Ten Rules For CIV IV

{TL:DR}
{I no longer care about Sid Meier's Civilization. But at one time, I do believe that I did.}

1) Everything is situational. There are no golden rules.
2) The most important early techs you can research are the religious ones. Choose a civ that starts with Mysticism and research Polytheism, Monotheism, Priest (start to build the Oracle), Writing, and Code of Laws. Slingshot Oracle for Theology (make sure you have Writing before you complete the Oracle) and unless you overbuild you'll be set with gold for the rest of the game. Clearly I'm talking about Noble level or below here, and I should mention that you're going to fall behind in everything else while you do this. You might squeeze in Roads, Pottery, Agriculture, and Animal Husbandry AFTER Monotheism, but the prize goes to First Place. Second gets precious little.
3) After Religion is in place back fill the worker techs (Hunting, Fishing, etc) and then go for Civil Service, because you're going to want to change to Civil Service as soon as you can, and because Macemen are handy to have around.
4) From there it's more of dealer's choice. At the end game I like getting Computers, building the Internet and turning research off. Before then I put a high priority on Optics (followed by Astronomy if there are choice lands ripe for the picking), Liberalism (for obvious reasons), and Steel. Unless I'm joining the crowd, I tend to delay declaring war until I've got a stack of cannons to back me up. Talk softly and declare war with two or more stacks of doom, that's my motto. Granted, it's long, unwieldy, and Monty has no clue what I'm saying, but it seems to work. To wit:
5) I've talked a lot about Techs. Let's talk about builds. First thing to keep in mind is that most Wonders are overrated. The Great Wall costs 150 hammers. You can build four Axemen for that, are guaranteed to get it, and get experience every time you kill

a Barbarian. But that's really just the short view. Four Axemen increases your relative power to the other civs and reduces the chance they will declare war on you. This is far more important than keeping out renegade barbarians.

6) So, what do I recommend building? An army. Go with a ratio of 2:1:1. Two combat units, one building, and then a missionary (or Settler or Worker). Now I don't build them in that order, and I have my capital help out a lot on the missionaries and combat units, but as a general rule keep your military builds at 50% of the total. In late game it approaches 100%. (At some point the game devolves into a slugfest and another unit versus 25% add to this or +1 that, is a no-brainer.)

7) But in the beginning, when I'm settling new cities, I tend to build Granary (I like Inky, a.k.a. the Incans and the +2 culture is important), Library, Barracks, and then a slew of combat units. One Worker per city is a good rule of thumb. Once the wars start you're bound to get more. As to Missionaries, I put them on automatic (under options along with the workers -- I've got a life and have no need to micromanage -- thank you very much). I keep on building the Missionaries until combat units become far more important (like I'm at war and peace is no longer part of the foreseeable future) or the game won't let me build anymore (i.e. every city on your home continent is converted.) Note: I play Noble, Inky, Continents, all default. I don't bother to spread religion to the next continent.

I guess that's all pretty basic, so far. Let's get more esoteric.

8) At some point research is meaningless. Turn it off. The point at which you should do this is different for differing games, but getting the Internet is a good spot, or if it looks like victory from war is at hand, or you're going for a cultural win -- in which case turning it off after Music might just work. (Note: I did the culture thing a few times, but the scores aren't as good. I play for score and the most significant way to increase your score is to have tons

of cities (i.e. capture them) and winning early. Good luck winning before 1950 with cultural.)

9) While you're turning the culture slider down, consider that there are other sliders. Concentrate your espionage on one foe and when you go to war, bring your spies with you. Start by running a Counter Espionage mission and then just Poison Water Supply and Formant Unhappiness left and right. I like concentrating on the capital, but that's just me.

As to war, some things to consider.

10) Siege units are expendable. You'll need a new stack at the beginning of each campaign. Plan for it.

