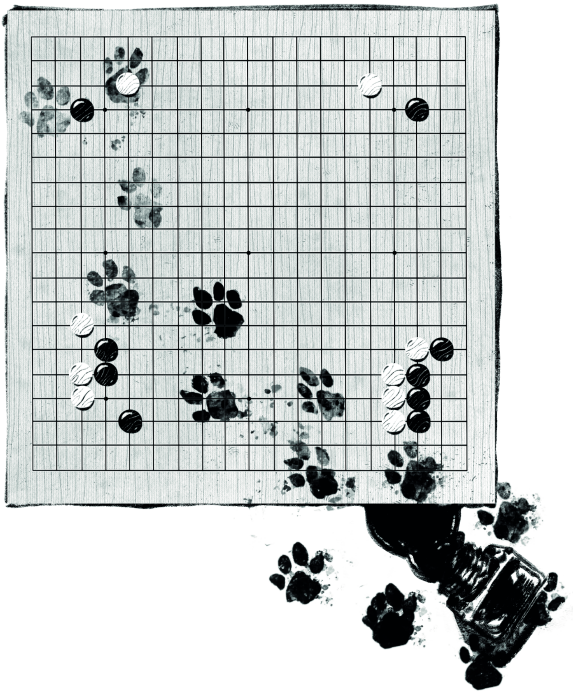
IMPROVING AT GO

JONATHAN PREVOST

Introduction



How can a 1 kyu player allow themselves to write a book about progressing in Go? What audacity, right?

When I started Go almost 20 years ago, I learned everything on my own. I played lots of games, read all the articles I could find on the internet, and joined a club. I tried doing problems, but I didn't understand them and

quickly grew to hate them. I didn't have a teacher, but I kept progressing, so everything was fine. I reached 3k in a year, and I was quite proud! But I had learned haphazardly. My game was riddled with bad habits, my intuition for shapes was completely wrong, my strategy chaotic. I couldn't improve anymore, and I hit a wall that prevented me from progressing for a very long time because I hadn't learned to play correctly.

I decided to write this book for two reasons: firstly, I want to know how to progress effectively because I want to become better at Go, and a guide summarizing this information doesn't seem to exist yet. Secondly, I really wish I had had this guide 20 years ago. I hope it can help players all over the world avoid making the same mistakes. This guide is therefore not based on my experience, but is the result of extensive research on the subject of learning Go, with the help of several highly qualified people.

> About 200 people responded to a survey I sent out before starting to write this guide. Over 65% of respondents indicated that their progress is too slow or has completely stalled!

This guide will cover what is effective or not for progressing, regardless of your level. The writing style of this work is deliberately direct. On one hand, it's my natural style; on the other hand, I know people don't necessarily have much time to read, so it's best to get straight to the point.

Contributors

Three people, in particular, contributed to the development of this book with their expertise, answering my many questions:

- **Diána Kőszegi, professional 1 dan**. She is the first —and so far only— Hungarian to become a professional Go player. She lives in South Korea, where she co-founded Blackie's International Baduk Academy (BIBA) with Kim Seungjun 9p, an international Go school that has been welcoming players from all continents for years.
- **In-seong Hwang, 8 dan**. Founder of the *Yunguseng Dojang* Go school, Inseong studied in his youth in South Korea to become a pro before settling in Europe. He teaches Go to the many students at his school, and at the time of writing this book, he is the strongest player in Europe according to europeangodatabase.eu.
- **Natacha Maamar, psychologist**. A state-certified psychologist and psychotherapist, Natacha holds a triple master's degree in psychology and neuroscience.

The illustrations in this book were done by Florian Shum-Kwoong.

Psychology and Go

You often hear: “I don’t need that” when psychology is brought up. However, it’s a serious mistake not to rely on it, especially in the game of Go where the mental aspect is central to everything.

Psychology in Service of Learning

Go is a magnificent but difficult game, into which people often invest a lot. Despite this, the path is paved with defeats. Indeed, regardless of your experience and efforts, as long as you play against players of your level, you will have roughly as many defeats as victories! And Go is not a game that can be beaten, like a video game that you finish with all achievements. Even if you are among the strongest players in the world, there will always be someone trying to beat you, and you will have to keep training to progress.

The path of learning Go can therefore be difficult, and certain teachings from psychology can help make the journey easier.

Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset

The fixed mindset is found in people who believe that abilities are immutable traits. Abilities are "fixed" and do not evolve, or evolve very little, with learning. With this way of thinking, failure becomes a terrible judgment of oneself, and losing a game can be very emotionally difficult.

The growth mindset is based on the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, perseverance, and good learning strategies. With this way of thinking, failure is an opportunity to learn and progress. Constructive feedback on one's way of playing is welcomed as a means to improve rather than as criticism.

What is intelligence?

