

Sheepshead

3-5 players

32 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Medium

As picker, collect 61+ card points with your partner; as defender, collect 60+ to defeat the picker.

SETUP

- 5 players with a 32-card deck (Sevens through Aces).
- Deal 6 cards each; 2 cards go face-down as the blind.

SCORING

- Ace: 11, Ten: 10, King: 4, Queen: 3, Jack: 2; lower cards: 0.
- Picker's team needs 61+ points; schneider at 91+; schwarz for all tricks.
- Defenders need 60+ points to win.

Tip: Pick the blind when you have at least 4 trumps — the blind often improves a borderline hand.

ON YOUR TURN

- In turn order, pick up the blind or pass.
- Picker discards 2 cards and secretly partners with the Jack of Diamonds holder.
- Play tricks following suit; trumps are all Queens, Jacks, and Diamonds.
- Highest trump or suit card wins the trick.

Sheepshead is an American trick-taking game with German roots, primarily played in Wisconsin. It uses a 32-card deck and features a complex trump hierarchy led by the Queens and Jacks.

Objective

As the picker, win enough card points (61 or more) with your partner. As defenders, collect at least 60 points to defeat the picking team.

Setup

1. **Players:** 5 players (3- and 4-player variants exist).
2. **Deck:** 32-card deck (Sevens through Aces in four suits).
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 6 cards. Two cards are placed face-down as the 'blind.'

Gameplay

1. **Picking:** Players in turn order may pick up the blind. The picker discards two cards and becomes the declarer.
2. **Partner:** The picker's partner is whoever holds the Jack of Diamonds, though this is kept secret until played.
3. **Trump hierarchy:** All Queens, then all Jacks, then all Diamonds form the 14-card trump suit, ranked $Q\clubsuit-Q\spadesuit-Q\heartsuit-Q\diamondsuit-J\clubsuit-J\spadesuit-J\heartsuit-J\diamondsuit-A\diamondsuit-10\diamondsuit-K\diamondsuit-9\diamondsuit-8\diamondsuit-7\diamondsuit$.
4. **Trick play:** Follow suit if possible; trumps beat all fail-suit cards. The highest trump or suit card wins.

Scoring

- **Card values:** Aces = 11, Tens = 10, Kings = 4, Queens = 3, Jacks = 2. Lower cards = 0.
- **Picker's team:** Needs 61+ points to win. Schneider (91+) and schwarz (all tricks) earn extra.
- **Defenders:** Need 60+ points to defeat the picker.

Variations

- **Leaster:** When everyone passes, the player who takes the fewest points wins.
- **Doubler:** A round where point values are doubled, typically triggered by everyone passing.
- **Jack of Diamonds partner:** Some groups let the picker call any card as partner instead.

Tips and Strategies

- Pick the blind when you have at least 4 trumps — the blind often improves a borderline hand.
- Lead trumps early to strip defenders of their trump cards and control the later tricks.

Tips & Strategy

Count trumps carefully. With 14 trumps in the deck, knowing how many remain is crucial for planning your trick sequence.

As the picker, bury high-point fail-suit cards in your discard to lock in safe points before the first trick.