**Canasta**



**Introduction**

The game of Canasta is said to have originated in Montevideo, Uruguay in 1939 *(see for example this archive copy of Philip E Orbanes' article*[*The Canasta Story*](https://web.archive.org/web/20180216002057/http%3A/www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/Canasta.shtml)*)*. From there it spread to Argentina, the USA and throughout the world. It was extremely fashionable in the 1950's, threatening for a while to displace Contract Bridge as the premier card game.

The rules were standardized in North America around 1950, and it was this version of the game, which will be called [Classic Canasta](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#classic) on this page, that gained worldwide popularity. In many countries, Classic Canasta is still played in more or less its original form, sometimes alongside a number of variations. In North America, however, some players have continued to develop the game, and these groups now favour a different version, called [Modern American Canasta](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american) on this page.

Canasta is generally agreed to be best for four players, playing in partnerships. However, there are playable versions for [two](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#two) and [three](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#three) players, which are given later on this page.

**General Rules and Terminology**

To avoid repetition, this section describes the terms and processes that are common to most or all versions of Canasta.

**The Cards**

Canasta is normally played with two standard 52 card packs plus four jokers (two from each pack), making 108 cards in all. They have standard point values as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Jokers |   . . .   | 50 points each |
| A, 2 |   . . .   | 20 points each |
| K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8 |   . . .   | 10 points each |
| 7, 6, 5, 4 |   . . .   | 5 points each |

The cards A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 are called **natural** cards. All of the deuces (twos) and jokers are **wild cards**. With some restrictions, wild cards can be used during the game as substitutes for a natural card of any rank.

The threes have special functions and values, depending on which variation of Canasta is being played.

**The Deal and Play**

Each player is dealt a hand of cards, and in the centre of the table is a face-down pile of cards called the **stock** and a face-up pile of cards called the **discard pile**. The player to the left of the dealer plays first, and then the turn to play passes clockwise. A basic turn consists of drawing the top card of the stock, adding it to your hand without showing it to the other players, and discarding one card from your hand face up on top of the discard pile.

After drawing, but before discarding, you may sometimes be able to play some cards from your hand face up on the table. To play cards to the table in this way is known as **melding**, and the sets of cards so played are **melds**. These melded cards remain face up on the table until the end of the play.

The play ends when a player **goes out**, i.e. disposes of all the cards in his or her hand. You are only allowed to go out after your team has fulfilled certain conditions, which vary according to the type of canasta played but always include completing at least one seven-card meld or 'canasta' ([see below](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#gen-melds)). Having achieved this, you can go out by melding all but one of the cards in your hand and discarding this last card. In many versions of Canasta you can also go out by melding your whole hand, leaving no discard. The game can also end if the stock pile runs out of cards: if a player who wishes to draw from the stock is unable to do so, because there are no cards left there, the play ends immediately and the hand is scored.

Under certain conditions, instead of drawing from the stock, you are permitted to take the whole of the discard pile. In order to do this, you must be able to meld the top discard, without needing any of the other cards in the discard pile to make your meld valid. The procedure in this case is:

1. Place the necessary cards from your hand face up on the table, and add the top card of the discard pile to them to form a valid meld or melds.
2. Take all the remaining cards of the discard pile and add them to your hand.
3. If you wish, make further melds from the cards you now have in your hand.
4. Discard one card face up on the discard pile to end your turn.

**Melds and Canastas**

The object of the game is to score points by melding cards. A valid meld consists of three or more cards of the same natural rank (any rank from four up to ace), such as three kings, six fives, etc. When playing with partners, melds belong to a partnership, not to an individual player. They are kept face up in front of one of the partners. Typically, a partnership will have several melds, each of a different rank. You can add further cards of the appropriate rank to any of your side's melds, whether begun by yourself or by your partner, but you can **never** add cards to an opponent's meld.

