

Tongits

3 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Medium

Empty your hand (Tongits) or have the lowest deadwood when the game ends.

SETUP

- 3 players, standard 52-card deck.
- First player gets 13 cards, others get 12 each.
- Remaining cards form the stock pile.

SCORING

- A=1, number cards=face value, J/Q/K=10 pts each.
- Tongits (empty hand) wins outright.
- Draw or stock depletion: lowest deadwood wins. Unmelded players are Burned.

Tip: Meld at least once early to avoid being Burned out of contention.

ON YOUR TURN

- Draw a card from the stock or discard pile.
- Meld sets/runs and lay off (sapaw) on any player's melds.
- Discard one card to end your turn.

Tongits is the most popular card game in the Philippines, a rummy-style game for exactly three players. Players draw and discard cards while forming melds (sets and runs), trying to reduce their hand's deadwood (unmelded card points) to zero or to have the lowest deadwood when the game ends. A player can win by going Tongits (emptying their hand), by calling a Draw, or by having the lowest count at stock depletion.

Objective

Empty your hand by melding all cards (Tongits), or have the lowest deadwood count when the stock runs out or a Draw is called.

Setup

1. **Players:** Exactly 3 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck.
3. **Deal:** The first player (determined by rotation) receives 13 cards. The other two players receive 12 cards each. The remaining cards form the stock pile.

Gameplay

1. **Draw:** On your turn, draw one card from the stock or pick up the top discard.
2. **Meld:** Lay down valid melds (three or more cards of the same rank, or three or more consecutive cards of the same suit).
3. **Lay off (Sapaw):** Add cards to any player's existing melds on the table, including your opponents' melds.
4. **Discard:** End your turn by discarding one card face-up to the discard pile.
5. **Tongits:** If you meld or lay off all remaining cards in your hand, you win immediately with a Tongits.
6. **Draw call:** If you have melded at least once, you may call a Draw instead of drawing a card. All players reveal their hands and compare deadwood totals. The caller wins if tied.
7. **Challenge:** An opponent can challenge a Draw call if they believe they have equal or lower deadwood.

Scoring

- Card point values: Aces = 1, number cards = face value, face cards (J, Q, K) = 10 points each.
- Tongits (emptying your hand): automatic win. The winner collects from both opponents based on their deadwood totals.
- Draw or stock depletion: the player with the lowest deadwood wins. Tied deadwood favors the Draw caller or the last player to meld.
- A player who has not melded at all is 'Burned' and cannot contest a Draw call.

Variations

- **Tongits with Jokers:** Add jokers as wild cards that can substitute for any card in a meld.
- **Progressive Tongits:** Points carry over across multiple rounds, with the first to reach a target score losing.
- **Tongits Go:** A digital version with online multiplayer, rankings, and tournaments.

Tips and Strategies

- Meld early to avoid being Burned, which would prevent you from contesting a Draw call.
- Use sapaw (laying off on opponents' melds) to reduce your deadwood without revealing your own meld plans.
- Track the discard pile and your opponents' melds to anticipate their strategies.

Tips & Strategy

Meld early to avoid being Burned. Use sapaw on opponents' melds to shed deadwood while keeping your own hand flexible. Monitor the stock pile depth to time your Draw calls optimally.

The sapaw mechanic is unique and powerful. Laying off cards on opponents' melds reduces your deadwood without building your own melds for others to see. Timing the Draw call is a critical skill, requiring you to read both opponents' hand sizes and meld states.