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The Basics

The game is played with two packs of cards, including Jokers, shuffled together to make a single pack of 108 cards.

Each card has a points value:

- **Jokers** are worth **50 points** and are “wild” cards
- **Deuces (twos)** are worth **20 points** and are also wild cards
- **Aces** are worth **20 points**
- **Kings to eights** inclusive are worth **10 points**
- **Sevens to black threes** are worth **5 points**
- **Red threes** are worth **100 points** but are not played in the same way as any other cards (see [The Play](#) page).

The wild cards can be made to represent any other card (except red and black threes).

The game can be played by 2, 3, 4 or 6 players, but the 4 player game is the preferred format.

- For the 2-player game, 15 cards are dealt to each player
- For the 3-player game, 13 cards are dealt to each player
- for the 4- and 6-player games, 11 cards are dealt to each player

The 4 & 6 player games are partnerships of, respectively, 2 and 3 players per team. The following text assumes a 4-player game is being played.

Conventionally, players cut for partners, the two highest playing together (that is Ace high down to 2 low and Jokers don't count) and the two lowest playing together, but other less formal arrangements can be made as the players wish. Formally, the dealer is the player to the right of the person picking the highest card.

Cards are dealt around the table to each player until each has received 11 cards. The remaining cards, called **the Stock**, are placed in the centre of the table face downwards. The top card is then turned over and placed next to the Stock. This starts **the Discard** pile. If this card is a wild card or a red or black three, then another card is turned over. Should that second card also be a wild card or a red three these two cards are shuffled back into the Stock and the new top card turned over until a natural card is at the top of the Discard pile. The Discard pile should be kept “square” so that only the top card is visible.

The purpose of the game is to build **Melds** and **Canastas**. Melds are three or more cards of the same value: for example 4-4-4 or 8-8-8-8. Wild cards may be used to make up a meld, but you cannot have more wild cards than natural cards; thus 4-4-2 or 8-8-2-Joker are valid melds but Q-2-2 is not. A Canasta is a meld of 7 cards: if all the cards are natural cards (i.e. no wild cards) it is called a **Natural Canasta** and is worth **500 points**. If there is one or more wild card(s) in the meld of seven, it is a **Mixed Canasta** and is worth **300 points**. Once a Canasta has been formed it is usual to collect them together into a single pile with a red card on top if it is a Natural and a black card on top if it is a Mixed Canasta. Cards may be added to a Canasta after it is formed provided that any wild card added does not take the number of wild cards in that Canasta to more than three. The only exception to this last rule is that a Canasta of wild

cards may be played as an opening meld making it a Natural Canasta in wild cards. **Note:** if a wild card is added to a Natural Canasta, that then becomes a Mixed Canasta which is worth 200 points less than the Natural Canasta had been!

Sequences such as 8-9-10-J do not count in Canasta.

At the start of the game one member of each team must make an opening meld of at least 50 points. Thus 8-8-8-8-8 or Q-Q-Q + 5-5-2 would be valid opening melds whereas Q-Q-Q + 5-5-5 is not (only 45 points). Once the team's score has become 1500 points that initial meld must be of 90 points and at 3000 points it becomes 120 points.

If a complete Canasta is initially melded, no minimum point count is required.

At the end of a hand, if a team's score has gone below zero points – because they have lost more points in that hand than they were previously holding – then no minimum meld value is required on the next hand; so 4-4-4 would be a valid opening meld.

Some Statistics:

For those interested:

- about two in every three hands dealt will enable an initial meld of 50 points or more to be made;
- about one in every three hands dealt will enable an initial meld of 90 points or more to be made;
- about one in every ten hands dealt will enable an initial meld of 120 points or more to be made;
- about one hand in every 230 will produce a mixed canasta straight from the deal;
- about one hand in 31,000 will produce a natural canasta straight from the deal (so don't hold your breath!)
- (These are statistical averages – they are what you would expect to find after millions of hands had been dealt – and can therefore vary enormously when only a few hands are considered.)

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The Play

Play commences at the left of Dealer. Each turn comprises the following (which should be followed in the order shown):

- A draw
- A Meld (this is optional)
- A discard

Each player in turn must take the top card from either the Stock or the Discard piles.