There are many definitions of intelligence. The one that interests us in this guide relates to learning. As defined by Jean Piaget, **intelligence is the capacity to adapt**. And this flexibility, this ability to adjust to new information and experiences, is not fixed; it is possible to improve it.

Thus, even if everyone does not necessarily have equal abilities at birth (particularly in processing speed and observational skills), to become better at Go, the most important thing is to be able to assimilate new information and adjust one's behavior accordingly. Therefore, try as much as possible to be in a growth mindset, where all information that comes your way, negative as well as positive, can be used to progress, rather than to judge yourself.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem can be perceived through two concepts:

- Trait self-esteem: This is the stable and long-lasting tendency to evaluate oneself. It's how one defines oneself over the long term.
- State self-esteem: Reflects fluctuations in esteem at a given moment. It is more variable and sensitive to what is happening "in the moment".

When you lose a game, or fail to solve a problem, it's the **state** self-esteem that should vary. Indeed, it's normal to be a little disappointed or sad after losing a game.

Nevertheless, this should not call into question your entire perception of yourself. Yet, this is often the case; variations in state self-esteem get confused with trait self-esteem. A little phrase players might frequently tell themselves is "I suck," and this is the kind of overly harsh (and completely counterproductive) judgment one can make when this confusion occurs. If the disappointment is too strong, a more accurate phrase might be "I feel sad": you accept your emotion, but without judgment, because it's only about how you feel at that precise moment, and not something permanent. Once the intensity of the emotion has calmed down a bit, you can also tell yourself things like:

- It's normal for me to lose 50% of my games
- I'm not an AI, it's normal for me to make mistakes, everyone does
- My opponent played well, congratulations to them

Encountering difficulties is part of the game; don't judge yourself harshly, it won't help you progress.

Self-Handicapping

Low self-esteem can also lead to training less to have an excuse for defeats. Indeed, if a person hasn't put in much effort, a defeat challenges their abilities less. And so some train less, more or less consciously, to avoid having to question themselves. This obviously doesn't work: to progress, you have to train. A person with good self-esteem will do what they deem necessary to succeed and showcase their abilities.

> Having good self-esteem, and therefore believing in your abilities, is an important foundation for progressing effectively in Go.

Emotions during the Game

During a game, and particularly important games, you can experience strong emotions. These can disrupt your play, causing you to make less rational decisions.

Emotion	Impact
Fear	Playing timid moves, not daring to fight or take any risks
Anger	Playing impulsively, taking reckless risks
Joy	Having poor judgment of the position, thinking you're more ahead than you are
Sadness	Losing fighting spirit, being defeatist

Different emotions and their impact on the game.

You cannot control your emotions. Nevertheless, you can prevent them from controlling your game too much. The first step is absolutely not to ignore them. When you feel, physically, that an emotion is emerging, note it mentally: it must be very clear to you that you are feeling fear, anger, or something else. In an ideal world, one could take the time to understand the why and how of this emotion, analyze it so that it has the least possible impact. But during a game, we will often be pressed for time. No pausing the clock to take time to manage anger!

Thus, during play, a fairly simple strategy is to keep the

physical symptoms of the emotion in the back of your mind. By being aware of the emotion's presence, you can reduce its impact on your game. Later, if you review the game, it can be beneficial to revisit this emotion and better understand why you felt it.

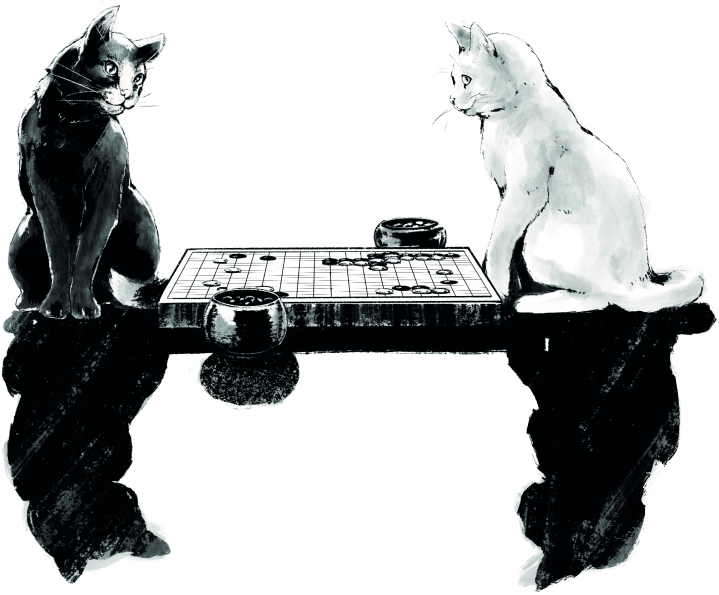
> When an emotion emerges, be aware of its presence for as long as it lasts.

