

## How to Play Skat:

Skat is a three-person trick-taking card game. If four people are playing, the dealer sits out each hand. In each hand, one person is playing against the other two.

One player bids for control of each hand. The winner of the bidding calls the game (by announcing the trump suit) and plays against the other two. The person that wins the bidding takes the two cards from the skat and places 2 of his or her cards aside. They count as taken points.

The game is played with a deck of 32 (2s through 6s removed).

In a strange fashion, each player is dealt 10 cards: each player is dealt three cards at once, then 2 cards go to the “skat” in the table center, then four cards are dealt to each player, then three cards. All cards are dealt.

Once bidding is complete (see below) and a game declared, the player to the left of the dealer (the forehand) leads with the first card. If possible, all players must follow with the same suit. **Jacks do not count with their suit.** Trump counts as its own suit and jacks are always the highest trump. Jacks are always trump. This can be hard for the beginner to understand. To repeat, jacks are always trump.

The rank order for jacks is club, spades, hearts, diamonds. The jack of clubs is *always* the top card. Then jack of spades, jack of hearts, jack of diamonds, then ace of trump suit, 10 of trump suit, king of trump suit, and so on down.

Let's say that for one hand clubs are declared trump. The first card played is the ace of hearts. All players must follow suit, hearts in this case (but not the jack of hearts because jacks are always trump).

If hearts are led, then the *highest heart* takes the trick. The order of cards in each suit is: ace, ten, king, queen, 9, 8, 7. Note the 10 is between king and ace. Trump always takes non-trump.

Let's say clubs are trump. The jack of spades is played. Remember, jacks are trump. All players must follow with a trump if they have one, in this case one of the clubs or any other jack. If you cannot follow suit, then you may play any card.

Whoever takes the trick leads with the next card. The leading player may play any card.

You take tricks, but the winner is determined by points. To win, the declarer must take 61 out of the 120 points in the deck.

- Aces are worth 11 points.
- Tens are worth 10 points.
- Kings four points.
- Queens three points.
- Jacks two points (even though they are the highest cards for taking tricks, they aren't worth many points in and of themselves).
- 7, 8, and 9s are worth zero points.

To win a hand, you basically have to take as many aces and tens as you can. The game is always one person against two. The two defenders play together (but do not share cards or knowledge). Their tricks and points count together against the one declarer.

I'm not going to pretend it's the easiest card game to learn. It's not. But it's just a card game and I'm sure you can handle it.

To learn the game, it may be best to skip bidding for the first few rounds. Simply give the forehand (to the left of the dealer) the option of playing or not playing, then the middle-hand, then the rear hand.

## Bidding:

Each hand is bid on, to determine which player plays solo against the other two. Bidding is kind of complicated for what is really just sets the table to the actual play.

First you have to decide if you want control of the hand, which is bit more art than science. You want the hand if you can win. And you can win if you have a few aces, at least one jack, lots of one suit (which would become trump), and are short-suited in another. The player also gets to take and replace the two cards in the skat.

**The multiplier** is determined by which jacks you do or don't have in your hand, starting with the highest jack, the jack of clubs. The order of jacks is everything: Clubs, Spades, Hearts, Diamonds.

You either have the jack of clubs or not. If you do, you are playing "with" however many jacks you have in sequence. The multiplier is then that number plus one. For instance, "with two play three." If you don't have the jack of clubs, the multiplier is determined by the first jack in sequence that you *do* have. The sequence and rank order of the jacks is always Clubs, Spades, Hearts, Diamonds.

Your multiplier will always be at least two (with or without one, play two). If you have all four jacks, you have: with four, play five. Without any jack would be the same multiplier (but a much tougher hand to win): without four, play five.

If you have the jack of clubs but not the jack of spaces, your multiplier is two (in that case the latter two jacks are irrelevant for bidding). The multiplier is three if you have the jack of clubs *and* spades and not the jack of hearts. You would think, "with two jacks, play three. My multiplier is three." Four if you have the first three jacks but not the jack of diamonds.

