

Spoil Five

2-10 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Hard

Duration: Medium

Win 3 of 5 tricks to take the pool, or spoil the game so nobody wins.

SETUP

- 2-10 players with a standard 52-card deck.
- Deal 5 cards each; turn up one card for trumps.
- All players ante into the pool.

SCORING

- First to win 3 tricks takes the pool.
- If nobody wins 3, the pool carries over (spoiled).
- Winning all 5 tricks (jinking) earns a bonus.

Tip: Learn the unique ranking system and use renegeing with top trumps at key moments.

ON YOUR TURN

- Follow suit to trumps if led. For non-trumps, you may follow suit or trump.
- Top three trumps (5, J, Ace of Hearts) may renege when a lower trump is led.
- Highest card in the trick's context wins.

Spoil Five is a traditional Irish trick-taking card game with a uniquely complex card ranking system that changes depending on the suit and colour. Each player receives five cards and must try to win three or more tricks; if nobody achieves this, the game is spoiled and the pool carries over. It is the national card game of Ireland and has been played for centuries.

Objective

Win at least three of the five tricks to take the pool, or prevent any other player from doing so (spoiling the game).

Setup

1. **Players:** 2 to 10 players, best with 5.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck.
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 5 cards, dealt in batches of 2 then 3 (or 3 then 2). The next card is turned face-up to set the trump suit.
4. **Pool:** Each player antes an agreed amount into the pool.

Card Ranking

1. **Trumps (highest to lowest):** 5 of trumps, Jack of trumps, Ace of Hearts (always third-best trump), Ace of trumps (if not hearts), then remaining trumps in unique order.
2. **Red suits (non-trump):** K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, A (Ace is low in diamonds).
3. **Black suits (non-trump):** K, Q, J, A, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 (numerals rank low-to-high).
4. **Key rule:** The 5 of trumps and Jack of trumps are always the two highest cards. The Ace of Hearts is always the third-highest trump regardless of the trump suit.

Gameplay

1. **Robbing the trump:** If a player holds the Ace of trumps, they may exchange any card from their hand for the turned-up trump card. The dealer, if the turned card is an Ace, may rob by discarding before play begins.
2. **Leading:** The player to the dealer's left leads to the first trick.
3. **Following suit:** Players must follow suit if a trump is led. If a non-trump suit is led, players may follow suit or play a trump, but they may not discard from a different non-trump suit if they can follow or trump.
4. **Reneging:** The top three trumps (5, Jack, Ace of Hearts) have a privilege: they cannot be forced out by a lower trump lead. A player holding only top trumps and no other cards of the led suit may renege.
5. **Jinking:** If a player wins the first three tricks, they may claim the pool immediately (jink). If they continue and fail to win all five, they forfeit the pool.

Scoring

1. **Winning:** The first player to win three tricks takes the pool.
2. **Spoil:** If no player wins three tricks, the hand is spoiled and the pool carries over to the next deal, growing larger.
3. **Jink bonus:** A player who jinks (wins all five tricks) often receives a bonus payment from each opponent in addition to the pool.

Variations

- **Twenty-Five:** A partnership variant of Spoil Five played with teams, where trick points accumulate to 25.
- **Forty-Five:** A popular Canadian and maritime variant where teams play to 45 points, scoring 5 points per trick won.
- **Auction Forty-Fives:** Players bid for the right to name trumps, adding a bidding element to the game.

Tips and Strategies

- Memorise the unique ranking of trumps; the 5 and Jack of trumps are always the top two cards.
- Use the reneging privilege of top trumps to your advantage by holding them back for critical moments.
- If no one seems strong, play to spoil rather than risk losing your position by overcommitting.

Tips & Strategy

Learn the ranking system thoroughly; it is the biggest hurdle for new players. Hold top trumps for later tricks when they can clinch a third trick. If you win two early, expect opponents to gang up to spoil.

The reneging rule is a powerful strategic tool: holding a top trump when a lower trump is led allows you to withhold your best card for a more decisive moment. Spoiling is a valid and often correct strategy.