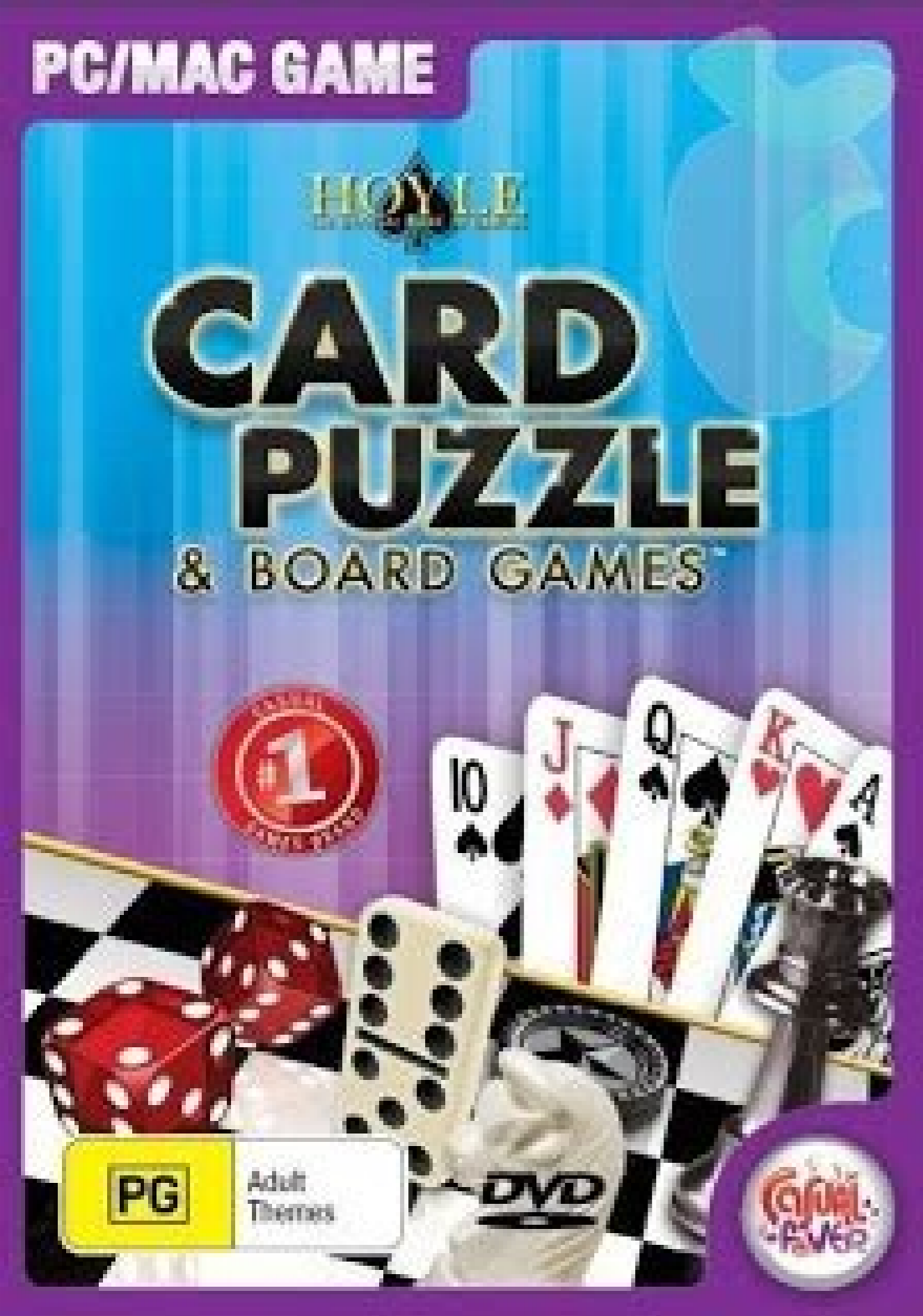


I'm not robot!



