
COMBO WHIST

THE TAINTELESS CARD GAME

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1 Overview

Combo Whist is a trick-taking card game and is—as its name implies—a variant of Whist. The key trait of Combo Whist is its great variety of available strategies while still having a rule set that is fairly simple (although the rule set is undeniably somewhat large—large, not complicated). The availability of a multitude of varied tactics avoids a substantial amount of randomness that is usually present in Whist games, without making the game overly complicated, keeping it fun to play for both experienced and casual card players.

Number of players: Preferably 4, but 3 to ∞ is also possible with some adjustments to the rules.

Requirements: A standard 52-card deck, a pen and a piece of paper.

Card rank: From highest to lowest: A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2

2 How to play

2.1 Preparations

If there are only 3 players, $\clubsuit 7$, as well as all the 8s, 9s and 10s are removed from the deck.

Make a column for each player on the paper. This is done in order to keep track of each players' score as well as some other information about the game. After you have properly prepared the paper, choose a dealer at random.

2.2 Deal

There are two main parts of a deal. The first part is the *bidding* and the second part is the *game*. Because things should be easier to understand in the reverse order, the game is described before the bidding.

A deal begins with the dealer dealing 13 cards to each player. Next, the bidding begins, and when it has finished, the game begins.

After the game, players' new scores are noted down and a new deal begins with the next dealer being the player who is seated to the left of the current dealer.

2.2.1 Game

The game plays similarly to any Whist variant. The player to the right of the *declarer*¹ leads by playing a card. Next, the player to the left of them plays a card which must follow the suit of the first card. After that, the next player (one step further left) plays yet another card which must also follow the suit of the first card, and so on until all players have played one card each.

If a player is out of cards in the leading suit, they may discard any card or play a trump. Unlike many variants of Whist, it is not mandatory to play a trump in case one would be out of cards in the leading suit.

¹The term “declarer” will be explained in Section 2.2.2—*Bidding*.

The player who played the highest card in the leading suit takes the *trick* (that is, takes all the played cards and puts them face-down on the table), unless a trump is played, in which case the player who played the highest trump takes the trick. The player who brought home the last trick leads the next one.

2.2.2 Bidding

In Combo Whist, players make *combo bids*. A combo bid is composed of exactly one standard bid and any amount (including zero) of unique special bids. The bids have certain rules associated with them that are applied during the game and during scoring.

The players take turns by bidding in a clockwise manner and the player to the left of the dealer makes the first bid. A player can either pass or make a combo bid that is worth more than the previous combo bids (from here on simply referred to as *bids*). If a player passes, they are out of the bidding and may therefore not make any new bids until the next deal. If all players pass, the same dealer collects all cards and deals a new deal.

A bid's worth is defined as the combined worth of the standard and special bids it comprises. A bid must have a worth of at least 1 in order for it to be eligible for bidding. A proposed time limit between bids is 20 seconds, but 1 minute before the initial bid. Although for beginners higher limits or no limits are recommended. If a player hasn't made a bid within the given time limit, they automatically pass. The bidding continues until all players but one have passed. That player is appointed declarer and the game begins.

The available bids are listed in the tables in Section 4—**Standard bids** and Section 5—**Special bids**. The number of tricks to bring home in order to complete the bid is listed in the standard bids table in the “Tricks” column. A special bid cannot be combined with another bid listed in the “Incompatibility” column, nor are combo bids allowed which are impossible to complete regardless of the distribution of the cards of the opponents. Note that there is a difference between worth and score; Worth is a bid's worth (You guessed it!) and score is the number of points the declarer scores if they complete the bid.

If it is unclear when an event triggered by a bid is supposed to occur, refer to the special bids' “Order” column. The order of a bid decides in what order the events given by its rules will take place. The bids with the lowest order go first. All of the standard bids have order 0.

