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Synopsis of Hearts

Hearts is a 4 player card game in which the winner is the player who has the least points at the end of the game.

Players get 1 point for every Heart card they win and 13 points for the Queen of Spades. All other cards are worth 0 points.

You win cards by having the highest card of the lead suit in a 4 card trick. There are no trump cards or wild cards.

Hearts Rules Options

You can change the rules of Hearts with the 'Game' item in the [Hearts menu system](#). A box will come up that lets you modify each of the items described below.

Jack of Diamonds worth -10 points

A common play option in Hearts is to make the Jack worth -10 points, causing it to be the only desirable card to win. Your playing [strategy](#) here should change somewhat with this option enabled.

When player scores exactly X points, his score goes to 0

Under this common option, if a player hits the game-ending score exactly, his score goes back down to 0.

'Shooting' gives you -26 instead of giving all others +26

It sure would be a bummer if you are in second place by 27 points and your great shoot causes the game to end because another player had 99 points. With this option, the game cannot end on a shoot.

You must dump the Queen at first chance

With this rule, a player must dump the Queen of spades at his first opportunity, rather than allow him to target other players by saving it.

No points allowed on the first round

This means that even if you can drop hearts in the first round, you are not allowed to. This creates a 'safe' first round.

In addition, in Hearts you can select the game-ending score yourself. While 100 points is most common, 50 point speed games and 500 point marathons are not unheard of.

How the Mouse Works in Hearts

The RIGHT mouse button selects/deselects cards to be played.
The LEFT mouse button actually plays/passes the card(s).

There is a menu option that alters this so that it occurs in the opposite way.
Remember that in Hearts you must select three cards to pass before passing.

In addition, clicking the left mouse button during some waiting actions ends the waiting and immediately proceeds with the game. For example, when you are passed three cards and they are shown to you in your hand, there is a three second delay before they go into your hand and play can resume. If you want to immediately proceed with the play, you can just click the mouse and play resumes before the three seconds is up.

How the Game Plays

13 cards are dealt to each of 4 players.

Each player in turn must pass 3 cards to the player on his left.

The player with the 2 of Clubs starts play by playing it.

Each player in clockwise turn must play a card of Clubs, unless he doesn't have Clubs, in which case he can play any card he has.

After all 4 players have played, the player who played the highest card of the lead suit wins all 4 cards.

Then that winning player starts the next trick by playing any card of his that he wants. However, the leader cannot lead a heart unless a Heart has already been played by someone. The next clockwise player must play a card of that suit if he has one. If he doesn't have one, then he can play any card he has. As usual, the highest card of the lead suit wins the hand.

The winner of each suit gets points for the four cards in the suit. But points are bad in Hearts. Each card that is of the Hearts suit is worth 1 point, the Queen of Spades is worth 13 (you want to avoid her). All other cards are worth 0 points.

This play continues until all cards are gone. Thus 13 tricks will be had in a single hand. Since there are 13 Hearts in a deck and one Queen of Spades, the total points given to all four players at the end of one hand should sum up to 26 points.

After the hand is done, a new round of cards are dealt, and a new set of passes are made, etc. The only difference between the second round and the first is that this time each player passes three cards to the right instead of the left. On the third round, cards are passed across. On the fourth round there is no pass at all. On the fifth round you go back to passing left, and so on.

Game is over when a (losing) player gets 100 points. The winner is the player with the least points when the game is over.

There are rule modifications that can alter both the way the game must be played and the strategy that the player needs to implement to be successful.

Options available in Hearts

Opponents

You can select your opponents when the game starts with the dialog box that comes up. You can put any player in any position around the table, including computer players in all four positions or even 'humans' in more than one position. In addition, you can change players at any time within the game.

Scorecard

The scorecard shows two things for the player. First is the points the player has so far in the present round. Next is the point total for the game. The game ends when this total reaches 100 points. For longer games, you can change the game-ending score with the menu option 'Change Rules'. You can get further information on a player by clicking on him in the scorecard.

Deck/Speed Options

You can select from a few different card styles from the 'Options' menu. Also you can change the speed for the game with this option; 5 is fastest. You might want to play four computer players against themselves, set speed to 5, and iconize the Hearts window and they will play many games in a short time. Then un-iconize the window and click on the scorecard player info. to see who won the most games.

