

## How to play MiniBridge

The game of Minibridge is played with a standard pack of 52 playing cards with the jokers removed. There are four players, who sit round a table and are usually identified by the points of the compass: North, South, East and West. They play as two partnerships, North–South and East–West. Partners can be agreed or designated, or the cards can be cut to determine who plays with whom.



Minibridge is a trick-taking game. One player starts by ‘leading’ or playing the first card to a trick. Each player in turn clockwise contributes one card to each trick and the highest card played wins the trick. Aces are high, followed in order by the king, queen, jack, ten, nine and so on down to the two, the lowest card in each suit.

There are four suits of these 13 cards:

Spades and Hearts (major) Clubs and Diamonds (minor)

When playing to a trick, each player must ‘follow suit’ with a card of the suit led if possible. Otherwise they may discard any card they like, but a discard cannot win the trick, however high the card chosen. The winner of a trick makes the lead to the next trick.

Deals may be played in ‘no trumps’ or with a trump suit – one which is more powerful than the others. Say spades are trumps then any spade beats any card in the other three suits. Players must still follow suit to each trick if they can, but when unable to follow, instead of discarding, a trump may be played which will win the trick (unless another player plays a bigger trump card to the trick).

The main feature of Minibridge that distinguishes it from whist and other similar trick-taking games is the existence of a ‘declarer’ who decides the ‘contract’ – that is, the choice of trump suit and a target number of tricks to be won by the partnership. The contract must always be for at least 7 of the 13 tricks available, but a higher target can be set, known as a ‘game’ contract, for which the declaring side scores more if it is made.

# 11 easy steps to play Minibridge

## 1 – Shuffle and deal

The pack should be shuffled (randomly mixed) and cut for dealer (highest deals). Dealer deals out the cards clockwise one by one to the players, so that they have 13 cards each. Dealer for the second game will be the next player clockwise and so on. Please note that many teachers will provide you with pre-dealt hands in bridge boards.

## 2 – Sorting the hand

The players sort the cards in their own hand into suits and into sequence within each suit, without showing the cards to the other players.



## 3 – Counting points

The value of the hand is worked out by counting up the high card points held, using the following scale:



**Ace = 4 points**



**King = 3 points**



**Queen = 2 points**



**Jack = 1 point**

Note that there are 40 points altogether between the four hands in each deal.

## 4 – Announcing points

Beginning with the dealer, and then in clockwise order, each player announces how many points his or her hand contains. The partnership with the most points becomes the declaring side who decide the contract. The other pair are the defending side, who try to prevent the contract being made by making tricks themselves. There is a re-deal if the point distribution between the partnerships turns out to be 20:20.

## 5 – The declaring side

The player with the higher number of points in the declaring side becomes 'declarer', and his partner becomes 'dummy'. If they both have the same number of points, the player who announced points first is declarer. Dummy then lays his or her hand down face up on the table to face declarer, with the suits arranged in columns.



## 6 – Deciding the contract

Declarer calculates how many tricks might be won in the combined hands and then chooses and announces the contract that seems likely to bring in the best score for the partnership.

Declarer may choose no trumps or a trump suit, and ‘part-score’ (at least 7 tricks) or ‘game’. The number of tricks required for a game contract varies according to the trumps. In no trumps, game means winning 9 tricks. In a suit contract, where spades or hearts are trumps it means 10 tricks, and where clubs or diamonds are trumps it means 11 tricks.

Game contracts score lots of extra points when made, but if the target is not met, then the declaring side scores nothing and the opponents score points instead. Choosing the best contract is therefore a critical part of the game which needs skill and judgement.


If declarer chooses a trump contract, the cards in dummy in the chosen suit are moved to be on the dummy’s right hand side (the left hand end as declarer looks at them).

## 7 – Play begins

The player on declarer’s left plays the first card, i.e. makes the ‘opening lead’. Play is in clockwise order and players must follow to the suit led whenever possible. The highest card played wins the trick (unless, in a suit contract, it is beaten by a trump, since trumps outrank the other three suits). If several rounds of a suit are played and a player runs out of cards in that suit, he or she may discard a card from another suit (which cannot win the trick), or in a trump contract can choose to play a trump (which will win the trick unless it is beaten by a higher trump).