11) If you're loosing your units, you're not winning. I like to have a good ten to twenty extra non-garrison units (1-5 units per city, depending) before I wage war. Five units per city back in the homeland, is good insurance against AI opportunists and allows for reinforcements should the need (and situation) arise. Anyhow, since I want 10-20 extra units (which becomes 20-30, and then 50+ later), the only way I'm ever going to have enough units for a second war (the game only lasts so many turns after all) is if you don't loose them in the first war. How?

12) Insist on a technological edge when fighting. If you don't have the edge, don't declare war. You're just going to get slaughtered.

13) Go into war with a bunch of allies. Don't pay others to fight your war. Given time the AI will declare war on someone and then with your stack of death choose a side.

14)   But when you do, here's a thing to consider. Any AI not at war will instantly size you up, and if you are now compromised (or would be compromised if they declared war) you can bet they will. What this means is simply you and the other dominant civ (or two) will be allies in the early game splitting up the other civs and then later on you will go head to head. Count on it. At some point, you will be at war with all of the survivors. The AI hates a human victor and will gang up on you. It is coming.

15) So, prepare for it. Look at the diplomacy screen (along with pretty much every other screen) every ten turns or so, but especially before a war. Make your decisions based upon tactical concerns (cities you wish to control and resources), but keep in mind strategic concerns: Who's fighting who? Why? And, who stands to profit the most? Not to mention, who are you going to be playing the end game against? (I'm going to go out on a limb here and guess that it not going to be Sitting Bull.)

16) That's a lot of question marks, which means it's probably not overly helpful. Basically, the bottom line is given half a chance, the AI will have every remaining civ declare war on you. How do you stop this? Have a powerful standing army. One that is capable of fighting a two front war. And even then, wait for the AI to declare war first. With an army that big, it will hardly ever be you that the AI decides to attack.

17) I don't typically fight wars for resources, but if you don't have Iron, capturing a city just so you can get this resource might be a good idea. Same for Aluminum. I suppose some might argue the same for Horses (but I don't think so). From there the goal of any war is capturing the capital. Nothing like capturing someone's capital to tip the balance in favor of their capitulation (not that it always work), but the real icing is all the wonders the AI tends to build in the capitals.

18) From there when fighting a war, you want to keep culture in mind. The rules of the game pretty much force you to cut in at the edges and take outlying cities first. If you take a single city (even the capital) in the midst of enemy lands, odds are you will never maintain control. Oddly a stack of troops will keep the city under your control, and an Artist culture bomb can work wonders in certain situations... but usually the situation is when you're not surrounded. Not being surrounded is important enough that it makes sense to launch an amphibians invasion (going all the way around the world if you have to) to land on a peninsula and establishing a strong hold on an outlying city that doesn't have much cultural reinforcement.

This has gotten more wordy than I would have liked, so let's recap and make it shorter.

1) Religions are your friend. Found enough, build those Shrines (once again, this is why we built the Oracle), and spread the word (through) Missionaries, and you will have more money than... anyone else.

2) Be a military opportunist. Since you standing army is so large, even if the AI declares war on you (it will -- trust me -- it will), it won't make a difference. Join the wars, pick off a city here and there, and watch your civilization prosper. In short, don't start wars, join wars.

3) A war that gains your units experience is a good war. One in which you loose twenty units is a bad war. Heal wounded units. Stop the forward advance. Sue for peace. Be amazed at what the AI will give you -- even when it's the one that declared war.

4) Do not convert to a religion unless everyone on your continent shares that religion (or if there is only one or two outliers). Let the AI fight about the religion amongst itself. (If you are playing a Spiritual Leader, converting and then converting back 10 turns later can be a good tactic, but beware, you might be setting yourself up for a war.)

5) Tech trading is overrated. All that you're really doing is speeding up research for everyone. If you can trade a tech to two or three civs and get comparable worth (not a bunch of little ones, but 455 for 455, or 910 for 910) then go for it, but remember, you're going to be researching the important stuff (Civil Service, Optics (and then Astronomy), Steel, Industrialization, and Computers) on your own. You don't want to trade away the stepping stones to these techs. Keep your advantage.