Posted by Will Roy on December 10, 2018 by BoardGameGeek reviewer EndersGame So you have a beautiful deck of custom playing cards. Now what? You can certainly put it quietly and safely on your display shelf, occasionally looking at it out of the corner of your eye to remind you that it is really yours, give an admiring glance at the exquisite tuck case, and get a fuzzy feeling inside knowing that it contains some wonderful cards within. You can even take them for an occasional spin with some high flying cardistry magic, or use them for some card magic. But one of the best ways to enjoy a wonderful custom deck is by using it for a card game. That way you actually get to use the deck, and others get to enjoy it too. And during moments of down time, when you are staring at a hand of cards, you can savour the stunning artwork and just enjoy the creativity. But what card games should you play? Most people have learned a handful of card games at best, but the truth is that there is just a whole world of wonderful card games out there, just waiting to be discovered and explored. I have a large collection of other modern games, but over the years I have learned a lot of card games with a traditional deck, and I find myself often coming back to them - especially when I have a custom deck in my hands!So here is a list of some of my favourite traditional games with standard playing cards, arranged alphabetically, and grouped roughly according to their primary suitability for adults or children. Included at the end of the list is a section with books about games with playing cards that I own and can recommend, along with links to some other resources. Each game also notes its suitability according to the number of players. It is worth noting that several games are excellent for just two players.Although some more recently invented games are included, for the most part the emphasis of this list is on traditional card games that have stood the test of time in some way, and we are not concerned here with using a standard deck to play modern games. Obviously there are many other games that can be played with a standard deck of cards besides the ones included here. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but it represents the ones are most well-known, and for the most part are games that I have personally tried and enjoyed, or ones that I know are good classics that are worthwhile learning. I hope this will encourage you to stretch yourself outside of your comfort zone, and that you will take the time to learn and explore some new territory. Believe me, it is really worth it, because there are some truly fantastic games here!Each game has a direct link to where you can find the rules on Pagat.com, which is the most authoritative and comprehensive website with rules for card games. Social and Family Games This category is somewhat arbitrary in that some of the card games in the other categories can also be enjoyed socially or with children, and the games in this category are certainly not just for children. But if I was looking for a fun and lighter game that is easy to learn and play, these are all excellent choices.Blitz (2-12 players) - A popular and casual/social card game, also known as "Scat", "Thirty-One", "Ride the Bus", and "Blitz". By drawing and discarding a card each turn, the aim is to try to improve your three card hand to have the closest to 31 points in one suit.Cheat (3-13 players) - Also called "I Doubt It" or "Bullsh***", this is a game many children have played. The aim is to be the first to get rid of all your cards, and you can bluff about what cards you are playing on a turn, but if you get challenged and caught out you have to pick up the entire pile.Egyptian Ratscrew (2-6 players) - This is a quick-slapping game that is like Slap Jack on steroids, and has been published commercially under the name Slamwich.Fan Tan (3-6 players) - Also known as "Sevens", "Domino", "Parliament", and "Pay or Play". In turns players play a card to a common layout, which will begin with sevens as the foundation for each suit. Once a seven is played, you can build up or down on that suit, with the aim to be the first to play all your cards. Golf (2-6 players) - A great casual game for two players that also works with 3 or more. There are many variations, the most common one being six card Golf, where everyone has a 3x2 grid of cards worth varying points, that you try to improve. Just like in real golf, the goal is to get the lowest score possible over nine holes or hands. GOPS (2 players) - A simple and quick bidding/bluffing game for two players. The Diamonds are point cards, corresponding to their value, and revealed one at a time in random order. Players each get an entire suit as their hand (Clubs or Spades), and play a card of their choice, with the revealed point card going to the higher played card. GOPS is an acronym for "Game Of Pure Strategy", since there is zero luck.Knock Out Whist (2-7 players) - Also called "Trumps", this is a simplified version of Whist, where the aim is to avoid elimination after each hand by winning at least