

Bartok

3-8 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Medium

Be the first to shed all your cards. Winner invents a new rule.

SETUP

- 3-8 players with a standard 52-card deck.
- Deal 7 cards each. Turn up one card to start the discard pile.

SCORING

- First to empty their hand wins the round.
- Winner creates a new rule for all future rounds.

Tip: Invent rules you can easily remember — they give you an edge as rules accumulate.

ON YOUR TURN

- Play a card matching the discard by rank or suit.
- Draw a card if you cannot play.
- Follow all accumulated invented rules or draw penalty cards.

Bartok (also spelled Bartog) is a shedding card game similar to Crazy Eights, with one revolutionary twist: the winner of each round gets to invent a new rule that applies for the rest of the game. As rounds progress, the accumulating layers of player-created rules make the game increasingly chaotic, hilarious, and challenging. It is a favourite party game that tests memory, adaptability, and creativity.

Objective

Be the first player to shed all your cards. The winner of each round invents a new rule for subsequent rounds.

Setup

1. **Players:** 3 to 8 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck (two decks for 6+ players).
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 5 to 7 cards (typically 7). The remainder forms a draw pile with the top card turned face-up to start the discard pile.

Gameplay

1. **Base rules:** On your turn, play a card that matches the top of the discard pile by rank or suit. If you cannot play, draw one card from the draw pile.
2. **Shedding:** Continue playing until one player has no cards remaining. That player wins the round.
3. **Rule invention:** The winner of each round announces a new rule that will apply in all future rounds. The new rule must be clearly stated and consistently enforceable.
4. **Penalties:** Breaking any rule (including invented ones) results in a penalty: drawing one or more cards from the draw pile. Penalties are enforced by the group.
5. **Secret rules variant:** In some versions, the winner does not announce the new rule. Other players must figure it out by observing penalties.

Scoring

1. **Round win:** The first player to empty their hand wins the round and earns the right to create a new rule.
2. **Game end:** Play continues for a set number of rounds, or until the rules become too numerous and chaotic to continue, at which point the player who has won the most rounds is the overall winner.

Example Rules Players Might Invent

- **Knock rule:** You must knock on the table before playing a face card, or draw a penalty card.
- **Silence rule:** You may not speak while a red card is on top of the discard pile.
- **Name rule:** When playing a 7, you must say the name of another player. That player draws a card.
- **Direction rule:** Playing a Jack reverses the direction of play.
- **Thank you rule:** You must say thank you after drawing a card, or draw another.

Variations

- **Mao:** A closely related game where the rules are never explained to new players, who must learn by trial and error and penalties.
- **Secret Bartok:** New rules are not announced; players must deduce them from penalties given by the rule creator.
- **Cooperative Bartok:** Players collectively agree on new rules rather than the winner deciding alone.

Tips and Strategies

- Create rules that are memorable and fun, not rules designed purely to penalise others.
- Keep track of all accumulated rules mentally; forgetting an old rule is a common way to draw penalties.
- When inventing a rule, consider how it interacts with existing rules to avoid contradictions.

Tips & Strategy

Invent rules that are fun and memorable rather than punitive. Track all accumulated rules carefully. Play cards that keep your options open for future turns. Watch for other players breaking rules you remember.

The meta-strategy in Bartok is creating rules that you personally find easy to remember and follow, giving you an advantage over opponents who struggle with the growing rule set.