2.2.3 Scoring

After the game has finished, the declarer scores a number of points determined by what combo bid was bid and whether it was completed. If the bid was completed, they score as many points as as noted in the “Score” column for the standard bid. If the bid was not completed, 2 points are subtracted from their previous score. It is possible to attain a negative score. If a player has a score below -5 , they are not allowed to bid during bidding. However, they automatically score 1 point for free after every deal they participate in (even if no one bids).

2.2.4 Winning

There are two variants on how to determine the winner in Combo Whist: *classic* and *limited*.

Classic: The winner is the player who first attains or exceeds the *winning score*. The winning score starts at 13, but 1 is subtracted from it every time all players have dealt one deal each. The winning score decreases *after* the final deal has been completed and scores for that deal have been counted. This continues until the winning score reaches 1, where it stays until someone wins. A player must win by completing a bid and can therefore not win merely because the winning score just decreased. A player can also not win unless they have the solitary highest score.

Limited: A predetermined number of *rounds* are played (one suggestion is 3), where one round comprises each player dealing one deal each. When all the rounds have been played, the next player wins who completes a bid which results in that said player attains the solitary highest score. In order to clarify: A player can win when the last round is completed.

Win of Shame: Common to both variants is the following rule: If all players but one attains a score of -5 or lower, the player who has the highest score automatically wins, regardless of the winning score. This type of win is called a *Win of Shame*.

3 Miscellaneous

3.1 Rules for more than 4 players

If there are more than 4 players participating in the game, for every deal, all players but 4 sit out (that is, they don't participate in the deal). These players are the ones that are closest to the right of the dealer.

3.2 Talking

A certain amount of talk is allowed in Combo Whist, but the players are not allowed to give hints about what cards they have.

3.3 Cheating

If the declarer unintentionally cheats, the current bid is not completed. If a non-declarer unintentionally cheats, the following occurs: The current bid continues, but no subtraction of points is done from the declarer's score should the bid not be completed. Furthermore, the same amount of points as the current bid's points is subtracted from the cheating player's score regardless of whether the bid is completed.

If unintentional cheating occurs before a declarer has been appointed, the deal is canceled, and 2 points are subtracted from the cheating player's score.

However, if all of the deal's players agree about how the events after the cheating occurred could be reversed, they should be reversed in the agreed-upon manner, without other changes to the scores except that 1 point is subtracted from the cheating player's score.

A player who intentionally cheats in Combo Whist is never again allowed to play it because it is obvious that they do not respect the game's magnificence.

4 Standard bids

DESIGNATION	Worth	Score	Trump	Tricks	Rules
BID OF SHAME	0	1	no	see →	The declarer must not bring home the greatest amount of tricks—not even if this amount is shared with another player.
APPROXIMATE	1	1	no	see →	The declarer guesses, before the beginning of the game, two possible amounts of tricks they think they could bring home. They must bring home one of the guessed amount of tricks.
TRUMP	1	1	yes	min. 5	The declarer decides trump suit.
GRILL	1	2	yes	min. 5	The declarer begins by deciding trump suit. This trump suit only applies to the first trick. After that trick, the new trump suit is the suit which was led in the previous trick, and this procedure is repeated until the game is finished.
BLOCK TRUMP	2	1	yes	min. 5	The declarer decides trump suit. The declarer is not allowed to play any trump card until any other player plays trump (unless the declarer holds only trump cards).
LIMBO	2	1	no	see →	The declarer must bring home fewer of the 7 first tricks than of the 6 last.
GAME	2	2	no	min. 5	—
MASTER'S BID OF SHAME	3	2	no	see →	The declarer must bring home the least amount of tricks. If no one brings home fewer tricks than the declarer, the bid is completed.
PRECISE	3	2	no	see →	The declarer guesses, before the start of the game, how many tricks they think they will bring home. They must bring home the guessed amount of tricks.
MAX TRUMP	3	3	yes	min. 7	The declarer chooses trump suit.
SUB TRUMP	3	3	yes	min. 5	The declarer chooses trump suit. They must not choose one of the suits in which they have the most cards.
RANK TRUMP	3	4	yes	min. 5	All players choose one card each and put them face-down on the table. The cards are then revealed and the declarer switches their card with a card of one of the opponent's which has the highest rank. If there are multiple cards with the highest rank, the declarer chooses one of them. The chosen card's suit is the trump suit.
MASTER'S GAME	4	3	no	see →	The declarer must bring home the solitary greatest amount of tricks.
ZERO	4	4	no	0	—
MASTER'S TRUMP	6	6	yes	min. 5	The player to the left of the declarer decides trump suit, but first the other non-declarer players may say what trump suit they prefer and how much they prefer it on a scale from 1 to 5 (without motivation).
TAINTLESS MASTER'S GAME	8	*	no	min. 12	*If the bid is completed, the declarer scores as many points as the combo bid's worth. Furthermore, in case the combo bid's worth is 13 or higher, the declarer immediately wins the game regardless of previous scores. When this occurs the declarer also earns the right to the title, <i>Tainless Master of Combo Whist</i> , for the rest of their life.

