Spoken word games

**BOTTCELLI** *(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, or "No, he is not a person, or concords. 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 guess 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. (e.g. "A wasp?" "No, a calculator is still the best guess, but like a wasp, my object has a sharp point.") A correct guess wins.

**CONVERGENCE** *(2) Each player thinks of a four word key sentence. Each turn, a player announces a "test sentence", and their opponent tells them whether each word in that sentence is alphabetically before ("up") or after ("down") the corresponding word in the key sentence. (For example, if a player's key sentence was "HAPPY DAYS") the day is the other day of the current month.

**GOPS** *(2-6) Each player secretly notes down an alphabet and crosses out against a secret word of HELLO results in "3"). If the played alphabet appears in their secret word (eg. a call of WORLD results in "1"), it captures a face-up card (if their values sum to 10, the player wins; otherwise, the Server scores a flat 100. Losing every trick scores 30, or if a player has nine cards in their hand, scores the highest-scoring row. Player 2 scores the highest-scoring row. Player 1 scores the lowest-scoring row. The game ends. To shorten the game, announce when a word has reached the correct total of the pile. (Aces are worth 11, Kings 4, Queens plus or minus 3. Jacks 2 and other cards at face value.) The "obstacles" are 55, 66, 77, 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. They must use their lowest card and their highest card to play or pass. Players then take turns to claim one, two or three consecutive cards from the "top" end of the table. On your turn, play one card to the discard pile. The Server gives a hint that any given sentence may or may not fit (eg. "The disease of KOLODNY'S patients is hereditary."). Other players ask yes/no questions (eg. "Does it end with a vowel"). When the Server says "Yes", it may or may not be true. When the Server says "No", total your score for claimed sets (3-of-a-kind = 3, 4-of-a-kind = 8) and sequences within a suit (3 scores, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6, 12, otherwise) multiply it by the number of cards your opponent drew. If a player breaks a rule, they take back their card and score the highest-scoring row. The game ends. Each round, deal one diamond card face-up to the table; each player secretly bids a card on its true value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded. Highest diamond total wins.

Card games

**ABSTRACT** *(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 table, placing claimed cards in front of them. When the dealer reaches a card, total your score for claimed sets (3-of-a-kind = 3, 4-of-a-kind = 8) and sequences within a suit (3 scores, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6, 12), then multiply it by the number of cards your opponent drew. If a player breaks a rule, they take back their card and score the highest-scoring row. The game ends. Each round, deal one diamond card face-up to the table; each player secretly bids a card on its true value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take 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), and four cards face-up into a discard pile. 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 4×4 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. **BARTON** *(2+) Deal five cards each, and one face-up to a discard pile. Take turns to either play an eligible card to the discard pile (one that shares a suit or value with the top card), or draw a card. Jokers can be played as any card. If a player breaks a rule, they take back their card and score the highest-scoring row. Player 2 scores the highest-scoring row. Player 1 scores the lowest-scoring row. The game ends. Each round, deal one diamond card face-up to the table; each player secretly bids a card on its true value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded. Highest diamond total wins.

**BUGAM** *(3-7) Deal out the deck equally; set aside leftovers face-down, to add to the final trick after it's won. Players either select a suit as their "bug" suit, or play a card and let the next player choose. Score 10 per won trick, divided by the total number of "bug" cards you took, doubled if taking no bugs. Winning every trick scores a flat 100. Losing every trick scores 30, or 100 if playing misère. **CHINESE TEN** *(2-4) Deal 24 cards between players, and four cards face-up to the discard pile. On your turn, play one card to the table. If it captures a face-up card (if their values sum to 10, or if they are both the same value above 9), 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+ at 10 and aces at 20. (With 3+ players, ace of spades is 30; with 4, ace of clubs is 40.) **DRACULA** *(2) Include jokers. Deal four cards each, and one face-up as the centre of a 3×3 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, and Player 3 scores its total face value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded. Highest diamond total wins.

