

Piquet

- [Introduction](#)
- [Scoring](#)
- [Deal](#)
- [Exchange](#)
- [Declarations](#)
- [Repique and Pique](#)
- [Play of the Cards](#)
- [Advice on Play](#)
- [Illustrative Hand](#)
- [Variations](#)
- [Other Piquet WWW Pages and Software](#)



Players: 2
32

Classic game for two players, which has deservedly survived with very little change since the 16th century. There are scores for longest suit, best sequence, best set of 3 or 4 of a kind and for tricks.

Class: [No Trump Group](#), [Combination by matching](#), [Capture cards or tricks](#)

Region: [Britain](#), [France](#)

★★★★★ Difficulty
♥♥♥♥♥ Popularity
🔥🔥🔥 Trend

Introduction

Piquet is game for two players, using a shortened pack of 32 cards which omits 2 to 6 in each suit. In ascending order, the cards rank **7, 8, 9, 10, J, Q, K, A** (high). A number of French terms are traditionally used for various features of the game and these are included below.

A game consists of a set of 6 deals called a *partie*, with the deal alternating. Each player is dealt 12 cards, with 8 left as a talon. A deal consists of three parts: discarding a number of cards and replacing them from the talon to try to improve the hand, declaring various features in the hand, and then playing the cards in tricks.

Piquet is a very old game. It was well established by 1650 with similar rules to the present ones (it differed in using a 36 card pack with a 12 card talon, elder hand being allowed to change 7 cards, and a game was ended by the first to reach 100, a variant still sometimes played). It was mentioned by Rabelais in 1535 although whether this was the same game is unclear. It has retained its popularity to the present day as one of the best and most skilful card games for two players. The rules described are those published by Cavendish in 1882.

This description was contributed by Noel Leaver.

Scoring

During the play of the hand, players announce their running total for the hand every time they score points. At the end of the hand the final totals are written down and added to the scores so far for the *partie*. The winner is the player who has a higher score at the end of *partie*. If the scores are equal after 6 deals, two more hands are played. If they are then

still equal the partie is a draw. A major aim of the players, apart from scoring more than the opponent over the six deals, is to "get over the Rubicon" by scoring 100 points or more in the partie.

At the end of the partie, if the loser has scored at least 100 points, the loser pays the winner the **difference** between the players' scores plus 100. If the loser has not scored as many as 100 points then the loser pays the winner the **sum** of the players' scores plus 100. If another partie is to be played, the scores are started from zero again.

Examples

At the end of a partie the scores are **A:99, B:120**. Player **A** pays 319 to player **B**.

At the end of a partie the scores are **A:101, B:120**. Player **A** pays 119 to player **B**.

Deal

Deal alternates between the players. Players cut for the highest card. The winner can choose who deals first (but should always choose to deal first, as there is a slight advantage to being non-dealer on the critical sixth hand).

The cards should be shuffled thoroughly. Twelve cards are dealt to each player, leaving 8 over as a talon. Dealer may deal in either 3s or 2s, but must deal her remaining two hands in the partie the same way. The talon is put face down in the middle.

The non-dealer is known as elder hand, the dealer as younger hand.

A player who is dealt a hand with no court cards (J, Q, K) may announce *carte blanche* and score 10 points. It should be announced as soon as it is noticed. The announcement is proved by rapidly dealing the cards face up onto the table after your opponent has discarded but before you discard. If Elder hand has *carte blanche* he announces how many cards he intends discarding so that younger hand can choose her discards before seeing Elder hand's cards.

Exchange

Elder hand exchanges first and must discard at least one and at most five cards face down (in practice, elder hand will almost always exchange 5). He then picks up the same number of cards from the top of the talon. Younger hand then does the same, discarding at least one card and at most the number of cards not taken by elder hand (usually 3), and taking an equal number of cards from the talon. If either player exchanges fewer than the maximum allowed they must announce this before picking up cards. Each player keeps his discards by him, and may refer to them during play to remind himself what he discarded.

If elder exchanges fewer than five cards he can look at the remainder of the five. If younger exchanges fewer than permitted she may expose the remainder (to both players) after elder hand leads.

Declarations

There are three categories of scoring combinations. Only the player with the best combination in each category scores for that category:

Point

the most cards in one suit. The number of cards in the suit is announced (e.g. "point of 5") and it scores this number.

Sequence

the longest run of consecutive cards in one suit (minimum 3). The possible sequences are:

- **tierce** (3 cards, scores 3);
- **quart** (4 cards - pronounced "cart" - scores 4);
- **quint** (5 cards, scores 15);
- **sixième** (6 cards, scores 16);
- **septième** (7 cards, scores 17);
- **huitième** (8 cards, scores 18).

