

Le Plateau

2-6 players

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Development: Sean Ross

Le Plateau is a pretentiously trendy Montreal neighbourhood infamous for its exorbitant rents.

Components

The BrownCastle Games edition of Le Plateau includes the following:

- Board: The board consists of 37 spaces arranged in a 4×4×4 hexagonal grid.
- Bidding table
- Bidding peg
- 37 double-sided counters
- 42 tokens:
 - 18 trick tokens
 - 16 card tokens
 - 8 card tokens

Note:

- Le Plateau requires a 78-card French Tarot deck, which isn't included in the BrownCastle Games edition of Le Plateau.
- You'll also need materials with which to keep score, such as paper and pencil or cold hard cash.

78-card French Tarot deck

A French tarot deck has five suits: A trump suit and four non-trump suits: spades, hearts, clubs, and diamonds. It also includes one special card called the *excuse*.

Trump suit

In Le Plateau, the *excuse* is the highest-ranked trump card. It has a star for its index. The rest of the trump cards are numbered from 21 (second-highest) to 1 (lowest).



The four highest-ranked trump cards

Trump cards rank, from highest to lowest: Excuse, 21, 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Non-trump suits

There are 14 cards in each of the four non-trump suits. The four highest cards of each suit are as follows:

- R: *roi* or king
- D: *dame* or queen
- C: *cavalier* or knight
- V: *valet* or jack



The king, queen, knight, and jack of hearts

Non-trump cards rank, from highest to lowest: R, D, C, V, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Counters

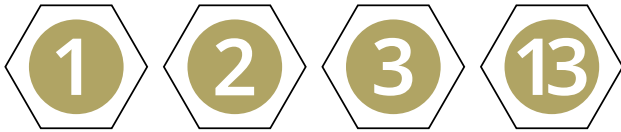
Each counter has two distinctive sides. They could be of different colours or different patterns. Assign one side to the declarer's team and the other to the opposing team.

Example: Suppose your counters are dark brown on one side and beige on the other. The declarer's team would always play with the counters' dark brown side while the opposing team would always play with the beige side.

Tokens

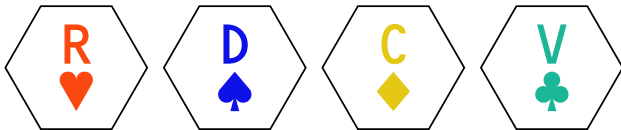
During game setup, you'll place one token in each space of the board. There are three types of board spaces depending on the token that's in the space: trick, card, and trump.

Trick spaces



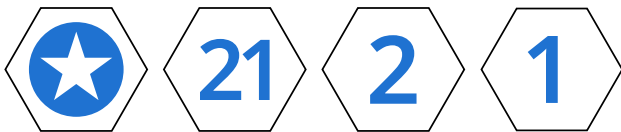
A team places one of their counters on a trick space when they win the corresponding trick. For example, they place a counter on trick space 1 by winning the first trick.

Card spaces



A team places one of their counters on a card space when they win a trick containing the corresponding card.

