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Canasta General Rules: Canasta, and its variations, appeals to card players of all skill levels. Canasta games play fast and are full of exciting twists. The rules are intricate but not difficult to follow. In fact, the accuracy of play demanded by the rules adds drama to the game. The instructions that follow include the rules for the basic Canasta game. It is important to read through the basic rules before beginning play. Pay extra attention to these Canasta conventions: Red Threes, Melds and Frozen Pile. Many game variations and conventions of play have sprung up across the United States. If you play using local rules, be sure that all players understand them.

Number of Players: Four, in two partnerships, play the basic game. There are Canasta variations for two, three, five and six players.

The Deck: 108 cards made up of two 52 card decks, plus four jokers. The two decks are shuffled together.

Point Value of Cards

Each Joker	50 PTS.
Each Two or Ace	20 PTS.
Each King, Queen, Jack, 10-8	10 PTS.
Each 7-4, And Black Threes	5 PTS.
Each Red Three	100 PTS.

Wild Cards: Jokers and twos of all suits are wild. All other cards are called natural cards.

Partnerships and preparing to play: Partnerships are formed by a draw of cards. The player drawing the highest card has choice of seats and takes the first turn of the first deal. The holder of the high card has the holder of the second highest card as a partner. Partners must sit opposite one another. For the draw, cards rank: A (high), K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2. Jokers are void. Suits rank: Spades (high), hearts, diamonds, and clubs. When there is a tie, the players involved draw again.

Players who draw a joker, more than one card, or any of the four cards at the front or back of the shuffled deck, must draw again. The first deal is made by the player sitting to the right of the winner of the draw. After the first deal, the deal and all play moves clockwise (left). Any player may shuffle. The deck must be cut by the player to the dealer's left.

The Deal: Cards are dealt clockwise. Each player receives eleven cards. The rest of the cards are placed, face down, in the center of the table and are called the stock. The top card of the stock is turned face up beside it and is called the upcard. The upcard begins the discard pile.

Cards discarded in play are laid face up on top of the upcard, or next to the stock if the upcard has been drawn. If the upcard is a joker, two or three, a card (or cards) from the stock must be turned up until a natural card appears. A wild card or three which is either on or in the pile freezes the pile. *See the heading Frozen Pile for additional rules.*

Red Threes: In their first turn, players must place all red threes in hand face up on the table. Next, players draw new card(s) from the stock to restore their hands to eleven cards.

Players who draw a red three from the stock during play must also place the card face up and draw again. Players who take up a discard pile containing a red three, place the card face up but do not draw a new card.

Players receive a bonus of 100 points for each red three. If one

partnership holds all red threes, the cards have a value of 200 points each. The values of the cards are added to the score of the partnership if it has made a meld.

If a partnership makes no melds by the end of play, the point value is subtracted from their score. Failure to declare receipt of a red three by deal or draw before play ends results in a 500 point penalty for the side. This penalty is assessed as long as the player holding the card has played one turn. *See Taking the Discard Pile for additional restrictions on the use of red threes.*

Object of Play: To score the most points by making melds and earning bonuses. A game is made up of a sequence of deals. Players try to be the first to go out in a deal by using all their cards. Going out ends a deal. Game score is 5,000 or more points.

Melds: Melds are made up of three or more cards of the same rank including wild cards. Sequences are not valid melds in the basic game. To be valid a meld must contain at least two natural cards and not more than three wild cards. Wild cards may never be melded without natural cards. Black threes may only be melded at the time a player goes out.

To be legal, a meld must be placed face up on the table during a player's turn. If cards not included in the meld are exposed during play, the cards must be left on the table. The exposed cards must be discarded one in each subsequent turn, unless the exposed cards form or are part of a valid meld.

The cards a player uses to make the first meld of a deal must equal a certain point value called the minimum count. This is determined by adding up the point value of each card and matching the sum to the total score point schedule.

