

John Greenwood's
Guide to Kriegsspiel (v 1.3)

What is Kriegsspiel?

Kriegsspiel (KS) is a double-blind military maneuver game intended to plausibly depict conflict which is arbitrated by neutral umpires and played on a simultaneous-turn basis.

The players act as individual commanders of their force, while the umpire acts as a neutral referee and facilitates the gameplay between the players. The umpire moves all the pieces and resolves all the engagements and various courses of action that the players take.

The decisions of the umpire are final. It is poor form to argue with an umpire, especially when a decision has been made clear.

Kriegsspiel has a long history. The first written set of rules were made in 1824, and has since evolved into many beloved games such as Dungeons & Dragons and Warhammer. Many of the earlier editions of these successor games include more direct artefacts from Kriegsspiel, such as the simultaneous combat in first edition D&D.

Kriegsspiel is a gentleman's game with expectations of conduct similar to chess. All participants are expected to act like gentlemen.

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Defining Kriegsspiel

This guide sets out the following criteria that qualify a game as a Kriegsspiel:¹

1. Double-Blind with dynamic fog of war
2. Simultaneous turns
3. Arbitrated by neutral umpire(s)
4. Intended to plausibly depict conflict²
5. Involves military maneuver

Generally, because of the above criteria, Kriegsspiel also has accurate simulation of movement speeds, asynchronous messaging, conflicts between formations of troops, the use of topographical maps, and rigorous accounting of logistics and casualties.

Fog of War

KS is at least double-blind, if not triple-blind. What is double blind?

No-blind: You play a game of chess. Both players can see all the pieces on the board and always have perfect information of the positions and capabilities of the enemy.

Single-blind: You play a game of chess. One player can see all the pieces on the board while the other player must play using a blindfold. The blindfolded player has some idea of where the enemy started and their capabilities, but they have to mentally keep track of the pieces in their own mind and have to update enemy positions by scouting with their own pieces.

Double-blind: You play a game of chess. Both players are blindfolded.

Triple-blind: You play a game of chess. The capabilities of the pieces have been changed, so that neither player knows the positions or capabilities of the other side.

The umpire decides which troops and information to reveal to which players. Troops which a player cannot see are hidden from their view.

The fog of war introduces **information asymmetry**, as no player is certain of where friendly or enemy forces are located.

¹ Wargamers argue incessantly about the definition of Kriegsspiel. However, these discussions are not useful for introducing new players and umpires to the genre. Therefore, I have stuck with the most "traditionalist" definition. There are obviously people who disagree. The first three points are relatively uncontroversial; point five is the most contentious.

² A sub-category to this criterion is the requirement of historicity. Some propose for conflict to be *plausibly* depicted, it must adhere to history.

Jargon

CiC: Commander in chief

2ic: second-in-command

Van: vanguard

Pbp: play-by-post

Sim: Simulation

TTS: Tabletop Simulator (a videogame)

Diplo: short for diplomacy. Refers to a political style of game.

Logi: Logistics

Defile: *aka* a chokepoint. A route through which troops can only march in a narrow column or with a narrow front. In geography, a narrow pass or gorge between mountains or hills.

Debouch: Emerging from/passing through a defile/chokepoint.

Enfilade: Enfilade fire is directed along the length of an enemy.

Overhead fire: Plunging fire directed over the heads of friendly troops. In any kind of warfare prior to WW1, this is a *faux pas* and was rarely done! Don't order this if you are a player, and don't allow it if you are an umpire.