Wild cards (jokers and twos) can normally be used in melds as substitutes for cards of the appropriate rank. For example **Q-Q-Q-2** or **8-8-8-8-8-2-joker** would be valid melds. There are, however, restrictions on using wild cards, which vary according to the type of Canasta being played.

Threes cannot be melded in the normal way. They have special functions, which are different depending on whether you play [classic](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#classic-threes) or [modern American](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-score-threes) canasta.

A **meld of seven cards** is called a **canasta**. If all of the cards in it are natural, it is called a **natural** or **pure** or **clean** or **red** canasta; the cards are squared up and a red card is placed on top. If it includes one or more wild cards it is called a **mixed** or **dirty** or **black** canasta; it is squared up with a natural black card on top, or one of the wild cards in it is placed at right-angles, to show that it is mixed.

For each partnership, the first turn during a hand when they put down one or more melds is called their **initial meld**. When making the initial meld for your partnership, you must meet a certain **minimum count requirement**, in terms of the total value of cards that you put down. You are allowed to count several separate melds laid down at the same time in order to meet this requirement. In our game (including [Modern American](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american)), the initial meld must be made entirely from your hand;

The initial meld requirement applies to a partnership, not to an individual player. Therefore, after either you or your partner have made a meld that meets the requirement, both of you can meld freely for the rest of that hand. However, if the opponents have not yet melded, they must still meet the requirement in order to begin melding.

**Modern American Canasta**

As usual, there are four players in fixed partnerships, partners sitting opposite each other. The winners will be the first team to achieve a cumulative score of 8500 or more points, or the team that has more points if both teams achieve this on the same deal. Two 52 card standard packs plus 4 jokers are shuffled together to make a 108 card pack. Sometimes a special tray is used to hold the draw and discard piles but this is not essential.

**The Deal**

The dealer shuffles, the player to dealer's right cuts. 13 cards are then dealt to each player. The undealt cards are placed face down in the centre to form a draw pile. No card is turned face up to start a discard pile - the play begins with the discard pile empty. The ninth card from the bottom of the draw pile is turned at right angles to the pile. This is known as the **turn card**. During the game, a player who draws the turn card must announce it so that all players know that there are just 8 cards remaining in the draw pile - the "bottom 8".

One procedure for dealing is as follows: when performing the cut, the player to the dealer's right lifts the top part of the deck, deals 8 cards from the bottom of this section into the draw tray, places the ninth card sideways in the draw tray as the turn card, and finally places the rest of the section on the draw pile. Meanwhile the dealer takes the cards that were left by the cutter and deals 13 cards to each player, one at a time, placing any remaining cards on top of the draw pile, or taking cards from the top of the draw pile to complete the deal if needed.

The turn to deal passes to the left after each hand. Normally the player to dealer's right also acts as scorekeeper for the hand.

**Melds**

In this game, **twos** and **jokers** are wild, and **threes** are special. The remaining cards, from 4 up to ace, are called **natural** cards. Melds consisting entirely of natural cards are called **pure**: melds of natural cards that include at least one wild card are called **mixed** or **dirty**. Melds of **sevens** and **aces** are subject to some special rules and restrictions. Melds consisting entirely of wild cards are also allowed. Many players refer to all the melds as 'canastas'. In that case a meld of fewer than seven cards is called an '**incomplete canasta**' and a meld of seven cards is a **'complete'** or **'closed'** **canasta**. A meld can **never** contain more than seven cards.

A meld of **4s, 5s, 6s, 8s, 9s, 10s, jacks, queens or kings** consists of at least three and not more than of seven cards of the appropriate rank. Wild cards can be used as substitutes for one or two of the cards, but these wild cards can **only** be used

* when the meld is put down as part of the team's [initial meld](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-initial), provided the meld contains at least **two natural cards**, or
* subsequently, provided that the meld already contains at least **five natural cards**.