Performance Window

With this option, available from the 'Action' menu item, you can see a bar graph of your and the other player's performances which rates play from all previous games. Higher scores and longer bars are best. You can reset your bar to start your performance tracking from scratch. Hearts keeps track of each player by its name. Thus, if you are playing against three 'Dominators', then they will all have their rating under one name. Consider that when you play against the same player more than once, once instance of him must lose if the other wins, so his scores may not accurately reflect his playing ability.

Game History

This would be more accurately be called a 'Session History'. When you select this menu item, you are presented with a text file that shows a report of the entire session (all games you played with this session of Hearts) until now. Also available is the option to see the most previous session's history. You must have the 'Log Games' preference menu-item set for logs to be kept. The 'Log Games' option is off by default when you start Hearts for the first time; this is due to the fact that logging every detail of play uses up mega disk-space (about 550 bytes per round, or often roughly 10K per completed game).

Add Your Own Comments

With this option (under the 'Actions' menu item), you can add comments to the game yourself. You edit the comments on-line with a standard editor. The comments appear at random intervals if they are entered under the 'All Players' heading. If you enter comments under a heading with your name on it, then your player will make these comments, and you can hot-key them yourself with the keyboard short-cut.

Make Your Own Player

See the External Player for this item. Just click on the green text to the left of this sentence.

Strategy Hints

I the author of Hearts, shouldn't be giving you any hints! This is because my own players in the game use many of them themselves. I am betraying them by telling you their secrets!

Since the goal of Hearts is to avoid getting points, your major enemy is the Queen of Spades. Thus much of your play will be based around avoiding her, even if it means intentionally getting a few hearts to do so.

The best hand in Hearts is all cards of any suit. You can't lose with this kind of hand.

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General Passing Hints

You want to lose your bad cards

You often will want to pass away your high Hearts and your high Spades, including the Queen herself. The Hearts are worth points and win hands. This is not desirable.

You don't want to lose too many of your bad cards!

On the other hand, If you give away all your high Hearts, the receiving player may now have the easiest shooting hand he ever saw. So you sometimes want to save some high cards.

You want to be sloughing suits

It would be great to be empty on Clubs or Diamonds, because then you can play whatever you want when they are lead. Thus, you want to put a high priority on passing cards that will cause you to be void of suits, notably Clubs and Diamonds.

Passing Clubs

Many people have an unwritten rule that everyone should put a club in his pass. The logic is that it makes sure that the receiving player isn't void of Clubs at game start so he can drop the Queen on you. Well, by this logic, you should pass a Diamond too, so now you only have one card left for a free choice. Nevertheless, you probably might want to pass either a Club or Diamond, especially if the pass is to the left or if you don't have the 2 of Clubs. It seems that about one-third to one-half of hands start out with a player void of Clubs.

Passing Spades

If you have any Spades below the Queen, never pass them ever! If you have the Queen of Spades, pass her if you have a total of four Spades or less. Otherwise, keep her and all other Spades. See below about 'avoiding the Queen of Spades' for more on this.

Saving Low Hearts

How many times have you gotten stuck with a trick of four Hearts, the 2, 3, 4, and 5, and you are the player with the 5? Too Many Times!

It is often desirable to save low Hearts because they will protect your high Hearts. What does this mean? Well there are only about three tricks led with Hearts in a hand. If you have the 3, 7, 9, K, and A of Hearts, you've got it made because on the first hand you play your 3, the second hand you play your 7, and by the time you are down to the otherwise loathsome King and Ace, nobody can lead Hearts anymore!

General Playing Hints

It is safest to play your lowest cards as much as possible, since this will reduce your chances of getting any points. On the other hand, you might find sometimes that you should play one of your high cards (and take maybe a single Heart) early so it doesn't hurt you more later when Hearts start falling like rain.

You may also want to save the Queen or some of your Hearts for 'targeting' a specific player.

Avoiding the Queen of Spades

I'm going to tell you the best way to avoid the Queen of Spades right now. It is to own it. Yes, one of the safest hands is to have four or five Spades and the Queen at the same time. That way you can absorb the nasty attempts by your opponents to fish her out, then spring her on them in the later rounds.

Otherwise, if you have the King or Ace of Spades, it's best to avoid the Queen by remembering how many of each suit has been played and which players have already demonstrated a lack of Spades as the hand proceeds. This will help you decide when it is safe to play the King or Ace.

If you have the Queen of Spades and you luckily sloughed your Diamonds or Clubs, then you are going to be finding yourself in a nasty position. You will be wanting the other player to lead your sloughed suit so you can play the Queen, and they will unfortunately be leading the mid-level spades in attempt to fish her out.