## 8 – Taking tricks

Each card is played face up in front of each player in such a way that everyone can see the cards clearly. When a trick is complete, the cards are turned over, players placing the ‘quitted’ cards from their own hands face down on the table in front of themselves in a neat row. To make it easy to see how many tricks have been won or lost, cards in tricks won are placed upright, and cards in tricks lost are placed sideways on. The winner of the first trick leads to the second and so on.

|            |   |             |
|------------|---|-------------|
| ♠ 10 5 3 2 |   | ♠ Q 7 4     |
| ♥ A K 4    |   | ♥ 7 5       |
| ♦ K 8 3    |   | ♦ J 10 6    |
| ♣ A 5 3    |   | ♣ Q J 9 7 6 |
| ♠ J 9 8    |  |             |
| ♥ Q J 10 8 |   |             |
| ♦ 9 7 5 2  |   |             |
| ♣ 10 8     |   |             |
| ♠ A K 6    |   |             |
| ♥ 9 6 3 2  |   |             |
| ♦ A Q 4    |   |             |
| ♣ K 4 2    |   |             |

## ***9 – Dummy play***

Declarer controls the play of dummy's cards, telling partner which card to play when it's dummy's turn. Declarer's partner must always play dummy's cards as instructed, and must keep the cards already played from dummy in correct order and formation.

Otherwise dummy takes no part in the play of this particular deal.

## ***10 – Play ends***

When all the cards have been played, the tricks for each side are counted and agreed, and the result is calculated and scored. Players record their score on a score sheet. The session can end when an agreed target total has been reached by one side, or after a set number of deals has been played. *See more about scoring below.*

## ***11 – The next deal***

The position of dealer moves clockwise round the table for each game.

It is a good idea to have two packs of cards available, so that the second pack can be shuffled by the dealer's partner while the first is being dealt. Before starting dealing the next set of hands these cards should be cut by the player on the new dealer's right.

## How to score in Minibridge

Now that you have a basic understanding of Minibridge, you will need to know how to score.

1. Each deal is scored independently, and the winners of the session are the partnership that scores the most points overall. The score for the deal should be recorded at the end of play of each deal, preferably by each of the players.
2. The declaring side only scores points if they win the target number of tricks (or more).
3. No points are won for the first six tricks. For each additional trick, points are scored according to the contract, as follows:
4. **Clubs/diamonds** 20 points **Hearts/spades** 30 points **No-trumps** 40 points for the first scoring trick, 30 points for each subsequent trick (Note that the goals of nine, ten or eleven tricks, according to the choice of trumps, will lead to a total of 100+ points — the requirement for game.)
5. If game has been announced before the play of the cards (and it is achieved) you gain a bonus of 300 points.
6. If a part-score has been announced (and seven or more tricks have been made) you gain a bonus of 50 points.
7. If you do not reach your goal, you do not get any points for the tricks you do make. Instead, the Defenders get 50 points for each trick that the declaring side are short of their target.

### Scoring Examples (Assume South is Declarer in all cases.)

| Declarer's Announcement | Declarer's tricks | Calculation         | North/South score | East/West score |
|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Part score in ♣         | 8                 | $2 \times 20 + 50$  | 90                |                 |
| Part score in ♣         | 6                 | $1 \times 50$ away  |                   | 50              |
| Game in ♠               | 10                | $4 \times 30 + 300$ | 420               |                 |
| Part score in ♠         | 10                | $4 \times 30 + 50$  | 170               |                 |
| Game in ♥               | 8                 | $2 \times 50$ away  |                   | 100             |
| Part score in NT        | 9                 | $40+30+30 + 50$     | 150               |                 |
| Game in NT              | 9                 | $40+30+30 + 300$    | 400               |                 |
| Game in NT              | 8                 | $1 \times 50$ away  |                   | 50              |
| Game in ♦               | 12                | $6 \times 20 + 300$ | 420               |                 |