If no Meld (see [The Basics](#)) has yet been made by a team, the top card of the Discard pile may only be taken if the player has at least two matching cards in hand and can make the required initial Meld of 50 (or 90 or 120) – this can include the value of the top card of the Discard pile. The player should lay out the cards intended for play **before** picking up the Discard. For example if a player has three 10s and three 6s in hand and the top Discard is a 10 or a 6 the three 10s and three 6s should be played face up on the table before the top Discard is taken and added to the appropriate Meld.

If the Discard pile has been “stopped” by a wild card (see later) then, again, the top card may only be claimed if the player holds at least two matching cards – one matching card plus a wild card does not count.

Whenever a card is taken from the Discard pile, it must be played immediately and is never taken into your hand.

After the initial Meld has been made by a team, and provided the Discard pile is not stopped, the top card of the Discard pile may also be used if the player has one matching card and a wild card; it may also be added to a Meld that has already been played, but it cannot be added to an already completed Canasta.

If the top Discard is taken and played, the remainder of the Discard pile **must** then be taken into hand by the player, who can then play any additional Melds that may be formed.

It is not compulsory to Meld, other than if the top of the Discard pile is taken.

You can add both natural and wild cards to your team’s Melds on your turn; you never add cards to your opponent’s Melds. Cards cannot be removed from a Meld once played.

It is convenient for the first player in a team who Melds to collect in front of them all the cards played by their team.

You are not allowed to discuss with your partner how you should play your cards, or what cards your partner is holding. The only question you may put to your partner is “Can I go out?” For example, if your partner is holding high valued cards which they can play, but may have been holding back for tactical reasons, you will not be thanked for going out without giving them a chance to play those cards!

A player’s turn ends with a Discard.

RED THREES

If a player is dealt one or more red threes the player must place them on the table face up at the start of the hand and take a further card from the top of the Stock pile to retain a starting position of 11 cards. If the drawn card is also a red three that must also be played face up immediately and a further card taken. If there was a red three at the start of the Discard pile, this is not replaced from the Stock when the player who picks up the Discard pile plays that red three.

Red threes are never played as a Meld.

Should a team collect all four red threes, their points score of **400** is doubled to **800**.

If a team fails to meld in a hand, any red threes are counted against the team in the same way as the un-played cards do.

If a player fails to play a red three by the end of the game that team is penalised **500 points** for **each** red three held but not played!

BLACK THREES

Black threes are stopping cards – if discarded by one player, the next player cannot claim that Discard and the Discard pile. The Discard pile is unstopped when the black three is covered by the next Discard.

Black threes can only be melded to finish a hand and cannot be melded with a wild card.

STOPPED DISCARD

The Discard pile is stopped if a red three or a wild card is turned over at the start of the hand.

The Discard pile is also stopped if a player discards a wild card during play. This cannot be taken by the next player and only by a following player who holds two cards of the same value as the current top card in the Discard pile. Thus, if the pile has been stopped and the current top card is a 9, the player whose turn it is must hold at least two 9s in their hand, which they must play immediately to claim the top discard, and then the remainder of the Discard pile can be picked up. Holding a 9 and a wild card is not sufficient to claim the top 9.

It is convenient to place the discarded wild card at right angles to the remainder of the Discard pile so that it remains visible as play continues as a reminder that the pile is stopped.

If a wild card has been played to stop the Discard pile, the next player cannot claim the Discard even if they hold two or more wild cards.

GOING OUT

The hand is complete when a player melds all the cards or all bar one and then discards the last card. (If your partner is holding several cards, remember to ask about going out before you do so!)

A player cannot go out unless their team has at least one Canasta and a bonus of **100 points** is added for the team that goes out.

The hand is also finished if the Stock pile is finished and the player cannot claim the Discard (games rarely get to this stage).

If a player has only one card in hand that player cannot take a Discard pile consisting of only a single card and thereby ending the hand.

If the last card of the Stock is a red three, the player plays this but is not allowed to play a discard and the hand finishes (very rare occurrence!).

