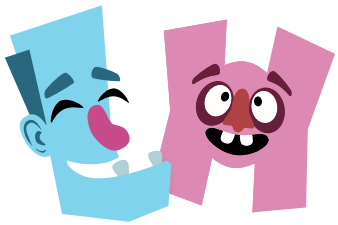
Rules for Games Played With the Letter Head Deck



Welcome to *Letter Head*! Rather than just a single game, a *Letter Head* deck can be used to play a wide variety of different games. Sixteen are available now. And because of the way the deck's built, it's easy to create your own variants.

All games using the *Letter Head* deck share the following core rules. When the rules of a specific game contradict these, though, go with the specific game's rules.

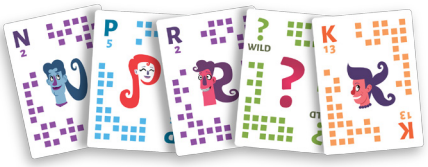
Choosing A Dealer

Each player draws one card from the deck. The player who draws the card nearest the start of the alphabet is the dealer.

On subsequent hands, the deal moves to the left.

Wild Cards

Each of the four wild cards in the deck can be used in place of any letter. For example, if a player has…



…they could use the wild card as an A to spell **PRANK.** When played, a wild card has the same point value as the card it's used in place of. In the above example, the wild card would be worth 2 points, since an A is worth 2 points. To find the value of a given letter, check a reference card

Challenges

When a player plays a word, any other player may challenge that word, then look it up in the dictionary. This should be a mutually agreed upon source, physical or digital, that everyone has access to. Any properly spelled word found in your dictionary is valid, as well as any correctly spelled plural (-s), participle (-ing), past tense (-ed), or other standard variation. This includes archaic, obsolete, foreign-origin, slang, or colloquial versions of words, so long as they are found in the dictionary. Abbreviations, prefixes, and suffixes standing alone; hyphenated words; apostrophized words; proper nouns (words always capitalized); and acronyms are not allowed unless they have entered the language as standard words and are listed as such in the dictionary. A challenged player may not rearrange their cards into a different word; once you declare a word, you are committed to it.The consequences of both successful and unsuccessful challenges are described in each game.

Time Limits

Players can take as long as they need to form the best-word possible

House Rules

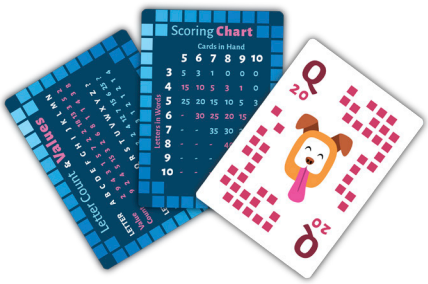
When selecting your dictionary, your group might alter what is considered a valid word. For example, you might include proper nouns.

Similarly, your group could impose a time limit to create a faster-paced game. Two-minute turns are still pretty leisurely, but one minute turns really crank it up. Use a watch or clock to keep time and if a player fails to form a word in their allotted time, they forfeit their turn

Design Note: Letter Frequencies

The *Letter Head* deck genuinely reflects how frequently letters actually occur in English, and the point values reflect how difficult it is to form a word using each letter.

To determine the frequency of letters in the English language, *Letter Head's* designers delved into dozens of reliable, detailed studies done over the last century (most of them used for code breaking!). A complete analysis can be found on the Atlas Games web site http://www.atlas-games.com/pdf_storage/lh_frequencies.pdf. None of this information is needed to play *Letter Head*, but fans of language and cryptanalysis will love it.



The Letter Head Deck

Letter Head comes with 130 cards: 120 consonants and vowels distributed to reflect their frequency in English, four wild cards, five scoring reference cards, and one title card. In addition to a letter, each letter card has a number printed on it. This is its point value, which is frequently used for scoring.

Letter Head

For 2–8 Players

"Letter Head" is an action-packed word-forming game that requires both mental agility and a good poker face. It is the "basic" game played with a *Letter Head* deck.

The Goal

Form words using the cards in your hand — or at least, convince the other players that you are doing so.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal way

The Deal

Deal everyone five cards face-down, and place the remaining deck face-down in the center of the table.

How to Win

You win if you're the player with the highest score after each player has taken five turns.

The Play

The player to the dealer's left goes first. When it's your turn, play by either using the cards in your hand to form a word, or bluff.

To play, announce a word to the other players and lay cards on the table to spell it out. You do not need all of the letters necessary to spell the word, and you may lay any number of cards face down. If any players think you're lying about having spelled the word correctly, they may "call your bluff." See "Bluffing" for more on this strategy.

After everyone has had a chance to call your bluff, flip over your face-down cards. If you spelled the word correctly, or if you successfully bluffed all the other players, you score points.

However, if you were bluffing and at least one player called your bluff, the players who called you on it score points. See "Scoring." If there's a dispute about whether you spelled your word correctly, a challenge ensues **(see "Challenges")**.

Played cards are placed face-up in the discard pile. You keep all unplayed cards, and if you have fewer than five cards in your hand, draw until you have five. Your turn is then over and play passes to your left.

After each player takes five turns, final scores are tabulated and a winner declared.

All Players Can Draw Cards at Any Time

Any player may draw additional cards from the deck at any time, even when it's another player's turn. You may never have more than ten cards in your hand, though.

You Can Pass Your Turn

On your turn, you may pass rather than play a word or bluff (although this uses up one of your five turns). Discard as many cards as you like. If you discard down to less than five cards, draw up to a five-card hand again. The turn then passes to the next player and continues around the table as normal.

When the Deck Runs Out

Once the draw pile has been exhausted, the cards in the discard pile are shuffled and turned over to form a new draw pile.

Bluffing

When you declare a word and lay your cards on the table, you can lay each card face-up or face-down as you wish. There's no limit to how many cards can be played each way— all could be face-up, all could be face-down, or any combination of face-up and face-down.

When you play a word with any face-down cards, all other players must decide for themselves if you are bluffing. Every player is given a chance to say whether they believe the cards on the table actually spell your word. Those who cast doubt are "calling your bluff." Once everyone has weighed in, all face-down cards are turned face-up.

If no one calls your bluff, you add up the point values of the cards you played, including the actual values printed on your face-down cards, as well as any bonus points (see "Scoring"). The total is added to your score, even if the letters do not spell the word you declared.

If one or more players call your bluff and your word is spelled correctly, you tally your score as normal and add 10 additional points for each player falling for your ruse.

If one of more players call your bluff and your cards do not form the word you declared, you score no points at all. All players correctly calling your bluff add 10 points to their scores.

The displayed word, regardless of whether it is spelled correctly, is placed in the discard pile and you replenish your hand as normal.

Bluffing Well

Act confident when bluffing. Act nervous when not. Sometimes bring out your poker face just to keep everyone off balance. If you can play an especially high-scoring word legitimately, lay most (or all) the cards face-down. Establish this pattern and eventually you can declare a high-scoring word for which you have none of the letters — lay them all face-down and no one will dare to call your bluff.

Scoring

Determine the points of a successfully played word by adding up each letter's point value along with the bonus points from the scoring chart below, which is also printed on each reference card.

Letters in Words \ Cards in Hand	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	5	3	1	0	0	0
4	15	10	5	3	1	0
5	25	20	15	10	5	3
6	-	30	25	20	15	10
7	-	-	35	30	25	20
8	-	-	-	40	35	30
9	-	-	-	-	45	40
10	-	-	-	-	-	50

If your word contains a wild card, score the replaced letter's point value, just as if you'd played that letter itself.