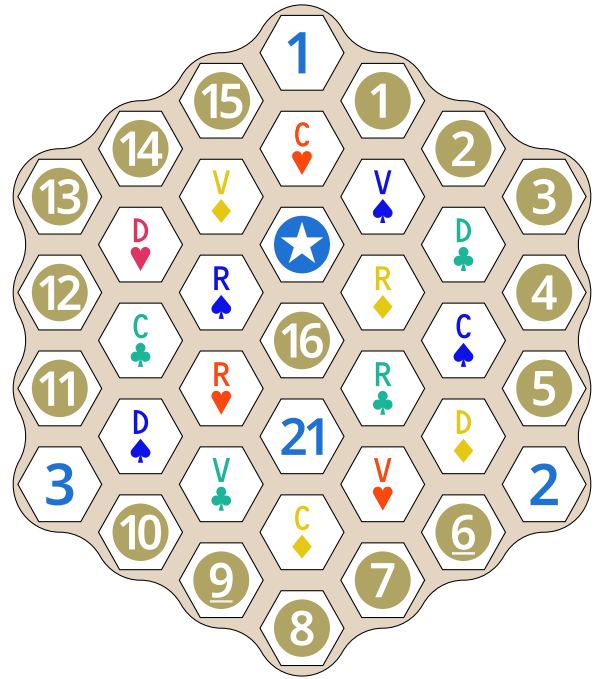
Trump spaces



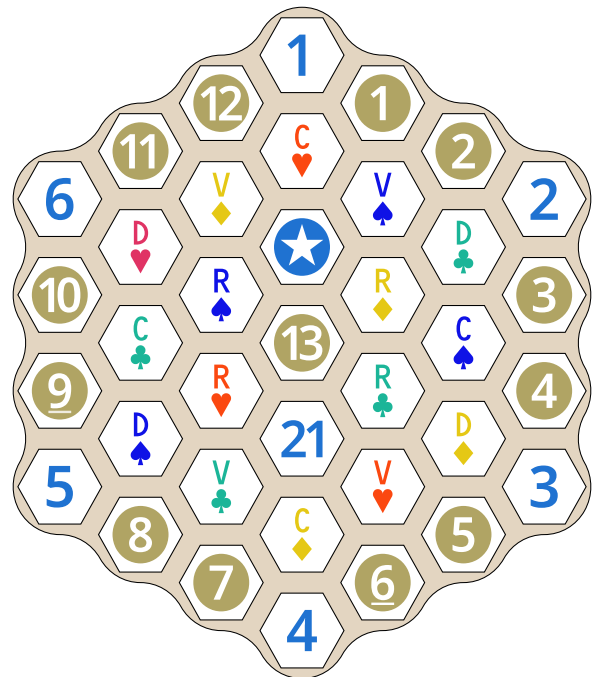
A team places one of their counters on a trump space when they win a trick containing the corresponding trump card. The trump token with a star represents the *excuse*.

Setup

1. Depending on the number of players, put a token in each board space as shown in one of the following diagrams. Place the filled board in the centre of the table.



Board setup for 2 players



Board setup for 3-6 players

2. Place the counters, bidding table, and bidding peg next to the board.
3. Remove cards from the deck depending on the number of players as specified in the following table:

Deck composition		
Players	Cards to remove	Deck size
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 through 9 in spades, hearts, clubs and diamonds 8 through 15 in trumps 	34
3	1 through 9 in spades, hearts, clubs, and diamonds	42
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 through 6 in hearts, clubs, and diamonds 1 through 5 in spades 	55
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1, 2, and 3 in hearts and diamonds 1 and 2 in spades and clubs 	68
6	None	78

4. Seat the players around the board. Choose the dealer for the first hand.
5. Decide how many hands you want to play. Ensure that this number is divisible by the number of players so that everyone gets to deal an equal number of times. Alternatively, you can stop playing when you're sick of the game.

Phases

Each hand consists of the following phases:

1. Deal
2. Bidding
3. Card exchange
4. Picking a partner
5. Increasing the objective characteristic
6. Card play
7. End of hand

1. Deal

Move all counters off the board but leave the counters in board. The dealer shuffles the deck. The process to deal cards varies by the number of players:

Two players

1. The dealer deals 5 face-down piles of 2 cards each to each player.

2. The dealer deals a hand of 6 cards to each player.
3. The 2 cards remaining form the talon. Set them to the side, face down.
4. Each player flips the top card of their 5 piles face up.

Three to five players

1. The dealer deals a hand of 13 cards to each player.
2. The 3 cards remaining form the talon. Set them to the side, face down.

Six players



1. The dealer deals a hand of 12 cards to each player.
2. The 6 cards remaining form the talon. Set them to the side, face down.

2. Bidding

Starting with forehand (the player left of the dealer) and continuing clockwise, each player either makes a bid that has a higher value than all previous bids or passes. A bid consists of two or three characteristics, depending on the number of players:

- In a 2- or 3-player game, a bid consists of two characteristics: **card exchange** and **objective**.
- In a 4-, 5-, or 6-player game, a bid consists of three characteristics: **card exchange**, **objective**, and **teams**.

Card exchange

This characteristic could be either  **Exchange** or  **No Exchange**. See the section "3. Card Exchange" for more details.

Objective

The declarer's team, which could consist of only the declarer, wins by creating a formation of their counters on the board. This involves creating a path of their team's counters that connects a number of board sides.

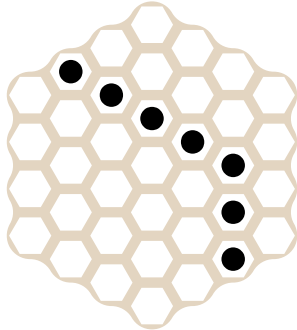
The declarer's team still wins if this path connects additional board sides.

Note: Corner spaces belong to both sides of the board to which they are adjacent.

