

Paper Boxing

A Game of Thrilling, Narrow Victories and Tiny, Crushing Defeats

A peculiar piece of optimization advice: “Win small, lose big.” It sounds wrong. But in a scenario with finite resources, it may be your best choice.

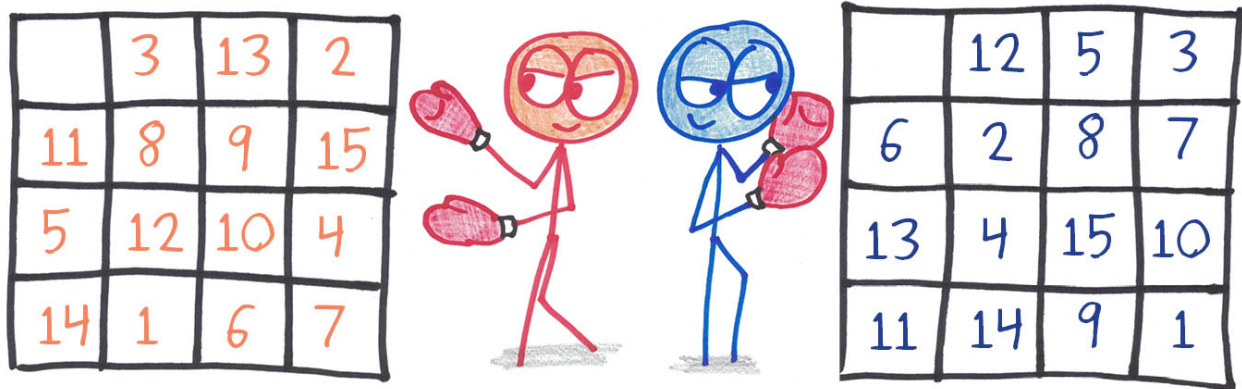
Here’s a cynical example. When trying to gerrymander a state to advantage your party, you can’t change the number of votes, only change how they’re allocated. So, in a 50/50 state, you want to lose one seat in a 90/10 landslide, then win every other seat in a 52/48 nail-biter.

The same logic that drives grade-maximizing students. If you’re going to land on an A-, you want to land there *barely*, with something like a 90.1%, not expend the extra effort to reach 92.4% yet wind up with the same final grade.

This sneaky insight is the key to the game of Paper Boxing. If you can string together efficient wins, and force your opponent into inefficient wins, then you’ll be well on your way to victory.

How to Play

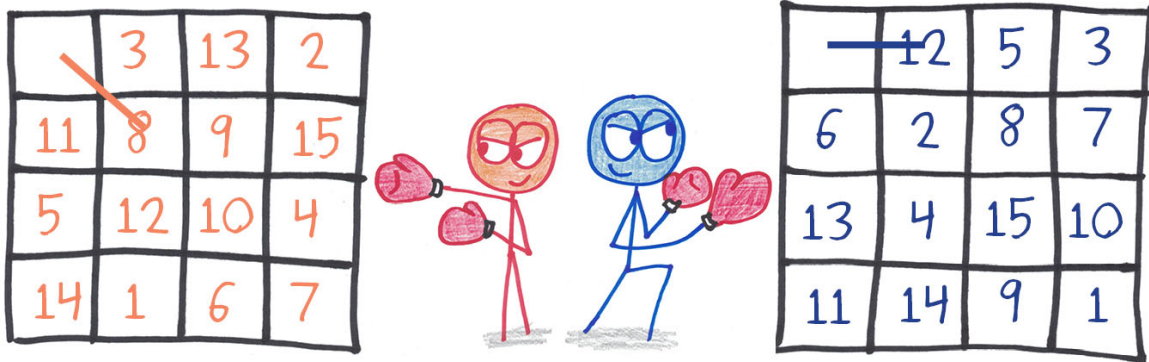
What do you need? Two players, each with paper and pencil. Each player draws a 4-by-4 grid, leaves the upper left corner blank, and secretly fills the other cells with the numbers 1 through 15 in any arrangement.



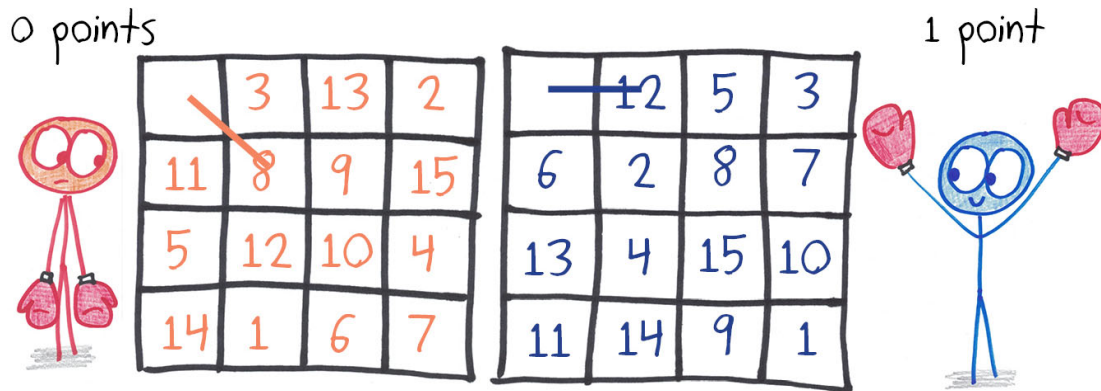
What’s the goal? Win a majority of the match’s fifteen rounds.