Example of Play

Ralph, Mary, and Jen sit down to a game of *Letter Head*. Ralph deals and Mary is to his left, so Mary goes first. Mary cannot form a word with her hand, so she draws two additional cards. She then declares the word PARTY and lays P A R face-up, followed by two cards face-down. Neither Mary nor Ralph calls her bluff so she turns over the two cards, which in fact are T and Y. No one challenges the spelling of the word so Mary adds up her score: 5 for P + 2 for A + 2 for R + 1 for T + 6 for Y + 15 bonus points for playing a 5-letter word out of a 7-card hand = 31 points.

Meanwhile, Ralph has drawn additional cards from the deck, hoping to improve his hand. Jen is satisfied with her original five cards and stands pat.

On her turn, Jen declares that she is playing the word BEVEL and lays down all five of her cards – the first one face-down, then E, then two more face-down, then the L. Ralph decides to call her bluff. Jen turns over G, U, and W. Her word is clearly not BEVEL, so she scores no points while Ralph adds 10 points to his score.

The turn then passes to Ralph.

Challenges

If a challenged word proves to be valid, the challenged player scores an additional 25 points for each player that challenged them. If the word is invalid, each challenger adds 25 points to their score and the declarer scores no points at all.

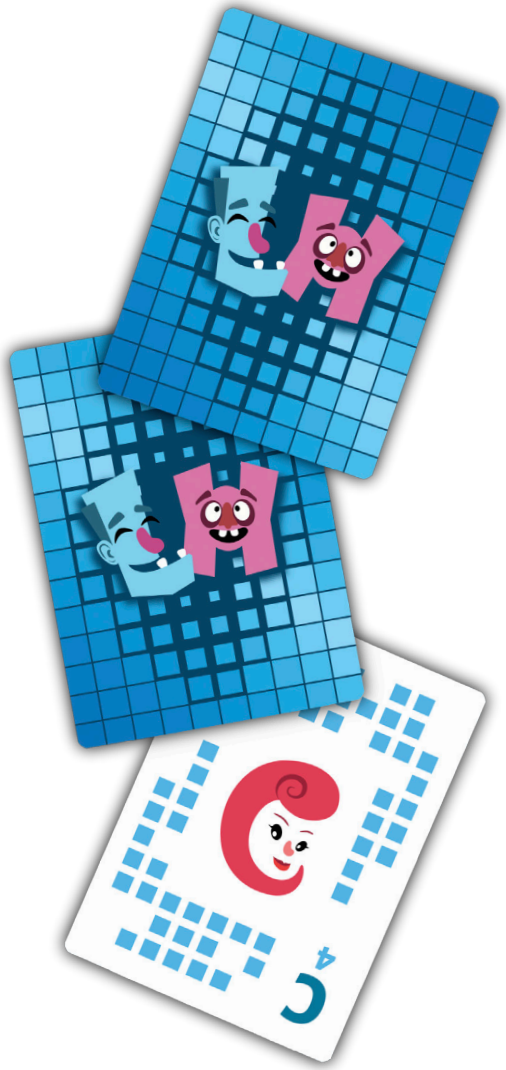
Strategy and Hints

You can always draw cards, but keep in mind that the bigger your hand, the fewer points you'll score.

House Rules

Play a longer or shorter game by adjusting the number of rounds to be played.

Add tension by doing away with a mandatory round limit and instead racing to a specified point total. First to reach it wins!



Red-Handed

For 3–7 Players

Based on concepts developed by legendary theoretician John von Neumann in his famous studies on game theory, "Red-Handed" features a cruel twist: the player who wins the hand is rewarded accordingly, but the player who comes in second fares the worst among the also-rans. Thus, the closer you get to victory, the greater the risk you take.

The Goal

Build a hand of cards and be the first to form a word with the letters in it.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal manner.

The Deal

Arrange nine cards face-down in a 3 × 3 grid on the table. Place the remaining deck to one side. When everyone is ready, turn over all nine cards as quickly as you can

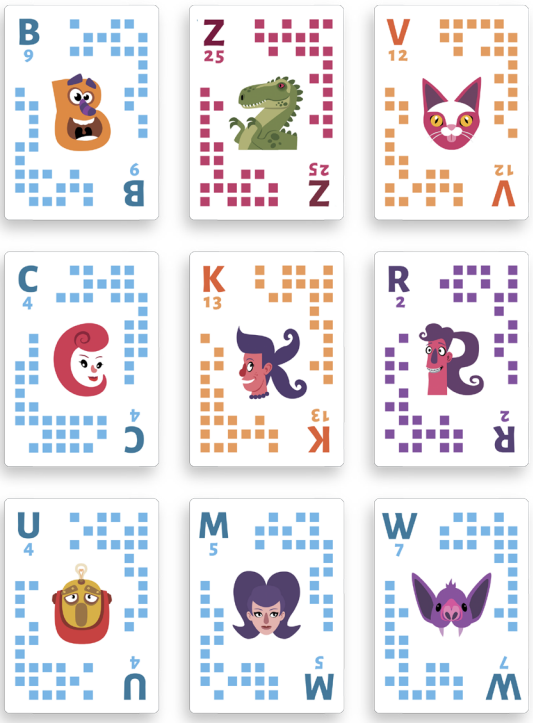
How to Win

You win if you have the lowest score after six rounds.

The Play

Spelling Words on the Table

Everyone plays at the same time. The first player to see a word at least five letters long amid the cards on the table immediately calls it out, spelling it out by tapping the cards in order. The letters need not be adjacent to one another or in any particular order within the grid. For example, in the following arrangement…



…you might call out, "Crumb! C-R-U-M-B," as you tap out the letters. If no one can find a five-letter or longer word in the grid, the dealer discards a single letter — they get to choose which one — from the cards on the table and replaces it with another from the deck. Repeat until a word is recognized.

Picking Up Cards

When you call out a correctly spelled word, you pick up one of the cards in the word and put it in your hand. Which letter you pick up is determined by the point value of the first letter in the word you spelled: If its value is 1, pick up the first card of the word; if the value of the first card is 2, pick up the second card; if it is 3, the third card, and so on.

Example: In the word CRUMB, since C is worth 4 points, you would pick up the M.

If the letter's value is greater than the length of the word, count to the end and "wrap around" to the beginning, then keep counting.

Example: In the word GROAN, the card picked up would be the R. Since the value of the first letter in the word, G, is 7, count five all the way to the N, then start again at G for 6. Thus R, the "seventh" letter.

When a card is picked up, the dealer replaces it with a new card from the deck.

Wild cards can substitute for any letter, as usual. If you pick up a wild card, it reverts to wild and can be used for any letter you want when later forming words from your hand (see "Spelling Words in Your Hand").

Spelling Words in Your Hand

At any time, if you can spell a word of at least five letters using just the cards in your hand, do so. If it's a valid word, you win the round. Everyone's score is then tallied and added to their running total (see "Scoring"). Then gather up all the cards, shuffle the deck, and the next dealer lays down a new grid.

Scoring

When a round ends, each player totals the points of the cards in their hands, with wild cards counting as 0. The winner *subtracts* the value of their word from their own total, counting wilds as the letter they replace. Lower scores, obviously, are better than higher scores

Challenges

In "Red-Handed" there are two kinds of challenges: Challenges to words spelled from cards on the table, and challenges to words formed from cards in your hand.