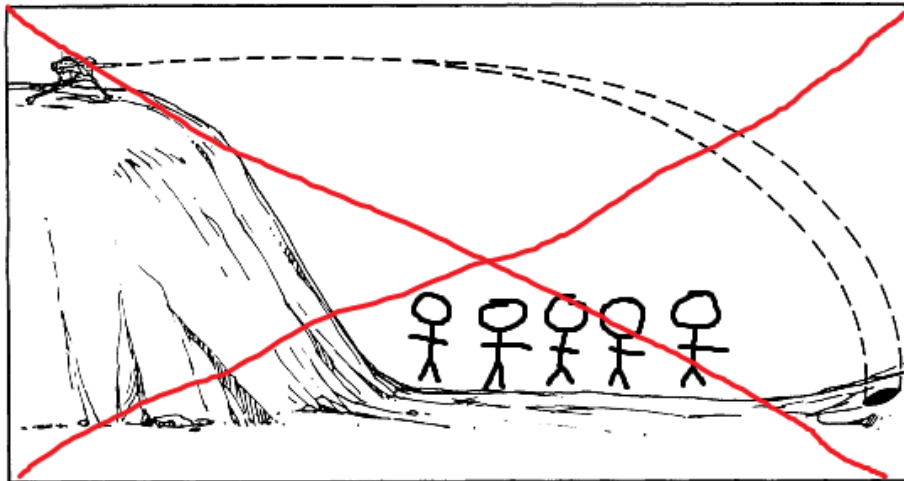
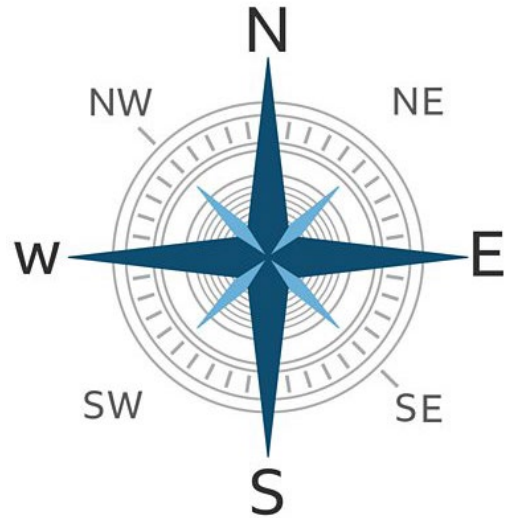


Figure 6-1. Plunging fire.

Basic Map Literacy

Cardinal Directions

There are four cardinal directions: **North, East, South, and West**, marked by their respective letters (N, E, S, W). The directions between these points are a combination of the two directions. For instance, the direction between north and west is called Northwest.



When first looking at a map, look for a compass in one of the corners. You only need one of the directions to figure out the other directions.

If there's no compass, then by convention, **north is usually "up"** on the map.

If you don't have a handy way to remember your cardinal directions, keep this phrase in your head: "NEVER. ENDANGER. SUPPLY. WAGONS."

Grids

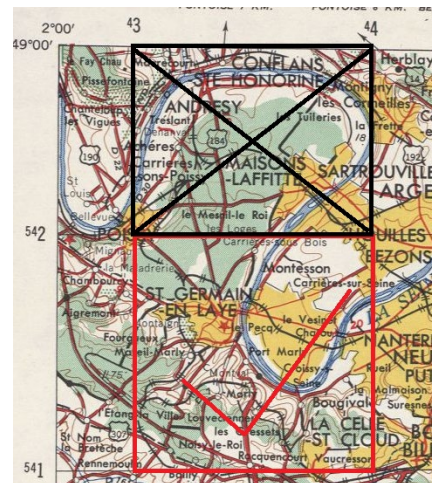
Grids are written "along the corridor and up the stairs," meaning X axis first and then Y axis: **"Read right, then up."**

The **X axis** (left to right) numbers increase as you go further right.

The **Y axis** (down to up) numbers increase as you go further up.

The grid coordinates point to the **bottom-left corner** of the grid square. For example, 4.3-54.1 refers to the red square with the checkmark, not the black square with the X.

Modern maps will have the scale of the grid written on the map.



You can quickly tell the scale of an older map's grid by seeing whether it is British or Prussian. If it is a British map, the old 1800s ordnance surveys were almost all 6 inches to a mile, and Prussian maps were 8 inches to a mile. Prussian maps usually had 1 grid square = ~2km, for instance, on the Metz map.

Bearings

A **bearing** is the angle from a certain position to your target (measured *clockwise* from the north). If someone asks you for a bearing, they are asking for the direction of the enemy.

In Kriegsspiel, it's better to give the bearing from *your own position* due to Fog of War. It's also better to give bearings in general terms according to cardinal directions.

