

The Rules of Uncle Baiting

Although the game's called Uncle Baiting, it's perfectly permissible to bait Aunts, Nieces, Nephews, Cousins, Sons, Daughters, and Friends — even Grandparents; this is an equal-opportunity game.

1 Setting Up

- At least two decks should be used, shuffled together. At present jokers should be removed (but see Sec. 8).
- At the beginning each player is dealt 7 cards.
- The remaining cards are placed face down in the centre of the table forming the 'pick-up pile'. When everyone is ready the dealer turns over the top card and places it next to the pickup-pile forming a discard pile;¹ the game has begun.

2 How to Play

The idea of the game is to get rid of all your cards. On each turn you usually attempt to play one card face up on to the top of the discard pile; it must either be the same suit (e.g. hearts; spades) or number (e.g. 3; Queen) as the last card played. The only exception to the follow-suit-or-number rule is a Jack — see Sec. 3. If you can't play (or don't wish to play) you must take a card from the pick-up pile.

Initially play passes to the left; the player to the dealer's left starts. Players should be given time to sort their hands before the game commences; no penalties may be extracted for being slow at this stage.

When you have only one card left² you *must* say "Last Card"; failure to do so results in a penalty (see Sec. 5). This penalty is picked up on your *next* turn, the one when you would have won. Exception: if you are required to pick up on this turn, you collect your penalty and then play as usual; either pick up or play a 2.

When the pick-up pile is exhausted, turn over the discard pile (leaving the top card behind), shuffle, and place face-down as a new pick-up pile. Put the old top card on top, and resume play. No penalties may be extracted from the shuffler while this is being done.

3 The Meaning of Cards

Some, well most, cards are special. If the card that's just been discarded is special you may be required to do something other than simply discard yourself.

In the following examples we assume that the players are *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E* in order of play, and 6_A means that *A* plays a 6. If you're in 'Queens mode' the plays are indicated

¹n.b. this card is 'dead'; none of the special meanings of cards apply (e.g. no-one has to pick up 4 cards if it's an ace; Sec. 3); if you 'butt-in' (Sec. 4) the butted-in card is also dead.

²i.e. when you play the penultimate card

as e.g. $X_{A1}X_{A2}X_{B1}$, where $A1$ means A 's leading hand, in other words the hand that plays first.

We use the term 'hand' to refer to a turn — usually a hand is the same as a player, but not when you're in Queens mode.

Ace The following hand must pick up four cards. The player of the ace must say "Sorry", although sincerity is neither required nor recommended. If a player goes out with an ace they must still say "Sorry" otherwise they will be required to pick up a penalty and the game continues.

2 The following hand must pick up two cards, or play another 2 in which case the next player must pick up four cards (or play a third 2 — the number of cards to pick up increases only arithmetically).

6 The direction of play reverses immediately, just as if you'd played a King. Then, after two more hands have been played it reverses again. In the simple case this means that play just goes backwards for two turns; If C plays a 6, the result would be $6_C X_B X_A X_B X_C$. Now consider what happens if a King's played; you get $6_C K_B X_C X_B X_A$ or $6_C X_B K_A X_E X_D$. With an 8, $6_C 8_B X_F X_A, X_B$.

If a second 6 is played while a 6 is active, the first 6's pending reversal is cancelled; e.g. $6_C X_B 6_A X_B X_C X_B X_A X_E$. Note that in this case the net effect is that the order of play has reversed.

N.b. 6s apply to hands, not players. In Queens mode, you might have $6_{C2} X_{C1} X_{B2} X_{C1} X_{C2}$.

7 The next card played must be 5 or less if the 7 is red; Jack or higher if the 7's black. N.b. Aces are low and may therefore be played following a red 7; 7s and Jacks are not 5 or less.³

8 The next hand is skipped, e.g. $8_C X_E X_F$.

9 The play shifts to the previous player and immediately reverses again: $9_C X_B X_C X_D$. N.b. 9s apply to players, not hands: in Queens mode, $9_{C1} X_{B1} X_{B2} X_{C1}$.

10 Every other hand is skipped until another 10 is played: $10_C X_E X_B X_D$. If there are an even number of players, this leads to only half the players getting a chance to play until another 10 is played (or a 9; e.g. $10_C X_E X_B 9_D X_C X_F X_A$).

When going into 10s mode (i.e. starting to skip) the player must say, "In"; when playing a 10 that leaves 10s mode the player must say, "Out". Failure to do so results, of course, in picking up a penalty card. A player whose last card is a 10 must still say "In" or "Out" before the game is over.

³The reason for the apparently asymmetrical ranges of permitted cards (Ace ... 5 v. Jack ... King) is that in fact there are four possible Jacks that can be played, so the ranges really are almost equal — five cards against six.

Jack A Jack may be played even if it doesn't follow suit or number. There are three situations when a Jack may *not* be played: after an Ace or 2; after a red 7; and as a player's last card.

You *must* announce the suit that the Jack represents (it may be the same as the current suit, or that of the Jack, if you so desire); in other words after a Jack of Hearts, if the player announces "Spades" you must follow with a spade, or another Jack.

If you fail to announce the new suit the next player may play a card of any suit other than the Jack's own suit.⁴ After the penalty for not naming a suit has been duly awarded, play continues from the card on the top of the discard pile — the owner of the Jack has missed their chance to choose a new suit.