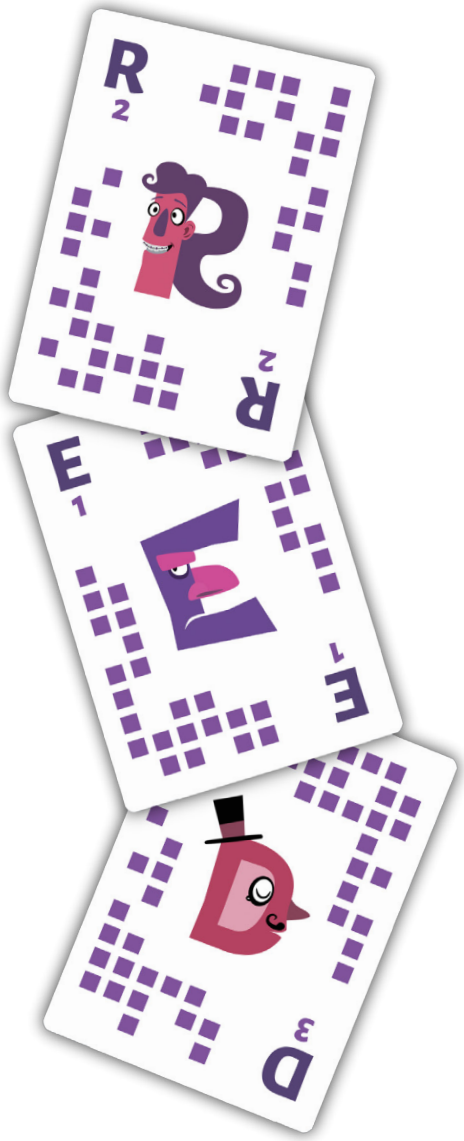
When a word you spell on the table is challenged and proven invalid, you do not pick up a card and can not spell any more words the rest of this round or the next round. If your word is valid, the challenger must sit out the remainder of this round as well as the next round.

When a word formed from cards in your hand is proven invalid, the cards remain in your hand and play continues. You are not allowed to form another word for the remainder of this round, or the next. There is no penalty to the challenger if your word is proven valid (other than losing the round to you).

Strategy and Hints

The key to "Red-Handed" is in the scoring. Every card you "earn" will eventually count against you unless you win the round. You may be tempted to do nothing at all, but the less competition you offer the other players, the less likely sitting pat will be a winning strategy.

Once you accumulate five cards in your hand, your attention will be divided between the action on the table and the cards you're holding. The better you are at managing these separate focuses, the more successful you will be.



Vultures

For 3–6 Players

Every word you play in "Vultures" becomes tasty "carrion" for the player after you to feast upon. And if you don't like your cards, you can always call "Fresh meat!" and snatch a letter from an opponent.

The Goal

Score points by forming high-value words using the cards in your hand and at least one of the cards played by the previous player.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal way.

The Deal

Deal everyone seven cards, face-down. Then place the deck face-down in the center of the table.

How to Win

You win if you're the first player to 300 points.

The Play

The player to the dealer's left goes first.

When it's your turn, lay down the highest-scoring word you can, using at least one card from your hand and one card that's currently on the table, if any. Then total your score (see "Scoring"), draw back up to seven cards, and move all cards on the table — other than the word you just played — to the discard pile. That word remains on the table for the next player to cannibalize. Play then passes to your left.

On your turn, prior to playing a word, you can call out, "Fresh meat!" When that happens, each player presents their hand face-down to the player on their right, who chooses one of those cards without looking at it. Once everyone has done this, you cry out "Eat!" and all players simultaneously place their chosen cards into their own hands. Then you go on with forming a word, as normal.

You may only call "Fresh meat!" once per turn.

You can pass your turn, even after calling for "Fresh meat!," by discarding as many cards as you want and drawing new cards from the deck until you have a hand of seven again. Cards on the table stay there for the next player to use.

If you form a word using a wild card, it is no longer wild for the succeeding players. While it's still on the table, the wild card counts as the letter it was played as.

When the deck runs out, the dealer gathers all the cards in the discard pile, shuffles them, and places them face-down as the new deck.

Scoring

Score each word by adding up all the points of all of the letters in it, as well as bonus points for length: 3 points for every letter in the word. Thus, a three-letter word earns 9 bonus points, a four-letter word earns 12, and so on.

Challenges

If a challenged word proves to be valid, the challenged player scores an additional 25 points for each player that challenged them. If a challenged word is proved to be invalid, each challenger immediately adds 25 points to their score. A challenged player scores no points for an invalid word. Regardless of whether a challenged word proves valid or not, its cards remain on the table for the next player to use.

Strategy and Hints

It isn't necessarily in your best interest to reuse valuable cards played by the player preceding you, because doing so allows later opponents to use them too.

Call for "Fresh meat!" whenever you feel your hand might be improved by the addition of a new card — but remember that the opponent to your right may randomly snatch the best card in your hand.



Freeze

For 3–6 Players

Based on a notorious gambling game popular in the Old West, "Freeze" requires nerves of steel and a good sense of timing. Players draw and discard cards around the table, trying to improve their hands. The suspense grows until one brave player takes the plunge and calls "Freeze!"

The Goal

Form the highest-scoring word as early in the game as possible.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal way.

The Deal

Deal everyone five face-down cards. Place the remaining deck in the center of the table. Then turn over the top card and place it face-up next to the deck to start the discard pile.

How to Win

You win if you're first to get fifteen tally marks.

The Play

The player to the dealer's left goes first.

When it's your turn, draw the top card from either the deck or the discard pile, and then discard any card from your hand face-up. As you are discarding, you may call out "Freeze!" if you think you have a higher-scoring hand than anyone else.

When someone says "Freeze!," each other player takes one additional turn to draw then discard a card. Then everyone lays their cards on the table and announces the word they're spelling.

Each player adds up the point values of the letters in their word. (There are no bonus points in "Freeze." The player with the highest-scoring word wins the round (see "Scoring").

Tied players share the round's victory, except for the player who called "Freeze!", who loses ties.

After the winner is noted, gather up and reshuffle the cards, then deal a new hand.

Scoring

Each round's winner gets a tally mark on the scoresheet. (Word scores are not recorded; they're only used to determine who wins each round.)

Challenges

If a challenged word proves invalid, the challenged player scores no points for that hand. If the word is valid, the word is scored as normal and there is no penalty for the challenger.

Strategy and Hints

Once you form a fairly respectable five-letter word, or a three- or four-letter word that uses high-scoring letters, it's often to your advantage to call "Freeze!" immediately, before the other players have a chance to substantially improve their hands.

Because there are no bonus points for longer words, high-scoring letters are especially valuable; often a short word with rare letters outscores a long word with common letters.

House Rules

For an even more free-wheeling game, try playing with six-card hands.



Word Slam

For 3–6 Players

You'll need a quick mind and quick hands to play "Word Slam", a raucous, fast-paced game for players of all ages and skill levels.

The Goal

Form words using both the cards in your hand and the cards face-up on the table.

Getting Started

All players should sit equidistant from each other around the table, or in a circle on the floor. Choose a dealer in the normal way.

The Deal

Deal everyone three cards, face-down. Place one card face-up in the center of the table. The remaining deck is placed face-down off to the side about eight inches away.

When everyone is ready, say "Slam!"

How to Win

You win if you have the highest score after the deck has been played through twice.

The Play

When the dealer says "Slam!" look at the cards dealt to you. The first person to spell a word at least four letters long using their own cards and the face-up card on the table wins the hand.

If you can't spell a word at least four letters long, lay your hand face-down in front of you. When everyone's hands are face-down in front of them again, the dealer deals each player one more face-down card. Then the dealer cries "Slam!" and a new race begins: pick up your cards and look for words at least four letters long, which must use the face-up card on the table.