6) When at war, check every turn to see if you enemy will Capitulate, if they will accept. If you don't, one of your foes is sure to. Keep in mind, no matter what you do, sometimes (far more often than seems fair) the AI will capitulate to another AI.

7) Before declaring a war (or joining a war) see how this will effect your diplomatic standing with other civs (and to make sure they didn't decide to become someone else's vassal last turn).

8) Have one or more of each unit type in every stack.

9) Once you're up against Bombers, stop using stacks. I tend to prefer a sprawling mass of tanks.

10) Nukes aren't worth it. Nor are Cruise Missiles, Aircraft Carriers, or probably even Anti-Tank units.

11) You have culture and espionage sliders. The AI is using them. Maybe you should.

12) CIV IV is a war game.

13) As the game winds to a close, the only thing you should be producing are more troops.

14) The top scores go to War Mongers.

15) The purpose of battle is to capture key cities (and to a lesser extent resources), gain land, and subjugate enemy civs (by either total conquest or capitulation).

16) The bigger and stronger you are. The faster your enemies will capitulate. It's not unheard of for a weak opponent to capitulate on the fifth turn of a war.

17) Having said that, I should also point out, a civ that is a vassal to another has never capitulated to me. And folks like Hannibal, Monty, and Genghis Khan value their freedom to the point of irrationality. Oh, and believe it or not, I'm told that you don't win if one of your vassals builds the spaceship... not that that matters. I've never seen a space ship launch before 1950 or so, and by then, I plan on owning the world.

Gee? I can't seem to stop. As an amendment to my religion strategy, I should point out that they are all getting founded in my capital. I insure this by not settling any other cities until I've got Code of Laws. Having said this, I should then point out that this doesn't mean that I don't routinely have 2+ escorted settlers ready to settle the next turn. Having four religions in the capital far outweighs the disadvantages of waiting an extra twenty turns to

settler your second city, and four streams of revenue coming into the capital is one of the main reasons why Civil Service and Bureaucracy are such high priorities.

Also, I tend to build cottages in my first few cities and then let the AI run the workers.

Initial build goes something like.
Warrior - Warrior - Worker (assuming I've got something to work) - Worker - Warrior - Warrior - Settler - Settler

On new cities I prioritize.
Granary - Library - Barracks - Combat Units

It makes sense to skip the Barracks in a city that you intend to dedicate to Missionaries.

I do my first revolution to get:
Organized Religion (and Representation if I've somehow managed to get the Pyramids -- seldom).
Monarchy is also good.
Slavery can be useful, but I run enough religions that happiness is not a factor and slavery runs counter to large cities (and specialization).

If you don't have 10 or more of something (research, shields, whatever) there is no sense building the special buildings.

Late game I prioritize:
Theatre - Library - Barracks - Combat Units (or for low hammer cities spies... put that slider up and you'll have no end of espionage points.)

Two topics that come up time again on the boards are:
1) I should have declared war 10 turns earlier, and\

2) Cottage versus Specialist

I say,
1) You're probably better off waiting an additional 10 turns (if not 50) before declaring war. Better yet, wait for cannons and wipe the board with them.
2) Cottage versus Specialists? Why not build cottages and then when you've worked the best 10 best squares in the fat cross put on the brakes (to growth) by running a few specialists. I'm guessing a Cottage/Specialist hybrid economy blows the doors off of either by itself. Besides, I know everyone says running Specialists takes longer (all that micromanaging), but tell me building a 50 cottages every game doesn't get tiresome.

Also, just in case you are interested I tend to build 4 or so cities and then wait for a decisive Cannons (Maceman/Trebuchet) advantage before I expand.

I only founded a corporation once. It happens too late in the game to be important and costs too much to found each branch office. I sure there are some strategies that this works for (say if you desperately need oil or aluminum), but other than that, with Mercantilism and State Property a mouse click away, I can't see anyone (or any AI) ever bother to found one.
As a note, the only game in which I founded a corporation was the only one where I ever noted that an AI civ did either.

{Ironically, as much time as I spent playing CIV IV, I never played Civilization 5.}