one trick. The first hand has seven tricks, and it becomes harder to stay in the game because each successive hand has one less trick. A perfect game to introduce people to trick-taking.Mao (2-7 players) - This game has especially been popular in college and university crowds since the 1960s, and the aim is not just to win but to have fun. Essentially it is a Crazy Eights variant with special additions, but the rules may not be discussed; new players are expected to try to figure out the rules by observing a game and by trial and error. Theoretically there are overtones of Mornington Crescent, Fizzbin, and Calvinball, but Mao is actually a playable game.Palace (2-6 players) - Also called "Sh**head", "Karma" or "Idiot". A very light casual game, where the aim is to avoid being last to get rid of your cards. Players each have a row of three face down cards, a row of three face up cards covering these, and a hand of three cards. On your turn you play cards equal or higher than the card on the discard pile, otherwise you pick up the entire pile.President (3-16 players) - Classically known as "Chairman," "Scum," or "A**hole", and fun for groups, this is an easy introduction to the family of climbing games. The aim is to get rid of cards as soon as possible, and you must play at least as many cards as the previous player, but with higher values. Depending on the order in which players go out, a new hierarchy of players is established. A variation of this was published commercially as The Great Dalmati. For more advanced climbing games, see Big Two later on this list.Ranter-Go-Round (3-12 players) - This is also known as "Screw Your Neighbor", "Chase The Ace" or "Cuckoo", with slight variations. A simple game of passing cards around, with the player with the lowest card at the end loses a chip, and the aim is to avoid being eliminated by losing your chips.Rummy (2-6 players) - A classic card game, in which players draw and discard cards, trying to get "melds" that typically consist of sets of the same values or runs of consecutive values. Many variants exist, including Gin Rummy, which is an excellent game and appears later on this list, as well as some commercially published games like the Mystery Rummy series. Contract Rummy (3-5 players) also developed from Rummy, and adds the complication that in each round players have to fulfil a different contract, which is a fixed combination of sets or runs, that they must have before they can meld. A version of Contract Rummy was published commercially under the name Phase Ten.Scopa (2-6 players) - A fascinating classic Italian card game that is especially good for two players, and for four players as a partnership game called Scopone. Players are using cards in their hand to "capture" point-scoring cards from a common pool, with captured cards matching or adding up to the value of the card played from hand. Also recommended is Escoba (3-4 players), which is the Spanish name for the Scopa di Quindici variant common in Brazil, in which you capture cards that add to a total of 15 by including a card from your hand. Closely related to Scopa is Casino, which has given some added options for play, and appears later on this list.Speed (2-4 players) - Also called "Spit", this is a high speed game similar in style to Nertz (see later on this list), but slightly easier and more suitable for children. The aim is to be the first to get rid of all your cards by simultaneously and quickly playing cards of higher or lower value to a common stock.Spoons (2-8 players) - A hilarious game for kids or large groups, also known as "Pig" or "Donkey". Players have four cards and simultaneously pass a card to the left, trying to get a set of four matching cards, at which point they take a spoon from the center, which is the signal for everyone to grab a spoon - but there is one less spoon available than the number of players! "My Ship Sails" is a variation that has the aim to collect seven cards of the same suit. Trick-Taking Games Trick taking games are one of the most common types of card games, and classics like Hearts and Spades are good examples. It is a game where players all have a hand of cards, and game-play revolves around a series of "tricks", in which each trick involves everyone playing one card from their hand, with the trick typically going to the person who played the highest card. If you have never played a trick-taking game before, I suggest you start with Knock Out Whist, which was listed in the previous category, and is an excellent and fun way to get introduced to this style of game.500 (4 players) - The national card game of Australia. A skillful trick-taking game where players bid for the number of tricks they think their partnership can win. The winning bidder is allowed to exchange several cards, and select the trump. There is much to love: the trick-taking, the bidding and selecting trump; the exchanging with the kitty to manipulate your hand; the playing in partnerships. A variant for three players also exists.Bezique (2 players) - A classic trick-taker for two players that originated in France, was very