Maintaining Long-Term Motivation

Generally, people train in Go for years, or decades. It's normal to have moments of pause: the brain may simply need a little rest to integrate certain information. This will only allow you to start again even stronger!

However, it is also possible to stop due to lack of motivation, or the feeling that one is no longer progressing. Chapter 8 offers you a method to avoid falling into this trap by building a motivating learning plan.

Playing Games



Getting better when playing games is the reason why Go players want to improve. Whether it's simply for the beauty of the game, competitiveness, or a personal challenge, the ultimate goal is to play better. And quite logically, playing games is systematically placed as the number one task for improvement. So play as many games as possible... but not just any which way!

Quality First

For optimal learning, play a maximum number of games with relatively long time settings: at least 20 minutes + 3x30 seconds of byo-yomi (or their equivalent in Canadian or Fischer time). This will allow you to take more time to think about your moves and play higher-quality games, in which you invest more of yourself. Your moves will have more meaning, which will make a post-game analysis more enriching than that of a fast game.

Moreover, the vast majority of Go tournaments have slow time settings, so this will be good training for them. If you only train with fast games, you will tend to play too quickly in tournaments, thus giving an advantage to your opponent. Nevertheless, if it's something you enjoy, you shouldn't deprive yourself of playing fast games as a supplement.

Besides, playing fast games can also have advantages, helping you with quick decision-making and good clock management under pressure. If you only play slow games, and you panic when you reach byo-yomi and your quality of play decreases at that moment, practicing playing many fast games for a certain period can be very beneficial.

Adding occasional tournament or league games to your usual slow games is an excellent thing. Since these are generally games that impact your ranking, players give their all, resulting in the highest quality games. They are often ideal for an interesting review with your teacher. Tournaments are discussed a little later in this guide.

	Byo-yomi	Fischer	Comment
Fast	1m + 3x15s	30s + 5s	For fun
Slow	20m + 3x30s 30m + 3x30s	10m + 10s	Do as much as possible
Tournament	1h + 5x30s	40m + 20s	Important occasionally

Examples of clock settings by type of game.

Another point: never cheat. Whether during your practice games, in tournaments, in person, or online. A victory by cheating is not a real victory, it doesn't help you improve, and when it becomes known, the cheater's reputation is tarnished forever. It's really not worth it.

Choosing your Games and Opponents

Your opponents are just as important: to improve, be careful not to play mostly against players weaker than you. You risk seeing your level lower over time. Ideally, you should almost only play against opponents of your level or stronger. Of course, Go is also a game of knowledge transmission, and it's not one game where you give handicap stones from time to time that will make you regress, as long as you also play against opponents of your level.

Also, be careful not to systematically play against the same opponents. This is something often seen among club players who face each other and don't play online. Confronting a wide variety of players is crucial for progress.

Experimenting with other Play Styles

You have surely heard about playing styles. Go players can

be more or less analytical, aggressive, or, for example, territorial. Some like moyos, others very complex situations. Some avoid fights and negotiate, while others cut first, then think. Each player is unique, even if we find broad themes.

Perhaps you know your playing style? Or perhaps you think you know your style, but the reality is different. Indeed, this is often a point where we are mistaken. A good way to know your playing style is simply to ask your teacher.

Whatever the case, it can be extremely beneficial to try to completely change your style during training. Do you like territory? Try playing only for influence! Do you like fighting? Systematically choose the peaceful option! The goal is to learn to adapt to all situations. Sometimes the right move can be found with an aggressive approach, other times negotiation will be the key. By learning to juggle between styles and not getting stuck on the same approach, you will become more flexible. Furthermore, this experimentation will allow you to better adapt to the different styles you encounter. It is possible that some playing styles are more difficult to face than others, but by playing them yourself, you will appropriate them and know better how to counter them.

Trying to vary styles in this way can be an excellent method to overcome a plateau.

This applies to practice games; in tournaments, it's better to play naturally.

Staying Focused

Try to eliminate distractions as much as possible while you play:

- Try to avoid music, but if you want to put some on, make sure the volume is moderate and there are no lyrics,
- Avoid eating or snacking during games,
- Go players often have a drink handy (tea, water, coffee) but avoid alcohol,
- Don't look at your phone during the game,
- If you are in front of a computer, avoid opening other applications.

The ideal is to reach a state of *flow*, where you are completely absorbed by your game.

Playing Against AI

It is now easy to play against a professional-level artificial intelligence; many Go servers offer it for free. This can be a good way to play a game without the pressure of playing against a human.

Playing against an AI allows you to train only the opening: just stop when the middle game begins, and use the score estimator to see how you did. The AI can also point out your main mistakes. In the same vein, it is possible to start a game from a given position for targeted training.