The following describes the possible formations:

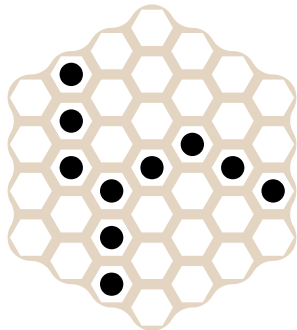
 Bridge

The declarer's team wins if there's a path of their team's counters that connects two opposite sides of the board.

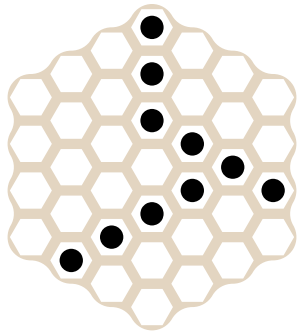


 Y

The declarer's team wins if there's a path of their team's counters that connects three non-adjacent sides of the board.

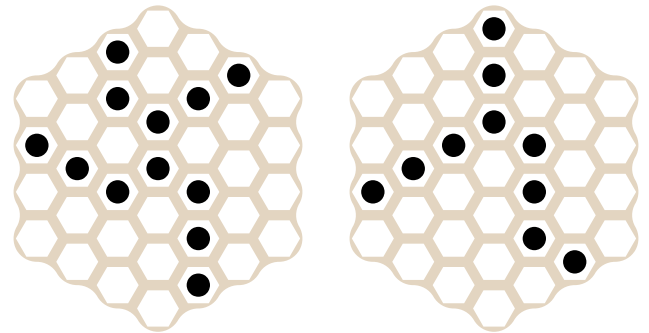


A team whose objective is Y would win with the following formation. It connects four sides, three of which are non-adjacent:



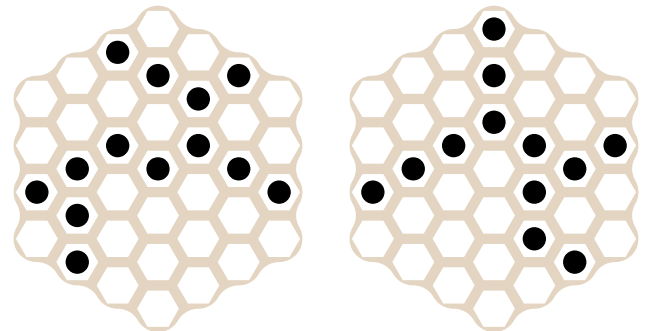
 Fork

The declarer's team wins if they create both a Y and a bridge.



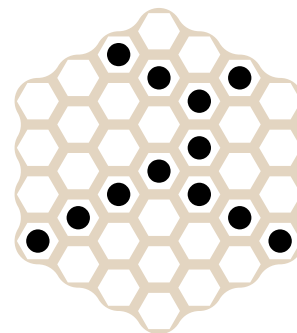
 Five sides

The declarer's team wins if they connect at least five sides.



 Six sides

The declarer's team wins if they connect all six sides.



Teams

In a 4- or 5- player game, this characteristic could be either **Duo** or **Solo**. In a 6-player game, this characteristic could be **Trio**, **Duo**, or **Solo**:

- **Trio:** The declarer forms a team with two other players.

- **Duo:** The declarer forms a team with one other player.
- **Solo:** The declarer plays alone.

The players not on the declarer's team play together as the opposing team.

Making a bid

To make a bid, announce the characteristics of your bid, and then place the bidding peg in the bidding table cell that corresponds to it. The number in the cell is the value of the bid.

The lowest permitted bid depends on the number of players:

Minimum bids		
Players	Bid	Value
2	Exchange Y	3
3	Exchange Bridge	1
4	Exchange Y Duo	3
5	Exchange Bridge Duo	1
6	Exchange Y Trio	3

Example: In a 4-player game, forehand opens with the minimum bid, Exchange Y Duo, which has a value of 3 points. Forehand places the bidding peg in the cell highlighted in blue. The next player overbids with Exchange Bridge Solo, which has a value of 6 points. That player moves the bidding peg to the cell highlighted in red.

6	Trio	Duo	Solo
4-5	Duo	Solo	—
2-3	Solo	—	—
Bridge	1 • 2 •	6 • 7 •	11 • 12 •
Y	3 • 4 •	8 • 9 •	13 • 14 •
Fork	5 • 6 •	10 • 11 •	15 • 16 •
5-sides	7 • 8 •	12 • 13 •	17 • 18 •
6-sides	9 • 10 •	14 • 15 •	19 • 20 •



Once a player passes, that player can't bid again. The bidding phase ends when all players but one have passed.

