

About Solitaire

This chapter explains the basics that underlie all solitaires, and will teach you the special words used to describe the game rules.

Solitaire generally involves laying cards out on the table in some pattern, called the layout. The layout is formed by piles of cards, some of which may be empty at the start of a game. The cards in a pile are sometimes stacked neatly, or squared, and sometimes spread out in a fan. Fans may spread left, right, up, or down, although down is most common.

Cards which are not part of the layout are kept in the hand. In most games, you play the cards in the layout until you can't find any more plays (or decide not to make any more plays just yet); then you add more cards to the layout by dealing from the hand.

The cards in a pile overlap each other. If the pile is squared, then only the topmost card can be seen; if fanned, then all the cards underneath can be partially seen as well. The topmost card of a pile is the one that is not overlapped by any other card, even when the pile is fanned down so that the topmost card is closest to the bottom of the screen.

(See picture: A Sample Game Layout.)

There are different kinds of piles, each with its own name. Here are the ones used in this manual:

Foundation: The goal of many solitaire games is to eventually move all the cards onto the foundation piles. Usually the foundations are empty at the start of a game.

Tableau: The tableau piles are your “workspace.” They’re where you move cards back and forth while you look for opportunities to transfer cards to the foundations.

Stock: Usually a single pile of cards that can be drawn upon, one card at a time, during the game.

Wastepile (or Discard, or Talon): Often the cards from the hand are dealt face-up onto a wastepile. The top card of the wastepile can then be moved onto other piles according to the rules of the particular game. In some games, wastepiles hold cards permanently removed from play.

Others: Special-purpose piles that only appear in one game are explained in the rules for that game.

Cards are distinguished by rank, suit, and color. Rank is the number on the card; in solitaire, the Ace counts as one and is the lowest-ranked card, while the Jack, Queen, and King count as eleven, twelve, and thirteen. The suits are Hearts, Spades, Diamonds, and Clubs. Hearts and Diamonds are colored red, of course, while Spades and Clubs are black. All solitaire games involve grouping or ordering cards by their ranks, suits, and/or colors.

An ordered sequence of cards is called a build. In Klondike, for example, the tableaux are built down by alternate colors. This is the official way to say that a red 6 goes on a black 7, and a black 5 goes on a red 6. Klondike's foundations are built up by following suit, which means that the 6 of Spades goes on the 5 of Spades. Some games build by following rank, which means a 4 goes on a 4. Some games allow circular building, in which an Ace can be built up on a King, or a King built down on an Ace.

Some games allow you to move a partial build from one pile to another; in other words, you can break a build in two and take the topmost part of it away. Other games require you to move full builds only; you are not allowed to break up a build. The cards that can be legally moved from one pile to another are said to be available.

Finally, you are blocked or stuck when you can't find any more moves to make.