grid **100** is a four-column grid). A payout schedule may identify that four star symbols is a winning symbol combination providing a payout. The random or pseudo-random presentation of star symbols in display subsegments **118***d*, **120***a*, **122***d*, and **124***c* would achieve that winning symbol combination. This is because the display segments **118**, **120**, **122**, **124** are the actual locations in which the star symbol must appear in order to achieve the four-star winning combination, and each display segment **118**, **120**, **122**, **124** includes a star symbol in respective display subsegments **118***d*, **120***a*, **122***d*, and **124***c*.

[**0040**] Payline-**2** therefore has a winning combination of four stars resulting in a payout to the gaming participant. However, the gaming participant can obtain even more winning symbol combinations on the same payline-**2**. For example, assume that the payout schedule further identifies that three consecutive circle symbols results in a winning symbol combination providing a payout. The random or pseudo-random presentation of circle symbols in display subsegments **118***b*, **120***c*, and **122***a* would achieve that winning symbol combination. This is because the display segments **118**, **120**, **122** are the actual locations in which the circle symbol must appear in order to achieve the three-circle winning combination, and each display segment **118**, **120**, **122** includes a circle symbol in respective display subsegments **118***b*, **120***c*, and **122***a*.

[**0041**] These principles of the present invention apply regardless of the number of paylines or the particular payline configurations. Referring now to **FIG. 2**, a nine-payline display grid **200** is illustrated. The representative display grid **200** of **FIG. 2** is a 5×3 (five column by three row) display. Payline-**1202**, payline-**2204**, and payline-**3206** are horizontal paylines corresponding to rows of the display grid **200**. Payline-**4208** and payline-**5210** form a V-shape and cut diagonally across the rows of the display grid **200**. Payline-**6212** and payline-**7214** are similar to payline-**4208** and payline-**5210** respectively, but are shifted a column to the right. Payline-**8216** and payline-**9218** cut diagonally across the rows of the display grid **200** in a zigzag fashion. These illustrated paylines are illustrated as examples of paylines, and the present invention is applicable to any contrived payline. For example, other payline configurations may include vertical paylines, particularly in video displays where each column of symbols need not necessarily correspond to a unitary "reel" as is the case for most mechanical slot machines. Other payline patterns can also be created, and the principles of the present invention are equally applicable thereto.

[**0042**] **FIG. 3** is a diagram of an exemplary slot game grid **300** in which the principles of the present invention are employed. In this embodiment, the display grid **300** includes five columns C**1302**, C**2304**, C**3306**, C**4308**, and C**5310**. The grid **300** includes three rows R**1312**, R**2314**, and R**3316**. At the intersection of each column and row is a display segment that forms a section of paylines that traverse that display segment. For example, at the intersection of R**1312** and C**1302** (R**1**-C**1**) is a display segment including four display subsegments. Similarly, each of the other display segments are shown at locations R**1**-C**2**, R**1**-C**3**, R**1**-C**4**, R**1**-C**5**, R**2**-C**1**, R**2**-C**2**, R**2**-C**3**, R**2**-C**4**, R**2**-C**5**, R**3**-C**1**, R**3**-C**2**, R**3**-C**3**, R**3**-C**4**, and R**3**-C**5**.

[**0043**] In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, each of the display subsegments of each display segment is associated with its own reel strip. A reel strip has traditionally referred to the physical strips of symbols attached to mechanical slot machine reels. In a video slot machine, the reel strips are not represented by physical material, but rather include electronically stored symbol patterns, i.e., a virtual reel strip. In one embodiment of the invention, each of the display subsegments is associated with a virtual reel strip, although a particular reel strip may be concurrently used for more than one display subsegment. By using virtual reel strips for each of the display subsegments, there is no physical correlation between display subsegments as there are with mechanical reel strips. For example, in the context of mechanical reel strips, three symbols presented in a column across three paylines are physically restricted to that particular order, since the reel strip is presented across three rows. In an exemplary embodiment of the invention, there is no such relationship between display segments or display subsegments. This allows each display subsegment to present symbols independent of any other display segment or subsegment, and further allows for maximum flexibility in the creation of paylines.

[**0044**] The slot game grid **300** of **FIG. 3** illustrates a more particular embodiment of a gaming activity utilizing multi-symbol display segments in accordance with the invention. For purposes of explanation, only horizontal paylines will be assumed in this exemplary embodiment. A first row, R**1312**, includes five display segments shown at the intersections of R**1**-C**1**, R**1**-C**2**, R**1**-C**3**, R**1**-C**4**, and R**1**-C**5**. Assuming that three triangle shapes has been predefined as a winning symbol combination, any three triangle shapes in consecutive display segments in the horizontal payline corresponding to R**1312** will result in a winning payout. In this example, a first triangle symbol is provided in display subsegment **320** of the display segment at R**1**-C**1**, a second triangle symbol is provided in display subsegment **322** of the display segment at R**1**-C**2**, and a third triangle symbol is provided in display subsegment **324** of the display segment at R**1**-C**3**. Because each of the display segments at R**1**-C**1**, R**1**-C**2**, and R**1**-C**3** include a triangle symbol, the predefined winning symbol combination has occurred, resulting in a payout to the gaming participant.

[**0045**] In accordance with another embodiment of the invention, a different number of display subsegments may be presented in a display segment. For example, in the display segment at the R**3**-C**2** intersection, a single symbol has been presented. This single symbol may be used in various modes. In a first mode, the single symbol presented at the R**3**-C**2** display segment limits the R**3**-C**2** display segment to a single use in formulating a winning symbol combination. In other words, while display segments having multiple display subsegments include a corresponding number of opportunities to formulate a winning symbol combination, a single symbol at the display segment limits the number of opportunities to formulate a winning symbol combination to one. In this example, a predefined winning symbol combination of three or more star symbols results in a winning symbol combination of five star symbols along the horizontal payline corresponding to R**3316**. The symbols include the star symbol at display subsegments **326**, **328**, **330**, **332**, and **334**, even though the display subsegment **328** corresponds to the entire display segment at the R**3**-C**2** intersection.