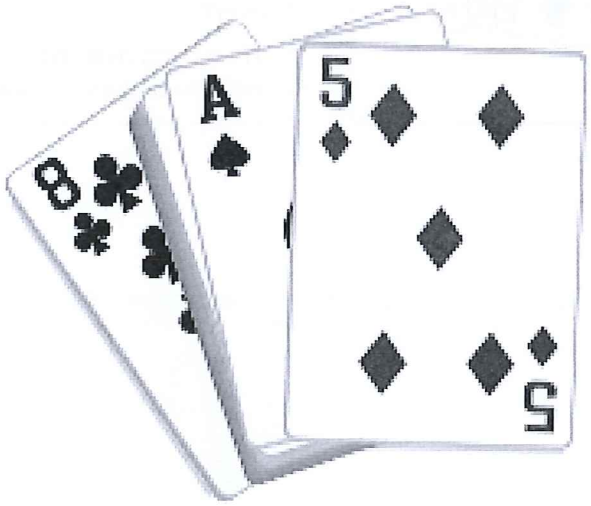
Playing Cards



Activities and games

What's in a pack? (YR–19, Y1–92)

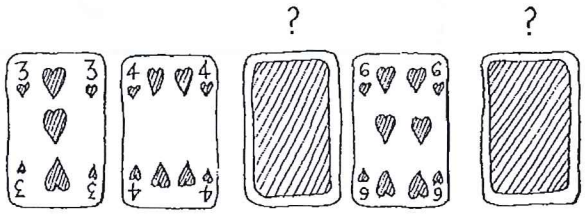
Sort and count the cards in different ways

- red or black?
- hearts, clubs, diamonds or spades?
- picture card or number card?
- odd numbers or even numbers?
- which number or value?

What's missing? (YR–14, 92)

Take one suit only (hearts, clubs, diamonds or spades) and sort the cards in order with the smallest (the ace) first.

Turn three of your cards face down and show your cards to a friend.



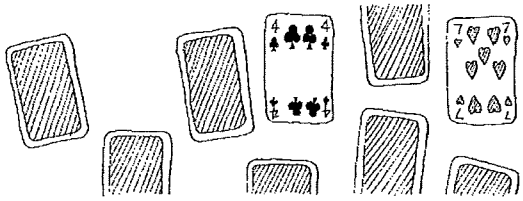
Can they guess which ones you have turned over?

Try turning over more cards, or arranging them with the biggest number first.

Target eleven (Y2–27)

Spread all 40 number cards face down in rows on the table.

Take turns with a friend to turn over two or three cards. If the total of the numbers is 11, keep the cards. If not, turn them back over.



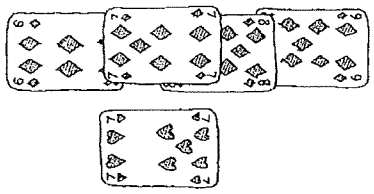
The first player to collect six sets of cards making 11 is the winner.

Try the game with different totals. You may need to take out some of the higher-value cards if you're aiming for a lower total.

Sevens (YR–14, Y1–12, 14)

Shuffle the cards and deal the whole pack out. Two to four players can play and whoever has the seven of diamonds starts by placing the card face up on the table.

Players then take turns (if they can) to place the next diamond card in order on the table, building up or down from the seven. Alternatively another seven can be put down to start another row.



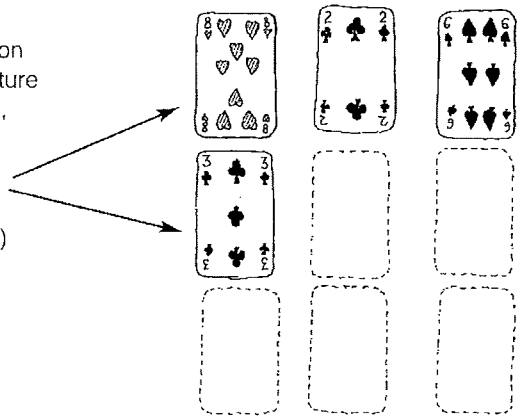
The first player to get rid of all their cards is the winner. Watch out for blocking strategies!