If you have the Queen and maybe only one other Spade, you're dust. Face it. Maybe you should lead it. Hey, the other players might get real scared and absorb it!

Targeting the Low Man

Good players that have been playing for a while are good at targeting the 'low man'. In fact, they are better at it than they ought to be. Hmm... Why is that? It's because they are colluding against you! They will intentionally use their hidden sign language to find out who has the Queen. Then they will play against each other like sissies, but bring hell on you! It's a fact, man. And you're cool if you do it! Just don't get too mad if it happens to you. They're just jealous.

How To Shoot (Make a run with all the Hearts)

This one is tough, because I don't want to stand here and tell you, "Shooting is easy, just get all the Clubs." If you have the four of the five highest Hearts and maybe three other high cards of the other suits (preferably kings or Aces), then I would say you have a decent chance of planning a Shoot. The trick is to lay low with your small cards until it is too late and then pull out the high cards. Don't forget to say 'Darn It!' or some other nasty exclamation when you get the first two Hearts of your shoot, lest your opponents smell the royal rat!

Ducking

This is the most common way of playing the game. Everyone spends the entire hand playing as low a card as possible so that they never get Hearts and never have to lead a hand. This yields uninteresting play, but it's what most everyone does.

You can be safe by doing this, but on the other hand, you create a real scare by leading an Ace of Spades sometime in the first few tricks. This will scare everyone: either you are shooting or you have the Queen of Spades. The best time to pull this stunt is when you have 5 spades and one of them is the Queen. It wreaks havoc every time!

Fishing for the Queen

Don't you notice that whenever you have the Queen of Spades in your hand that all the other players seem to be leading with Spades? They are fishing for the Queen and all you can hope for is that you have enough Spades to protect yourself. It is always nice to have four other spades in your hand at these times. When it is your turn, you can bond with two other players by going on a Queen hunt! Watch for grimaces on the player with the Queen. You will know him because he'll take the Spade trick with a Jack or King and then immediately lead a non-spade! If you want to really drive him/her nuts, secretly get a Queen out of a second deck of cards and show this card to him, confiding, "Boy I hope I can get rid of this."

Preventing a Shoot by Another Player

A player most often tries to get into a shooting position by having all the high cards of a given suit, which is Hearts about 50% of the time. There are two ways you can head him off at the pass. One, don't let him get too many high cards to start with, and Two, don't be so hasty in getting rid of your highest Hearts. Players will often save their King or Ace (but only one at a time) while passing, in order to prevent other players from having shooting hands. By the same token, you might want to satisfy yourself by picking up one or two Hearts sometime in the game when you don't have any really high cards (this only applies when no Hearts have fallen yet in the hand, of course).

One other thing you should heed. When everyone has finished their passing and suddenly three of the four players start talking about having 'really safe' hands, that usually means one of the players is at that very moment smiling in a big way on the inside- he's got the Queen, King, and Ace of every suit!

Playing with the 'Jack' worth -10 points

When the -10 point Jack rule is in effect, Diamonds suddenly become a valuable commodity. While an Ace of Diamonds may otherwise get you the Queen of Spades, it can also get you the Jack of Diamonds. All too often you get them both in the same trick! With the Jack worth -10 points, people will be leading low diamonds less than they normally would, because the fourth player might be able to take the trick with the Jack. On the other hand, if you see a player leading many low Diamonds early in the hand, he often will have the Jack; he is attempting to fish out the Q, K, and A. On the other hand, players leading that have the Queen of Spades are often also known to lead many low Diamonds as well.

Mental Tricks

There are things you can do in a Hearts game to increase your chances of winning whenever possible.

Rule Number One: Lay as low as possible. Never let on that you are in the lead when you are.

Sometimes a quiet leader goes unpunished. Whenever you get the Queen of Spades, complain out loud so everyone can hear. You see, people are unknowingly adding up the number of Queens that everyone is getting and want to make sure everyone gets their fair share. If you make it obvious when you do get yours, it will count for more in their minds. I'm serious!

Another general hint: It sometimes pays to hang out in second place if you can for as much of the game as possible. For some reason people will always be targeting the person in first place, even if you are only 1 point behind.

Terms Used In Hearts

Here are presented some of the more common terms used in Hearts. Of course there are many other terms used in Hearts, many of which are improvised on the spot- and can't be repeated here!

Ducking

When a player is 'ducking' on a play, he is playing a card that is just below the highest card in the trick so far. This is an attempt to get rid of the highest cards possible without ever taking a trick.

