

Crowns

Crowns is a card game for four players, played over four rounds using an ordinary deck of cards.

Each round, players are dealt some cards onto the table, and play others from their hands on themselves and each other, attempting to collect the optimum set of cards. At the end of the round, each player determines his 'crowned suit' (the suit in which he has a King) and scores according to how many cards of that suit he has in his collection. Scores are recorded each round, and the player with the highest total after four rounds wins the game.

The first round of Crowns is a simple card game with each player looking out for himself. But the second, third and fourth rounds are partnership rounds. At the end of each partnership round, players will be scored in pairs, with each player's success depending on both his own collection and his partner's. But the difference with other partnership games is that, instead of being determined before the round begins, partnerships are fluid and are only settled during the course of the round.

Choosing the dealer

Players take it in turns to be the dealer. For round 1, choose the dealer at random. In subsequent rounds, the role of dealer moves clockwise around the table. After four rounds, each player will have been the dealer once. Then the game ends.

Dealing round 1

Before the first round, the dealer first removes all the Tens and court cards (Jack, Queen, King) from the main deck to form a smaller deck of 16 cards. He also removes the Aces and sets them aside. They are not used in this round.

Having removed these cards, the dealer shuffles the remaining 32 cards and deals them **face-up** in four piles of 8 cards, one pile in front of each player. These cards form the players' starting collections for the round. Players should lay these cards out on the table in front of them, face-up, grouped into suits so all players can see how many cards of each colour are in each player's collection.

The dealer then takes the smaller deck of 16 cards (Tens and court cards), shuffles them, and deals them **face-down** in four equal piles of four cards to each player. These cards form the players' hands for the round. Players should pick up these cards and look at them, without showing the other players.

Dealing rounds 2 and 3

Rounds 2 and 3 are dealt just like round 1, except that the four Aces are added into the smaller deck before dealing, for a total of 20 cards. This means that each player will receive five cards in their hand, instead of four.

Dealing round 4

Before dealing round 4, the dealer removes one face-down card at random from the smaller deck (Tens and court cards) and then adds a Joker card to that deck in its place, before adding the Aces and shuffling the deck.

He sets aside the removed card without looking at it, so no player knows which card has been replaced by the Joker. He then deals round 4 in exactly the same way as rounds 2 and 3.

Playing a round

The player to the left of the dealer takes the first turn. Play then proceeds clockwise around the table, with each player in sequence taking a turn.

On your turn, you must choose one card from his hand and play it face-up in front of either yourself or any other player of your choice around the table, thus adding the card to either your own or someone else's collection. (The player who receives the card should add it to the appropriate suit in their collection.) A further effect may then take place, depending on the card that was played:

- **Ten:** Playing one of these cards has no special effect. After playing it, your turn ends and play passes to the next player in sequence.
- **Jack:** When you play a Jack, the player who *received* it (you or someone else) must immediately choose one card in any other player's collection and steal it, placing it in his own collection instead.
- **Queen:** When you play a Queen, the player who *received* it must immediately choose one card from his own collection (this may even be the Queen itself) and add it to another player's collection.
- **King:** A King has no special effect when it is played. However, at the end of the round, the presence of one or more Kings in a player's collection will determine his crowned suit. See 'Scoring the round', below.
- **Ace:** An Ace has no special effect when it is played. However, at the end of the round, the presence of an Ace in a player's collection will determine his scoring partnership: the two players who have red Aces will be scoring partners, and the two players who have black Aces will be scoring partners. See 'Scoring the round', below.
- **Joker:** The Joker is only used in round 4. It has no special effect when it is played. However, at the end of the round, the player who has the Joker in his collection will double his own score rather than taking his scoring partner's score. See 'Scoring the round', below.

Note that the Jack and Queen effects are only triggered when the cards are first played from a player's hand. If a Jack or Queen is subsequently moved from player to player (for instance, because of another Jack or Queen being played), the effect is not triggered a second time.

As cards are played throughout the round, players' collections will change, with cards being both added and taken away. However, no matter what else changes, *no player may ever have more than one Ace in front of him*. This important rule means that:

- you can't play an Ace on a player (including yourself) who already has an Ace;
- you can't use a Jack to steal an Ace from another player if you already have an Ace;
- you can't use a Queen to give an Ace to another player who already has an ace.

The round ends when all four players have played all the cards from their hands.

Player interaction

Free discussion and negotiation are encouraged — Crowns is a difficult game to win without striking deals with other players. The only general rules governing discussions are:

- all conversations must take place within earshot of all players – secret negotiations are not allowed
- the unplayed cards in a player's hand may never be shown to any other player – players are allowed to *claim* to hold certain cards, but they are not allowed to *show* these cards to each other before they are played

Apart from these general rules, discussions and negotiations are free. In particular, there is no rule requiring players to stick to agreements they have made – it is up to players to decide whom to trust. For instance, you may strike a deal with another player that you will play a Jack on them if they agree to steal a particular King from another player – but, even if they agree, they are under no obligation to stick to that deal once the Jack has been played.

Scoring the round

After a round has ended, each player calculates his personal score for that round. Each card in the player's crowned suit (including all face and court cards) is worth 1 point, and all cards not in the player's crowned suit are ignored.

A player's crowned suit is the suit in which he has a King. If he has more than one King, his crowned suit is the **overall lowest-scoring** (i.e. smallest) of the suits in which he has Kings (and the others are ignored). If he has no Kings, his personal score is 0.

- **Round 1:** There are no Aces in this round, so there are no scoring partnerships. A player's individual score is his final score for that round.
- **Rounds 2 and 3:** In this round, individual scores are *not* final scores because Aces determine scoring partnerships. To determine each player's final score, add together his individual score and the individual score of his partner (the person who has the matching coloured Ace, red or black) and award this total to *both* partners. Even though this means that the partners' final scores in a given round will always be the same as each other, record these final scores under each player separately, since in subsequent rounds the partnerships will change.
- **Round 4:** There is a further complication in this round because of the Joker. Score round 4 in the same way as rounds 2 and 3, except that the player who has the Joker does *not* determine his final score by adding his partner's individual score to his own. Instead, his final score is equal to his own individual score *doubled*, ignoring that of his partner. His partner, who does not have the Joker, follows the normal scoring rule, so his total score is his individual score plus his partner's (even though that partner has the Joker).

Once the final scores for the round have been recorded, a new round begins with a new dealer.

Ending the game

After four rounds, each player will have been the dealer once. Then the game ends and the player with the highest total score from the four rounds is the winner. If two or more players are tied for the highest total score, they share the win.