



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:

	Target Scores				
Players:	2	3	4	5	6+
Losing Score:	31	21	16	13	11

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

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.

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.

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.

Ties for Low Card: If there is a tie for lowest card at the start of the round, deal an extra card to the tied players, and use those cards to break the tie. (You might have to repeat this.) If any player catches a pair in this step, you discard the paired card and deal a replacement. You can’t lose by catching a pair on the deal.

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. 

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!

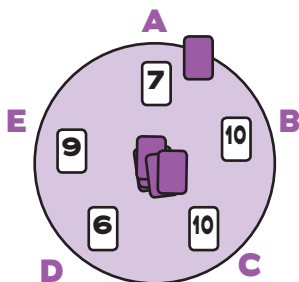
An Example of Play

Here is an example showing how to play a round of Pairs step-by-step. If you're new to the game, this walkthrough should give you a sense of how it flows.

The Players: This is a 5-player table, featuring Angie, Bob, Carlos, Delia, and Echo. In the diagrams, they are Players A, B, C, D, and E.

The Target Score: Because we have five players, the target score is 13 points. (See the chart on the previous page.) That means the first player to score 13 points will *lose*.

Setup: Angie is dealing (see the diagram below). She shuffles the deck, puts the cut card on the bottom, and burns five cards into the middle, to start the discard pile. She then deals one card to each player, faceup, so the table looks like this:



Delia is First: Because she has the lowest card, a 6, Delia will take the first turn. Her choices are to *fold for 6 points*, or to take a *hit*, and risk getting 6 points. Obviously, she takes a hit. (This is usually the right choice on the first turn.) Delia's new card is an 8, so she avoided pairing up. Hooray!



Echo's Turn: After Delia, the turn goes left. Echo can hit her 9, or fold for 6 points. Folding for 6 seems costly, and hitting the 9 isn't all that risky. (There are only eight 9's left in the deck.) So Echo takes a hit, and catches a 3.



Angie's Turn: Angie is next. She could now fold for 3 points, since Echo has a 3, but she decides to take a hit. She catches a 9.



Bob's Turn: Bob has a 10. He could fold for 3 points, but he decides to take a hit. He gets a 5.



Carlos' Turn: Carlos is a cautious player. Rather than risk pairing his 10, Carlos folds, and takes the 3. Everyone's cards are then discarded, facedown in the center, but Carlos keeps Echo's 3 for three points. (If Carlos had taken a hit, rather than folding, and if he had paired his 10, he'd get 10 points instead of 3.)

Dealing the Next Rounds: Angie won't reshuffle until the deck is empty. She keeps dealing until she reaches the bottom, or until someone loses the game.

Reshuffling: When it's time to reshuffle, Angie shuffles only the discards (not the cards in play, and not the cards that have been kept for score). After shuffling, she burns five cards, then resumes dealing wherever she left off.

Ending the Game: The game continues until one player scores 13 points. That player loses the game.

Breaking a Tie for Low

In this example round, there is a tie for low card. Angie deals more cards to break the tie, one to each low card:

	A	B	C	D	E
First Cards:	10	4	4	10	7
Tie Breaker:		8	9		

Thanks to the tiebreaker, Bob will go first. He has 4-8, which is lower than 4-9. (If Angie deals a pair when breaking a tie, she discards the paired card and deals another card.)

Some Hints for Dealing

You can keep the game moving along by calling out the cards and making sure that every player acts in order.

As mentioned above, it doesn't matter if one player deals all the time, or if the deal passes around the table. The first player is always determined by the low card, and that's fair no matter where the dealer sits.

Be sure to deal cards in a *consistent order*. Start with the player on your left each time, and deal tiebreaking cards in the same order, starting on your left.

To use the cut card, place it on the table after you shuffle. Cut the deck onto the card, and then pick up the deck. The bottom card should be hidden by this process.

Credits

Pairs was designed by **James Ernest** and **Paul Peterson**, with help from **Joshua Howard** and **Joe Kisenwether**. 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 Fingold, Kenneth Hite, Mike Selinker, Nathan Clarenburg, Nora Miller, Owen Jungemann, Rick Fish, Shawn Carnes, Tom Saxton, and many others. Edited by Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, Christopher Dare, and Mike Selinker. Made possible through **Kickstarter!**

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