Pinochle

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Pinochle (sometimes **pinocle**, or **penuchle**) is a trick-taking game typically for two, three or four players and played with a 48 card deck. Derived from the card game bezique, players score points by trick-taking and also by forming combinations of cards into melds. It is thus considered part of a "trick-and-meld" category which also includes a cousin, belote. Each hand is played in three phases: bidding, melds, and tricks.

In some areas of the United States, such as Oklahoma and Texas, thumb wrestling is often referred to as "pinochle". [citation needed] The two games, however, are not related.

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History

Pinochle derives from the game bezique. The French word "binocle" also meant "eyeglasses".[1] The word is also possibly

derived from the French word, "binage", for the combination of cards called "binocle".^[2] This latter pronunciation of the game would be adopted by German speakers. German immigrants brought the game to America, where it was later mispronounced and misspelled "Pinochle."^[3]

Auction pinochle for three players has some similarities with the German game skat, although the bidding is more similar to that of bid whist.

During World War I, the city of Syracuse, New York outlawed the playing of pinochle in a fit of anti-German sentiment.^[4] Pinochle was the favorite card game of American Jews and Irish immigrants, while skat was the

Pinochle



The jack of diamonds and the queen of spades are the "pinochle" meld of pinochle.

Type Trick-taking

Players 4 in partnerships or 3

individually, variants exist for 2-

6 or 8 players

Skills required Strategy

Social skills Teamwork Card counting

Cards 48 (double 24 card deck) or 80

(quadruple 20 card deck)

Deck Anglo-American

Play Clockwise

Card rank A 10 K Q J 9

(highest to lowest)

Playing time 1 to 5 hours

Random chance Medium

Related games

Sixty-six, Bezique, Marjapussi, Skat, Belote

preferred game of a majority of German immigrants.

The deck

A pinochle deck consists of two copies of each of the 9, 10, jack, queen, king, and ace cards of all four suits, for 48 cards per deck. Aces are always considered high. Pinochle follows a nonstandard card ordering. The complete ordering from highest to lowest is **A,10**, **K**, **Q**, **J,9**. The game can also be played using standard ranking with a simple change to scoring.

Originally, the deck had to be composed by combining two poker, piquet or euchre decks and removing unneeded cards (a piquet deck does not have the 2-6, making it easier to modify, and a euchre deck is exactly half a pinochle deck), but with the game's popularity in the United States in the early 1900s, a single boxed deck with the necessary cards was marketed, and these specialized pinochle decks are now widely available in similar styles to common 52-card counterparts. Variants of pinochle can be played with five, six, eight or more players. These larger variations can combine two pinochle decks called a "double deck". The double deck can also be used when playing with 4 players; hand sizes, average scores and minimum bids are doubled.

Dealing

The game is played with one or two pinochle decks of 48 cards each; one player is the dealer. The deck may or may not be shuffled, particularly after the first round. By not shuffling, groups of cards played as tricks in the previous round are kept together, increasing the chances that a player will have a "heavy" (very favorable) hand, allowing for higher bids.

In pinochle, after the shuffle (if it occurs), the dealer will offer a cut to the player on their right, then distribute the cards. All the cards are dealt in partnership pinochle (4,6, or 8 players). In variations for odd numbers of players like three, a *widow's hand'* (also called a "kitty", "talon", or "stock") of cards remain. Traditionally, the deal is done clockwise, dealing a packet of three or four cards at a time, starting with the player to the left and ending with the dealer. The deal rotates clockwise, so the dealer's left-hand opponent will deal next.

Some players use a house rule that if a player receives a hand with an abundance of nines (variously, "a hand of 6 nines, or 5 nines and no meld", or "4 nines and no Aces, or 5 nines and only one Ace", for example), they can toss in their hand and declare a misdeal; the cards are then re-dealt by the same dealer. An accompanying rule sometimes limit the number of re-deals to three.