Example

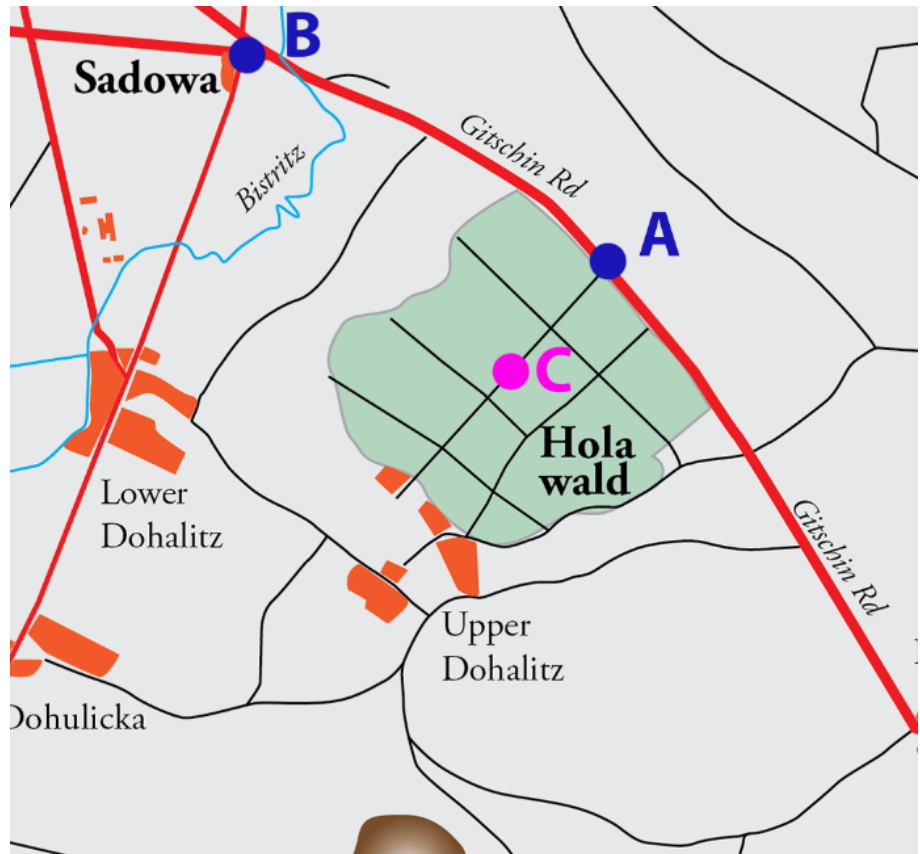
Suppose we are at A, our friends are at B, and the enemy is at C.

If we want to let our friends know the bearing of the enemy, we could say:

"The enemy is in the center of the woods southwest of my position."

Getting the precise degree of bearing is often difficult on a map. It is much easier in real life.

Mils are another common unit of bearing, but I don't want to teach random people on the internet how to operate mortars.

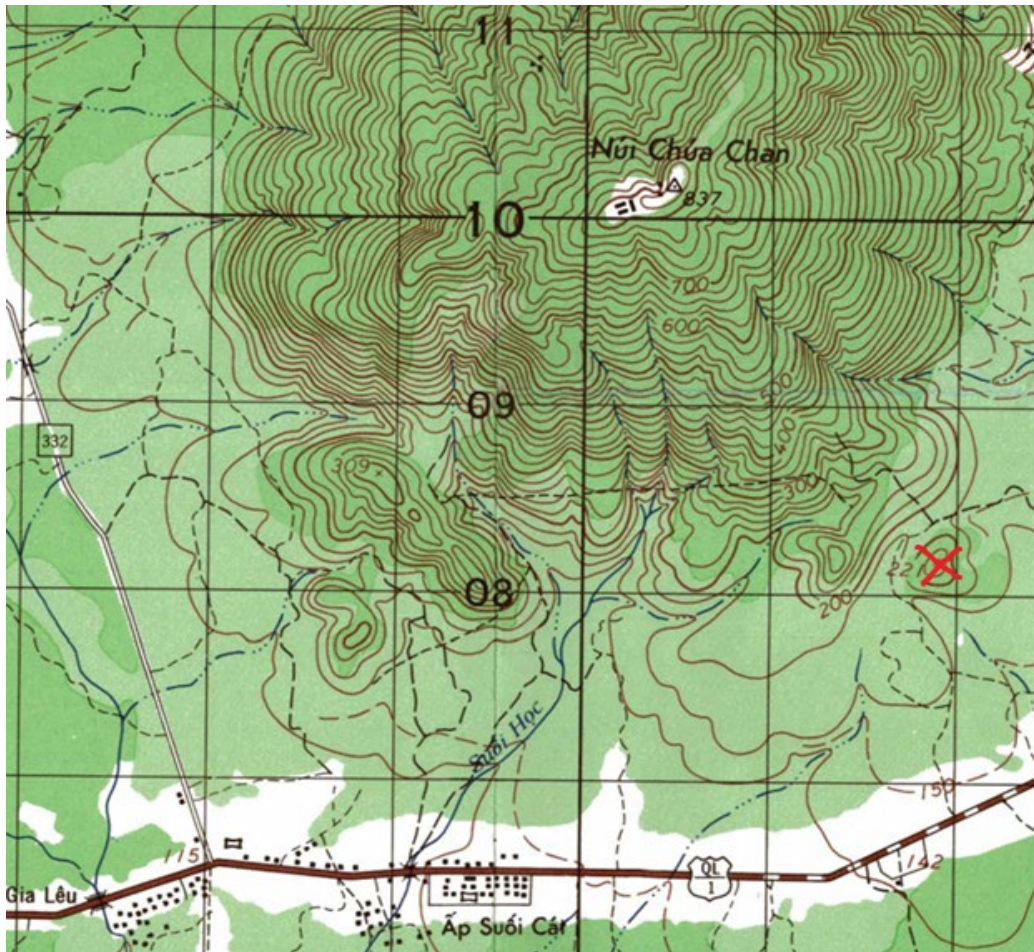
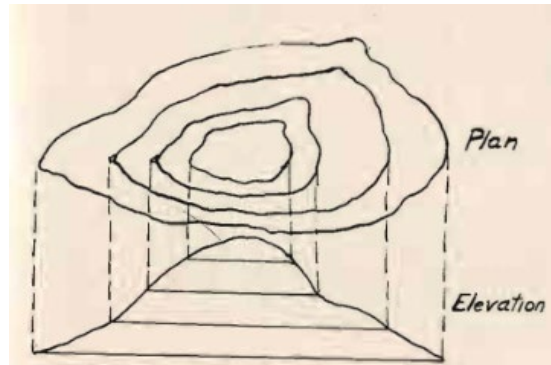


