

Chancery Lane

A game in the style of Mornington Crescent, for 2-9 players

Played on any London Underground map, the aim of this game is to be the first player to reach **Mornington Crescent**. Players take turns to move around the board, optionally adding tokens to it, and may spend their veto chips to veto other players' moves: in doing so, they will gradually build the rules for how the game is to be played.

Setup

Place the **London Underground map** in the middle of the table. Each player takes a **pawn** of their choice and **two veto chips** (or three chips, in a two-player game; one chip each if playing with six or more). Place a shared pool of **miscellaneous tokens** near to the board.

A random player is selected to be the starting player, and begins the game by placing their pawn on any unoccupied terminus station (a station at the end of a line). Going clockwise, other players do the same.

The starting player then studies the board and thinks of a movement restriction rule which would prevent any player from moving directly to Mornington Crescent on their first turn, announcing this rule to all players as a "variant". (eg. "*This week we're playing under Stovold's third amendment, which means players cannot change lines mid-move.*") Suggested variants are listed as an appendix.

The "variant" rule becomes binding, and player to the left of the starting player then takes the first turn.

Taking a turn

On your turn, you may either:

- **Move your pawn** to any station (theoretically tracking along a specific path, although this need only be traced out if another player requests it), and then optionally add a **token** to any station that was part of your move's path; or
- **Pass your turn** without moving.

If a player moves their pawn, each of their opponents (in clockwise order) has the option to **veto** that move by spending a veto chip. When a move is vetoed, the vetoer must casually but clearly explain the rule which makes the move illegal (eg. "*slow down, you moved more than six stops there!*") - this rule is **invented** by the vetoer at the time of vetoing.

When this rule is put forward, any player may **override the veto**, either by spending a veto chip of their own (in which case both of the spent veto chips are lost) or showing that the rule is **dubious** (as defined in the next section; in which case the rule's proposer gets their veto chip back). When a veto is overruled, the original move is immediately put back up for a fresh veto round.

If a veto rule is not overruled, it **becomes binding for the remainder of the game** and all future moves must obey it. The now-illegal move is taken back in its entirety, and the player who made it makes a replacement legal move in its place. (This move also has a veto round as before.) Once a legal move has been made, the player's turn ends.

If a player ends their turn at Mornington Crescent, they win the game.

Example: In a four-player game, it is Cryer's turn. His pawn is at South Acton, and the only rule in effect so far is that the first letter of a player's starting station must appear in the station they are moving to.

Cryer announces a bold move to Mornington Crescent. Neither Rushton nor Garden choose to veto, forcing Brooke-Taylor's hand: he discards one of his veto chips and reminds Cryer that they are playing under Regency rules, and that starting on one side of the Central Line and ending on the other - "striling" - is inappropriate. Cryer accepts this, takes back his pawn and instead moves from South Acton to Oxford Circus, tacitly verifying that a move that ends on the Central Line is not "striling". Brooke-Taylor nods, nobody chooses to veto this new move, and the turn ends.

The rules now in effect are that the first letter of a starting station must appear in the destination, and no move may cross the Central Line.

Dubious and ambiguous rules

Rules created by vetoes (and the initial “variant” rule) should obey the following protocols:

- A rule should be **concise**: enough to render the relevant move illegal, and do no more. Although the rule can give a broad, generic rule that covers the specific move and many others (“*you can't move to any station with 'Green' in its name*”), it should not include any separate clauses that would not have been necessary to invalidate the move (“*you can't move to a station on the DLR, or with another player at it*”). The only exception to this is that a rule may, if required, explicitly exclude Mornington Crescent itself.
- A rule should only refer to the **current state** of the board and the pieces placed on it - a rule should not refer to the identities of players or other aspects of the wider world, and the board should be considered to have no “memory” of earlier turns (so a rule could not say “*players cannot return to the station they started at*”). A rule may refer to the rolling of dice, if players insist.
- A rule should never **deadlock** a player (making it demonstrably **impossible** for them to win the game - this is broadly as it sounds, but is clarified in the “Deadlock” section).

If a rule breaks any of these protocols, then it is considered **dubious**, and any player may choose to prevent the rule from being adopted, at the time of its introduction, at no cost. (Players are free to wave through a complex or potentially deadlocking rule if nobody raises an objection.)

If the phrasing of a rule is realised to be ambiguous on the turn it was created, then its creator must clarify it. If the ambiguity is not realised until later in the game, players should take a vote on how to resolve it, with the player whose turn it is breaking any ties. This resolution is binding.

Veto rules can only apply to moves, never to **passes**. A player always has the option to pass their turn.

Players should attempt to work together to clarify rules upon their creation, as much as possible, ideally in conversation and without going so far as actually writing them down.

“Marble Arch.”

“No, no, this is Ruttsborough '58, you can't change lines like that.”

“Like what?”

“You ended on a different line to the one you started on!”

“Oh, of course. But I can leave a line mid-move and return to it?”

“Well, naturally!”

Style

In terms of delivery, a game of Chancery Lane should be undertaken as if its players are actually playing under an existing set of rules, and merely reminding one another of the details, or arguing over nuances.

Instead of telling your opponent that you're imposing a rule against moving to stations that start with the same letter, admonish them for forgetting to apply a Webster shift and point out how obvious it is that Neasden and Northolt start with the same letter. (This also means that when you want to refer to the rule later on - usually when someone else has broken it - you will already have a shorthand term for it.) It may seem strange if a veto rule would have affected earlier moves, but didn't - if players have been freely crossing the river all game, but suddenly there is an objection to a player crossing the river to reach Mornington Crescent - but this is easily explained by some aspect of the game having changed since then. (“*We've gone into extra time now, you can only cross the river at London Bridge. Keep up!*”)

If you realise that a rule is ambiguous, ask someone to remind you how it works, or to clarify which year's ruleset you're playing it under.

