

Cribbage

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The basics

- Number of players: two (three or four possible)
- Playing time: around 1 hour
- Cards: standard pack, no jokers.
- Ranking: court cards count as 10 points, Aces one point, other cards their pip values. Suits are equal.
- Deal: lowest cut usually deals. Five cards are dealt singly to each player. The deal alternates each hand.

Object of the game

To form scoring combinations both in hand and during play, and to earn bonuses.

Play

On completion of the deal, on the first hand only. Elder scores three points "for last". This is to compensate for the dealer's initial advantage. Elder cuts the stock and dealer turns over the top card of the lower packet. This is the "starter". If the starter is a Jack, dealer scores two points "for his heels". Both players now discard two cards face down to the "crib", which belongs to the dealer.

Elder starts by placing a card from hand face up on the table and calling its point's value. Dealer then does like-wise, mentally adding the two card values together and calling the total. Now Elder plays a second card, calling the progressive total, and so on until all six cards are used or a player is unable to continue without exceeding 31. That player then calls "Go" and the opponent, who may also be obliged to call "Go", can play one or more cards provided that the progressive total does not exceed 31. A player who reaches exactly 31 scores two points, otherwise the last player to play scores one point. If during the hand either player calls "15", that player scores two points.

Certain combinations, which must be consecutive cards, can be scored during play. These are as follows:

- Pair: the player who puts down a card of the same rank as the previous card scores two for a pair.
- Pair-royal: the player who adds a third card of the same rank to a pair scores six for pair-royal.
- Double pair-royal: the player who adds a fourth card of the same rank scores 12 points for double pair-royal.
- Sequence: the player who puts down a card which makes a sequence with the previous two or more cards regardless of suit and regardless of card order, scores one point for each card in the sequence. For example, if the last four cards played in order are 4, 7, 5, 8, the next player can put down a 6 and score five points.

When play is over the players retrieve their cards and score points for their hands, each including the starter as a fourth card. This part of the game is known as "the show".

Every combination of two or more cards that totals 15 scores two points. Pair, pair-royal, double pair-royal and sequence score as in play. In addition, if the hand is one-suited this scores three for a flush or four if the starter is of the same suit. Finally, a player holding the Jack of the starter suit scores one point "for his nob".

When both hands have been scored the dealer exposes the crib and scores that hand as well, including the starter as a fifth card. A flush is only scored if all five cards are of the same suit.

Scoring

A cribbage board using pegs or matchsticks and placed lengthwise between the players is ideal for scoring. Points are recorded as they are made. Elder will start by scoring three points "for last" by placing a peg in the third hole from the left on the nearest row.

Next time Elder scores (two points for "15", for example), a second peg is entered two holes ahead of the first. Thereafter points are recorded by leaping the back peg over the front peg. The front peg marks the player's score, the second peg serving as a check on the actual points entered. When the end of the line is reached the pegs travel down the inner line to the winning 61st hole (extreme left centre). Dealer scores likewise.

During the play, points scored are announced in addition to the cumulative total; thus “15-two”, “31-two”, “pair-two”, “three for a run”. In the show, points are usually scored in a set order: 15s, pairs, etc., runs, flush, “his nob”. 31 is not scored in the show.

Tips on how to win

Consider carefully your discards to the crib, since whereas the players’ hands contain only four cards, the crib has five and is worth on average the same number of points. The temptation for Elder is to look on it as a waste disposal unit: remember it may well be wiser to spoil the crib for dealer than to score in hand. And don’t forget the starter!

As a dealer, look on the crib as a safe deposit and consider carefully the split of your hand (bearing in mind the kind of cards Elder is likely to discard).

Lead a low card but not a five. Gives are the best cards, since they can be married with cards scoring 10 – of which there are 16 – for a “15”. One of a pair is also a good lead, since if opponent scores for a pair you score for a pair-royal. Avoid playing consecutive cards which are close in rank since they may cede a run.

Playing for “Go” is important. Points are scarce in Cribbage (in an average hand, five for Elder and 11 for dealer including the crib). Be alert when approaching 61: the player who dealt first has a slight edge, even allowing for the “three for last”.

Variants

In six-card Cribbage each player receives six cards and the game is played to 121 points (twice round the board). In seven-card cribbage (not recommended) the game is played to 181 points. In both games the players discard two cards each to the crib. When the 31 mark is reached another game up to 31 is started, and a third is necessary (seven-card Cribbage only), Elder’s “three for last” is omitted in both games.

In partnership (four-handed) Cribbage each player gets five cards and subscribes one to the crib. The cards are played to 31-up as many times as necessary to exhaust the hands.

Muggins is an optional feature to be agreed beforehand. If during the show, including the crib, one player over-looks a scoring combination the opponent can score it on calling “Muggins”.

In all these variants, scoring the player and show is carried out exactly as in the five-card game.

An example hand of Cribbage



The highest-scoring hand in five-card Cribbage. Count “15-eight” (four combinations of 15 = eight points) and a double pair-royal (total 20 points)



The highest-scoring hand in the crib or in six-card Cribbage. Count “15-16”, a double pair-royal and “one for his nob” (total 29 points).