

# Berzerka

**Players:** 3 players / **Time:** 30-75 minutes / **Age:** 13+

(I am sure you can play this with someone younger, but I haven't tested that theory yet. Let me know if you do!)

## Theme (Yeahhh, don't think too hard about it. This is just a card game!)

It's time for the 30<sup>th</sup> Berzerka-lympics! You find yourself standing center stage of the arena. You've been training for this moment your entire life. The only thing that stands in your way is the competition across from you...

Each player takes the role of a Berserker who has made it to the final stage of this grand contest. It will take cunning tactics, back up plans, and maybe a little bit of rage to become the next champion. You are only a few events away from that decision. So, get out there and make a name for yourself!

## Game Overview

Berzerka is a compendium<sup>1</sup> trick taking game that takes inspiration from Mizerka and Coiffeur Jass<sup>2</sup>. Over the course of the game, players will be completing various contracts (*will change the rules or objective of the hand*). In Berzerka, the objective of contracts is tied to the number of tricks a player wins in a single hand.

After all players complete the same contract, the number of tricks won will be compared. Whoever ranks highest in that contract will gain Game Points and whoever ranks lowest will lose Game Points. The game ends after all contracts have been completed by all players. The player with the most Game Points wins!

*1) Compendium: A game that has multiple objectives/scoring categories. These objectives are commonly referred to as "contracts". Each player must complete every contract before the game can end. Most importantly, once a player completes a specific contract they cannot attempt to complete that contract again. A very popular example that uses this compendium-style system would be Yahtzee.*

*2) It is ok if you unfamiliar with Mizerka or Coiffeur Jass. Berzerka can be equally enjoyed with or without prior knowledge of either game. However, if you enjoy Berzerka, I would strongly suggest you check out the games that inspired me to design this one!*

## Components

- 52 playing cards; four suits, each suit is ranked 1-13
- 1 double-sided 'Overbid Penalty' card
- 15 cubes; five cubes each in three colors
- 1 forehand/hotseat token
- 1 contract board (preferably laminated)
  - You will need a writing implement to mark scores on the contract board
- 16 contract value tokens (with values ranging from x2-x12)
- 13 mix-n-match contract tiles

## Trick Taking Jargon Explained

**Forehand:** The player that starts the bidding during the bidding phase.

**Declarer:** The player that ultimately decides which contract is being played.

**Defenders:** The players that are playing against the declarer.

**In the Hotseat:** When the forehand is forced to be the declarer. In traditional games like Coiffeur Jass, you would say "in the barrel".

**Trick:** In clockwise order, each player plays a card from hand to the table face up.

**Lead player:** The player who plays the first card to a trick.

**Follow player:** The players who play a card to the trick after the lead player.

**Led suit:** The suit (color) of the card played by the lead player.

**Trump suit:** A suit that is stronger than the other three suits. It does not appear in every contract, but when it does, the suit is determined before the first trick.

**Must follow:** The lead player may play any card from their hand. Each follow player must play a card that matches led suit, if possible.

*Example: Michelle leads with the 5 of Hearts. DJ must follow suit and play a Heart.*

**Must beat:** Follow players must play a card that is stronger than the strongest card in the trick, if possible. (You are berserkers after all, show no mercy!)

*Example: Michelle leads with the 5 of Hearts. DJ must follow suit and play a Heart. Additionally, DJ must play a 6 of Hearts or higher, if he has one. DJ has the 3 and 9 of Hearts. Therefore, DJ must play the 9 and cannot play the 3.*

**Must trump:** If a follow player does not have a card in hand that matches the led suit, they must play a card of the trump suit, if possible.

*Example (Spades is trump): Michelle leads the 5 of Hearts. DJ must follow and must beat by playing a 6 of Hearts or higher. However, DJ is out of Hearts but has Spades in hand. Therefore, he must play a Spade, of any rank, from his hand.*

**Off suit:** If a follow player does not have a card in hand that matches the led suit and they do not have a card of the trump suit (or there is no trump suit), they may play any card.

*Example (Spades is trump): Michelle leads the 5 of Hearts. DJ must follow and must beat by playing a 6 of Hearts or higher. DJ is out of Hearts so he must trump by playing Spades. However, DJ is also out of Spades. Therefore, he can play any card of his choice from the other two suits, Clubs or Diamonds.*

*Note: You must always check for the **must follow** rule before checking the **must beat** and **must trump** rules. This applies even if someone plays a card of the led suit that is stronger than your strongest card in that suit.*

*Example (Spades is trump): Michelle leads the 5 of Hearts. DJ follows with the 9 of Hearts. Jacob has the 2 of Hearts, 7 of Hearts, and 4 of Spades in hand. Because he still has Hearts in hand he must play one of them. They are all weaker than DJ's 9 of Hearts, so Jacob can play either one. Jacob would not have been able to play the 4 of Spades (trump suit) in this situation because he could still follow the led suit.*

## Game Setup

- Place the contract board near the middle of the table, within easy reach of all players.
  - Alternatively, you may designate one player to be the scorekeeper for the whole game. Tokens will be placed on the board and you may want to avoid moving it around.
- For your first game, it is recommended to use the contracts printed on the board. There are other mix-n-match contracts you can use in future games.
- Place the deck, Overbid Penalty card, contract value tokens, and the writing implement near the contract board.
- Each player selects a color and takes 5 cubes matching that color.
- The last player to be filled with rage is the first forehand (may decide at random). Give that player the forehand token and write their name in the player 1 space of the contract board. Fill out the other player's names in clockwise order.