popular in the early 20th century, and has some similarities to the two player version of the American game Pinochle.Bridge (4 players) - The ultimate classic among trick-taking card games. It is played in partnerships, and gives much room for much skillful play. Contract Bridge is often played in organized club settings, and the bidding and game-play has an extensive series of conventions that can take some time to learn in order to play well.Briscola (2-6 players) - An Italian trick-taking game that is quite easy to learn and play especially as a two player game. Using just 40 cards, the aim is play tricks from your hand of three in order to win point scoring cards. Apparently this is especially good with the five player Briscola Chiamata variant.Euchre (4 players) - Extremely popular as a social game in parts of Canada and the USA, Euchre can especially be fun when played in a casual tournament setting. Just 25 cards are used, with the Jacks being powerful "bowers". One partnership is trying to win the most tricks from a five card hand, with trump determined by a turned up card. Ecarte (2 players) is an excellent trick-taking game that is very similar to Euchre, but better suited for a two player game.German Whist (2 players) - An excellent Whist style game for two players. Each player has a hand of 13 cards, and the first phase involves each person playing a card in order to compete for the face up card from the top of the stock (the very first card shown is the trump suit); the winner gets that card, the loser gets the next face-down card. When the stock is gone, you play out your remaining 13 cards, and the player winning the most tricks is the winner.Hearts (3-7 players) - One of the all time classic trick-taking games, where the aim is to avoid taking tricks with Hearts, since these are minus points, while the Queen of Spades is a whopping 13 minus points. There is no trump suit.Jass (2-4 players) - The national Swiss game, playable with two players or in partnerships. This is part of the Jass family which originated in the Netherlands. The wider family includes Belote (French), Kladderjass/Clob (German), and Klaverjassen (Dutch). The Swiss Jass is somewhat similar to Bezique and Pinochle.Le Truc (2 players) - This out-of-the-ordinary betting/bluffing/trick-taking game is a 19th century French game using a 32 card deck, and was especially popularized after inclusion in Sid Sackson's Gamut of Games. A brilliant bluffing game where you use a hand of three cards to play only three tricks, but can increase the value of a hand throughout the game, to bluff and cause your opponent to fold. Be aware of some rule variations. Both the French Le Truc and the Spanish Truc (which has 2 player partnerships) are derived from the older English game Put (2 players), which is a simpler two player bluffing game that I can also recommend.Ninety-Nine (3 players) - This original game by David Parlett is regarded as one of the very best trick-taking games for exactly 3 players. Only 36 cards are used, and from a hand of 12 players lay aside three cards that represent the number of their bid, and play out the remaining 9 cards in tricks, trying to win exactly the number of tricks corresponding to their bid.Oh Hell (3-7 players) - This goes under many names, including Up and Down the River, Bust, Estimation, and some less savoury titles that are variations on Oh *****. A great trick taking game where you bid how many tricks you can win, while the hand size increases or decreases each round. The game enables considerable skill, because even with bad cards you score if you bid correctly. Numerous scoring variants exist, one being published commercially under the name Wizard.Pinochle (4 players) - A popular and classic American trick-taking game for partnerships that uses an 80 card deck. Gameplay starts with an auction in which players bid how many points their team will win, with highest bidder picking trump. Each player gets a hand of 20 cards, and individual cards are worth points, as well as combinations of cards in hand (melds). A two-player variant of Pinochle using a single-deck also exists.Piquet (2 players) - This classic game has a very long history going back several centuries. It is demanding since it has some old-fashioned complications, but is still popular, and regarded as one of the all-time best and most skillful card games for just two players.Pitch (4 players) - Derived from the old English game All Fours, this game has especially been popular in parts of the USA, and there are many variations. Typically played in partnerships, it begins with a bidding round after players each are dealt six cards, and bid for many of the following four items they think they will have at the end of a hand: High trump, trick with Jack of trumps, and highest total point value.Rook (4 players) - Rook is a terrific partnership trick taking game with bidding that was even published commercially under that name with a special deck. The aim is to win tricks with point cards (e.g. the Rook=Joker card is worth 20 points), rather than the maximum number of tricks. The