

How to Play Sudoku

The one rule, a four-step method, and a starter puzzle to try.

THE ONE RULE

Every row, every column and every 3×3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9 exactly once.

A METHOD THAT WORKS EASY TO EXPERT

1. Place the forced digits.

Look for a row, column or box missing just one digit, and for a cell that has only one legal digit. Fill those in. Easy puzzles are entirely this step.

2. Pencil candidates when you stall.

Lightly write every digit a cell could still hold. Solving is now crossing candidates off.

3. Use locked candidates.

If a digit inside a box can only sit in one row, it cannot be in that row outside the box. Erase it there. This is the medium-puzzle move.

4. Find pairs, then patterns.

Two cells sharing the same two candidates lock those digits. Hard puzzles add an X-Wing or XY-Wing; expert puzzles need a chain. Never guess: every cell you write should be forced.

TRY ONE: EASY, SINGLES ONLY

7		4		9			2	8
		8	1		7	5		
9		2	4			6		
	8		9	4		7		
	9	7	5		6	4	8	
		6		7	2		3	
		5			4	9		7
		1	2		9	8		
4	3			1		2		6

Puzzle E-20260905 · solution on page 2

READING THE GRID

The heavy lines mark the nine 3×3 boxes. A digit you write must be new to its row, new to its column and new to its box, all three at once. Start with the digit that appears most often in the givens: it has the fewest places left to go, so its empty boxes are the easiest to pin down.

Common mistakes: writing a digit that fits the row and column but is already in the box; guessing when stuck instead of pencilling candidates; and pencilling the whole grid on an easy puzzle, which is slower than scanning.

Starter puzzle: solution

Puzzle E-20260905. Check a row at a time; every row, column and box reads 1 to 9.

7	1	4	6	9	5	3	2	8
3	6	8	1	2	7	5	9	4
9	5	2	4	8	3	6	7	1
2	8	3	9	4	1	7	6	5
1	9	7	5	3	6	4	8	2
5	4	6	8	7	2	1	3	9
8	2	5	3	6	4	9	1	7
6	7	1	2	5	9	8	4	3
4	3	9	7	1	8	2	5	6

WHERE TO GO NEXT

If the starter went smoothly, print the Easy pack (24 puzzles, six per page) and work through it until scanning is automatic. Then Medium, which adds the locked-candidate move from step 3, and Hard, which adds the X-Wing family. The Daily Sudoku prints one large-format edition every morning in every tier.