Fallen Queen

This simply means that the Queen of Spades has been played by someone. It marks an important point in a hand because after this point, players are much less cautious about what cards they play.

Fishing for the Queen

Players who are 'fishing' are leading their highest Spades that are below the Queen. They are trying to force the owner of the Queen into taking a trick with it.

Passing Clubs

People will often ask you if you are passing clubs, because they are thinking that if you aren't, then you are giving the player you pass to a chance to slough Clubs too easily.

Running

A synonym for 'shooting the moon'.

Safe hand

This is a hand that is 'safe' for its owner. It means that he probably won't have to try too hard to be successful in this hand. A hand of only low cards is a textbook case of this.

Shoot the Moon

In Hearts, each card of the Hearts suit is worth 1 point and the Queen of Spades is worth 13 points. Thus you can get a maximal of 26 points if you get all the Hearts and the Queen of Spades. But actually, when you do this, instead of you getting 26 points, everyone else gets 26 points. So while Hearts and the Queen is bad, getting ALL of them isn't.

Sloughing

In Hearts, when someone leads a suit, you must play a card of that same suit when it is your turn. If you don't have that suit, then you can play any card of yours you want. This is a perfect chance to unload your bad cards onto the trick. So, 'sloughing' your suits means trying to get rid of all cards of a given suit, so you can have the freedom described above.

Targeting

This means that you are trying to give your point cards to a specific player, generally the player in the lead, or at least the player who is next ahead of you in the scoring. You are 'targeting' that player with your bad cards. This is common but risky- you may be forced to 'eat' the cards yourself if.

Short-cuts

1,2,3,4,5,6,7	These keys adjust the playing speed from slow to fast (7 fastest).
F1	Brings up the generic help index.
F2-F6+	Selects from the different card backings that are available (deck selection)
Arrow Keys	Scroll the screen in all four directions.
Ctrl-A, B, etc.	These are hot-keys to calling up the user-defined comments on screen. See the "Add your own comments" menu item.
Space Bar	Ends the current trick immediately and proceeds onto the next. Also it ends the showing of your pass to you if done at that time.
Left Mouse	If clicked on the trick cards, it ends the current trick If pressed on your cards while the pass you just got is being shown, it ends the showing to you and proceeds with the game.

Command-line arguments

Hearts allows you to some command-line arguments. While none of these is required, you may find them useful for their simplicity. Any other options may added later and will be documented with the 'release notes'.

- `/f` This tells Hearts to start playing a new game at startup right away without prompting you for new opponents. The opponents from last game will be played if possible. This option can also be set in the menu under preferences.

- `/snnnnn` This tells Hearts to use very slow timeouts when playing with the external player. This option is useful for debugging your own external player, in which case you may want to step through the code slowly. The 'nnnn' is the number of seconds you want the 'dealer' to wait before 'timing-out' and can be a maximum of 15000 (about 4 hours). '/s' with no number after automatically sets the time out to 40 minutes. The default time out with no '/s' is 8 seconds.

The Menu System In Hearts

Game	Preferences	Action	Help
new game	show scores	add own comments	index
change players	player comments	add own cards	synopsis
change rules	show instructions	view this game	rules
quit	prompt when pts out	view last game	how to play
uninstall	log games	check out performance	strategy
about hearts	fast startup	view hands	how do I...?
	left mouse plays...		
	speed		
	deck		
	background color		

new game	Resets present game and starts a new one
change players	lets you change players at any time
change rules	lets you change rules at any time
quit	quit the game
uninstall	everything you need to know to uninstall easily
about hearts	gives information about the author and how to register
show scores	toggles visibility of the score box
player comments	turns on/off the player chatter, whether the players like it or not
show instructions	turns on/off the arrows/text in the middle of the screen
prompt when pts out	when all hearts have been taken, the round ends
log games	record the game session's history
fast startup	start the game without prompting for opponents
left mouse button...	If checked, then the left mouse button passes/plays cards while the right button merely selects and deselects them. Otherwise the left/right buttons are reversed from this.
speed	alters speed (1=slow, 7=fast)
deck	alters deck design
background color	change the background (green is standard)
add own comments	you can edit a set of your own custom comments
add own cards	tells you how to add your own card designs
view this game	brings up record of this session
view last game	brings up a record of the last session
check out performance	brings up the performance bar ratings
view hands	turns all the player's cards over
index	lists major help topic items
synopsis	a brief summary of Hearts play
rules	all the rules about Hearts if you were afraid to ask
how to play	a walk-through of a session
strategy	helpful hints on good play
how do I...?	(this brings up a number of items)

External Players

This option is not in any menu item, and to describe it would take an entire file itself. And so it does. That file is called external.txt/external.doc/external.sam, and it is the documented format of an external player.

