

# So You Want to Play Go?

*Level 1: Beginner to 20 kyu*

By Jonathan Hop

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Other publications:

“So you want to play Go?” Level 2 and 3  
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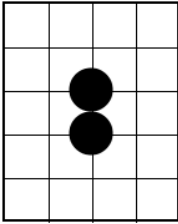
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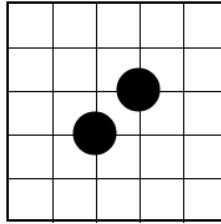
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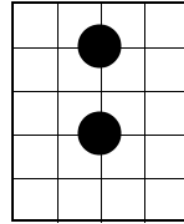
# Slow and Strong



The iron pillar

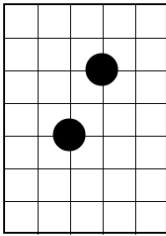


The kosumi

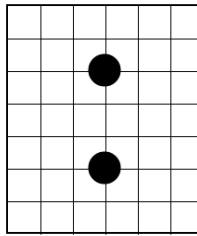


One space jump

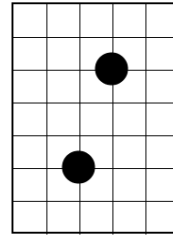
# Fast and Weak



The Knight's move



Two space jump



The large Knight's  
move

The **iron pillar** is the strongest shape because it is two Black stones directly connected to each other. It is especially useful when we need a sturdy, unbreakable shape to protect territory or the connection of our stones, but is a very slow move in and of itself.

The **kosumi** (or diagonal move but kosumi sounds way better) is not quite as strong as its friend the iron pillar but by no means is it a weak shape. If White intends to break Black, he needs two moves in a row to do so. Again, kosumi can be rather slow so it can be quite good for defense but not so successful at track and field.

The **one space jump** is a good middle ground as it moves ahead quite well but at the same time is a decently strong shape. Of course, its weakness lies in its middle where it is possible White could cut. If White plays at 1 in Diagram 1, Black has the option of simply linking at 2. When we play the one space jump, we want to avoid Diagram 2, where White is spearing through our shape. If your opponent ends up like Black, you can picture his stones are delicious pieces of beef (or Tofu should you be vegetarian), and you have skewered them, ready to roast them over an open fire.

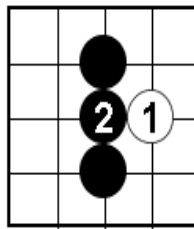


Diagram 1

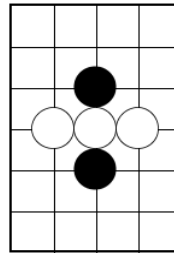
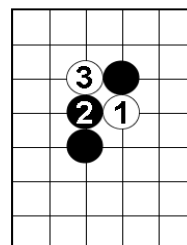
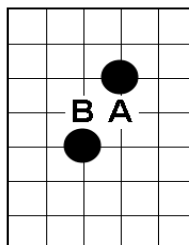
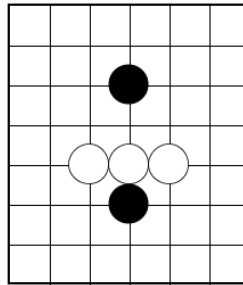
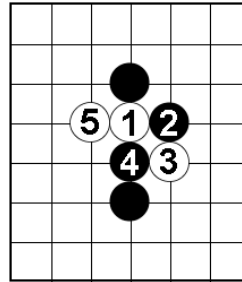
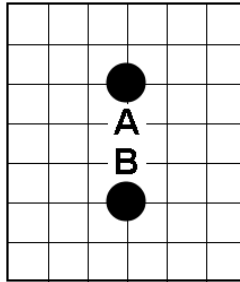


Diagram 2

The **knights jump/move** (or if we're being fancy, keima) is a typical attacking move and is a bit weaker than the one space jump. The reason for that is the simple fact that the two stones are not in line with one another, but are separated horizontally *and* vertically. Why then play the knights jump instead of a one space jump? The knight's move is used to cover enemy stones or run out if the shape can withstand your opponents attack. The knight's jump has a weakness at both A and B, which are called its "waist". However, it might be difficult for White to use this weakness outright. For instance, if White tries to break Black's shape by playing 1 in the lower right diagram, Black will attempt to link up at 2. White will cut at 3, and White will have two groups with only two liberties to look after.

