

SUPER FUN BONUS SECTION!

the rules of SHEEPSHEAD

WHAT YOU NEED

Sheepshead is a 5-player game played with 32 cards, the 7 through Ace (A) of all four suits.

CARD ORDER

There are four suits in Sheepshead: spades, hearts, clubs, and trump. The order of the cards in each suit, from high to low, is:

TRUMP:		
HIGHEST		LOWEST
♣ ♠ ♥ ♦	♣ ♠ ♥ ♦	A 10 K 9 8 7
QUEENS	JACKS	♦

NON-TRUMP:	A 10 K 9 8 7
(♣ ♠ ♥)	

POINTS

Each card has a point value:

CARD:	A	10	K	Q	J	9 8 7
POINTS:	11	10	4	3	2	0

DEAL

Starting with one of the 5 players, deal rotates to the left each hand. The dealer deals 6 cards to each player and places the 2 leftover cards in the center of the table. After all the players arrange their hands bidding begins.

OBJECTIVE

On almost every hand there will be a bidder and a partner. Their objective is to collectively take at least 61 of the 120 available points. The objective of the other 3 players is to stop them, which means that they collectively need to take at least 60 points.

On occasion there will be no partner, and occasionally there will be no bidder (this second type of hand operates on different rules, which are given under **LEASTER**).

BIDDING

The player left of the dealer gets the first chance to bid or pass. To bid, a player (referred to from now on as player X) simply says "I'm bidding" or "I'm picking up", and then picks up the 2 center cards. If a player does not wish to bid, he passes to the player on his left ("I pass"). If all 5 players pass then the hand is a **LEASTER**, and the leaster rules apply.

PARTNER / CALLING UP

The partner is the player holding the jack of diamonds. If that's you, shh! Don't blow your cover!

If player X has the jack of diamonds in his hand and wishes to bid, he is still entitled to a partner. In this case **ONLY** may he "call up" to the next highest card not in his hand. Instead of just saying "I'm picking up", X could say "I'm picking up, and I'm calling up to the jack of hearts" (the jack of hearts is the next highest card up the trump order).

If player X has both the jack of diamonds and the jack of hearts, he would call up to the jack of spades. If he has all 4 jacks, he would call up to the queen of diamonds. In theory it is possible to call up as high as the queen of spades.

IMPORTANT: If player X wishes to call up, he **MUST** do it before he looks at the 2 center cards. **MUST MUST MUST!**

Note that this process of calling up still leaves open the possibility of the call-up card being in the 2 center cards. If the jack of diamonds (or whatever the call-up card is) is in the 2 center cards, then player X has **NO PARTNER** for that hand, and must try to take the 61 points on his own.

PLAY

After incorporating the 2 center cards into his or her hand, player X discards any 2. The points in those cards **DO** count toward X's final total, so discarding 10's and Aces is generally a **GREAT** idea.

Player X leads the first trick, and players must always follow suit. If no trump is played, then the highest card in the lead suit wins. If trump is played, highest trump card wins. Please take great care to remember that **TRUMP** is its own suit; the queen of clubs, the jack of spades, and the 7 of diamonds are all of the suit **TRUMP**. Beginning players make mistakes here all the time, so please pay attention!

After the tricks are done, the two teams count up their point totals. The scoring for the hands is outlined in the **CHEAT SHEET**.

Like with Dalmuti, there is no set endpoint for play. Either set a pre-determined number of hands, or simply stop when you feel like it*. (My longest game lasted 74 hands.)

LEASTER

If nobody bids, then the hand is a **LEASTER**. Dealer leads the first trick, with standard trick-taking rules in place. The object of a leaster is to take the **FEWEST** number of points. The 2 center cards stay face down in the middle until someone (call him player Y) takes a trick involving trump, at which point those cards go to Y (who is under no obligation to reveal them at that time).

After all 6 tricks, players count their points. The winner is the person who took the fewest number of points while still taking **AT LEAST ONE TRICK**. It is possible to have a tie for winner.

DOUBLERS

There are 8 ways in which the scoring can be doubled on a normal hand, but there are **NO DOUBLERS** for leaster hands. The general rule of thumb when debating whether it's better to pick up or pass is "you can only lose 1 point in a leaster"*. Scoring and doublers are on the next sheet (the **CHEAT SHEET**).