Set

a set of cards of the same rank. There are two types:

- **quatorze** is four Aces, Kings, Queens, Jacks or Tens, and scores 14;
- **trio** is three Aces, Kings, Queens, Jacks or Tens, and scores 3.

Note that sets of 9s, 8s or 7s do not count.

Elder hand declares first, announcing his best combination in each category, usually in the order given. After each announcement, younger hand says "good", meaning elder's is better and can be scored, "not good" if younger has a better combination, or "equal" in which case elder gives more information and younger replies "good" or "not good", or "equal" if they are precisely equal, in which case neither player scores.

Equal length points are compared by adding the face value of each card, court cards being counted as 10 and ace as 11. Equal length sequences are compared according to the highest card, eg **A-K-Q** beats **K-Q-J**. Any quatorze beats any trio, and when comparing two quatorzes or two trios, the one with the higher ranked cards wins.

The player with the winning sequence can score any other sequences they hold. The other player scores nothing for sequences. Similarly, the player with the better trio or quatorze can also score any other trios and quatorzes they hold, but the other player scores nothing for any trios or quatorzes.

After elder hand has declared he leads a card, and then younger hand announces and scores for combinations in categories where she has said "not good" or where elder has not made any declaration.

After Elder Hand has led to the first trick either player may ask to see any combination that has been scored for or which caused no score because of equality, although in practice this is rarely necessary as you can normally deduce what the cards are. You might, for example, after a declaration of three queens ask which one is missing. It is not obligatory to announce your best combination (or to announce anything in a category at all) if you think you can obtain some advantage in the play by concealing the cards, or if you think it is certain to be beaten. Deliberately not announcing a combination is known as **sinking** a declaration. For example, if you only have a trio of tens and are sure your opponent has a trio of aces, there is little point in announcing the tens. However, once elder hand makes a declaration, it cannot be revised by declaring a higher one if younger hand says not good or equal, nor may such better combinations be scored by elder hand if younger hand says good.

Repique and Pique

A player who scores 30 in declarations before his opponent has scored anything gains a **repique** which is worth 60 points extra. A player who scores 30 in declarations and play before his opponent scores anything gains a **pique**, which is worth 30 extra. In deciding whether the 30 has been reached before the opponent scores, points are reckoned strictly in this order:

1. Carte Blanche
2. Point

3. Sequences
4. Quatorzes and trios
5. Points made in play

For example, suppose elder hand chooses not to declare a point or sequence but announces four aces. If younger then announces two quints for 30 points this counts as a repique. Similarly, if elder hand scores 30 for sequences and sets, but younger hand has the better point, elder hand does not score a repique.

Because elder hand always scores one for leading to the first trick, only elder hand can ever score a pique.

Equality in a declaration does not prevent a pique or repique.

Play of the Cards

Play is in tricks with no trumps, and you must follow suit. A point is scored each time a card is led, and an extra point is scored for winning a card led by the opponent. There is one additional point for winning the last trick. The contents of tricks already played may be examined by either player at any time.

The player who wins more tricks scores 10 for **the cards**, or 40 for **capot** if all 12 tricks are won. There is no score for cards if each player wins 6 tricks. The 10 points for the cards or 40 for capot cannot be counted towards a pique.

Advice on Play

The most interesting and difficult part of the game is choosing what to discard. Elder hand, with 5 cards available and the lead is in a much stronger position than younger and should normally go all-out for the best possible hand, ignoring any thought of defence. Younger hand however will want to try and preserve (or pick up) a holding such as Kx or Qxx in what looks likely to be elder hand's longest suit.

It is very rarely correct for elder hand not to take 5 cards; beginners will often exchange only 4 in order to retain a side suit ace or king, but it is better to take the extra card and increase the chance of winning one of the categories or of scoring pique or repique. Also, leaving 4 cards gives younger hand an extra card to exchange. For younger hand it is more frequently correct not to take the maximum, but still rare.

It is normally correct to retain all of your longest suit. It is valuable both for the point and to try and take the cards, as well as the possibility of a sequence. If there are two of equal length, keep the one with the better potential in play, or sometimes the one which is most likely to make a run of five or more. In addition you will normally keep aces and the cards most likely to form a Quatorze or trio. For elder hand, this will often determine all 7 cards to keep.

