Spoken word games

**BOTTICHELLI** (2+) The Thinker thinks of a person and says the first letter of their surname. Others take turns to ask a yes/no question where the asker has a person in mind for “yes” (who fits all confirmed information about the mystery person); the Thinker either says “No, I am not [name],” naming someone who fits but is not the mystery person, or concedes. If conceding, the asker reveals who they had in mind and may ask direct yes/no questions to the Thinker until they answer “no” to one. If the Thinker answers yes to “Are you [name]?” the guesser wins.

**BREAKFAST COMBO** (2+) The Server thinks of an object. Another player makes a guess as to what this object might be, and this automatically becomes the best guess so far. Other players then make guesses. For each guess: if it is closer than the current best guess, the Server announces that this is the new best guess; otherwise, the Server declines it but names something that the guess has in common with the object. (eg. “A wrap?” “No, a calculator is still the best guess, but like a wrap, my object has a sharp point.”) A correct guess wins.

**CONVERGENCE** (2) Both players think of their own four word key sentence. Each turn, a player announces, and their opponent indicates whether each word in their own key sentence is alphabetically before ("up") or after ("down") the corresponding word in the test. (For example, if a player’s key sentence was "A NICE DAY" and the other tested with "LET THERE BE LIGHT", the player would answer "up, up, down, up"). Repeat until a sentence is guessed. To shorten

Card games

**ABSTRAC** (2) Remove 2s through 8s. Shuffle and deal the 24 cards as a face-up line, overlapping so that values are visible. Dealer chooses whether to play or pass. Players then take turns to claim one, two or three consecutive cards from the "top" end of the line, placing claimed cards in front of them. When the line is gone, total score for claims (3 of a kind = 3, 4 of a kind = 8) and sequences within a suit (3 scores 3, 4, 4, 5, 6=12), multiply it by the number of cards your opponent drew. If a single player scores nothing, swap scores.

**ACES AND FACES** (2) Lay all ace and face cards face-up on the table. Each has four relevant characteristics: red or black; rounded (club/heart) or pointed suit top; male or female (aces are female); normal or joker. Take turns to select a face-up card and hand it to your opponent, who places it into an imaginary shared grid (which may never exceed a 4x4 square). If a player completes a line of four cards which share a characteristic, and notice this, they win. A player also wins if they spot an unnoticed completion before playing the next card. **BARTOK** (2+) Deal five cards each, and one face-up to a discard pile. Take turns to either play a face card equal to the discards (one that shares a suit or value with the top card), or draw a card.okers can be played as any card. If a player breaks a rule, they take back their card and draw a penalty card. When a player has one card in hand, they must say "Bartok." With an empty hand, they win and openly invent an additional, unbiased rule for all future rounds, typically affecting eligible plays or adding effects for certain cards.

**BURRIT** (3-7) Deal the deck equally, set any leftovers aside face-down. On count of three players call out a chosen “bug” suit, or “misère”: note these down somehow. Dealer starts; everyone plays a card, following the suit of the bug. The player who plays the highest card in the same suit wins the trick; winner takes the cards and leads the next trick. (Winner of the final trick also takes the leftovers.) Winning every trick scores 100; losing every trick scores 30, or 10 if misère.

or of the words or letters of their name. Once a category is excluded, people covers cannot be named. If a player can’t think of a person, or has any player correctly challenges them for a move that breaks earlier exclusions, they are eliminated. (Upon excluding a category, a player may be asked to name another who also fits it; if they can’t, they are eliminated.)