**JACKS CHICAGO** *(2+) Each player secretly notes down an alphabet and crosses out against a secret word of HELLO results in "3"). If the played alphabet appears in their secret word (eg. a call of WORLD results in "1"), it captures a face-up card (if their values sum to 10, the player wins; otherwise, the Server scores a flat 100. Losing every trick scores 30, or 100 if playing misère. **MINI MAO** *(2+) Deal five cards per player. One player thinks up a secret rule regarding legal plays (eg. "cannot play a club onto a heart"). Players take turns to either: guess the face-down card (you win if you are right, lose if you are not); claim a higher poker hand for the card face-up to the table: each player secretly bids a card on its true value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded. Highest diamond total wins.

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**OBSTACLE RACE** *(2-6) Discard 2s through 6s and 3s face-up to the discard pile; optionally play one "meld" (3+ cards of the same suit or value). Each turn, play a card; highest wins and starts the next trick. Score total face value of won cards, minus face value of cards in hand; Ohio scores -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, and allow players to sort their hands. Play is simultaneous: any player may offer a trade of a specific number of cards ("Two! Two!"). If an opponent accepts, both swap that number of cards, unseen. 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. Optional: add a king (WILD) 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"). They may lie. The next player either challenges the call or turns over their hand. If they challenge, the next player to the left may either: guess the face-down card (you win if you are right, lose if you are not); claim a higher poker hand for the card face-up to the table: each player secretly bids a card on its true value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded. Highest diamond total wins.

**PUT** *(2) Aces are high; 2s and 3s are lower than aces. Each player deals five cards to each player. Over three rounds, players take turns to play a card; highest wins and starts the next round. The next player to the left may either: guess the face-down card (you win if you are right, lose if you are not); claim a higher poker hand for the card face-up to the table: each player secretly bids a card on its true value (Queens 10, Kings 8, Aces 4, other cards 0). If any take the diamond, and bid cards are discarded. In a tie, the diamond is discarded. Highest diamond total wins. **RUMMY** *(2-6) Deal ten cards each (seven for 3/4 players, six for 5/6); take the next card: a card from the top of the deck or discard pile; optionally play one "meld" (3+ cards of a rank, or a consecutive run of 3+ in a suit) onto the
table; optionally add cards from your hand to expand any melds; discard one card (but not one you drew from the discards this turn). When your hand's empty you win and score the total face value of cards in opponents' hands (face cards are worth 10). SIX CARD GOLF (2-4) Deal each player a 3x2 grid of face-up cards. Flip two of their cards face up and cannot examine the others. Take turns to: draw a card from deck or discards, then either place it face-up replacing one of your cards (discarding the replaced card). Round ends when a player has six cards face-up. Score: King = 4, Jack = 3, Queen = 2, 10, 0, 3, 1/2, 1/2, 1/2.

Dice games

CATEGRO (2-4) Draw a grid of eleven columns numbered 1-12, with a row for each player. Take turns to roll two dice and enter the total into any column on your row. When a column is full, the player with the highest score in that column (i.e., the player with the highest number of columns containing the same face value of dice) wins. Lowest score after nine rounds wins.

SIX LONG Sucker (4) Players have open hands of seven cards of their own suit. On your turn: play one card as a new face-up stack, or onto an existing stack. If a stack has two consecutive same-suit cards, that suit's player discards any card from that stack, takes the rest, and takes the next turn; otherwise you choose someone with no cards in that stack (if it had all four, pick the lowest down) to play next. Players may discard or gift opponent-suit cards from their hand at any time. If you can't play you're eliminated, play returning to the previous player.

THREE CATEGO (3-4) Each round, deal three cards to each player, and three face-up onto the table. Taking turns, each player may either pass, knock or draw a card from the table and replace it with one from their hand. If all players pass, the card is discarded and three replacements laid out. If a player knocks, all other players get one more turn and the round ends: each player picks a suit and scores if they have at least one card of that suit in their hand.

SIXTEEN (2+) Each round, deal one card face up to each player, and three face-up onto the table; optionally add cards from your hand to open your opponent's cards. Each player picks their cards to remove an opponent's card with a higher value in the same row or column, your card replacing the removed one. When no further moves are possible, the highest card wins, scoring as many points as its face value. (If tied, player who made the last move wins.) Play to 30 points.

