Championship Spades 2.1 Help (Unregistered)

CHAMPIONSHIP SPADES - USING THIS PROGRAM

General help
Quick tips and tricks
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SPADES 101 - BASIC RULES OF THE GAME

Cards
Trump
Bidding
Playing
Scoring
Game Variations and Sandbags
Going Nil

MASTERING SPADES - A TUTORIAL FOR ADVANCED PLAYERS

Chapter 1: Bidding better and signaling
Chapter 2: Playing to maximize tricks
Chapter 3: Setting them AND minimizing bags
Chapter 4: Review and Quiz
Chapter 5: NIL: bid, play, protect, sink
Chapter 6: Advanced end-game strategies
Chapter 7: Test of Spades Mastery

Championship Spades general help

What makes Championship Spades different?

Championship Spades specializes in Spades for the championship player who seriously enjoys the game, offering:
-=- Colorful, fast, non-cluttered, and polished interface.
-=- Selectable, customizable computer personalities with different styles.
-=- Expert computer players who will cover, sink, signal, etc..
-=- Many game variations (incl. Jokers) and image/sound customization.
-=- Both 16-bit and 32-bit versions for Win 3.1, OS/2, Win 95, and NT.

General help

Bidding - To bid your hand, click on the appropriate card in the bid window corresponding to the number of tricks you can take when the arrow points to you.   It is also possible to bid by entering the number corresponding to your bid on the keyboard.

Playing - To play your hand, click on the appropriate card in your hand that you wish to play when the arrow points to you.   It is also possible to bid by entering the number corresponding to your card on the top row of keyboard (1-9,0, - for 11, and = for 12).

Options - To change the game options for various Spades variations, select them under the options menu.

Players - To change the personalities of your computer opponents, select Player… under the Options menu.

Tables and decks - To select a different table or deck pattern, select them under the Options menu.

Practice features - Various items under the Practice menu will allow you to take back a play, redeal, rebid, or replay a hand.   You can also assign specific cards to players or let the computer playout an obvious hand for you. You can also view a play history window or all players cards if you want to analyze a hand in-depth.

Save/print/restore - Finally, you may save, restore, and print hands and play history under the File menu or via a button on the hand summary dialog.   This will allow you to print or save particularly interesting hands.

Improving your Spades game - See Spades 101 and Mastering Spades

♠ Championship Spades tips and tricks

Here are my favorite quick tips and tricks to enjoy the game more:

1. View each of your opponent's playing styles by right-clicking on their face.
2. Disable the name prompt under the Options...General dialog.
3. Get help bidding or playing by using the Hint option (Ctrl-H).
4. Click on the trickcard to show the last trick played.
5. Practice using the undo, rebid, and replay options under the Practice menu.
6. Disable the scorepad, status bar or player faces under the view menu.
7. Create custom computer personalities by clicking on Edit... under Details.
8. Read Spades 101 and Mastering Spades to improve your game.
9. Use the keyboard number keys to quickly bid and play.
10. Use Shift-Ctrl-B (boss key) to quickly minimize game and turn off sound.
11. Use Shift-Ctrl-S or sounds dialog (under Options) to toggle all sounds on and off.
12. Use Shift-Ctrl-N or Change sound option to skip to the next MIDI soundtrack.
13. Use Shift-Ctrl-P to have the computer play out an entire game against itself!

♠ Picking your favorite game variation

Championship Spades offers extensive customization to support different game variations which affect both game play and scoring.

Game options

Name prompt on startup - Change this to No to disable the name prompt on game startup.   You can still change your name at any time under Options menu and the previous name used will be restored automatically the next time you play.

Game speed - Ranges from Slow to Fast affect how quickly the game play operates.   Note that at the Fast level, many of the play sounds, indicator updates, and animations are disabled or abbreviated.   Most people should be happy with the Normal speed.

Score w/hash marks - Change this to No if you prefer numbers instead of hash marks when recording tricks bid and taken on the trick card.

Confirm practice options - Change this to No if you want to use the Practice options (take back, hint, redeal, rebid, replay, and view history) without being prompted first.

Personality for hints - Change this to the computer personality name that you wish to provide you hints for bidding and playing.   If you are a more recreational player, you should probably choose a strong intermediate player like ProfPlum, as an expert player (Red, LadyLuck, and Sparky) may suggest bids and plays that may confuse you.   For more information, see Selecting a Computer Personality

Cutthroat (no partners) - Change this to Yes if you wish to play cutthroat.   In cutthroat, every player is for themselves and there are no partners.   This can change play dramatically and makes it very difficult to get a Nil.

Overtricks count as bags - Change this to No if you do not want to play with sandbags.   Most players play that overtricks count as sandbags.   Once a certain number of bags are accumulated (usually 10 over several hands), the player is penalized (usually 100 points).   Sandbags help prevent players from consistently underbidding.

Count bags won by Nil - Change this to Yes if you want bags to count against a Nil bid.   Normally, if a player does not get their Nil bid, their tricks do not count as bags.

Who gets the first lead - Change this to High bidder if the highest bidder should get the first lead.   Change this to Two of clubs if the player with the two of clubs should always get the lead.   Note that choosing this option also forces all players to play their lowest club on the first trick.   This variation is true to the original and official Spades rules.   Finally, the most common is the Dealers left option which has the player to the dealers left leading for the first trick.