## Gameplay

Berzerka will be played over 15 hands (*9 hands in a short game, explained in more detail on page 10*). A hand will consist of 5 phases in the following order:

- 1) Initial Dealing
- 2) Bidding & Finish Dealing
- 3) Discarding & Drawing
- 4) Trick taking
- 5) End of Hand Scoring

### 1) Initial Dealing

At the beginning of each hand, the forehand will shuffle the deck and deal 7 cards to each player, face down. Players take their cards into hand, but keep them hidden from the other players. The forehand should place the rest of the deck nearby, facedown.



## 2) Bidding & Finish Dealing

Starting with the forehand and going clockwise, each player may bid on a contract or pass. **You cannot bid on a contract that you have already completed this game.** At the beginning of the game no contracts have been completed and any player may bid on any contract.

**Note:** Players are only dealt 7 cards at this time, but the final hand size for the trick taking phase will be 13 cards. This means players are making bids with only (slightly more than) half of their hand. *Berserkers can be filled with blind rage and don't always see clearly when making decisions!* However, there is a situation where players could bid with their entire hand (explained on the next page).

When bidding on a contract you must say the name of the contract and place one of your cubes next to it on the contract board. If your contract requires giving **additional information**, such as picking a trump suit or card rank order, you **do not** provide that information at this time.



*Example: Michelle (Blue) bids by saying "Berzerka" and places her cube next to that contract.*

Players may bid on the same or different contracts during this part of the bidding phase. However, players cannot change contract bids. Once you pick a contract for that hand, it's that contract or bust! In a situation where two or more players want to bid on a contract (same or different), then overbidding occurs.

## Overbidding:

The first time any player bids on any contract they do not need to overbid. However, if there are any subsequent bids, those will require overbidding. To overbid, name your contract, place your cube next to it on the contract board (*if it is not there already*) and take the Overbid Penalty card. If this is the first overbid, place the card with the 1 rotated towards the top. Each time a player overbids another player, they must take the Overbid Penalty card and rotate it by one number ( $1 \rightarrow 2 \rightarrow 3 \dots$ ), increasing the overbid amount. If you have already bid on a contract and another player overbids you, your options are to either continue to overbid or pass.



*Example: DJ (Yellow) overbids Michelle's bid by saying "Hold Steady" and places his cube. This is the first overbid, so DJ takes the Overbid Penalty card and rotates the '1' towards the top. Jacob (Red) passes. At this point, Michelle can either overbid DJ with her Berzerka contract by taking the Overbid Penalty card and rotating it towards the '2' or pass.*

The overbid penalty number is the number of tricks the declarer will subtract from their score that hand (*explained in more detail under End of Hand Scoring on page 8*).

## Passing:

If a player passes, they will no longer participate in bidding this hand (hard pass). Once all but one player passes, that remaining player becomes the declarer. **Only the declarer's contract is played! All other contract bids that were made are ignored.** If any other player bid on a contract, they must take back their placed bid cube now. Then, proceed to i) under Finish Dealing.

## What happens if all players pass? The Forehand is “put in the hotseat”!

It is possible that all three players pass in a row (no one places a bid while holding half their hand). **In this situation, the forehand is put in the hotseat, becomes the declarer, and must bid on a contract.** However, this bid comes after players are dealt the rest of their hand. Proceed to ii) under Finish Dealing.

## Finish Dealing:

- i) **If players reached this step because a bid was made with half their hands:**
- Before the forehand finishes dealing, the declarer must place their bid cube on the bottom right space of the box that matches their contract (*marked x1*).
  - They must also place a contract value token so that it covers up the previous contract value. The value token should be one value higher than the previous value shown (*x1 is covered by x2, x2 is covered by x3, and so on*).
  - Finally, if the contract requires **additional information** (pick trump, card rank order, etc.) the declarer must provide that now.

| Contracts              | Player 1                 |                               |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Berzerka<br>Pick Trump | # of tricks<br><b>x2</b> | Game Points<br>Discard Amount |

*Example: Michelle is the declarer after bidding Berzerka with half of her hand. She places her bid cube on that contract. Next, she places the x2 contract value token covering up the x1 value that was printed on the contract board. Finally, her contract requires additional info (pick a trump suit), so she announces to the table that Diamonds will be trump.*

After the above steps are completed, the forehand should finish dealing the hand by giving each player 6 more cards. Players will now have 13 cards and 13 cards will be left undealt. Place the 13 undealt cards face down, nearby. These undealt cards will be referred to as the draw pile and will be used in the next phase.

