CRISS CROSS TOWN

A town-building game by **Sotirios Karamitsos**

30-45 mins — 1-4 players — 10+ years

In Criss-Cross Town, players are in charge of building a bustling town — in the form of a crossword! Starting with a 10x10 letter grid, you cut off letters to add them to your town, aiming to place buildings such as offices, shops, and parks in the best spots for future residents to benefit from. Building houses will attract more workers, helping you build a bigger and better town by making difficult letters wild. Balance both the size and the quality of your town in order to score the most points and become the best urban planner in the wor(l)d!

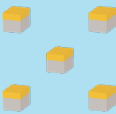## COMPONENTS

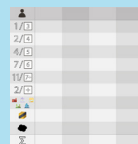letter sheets
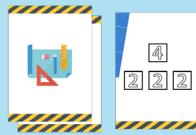
blueprint cards

safety scissors

worker cubes

semi-transparent building tiles

scorepads

sand timer

SETUP

1. Place the worker cubes and the timer within easy reach of all players.

2. Give each player a letter sheet, a pair of scissors, and one worker cube to add to their reserve in front of them.

3. Randomly select and shuffle 4 single-blueprint cards and 4 double-blueprint cards (return the rest to the box).

4. Make the 8-card blueprint card stack by putting the single-blueprint cards on top of the double-blueprint cards.

FLOW OF GAMEPLAY

Criss-Cross Town is played over the course of eight rounds. At the start of a round, a blueprint card is revealed from the stack. The blueprint card tells players how many pieces they're allowed to cut this round from their letter sheet. Players then simultaneously add their cut pieces to their crossword along with any workers from their reserve. Players then pass their letter sheets to the player on their left, and a new round begins.

The precise structure of a round is as follows:

1. Reveal the top card of the blueprint stack.

2. Players cut up to as many pieces as the blueprint card allows.

3. Players append their pieces to their crossword

4. Players pass on their sheet to the left, and receive a sheet from the player to their right. Proceed to the next round (or scoring after the eighth round).

LEGAL CUTS

A legal cut is one that starts and ends at the outer border of a letter sheet without turning on itself (it's fine to start cutting from a corner). Sheets must never be punctured, and there should never be any unfinished cuts after you are done with your sheet. In simple terms, you are allowed to extract any letter of sheets

After pieces fall off from your sheet, you are still allowed to cut them. Your final cut pieces should have **no 2x2 blocks of letters appearing in them**; letters on these pieces will have to be removed from your crossword at the end of the game, costing you points (see **Pollution** section).
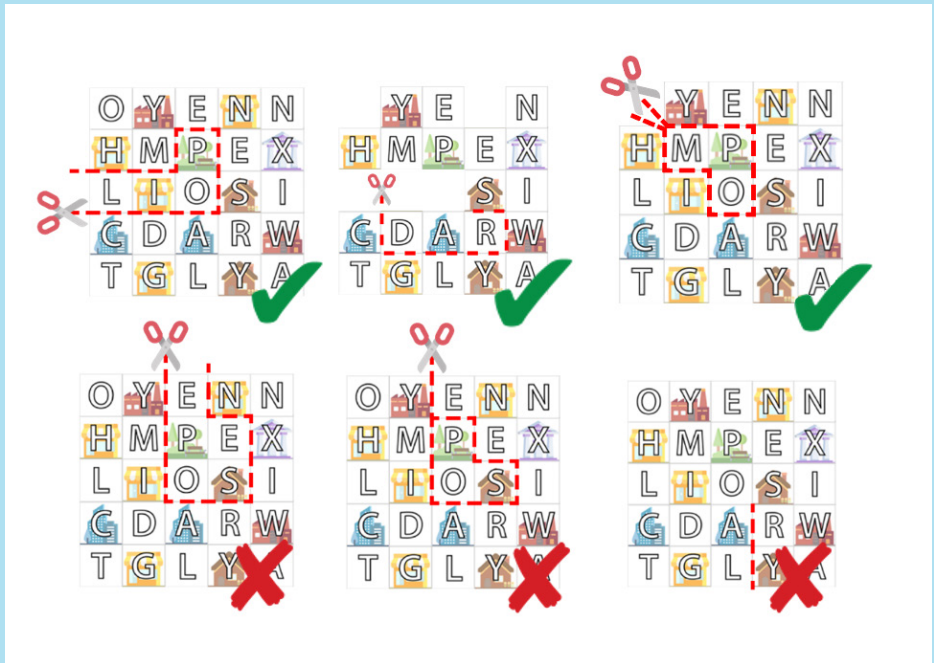
Top row: legal cuts.

