

Rules for Pinochle

More precisely, "Single Deck Partnership Auction Racehorse Pinochle." The thumbnail sketch of the distinctions: "pass 3," "you don't have to play a losing trump," "extra KQ of trump in a run only score as a royal marriage," and "no 'pass with help' bid."

This is the "short form" set of my rules. You can find the long form at <http://howell.seattle.wa.us/games/rules/Pinochle.html>

Dealing

Although it's traditional in some circles to deal out the cards three at a time, and some rule books even insist this is *required*, if the deck was properly shuffled to begin with, it's random no matter how you deal it, so a dealer can (and should) deal out the hands in whatever manner is most comfortable for them.

Cutting the Deck

On the other hand, there are good reasons for cutting the deck properly (in any card game). The dealer, after shuffling, should set the deck down to their *right*, and that player should lift up some portion of the deck and set it down *closer to the dealer*.

Bidding

Because this is a "racehorse" form, with cards passed between the partners who win the bid (just the winning partners), the minimum bid is 250 points. (If it weren't racehorse, the minimum bid would be 150.) Bids must be in multiples of ten. You can't bid "two sixty-five." If nobody else bids, then the dealer is required to bid at least the minimum bid.

Passing Cards

Once somebody gets the bid, they name a trump suit, and their partner passes them *three* cards. Four is a commonly passed amount, but I *strongly* suggest three instead.

Laying Down Meld

Because this version includes passing cards, the winning bidder should lay down their meld first. While those cards are on the table, they pass three cards back to their partner. This ensures that meld isn't counted but then passed back. Once cards have been passed back, then the other three players can lay down meld. Laying down earlier can give the bidder important information on what to pass back.

Categories of Meld

Any card you play for meld can be used more than once, as long as it's not used more than once in each category. The categories are indicated by the divider lines on the table.

For example, let's say you call Diamonds as trump and lay down **A, 10, K, K, Q, J, 9** of Diamonds; **K, Q** of Spades, **K** of Hearts; and **K** of Clubs.

- The first category, "Runs & Marriages," means you score 150 points for the **A** through **J** of Diamonds, and 20 points for the **K** and **Q** of Spades. You can't use that extra **K** of Diamonds with the **Q** for a 40 point Royal Marriage because the queen's already in the run, and you can't use a card to score two different melds in the same category. If you had *both* the extra **K** and **Q** of Diamonds, you could score 40 for a Royal Marriage.
- In the second category, "Nine of Trump," you get 10 more points for that **9** of Diamonds.
- In the third category, "Pinochle," you can use the **J** of Diamonds from the run with the **Q** of Spades from the marriage in Spades for 40 points.

Runs & Marriages	Basic Run (A, 10, K, Q, J) <i>in trump</i>	150 pts.
	Extra K or Q <i>in trump</i>	0 pts.
	Double Run (A, A, 10, 10, K, K, Q, Q, J, J) <i>in trump</i>	1500 pts.
	KQ in trump (aka "Royal Marriage")	40 pts.
	KQ, not trump (aka "Marriage")	20 pts/marriage
Nine of Trump	a nine in the trump suit (aka "the nine")	10 pts. each
Pinochle	J of Diamonds & Q of Spades	40 pts.
	Doubled (J, J, Q, Q)	300 pts.
Arounds	A, one of each suit (aka "100 Aces")	100 pts.
	K, one of each suit (aka "80 Kings")	80 pts.
	Q, one of each suit (aka "60 Queens")	60 pts.
	J, one of each suit (aka "40 Jacks")	40 pts.
	Double Around (two of each suit for any of the above)	10x value of single
Around The Horn	0 (240) pts.*	

- In the last category, “Arounds,” you score Kings Around for 80 points, using the **K** of Diamonds (who's also been scored as part of the run and as part of a marriage), the **K** of Spades (also part of a marriage), the **K** of Hearts, and the **K** of Clubs.

Around the Horn

“Around the Horn” isn't actually a real scoring category; it's simply a name for having marriages in all four suits. Some people find it easier to remember this name and its point value than to add up all the points the normal way: Around Kings (80) + Around Queens (60) + Royal Marriage (40) + 3 Common Marriages (3 × 20) = 240.

