



Introduction

Canasta requires two complete decks of cards with four Jokers, making 108 cards in all. It is of the utmost importance that the cards be shuffled thoroughly. The Jokers and Twos are wild cards and can be used to represent any other card in the deck. The cards have the following values:

Joker	50
Twos and Aces	20
Kings to Eights	10
Sevens to Fours and Black Threes	5

Canasta can be played by between two and six players. In the case of two or three players, each plays for himself; when there are four or more players, they play as teams.

By far the most popular version of the game is that for four players, in two teams of two each. The rules given below apply to this version. For the variations with different numbers of players, see paragraph 10.

Preliminary instructions

1. The teams are selected by cutting the deck. The two players cutting the two highest cards are partners. Aces count high, while Jokers do not count in the cutting. The player sitting on the right of the player who cut the highest card deals.
2. Each player is dealt eleven cards, the remainder being placed face down on the table to form the Stock. The top card of the Stock is turned over and placed face up beside the Stock to begin the Discard Pile. If this card is a Joker or a Two (a wild card) or a red or black Three, a further card is taken from the Stock and placed over it. If this proves to be a second wild card or a second red Three, the cards concerned are returned to the Stock, which is reshuffled. This process must be repeated until the card lying face up on the Discard Pile is a natural card. (Special rules apply to red and black Threes; these are explained in paragraph 6.) It is important to ensure that the Discard Pile is always squared off so that only the top card is visible.
3. Each player tries to build Melds or Canastas. A Meld is a sequence of three or more cards of the same value (irrespective of suit): thus, three Eights, four

Tens etc. Melds may contain wild cards, but only in certain proportions: a Meld of three cards may contain only one wild card, a Meld of four only two wild cards, and a Meld of five or six only three wild cards. Canastas are in effect Melds of seven cards. A Canasta made up only of natural cards is a Natural Canasta and scores its points' value plus 500 bonus points. A Canasta made with the help of wild cards is a Mixed Canasta and scores its points' value plus 300 bonus points. A Mixed Canasta may not contain more than three wild cards. A wild card may be added to a completed Canasta provided that the maximum of three wild cards is not exceeded. If a wild card is added to a Natural Canasta, it then counts as a Mixed Canasta. Completed Canastas are displayed face up in piles on the table. A Natural Canasta is designated by a red card on top, a Mixed Canasta by a black card.

4. The first Meld a player makes must amount to a certain minimum value depending on the team's score at that stage of the game.

Up to a score of 1,500 it must have a value of 50 points; Up to a score of 3,000 it must have a value of 90 points; Over a score of 3,000 it must have a value of 120 points; Only when a team has a minus score does no minimum value apply. A complete Canasta from the hand can be used as a first Meld, and the top card of the Discard Pile may be used to make up the Canasta. If the first Meld is a Canasta, no minimum value applies.

Play

5. The player to the dealer's left begins. Each turn consists of the following stages:
 - a) Drawing a card;
 - b) Putting down a Meld (optional);
 - c) Discarding.

a) Drawing:

The card that is drawn is either the top card of the Stock or the top card of the Discard Pile. A player can draw from the Discard Pile only if he can use that card to make a Meld; in other words, if he has at least two matching cards in his hand. In the case of a first Meld, he needs two matching natural cards, and the total value of the cards concerned must of course amount to at least the minimum value prescribed (see paragraph 4), whereby the card from the Discard Pile is counted towards the value of the Meld. If the player uses the top card of the Discard Pile to make a Meld, he must display the cards from his hand on the table first and then add the card from the Discard Pile. To take the top card of the Discard Pile, a player needs two matching cards in his own hand, but — except in the case of a first Meld — these can be one natural card and one wild card. The top card of the Discard Pile may also be added to a previous Meld but not to a complete Canasta. When a player takes the top card of the Discard Pile, he must take the whole of the Discard pile into his hand.

b) Melds:

A player is not obliged to put down a Meld unless he wants to take the Discard Pile. Instead of making a Meld he can add natural or wild cards to his own or his partner's Melds (complying with the limits for numbers of wild cards in a Meld). He cannot, however, add to an opponent's Melds. There are no Melds consisting of wild cards alone. Once a Meld is on the table, no card may be withdrawn from it.

c) Discarding:

When a player has completed such of the above steps as he wants, he discards one card from his hand, placing it on the Discard Pile.

6. Special rules apply to the red and black Threes:

a) Red Threes are not used in play. When a player is dealt or draws a red Three he puts it face up on the table in front of him and replaces it with a new card from the Stock (if this is again a red Three he repeats the process). If a red Three is drawn with the Discard Pile it is also exposed on the table but is not replaced from the Stock. The red Threes are counted in the scoring: 100 points for each, or 800 points in total if a team has all four at the end of a hand. If a team has failed to make a Meld before the other team goes out, the red Threes count as minus points to the same values as above. A player who fails to expose a red Three is penalized with 500 minus points.

b) Black Threes are used to block the Discard Pile for the next player; i. e. when a player discards a black Three the next player cannot take the Discard Pile. This is effective for only one player. Black Threes may not be used to make a Meld, but three or four black Threes (without wild cards) may be melded to end a hand.

