

SAM

A card game for two or more

History

SAM was devised by John MacNeill, based on the game *Spite And Malice*, in the hope of finding a game that could be enjoyed by two or three players.

What it is like to play SAM

It is common to find that things are going badly for long spells, but then one or two very good turns improve matters greatly, until the bad times return. One game *can* take an hour or two. There is continual decision-making, with scope for strategy [i.e. longer term policy or planning] and for tactics [e.g. deciding between a play that *helps* both yourself and your opponent(s) and a play that *hinders* both yourself and your opponent(s)]. Sometimes a good memory helps. It can happen that for several turns a player seems to be on the brink of winning, until that player's position worsens and the game goes on for much longer than seemed likely.

Number of players

The rules allow for two or more, but with a lot of players it can be boring awaiting your turn.

Equipment

For a typical 2-player game, 2 standard 52-card decks are enough. Use more than 2 decks for games using larger pay-off piles or involving more players. A table may be useful.

The deal

After the usual formalities of shuffling and cutting the cards, an agreed number of cards are dealt to each player face down to form the players' *pay-off piles*. The dealt cards are formed into neat piles. The top card in each pile is turned over. The cards not dealt out are placed face-down to form the *stock pile*.

Piles of cards

As just mentioned, initially there is a *stock pile* and each player has a *pay-off pile*.

Each player also has a *discard pile* (initially empty) next to his/her pay-off pile. Cards in discard piles are always face up and spread enough to make them all visible.

If it happens that a pay-off pile and the discard pile next to it are each just a single card, then the two cards will be face up; so make sure you remember which pile is which!

During play, players will create and build up a number of face-up *centre piles*. The rules do not limit the number of these commonly owned centre piles. Players are allowed to inspect the centre piles to check what cards are in them.

Completed centre piles are turned face down and moved to one side.

Whenever the stock pile becomes empty, replenish it with the completed centre pile(s) shuffled together. If there is no completed centre pile, then the game may be saved from an abrupt end by replenishing the stock pile using a spare deck or the most nearly completed centre pile; this rarely happens though.

The object of the game

Win by playing out all the cards from your pay-off pile (and completing your turn with a legal [discard](#) – see [At each turn](#) below).

Size of the pay-off piles

When learning the game, 3 or 4 cards per pile is suitable. Thereafter, at least 10 cards per pile is usual. The more cards per pile, then of course the longer the game is likely to last. The length of any single game though is unpredictable.

The significance of the cards

A card's suit does not matter, but its rank does. Aces are low. Kings are wild when played on to a centre pile, but otherwise rank above queens (i.e. when played on to a discard pile or when determining who has first turn).

Taking turns

The first turn goes to the player with the highest card on top of his/her pay-off pile. If there is no single highest card, decide who has the first turn by cutting the stock pile – again the highest card gives the first turn. The turns are taken in clockwise order. (If you are under the table, it's anti-clockwise to you.)

At each turn

1. Draw a card or cards from the top of the [stock pile](#) to make the number of cards in your hand up to five. So at your first turn you will draw five cards. At later turns you will draw from one to five cards.
2. Perhaps play one or more cards (one at a time) on to [centre piles](#) (see [Playing cards on to centre piles](#) below). Often this will not be possible.
3. If you now have no cards left in your hand, then have another turn immediately. So take another five cards.
4. If possible, finish your turn by discarding a card from your hand face up on to the top of your [discard pile](#). However **it is not allowed for any card in a discard pile to be higher than the card that underlies it**. For instance, discarding a 7 on to a 5 is *illegal*, but it is *legal* to discard a 7 on to a 10, or on to another 7, or on to an empty discard pile.
5. **If (and only if) no card in your hand may be legally discarded**, then turn your discard pile face down and add it to your pay-off pile by putting it under your [pay-off pile](#); after that, discard on to your now-empty discard pile.
6. If (after discarding) your [pay-off](#) pile is empty, then you have won and the game is over.

Playing cards on to centre piles

A card played by a player may come **from**:

- the top of the player's pay-off pile (and then the new top pay-off card will be turned face-up and become available);
- the top of the player's discard pile;
- the player's hand.

A card played may either start a new centre pile (if it is an ace, or a king used as an ace) or add to an existing centre pile.

Each centre pile starts with an ace (or a king used as an ace), and builds up in order: 2, 3, 4, ... 10, J, Q. So for instance the only card that can go on a 7 (or on a K used as a 7) is an 8 (or a K used as an 8).

There is no compulsion to make plays that are possible.

Playing a queen (or a king used as a queen) on to a centre pile completes the pile.

Having a break in play

If play stops at a point where there are five cards in a player's hand, then when play resumes the turn must be with the player who has five cards.

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