The auction

In auction pinochle, players bid for the points they predict their hand could earn. The highest bidder earns the right to declare the trump suit. One of the players, usually the player to the left of the dealer, or the dealer themselves, is obligated to open with a first bid. The size of bids is based on the point scale and number of decks used; traditionally, points are in multiples of 10, thus a minimum opening bid might be agreed to be $100^{[5]}$ or $250^{[3]}$. However, many alternate scoring rules drop the unnecessary trailing zero; in that case, bids of 10 and 25, respectively, have the same value. When a player has the turn to bid, the player may do either of the following:

- 1. Make a new bid, or
- 2 Pass

Each bid must be greater than the previous one, and be a multiple of 10 or 25 (if playing without trailing zeroes, the bid must be one or two greater respectively). When a player passes, they can no longer bid. The auction ends when all subsequent players in rotation have passed after the last bid. The last bid becomes the *contract*. The player that made this final bid will then declare trump in the suit that is desired. In some house rules, trump cannot be declared in any suit not containing a *run*, *marriage* or *dix* meld.

In order for the winning bidder to win the hand, the combined total of *melding* and *trick* points must be equal to or greater than the winning bid. Thus bidding involves anticipating the points that will be accumulated from melds

and from the points accumulated from winning tricks. If the combined score is lower than the bid, then the bidding team or player has been *set*. This means that the total bid amount is subtracted from the total game score, often accompanied by losing the points scored in meld for that hand as well. This can result in a negative score. ^[5]

A related though different style of bidding is for the players to bid individually, and partners' bids are then summed. The winning bid only decides trump; both (or all) teams' bids become their contract, meaning any team can score or be set. This creates a more balanced game. A house rule often used with this style of bidding is that a player or partnership must have a minimum number of meld points (usually 20 or 200 depending on point scales) in order to bid, and if it is discovered that they do not, a mis-bid is declared and the team's contract is null, with or without a penalty.

Passing cards

In some versions of Pinochle, after the bid has been taken and trump declared in a partnership game, the bid winning team exchanges cards. It may be two, three, or four cards, depending on the version of the game. The partner of the bid winner passes first. The objective of the partner is either to add to the total points in meld or to pass trick-winning cards. After receiving the cards, the bid winner examines what will create the strongest hand and then discards an equal amount of cards back to their partner. A variation is for the bid winner and partner to exchange the designated number of cards simultaneously, or for no passing to occur.

Melding

Melding consists of displaying specific combinations of cards to all players. Typically this is done by placing the combination of cards face up on the playing surface until all players have had the opportunity to examine them. All players meld after the bid winner shows meld first. The types of melds include **arounds**, **marriages**, **flushes** and **pinochles**.

{NOTE: trailing zeros in the counting of meld may be done consistent with the bidding process}

The *rank melds* containing four of the same face cards – ace, king, queen or jack – must include one card from each of the different suits. They are scored as follows:

- "100 Aces" or "Aces around" 4 aces of different suits 100 points
- "80 Kings" or "Kings around" 4 kings of different suits 80 points
- "60 Queens" or "Queens around" 4 queens of different suits 60 points
- "40 Jacks" or "Jacks around" 4 jacks of different suits 40 points

A player holding all eight aces, kings, queens or jacks is called a double around (or double aces, double kings, etc.). This hand is worth 10 times the value of a single around. For instance, a kings double around is worth 800 points.

The marriages, flush and dix are the *suit melds*.

- "Trump Marriage" king and queen of trump suit 40 points
- "Marriage" king and queen of a suit other than trump 20 points
- "Flush", "Family", "Rope", "Book", or "Run" A 10 K Q J of trump suit only 150 points. Similar to what is done with Aces, Kings Around, etc. A double run, or two runs in trump in the same hand, is worth 1500 points.
- "Dix" (pronounced 'deece') nine of trump 10 points

A marriage in each suit is worth 240 total points, which is nothing more than the sum of the marriages, plus kings around and queens around. As a shortcut, this is called a "roundtable", "marriages around", "Round House", or a "Round Robin". The pinochle is the unique combination that shares the name of the game.

- "Pinochle" jack of diamonds and queen of spades 40 points.
- "Double pinochle" both jacks of diamonds and both queens of spades 300 points.