Patient elevens (Y1–30, Y2–30)

Play this game of patience to help you remember addition facts. Use the whole pack of cards, and count each picture card as worth 10. Shuffle the cards and deal nine cards, face up, in three rows of three.

If, at any time, two or more cards add up to 11, turn them over and deal new cards face up to cover them. If three picture cards of the same value (eg. three kings) are showing, you can turn them over and deal three new cards to cover them.

The aim is to turn over all the cards in the pack using only the nine spaces.

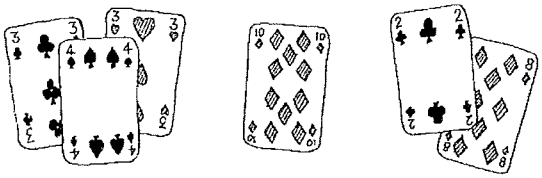


Totals to 10 race (Y1–30)

Two to four players can race in totals to 10.

Shuffle the 40 number cards and deal them all out between the players.

Then see how quickly you can sort your cards into totals of 10. Any number of cards can be used to make 10.

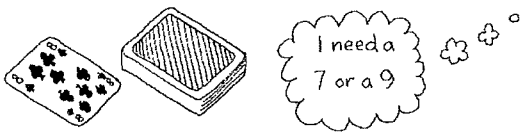


The winner is the first player to make as many tens as they can with their cards. Or you could score the number of tens you make.

More or less (YR–14, Y1–12)

A game for up to four players. Shuffle the cards and deal out seven each, placing the rest of the pack face down on the table, with one card turned face up to start the game.

Players take turns to place a card with a value one more or one less than the number on the card face up. An ace can count high or low. If a player cannot go, they pick up another card from the pack.



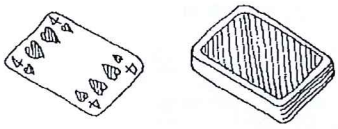
The winner is the first player to get rid of all their cards, or the one who has the least left when no more cards can be played.

Bonds to 20 (Y3–31)

Play with the number cards 1 to 10 from each suit.

Shuffle the cards and place them face down in a pack.

Take turns to turn over the top card and subtract the number showing from 20. Score your answer.



20 − 4 = 16

score 16

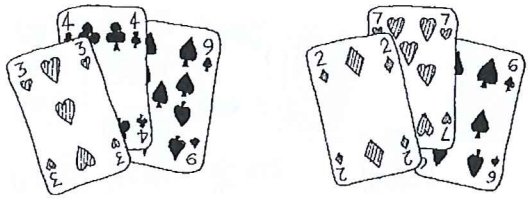
The winner is the first player to reach 50.
Or you could play up to 100.

Three-digit deals (Y3–9)

A game for two or three players. You need the numbers cards from 1 to 9 from each suit.

Shuffle the cards and deal three to each player.

Whoever can make the largest 3-digit number with their cards wins a point.



943 762

Used cards are placed on the bottom of the pack and play continues until one player has 10 points.

Fives (Y3–53)

You need a friend to play with and a number grid like the one shown. You also need all the number cards from the four suits and two coloured pencils, one for each player.

Shuffle the cards and place them face down in a pack. Take turns to turn over a card, multiply the number by 5 and cross out the product on the grid if it's showing.

The winner is the first player to cross out four in a row in any direction.

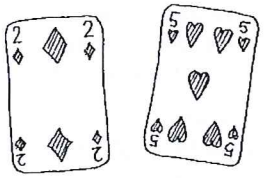
(If you play the game to practise another times table, the grid will need to be altered to show the appropriate multiples.)

