

# Briscola



This page is based on a contribution from Paolo Marino who runs the Italian Game Reference site.

## Introduction

Briscola is a trick taking game - that is, the object of the game is to take cards which gives you (or your team) a high score. It is played with a 40 card deck. It is often played with Italian cards, which have suits of coins, cups, batons and swords, but you may play using a standard card deck, just by removing the Jokers, eights, nines and tens.

Briscola may be played with two, three, four or six players. There is a special version for five players, which is strongly recommended.

## Rank and value of cards

In order to define which card wins a particular trick, we must first define a card ranking, given from highest to lowest:

ace, three, king, queen, jack, 7, 6, 5, 4, 2.

Also, the cards have a point value:

Ace:	11 points
Three:	10 points
King:	4 points
Queen:	3 points
Jack:	2 points

The remaining cards have no point value.

As you see, the total value of cards in the deck adds up to 120 points. The player (or team) which scores at least 61 points in a game wins. Games can end in a draw when both reach the same point total (60), and usually Briscola is played to the best of three or five games.

## Two player Briscola

This is the easiest version of the game, and will serve as a basis for the multiplayer versions.

One of the two players shuffles the deck and deals three cards to each player. He then takes a card (the seventh, in this case) and puts it face up near the pile of undealt cards, which are placed face down. The face-up card suit defines which will be the Briscola suit for the game. The Briscola suit is the trump suit, i.e. the suit which always takes all other cards, card ranking notwithstanding.

The game starts. The first to play is the player to the right of the dealer. In the two player version, this means that the non-dealer (A) will start.

A leads one of his three cards, face up.

B plays one of his cards, and wins or loses the trick according to these three simple rules:

If B plays a card of the same suit as the card led by A, then the trick is won by whoever played the higher card - the winner takes both cards away, and puts them, face down, in a pile near him.  
If B plays a card which has a different suit from the card which A led, but neither card is a Briscola (trump), A wins the trick, and the cards will go to A, even if B's card was of higher rank.

If B plays a card of a different suit from A's, and one of the cards is a Briscola (trump), then the player of the Briscola wins the trick.

Example (Briscola is the four of spades):

Player A leads the 5 of clubs.

Player B plays the ace of clubs. B takes the trick (Rule 1).

Player A leads the 5 of hearts.

Player B plays the King of clubs. Player A takes the trick (Rule 2)

Player A leads the ace of diamonds.

Player B plays 6 of spades (briscola). He wins the round (Rule 3).

Note that Briscola is unlike many card games, in that there is no obligation for the second player to play a card of the same suit as the first card or to trump it, just because he can. The second player is free to play any of his cards.

Note that if both players play a briscola, rule 1 dictates that the higher ranking card wins.

After each trick, each player draws a card from the pile of undealt cards, and the game goes on. The player who won the trick will lead to the next one.

Eventually the undealt cards will be used up, and one of the two players will have to draw the face up Briscola card. The game then continues, without drawing cards, until all the cards have been played.

At the end, each player takes the pile of cards he won in tricks during the game, and counts up the points according to the point scale shown above. The player with more points wins, or if each has 60, it is a draw.

#### Variation

Some people play that if the turned-up card, the one that indicates the trump suit, is an ace or a three (the two strongest cards), the card is put back in the middle of the deck and another card is turned up.

#### Four player Briscola

The game remains more or less the same, but the two pairs of players sit face to face, and each pair plays as a team, like in Bridge. Playing proceeds counter-clockwise.

When playing the 4 or 6 players versions, players should avoid talking about the cards they have in hand. However, some players use a system of signalling, using facial expressions to indicate what cards they have.

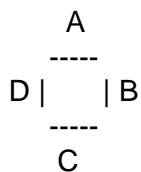
The player to the right of the dealer leads first. The other players may play ANY card (there is no requirement to follow suit). If no one plays a Briscola the trick is won by the highest card of the suit led. If one or more players plays a Briscola, the highest Briscola wins.

Each player in turn, starting with the winner of the trick, then draws a card from the undealt pile. The winner of the trick then leads to the next one.

