



ARCHDUKE



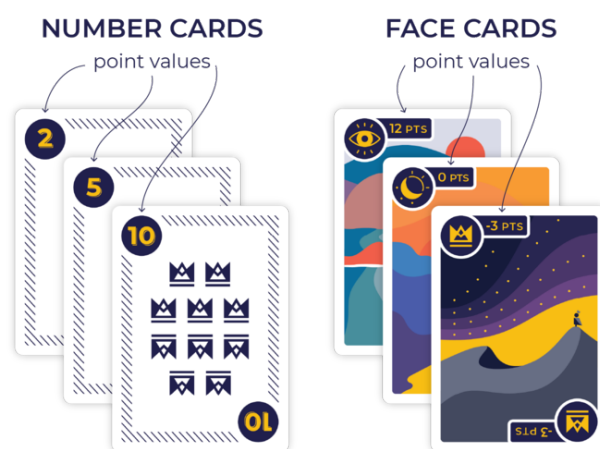
by Ryan Tibbitts

How to Play Archduke

Archduke is a fast-paced card game that combines elements of speed, memory, luck, and competition. It's quick to learn and can be played by 2-6 players using one deck, or up to 12 by combining two decks - though the optimal group size is 4-10.

SUMMARY

Players have a set of cards (starting with four) placed face-down in front of them: some that they know, and some that they don't. Each card has a point value, ranging from -3 to 13, shown in the corners of the card. The goal is to have the lowest sum of points at the end of each round, accomplished by swapping, stealing, and getting rid of cards. Points are scored after each round, with the game continuing to an agreed mark (see **GAME END** below) when the player with the lowest score wins.



SETUP

Grab a pen and paper (or use a phone) to score players' points. It's recommended to keep this scorecard handy so that all players can know who's winning at any time.

Shuffle the cards and deal four, face-down, to each player. Each player then arranges their cards in a 2x2 grid in front of them. Throughout the game, it is important that as cards come and go, they 1) always remain face down, and 2) their positions never be rearranged.

The remaining cards are placed face-down in the center of the table to form a draw pile.



Before the game begins, players have **ONE** opportunity to look at any **TWO** of their own cards, returning them to the same face-down position. Players should remember their value and location.

Once all players have looked at their two cards, the dealer turns over the first card of the draw pile to form the start of a discard pile. Play begins by the player left-of-dealer, and any other player may immediately match if possible (see **MATCHING** below).

PLAY

In general, a player's turn consists of drawing a card and, if they choose to keep it, exchanging it for one of the face-down card in their set.

First, the player picks the top card from either the draw pile or discard pile.

If picking from the draw pile, the player looks at the new card (keeping it secret) and chooses to keep it if desirable or immediately discard if undesirable. If the player chooses to keep the drawn card, they use it to replace one of the cards face down in front of them (being careful to replace and not rearrange). They may choose to replace a card that they already know (e.g replace a high point card with a low point card) or gamble on a card that they don't.

If picking from the discard pile, the card must be kept and is replaced into the player's set in the same way.

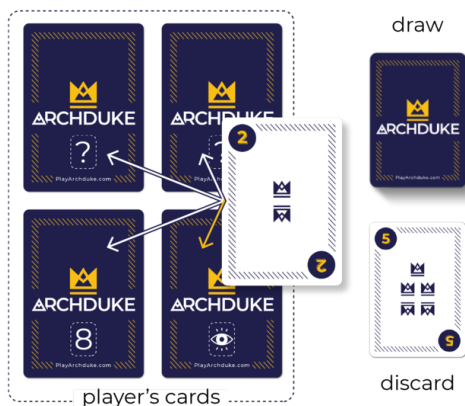
In either case, the card being replaced is immediately discarded face-up and—if the card is an action card (see below)—the player takes the appropriate action. Once that action is resolved, this player's turn is over and play continues clockwise.

Play continues until one player announces “Archduke” (see below), signaling the end of a round. If the draw pile is exhausted, shuffle the discard pile to form a new draw pile and continue playing; however, if this happens frequently, consider playing with two decks instead of one.

FIRST TURN EXAMPLE:

DRAW

Our player takes from the draw pile and finds a **2**. They choose to exchange this **2** for their **PEEK** card because a) it improves their position by 10 points and b) activates the **PEEK** action upon discard.



REPLACE

Upon discarding the **PEEK** card, our player is granted the ability to peek at any one card on the table. They choose one of their own, and now know three of their four cards. Our player's turn is over.



MATCHING

Matching is the only way to *get rid of* cards. At any point in the game, if a discarded card matches the value (for number cards) or symbol (for face cards) of one of the players' own cards, they may quickly discard that matching card without replacement, thus creating an empty space in the player's set.