■ "Triple pinochle" (can only occur in double-deck play) - 3 pinochles - 450 points.

In the most common form of the game (see variations below), any one card may be used in only one meld of each type. Thus, a queen card can be used in one marriage with one king, regardless if the player has the other king of the same suit. However, a queen can be used to score a marriage and a pinochle if the player also has the correct jack.

After the melds are displayed, the points are counted and the teams total their individual meld scores to form a team score.

Meld	Traditional Value	Traditional Value Simplified Value	
Miciu	Simplified Value		
Suit	Trump	Non-Trump	
Run	150	0	
(A 10 K Q J)	15	0	
Double Run	1500	0	
(A A 10 10 K K Q Q J J)	150	0	
Marriage	40	20	
(K Q)	4	2	
Dix	10	0	
(9)	1	0	
Rank	1 of Each Suit	2 of Each Suit	
Aces	100	1000	
(A)	10	100	
Kings	80	800	
(K)	8	80	
Queens	60	600	
(Q)	6	60	
Jacks	40	400	
(\mathbf{J})	4	40	
Pinochle	Single	Double	
Pinochle	40	300	
(J ♦ Q ♠)	4	30	

Playing tricks

In playing cards for tricks, there are strict rules of forced play, which limit a player's ability to strategically retain high cards: The high bidder leads the play with the first card, which can be any card in the contract winner's hand, although some rules require the first card led to be a trump card. Then there are two variations of following suit depending if you are playing post-1945 or pre-1945 rules.

Pre-1945 rules: Every player must follow the lead suit if possible. Usually every player must play a winning card

against those played so far, if it is possible to do so, even when the current player expects a later player to win the hand with a better card. The only exception is if a player played a trump card when trump was not the suit led. In that case, those following that player may play any card of the lead suit, since they must follow the lead suit but are already losing to the player who played trump. So if a player can play a card in suit, higher than any played so far, the player must do so, even if the player expects to lose to a later played card. Likewise, if a player cannot follow suit, but has trump, they must play trump. Again, if a player does not have any cards of the lead suit and can play a trump card higher than any other trump played so far, the player must do so, even if the player expects that a later player will beat the card. If another trump has already been played that a player cannot beat, then they can play any trump in their hand, but they still must play a trump card if they can. Only when a player has no cards in suit, and has no trump, can the player choose to play any card in their hand.

Post-1945 rules: Most books today say that unless trump is led you need not try to win the trick. It is only when trump is led that "heading" the trick is mandatory. In pinochle circles and tournaments the post-1945 rules are played about 50% of the time according to Pagat and Hoyle.^[6]

If two identical cards are played, the first one outranks the second.

After the first trick, the winner of each trick leads the first card for the next trick, until all the cards are played.

Scoring tricks

Points are scored based on the tricks won in the hand. There are several ways to count up the points for play, but they always add up to 250 points. The last trick is always worth 10 points. The classic counting system of Pinochle is where aces are worth 11, tens are worth 10, kings are worth 4, queens are worth 3, jacks are worth 2, and nines are worth zero. This method takes longer to count the score at the end of each hand. A simpler method is to count aces and tens for 10 points, kings and queens for 5 points, and jacks and nines are worth zero.

An even simpler method that reduces strategy in trick-taking has aces, tens, and kings worth 10 (and known as "counters"), and everything else zero ("garbage"). Since all points are multiples of ten in the third method, some players drop the redundant zero. Aces, tens, and kings won in tricks are worth one point. The meld scoring can also avoid the zero in the tenth place. Melds like 1,000 aces are thus worth 100. The terms "1,000 aces", "800 kings" and so on are often used, even though the point values are one-tenth.

	Method 1	Method 2	Method 3	Method 4
Aces (A)	11	10	10	1
Tens (10)	10	10	10	1
Kings (K)	4	5	10	1
Queens (Q)	3	5	0	0
Jacks (J)	2	0	0	0
Nines (9)	0	0	0	0
Last Trick	10	10	10	1

Game variations

Two-handed Pinochle

Two-handed Pinochle is the original Pinochle game, while partnership, auction, and all other variants are derivatives from it. It is the game most similar to the original Bezique game, whence Pinochle derived. The only significant difference in its rules from Bezique is the scoring.