## Minibridge Vocabulary

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Balanced hand</b>         | One with a relatively equal number of cards in each suit. No void or singleton, not more than one doubleton.   |
| <b>Board</b>                 | The container which holds a deal and shows who is dealer. Sometimes called a wallet.   |
| <b>Bonus</b>                 | Extra points for making a contract, The part score bonus is 50 points and game bonus is 300 points.  |
| <b>Cash</b>                  | To play a winning card or cards. To 'cash out' is to take all your winning cards.  |
| <b>Claim</b>                 | When the play is clear-cut, declarer may show his/her hand, claiming a stated number of tricks.  |
| <b>Contract</b>              | The announcement by declarer of the denomination (trump suit or no trumps) for this deal and the target number of tricks to be won by the declaring side.                |
| <b>Deal</b>                  | Fifty-two cards distributed so each player has thirteen cards.   |
| <b>Dealer</b>                | The player who announces points first on a deal.   |
| <b>Declarer</b>              | The player on the side winning the contract who has the most points, or who announced points first. Declarer has responsibility for playing both his/her hand and dummy. |
| <b>Defeat the contract</b>   | To win, in defence, enough tricks so that declarer fails to make the contract.<br>Defenders score 50 points for each undertrick.   |
| <b>Defence</b>               | The line of play adopted by the defenders.   |
| <b>Defenders</b>             | The two players in opposition to declarer. Often referred to as LHO (left-hand opponent) and RHO (right-hand opponent).  |
| <b>Discarding</b>            | Playing another suit (not trumps) when unable to play a card in the suit led, preferably throwing a card that gives helpful information to partner.                      |
| <b>Doubleton</b>             | A holding of two cards in a suit, often shown by either leading the higher or playing the higher one before the lower.   |
| <b>Drawing trumps</b>        | Continuing to lead trumps until opponents have none left – this involves counting the cards played to make sure all opposition trumps have been drawn.                   |
| <b>Ducking (hold-up)</b>     | Deliberately withholding a high card which could have won a trick.   |
| <b>Dummy</b>                 | The hand of declarer's partner which is placed up on the table.  |
| <b>Duplicate competition</b> | Where the result on each deal is determined by comparison with scores achieved by other pairs playing the same deal.   |

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Duplication</b>         | Duplication of distribution is when both players in a partnership have the same length in each suit. Duplication of values is when strong holdings in one hand are facing strong values in the same suit in partner's hand, such as AQ opposite KJ. |
| <b>Eight-card fit</b>      | A combined holding of eight cards in a suit between the two hands of a partnership.   |
| <b>Establishing a suit</b> | To force out the high card held by the opponents and set up winners.  |
| <b>Fourth highest</b>      | The lead in a suit of the fourth card from the top. e.g. the lead of the 6 from K J 9 6 4.  |
| <b>Game</b>                | Contract whose trick score is 100 points or more  |
| <b>High card points</b>    | Values given to high cards as follows: ace=4, king=3, queen=2, jack=1. There are 40 high card points (HCP) in the pack.   |
| <b>Honours</b>             | The five highest cards in a suit (ace, king, queen, jack, ten).   |
| <b>Lead</b>                | The first card played to a trick.   |
| <b>LHO</b>                 | Left-hand opponent.   |
| <b>Long suit</b>           | A suit of four or more cards in the same hand.  |
| <b>Major suits</b>         | Spades and Hearts whose tricks score 30 points each.  |
| <b>Minor suits</b>         | Diamonds and Clubs whose tricks score 20 points each.   |
| <b>No trumps</b>           | A contract played without trumps. Tricks in no trumps score 40 points for the first trick and 30 points for the next ones.  |
| <b>Opening lead</b>        | The card led to the first trick.  |
| <b>Overtrick</b>           | A trick made by declarer above the number required for the contract.  |
| <b>Pair</b>                | The partnership of two players.   |
| <b>Part score</b>          | A contract to take at least 7 tricks, but less than game.   |
| <b>Penalty</b>             | Points scored by defenders when declarer fails to make a contract.  |
| <b>RHO</b>                 | Right-hand opponent.  |
| <b>Side suit</b>           | Any suit other than trumps.   |
| <b>Singleton</b>           | Holding of only one card in a particular suit.  |
| <b>Trick</b>               | Four cards, one from each player, played in clockwise rotation.   |
| <b>Trump</b>               | A card in the suit named as trumps by declarer.   |
| <b>Unbalanced hand</b>     | Contains a void or singleton or two doubletons.   |
| <b>Void</b>                | Holding no cards in a particular suit   |