The player who made the highest bid is the declarer.

If all players pass, then the next dealer in turn starts a new hand.

3. Card exchange

If the declarer's winning bid contained the characteristic Exchange, then they take the talon and add its cards to their hand. The declarer then discards 3 cards face down.

Note: In the 2-player game, the declarer exchanges by adding the 2 cards of the talon to their 6-card hand, and then discards 2 cards face-down from their 8-card hand.

After the last trick, the declarer turns face up their discarded cards. Confirm that any unoccupied card spaces correspond to these cards. The **opposing team** places their counters on the remaining unoccupied spaces.

No exchange

If the declarer's winning bid contained the characteristic No Exchange, then after the last trick, turn face up the cards of the talon. Confirm that any unoccupied card spaces correspond to these cards. The **opposing team** (and not the declarer's team) places their counters on the remaining unoccupied spaces.

Card exchange in a 6-player game

If the declarer's winning bid contained the characteristic Exchange, then they take 3 cards from the talon and add them to their hand. The declarer then gives 1 card, face down, to 2 different players. Afterwards, the declarer deals the remaining 3 cards of the talon to the players who still have 12-card hands.

If the declarer's winning bid contained the characteristic No Exchange, then the dealer deals the talon to the players so that each player has a 13-card hand.

4. Picking a partner

Note: In a 2- or 3-player game, the declarer never picks a partner.

If the declarer's winning bid contained the characteristic **Duo** or **Trio**, then they pick a random partner by announcing the highest non-trump card they don't hold. The player who holds that card announces the fact and becomes part of the declarer's team.

If no one holds the card that the declarer announced (because it's in the talon), then the declarer repeats this process of announcing a card until they find a partner.

If the declarer is entitled to another partner (because their bid contained **Trio**), then the declarer repeats this process of announcing a card until they find a partner that hasn't already been chosen.

5. Increasing the objective characteristic

The declarer's partner has one chance to increase the winning bid's objective characteristic, thereby increasing the bid's value. Afterwards, the declarer has one chance to increase the objective characteristic.

Note: In a **Solo** bid, the declarer still has a chance to increase the objective characteristic.

Increasing the objective characteristic in a 6-player game

In a **Trio** bid, the partner closest to the declarer's left has the first chance to increase the objective characteristic, followed by the other partner, then finally the declarer.

Counter-sabotage rule for the 5-player game

Only if the declarer's partner increased the objective characteristic, the declarer may *abdicate* the role of declarer to their partner instead of increasing the objective characteristic.

The new declarer and the ex-declarer still play the hand as a team. The consequence is during the scoring, the new declarer wins or loses points like the declarer while the ex-declarer wins or loses points like the partner. In particular, if the declarer's team loses the hand, then the new declarer will lose double compared to the ex-declarer.

6. Card play

Card play alternates between players playing cards to a trick and placing counters on the board depending on which team won the trick.

Special rules apply to the 2-player game.

Trick play

Trick play is similar to most other Tarot games. (However, unlike French Tarot, you're not forced to overtrump, and the *excuse* is the highest trump card.)

A trick consists of one card played by each player.

The *lead player* is the first player to play a card to a trick.

Forehand is the lead player for the first trick.

The lead player plays any card from their hand and places it face up in front of themselves. Starting with the player to the left of the lead player and proceeding clockwise, each player plays a card in front of themselves until each player has played one card.

When you play a card, you must *follow suit*: your card's suit must match the suit of the first card played (the *led card*). If you can't follow suit because you don't hold any cards of the led card's suit, you must play a trump card. If you don't hold any trump cards, you may play a card of any other suit.

Once each player has played one card, determine who won the trick. The player who played the highest trump card wins the trick; otherwise, the highest card of the led card's suit wins the trick.

Placing counters on the board

The trick winner places one of their team's counters on the space corresponding to the trick.

Example: The winner of the first trick places one of their counters on trick space 1; the winner of the 13th trick places one of their counters on trick space 13.

If there are any card spaces that correspond to any of the cards in the won trick, then the trick winner places one of their team's counters on each corresponding card space.

Preparing for the next trick

All players turn their played cards face down. Players can either keep their played cards in a personal discard pile or put them in a common discard pile.

The trick winner becomes the lead player for the next trick.

Special rules for the two-player game

Your hand includes the face-up card of each of your piles. When you play a card from a trick, you play either a card from your hand or a face-up card from one of your piles.

