

# Candid Whist

*A thinking player's trick-taking game that is easy to learn but challenging in play*

This trick-taking game combines the best of Whist, Spades, and Bridge, and addresses some of their shortcomings. Whist rewards concentration and deduction but play begins in almost total darkness. In Spades, trick estimates can go awry and the fixed trump rules out both competition for the choice of trump and No-Trump play. The complex bidding systems and conventions of Bridge are forbidding to newcomers, and to have one player sitting out as dummy after that elaborate prancing is something of a let-down.

Candid Whist takes its name from the straightforward announcement of high-card points (HCPs) and a simple auction for the number of tricks a partnership aims to make with its choice of trump suit (or in No-Trump). Whist-playing Victorians might have appreciated the touch of irony in the name: after the candour comes the cunning and calculation of play.

Conventional opening leads and signals of Whist, such as those devised by Robert Frederick Foster, may be used effectively by partners. But without memory, deduction, and careful counting of points and cards, any system will prove useless. A satisfying game may be played with commonsense opening leads and careful card-tracking, since the HCP announcement and auction give enough information to reason intelligently about the unseen hands.

## Players and Cards

The game is played by four players in two partnerships, with partners sitting opposite each other. A standard 52-card deck is used, with cards ranking in the usual order:

A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 (Ace highest to 2 lowest).

For bidding, the suits rank, from lowest to highest:

- Clubs
- Diamonds
- Hearts
- Spades
- No-Trump

## The Deal

The dealer distributes 13 cards to each player, one at a time, clockwise, from a well-shuffled deck. The players pick up and examine their hands, keeping them hidden from the others.

## Phase 1 of Play: Announcing Strength

Beginning with the player to the dealer's left and proceeding clockwise, each player announces the high-card points (HCPs) in their hand, as in Mini Bridge. HCPs are counted the usual way:

- A = 4
- K = 3
- Q = 2
- J = 1

For example, North may announce 13 HCPs; East 8; South 11; and West 8.

These announcements give everyone a rough idea of where the strength lies, but tell nothing about the distribution of suits or hand patterns. The announcements are made only once, and are not written down. Players must remember them.

## Phase 2: The Auction

The player with the **lowest HCPs** begins the bidding. If two or more players tie for the lowest bid, the player whose partnership has the **lower combined HCPs** begins. If still tied, the player with the lowest HCPs **closest to the dealer's left starts**. Bidding then proceeds **clockwise**.

A bid consists of:

- a **number of tricks**, and
- a **trump suit** (or No-Trump)

The lowest possible contract is **7 tricks** and is announced with the strain (a trump suit or No-Trump). Unlike Bridge, the book (or baseline of six tricks) is not added to the number bid. For example, a bid of 7 Clubs says that the bidder and partner intend to make at least 7 tricks, with Clubs as trumps. A bid of 8 Hearts says they intend to make at least 8 tricks, with Hearts as trumps.

Each new bid must be **higher than the previous bid**, either **by bidding more tricks**, or **by bidding the same number in a higher-ranking suit (or No-Trump)**. A player may also **pass**.

When three players pass after a bid, the final bidder wins the auction and becomes the **declarer**. The declarer's partner supports the contract. Together they attempt to fulfil the contract, while the other partnership (**the defenders**) tries to prevent them.

If all players pass, the hand is redealt.

## Phase 3: Play of the Hand

The player to the **left of the declarer** leads the first card – the **opening lead** – and play proceeds clockwise. Unlike Bridge, there is no dummy; all players retain their hands and participate fully in the game. Players must follow suit if possible. If unable to follow suit, they may play any card, including a trump. If a trump has been named, the highest trump wins the trick. Otherwise, the highest card of the suit led wins. The winner of each trick leads to the next till all 13 tricks have been played; then the hand is scored.

Trumps may be led at any time, including to the first trick. There is no requirement to “break” trumps before leading them, as in some games such as Spades.

## Making or Failing to Make the Contract

The declaring partnership must win **at least the number of tricks bid**. For example, if the contract is for 8 Hearts, it must take eight or more tricks. Failure to make a contract is penalized.

## Scoring

Scoring follows the familiar system of Spades. If the declaring partnership makes its contract, it **scores 10 times the number of tricks bid**. Each overtrick scores 1 extra point, called a *bag*. Bags accumulate from hand to hand and when a partnership collects 10 bags, it immediately receives **a penalty of 100 points**. This discourages underbidding. If the declaring side **fails to make the contract**, it scores **minus 10 times the number of tricks bid**.

## Winning the Game

Players agree beforehand on a target score: like in Spades, **500 points** is a good target for a competitive and engaging game, and **250 points** for a short game. But without the Nil bids of Spades, it's a fight all the way to the target.

## Strategies and Skills

Although the rules are simple, good play demands concentration, memory, calculation, and card counting. From the outset, players try to deduce where the honours in each suit are placed and what the likely distributions are. With the HCPs and their own hand known, skilled players form a picture that gets sharper during the auction as they infer possible suit lengths and confidence in certain contracts.

The opening lead by the defender to the left of the declarer may give another clue, though there is always scope for deception. Coordination and signaling between partners, as in Whist, Bridge, or Spades, further refine the mental picture of the unseen hands. Familiarity with the common distribution patterns such as 4-4-3-2 (the most frequent), 5-3-3-2, and so on, greatly aids deduction. The principles of opening leads and signalling described by Robert Frederick Foster in his *Manual of Whist* are also well suited to this game.

## A Contest of Gradual Inference

Much of the pleasure of Candid Whist comes from the gradual unveiling of information: only HCPs at first, then hints about suits and ambitions during the auction, and finally the full story during the play of cards. Good players learn to read these clues to advantage and good partners learn to read each other. Neither skill is useful without the other.

Candid Whist is challenging and engaging, yet can be learnt in a couple of hours. Its simple structure conceals a depth of play that rewards memory, inference, and the subtle art of reading both cards and partner.

– S.B. Easwaran