When you successfully play a word, gather up those cards (including the face-up card) and put them in a pile next to you — this is your score pile (see "Scoring"). All other cards — yours and other players' — are discarded and a new hand is dealt. When the deck is depleted to the point that there aren't enough cards for the next hand, all players total their scores (see "Scoring"), then all cards are reshuffled and a new deal happens.

Scoring

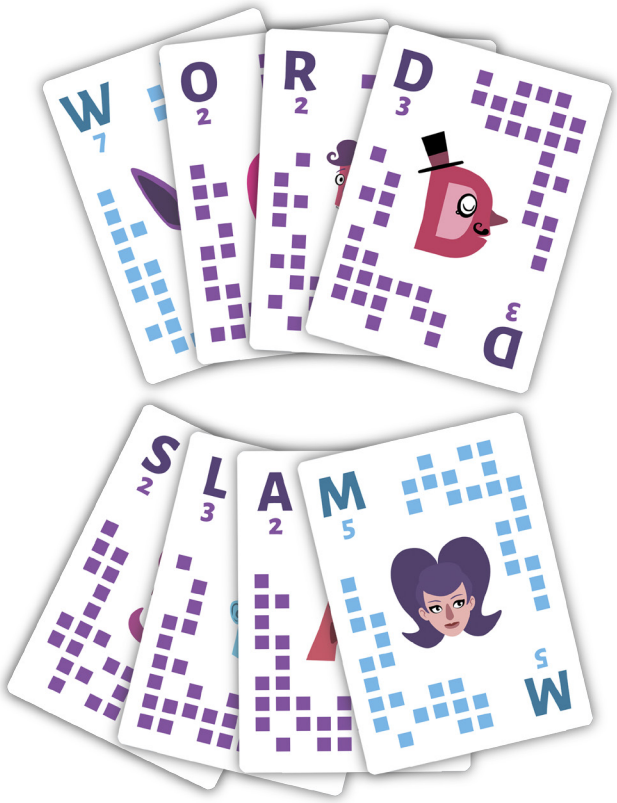
When the deck runs out, add up the points on all the cards in your score pile. There are no bonus points for forming long or short words, and wild cards count as zero. Write down your score, then discard all your cards so they can be reshuffled.

Challenges

If a challenged word proves invalid, the player who spelled the word must retract their cards. Play then continues as before. If the word is valid, there is no penalty for the challenger.

Strategy and Hints

As soon as you see any word of at least four letters, slam it down on the table as quickly as possible. Don't mull over your cards looking for the longest or the most valuable word — while you hesitate, someone else may beat you to the punch!



My Word!

For 3–8 Players

"My Word!" is a tense game requiring strategic thinking, deep knowledge of the English language, and lightning-quick reflexes. Everyone is playing at all times and each time a new card is revealed a hush falls over the players... sometimes broken by the triumphant cry of "My Word!"

The Goal

Form words by adding one card from your hand to the communal face-up cards before your opponents can.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal way.

The Deal

Deal each player ten cards, face-down, and then set the deck aside until the next deal. The player to the dealer's left goes first.

How to Win

You win if you're the player with the highest total number of points at the end of three complete deals.

The Play

The first player lays one card from their hand face-up in the center of the playing area. The player to their left then adds a card face-up, and so on around the table. As each new card is played, make sure all the face-up cards remain visible to everyone.

Any time there are at least three cards face-up on the table, *everyone except the player to lay the last card* may attempt to form a word. If you are able to form a word at least four letters long using no more than one card from your hand, call out "My word!," reveal the card from your hand, and arrange the cards into a word, naming it aloud. If no one challenges your word (see "Challenges"), or if they do and your word is valid, gather up the word and place it in a face-down pile next to you. This is your score pile.

Play only stops long enough for the next player in line to play a card face-up. They can take as long as they like to decide what card to lay, and until they actually place that card on the table, they are allowed to form words using the cards already in play. In practice, this means that player will first look to see if they can form a word, and if they can't, only then will they consider which card to lay face-up for everyone else to use.

Play continues around the table until only one player is left with cards in their hand. At that point, the deal ends and each player's score is totaled (see "Scoring"). Then, gather up the cards and reshuffle them. The next dealer deals out ten cards to each player. The game is over after three complete deals.

Scoring

When there is only one player left with cards in their hand, turn over the cards in your score pile and total up the point values. Add that amount to your score. There are no bonus points for long words, and wild cards score 0.

Challenges

If a challenged word proves to be invalid, the player who formed it must retract the card they played, and forfeit the opportunity to form any other word that turn. If the challenged word is valid, then the challenger forfeits the right to form a word on the next play.

Strategy and Hints

When it's your turn to play a card face-up, the pace of the game is in your hands. You have all the time you need to form a word, but once you lay a card face-up, you're stuck doing nothing until the next player goes. It's generally better to take your turn as quickly as possible; if you don't think you can form a word, pushing play to the next player only helps you, and if you can play cards to the table faster than your opponents can think, you'll keep their attention divided.

On your turn, try to play a letter that doesn't "go with" the letters already visible. For example, if a T was face-up, and you had in your hand both an R and a B, you should play the B because "tb" and "bt" almost never occur in English, whereas "tr" and "rt" are very common. Avoid playing vowels face-up, as they will almost always help your opponents.

Only play difficult letters like J and Q if you're sure they will not help your opponents. Consider holding on to them instead; all it will take is your opponent laying down a vowel or two for you to put those letters to good use.

If your hand is so good that you have several different word-forming options, try to use uncommon letters with high point values — but don't take too long fumbling for a high-scoring word, or another player may call out "My word!" first.

When it's someone else's turn to play a card in the center, pay close attention and be ready to pounce.

House Rules

For a longer, more involved game, simply extend the number of deals required before declaring a victor to four, five, or even more.

When children play "My Word!," lower the minimum word length to three. When playing a mixed game with both children and adults, allow the children to form words of any length but require four-letter words of the adults.

Crosswords

For 2–4 Players

In "Crosswords," players compete for letters to build grids of words, creating the most dense, highest-scoring word arrays they can.

The Goal

Arrange your cards in a 5 × 5 grid, forming the highest-scoring words possible both horizontally and vertically.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal way.

Make sure that everyone around the table has ample space to arrange their cards.

The Deal

Place the deck face-down in the center of the table. Flip two, three, or four cards face-up next to it, depending on whether there are two, three, or four players in the game.

How to Win

You win if you're the player with the highest grand total.

The Play

The player to the dealer's left goes first.

On your turn, choose one of the face-up cards and place it in front of you, as the first card in what will eventually grow into a 5 × 5 grid of cards. Play passes to the left, with each player selecting a card from among those remaining, until everyone has a card.

When the cards in the center are all gone, the player to the left of the last round's dealer becomes the new dealer, and flips two, three, or four cards face-up. Then the player to the new dealer's left chooses the first card, and so on. Play proceeds through a total of 25 deals — enough for each player to fill their 25-card, 5 × 5 grid.

As you collect cards, once you've placed a card in a specific location in your grid, you are not allowed to move it. Your grid may grow in any direction, but there may never be more than five rows and five columns. You may not leave empty spaces as your grid grows; every card after your first must be horizontally, vertically, or diagonally adjacent to a previous card in your grid.

Try to arrange your cards so the greatest number of words are spelled both in the five horizontal rows and the five vertical columns. Words must be at least three letters long. Wild cards can substitute for any letter, and may be used in place of a certain letter for a horizontal word and for a completely different letter for a vertical word.