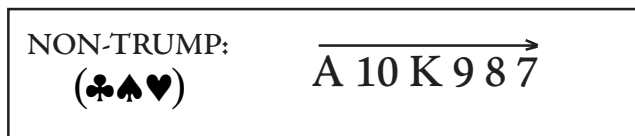
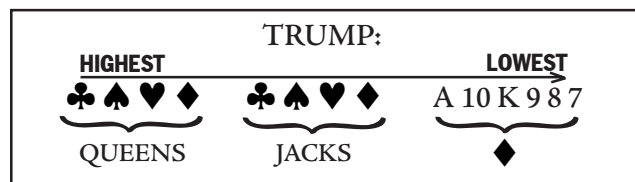
WINNING

Sheepshead games tend to work like poker, in that people stop whenever they feel like it. But if you wish to impose a strict set of finishing rules, the best way to do so is to set a "point limit" at the start of the game. Point limits start at an arbitrary score - say, 50 points. Every hand, the point limit decreases by 1, and the first person to hit or exceed the point limit is the winner. So, in the example above, if someone's score hits 36 on the 15th hand, they would be the winner. If two players pass or hit the point limit at the same time, then whoever passes it by the widest margin is the winner. In the event of a tie, extra hands are played until there is a single winner.

* It generally seems that the player who succeeds in making the most outrageous bid (say, making a bid alone with 4 doublers in tow) has the most bragging rights. * It is possible, although extremely rare, to lose more than 1 point in a leaster. But the spirit of the saying is very true: leasters are a far safer bet if you have a marginal hand (since their stakes cannot be doubled) and are debating whether to bid or pass.

SHEEPSHEAD CHEAT SHEET

A HELPFUL REFERENCE FOR THE CONFUSED NEWCOMER



CARD RANKS & POINT VALUES

CARD:	A	10	K	Q	J	9	8	7
POINTS:	11	10	4	3	2	0		

SCORING (Note that Sheepshhead is a zero-sum game!)

NON-LEASTER <small>(these scores may be doubled)</small>	BIDDER	PARTNER	OPPOSITION <small>(each player)</small>
bidder & partner MAKE <small>(get 61 or more)</small>	2	1	-1
bidder & partner MISS <small>(60 or fewer)</small>	-4	-2	2
no partner; bidder MAKES <small>(61 or more)</small>	4		-1
no partner; bidder MISSES <small>(60 or fewer)</small>	-8		2
LEASTER <small>(no doublers may apply)</small>	WINNER(S)		LOSER(S)
1 winner	4		-1
2 winners	3		-2
3 winners	2		-3
4 winners*	1		-4
5 winners*	0		

DOUBLERS Doublers can be applied to any non-leaster hand. Below are the names, scorekeeping symbols, and rules of use for the 8 doublers:

- BLITZ (B):** If a player has both black queens he or she may say "blitz" (and show the 2 queens) after the bidder (whoever it is) picks up, but BEFORE the first trick has begun. The bidder may blitz, but must do so BEFORE looking at the 2 cards, and may not include either queen in the 2 discards. (In this case, he would say "I'm picking up and I blitz!" and THEN pick up the 2 cards.) Optional.
- SCHMALTZ (S):** Same as a blitz, except with the 2 red queens. Optional.
- NO SCHNEIDER (N):** If either team fails to take 30 points in a non-leaster hand, then this is enforced ("schneider" is 30 points).
- NO TRICK (turn N to N²):** If either team fails to take a single trick, then this is enforced (on top of the "no schneider" doubler).
- ALONE (A):** Player X may refuse the help of a partner, if desired, but must say so while picking up, BEFORE seeing the 2 center cards.
- CRACK (C):** Any opposition player may knock on the table (or preferably say "I crack") to signal his status and challenge the bidder, but he or she must do so before the bidder starts playing the first trick. (This is very rare, and usually happens in the event where player Y had an extremely strong hand but player X picked up before Y had a chance to pick up.)
- RE-CRACK (turn C to C²):** After a crack, the bidder may re-crack (by saying "I re-crack"). If the bidder wishes to re-crack, he or she must do this before starting the first trick. (This is even rarer; a re-crack usually means that two players have very even-matched hands, like say two queens apiece, plus extra trump support.)
- LEASTER (L):** The first hand after a leaster is automatically doubled, unless it's a leaster as well. If there are several leasters in a row, the first non-leaster hand afterwards only inherits one leaster doubler L (and not one for each of the consecutive leasters.) The symbol for a cancelled leaster doubler is ~~L~~.

* I have never seen a 4 or 5-way tie in a leaster hand; I've only seen a small handful of 2- or 3-way ties.