

How to Play Canasta (Adapted from bicyclecards.com)

HOYLES RULES OF GAMES

is often considered the judge and jury over disputes over rules

Wild Cards

Jokers and deuces are wild. A wild card is melded only with natural cards and then becomes a card of that same rank.

The Draw

Partnerships may be determined by drawing cards from the deck. The player drawing the highest card has choice of seats, plays first in the first deal, and has the player drawing the second-highest card as their partner. In drawing, the cards rank: A (high), K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2. Jokers are void. Only for the draw, suits rank: Spades (high), hearts, diamonds, clubs. Players drawing equal cards or jokers must draw again. A player drawing more than one card or one of the four cards at either end of the deck, must draw again. Partners sit opposite each other.

The Shuffle and Cut

The first hand is dealt by the player to the right of the person who drew the highest card. Thereafter the turn to deal rotates clockwise. Any player who wishes may shuffle the deck, and the dealer has the right to shuffle last. After the shuffle, the deck is cut by the player to the dealer's left.

The Deal

The dealer gives 11 cards face down to each player, one at a time, clockwise, beginning with the opponent on their left and ending with themselves.

The undealt remainder of the pack is placed face down in the center of the table, becoming the stock, and the top card is turned face up beside it. If the upcard is a joker, deuce or three, one or more additional cards must be turned upon it until a "natural" card (a four or higher) appears.

Red Threes

A player finding a red three in their hand must, on their first turn, put it face up on the table and draw a replacement from the stock. A player who draws a red three from the stock also lays it on the table face up and draws a replacement. Finally, a player who takes the discard pile and finds a red three in it must place the three face up on the table but does not draw a replacement.

Each red three has a bonus value of 100 points, but if one side has all four red threes, they count 200 each, or 800 in all. The value of the red threes is credited to a side that has made a meld, or debited against a side that has made no meld, when the hand ends.

Object of the Game

The principal object of play is to form melds - combinations of three or more cards of the same rank - with or without the help of wild cards. (Sequences are not valid melds).

The Play

The player to left of the dealer plays first. Thereafter, the turn to play rotates clockwise (to the left). Each turn comprises a draw, a meld (optional) after drawing, and a discard, which ends the player's turn.

When the player's turn comes, a player is always entitled to draw the top card of the stock. Or, if the player wishes, they may instead (subject to restrictions under "Taking the Discard Pile") take the top card of the discard pile to use it in a meld; having done so, they must take the rest of the discard pile.

The discard is always one card from the hand (never from a meld). All discards are placed in one pile beside the stock (on the upcard, if it is still there), and the discard pile must be kept squared up, except as noted later.

Melds

A meld is valid if it contains at least two natural cards of the same rank - aces down to fours inclusive - and not more than three wild cards. Jokers and deuces may never be melded apart from natural cards. A set of three or four black threes (without wild cards) may be melded only when a player goes out.

To count plus, a meld must be laid on the table face up during a person's turn to play. All cards that are left in the hand when play ends, even though they form melds, count minus. A player may meld as many cards as they please, of one rank or different ranks, forming new melds or adding cards to previous melds. (But see restrictions on "Going Out".) All the melds of a partnership are placed in front of either partner. A partnership may meld in a rank already melded by the opponents, but may not make two different melds of the same rank.

A player may add additional cards to a meld by their side, provided that the melds remain valid (having no more than three wild cards). He may not add cards to the opponents' melds.

Canastas

A meld comprising seven or more cards, including at least four natural cards (called a "base"), is a canasta. In addition to the point values of the cards, a canasta earns a bonus of 500 for a natural or "pure" canasta (one that has no wild card), and 300 for a mixed canasta (one that has one to three wild cards).

A completed canasta is squared up with a red card on top to indicate a natural one and a black card on top to indicate a mixed canasta. Additional cards may be added to a canasta to score their point values, but these do not affect the bonus - except that a wild card

added to a natural canasta reduces it to a mixed canasta (and a black card replaces the red card that was previously on top).

Minimum Count. Every card has a fixed point value, as follows: Each joker 50 Each deuce 20 Each ace 20 Each K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8 10 Each 7, 6, 5, 4, and black 3 5

A partnership's first meld (its "initial" meld) must meet a minimum count requirement that depends on the accumulated score of that side at the time, as follows: Accumulated Score (at beginning of the deal) Minimum Count Minus 15 0 to 1,495 50 1,500 to 2,995 90 3,000 or more 120

The count of a meld is the total point value of the cards in it. To meet the minimum, a player may make two or more different melds. If a player takes the discard pile, the top card but no other may count toward the requirement. Bonuses for red threes and canastas do not count toward the minimum.