Queen In Queens mode, each player plays twice, once for their 'leading' and once for their 'trailing' hand — the leading hand plays first.

When going into Queens mode (i.e. starting to play two hands per player) the player must say, "In"; when playing the Queen that leaves Queens mode the player must say, "Out", even in the Queen is the the player's last card. Failure to do so is rewarded by picking up a penalty card.

Note that the combination of 10s and Queens mode feels normal at first sight as each player plays a single hand in turn. However, when another 10 is played you need to know whether you were playing on leading or trailing hands: $X_{A1}X_{B1}X_{C1}10_{D1}X_{D2}X_{E1}X_{E2}$ but $X_{A2}X_{B2}X_{C2}10_{D2}X_{E1}X_{E2}$.

King The direction of play is reversed: $X_C K_D X_C X_B$. In Queens mode, this can result in playing three hands in succession: $X_{C2}X_{B1}K_{B2}X_{B1}X_{C2}$.

4 Butting in

Uncle Baiting is always played with at least two packs of cards, which means that there are duplicates of all cards (e.g. two Queens of Hearts). When a card is played and you have an identical one in your hand, you may always play it — this is known as 'Butting In'. Following a butt-in play proceeds as if you'd been the original player of the card, and the butt-in does *not* count as a separate play (an important point when considering 6s and 9s).

In two cases, the butt-in augments rather than replaces the original card: an Ace or a 2. As soon as an Ace is played the next hand starts to pick up four cards; when the butted-in Ace is played the player after the butter-in must pick up the remainder of the initial four cards, and also four cards for the second Ace; the butter-in is required to say "Sorry" as usual. You may choose to butt-in at any time before the player following the original picker-upper plays. Butting in with a 2 is similar; the balance of cards being picked up by the initial victim is transferred to the player after the butter-in, along with an extra two for the butted-in 2.

⁴The rationale for requiring a change of suit is to minimise the chance that a careless player will make a correct play by mistake.

When butting-in on a Jack, you may play either a Jack of the face-value or nominated suit. For example, after a Jack of Hearts announced as “Spades” you may butt-in with either a Jack of Hearts or a Jack of Spades.

Butting in in Queens mode is always considered to be a play from the trailing hand (i.e. you don’t get to play a second card).

5 Penalties

Penalty cards are awarded for all errors; when something must be done promptly (e.g. saying “Sorry” or “Last card”) this must be done before the next player plays. Picking up a penalty doesn’t end your turn; after accepting it you must still play or pick up.

Examples of errors are:

- Playing slowly; the definition of ‘slowly’ is left to the consensus of the other players.
- Attempting to play when it isn’t your turn (e.g. if the player before you plays an 8).
- Playing an illegal card (e.g. not following suit-or-number; playing a Jack on a 7).
- Making a mistake even if the card was played illegally; e.g. playing an Ace on a black 7 and forgetting to say “Sorry” would result in two penalty cards (plus potentially a third for arguing).
- Asking for clarification of the state of play; after the card is awarded the clarification should be given.
- Explaining the state of play until the information’s been bought with a penalty.
- Dropping hints about cards that should be played.
- Being too officious about awarding penalty cards (the definition of ‘too’ is to be decided by majority vote of the players).
- Failing to say “Sorry”, “In”, or “Out” as required when you triumphantly play your last card. This is an especially satisfactory penalty, as it means that the game isn’t over after all.

Once a penalty card has been awarded it may not be returned to the pickup-pile. If it found that the award was incorrect or unjust the penalty is given to the person who originally proposed it.

6 Uncle Baiting Junior

As a gentle introduction for new Uncle Baiters, it’s possible to play just a subset of the full rules:

- Only Ace, 2, 7, 8, Jack, and King are special.
- All 7s are treated as being red (i.e. to be followed by 5 or less).

7 Uncle Baiting Classic

When Uncle Baiting came into the family it was a rather different game.

- Only Ace, 2, 8, Jack, and King were special.
- Penalties were not enforced.
- There was no butting-in.

8 Proposed Changes to the Rules

Uncle Baiting is an evolving game. The following suggestions have been made, but either not accepted, or we've been too scared to try them:

- – Split the players into two groups, initially the 'even' and 'odd' players counting round the table.
- Split the discard pile into two separate piles, one for each group.
- Each group plays a separate game of Uncle Baiting; the first player to win either group is the overall winner.
- A player may butt-in to either group; he or she then becomes a member of that group.

N.b. We haven't tried this one yet

- Jokers

Jokers may not be played by themselves, but one or more jokers may be played along with any legal card; each joker has the effect of skipping one hand. For example, if player A plays a Joker and 2, $(J^k 2)_A$, C must pick up 2 cards or play a 2 herself; she is of course at liberty to play $(J^k J^k 2)_C$ to make A pick up 4 cards. You may butt in on a card played with a joker, but not on the Joker itself (the original Jokers are automatically attached to the butted-in card).

Option: Maybe we should allow butting in on the Joker, which could be exactly equivalent to the butter-in playing the original cards, but with an extra Joker. Question: is it clear when two Jokers are identical?

A joker may not be played along with a player's last card.

N.b. We haven't tried this one yet