

BARTOK

Bartok is a fun, fast-paced card game. It's also very easy to learn and has probably the fewest rules of any card game in existence.

Get a standard pack of cards (remove jokers) and some friends, because here are the rules:

1. Choose a dealer. After each hand, the player on the dealer's left should become the new dealer. The deal is 7 cards each, with one card placed face up in the centre to start the discard pile, and the remainder face down as a draw pile.
2. If a player breaks any rule, either purposefully or accidentally, and the breach is noted by other players, that player must immediately draw a penalty card.
3. Players may not ask questions while the game is in progress.
4. Players may not address or refer to any other player by name while the game is in progress.
5. Players take turns in clockwise sequence. During a player's turn, they must either discard a card from their hand which matches the suit or number of the card on top of the discard pile, or if they cannot do so, draw a card.
6. Whenever the number of cards in a player's hand reaches one, they must say "Bartok".
7. The first player to rid their hand of cards wins the hand. The winner of the hand must invent one new rule before the start of the next hand.

That's it! Simple, huh?

Oh, what's that? "What sort of new rules can you invent?"

I'm glad you asked... Here are some samples:

- Whenever an ace is played, the person playing it may declare it to be any suit.
- When a 7 is played, the direction of play is reversed (clockwise becomes anticlockwise, and vice versa).
- Whenever the number of cards in a player's hand reaches two, they must say "Bartok minus one". Note that this includes when a player goes up to two cards because of a penalty card drawn for not saying "Bartok".
- When a 2 is played, the next player must forfeit their turn and draw two cards instead.
- When a black 6 is played, the player two positions to the right of the current player must miss their next turn.
- Red queens shall be considered 5s for all purposes, black 5s shall be considered queens for all purposes.
- Any player who plays a jack must immediately quote a line from a Monty Python sketch. Lines previously quoted in the same game do not count.
- When a red 9 is played, the person whose turn was two players before the current person's turn must moo loudly like a cow.
- When a card is played which causes the numerical value of the top two cards on the discard pile (counting jack=11, queen=12, king=13) to sum to 14, the player who played the second last discard gets an extra turn between the players who would otherwise have their turns next and next again.
- All clubs shall be considered as cards of their numerical value plus 5, modulo 13.
- When a black card of value 3 less than the previous discard is played, all cards which are currently clubs become diamonds, and vice versa.

The game of **Bartok**, also known by a number of other names, such as **Wartoke**, **Warthog**, **Bartog**, **Bentok**, **Last One Standing** or **Bong 98**, is a card game that is often also a drinking game. It belongs to the "shedding" or Crazy Eights family of card games, whereby each player tries to rid himself of all of his cards. The game progresses through a series of rounds with a new rule being added in each round, thus making the game increasingly complex as it progresses. These newly introduced rules may modify any existing rules. It is against the spirit of Bartok to divulge any information about the rules to new players, including when and how they may play. A penalty of one card is typically awarded for any incorrect action.

History

It is claimed in Australian Mathematical Olympiad circles that the game of Bartok originated there, although no inventors can be definitively identified. Others claim that the game came from the United Kingdom, possibly as a variant of Mao, which gained popularity in Universities of Cambridge and Oxford around 1975.¹

Bartok and Mao

As with other combination shedding and guessing games such as Mao, the rules can become quite complex. The similarity between Mao and Bartok is such that the two games are sometimes referred to by the other's name. The principal difference is that in Mao a substantial set of rules is maintained between games, whereas in Bartok this is only true of the minimal initial set of rules. Further, in those variants of Mao where rules are added between rounds, these rules are usually added silently and must be deduced by other players, whereas in Bartok the new rules are told to everyone. This allows the rules of Bartok to be substantially more technical than the rules of Mao, since the details of the rules can be discussed.

Gameplay

The game of Bartok consists of several rounds of play. The winner of each round creates a new rule which remains in play for future rounds of the game.

The players sit in a circle and the cards are placed face down in the centre and mixed. Each player then picks up either five or seven cards, by agreement. A single card is then flipped to face up to start the discard pile. The rest of the face down cards form the draw pile. Any player may then play on that card, providing such a play is legal. One of the players to the left or right of that person then plays, to determine the direction of play. It is also possible to use a dealer, who deals the cards to each player in the usual manner. In this case play follows to the left of the dealer, as usual.

Initially a legal play is the same as in Uno, one may discard a card face up on the discard pile which has either the same suit or face value of the top card of the discard pile. At that point play moves on to the next player. Plays must be made in a timely manner or face a penalty. In rounds after the first the notion of a legal play may change with the introduction of new rules. Providing there are no new rules that obtain, the Uno system of play is used. If a player cannot, or does not wish to, make a legal play, he may pick up from the draw pile; this also ends his turn. In some games it is acceptable, if a player has just drawn a card to end his turn which *could have* legally been played, he may jump in with that card before the next player has played.

