

# Card Game for 4 Players

## PINOCHLE

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### Concept

Pinochle is a label for a family of games that involve melding, taking tricks, and a German ranking of cards. No rules to Pinochle are “official.” If you learn the basic ones described here (technically “Partnership Auction Pinochle”), you should be able to adapt easily to most variations.

The melding process makes Pinochle fairly dependent on the luck of the deal, but there remains moderate opportunity for skillful play of the tricks.

### Players

Four, two against two as partners, facing each other. All players participate in the play of every round. One player keeps score.

### The Deck

The Pinochle deck has 48 cards, made up of two each of the 9 through ace of each suit. Such a deck can be made by taking two standard 52-card decks and discarding all 2s through 8s.

The rank of the cards is ace (high), 10, king, queen, jack, 9 (low).

If two cards of equal rank (and suit) are played in the same trick, the first played outranks the second played.

### The Deal

Select the first dealer randomly. Subsequent hands are dealt by each player in turn in a clockwise rotation. Deal out the entire deck, three cards at a time, face down, so that each player receives 12 cards.

### Trump

In each round played, trump is the suit (clubs, diamonds, hearts, or spades) declared by the winner of the bidding. Other than trump, there is no rank of suits (that is, no suit is more powerful or valuable than another suit).

### Melding

Each player’s meld consists of combinations of cards that are valued as follows:

Run: A, 10, K, Q, J of trump = 15  
[doubled (same suit) = 150 — automatic game winner]

Royal marriage: K & Q of trump = 4  
[doubled (i.e. two of them) = 8]

Marriage: K & Q, any non-trump suit = 2  
[doubled = 4]

Pinochle: J  $\spadesuit$  & Q  $\heartsuit$  = 4  
[doubled = 30]

Dix (“deece”): 9 of trump = 1 each

Aces around: A  $\clubsuit$ , A  $\heartsuit$ , A  $\spadesuit$ , A  $\diamondsuit$  = 10  
[doubled = 100]

Kings around: K  $\clubsuit$ , K  $\heartsuit$ , K  $\spadesuit$ , K  $\diamondsuit$  = 8  
[doubled = 80]

Queens around: Q  $\clubsuit$ , Q  $\heartsuit$ , Q  $\spadesuit$ , Q  $\diamondsuit$  = 6  
[doubled = 60]

Jacks around: J  $\clubsuit$ , J  $\heartsuit$ , J  $\spadesuit$ , J  $\diamondsuit$  = 4  
[doubled = 40]

Note that no points are given for four 10s. Cards may be used more than once (for example, a Q  $\spadesuit$  can be part of a run and a pinochle). But a marriage that is part of a run (or one card of which is part of a run) does not count separately as a marriage. A marriage in all four suits (that is, the combined score of the marriages and the Kings and Queens around) is called a Round-house (or Round Robin) and equals 24 points. This is a label for convenience, not an extra 24 points.

There is no rule that you must lay down all possible meld, but there really is no good reason not to do so. If you don’t lay it down at the start of the round, you cannot get credit for it later.

### Tricks

A trick consists of four cards, one placed by each player in-turn, face-up in the middle of the playing area. The player who places the highest trump in the trick, or the highest ranked card of the suit led (if there is no trump) wins the trick.

Tricks that are won by either partner should be collected by one of the partners so that each team has one (and only one) pile of the cards it has taken in tricks.

At the end of the round, each team receives one “earned” point for each ace, ten, and king (known as “counters”) that they have collected. In addition, one point is awarded to the team that captured the last trick of the round. There are thus a total of 25 earned points for each round.

## The Bidding

Beginning with the player to the left of the dealer, each player may either bid or pass. Once a player has passed, she cannot bid again in that round. The bid is a number (no suit is mentioned) representing the minimum number of points (the total of the team’s melds and the earned points taken in tricks) that the bidder claims her team can make from that round.

The minimum (and most common) opening bid is 21. Those who make a bid may continue making higher bids in turn until all others pass. Rarely does the bidding exceed 30, although in theory, a team could score far higher in a round.

If the first three players pass, the dealer has the option of accepting the lead with a bid of 20 or of ending the round by “throwing in” (folding) and taking a loss of 20 points. When the dealer chooses to throw in, no melds are scored, and the next player deals a new round.

The scorekeeper makes a note of the amount of the bid and who won it.

## The Play

Whoever wins the bid declares trump and all players lay out their meld (if any) face-up in front of them. After the scorekeeper has noted the total of the melds for each team, the cards are put back into the hands from which they came.