Elevation

Elevation is represented by **contour lines** on the map, as in the diagram on the right.

Sometimes, the peak of a hill is marked by a number on the map.

For example, if we wanted to report the position of an enemy at the red X in the map provided, it might be smart to call them out as "enemy on hill 221" so that our commander does not waste time guessing whether the enemy is on hill 221 or hill 200.

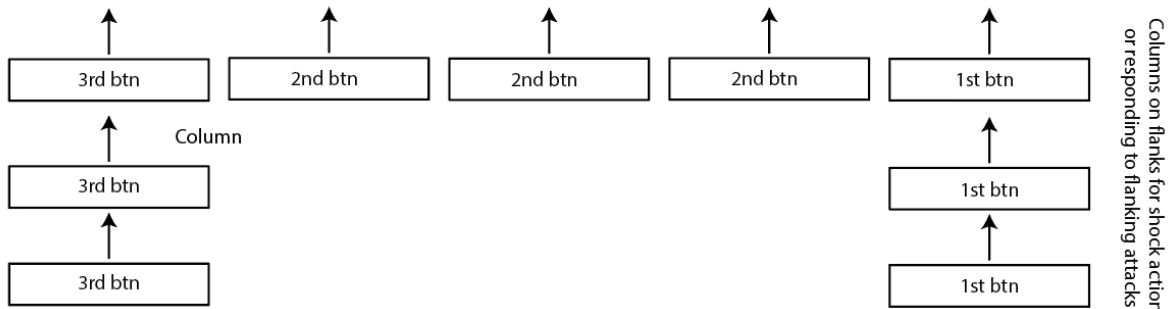
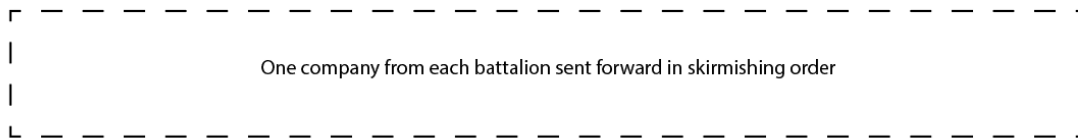
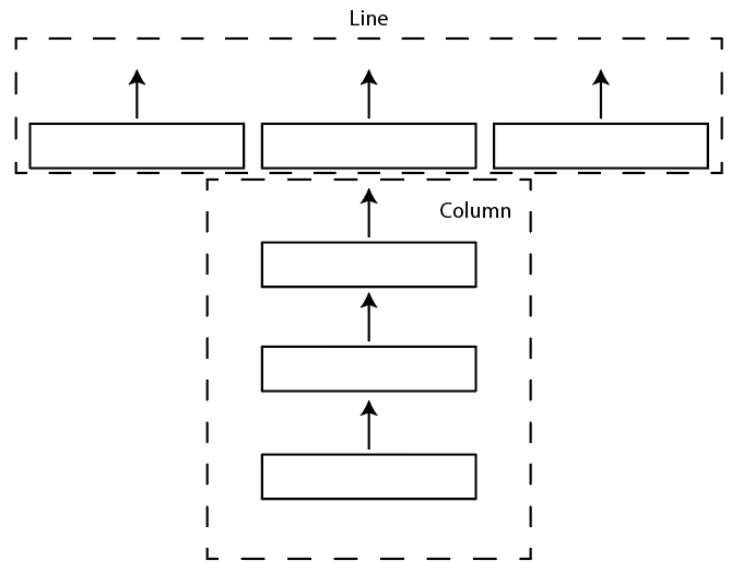