The original version of Pinochle involves a partial deal of twelve cards to both players in sets of four, leaving a stock of 24 cards. A player can score one meld after each trick won of the first 12 tricks. Melded cards can even be

used to win tricks. After each trick, players draw one card from the stock into their hand starting with the trick-winning player. For the last 12 tricks, melds are taken into each player's hand and are no longer announced by the player who wins the trick. The traditional trick-taking rules apply only for these last 12 tricks.

In variations of two-handed play, no cards are initially dealt, a distinction from all other variations. Instead, the entire deck is placed face-down on the playing surface between the two players to form the widow. One player begins the hand-building process by drawing the top card of the widow. The player can either keep that card for her or his hand or reject the card. If the player chooses to hold the initial card, the player then draws a second card from the widow, then places it face-down, without looking at it, creating a discard pile. If the player rejects the first card, the card becomes the first card in the discard pile. The second card drawn from the widow must be kept, regardless of whether she or he preferred the first card. Players alternate turns in this hand-building process until all cards are chosen.

With bidding, the player winning the bid declares trump, then lays all meld face-up on the table. The other player shows her or his melds as well. Meld points are tallied, and players return meld cards to their hands. Some varieties accept a "Round house", kings and queens of each suit, and earn a bonus 10 points awarding a total of 250 points.

Trick-taking commences and continues until all held cards have been played. One variation has no "leading" requirement for the bid winner or subsequent trick winner to lead a specific card, however the rules of "following" are still observed.

When adding counters, cards from each player's discard pile are included in totals for a total of 240 counters per round, plus one counter for winning the final trick. One variation to make it more difficult for the bid-winning player, the discard pile created by drawing cards is used by the non-bidding player to score towards tricks.

Three-handed Pinochle

Each player plays for himself. The dealer deals 15 cards to each player and three cards to the widow—a separate pile in the middle.

All players review their cards and silently count meld, determining their bids. The player to the dealer's left initiates the bidding process. If the player has a meld, he or she is required to open the bidding; otherwise, they may pass or bid. If he or she passes, the obligation to bid passes to the next player, if meld is held. Once a player passes, he or she is out of the auction.

Bidding begins at 300, or 250 for an easier game, and increases in multiples of 10. The highest bidder wins the auction and turns up the three-card widow for all to see. In some versions, the cards are placed in the bid winner's hand. The bid winner then declares trump, lays down meld and discards three non-point cards. The widow cards are added to their hand and must now discard any three of the 18 cards in their hand and set the discarded cards aside. The winning bidder now names the trump suit and lays any meld face-up on the table to be counted. The other two players also lay meld face-up for count. After the appropriate points have been tallied for all three players, meld is returned to each respective player's hand, and the round is played. During the round, a player must take at least one trick to "save one's meld", even if the trick contains no points; otherwise, no meld points will be counted for that player during that round.

After all tricks are taken, counters are tallied for each player. The three discards by the highest bidder count toward their counter score for the hand, so there is always a total of 250 points for the trick score among the three players. If the highest bidder fails to make their contract by adding meld points and trick points from the play, then their score is negative the amount of the bid for that hand.

- After viewing the widow, the highest bidder may concede the hand and take a negative score for the amount of his bid; however, they still must name trumps and the other two players score their meld. Conceding the hand does save the trick points opponents would score playing their hands, although opponents will not have an opportunity to lose their meld by failing to take a trick.
- A player may not attempt to play the hand for more than 250 points. For example, if the bid is 350 and a

player has only 80 points in meld, that player is forced to concede. If a player is about to win, it may have been worthwhile to play the hand and try to deny that player a trick. Remember, the decision to concede a hand must be made before seeing the opponents' meld.

- A player forced to take the bid for 300 points may choose to concede without viewing the widow. His score is lowered by 300 points, and the opponents score nothing for the hand. This strategy is useful when another player is close to winning.
- The widow can often salvage a hopeless hand, so it pays to look when nobody is close to winning.