5	15	20	35	25	30	10	50
25	45	35	40	15	5	50	40
15	25	10	5	40	10	30	15
50	30	45	25	35	20	25	45
20	45	50	40	5	30	10	35

Mental differences (Y4–46)

Use the number cards from 1 to 9 from each suit. Shuffle the cards thoroughly.

Two players each take two cards from the top of the pack and use these to make two 2-digit numbers.



52 − 25 = 27

Players score the difference between the two numbers they make, the winner being the first to reach a total score of 200.

Double dealing (Y3–53, Y4–58)

A game for two players. This is a timed activity, so you need a watch with a second hand.

Use the number cards from 1 to 10 from one or two suits, shuffled thoroughly.

One person is the dealer and turns the cards over one at a time. The other person adds 10 to the number showing and doubles it. If the dealer agrees, the next card is turned over. The aim is to see how quickly you can get through all the cards, adding 10 and then doubling each time.

Don't forget to time yourself and then let the dealer have a turn!

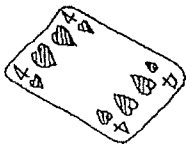
3 + 10 = 13

13 + 13 = 26

Likely or not? (Y6–113)

If you pick just one card out of the whole pack of 52 playing cards, what is the chance of selecting the following – is it impossible, unlikely, an even chance, likely or certain?

- a number 4
- a red card
- a picture card
- a card with an even number
- a green card
- a club card
- a number up to 10.



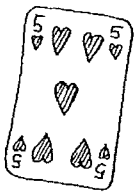
Try to work out the probability of each one happening as a fraction.

Negative and positive (Y5–15)

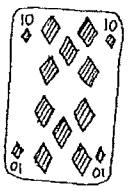
Use the number cards only.

All players start with a score of 0 and take turns to turn over the top card of the pack.

If it's an odd number, subtract it from your score. If it's an even number, add it to your score.



subtract 5



add 10

The winner is the player with the highest score once all of the cards have been used.

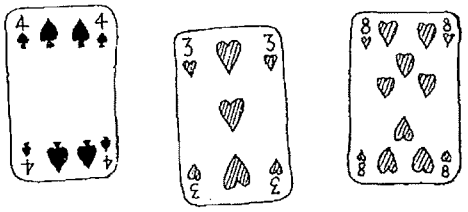
Decimal differences (Y6–51)

You need the 1 to 9 cards from each suit and two players. Shuffle the cards thoroughly.

Deal three cards to each player. Use the digits to make a number with two decimal places. Make this number have as big a difference from 10 as possible.

Each player scores the difference between the decimal number made and 10.

The winner is the first player to score a total of more than 20.

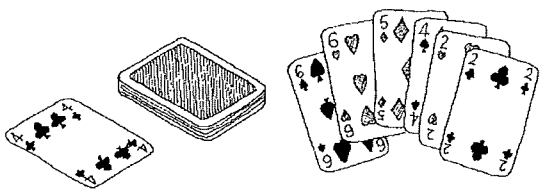


10 - 3.48 = 6.52

Number bust (Y5–3)

The aim of this game is to make the largest 6-digit number possible.

Using the number cards 1 to 9 from each suit, deal each player six cards. The rest of the pack is placed face down on the table, with one card turned over to start the discard pile.



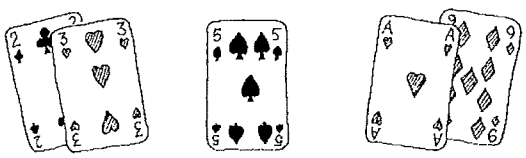
Take turns to take a card from the top of the pack or discard pile. Then discard one from your hand. The winner is the player with the largest 6-digit number once the whole pack has been used.

Prime numbers (Y6–21)

Use the number cards 1 to 9 from each suit.

Shuffle these and deal each player five cards to start with, placing the rest face down on the table in a pack.

Take turns to pick up the top card from the pack. If you can make a prime number less than 100 with some of your cards, place these cards face up on the table.



Continue playing until all the cards have been used. The winner is the player who has made the most prime numbers.