Play with jokers - Change this to One or Two if you want to replace the Two and Three of Diamonds with Low (and High if Two) Jokers.   These jokers will beat any other Spade (including the Ace).   For printing and assigning purposes, jokers are considered Spades and they use L and H to indicate the low and high joker ranks respectively.

Allow Blind Nil swapping - Change this to 1 card or 2 cards if you want to allow swapping of cards (in partner games) when you go Blind Nil.   After bidding and before playing begins, you may swap 1 or 2 cards with your partner.   Note that the author feels this unbalances the game and makes Blind Nils way to easy for a experienced players to get.   You may wish to lower the Blind Nil score value from 200 to even the game scoring out.   Note that to avoid extra prompts, Blind Nil is bid from the preceding hands scoring summary dialog which also means that you cannot bid Blind Nil on the first hand of a new game.

Scoring options

Minimum bid required - Set this to minimum bid required.   This is usually 1 or 2 and applies to each individual player.   If you set this to 4 or more in a partnership game, it is interpreted to mean the minimum bid for partners (both players combined).

10 trick bid/got bonus - Set this to the bonus amount if a team bids AND wins 10 or more tricks.   Set this to 0 if you do not want a bonus.   Set this to 100 for the common 10 for 200 variation (since the 10 tricks are already worth 100).   This encourages high bidding and provides another means of getting bonuses in addition to Nils.

Slam (all 13) bonus - Set this to the bonus amount if a team wins all 13 tricks (regardless of their bid).   Set this to 0 if you do not want a bonus.   200 is usually a fair bonus which will usually assure the players a win in the current game.

10 bags total penalty - Set this to the penalty when a player or team accumulates 10 bags. Note that penalties have a minus in them.   This is usually -100.

Overtrick penalty after - Set this to the number of overtricks after which a penalty is charged.   This less common method of addressing consistent underbidding is usually an alternative to playing with bags.   Set this to 13 to assure that no overtrick penalty is used.   Note that you cannot score with both bag and overtrick penalties. If you do, bags will take priority and the overtrick penalty will be ignored.

Overtrick penalty - Set this to the penalty charged when the number of overtricks set in the last option are won. Generally this is -40.

Game played until - Set this to the game ending score.   Partnership games usually are played to 500 and cutthroat games to 300.

Trick bid and won - Set this to the number of points a bid and won trick is worth.   This is almost always 10.

Trick bid and lost - Set this to the number of points a bid and lost trick is worth.   This is almost always -10.

Nil bid and won - Set this to the number of points a bid and won Nil bid is worth.   This is almost always 100. Losing a Nil bid always causes you to lose an equal number of points.

Blind Nil bid and won - Set this to the number of points a bid and won Blind Nil bid is worth.   This is usually 200, unless playing with card swapping enabled.   Losing a Blind Nil bid always causes you to lose an equal number of points.

Overtricks are worth - Set this to the number of points an overtrick is worth (trick won over the bid).   This is almost always 1.   You could also use this to penalize for overtricks by setting it to a negative value.

♠ Different computer play styles

One of the unique strengths of Championship Spades is the variety of computer play styles you can play against. Each computer personality bids and plays differently.   You may select which players you wish to play with under the Players… option on the Options menu.   In this dialog you may right-click on any players face to get details on that players play style.   You can then select the player by clicking on the player.   The positions at the bottom of the dialog indicate which position each player will be in.   In particular, note that the North position will be your partner in Partnership Spades so this player should probably play with a similar skill level and aggressiveness to yourself. Specifically, each computer player has four attributes which affect their bidding and game play:

Skill - This central attribute assesses the players skill level in Spades.   For example, beginners will generally bid by just counting Aces and Kings.   Expert players will look at distribution and take into account what other players may have bid or the current game score.   Note that expert players will go Nil with more challenging hands and will also try for finesses and signal preferred suits to their partner.   This expert style of play may be confusing to recreational players.   For a thorough explanation of how expert players play, see Mastering Spades: A tutorial for advanced players in the help file provided to registered users.

Memory - This attribute assesses the players skill at remembering what cards have been played so far.   Card-counters will be able to take more chances guessing what the opponents cards are based on what they have played so far.   Expert card-counters will also remember better what suits their partner indicated a preference for and will try for the finesse more often.

Predictability - This attribute assesses the players predictability.   Near-random players will catch other players off-guard with unexpected plays sometimes and their bids and plays may vary (even with the same hand) from time to time.   Predictable players analyze their hands and always bid and play the same given a particular situation.

Aggressiveness - This attribute assesses the players aggressiveness.   Aggressive players will generally bid Nil with tough hands, bid more tricks, try to go for the set more often, and may even set themselves in an effort to set an opponents Nil bid.

Customizing your own styles

You may also customize any of the computer players by selecting details on the player and clicking the Edit… button.   You may then change the name, bitmap, and/or all of the player attributes for the given player.   This means you can rename the players to your friends names, change their styles so you have a host of expert players, or even include a custom bitmap for yourself or another player.   If successful, you will see the picture change to your custom face and it will automatically be saved for future games.   For details, see Customizing images.