After a side has made its initial meld, either partner may make any valid meld without reference to any minimum count.

Freezing the Discard Pile

The discard pile is frozen against a side before that side has made its initial meld. The initial meld unfreezes it for both partners, provided that it is not frozen again as described below.

The discard pile is frozen when a red three is turned as an upcard or if a wild card or a black three is turned as an upcard or discarded. (The lowermost freezing card of the pile is turned sideways to indicate the freeze.)

Unfreezing the Discard Pile

A frozen discard pile is unfrozen only by being taken. When the discard pile is topped by a wild card or a black three, at least one natural card must be discarded on top of the pile before the pile may be taken. Then, a player may take that card (and the pile) only with a natural pair of the same rank from their hand. Before touching the discard pile, the player should show the pair (together with any additional cards if needed to meet the minimum count of an initial meld).

Taking the Discard Pile

When the discard pile is not frozen against their side, a player may take it: a) with a natural pair matching the top card as above; or b) by melding the top card with one matching natural card and one wild card from his hand; or c) by adding the top card to a meld they already have on the table.

Having taken and melded the top discard as described, the player takes the rest of the pile into their hand and may then meld some or all of the additional cards as they please.

The discard pile may never be taken when its top card is a wild card, a black three, or a red three.

Information

A player may: 1) Examine the discard pile during their first turn before discarding. 2) Call attention to the correct minimum count needed if their partner is making an initial meld. 3) Remind their partner to declare red threes or draw replacements. 4) Turn the sixth card of a meld crosswise to indicate that only one more card is needed to complete a canasta. When it is their turn to play, a player is entitled to be informed of a) the minimum count requirement or score (at the beginning of the hand) of either side; b) the number of cards held by any player; and c) the number of cards remaining in the stock. If a player's hand is reduced to one card, they may announce this fact.

Going Out

A player goes out when they get rid of the last card in their hand by discarding or melding it, provided that their side has melded at least one canasta or they complete a canasta while going out. Failing this requirement, a player must keep at least one card in their hand. When a player goes out, the hand ends and the results on both sides are scored.

A player need not make a discard in going out; they may meld all of their remaining cards.

A player with only one card left in their hand may not take the discard pile if there is only one card in it.

Permission to Go Out

If a player sees that they are able to go out, before or after drawing, the player may say "Partner, may I go out?" The partner must answer "Yes" or "No," and the answer is binding. Before responding, the partner may obtain the information specified under "Information" (see above).

A player may not ask "Partner, may I go out?" after having melded any card or having indicated the intention to take the discard pile. However, they may go out without asking permission.

Concealed Hand

A player goes out "concealed" when they meld their entire hand in one turn, including at least one canasta, without having made an earlier meld and without previously having added any card to melds that their partner has made. If a partner has not made an initial meld, the player must meet the minimum count (without the canasta bonus) if they have taken the discard pile, but need not do so if they have drawn from the stock.

Exhausting the Stock

If a player draws the last card of the stock and it is a red three, they must reveal it. The player may not then meld or discard, and play ends.

If the last card of the stock is not a red three, play continues as long as each player in turn takes the discard, and they must do so if it matches a meld on their side and the pack is not frozen. (The only exception is that a one-card hand may not take a one-card discard pile). A player does not have to take the discard to form a new meld. The play ends when a player cannot take the discard or legally refuses to take it.

How to Keep Score

Scoring a Deal A partnership's base score is determined by totaling all applicable items in the following schedule: For each natural canasta 500 For each mixed canasta 300 For each red three 100 (All four red threes count 800) For going out 100 For going out concealed (extra) 100

A partnership's score for the hand is the values of all cards that were melded, minus the values of the cards left in both hands. In other words, the final score of a side for a deal is the net of its base and point scores. (It may be minus.)

The score should be recorded on a sheet of paper divided into two columns, one for each side. (Customarily, the columns are marked We and They.) Each entry should show the scores of the previous deal, together with the accumulated totals (which determine the initial meld requirement).

The side that first reaches a total of 5,000 wins a game. The final deal is played out even though it is obvious that one or both sides have surely reached 5,000. There is no bonus for winning a game; the margin of victory is the difference of the final totals.