*Bottom left: legal cut, but inadvisable (features 2×2 block of letters).*
Bottom middle: illegal cut (turns on itself).
*Bottom right: incomplete cut.*

BLUEPRINT CARDS

The blueprint card revealed at the start of each round tells players how many pieces they are allowed to cut from their letter sheet and the size of those pieces (as well as any additional rules for this round). Players may cut fewer pieces and those pieces can be smaller than the number indicated. Remember: the shape of these pieces is up to you as long as no 2x2 blocks of letters appear in them. Cutting more pieces will result in **pollution** (you will not be able to place them and they will count against your score at the end of the game; see Pollution section).
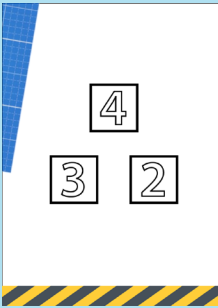
Players may cut up to 3 pieces this round: one up to 4 letters, one up to 3 letters, and one up to 2 letters.

*Players receive an additional worker at the start of the round.*
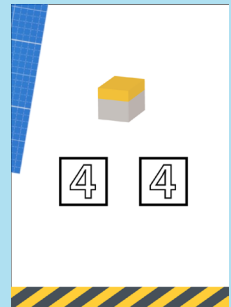
This blueprint card indicates that the pieces cut must have the exact size (players may still decline to cut them).

EXPANDING YOUR TOWN

After cutting your pieces, you may add them to your crossword in any order you wish. To add a piece to your crossword, append it **orthogonally adjacent** to one of your previously placed pieces (except of course for the

first piece, which starts your crossword). Pieces must always be placed such that their letters are upright. Similar to cutting, no 2x2 blocks of letters are allowed to appear in your crossword.
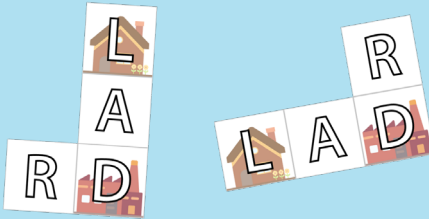
NOTE: Players can flip their pieces before placing them. This turns rows into columns and vice versa. This allows you to focus on finding helpful combinations of letters without worrying whether they are oriented horizontally or vertically.

As you place your pieces, you may add worker cubes from your reserve onto some of the letters (except for houses). This turns them wild: at the end of the game, they stand in for a letter of your choice. You may rearrange your workers at any time.

You may also place workers in between pieces: these are "freelance workers" and while they help you complete words, they do not add to the length of a word for the purposes of scoring (see Scoring section). You may also rearrange these workers at any time.

VERY IMPORTANT: Your crossword does not have to feature complete words at the end of the round, only at the end of the game. In order to keep track of which pieces you cut this round, you can mark them with the provided transparent tiles: you may rearrange these pieces until the end of the round, but not in future rounds.

WORKERS

During the game, you can recruit workers to help you turn difficult letters wild. This means that at the end of the game, each worker is treated as a single letter of your choice. When a worker belongs to multiple words, the letter that the worker emulates must be the same letter for both words.

When you add a house to your crossword, you immediately receive a worker, or two workers if the house was placed in a word with at least another house.

Placing the outlined house would give the player a single worker.

Placing the outlined house would give the player two workers. Any further houses added to the word would still give two workers each.

Remember that you may add freelance workers to your crossword without placing them on already placed letters. This does not increase the length of words for the purposes of scoring (as described in the Scoring section), but is helpful for avoiding incomplete words. At the end of the game, having more workers on your crossword than your neighbours will also award you points.

IMPORTANT: houses may **never** be covered by a worker.

POLLUTION

Pollution is how mistakes are penalised in Criss-Cross Town. There are two ways for pollution to creep into your town: during cutting and adding letter pieces to your crossword, and during end-game scoring (as detailed in the Scoring section).

If you:

- Do not wish or cannot place a piece you have cut (because it exceeds the limits specified by this round's blueprint card)

- Cut a piece that includes a 2×2 block of letters

You must then crumple it and set it aside next to your crossword. Each crumpled piece will count as one pollution at the end of the game.

Careful! A careless cut may split your sheet in two large pieces. You are allowed to pass only one piece to your left, so if this happens, you will have to choose one piece to pass and crumple the other as pollution (no matter how big the crumple is, it still counts as 1 pollution).

If a sheet has been reduced to 5 or fewer squares in **both length and width** due to an abundance of mistakes, the player holding it **may** replace it with a fresh sheet at the start of their turn.

VALID WORDS

Generally, all English words found in a major dictionary are valid, as well as their inflected forms (*drink, drank, drunk*). Proper nouns (*Paris, Donald, Einstein*) are not valid. Foreign words are not valid, unless they are widely used loanwords (*schadenfreude, klutz, macho*).