## ii) If players reached this step because the forehand was in the hotseat:

- The forehand finishes dealing the hand by giving each player 6 more cards. Players will now have 13 cards and 13 cards will be left undealt. Place the 13 undealt cards face down, nearby. These undealt cards will be referred to as the draw pile and will be used in the next phase.
- The declarer (which is the forehand) must bid on a contract by placing their bid cube to the side of the contract. Do not place it in the x1 space. The value of the contract is also not increased. Do not place a new contract value token.
- Finally, if the contract requires additional info (pick trump, card rank order, etc.) the declarer must provide that now.

| Contracts              | Player 1                 |                               |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Berzerka<br>Pick Trump | # of tricks<br><b>x1</b> | Game Points<br>Discard Amount |

*Example: All three players passed. This puts Michelle, the forehand, in the hotseat. After being dealt the rest of her hand, she bids Berzerka and announces Clubs as trump. She places her bid cube to the left of the contract and does not increase the contract value.*

### 3) Discarding & Drawing

Players will now have the opportunity to discard cards from their hand and draw back up from the draw pile (*the 13 undealt cards*).

#### i) If players reached this step because a bid was made with half their hands:

The declarer starts this phase, making the declarer the first person to interact with the discard/draw steps.

#### ii) If players reached this step because the forehand was in the hotseat:

The player to the left of the declarer starts this phase, making the declarer the last person to interact with the discard/draw steps.

No matter who starts this phase, the 2 steps below are the same for all players and must be done in this order:

##### 1) Discard any number of cards in hand, face down. This can include 0.

- Discards should be placed off to the side. They will not be used for the rest of this hand. Be careful not to confuse them with the draw pile.
- Players may only discard cards equal to or less than the remaining number of cards in the draw pile (e.g. if there are 8 cards left in the draw pile, you may only discard 0-8 cards)

##### 2) Draw an equal number of cards from the draw pile.

- E.g. if you discarded 2 cards, you must draw 2 cards from the draw pile.

Repeat steps 1 and 2 above, with the next player in clockwise order, until:

- All players have had a chance to discard and draw
- The draw pile is empty

*It is possible not everyone gets a chance to discard and draw. This can happen if the first or second player discards and draws enough cards to empty the draw pile. On the flip side, it is possible that there will be cards left in the draw pile. In that case, leave them facedown for the rest of the round. They will not be used this hand.*

**If you are the declarer, you must record the number of cards you discarded by writing that number in the matching contract box.** You must do this no matter how you became the declarer (half hand bidding or being in the hotseat). The other players do not record their discard amounts.

| Contracts              | Player 1                     | Player 2                    | Player 3                       |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Berzerka<br>Pick Trump | # of tricks<br><br><b>x2</b> | Game Points<br><br><b>4</b> | Discard Amount<br><br><b>4</b> |

*Example: Michelle discards 4 cards in hand during her Berzerka (Clubs trump) contract and draws 4 cards from the draw pile. She must write the number 4 in the 'Discard Amount' section of her Berzerka contract.*

### 4) Trick Taking

- This is a **must follow, must beat, must trump** trick taker (*refer to 'Trick Taking Jargon Explained' on page 2 for a reminder of what all this means*).

- The declarer will always be the lead player for the first trick. The winner of the current trick will be the lead player for the next trick.

- When a player wins a trick, they must collect all cards and place them in a facedown pile in front of themselves. If a player wins multiple tricks, make sure to keep the piles separate so all players can easily tell how many tricks someone has won throughout the hand.

#### \*Clubs is trump for all examples

*Trick Example 1) Michelle leads with the 8 of Clubs. DJ follows and beats with the 10 of Clubs. Jacob follows and beats with the 13 of Clubs. Jacob wins and leads the next trick.*

*Trick Example 2) Jacob leads with the 13 of Diamonds. Michelle does not have Diamonds and must trump. She trumps with the 1 of Clubs. DJ cannot beat, but can still follow. He follows with the 3 of Diamonds. Michelle wins and leads the next trick.*

*Trick Example 3) Michelle leads with the 12 of Clubs. DJ cannot beat, but can still follow. He follows with the 9 of Clubs. Jacob is out of Clubs, which is trump, so he cannot beat and cannot trump. Therefore, he can play anything. He plays the 5 of Diamonds. Michelle wins and leads the next trick.*

After all 13 tricks have been played proceed to End of Hand Scoring.

