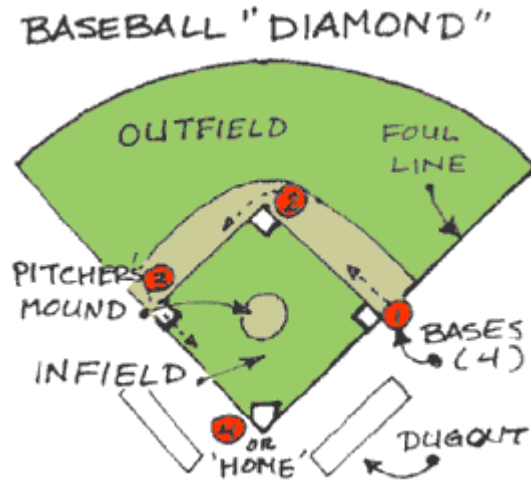


Understand the basic objective



In a game of baseball, two opposing teams try to score more runs than the other. A run is scored when a team's player runs (in a counter-clockwise direction) and steps on all three bases and home plate, which is also known as completing the circuit.. A game lasts nine innings unless the score is tied. In that case it continues for additional innings until one team breaks the tie by scoring another run.

Each inning is broken down into two parts: the top of the inning, and the bottom of the inning. The visiting team is given the opportunity to score runs in first section of the inning, known as the **top of the inning**. The home team is given the same opportunity in the latter half, or the **bottom of the inning**. During this opportunity to score, either team is known as the **batting team**. When either team is preventing the other team from scoring runs, it's called the **fielding team**.

Each team's opportunity to score runs in an inning are limited by **outs**. An out is an action by the fielding team to remove temporarily a batting team player from active play. (You'll read several examples a little later.) Three outs in an inning mark the end of a batting team's effort to score runs.

Watch the pitcher and batter

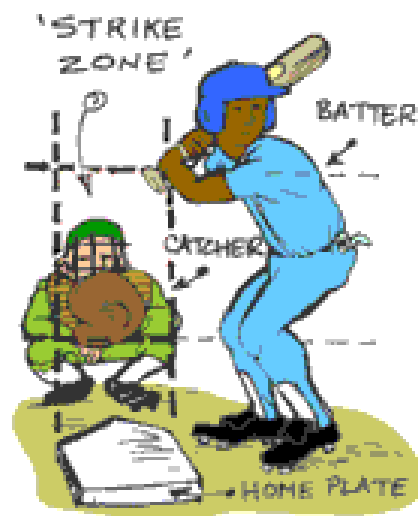
Much of the action in a baseball game takes place between two players. The pitcher stands on a pile of dirt called the pitcher's mound; the batter stands over

a slab of white rubber with five sides, located about sixty feet away on [home plate](#).

A batting team sends players to home plate one at a time. When a batting player stands at home plate, he's called a **batter**.

The fielding team has nine players standing at specified positions on the field. Included in that number is the pitcher. The pitcher tries to throw a small, hard white ball past the batter and to the catcher, who stands behind home plate. The batter tries to hit the ball back onto the field with a wooden or aluminum bat.

Each of the pitcher's throws toward home plate is called a **pitch**, and the pitcher generally tries to throw the ball over home plate within a specified area. Also at home plate, standing behind the catcher, is a game official unconnected with either team. This is the **umpire**, who decides if the pitch is within a specified area called the strike zone. If it is within the [strike zone](#), the umpire calls it a [strike](#). If it's outside the strike zone, he calls it a **ball**. You'll understand the importance of these terms in a moment.



A batter has the option of swinging the bat at the ball on any pitch. If a batter swings at the ball with the bat and completely misses, that is a strike. If the batter swings at the ball and hits it out of bounds (a [foul](#)), that is almost always a strike.

It is **not** a strike if the umpire has already called two strikes. In this case, the pitcher continues to pitch. There is no limit to the number of fouls a batter can hit.