highest bidder has choice of trump, and can exchange with the "nest/kitty" in order to improve their hand. Several good variations exist, and in parts of Canada one of them is played under the name 200 (in French: Deux Cents).Schnapsen (2 players) - Popular in many parts of Europe, Schnapsen is the national card game of Austria, and is a classic trick-taking card game for two players with a long history, and allows for genuinely skillful and clever play. Played with a small deck, one of its peculiarities is how points are scored for "marriages" (King-Queen couples). For a comprehensive look at the difference between the closely related Sixty Six, and common Schnapsen rule variations, see here and here.Skat (3 players) - This classic trick-taking game is the national card game of Germany. It features complex scoring and bidding, but is one of the best card games for three players. A similar game with simpler bidding and scoring rules is Schafkopf, which was been Americanized and popularized by immigrants to the USA as Sheephead. Also related is the demanding Doppelkopf (i.e. Double Sheephead).Spades (4 players) - One of the better trick taking games for partnerships, and another classic after being invented and popularized in the USA in the 1930s. Spades are always the trumps, and players bid how many tricks they think they will win in advance. Although the bidding and scoring is not the easiest if you are new to trick-taking games, it is a game that allows for more skill than casual games like euchre.Whist (4 players) - A simple but classic trick-taking card game from which many others are derived. Played in partnerships, there is no trump, and teams try to win the most tricks as they play out a full hand of 13 cards. Good variations include titles elsewhere on this list, like German Whist (2 players) and Knock Out Whist (3-7 players). Non Trick-Taking Games Trick taking games are arguably one of the most popular and common types of card games, which is why they were listed as a separate category. But there are certainly a large number of other fantastic card games as well. Most of the games listed in the "Social and Family Games" category were also non trick-taking games, and the games listed below tend to be a little more thoughtful and involved.Big Two (4 players) - Best with four players (although variants for 2-3 players exist), this along with President (which appears earlier on this list) represents one of the more accessible and well-known climbing games. With the climbing game, the idea is to be the first player to get rid of all your cards, playing cards individually or in special combinations. For a slightly easier climbing game than Big Two, consider Tien Len, which is the national card game of Vietnam. One of the most popular climbing games of all times is Tichu, which was published commercially with a special deck.Canasta (4 players) - A game that became extremely popular in the 1950s, Canasta uses two standard decks, and is best in two-player partnerships. It is a rummy style of game in which the aim is to make melds of seven cards of the same value, and "go out" by playing your entire hand. There are also several variants, such as the popular Hand and Foot.Casino (2-4 players) - This classic card game is a "fishing" game that has some parallels to the simpler Scopa (see earlier on this list), and the Anglo-American version is especially popular. Players capture face-up cards in a common pool by playing matching cards from their hand, either individually or a number of cards that adds to a total equaling the card played from hand. Unlike Scopa, players have more options, and can also build and pick up trumps for later, which adds a more tactical element.Cribbage (2 players) - A classic name based on card combinations worth points, with the aim of being first to 121 points, scored by pegging on a board. Players each get a hand of six cards, and must set aside two to a "crib" which will later score for one of the two players. Cards are played in turns, adding their values together until you reach or near 31, and then this is repeated. Players score for combinations like cards that add to 15, pairs/triples, or runs, and also score for their hand at the end. Despite the casual feel, there is considerable skill, and experienced players will consistently outperform novices. Requires decision making for selecting cards for the crib, and which order to play the cards in hand. Even children will enjoy finding the point scoring combinations, while the imbalance/asymmetry of each game turn makes it especially interesting.Eleusis (4-8 players) - A modern card game simulating scientific research, as players ("scientists") conduct experiments to determine the rule governing play. Players try to get rid of cards by discarding them, but the "rule" that allows legal play is invented by the dealer and is unknown to the players, and they must try to figure out the rule by deducing it from legal plays.Gin Rummy (2 players) - Derived from Rummy (see earlier on this list), Gin Rummy is a "knocking game" that differs from Rummy in that melds are kept