Brain Jam Help Index

This index lists all main Brain Jam topics.

How to Play Brain Jam
Commands
Strategy
Best Scores
The Brain Jam Newsletter
Registration and Ordering
Submitting your Best Scores

Legal Matters

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Acknowledgements

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Card face bitmaps: adapted from VBCARDS.DLL by Richard R. Sands
Initial playtesting: Sandy, Kato, Andrew and David

How to Play Brain Jam

The game tableau consists of three areas:
- the four **Build Stacks** at the top left
- the four **Scratch Spaces** at the top right
- eight card columns

Initially a deck is dealt face up into the card columns.

The object of the game is to move all cards onto the **Build Stacks**, starting from Aces and progressing to Kings.

You move a card by pointing to it and clicking with the left mouse button.   If there is no legal destination for the card nothing will happen.   If there is more than one legal destination the system will select one.   You can select an alternate destination by holding down the Shift key while clicking the left mouse button.

You can move a card if it is uncovered and has a legal destination (see below).   You cannot move a card that is already in a **Build Stack**.

A card can be legally moved:
- to an unoccupied **Scratch Space**
- to a **Build Stack** if the card is an Ace
- to a **Build Stack** if the next lowest card of the same suit is already there
- to an empty column
- onto the next highest card of the same suit if that card is the exposed card in its column.

Clicking the right mouse button or selecting the Backtrack menu option will run the game in reverse, one move at a time.

The game can be played from the keyboard.   Column cards are played using the keys from 'a' to 'h' for the columns going from left to right.   Cards in scratch spaces can be played using the keys from 'i' to 'l'. The Shift key selects alternate moves.   The backspace key will run the game in reverse.

The current number of moves is displayed on the window title bar.

Games are indexed by numbers ranging from 0 through 999.   Not all games are winnable, and games are not arranged in order of difficulty.   The Deal option chooses a new game at random.   The Select Game... option allows you to select any game by typing its number.   See <u>Commands</u> for more information.

When you win a game, the sequence of moves you used is saved, unless you have already won that game using a shorter sequence.   See <u>Best Scores</u> for more information.

Commands

Game Menu

Select Game...
Prompts you for a game number between 0 and 999 and allows you to review which games you have already won.

Deal
Chooses a new game at random

Restart Game
Restarts current game

Exit
Ends this session of Brain Jam

Backtrack!
Undoes the most recent move (same as right mouse button)

Layout Menu
In some circumstances the card tableau will overflow the Brain Jam window and make it impossible to select certain cards.   If you can't fix this by resizing the Brain Jam window, you can use the Squeeze and Cram layout settings

Normal
Normal layout

Squeeze
Eliminates vertical spaces and moves cards closer together

Cram
Like Squeeze, but moves entire tableau up by a half card height

Strategy

"Life is two locked boxes, each containing the other's key"

Brain Jam isn't easy.   Many games are not winnable, but perhaps the most satisfying experience you can have in Brain Jam is cracking a really tough game, perhaps even a game that nobody has won before.

The good news is that about 70% of games are winnable.   The bad news is that about 30% aren't.   But these percentages are better than most solitaire games.   The Select Game dialog box helps you select winnable games for Games 0 through 49.   Beyond that you are on your own.

In learning Brain Jam you first have to unlearn some of the rules from conventional "Solitaire".   Cards may be played only on cards of the same suit, not cards of the opposite color.   When there is an open column, ANY card can be placed in it, not just a King.   Finally, you cannot move runs of cards; you may only move one card at a time.

You can move runs of cards if there are enough scratch spaces to do so.   For example, suppose that one column has a 9-8-7 sequence of a suit at the bottom, while another column has a 10 of the same suit at the bottom.   Further suppose that there are two empty scratch spaces, or two empty columns, or an empty scratch space and an empty column.   Then the 7 and 8 can be moved into the free spaces, the 9 can go on the 10, and then the 8 and 7 can be moved onto the 9, leaving a 10-9-8-7.   This type of maneuver is reminiscent of the famous Towers of Hanoi puzzle, especially if the run is several cards long.