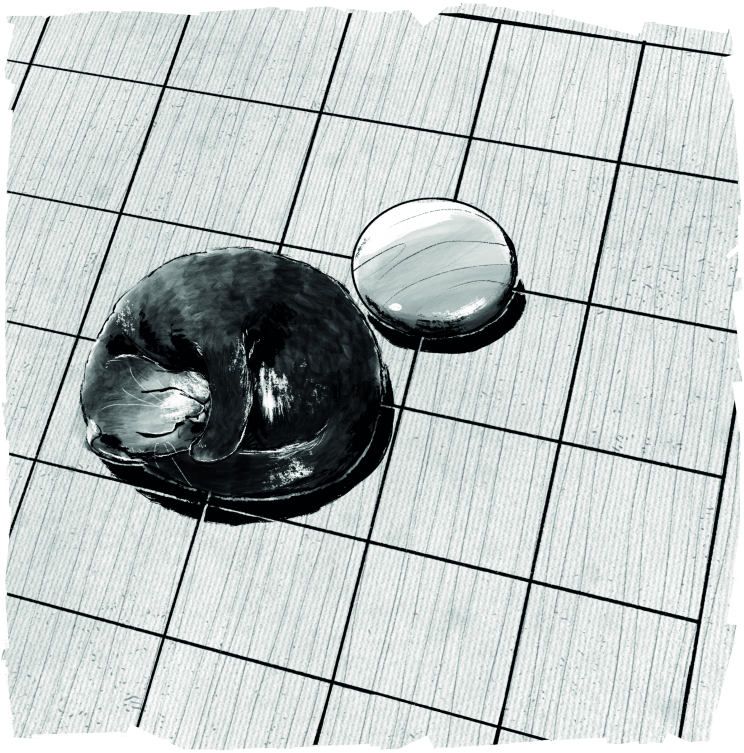
Nevertheless, AI can play effective moves whose deep logic is difficult to grasp, and it doesn't have the full variety of styles and experiences of humans. To get better against humans, it's better to play mostly against humans.

Key Takeaways:

- Prefer playing a majority of slow games
- Try to play tournament games regularly
- Play against opponents of your level or stronger

- Don’t hesitate to experiment during training
- Be engaged when you play

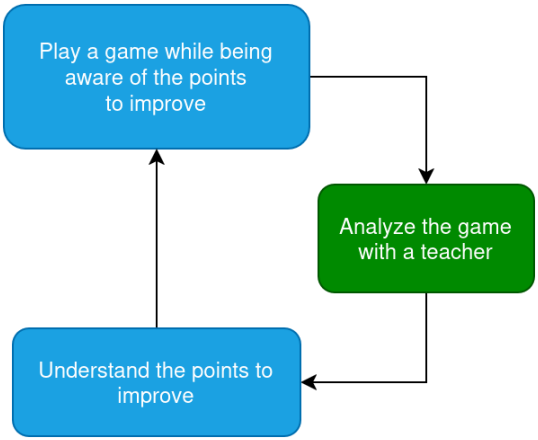
Analyze your games



Just like playing games, getting feedback from a stronger player on your game is a crucial element for progress. We can call them a *mentor*, *coach*, or *more experienced player*; we will call them a *teacher* for simplicity. *Game review*, *game commentary*, and *game analysis* are the same thing: spending time with a teacher who looks at the game and gives you their perspective.

Why have your Games Reviewed?

Humans are not very good at self-analyzing and finding their own strengths and weaknesses; and a player who cannot understand their own mistakes is doomed to repeat them. That's why reviewing your games is crucial: you will then know what to focus on for your training. Maybe you need to improve your reading? Or perhaps you're not aggressive enough in the mid-game? Adjusting your own game is a permanent quest, regardless of your level. Furthermore, discussing with a teacher can open up new perspectives: there are moves one might never think of on their own.



Using this learning loop will allow you, among other things, to:

- correct your bad habits
- implement new strategies
- know your strengths
- know your weaknesses to work on

Finding the Right Teacher

If you have joined a club, maybe someone will be willing to help you. Otherwise, if you are willing to spend money, there are many very strong or professional players who offer their services. You can inquire on online Go teaching platforms, dedicated forums, or by asking for recommendations within your communities. In any case, your teacher should be significantly stronger than you, with a minimum of five stones difference between you and them. For example, if you are 6 kyu, your teacher should be at least 1 kyu, and ideally even stronger. If your level approaches 3 or 4 dan or beyond, your teacher should be of professional level.

You will sometimes see two types of reviews offered: live and *offline*. For the *offline* game review, you send a file with your game to the teacher, who returns it annotated with their comments. If you have difficulty communicating, *offline* reviews might be simpler for you. Live reviews are generally done via voice chat. The advantage of live reviews is that you can ask questions as they arise. Feel free to experiment with both types to find what suits you best! A good teacher will strive to adapt to your needs and offer personalized advice. Maybe not after the first review, but you should quickly know what you need to train on and what your strengths and weaknesses are.

