

Loo (Lanterloo)

3-8 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Short

Win at least one trick out of three to avoid paying a loo penalty into the pool.

SETUP

- 3-8 players with a standard 52-card deck.
- Deal 3 cards each plus a spare hand (Miss). Turn up next card for trumps.
- All players ante into the pool.

SCORING

- Each trick wins one-third of the pool.
- Players who played but won no tricks are looed and must pay into next pool.

Tip: Fold weak hands freely — being looed is far worse than missing a small pool.

ON YOUR TURN

- Declare: play your hand, take Miss, or fold.
- Lead a card; others must follow suit, trump if void, and head the trick if possible.
- Highest trump or highest of led suit wins the trick.

Loo, also known as Lanterloo, is a classic English trick-taking card game that was enormously popular from the 17th through 19th centuries. Each player receives three cards and must follow suit, with looed players paying a penalty into the pool. The game combines straightforward trick-taking with a compelling pot-building mechanism that can create dramatic swings in fortune.

Objective

Win at least one trick out of three to avoid being looed and having to pay into the pool for the next deal.

Setup

1. **Players:** 3 to 8 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck.
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 3 cards, dealt one at a time. An extra hand called Miss is dealt face-down to the table. The next card is turned face-up to determine the trump suit.
4. **Pool:** Each player antes an agreed stake into the pool before the deal.

Gameplay

1. **Declaration:** Starting from the dealer's left, each player must declare whether they will play, take Miss (exchanging their entire hand for the spare hand), or pass and fold.
2. **Leading:** The player to the dealer's left leads any card to the first trick. In some versions, if you hold the Ace of trumps you must lead it first.
3. **Following suit:** Players must follow suit if able. If unable, they must play a trump if they have one. Players must also head the trick (play a higher card) if possible.
4. **Winning tricks:** The highest trump wins, or the highest card of the led suit if no trumps are played. Each trick won earns one-third of the pool.

Scoring

1. **Pool division:** The pool is divided equally among the tricks, so each trick is worth one-third of the total pool.
2. **Loo penalty:** Any player who played but won zero tricks is looed and must pay an amount equal to the current pool into the next round's pool.
3. **Unlimited vs. Limited Loo:** In Unlimited Loo, the penalty equals the entire pool. In Limited Loo, the penalty is capped at a fixed amount.

Variations

- **Five-Card Loo:** Each player receives 5 cards instead of 3, and must win at least one trick. Flushes (5 cards of one suit) automatically win the pool.
- **Irish Loo:** The trump card is not turned up; instead the first player to lead chooses trumps by their lead card.
- **Limited Loo:** The loo penalty is fixed at a set amount regardless of the pool size, keeping stakes manageable.

Tips and Strategies

- Only stay in if you hold at least one strong trump or a likely trick-winner; folding is free but being looed is expensive.
- Take Miss if your hand is weak but you suspect the spare hand might contain trumps.
- In the early rounds when the pool is small, take more risks; when the pool grows large, play conservatively unless you have a very strong hand.

Tips & Strategy

Fold weak hands early to avoid the loo penalty. When holding one strong trump, play it on a trick where you can guarantee a win. Taking Miss is a gamble but can rescue a marginal hand.

The key decision in Loo is whether to play or fold. With the pool growing each time someone is looed, the risk-reward calculation changes every round. Strong trumps are essential for staying in.