

Don't Cheat!

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This is a concept for a card game for 3-6 players. It's easy to learn, requires only a few decks of standard cards, and may or may not be centered around cheating. Each player has their own deck and a hand of five cards, and draws and discards a card each round to try to get four-of-a-kind in their hand. And there are a lot of additional rules that definitely do not reward cheating.

I can't tell you that you should try to cheat, but this game would be pretty boring without cheating. Just saying. (Get creative!)

The Rules

Each player brings a standard deck of playing cards to the game. Each deck is shuffled together to make the game deck, which is then dealt out into decks of 52 cards, one deck for each player. Each player then draws five cards from their own deck to form their hand.

The object of the game is to get four-of-a-kind in your hand of five cards. Play occurs in rounds, and a round consists of each player simultaneously drawing a card from their personal deck, choosing a card to discard, and then discarding it facedown in their discard pile. Once everyone has discarded a card, the next round begins. If any deck is exhausted, the player should shuffle their discard pile and use that as their deck. Players can win at any time during a round by placing their hand on the table, face up, so every player can see that they have four-of-a-kind.

There are a few additional rules, as well. If a player believes that another player has three-of-a-kind, they can point to the player and call "Three!" at any time. The player must show their hand to the table, and if they have three-of-a-kind, they must take one of the three, along with the top four cards of their deck, and put them in the calling player's discard pile. Then, they may draw another card from their own pile to replace the one that was given away. If the accused player does not have three-of-a-kind, the accusing player must give the top three cards of his deck away to the accused's discard pile. Note: there is no way to know whether your opponent has three-of-a-kind without cheating, of course, and cheating is not allowed.

Cheating is not allowed, and so there's a penalty for any player cheating. If any player cheats and is caught, they must show the other players their hand and permanently discard a card, choosing a three-of-a-kind card or a two-of-a-kind card, if possible. They are then not allowed to draw a new card to replace the card they discarded, leaving them with a four-card hand. If they are caught cheating again, they lose the game, as you cannot make four-of-a-kind with three cards.

When accusing another player of cheating, special considerations must be taken. The accuser cannot use probability in their accusation – the offending player must be caught in the act of cheating, currently contradicting a rule. An accusation like "The lights went out and when they came back on, you had four aces; you must be cheating," is not valid because there exists a small probability that they acquired four aces legitimately. The accuser is allowed to call out actions that are violating unwritten, common-sense rules, however. An accusation like "You're not allowed to put your hand cards into your pocket and

bring them out again” is valid. Writing out these unwritten rules would limit the creativity of cheating techniques, which are still not allowed, by the way, so they will remain unwritten. However, the existence of these unwritten rules may require an Arbiter – see below.

Variations

There are plenty of variations of this game that are worth trying once you get the hang of the game. Here’s a few that I’ve thought up, but there’s many ways you can play this that I haven’t thought of yet.

Assigning an Arbiter

In any game with purposefully general rules about cheating and accusations, baseless accusations can get very overwhelming, and baseless denials of legitimate accusations may be thrown out even faster. When these begin to interfere with gameplay, the assignment of an arbiter is useful. The arbiter sits out of the game and is the final judge of what is reasonable to assign as cheating and what is not, and when a player is making too many baseless accusations. A new arbiter each game makes each game different and balances the scales a bit. Of course, a player could bribe an arbiter, but that’s cheating.

Additional players

Don’t Cheat is meant to be played by 3-6 people, as the decks get unwieldy after that point, but a 2-player version could be possible, as well as a game adapted for more players. Two-player games are much more difficult because each player can focus on tactics employed by the other; they don’t have to split their attention. As for the 7+ player game, grouping into teams should work well. If there are 9 players, for example, split into teams of three. No team will win without all three of its members having four-of-a-kind.

Friends!

Everybody has a friend. If there’s an even number of players, your friend is the person across from you. If there’s an odd number of players, your friend is the player directly to the right of you. The additional rule is that accusing your friend of cheating is against the rules. This leads to interesting cooperative opportunities – but if you decide to call your friend on cheating, they lose a card for cheating, and you lose a card for cheating by breaking that rule.

Playing with fewer cards

It’s not difficult for someone to win the main game without any cheating at all – getting four of a kind in a deck of fifty-two cards is very possible. However, if you want to make the game harder, you can limit the deck sizes to thirty-nine or even twenty-six cards. This would give each deck a moderately unlikely chance to contain any set of four at all and would increase the difficulty for advanced players. It should definitely not be used to encourage more cheating.

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