♛ Customizing images and sounds

Championship Spades will allow you customize almost all the images and sounds used in the game.   You may select from one of the several supplied images or sounds under the appropriate item under the Options menu.   For the more adventurous, you may also supply your own images or sounds by following the instructions below:

Adding your own custom table background

1) Create your own table background and save it as a 256-color Windows BMP.   Note that if you are on a 256-color system, your background may not look good if you dont use the same palette as the other backgrounds provided with the game.   Backgrounds can be any size although 64x64 is usually a good size.
2) Copy your Windows BMP file over to the TABLES subdirectory.
3) Restart Championship Spades and select the Tables… option.   The game will automatically detect your bitmap in the directory and show it along with the other bitmaps for selection.   Select your bitmap from the dialog.

Adding your own custom deck pattern

1) Create your own deck pattern and save it as a 16-color (or 256-color) Windows BMP.   Note that if you are on a 256-color system, your deck may not look good if you dont use the same palette as the other decks provided with the game.
2) Resize the deck back to the same size as the other decks provided with the game.
3) Copy your Windows BMP file over to the DECKS subdirectory.
4) Restart Championship Spades and select the Decks… option.   The game will automatically detect your bitmap in the directory and show it along with the other bitmaps for selection.   Select your bitmap from the dialog.

Adding your own custom player face

1) Create your own player face and save it as a 256-color Windows BMP.   Note that if you are on a 256-color system, your face may not look good if you dont use the same palette as the other faces provided with the game.
2) Resize the face to the same size as the other faces provided with the game.
3) Copy your Windows BMP file over to the FACES subdirectory.
4) Select the details dialog for the player you wish to replace, and then select the Edit… button.   After the edit dialog appears, enter the picture name (no path) in the field provided.
5) Click OK and the players face will change immediately and be saved for future games.

Adding your own custom sounds for events

1) Create or copy your favorite WAV files over to the SOUNDS subdirectory.   You may also reference sounds in another directory by entering the full path in for the given sound.
2) Make sure WAV files on Windows 3.1 are less than 64,000 bytes in size.   Windows 95 WAV files can be any size.
3) Choose the Sounds… option and enter the filename under the appropriate events entry field.   If you do not give the full path, the sound must be in the SOUNDS subdirectory.   The .WAV extension is optional.

Adding your own custom soundtracks

1) Create or copy your favorite MIDI files (with a .MID extension) over to the SOUNDS subdirectory or specify your own MIDI directory.
2) Choose the Sounds… option under the Options menu and enter either a specific filename under the soundtrack entry field (e.g. rockroll.mid) or a directory (e.g. c:\midi).   If you provide a directory, the game will choose a random .mid file from this directory and play it.
3) The game will also keep starting random .mid files when the others finish (or you can skip to the next at any time using the menu option under the Options menu).   This produces a nice jukebox background music track to enjoy with your game.

Will there be a multi-player network version?

The author DOES wish to produce a multi-player network version.   My goal for the first releases was to make an AWESOME standalone game with a solid, fun interface first.   Now that that is complete, I can address supporting multiple players.

Supporting network play is not that difficult and the game has already been architected with multiple players in mind.   However, their are numerous competing technologies right now for supporting network play so the author wishes to investigate and evaluate these.   You can help by letting the author know (at spades@dq.com):

  1) Do you have Windows 95 or NT?   Do you expect to be getting it soon?
  2) Would you prefer a DirectPlay (Windows 95) version which would support modem, LAN, and Internet play on Microsofts free Internet game servers?
  3) Would you prefer some other network protocol?   IPX?   IP?   If so, which one?
  4) Is modem play important to you?   Is local LAN play important to you?
  5) How should players meet to form games?   IRC?   BBS Door?   An online service?

Registering and sending email with your answers to the above questions are the best ways to convince me to hurry up with the network version…

Also, please contact the <u>author</u> if you are interested in being a Beta tester for the network version when it is ready.

Registering

This game is NOT freeware.   The author has spent several hundred hours over more than a year to make a quality Spades game.   If you have enjoyed playing this, please register so you can help fund network play and future game enhancements.   You have 15 days to evaluate this game, after which you must either register it or uninstall it.   To uninstall, simply remove the icon from your Games group and the SPADES directory.   The program is completely self-contained.

If you register, you will receive a key to disable the nag screens (on both the 16-bit and 32-bit versions) and a code to download the Mastering Spades advanced tutorial off the Web site.   If you provided your email address you will also be automatically notified of upgrade releases and your key will also work in these future versions.   If you really want diskettes, you can pay $9 more and I will ship you either the 16-bit or 32-bit version on diskette.   The Web site always has the latest version (and allows you to switch between 16-bit and 32-bit versions) and making the diskettes is a pain for me, so only order diskettes if you REALLY need them.

You may conveniently register this product with any major credit card through the Public Software Library (PSL) for $39.   Ask to register Championship Spades, product #14669.   You may contact PSL to order via several means:
   1) If you have questions of any type, please send email to spades@dq.com or   contact the author.   PSL cannot help you with questions
   2) Connect to their web site at http://www.pslweb.com and order online.   Please make sure you provide a COMPLETE Internet email address.   A link to register is also provided off the Spades home page at http://www.dq.com/spades.htp
   3) Call 800-2424-PSL (713-524-6394 outside the U.S.) for ORDERS ONLY.
   4) Email Internet order to 71355,470@compuserve.com
   5) Email CompuServe order to CIS id 71355,470
   6) Fax order to 713-524-6398.
   7) Dial their BBS at 713-442-6704 and order online.

