A HOUSE RULEBOOK · SETTLED

Dominoes

The rules, written in our own words.

Dominoes belongs to nobody, so these rules are ours to write. They are the Draw game as most tables play it, with the Block game and the trains family beside it.

Written by Nine Fathoms for Settled, 2026. Free to print for your own table.

The tiles and the hands

Dominoes is played with a double-six set of twenty-eight tiles. Each tile is divided across the middle into two halves, and each half is either blank or marked with one to six spots, called pips. Every pair of numbers from blank to six appears on exactly one tile.

A tile with the same number on both halves is a double, and the set has seven of them, from the double-blank to the double-six. A tile is named by its two numbers, so the 6-4 has six pips on one half and four on the other. Every number appears on seven tiles, counting its double once.

The main game of this book is the Draw game, for two, three or four players, each playing alone.

Taking the hands

Before every hand, all the tiles are turned face down and shuffled about the table. With two players, each takes seven tiles, and with three or four players, each takes five. Some tables give three players seven tiles and four players six. A player stands their tiles on edge so that only they can see the faces.

The boneyard

The tiles that nobody takes stay face down at the side of the table, and are called the boneyard. No player may look at them. A player takes a tile from the boneyard only when they must draw.

Starting the line

The first tile of a hand is called the set. The player holding the highest double makes the set, laying it face up in the middle of the table. The double-six is the highest double and the double-blank the lowest.

If no player holds a double, the player holding the heaviest tile sets it instead. The heaviest tile is the one with the most pips, and between two equal totals, the one with the higher half. Some tables draw for the set instead, and then pass it one place to the left each hand. After the set, play passes to the left, and each player in turn plays one tile.

Matching ends

The tiles on the table form one line with two open ends. A tile may be played only against one of those ends, and the half laid against it must show the same number, so a four goes against a four and a blank against a blank. The other half of the tile becomes the new open end.

Doubles

A double is laid across the line instead of end to end, and the next tile played against it must match its number. In the Draw game a double is not a spinner: it leaves the line with two open ends like any other tile, and nothing may be played against its long sides.

Drawing and passing

A player who holds a tile that matches either open end must play a tile on their turn. A player may not draw from the boneyard while they hold a tile that can be played.

Drawing

A player who has no tile to match either open end must draw from the boneyard, one tile at a time, until they draw one that matches. That tile must be played at once, and playing it ends their turn. Every tile drawn before it stays in the player's hand.

The last two tiles

The last two tiles of the boneyard are never drawn. Once only two remain, a player who cannot play says so and passes, and the turn moves to the next player on the left. A player may never pass while they hold a tile that can be played.

Because a player must draw before they may pass, nobody passes while the boneyard still holds more than two tiles. The two tiles left behind stay face down until the hand is over, and nobody may look at them.

The end of a hand

Going out

A player who plays the last tile from their hand has gone out. The hand ends at once, and that player wins it.

A blocked hand

A hand is blocked when no player can play and the boneyard is down to its last two tiles, so nobody may draw. Play stops, every player turns their tiles face up, and each counts the pips in their own hand. The player with the fewest pips wins the blocked hand. If two or more players tie for the fewest, nobody scores for that hand.

Scoring a hand

The winner of a hand scores the total of all the pips left in the other players' hands. A player never adds their own pips to their score. After going out they hold no tiles, and in a blocked hand their own count only decides who has won.

A blank half counts as nothing, so the double-blank is worth nothing at all. The two tiles left in the boneyard are never counted.

A player who goes out while one opponent holds the 6-3 and another holds the 4-2 and the 1-0 scores sixteen.

Winning the game

Scores are kept from hand to hand, and before the first hand the players agree how long the game will run. The usual game is played to 100. The first player whose total reaches 100 or more at the end of a hand wins the game. Only the winner of a hand scores, so two players can never reach 100 on the same hand.

A table may instead agree on a set number of hands. The player with the highest total after the last of them wins.

For each new hand, the tiles are shuffled face down again and every player takes a fresh hand. The player holding the highest double makes the set, just as in the first hand.

The Block game

The Block game is the Draw game without drawing. Each player takes as many tiles as in the Draw game, seven with two players and five with three or four, and the tiles that nobody takes are set aside face down and stay out of play until the hand is over. A player who cannot match either open end simply passes. A player who can play must still play.

A Block hand ends when a player goes out or when nobody can play, and it is scored just as in the Draw game. Blocked hands come far more often, because nobody can draw a way out.

The trains game

The trains game is a family of games played with a double-nine or a double-twelve set, a hub with a slot for each line, and a marker for each player. Each round begins with a double in the hub, the highest in the set first and one lower each round after. With a double-twelve set, two to four players take fifteen tiles each, five or six take twelve, and seven or eight take ten. With a double-nine set, two or three players take twelve tiles each, four take ten, and five or six take eight.

The lines

Each player builds their own line from the hub, starting with a tile that matches the hub's double, and one more line is public. A player plays one tile a turn, unless a double is laid, on their own line, the public line or any line marked open. A player who cannot play draws one tile and plays it if it fits. If not, they set their marker on their own line, opening it to all until they next play on it.

Satisfying a double

A player who lays a double must also satisfy it with a matching tile, and nobody may play elsewhere until it is satisfied.

Ending a round

A round ends when a player goes out, or when the boneyard is empty and nobody can play. Each player adds the pips left in their hand to their score, and the lowest total after the last round wins.

Common variations

Many tables play a small change or two. Each of these is a variation, to be agreed before the first hand. Without that agreement, the rules on the earlier pages stand.

- **The spinner.** In some games the first double played is a spinner, and tiles may be played against both its ends and both its long sides. The standard Draw game has no spinner.
- **Setting after the first hand.** Some tables let the winner of the last hand set first in the next hand, with any tile they choose.
- **Drawing at will.** Some tables let a player draw from the boneyard even when they hold a tile that could be played.
- **Drawing to the end.** Some tables let players draw every tile in the boneyard, and pass only when it is empty.
- **The difference.** Some tables give the winner of a blocked hand only the other players' pips less their own.
- **Seven each.** In the Block game, four players may take seven tiles each, so the whole set is dealt.
- **Partners.** Four players may play as two pairs, with partners sitting across from each other and sharing one score.
- **The opening turn.** In the trains game, some tables let each player lay as many tiles as they can on their own line on their first turn.