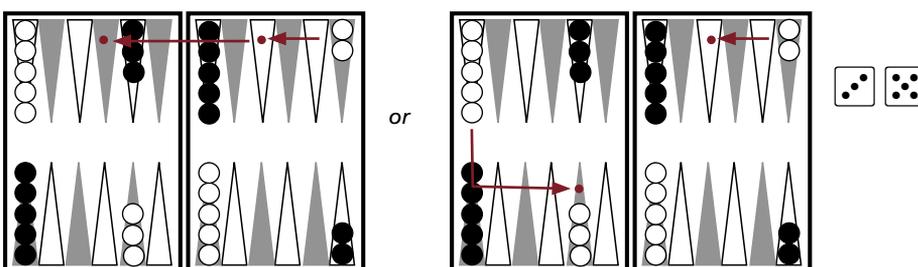
Both players roll one dice each and the higher roll indicates who is to go first. The player throwing the higher number now moves his checkers according to the numbers showing on both dice. After the first roll, the players throw two dice and take alternate turns.



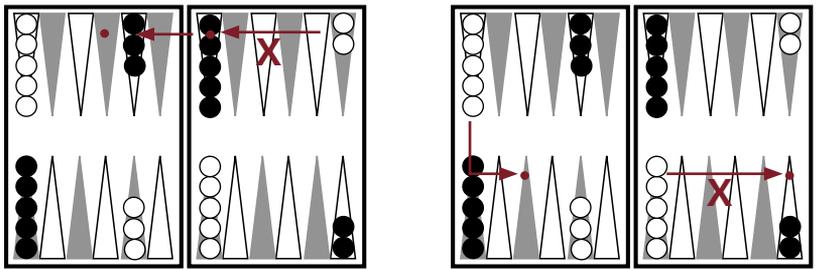
Throwing the dice and moving

The roll of the dice indicates how many points, or pips, the player is to move his checkers. The checkers are always moved forward in the direction indicated in the diagram above. The following rules apply:

1. A checker may be moved only to an open point, one that is not occupied by two or more opposing checkers.
2. The numbers on the two dice constitute separate moves. For example, if a player rolls 5 and 3, he may move one checker five spaces to an open point and another checker three spaces to an open point, or he may move the one checker a total of eight spaces to an open point, but only if the intermediate point (either three or five spaces from the starting point) is also open.



These would be illegal moves because white is not moving onto an open point.



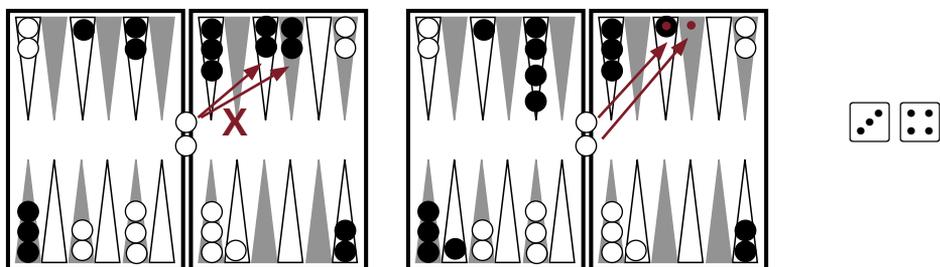
4. If you are lucky you might roll doubles. This is when both dice are the same and means you can move double the amount. For example, if you were to roll 6 and 6 you would be able to move 6 four times and you may move any combination of checkers you feel is best. You lucky sod.

5. A player must use both numbers of a roll if this is legally possible (or all four numbers of a double). When only one number can be played, the player must play that number. Or if either number can be played but not both, the player must play the larger one. When neither number can be used, the player loses his turn. In the case of doubles, when all four numbers cannot be played, the player must play as many numbers as he can.

Hitting and entering

A point occupied by a single checker is called a blot and if an opposing checker lands on it then this checker is removed from the board and placed on the bar. Therefore it's best to try and keep your checkers in groups of two or more so that they cannot be attacked.

If a player has one or more checkers on the bar, they cannot resume playing until they have succeeded in returning their pieces to the homeboard of their opponent. They do this by rolling a number that corresponds to an open point on the opposing home board. If white had two checkers on the bar and rolled a 3 and 4 in the first example they could not move and would lose a turn and in the second example they could return both checkers to play and simultaneously remove an opponents checker to the bar. Yay!

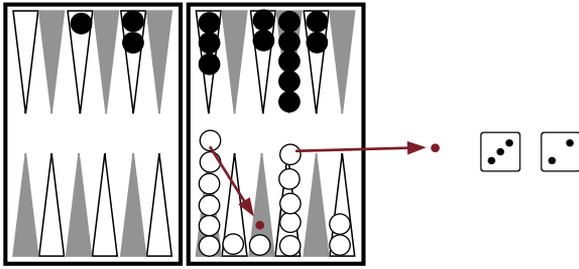


Bearing off

Once a player has moved all their pieces to their home board, they can start bearing off. A player bears off a checker by rolling a number that corresponds to the point on which the checker resides, and then removing that checker from the board. Thus, rolling a 4 permits the player to remove a checker from the fourth point.

If there is no checker on the point indicated by the roll, the player must move instead by moving a checker on a higher point (in the case of rolling a 4, he could move a checker on the fifth or sixth point instead). If there are no checkers on higher-numbered points, the player is permitted (and required) to remove a checker from the highest point on which one of his checkers resides. A player is under no obligation to bear off if he can make an otherwise legal move.

A player must have all of his active checkers in his home board in order to bear off. If a checker is hit during the bear-off process, the player must bring that checker back to his home board before continuing to bear off. The first player to bear off all fifteen checkers wins the game.



In the above example white can begin to bear off but black cannot. If white was to roll a 3 and a 2 they could bear off a counter on the third point but because the second point is empty they would have to move a counter on either the 3rd, 4th, 5th or 6th points.