
COMBO WHIST

THE TAINTELESS CARD GAME

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1 Overview

Combo Whist is a trick-taking card game and a variant of Whist. It is easy to learn in a few minutes, but difficult to master.

Combo Whist presents the players with an exceptionally large plethora of ways of play by having them negotiate a combination of rules to use before each hand. This is achieved by presenting the players with a *reasonably small number of bids* that can be combined in a *large number of ways* in order to make “combo bids,” which determine the rules. This is done in hope that the vast possibilities of controlling the rules in sophisticated ways favors skill in contrast to chance more than in other Whist variants, without making the game overly complicated—making the game fun to play for both casual and professional players.

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

Requirements: Standard 52-card deck, pen and paper. (The helper cards are *optional* and can aid in organizing a player’s thoughts, but have no real effect on the game.)

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, remove ♣7 as well as all the 8s, 9s and 10s from the deck, making 4 suits of consisting of 10, 10, 10 and 9 cards, respectively.

Make a column for each player on the paper. This is done in order to keep track of each player’s score and some additional information. When the paper has been prepared, choose a dealer at random.

2.2 Deal

A deal consists of two main parts—the *bidding* and the *hand*. Because it should be easier to understand the bidding if the hand is already understood, the hand is described first.

A deal begins with the dealer dealing 13 cards to each player, whereafter the bidding starts. After the bidding is complete, the hand starts.

After the hand, players’ new scores are recorded, and a new deal begins with the next dealer being the player on the current dealer’s left.

2.2.1 Hand

The hand plays similarly to how a hand is played in most Whist variants: The player to the *declarer’s*¹ right is called *forehand* and leads by playing a card. Next, in a clockwise manner, the other players play one card each. The other

¹The term “declarer” is explained in Section 2.2.2—Bidding.

players must—if they can—play cards which follow the suit of forehand’s card. Otherwise they must discard any card or play a *trump*.² Unlike in some Whist variants, there is no obligation for a player to play a trump in case they are out of cards in the leading suit.

The player who played the highest card in the leading suit brings home the *trick*³ 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 number (including zero) of unique special bids. The bids have specific rules associated with them, which are applied during the hand and during scoring.

The players take turns by bidding in a clockwise manner and the player to the dealer’s left makes the first bid. A player can either make a combo bid that ranks higher than the previous combo bid, or pass. A player who passes is out of the bidding and may therefore not make any new bids until the next deal. If all players pass, a *redeal* occurs, where the same dealer deals again.

A combo bid’s rank is defined as the combined rank of all its constituent standard and special bids. A combo bid must have a rank of at least 1.

A proposed time limit between bids is 30 seconds, with an extra 60 seconds before the first bid. However for beginners, higher limits or no limits are recommended. A player who does not make a bid within the given time limit, passes automatically. The bidding continues until all players but one have passed. That non-passing player is appointed declarer and the hand begins.

The standard and special bids that are available to combine into a combo bid are listed in the tables in Section 4—**Standard bids**, and Section 5—**Special bids**, respectively. The number of tricks to bring home in order to complete a combo bid is listed in the standard bids table in the “Tricks” column. A special bid cannot be combined with bids listed in its “Incompatibility” column.

If it is unclear when an event triggered by a bid is supposed to occur, refer to the special bids’ “Priority” column. The priority number listed in said column decides in what order the events specified by a bid’s rules will take place. The bids with the lowest priority numbers go first. All standard bids have the priority number 0.

2.2.3 Scoring

After a hand has been played, 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 listed in the “Score” column for the standard bid. If the bid was not completed, the declarer loses 2 points. A player is allowed to attain a negative score, but if a player has a score below -5 , they are not allowed to take part in the bidding. However, said players automatically score 1 free point after every deal they participate in (even in the event that no one bids and a redeal occurs).

²A trump is a card from the trump suit. The trump suit is determined during bidding.

³That is, takes all the played and discarded cards and puts them face-down on the table.

2.2.4 Winning

There are two variants for determining 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 each time all players have dealt one deal each—after one *round*. The winning score decreases *after* the score for the final hand has been recorded. 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 decreases. A player can also not win unless they have the solitary highest score.

Limited: A predetermined number of rounds are first played (one suggestion is 3). After all rounds have been played, the next player wins who completes a bid which results in said player attaining the solitary highest score. To clarify: A player can not win at the end of the last of the predetermined number of rounds.

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 with the highest score 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 each deal, all players but 4 *sit out*; That is, they don't participate in the deal. These are the players seated closest to the right of the dealer.