Finally, don't get overly attached to your teacher. Changing teachers can help you overcome a plateau or open up new horizons.

The Recipe for a Successful Commentary

Before the Commentary

First, choose a quality game. Tournament games are often the best to analyze, but a slow game, even online, can be just as valuable. Avoid analyzing a fast game; the quality will likely not be there. People generally tend to analyze lost games. This is not an absolute rule; it is sometimes possible to analyze a won game, for example, if you turned around a disadvantageous situation and would like to understand how you ended up in that situation. But you will learn less from a game you easily won than from a difficult loss.

Whenever possible, try to review the game shortly after playing it. Also, don't hesitate to review the game alone before the commentary with your teacher, so you have the key points in mind when you arrive. This will allow you to prepare your questions and identify the moments you think were key.

During the Commentary

Remember that you are here to progress, and everyone makes mistakes in Go. It is therefore very important to come to the game review with an open and receptive mindset, and not to take criticism personally.

After the Commentary

Try to briefly note down the points to work on. If the review is recorded on video, don't hesitate to watch it again a few days later. Now you must try to apply what you saw in the commentary in your games!

Using Artificial Intelligence?

Your use of AI should depend on your level:

- You should not use AI **below 10 kyu**,
- **Between 10 and 5 kyu**, AI can be useful for getting an overview and identifying major mistakes, but without delving too deep, as filtering through different variations can be difficult,
- **From 5 to 1 kyu**, AI starts to become truly relevant, as you will be better able to interpret its suggestions,
- For **dan players**, AI becomes a valuable tool, as your solid foundations allow you to sort through and better understand its advice.

Don't run your AI right after the game! Take the time to do a personal analysis first, even if it only lasts a few minutes. Mentally note the important moments of the game, what you think were the good and bad moves, and the questions you asked yourself during the game. This will allow you to better compare your thoughts about the game with the AI's teachings, thus improving your learning.

Artificial intelligence can propose an almost infinite number of variations, so don't get so absorbed that you lose sight of the essential points of the analysis. Try to understand the AI's suggestions in a simple and direct way. Sometimes, it will suggest moves that are beyond your comprehension. This happens even at very high levels. In these cases, there is no point in spending too much time trying to understand these moves, or even worse, learning them by heart. You have to accept that sometimes, the AI will play good but incomprehensible moves. You should not be inspired by them, because it is not good to play moves that you do not understand.

Finally, while AI is an incredible tool, it does not replace a human teacher who will better understand your needs and be able to advise you personally. The two are complementary.

Key Takeaways:

- Reviewing your games with a significantly stronger teacher is crucial
- You must remember the points to correct and take them into account in subsequent games
- Prioritize analyzing quality games: tournaments, slow games
- Using AI can be interesting depending on your level, but does not replace a human teacher

Solving Problems

To progress effectively in Go, solving problems is as essential as playing games and analyzing them.

Why Solve Problems?

Like it or not, reading is a crucial part of Go. Even if you prefer peaceful games with minimal combat, opponents can always force you into a situation where reading is necessary. Generally, you will need to read sequences in almost all your games. But what exactly is reading?

One might think that reading is about calculating all possible variations, even the most unlikely ones. This is actually impossible, as the number of branches increases

exponentially. Imagine finding 6 possible moves and wanting to read all variations just 3 moves deep: an approximation already gives 120 sequences to read! If you find 10 possible moves and want to read all moves 6 moves deep, you would need to read about 150,000 sequences. Reading actually relies heavily on intuition, which allows you to prioritize the moves most likely to work. This intuition helps optimize your **reading width**, which is the number of variations you read before reaching a conclusion.

On the other hand, **reading depth** allows you to calculate a larger number of moves in each variation. We often marvel at pros who can read 20 or 30 moves ahead; it's their reading depth capabilities at work.

Finally, there is **visualization**, which allows you to imagine the moves even when they are not on the board. Some sequences, being too long or involving captures or unusual shapes, may require more visualization effort. Depending on the situation, visualization can be immediate or, conversely, impossible.

Solving problems will help you improve these three crucial skills for progress.

How to Solve Problems?

There are many ways to solve problems. You can spend up to 10 minutes trying to solve a difficult problem, but you can also chain together very simple problems, with a timer of a few tens of seconds for each problem.

The most important thing is to understand the problems, which means not solving them based on intuition alone. Even with simple problems, you should take the time to verify that the intuitive sequence is correct. If you end up

looking at the solution (try to avoid this as much as possible), take the time to grasp the logic behind the moves. There's no point in memorizing problem solutions: the goal isn't to know where to play in a real game if you encounter the exact same shape, but to develop your skills to adapt to a multitude of situations.

Which Problems to Solve?