Example: Your opponent led with a spade. Your hand contains no spades or trumps, and none of your face-up cards are spades. However, you have one face-up card that's a trump. You must play that trump.

If you uncover a face-down card after playing a face-up card, you flip it face up after you've determined who won the trick.

7. End of hand

The hand ends once the declarer's team wins or loses. Players might still have cards in their hands when this happens. Players' scores depend on the declarer's bid's value.

Note: Your bid value doesn't increase if you created a formation that's worth more than your bid's objective.

Declarer's team wins

The declarer's team wins if they create the formation as specified in their bid.

Each player on the declarer's team receives points according to the following table, where v is the declarer's bid value:

	Each player on the declarer's team		
	Trio	Duo	Solo
6-players	$1 \times v$	$2 \times v$	$5 \times v$
5-players	—	Declarer: $2 \times v$ Declarer's partner: v	$4 \times v$
4-players	—	$1 \times v$	$3 \times v$
3-players	—	—	$2 \times v$
2-players	—	—	$1 \times v$

Each player on the opposing team loses v points.

Declarer's team loses

The declarer's team loses if the opposing team creates a formation that makes it impossible for the declarer's team to win.

Each player on the declarer's team loses points according to the previous table.

Each player on the opposing team receives v points.

Preparing for next hand

At the end of each hand, verify that the sum of all players' scores is equal to zero.

The player to the dealer's left is the dealer of the next hand.

Game end

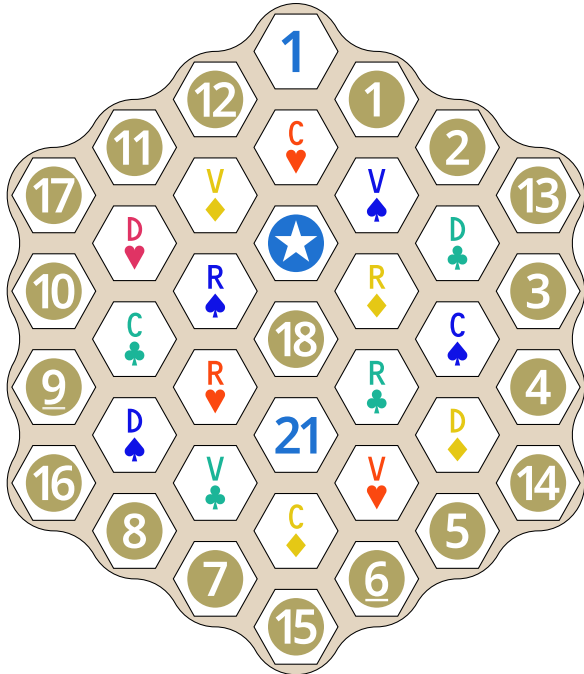
Before the game starts, decide how many hands you want to play. Ensure that this number is divisible by the number of players so that everyone gets to deal an equal number of times. Once you played that many hands, the game ends! Highest score wins! Find other means to break ties.

Alternatively, you can stop playing when you're sick of the game. Consider yourself a winner if your score is positive.

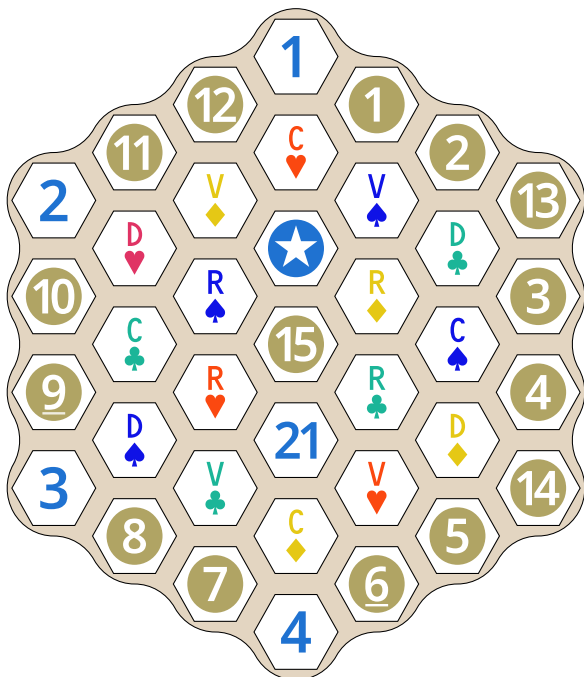
Variants

Full deck Le Plateau

You can use all 78 cards of the deck for the 4- and 5-player versions. This helps prevent uneven wear of your Tarot cards.