So after a team's initial meld, any new melds begun by either member of that team in future turns must be clean until they contain at least five cards. Another consequence is that if a team's initial meld includes for example a dirty meld of sixes 6-6-joker, cards added to this meld in future turns must be real sixes until there are five of them: 6-6-6-6-6-joker. At that point either a six or a wild card could be used to complete (close) the canasta.

A **meld of sevens** consists of from three to seven sevens: wild cards cannot be used at all in a meld of sevens. Note that although there is a large bonus for completing a canasta of sevens, if you start a meld of sevens but fail to complete your sevens canasta you incur a penalty at the end of the play.

A **meld of aces** must be pure unless it is part of the team's initial meld and includes at least one wild card from the outset. A dirty (mixed) meld of aces can initially contain from three to seven cards, including at least two natural aces and not more than two wild cards. As with other natural melds, a dirty ace meld begun with one wild card cannot have a second wild card added until it contains five real aces. A meld of aces begun after your team has put down its initial meld cannot include any wild cards. If an ace meld is begun pure (whether as part of the team's initial meld or later), no wild cards can be added to it. A pure meld of fewer than seven aces incurs a penalty at the end of the play.

A **meld of wild cards** consists of from three to seven twos and jokers in any combination. If your team starts a meld of wild cards, you cannot add any wild cards to any of your other melds until your wild card canasta is complete. If you have a wild card meld of fewer than seven cards when the play ends, your team incurs a penalty.

**One team is not allowed to have more than one meld of the same rank.** However, it is possible for both teams to meld the same rank. For example after one team has put down an initial meld of aces with wild cards, the other team may also use aces with wild cards for their initial meld.

When a natural canasta is completed (closed), **neither team** is allowed to begin or add to a meld of that rank. Natural cards that match the rank of a closed canasta are known as **dead cards**. However if the opponents have not melded, a closed canasta does not prevent them from including cards of that rank in a [special hand](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-special).

**The Play in American Canasta**

The player to dealer's left begins and the turn to play passes clockwise.

A normal turn is begun by **either** drawing the top card from the face-down stock **or** taking the whole of the discard pile. The player may meld some cards (and must do so if taking the discard pile). Each turn must be ended by discarding one card face-up on top of the discard pile.

A player may always opt to draw the top card of the face down stock.

You can only take the discard pile if you have a pair of natural cards in your hand which are of the same rank as the top card of the discard pile. You must show your pair and meld these cards with the top discard before taking the rest of the pile into your hand. After picking up the pile, you can then make further melds. If your team has not yet melded, you cannot take the discard pile until you have met the [initial meld requirement](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-initial).

It is not necessary to take the discard pile in order to meld. If you wish, you can meld after drawing from the stock.

If the top discard matches the rank of one of your partnership's existing melds, you can take the pile if you have a pair of cards of the same rank in your hand and your existing meld has three or four cards. The new meld of three cards is immediately combined with your existing meld of that rank.

If a team has a meld of five or more cards matching the rank of the top discard, they cannot take the pile since this would create a meld of more than seven cards, which is not allowed. Therefore cards that match the opponents' 5-card or 6-card meld are safe discards: they can be thrown without any risk that the opponents will take the pile. 'Dead' cards, which match a closed canasta, are also safe to discard.

It is illegal to meld in such a way as to leave yourself with only one card, unless either

1. you have satisfied the conditions for [going out](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-end), or
2. you are putting down the initial meld for your team and the 'turn card' has not yet been drawn.

If you are not going out, you must have at least two cards in your hand after melding: one to discard and one to continue play. In case (b) although you discard the last card of your original hand, making the initial meld entitles you to draw three or four [bonus cards](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-bonuscards) from the deck and use those to continue play.