It all depends on what you enjoy and what you need to improve on! Here are some suggestions:

- You make **simple reading errors** in games: do many problems below your level, without a timer, and make sure you get the right answer on the first try.
- You have difficulty **visualizing stones** in long sequences: do more difficult problems, spending up to 10 minutes on each, and read the sequences through to the end. Finding the solution isn't necessarily important, but you must apply yourself to reading carefully.
- You have increased your level without doing problems, or **learned Go without doing problems**: start with very easy problems, and increase the difficulty very gradually. For example, if you are 5 kyu, start with 15 kyu problems, which will be very simple but lack practice for you, and gradually increase the difficulty.
- **You don't like doing problems**, or you get discouraged quickly when you do: the problems you've faced might have been too difficult. Try finding problems you can solve in about 30 seconds with a high success rate. It doesn't matter if they are not at your level.
- If you **cannot visualize stones at all**, you can start practicing by simply reading ladders or *atari* sequences with no possible variations. Don't use a

timer, and only confirm the solution once you are certain you've read it correctly.

- In games, you have trouble finding solutions, **there are too many possible moves**: you need to improve your intuition, try solving problems at or below your level, with a timer. If your success rate isn't satisfactory, decrease the difficulty of the problems.

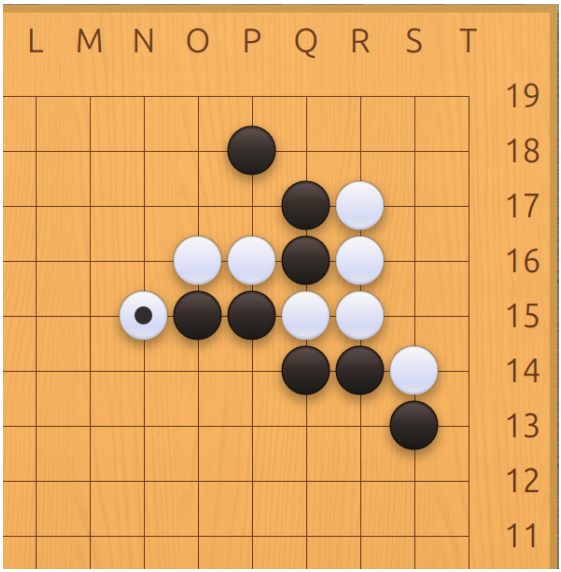
Generally, don't hesitate to do problems that are below your level. Problems at or above your level are valuable but can also be discouraging. Remember: doing problems should be a pleasant and stimulating experience, not torture. Feel free to experiment and adjust to find what works for you.

> Depending on the books, websites, or apps you use, the indicated levels for problems of the same rank will vary greatly. Pay no attention to them and determine which rank corresponds to what you want based on your results on the problems.

Accumulating Knowledge

A sequence is a studied series of moves considered locally optimal. The best-known sequences, called Joseki, typically take place in the corners, but standardized move sequences can also exist on the sides or in the center of the goban. There can be many variations within the same sequence.

Learning sequences is a less critical part of learning than playing, analyzing, and solving problems. Some people love and can absorb an incredible number of sequences, but if you don't particularly enjoy this aspect of the game, you shouldn't force yourself to spend a lot of time on it.



Some sequences are terribly complex to learn.

Nevertheless, learning sequences is far from useless, and can give you significant advantages. On the one hand, knowing the final shapes of certain sequences will allow you to choose them better: you won't need to read the sequences on the spot. Similarly, if a ladder is part of a sequence, you take less risk of making a mistake by already knowing the sequence. Along the same lines, some sequences include moves that are difficult to see on your own; again, knowing the sequence will allow you to play the right moves without having to think too much about it. Finally, and this is not the least of the advantages,

knowing certain sequences will allow you to be more confident when playing them and save precious time during the game, because you won't need to read.

A game can easily be decided when one of the players embarks on a sequence they don't master while their opponent does!

What to learn?

First of all, with the artificial intelligence revolution, the number of sequences to know has drastically reduced. Professional players used to spend considerable time in games choosing the right josekis, whereas today, AIs have freed us from this complexity, and pros tend to play the opening more quickly to focus on the middle game.

So, learn the sequences that AIs have passed down to us as a priority.

On the other hand, learn the sequences that are played at your level or below. Learning very complex sequences that are beyond your level will certainly not be wasted time, but it can also be demotivating due to its difficulty. It is better to understand the sequences played at your level well than to try to cram higher-level ones without understanding them.

If you don't like learning sequences, or if you don't like a particular sequence, one strategy can be to learn how to avoid it: often, it is possible to play moves that prevent a sequence from being activated. However, this technique has its limits.

How to learn?

