PAIRS
A New Classic Pub Game

by James Ernest and Paul Peterson

Welcome!

Pairs is a simple press-your-luck card game, using an unusual "triangular" deck. The deck contains the numbers 1 through 10, with 1x1, 2x2, 3x3, and so on. You can play many different games with your Pairs deck, but let's start off with the basic rules.

The Basics: Pairs has no winner, just one loser. In each round, players will take turns drawing cards, until one person either *folds* or gets a *pair*. Either of these scores points, and points are *bad*. The first player with too many points loses:

Target Scores

Players:	2	3	4	5	6+
Losing Score:	31	21	16	13	11

(The formula: Take 60, divide by players, then add 1.)

Penalties: If you like, you can choose a penalty for the loser. The loser could tell a joke, buy a round of drinks, make a funny noise, or whatever is appropriate for your group.

> ***Who Should Deal?*** *One player can deal for the whole game, or the role of dealer can pass around the table. The dealer's position doesn't matter, since the starting player is always determined by the low card.*

Playing the Game

Getting Started: Shuffle the deck and *burn* (discard) five cards, facedown, into the middle of the table. This is the start of the discard pile. Each time you reshuffle, you will burn five cards again. (This makes it harder to count the cards.)

To start each round, deal one card faceup to each player. The player with the lowest card will go first.

> ***Ties for Low Card:*** *If there is a tie for lowest card at the start of the round, deal an extra card to the tied players, and use those cards to break the tie. (You might have to repeat this.) If any player catches a pair in this step, you discard the paired card and deal a replacement. You can't lose by catching a pair on the deal.*

On Each Turn: On your turn, you have two choices: You may *hit* (take a card), or *fold*. If you catch a pair, or fold, the round is over and you score points. If not, play passes to the left.

Pairing Up: When you hit, you're hoping not to get a pair (any two cards of the same rank). If you pair up, you score that many points. For example, if you catch a pair of 8's, you score 8 points. Keep one of those cards, faceup, to track your score.

Folding: You can surrender (fold) instead of taking a card. When you do this, you take *the lowest card in play* and keep it for points. You may choose this card from all players' stacks, not just your own.

Folding can be better than hitting, depending on the odds of catching a pair, but it's up to you to decide when to do it.

Ending the Round: As soon as one person pairs up or folds, the round is over. Discard all the cards in play, facedown into the middle, and start another round.

Players keep their scoring cards aside, faceup. These cards will not return to the deck until the game is over.

Reshuffling: When the deck runs out, reshuffle the discards. Pause the game, shuffle, and resume where you left off. (Remember to burn five cards off every new deck.)

> ***Using a Cut Card:*** *This deck includes one blank card, or "cut card." Keep this card on the bottom of the deck, where it prevents players from seeing the bottom card. When you reach the end of the deck, you can use the cut card to mark where play was interrupted. Place it back on the bottom after you shuffle.*

Losing the Game: There is no winner, just one loser. The game ends when one player reaches the target score (see the Target Scores chart on the left). For example, in a 4-player game, the loser is the first player to score 16 points.

Keep Playing! We hope you'll enjoy playing Pairs. Please visit **playpairs.com** for more games.

> ### Variation: Continuous
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> Continuous Pairs is nearly the same as basic Pairs, except that when a player pairs up or folds, *only that player's cards are discarded*. Everyone else keeps their cards, and that player is still in, currently with an empty stack. This game is basically one long round, instead of several short ones.
>
> Here are a couple of rules clarifications for Continuous:
> 1: When you fold, you may take *any card in play*.
> 2: When you have no cards, you must *always hit*.
>
> *Continuous Pairs can be a great change of pace. Try it out!*

About the Pirate Deck:

The Pirate Pairs deck was illustrated by **Brett Bean** for the 2014 Pairs Kickstarter project. It's a delightful assortment of colorful characters from a made-up world.

Note: *As in basic Pairs, you can burn five cards and then play until you run out of cards, in both Port and Starboard.*

Game Variant: Port

Port and Starboard are two simple games that you can play with a Pairs deck after (or during) a long sea voyage. They have similar core mechanics, but are quite different. Try them both!

Port is played in rounds, keeping score after each round. The first player to score 21 points wins.

Players: 2 to 7
Equipment: A Pairs deck and a way to keep score.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and burn five cards.

Each Round: Deal each player one card faceup. The low card will go first, with ties broken with extra cards, as in Pairs.

Each Turn: On your turn, you may either take a hit, or *lock* your stack. If you lock, you will receive no more cards in this round. If you hit, you are trying to get more points without getting a pair. A pair busts you, and you get no points at all.

The round continues until everyone has locked or busted.

Scoring: The player who has the most total card points in her stack (adding all the cards together) scores N game points, where N is the number of players. The next highest total scores N-1 game points, and so on, down to 1 game point for the lowest valued stack (if no one busted). Players who busted get no points. If there is a tie for any score level, both players receive the higher amount.

For example, in a 5-player game, the stacks are 23, 22, 22, 17, and bust. These players earn 5, 4, 4, 2, and 0 game points.

After the round is over, discard all the cards and deal again, and keep playing until a player scores 21 points or more. If there is a tie (that is, players with the same score of 21 points or more), those players play another round to break the tie.

Variation: Pieces of Eight

This is a simple variant for basic Pairs or Continuous Pairs.

8's are special. If you have an 8, instead of taking a hit, you can discard the 8 and take **two cards**. *(Note: If the first card makes a pair, you don't deal the second.)*

Game Variant: Starboard

Starboard *is a gambling game, so each round is a separate game. Players are betting on the same central hand of cards, trying to guess how long it will last before it pairs up.*

Players: 2 to 7
You Need: A Pairs deck, coins for gambling, about 100 per player, and a button or coin to designate the first player.

To Begin: Each player antes 1 coin into the pot. The player with the button acts first. If this is the first game, give the button to a random player; otherwise, it passes one seat to the left after each game.

Deal two cards into the middle of the table. This is the start of one hand that everyone will play. If the first two cards are a pair, discard one of the cards and replace it.

Each Turn: In turn, players may either *draw* or *lock*.

Draw: To draw, pay 1 coin into the pot. Deal a card to the hand, faceup. If this pairs the stack, you *bust* (lose), but the game continues. *Discard the paired card*, and drop out.

Lock: Declare that you are locked. When a player locks, any players who locked with *fewer cards* are knocked out. To win the pot, you must lock with the *highest number of cards*.

Ending the Game: The game ends when every player busts or locks. (If you are the only player left, you lock.) The pot is split among all players who locked with the highest number of cards. (Unlike in Port, the card points are irrelevant.)

Odd Coins: If the pot does not divide evenly, leave any odd coins for the next pot.

Dealing Hints: *To track which players are in what state, do the following: At the beginning of the game, keep each player's ante in front of that player, to designate that player as "in." When a player busts, move their ante into the pot. When a player locks, deal them a card facedown, placed under their ante. When a locked player is knocked out (because someone drew without pairing), take away their facedown card, and put their ante in the pot.*