If you *don't* have the jack of clubs, then you see how many jacks in a row you don't have (clubs, spades, hearts, diamonds). Your multiplier is the first jack you *do* have. If you have only the jack of diamonds, then you would think, "without three jacks, play four. My multiplier is four."

*[If you are playing any suit and you have all four or none of the four jacks, you continue on to the potential trump suit so you could play a with or without 5 (the four jacks with or without the ace) or with or without 6 or 7 hand.]*

The cards in the skat count toward your multiplier even though you don't know what they are. Therefore one should always bid cautiously on hands that are "without" two or more jacks. A jack in the skat could very easily lower your multiplier and your bid.

If you have only the jack of diamonds, for instance, your multiplier would be "without three, play four." If you win control and it turns out the jack of clubs is in the skat, your bid reverts to "with one, play two." If you bid too high for a hand, you lose.

**Your bid** is based on the multiplier times the game you want to play (the suit that will be trump). Generally your trump is the suit you have most of.

Each suit has an arbitrary number value: clubs = 12, spades = 11, hearts = 10, diamonds = 9. The minimum bid is 18 (9 X 2). "Grand" (no trump suits, just the jacks), the number value is 24 times the multiplier. Thus, if you can play trump, you will likely win the bid because the minimum grand bid is 48 (24 X 2).

OK... when you get your cards, you arrange your jacks off to one side and group all the other cards first by suit, then in order (A, 10, K, Q, 9, 8, 7).

If you want to play the hand, figure out your maximum no-problem bid and keep that number in mind. Bidding happens fast and starts with the player on the forehand's left (opposite the dealer, in a four-person table) offering the forehand a bid of 18. The person receiving a bid simply says yes or no. The bid can then be raised to the next highest bid (all possible bids are listed below). When either player drops out, the rearhand takes to the remaining bidder.

To remember who deals, who listens, and who speak, the Germans say geben, horen, sagen (give, listen, speak, going clockwise).

If you want control of a hand but can't bid high enough, there are two simple ways to raise your multiplier by won. "Hand" means you don't look in the skat. Winning Schneider means winning with 90 points rather than usual 61.

Null games (see below) are not affected by the multiplier. Null has a flat value of 23. The game of “null hand” has a value of 35. The game of “null open” (turn your cards face up) has a value of 46. The game of “null hand open” has a value of 59.

You are never forced to play a hand. If a player doesn't want to place a bid, he or she simply says “pass” or “weg” (out). If all players pass, Ramsch is played (see below).

The winner of the bid then takes the two cards in the skat (unless playing “hand”) and puts two cards back into his or her skat. Then the game (usually what suit is trump) is announced. The game can also be Grand (only jacks remain trump) or Null. When the game is announced, the forehand plays the first card.

**Play** is pretty easy by comparison. After three cards are played, the winner takes the trick. After all cards are played, point are counted. If the declarer has 61 or more points, he or she wins. *How much* the player wins goes back to value of the hand or the maximum bid possible (which is usually higher than what was actually the winning bid).

With two, play three, clubs is a 36-point hand. It is a 36-point hand regardless. With one, play two, Grand is a 48-point hand.

In skat scoring, the winner of the hand receives the bid value of the hand plus 50 points. If the declare loses a hand, he or she loses *double the value of the hand* minus an additional 50 points. On top of that, each opponent receives 40 points (30 points in a three-person game).

### **Null:**

Null has a bid value of 23. Null is a different game than skat. In null, the declarer must *lose every trick*. There are no trump. The rank order of the cards goes to the traditional A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7. To win null, it helps to have 7s in every suit you hold.

### **The NYCSA plays standard DSkV rules except:**

Contra (X2) may be declared up to and included when a player plays his or her first card. Re-contra (X4) allowed. One must bid to declare Contra.

If no bid is placed (a passed hand), one hand of Ramsch (see below, but no grand-hand offered, no Schieberamsch).

