



Rules of Canasta

Players

This version of Canasta is played by 4 players as two partnerships.

Object

The object of the game is to score points by melding cards. The game is ended when one of the players has played all the cards in their hand and the total accumulated points for their team exceeds 5000.

Deal

Two standard 52 card packs with four jokers (2 per pack) are used making 108 cards in all. Players take it in turn to deal 11 cards to each player, and then one card face up on the table (this is the “discard” pile). The remaining cards are placed face down on the table and become the “stock”.

At the end of each hand the player to the left of the previous dealer becomes the dealer of the next hand.

Card Values

They cards have point values as follows:

Card	Points
A	20
K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8	10
7, 6, 5, 4	5
Red 3	100 *
Black 3	5 *
2 (wild)	20
Joker (wild)	50

The twos and jokers are wild cards, and can (with some restrictions) be used as a substitute for a natural card.

- The threes have special functions and values, described below.

Melds

A meld is a group of cards of the same rank (from 4 up to Ace) placed face up on the table. When it is their turn, players may create a new meld or add to an existing meld created by either themselves or their playing partner. A meld may also contain wild cards, provided there are more natural (non-wild) cards than wild cards in the meld. A meld of 7 or more cards is called a “Canasta”. A canasta with no wild cards is a “Pure Canasta” and if it has one or more wild cards it is a “Mixed Canasta”.

Basic Play of the Hand

The player to the left of the dealer plays first and then play proceeds clockwise around the table. On their turn the player either picks up a card from the stock, and adds it to their hand or (provided certain conditions are met) picks up the entire discard pile and uses the cards from that. They can then create or add to melds on the table (if they can) before discarding a card from their hand to complete their turn. Note that there are conditions that must be met when a partnership creates the first meld of a round.

Play continues around the table until a player has no cards remaining in their hand, or there are no cards left in the stock, at which point the number of points accumulated by each player are calculated and added to their cumulative team score. Note that there are conditions that must be met before a player can “go out”.

First Meld

The first meld (or melds) added to the table by a partnership must contain cards with a minimum cumulative score. This minimum score depends on the current total score for the partnership as follows:

Score	Minimum Points
Negative	15
0 to 1495	50
1500 to 2995	90
3000 or more	120

Threes

The 3’s cannot be melded in the usual way. Instead, red 3s are placed on the table as soon as possible, and another card is drawn from the stock to replace it. Red 3s that are dealt to a player are played on the players first turn. Black 3s can be melded by a player when they go out provided all four are held.

Picking up the discard pile

A player may pick up the discard pile on their turn, if they can meld the top card of it either with cards already on the table or with cards from their hand. Once the top card has been melded, the remainder of the discard pile is added to the players hand and they can then proceed as if they had picked up a card from the stock.

Freezing the pack

If a player discards a wild card at the end of their turn, then the discard pile is “frozen” for subsequent turns until it is picked up. (The wild card is usually placed at right angles to the other cards in the pile so it can be seen after other cards have been added to the pile). Once frozen the discard pile can only be picked up if the player has two cards of the same rank as the top card of the discard pile in their hand, and these three cards must be played to the table before the rest of the discard pile is picked up.

Going Out

A player can only out “go out” if their partnership will have at least one Canasta once they have done so. On their turn, before they have laid any cards on the table, they must ask their partner if they would like them to go out. Their partners response must be either “Yes” or “No”, and their decision is binding (so if the partner says yes, they must go out, and if the partner says no then the player cannot go out). There is a penalty of 100 points for not being able to go out after requesting to do so.

Scoring

At the end of a round the scores for each partnership is calculated as follows:

First the value of any melds is as follows:

Pure Canasta	500 points
Mixed Canasta	300 points
Red 3s	100 points each (or 800 points for all 4)

(The score for a Red 3 is counted again the partnership if they have not made their first meld)

The team partnership that goes out gets an extra 100 points.

The point values of the cards remaining in both players hands is then deducted from their total score for each partnership.