CONCEALED HAND

If you have not played any cards in a hand but can play all your cards in a single turn, including a Canasta, you can play them and go out earning an additional bonus of **100 points**. Your cards do not have to add up to the initial meld value that you are currently playing to. For example, your hand consists of:

2 4-4-4-4-4-4 5-5-5 K

and you pick a 5 from the Stock pile. You can play a mixed Canasta in 4s, the four 5s and discard your King to go out even if your partner has not made a first meld and your team requires 90 or 120 to start. (The value of the hand played is only 70 points.) If your partner is still holding more than one or two cards, it would be diplomatic to ask the “Can I go out?” question before playing this hand!

You cannot add any cards to your partner’s melds out of a Concealed Hand. For example, if in the above hand your hand had been

2 4-4-4-4-4-4 5-5 Q K

and you pick a five from the Stock and your partner has already played a Meld of 4 queens, you cannot play the Canasta of seven 4s, the Meld of three 5s, add your Queen to the Queens played by your partner and then discard the King to go out and claim the 100 point bonus. You can of course play the Canasta of seven 4s, and the Meld of three 5s, discard your King, keeping the Queen which you could play on your next turn.

SCORING A HAND

Once one team has gone out, both teams total the value of all their cards played plus any bonus points they have accumulated (red threes, going out, canastas etc.) less any cards not played and left in hand as these count against you.

Before totting up the values, it is convenient to take out and not count cards that have been played which have the same value as those cards that have not been played. It just makes the adding up easier.

In counting the remaining points, after the points from the un-played cards have been taken out, it is easier if the cards are collected together in groups of 100 points so that the piles of

100 can be counted quickly with one pile that has less than 100 points and then add all the bonus points at the end.

Each team then adds their points for this hand on to the points accumulated from previous hands. The game ends when one team reaches at least 5000 points (although other ending values can be agreed before play starts).

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Points Summary

CARD VALUES

Each card has a points value:

- **Jokers** are worth **50 points** and are “wild” cards
- **Deuces (twos)** are worth **20 points** and are also wild cards
- **Aces** are worth **20 points**
- **Kings to eights** inclusive are worth **10 points**
- **Sevens to black threes** are worth **5 points**
- **Red threes** are worth **100 points** but are not played in the same way as any other cards

BONUS VALUES

Bonus points are awarded as follows:

- **Natural Canasta = 500 points**
- **Mixed Canasta = 300 points**
- **Going Out = 100 points**
- **Going Out from a Concealed Hand = 200 points (i.e an additional 100 to the normal going out bonus)**
- **Each Red Three = 100 points**
- **Four Red Threes in a single hand = 800 points**

PENALTY VALUES

Penalty points are awarded as follows:

- **All cards remaining in hand after a player has gone out = total value of the cards**
- **Failing to declare a Red Three = 500 points**

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Glossary

Canasta, like most games, has its own “language”. So if you are unfamiliar with some of the terms that you will encounter as you start to play, here is a list with their “translation” into normal English:

- **A Canasta** – a group – or Meld – of at least seven cards having the same value (this may include some wild cards).
- **The Discard** – the card that a player “throws away” at the end of his/her turn. It is placed face up on the table on top of any previously discarded cards, to form the *Discard Pile*. The Discard Pile is placed next to the Stock.
- **A Game** – a series of hands played until one player/team reaches the agreed total score (typically 5000 points).
- **Going Out** – the end of the hand, when one player plays his/her final card.
- **The Hand** – these are the cards dealt to each player initially and then played out until one player “goes out”.
- **A Meld** – a group of at least three cards of the same value (which may include wild cards)
- **Mixed Canasta** – a Canasta that has at least one wild card in it
- **Natural Canasta** – a Canasta which consists of no wild cards.
- **The Stock** – these are the cards that are placed face down on the table after the hands have been dealt.
- **Wild Cards** – these are the Jokers and the twos in the pack of playing cards and can represent any other of the playing cards. Thus, if three of the cards in your hand are 9-9-2 they can be regarded as three 9s.

