

Cribbage

Playing the game

The dealer rotates with each hand, and this is important because of the advantage the crib gives to the dealer (especially in five-card). If at any point in a hand a player pegs out (that is reaches the winning score), then the game ends and he wins. A notable feature of cribbage is that as soon as a player pegs out, the game is over; this can happen during the play of cards or while the hands are being scored. Some cribbage boards are marked with an 'S' in place of 90 because a player is said to be 'skunked' if, when the game ends, the player has fewer than 91 points. A player who finishes with fewer than 61 points is said to be 'double skunked' or 'lurched.'

The deal and the formation of the crib

The dealer shuffles the pack and deals the required number of cards. The non-dealer has the right to cut the deck before the deal, though this can be ignored to save time. The players then discard cards face-down to form the crib, which will be by the dealer.

In one (unfriendly, but nevertheless common) variation, the non-dealer does not have the right to cut the deck before the deal. In this variation, the dealer may choose to offer the cut; a naive or inattentive opponent will cut the deck and hand it back, whereupon the dealer immediately pegs one point; a knowledgeable opponent, though, will simply accept the deck, whereupon he becomes dealer for that hand.

The turn-up

The player to the dealer's left cuts the pack and the dealer turns up the top card (sometimes called the Starter). If the card is a Jack, the dealer scores two points "for his heels."

Card values

Aces always count as 1, and face cards always have a counting value of 10, but their customary rank for runs (i.e., 9,10,J,Q,K is a valid run of 5, but A,10,J,Q,K is only a run of 4, since the Ace is always 1).

The play

Each player in turn plays a card, with the dealer playing last, stating the total as he goes (face cards count as 10, aces as 1). When the first player leads with a card which is the same as the turned up card, they will often exclaim "See one, play one". The total must not pass 31. If a player has no cards left or no cards small enough to play, then he misses his turn.

If a player cannot play a card without bringing the total over 31, the player says "Go" and the other player must then play any cards that keep the total at 31 or less, he also pegs 1 point for the go (or 2 points if he hits 31 exactly). The count then resets to 0, and the player who said "go" leads the next card.

The cards should be played face up in front of the player. Players peg points as follows:

- 2 points for bringing the total to 15,
- 2 points if the card is of the same value as the previous card (i.e. completing a pair),
- 6 points for playing a third consecutive card of the same value,

- 12 points for playing a fourth consecutive card of the same value,
- Three points for completing a run of three cards, four for completing a run of four cards, etc. This is regardless of the order of play, so if the cards played are 4,2,6,5,3, then the player who plays the 3 will score five.
- 1 point for playing a card such that none of the other players can go--because either everyone else is out of cards, or no one else can play without exceeding 31--in either case this is a 'point for go.'
- 2 points for bringing the total to 31.
- 1 point for playing the last card--except when the last card counts to 31 in which case 2 points are scored (see above).

In all games except five card, when no other player can play, you play until you also cannot play (scoring one point total for go, no matter how many additional cards you play), then tally begins again at 0. An example from a two player game:

Player 1 plays a 10, saying "Ten",

Player 2 plays a 5, saying "Fifteen for two" and pegging two points,

Player 1 plays a 5, saying "Twenty for two" and pegging two points,

Player 2 plays a 5, saying "Twenty-five for six" and pegging six points,

Player 1 plays a 6, saying "Thirty-one for two" and pegging two points.

The count resets and play continues until all eight cards are played.

Another example:

Player 1 plays a 9, saying "Nine",

Player 2 plays a 7, saying, "Sixteen",

Player 1 plays a 8, saying, "Twenty-four for three" and pegging three points (run of 7,8,9),

Player 2 plays a 5, saying, "Twenty-nine",

Player 1 having no cards which would keep the total at 31 or less, says "Go",

Player 2 plays an Ace, saying "Thirty" and pegging one point (for the "go"),

Player 1 plays a 9, saying "Nine" (the count has been reset after the "go"),

Player 2 plays a 3, saying "Twelve",

Player 1 plays a 4, saying "Sixteen and one for last" and pegs one point (for the last card of the hand)

The show

Each player in turn (in the order of play), ending with the dealer, totals up the points in his hand, including the turn-up card, and pegs the amount. The order in which this is done is important as a player who tallies his score first may peg out and thus win the game even though another player's tally would take him to an even greater score. In a standard, two-handed game, the hands are scored in the following order:

- Non-dealer's hand
- Dealer's hand
- Dealer's crib

In general, hands are scored starting with the player to the dealer's left, then rotating round to finish with the dealer's hand, then the dealer's crib.

Points are scored for:

- 2 points for having a group of cards that total 15 (again, face cards count 10, aces 1),
- 2 points for having a pair (notice that three of a kind forms three pairs, hence scores 6 points, and four of a kind scores 12; three of a kind is sometimes called a "pair royal", with 4 of a kind being a "double royal"),
- 3 points for a run of three, 4 for a run of four, etc.
- The number of cards in the hand (3 in five card, 4 in six card, 5 in seven card) points for a flush (that is cards of the same suit) not including the turn-up card, one more if the turn-up card is included. If you have a Jack in your hand when you score a flush, you still get to count one point for the "right Jack" assuming it is of the same suit as the turned up card (this is often overlooked by beginners). Also, the crib must be all the same suit (including turned up card) to score any flush points,
- 1 point "for his nob" or "nibs" for having a Jack of the same suit as the turn-up card (also known as the "right Jack").

For example, if a player has the Ace, 6, 7 and 8 of Spades in his hand and the turn up card is the 6 of Hearts, he would score:

"Fifteen six" - for three ways to form 15, that is 7 and 8, and Ace, 6 and 8 twice,

"and two" - for a pair of sixes,

"and six" - for two runs of three (6, 7, 8),

"and four" - for the flush,

"makes eighteen" - the total.

The score is traditionally read as shown, though players may simply declare the score, particularly with low-scoring hands. The highest possible score in six card cribbage is 29, for a holding of 5, 5, 5, J with a turn-up of a 5 of the same suit as the Jack. This scores:

"fifteen sixteen" - for J-5 four times and 5-5-5 four times,

"and twelve" - for four 5s,

"and one for his nob makes twenty-nine."

(Don't be too concerned about how to score this particular hand, as acquiring this hand is extremely rare).

In the seven-card game it is a whopping 46, scored by 4,4,5,5,6,6 (including turn-up), that is fifteen 16, 24 in runs and 6 in pairs.

Not every score below these can actually be made and the lowest of those that can't is 19 (except in seven-card). Because of this, a player with a hand scoring 0 will often declare "nineteen". Another name for a hand scoring zero points is "Ukrainian Straight". Other common calls are "Fifteen two and the rest won't do", and "Fifteen four and the rest don't score".

In a variation called "Muggins", if a player does not claim points either in the play or in the show, their opponent may announce "Muggins" and claim those points for themselves. Whether or not to play Muggins is determined before the start of the game.

The crib

Finally the dealer tallies the points in the crib. This works precisely the same as tallying the other hands, except that a flush scores only if its suit matches that of the turn-up card.