Learning a sequence by heart without understanding it is a

serious mistake: players who do this find themselves playing moves they don't understand, and the slightest divergence from their opponents becomes very dangerous. To learn a sequence, you must stop at each move and understand it. What is the intention behind this move? What strengths and weaknesses does it exploit? This work is necessary for you to internalize the sequence.

You must then practice the sequence, creating situations where you can use it as often as possible in your games. This will allow you to memorize it, but also to encounter unexpected variations from your opponents and learn to adapt. You will need to replay it many times for you to fully integrate it.

For initial learning, you can use spaced repetition: review the sequence several times, increasingly spaced out over time, to facilitate memory encoding. For example, you can try to memorize it the first time, then 20 minutes later, then 2 hours, then the next day, and finally 3 days later. This is a technique that has proven effective in chess.

Your Repertoire

Another lesson from chess that is never seen in Go is keeping a personal repertoire of sequences. Using any game editor, you can build your own database of sequences you know, possibly with your own notes. This will allow you to revisit them whenever you want, and have a reference of your knowledge that you can update as you go.

Where to learn?

The best way is live with a teacher giving an individual or group lesson, as this will usually allow you to ask questions.

There are also many "on-demand" video courses via the numerous online Go schools that exist, via paid or free courses on YouTube or other Go sites, which can be excellent resources.

There are also encyclopedias of sequences available on the Internet, of *extremely variable* quality. Be careful not to learn just anything from these.

Key Takeaways:

- Learn "post-AI" sequences at your level
- Never learn by heart without understanding
- Practice the sequence you are learning many times
- You can keep a repertoire of your sequences

Other things to do

Although playing, analyzing your games, and doing problems are the 3 main drivers of progress in Go, there are many other activities you can do that can also contribute to improving your level.

Participate in Tournaments

Although it's not necessary to progress, playing tournament games can give your level a boost. It's in tournaments that you will encounter the highest intensity of play: you and your opponents give it your all, the stakes are at their highest! Since the challenge is at its peak, this can help you reveal your strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, tournament games are often very interesting to analyze with your teacher.

If you have registered for a tournament, there are things you can do to simplify your participation. First, try to have a calm week before the tournament to arrive as rested as possible. You can also try playing games with the tournament settings to prepare, although it is sometimes difficult to find online partners for long games. Additionally, you can plan the logistics of your tournament as much as possible: how will you get there? Where will you sleep? How will you eat? Are there things you will need? Planning all this can reduce your stress once you are there.

Once the tournament starts, it's up to you to behave in the way that allows you to be most effective in the game. Generally, it is recommended not to overdo things: try to eat properly, drink water, try to sleep as much as possible. Avoid drinking too much coffee or eating too much sugar, it's counterproductive.

During the tournament, try to have something to record your games on a kifu or your phone once they are finished. If you wish to use your phone or computer to record during the game, be sure you have permission from the organizers and your opponent.

Besides one-off tournaments, many online or club leagues offer a different format, allowing you to regularly play

high-stakes games over a longer period (one to a few games per month).

Be part of a Community

Being part of a group is excellent for encouragement, stimulation, and determination to progress. It allows you to share new ideas with other players and meet people. Online, you will find a multitude of communities to join, from public forums to study groups to Discord servers.

Watch Live Games

Watching games online, possibly discussing them live, is a good way to pass the time, but unless you are actively analyzing the game, it's not really an effective way to learn.

Learn Pro Games

For a long time, it was recommended to learn pro games by heart. Today, this is no longer the case:

- Current pros often develop very complex and specific strategies, which are difficult for an amateur to draw direct and effective inspiration from.
- Older pros often have a classic style that is more interesting to draw inspiration from, but they do not know modern *post-artificial intelligence* Go, and some of their sequences or position evaluations are no longer considered correct.

Of course, replaying a pro game on your goban can in no way harm you, but it is not a very effective way to learn.

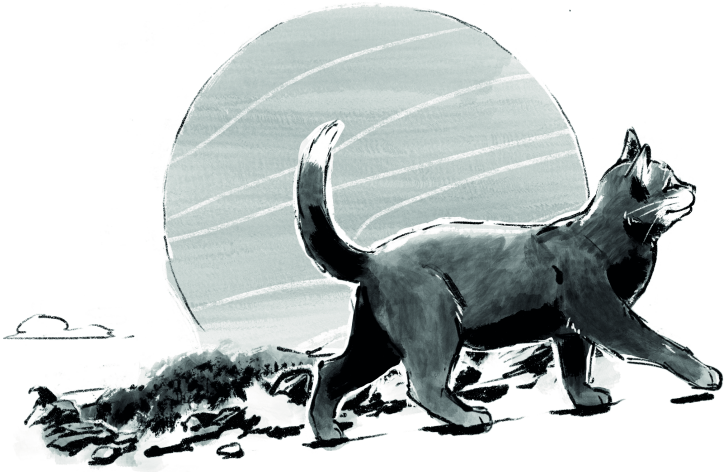
Learn Proverbs and Read Books

Although direct teaching by a teacher is often ideal for

assimilating theory, reading books and studying proverbs can be useful complements, provided they are approached judiciously. In the case of proverbs, as with everything else, there is no point in learning them by heart and applying them blindly; you must understand why and how the proverb works, because no proverb is true in all situations.