When deciding what to exchange consider what, from the cards you can see, is the best possible combination your opponent can have. For example, if you have a Quatorze of 10s then if you have, in various suits, at least one A, K, Q and J you know it cannot be beaten ("good against the cards"), and should keep it. If however you have neither an ace nor a king it is unlikely to win, particularly if you are younger hand and only get 3 cards. Similarly, 7 8 9 10 is probably worth keeping as younger hand if you have cards in each suit which prove your opponent cannot have a run of 4, particularly if you think there is a danger of a repique or pique.

As younger hand, while you should still keep your longest suit you should also try to retain a "stop" in each suit (eg Qxx), or to keep cards that might help towards a stop. Often the best discard is a from a suit consisting of three or four small cards: it is no use on its own in the declaration or play, and if you pick more then your opponent's suit cannot be long and is not a great threat. Sometimes it is best to throw a moderately strong 3 card suit such a K J 7: your opponent may avoid leading it, expecting this to set up tricks for you.

Be alert for situations where a particular card picked up would give you a repique (whatever else your opponent holds) - it is always worth discarding in a way that preserves the chance for this to happen.

Note that having a better trio than your opponent is really worth 6 not 3, as you deprive your opponent of the score, but a second trio is only worth 3 points. Similarly, winning the cards rather than your opponent is worth 20 points not 10.

The odds of elder hand picking up one of two particular cards are about 5 to 4 against, so saving an open sequence of 4 (ie one which you can add a card at either end) is usually worth doing provided it would be good against the cards. For younger hand the odds are 5 to 2 against, much less attractive.

Some care is needed in making declarations. For example, younger hand should not automatically say equal to the point because she holds the same number of cards when she can tell it cannot be good. Occasionally you might declare a shorter point than you hold (provided the shorter is good against the cards) to mislead your opponent. You might sink an additional trio or tierce if the three points gained would cause you to fail to win the cards.

With experience, the play of the cards can be near perfect since you know almost all the cards in your opponent's hand. However, beginners will lose many tricks to an experienced player, and with it 10 points for taking the cards. You must be alert to the possibilities of a throw-in, e.g. to give your opponent the lead in a suit where you have no chance of a winner, so that your opponent eventually has to lead to your **A-Q** in another suit, giving you two tricks in that suit. The beginner leads the ace in the faint hope that the king will fall. It is very important to keep careful note of what cards your opponent discards and what is left, taking into account what he has declared (and failed to declare). When playing cards, always play a card you have declared in preference to an equivalent card your opponent does not know about.

A common mistake by beginners is that when their best suit proves to be blocked by the opponent, they may switch and try each other suit in turn. Unless there is another suit which has a good chance of running, it is normally best to continue the first suit.

On the last hand, if the losing player has scored less than 100 this affects the game. The leading player should try to discard to minimise the loser's score. In the play, each time the lead changes hand this in adds one to the score so the loser might try to cause this to happen if it will get his score to 100. However, if the loser has no chance of making 100 each time the lead changes hand it adds one the total score and so it is to the loser's advantage to avoid lead changes. Similarly, the loser who cannot reach 100 wants to have equal declarations (by deliberately declaring a shorter sequence than held, for example) so that no points are scored, and to split the cards if possible.

Illustrative Hand

Ann is playing Bill. In the first hand of the partie she deals him:

♣ A
♠ K Q 10 9 8
♥ K 10 7
♦ A 10 8

This is a fairly straightforward discard. The long suit, spades, should be kept. The ♥7 and ♦8 can be discarded, as they are of little use. There is little point in keeping the other two 10s. The odds are about 3 to 1 against picking up the fourth, and even if you do your opponent may well have four jacks, and they will be of little use in the play. In order to discard 5 cards then one of the two aces and ♥K must be thrown. The king is best: it might be a loser, the hand only has one other king so it is unlikely to form a Quatorze, and as two hearts have already been discarded it is less likely to be Ann's suit (and in any case, it is rarely correct for elder hand to be defensive).

Bill picks up some poor cards from the talon: ♥A J 8, ♣7, ♦J. The resulting hand is:

♣ A 7
♠ K Q 10 9 8
♥ A J 8
♦ A J

Ann has:

♣ K Q 10 9 8
♠ J 7
♥ 9
♦ K Q 9 7

This is a much more difficult discard than Bill's. The clubs should be kept to try to gain the point, also they only need the jack to form a sixième which is good against the cards. The ♦9 7 are obvious discards as you are not saving this suit (and nor is Bill likely to be) and the ♦K Q form a stop.