otherwise score 10 per won trick, divided by the number of bug cards you look, or doubled if you took none. CHINESE TEN (2-4) Deal 24 cards between players, and four cards face-up to the table. On your turn, play one card to the table. If it captures a face-up card (if its values sum to 10, or if it is both the highest and no alien), claim both cards face-up in front of you. Then deal a new card face-up and claim a capture with it if possible. When the deck’s empty, score claimed red cards only: 1×8 at face, 9×4 at 10 and aces at 20. (With 3+ players: a 1 ace, ace of clubs is 40.) **DRAULA** (2) Include jokers. Deal four cards each, and one face-up as the centre of a 3x3 grid. Take turns to add one card, orthogonally adjacent to an existing card. After eight plays, Player 1 scores the highest-scoring row, Player 2 scores the highest-scoring column: a line scores its total face value (Queens 10 horizontal but 0 vertical, Kings vice versa. Jacks always 0); x2 it if it has two cards of one suit, x3 for three in one colour, x5 for three of one suit. A line with a joker ("vampire") scores zero. Play six rounds. **GOPS** (2-3) Give one player the spade cards and the other clubs (if there’s a third player, give them hearts). Shuffle the diamonds. Each round, deal one diamond card face-up to the table: each player secretly bids a card of their choice from their hand - the highest bid (if any) takes the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded.

Highest diamond total wins. **JAMES BOND** (2-3) Deal six piles of four cards to each player (four piles for three players, four cards face-up into a middle row. Play is simultaneous: players swap cards from their piles with cards from the middle row, but may only pick up one pile at a time, and swap one card at a time. If all of a player's piles contain four matching cards, they call "James Bond" and win. **LIAR!** (2) Use the Jack, Queen and King from any three suits. Shuffle and deal four cards each, and one face-down to the table. Take turns to either play a card (you win if you are right, you lose if wrong) or play a card from your hand face-up to the table and ask your opponent either how many cards they have of that suit, or how many of that rank. Players must answer truthfully, but may lie once per game. Suspected lies may be challenged; if correct, the challenger wins, if mistaken they lose. **MINI MAO** (2+) Deal five cards per player. One player thinks up a secret rule regarding legal plays (eg. "cannot play a card onto a heart"). Players take turns to play one card into a middle pile; if you break a secret rule, the player who invented the rule informs you that you have done this (without explaining the rule) and hands your card back, you draw one penalty card and your turn ends. First to empty their hand wins the round, and invents an additional secret rule for the next. With two players, both create a rule in the first round. **OBS TACLE RACE** (2-6) Discard 2s through 6s and do one round and announce the total new of the pile. (Aces are worth 11. Kings 4, Queens plus or minus 3. Jacks and 2 and other cards at face value.) The "obstacles" are 66, 88, 99 and 111: score 1 point for hitting an obstacle, lose 1 point for skipping over one in either direction. If the total exceeds 120, reset it to zero. Continue until all cards have been played. **OHIO** (2-5) Each player has 1-10 and the Jack ("Ohio") of a single suit. The first player plays any card. Going clockwise, each player must either play a lower card, or retre from the round. Ohioos are counted as 0.1 less than the previous played card. Repeat until all but one player has passed; that player wins the cards and the table leads the next round, unless any player has no cards, in which case the game ends. Score total face value of won cards, minus face value of cards in hand; Ohioos score -10 wherever they are. **PIT** (3-4) Prepare a deck of the numbers 1 through 9 for as many suits as there are players. Shuffle and deal nine cards each, then each player makes a trade of a specific number of cards ("Two! Two!"). If no one accepts, both swap that number of cards, unless. Cards handed over in a trade must all be of the same suit. If a player has nine cards of the same suit, they win. Optionally: add a king (a wildcard) and a joker (cannot win while held).

**POKER MENTEUR** (2+) Deal five cards to the starting player, who examines them privately and announces a poker hand, optionally naming specific cards (eg. "a pair" or "pair of nines and a six"). The next player can either challenge the call or takes the hand. If they challenge, reveal and discard the hand: the challenge losser takes a penalty point and starts a new round. If they take the hand, they may discard (face-down) and redraw up to four cards, then claim a higher poker hand for the next player to judge. Play to a pre-agreed penalty total.