PSL may take a couple days to notify me of your registration.   As soon as I receive notification, I will send the registration key to you via email or postal mail.   This process usually takes between   2 and 5 business days to complete.   If you want to inquire about the status, you can send email to spades@dq.com or send snail mail to the author.   Sorry, but the 800# cannot give any information on order status.

If you requested diskettes, please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.   Once you receive your registration key, simply press the Enter key… button on the Register dialog under the Help menu.   Enter your name and key EXACTLY (including upper and lower-case) as they appear on your registration sheet.   The reminder screens will then be disabled and the registration dialog will show your name.   To install the registered Mastering Spades help file, simply copy the CHMPSPAD.HLP file you downloaded from the Web site (or received on diskette) to your already-installed SPADES directory.

Please note that PSL is a registration service and they have nothing to do with the author or the game itself.   If you have questions, need support of any kind, want to verify the status of your order, ask for volume discounts, to pay by check, or have any other kind of question, please Contact the Author directly.   Calling the 800 number for support will just delay you getting the assistance you need and needlessly charges the author for a non-sales call.

♠ Contacting the author

Christopher Williamson is the author of Championship Spades.   Christopher and his wife, Cynthia, together, along with their 130-pound German Shepherd, provide custom user-interface, graphics, and Web page consulting services through their consulting company, Dynamic Visual Solutions.

Both of us have played Spades for years both with friends and on the INN network.   Christopher has also won several tournaments and taught several Mastering Spades classes as INNURed on the ImagiNation network (see www.inngames.com for more information).

The best way to get support, tips, report a bug, get the latest version of this game, or for any other reason, is via the Internet.   You can reach the Championship Spades Web site at http://www.dq.com/spades.htp or send email to spades@dq.com.

If charging is not convenient for you, you may also obtain support or register by mailing a check for the $39 to the address below.   If you want disks (and not just a key) mailed to you, please include an additional $9 to cover the cost of the media and shipping. The Web site always has the latest version and making the diskettes is a pain for me, so only order diskettes if you REALLY need them.   When you order **make sure to indicate** if you want the 16-bit or 32-bit version and to include your email address for upgrade notification.   Checks and correspondence can be sent to:

> Christopher Williamson
> 610 Parthenon Court
> Lafayette, CO 80026-8805

If you are reporting a bug or suggesting an enhancement, please provide as much detail as possible about what you were doing before you encountered the bug, what OS you are running under, and details about your suggested game variation or type of network you would like supported.   Including a sample bug report by using the Report bug or bad play option off the help or hand summary menus will include most information I need.   If you include this, please just PASTE THE TEXT into your email, DONT use your email attachment feature as my mailer may not be able to decode it properly.   Obviously, I am more prone to incorporate your requests if you register, but you may still make suggestions as an unregistered user.   Dont forget your name and email address so that I may reply with additional questions.

♠ Version history

Additions in this 2.1 swap release:

1. Added a Blind Nil card swap general option (1 or 2), default to none.
2. Added card swapping for Blind Nil players (beginners dump low, experts dump singletons).
3. Midi and Wave sounds are now properly disabled on machines w/o sound.
4. Improved and expanded the Spades 101 introductory help section.
5. Made 15-day reminder text less picky about case and punctuation.
6. Version upgrades now reset the 15-day evaluation period.
7. Starting on 16-color machines now gives a warning about viewability.
8. Starting up the game minimized no longer gives an error.
9. Removed Confirm play and NilLost custom scoring options.
10. Added a Blind Nil won custom scoring option, defaulting to 200.
11. Created a new OLE2DLLs to w/o OC25 for old OS/2 and Win 3.1 users.
12. OC25.DLL now distributed with 16-bit version, not in OLE2DLLs.
13. README explains need for OLE2 DLLs a bit better.
14. OLE2DLLs now starts up Spades after installation.
15. Help updated to explain OLE DLLs, quick keys, and swapping.
16. Timestamped all files to show 2.1 release.

Version 2.0 Joker release

1. *Optimized expert bid & play so computer should be much more challenging.
2. *Game soundtrack will now also play random MIDI from the directory.
3. *Added a game counter that displays games won and played in reg & game over.
4. *Occasional score resets on Nil, Blind Nil, and slams are fixed.
5. *Added a new optional scorepad to show score graphically.
6. *No longer protects partner if they already lost their Nil.
7. *No longer tries to sink opponent if they already lost their Nil.
8. *If it is not possible for player to get bid, avoid the bags.
9. *Expert cutthroat players will now always try for set & ignore bags.
10. *Nil will 'dump' highest card (including Spades) when out of suit.
11. *Expert players are now better at going Nil with questionable hands.
12. *More aggressive rather than expert players will now try and sink Nils.
13. *Partners will now cover partner's Nil BEFORE trying to sink opponent's.
14. *Help buttons now available on all dialogs to explain more.
15. *Refreshing, sizing, and flashing reduced on startup.
16. *Aggressive players now reduce their bid by one if partner goes Nil.
17. *All player types will now never bid Nil if partner went Blind Nil.
18. *Aggressive experts (Red) no longer bid quite as aggressively.
19. *Excessive lines in window will no longer cause Nils to reset score.
20. *Two of Clubs lead now requires ALL players to lead low club.
21. *Minimum bid now supported for partners as a team (if >= 4).
22. *Experts now signal with more moderate cards (8-10) first.
23. *Experts now protect Nil by trumping (to get lead) with extra Spades.
24. *Typelib and Compobj DLL versioning issues with 16-bit fixed.
25. *Added a sound key 'Ctrl-Shift-S' to quickly toggle all sound off & on.
26. Overtricks will no longer show in scoring window.
27. Custom personalities now save and restore better.
28. Player selection dialog now sizes better on some systems.
29. Player details and edit dialogs now also size better.
30. Keyboard shortcuts for show all cards and others removed.
31. Clicking on the trickcard now shows the last trick dialog.
32. Turn indicator moved to accomodate smaller screens.

