

Watten

4 players

33 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Medium

Be the first team to win 3 of 5 tricks in a round, or bluff opponents into folding.

SETUP

- Use a 33-card deck with 4 players in two partnerships.
- Deal 5 cards each (3 then 2).
- The dealer and partner secretly agree on the trump suit and trump rank (Schlag).

SCORING

- Winning 3 tricks scores 2 game points (more if stakes were raised).
- A team that folds concedes 2 game points.
- First team to 15 or 18 game points wins the match.

Tip: Master secret signals with your partner to coordinate plays without speaking.

ON YOUR TURN

- Play any card; there is no obligation to follow suit.
- Three Kritische cards always rank highest regardless of trump.
- Either team may raise the stakes; opponents must accept or fold.

Watten is a beloved trick-taking card game from Bavaria and the Austrian Tyrol, famous for its unique system of three permanently high cards called Kritische and its tradition of secret signaling between partners. It is one of the most culturally significant card games in the Alpine region.

Objective

Be the first team to win 3 tricks out of 5 in a round, or bluff your opponents into folding. The first team to accumulate the target number of game points across rounds wins.

Setup

1. **Players:** 4 players in two partnerships.
2. **Deck:** 33-card deck (special Bavarian or Austrian pattern cards, or a standard deck adapted with 7 through Ace plus one 6).
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 5 cards, dealt in a batch of 3 then 2.
4. **Determining trumps:** The dealer and the player to their right secretly agree on the trump suit and the trump rank (the Schlag), which together define the highest-ranking cards.

Card Hierarchy

1. **Kritische:** Three cards that always rank highest regardless of trump: the King of Hearts, the 7 of Bells (or Diamonds), and the 7 of Acorns (or Clubs).
2. **Hauptschlag:** The card matching both the trump suit and the chosen rank is the single highest card after the Kritische.
3. **Other Schlag cards:** The remaining three cards of the chosen rank rank next.
4. **Trump suit cards:** Cards of the trump suit rank above non-trump cards.

Gameplay

1. **Leading:** The player to the dealer's left leads any card.
2. **No obligation to follow suit:** Players may play any card from their hand on any trick.
3. **Winning tricks:** The highest-ranking card according to the hierarchy wins the trick.
4. **Raising:** Either team may propose raising the stakes during play. The opposing team must accept or fold.
5. **Signaling:** Partners may use secret facial expressions and gestures to communicate about their cards, which is a legal and expected part of the game.

Scoring

- **Winning a round:** The team that wins 3 tricks first scores 2 game points (or more if stakes were raised).
- **Folding:** A team that folds concedes 2 game points to the opponents.
- **Game target:** The first team to reach 15 or 18 game points (depending on local rules) wins.

Tips and Strategies

- Master the signaling conventions with your partner to coordinate plays without speaking.
- Raise the stakes aggressively when you hold Kritische or the Hauptschlag to pressure opponents into folding.
- Bluffing a raise with a weak hand can steal rounds, but getting called will cost you dearly.

Tips & Strategy

Signaling is the soul of Watten. Develop a reliable system with your partner and practice reading opponents' signals to intercept their plans.

Knowing when to raise versus when to fold is the most important skill. A well-timed raise with moderate cards can win more points than actually playing out a round with strong cards.