Sudoku Rules Cheat Sheet

Sudoku a Day — sudokuaday.com Updated 2026-02

What Is Sudoku?

Sudoku is a logic puzzle played on a 9×9 grid. The grid is divided into nine 3×3 boxes. Some cells already have numbers filled in — these are your starting clues.

Your job: fill every empty cell so that the three rules below are satisfied.

The 3 Rules

Rule 1 — Every Row Contains 1–9

Each horizontal row has exactly nine cells. Every number from 1 to 9 must appear once. No repeats.
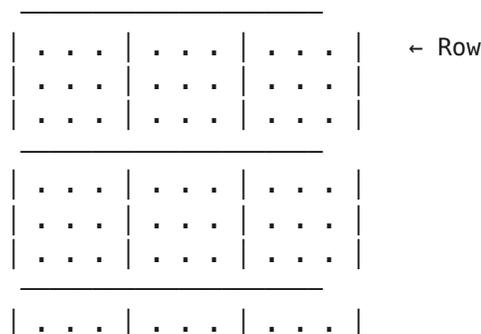
Rule 2 — Every Column Contains 1–9

Each vertical column also has nine cells. Same rule: every number from 1 to 9, exactly once.

Rule 3 — Every 3×3 Box Contains 1–9

The grid has nine 3×3 boxes (marked by thicker lines). Each box must also contain every number from 1 to 9, with no duplicates.

That's it. There are no other rules. No math, no adding, no arithmetic. Pure logic.

The Grid at a Glance

```
 _____
| . . . | . . . | . . . |     ← Row
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
 _____
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
 _____
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
```

```
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
| . . . | . . . | . . . |
  _____
    ↑              ↑
  Column       3×3 Box
```

- **81 cells** total
- **9 rows**, **9 columns**, **9 boxes**
- Each unit (row, column, box) contains the digits **1–9 exactly once**

Quick-Start Tips

1. **Start where it's easy.** Look for rows, columns, or boxes that already have many numbers. Fewer empty cells = fewer possibilities.

2. **Use pencil marks.** Write small candidate numbers in empty cells. This helps you spot where a number must go.

3. **Cross-hatch.** Pick a number (say, 5). Check which rows, columns, and boxes already have a 5. Often you can find where the remaining 5s must go.

4. **Check all three constraints.** Every cell belongs to one row, one column, and one box. Always verify all three before placing a number.

5. **Never guess.** A well-made Sudoku puzzle has exactly one solution, and you can always find it through logic alone.

Common Terminology

Term	Meaning
Given	A number pre-filled in the puzzle
Candidate	A number that could go in an empty cell
Pencil mark	A small note of candidates in a cell
Naked single	A cell with only one possible candidate
Hidden single	A candidate that can only go in one cell within a unit
Unit	Any row, column, or 3×3 box
Elimination	Removing a candidate because it violates a rule

What to Learn Next

- **Beginner strategies:** Scanning, Naked Singles, Hidden Singles
- **Intermediate strategies:** Naked Pairs, Pointing Pairs, Box-Line Reduction
- **More puzzles:** sudokuaday.com/printable-sudoku-puzzles
- **Full strategy guide:** sudokuaday.com/sudoku-strategies

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