The minimum count may include the value of a card taken in a draw from either the stock or discard pile. *See rules under The Play.* The required minimum count depends upon the total score of each side prior to the current deal:

TOTAL SCORE	MINIMUM COUNT
Minus Score	0
0-1495	50
1500-2995	90
3000 or more	120

All melds and red threes on the table are placed near one member of the partnership, usually the player who makes the first meld. After making all melds in a turn, the player must discard one card if the discard may be made legally. *See rules for discards under heading The Play.*

Players may add one or more cards (same rank or wild) to melds made by their partners or themselves, as long as the melds are already on the table. Players may add only three wilds cards to a meld, unless the meld is a completed canasta, which may have more than three wild cards added to it. Players make as many melds as desired during a turn. Including additions to, or the combining of, the partnership's melds. Players may never add cards to an opponent's meld or remove cards from their own or their opponent's melds.

Canastas: Canastas are melds made up of seven or more cards. A partnership must have at least one canasta to go out, and bonus points are awarded for each canasta made. A natural canasta is made up of seven natural cards and is worth 500 points. Mixed canastas include one to three wild cards and are worth 300 points. A canasta with more than seven cards does not receive an additional bonus. When a canasta is completed and placed on the table, wild cards may be added to it, over the limit of three. However, a wild card added to a natural canasta reduces its point value from 500 to 300 points. A complete canasta is laid in a pile with a red card on top if it is natural, and a black card on top if it is mixed.

The point count of cards left in a player's hand at the end of a deal are subtracted from the partnership's score – even if the cards could have been melded.

Meld Restrictions

Insufficient Melds: If a player puts down fewer cards than needed for the minimum count, the player may correct the error by melding additional cards during the same turn. A player may rearrange the cards already melded but only to correct the minimum count.

A player may also retract all cards in the meld. The partnership is then penalized during the deal by an increase of ten points in the minimum count requirement. If a player retracts only some of the cards, the partnership is penalized by having 100 points subtracted from their score.

Illegal Melds: Cards melded illegally (in any play situation) or excess wild cards in a meld, must be retracted. The partnership is penalized 100 points.

The Play: The opponent to the dealer's left plays first. All play moves clockwise. A player's turn is made up of a draw, an optional meld and a discard. Discards are turned face up next to the stock. The play continues until a player goes out by using all cards in hand, or a player is unable to legally discard (called Forcing).

Draw: A player, in turn, is entitled to draw only the top card from the stock. If a player draws more than one card, the player must discard, without drawing cards, in each turn until the hand holds eleven cards.

A player also has the option of drawing the top card of the discard pile if the card can be used in a meld. The player must then take the rest of the discard pile in hand. This is called "Taking the Pile". Taking the Pile is subject to the following restrictions:

Taking the Pile: A partnership may not take the discard pile unless they have made their first meld of the deal. A partnership may use the top card of the discard to form the first meld. To take the pile, a player must lay down two cards from the hand, which form a valid meld with the upcard of the pile. The player then places the upcard with the cards from the hand. If it is required to meet the minimum count, a player must make additional melds. The cards used to make the additional melds are separate from the first meld and any other cards in the discard pile.

When the pile is not frozen, the top card of the discard may be melded with a natural card and wild card or be added to a meld already on the table. Next, the player must take up the rest of the discard pile, making any other melds desired. These additional melds are not included in the minimum count.

Frozen Pile: The discard pile is frozen any time it contains a red three turned as an upcard, a wild card, or a black three. Wild cards or black threes may appear as either an upcard or as discards.

When the discard pile is topped by a wild card or a black three, other cards must be discarded on top before the pile may be taken. When there is more than one freeze card in a pile, the lowermost freezing card is turned sideways to indicate the freeze. The pile remains frozen until a hand holding a natural matching pair takes it.

For example: The Frozen Pile is taken in turn by the player who shows a pair of Jacks.

The discard pile formed after a freeze is broken is available to any player who can meet the taking up requirements. The pile can be frozen again by the discarding of a wild or black three. When the discard pile is reduced to one card and the next player in turn has only one card, the player may not take the discard and go out unless forced.