7. Blocking the Discard Pile: As we have seen, a black Three blocks the Discard Pile for the next player. There are other ways of blocking it:

If at the beginning of the hand the first card turned over from the Stock and placed on the Discard Pile is a red Three or a wild card, the Discard Pile is "stopped". Likewise, the Discard Pile is "stopped" when a player discards a wild card. When the Discard Pile is "stopped" it cannot be taken by the next player but only by a subsequent player with a pair of natural cards to match the uppermost natural card. Thus, if a player discards a wild card and the card beneath it is a Seven: the next player cannot take the Discard Pile at all, and after him the next player would need two Sevens, the next player two of the cards just discarded, and so on. As long as the Discard Pile is "stopped" the top card may not be added to existing Melds. A wild card on top of the Discard Pile may not be taken with two wild cards from the hand.

8. Going out: The hand ends when one of the players goes out; i.e. when he places all his remaining cards on the table as Melds or all but one, discarding the last card. A player may go out only if his team has at least one Canasta. Going out scores a bonus of 100 points. Going out with a "concealed hand"

(before having made a Meld and with a hand that contains the necessary Canasta) earns a further 100 points.

The hand also ends when no cards are left in the Stock and the player whose turn it is cannot take the Discard Pile. If he does take the Discard Pile, the hand ends with his discard. In the last two cases no bonus points are awarded. If the last card of the Stock is a red Three, the player who draws it exposes it on the table, makes such Melds as he wishes but cannot discard. The hand is then over. If a player has only one card left in his hand but cannot go out, he may not take the Discard Pile.

9. Scoring: After each hand the team scores are added up and then added to the team totals. The game is won by the first team to reach a total of 5,000 points. If both teams reach 5,000 points in the same hand, that hand is completed and the team with the higher total wins. All cards on the table count plus points, Canastas score 500 (Natural) or 300 (Mixed), red Threes 100 or 800 for all four. All cards remaining in the players' hands at the end of the hand are scored as minus points.
10. Canasta for different numbers of players: The rules for play are as stated above, with the following exceptions:
 - a) for two players: either deal 15 cards to each player, and two Canastas are required to go out; or deal 13 cards to each player, and only one Canasta is required to go out.
 - b) for three players: deal 13 cards to each player. There are no teams.
 - c) for five players: deal 11 cards to each player. Cut for teams, the players cutting the three highest cards playing against the remaining two. The players on the three man team take turns to sit out one hand.
 - d) for six players: deal eleven cards to each player. Cut for teams, the players cutting the three highest cards playing against the others. Then: either play in teams of three (seated alternately) or play in teams of two, with the players on both teams taking turns to sit out a round.
11. [Variations on Canasta](#)
 - a) Samba Canasta: This is a development of the basic fourhanded Canasta game. The differences in the rules are as follows:

Three decks and six Jokers are required, making a total of 162 cards. Each player is dealt 15 cards.

Each player draws two cards at a time from the Stock but discards only one. Melds and Canastas can be made of both matching cards and sequences. A sequence is a succession of numbers in the same suit; they may not contain Threes or wild cards. A sequence of seven cards makes a Sequence Canasta (Samba Canasta), scoring a bonus of 1,500 points. A Sequence Meld may be made only from the hand, not with a card from the Discard Pile. No cards may be added to a complete Sequence Canasta.

Not more than two wild cards are allowed in a Mixed Canasta. A wild card may not be added to an existing Canasta.

The Discard Pile may not be taken with one natural and one wild card, nor by adding the top card of the Discard Pile to an existing Canasta.

In order to go out a team must have at least two Canastas (either Matching-Card or Sequence Canastas).

If all six red Threes are held by one team at the end of a hand, they score 1,000 points - but these are minus points if the team concerned has not made two Canastas when the hand ends.

The minimum points required for the first Meld are:

Up to a score of 1,495, the first Meld must have a value of 50

from 1,500 to 2,995, the first Meld must have a value of 90

from 3,000 to 6,995, the first Meld must have a value of 120

from 7,000 to 10,000, the first Meld must have a value of 150

The winning total score is 10,000.

b) Bolivia: This is a variant of Samba Canasta, with the following differences in the rules for play:

Melds and Canastas consisting only of wild cards are permitted (a Canasta of seven wild cards — a Bolivia Canasta - scores a bonus of 2,500 points).

In order to go out a team must have two Canastas, of which one must be a Sequence Canasta.

Black Threes held in the hand when a hand ends count 100 minus points.

200 bonus points are awarded for going out.

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