

## Historic Card Games by David Parlett

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# PIQUET

The classic two-hander

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## How to play it

These are essentially the rules of the English club game as established by the Portland Club in the late 19th century. The principal author and authority was [Henry Jones](#) (1831-99), who wrote under the pen-name 'Cavendish'.

### Cards

Use a 32-card pack ranking AKQJ10987 in each suit.

### Object

To score most points for making card combinations and winning tricks. In basic Piquet (aka **Saunt**), the winner is the first to reach a total of 100 points (or any other agreed target score). In **Rubicon Piquet**, the winner is the player with the higher score after a "partie" of exactly six deals, and the loser is penalised if he fails to "cross the Rubicon" by scoring at least 100 points overall. Points are scored in dribs and drabs throughout play and it is traditional to call out your cumulative total as you go along, not writing it down till the hand has been played out. However, there's no reason why you shouldn't use a crib board or other mechanical device.

### The deal

Each deals in turn. Whoever cuts the lower card deals first. The dealer is called **Younger** and non-dealer **Elder** hand. Deal 12 cards each in batches of two or three. (You must state from the outset whether you are going to deal in twos or in threes, and may not change during the course of a partie.) Spread the remaining eight cards face down on the table, slightly separated into five and three. These eight form the "talon", or stock.

### The blank (*carte blanche*)

A **blank** or **carte blanche** is a hand consisting entirely of numerals, with no face cards. If you're dealt one, you may claim and score **10 points** for it, but you must first prove it by playing your cards rapidly face up on the table. If you are Elder you must do this immediately; if Younger, you announce it immediately but don't show it till Elder has exchanged cards.

### The exchange

**Elder:** You now discard from one to five cards face down and restore your hand to twelve by drawing the same number of cards from the top of the talon. **You must discard at least one.** If you discard fewer than five, you may privately peep at the cards you would have taken had you exchanged all five.

**Younger:** You next similarly discard and draw up to as many cards as remain (at least three). Unlike Elder, you are not obliged to exchange any. If you draw fewer, you may either expose all the untaken cards both to see, or leave them face down for neither to see.

Either player may examine their own discards at any time during the play.

### Declarations

You next state which card-combinations you hold in each of three types or classes designated **point**, **sequence**, and **set**.

In each class, Elder always declares first. If Younger has a higher combination of the same class, or any combination of a class in which Elder has none, they say "Not good" and will eventually score whatever they hold of that class (but not yet). If unable to match it, Younger says "Good", and Elder scores for it immediately. Holding an identical combination in any class, Younger says "Equal" and neither will score for it.

**Point.** Elder announces how many cards he holds in his longest suit and Younger replies "Good" or "Not good" as the case may be. If Younger has an equal number he asks "Making?" and Elder announces the total face value of his point suit, counting Ace 11, courts 10 each, and numerals at face value. Again, Younger states whether or not it is good. If Younger's point suit has the same value, he says "Equal", and neither player will score for the point.

A note about declarations. The point of making a declaration is that you thereby score points in return for giving away information about your hand. You are not obliged to declare any combination if you think it safer to withhold such information than to score points for declaring it. Withholding a combination is called **sinking** it and is an advanced tactic. However, any combination that you do score for must be fully specified to your opponent, and even shown on request, though this is rarely necessary as it can usually be deduced.

**Sequence.** A sequence is three or more cards of the same suit in ranking order. Elder starts by announcing his longest sequence (if any), using the terms **tierce** for a run of three, **quart** (pronounced "cart") for a run of four, **quint** for five, or **sixième, septième, huitième** for six, seven or eight. If Younger cannot match or beat Elder's sequence he replies "Good" and Elder scores for that sequence and any others that he is able to declare. A tierce and quart score 3 and 4 respectively; a quint is 15 and higher sequences 16, 17 and 18 as the case may be. If he can beat it, he says "Not good", and will eventually score for whatever sequences he holds. If he can equal it, he asks Elder to name the top card of the declared sequence, and again replies "Good", "Not good", or "Equal". If still equal, neither player will score for sequences.

**Set.** A set is three or four Tens or higher. (Lower numerals don't count.) Three is a **trio** and scores 3, four a **quatorze** for 14. Elder announces his best set and Younger replies "Good" or "Not good" as the case may be. Any quatorze beats any trio, and as between equal sets a higher-ranking beats a lower. A tie is impossible. Whoever has the highest set score for that and any other sets he is able and willing to declare.

### Announcing the score

The declarations over, Elder now summarises the scores he has made so far, leads a card to the first trick, and counts 1 point "for leading" to the first trick. Younger, before playing a card, then fully identifies and scores for any combinations he holds that are themselves "Good" - that is, which enabled him to describe Elder's as "Not good" - and announces his total score for combinations before playing a card to Elder's lead. In announcing their scores it may be necessary to add one of the following bonuses:

### Pique and repique

**Pique.** If, as Elder, you reach a total of 30 with the addition of points for tricks before Younger has scored anything at all, you add a bonus of **30** for **pique**. (You can't score pique as Younger hand, because you don't score for combinations until **after** Elder has scored 1 for leading to the first trick.)

**Repique.** If you reach a score of 30 or more for combinations alone, before any card is played to a trick, you add bonus of **60** for **repique**. For this purpose, points accrue strictly in order blank, point, sequence, sets.