There are certain restrictions on discards:

* Threes can **never** be discarded.
* It is illegal to discard a wild card, except in the following cases:
	1. You may discard a wild card as your final discard, when going out.
	2. In rare cases, you may reach a situation where your hand consists entirely of wild cards. If on your turn you then draw yet another wild card, you may discard a wild card of your choice. The next player is not allowed to take the pile (since there are no natural cards that can match your discard). If requested by an opponent, you must show your hand to prove that you had only wild cards.
* When the discard pile is empty (on the first turn of the game, or when you have taken the pile at the start of your turn), it is illegal to discard an ace or a seven, unless these are the only natural cards you have in your hand at the time you discard. If you discard an ace or seven in this situation, you must show your hand if requested by an opponent, to prove that you had only aces, sevens and wild cards.
* When the discard pile is empty it is illegal to discard a 'dead' card - a card of the same rank as a completed canasta belonging to either team - unless you have no legal alternative. If requested by an opponent you must show your hand to prove that the only cards you had other than dead cards were sevens, aces and wild cards.

**Threes in American Canasta**

If you are dealt any threes, red or black, in your initial hand, you should normally begin your first turn by placing all your threes face up in the space that will be used for your team's melds. You immediately draw an equal number of replacement cards from the top of the stock, and if any of these are threes you lay them out and replace them in the same way, until you have no threes among your 13 cards. You then begin your normal turn by drawing from the stock (or possibly taking the discard pile).

If you draw a three from the stock during the game you should normally place it face up among your team's melds and immediately draw a replacement card from the stock. You then continue your turn by melding (if you can and wish to) and discarding.

If your team has not yet put down its initial meld, it is permissible to retain just **one** three in your hand, either from the initial deal or one drawn later, for the purpose of collecting a straight - see [special hands](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-special). If you choose to keep a three the following rules apply:

1. You may only keep a three in your hand if your team has not yet melded. As soon as your team puts down its initial meld (so that a straight is no longer possible) you must lay down any three you are holding at your next opportunity. If it is your partner who lays down the initial meld this will be at the start of your next turn: you lay down your three before drawing from the stock, and as usual you must draw a replacement card for the three. You then draw another card from the stock or take the pile according to the normal rules to begin your regular turn.
2. You may never keep more than one three in your hand. If you draw a second three you must lay down one of them and draw a replacement card.

If you have been holding a three in your hand and decide you no longer wish to keep it, then during your turn you may lay the three face up in your team's meld area and draw a replacement card from the stock.

**The Initial Meld in American Canasta**

The first meld made by each team during a hand is subject to some conditions. There are three possible ways to make a valid initial meld.

**Initial meld**

**1. Minimum count and three card meld from hand**

You can make the initial meld for your team by melding cards from your hand whose total value is at least the minimum count. The minimum count depends on your team's cumulative score at the start of that hand:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cumulative score** | **Minimum count of initial meld** |
| less than 3000 | 125 points |
| 3000 to 4995 | 155 points |
| 5000 or more | 180 points |

Note that a team that has a negative score is still subject to the 125 point minimum count.

* **GNPS conditions for an initial meld:**
* Must include a pure meld of at least three matching natural cards (with no wild cards),
* May include additional pure melds
* May include multiple mixed melds of two cards and up to two wild cards
* May also include a wild card meld (at least three wild cards).

When making the initial meld you may take the discard pile in the same turn (instead of drawing from the stock), if you hold a pair of natural cards which you can meld with the top card of the discard pile. The minimum count and the required three card natural or wild meld must already be present and complete in your hand and must be laid down before you are allowed to take any card from the pile. The pair that you use to take the pile could be within one of the melds you are using to meet the initial meld requirement, or it could be a separate pair of another rank - but in this last case, the point value of the cards in this pair do not count towards meeting your minimum count, since they are not a complete meld from your hand.

**2. The Splash**

If you have a natural canasta (seven natural cards of the same rank) or a wild card canasta (seven cards that are twos or jokers) in your hand, you may meld them as the initial meld for your team. In this case you do not have to meet any minimum count requirement.