Players are encouraged to decide on a dictionary before the game starts in order to resolve disputes during scoring.

GAME END

The game ends at the end of the eighth round, when the blueprint stack is empty. Players may rearrange their workers one final time, trying to use as many workers as possible to avoid having any incomplete words in their crossword. Once everyone is done, proceed to final scoring.

SCORING

Once the game is over, every player checks their neighbours' crosswords for any mistakes (non-valid words or 2x2 block of letters). If any are found, then the offending player must **pollute** letters by blacking them out with a marker until all visible words (of length 2 or more) in the crossword are valid. It's okay if those words are not connected.

If you must pollute a building covered with a worker (because no choice of letter will result in a valid word), remove the worker from your crossword and set it aside.

If you must pollute a house, you must remove a worker from those set aside. If you cannot do this, you must remove a worker from anywhere in your crossword. This may mean that you need to pollute additional letters to eliminate all visible non-valid words!

An example of a segment of a crossword with multiple mistakes before and after pollution (with no invalid words or 2x2 block of letters).

After all pollution has been assigned, proceed to counting points. First, players score points for the length of the words in their crossword. Each word at least 3 letters in length scores points according to the table below. **Remember**: freelance workers do not count towards the length of the word (but workers placed on letters to turn them wild do count.
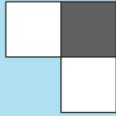
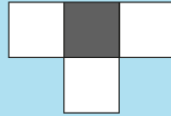| word length	2	3	4	5	6	7	7+
points	0	1	2	3	5	8	8 + 2/additional letter

Players then score bonus points for placing buildings in certain spots. The terminology used for the different places a building can be is shown in the image below.
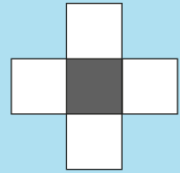
edge   corner   fork   cross

Offices score 1 bonus point if they are placed next to a worker (including freelance workers).

Parks score 1 bonus point if they are **not** situated at an **edge, corner, fork, or cross**.

Factories score 1 bonus point if they are situated at a **corner**, and 2 bonus points if at an **edge**.

Shops score 1 bonus point if they are situated at a **fork**, and 2 bonus points if at a **cross**.

Museums score 3 bonus points each.

Letters without buildings, letters covered with workers, and houses do not score any bonus points.

Players then compare how many workers they have placed on their crossword (either on letters or as freelance workers, but not unused workers) with their neighbours. If **no** neighbour has more than them, they score 1 point per worker. If **one** neighbour has more than them, they score 1 point per 2 workers. If **both** neighbours have more than them, they score 1 point per 3 workers.

Example: in a 3 player game, Kiran, Sotirios, and Brian have collected 9, 5, and 5 workers, respectively. None of Kiran's neighbours have more workers, so he scores 9 points. Sotirios and Brian have only one neighbour with more workers than them (Kiran), so they score 2 points each. If Sotirios had 3 workers, he would have two neighbours with more workers than him, and he would only score 1 point.

Finally, players receive a -2 point penalty for each pollution (blacked out letter on their crossword and crumpled up piece next to their crossword). Players tally up their points, and the player with the most points wins! In case of a tie, the player with the least pollution wins. In case of a further tie, the tied players share the victory.

VARIANTS

Permissive urban planning (*suggested by Brian Le*). In addition to constructing words such that they are read from top to bottom and from left to right, you can allow players to construct words backwards (i.e. so they can be read from bottom to top and from right to left). This increases the chances of finding helpful letter clusters, but they may be more difficult to locate on your sheet.

Tight deadline. This is a more competitive variant aimed at experienced players (or groups wishing to play faster games). Count down the start of each game round: players are only allowed to move their letter pieces and workers once the round has started. The first player that has finished with their turn can turn over the sand timer. They are no longer allowed to touch their crosswords or letter sheets (they cannot cut or rearrange any pieces

or rerrange their workers). Everybody else has 60 seconds (until the sand timer runs out) to complete their turn (at which point they too are not allowed to touch their crosswords or letter sheets). Any unplaced pieces count as polluted as usual. This variant leads to a much more frantic game (and one in which players may often need to cut fewer/smaller pieces than shown on the blueprint card in order to play quickly).

Solo project. Criss-Cross town can very easily be played solo. The game proceeds as usual except you play with a single letter sheet throughout all eight rounds, and you play against two "imaginary" opponents with 5 and 9 workers each for the purposes of scoring workers. Can you beat your high score?

Score	Score
0-29	Intern
30-39	Trainee
40-49	Junior planner
50-59	Senior planner
60-69	Executive urban developer
70+	Master urban developer