33. Overtricks gained dont show red if bag penalty disabled.
34. Bags dont show in status bar when bag penalty disabled.
35. Hand scoring summary screen enlarged to prevent cutoff.
36. Added exit game button to game winner's dialog.
37. Bad scoring and plays are no longer printed in mid-game.
38. Score/history is now printed nicer when you print/save/report.
39. Winner and score reporting is now better for cutthroat games.
40. Made reporting score/play available from hand summary dialog.
41. Default minimum bid is now 1 to prevent computer overbidding.
42. Palette should be better on 256-color systems.
43. Blind nil bid status now colored properly in trickcard.
44. Take back now resets suit led if previous round led by player.
45. Can now toggle computer playout or reset it by replaying hand.
46. Maximum bid of 13 for partners now enforced.
47. 2S as high card option (never implemented) was removed.
48. Reset options now resets ALL options, except players & icon.
49. Flashing on resizing and view changes should be greatly reduced.
50. 15-day expiration nag dialog now allows view registration & exit.
51. Entering correct string in nag dialog should now work for all.
52. Startup time should now be reduced and dialogs show after title.
53. Assign cards now allows lower-case and joker assignments (L & H).
54. After 45 days, the game will stop working entirely until registered.
55. Shift-Ctrl-R will now reinstall the product and reset all options.
56. Added magic key to set score for debugging (can you find it?).
57. Added magic key and password for registering users.
58. Added magic key and password to set install date.
59. Cursor now changes to pointer when entering username or nag entry.
60. Reset Edits... button added to player selection dialog.
61. View: Close box when winner dialog displayed wont exit.
62. View: Draw picture text up one pixel to center better.
63. Gray & Blue changed to darker shade for Win95/NT 'darker' look.
64. Trick animation now goes to the player's cards instead of face.
65. Debug printing now also reports game options and player styles.
66. Cancelling from name dialog now keeps current instead of Unknown.
67. Saving and restoring of custom personalities is error-checked better.
68. Flat overtrick penalty is now reported properly in scoring summary.
69. Names on player pictures now has more space on some resolutions.
70. Experts dont ever 'signal' in cutthroat games.
71. Nils (and Blinds) are now always covered by partner even if bags.
72. Open/save dialogs on 32-bit version now filter and show save games only.
73. Edit player personality dialog is now a little taller.
74. Experts will now play trump, if appropriate, to cover partner's Nil.
75. Card counters will now try and play void suits to cover partner's Nil.
76. Signaling improved so players will no longer waste Queens or Kings.
77. Players avoiding bags or sinking Nils will now lead better (and lower).
78. If using overtrick penalty, trickcard will go red when over limit.
79. Added a 'magic' autogame hotkey that will autoplay all the way to game.
80. Soundtrack will either restart or play the next when it finishes.
81. Added a menu entry to skip the current soundtrack and start the next.
82. Updated help file to mention 2C lead, jokers, multi-soundtracks, 10 for 200.
83. Updated help file to mention Plus! incompatibility and reduced author BMPs.
84. Tested and improved 16-bit version.
85. Update typelib.dll to fix some incompatibilities on 16-bit versions.
86. Added several more public-domain MIDI files to enjoy (32-bit only).
87. Split VB runtime and MIDI files out of 16-bit installer to fit on 1 disk.
88. Made some minor play changes after joker testing by Beta users.

89.   Change 'play next soundtrack' to 'Change soundtrack'.
90.   Improve randomness of soundtrack selection.
91.   Ctrl-S hotkey will change the current soundtrack.
92.   Reset all should prompt for expert players and No should work.
93.   Mean calc works now so Nils should not be bid with medium cards.
94.   Only aggressive players should lower bid on cover, not LadyLuck.
95.   Renamed help file from SPADES.HLP to CHMPSPAD.HLP to avoid conflict.
96.   Removed accelerator to avoid lockup when starting Help in 2.0 Beta.
97.   Added a disable/enable all button to Sounds dialog.
98.   Made soundtrack option label more readable & prominent.
99.   Disabling a sound now also prevents editing the filename.
100.   'Thank you for playing' sound on exit is no longer cutoff.
101.   Added a boss-key 'Ctrl-Shift-B' to quickly minimize the game.
102.   Expert players will now try to let partner win on 3rd play of trick.
103.   Soundtracks will now play even if Spades or sound path includes a space.
104.   Rare cases of player playing no card (a '?') have been eliminated.
105.   General option summary now prints out to assist with debugging.
106.   Rare cases of winner not always leading the next trick have been fixed.
107.   Assign dialog now highlights and defaults to next player to allow faster entry.
108.   Added mnemonic keys for all dialog buttons.
109.   Cut/joker/player changes force a rebid of the current hand.
110.   Error warnings when loading valid saved hands eliminated.
111.   Last trick and confirm background now blends better with dialog.
112.   Registration and author info help topics will now 'jump' properly.
113.   Conservative bidding in Beta reduced somewhat for final release.