One round of Bock (double value), followed by one round of Ramsch is played after grand hand won, contra won, re-contra won, or a 60-60 game. Only one round of Ramsch will be played per scoresheet page (usually 32 hands). Games are played for 1/2 cent per point.

### **Ramsch rules:**

Ramsch is played when no player places a bid. In effect, it punishes the player with the best hand. In Ramsch (unlike Null) cards remain in standard Skat-order and jacks are trump. But each player plays solo and tries to gain as *few* points as possible. Last trick takes skat.

Grand hand is offered (not when Ramsch is played after a passed hand) to each player. If grand hand is played, the same dealer deals the next round of Ramsch.

Schieberamsch is played (taking the Skat and passing two cards). Jacks may not be passed. Schiebe (not looking) doubles the final point value.

There are many different ways to score Ramsch. The NYCSA plays with one loser losing the points taken. The maximum multiplier in any Ramsch hand is X4. On a tie there can be two losers. On a tie there cannot be two winners. The game counts as a loss for the loser and a win for the winner.

If one player in Ramsch takes *all* the tricks (shooting the moon), he or she wins 120. Taking no tricks (Jungfrau) doubles point values.

Bidding	Playing	Counting
Possible bids (basically multiples of 9, 10, 11, and 12 plus the null values): <b>18 20 22 23 24 27 30 33 35 36 40 44 45 46 48 50 54 55 59 60 63</b> <b>66 70 72 77 81 84 88 90 96 99 100 108 110 120 121 132 144 160 168 192</b>		<u>Point value:</u> Ace = 11 Ten = 10 King = 4 Queen = 3 Jack = 2 7, 8, & 9 = 0  Dealer must take 61 points to win. 90 points is Schneider. All tricks is Schwartz.
The multiplier comes from the order of jacks in your hand. Play is one more than the number of jacks you are with or without. Times the value of suit you will play as trump: <b>clubs = 12, spades = 11, hearts = 10, diamonds = 9, grand (no trump suit) = 24</b>  null hands have a fixed value (not multiplied): <b>null 23 null hand 35</b> <b>null open 46 null open hand 59</b>	<u>Order of cards for taking tricks:</u> Jack clubs, jack spades, jack hearts, jack diamonds. Trump Suit. Ace, Ten, King, Queen, 9, 8, 7	
Increase your multiplier by one by: 1) Playing hand (don't look at Skat). 2) Declaring schneider (winning with 90 points). 3) Winning schneider. 4) Declaring schwarz (winning all tricks). 5) Winning schwarz. 6) Playing open (show your hand). Standard rules say you must play hand before you can declare schneider and Schwarz.	<b>Play grand:</b> <i>Only jacks are trump. Multiplier of 24.</i>  <b>Play Null:</b> <i>bidding value is 23. Player must lose all tricks. Order of cards reverts to "traditional" ace, king, queen, jack, 10, 9, 8, 7. No trump, not even jack.</i>	<b>Ramsch:</b> <i>If nobody bids, ramsch may be played. Each player plays alone to take fewest points. Can be seen as punishing he or she with the best hand. Jacks remain trump. Standard Skat order of cards.</i>

### Some Strategy:

In Grand, play aces.

Defense: keep the player in the middle.

Play "short" to your partner and "long" to your opponent. That means that if you have just one of a suit (short in a suit), play it to your partner. If you have 4 or more of a suit (long in that suit), play it to your opponent.

If your partner plays a suit, play the same suit. That is your partner's strategy. Do not follow the soloists with the same suit, if possible. This is *his* strategy. Don't play into it.

If you are the soloist, take out all the other trump, if possible. Odds are high that one opponent has two trump, so try and win the third play of trump. Don't have an "unprotected" ten. If the player doesn't start by taking out trumps, it means he or she is weak in trumps.

Remember how many and which trump have been played. Ideally remember *everything* that has been played. Count points as well.