



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!

About the Shallow Ones Deck:

The Shallow Ones deck was illustrated by **John Kovalic** for the 2014 Pairs Kickstarter project. This rules sheet includes a poker-like variant called Monster.

Game Variant: Monster

Monster is a Pairs game based on the best dealer's choice poker game of all time, **Frankenstein**. Monster doesn't work exactly the same, since this isn't poker. But it's got a bit of the same flavor.

Players: 4 to 8

You Need: A Pairs deck and coins or chips for gambling, about 100 per player.

Summary: Monster is a self-contained gambling game, like poker, although a single game can take several rounds. The deal passes to the left after each game (when the pot clears). This means that the same player can act first for many rounds. This is balanced out over multiple games.

To Begin: Start by paying an *ante* into the pot. If you have 4 or 5 players, the ante is 2 coins. With 6 or more, the ante is 1 coin. (The ante is paid only on the first round of every game).

Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of six cards to each player. The player on the dealer's left will act first.

On Each Turn: Each player acts once, in turn. On your turn, you may *discard* zero to three cards, or *fold*. You are *not allowed* to keep a hand that includes a pair. You may want to fold some other hands as well, depending on circumstances.

Your discards go facedown into a pile in the middle, which becomes the Monster's hand. Folded cards *do not* go to the Monster; they are completely out of play.

The Showdown: After each player has acted, there is a showdown for best hand. Then, the high hand must compete against the Monster.

Definition of High Hand: Any player hand that contains a Pair is a losing hand, and can't be kept for the showdown.

All hands in the showdown will be compared by highest card, then second highest card, and so on. The best player hand is 10-9-8-7-6-5. A card is better than nothing, so a hand with 10-8-7-4 is better than just 10-8-7.

This is similar to comparing poker hands for high card, except that there is no limit on the number of cards that can play, and it doesn't matter if your cards are in sequence.

The Monster uses the same rules, but it *ignores pairs*. Treat the Monster as if it had only one card of each rank.

When a player faces the Monster, he *must beat it* to take the pot. Otherwise, the player loses, pays 5 coins, and is out of the game. (The Monster beats the player in a perfect tie.)

Moving Forward: If no one beats the Monster, shuffle and play another round with the surviving players. Players who fold, or who lose to the Monster, are out. The game ends when someone beats the Monster, or when only one player is left.

Ties: Two players who beat the Monster with exactly the same hand will split the pot. Two players who are exactly tied, but lose to the Monster, must each drop out and pay the 5 coin penalty, unless they are the only two players remaining, in which case they pay 5 coins but *play another round*.

Strategy: In the first few rounds, you may want to "duck," playing low hands and trying *not* to fight the Monster. As players leave the game, it becomes easier to fight for the pot. You'll have to experiment with different strategies as your group learns the flow of the game. 

Other Gambling Rules

Here are a few ways to gamble on the basic Pairs game. Feel free to invent your own!

Note that you don't have to play for real money just to make gambling fun. Just keep score with chips, and see who has the most at the end of the night.

Seattle Rules: At the end of the game, the loser pays one coin to every player.

Tacoma Rules: The loser pays a predetermined amount (for example, 6 coins) to the player with the *lowest score*. Tied players split the prize. If the award is split, leave odd coins in the pot for the next game.

Olympia Rules: The loser pays the player(s) with the lowest score, as in Tacoma, but the penalty is equal to *the difference in those players' scores*. This makes each point more interesting! (It sounds more expensive than the versions above, but you can play for smaller stakes.)

Credits

Pairs was designed by **James Ernest** and **Paul Peterson**, with help from **Joshua Howard** and **Joe Kisenwether**. *Frankenstein* was invented by E. Jordan Bojar. *Shallow Ones* artwork by **John Kovalic**. 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!**

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