Basic Formations

Most units in KS are only capable of **line** or **column** formation. Line is generally reserved for combat. Column maximizes rate of movement while line maximizes firepower.

Marching Column is a looser, more relaxed form of column that maximizes marching speed. It is generally four men wide, regardless of whether on foot or horse.

Assault Column is tighter and wider than a Marching Column and is meant for bayonet charges.



Here's a company-level diagram of the late Napoleonic (1811-12) *Ordre Mixte* ("Mixed Order"). This is a stereotypical deployment formation for a French Brigade. You may want to look at historical formations for inspiration on troop formations. Think carefully *why* each unit is placed in its position in the textbook formation.

Dispatches and sending orders

A **dispatch** is a message to another player. Dispatches must be *physically carried* by a courier to your allied commander, spoken in person, or tapped into a telegram wire and decoded by a listener on the other side.

There's a *significant delay* between you sending the dispatch and the other person receiving it. Remember to factor the time it takes to transmit, receive, and understand the dispatch, and for the recipient to act on the dispatch. Distance matters! The longer the distance, the less the effect of your dispatch.

Common mistakes in dispatches

- Failing to consider the recipient's current situation or capabilities
- Neglecting to include reporting instructions
- Using vague or ambiguous language
- Antagonizing the recipient

Example Dispatch 1

FROM: Canadian Corps, 0645 Nov 11 /
FWD: 4th Canadian Dragoons, 0730 Nov 11
TO: All Canadian Corps
Canadian Corps 0645.
Hostilities will cease at 11 hours on Nov 11th.
Troops will stand fast on the line reached at that hour which will be reported to Corps HQ.
Defensive precautions will be maintained.
There will be no intercourse of any description with the enemy.
Further instructions follow.

Example Dispatch 2

FROM: 1st Army HQ, 0530 Jun 15, at
Generictown
TO: Cmdr. Greg, 1st Division, at Blue Town
grid 000-123
MESSAGE: Enemy breakthrough reported
sector C4.
1st Division advance to defensive line Sierra
by 0800. Artillery to provide supporting fire
from positions Alpha and Bravo. Cavalry to
screen flanks.
Report positions upon arrival. Hold position
and engage enemy forces. 2nd Division to
reinforce by 1200.
Further orders to follow.

Discord Template

DISPATCH

Time:

To:

To Location:

From:

From Location:

Message:

Orders

Get to the point in fewer than 200 words.³ If you have to split orders into two discord messages, you're doing something wrong. These orders should be so short that it's easier for you to write them yourself than to set up a prompt for an AI to do it for you.⁴

Avoid micromanaging and overcomplicating your orders.

1. It frustrates your subordinates
2. It creates unnecessary busywork for yourself
3. It frustrates the umpire
4. It's rarely more effective than giving your units flexibility

Your units will independently make decisions without the need for orders. For example, cavalry would probably attack undefended supply wagons without orders.

Form of Orders

1. Always give an order (even to say "no further orders").
2. Assume the umpire has no memory of the situation (they probably don't)
3. Make your orders and dispatches easy to find. In discord, you can use lines (---) and Headers (## Header) to demarcate your dispatches.

How to give orders in a Play-By-Post Discord game

1. Go into the channel where you're supposed to give orders (e.g. # red-1)
 - a. Usually this is your personal channel, i.e. the channel named after your player character or your command position
2. Write a header and include the time
 - a. E.g. # Orders 0930
3. Write a brief description of what you'd like your men to do
 - a. **Situational context** so that your men can understand the reasons behind their orders and so they can improvise if necessary
 - b. Your **goal or intention** of the orders
 - c. A **numbered list** with the maneuver elements
 - d. **Reporting instructions** – where can your units return reports?