If this canasta was already complete in your hand before your turn, and you also have a natural pair of a different rank that matches the top card of the discard pile, you can use the pair to take the discard pile in the same turn. However, you cannot claim a splash using six cards from your hand and the seventh card of the canasta from the discard pile.

**3. Special Hand**

If after drawing from the deck you have the cards required for any of the [special hands](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-special) that your table rules allow and your team has not yet put down its initial meld you may make the first and only meld for your team by laying down your entire hand without a discard and thereby end the play.

**Notes on taking the discard pile when making the initial meld.**

1. If you take the discard pile you cannot have drawn in that turn. Therefore, in order to take the pile, you must have the initial meld complete in your hand before the start of your turn. Unless you were dealt this meld in your original hand, this means that you could in fact have melded on your previous turn. However, good players often prefer to hold back from melding as soon as they can waiting for a better set of cards or a better opportunity.
2. You can take the pile if you have a natural pair matching the natural card on top of the pile. Natural means any card from 4 to Ace inclusive. For example if you put down from your hand A-A-joker, Q-Q-Q, 9-9-2 and you have a pair of 10's in your hand, you can take the discard pile if the top card is a 9, a 10, a Queen or an Ace. Aces are natural cards, even when used in a meld of mixed Aces (but see [variations](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-variations)).

**Bonus cards**

If you make the initial meld for your team, but do not go out on that turn, then after discarding at the end of your turn, if the turn card is still in the draw pile (so that there are at least 9 cards in the draw pile), you draw some **bonus cards** from the top of the draw pile and place them face down in front of you. If your team is the first to meld you draw **four** bonus cards; if the other team has already melded you draw only **three** bonus cards. You are not allowed to use these bonus cards in the turn in which you make the initial meld. At the start of your next turn to play you add the bonus cards of your talon to your hand, place any threes that you find in among them face up with your team's melds and replace them by drawing an equal number of cards from the stock. Then you begin your normal turn by drawing a card from the stock (or possibly taking the discard pile).
If a team makes its initial meld after the turn card has been drawn, so that only 8 or fewer cards remain in the draw pile, no bonus cards are taken.

**American Canasta: End of the Play**

The play ends if a player goes out or if the stock becomes depleted so that a player who needs to draw a card cannot do so.

You can go out if you can satisfy **both** of the following conditions:

1. your team has completed two canastas, and
2. you are able to meld all but one of your cards and discard your last card.

Unless you have completed a [special hand](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-special), it is not legal in this version of Canasta to go out by melding all your cards - you must have a card to discard at the end of your turn. This final discard is made face-down, and this is the only case in which a wild card can be discarded.

When you are in a position to go out you may, if you wish, first ask your partner's permission. If you ask, and partner says yes, you must go out; if partner says no, you cannot go out on that turn, and therefore you must keep at least one card in your hand after discarding. You may ask permission to go out only once in each hand.

If you satisfy the conditions for going out, you are free to go out on any turn without consulting your partner.

If you do not satisfy the conditions for going out, you are **not allowed** to leave yourself without any cards at the end of your turn: you must play in such a way as to keep at least one card after discarding.

It often happens that the end of the stock is reached before anyone has gone out. The player who draws the turn card must announce it, saying "turn card" or "turn", so that everyone knows there are only 8 cards left to draw and no bonus cards are available. When there are no cards left in the stock, play can continue as long as each player is able and willing to take the previous player's discard. As soon as someone needs or wishes to draw from the stock, the play immediately ends and the hand is scored. If the last card drawn from the stock is a three the game ends immediately. The player who drew the three cannot meld or discard and the three will count 5 points against that player's team.

**American Canasta: Special Hands**

A special hand is a combination of 14 cards which entitles you to go out by exposing your entire hand after drawing from the deck, without discarding. You are only allowed to put down a special hand if your team has not yet melded any cards. Note that a special hand may include cards matching a closed (complete) canasta melded by the opposing team - i.e. cards that would otherwise be considered 'dead'. Since a special hand cannot use cards taken from the discard pile this does not prevent dead cards from being safe to discard.