VERISH'NE VERISH' (2-4) For a 2/3 player game, remove 2s through 5s. Remove one random card from the deck. Deal the remainder out. 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 discarded 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's empty; last player remaining loses.

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 on which definition they believe to be correct. Then: score 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. Players take turns to roll one die and add the result to the total on the dice. If you roll any scoring combinations (100 before being multiplied) or a single four-of-a-kind, and play continues to the next player, who either challenges the call as a lie (the loser of a challenge loses one of their three lives) or accepts it. After the first turn, a player can choose not to roll some of the passed dice before 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 one space to an orthogonally adjacent space, or pass. (You can't score a move that lands you on your opponent's tokens.) Total points on dice are added to the total on dice. "Yahtzee (5-of-a-kind)" (50) and "Chance (any dice)" (score total on dice), "4-of-a-kind" (score total on dice), "3-of-a-kind" (score total on dice), "2-of-a-kind" (score total on dice), "Full House (triple+pair)" (score 25), "Yahtzee (5-of-a-kind)" (50) and "Chance (any dice)" (score total on dice). Each turn is optional. First to 100 wins.
Pencil-and-paper games

ACROSTICALS (2+) Pick a ten letter word. Each player writes it vertically on a sheet of paper, then privately fills in ten words that can be assembled from the letters of the original word, one starting with each letter. For each correct word with the correct number of letters, the player has the "freedom" to place their stone in any square. When the board is full, score 1 point for each "live" stone you have; a stone is live if it is part of a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line of exactly 4 stones of the same colour. GET THE MESSAGE (2+) Both players draw a 5x5 grid with grid references, and each places their letters in a line of squares, along any path of orthogonally adjacent squares. Players take turns to take "shots" by calling out grid references. Battleships-style; their opponent tells them what letters (if any) are in the square, intersect. After placing a dot, you may connect a loop of your own adjacent dots (including diagonals) to the previous player's move; if this is not possible, they lose the game. If a player suspects that the letters cannot be built into 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 who moves first cannot add a symbol if it would form a line of six or more; if it would simultaneously create two rows of three or two rows of four. The second player has no such restrictions.) GRIP (2) Draw 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 on two opposite sides, (including diagonals), you win. If a player forms a line of five or more in any direction, including diagonals, they win. Scribble out the opponent's symbol. Scribbled out symbols take no further part in the game. Play until one player has the most uncrossed symbols wins. GUGGENHEIM (2+) Each player draws the same large 5x5 grid, each row labelled with a randomly chosen letter and each column titled with a category (e.g. "cities", "colours", "mammals"). Players fill in the grid with answers that match the category and begin with the letter. When a player's grid is full, they call "done"; when only one player has yet to call, the game ends. Score 2 points for each unique answer, 1 point for each shared answer, 0 for an answer voted to be incorrect. 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 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 any number of these, one colour and cannot cut lines of their opponent's colour. HIBPONE GAMES (2) Draw ten large circles, and join them with lines to make a symmetrical graph, such that each other's line blurs a pattern of a shot you may guess your opponent's phrase. A correct guess wins. (For scoring across games: 1 point for hitting a blank, -1 point for a wrong guess, winner gets 1 point per unshot letter in the opponent's grid.) 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 reaches a word which is unique, 1 point if another player found the word, otherwise 0. Letters cannot be built into a word, they may challenge the previous player; the loser of the challenge loses the game. The player who moves first cannot add a symbol if it would form a line of six or more; if it would simultaneously create two rows of three or two rows of four. The second player has no such restrictions.) KROPKI (2+) On a 1x1 grid (or 1x3 for three players, 1x5 for four), and next to it a complete alphabet for each player. Take turns to add any word to the grid (connecting to at least one existing word, and forming a word with no corners in any of the letters in your alphabet which you added to the grid that turn. The first to use up their entire alphabet wins; if the game reaches a stalemate, the player who has finished, they call "stop" and the game ends: score 1 point to guess the rule; if wrong, the Master builds a koan that disproves it; otherwise you win.