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Questions and Answers

Questions

If you are a complete beginner, here are a few questions for you to have a go at to see if you have followed the rules of the game and have an idea of how you might play the cards dealt to you (click the links to move quickly to the relevant section):

1. [CanastaQ1](#)
2. [CanastaQ2](#)
3. [CanastaQ3](#)
4. [CanastaQ4](#)
5. [CanastaQ5](#)

Answers

Here are my answers to the questions I have posed – they are not necessarily exhaustive, but are typical of the kinds of play that you are likely to come across:

1. [CanastaA1](#)
2. [CanastaA2](#)
3. [CanastaA3](#)
4. [CanastaA4](#)
5. [CanastaA5](#)

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Tactics

In the hope that this might be of interest, I give below some thoughts on tactics that might prove useful to you when playing the game, especially if you are new to it. I am not an expert, just a keen amateur, so please feel free to comment, disagree or add to what I have put – indeed I would encourage you to do so! It would be good to build up a resource based on our collective experiences of the game, rather than just one person's opinions. With that said, let's dive in.....

Should I Meld my Cards?

I am often asked by newcomers to the game, whether they should hold on to melds that they could make or play them as soon as possible. I think the answer depends on the state of play and the type of game being played (not very helpful so far then!)

Thinking about opening melds first:

If you are playing in a **threesome** and are therefore playing without a partner, there is some merit in not playing your opening meld just because you can. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to play all your cards out in one go and catch your opponents by surprise? An additional 100 points will also be added to your score! [See the "[Concealed Hand](#)" section on the "**The Play**" page of this document for full details.] Of course the risk is that one of your opponents might beat you to it and catch you with a fistful of high valued cards, all of which will count against you. Hmm, not so good! Remember, 7 of your 13 cards will have to make a canasta, even out of a concealed hand!

If you have been dealt a very strong hand, with perhaps 2 or at most 3 cards short of being able to play a concealed hand, you might want to take the risk – if you are a risk-taker. Otherwise I suspect you will want to play most, if not all, your playable cards and get the points on the board. Of course, if any of your opponents have already played melds, the risk to you of holding out for a concealed hand simply increases.

You also need to give some thought to the cards you will have to discard each time your turn comes around. If the opponent to your left (i.e. the next player) has played no melds you are in the dark over what (s)he is keeping, so consider the "**What should I discard**" section of these notes.

But you might find yourself *having* to discard a card that you know (s)he wants, because otherwise any other card will mess up your own hand. In that case I would be tempted to play my cards before I make the discard just in case the discard I have to make enables the next player to go out. Your discard will certainly increase their opportunities!

OK. What about playing in a **foursome** or a **six-some**? The situation here is rather different as you are playing with partners – playing as a team. If you play an opening meld of, say, 3 kings (with other cards to make your minimum opening meld score) and your partner holds 2 kings, they can add their 2 kings to your 3 and suddenly you are up to 5 with only 2 more to find to get your all-important canasta. If you are playing in a six-some and you are lucky to have both your partners holding 2 kings, your canasta is made in one round of play. But, if you choose *not* to play your opening meld with the 3 kings, your partner(s) will not be able to

meld these cards until they collect either another king or a wild card and enough points to make the opening meld on their own.

This could severely restrict your team's opportunity to get a head-start in the game and perhaps catch the opposition napping. My advice would be: play your opening meld and take it from there.

Let us now imagine we are playing in a partnership game and we have been dealt a hand full of melds – it does happen sometimes! Should I play them all out?? Let us consider the following hand, needing an opening meld of 50 points, and think about our options:

A-A-A K-K 8-8-8 5-5-5 The stock card we picked was a K

What can we play as our opening meld? We are swamped with choices! Here they are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| A-A-A | (1) |
| A-A-A + K-K-K | (2) |
| A-A-A + 8-8-8 | (3) |
| A-A-A + 5-5-5 | (4) |
| K-K-K + 8-8-8 | (5) |
| A-A-A + K-K-K + 8-8-8 | (6) |
| A-A-A + K-K-K + 5-5-5 | (7) |
| K-K-K + 8-8-8 + 5-5-5 | (8) |

I would play one of options 1 to 5.

