

# Whist Rules

The classic game of whist is a plain-trick game without bidding for 4 players in fixed partnerships. Although the rules are extremely simple there is enormous scope for scientific play, and in its heyday a large amount of literature about how to play whist was written.

## *Players*

There are four players in two fixed partnerships. Partners sit facing each other. The game is played clockwise.

## *Cards*

A standard 52-card pack is used. The cards in each suit rank from highest to lowest: A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2.

## *Deal*

The player to the dealer's left shuffles the cards and cut by the player to dealer's right. The dealer deals out all the cards one at a time so that each player has 13. The final card, which will belong to the dealer, is turned face up to indicate which suit is trump. The turned trump remains face up on the table until it is dealer's turn to play to the first trick.

It is traditional to use two packs of cards. During each deal, the dealer's partner shuffles the other pack and places it to the right. The dealer for the next hand then simply needs to pick up the cards from the left and pass them across to the right to be cut. Provided all the players understand and operate it, this procedure saves time and helps to remember whose turn it is to deal, as the spare pack of cards is always to the left of the next dealer.

## *Play*

The player to the dealer's left leads to the first trick. Any card may be led. The other players, in clockwise order, each play a card to the trick. Players must follow suit by playing a card of the same suit as the card led if they can; a player with no card of the suit led may play any card. The trick is won by the highest trump in it - or if it contains no trump, by the highest card of the suit led. The winner of a trick leads to the next.

### *Scoring*

When all 13 tricks have been played, the side which won more tricks scores 1 point for each trick they won in excess of 6.

The partnership, which first reaches 5 points, wins the game. This will normally take several deals.

## **Variations**

### *Honours*

Honours are the top four trumps - A K Q J. A partnership, which between them held all four, honours in their hands score an extra 4 points, which they claim at the end of the play. A side, which held three of the four honours, can claim 2 points for them. A team which at the start of the already has 4 points towards the 5 required for game cannot score honours on that deal.

If on the same deal one-side scores for tricks and the other side scores honours, the tricks are scored first. That means that if both sides would have reached 5 or more points, it is the side scoring for tricks that wins the game.

Although scoring honours was part of the traditional game, nowadays many players do not count them. Scoring for honours introduces a larger luck element into the game.

### *Determination of Trumps*

Instead of determining trumps by facing the last card in the deal, an alternative is to fix the trump suit in advance. In this case it is normal to go through the trump suits in a fixed sequence - for the first deal hearts are trumps, for the second deal diamonds, then spades, then clubs, then hearts again, and so on. This method is commonly used in tournaments, such as whist drives.

It is also possible to introduce no trumps into the sequence - so that every fifth hand is played without trumps.

### *Scoring*

The number of points required for game varies. In America a target of 7 was customary. In Britain the game was 5 points up, but it was usual to

play a rubber, which was the best of three games - that is, the winners were the first side to win two games. There was also "Long Whist" in which game was 9 points.

When playing a tournament, it is inconvenient to have people at different tables play varying numbers of deals before moving. Therefore it is usual to play a fixed number of deals, rather than a game. Each player's score is the total number of odd tricks (tricks above six) that their side has taken over the deals played.