What are the rules?

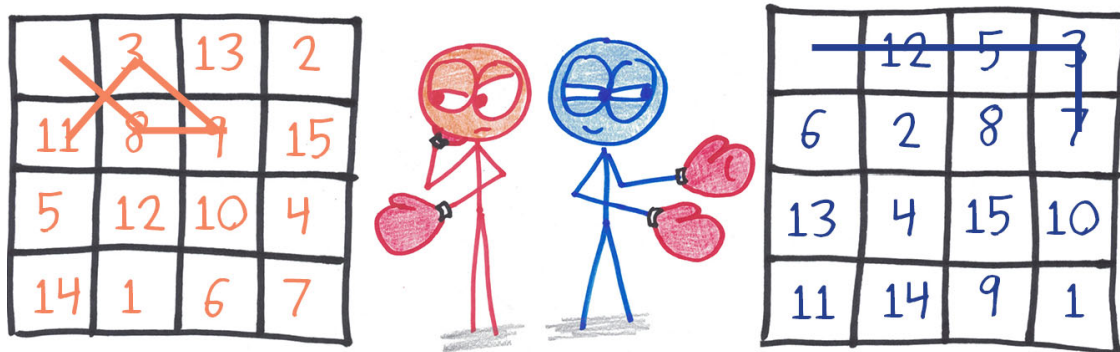
1. Place the grids face-up, so each player can study them both. Then, when ready, hide your grid, and **secretly draw a line from your blank START to any adjacent number**.



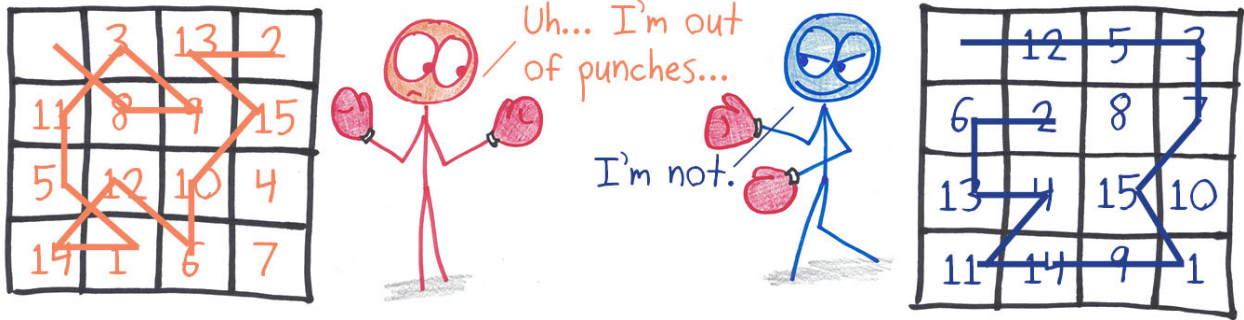
2. Reveal the grids face-up again. **Whoever chose the higher number wins the round**, scoring one point. (In case of a tie, neither player scores a point.)



3. Repeat this process: inspect the grids; hide them; and secretly draw a line from your most recent number to any neighbor. **Your path may cross itself along diagonals, but cannot revisit any numbers**. Each round, the higher number scores one point.



4. If you manage to **trap yourself**, so that your path cannot continue, then you have in effect chosen “zero” for all remaining rounds.



5. The champion is **whoever wins more rounds** (i.e., scores more points). Ties are possible.



Variations

Adversarial Boards: Instead of designing your own board, design your opponent's.

Knockdowns: If you win a round by a margin of 10 or more (e.g., 13-2, or 14-4), then this is a *knockdown*, and adds not one, but *two* points to your score.

Knockouts: Losing a round 15 to 1 is an instant knockout. Whoever played “15” wins the game.

Flexible Values: Instead of 1 through 15, design your board using any (non-negative) numbers that you want, as long as they add up to 120.

	15	0	15		5	10	5		6	10	5
15	0	15	0	5	10	10	10	5	9	12	8
0	15	0	15	10	10	5	10	10	11	4	10
15	0	15	0	5	10	10	5	5	0	20	5