

Rules for Shafer Shanghai (June 2017)

These are the rules for the variant of Shanghai (aka Michigan Rummy) we play in our house, as played by my family since I was a kid.

The game is played with two decks of cards with jokers. Each player plays for themselves; there are no partnerships. Low score wins.

There are seven hands. Each hand has a different goal, varying with the number of cards dealt.

Hand	Name	Cards	Goal
1	2-of-3	10	Two sets of 3
2	1-of-3/1-of-4	10	One set of 3, one straight of 4
3	2-of-4	10	Two straights of 4
4	3-of-3	10	Three sets of 3
5	2-of-3/1-of-4	12	Two sets of 3, one straight of 4
6	1-of-3/2-of-4	12	One set of 3, two straights of 4
7	3-of-4	14 /13 ‡	Three straights of 4

‡ The number of cards dealt in the seventh hand depends on the number of players. If the number exceeds six, then only thirteen cards are dealt instead of the normal fourteen.

Game play follows normal conventions: after the first card is turned face up in the discard pile, the player to the left of the dealer starts. Play continues to the left, with players selecting either the top card from the discard pile or the top card from the draw pile, discarding a card to end their turn. Only the top card on the discard pile should be seen.

The goal of the hand is a combination of “sets” and “straights”. **“Sets” are cards with the same rank**, e.g. “5 of hearts, 5 of clubs, and 5 of diamonds”. **“Straights” are four card, in-suite straights**, e.g. “5, 6, 7, and 8 of hearts”. An ace may be high or low, but straights cannot “wrap around”, e.g. “Q, K, A, and 2 of clubs”.

The game uses the term “buy” for when an out-of-turn player takes a card. If a buyer wants the top card on the discard pile, he stops the next player before their turn begins and requests a “buy” from the player, typically saying **“I’ll buy that!!”**. If the player approves, the buyer picks up the discard, along with the top two cards from the draw pile, followed by the discard of a single card. The player may reject a buy request only by picking up the discarded card (not a card from the draw pile).

The number of buys is **limited to two per hand** per player. Since a buy increases the number of cards in the buyer’s hand by two cards, the number of buys used can be learned by counting the cards in a player’s hand.

In addition, the player may buy either the top discard or the top draw card during that player’s turn or during their buy. The former allows access to deeper cards in the discard pile, while the latter allows a “desperation buy” that gives some slim hope to players on the verge of losing a hand. The player must then discard multiple cards, one for their turn and one for each buy.

When a player holds cards sufficient to fulfill the “goal” of the hand, they may “lay down” during their turn (not during a “buy”). **Only the minimum cards required for the goal can be laid down**. These cards are played in front of the player, allowing other players to see them.

Starting in the turn after a player has laid down, the player may begin to play “hits” during their turn. Hits are played on the player’s own groupings as well as those laid down in front of other players. Hits are placed

on the appropriate groupings. Hits follow the same rules as the initial hand's goals, such as straights must be in suite, in sequence, and cannot wrap around.

When laying down in a hand with more than one straight-of-four, the straights may not be "adjacent", e.g. one with "2, 3, 4, and 5" of hearts and one with "6, 7, 8, and 9 of hearts". There must be at least one card of spacing or overlap to avoid this situation. This rule does not apply to hits.

Similarly, when laying down in a hand with more than one set-of-three, the sets cannot be the same rank, e.g. six Queens as two groupings.

Jokers are wild cards and may be used in place of any card, but when "laying down", only one joker can appear in any specific grouping. This rule does not apply to hits.

When playing hits, a player may replace a joker in their groupings with the actual card, playing the joker elsewhere as a hit. Once placed in a grouping, only the owner of that grouping can replace the joker even if another player played the joker as a hit.

The hand is won when a player plays the last card in their hand as a hit. A player cannot discard their last card, but must go out "on a hit".

When the hand has been won, each player counts the points from the cards remaining in their hand. Only the cards in the hand are counted, not the cards "laid down" or played as hits.

Card	Points
2-9	5
10, J, Q, K	10
A	15
Joker	25

When all seven hands have been played, the points from each hand are totaled and the lowest score wins.

Some general tips:

Use the two buys carefully. In general, save them to acquire cards that complete groupings. Watching the card you desperately need land on the top of the discard pile when you can't buy it is a painful experience.

In the "set-of-three" oriented hands (the first and fourth hands), laying down early is an advantage, especially with large numbers of players, since the hands tend to go quickly once the first player lays down. With five players in the fourth hand, fifteen groupings are potentially played, making almost any card a hit.

In the "straights" oriented hands (the third, sixth and seventh hands), consider waiting to lay down while collecting hits, since hits will be harder to come by.

This is a long game, but hands can be played over a series of nights.

The "desperation buy" of the top draw card can be surprisingly successful, but should be used only when all other hope is gone and the odds of getting caught with a heavy hand are too high to ignore.

Watch what other players are picking up for clues to what they are collecting. When possible, avoid "telegraphing" what you are collecting, since it helps other players retain potential hits on you, but means you won't get those cards.

Buys during your turn allow you to "bury" a card that might be a hit or a "must have" for another player.