The high bidder then leads, that is, initiates play by playing the first card of the first trick.

The winner of a trick leads to the next trick. Remember that 10s are outranked only by aces.

There are three general rules of play. First, that you must follow suit (play a card of the suit that is led) if you can. Second, if you cannot follow suit, you must play a trump if you have one.

Third, that you must take control of the trick, if possible.

In practice, these rules mean that:

- ◆ If able, you must play a card higher than the card that currently controls the trick, even when that controlling card was played by your partner.
- ◆ If a non-trump is led and you have no card of that suit, you must play a trump, if able. If the trick has already been trumped, you must trump higher, if possible.
- ◆ If you have both a higher and a lower card of the suit led, but the trick has been trumped so that you cannot take control, you may play either card.
- ◆ If you have neither the led suit nor the trump suit, you may play any card in your hand.

## Scoring

When all tricks have been played, a member of the non-bidding team counts the earned points (also known as “card points”: the aces, tens, and kings) in the tricks that team has captured and adding one point if they captured the final trick. The earned points captured by the bidding team may be calculated by subtracting the non-bidding team’s number from 25, or it may be separately counted. These points are combined with each team’s meld.

If a team fails to capture any tricks, its meld is not counted.

If the bidding team failed to make as many points as it bid, its score for the round is minus the amount bid.

Add the round scores to the current game totals.

## Winning

The game is won by the team whose score first reaches or exceeds 120. If both teams reach 120 in the same round, the bidding team for that round wins the game, even if the other team has a higher score.

## Strategy

You may begin with a bid higher than 21 or outbid your partner by more than one, thereby signaling your possession of considerable meld (generally 8 points or more) but without a good

playing suit. (There is no value in this if your partner has already passed.) Your partner is expected to respond by bidding if she has a strong suit.

When it is certain that your partner will win a trick, give her counters if feasible. (Kings are almost always a good idea, tens can be, an ace only if it is in danger of being captured by trump.)

If your team is within a few points of winning and your opponents are not, and you are not the dealing team, it is usually best to refrain from bidding.

The dealer is sometimes wise to throw-in (fold) a questionable hand and take the 20-point loss rather than play and allow the opposition to score their meld and possibly reach 120.

If the dealer's team is close to going out and you do not have a very strong hand, it is generally best to pass in the hope of forcing the dealer to fold and go down 20 points.

## Variations

(Listed in approximate order of popularity.)

Some play that the bidding team scores what it bid, not what it made (assuming it made its bid).

Some play Racehorse Pinochle, in which, after a player has named trump, her partner passes her three (or four) cards which she incorporates into her hand and then passes the same number of cards back to her partner. This makes for higher scoring rounds and the bidding usually begins at 25 rather than 21 and game is 150 rather than 120.

Some play that when both teams' scores total above 120 after the same round, the team with the highest score wins the game rather than the team that bid that round.

Some play that the initial lead must be a trump card.

Some have developed elaborate bidding conventions to signal the power of their hands.

Some play that "the requirement to beat" is only applicable when trump is led. When non-trump is led, you may choose to not play a higher card and refrain from taking control of the trick.

Some play that the player to the left of the dealer makes the initial lead, not the high bidder.

## Double-Deck Pinochle

Same rules as above except:

- ◆ Use two Pinochle decks and discard the 9s, so that you have 80 cards.
- ◆ Deal 20 cards to each player, either four or five at a time.
- ◆ Meld scores for triples (three sets), and quadruples (all four sets) are: runs = 225/300, royal marriages = 12/16, marriages = 6/8, pinochle = 60/90, aces around = 150/200, kings = 120/160, queens = 90/120, jacks = 60/80
- ◆ Minimum bid is 50. Three opening passes force the dealer to bid 50 or fold and score minus 50.
- ◆ Game is 500 (some play 450 or 350) or winner is highest scorer after an announced number of rounds or predetermined elapsed time.

## Three-Player Pinochle

Same rules as for four-player game except:

- ◆ 15 cards to each player and three to form a "widow" (or "kitty") that is not revealed until bidding is completed.
- ◆ Winner of the bid shows the widow to all and then adds the three cards to his hand.
- ◆ After trump is declared and melds laid out, bidder discards three cards from those remaining in his hand (not from his meld). These cards remain in the bidder's trick pile and are counted in at the end of the round. Then the melds are picked up and play begins.
- ◆ A trick consists of three cards.
- ◆ Game is 150.

Players play as individuals, but two players may cooperate (by judicious placement of counters) to stop the third from winning or gaining too great a lead. ■