Missing the Bid

If a partnership's meld is more than 250 points *below* their bid, then there's clearly no way they can avoid “going set” (see “Counting the Score” if you don't know this term). They may, if they choose, “throw in the hand:” their meld doesn't count, their bid is subtracted from their score, the hand is not played, and the next hand is dealt. This *does* deprive the other team from getting the points from tricks they might have taken, but if the bidding team missed the bid that much, it's cruel to make them play out the hand. However, if they miss the bid by 250 or less, then they must play out the hand unless everybody agrees to throw it in. (I have seen despairing people who needed to take 220 points actually make it, to their utter astonishment.)

Taking Tricks

Key rules, in order of precedence:

1. If two identical cards are played, the first one outranks the second.
2. You must follow suit if you can.
3. You must take the trick if you can.
4. You may play any card in your hand.

Let's say ♥ are trump. Q♦ is led, with a J♥ following. You have A♦, 10♥, J♥, 9♣. Can you take the trick with the 10♥? No. Rule #2 comes before Rule #3: you must play the A♦.

If you don't have any diamonds, you *must* play the 10♥, even if you don't want to waste it on this trick, because of Rule #3.

But! if you have just the J♥, you can sluff your 9♣ on the trick instead. Since you can't take the trick (see Rule #1), you *do not* have to trump the trick.

Don't confuse Rule #4 with Rule #2, though. If somebody *leads* with a Heart, then you will have to play that J♥.

Scoring

Counting the Score

At the end of the hand, each team receives 10 points per counter in their tricks (counters are the A, 10, and K of any suit). The team that took the last trick get 10 points for that. Twenty-four counters in the deck plus the points for last trick means that there are 250 points available in the tricks. If the bidding team earns the amount bid (combined meld and trick score), then all the earned points are added to the team's

previous score. If they do not, they “go set:” they do not score any points melded, they score no points taken in the tricks, and their previous score is reduced by the amount bid. If the other team fails to earn points while taking tricks (that is, they pulled no counters and failed to capture the final trick), they do not score any points that were melded. (They failed to “save their meld.”)

A nice time saving tradition is for the partners that did not get the bid to count their points first. They'll usually have fewer points to count, and if their score is, say, eighty, then the other team knows that it can score 170 (since 250-80=170).

Another good habit to learn is to count by simply flipping through your stack of tricks, counting (in your head, not out loud, please) the counters as you pass them. Some people will sort their trick into counters and non-counters, either counting them as they separate them, or counting the stack when they're done. If you do this, you're making more work for the next dealer, because they have to be shuffled even more to get the counters mixed back in again properly.

Strictly speaking, whichever partnership had the bid gets to score first. What this means is if both teams get more than 1500 points on the same hand, the partners that had the bid on that hand win, even if the other team has a higher score. Keep that in mind when you're deciding whether or not to keep bidding near the end of the game. Yes, you could play that who ever has the most points wins, but with that variation, a team with good meld can choose not to bid, planning on winning just because they got dealt a Double Pinochle. It's more exciting if both teams have 1400 or more and they know that you have to get *and make* the bid to win the game.

Keeping Track

Some people use good old pencil and paper, but a much more convenient way uses poker chips. Each team gets 10 white chips (worth 10 points each) and 14 colored chips (worth 100 points each), which start with one of the partners. Scoring works rather like an abacus. For example, let's say on the first hand, a team scores 80 in meld. The team passes 8 white chips across. They get 110 in trick points, and pass 1 colored and 1 white chip. On the next hand, they get 40 in meld. Pass 1 colored chip over, and 6 white back. (100 - 60 = 40). The meld is set next to the other chips, so that if they go set, it's easy to pass the meld back before passing back the bid amount. This might seem more complicated than pencil and paper when you read it, but believe me, with only a bit of practice, it becomes far more efficient and easy than the alternative. As a bonus, it's always easy to tell who's winning, and by how much.

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If you find these rules helpful, or want to comment, please drop me, Dave Howell, some email at dh.pinochle@GrandFenwick.net.