Having said earlier, get out your melds so as to maximise your partner's chance of adding to what you have started, what is wrong with options 6, 7 or 8?

The problem with any of these options is that, after your mandatory discard, you have only 2 cards left in hand and you are still 4 cards short of a canasta. Your team's only hope of going out is that either your partner(s) can make up a canasta from what you have played, or that you hope the opponent to your right discards a card that you can pick up, giving you the opportunity to increase the number of cards in your hand. Both are more a hope than an expectation. If your team cannot make a quick canasta from your play, you have become a liability to your team because on each turn of yours you cannot go out and you have to make a discard. Increasingly as the game progresses your discard is likely to be a card that your opponents want.

What about adding additional melds to those already tabled?

See the "[To Meld Or Not To Meld](#)" section below for thoughts on this topic.

What Should I Discard?

If I can go out without making a discard then I am allowed to do this. Otherwise, to signify that my turn has ended, I must add a card to the discard pile. But what should I throw away?

It (almost) goes without saying – don't throw away a card that you know your opponent can pick up! [But see later!!] There is nothing more frustrating to a partner than seeing you throw away a card that your opponents have already melded. Of course, you might be in a complete bind and every card in your hand is one that your opponents are playing [see "[Freezing the Discard Pile](#)"]. In such a situation, just apologise to your partner(s) – but only *after* your opponent has elected to pick up your discard. Don't apologise beforehand, as your opponent may not spot what you have done!

Very often, I see people throwing away their smallest valued cards that don't "fit" with the other cards in their hand. I would suggest that this is not always the best policy, although it is always the safest *in the short term*. When there are very few cards in the discard pile – no more than about 3, I would suggest – discarding a high-valued card *might* be a better option than a low-valued card. If your opponent gleefully jumps on your high-valued discard, that is a nuisance but at least (s)he is only getting 1 or 2 additional cards to the top one, which they must play immediately. This is especially true if you are only melding on 50 points – 2 out of 3 hands will already have 50 points at the start of the hand, so even throwing a 5 point card away carries a significant risk that your opponent will be able to claim it. When the opening meld has to be 90 or 120 points, the risk of discarding a high-valued card, of course, becomes proportionately larger. However, if you have been discarding your low-valued cards from the start of the game and several rounds have elapsed with no one opening, the discard pile has become somewhat more substantial. You might then find yourself *having* to start discarding the high-valued cards that are of no use to your hand. If your opponent now claims the discard, not only does (s)he benefit from the card you have just thrown away – as they would have done at the start of the game – but there is a good chance that there are melds of low-valued cards hiding in the rest of the discard pile, which will be played to add to your misery.

When to discard a card you know your opponents want! Am I serious? Well, yes, there are a couple of times when discarding a card you know your opponents want might be in your own interests.

Firstly: if the discard pile is quite thick and both you and your opponent have only one or two cards left and have made your canastas, so are able to go out, then throwing away a card that they could pick up to play will force them to pick up the whole of the discard stack if they claim your discard. There will almost certainly be a few melds in that discard pile but you are hoping (unless your memory is good enough to recall all the discards that have been made!) that they will be left with a handful of cards that they can't make useful melds out of. If your team can then go out quickly, you have caught the opposition with more points counting against them than they have scored by choosing to take your discard. It can be a risky tactic – and you must be sure there is no canasta in the discard pile otherwise you have just gifted them at least 300 additional points!

Secondly (and this is safe): if your opponent has only 1 card in hand and your discard makes a pile of just 1 card (in other words there were no discards on the table when you came to play) then your opponent is not allowed to pick up that one card and add it to one of the melds (s)he has already played and then discard their one remaining card to go out.

Another point to watch for is the discards the player to your left is making. It might help you choose which of your cards you can discard without the risk of that player picking it up. For example, if you spotted that the opponent on your left discarded a jack, it is possible that (s)he is not saving jacks to make up a meld. If you have a jack that you cannot usefully use then throwing away this jack rather than another card might be a safer option.

