

# Civ VI Early Game Guide for the Decidedly Average.

*by Knighterrant81.*

Hello! I'm a longtime fan of the Civ series, and I've always loved some of the guides that have been posted on Civfanatics. However, there haven't been many general use guides posted for Civ VI, So I'm sitting here with a bit of extra time on spring break and I thought I'd give guide writing a shot.

I play mostly at Emperor level, which I can beat fairly reliably. I don't try to get the absolute quickest win times I possibly can, but I do try to play efficiently and I am always looking for ways to improve my play. My goal with this guide is not to create something all-encompassing, but rather something that is relatively digestible, while being a little bit more detailed and informative than what the advisor or the Civilopedia gives you.

Note: I wrote this just before the Antarctic Late Summer patch was announced, so I sat on it for awhile until I'd played using the patch. Mostly, I think everything is still relevant.

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## 1. Founding your First City

Finding a good spot for your first city might seem inconsequential, but it is actually one of the most important decisions you make the entire game. Basically, you want to find a good spot, but not spend a lot of turns looking. Learn to love the Y hotkey (show tile yields). Have this up when founding your cities so you can make better decisions.

- Settle by turn 2 or 3 (move 1 or 2 tiles at most). If you take too long to settle, you'll fall too far behind, but you can afford to move a bit to find better land.
- Settle by a water source, preferably fresh water. You need about 4-5 pop for a city to really be self-sustaining, so food and housing are important early on.
- Settle near 2 food/2 production (2f/2p) tiles (or better). You want as much production as you can get, but having 2 food also means that citizen is feeding itself as well. The best tiles give at least two food, and then as much production as you can get. You want them 1 or 2 tiles away, not 3, because it just takes too long for your borders to expand for them to be helpful.
- The best tiles to settle on are Luxuries and Plains/Hills. Settling on Luxuries gives you immediate access without having to improve them. Luxuries can be sold to the AI for hefty sums of gold, while Plains/Hills will actually give you a 2f/2p tile for your City Center, versus the 2f/1p you get from other tiles.
- Make plans for the future. Plan out where your city is going to get production and food from, where you will put your Districts, and which Districts you will build. Hills provide the most reliable sources of Production. Food is less important, except when your city is just starting off. Rivers and Grasslands provide the best sources of Food.

## 2. The Opening.

So you've founded your first city. Now, what do you build first? This is another one of those Very Important Decisions you make early game. You have access to a Builder, a Monument, a Scout, a Settler, a Slinger, , and a Warrior. Settlers can only be built after you have 2+ pop, so you they aren't available yet. There are good reasons to build every one of these. These descriptions basically hold up for your first two or three builds. Then you should build a Settler.

In general, I would avoid getting locked into one opening or "build order" for your early game that you use all the time. You just learn bad habits and don't really learn WHY you are doing the things you are doing. Here is what each build will do for you. (Side note: a "greedy" play is where you do something that is optimal in the long-term, but is slow and leaves you vulnerable. A "tempo" play is when you do something for an immediate advantage at the cost of being less optimal long-term).

**Builder** - This allows you to improve your land and unlock several important Inspirations and Eureka's, but makes you highly vulnerable to attack. Build a builder if you have a lot of easily improvable resources nearby. This is a greedy play.

**Monument** - Culture is an important resource in the early game, so Monuments are strong. Remember that you can also earn Inspirations to boost your culture. Build a monument if you need a source of Culture but don't have a lot of improvable land around for a Builder. This is an extremely greedy play and is generally inadvisable (ITS A TRAP FOR CIV V PLAYERS).

**Scout** - Scouts allow you to earn a lot of early benefits and discover the best locations for new cities. Build a Scout if you started in a particularly good spot, or only moved a little before settling. This is a slightly greedy play.

**Slinger** - Building a Slinger aids your ability to defend yourself, and it also allows you to earn the Eureka for Archery early. Build a Slinger if you are worried about being attacked early. This is a strong tempo play that can help when you first move to a higher difficulty. "If you aren't sure what to build, build a Slinger."

**Warrior** - Building a Warrior is similar to the Slinger build, but more aggressive. Warriors are better at scouting, and it is possible to rush a close neighbor with a few Warriors. Build a Warrior if you need scouting or want to go on the offense early. This is a tempo play.

### 3. Research and Civics

First of all, you need to remember that Inspirations and Eureka's are a huge source of Science and Culture in the early game. It is better to focus on building units and cities early rather than boosting your Science or Culture because you can earn a lot of these yields through Eureka's/Inspirations.

- Your Culture research should be focused on getting Political Philosophy and your first Government. Governments and Policy Cards are very powerful tools for boosting your Civ in specific areas of the game.
- Important early civics: Craftsmanship (Agoge), Early Empire (Colonization), Political Philosophy (Tier 1 Government), Military Tradition (Maneuver)
- Your Science research should be focused on your early game goals. It is often better to "beeline" (spend all your research on) a particular tech rather than just try to fill up each era. For instance, if you can get Horseback Riding early, you can build Horsemen early to rush your neighbors before they have adequate defenses.