### 5) End of Hand Scoring

**Only the declarer's number of tricks won will be calculated for scoring!** The other players are trying to win (or lose) tricks to have the declarer perform poorly during their contract, but ultimately, only the number of tricks the declarer wins will count for scoring in that hand.

**Important: If the declarer had an overbid penalty, they would subtract that number from their total trick count.**

| Contracts              | Player 1                    | Player 2                    | Player 3                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Berzerka<br>Pick Trump | # of tricks<br><br><b>6</b> | Game Points<br><br><b>4</b> | Discard Amount<br><br><b>4</b> |

*Example: Michelle won 8 tricks during her Berzerka (Clubs trump) contract. She had an overbid penalty of 2. 8-2=6. She writes a '6' in the section marked "# of tricks" for the Berzerka contract. The other two players do not write anything down this hand.*

## Game Points:

If an entire row is complete (*meaning all players have completed that same contract at some point throughout the game*) it is time to hand out game points. Game points are the actual score to the game. The player that did the best at meeting the objective of the contract ranks highest and will gain game points equal to the contract value. The player that did the worst ranks lowest in that contract will lose game points equal to the contract value. The middle player neither gains nor loses game points. For the majority of contracts, the objective is to win the most tricks. But there are some that have different objectives. Please refer to the Contract Appendix for each contract's objective.

| Contracts              | Player 1 | Player 2 | Player 3 |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Berzerka<br>Pick Trump | 6 0      | 8 3      | 3 -3     |
| x3                     | 4        | 4        | 7        |

Example: Michelle won 6 tricks during her Berzerka contract, DJ won 8 tricks, and Jacob won 3 tricks. Berzerka's objective is to win as many tricks as possible. DJ ranks highest, Jacob lowest, Michelle middle. The contract value is x3 so DJ gains 3 game points, Jacob loses 3 game points, and Michelle does not gain or lose game points.

| Bottle It Up<br>Trick Avoidance | 4 | -5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
|---------------------------------|---|----|---|---|---|---|
| x5                              | 6 | 8  | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |

Example: Michelle won 4 tricks during her Bottle It Up contract, DJ won 3 tricks, and Jacob won 0 tricks. Bottle It Up's objective is to lose as many tricks as possible. Jacob ranks highest, Michelle lowest, DJ middle. The contract value is x5 so Jacob gains 5 game points, Michelle loses 5 game points, and DJ does not gain or lose game points.

If there is a tie for '# of tricks', the player who increased the contract value (has their cube placed in the contract box) is considered to be ranked higher.

If both players have their cube there, then the player with the lowest 'Discard Amount' is ranked higher.

If still tied, the player who completed the contract first is ranked higher.

*Designer Note: Players may find it difficult to remember who completed a contract first. If that is the case, I recommend writing a small 1/2/3 in the contract box next to the '# of tricks' to show if you were 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> to complete the contract.*

## Starting A New Hand

If there are any contracts left, proceed to the next hand by performing the following steps in order:

- If the forehand was in the hotseat, return their bid cube to them (it should be next to the contract they bid on)
- Return the Overbid Penalty card and place it next to the contract board
- Pass the forehand token clockwise

- The new forehand should collect all playing cards and shuffle them together

- Repeat the main 5 phases (starts on page 3)

If all contracts are completed (15 hands played), proceed to End of Game.

## End of Game

After all contracts are completed, each player should add (or subtract) all of their game points across all contracts. It is possible to have a negative score. In fact, after the totals are determined, the amounts between the three players should be a zero sum. The player with the highest positive score wins. If there is a tie, the player who completed all of their contracts first wins!

## - Short Game

To play a short game, players should only select 3 contracts instead of 5 contracts. This will make the game 9 hands long instead of 15. If you are using the starter contracts it is recommended to use Berzerka, Hold Steady, and Bottle It Up. Of course, you may use any of the contracts you'd like!

## - Slightly Less 'Push Your Luck' Bidding Variants

The base game, by nature, is designed to be rather cutthroat and includes some push your luck elements. If players are enjoying the compendium nature of the game, but would prefer a slightly friendlier and less push your luck-y game, you may implement either of the following variants. All base game rules are exactly the same, unless stated in the variant.

### Less Mizerka Variant:

- Skip the half hand part of dealing/bidding (start with all 13 cards in hand)
- The bidding phase works the same except players now start the bidding with their entire hand. If all players pass the forehand is still in the hotseat.
- Game values cannot increase, first tiebreaker is now 'Discard Amount'
- Forehand always starts the Discarding & Drawing phase

### Forehand In The Hotseat Is First To Discard/Draw:

- Normally, if the forehand is put in the hotseat they are last to discard and draw. With this variant, they will be first to discard and draw instead.

## Contracts Explained In More Detail

See Contract Appendix for more information

## Credits

**Designer and Rulebook Writer:** Ryan Campbell

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