In the case of books, try to practice the theory of what you read as much as possible as you go along to make it your own. Furthermore, even if not everything published before 2016 should be discarded, pay attention to the publication date of the works; many books are no longer up-to-date following the appearance of AI.

Your Learning Plan



Having overly ambitious goals is a classic pitfall in the Go community. It's not uncommon to meet 6 or 7 kyu players whose goal is to become 1 dan. In absolute terms, having a very ambitious long-term goal isn't necessarily a bad idea, but to avoid discouragement, you need to break it down into smaller, quickly achievable objectives.

Define your Objectives

Behind the somewhat pompous name *SMART* lies a method that has existed since the 1980s and is widely recognized and approved. Several variations exist; here is the one chosen for this guide (with the original terms in English):

- **Specific**: define precise and framed objectives.
- **Measurable**: you should be able to quantify your objectives.
- **Achievable**: the objectives should not be too difficult to reach.
- **Relevant**: the objectives are consistent with what you are trying to improve.
- **Time-bound**: there is a deadline for each objective.

By preparing with this method, you will have precise, realistic, and relevant objectives, whose results you can measure over time. This might be a bit too abstract for now, so here are some examples:

Specific	Measure	Time frame
Do problems from Cho Chikun's Life & Death encyclopedia	Do 100 problems with a success rate of 80% or more	Every Friday for a month
Learn a set of 10 specific variations of the 3-3 invasion	Be able to replay at least 7 out of 10 variations from memory	Before June 5th
Solve medium-level problems under time pressure	Find the solution in less than 45 seconds for at least 14 out of 20 problems	Twice a week for a month

Play slow games on my favorite Go server	At least 20 games	During the next 3 months
Complete my joseki repertoire	Add 10 josekis that I know	Thursday evening at 8 pm
Play serious league or tournament games	Play at least 2 games	This month
Analyze serious games with my teacher	Analyze 2 games	Make an appointment with my teacher this week
Practice a joseki to learn it	Play this joseki at least 5 times in a game	Before the end of the month
Solve problems that are difficult for me	Manage to solve at least 2 out of 3 problems in less than 10 minutes each	Tomorrow
Read a book	Read at least 4 chapters per week	Finish in 20 days

Some examples of SMART goals applied to Go training.

You might notice that there are no measures of the number of wins, nor specifics like "win X games". This is intentional because this type of goal actually makes little sense: as long as you play against opponents of your level, you will have about 50% wins and 50% losses. Variations in these measures are too slight to be interesting and can even be discouraging. A lost game is at least as interesting for training as a won game, so focus on the number of games played rather than their results. Similarly, you might notice

that there is no rank increase in the objectives, such as "Reach 7 kyu". This type of goal can also be demoralizing if it doesn't happen quickly enough, and it's better to focus on smaller, realistic tasks which, once accumulated, will naturally lead to rank improvement.

SMARTER

After a few days or weeks of trying to achieve your goals, you might notice some issues. Is it too difficult? Or, on the contrary, is the challenge missing? Will you have less time for Go for a few weeks? The SMARTER method complements the SMART approach by adding 2 criteria that allow for better management of objectives over time:

- **Evaluate**: look at where you are with your objectives.
- **Readjust**: modify the objectives.

It's simply a matter of scheduling regular time to review your progress towards your goals and adjust them if necessary. This is more important than it might seem, as having unsatisfactory goals can lead to discouragement. So, remember to schedule this brief moment in your agenda every week or two to see where you are and make the necessary adjustments.

In Practice

It's now up to you to find objectives that suit you! The time you can dedicate to Go will be one of the determining factors for the number and difficulty of your objectives. In any case, it is preferable to start with modest objectives and gradually increase the difficulty rather than the other way around. Furthermore, failing to achieve an objective is not a disaster, far from it. However, it is interesting to understand *why* you didn't manage to reach that goal. Was it too ambitious? Did you not have enough

time? Or was motivation lacking? Answering these questions will help you adjust your learning plan.

If you are receptive to it, you can plan rewards for achieving certain objectives. The reward should be appropriate to the difficulty of the task. It's entirely up to you to decide which rewards to choose; it could range from treating yourself to your favorite meal at a restaurant to buying yourself a magnificent new goban!

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- Framaforms: https://framaforms.org/
- Hugo: https://gohugo.io/
- Diagrams.net: https://app.diagrams.net/
- Sabaki: https://github.com/SabakiHQ/Sabaki

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