The Freeze-Dried Games Pack

Compiled by Kevan Davis. Last update June 2022, latest version at kevan.org/tfgp.
One player is hearts, the other clubs. Shuffle those suits together (minus the aces) and deal out into a 5x5 grid with a hole in the middle. Each turn, use one of your cards to remove an opponent’s card with a higher value in the same row or column, your card replacing the removed one. If no further moves are possible, the highest card wins, scoring many points as its face value. (If tied, play to the last move won.) Play to 30 points.

**VERISH’ NE VERISH** (2-6) For a 2/3 player game, remove 2s through 5s. Remove one random card from the deck. Deal the remainder face-down. Each turn, play one to three cards face-down and announce them (eg., “two sevens”). You may lie. The next player either accepts or challenges; if they accept, they take their turn, naming the same card rank; if they challenge, played cards are revealed, the loser draws the discard pile, may optionally discard a single, four-of-a-kind, and play continues to the loser’s left, naming any rank. Retire when your hand is empty; last player remaining loses.

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**Dice games**

**CATEGO** (2-4) Draw a grid of eleven columns numbered 2-12, with a row for each player. Take turns to roll two dice and enter the total into any open column on your row. If a column is full, the player with the highest score in that column (if any) scores the number of the column. Tally the scores as you go. The game ends when the grid is full.

**CINQ-O** (2-6) Take six dice, one of them a different colour as the “hi/lo” dice (1-3 = low, 4-6 = high). Roll any number of unbanked dice, then “bank” one or more. Repeat up to five times. If your hi/lo dice was low, score 14 minus the total of the other dice (minimum 1), multiplied by three less than the hi/lo die. If it was high, score the total of the other dice minus 21 (minimum 1), multiplied by three less than the hi/lo die. A straight and five-of-a-kind always score 10 above being multiplied. First to 100 wins.

**FARKLE** (2+) Take turns to roll six dice. Whenever you roll, if you roll any scoring combinations (100 times the face value for a triple, 1000 for a triple 1, 100 for a 1 outside of a triple, 50 for a 5 outside a triple) set at a random combination aside and either reroll what’s left, or end your turn, scoring the combinations you set aside. If you ever make a roll that scores zero, your turn ends immediately, remembering those combinations’ total and continue with six fresh dice. First to 10,000 wins.

**GOLDEN SIXTEEN** (2+) Put two chips per player in the middle. Take turns to roll three dice, then (optionally) roll some of them, no more than twice, then score the total. If your dice total ever exceeds 15, you are eliminated and take a chip. After each round, the player(s) with the lowest score that round takes a chip, unless they are the only uneliminated player. When all chips are taken, many points as its face value. (If tied, play to the last move won.) Play to 30 points.

**SHUT THE BOX** (1+) Lay out nine face-up playing cards numbered 1 through 9 (or note them on paper if you have no cards). On your turn, roll two dice and then “shut” (turn face-down) any group of un-shut numbers whose totals add up to the dice total. (So a roll of 6 may shut either, 6, 5, 1; 6, 4, 2; or 3, 3, 3.) If 7-9 are shut, you may choose to roll just one die. Repeat until you produce a roll which can shut no numbers, then score the total of un-shut numbers. Each player takes five turns. Lowest overall scores wins. SIX SIX SIX (2+) Players take turns to roll three dice, calculating the roll beneath a cup or cover. They peek and call out the result in descending order (“5-3-1”), which must be higher than the previous player’s call, and may or may be a lie. They then pass the dice, covered, to the next player, who either challenges the call as a lie (the loser of a challenge loses one of their lives) or accepts it. After the first turn, a player can choose to not reroll their dice by calling. **TAKE-BACK-TOE** (2) Draw or imagine a 3x4 grid. Place 10 tokens in each of the four squares on the middle row; the other two rows are players’ “home rows”. On your turn, roll a six-sided die and move that many chips from a single space to an orthogonally adjacent space, or pass. (You can undo your opponent’s previous move.) If three spaces in your home row contain the same number (non-zero), score the total of the three. If the YAHTEE picks a “category” of three spaces in your row, remember those combinations’ total and continue with six fresh dice. First to 10,000 wins.