Scoring

Once each player's grid is complete, announce one word in each column and row of your grid. Each word must be at least three letters long. Only one word may be chosen per row or column, no matter how many different words might be present.

Total up the points for all your words to arrive at your grand total. A letter used in both a horizontal word and a vertical word is counted twice. There are no bonus points for word length. Wild cards score the value of the letter they substitute for. A wild card may substitute for a different letter vertically than it does horizontally.

Challenges

If a challenged word proves invalid, it is disqualified. The challenged player may announce a different word for the same line, if they have one. If a challenged word proves valid, it is scored as normal and there is no penalty for the challenger.

Strategy and Hints

It's tempting to grab high-scoring letters when you have a chance, but be careful: high-scoring letters are often difficult to form words with.

On the other hand, if you play it safe and fill your grid with easy-to-use E's, T's, and S's, you may be able to spell many words across and down, but you won't score very much.

Despite its apparent simplicity, "Crosswords" is a difficult game to play well. You must visualize the possibilities of the entire grid each time you select and place a letter.



Crosswords Solitaire

For 1 Player

"Crosswords Solitaire" is a single-player version of "Crosswords," which challenges you to complete a grid of letters to form up to ten words, without the option to choose what letter you'll take next!

The Goal

Arrange your cards in a 5 × 5 grid, forming the highest-scoring words possible both horizontally and vertically.

Getting Started

Shuffle the deck and place it face-down in front of you.

How to Win

Keep a record of your highest grand totals and try to outdo your best score.

The Play

Draw cards one at a time from the deck. Each time you draw a card, place it in front of you, inside what will eventually grow into a 5 × 5 grid of cards.

Once you've placed a card in a specific location in your grid, you are not allowed to move it. Your grid may grow in any direction, but there may never be more than five rows and five columns. You may not leave empty spaces as your grid grows; every card after your first must be horizontally, vertically, or diagonally adjacent to a previous card in your grid.



Scoring

When you've completed your 5 × 5 grid, choose one word in each column and row. Each word must be at least three letters long. Only one word may be chosen per row or column, no matter how many different words might be present

Total up the points for all your words to arrive at your grand total. A letter used in both a horizontal word and a vertical word is counted twice. There are no bonus points for word length. Wild cards score the value of the letter they substitute for. A wild card may substitute for a different letter vertically than it does horizontally.

Strategy and Hints

Carefully ponder each card before you place it — one mislaid card can wreak havoc on your entire grid.

House Rules

For a less punishing game, choose some number of mulligans you'll allow yourself when the game starts. Spend a mulligan to send a drawn card to the bottom of the deck, instead of being forced to play it in your grid.

Letter Head Solitaire

For 1 Player

This is a no-frills form of solitaire that takes up very little space. It's a good game to play while waiting in airports, riding trains or buses, or in any other setting where you don't have a lot of room to spread out.

The Goal

Form a series of words using every single card in the deck.

Getting Started

Place the thoroughly shuffled deck face-down in front of you.

The Deal

Draw seven cards from the deck to start.

How to Win

You win if you are able to use up the entire deck.

The Play

Inspect the cards in your hand, create any word at least three letters long, and place those cards face-up in the used pile. Replenish your hand up to seven cards again from the face-down deck.

Keep playing words from your hand, placing them in the used pile, and replenishing your hand from the deck after every word.

At any point in the game you may find yourself with a seven-card hand in which no words at all can be formed. This is called "being stymied." When you get stymied, place all the cards in your hand face-up on the bottom of the unplayed deck. When you reach the end of the face-down cards, take all the unplayed face-up cards, reshuffle them, place them face-down in front of you, and start drawing again from these recycled cards. If you are again stymied, repeat the process until you have used up all the cards or you are unable to play any more words.



Strategy and Hints

Play words that have a high proportion of consonants and just one or two vowels.

Use difficult letters like J and X whenever you can, even in short or unimpressive words.

If you've played halfway through the deck and notice that the Q has not yet appeared, try to hang on to unplayed U's, to avoid getting stuck with an unplayable Q at the end of the game. Beware, though: if your hand has only one vowel, you will be compelled to play it in a word, even if you don't want to.

Hang on to wild cards as long as possible, especially as you get near the end of the deck; they'll come in handy when you find yourself facing a stack of troublesome letters that stymied you earlier.

Letter Recall

For 2–6 Players

This game takes the old parlor game Concentration to an entirely new level. Not only must you remember the locations of dozens of hidden cards, you must also manipulate the hidden combinations in your mind to form words.

The Goal

Spell out words with face-down cards by remembering the location of hidden letters as they are revealed — before your opponents do the same thing.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the usual way

The Deal

Arrange 64 cards face-down in an 8 × 8 grid in the center of the table.

How to Win

You win if you're the player with the most points after two complete 8 × 8 grids have been exhausted.

The Play

Play moves around the table starting on the dealer's left.

On your turn, select one card from the field and turn it over. Once everyone has seen the card, turn it face-down again. Play continues around the table.

On your turn, if you think you're able to spell a word of at least three letters, instead of turning over a random card, name the word you intend to spell. Then recite each letter and turn over each corresponding card, all in the proper order. Wild cards may be called as any letter. If you are successful in recalling the location of every card in a correctly spelled word, gather those cards into your scoring pile. If you turn over an incorrect letter, though, you must stop immediately, flip the cards face-down again, and forfeit the remainder of your turn.

Play continues until there are no cards left in the grid, or until all players agree no more words can be formed.

Scoring

To score, tally up the values of the cards in your scoring pile. Wild cards count as zero. Add this total to your score, and then a new deal begins. Do not shuffle the previous grid's cards into the second grid. The new dealer is the player with the lowest score in the preceding round.

Challenges

If a challenged word proves invalid, all the cards must be returned to their original positions, face-down, and the challenged player must close their eyes the next time a card is turned over. If a challenged word proves valid, the challenger(s) must close their eyes the next time a new card is turned over.

Strategy and Hints

Don't get distracted. Try to concentrate as carefully as possible on each card as it is turned over, and don't let the other players' antics disturb you.

Spell a word as soon as you sure you can do so — it rarely pays to wait to construct a better or longer word.

House Rules

For a more difficult challenge, increase the minimum word length to four letters.



Word Poker

For 2–8 Players

"Word Poker" plays exactly like five-card draw poker except there are no standard hands like three-of-a-kinds, straights, or flushes. Instead, the pot is won by the player with the highest-scoring word.

The Goal

Be the player with the highest scoring word in the showdown

The Deal

Deal everyone five cards face-down.

How to Win

You win if you have the most chips when the predetermined stop time or condition rolls around.

The Play

The rules for betting, drawing cards, and winning the hand are the same as for standard five-card draw poker, as described below.

Getting Started

Choose a dealer in the normal way. Collect a set of objects to bet with: Poker chips or coins are recommended, but any small household objects such as buttons or paper clips will do. Distribute an equal number of chips to each player, in sufficient quantities to allow for several rounds of play. Different colors or sizes of chips can indicate different values.

Players may wish to agree ahead of time on the maximum amount allowable for any one bet, to prevent excessively large bets designed to force out players with only a few chips left.

Make sure all players at the start of the game are familiar with the "25/15/5" bonus point scheme for five-card hands, because it is essential knowledge for calculating how likely a hand is to win the pot.

Decide how long you want to play. A predetermined time ("We'll go to 10pm, sound good?") or when one player has won a certain number of chips (possibly "all the chips") both work well. Alternatively, you can just play until everyone decides it's time to stop, but make sure you decide before beginning.

