

Ombre

Aim of the game: to win the most tricks and earn prize chips from the pool and your opponents.

Requirements

3 players

A modified deck of playing cards: take a standard 52-card deck and then remove the 8s, 9s and 10s to create a 40-card deck.

Variable time (adjust by increasing/decreasing chips, or by setting a limit on the number of rounds)

Rules

Rank of Cards

As part of the 'bidding round' (see below) the trump suit is determined. This affects the value of cards.

In all games the following cards are the top three trumps, also known as 'Matadors', from highest to lowest:

1. Ace of Spades, called *spadille*
2. The nominally lowest trump (black 2, red 7), called *manille*
3. The Ace of Clubs, called *basto*.

Special rules govern the matadors (see below).

The trick-taking power of cards, from highest to lowest in each suit, is as follows:

in black trumps: *spadille*, *manille* (2), *basto*, K Q J 7 6 5 4 3

in non-trump black suits: K Q J 7 6 5 4 3 2

in red trumps: *spadille*, *manille* (7), *basto*, A (also known as 'Punto'), K Q J 2 3 4 5 6

in non-trump red suits: K Q J 2 3 4 5 6 7

Dealing

Give each character a stack of chips.

Each player draws a card from the deck at random and reveals it. The player with the highest card (aces are high, players redraw to break a tie) becomes the dealer. The dealer puts 5 of their chips into the pool.

Return all cards to the deck. The dealer then deals nine cards counterclockwise in batches of three to each of the three players (the dealer is also one of the players). The remaining thirteen cards are left face-down in a pile to form the 'talon'.

The Bidding Round

Each player looks at the cards in their hand and then, starting with the player who first received cards from the dealer (so seated to the dealer's right, also known as the 'eldest'), take turns to either pass (if they don't think they can win) or make a bid to become 'Ombre'. The bids correspond to actions taken before playing the round. There are three possible bids:

Lowest bid: 'Entrada': 'I will win an individual majority of tricks after announcing a trump suit of my choice and exchanging some cards with the stock'.

'Vuelta': 'I will win an individual majority of tricks after turning the top card of the stock, accepting its suit as trump, and exchanging some cards with the stock.'

Highest bid: 'Solo': 'I will win an individual majority of tricks after announcing a trump suit of my choice.'

Each bid made must be higher than the last. If a player says pass they can make no further bids. If no one bids, restart the game, but with an extra five chips in the pool.

The player who makes the highest bid becomes Ombre (*el hombre*, the man).

If playing entrada or vuelta, Ombre determines trumps and then discards face-down and redraws. Ombre can discard and redraw from the talon as many cards as they wish at this point.

Once Ombre has established trumps and their hand, the two other players (known as 'defenders') can choose to discard face-down and redraw from the talon as many cards from each of their hands as they wish. Defenders can choose who gets to do this first.

If Ombre is playing solo, each of the defenders can only discard and redraw a maximum of eight cards.

Play

The 'eldest' starts by playing a card then goes counter-clockwise. Players must follow suit. If they cannot, they play any card (either a trump or effectively discarding).

The trick is taken by the highest card of the suit led, or by the highest trump if any trumps are played. The winner of one trick plays the first card of the next trick.

Reneging and Matadors

There are special trump cards known as 'matadors'. If a trump is led and you hold a matador, you are not obliged to play it, even if you have no lower trumps. Instead, you may 'renege' by playing from another suit. However, if a matador higher than yours is led, you may not renege, but must play it if you have no lower trump.

Winning

If Ombre gets the most tricks, they win:

- The contents of the pool and 5 chips from each defender.
- Bonus chips, depending on the nature of the win:
 - o 'Primeras' (winning the first five tricks straight off): an additional chip from each defender
 - o 'Estuches' (winning with an opening hand that contained the top three trumps – the matadors): an additional three chips from each defender, plus an additional chip for each other successive trump below the matadors, up to a maximum of five from each defender.
 - o 'Vuelta' (winning on a 'vuelta' bid): two additional chips from each opponent.
 - o 'Solo' (winning on a 'solo' bid): ten additional chips from each opponent.

If Ombre loses, then they have to pay the defenders:

- 'Codille' (if a defender scores five or four tricks): Ombre pays the value of the pool to the defender who scored four or five tricks, and five chips to each defender.
- 'Puesta' (Ombre scores four or three tricks): pay the value of the pool into the pool (i.e. double it), and pay five chips to each defender.

Other Cases

'Vole' – If Ombre wins the first five tricks they can either stop and declare 'primeras', or they can go for 'vole' and try and win all nine tricks. If Ombre wins all nine tricks then each defender pays Ombre thirty chips. If Ombre fails to achieve 'vole' however, they have to pay each defender 30 chips...

Surrendering – if Ombre feels, before the start of play for the fourth trick, that they cannot win the game, then Ombre may offer to surrender. Two things then happen:

- Defenders accept the surrender: Ombre pays a 'Puesta' penalty only
- One of the defenders 'forbids the surrender' and becomes a new Ombre (who cannot surrender). At the end of the round, either:
 - o The new Ombre has won, and the old Ombre pays a 'Codille' penalty
 - o The new Ombre has not achieved five tricks, and so is also beaten: both old Ombre and new Ombre each pay a 'Puesta' penalty (making the one remaining defender very happy).