*Example 1: Elder scores 7 for point, sequences of 15, 4 and 3, and 3 for a trio, giving him  $32 + 60 = 92$ . But if Younger had already called a blank, Elder fails the repique, because the blank counts first.*

*Example 2: Neither scores for point or sequence because Younger replied "Equal" to both, but Younger then calls two quatorzes and a trio for 31, earning 60 more for repique. If, however, Elder had scored for blank, point or sequence, Younger's sets would not earn the repique.*

### Trick-play

Elder hand having led to the first trick, the following rules apply: You must follow suit if you can, but may otherwise play any card. Each trick is taken by the higher card of the suit led, and the winner of each trick leads to the next. There are no trumps.

You add 1 point to your score each time you lead to a trick, and another 1 point each time you capture the lead from your opponent - that is, each time you win a trick to which the other led. Winning the last trick counts an additional 1 point "for last".

### Cards and capot

If you win a majority of tricks (from 7 to 11) you add a bonus of 10 "for cards". If you win all 12, you add a bonus of 40 for **capot**.

### Game

If you are playing up to a target score, play ceases the moment one player reaches that total, leaving the rest of the hand unplayed. (At least, I assume so, but no source that I have consulted is explicit on this point.) In Rubicon Piquet, the sixth deal is played out to the end. If the loser has "crossed the Rubicon" of 100 points, the winner scores 100 plus the difference between their two totals. If not, the loser is said to be "rubiconed", and the winner scores 100 plus the **total** of their final scores.

**Examples.** Napoleon ends up with 154 points to Josephine's 113 and scores 141 points of settlement. (That's  $154 - 113 + 100$ .) Next time round, Josephine finishes with 154 points to Napoleon's 93 and scores 347 in all. (That's  $154 + 93 + 100$ .)

In case of equality, play two more deals to break the tie.

### Simplification

There is a much simpler way of describing the score for tricks, which comes to exactly the same thing as the traditional mode of description used above, namely:

Elder scores "1 for leading", as of right. Thereafter, each trick you win scores 1 point if you led to it or 2 if your opponent did. To avoid having to keep announcing scores as you go along, lay each of your won tricks face down if it scores 1 or face up if it scores 2, then do your counting at the end. (This way of describing things makes it unnecessary to score an additional point for winning the last trick.)

## THE HIGHEST SCORE

It's natural to ask what is the highest score that can be made in a single deal. Elder can win a single hand by a margin of no less than 170 in the following way: After the discard, he holds A-K-Q in each suit and counts 3 for point (rather improbably). Four tierces add 12 for 15, three quatorzes add 42 for 57, and repique makes it 117. One for leading each of twelve tricks, plus 1 for last and 40 for capot, makes 170 in all.

In theory it is possible to concoct an even higher-scoring hand, though it could hardly occur in real play since the winning of all 12 tricks for capot would require younger's co-operation. Still, for the sake of interest here goes: After Counting 10 for blank and exchanging at least three cards, Elder finds himself with a hand consisting of four Aces, four Tens, and King, Queen, Jack, Nine of one suit. Ten plus a point and sequence of six brings him to 32,

repique makes it 92, and two quatorzes make it 120. If permitted to win every trick, he scores 13 for tricks plus 40 for capot, making a final grand total of 173.

## VARIANTS

Piquet has changed little through the centuries and has generally resisted the temptation to engender deviant offspring, though its rules vary slightly from place to place, mostly in connection with minor points of procedure. One particularly interesting continental variation, completely absent from the English tradition, is the addition of a scoring feature called **carte rouge**. This is a hand in which each and every card forms part of at least one scoring combination (whether point, sequence or set), and counts variously 10, 40 or 50 points.

Older French books include adaptations for three players ("Piquet Normand") and for four in partnerships ("Piquet Voleur").

**Auction Piquet**, developed by some English prisoners of war (1914-18), has some interesting features. Players can bid for the right to become Elder hand and exchange five cards, which seems sensible enough, though the introduction of negative bids seems to complicate matters unnecessarily. For details, see MY [Penguin Book of Card Games](#).

**Contract Piquet** is a variant I devised in collaboration with the late Andrew Pennycook. Combinations are scored "above the line" and tricks below, and winning exactly the number of tricks bid attracts a bonus of 30 for "counterpique". Here's a [link](#) to it.

Another of my perversions involves scoring for a **point and sequence of nought**. A void suit discovered after the exchange counts as a point worth 50 for a score of 5 (if good), and as a quint ranking between Ace-high and King-high, for a score of 10 (if good). In other words, either as point or sequence it can be beaten only by a quint major (AKQJ10) or a point or sequence of six or more.

A way of simplifying and enlivening the play is to score a flat 1 point per trick and to award the bonus of 10, not for winning most tricks but for winning the **last** trick.

**Links (open in new windows)**

[Pagat](#): Rules and tactics by Noel Leaver

[Medieval and Renaissance games](#): by Justin duCoeur. Justin describes the old 36-card game presented by 17th-century authors Cotgrave and Cotton. I'm quite certain that he is mistaken in asserting that sequences are like "straights" in Poker in that they do not have to be of the same suit, an assertion based solely on the fact that Cotgrave (copied by Cotton) fails to mention it.

[Carnegie Mellon School of Computer Science](#) A translation from Belarusian

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