Anteing Up

Everyone puts one chip in the center of the table. This initial bet is known as the "ante." The communal pile of everyone's bets in the center of the table is called the "pot." Once you've anted, you may look at your cards.

Betting: First Round

The player to the dealer's left goes first. They can bet as much as they like by placing that many chips in the pot. They can also bet zero chips, also called a "check." In either case, the option to bet next passes to the next player.

Each subsequent player must contribute to the pot at least as many chips as the previous player, contribute *more* chips than the previous player, or withdraw from the hand. Betting the same amount as the previous player is a "call," betting more is a "raise," and withdrawing is a "fold."

Once all players have either folded or contributed the same amount to the pot, the betting round is over and the draw begins, unless only one player remains, in which case that player wins the hand.

The Draw

After the first round of betting, each player, starting on the dealer's left, has the option to discard as many cards as they want, from none to all of them. After you place your unwanted cards in the discard pile, the dealer replaces them with an equal number of cards from the deck, face-down.

Betting: Second Round

After the draw there is a second round of betting, which works exactly like the first, except that the player who established the highest bet in the first round goes first, instead of the player to the dealer's left.

After the second round of betting is complete, players still in the game have a showdown to determine the winner.

The Showdown

Lay your cards face-up on the table and announce the word you're spelling, along with its point value. Announced words are final; if you or another player later notice a higher-scoring word that could have been formed, it's too late.

Side Pots

If a player runs out of chips in the middle of a hand, they may stay in the game, but only win the total that was in the pot at the time they ran out of chips.

To keep track of this, all bets above the amount contributed by the player who ran out of chips are placed in a "side pot." If the player who ran out of chips wins the hand, they only win the chips in the main pot. The remaining chips in the side pot are won by the player with the second-best hand. If someone other than the player who ran out of chips wins the hand, then the winner takes all the chips in both pots as normal.

Scoring

The player with the most chips at any given moment is winning

Calculating the Point Value of Words

Each word's score is determined by adding up all the points on all of the cards in the word as well as any bonus points, which are determined by the length of the word, as shown on the reference card for five-card hands.

Winning the Hand

You win the hand and collect all the chips in the pot if your word scores the most total points. If everyone was bluffing and no one can spell a word at all, the player with the highest-value single card wins the pot. Tied players split the pot evenly among themselves, with leftover chips left in the pot to be collected by the winner of the next hand.

Challenges

Any player in the showdown can challenge any word. If the word proves invalid, the challenged player's word is disqualified and can't win the pot. If the word is valid, there is no penalty for the challenger, since they are going to lose the pot anyway.

Strategy and Hints

As with standard poker, the most successful players have a knack for bluffing and misleading their opponents. The purpose of bluffing is to scare off players with good hands so you can win the pot with a mediocre or bad hand. Bluffing can entail pretending to have a better hand than you actually do, or maintaining an expressionless "poker face" while making large and risky bets.

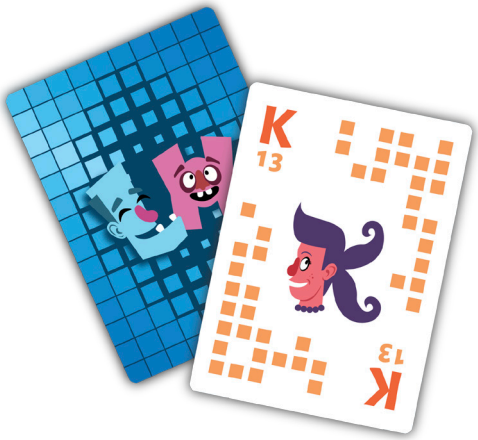
"Sandbagging" is the opposite of bluffing: feigning disappointment, or at least apathy, with your cards when in fact you have a high-scoring hand. The goal of sandbagging is to keep as many players in the game as possible and thereby increase the size of the pot. A good mixture of bluffing, sandbagging, maintaining a poker face, and playing honestly will keep the opposition confused and running scared.

Quick Rules for Experienced Poker Players

1. Everyone antes one chip.
2. Everyone is dealt five cards.
3. The first round of betting: Starting with the player to the dealer's left, everyone bets, raises, or folds as in standard poker.
4. The draw: Everyone can discard and draw as many cards as they like, up to five cards.
5. The second round of betting: Starting with the player who opened the first round of betting, everyone bets, raises or folds as in standard poker.
6. The showdown: If there's more than one player left in the game after the second round of betting, everyone shows their cards and announces their word. The player with the highest point value word wins the pot. A word's value is determined by adding up all its cards as well as its bonus points, as shown on the reference card (25 bonus points for a five-letter word, 15 for a four-letter word, and 5 for a three-letter word). The player who wins the pot collects all the chips that have been bet and a new hand begins.

Advanced Poker Rules

There are a wide variety of customs advanced poker players observe that can apply equally to "Word Poker." For example, many poker games only allow raises in amounts equal to or greater than the preceding bet, and many prevent a player who calls a bet from later raising a bet in the same hand. Happily, the rules of standard poker and its variants are widely available on the Internet. The right set for you is just a web-search away.



Seven-Letter Stud

For 2–8 Players

"Seven-Letter Stud" is based on seven-card stud poker. The betting rules are essentially the same as for "Word Poker." What's different is the number of cards and the manner in which they're dealt.

The Goal

Be the player with the highest scoring word in the showdown.

Getting Started

Get started the same way you do in "Word Poker." The "Word Poker" rules for side pots are also observed, in exactly the same way, in "Seven-Letter Stud."

The Deal

Deal everyone two cards face-down and one card face-up.

How to Win

You win if you have the most chips when the predetermined stop time or condition rolls around.

The Play

Each player may look at their own face-down cards at any time.

Betting: First Round

After the deal, the player with the lowest-value face-up card is forced to bet one chip, which begins a betting round just like the betting rounds described in "Word Poker."

More Cards and Betting: Second, Third, and Fourth Rounds

Once the first betting round is done, each player still in the game is dealt another face-up card. This is followed by a round of betting, starting with the player showing the highest sum of face-up card values. In all rounds of betting after the first, the lead player may bet no chips (a "check"); only in the first round of betting is there a forced one-chip bet.

The third and fourth rounds are just like the second, with an additional card dealt followed by an additional round of betting.

The Final Card and Final Round of Betting

After the fourth round of betting, each player still in the game is dealt a seventh card face-down. This is followed by the fifth and final round of betting, led by the player with the highest sum of face-up score values, who may check to lead the betting if they wish.

After the final round of betting, players still in the game have a showdown to determine the winner.

The Showdown

Lay your cards face-up on the table and announce the word you're spelling, along with its point value. Announced words are final; if you or another player later notice a higher-scoring word that could have been formed, it's too late.

Quick Rules for Experienced Poker Players

1. The dealer deals all players two cards face-down and one card face-up.
2. The player with the lowest-value face-up card must ante one chip, which is considered a live bet in the first betting round. If there's a tie for lowest, the first player to the dealer's left is the one who antes.
3. The first round of betting: Starting with the player to the left of the player who anted, every-one bets, raises, or folds as in standard poker.
4. Additional cards and betting rounds: The dealer deals to all players a second, third, and fourth face-up card, each of which is followed by an additional round of betting. In each of these rounds of betting, the player with the highest sum of face-up scores bets first, but may check when leading.
5. Final face-down card: The dealer deals all players a seventh card, face-down, which is followed by a fifth and final round of betting, also led by the player with the highest sum of face-up scores.
6. The showdown: If there's more than one player left in the game after the last round of betting, everyone shows their cards and announce their word. Players may use any or all of their seven cards. The player whose word has the highest point value wins the pot. A word's point value is determined by adding up all its letter points as well as its bonus points, as shown on the reference card (35 bonus points for a seven-letter word, 25 for a six-letter word, 15 for a five-letter word, 5 for a four-letter word, and 1 for a three-letter word). The player who wins the pot collects all the chips that have been bet, and a new hand begins.