The choice of the third card is more difficult, although you must throw three to maximise your chances of picking up a club (preferably the jack) and also to try and get a stop in hearts or spades. You could find players who would choose any of the suits. The ♥9 should be kept as part of a possible stop in what seems most likely to be Bill's suit. You might discard the ♣8 on the grounds that if you pick up the jack the quint is still good against the cards, but this reduces both your chances of the point and the playing strength of the hand and should not be done. The discard of the seven of spades is attractive as you still have the jack towards a possible block.

However, discarding a third diamond is slightly better. It is unlikely that this is Bill's suit, and he will not expect it to run so is unlikely to lead it. Being able to keep both two kings and queens is unlikely to score for a trio since you are missing all 4 aces. Similarly, even if you pick up two kings or queens your quatorze is likely to be beaten by a quatorze of Aces. However, the two spades will form a stop if you pick up the queen, and a double stop if you pick up the ace or king. The latter might help you win or split the cards. Ann discards the ♦Q, although the ♦K is equally good, possibly better since Bill is less likely to continue diamonds in the play if the Ace drops the Queen rather than the King. In practice, when choosing between two equal cards, in discarding or in play, you should vary your choice in order to avoid revealing too much to an alert opponent.

Ann is lucky and picks up ♠A, ♥Q and ♣J giving:

♣	K	Q	J	10	9	8
♠	A	J	7			
♥	Q	9				
♦	K					

The declarations go as follows:

Bill: Point of 5

Ann: Not good

Bill: Trio of aces

There is no point in Bill mentioning the sequence of 3, as he knows Ann has a sequence of six in clubs and it just gives Ann additional information

Ann: Good

Bill: 3, [*leads ♠K*] 4

Ann: Point of 6, 6, Sixième for 16, 22, [*plays ♠A*] 23, [*leads ♣K*], 24

Bill: [*♣A*] 5, [*leads ♠Q*] 6

Ann: [*♠7*]

Bill thinks Ann may have ♠J, but there seems no better play than continuing spades.

Bill: [*♠10*] 7

Ann: [*♠J*] 25

Ann now cashes five clubs on which Bill discards down to the two aces and the ♠9

Ann: 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, [*leads any card, confident Bill has only winners left*] 31

Bill: [*playing three remaining cards*] 8, 9, 10, 11 (for last trick)

Ann has won seven tricks and hence the cards, so she scores a total of 41 for the hand. Bill scores 11. This is a very good result for younger hand, as on average elder hand scores about 14 points more than younger.

Saving both spades worked out very well for Ann because Bill saved spades rather than hearts. If she had discarded the ♠7 and kept the ♦Q, Bill would have taken 9 tricks and the scores would have been Ann: 27, Bill: 23. If she had discarded ♣8 the cards would have been split, for a score of Ann: 30 Bill: 12. This illustrates the importance of winning the cards, which represents a swing of at least 22 points.

Variations

The version of Piquet described above is often known in the literature as **Rubicon Piquet**. This became the prevalent form of the game in English-speaking countries from the late 19th century onwards. Many of the books also describe other versions, notably **Piquet au Cent**, in which instead of lasting for 6 deals a game ends when one player has 100 points or more. A player who scores 100 before the opponent has scored 50 wins a double game. A *partie* is the best of 5 games, so is won by the first player who wins three or more games, counting a double game as two. Piquet au Cent has numerous small differences in procedure and some differences in scoring from Rubicon Piquet. For example in some versions of it points are only scored in play when the card that is led or wins the trick is a 10 or higher. In this case it is possible for younger hand to score a pique if elder hand leads a 9, 8 or 7 to the first trick, which does not score a point.

Some people allow a player to score the 10 points for cards as soon as they have won a majority of the tricks, and count this 10 towards the 30 needed for a pique if the opponent has not scored yet. This variant possibly arises from a misinterpretation of the Portland and Turf Club laws of 1882 in which law 69 states ""A capot reckons after points made in play;

and, therefore, does not count toward a pique." The fact that this law mentions the 'capot' but not the 'cards' can create the impression that the 10 for cards, unlike the capot, can count towards pique. However it is clear from law 67 that the 10 for cards are not to be counted until the end of the play, by which time the opponent will have scored at least one point unless elder hand won all the tricks.

Other Piquet WWW Pages and Software

The [Picket](#) page of the [Medieval and Renaissance Games](#) site has a reconstruction of an early form of Piquet, using 36 cards.

Gretchen Miller's [Piquet](#) page also has a summary of the early 36 card game.

[Rules of Piquet](#) are available at the Card Game Heaven web site.

On the German Wikipedia is a description of [Piquet](#) taken from Meyers Konversationslexikon (1888).

[Home Page](#) > [Classified Index](#) > [Trick Taking Games](#) > [Plain Tricks without Trumps](#) > Piquet

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