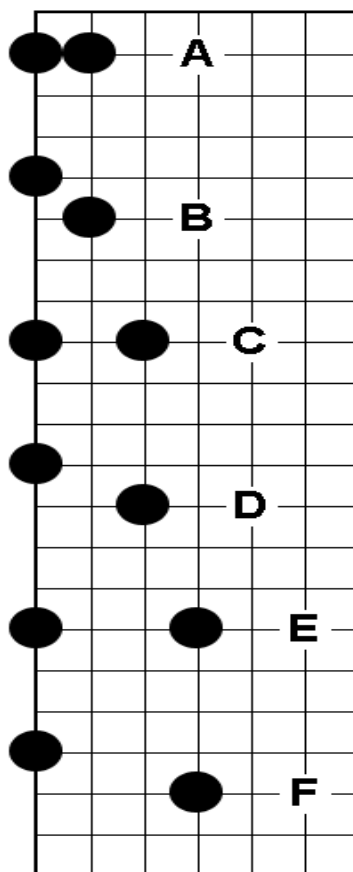


The **two space jump** is much faster than the other shapes and got a gold medal at the state track and field tournament. This shape is highly useful when we need to run away quick or take a lot of space in one move. The shape has weaknesses at A and B, so be careful, you could get cut. For example, let's say White just dives right in at 1. Black will try to connect his stones, and then White might stubbornly play 3. After Black cuts White with 4, White's stone is in Atari and he will have to extend at 5 or Black will laugh at him. Here, White has cut Black but he has some weak stones to deal with. We do not want our shape to end up like Diagram 3 because it will bring shame to our family.





I have lined up all of the previous shapes with the slowest move, the iron pillar, at the top and the faster move, the large knight's move, at the bottom. The faster shapes reach out further. This is good to keep in mind when we need to run away with a group, or whether we need to think about defense. Faster moves can get us out of trouble in a jiffy, but slower and stronger moves have less of a possibility of being cut, and we might find we won't have to defend later. The concept of the movement of stones in Weiqi is called "Haengma" in Korean. Haengma literally means "moving horse" but since I like monkeys better I just imagine it means "moving monkeys". In this light, it's easier to imagine our stones moving across the board. The iron pillar is the fat monkey in the back of the group, snacking on a banana, while the large keima is the swift and springy monkey at the head of the pack. The fat monkey is hard to budge, but the fast simian is easy to trip.



For right now, you should take care to recognize these shapes, not just in your own games, but in the games of stronger players. It does not matter whether you are watching two twenty kyus or two six dans play, you will see these shapes in many different situations. Try to gain as much experience as you can and find out when and where they are used.

Now, imagine a friend of yours has gone to the mountains to study Weiqi. You didn't take him seriously at first, but after he was gone for a month you've been starting to wonder whether or not there was truth to his words. Then, one day your friend appears in a ray of dazzling light, his hair long and scraggly from his many days of self

denial. He is holding a tablet that looks like some Weiqi board he probably dug up out of an archeological dig. He raises it high and begins to impart on you the knowledge he has gained through his enlightenment.

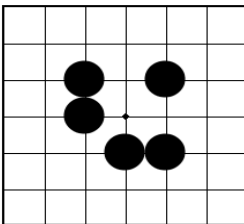
Strange image isn't it?

Well you don't have to have an ascetic friend to impart mystical knowledge on what makes good shape in Weiqi, but you certainly could learn....

### The 3 commandments of Good shape:

1. Thou shalt be connected – Your stones must be attached to each other along the horizontal and vertical lines, or have the ability to attach to each other unhindered by enemy stones.
2. Thou shalt have no weakness- Stones with good shape have lots of liberties, have no viable cutting points, and no outright weaknesses that will make you break into sobbing fits at the Weiqi board. Count your liberties!
3. Thou shalt be functional – Your stones should be in good shape when they are all performing admirably at their jobs and are employee of the month.

Whenever you play stones try to make sure they have good shape, you'll have a better game if you really pay attention to it. Here are some basic good shapes that you will see stronger players make in their games all the time. Remember, you'll see some of these shapes in part but not whole oftentimes, so try to watch out for that.



This is called the mouth shape (maybe you have a better imagination than I and can find some other applicable name for this shape. Be creative!). This is the essence of good shape. Why? Well let's take a look at our commandments. Black can solidly connect all his stones with ease, has no cutting points, and has plenty of liberties.