Strategy

Veto chips can be the key to the game: if your opponents spend most of theirs and leave you holding a majority, no further rules can stand in your way of Mornington Crescent! There's barely ever any reason to veto a rule if a player further around the table could veto it instead; force them to spend the token.

Generally speaking, a veto should only ever be employed when a player is attempting to move to Mornington Crescent, and a tactical player should always move to Mornington Crescent whenever possible (even if this might sometimes seem a little gauche) in order to force a veto.

Be careful to ensure that your veto rule solidly prevents a win, even if the player retakes their move differently. Using your last chip to explain that Paddington is *en passant* will do you no good if your opponent can simply retake their move along a different route via Holborn, to victory.

Tokens

Example: Garden moves to Dollis Hill via Holland Park. He announces that he is placing a wooden cube on Holland Park and that this "blocks" it, but should not explain what a "block" is.

Rushton later plays a move that passes through Holland Park, but Cryer vetoes it observing that Rushton has blatantly just moved through a blocked station.

Optionally, a player may add (but not remove) a single new **token** of their choice to any station that their move started at, passed through or ended at. Any such token addition is automatically permitted (unless it is vetoed) and other players are free to repeat it, but these tokens can have no actual effect until a veto rule refers to them.

Created rules are permitted to refer to tokens which do not yet exist. (eg. "Mornington Crescent is out of bounds until Neasden has been revanched.") Any unexplained reference to a station having a particular quality should be taken as meaning that the station must bear a token of that type, to have that quality.

For tokens with several possible orientations (such as dice or matchsticks), that orientation is initially unregulated, and may be referred to and/or restricted by future veto rules.

If a certain type of token is used up during the game - some tokens may even be unique - then it can no longer be added to the board.

Deadlock

The most complex restriction on an invented rule is that its addition to the game should not "deadlock" a player - it must not make it **theoretically impossible** for them to win. This is mainly intended to stop uninteresting rules of "of course, a player at Dollis Hill can only ever move to Dollis Hill", but requires a strict definition for those exploring the edge cases.

A player is deadlocked if there is no theoretical way that they could ever reach Mornington Crescent, assuming that:

- each of their opponents continued to play as **obstructively** as possible (but without winning themselves);
- that any randomly-generated effects produced the **worst possible result** for the player; and
- that **no further rules** were added to the game.

In practice being deadlocked is not always serious, as your opponents will have to balance playing obstructively against winning the game themselves, but if a single player objects to a potential deadlock, this is enough to overrule the veto.

A rule that causes a deadlock must be proven at the time of its addition to the game. (It's up to the players how seriously to take the proofs; if you're having to overthink it, the rule is probably complex enough to be employed strategically against anyone.) If players only realise later that a rule is able to cause a deadlock, then the rule stands, unless it has made it impossible for *any* player to win the game, in which case players may modify or remove the offending rule. Agreement on such a change must be unanimous; if none can be reached, the game is abandoned as a stalemate.

For example, a rule of "a player at Dollis Hill can only move to a different station if another player is at Dollis Hill" would not make it impossible for a player at Dollis Hill to move, but if all opponents were being obstructive, they would refuse to help the player out by joining them at Dollis Hill: the player would be deadlocked. Similarly, "you may only move from Dollis Hill if you roll a six" would create a deadlock, as a hypothetically unlucky player would never roll a six.

A rule that "with the exception of Mornington Crescent, players may not end their turn at closed stations", with players placing markers on the board to close one station per turn, might make it impossible for a player to reach Mornington Crescent if they are carefully blocked at every turn, even if they play their best possible game in response, but they must prove this to the satisfaction of other players when the rule is created.

If a new rule would cause an already-deadlocked player to become deadlocked in a different way (ie. even if the original deadlock were avoided by opponents moving differently or better numbers being rolled, the new deadlock could still occur), that new rule is still considered to deadlock that player.

Appendix: Suggested Variants

This is a list of suggested opening rules for the starting player to announce.

Those marked with a star may not be suitable for all maps and board openings, as some players may still have a route to Mornington Crescent; check before declaring.

<p style="text-align: center;">Regency Rules</p> <p>Players may not move more than six stations' distance in a single turn.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Roundhouse</p> <p>Mornington Crescent is out of bounds until each line has been Huffed (ie. has one or more Huff tokens on it).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Moreton's Convention ★</p> <p>A move cannot start and end at stations which contain the same number of words.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ruttsborough '58 ★</p> <p>If player moves onto a line occupied by another player, their move ends there.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Junkin's Progression ★</p> <p>Each move must end at a station whose first letter is before, after or the same as its starting station.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Mainlines Wild ★</p> <p>A player may only move to Mornington Crescent from a mainline station.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Original Modern ★</p> <p>Each move must end at a station whose first letter appears in the name of the starting station.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Standard Freighting</p> <p>If a move traverses a curved section of line, it must stop at the next station.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Junior Crescent</p> <p>Each turn must start with the rolling of a six-sided die, and the turn's move must be exactly that many stations.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Moreton's Second Parallel ★</p> <p>Each move must nominate a line, and all steps of its movement must be along that line.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Basic Knip</p> <p>Moves of more than zero distance must end within five stations' distance of a Knip token. (A zero-distance move that places a Knip token is permitted.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Royal-and-Ancient ★</p> <p>Any move that starts outside Zone 1 must end inside Zone 1.</p>