

UPTOWN STRATEGIES

Although Uptown is a simple game to learn, there are many possible strategies and many paths to victory. Here are four different styles to try.

The Center Strategy

This is the most straightforward strategy. Begin near the center, and build a strong wall which stretches across much of the board. Try to keep your tiles in one connected line, so that only the two ends are vulnerable. If you must begin a second group, try to connect it to your main group as soon as possible. If you end the game with a single group, you'll usually win. If you end with two groups, you still have a chance of winning, depending on how many tiles you captured. This strategy tends to generate an average number of captures – perhaps between eight and twelve in a four-player game.

It's best to make your first play of the game into one of the “power-intersections” on the board, where the corners of four different symbols meet. These are powerful and contested spaces. It's best to start in an unoccupied intersection.

The Edge Strategy

This is the opposite of the Center Strategy. Your goal is to stay out of everyone's way by building a long L-shaped wall along two edges of the board. You will probably need to create many scattered groups along your chosen edges at the beginning of the game, and gradually connect them as the game progresses. It's best to play your letter and number tiles first, and save the more flexible icon tiles to defend against encroaching players in the later stages of the game. Furthermore, if you're playing all your tiles in the H row and the 9 column, save your H tile and 9 tile until you need them most.

The hardest tiles to play will be the ones that go in the power-intersection opposite your L-shape's corner. You can often get rid of one of these tiles by playing it into that power-intersection as a singleton. A singleton in a power-intersection is virtually guaranteed to be captured by some other player. Also, look for opportunities to branch out towards the center of the board so that you can play your center-region tile.

This strategy usually generates a lower-than-average number of captures – perhaps five in a four-player game. Your goal is to end the game with a single group, but two groups may also be a winning score.

The Two-Group Strategy

In many games, no player manages to finish with a single group. The Two-Group Strategy takes advantage of this fact. While your opponents beat each other up trying to get a single group, quietly work on building two separate groups while avoiding confrontations. Although you should attempt to capture as few tiles as possible, don't pass up an opportunity to thwart an opponent's connection with a well-timed attack. If no one manages to end the game with a single group, you will almost certainly win with two groups and the fewest captures.

Because your goal is to capture as few tiles as possible, it's best to avoid the heavily-contested power-intersections. You should also avoid playing along the edges, because you must then build longer walls to reach distant areas of the board. The best approach is to select two opposite corners of the board and create two L-shaped groups with their corners in the centers of their respective regions. This provides good coverage of the entire board – you'll have multiple ways to reach all nine regions, and you'll rarely get stuck with unplayable tiles in your hand.

This strategy is especially effective in a five-player game, where it's very difficult for any opponent to get a single group.

The Hyper-Aggressive Strategy

This is the most risky strategy, but it can also be the most exhilarating. On your first turn, if someone has played a singleton into a power-intersection, capture it! (If not, just play into any power-intersection.) From then on, build a strong wall and guard it by capturing without restraint. If anyone plays a singleton near you, capture it, even if you must play a singleton of your own to do so. Beat back any encroaching groups with captures when you can. Your goal is to bludgeon your way to a single-group win, while reducing the flexibility of other players by capturing their pieces. You will make a large number of captures – often more than 20 – so you will almost certainly lose unless you end the game with a single group. This strategy can fail spectacularly, but when it succeeds, it's glorious!

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