5 Special bids

DESIGNATION	Worth	Order	Incompatibility	Rules
JUSTICE	-4	1	—	The declarer selects any card before the game begins. This card becomes the <i>card of justice</i> . The declarer decides who takes a trick containing the card of justice when this trick is brought home.
SLOTH	-3	—	—	For the tricks in which the declarer does not lead, the declarer plays last.
POTENTIAL	-2	—	—	If this bid is completed it is marked by a P, a <i>potential</i> , in the declarer's column. A player who has more potentials than another can over-bid the latter's bid with a bid worth as much as the leading bid.
HURRY	-2	—	—	The declarer leads the first trick.
IRON	-1	—	—	The aces rank the lowest instead of the highest.
MAIL	-1	2	—	Before the game starts, all players send 3 cards in a direction the declarer chooses (to the right, to the left or across).
GREED	0	—	—	At the end of the game, one virtual trick is added to or subtracted from the declarer's stick count in such a way that it disfavors them. If the bid is completed, the declarer scores 1 extra point.
ATELIER	1	—	<i>Open Hand</i>	The declarer chooses 4 cards that they put in the <i>atelier</i> . These cards must be shown to all players during the game. As soon as the atelier no longer consists of 4 cards, the declarer must add a card to it, if possible.
ENDING DOG	1	—	<i>Zero</i>	The declarer must not bring home the last trick.
MASTER'S MAIL	1 or 3	3	—	If the bid is combined with a trump bid that is not <i>Grill</i> , its worth is 3, but otherwise merely 1. Before the game starts, all players but the declarer sends 3 cards to the player to the right (skipping the declarer).
OPEN TRUMP	1	—	trumpless bids, <i>Grill</i> , <i>Open Hand</i>	The declarer must play with open trump cards. That is, all of the declarer's trump cards must be shown to all players during the game. If combined with <i>Atelier</i> , the atelier must not contain any trump cards.
LOCK	2	—	<i>Zero</i>	The declarer must not bring home any of the first 3 tricks.
PENALTY	2	—	—	If the declarer does not complete their bid, 2 extra points are subtracted from their score.
PLAGUE	2	1	<i>Bid of Shame</i> , <i>Master's Bid of Shame</i> , <i>Zero</i>	The declarer chooses a suit to be the <i>plague suit</i> . The declarer must not become <i>beplagued</i> ; that is, must not bring home the solitary greatest amount of plague cards (note: <i>not</i> tricks), unless they become <i>honorably beplagued</i> and bring home the whole plague suit as well as fulfill all the other requirements of the combo bid, in which case they also score 1 honorable extra point. The declarer must not lead in the plague suit before the plague suit has been played in some other way, provided the declarer does not hold only plague cards.
OPEN HAND	3	—	<i>Atelier</i> , <i>Open Trump</i>	The declarer must play with an open hand. That is, all of the their cards must be shown to all players during the game.