

How to make and play Senet

What is Senet?

People have been playing board games for over 4,000 years, not just in Egypt but right across the ancient world in places like Israel, Cyprus and the Lebanon. Many games have been found by explorers and archaeologists in the ruins of palaces, temples and tombs. Senet (pron. Sen-It), is one of the oldest games in the world. It was played by the wealthy and the poor. A board could be drawn in the sand and stones used for the pieces, or if you were rich you may own a board made by a craftsman from wood with pieces made of clay, faience or even ivory. Egyptian faience is the nearest material that the Egyptians had to glass, blue-green was the most common colour. The board and pieces may be moulded or carved with animals or pictures of humans or gods.

For some winning the game represented the safe journey of their *ba* (spirit double) from the tomb at sunrise across the sky in the company of the sun god *Re*, in his solar barge, and returning safely to their tomb at sunset. *Re* had many enemies who tried to destroy the *ba*.



1 Howard Carter found four beautifully decorated Senet boards in the tomb of Tutankhamun with playing pieces and throwing sticks

Image from *The Cairo Museum Masterpieces of Egyptian Art* (1999).

The Ancient Egyptians did not have dice, they used two sided throwing sticks. One side would be marked. When you throw the sticks if the marked side landed upwards then that counted as one.

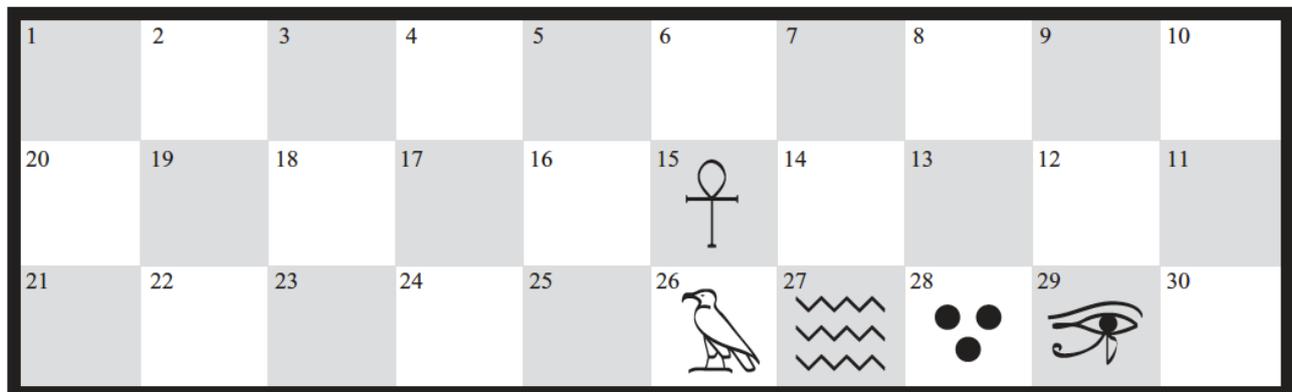
How to make your game

Making throw sticks

You can use dice when you play Senet or instead make some throw sticks out of something you have at home, such as lollipop sticks. You could colour one side of each stick with pencils or paint. Remember when you throw the sticks, all the sticks that land coloured side up count as one. You should make and use six sticks.

Making your board

Draw your board on paper or maybe a piece of card from the side of a cereal box using pencils or felt pens. You may find using a ruler helpful to draw the squares. Each square doesn't need to be too big. 3cm will be fine.



2 Picture showing the layout of a Senet board

Making your own counters

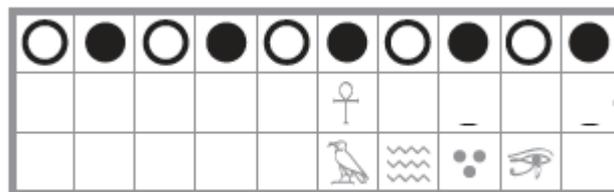
You could use lots of things, from plastic counters to pebbles from your garden. However if you would like to make and decorate your own you could do this by making and decorating [salt dough](#). Why not do some research on the internet to find some [designs for Senet pieces](#) or you could make your own design. You will need 10 pieces in total to play the game, remember though you will need 5 pieces of two different colours or designs so you know which piece belongs to which player!

HOW TO PLAY

The original rules of Senet are unknown, no record of the rules has ever been discovered. But through imagery found on ancient tomb walls and actual Senet artefacts found through excavation, some have attempted to reconstruct the rules.

In this version we are primarily using what are known as Kendall's Rules¹ but with some slight modifications to enable the game to generally be completed in under 30 minutes.

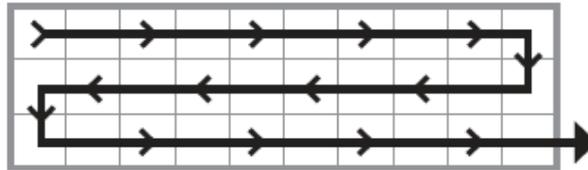
- ▶ You need two people to play, if more people want to play then you could play in pairs. At first you may wish to include an adult so you can learn the rules together.
- ▶ At the beginning of the game place five pieces per player alternately along the first 10 squares.



3 Picture showing where to place your game pieces at the start of the game along the top row

- ▶ Square 15 (The House of Rebirth) is the starting space for each piece. The pieces move according to the throw of two dice or your six throw sticks. If you throw a double when using dice, or six when using throw sticks, you get another go.
- ▶ The overall aim of the game is to move all your pieces past your opponent, taking the opportunity to push their pieces back, and proceed to get all your pieces off the board.
- ▶ Move any of your pieces the number of squares equal to the total on your dice or thrown sticks.

¹ Kendall Timothy, *Passing Through the Netherworld: The Meaning and Play of Senet, an Ancient Egyptian Funerary Game*, 1978



4 Picture showing the direction the pieces move around the board in an S shape

- If you land on an opponent's piece you swap their piece with yours, placing your opponent's piece in your starting square. You have pushed them back!
- You cannot land on one of your own piece, you must make a different move with another of your pieces. If you can't make a different move you lose your turn.
- Special squares which have particular actions:

	<p>Square 26 House of Happiness Your cup can go straight to the finish and off the board</p>
	<p>Square 27 House of Water You have fallen in the river Nile and have to move back to the House of Rebirth on square 15</p>
	<p>Square 28 House of the Three Truths Your cup can only leave the board if a three is thrown</p>
	<p>Square 29 House of Re-Atum Your cup can only leave the board if a two is thrown</p>
	<p>Square 15 House of Rebirth This is the starting square and also the return square from square 27 if you unfortunately fall in the river Nile</p>

- The winner is the first person to move all their pieces off the board. Other than if you land on squares 28 or 29, you may throw any number, greater than the squares left to move off the board.
- Tip: If you are playing with two dice and each player only has one piece on the board but you are stuck in square 28 and 29, then take one die away!

Enjoy!