Of course, your sneaky opponent might be bluffing you and actually has 3 jacks in hand (or two and a wild card). They throw a jack away to make you think they don't want jacks and to your chagrin you throw a jack and they pick it up, knowing they can play it straight away and knowing there is at least 1 more jack in the discards! If they have thrown away 2 jacks then it is highly unlikely they are keeping jacks to make into a meld. Your throwing a jack away will then really annoy them because they will wish they had kept those jacks!

It is inevitable that sometimes you will have to discard a card that you know your opponents want. The key here is damage limitation – discard whatever is least damaging to your hand and least beneficial to your opponents – and if you can find one card that achieves both of these objectives simultaneously, smile and be thankful.

Should I Pick The Top Discard or The Top Stock Card?

This option will very much depend on the state of play. Some things are clear, however:

If your team has not made its initial meld then you cannot claim the top discard unless (a) you have at least 2 of the same type of card (i.e. if the top discard is a queen, you must have at least 2 queens in your hand) **and** (b) you are able to make the number of points (50, 90 or 120) or more needed for a valid first meld to be made.

If your team has made its initial meld then you must have at least one card of the same type and a wild card.

Remember that it is only the *top card* in the discard pile that you can claim and you *must* use it immediately to play a valid meld before any of the other cards in the discard pile can be taken into hand and possibly used to make other melds or add to existing melds.

Other than these clear-cut situations, it is a judgement call as to whether to claim the discard or take from the stock. The stock card is a mystery card – it might just be the card you need to make a meld or a canasta or to go out. The discard, on the other hand, might enable you to make a few new melds or add to existing melds – possibly creating a canasta. If you are very low on cards and have not yet made a canasta then the extra cards will give you more of a breathing space and more options for converting a meld to a canasta. On the downside, you could be left with a handful of rubbish! It really helps if you are able to remember all the cards that have been discarded since the last discard pile was claimed.

To Meld Or Not To Meld – That is a Question!

I have given my thoughts above on the general question of melding or holding back, but there is one situation that often arises where newer players are tempted to make a poor choice and I think it deserves this separate section:

Imagine you are part way through a game and your team has accumulated (say) 5 tens – plus other melds probably, maybe consisting of only 3 or 4 cards in each. You have not yet made a canasta. In your hand you hold:

Q-Q + 8-8 + Joker + 2 + 5 + 9.

What do you play? The temptation can be to make melds of your queens and eights using your 2 wild cards. Great! You have added 110 points to your score. However, you are now left with 1 card, (after discarding the 5 or the 9) and your team *still* does not have a canasta. This means that you cannot go out, even if you collect a card from the stock on your next turn which would otherwise be playable on one of your melds. Even worse than that, had you played your 2 wild cards on the group of 5 tens, you would have made a canasta – worth 300 points – enabling your team to now go out with a potential further 100 points for this. Admittedly, you are now left with Q-Q + 8-8 + 5 (if the 9 was discarded), but this is still a very playable hand. A queen, an eight or a wild card will enable you to make another meld, with the possibility of a further meld to come. OK, it might not work out quite so rosily as this – your opposition will be trying to steal your thunder – but you have significantly increased your score and given yourself the chance to go out, whereas by playing all the short melds of queens and eights you have left yourself in a very difficult position.

Never forget: your first priority is to make an opening meld; your second priority is to convert a meld into a canasta. Once these features are in place you can either choose to try and cut the game short by going out as soon as possible, or to try to prolong the game to build up your score [see “[Should I Go Out?](#)”].

Freezing the Discard Pile

If a wild card is added to the discard pile then the pile is “frozen”: meaning it cannot be claimed unless the player has 2 natural cards in hand to match whatever happens to be at the top of the discard pile [See “[The Play](#)” page of this document]. Why would you want to do this? After all, it has cost you a very valuable card.

If your opponents have played a number of melds and your team has yet to start, it could be very difficult to make a discard that your opponents don’t want to pick up. Under these circumstances it could well be in your interests to freeze the discard pile as it carries no disadvantage to you (short of “losing” a wild card). For example, suppose your opponents have made a meld with 3 nines and you or your partner have frozen the discard pile. If one of you now throws a nine on the discard pile, the opponent next to play will still have to have 2 nines in their hand otherwise they will not be able to claim the nine you have just thrown away.