Briefly, an external player is a separate executable program with its own window that communicates with the Hearts program via simple DDE. The external player has all the capabilities of the 'internal' players; in addition, you can put pictures of you player grimacing, etc. when the appropriate things happen in the game.

To make an external player, you will need any Windows compiler that can create DDE windows and send/receive DDE messages. External players are separate programs, and not DLL's. There are many disadvantages to DLL's with respect to this type of application, and only a few development systems can actually create DLL's, while virtually all can create executables. I have shifted as much of the work as possible to my side for these external players, so all you must do is basically fill in the blanks on code that I provide. You can truly have a working player in 5 minutes, though he would be rather weak. Contact me, Paul Pedriana, for any questions about the availability of this pre-written code for your language. I am giving out the detailed protocol and detailed pseudocode (good for any language) for free; it should be on your Hearts disk. I will give you the pre-written 'C' code (you just fill in about 20 blanks to the amount of detail of your choice) for 5 dollars with registration. The pre-written code also has some useful utility routines. I don't want to charge anything, but you see, I'm going to have to do a lot of extra work for it.

How Do I . . . ?

Select and pass/play cards

[click here](#)

Change the Speed of Play

[click here](#)

See my Performance

[click here](#)

Add my own card designs

[click here](#)

Install Hearts properly

[click here](#)

Uninstall Hearts completely

[click here](#)

Register Hearts and get the benefits

[click here](#)

Add my own comments to the players

[click here](#)

View a history of this or last session

[click here](#)

Scroll the screen on small monitors

[click here](#)

Change the background color

[click here](#)

Installing Hearts

Hearts version 2.X comes with a number of files, including:

- Hearts.exe

- Hearts.hlp

- Hearts.txt

- .bmp file(s) for custom card backings

- .txt, .doc, .sam files describing the 'external player' format.

- .exe files that are actually external players for Hearts.

- Other files that are information files in .txt, .doc, and .sam format.

All you really, really need is Hearts.exe. The other files are used for options that are desirable in this version, but if you are low on memory, you can delete them. Hearts wants all of its files to be in the same directory as Hearts. It does not mess with any other directories. This makes it simple for uninstallation among other things.

When giving copies of Hearts to other people, please give it in its original ZIPped format.

Changing the background color in Hearts

You can change the color of the background on which all the cards are laid in Hearts by selecting the menu option 'Preferences' and selecting the item 'background color'. You will be given a number of choices to pick from, or you can select 'other...' and get the standard Windows color selection box. The background color is remembered from session to session.

Uninstalling Hearts

Hearts uses a number of files, all of which will always be in the same directory that Hearts is in. In addition, Hearts will make an INI file that it keeps in its directory, as long as you run Hearts from a 'writable' disk drive (i.e. not a CD ROM drive). To uninstall Hearts, simply remove these files. There is an 'uninstall' option under the Hearts 'Game' menu item. This menu item brings up a box that describes more fully the files that may exist in your directory that you want to delete.

Registering Hearts

You get all kinds of great things if you register Hearts. If you see the 'About Hearts' item under the 'Game' menu item in Hearts, you get a box that says 'OK' & 'Pitch'. Selecting 'Pitch' describes registration.

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Among other things you get the Registered version of the game, which is a similar but more advanced version that has better players, more card backings, no players hassling you to register, and new and better player comments. You also get the Hearts newsletter and free upgrades to the next version of Hearts. If you ask for it, you get 101 blonde jokes and 101 lawyer jokes as well! And, just for the asking, you can get a library of card designs free (all types of cards can be found here, both 16 and 256 color). You also get the 'Boss button option'; when your boss comes in your office while you are playing, you simply strike the special key and your registered Hearts game suddenly becomes a spreadsheet-packed with all the important figures your boss told you to work on! All this and more for \$15.

In addition, if you want to make your own Hearts players and have a Windows development system, you can buy for \$5 the pre-written and already debugged player code! All you have to do when you have this code is fill in the blanks for playing logic and write any extra functions that you wish. The first person to submit a player that beats the Hearts internal players gets \$25 back from me and gets his player distributed with future releases of Hearts. Hey, of course there's nothing I can do to prevent you from distributing your player with Hearts yourself; I don't really care as long as your player doesn't take down the system!