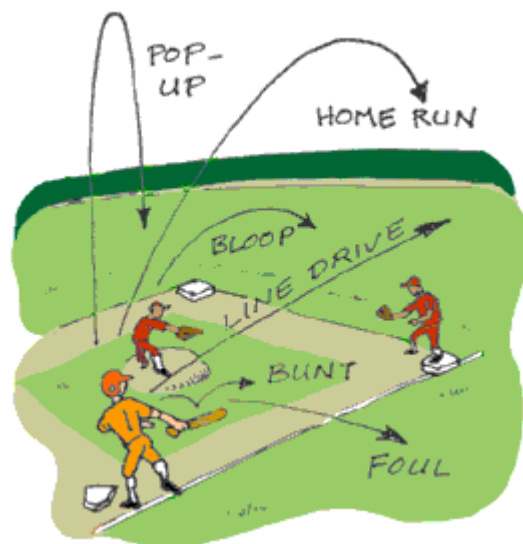
The pitcher's objective, generally, is to throw three strikes before throwing four balls. If he throws three strikes (they don't need to be consecutive, or "one-after-the-other"), the batter is out. He must return to his team's dugout and is not eligible to return to bat until everyone else in the batting team's **lineup** (the list of players that are registered to bat) has batted.

If the pitcher throws four balls before throwing three strikes, the batter receives a **walk** from the umpire: he goes to the first of the three bases. When a batter reaches any of the three **bases**, he's called a **runner**. A base is like a safe haven where a batter may reside safely, under certain conditions, without being taken out by the actions of the fielding team.

A special situation develops when there's a full count: the pitcher has thrown two strikes and three balls. This places extra pressure on him to strike out the batter. If the pitcher throws another ball, the batter gets a walk and goes to first base.

If the batter swings at the ball and hits it within bounds, a whole bunch of stuff happens. That stuff is described next.

Watch for a hit



After hitting the ball in bounds, the batter will run to first base, while one of several things is happening:

Scenario One: The ball is caught before it hits the ground, in which case the batter is out and returns to the dugout.

Scenario Two: The ball hits the ground before it's caught, in which case the batter runs to first base. If he is to remain in the game, he must step on first base before the ball is thrown to the first baseman of the fielding team. The first baseman stands with one foot contacting the base, thus "connecting" the ball to the base when it arrives to his glove from his own teammates's throw. (Basically, any time a batter is physically touched by a fielding team player with the ball, or with a glove that's holding the ball, the batter is also out. This is **tagging** the runner.)



Scenario Three: The ball is hit so high and far away from the fielding team (without being caught) that the batter has the opportunity of running to first base, and then onwards to second (or even third!) base.

Scenario Four: The ball is hit so high and far away that it leaves the confines of the playing field. This is called a **home run**, and enables the batter to complete the circuit of the bases. On returning to home plate, the batter scores a run for his team.

Watch for the fielding team's response

Keep in mind that the opposing team has nine players on the field (including the pitcher). These players are collectively called fielders. While the batter running towards one of the bases, the opposing team's fielders are doing one of several things:

Scenario One: Catching the ball before it hits the ground is the best play that a fielder make. When this happens, the batter is out.

Scenario Two: The next best play for a fielder is to retrieve the ball after it hits the ground as quickly as possible. He then throws it to the base that the batter is running towards. For example, let's say the batter is running towards first base. If the fielder who's standing on first base catches the ball before the batter reaches first base, the batter is out. In this instance a tag is not necessary.

Scenario Three: If the ball was hit very far away, the batter has the option to run to first base and continue towards second or third base, or even homeplate.

During this run, the ball can be thrown to a fielder who'll try to tag the batter with the ball before the batter has reached the base.

Watch runners on base

Excitement builds in a baseball game when one or more batters have successfully reached a base (now known as runners). When a new batter hits the ball, the fielders have some choices to make. And the batting team has choices, too: should the runners advance? This means, should they try to run and reach the next base after a hit?