Forcing: When the stock is used up, players must take and meld the card discarded by the opponent on their right, as long as the meld is legal. When a player may not legally take the discard, or chooses not to take the discard, play ends.

Play Information: Players may get information in four areas of play during their legal turn:

- 1) A player may examine the discard pile before discarding in the first turn.
- 2) A player may remind a partner of the minimum count if the partner is making the initial meld.
- 3) A player may remind a partner to lay red threes on the table or draw a replacement.
- 4) A player may turn the sixth card of a meld crosswise to show that only one card is needed to make a canasta.

Going Out: When a player gets rid of the last card in hand, by a legal meld or discard, the player goes out. Going out ends play, and the deal is scored. A player may go out only if the partnership has at least one canasta on the table, or if the player melds a canasta in going out. If this requirement is not met, the player

must hold at least one card in hand. A player holding only one card may not take a discard pile of only one card. A player does not have to discard in going out if a meld is made with all cards in hand.

If able to go out, a player may ask, "Partner, may I go out?" A player may ask permission to go out only before drawing from stock or after drawing from stock. Players may not ask for permission after melding or after showing an intention to take the discard pile.

When asked for permission to go out, a partner must answer "Yes" or "No". The answer is binding. However, before a partner answers, three specific questions may be asked:

- 1) The minimum count requirement or score of each partnership?
- 2) The number of cards held by any player?
- 3) The number of cards remaining in stock?

Players may also ask these questions during their turn. Players do not have to ask permission to go out.

Concealed Hand: A player goes out concealed when the entire hand is melded in one turn.

- 1) The player must make at least one canasta.
- 2) The player must not have made a prior meld.
- 3) The player must not have added any cards to a partner's melds.

When the partner has not made a first meld, the holder of the concealed hand must meet the minimum count if he or she has taken the discarded pile. If the holder of the concealed hand has only drawn from stock, then the minimum count need not be met. In both cases, the minimum count is met without the canasta bonus.

Scoring: The score may be kept on a bridge scorepad, with "We" and "They" columns.

Scoring the Deal

Bonus Values

For going out	100 Pts.
For going out concealed, an extra	100 Pts.
For each red three	100 Pts.
For each natural canasta	500 Pts.
For each mixed canasta	300 Pts.

Add the total point values of all melded cards for the partnership and subtract the point value of all cards left in the partnership's hand. Add this to the value of any bonus points for a side's net score. Partnerships may have a minus score.

Scoring the Game: The score should be recorded on paper, with one column for each side. Each entry should show the scores of the previous deal together with the accumulated totals (which determine initial meld requirement).

The side that first reaches a total of 5,000 wins a game. The final deal is played out, even though one or both sides have surely reached 5,000.

Strategies: You will win more games if you make several canastas in each deal. To increase your chances of creating multiple canastas lay out a variety of melds on the table. This will also give your partner the greatest opportunity to add cards. However, don't make an initial meld if it will reduce your hand to fewer than six cards. Try to make your first meld with the minimum number of cards. By holding more cards you can make more additions to your partner's melds. You are also in the best position for taking the discard pile.

Taking the pack is very helpful. Canastas require a lot of cards, and the best way to get cards is by repeatedly taking the pack.

Try to keep both a wild card and black three in your hand. They may be used to block your opponent's move on the discard pile and clear the way for your partner to take it. However, don't freeze the pile if your side is behind in melds as you may block yourself from the advantage of taking the pile.

Taking the pile is an important offensive strategy, but it can prolong the game. If it appears that a longer game will aid your opponents, plan your play with the idea of going out quickly. Make melds as often as you can and try to place yourself, or your partner, in a position for a force. If possible, position yourself to go out with a concealed hand.

Take advantage of the rules allowing you to get information. Also develop your memory. Concentrate first on your left opponent's discards, then the pack, and lastly on your partner's and right opponent's discards.