A HOUSE RULEBOOK · SETTLED

Cribbage

The rules, written in our own words.

Cribbage belongs to nobody, so these rules are ours to write. They are the standard rules of the six-card game for two players, with the other forms of the game at the end. Written by Nine Fathoms for Settled, 2026. Free to print for your own table.

The cards and the board

Cribbage is played by two players with an ordinary pack of fifty-two cards and a board for keeping score. The cards rank from the king, the highest, down to the ace, the lowest. The ace is always low and never follows the king.

What each card counts

For adding up, each card counts the number it shows, so an ace counts 1, a two counts 2, and so on up to the ten. The jack, the queen and the king each count 10. These values are only for adding: in pairs and runs a card keeps its own rank, so a jack and a king are not a pair.

The board and the pegs

Each player has a track of holes on the board and two pegs. Each point scored moves a peg one hole along the track. To peg a score, the player lifts the back peg and sets it ahead of the front one by the number of points, so the gap between the two pegs shows the last score and either player can check it. The front peg always shows the player's total.

On most boards the track runs twice round a course of sixty holes, and the last hole, the game hole, is the 121st.

The deal and the crib

Cutting for the deal

Each player cuts the pack, and the player who cuts the lower card deals first. If both cut cards of the same rank, they cut again. After each hand the deal passes to the other player.

Dealing

The dealer shuffles, the non-dealer cuts, and the dealer deals six cards to each player, face down and one at a time, beginning with the non-dealer. If the dealer turns a card face up while dealing, or a card is found face up in the pack, the same dealer shuffles and deals again.

The crib

Each player looks at their six cards and lays two of them face down to one side. These four cards make the crib, which belongs to the dealer and is scored for the dealer at the end of the hand. Nobody looks at the crib until then. Each player keeps their other four cards as their hand.

The starter

When both players have laid away, the non-dealer cuts the rest of the pack. The dealer turns up the top card of the lower part and lays it face up on top of the pack as the starter. The starter is never played, but at the show it counts as a fifth card with each hand and with the crib.

His heels

If the starter is a jack, the dealer pegs 2 points straight away, called two for his heels. These points can win the game on their own.

The play

After the starter is turned, the players take turns laying one card at a time, and the non-dealer lays first. Each player lays their cards face up in front of themselves and says aloud the running total of the count. The total may never go past 31. A card is played once it leaves the player's fingers, and may not be taken back.

Scoring in the play

A player scores for what the card just laid makes with the cards before it, and pegs the points at once.

- A card that brings the total to exactly 15 scores 2.
- A card that brings the total to exactly 31 scores 2.
- A card of the same rank as the card just before it makes a pair and scores 2.
- A third card of that rank, laid straight after the pair, makes a pair royal and scores 6.
- A fourth card of that rank, laid straight after the pair royal, makes a double pair royal and scores 12.

A pair royal is worth 6 because it holds three pairs, and a double pair royal is worth 12 because it holds six. The cards of a pair must follow one another, so a different card laid between them breaks it. One card may score more than one way at once: a third five laid on two fives scores 8, with 6 for the pair royal and 2 for the fifteen.

Runs in the play

A run is three or more cards of consecutive rank, such as a four, a five and a six. A player whose card completes a run with the cards just before it scores one point for each card in the run. The cards may come in any order: after a three and a five, a four scores 3 for the run, and a six laid next scores 4. To find a run, count back from the card just laid: the last three cards, or the last four or more, must make an unbroken sequence with no rank repeated.

Go

A player who cannot lay a card without taking the total past 31 says go. A player may not say go while holding a card that can be laid. A player who does, and is found out, gives the other player 2 points for each card that could have been laid. The other player must then lay every card they can without passing 31. Whoever lays the last card of the count pegs 1 for the go, or 2 if the total is exactly 31, but never both.

The count then starts again from nothing, led by the player who did not lay the last card. Pairs and runs never carry over into a new count.

The last card

The last card of the whole play scores the same way: 1 for last card, or 2 if it makes exactly 31.

The show

When all the cards have been played, each player picks up the four cards they laid, and the hands are counted in a fixed order. The non-dealer counts first, then the dealer counts their own hand, and last of all the dealer counts the crib. Each hand, and the crib, is counted together with the starter, as five cards. The order matters at the end of a game, because the non-dealer may reach 121 before the dealer counts at all.

What a hand scores

- Each different set of cards adding up to 15 scores 2.
- Each pair scores 2, so three cards of one rank score 6 and four of one rank score 12.
- Each run of three or more cards scores one point for each card in it.
- A flush scores 4 or 5, as the next page sets out.
- A jack of the same suit as the starter scores 1, called one for his nobs.

A card may be used in every combination it fits. A four, two fives and a six hold two different runs of three, one with each five, and a pair, so they score 8 before any fifteens are counted.

Flushes

In a hand

A hand whose four cards are all of one suit is a flush and scores 4. If the starter is of the same suit as well, the flush scores 5 instead. Three cards of a suit in the hand and a starter of that suit make no flush.

In the crib

The crib scores a flush only when all four of its cards and the starter are of one suit, and that flush scores 5. Four crib cards of one suit with a starter of another suit score nothing for a flush.

His nobs and his heels

Tables often mix up these two scores for a jack. His heels is the dealer's alone: it is the 2 points scored when the starter itself is a jack, pegged as soon as the card is turned. His nobs is 1 point at the show, scored for a jack in a hand or in the crib that matches the suit of the starter. When the starter is a jack, no hand can score his nobs, because no other jack shares its suit.

Counting aloud

Each player counts their own hand aloud and pegs the total. The other player may check the count. Once a hand is counted and pegged, any points missed in it are lost. A player who pegs more than the hand holds, if the other player catches it before the next card is played or the next hand is counted, moves the peg back, and the other player pegs the extra points instead. Caught later, the score stands.

Winning the game

The first player to reach 121 points wins. The game ends the moment a player pegs their 121st point, whether in the play, at the show, or from his heels, and nothing more is scored. Cards still waiting to be counted are never counted.

A player does not need to land exactly on 121. Any score that reaches or passes it ends the game, and the points beyond it are not kept.

This is why the order of counting matters. Near the end, the non-dealer counts first at the show and may win before the dealer's hand or the crib is counted, even if those would have scored more.

The skunk

If the winner reaches 121 while the loser has fewer than 91 points, the loser is skunked. At a table that keeps a tally of games, or plays for a stake, that win counts as two games, and never more than two.

Common variations

Each of these changes the standard rules in this book. Agree before you begin whether your table plays any of them.

Muggins

In this variation, when a player misses points in their own count, the other player may call muggins and peg the missed points for themselves.

The double skunk

In this variation, a loser with fewer than 61 points when the game ends is double skunked, and the win counts as four games.

Three players

In this variation, each player is dealt five cards, the dealer deals one more card face down to the crib, and each player lays away one card. The player to the dealer's left leads the play and counts first, and turns go round to the left.

Four players

In this variation, four players sit as two partnerships, with partners opposite each other. Each player is dealt five cards and lays away one, and partners peg their points together on one track.

Five cards

In this older variation, each player is dealt five cards and lays away two, and the game is played to 61. The non-dealer pegs 3 points at the start of every game, before its first hand, to make up for the dealer's crib.