³ An average English speaking rate is 150 words per minute. If an officer is conveying an order over 150 words, they will be speaking for more than a minute, and whoever is listening to the order (i.e. your men) will start to lose vital details, leading to misunderstandings and disasters.

⁴ Also, why play the game if you're going to get the AI to do it for you?

Example Game Interaction⁵

The time is 0900 hours.

There are two players on two respective teams: Richard and Sally.

Richard is in a defensive position awaiting an attack.

Sally is directing her forces toward Richard's position and has learned that it is defended. She is directly marching into Richard's position and the head of her column will reach Richard by 1000h. The Umpire asks Sally what she will do.

Sally tells the Umpires:

"At 0915 my columns begin to debouch from the wood 3,000 yards from the enemy's position.

- 1st Bde deploys in the valley in front.
- 2nd Bde moves under the cover of the wood to the left of the enemy. It will arrive there and be ready for attack at 10AM.
- At 0930, my three batteries open fire on the enemy's position or any of his artillery they may have seen.

After 2nd is in position, both brigades are to attack simultaneously at 1000."

The umpire gives an update to Richard:

"At 0915, enemy columns debouch from the wood in front of you. They disappear into the valley. At 0930, 18 guns at your front open fire on you. What do you do?"

After getting an answer, both Richard and Sally's troops are arranged by the Umpires at the Umpire's discretion, according to the principles of action stated by the players.

⁵ Game interaction modernized from: Her Majesty Queen Victoria, *Rules for the Conduct of the War-Game on a Map*, (Harrison & Sons, London: 1896).

Kriegsspiel Etiquette

You can more easily remember the most important elements of Kriegsspiel etiquette by trying not to violate any of the core principles this guide itemized when defining Kriegsspiel.

1. Double-Blind with dynamic fog of war
2. Simultaneous turns
3. Arbitered by neutral umpire(s)
4. Intended to plausibly depict conflict⁶
5. Involves military maneuver

For instance, you should not “metagame” because it would violate the principle of double-blind play or fog of war. You should not touch the pieces because the game is arbitered by a neutral umpire. You should be punctual because being late would interfere with the simultaneous turn structure, etc.

The rest of the etiquette is basic human decency and common sense.

Follow the rules

If a rule isn't clear, discuss it calmly and work out a solution with your umpire.

Be punctual

Show up on time to game sessions, and respect everyone's time by being ready to start when the session is scheduled or when your deadline for orders is due. If you're running late, let others know.

If you suspect you will not be able to meet a deadline schedule or time commitment, do not play in that game.

Don't waste time during your turns, as long delays cause frustration and interfere with the simultaneous turn structure. Be mindful of the clock. Games have time limits and other groups may be waiting to use the space or make their next turn. Keep the game moving.

Respect the space

Clean up after yourself. Whether at home or at a convention, leave the gaming area tidy when you're done. Properly dispose of food and drink.

Do not touch models or pieces. In Kriegsspiel, it is against the rules for players to touch the pieces; this is reserved for umpires only. It is extremely disrespectful to touch the pieces and you will likely be ejected from the game for doing so.

Practice good sportsmanship

Celebrate wins humbly and accept losses graciously. Taunting, gloating, or being a sore loser ruins the fun for everyone.

Respect the results of the game. Do not nitpick or try to retroactively argue results.

Be easy on beginners – help them learn the ropes rather than exploring their mistakes in too much detail.

⁶ A sub-category to this criterion is the requirement of historicity. That is to say that some propose for conflict to be *plausibly* depicted, it must adhere to history.

Do not metagame

This restriction is so commonplace that most umpires don't explicitly state it as a rule – it is considered common-sense. Metagaming will likely see you ejected from the game and overall avoided in the community.

Metagaming is the practice of using knowledge that you as a player have outside of the game and shouldn't have inside the game to inform your decisions within the game.

Metagaming does not mean pulling on your life experiences. Metagaming is instead acting against the spirit of the game or exercise by relying on knowledge that you are not supposed to possess.

While you may be desperate for information, as this is what your plans hinge on, sometimes we must be kept in suspense because our characters do not know what's happening. Kriegsspiel is at its core a double-blind game. Messaging people outside of the game to remove your blindfold and gain information that you should not have is metagaming.

Some examples may help to illustrate what umpires are concerned with preventing when they say that metagaming is not allowed.

Timothy Metagames the Moltke Problems

Timothy reads ahead for von Moltke's explanation on the solution to the textbook problem so that he can appear clever to his peers and "win" the exercise. Timothy has metagamed.