- Important early techs: Animal Husbandry (reveal Horses, early worker build), Mining (Luxury access, early worker build), Astrology (for Religious or Naval civs), Bronze Working (reveals Iron), Archery (Archers are boss)
- For both Science and Culture, pay attention to the bonuses of your particular Civ. You'll want to focus on getting access to your Civ's bonuses as soon as you can. Otherwise, focus on Civics and Techs that will aid your early expansion.

## 4. Expansion

Civ V players might recall that that game was a back and forth balancing act between rapid expansion (going "wide") and having a few high-pop cities (going "tall"). Well, Civ VI has definitively answered that question! There is only wide. THERE. IS. ONLY. WIDE. There is no such thing as having too many cities in Civ VI, and it is the best way to ensure your success. So, here is how to do it!

You can expand peacefully or through early war, or through some mixture of both. A good rule of thumb is to have about 10 cities by turn 100.

Peaceful expansion - Build Settlers early, and build them often. Know the sources of boosts to Settler production:

- Colonization (+50% production to Settlers)
- Ancestral Hall (+50% production to Settlers, free Builder when you found a city)
- Magnus w/Provision (His city does not lose a pop when building a Settler)
- Monumentality Golden Age (You can buy Settlers with Faith for cheap)
- Buy Settlers with Gold - This isn't necessarily a bonus, but Gold is easier to come by than production!

If you can build a Settler in about 12 turns or less, then you should probably build it. Also, practice the art of forward-settling. Remember all the guidelines for founding your Capital, but you should also try to found your cities closer to the AI if possible. This makes it harder for the AI to expand and generally blocks off large swaths of land for your cities that you can backfill later.

Expansion through War - Basically, beyond just building a lot of units or getting better at tactics, you just need to know when to quit. The best scenario by far is that you completely wipe out a

neighbor or two in the first 50 turns, and now you have several "free" cities and a ton of open land for you to expand into. However, that isn't always possible or even optimal. Don't force the issue. The AI will often grant you a hefty tribute for making peace. Even if you only take one city, or even if you just kill a bunch of their units and pillage their Districts, you have already significantly slowed the AI, which is really all you need to do. It is not really helpful if you spend all your time trying to whittle down a city while hemorrhaging troops.

It is helpful to know how to do a "timing push." This is where you build an advanced unit earlier than your neighbors and then proceed to pound face. You can rush with Archers, Swordsmen, Horsemen, or Knights in the early game. This is obviously particularly effective for Civs like Rome or Macedon that have Unique Unit replacements for these or other early unit types. It is often better to use gold to upgrade early units rather than to build these advanced units from scratch. As with peaceful expansion, know the appropriate boosts:

- Agoge (+50% when building melee and ranged units)
- Maneuver (+50% when building light and heavy cavalry)
- Oligarchy (+4 combat strength to land and naval melee units)
- Great General (+5 combat strength for nearby units of the appropriate eras)

Know also that siege units in Civ 6 are rather weak. All you really need to counteract City Walls though is a Battering Ram.

What if I don't have a lot of room to expand? - Depending on your map and the location of City-States and rival Civs, you may not have a lot of room to settle cities, but early conquest is also not particularly feasible, or you may want to focus on a primarily peaceful strategy. These are cases where the Audience Chamber is probably more helpful than the Ancestral Hall. Carefully plan out your city locations, and try to wedge in two or three cities in an area instead of locking up large swaths of territory using one central city. Remember, you only need 3-4 strong tiles per city to make it viable. Sometimes, you don't even really need a viable city - you just need another place to build that next Campus or Theater Square or to claim a particular resource. Remember, however, that the Audience Chamber *actively punishes you* for not having a Governor in a particular city. -2 Loyalty isn't a particularly large penalty, and I would not suggest only building as many cities as Governors you plan to recruit or anything like that. Just remember think twice about where you place your cities and keep your Governor plans in mind as you go.

## 5. Building Districts

After you've done your initial expansion, you will move into the mid-game, where you are now expanding and improving the cities you have built or conquered. This often means building Districts in your cities. Districts are at the heart of Civ VI, so it is important to know how they work. After every 3 population, you can build a new District. Districts go up in production cost as the game goes along, but you can lock the production cost by placing the District. You can then build other things and finish the District later. They unlock important Eureka/Inspirations and move you towards different victory types. I like to think of cities as having "slots" for Districts. You don't want to spend your District "slots" frivolously. Pay attention to your surrounding land and how you can maximize your District adjacency bonuses.

Don't build Districts too early. Focus on expansion and defending yourself first. Wait until turn 80 or so. But do lock in production costs!

Remember that Districts get bonus resources from your City State Envoys. That means that if you have, for example, a lot of Campuses, you should search out Scientific City States. The reverse is less true, but still a consideration.