Version 1.31 Production release

Released on October 19, 1996
1. Nil scoring bug introduced in 1.3 version corrected and always added to the score.
2. Slam & 10 for 200 bonuses from East/South now added properly to score, as above.
3. Game play speed improved dramatically.   Normal should now suffice for most.
4. Undo feature improved and now quite usable.   Please report if otherwise.
5. All computer personality attributes can now be customized and saved.
9. Two of clubs lead option now enforced properly.
10. Name prompt on startup option now properly saved and restored.
11. View last trick dialog now autosizes correctly on all systems.
12. Player minimum bid now always enforced.
13. Scoring dialog now always sizes properly and allows save, print, bug report.
14. Save/load buffer size increased to allow long paths and filenames.
15. Assign cards dialog update, sizing, and error-checking improved.
16. Install/uninstall instructions, requirements, and quick tips added to README.
17. Screen resizing on some machines now improved.
18. View faces option added to hide player faces.
19. Help file layout improved for readability.
20. Unchecking the MIDI soundtrack option stops playing immediately.

Version 1.3 Production release

Released on September 12, 1996
1. Corrected pallette bug introduced in 1.25 versions that caused colors to look wrong on 256-color displays.
2. Icon installer and upgrades from previous Beta versions now works properly.
3. Improved security with tougher keys.   Early users have been sent new keys.
4. Prevented misplays (incl. trumps) when Ace played against opponent's Nil.
5. Prevented trumping by 4th player when opponent's Nil was winning trick.
6. Eliminated automated bug report that occasionally occured on some plays.
7. Blue color used throughout darkened to show better on dark grey backgrounds.

8. Sizing of score, player, and details dialogs should now work in all resolutions.
9. Scoring dialog formatting completely re-written for a nicer look.
10. Removed automated bug reporter entirely.   You can still manually use menu item.
11. Expert players will now cover Nil properly if they are 2nd to play on trick.
12. Expert players will no longer take a trick that a Nil player was already winning.
13. Expert players will stop sluffing tricks if Nil player already lost Nil.
14. Partner should no longer 'steal' tricks you have clearly already won.
15. Hopefully fixed some install problems for 16-bit users.
16. Increased delay on registration screen and annoyance for expired users.
17. Updated help file to include known issue with older video drivers and DirectX.
18. Completed Mastering Spades tutorial for registered users.
19. Completed a fair amount of personal and user testing of game.

Version 1.25 Cleanup releases

Released on August 26, 1996 and other dates
1. Expert computer players dont bid quite as aggressively as they did before.
2. Beginner computer players will no longer sometimes lead a Spade before they have been broken.
3. Changed the name of the executable to chmpsp32.exe and the ZIP archive to spades32.exe so it is easier to find for downloaders.
4. Added full keyboard support for bid, play, and option selections (see help file for details).
5. No longer warns about changing options when a new game is first started.
6. Allow entry of full-path for sounds so players can use sounds from other directories.
7. Improved and fixed several sound-entry bugs when disabling sounds and added a reset button.
7. Fixed (hopefully) occasional AutoRedraw failures and blank cards shown on 16-bit version.
9. Fixed save/load hands and MIDI soundtrack on 16-bit version.
10. Space bar now bids and plays using the hint provided by the hint option.   This will quickly finish each hand if you do not want to use computer playout.   This is used mostly by me and is therefore not mentioned in the help or drop-down menus.
11. Updated bug report dialog to prompt for an explanation.
12. Resized printing to avoid going over right margins.
13. Rewrote most of the assign cards dialog to load existing hands in and to browse through players hands.
14. Added wait cursor (hourglass) for actions that take time on slower machines.
15. Added crosshair cursor for player and other selection dialogs.
16. Added context-sensitive help for all dialogs and updated the games help file.
17. Resized various things to run and look better on 640x480.
18. Tab order updated for keyboard navigation of option dialogs.
19. Fixed default size bug when maximized.
20. Added a warning when the take back feature is used (it still does not always work properly).
21. Removed crash when player attempts to print on a machine without a printer.

Version 1.2 Performance release

Released on August 18, 1996
1. Changed the way images are handled so it should be faster.
2. Greatly reduced resource usage which should prevent Autoredraw and out of memory errors on the 16-bit version.

Version 1.1 Patch release

Released on August 5, 1996
1. Fixed bad computer plays once and for all (I hope!).
2. Fixed incorrect scoring when calculating bag penalty.
3. Added extensive online context-sensitive help and improved help file.
4. Added a bug report feature to allow easy dumping of hand.
5. Fixed some cases when indicator or bid window was not drawn.
6. Allow use of numbers on keyboard for bid, play, and other selections.
7. Fixed 16-bit help and installer to include all needed files.

