

Spades Reference

Scoring, the rules of play, and what to track to win at Spades.

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SCORING · MAKE YOUR BID

- Make it** Take at least as many tricks (**books**) as you bid and you score **10 × your bid**, plus **1 point per overtrick** (a “bag”).
- Get set** Fall short of your bid and you are **set** — **−10 × your bid**. Overbidding is punished as hard as underplaying.
- Bags** Overtricks (**bags**) score +1 each but are dangerous: in most rules every **10 bags** collected costs you **−100**. Bid your hand, don’t sandbag.
- Nil** Bidding **nil** claims you will take *zero* tricks: succeed for a big bonus (commonly **+100**), but take even one book and it’s **−100**.

RULES OF PLAY

- Spades trump** **Spades are always trump**. Any spade beats every card of the led suit; the **highest spade** played wins the trick.
- Follow suit** You **must follow the led suit** if you can. Only when you are void in it may you play another suit — including a trump spade to ruff.
- Break ♠** You cannot **lead** a **spade** until spades are “broken” — i.e. a spade has been played because someone could not follow suit (unless spades are all you hold).
- No 2♣** Unlike Hearts there is no forced opening card. The first leader simply leads any non-spade to start the round.
- Winner** The highest spade wins; with no spade played, the highest card *of the led suit* wins. The winner leads the next trick.

WHAT TO TRACK

Count books

Keep a running count of the **books** you and each opponent have won against their bids — it tells you who still needs tricks and who is fighting bags.

A♠ K♠

Watch the high spades — A♠ and K♠. Until they fall, the boss trumps are live and can swallow your winners. Knowing they are gone frees your own spades.

Count ♠

Count how many **spades** have been played. When trump is exhausted, long side suits and your remaining spades become winners.

Read voids

When a player discards or ruffs off the led suit, they have revealed a **void** in it. A void suit will trump that suit next time — lead carefully, and use voids to place the cards still out there.