- Timothy has gained knowledge outside of the game by reading the book (which he's not supposed to know) rather than working with what the umpire has provided.
- Timothy *used* the book solution rather than inventing his own strategy.
- Timothy has acted against the spirit of the exercise. The purpose of the Moltke Problems is to go through the process of *planning* and *discussing* strategies with other officers, helping you get into the habit of thinking like an officer. Instead of learning a new way of thinking, Timothy has learned to regurgitate.

Lucy Metagames her counterattack

Lucy is a general playing a game on a discord server. Her lieutenant is forward several miles with the vanguard. Lucy ordered her lieutenant to send her a dispatch by 0900 hours so that she can decide where her main body should move in response to the enemy. It's now 0930 hours. The dispatch is long overdue, and the pressure to act continues to mount.

Lucy decides to open her lieutenant's direct messages on discord and simply asks him, "can you send me a screenshot of your update?" Lucy has metagamed.

- Lucy attempted to gain knowledge outside of the game through bypassing the in-game dispatches and directly messaging the player outside the server
- Lucy has shown every intention of using this information to inform her decision of where to move her forces in response to the enemy.
- Lucy has acted against the spirit of the game. In Kriegsspiel, the associated delays with command are essential to replicating the friction and fog of war. Lucy's choice to directly message her lieutenant for a screenshot bypasses this vital component of

real life, nullifying the challenge and skill involved in managing delayed or incomplete information.

Bob Metagames his defensive posture

Bob is a captain in a live Kriegsspiel game at a conference. During the game, Bob notices that another player has inadvertently left their orders visible on the table while they go to the toilet, showing a map with enemy troop positions and movements. Instead of immediately warning the umpire and doing his best to forget this information, Bob quickly memorizes the details and adjusts his plans accordingly. Bob has metagamed.

- Bob gained knowledge outside of the game by exploiting an accidental display of information that he would not have had if the Kriegsspiel scenario had occurred in real life.
- Bob used this knowledge to inform his decisions; his responses were based on this "meta" information rather than the information made available to him through in-game reports.
- Bob acted against the spirit of the game by disrupting the intended challenge and realism of the exercise, acquiring and acting upon information that he should not know. Bob's actions undermine the game's core principle of uncertainty. By exploiting an out-of-game occurrence, Bob not only gained an unfair advantage but also disrupted the realism and fairness of the exercise. His behavior erodes the trust between players and umpires, which is vital for maintaining the integrity of the game.

Do not argue with the umpire

This is the most common mistake committed by new players. Save your arguments for when the game is *done* or at any time the umpire asks for feedback.

Do not argue with the umpire during play. This is *egregious* conduct. You will justifiably be kicked from the game.

Do not harass the umpire

This happens more during play-by-post than in-person.

Do not take the umpire's silence for deliberate ignorance. They are likely handling another important matter. When the umpire seems like they are not answering you, don't ping spam them or privately DM them for updates.

Do not distract

Respect the focus of the other players and the umpire.

Mind your noise levels as well. Loud conversations can disrupt the ability of others to communicate.

Do not interfere as a spectator

Do not interfere with someone else's game unless asked for help or advice by the umpire. Avoid backseat gaming.

Having fun is your responsibility

It is not the umpire's job to make sure that you have fun.

Many different people have different ideas of fun, and the umpire cannot juggle them all. A glorious death in the charge of the vanguard may be fun to one player while frustrating to another.

Do not suddenly drop out

Avoid suddenly dropping out. Inform the umpire of any need for you to drop out – whether that be life circumstances, or a loss of fun, or too much frustration to continue. Never drop out of the game without telling the umpire. They are unlikely to allow you to play in their games in the future.

It is best practice to try to give the umpire a short window to find a replacement, or to offer your position to your second-in-command where possible.

Avoid war crimes

Avoid committing war crimes unless the umpire specified they are allowed. Most commonly this includes:

- Execution or mistreatment of POWs
- False surrenders
- Targeting civilians or civilian structures
- Using civilian structures such as hospitals, churches, or schools as fortifications
- Using civilians as human shields
- Killing or imprisoning a negotiation envoy/diplomat
- Targeting medical personnel
- *Sector bombing* (bombing grid-by-grid on a map without eyes-on)
- Torture

Thank each other

At the end of the game, thank the umpires for running the game. The umpires should thank the players for their time.

Supplementary reading list

"Get good" by reading these books. I have provided links to free, legally available downloads wherever possible.