If both teams have melded, but one team is making lots of melds, then again one member of the team with few melds might decide to freeze the pack to put a break on the opponents’ progress. In this situation, both teams are penalised by the freeze, but the one with many melds more so than the one with few.

Should I Go Out or Not?

There are a couple of situations where it might not be in your team’s best interests to go out at the earliest possible opportunity...

Firstly: if your partner is holding a lot of cards and for tactical reasons has been holding back some cards that they could otherwise have played, (s)he will not be too happy with you for going out without first asking if it is OK to do so. As you know from “**The Play**” page of this document, this is the only time you can ask your partner a question (relating to your game of canasta, anyway!)

Secondly: if your opponents are struggling to get started, or seem to be having difficulty getting melds or a canasta together, then keeping the game going could well result in your team making several canastas before the game comes to a close. Bear in mind though that the longer you keep the game going, the greater the chance that your opponents will start or will make a canasta, thereby reducing the points difference between the two teams. Conversely, if your team is the struggling team, then endeavour to go out as soon as possible to stop your opponents accumulating an even bigger score.

When you are approaching the magic 5000 point finishing line, try to estimate how many points you are going to score on this hand and, if you can, try to keep the game going to see you over the line. Otherwise, if you fall short, you will have to face another hand with a 120 points start with a potentially rubbish hand dealt to you!

And Finally...

Don't get so worked up about making the best tactical moves, that you stop enjoying the game!!

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Canasta Programs

I have been asked if I can recommend any programs (or aps as they tend to be called these days) for playing canasta. The short answer I'm afraid is "no" as I don't play canasta on my computer or smart phone. However, a couple of people have shared the aps they are using – and are presumably OK with – and I have done a brief trawl of the internet to see what else I can find. So, for those of you who would like to try out some software for playing canasta, here is what I have found; as far as I know these are all free, so expect to have adverts to contend with:

For Playing on iPad or iPhone:

- Jogatina Canasta Turbo. Scores 4.5 out of 5 in user reviews (submitted by Sue)
- Lite Games Canasta. Scores 4 out of 5 in user reviews (submitted by Cherry)
- Mahjong (the name of the software company) Canasta. Scores 4.5 out of 5 in user reviews
- Intent Software Canasta. No reviews appear to be recorded
- NR-Canasta HD. Again, no reviews appear to be recorded

For Playing on Android Smart Phones/Tablets:

- Karman Games Canasta. Scores 4.5 out of 5 in user reviews
- Jogatina Canasta. Scores 4.3 out of 5 in user reviews
- North Sky Games Canasta Royale. Scores 4.1 out of 5 in user reviews
- ConectaGames Canasta. Scores 3.6 out of 5 in user reviews – this program appears to require you to have a Facebook account
- Gazeus Games Canasta. No reviews appear to be recorded

For Playing on Windows PC:

- North Sky Games Canasta Royale. Scores 4 out of 5 in user reviews
- Special K Software Canasta. Scores 3.5 out of 5 in user reviews
- Softonic Cansta. Scores 3 out of 5 in user reviews
- LO4D Canasta. No reviews appear to be recorded.

If anyone else has used any canasta software on the iPhone/iPad/Mac or on an Android phone/tablet or on a Windows PC, then please let me have some details and any comments that may be helpful to other players and I will happily add them to the lists above. Conversely, of course, if you have tried a program that you would not now touch with a barge pole, that again would be helpful information to other players.

Do note that these programs may play to slightly different rules to the ones we use in our meetings.