Important: This window of opportunity is only open until the next player in rotation starts their turn by touching either draw pile (see optional Nola Rule below). It's advantageous for a player to anticipate their upcoming turn in order to shorten the other players' matching window.

For example, Player A discards a 7 at the end of their turn. Player C knows that they also have a 7 in their set and, *even though it's not their turn*, quickly match it on top the discard pile before Player B is able to start their turn.

If a player goes to match their card but is either too late (the upcoming player beats them to the draw) or the cards don't actually match, they must keep the attempted match AND take a penalty card from the draw pile, adding it to their set without peeking.

There is no limit to the amount of cards that can be matched at one time. For example, multiple players may match at once, or one player may match multiple cards. A player may even match on their own discard (e.g A player has a 6 in their set and draws a new 6. They may immediately discard that drawn 6, then also match their original 6 on top).

ACTION CARDS

Certain face cards grant a player special actions upon being discarded or matched, even if that card was just pulled from the draw pile (e.g a player draws and immediately discards a PEEK card to activate it). If multiple cards are matched, multiple actions are taken in the order matched.

Note: As described above, a player choosing to draw an action card from the discard pile **must** place it into their set. However, once in their set, the player may discard that action card on a subsequent turn to activate it.



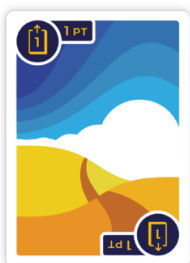
PEEK

The player may **PEEK** at any one card on the table; theirs or another player's.



SWAP

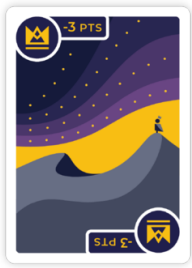
The player may **SWAP** the position of any two cards on the table, one-for-one. i.e They may steal another players card in exchange for their own, or swap one card each of two opposing players in order to confuse them both. No player (including the one swapping) may look at their new card.



GIVE

The player may **GIVE** a penalty card from the draw pile to any other player, adding it to their set. The receiving player does not get to look at their new card. Like penalty cards, this may cause the player to have more than 4 cards.

SPECIAL POINT CARDS



ARCHDUKE

Keep track of this **ARCHDUKE** card, as it's the only one worth *negative* points instead of positive.



ECLIPSE

Pay attention to these **ECLIPSE** cards, as some are worth 0 points, whereas others are worth 13! Note that the symbol here indicates these cards may be matched with one another, but they do not have an associated action.

ROUND END

Play continues until one player believes they have the lowest sum of points at the table. At the end of their own turn, any player may announce “Archduke” signaling the end of the round. All other players (except the one who called Archduke) play a final turn, and points are tallied.

If the player who called Archduke does, in-fact, have the fewest points, all points are scored and a new round begins as normal. However, if a different player tied or beat them with a lower score, the player who called Archduke is “assassinated” and must draw a random penalty card from the draw pile, adding its value to their score for the round.

Important: After calling Archduke, that player is immune from action cards played by others. i.e they cannot be swapped from a **SWAP** card or given extra cards from a **GIVE** card. They may continue to match as normal, and are still subject to penalty cards from their own mistakes.

If, at any point, a player matches down to zero cards, the round ends immediately and points are tallied. This may even happen after “Archduke” has been called. In this case, points are assessed as normal: this player has zero points, which may be lower than the player who called Archduke, causing that player to draw a penalty card. It might also happen (though very rare) that a player who’s called Archduke also matches down to zero cards *but* is beaten by another player who has less than zero points. In this case, the player who called Archduke must still draw a penalty because they were beaten.

GAME END

A full game of Archduke consists of several rounds played until an agreed-upon mark. At that point, the player with the lowest total score wins. This mark may be as short or as long as desired. Below are some suggested marks, each with their own nuances, but feel free to adapt your own.

1. Once a player reaches a certain point threshold, they are eliminated from play. Continue playing (and eliminating) until only one player remains. If all remaining players cross the threshold on the same round, the lowest total score wins.
 - For larger groups, eliminate players until only three remain. One more round is played.
2. Once any player reaches a certain point threshold (e.g 100 points), the game ends.
3. Play a set number of rounds (e.g 10 rounds).
4. Set a timer and play for a determined period of time (e.g 30min).
5. Play until you get bored.

OPTIONAL “NOLA” RULE

At the start of a player’s turn, the first deck they touch (draw or discard) is the one they have to draw from.

If played aggressively, it’s possible to prevent any matching by anticipating a discard and immediately touching one of the draw piles. For novice or less-competitive players, this can ruin the spirit of the game. This rule forces a player to wait and consider the discard, if only for a split second, before starting their turn.

Note: This rule is optional, and assumed to not be in effect until invoked.