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**Miscellaneous games**

**THE DICTIONARY GAME** (4-6) The Reader selects an obscure word from the dictionary, reads the word aloud (checking that no player knows its meaning) and copies the definition onto a piece of paper. The other players write their own definitions on identical papers. The Reader collects the papers to read aloud in a random order. Going clockwise, other players vote aloud on which definition they believe to be correct. Then: score 1 for selecting the true definition and 1 for each player who selected your false definition. If nobody guessed correctly, the Reader scores as many points as players. Take turns to be Reader. **LYNX** (2) Take an empty crossword grid. Players take turns to write a word or crossword-suitable phrase into an empty clue space. First move must be into one of the shortest spaces, subsequent moves must cross at least one existing word. The first move scores 2 points per letter in the word or phrase; subsequent moves score 1 point per letter, multiplied by the number of words the move crosses. Continue until both players resign; the first to resign gets a 10 point bonus.

**MAFIA** (7+) Prepare as many cards as players: two “Mafia”, one “Detective” and the rest “Citizens”. A Moderator deals these out secretly then moderates repeating Night and Day phases. Night: Players close their eyes, the Moderator asks the Mafias to open theirs, silently nominate a player, and then close their eyes. Moderator asks Detective to open their eyes and indicate a player, and gives a thumbs-up if it are Mafias. Day: Everyone opens their eyes, the Mafia-targeted player is eliminated and players vote on one player to eliminate. Mafia lose if eliminated, and win if only two non-Mafia remain.
**NOMIC (4+)**

**Rule 1:** Going clockwise, players take turns to roll a die and add the result to their score, then propose the enactment, repeal or amendment of any rule. **Rule 2:** When a proposal is made, every player must vote for or against it; if the vote is unanimously in favour, the proposal takes immediate effect; otherwise the proposer loses 10 points. **Rule 3:** If two or more players disagree about any rule interpretation, the player to the left of the current player resolves the dispute. Their decision is binding. **Rule 4:** The first player to reach 100 points wins.

Each player starts with identical 11x11 grids of coins (standard is 4 pennies, 3 nickels, 2 dimes and 1 quarter). On your turn, play one coin from your pool to the middle (and if you can) take back change up to one penny less than the value of the coin you played. If your pool is empty at the end of your turn, you are eliminated. **ZENDO (3-6)** Pick any medium (coins, words, drawn shapes, etc) for constructing small, ambigious “koans”. The Master picks a secret rule (e.g. “a circle surrounds a square”), and builds one koan that fits the rule and one that doesn’t, marking which is which. Students take turns: build a koan, and optionally call for all students to privately guess whether it fits the rule. The Master marks whether the koan fits, correct guesses earn 1 point. On your turn, you may spend 1 point to guess the rule; if wrong, the Master builds a koan that disproves it: otherwise you win.

**ACROSSENTAI (2+)**

Pick a ten letter word. Each player writes it vertically on a sheet of paper, then propose the enactment, repeal or amendment of any rule. **BOGGLE (2+)**

Generate a 4x4 grid of random letters (by, say, picking a random sentence and writing the first eight letters in a checkerboard pattern, and the next eight in the gaps). Each player privately lists words that can be made from a path of sequentially adjacent letters (including diagonals). A single word cannot use the same grid twice. The game ends after three minutes; players reveal their words, strike out any which more than one player found, then score by word length (3/4 letters=1 point, 5=2, 6=3, 7=5, 8+=11). For a sharper game, disallow 2-letter words and 5-7-plurals. **BRIGITTE (2)**

Draw a 6x5 grid of black dots. At the centre of each grid square, draw a small empty circle ("a white dot") then draw five more white dots above and below the top and bottom rows, to produce two interlocking 5x5 grids of black and white dots. One player takes black, the other white; take turns to connect two horizontally or vertically adjacent dots of your colour, without crossing a line drawn by your opponent. The first player to connect the two shortest sides of their grid wins. **BATTLESHIPS (4+)**