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Question 1

You are the first to play and have been dealt the following hand:

2 ♣ The Discard is
A ♥ 8 ♥
A ♦
K ♥
J ♥
J ♠ What options do you have for melding,
10 ♣ given that you are required to make at
8 ♠ least 50 points.
8 ♣
4 ♠
4 ♥

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Question 2

You are the first to play and have been dealt the following hand:

Joker		The Discard is
A	♠	10 ♦
10	♦	
10	♠	
10	♥	If you have to make an initial meld of at least 50 points, what are the different options that are open to you?
10	♣	
9	♦	
8	♠	
7	♦	
6	♠	
5	♠	

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Question 3

You are the second of your team to play and your partner has made an initial meld of two Qs plus a Joker. You have the following hand:

A ♠ The top Discard is
Q ♣ A ♣
Q ♦
9 ♦
9 ♠ You cannot claim the discard because
8 ♦ you are not able to play it straight away
6 ♣ so you take the top Stock card. It is:
6 ♥ 2 ♠
5 ♥ What play can you make?
4 ♣
4 ♦

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Question 4

You are the first to play and have been dealt the following hand:

2	♥	The Discard is
A	♠	8 ♥
K	♠	
J	♦	
10	♥	
8	♣	What options do you have for melding,
7	♥	given that you are required to make at
6	♥	least 50 points.
3	♠	
3	♠	
3	♣	

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Question 5

You are the first to play and have been dealt the following hand:

Joker

2	♥	The discard is
2	♦	4 ♣
K	♥	Which you ignore in favour of the top
J	♦	Stock card, which turns out to be:
J	♠	Q ♦
10	♥	Given that you need to make an initial
9	♦	meld of 90 points, what can you play?
8	♥	
6	♠	
4	♦	

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Answer 1

There are two options open to you:

1. You can ignore the discard and take the top card of the Stock pile (it turns out to be a 5 – so no help at all). You decide to play your two Aces and the wild card with a meld value of 60.
2. You can play the two 8s in your hand and the wild card and then claim the discard 8 to make a meld of 50.

As always, you can opt not to play at this stage to see if your partner makes the initial meld which might influence how you choose to play your own cards. But remember, it is a team game and if both you and your partner hold on to playable cards your opponents may catch you napping!

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Answer 2

There are several possible plays:

1. Pick the discard and play all five 10s. Meld value = 50;
2. Pick the discard and play three of your 10s with the Joker. Meld value = 80;
3. Pick the discard and play all five 10s plus the Joker. Meld value = 100
4. Pick the discard and play two of your 10s with the Joker. Meld value = 70;
5. Pick the discard and play four of your 10s with the Joker. Meld value = 90;
6. Not play a meld at all and discard one of your low valued cards.

Option 1 is the most natural: it gets your team started and holds back the wild card for deployment later in the game. Option 2 looks ahead to the possibility that the pack at some time will be made frozen and the player before you discards a 10 in the belief that you have no more in your hand. It's a riskier strategy as your opponents – or your partner – may go out before you have played your two tens. Options 3 to 6 have little practical value and are not to be recommended.

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Answer 3

Your options are:

1. Play the two Qs on your partners meld of Qs, giving a 5-card meld with one wild card;
2. Play the two Qs and the wild card just picked up on your partners meld of Qs, giving a 6-card meld with two wild cards;
3. Play the two Qs on your partners meld of Qs, giving a 5-card meld with one wild card and add your wild card to one of your pairs to make a meld of either
9-9-2 6-6-2 4-4-2;

The 9-9-2 option would seem the best as it plays the maximum points. However, if your opponents have melded with 6s or 4s, there will be fewer 6s or 4s in the Stock for you to collect and you may find yourself later in the game having to discard a 6 (or a 4) perhaps when the opposition is close to getting a canasta in this value. Of course, if they have already made their canasta in 6s (or 4s) you can discard a 6 (4) with safety as it is extremely unlikely that your opponent to play next has kept a couple of natural cards back. If they have, however, they can claim your discard and play it with their two natural cards!

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Answer 4

You cannot claim the discard as you only have a single 8 and a wild card in your hand. For your (team's) first meld you have to have two – or more – natural cards in your hand before you can claim the discard

You would have to take the top Stock card. If it is A then you can meld with two As and a wild card. Any other card – including a wild card – would prevent you from melding

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Answer 5

The Stock card does not help in any way, but you do have a meld if you choose to play it:

Joker-2-J-J

Note: you cannot play Joker-2-2-J-J because you would have three wild cards and only two natural cards which is not allowed.

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