in hand until the end of a deal. It is an excellent and time-tested two player game.Nertz (2-6 players) - Also known as "Racing Demon" or "Pounce", Nertz is a competitive multi-player solitaire that is played in real time. The aim is to be the first to get rid of cards from your Nertz piles by building upwards on common foundations. It is basically the same game as the commercially available Lignrette/Dutch Blitz, but played with a standard deck.Poker (2-10 players) - This is considered the ultimate bluffing game, and No Limit Texas Hold 'Em has been popularized with the help of television and local tournaments. Players "bet" chips on whether or not they have the best five card poker hand. Many say it is only fun when played for money, suggesting that the thrill is in the gambling rather than the game-play. Even if you do not play for money, you do have to approach the game semi-seriously for it to be fun, otherwise it is too easy for someone to play foolishly and hand another player the game. A must for those who enjoy bluffing.Spite & Malice (2-5 players) - Also known as "Cat & Mouse", this is a competitive patience/solitaire game for two or more players that uses two decks, and is better known to most people under its commercially produced variation, Skip-Bo. Unlike Speed and Nertz, it is not played simultaneously in real time, because players take turns, but the overall concept is somewhat similar.Zetema (2 players) - This is an obscure Victorian card game that revived in popularity as a result of Sid Sackson's A Gamut of Games. David Parlett recommends it as an out-of-the-ordinary card game that is "long and savory". It is played with a 65-card deck (52 cards plus an additional two through Ace in one suit), and each player's objective is to reach a certain number of points scored by discarding assemblies, completing tricks, setting up marriages, or revealing flushes and sequences. Also playable with four or six players in partnerships. Recommendations So where should you start? Hopefully some of the descriptions I have provided will intrigue you enough to give a particular game a shot, or look into it further. But often games will depend on who you are playing with, the number of players you have, and the kind of game you are looking for. So to help you branch out beyond the repertoire that you might already be familiar with, here are some recommendations for games that I especially suggest for different situations.Are you looking for... - a game for just two players? GOPS and Scopa are two simpler games that are quite rewarding. If you want a trick-taking game for just two, then Briscola and German Whist are both straight forward and good choices, while Le Truc is fantastic for those who like bluffing, and Schnapsen is worth the effort to learn if you enjoy skillful play. Cribbage and Gin Rummy are two non trick-taking classics that are every bit as good today as they have always been. - a game for four-players in partnerships? There are several good trick-taking games to choose from in this category, and while the ever-popular Bridge is good, the learning curve can be steep. I recommend starting with a simpler game like Euchre or Whist, or else something that involves more skill, like 500, Rook, or Spades, which incorporate the fun of bidding and give opportunity for a winning bidder to strengthen their hand. - a trick-taking game for an odd number of players? Ninety-Nine is the best trick-taker that plays with exactly three players. Hearts and Oh Hell can both handle various player counts, and are very good; if you enjoy bidding for how many tricks you will win then Oh Hell is an absolute must. - a light social game for a larger group? Try the classic climbing game President, the almost brainless Ranter-Go-Round, or the frenzy of Spoons, all of which are easy to learn and don not require too much brain power. Blitz and Cheat are also good choices for fun social games that can work with more than four players. - a game that is fast-paced? Try the craziness of two player Speed/Spit, or else ramp up the difficulty slightly with the frantic game-play of the popular Nertz, both of which have simultaneous real-time game-play. Egyptian Ratscrew also requires quick reactions and speed. - a game that is unusual and out-of-the-ordinary? Try the logical deduction required by the clever and inventive Eleusis, or the long and savoury gameplay of Zetema. - a game for older children? 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There are some fantastic books with rules to all the classic card games, and you will need some way to learn a game to play and resolve those inevitable arguments about who is right and who is the go. Here are two of the best:● The Penguin Book of Card Games - Also published under the title The Penguin Encyclopedia of Card Games, this book by David Parlett is easily the most comprehensive book in the English language with standard card games. If you are looking to discover new games, or find rules to lots of different games, this is the best book to get.