A round ends when any player has no cards left. That player is declared the winner of the round and is permitted to create a new rule for the next round. If a player has only one card left he or she must say "Bartok" or receive a penalty. This applies even if a player gets down to one card by non-standard means, such as trading hands with someone else. If the draw pile runs out before a round ends, all but the top card of the discard pile is flipped over to form the new draw pile. The game usually ends when several rules combine to make continued play impossible.

The game has no overall winner, only a series of winners of each round.

Penalties

A penalty of one card is awarded for a number of illegal actions in Bartok. Anyone may award penalties in Bartok, although only one penalty may be awarded to a player for any given action, so if two people simultaneously accuse player X of the same action, only one of the penalties holds. Penalties do not end a player's turn. For example, if awarded a *Too Slow* penalty the player must still either play or pick up. Below is a complete list of penalties. In italics is the appropriate accusation that should accompany each one.

- *Question*: For a player who has asked a question or started to ask a question. It does not matter if the question is relevant to the game or not. Sometimes this penalty may be dealt to an observer not playing the game - thus immediately involving them in the game.
- *Incorrect Play*: For a player who has just played illegally during his turn.
- *Out of Turn*: For a player who has played when it is not his turn.
- *Too Slow*: For a player who has not played in a timely manner. These can be issued multiple times during one turn if the player is extraordinarily slow. As a rough guide, leave about 3 seconds between each *Too Slow* issued.
- *Failure to say "Bartok"*: For a player who has only one card left but has not said "Bartok". In many circles these are issued very quickly after the player reaches one card, since he should say "Bartok" directly after playing his last card. If a player wins the round without saying "Bartok" and without being caught, he still successfully wins the round. The penalty is not awarded retroactively.
- *False Accusation*: For a player who accuses another player of a penalty incorrectly.

There is no penalty awarded for drawing a card when it is not your turn, since you only disadvantage yourself by taking another card.

Creating new rules

New rules are introduced to Bartok by the winner of each round, making the game more complex as it progresses. The creator must tell the other players what this rule is. Rules cannot be specific to particular players (such as "skip Bill every turn") and cannot remove or alter a rule introduced in a previous round, unless that is the wish of every player. Additionally, if there is a unanimous veto, that is, *every* player bar the creator vetoes a new rule, then the rule is not used and the creator must think of another. Commonly there is a time out rule, whereby if players need clarification during a round of a newly introduced rule they may call time out and discuss it.

Almost all rules are of the form "if (trigger) then (consequence)", for example "*If a 7 is played, reverse the direction of play.*" Common triggers and consequences are listed below. Many rules can be made cumulative as well, for example "*If a 7 is played, the next player picks up two cards and forfeits his turn or plays another 7, if he plays another 7, the player after him picks up 4 cards and forfeits his turn or plays another 7, etc.*" Generally it is desirable to have the more confusing or tricky rules on a rarer trigger so that the players are not overly taxed by any one rule. The very best rules are creative but playable and fun. The list below is certainly not intended to be comprehensive.

Common triggers

Based on the last played card

- Cards of a given rank e.g. 7s, Ks, <4s
- Cards of a given rank and color
- Cards of a given rank and suit
- Primes (2s, 3s, 5s and 7s)
- Picture cards
- One eyed Jacks (two Jacks in a standard deck only show one eye)
- Violent royals (royals holding weapons)

Based on the last several played cards

- Change of suit
- Change of parity (odd to even, even to odd)
- Identical/nearly identical top two cards
- Relationship between top two cards e.g. face value relatively prime
- Relationship between top n cards e.g. last 3 cards ascending face value

Not involving played cards

- Someone draws a card
- Someone receives a penalty
- Someone walks into the room
- Someone says a particular word
- Someone has a certain amount of cards in hand

Common consequences

Changing the order of play

- Reverse the order of play
- Skip the next n people
- Reverse and skip

- Position swap, two players swap position
- Virtual swap, two players act as though they have swapped position

Changing card values

- Simple reassignment, e.g. 3s are 5s and 5s are 3s
- Mass reassignment, e.g. all hearts are one value higher than printed

Card shifting

- Give n cards to a player of your choice
- Swap hands with a player of your choice
- The next player draws n cards instead of playing

Not involving the game

- Drink a glass of water
- Run around the circle
- Say a particular word / animal noise
- Question toggle, players are only allowed to speak in questions. This may or may not affect things like "Bartok" or penalty accusations.

Other common rules

Redefining legal plays

- Only cards of a different parity may be played
- Instead of playing the same face value, can only play the additive inverse modulo 14 (i.e. playing a card whose rank added to the rank of the top card equals 14. For example, Aces are played on Kings and vice versa.)
- A certain card is transparent, so the next player must play on the second top card
- A certain card is a rock, it may never be played (you can get rid of it via a hand-swap rule)
- A player may jump in (i.e. play out of turn) if he has the same card as the one on top of the discard pile

Redefining legal actions

- Players may never say a particular word
- Players may only speak in complete sentences
- Players may only play with their left hand