The game is won when one player reaches 1000 points. It is possible for two or all three players to go over 1000 on the same hand. There are 3 methods of resolving ties:

- 1. "Highest Score": If there's a tie, play another hand. This is the least desirable method.
- 2. "Overtime": The game is extended and is now a contest to 1250 points. If two players exceed 1250 points on the same hand, the contest lengthens to 1500 points. This rule holds regardless of score fluctuations (players "going minus" failing to reach their bid amounts and falling below 1000 points.
- 3. "Bid and Out": If two players exceed 1000 points on the same hand, then the high bidder for that round automatically is declared the winner. If two non-bidders exceed 1000 points on the same hand (extremely rare), then Method #1 or Method #2 would apply. The advantage of this method is that it very interesting when two or all three players are close to 1000 points.

Renege Any time a player accidentally misplays during the play portion of the hand, it is called a renege. There are various forms of misplay:

- playing out of suit
- sloughing on a trick when you hold trump in your hand
- playing out of turn
- failure to discard 3 cards prior to the play portion of the hand this constitutes a renege if bidder has led to the first trick
- purposely exposing any portion of your hand to another player (during the play portion of the game for all players and also during the meld *portion of the hand for nonbidders with the exception of meld cards)
- failure to kill
- any other action that disrupts the harmony of the game.

If the bidder reneges, he automatically takes a double set and the amount of his bid is subtracted from his score. The 2-opposing players get to count their meld points and the remainder of the hand is thrown in.

If either of the 2 nonbidders accidentally misplay, the bidder automatically makes his bid. The bidder gets to score the amount of his bid and his meld, the player that misplayed loses all meld and takes a single set, and the third player scores only his meld.

Cutthroat Pinochle

Similar to Three-handed Pinochle, Cutthroat is a simple modification. The dealer deals the entire deck out (16 cards to each player), in packets of 4. The player to the left of the dealer begins the bidding once meld has been silently determined by all players. Play continues normally in terms of scoring and trick taking, according to house rules. The only way to win in Cutthroat Pinochle, however, is to "Bid and Out," or to have taken the bid and surpassed the predetermined winning score. It is then possible for multiple players to go over the winning score, yet if none has taken a bid and met the resulting contract, a win has not happened and play continues. It is also possible for a person to lose with the high score if they do not take a winning bid. [citation needed]

Four-handed Pinochle

Four-handed Pinochle, or **partnership Pinochle** is played with two teams consisting of two players each. Partners are seated opposite from each other. Each player is dealt 12 cards. The opening bid is typically 150, but

can be a higher agreed on value. All four players may bid. Both the bidder and his partner have their score count towards making the contract. High bidder names trump. There typically is no kitty. With a kitty, the four cards are distributed, one to each player, by the bid winner. Each hand must meld separately: If your partner has a spade marriage, you may not put down the diamond jack for a pinochle; you must also have a spade queen. As in the three-handed version, the first player is forced to bid when holding meld. Play is often to 1000 but can increase to 1500 during partnership.

Optional rules for partnership Pinochle include forcing the dealer to bid 190, or some other agreed amount, if the first 3 players pass initially because they have no meld. In another variation, the winning partnership must, before melding, exchange 3 or 4 cards from each of their hands. This version is usually played to 1500. A player may announce they will "Shoot the Moon", declaring to all the other players that they are going to attempt to capture all the tricks in the current hand. If so, they earn 1,000 points and win the game. If they do not, they subtract 1,000 points from their score. This must be declared just before the tricks are going to be played out. Some versions give the game to a team which successfully 'shoots the moon', others automatically give 250 points for this no matter what the bid was.

Five-handed and larger Pinochle

Games with five hands or more typically modify partnership Pinochle in a variety of ways. With an odd number of players, the bidder asks for a desired card to be lead and played by the player who will be their partner for that hand. Everyone else plays against the team. In larger groups, one or more players can sit out each hand allowing the remaining players to follow the appropriate rules for the respective number of players.

Check Pinochle

This is a gambling variant of three-hand. It is the same as to 1000, except that you keep track of "checks". If you are playing \$1 stakes, each check you gain means that the other 2 players owe you a dollar. The following events cause a gain/loss of checks.