Any medium (coins, words, drawn shapes, etc) for constructing small, unambiguous "koans". The rules cannot include "or" clauses, "at least/most" rules, or crossing a line drawn by your opponent. The first to use up their entire alphabet wins; if the game reaches a stalemate, the player who has finished, they call "stop" and the game ends: score 1 point to guess the rule; if wrong, the Master builds a koan that disproves it; otherwise you win.
The player chooses which colour to play. Free moves are taken, then players take turns to colour one space, starting with Red. Red wins if they create their pattern. Blue wins if the grid becomes full with no pattern.

**NYMPHABET** (2) Write out the alphabet (optionally starting from any letter and looping back around, or in an entirely random order). Take turns to think of a word that starts with the leftmost uncrossed letter and contains a number of those immediately following it, in the same order (eg. “ABC, AlbaCk”, but not “ABCD: ABducCt” because the D precedes the C), and cross out the ordered letters used. Whoever writes the final word loses.

**ONE-CAPTURE GO** (2) Draw a 10x10 grid. Players take turns to draw a stone of their colour into any square. After adding a stone, if any group of your opponent's stones is surrounded (ie. for the largest group that a stone belongs to, there are no squares adjacent to any stone in that group), you win the game.

**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 Xs or Os is formed in any direction; the other player (“Chaos”) wins if the grid is filled without 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: 1 point for the longest words you can make in each direction, 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 Superpowers (eg. “3 Energy after each round”, “+10 Defence if Attacks are zero”, “pay 40: target opponent can’t attack next round”) and these are secretly bid upon; highest bid pays that much energy and gets the power. Each round, each player secretly divides their Energy between Defence, Attacks against other players and (if relevant) their Superpowers; this is then revealed, and if a player sustains Attacks greater than their Defence, they lose the difference in Energy. Repeat until one player survives.

**RUSH** (2) Prepare a 19x19 grid (or any odd-sized square). Take turns to add or mark a stone on any cell. You can’t add a stone to a square where two or more orthogonally adjacent cells contain your own stones, unless an orthogonally adjacent cell also contains an opponent’s stone - in which case, you get another turn. Play until the board is full, and the player with the most stones on the board wins.

**SAINT MARK’S** (2+) Draw a 12x12 grid. One player writes a letter in any square. Players then take turns to add a letter adjacent to an existing one, crossword-grid-style. If a player completes a word of three or more letters, they lose. Instead of their turn, a player may challenge the last move: if their opponent can show that every horizontal and vertical sequence of two or more letters can be extended to form a word, forming no illegal words in the process, the opponent wins. Otherwise the challenger wins.

**SCOREWORDS** (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 must privately add it to a single square in their own grid. When only one square remains, each player gets a letter of their choice, and the game ends. Score points equal to the length of each word in your grid which is not wholly inside another word; 3 for 3 letters, 4 for 4, 10 for 5, 12 for 6, 15 for 7.

**SHANNON SWITCHING GAME** (2) Draw an arbitrary network of small circles connected by lines. Emphasise any two circles as targets. Players are known as “Short” and “Cut”, and take turns, starting with Cut. On Short’s turn, he or she colours (or otherwise emphasises) a line. On Cut’s turn, he or she erases (or crosses out) a non-coloured line. If a coloured path exists between the two target circles, Short wins; if no path exists between them, Cut wins.

**SLIMETRAIL** (2) Draw any rectangular grid of 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.

**SPROUTS** (2+) Draw a grid of 6x6 dots. Each player at their turn: draw any number of connecting arrows. Sentury 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) 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 claimed areas have the largest total area is the winner.

**VERBAL SPROUTS** (2) Write a four-letter word across four circles connected by left-to-right arrows. Players take turns to: a new circle anywhere on the paper containing a previously unused letter, draw any number of connecting arrows, then spell out any number of words from connecting paths of letters. Each word must use the new letter, and all added arrows must be used that turn. Score 4 point pen for each word; if one is a substring of another, score only the longest. Maximum 4 arrows per circle, arrows may not overlap, and no double-arrows between a pair.

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**Rules for interesting games in no more than 100 words, compiled by Kevan Davis**

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