When the undealt cards are used up, the next player draws the Briscola card, and the game continues without drawing until all the cards have been played.

Example:

The players are A, B, C, D, placed around a table like this:



A and C play together against B and D. A deals the cards. Briscola (the thirteenth card) comes up as a three of hearts.

D, who sits counter-clockwise from A, plays first, and leads the 4 of spades.

C plays the Jack of spades.

B plays the two of hearts.

If A does not play a higher Briscola, all four the cards will go to the D & B team.

A thinks that for this meagre booty (the Jack is only two points, after all) it is not worth using a Briscola, or perhaps he does not have one; anyway, he plays the 5 of clubs.

The trick is taken by the B & D team.

B leads to the next trick.

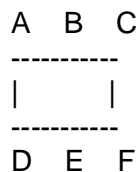
Signals

One system of signals in use to indicate high Briscola cards is as follows:

Ace	stretch the lips over the teeth
Three	distort the mouth to one side
King	glance upwards
Queen/Knight	show the tip of the tongue
Jack	shrug one shoulder

#### Six player Briscola

This works in the same way as the four player version. The two teams are made up of three players each:



A, C and E play against D, B, F. The deck is reduced to 36 cards by taking away the two's.

Three player Briscola

It's played the same as the two player version, and the deck is reduced to 39 cards by taking away a 2. All three players try to gain the highest number of points.

Briscola Bastarda [Five player variant]

Briscola Bastarda (Bastard Briscola) is probably the most enjoyable version of this game. The base mechanics remain the same, i.e. object of the game remains to gain the highest number of points, a briscola suit exists and so on, but there are two important twists to the basic game.

The deal

All the 40 cards are distributed among the players. Each receives eight cards, so no cards remain on the table, and everyone sees from the start all the cards in his/her hand.

## Bidding

Starting with the player to the right of the dealer, everyone in turn "declares" how many points he will probably score in the game, based on the cards he has in hand. Each bid must be higher than the previous one; a player who does not wish to bid higher can pass. A player who has passed cannot bid again during the auction. The bidding continues, for several rounds if necessary, until all the players except one have passed.

The highest bidder then "calls" the Briscola, i.e. decides which card will act as Briscola for the game. He declares which is the selected card to the other players. (Ace of clubs, for example). The called card identifies the briscola suit, but serves also to define which of the remaining players will team up with the first one: the three remaining players form a team which is opposed to the caller/holder pair.

The problem is that no-one, except the holder, knows which one of the players will team up with the caller.

## Play

The actual play is the same as in a "traditional" Briscola game. The play continues until all cards have been played.

The holder should avoid revealing his identity until the time comes to play the called card. The other players should try to deduce which player is playing with the caller, and adjust their strategy accordingly.

## Scoring

At the end of the game, points gained by the caller and by the holder are counted together.

If the total is equal to or more than what the caller declared before the game, he gets 2 points, the holder takes 1 points, and the three other players get -1 (negative) point each. If the total is less than the declared amount, the three players get 1 points each, while the caller loses 2 points and the holder 1 point.

At the start of the game, the players should agree how many points they will play to - usually 10-15 points. Further games are played until someone wins by reaching this total.

## Additional Notes

The caller can, if he has an exceptionally good hand, call for a card he has in its own hand. This will gain (or lose) him 4 points, while his opponents still gain/lose 1 point each.

The game is extremely funny: players need to decide whose side the others are on, mainly by observing the cards played during a round (it's forbidden to talk about the cards in one's own hand, as usual). The holder should walk a thin line between gaining points for himself and his partner, while avoiding being discovered too soon.

## Variation

Some people play a different method of bidding. Players state the rank of the Briscola they wish to call (e.g. ace, three, king, ...), the objective being always to win at least 61 points. Each player in turn must pass or bid a lower rank than the previous bidder. So the bidding is won by whoever is prepared to call the lowest card. If someone bids "two", the bidding can continue by other players offering to call a two and win more than 61 points, and then the player who was prepared to call a two and win most points would win the bidding.