Each player draws a 5x5 grid. Take turns to add your own symbol to an empty square. If by placing your symbol you have surrounded an opponent’s symbol, the player to connect the two shortest sides of their grid wins. **CRYSTALS (2+)**

Draw a 2x2 or 21x21 grid. Take turns to draw a personal symbol (a “seed”) in any square, and optionally draw a “crystal”, scoring 1 point for every square in that crystal. A crystal is an outline of a number of orthogonally-connected squares which must: contain four or more seeds of your symbol, and no other seeds; be symmetrical about all four horizontal, vertical and diagonal axes; have no jigsaw-style boundary sections (such that it could “interlock” with another crystal); not overlap with another crystal; and contain no holes. Play until no further crystals can be formed.

**FACTO (2+)**

Each player takes a piece of paper and writes any single sentence at the top, announcing every word it contains. Students take turns to make notes on your strike grid. If a ship is hit, the player claims all remaining letters on the opponent’s grid, then identity announced. A sunk fleet loses.

**GET the MESSAGE (2+)**

Each player takes a piece of paper and writes any medium (coins, words, drawn shapes, etc) for constructing small, unambiguous “koans”. The Master marks whether the koan fits, correct guesses earn 1 point. On your turn, you may spend 1 point to guess the rule; if wrong, the Master builds a koan that disproves it: otherwise you win.

**GHOST (2+)**

One player writes a letter, and players then take turns to add a single letter after it. The letters must always be building towards a proper word. If a player causes the letters to spell a complete word of three or more letters, they lose the game. If a player suspects that the letters cannot spell a word, they may challenge the previous player; the loser of the challenge loses the game. The Superghost variant allows letters to be played on either end of the fragment.

**GOMOKU (2+)**

On a 15x15 grid, players take turns to add their symbol (O or X) to an empty square. If a player forms a line of five or more in any direction, including diagonals, they win. (For a version of the more balanced "Renju", the player when first cannot add a symbol, it would make a line of six or more, or if it would simultaneously create two rows of three or two rows of four. The second player has no such restrictions.)

**HACKENBUSH (2+)**

Draw a horizontal “ground” line, with any number of dots above it. Draw lines from one or more dots to the ground, and draw any pattern of lines between dots such that each dot has at least one route to the ground. Players take turns to cut a line by erasing or crossing it through; any line that now has no connecting route to the ground is also erased. If a player has no line to cut, they lose. Variant: draw lines in two or three colours, each player picks one colour and cannot cut lines of their opponent’s colour. **HIPHONE GAMES (2) DRAW ten large circles, and join them with lines to make a symmetrical pattern, such that each circle has between two and seven connections. Players take turns to write a word or phrase into an empty circle: upon doing so, they score a point for each filled circle which is both connectedly adjacent to their move, and for which they can argue some logical connection between the circles’ contents. The second turn of the game must be unadjacent to the first. **KROPiNG (2+)** On a square grid of any size, players take turns to add a dot of their colour (or an identifying symbol) to an intersection. After placing a dot, you may connect a loop of your own adjacent dots (including diagonals) by drawing a line through them. This forms a “territory”. If one territory encloses another, the enclosed one is no longer counted as a territory. At the end of the game, score one point for each dot of an opponent inside your territories. Alternate scoring: score the total size of your territories.
LAST WORD (2-4) On a 9x9 grid, fill the middle 3x3 with random letters. Take turns to: add any letter adjacent to two or more existing letters; for each such move, the other player writes down an answer. When all questions have been asked, score the game: each question is worth 2*X points to its questioner and those who answered correctly, where X is the number of players who answered incorrectly (unless everyone answered incorrectly, in which case the questioner loses 2*X points). QUOD (2) Draw an 11x11 grid and mark dots ("quasars") in the four corners. Each player has a pool of six quasars, and here is how game play will work: on your turn, add any number of your quasars to the grid, plus a single personal symbol ("quad") in any empty square. If a player’s quasars form a square (of any size and orientation), that player wins. If each player has played 20 quads, the game ends and the player with the most unplayed quasars wins. (Alternatively: score 1 point per square and play 20 quads each.) RAGAMAN (2-6) Draw a 5x5 grid. Write any vowel in the middle square. Take turns to add a letter adjacent to an existing letter, then score for the longest words you can make in each of four directions (vertical, horizontal and two diagonals). Letters of a claimed word must lie consecutively, and must include the added letter, but need not be in order. Add the lengths of the words together for your score that turn. (Scoring variants: multiply instead of adding; or score 2 for 2 letters, 6 for 3, 10 for 4, 15 for 5.) Play until the grid is full. RUMBLE (2+) Players start with 100 Energy. Each player designs two game-modifying letters, 6 for 3, 10 for 4, 15 for 5. Play until the grid is full. SHANNON (2) Draw an arbitrary network of small circles connected by lines. Emphasise any two circles as targets. Players are given 100 Energy and get the power. Each round, each player must claim at least two words. Multiply the length of each word in your grid which is not adjacent to any other word, claim it by marking it with a symbol. Play until the grid is full; the player whose claimed areas have the largest total area is the winner.