3.2 Talking

Players are allowed to talk on the condition that they don't hint about what cards they have.

3.3 Cheating

If the declarer unintentionally cheats, the current combo bid is not completed. If a non-declarer unintentionally cheats, the following occurs: A number of points equal to the current bid's score is subtracted from the cheating player's score. The current combo bid continues, but no subtraction of points is done from the declarer's score should the bid not be 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 can be reverted, they should be reverted 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	Rank	Score	Trump	Tricks	Rules
MISERY	0	1	no	see →	The declarer must not bring home the greatest nor shared greatest number of tricks.
UNCERTAINTY	1	1	no	see →	The declarer guesses two possible numbers of tricks they they could bring home. They must bring home one of the guessed numbers of tricks.
TRUMP	1	1	yes	min. 5	The declarer decides trump suit.
GRILL	1	2	yes	min. 5	The declarer decides trump suit. However, said 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 hand is finished.
BLOCK TRUMP	2	1	yes	min. 5	The declarer decides trump suit. Unless the declarer holds only trump, they are not allowed to play trump until a non-declarer has played trump.
LIMBO	2	1	no	see →	The declarer must bring home fewer of the first 7 tricks than of the last 6.
ABUNDANCE	2	2	no	min. 5	—
CERTAINTY	3	2	no	see →	The declarer guesses how many tricks they will bring home. They must bring home the guessed number of tricks.
MASTER MISERY	3	2	no	see →	The declarer must bring home the least or shared least number 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.
MASTER ABUNDANCE	4	3	no	see →	The declarer must bring home the solitary greatest number of tricks.
RANK TRUMP	4	4	yes	min. 5	The non-declarers choose one card each and put them face-down on the table. The cards are then revealed and the declarer swaps one of their cards with one of the revealed cards that ranks the highest or shared highest. The trump suit is that of the chosen card.
ZERO	4	4	no	0	—
MASTER TRUMP	6	6	yes	min. 5	The player to the right 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).
TAINTELESS BID	8	*	no	see →	The declarer must bring home all 2s. All 2s must be shown to all players during the hand and must not be included in an atelier. *If the bid is completed, the declarer scores as many points as the combo bid's rank. Furthermore, in case the combo bid's rank is 13 or higher, the declarer immediately wins the game regardless of previous scores. When this occurs, the declarer earns the right to the title, <i>Tainless Master of Combo Whist</i> , for the rest of their life.

5 Special bids

DESIGNATION	Rank	Priority	Incompatibility	Rules
JUSTICE	-4	1	—	Before the hand begins, the declarer selects any card to be become the <i>card of justice</i> . When the trick containing the card of justice has been played, the declarer decides which player brings it home.
SLOTH	-3	—	—	For the tricks in which the declarer does not lead, the declarer plays last.
POTENTIAL	-2	—	—	If the bid is completed, a P—a <i>potential</i> —is marked in the declarer's column. A player who has more potentials than another can over-bid the latter's combo bid with a combo bid ranking as high the leading bid.
HURRY	-2	—	—	The declarer becomes forehand and thus leads the first trick.
IRON	-1	—	—	The aces rank the lowest instead of the highest.
MAIL	-1	2	—	Before the hand begins, all players send 3 cards to the right.
GREED	0	—	<i>Taintless bid</i>	At the end of the hand, 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	4	<i>Open Hand</i>	The declarer chooses 4 cards that they put in <i>the atelier</i> . These cards must be shown to all players during the hand. As soon as the atelier no longer holds 4 cards, if possible, the declarer must add one card to it.
ENDING DOG	1	—	<i>Zero</i>	The declarer must not bring home the last trick.
MASTER MAIL	1 or 3	3	—	If this bid is combined with a trump bid that is not <i>Grill</i> , its rank is 3, but otherwise it is 1. Before the hand starts, all players but the declarer send 3 cards to the player to the left, skipping over the declarer.
OPEN TRUMP	1	4	non-trump 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 hand. If combined with <i>Atelier</i> , the atelier must not hold 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 the bid, they lose two additional points.
PLAGUE	2	1	<i>Misery</i> , <i>Master Misery</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, they must not bring home the solitary greatest amount of plague <i>cards</i> , unless they bring home the whole plague suit as well as fulfill all the other requirements of the combo bid, in which case they become <i>honorably beplagued</i> and score 1 honorable extra point. Unless the declarer has no other choice, they must not lead in the plague suit before the plague suit has been played in some other way.
OPEN HAND	3	4	<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 hand.