● Hoyle's Rules of Games - An authoritative and standard text on classic card games. I personally own the Third Revised edition (Philip D. Morehead), and have used it often, although it is not as exhaustive as David Parlett's book, so it can happen that the card game of your choice is not included. But the section on card games is very useful, especially the contents pages which categorizes the games by suitability for adults/children and by number of players; plus it has rules to other classic games as well. This book and a deck of playing cards is all you need to take along on a vacation!Check online resources: There are some terrific resources online about traditional card games. Pagat.com is easily the most authoritative and best when it comes to rules, but there are certainly other places that are helpful as well. Suggestions to get you started:● Pagat.com - John McLeod's award-winning site is considered to be the most exhaustive website with rules for different card games played with a standard deck. An outstanding and useful resource.● BicycleCards.com - Bicycle's official website has their official rules for many different card games. It also has a helpful search function that allows you to find a suitable card game based on the number of players, who is playing, and type of game.● BoardGameGeek.com - BoardGameGeek.com is the world's largest community of boardgamers. This page lists a number of games that can be played with a standard deck of playing cards, and gives some other links to their site. Also check their family page for traditional card games for more.● Poker Suite - Cheapass Games offers a free download of the rules PDF for their Poker Suite, which is a collection of 14 original games that is well worth looking at.● Femtitivá - Scott Huntington's free collection of 10 clever card games is inspired by modern games like Ticket to Ride and 7 Wonders.● Isaludo - A set of ten modern card games designed to be played solitaire, created by hobbyist gamer Wilhelm Su from the Philippines.Play using an app: If you are not quite sure on the rules of how to play a specific card game mentioned above, there are plenty of apps available that will help you with that. The ideal way to learn a game is to have someone teach you, but an app is a fantastic second best, because it will enforce the rules. Many of them also include tutorials. There are quite a few software programs for card games that are readily available as well - most versions of Windows will come with Hearts and Spades, and some solitaire games too. Here are some good free apps for iOS for some of the games listed above; I've personally used, enjoyed, and can recommend all of these: Cribbage Craze (Cribbage) by Tim Eakins, Thirty One Rummy (Blitz) by North Sky Games, Briscola Pro (Briscola) by Appsmob, Scopa Dal Negro (Scopa) by Digitalmoka Sri, Master Schnapsen/66 Lite (Schnapsen) by Psellos, Truco Argentina (Le Truc) by Jaime Garcia Ghirelli. There is also a great free app called Bicycle How To Play by United States Playing Card Company. You cannot play any games with this app, but it comes with rules for many of the most popular card games, so it functions as a digital document you can use on the fly to find the rules you need.Play online: Playing with an app that incorporates multiplayer games is one way to play online, but there are also websites dedicated to this purpose as well. This is not something I have tried much myself, but here are a few that you can start with: cardgames.io, worldofcardgames.com, trickstercards.com, and cardzmania.com.Ask family and friends: Many families have their household favourites. Perhaps some of your friends know some great card games that they would just love to teach you! A night playing card games with family or friends makes for a relaxing social evening, and is a great way to spend time together. So dust off that custom deck that is looking down at you expectantly from the shelf, invite over some family or friends, and get those playing cards to the table. Enjoy your deck and discover the fun that playing card games has been bringing people around the world for centuries!Do you ever play card games? Which games do you play most? What do you think of the listed games? Other articles you might find interesting: The Very Best Two Player Card Games What You Should Know About Solitaire About the writer: EndersGame is a well-known and highly respected reviewer of board games and playing cards. He loves card games, card magic, cardistry, and card collecting, and has reviewed several hundred boardgames and hundreds of different decks of playing cards. You can see a complete list of his game reviews here, and his playing card reviews here. He is considered an authority on playing cards and has written extensively about their design, history, and function, and has many contacts within the playing card and board game industries. You can view his previous articles about playing cards here. In his spare time he also volunteers with local youth to teach them the art of cardistry and card magic. Last update date: 11/08/21 Tags: games, playing cards 27 comments

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