8. Removed save as default option, it now ALWAYS saves options.

Version 1.0 Initial release

Released on July 28, 1996

1. Computer now plays MUCH better based on skill and other traits.
2. Computer will try to sink opponents Nils by lead low, etc.
3. Popup registration reminder dialog on exit and pause.
4. Fixed bug with 2D being played more than once and # of cards off.
5. Added registration key entry screen and PSL info in help.
6. Count days since install and display in reg screen.
7. Put possible bid on statbar to help confused people.
8. Support saving, loading, and printing of hands and play history.
9. Right-click current players for play style.
10. Fixed bug where New game on bid loops.
11. Ignore all menu choices during startup.
12. Added a redeal hand option
13. Allow player to assign cards for each player.
14. Added a trick-taken animation.
15. Install now prompts for med/high skill levels.
16. Hashes are now colored to show overtricks.
17. Take back now works properly
18. Added an extensive help file for game and rules.
19. Added an extensive Mastering Spades tutorial for registered users.
20. Optimized play speed for computer playout.
21. Fix icon on game install.
22. Generally cleaned-up and smoothed game out.

Version 0.9 Beta release

Released on June 17, 1996

1. Computer now bids MUCH better based on skill and other traits.
2. Added view option to show last trick taken.
3. Installer now creates an icon and group.
4. Fixed Blind NIL bags counting incorrectly.
5. Fixed Game not ending at 500?
6. Confirm scoring/player options during mid-game.
7. Add confirmation for rebid and replay options.
8. If cut, draw 2 red lines in trickcard to show.
9. Resize text in help to be more even.
10. Refresh history on bid.
11. All cards should be checked & confirm on Show.
12. Cutthroat play scores not shown properly in statbar.
13. Size properly on small font.   Stretch startup.
14. Always save size and location.

Version 0.8 Alpha release (initial)

Released on May 25, 1996

Features under consideration for future releases

1.   Multi-player support for Internet, LAN, and modem play.
2.   Add sounds for each player when game starts/selection?
3.   Update player graphics for a sexier look?
4.   Allow loading of a complete game (scores, bags, and options as well as hands)?
5.   Fix palette on table selection for 256-color displays?
6.   Overcome Microsoft Plus! resizing/dragging incompatibility?

♠ Known bugs and possible workarounds

The current release only has four minor known bugs and issues:

1) Table selection dialog does not display images with the proper palette on a 256-color display.   Workaround: Simply ignore the images and select by the names.   After the selection, the table will be displayed properly.   There is really nothing I can do about this on 256-color systems since each background has its own 256-color palette…

2) The colors sometimes appear inverted or incorrect on 32-bit Windows 95 systems.   Assuming you are using a 256-color or higher display (the game will look bad on a 16-color display), you should see nice faces on a wooden table background with a yellow notepad with dark blue writing for recording tricks bid and taken.   Note that previous versions also demonstrated this bug on many systems.   Now, it only appears on a few using outdated Win95 video drivers, usually in conjunction with DirectX (a Microsoft library supplied with several Windows 95 games and multimedia applications).   Luckily, it appears that one of two things has cured the problem for other users that have reported this:

   - Try switching to a hi-color (32,000 colors or more) mode.   Do this using the Display option in the control panel. You may also wish to get the QuickRes powertoy from Microsoft that makes resolution changing easy without a reboot from http://www.dq.com/musthave.htp.
   - Obtain and install the latest video drivers for your particular video card from the manufacturer (most have web pages with the drivers available for free download).   Many of the drivers that come already installed with the computer are older than DirectX and most have made some recent upgrades to correct problems like this.   Since the driver depends on your video card, I can't direct you to a specific site.

3) The game sometimes crashes or has memory or resource problems on older 16-bit systems with 8MB or less. Workaround: Increase your Windows swap file (see Windows Help), disable the sounds, or avoid player selection dialog, help file, and other extras to reduce memory usage.

4) On some systems running Microsoft Plus and using the Show window contents while dragging option, you may be unable to resize Championship Spades.   Workarounds: Disable this option under the Plus! tab in the Display settings dialog box or simply maximize Championship Spades using the icon or use the default size menu item.

Please, if the game crashes, or an expert computer plays poorly, please use the Report bug or bad play… option under the Help menu on the hand that caused the error or bad play.   This will dump the player hands and play history out to C:\BADHAND.TXT.   You can then email that file (paste the text, dont attach it) to spades@dq.com ALONG WITH A SHORT EXPLANATION and I will have almost all the information I need to hopefully correct the error.   Do not forget to include which player made the mistake, what the mistake was, and either the round # or the misplayed card.   Please report bugs even if you are not registered.   I cannot improve the game without your feedback, particularly since I take pride in the computers playing ability.

♠ Spades 101: Basics

Spades is a very exciting and challenging card game, less complex than Bridge, but more so than Hearts.

There are four players for a game of Spades, and each player is dealt 13 cards.   Each turn, they play one card.   The four cards that are played each turn are called a "TRICK".   That means there are 13 "TRICKS" each time a hand of Spades is played.

The first card played in each trick is called the LEAD card & the suit of that card is the LEAD SUIT.   Players must always match the LEAD SUIT if they can.