Here are some likely options you'll be locking in, if not completing, in your first 100 turns:

Holy Site - You need to build 1-2 of these early to found a Religion. They like Mountains, Forests, and Natural Wonders. Faith is a strong resource that can be abused easily, but building a District this early in the game is a big downside. Religion is just not as powerful as it was in Civ V. Build them only if you are going for a Religious or possibly a Cultural Victory, or if you know what you are doing.

Campus - These come early and are always useful, even when you are not going for a Science Victory. It is important to keep your military up to date with your rivals, and that requires Science. Great for getting that State Workforce Inspiration. They like Mountains and Jungles. You should have at least 2-3 when not going for a Science Victory.

Commercial Hub - Trade Routes are strong in Civ VI, and are a main source of Gold in the mid and late game. Commercial Hubs like Rivers and Harbors. You should start building 2-3 before the Medieval era.

Encampments - The buildings are pretty uninspiring, but Great Generals are pretty good. You never NEED these, but they can be nice and are obviously helpful for a Domination Victory. They don't give bonus yields, but instead become mini-city fortresses guarding your land.

Theater Square - These are primarily useful for a Cultural Victory, but it is always nice to have a few of them. They really like World Wonders, but that's it. Build these near any Wonders you have built or captured, or if you are going for a Cultural Victory.

Harbors - They are primarily useful for their Trade Route. You only get one Trade Route if you build a Harbor and a Commercial Hub in the same city! Later, they help with production in their city. They don't get any bonuses from City States. They are better than nothing in coastal cities which often don't have access to many other good adjacencies, and they can give very nice amounts of Gold. They like coastal resources.

Industrial Zones - They come a bit later than turn 100, but I wanted to discuss them. IZs used to be really good. Then Factories were nerfed. Their use is rather more marginal now. Workshops are just really bad, but Power Plants actually make them somewhat worthwhile (balanced by Climate Change, obviously). Factories are still pretty nice, if for no other reason than making one city (the one with Magnus and Vertical Integration) very high in production. You'll want a few (if for no other reason that to turn off the low power notifications late game) but think hard about how many you want.

## 6. Setting a goal/win condition

In Civ VI, it is important to have your win condition in mind fairly early. Generally, win conditions center around building certain Districts, so with every new District you lock down, you are also locking yourself into a certain playstyle and win condition. You can change your focus, but you have to wait until your cities are big enough to build new Districts, and by then you are behind. Your first 50-100 turns or so should be less focused on your win condition and more about expanding and building a solid base (about 10 cities, 4 trade routes, a decent army, 2-3 ships, and maybe a Wonder or two) by turn 100. You might be behind in certain areas, but that's okay, just get caught up. The most important step is to have a lot of cities and a lot of land.

Here's some general guidelines on setting up your victory types:

Domination: The most important thing to do is of course building a large and diverse army. Focus on the unit type that includes your Unique Unit, use those unit for your first timing push, and then fill in the gaps later. You'll want at least two Encampments to generate Great Generals for each era fairly reliably. You are not going to make many friends, so depending on your border situation you might want to put a few walls and ranged units in cities who might be vulnerable to surprise attack while your main army is gobbling up territory somewhere else. On Continents maps loyalty can give you trouble with getting a foothold on the other continent. Population pressure is a big part of loyalty, so it can help to conquer several cities at once to reduce the pressure. Hit hard and fast and don't give up!

Religion: I don't tend to go for Religious Victories very often, but what I can say is that Faith generation is really important so you can buy Apostles and Missionaries, both to spread your religion and fight the AI religions. You also need to found a religion, so build 1-2 Holy Sites very early to get that Great Prophet. If you can get a Prophet using Shrines, that's more efficient, but if you're desperate Holy Site Prayers will get you a Prophet faster.

Science Victory (SV): Build a lot of cities, build a lot of Campuses, run Natural Philosophy and Rationalism, hit the End Turn button 100 times, win the game.

But really, the bottleneck for a Science Victory is often late game production. Seondeok is the best leader in the game for Science not only because of Seowons but because she has a Hill start bias. You will want a few Industrial Zones as well as Campuses (or go and find all the threads about fast Science Victories, which abuse chopping and other tactics to make things like IZs unnecessary).

Culture Victory (CV): Culture is pretty similar to a Science Victory in how you just build a ton of Theater Squares and run bonus Culture cards, but there are a few twists. Religion is more directly helpful for a CV than an SV because Holy Sites generate a good amount of Tourism, and Faith is used to build National Parks and, more importantly, Rock Bands. Wonders in Civ VI are relatively low in power, but you are basically building your own major Culture adjacencies. That's why it often doesn't matter as much which wonders you build for a CV, just that you build enough to boost your Culture generation from your Theatre Squares.

Diplomatic Victory: I haven't won this way yet. It looks like you build a generally strong Empire, play well with others, and try to become the Suzerain of many City States. Certain Wonders give Diplomatic Victory Points. You can also trade for Diplomatic Favor, although it seems the AI values it pretty highly.

There you go! The most important thing to remember: BE FLEXIBLE. However, in order to do that, you need to know how to prioritize. Hopefully I've given you some ideas in order to do just that!