Calculating the Point Value of Words

Each word's score is determined by adding up all the points on all of the cards in the word as well as any bonus points, which are determined by the length of the word, as shown on the reference card for seven-card hands.

Winning the Hand

You win the hand and collect all the chips in the pot if your word scores the most total points. If no one can spell a word at all, the player with the highest-value single card wins the pot. Tied players split the pot evenly among themselves, with leftover chips left in the pot to be collected by the winner of the next hand.

Scoring

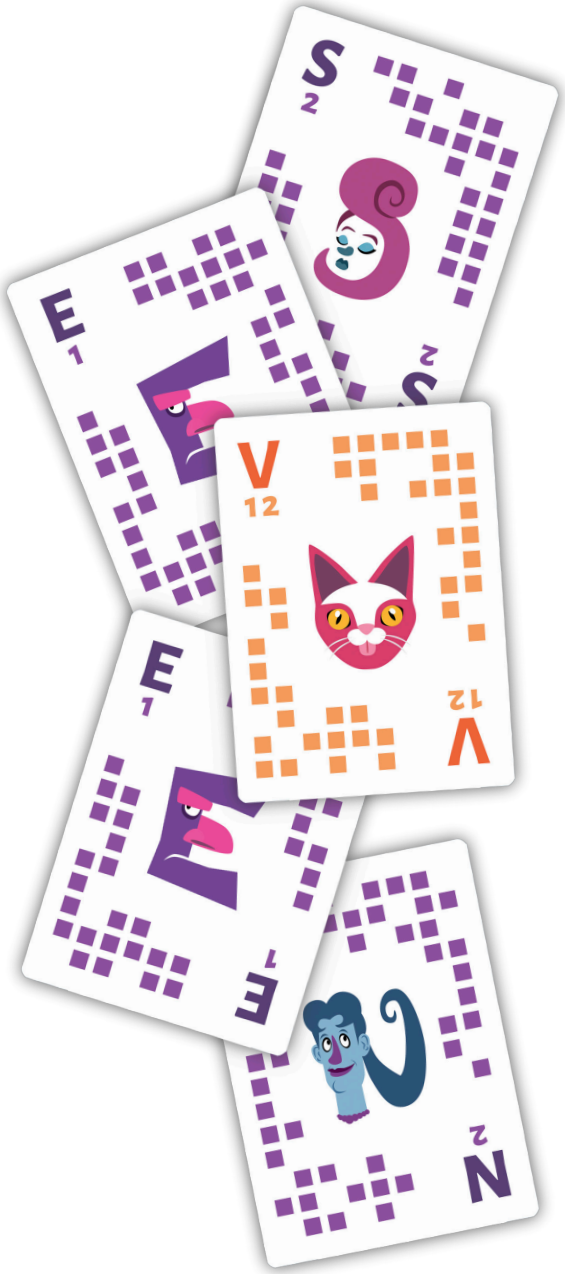
The player with the most chips at any given moment is winning.

Challenges

Any player in the showdown can challenge any word. If the word proves invalid, the challenged player's word is disqualified and can't win the pot. If the word is valid, there is no penalty for the challenger, since they are going to lose the pot anyway.

Strategy and Hints

Carefully examine your opponents' face-up cards when deciding whether and how to bet. Being able to see some of your opponent's cards is one of the unique features of all stud poker games. Otherwise, winning strategies for "Word Poker" are typically also winning strategies for "Seven-Letter Stud."



Stormy Letters

For 2–8 Players

This wild and woolly poker variant is like "Seven-Letter Stud," except all players share the same face-up cards. Players are also allowed to improve their hands by discarding and redrawing, which frequently leads to high-scoring words and high-drama showdowns.

The Play

Each player may look at their own face-down cards at any time, but players can only see what the community cards are as they are revealed in the course of play.

Anteing Up

Everyone puts one chip in the center of the table. This initial bet is known as the "ante." The communal pile of everyone's bets in the center of the table is called the "pot."

Betting: First Round

Betting rounds in "Stormy Letters" are conducted exactly as they are in "Word Poker."

The Draw

After the first round of betting, each player, starting on the dealer's left, has the option to discard as many of their four cards as they want, from none to all of them. After you place your unwanted cards in the discard pile, the dealer replaces them with an equal number of cards from the deck, face-down.

Revealing and Betting: Second, Third, and Fourth Rounds

After the draw, the dealer turns one of the community cards in the center of the table face-up. This is followed by a second round of betting, starting again with the player to the dealer's left. The dealer then turns over the second community card, followed by a third round of betting, and then the third community card, followed by a fourth and final round of betting.

After the final round of betting, players still in the game have a showdown to determine the winner.

The Showdown

Lay your cards face-up and announce the word you're spelling, along with its point value.

You may use any, all, or none of the cards in your hand as well as any, all, or none of the community cards in your word. If one player incorporates a particular letter from the center into their word, that letter is not "used up"; the other players may use that letter in their words too. Wild cards in the center can be used by different players as different letters.

Announced words are final; if you or another player later notice a higher-scoring word that could have been formed, it's too late.

The Goal

Be the player with the highest scoring word in the showdown.

Getting Started

Get started the same way you do in "Word Poker." The "Word Poker" rules for side pots are also observed, in exactly the same way, in "Story Letters."

The Deal

Deal everyone four cards face-down. Then deal three face-down community cards in the center of the table.

How to Win

You win if you have the most chips when the predetermined stop time or condition rolls around.

Quick Rules for Experienced Poker Players

1. All players ante one chip.
2. The dealer deals each player four face-down cards, and then deals three face-down community cards in the center of the table.
3. The first round of betting: Starting with the player to the dealer's left, everyone bets, raises, or folds as in standard poker.
4. The draw: Everyone can discard and draw as many cards from among their four cards as they wish, from zero to four.
5. Community cards revealed and additional betting rounds: The dealer reveals the community cards one by one, with each revelation followed by a round of betting, each starting with the player to the dealer's left.
6. The showdown: If there's more than one player left in the game after the last round of betting, everyone shows their cards and announces their word. Players may use any or all of their four cards as well as any or all of the three community cards to form a word. The player with the highest point value word wins the pot. A word's point value is determined by adding up all its letter points as well as its bonus points, as shown on the reference card (35 bonus points for a seven-letter word, 25 for a six-letter word, 15 for a five-letter word, 5 for a four-letter word, and 1 for a three-letter word). The player who wins the pot collects all the chips that have been bet, and a new hand begins.

Calculating the Point Value of Words

Each word's score is determined by adding up all the points on all of the cards in the word as well as any bonus points, which are determined by the length of the word, as shown on the reference card for seven-card hands. (scoring image)

Winning the Hand

You win the hand and collect all the chips in the pot if your word scores the most total points. If no one can spell a word at all, the player with the highest-value single card wins the pot. Tied players split the pot evenly among themselves, with leftover chips left in the pot to be collected by the winner of the next hand.

Scoring

The player with the most chips at any given moment is winning.