The high card in the suit played wins that given trick.   The winner of the trick gets to lead the next card, which may be of any suit (except Spades, until they are broken, more on this later).

♠ Spades 101: Trump

If a player does not have any cards of the LEAD SUIT then they can play any card in their hand.

Any spade (the TRUMP suit) ranks higher than any non-Spade.   So, the highest Spade played on a non-Spade lead will take that trick. Spades are always TRUMP in the game of Spades.

For example: if the AH was led and you have no hearts, you may win the trick by playing the 2 of Spades.

For example: if your partner is winning with a AH and you have no hearts, you may play the 2 of Clubs rather than waste a Spade.

You can not lead Spades until they are "broken"; that is until they are played on a non-Spade lead.   Once that happens, you can lead with a Spade.

♠ Spades 101: Bidding

Thirteen cards are dealt to each of the four players.   You must decide how many of the thirteen possible TRICKS you think you can take.

To do this, look at how many high-ranking cards you have.   An Ace will usually take a TRICK.   If you also have the King in that suit, you can usually count on taking that TRICK, too.   Also check to see if you have any short suits (only a few of any one suit).   As soon as those cards are gone from your hand you can start to play TRUMP (Spades) on those tricks.

When it is your turn, a window appears on your screen that has NIL and 1 through 13 Spades on it.   Click on the card that equals the number of TRICKS you think you can take (NIL being zero).

If you want some guidance, you can use the hint function (under the Practice menu or press Ctrl-H).   The computer will display what it would bid in the status bar.

♚ Spades 101: Playing

After the bidding is completed, the person to the left of the dealer leads the first card.   Any card except a Spade may be led.   Remember that Spades cannot be led until "broken".

An arrow will always point to the current player.   When it is your turn, simply click on the card you want to play. It will then be placed in the playfield in the center of your screen with the other players cards in the current TRICK.

Whoever wins the TRICK will lead for the next hand.   Play continues until all 13 TRICKS are taken.   As play progresses, the number of TRICKS bid and taken by each player (or partner team) is shown in the trickcard in the lower right-hand corner.   Remember in partnership Spades, both players tricks count together toward the team total.

You MUST follow suit, if you can.   If you do not have any cards of that suit, and so cannot follow suit, you may play any card including TRUMP (Spades).   You do not have to play trump if you do not wish to do so.

If you want some guidance, you can use the hint function (under the Practice menu or press Ctrl-H).   The computer will display what it would play in the status bar.

♠ Spades 101: Scoring

Scoring in Spades is determined by how many TRICKS you take versus how many TRICKS you said you would take.

If you take as many TRICKS as you bid, then you score 10 points for each trick taken.   So if 5 tricks are bid and 5 tricks taken, you would get 50 points.

If you do not make your bid, you lose 10 points for each one you bid, no matter how many tricks you actually end up taking.   So, if you bid 5 and get 4, you lose all 50 points, not just 10.

If you bid NIL (zero tricks) and make it, you score 100 points.   However, if you take any tricks at all, you lose 100 points!   More on NILs later.

A game is typically played to 500.   Note that all scoring amounts are adjustable under the Options…Scoring menu, the above numbers are the default score values.

Spades 101: Game Variations and Sandbags

Championship Spades offers many game variations found under the Options…General menu.   The default game variation is partnership spades with sandbags.

In PARTNERSHIP spades, you and your partner (the computer player across the table from you), bid and play together.   This means that you will help one another, not take each others tricks, protect your partners NIL bids, etc. In CUTTHROAT spades, it is every man for themselves.   This means that every player bids and plays separately. CUTTHROAT is also generally more competitive as players try to SET others bids more aggressively.

SANDBAGS were originally put into place to prevent people from always underbidding their hand.   Any trick over the ones you bid are called SANDBAGS.   Once you have collected 10 sandbags, over several hands, 100 points are deducted from your score.   In PARTNERSHIP spades, bags are counted together toward the team total.

♠ Spades 101: Going Nil

One of the aspects of Spades that make it unique is the ability to bid NIL.   This means you will not take any tricks. This is harder than it might sound as your opponents will be deliberately trying to SINK you and force you to take a trick by playing 2's...

For beginners, a good NIL hand has no Aces or Kings, lots of low cards, and no more than 3 low Spades.   Keep in mind that your partner can (and should) protect you, so if he bids high, you can go NIL with a tougher hand.   Under CUTTHROAT, NIL is much harder to get since you have no partner to help prevent you from taking tricks.

BLIND NIL is a desperation bid if you are losing and your opponent could win the game next hand.   Before you even SEE your cards, you can go BLIND NIL.   If you make it, you gain 200 points, if not, you lose 200 points.

I cover much more about the fascinating Nil bid in the Mastering Spades tutorial (only available to registered users) along with many other useful topics to more experienced players.

Mastering Spades 1: Bidding better and signaling

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.

Mastering Spades 2: Playing to maximize tricks

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.

Mastering Spades 3: Setting them AND minimizing bags

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.

♠ Mastering Spades 4: Review and quiz

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.

♠ Mastering Spades 5: NIL: bid, play, protect, sink

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.

Mastering Spades 6: Advanced end-game strategies

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.

Mastering Spades 7: Test of Spades Mastery

Sorry, the advanced tutorial only comes with the registered version.