

Primero

2-6 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Medium

Hold the best 4-card combination or bluff opponents into folding.

SETUP

- 2-6 players with a 40- or 52-card deck.
- Deal 4 cards each. All players ante into the pot.

SCORING

- Chorus > Fluxus > Primero > Numerus.
- 7 = 21 pts (highest), 6 = 18, A = 16, then descending.
- Combinations ranked by type first, then point total.

Tip: Collect 7s — they are worth 21 points each and anchor the strongest hands.

ON YOUR TURN

- Optionally exchange cards with the stock.
- Bet, call, raise, or fold.
- Showdown: best combination wins the pot.

Primero is a Renaissance-era card game widely regarded as the direct ancestor of modern poker. Played extensively across Italy, Spain, France, and England during the 15th and 16th centuries, it was a favourite of Henry VIII and was mentioned by Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Each player receives four cards and wagers on having the best combination, with special hand types including Primero (one card of each suit), Fluxus (flush), and Chorus (multiple cards of one rank).

Objective

Win the pot by holding the best four-card combination, or by bluffing all opponents into folding. The game combines card valuation, combination-making, and wagering.

Setup

1. **Players:** 2 to 6 players.
2. **Deck:** A 40-card deck (standard deck with 8s, 9s, and 10s removed). In some versions, a full 52-card deck is used.
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 4 cards, dealt one or two at a time.
4. **Antes:** All players place an agreed ante into the pot before the deal.

Card Values

1. **Special values:** Cards have point values different from their face value. 7 is worth 21 points (the highest single card), 6 is worth 18, Ace is worth 16, 5 = 15, 4 = 14, 3 = 13, 2 = 12.
2. **Face cards:** Kings, Queens, and Jacks are each worth 10 points.
3. **Suit multiplier:** In some versions, each suit multiplies differently for scoring purposes.

Combinations (Best to Worst)

1. **Chorus (Four of a Kind):** Four cards of the same rank. Exceptionally rare and the best hand.
2. **Fluxus (Flush):** Four cards of the same suit. Valued by the sum of the card points.
3. **Primero:** One card from each of the four suits. Valued by the sum of the card points.
4. **Numerus (Pair-based):** Two or three cards of the same suit (not all four). The best two, three, or individual card points are summed.

Gameplay

1. **Vying (Betting):** After receiving their cards, players take turns deciding to stake (bet), call (match the current bet), raise (increase the bet), or pass (fold and forfeit their ante).
2. **Card exchange:** In some versions, before betting, players may discard and draw replacement cards from the stock to improve their hand.
3. **Showdown:** When all remaining players have matched the highest bet, hands are revealed. The best combination wins the pot.
4. **Bluffing:** A player may bet aggressively on a weak hand to force opponents to fold, similar to poker.

Variations

- **Spanish Primero (Primera):** Uses a 48-card Spanish deck and slightly different card values.
- **Italian Primiera:** The original version with the 40-card Italian deck.
- **French Prime:** The French adaptation that eventually influenced the development of Breton and ultimately Poker.

Tips and Strategies

- The 7 is the most valuable card in Primero; try to keep 7s in your hand whenever possible.
- A Primero (one card per suit) is easier to achieve than a Flush but often lower in value; weigh the odds carefully.
- Bluffing is essential; aggressive betting on a Numerus can force opponents with marginal hands to fold.

Tips & Strategy

Focus on collecting 7s, which are the highest-value cards. A Flush beats a Primero of equal point value, so pursue flushes when suited cards come your way. Bluff confidently; Primero rewards aggressive play.

Understanding the unusual card valuation is critical: 7s are worth more than Kings. This inverted value system means hands that look weak by modern standards may actually be strong in Primero.