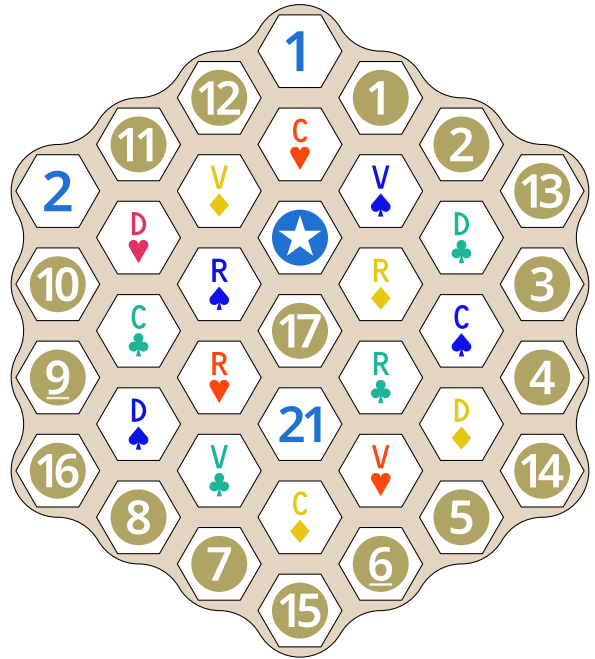


Board setup for 4 players and 78-card deck



Board setup for 5 players and 78-card deck

You can use a larger 54-card deck for the 3-player version. In this case, remove cards 1 through 6 in spades, hearts, clubs, and diamonds.



Board setup for 3 players and 54-card deck

The board and deal vary depending on the number of players as the number of tricks change:

Full deck Le Plateau		
Players	Cards dealt to each player	Size of talon
3	17	3
4	18	6
5	15	3

Card exchange in a 4-player game

The declarer divides the talon in two groups of three. The declarer flips both groups of cards face up, then picks one group with which to exchange cards. Place an opposing team's counter on each card space that corresponds to a card in the card group that the declarer didn't pick.

The Excuse

If you're playing with all 78 cards, then consider treating the *excuse* not as the highest ranked trump card but as in French Tarot.

The *excuse* doesn't belong to any suit. If you hold the *excuse* in your hand, you may play it to any trick, irrespective of which suit was led or whether you hold any cards of that suit. This means you can

play the *excuse* instead of following suit or playing a trump card if you can't follow suit.

You can never win a trick by playing the *excuse*. However, someone on your team can win the trick to which you played the *excuse*.

If you lead a trick with the *excuse*, then the next player may play a card of any suit. The suit of this card determines the suit that other players must follow.

Irrespective of who wins the trick, if you played the *excuse*, you play your team's counter on the card space with the star.

Alternative board setups

During game setup, or before every deal, randomly place the tokens in the board spaces. Alternatively, devise your own board setups. Try arranging the card tokens of the same suit so that they're all adjacent to each other. Or position the trick tokens in the centre of the board.

Positive-only scoring

You can convert any zero-sum game to a positive-only scoring game:

1. Determine all the possible numbers of players that could be on the declarer's team. For example, in a 6-player game, this would be 1, 2, and 3 players.
2. Among these possible numbers of players, find the lowest common multiple, *lcm*, which is the lowest positive integer that is evenly divisible among all numbers in a set of integers. For

example, the lowest common multiple for 1, 2, and 3 is 6.

3. If the declarer team wins, then every member of the declarer's team wins $lcm \div (\text{number of players}) \times (\text{declarer's bid value})$. If the declarer team loses, then every player on the opposing team wins the same amount.

If these steps seem confusing, then here's a table. The variable v represents the declarer's bid value.

Number of players on declarer's team	Points per player on winning team		
	2- or 3-player game	4- or 5-player game	6-player game
Trio (3)	—	—	$2 \times v$
Duo (2)	—	$1 \times v$	$3 \times v$
Solo (1)	$1 \times v$	$2 \times v$	$6 \times v$

Note: If you follow these steps to score a 5-player game, then you no longer need the counter-sabotage rule as both the declarer and their partner score the same number of points. However, if you still want to play with this rule, then adjust the scoring as follows:

Number of players on declarer's team	Declarer's team wins: Points per player on declarer's team	Declarer's team loses: Points per player on opposing team
Duo (2)	Declarer: $2 \times v$ Partner: $1 \times v$	$1 \times v$
Solo (1)	$3 \times v$	$3 \times v$



Raymond Gallardo, May 2021
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