Welcome!

Pairs is a simple press-your-luck card game, using an unusual “triangular” deck. The deck contains the numbers 1 through 10, with 1x1, 2x2, 3x3, and so on. You can play many different games with your Pairs deck, but let’s start off with the basic rules.

The Basics: Pairs has no winner, just one loser. In each round, players will take turns drawing cards, until one person either folds or gets a pair. Either of these scores points, and points are bad. The first player with too many points loses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Players</th>
<th>Target Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The formula: Take 60, divide by players, then add 1.)

Target Scores

Penalties: If you like, you can choose a penalty for the loser. The loser could tell a joke, buy a round of drinks, make a funny noise, or whatever is appropriate for your group.

Playing the Game

Getting Started: Shuffle the deck and burn (discard) five cards, facedown, into the middle of the table. This is the start of the discard pile. Each time you reshuffle, you will burn five cards again. (This makes it harder to count the cards.)

To start each round, deal one card faceup to each player. The player with the lowest card will go first.

On Each Turn: On your turn, you have two choices: You may hit (take a card), or fold. If you catch a pair, or fold, the round is over and you score points. If not, play passes to the left.

Pairing Up: When you hit, you’re hoping not to get a pair (any two cards of the same rank). If you pair up, you score that many points. For example, if you catch a pair of 8’s, you score 8 points. Keep one of those cards, faceup, to track your score.

Folding: You can surrender (fold) instead of taking a card. When you do this, you take the lowest card in play and keep it for points. You may choose this card from all players’ stacks, not just your own.

Folding can be better than hitting, depending on the odds of catching a pair, but it’s up to you to decide when to do it.

Ending the Round: As soon as one person pairs up or folds, the round is over. Discard all the cards in play, facedown into the middle, and start another round.

Players keep their scoring cards aside, faceup. These cards will not return to the deck until the game is over.

Reshuffling: When the deck runs out, reshuffle the discards. Pause the game, shuffle, and resume where you left off. (Remember to burn five cards off every new deck.)

Using a Cut Card: This deck includes one blank card, or “cut card.” Keep this card on the bottom of the deck, where it prevents players from seeing the bottom card. When you reach the end of the deck, you can use the cut card to mark where play was interrupted. Place it back on the bottom after you shuffle.

Losing the Game: There is no winner, just one loser. The game ends when one player reaches the target score (see the Target Scores chart on the left). For example, in a 4-player game, the loser is the first player to score 16 points.

Keep Playing! We hope you’ll enjoy playing Pairs. Please visit playpairs.com for more games.

Who Should Deal? One player can deal for the whole game, or the role of dealer can pass around the table. The dealer’s position doesn’t matter, since the starting player is always determined by the low card.

Variation: Continuous

Continuous Pairs is nearly the same as basic Pairs, except that when a player pairs up or folds, only that player’s cards are discarded. Everyone else keeps their cards, and that player is still in, currently with an empty stack. This game is basically one long round, instead of several short ones.

Here are a couple of rules clarifications for Continuous:

1. When you fold, you may take any card in play.
2. When you have no cards, you must always hit.

Continuous Pairs can be a great change of pace. Try it out!
About the Faen Deck:

The Faen Pairs deck, by Nate Taylor, is based on the books of Patrick Rothfuss, including the Kingkiller Chronicles (The Name of the Wind and The Wise Man's Fear, from DAW Books). Here’s how Pairs figures into that world (from Patrick Rothfuss):

**Pairs** exists in one form or another throughout the civilized world, from Vintas and the Commonwealth to the farthest corners of the small kingdoms. In his seminal history, The Chains of Empire, Etrekan speculated that the game originated in Atur, and was spread by conquest, just as Atur brought rule of law, common language, and a standardized system of timekeeping to the lands it subjugated.

Many scholars disagree, citing as evidence Modegan decks that appear to predate Atur’s expansion by more than 400 years. Others point out iconography in Aturan decks that predates the empire and seems to originate in pre-plague Calupenten. The game’s origin seems lost to history, with countless regions having their own decks and variations of play.

The Faen play a Pairs variant called Hawthorn, described here. You can play this game with any Pairs deck, of course.

Game Variant: Hawthorn

**Hawthorn** is a game like Pairs, but using a hand of cards. Players alternate taking cards from their own hands, and the deck. It feels a bit like poker, even though there is no betting.

**Players:** 2 to 6

**You Need:** A Pairs Deck, and chips or coins for gambling, about 100 per player. You also need a button (a marker or a special coin) to designate the “first player.”

**To Begin:** Everyone antes one coin into the pot. Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of five cards to each player, facedown.

**The First Card:** Each player chooses a starting card, and these cards are revealed simultaneously. After that, play starts with the low card, and proceeds clockwise around the table.

If there is a tie for low card, break the tie by dealing more cards from the deck, discarding and replacing any paired cards, as in Pairs.

Give the first player the button. Every round in the game will begin with this player, or to this player’s left, if she drops out. This is important because the rules of play change on alternate rounds, and it’s easier to remember that the round type changes each time the play reaches the button.

There are two kinds of rounds, called deck and hand rounds. The first round will be a deck round.

**Deck Rounds:** In a deck round, play proceeds roughly as it does in Pairs. Players may opt to hit (take one card from the deck), or fold.

If you fold, rather than scoring points, you must pay coins into the pot. The price of folding is the value of the lowest card in play. (Turn your cards facedown to show that you are out.)

If you hit, you are hoping not to get a pair. If you do, you are out, and you pay a penalty equal to the value of the pair. For example, if you are knocked out by a pair of 8’s, you pay 8 coins into the pot, and you are out.

**Hand Rounds:** Once the action returns to the first player, the rules change. In a hand round, you will play a card from your hand, rather than taking one from the deck. The rules are the same for folding and pairing, so of course you will play an unpaired card if you can, and you will fold if you can’t.

Play continues, alternating between Deck and Hand rounds, until only one player remains. That player wins the pot.

**Strategy:** The rank of your starting card will determine whether you go first, and it will also affect your odds of pairing up on the first round. If you’d rather not catch a pair, play low. If you’d rather not go first, play high.

Each time you play a card from your hand, you can reduce the price of folding (for yourself and everyone else) by playing a lower card than is currently in play.

And note that the price of folding can go up, since cards leave play when their owners go out.

You’ll need to play Hawthorn a few times to see how it works. There is some strategy and tension, and even some good opportunities for bluffing.

Credits

Pairs was designed by James Ernest and Paul Peterson, with help from Nate Taylor, based on the works of Patrick Rothfuss. Playtesters include Adam Sheridan, Ahna Blake, Bob De Dea, Boyan Radakovich, Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, Daniel Solis, Debbie Mischo, Don Flinspach, Hal Mangold, Jeremy Holcomb, John Mischo, Jonathan Pingold, Kenneth Hite, Mike Selinker, Nathan Clarenburg, Nora Miller, Owen Jungemman, Rick Fish, Shawn Carnes, Tom Saxton, and many others. Edited by Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, Christopher Dare, and Mike Selinker. Made possible through Kickstarter! Pairs and the Pairs logo are © and ™ 2014 James Ernest and Hip Pocket Games, Seattle WA: www.hippocketgames.com. For more rules, variants, alternate decks, and more, please visit us at www.playpairs.com