CARD GAMES

How to play Hearts

A trick-taking card game where points are bad: every heart costs one, the queen of spades thirteen, and the lowest score wins.

Players	You need	Game length	Difficulty	Ages
3–5	A deck of cards and Pen & paper	30–60 min	Takes some practice	13+

RULES IN 60 SECONDS

Four players get 13 cards each. Pass three cards left, right, across, then none. The 2 of clubs leads. Follow suit if you can. The highest card of the suit led wins. Each heart costs 1 point, the queen of spades 13. Take them all and you score 0, everyone else 26. At 100 points, the lowest score wins.

01 — GOAL

Take as few points as possible

Hearts is a trick-taking game, usually for four players, each playing for themselves. Points are bad: every heart you take in a trick costs you 1 point, and the queen of spades costs 13. The penalty cards are worth 26 points in total.

You play several hands. As soon as a player reaches 100 points or more at the end of a hand, the game is over, and the player with the **lowest** score wins.

02 — DEAL

Shuffle and deal the cards

1. Use a standard 52-card deck without jokers.
2. The dealer shuffles and deals all the cards face down, one at a time and clockwise, so everyone gets 13.
3. Cards rank from ace (high) down to 2 (low) in every suit. There are no trumps.

Three or five players: with three players, take out the 2 of diamonds and deal 17 cards each. The 2 of clubs still leads. With five players, take out the 2 of diamonds and the 2 of clubs and deal 10 each. The 3 of clubs then leads the first trick. With three or five there's nobody opposite, so a common passing cycle is left, right, then no pass. Groups play this differently, so agree on it before you start.

03 — PASS

Pass three cards before you play

After looking at your hand, choose any three cards and pass them face down to another player. With four players, the direction changes every hand:

1. first hand: to the player on your left
2. second hand: to the player on your right
3. third hand: to the player opposite
4. fourth hand: no passing

Then the cycle starts again. Put down your own three cards before you pick up the ones passed to you.

04 — PLAY

Follow suit, the highest card wins

What do “trick” and “follow suit” mean?
Trick: each player in turn puts one card on the table. Together these cards are called a trick. Whoever played the highest card of the suit that was led wins the trick and takes all the cards.
Follow suit: if someone leads a club, you must play a club too if you have one. Only if you have no clubs may you play a different suit.
Important: in Hearts, winning a trick isn’t always good. If it contains hearts or the queen of spades, you get penalty points for them. So you usually try to avoid those tricks.

1. Whoever holds the **2 of clubs** after the pass leads it to the first trick. With five players, the 3 of clubs leads instead.
2. Play continues clockwise. You must **follow suit** if you can. If you can’t, play any card.
3. The highest card of the suit led wins the trick. The winner takes the cards, keeps them face down and leads the next trick.

- **First trick:** you may not throw a heart or the queen of spades on it, unless you have nothing else.
- **Breaking hearts:** you may not lead a heart until a heart has been played to an earlier trick, unless you have only hearts left.
- **Queen of spades:** from the second trick on, you can lead spades, including the queen. Otherwise she follows the normal rule: you can only throw her on another suit when you have none of the suit led.

Rules vary a little from group to group. Some players also count the queen of spades as breaking hearts, and some allow points on the first trick. Agree before you start.

First trick: the 2 of clubs leads and everyone follows suit, so the king of clubs wins



No diamonds left: a player throws the queen of spades, and the ace of diamonds takes her



05 — POINTS

Count your points after each hand

Card taken in a trick	Points
Each heart	1
Queen of spades	13
Any other card	0

Shooting the moon: if you take all 13 hearts and the queen of spades in one hand, you score 0 for that hand and every other player scores 26.

Add each hand's points to the running totals. When someone has 100 points or more at the end of a hand, the player with the lowest total wins.

Some groups let the player who shoots the moon subtract 26 from their own score instead, or play to 50 points. If two players tie for the lowest score, you can play more hands until there's a clear winner or share the win.

A costly trick: the ace of hearts wins 16 penalty points



06 — TIPS

Play smarter

- If you hold the queen of spades or the ace or king of spades without many low spades to protect them, think about passing them.
- Try to get rid of all your cards in one suit early, so you can throw hearts or the queen of spades when that suit is led.
- Keep a few low cards for the end of the hand, when you'll want to stay out of tricks full of hearts.
- If one player has taken every heart so far, win a heart yourself to stop them shooting the moon.