Scenario One: The ball is caught before it hits the ground. In this case, any of the runners on any base can't allow themselves, while they're off the base, to be tagged by a fielder with the ball in his glove. If a fielder tags any runner, the runner is out.

Scenario Two: The ball isn't caught before it hits the ground. In this case, a runner on first base must attempt to advance to second base. Only one batting team player is allowed on a base at any time. (If the runner were to remain, he'd automatically be called out, so he always tries to advance). The runner's necessity creates an opportunity for the fielders--they can throw the ball ahead to the base that the runner is trying to reach safely. If the ball reaches the baseman's glove before the runner does, the runner is out. This is known as a force play, since the runner has no option but to run.

Scenario Three: A trickier scenario is when there's a runner on second or third base. Since the batter (who has just hit) is only trying to reach first base (not second or third) the runner on second or third doesn't have to advance. A runner is must try to advance only if a batter (or another runner) is trying to advance to the base where they're standing. Otherwise, runners try to advance only when they think they can safely reach the next base.

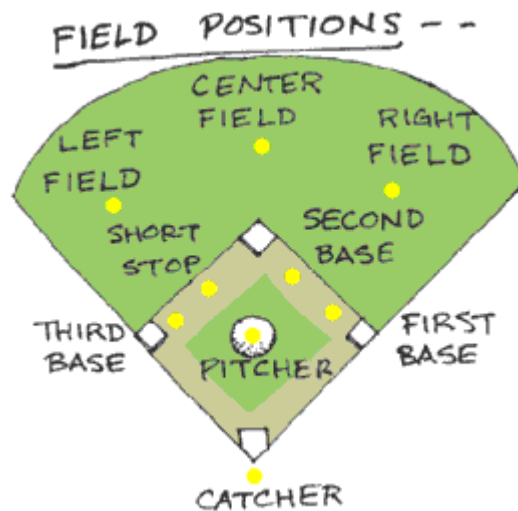
For example, let's say a runner tries to advance without a batter forcing him to try. To record the out, a fielder must tag the runner with the ball before the runner reaches the base safely. Some spectacular plays are made in this situation, where the runner sprints, dives, and slides toward the base. The fielder covering the base must catch the ball from his teammate and swing his glove down to tag the body of the runner. The result is sometimes the amusing picture of a very dirty and very happy runner.

In summary, every time a runner completes the circuit and advances to home plate with less than three outs for that inning, a run is scored for the batting

team. For example, if there are runners on all three bases and the batter hits a home run, four runs score. The runs are made by the three runners on base, as well as the batter (by the way, this example is called a **grand slam**).

Watch for special situations

It's hoped that you now have a grasp on how runs are scored, and outs are recorded, so you're almost home. **To review:** when three outs are made, the team that was in the field comes in to become batters. The team that was at bat now goes out to their specified positions in the field. Those positions are detailed in the following chart.



When runners are on base, the opportunity arises for more than one out to be recorded on a ball that is hit by the batter. A **double play**, for instance, often happens when a runner is on first base and the ball is hit by the batter towards the shortstop:

The first out: The shortstop will throw the ball to the second baseman, who will be standing on second base, to make a force play.

The second out: The second baseman will then throw to the first baseman. The first baseman will stretch to catch the ball, while keeping a foot on the base. This is an attempt to record the out on the batter, who is trying desperately to reach first base ahead of the throw.

The steal: You already know that the runners may try to advance to the next base when they think they'll be successful. Well, sometimes, they'll try to advance to

the next base as the pitcher is throwing the ball to the batter. This is known as trying to steal the base, and is most often attempted by the runner on first base.

The sacrifice play: Sometimes, a runner on third base will feel that they can advance to home plate when the ball has been hit, and caught by one of the outfielders (see diagram). If the runner reaches home plate before the outfielder's throw does, a run is scored and a sacrifice fly is recorded. In other words, the batter sacrifices his own opportunity for a hit, in order to provide an opportunity for the runner to score.

Many more situations than these few will arise in a game of baseball. But at this point you hopefully have an idea why everyone's standing around, and then running around.