General

Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Translated by Lionel Giles, 1910. Project Gutenberg Press, 2024. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/132>.

- Read the entire book. It's short. Kriegsspiel involves a lot of reading
- Read an **annotated version** of the book that includes the Chinese introduction. The Gutenberg version (public domain) includes these features

Thomas Wilhelm. *A Military Dictionary and Gazetteer*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2019. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/59563>.

- Search through this dictionary whenever you encounter an unfamiliar term
- The dictionary includes several pictures to aid your understanding
- More of a reference, don't read this cover-to-cover

Herber George Wells. *Little Wars*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2003. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3691>.

- Read this if you have any interest in becoming an umpire, as it will save you having to relearn the lessons of old. It provides explanations for why the author codified certain rules and how the procedure of play is carried out

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. *Napoleon's Maxims of War*. Translated by Sir G. C. D'Aguilar, 1862. Project Gutenberg Press, 2015. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/50750>.

- Read through the entire book at least once. This is your bible.

Major Stewart Lygon Murray. *The Reality of War: A Companion to Clausewitz*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2013. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/44200>.

- Let's be real. You have been recommended Clausewitz's *On War* a thousand times, and you've never read it. Nor will you. Its length is daunting. Its prose is dense. Read the summary instead.

Carl von Clausewitz. *On War*. Translated by J. J. Graham, 1874. Project Gutenberg Press, 2006. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1946>.

- We are not interested in his philosophical ramblings. Skip Book 2 and 8.
- Book 1 for sure
- Sun Tzu already covers most of Book 3. Perhaps Chapter 13, Strategic Reserve.
- Books 4-7 cover more tactical considerations in vague terms.

Napoleonics

William Duane. *A Military Dictionary, 1810*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2024.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/74739>.

- An earlier version of Wilhelm's work which may explain other terms.
- Contains useful measurements that may be of interest to umpires for Napoleonics

Long 19th Century

Captain E. Baring. *Rules of the Conduct of the War-Game*, 1872.

Her Majesty Queen Victoria. *Rules for the Conduct of the War-Game on a Map*, 1896.

Marshall Neal. *KS22 Abridged: Kriegsspiel 2022 System*. Edited by John Greenwood, 2024.

Colonel William Balck. Walter Krueger. *Tactics, Volume 1 (of 2). Introduction and Formal Tactics of Infantry*. Translated by Walter Krueger, 1911. Project Gutenberg Press, 2021.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/64927>.

- A treasure trove of mid to late 1800s details on various armies, including drills, instruction, tactics, organization, equipment, formations, signals, paces and movement, artillery capabilities, rangefinding, fire rates, fire effectiveness, casualties, morale effect, frontage, depth... This book answers any question you ever had and more.

Modern Warfare

Anonymous. *A General's Letters to His Son on Minor Tactics*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2024.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/52640>.

- Light, easy reading, with straightforward tactical advice from 1917
- Covers WWI tactics, emphasizing preparation and giving advice

General Rene Radiguet. *The Making of a Modern Army and Its Operations in the Field: A Study Based on the Experience of Three Years on the French Front (1914-1917)*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2019.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/59804>.

- Great operational/strategic advice, less so tactical
- Chapter 1: War Principles
- Chapter 3: Trench organization
- Trench systems mostly use three successive lines of defense, and the first line of defense is often annihilated.
- The thicker the fortification, the thicker the gun in response – "the guns have the last word".

William H. Waldron. *Terrain Exercises*. Project Gutenberg Press, 2020.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/62552>.

Medieval Warfare

Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey. A summary of the history, construction and effects in warfare of the projectile-throwing engines of the ancients, with a treatise on the structure, power and management of Turkish and other Oriental bows of mediæval and later times, 1907. Project Gutenberg Press, 2024. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/74719>.

- The essential text on siege engines and bows – a **must skim for Medieval umpires**

Christine de Pisan et al., *L'art de chevalerie selon Vegace*. Translated by Jean de Vignay, 1488. Project Gutenberg Press, 2024. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/74141>.

- Chapter 9 on how medieval nobles used to train their children in the use of arms

Charles W. C. Oman. *The Art of War in the Middle Ages A.D. 378-1515*, 1884. Project Gutenberg Press, 2013. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/44308>.

Robert Coltman Clephan. *The Defensive Armour and the Weapons and Engines of War of Mediæval Times, and of the "Renaissance"*, 1900. Project Gutenberg Press, 2019. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/59209>.