Three types of special hand are widely recognized: straight, pairs and garbage.

**Straight**

This consists of one card of every rank: **A-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-J-Q-K-joker**. Exceptionally, for the purpose of making this combination, you are allowed to keep a three in your hand.

**Pairs**

This is a hand of seven pairs. It must not contain any jokers or threes. There are two types:

1. Without wild cards. Example: **4-4-5-5-7-7-8-8-9-9-10-10-Q-Q**.
2. With twos, sevens and aces. Example: **2-2-6-6-7-7-9-9-J-J-K-K-A-A**.

The following hand: **2-2-4-4-5-5-6-6-8-8-9-9-A-A** is not valid, because a hand with a pair of twos **must** contain both sevens and aces as well.

**Garbage**

This consists of two sets of four of a kind and two sets of three of a kind, without any wild cards or threes. Example: **4-4-4-6-6-6-6-J-J-J-J-A-A-A**.

**Zip Code**: 1 set four of a kind, 2 sets 3 of a kind and 2 sets pairs.

Example: 2-2-4-4-4-4-6-6-6-9-9-9-A-A

**American Canasta: Scoring**

At the end of the play, each team reckons its score for the hand. There are six possible elements to this score, and the way they are combined depends on how many canastas the team has completed.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Scoring item** | **Team has no complete canastas** | **Team has one complete canasta** | **Team has two or more complete canastas** | **Team goes out with a special hand** |
| 1. [Bonus scores for canastas and for going out](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-bonus) | does not apply | bonus added to score | bonus added to score | not counted |
| 2. [Penalties for incomplete canastas](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-incomplete) | penalty deducted from score | penalty deducted from score | penalty deducted from score | not counted |
| 3. [Bonuses or penalties for threes](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-score-threes) | penalty deducted from score | not counted | bonus added to score | not counted |
| 4. [Scores for melded cards](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-melded-cards) | deducted from score | added to score | added to score | not counted |
| 5. [Penalties for cards remaining in players' hands](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-hand-cards) | deducted from score | deducted from score | deducted from score | not counted |
| 6. [Scores for special hands](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-special-score) | not counted | not counted | not counted | added to score |

Note that if a team has at least one completed canasta, the values of their melded cards (item 4) are always added to their score, even if these cards form part of an incomplete canasta of aces, sevens or wild cards (item 2) for which the team is to be penalised.

Note that if one team goes out with a special hand, the other team scores in the normal way, depending on how many canastas they managed to complete.

**1. Canasta and going out bonuses**

Both teams score for any canastas they have managed to complete as follows:

* each complete **mixed canasta**, using any natural rank except sevens: **300 points**
* each complete **pure canasta**, using any natural rank except sevens or aces: **500 points**
* each complete **pure canasta of aces or sevens**: **2500 points**
* a complete **twos canasta** scores **3000 points** (this is a wild canasta made entirely of twos)
* a complete **joker canasta** scores **2500 points** (this must contain all four jokers, together with three twos)
* any other complete **wild canasta** (containing one, two or three jokers) scores **2000 points**

If any player succeeded in going out, their team scores an extra bonus of 100 points.

**2. Penalties for incomplete canastas, and for unmelded aces and sevens**

If a team has melded pure aces, sevens or wild cards but not completed a canasta of that type, they are penalised as follows:

* for a pure ace meld of less than seven cards: **minus 2500 points**
* for a sevens meld of less than seven cards: **minus 2500 points**
* for a wild card meld of less than seven cards: normally **minus 2000 points**, but **2500 points** if it contains all four jokers

If a player's hand contains three or more aces or three or more sevens at the end of the play, that player's team is penalised as follows:

* for three or more sevens remaining in a player's hand: **minus 1500 points**
* for three or more aces remaining in a player's hand: **minus 1500 points**

Because of this, near the end of the play it is not safe to retain three aces or three sevens in your hand. If you are confident that your team can complete an aces or sevens canasta you should meld them; otherwise you should normally discard so as to keep not more than two aces and two sevens.

