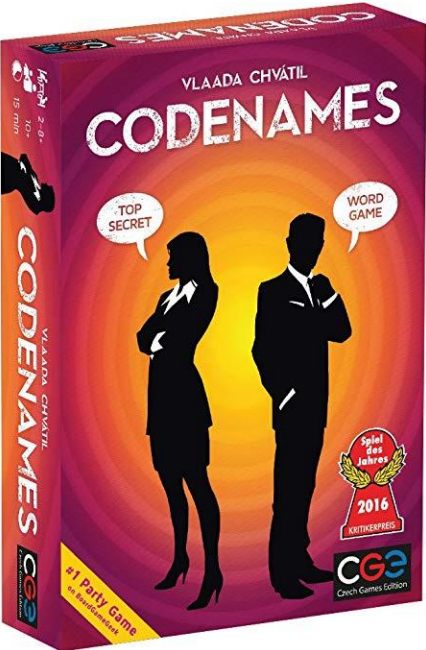


How to win at Codenames – Tips and Tricks

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Released in 2015, the original Codenames board game by Vlaada Chvátil is an award-winning bestseller. This modern classic is a fun, simple and quick party game that also involves a fair amount of strategy.

The following does not describe [the rules of Codenames](#) or ways to cheat if you dare; what follows explains how you can win fair-and-square! Whether you are new to Codenames or just want to get better at it, continue reading.

Most of the strategies discussed here will work for other versions of Codenames as well, such as [Codenames Pictures](#) which uses intriguing multifaceted images instead of words.

THE BEST STRATEGIES TO WIN AT CODENAMES

First, it is crucial to consider how everyone else thinks and plays. It is wise to **have empathy and intuition** for other players and to stay mindful of what you know about them. Second, make sure to **always be listening**.

Given a spymaster’s objective to speak clues their team is likely to understand, they should either give obvious clues, or rely on shared knowledge and ways of thinking. A spymaster should be careful not to give clues that are too abstract or too obscure a reference. After giving a clue, the spymaster must keep a poker face, but they can still pay attention to how their team reacts, which may help decide their next clue. Accordingly, to keep their spymaster informed, field operatives should reveal their thoughts aloud after each turn. To be successful, field operatives should likewise be mindful, and interpret their spymaster’s clues while keeping things like personality, play-style and your relationship to each other in mind.

Make sure you are analyzing and listening to the other team as well. As a spymaster, if you notice the other team’s field operatives targeting one of your agents for their next bonus guess, then consider not creating a clue for that tile and hope they will choose it for you. As a field operative, you have better chances of guessing correctly if you avoid tiles likely belonging to the other team, agents you believe they missed previously.

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR THE CODENAMES SPYMASTER

As spymaster, the first thing you should do is analyze every word, **comparing your agents** to the other team’s agents and especially to the assassin, so as to not accidentally give clues relating to these unfavourable tiles. Though less critical, the bystanders are still a consideration as well since any wrong guess will cut a turn short.

Begin formulating a rough **plan to win** before you even start. Try leaving on the board agents of yours that connect with the opponent’s agents, to frustrate them with limited options, and in hopes that they will give a clue that leads to one of your agents being picked by mistake. Unsurprisingly, sometimes you will need to be patient before giving a clue for certain agents, waiting until the clue becomes safer as the grid evolves.

Try not to re-clue: giving more than one clue for the same agents. Wait until you really must, because hopefully your team picks those agents later with bonus guesses. Creative, abstract and ambitious clues are great if successful, but make sure you **moderate your risk** with how well you are doing against the other team. When falling behind, be ambitious and take on bigger risks to win!

Another good strategy is learning when to use the **zero and unlimited clue types**. The zero clue type allows you to give a clue of what not to pick, enabling your team to choose everything else that makes sense, at a minimum of one tile. The zero clue type can be a strong strategy near the end of the game when there are fewer words left, or if you want to ensure the assassin is avoided. Also since zero clues allow unlimited guesses, that can be useful to catch up. The unlimited clue type likewise allows unlimited guesses based on a single clue, but your team might not be able to determine when the new clue ends and guessing for previously missed clues begins. An unlimited clue is best used near the end of a game as well, when your team has missed a lot of opportunities and is really in need of catching up.



BEST STRATEGIES FOR THE FIELD OPERATIVES

As a field operative, you should think like your spymasters do and **scan the grid for connections** between groups of words. If you see obviously connected pairs or groups, and neither spymaster is hinting at them, you can consider these tiles likely split between the two teams or by the assassin. Every hint of information helps.

Always **guess what you are most confident in first**, even if it relies on a previous clue. For bonus guesses, it is best to use them only when you can make an informed decision. Finally, remember just because a guess is right does not always mean it was what the spymaster was intending. **Keep an open mind** as things progress.

While there are no guarantees, I hope you find the above strategies helpful next time you play Codenames.

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