- Flush or run +1 check
- Aces +1 check
- Roundtable +2 checks (marriage in each suit)

Note that checks for meld can be earned either by the bidder or non-bidder. Checks are kept even if you do not make your bid or "throw it in".

- Looking at the "talon" and losing the hand (either by conceding or playing) -1 check
- Playing the hand and losing -1 additional check (optional)
- Not looking at the talon and conceding 300 points. no gain or loss of checks (happens when forced to bid)
- Double marriage (2 marriages in same suit) +1 check (optional)
- Double pinochle +1 check (optional)
- Double Aces, Double Kings, Double Queens, or Double Jacks +2 checks (optional)
- Winning the game +5 checks or +10 checks
- 7 nines +5 or +10 checks (optional) (do not need to win the bid to get credit)

Double-deck Pinochle

Double-Deck Pinochle is played with 2 Pinochle decks, minus the nines. This makes for an 80 card deck.

Play is similar to regular Pinochle, except 20 cards are dealt to each person and minimum bid is increased to 500 points. In some variations, bids are made in increments of 10 or more points until 600 is reached, then by 50 points. This version often features "meld bidding", a bid to your partner letting them know what you have in your hand. This can be any numerical bid, and it is advised that you talk to your partner before the game so you have a better understanding of what their bids mean. For instance, a bid of "510" after an opening bid of "500" by the first bidder could signal "aces around" (but ONLY in this specific bid sequence). Alternatively, this could mean that the bidder is asking for meld from their partner (anytime a player bids 10 more than the player before them). A bid

raise of 20 or more is to let your partner know what you have in your hand. Remember, it is best for all to talk to your partner before the game begins. You may not use a passing bid of "by me" to signal ten points held. The only communication during bidding should be a numerical number or "pass". Any other way of communicating is called "talking across the table" and is forbidden.

Racehorse Pinochle

Note that this use of the term "racehorse" is inconsistent with the commonly understood meaning of the term when applied to Pinochle. As aptly summarized by Dave LeVasseur: "Racehorse means that, after the winning bidder has named trump, that player's partner passes cards across the table" [7]

Played much as the same as "double deck" but to 6 hands, the point values are inflated.

Two teams are formed, 20 cards are then dealt to each player and 4 cards are dealt to the blind. Bidding commences with the person immediately to the left of the dealer automatically bidding 500. The winner of the bid includes the blind into his hand, calls trump and melds.

	Around (1 of each suit)	Twice Around	4 of a kind
Aces	100	1000	1000
Kings	80	800	800
Queens	60	600	600
10's or 9's	0	0	0

Note: All Runs, Double, Triple, and Quadruple, Marriages must be in Trump.

	Not Trump	Trump	Double	Triple	Quadruple
Marriage	20	40	300	900	the game
Pinochle	40	-	300	900	the game
Run	-	150	300	900	the game

The game continues with the standard rules of play. When the play is over each team adds up their points in the *count* with kings, 10s, and aces worth ten points, while queens and jacks are worth zero. If a team count plus meld does not equal their bid, they "go set". By going set the amount of the bid is subtracted from the teams score and their count is discarded. The other team retains both their meld and their count provided they took at least 10 points in the count.

Double-deck Pinochle for eight players

Two full decks are dealt between eight players, forming four teams. Team members are spaced so that they are not able to see any other hands. The game is usually played to a score of 5,000 or higher. Other than this, the four player rules apply, and any variations may also be used. There is an increased possibility that when one team declares trump another team may have an equal number of trump also, which may lead to an interesting game. An optional scoring rule rewards 1,000 points for a **quadruple pinochle**--four jacks of diamonds and four queens of spades in a meld.

See also

- Belote
- Bezique
- Marjolet

References

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- 6. ^ Card Games
- 7. ^ Pinochle Rules, Six Card Racehorse

External links

- American Pinochle Association
- National Pinochle Association
- Comprehensive Pinochle Documentation
- Detailed Pinochle Rules and Free computer game

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