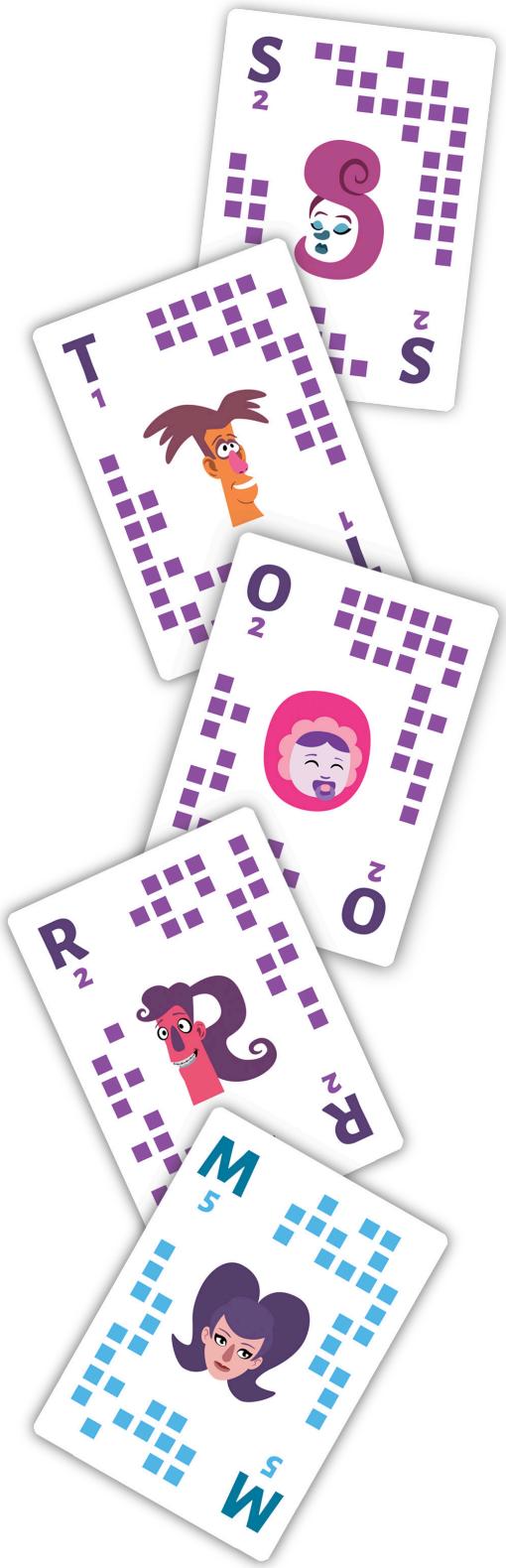
Challenges

Any player in the showdown can challenge any word. If the word proves invalid, the challenged player's word is disqualified and can't win the pot. If the word is valid, there is no penalty for the challenger, since they are going to lose the pot anyway.

Strategy and Hints

Remember that the three cards in the center can be used by all the other players, so don't get too excited if you can incorporate a high-scoring letter from the center in your word; the other players will likely be able to do the same.

The key to winning "Stormy Letters" is to make six- or seven-letter words, or to incorporate high-scoring letters from your hand into your word. Otherwise, winning strategies for "Word Poker" are also typically winning strategies for "Stormy Letters."



Letter Hogs

For 5–9 Players

"Letter Hogs" is a fast-paced, comical game based on the old children's game Pig. Knowledge of the alphabet is key information, so this fun-filled party game is also a fun-filled learning experience.

The Goal

Be the first player to get three cards in consecutive alphabetical order — or at least avoid being the last player to notice that another player has done so.

Getting Started

First, remove all wild cards from the deck. Then, choose a dealer in the usual way, although in a mixed adults-and-kids game, things usually go faster if a grown-up deals.

The Deal

Dealt each player seven cards face-down.

How to Win

You win if you're the first to get three letters in a row.

The Play

Look at your cards and try to find any three "in a row" — that is, in consecutive alphabetical order. If you can't, choose one card from your hand and pass it to the player on your left by placing it face-down on the table between you.

Each player who has passed a card to the left can always immediately pick up the new card that has been passed to them from the right. That is, there are no turns — everyone is passing and picking up cards simultaneously. However, no one can ever have more than seven cards at a time, so it's important to pass to the left before picking up from the right.

Once you have three cards in a row alphabetically, inconspicuously put your finger on your nose. You can stop passing cards, or you can keep playing with one hand. In any case, try to avoid attention. As each player notices that someone has gotten three in a row, they, too, put their fingers on their noses. The last player to notice is the "letter hog," and must stand up and recite the alphabet.

Scoring

"Letter Hogs" has no scoring.

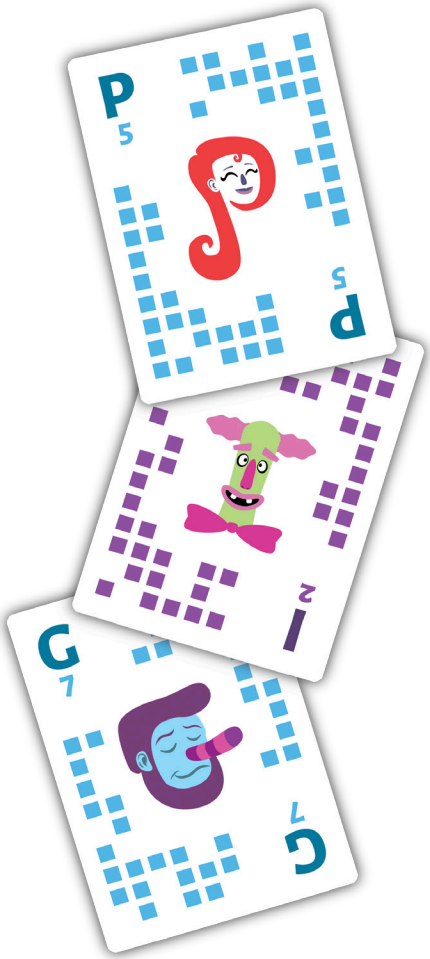
Challenges

If you claim to have three cards in a row and it is later discovered that you do not, everyone immediately picks up their cards and continues passing as before.

Strategy and Hints

Arrange the letters in your hand in alphabetical order so you can see all the possible groupings. Get rid of duplicate letters — they never do you any good.

Try to keep letters that are clustered close together, and pass away isolated letters that are off all by themselves. For example, if you have B, C, E, H, I, L, T, pass the outlying T and try to accumulate letters near the beginning of the alphabet, because you're much more likely to get three in a row there.



Letter Perfect

For 1 Player

This game is for very young children first learning the alphabet.

The Goal

Help your child learn the alphabet, spell simple words, and become comfortable with letters.

Getting Started

Make a 26-card deck with one card of each letter. Scramble them all face-up on the floor or talbe in front of your child.

The Play

Encourage your child to arrange the cards in alphabetical order.

If they have already mastered the alphabet, once they've arranged the cards in order, encourage them to find the cards that spell out easy words. Show them how replacing a single letter varies the word, such as how "bat" can become "cat" can become "hat."

Strategy and Hints

If your child is having trouble finding the next letter in the sequence, you can help them locate the card or remember which letter comes next — singing the alphabet song works as a friendly encouragement and reminder.



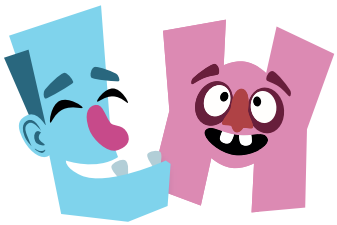
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