If a team has a sevens meld of less than seven cards **and** one of the players of the team has more than two sevens in their hand at the end of the play, they will score both penalties - the penalty will be 4000 points in all. The same applies if a team has a meld of less than seven pure aces and three or more aces in a player's hand. If both players of a team have the same type of incomplete meld, for example three aces each, then there is a penalty for each player, total 3000.

**3. Bonuses or penalties for threes**

All threes melded by a team are counted as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| one red three      . . .    100 points | one black three      . . .    100 points |
| two red threes    . . .    300 points | two black threes    . . .    300 points |
| three red threes   . . .    500 points | three black threes   . . .    500 points |
| four red threes    . . .   1000 points | four black threes    . . .   1000 points |

* If a team has **no canastas**, the total score for their melded red and black threes (calculated from the above table) is a **penalty**, to be subtracted from their score.
* If a team has **one canasta** there is **no score** for melded threes.
* If a team has **two or more canastas**, the total score for their melded red and black threes (calculated from the above table) is a **bonus**, to be added to their score.

**4. Score for melded cards**

If a team has completed at least one canasta, the total value of all the cards (other than threes) melded by the team, whether forming part of a canastas or smaller combinations, is added to the team's score. The [standard values](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#gen-cards) of the cards are used.

If a team has not completed any canastas, then the value of all their melded cards is subtracted from their score, along with the value of the cards remaining in their hands.

**5. Penalty for cards remaining in hand**

The total value of all the cards remaining in the hands of the players is subtracted from the team's score. The [standard values](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#gen-cards) of the cards are used. In the unusual case where a player has one a three in hand at the end of the play, this counts 5 points against the team.

**6. Special hand scores**

If the play ends by a player going out with a [special hand](https://www.pagat.com/rummy/canasta.html#american-special), the team that went out scores only the amount shown below for the special hand. The scores described under items 1-5 above do not apply to that team. However, the opposing team calculates their score in the normal way. The special hand scores are:

* **straight**: 3000 points
* **pairs without wild cards**: 2500 points
* **pairs with twos, sevens and aces**: 2000 points
* **garbage**: 2000 points

Each team reckons its total score for the hand, as detailed in 1 to 6 above. This amount is added to its cumulative total. It is possible for a team to have a negative score for a hand - this will be the case, for example, if they fail to complete a canasta, and in that case their cumulative score will be reduced. It is possible for a team to have a negative cumulative score.

The overall object of the game is to have a cumulative score of 8500 or more points. When one or both teams achieve this, the game is over and the team with the higher score has won. The difference between the teams' scores is the margin of victory.

**American Canasta: Table Rules / Variations**

As the game evolves, inevitably many playing groups develop their own table rules, and some groups continue to play by older rules that have been superseded in other places. So far as I know there is no single set of rules that is generally accepted as 'correct'. When joining an unknown group of players it is therefore advisable to find out what set of table rules are in force. Below I list some of the alternative rules that may be encountered: there are probably many others.

**Special hands**

There is considerable variation in the special hands that are allowed and how they are scored:

* Some players allow the pairs hand with wilds, sevens and aces to use a pair of jokers or a pair of twos as the wilds.
* Some players allow the pairs hand to include sevens or aces but never threes or wild cards.
* Some players require for the garbage hand four natural sets of three equal cards plus two matching wild cards (two twos or two jokers).
* Some players award a higher score of 3500 points for pairs and garbage hands.
* Some play that a special hand can be completed by taking its 14th card from the discard pile, but **only** if the discard pile has just one card in it - in other words the previous player took the pile and discarded a card to the empty pile, and this discard was exactly the card that the following player needed to complete their special hand.