ORDER and CHAOS (2) On a 6x6 grid, players take turns to mark an "O" or "X" in any square - each player may add either mark. One player ("Order") wins if a line of five Os or Os is formed in any direction; the other player ("Chaos") wins if the grid is filled with any such lines being formed. POORMAN’S TRIVIA (4+) Each player has their own sheet of paper, and thinks up and writes down three trivia questions that they know the answer to, with spaces to write three answers to each of the other players’ questions. Going around the table, each player asks one of their questions and the other players write down an answer. When all questions have been asked, score the game: each question is worth 2*X points to its questioner and those who answered correctly, where X is the number of players who answered incorrectly (unless everyone answered incorrectly, in which case the questioner loses 2*X points). SCORCLOCK (2-6) Each player draws their own 5x5 grid (6x6 for a game with five players, 7x7 for six). Players take turns to call out a letter; for each letter, every player scores the length of the word in their own square, and the other players score the length of the word in their own square. The player with the least score wins.

TIC-TAC-0 (2) Draw a 3x3 grid. On your turn, draw a "T" or an "X" in any odd pair of empty squares, one adjacent to the other. Draw a line if you have adjacent squares: a taijitu is a pair of symbols, your own symbol in one square and your opponent’s in the other. Continue until no further moves can be made. The player who wins the most points in their two largest orthogonal groups of symbols wins. TIED (2) Draw any 3x3 grid, in a 3x3 formation. One player is "X", the other "O" - on your turn, add your symbol to any space in a small grid. Your opponent must play their next move in the grid whose position corresponds to that space in the small grid (unless that grid is full or has been won, in which case they may choose any grid). If a small grid contains three of a symbol in a row, the grid is marked as won by that player; if three grids in a row are won by a player, that player wins. TWIST (2) Prepare a 2x2-24 grid of dots but don’t draw the dots in the four corners. Give each player a differently coloured pen, and mark the top and bottom edges of the grid in one colour, the two sides in the other. Take turns to: claim any unclaimed dot by marking it your colour, then draw any number of links between dots you have claimed which exactly a knight’s move apart. Your links may cross your own links, but not your opponent’s. You may not claim dots on your opponent’s board edges. First player to link their own two borders wins. URBANIZATION (2) A draw a grid of 6x6 dots. Take turns to connect two adjacent dots (including diagonals), or a line of three adjacent dots (again, including diagonals). If you draw the final line that encloses an area, claim it by marking it with a symbol. Play until the grid is full; the player whose claims have the largest total area wins. VITAL (2) Draw a 9x9 grid. Take turns to: add a letter adjacent to two or more existing letters, unless it is adjacent to any other word. Add a new dot anywhere on the grid, and add a new word adjacent to it. The other player must write a word of the same length which encloses the new dot anywhere on the grid, and add a new word adjacent to it. The game is full when all dots are encircled.