

Ecarte

2 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Short

Be the first player to score 5 points by winning tricks and declaring the King of trumps.

SETUP

- Two players, deal 5 cards each from a 32-card deck.
- Turn up one card to set the trump suit.
- Non-dealer decides whether to propose a card exchange.

SCORING

- 3-4 tricks = 1 point; all 5 tricks (vole) = 2 points.
- Declaring or turning up the King of trumps = 1 point.

Tip: Propose when your hand has fewer than 3 winners; refuse proposals as dealer when your hand is strong.

ON YOUR TURN

- Lead a card; opponent must follow suit or trump if unable.
- Highest card of the led suit wins unless trumped.
- Winner of each trick leads the next.

Ecarte is a classic French two-player trick-taking game played with 32 cards. It features a unique card exchange phase before play begins, and the King is the highest trump card with a special scoring bonus.

Objective

Be the first player to score 5 points by winning the majority of tricks in each hand and by holding or turning up the King of trumps.

Setup

1. **Players:** 2 players.
2. **Deck:** 32 cards from a standard deck (7, 8, 9, 10, Jack, Queen, King, Ace of each suit).
3. **Card Ranking:** King (highest), Queen, Jack, Ace, 10, 9, 8, 7 (lowest).
4. **Deal:** Deal 5 cards to each player in batches of 2 and 3 (or 3 and 2). Turn up the next card to establish the trump suit.

Gameplay

1. **Step 1:** The non-dealer (elder hand) may propose an exchange of cards, or play with the current hand. If they propose, the dealer may accept or refuse.
2. **Step 2:** If accepted, the elder hand discards unwanted cards and draws replacements from the stock. Then the dealer may do the same. Proposals may continue until either player is satisfied or the stock runs out.
3. **Step 3:** If the dealer refuses a proposal, play begins immediately. The elder hand leads the first trick.
4. **Step 4:** Players must follow suit if possible. If unable, they must play a trump if they have one. The highest card of the led suit wins unless trumped.
5. **Step 5:** The winner of each trick leads the next. After all 5 tricks are played, points are awarded.

Scoring

- Winning 3 or 4 tricks scores 1 point.
- Winning all 5 tricks (the vole) scores 2 points.
- Holding the King of trumps and declaring it before playing scores 1 point.
- If the turn-up card is the King of trumps, the dealer scores 1 point.
- If the elder hand plays without proposing and fails to take 3 tricks, the dealer scores 2 points instead of 1.

Variations

- **Three-Handed Ecarte:** A variant where three players compete, with the dealer sitting out each hand and the other two playing against each other.
- **Ecarte for Stakes:** A gambling variant where each point is worth an agreed-upon amount, with the vole bonus doubled.
- **Quick Ecarte:** Play to 3 points instead of 5 for a shorter game.

Tips and Strategies

- Propose an exchange when you have fewer than 3 likely trick winners, as improving your hand is usually worth it.
- If you hold the King of trumps, always declare it before play for the free point.
- As dealer, refuse a proposal when your hand is strong, forcing the elder to play with a weaker hand.

Tips & Strategy

Evaluate your hand carefully before proposing. Holding two or fewer likely tricks means you should propose, while three or more winners means you should play immediately.

The proposal phase is where Ecarte separates skilled players from beginners. Knowing when to refuse an exchange as dealer, trapping the elder with a weak hand, is a key winning tactic.