When you click on a card the program moves it for you.   Remember that you can choose an alternate destination by pressing the Shift key.

A beginning player will often try to free the Aces and low cards and put them on the Build Piles.   The result is often that the scratch spaces are filled up and there are no more moves.

A sounder approach is to start sorting cards to create runs of the same suit, "harvesting" the Aces and lower cards as the opportunity arises.   But you can't overdo this either, because eventually the tableau clogs up with most columns having runs at the bottom.

One strategy that often works is to try to eliminate one column of cards altogether by placing all of its cards on other columns, or in the scratch spaces or build piles.   The free column not only acts as an extra scratch space, but also as a place to put a run that has been built up elsewhere, as long as there are sufficient free spaces to transfer the run.

Successful play in Brain Jam appears to result not from any one doctrine, but from an ability to balance several strategies.   Often you must play a game several times before you get a sense of where the connections and bottlenecks are.   Only then can you work out a winning series of moves.

The early and middle moves in a game are the most important.   Usually there is a "turning point" after which the game can be completed as long as you are paying attention.   In analysing a successful game you will often see that everything almost trivially hinges on building up one or two runs and clearing out one or two columns until they are empty; the hard part is figuring out which runs and columns to concentrate on.

For more information on strategy and solutions, see Brain Jam Newsletter.

Best Scores

Your "score" for a game is just the number of moves it took you to complete it.   As in golf, the lower the score the better.

You can review your scores/solutions by choosing the Select Games option under the Games menu.   For each game you have already won, the solution for the game will appear in the lower right area of the dialog box when you type in (or highlight in the list box) the game number.

A solution is encoded as a series of letters.   Each letter corresponds to one move.   The letters correspond to columns and scratch spaces, and denote which card was moved.   The letters 'a' through 'h' correspond to the eight card columns, going from left to right.   The letters 'i' through 'l' correspond to the Scratch Spaces, from left to right.   Upper case letters have the same meaning as the lower case letters, except that the "alternate move" was selected by using the Shift key.

Brain Jam saves solutions in a file called BRAINJAM.INI in the Brain Jam directory.   You should not attempt to modify this file; results will be unpredictable if you do.   You are encouraged to send in your BRAINJAM.INI file (See <u>Submitting your Best Scores</u> for instructions).   Best overall solutions will be published in the <u>Brain Jam Newsletter</u>.

Here are sample solutions for 6 games (you can use these as "hints" if you are stumped):

```
Game1:fffdfdddeggjlikhhlfflhhlhjaabblbkbbbbbeAAalkaaajfffffbbbkaacccccafjkccg
gggbcchhahgeeeecdddddaiedlbffj

Game2:bgccccccclejieeeeddhheaaelffkaaaaaaccaddadidbbbbbkbbiFfifffccddddjiclkfe
gggggggegggbbbbbgccccgdhhhhdcbhhhchhhggggbddchhfffijkleaaa

Game4:cbbbfbjgaaadbkddddhhhdccegaajccdCcjkieeeeeilFFFflkifffeeeeikfhhhggggfhh
bjhdddhcccbgaaaei

Game6:ehgbbbffffffaaaailgccicccccijgggkaaaaakcckjbbbkjddeeeeebbbaaagggeedidda
lhhhhhhhhhhdjhkbdffhcccc

Game7:gccicbgggccccddbcgjffkffffijhhhjihaaccjihhikhaaffhbhbbbbigggggaeeeeeeeeee
bbghijcccccaakladddddddddddffbaceghij
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The Brain Jam Newsletter

The Brain Jam Newsletter is published periodically, at least four times per year.

It contains articles on subjects relating to Brain Jam, such as new version announcements, strategy, and commentary.   Players are welcome to submit articles to the newsletter.

Primarily the Newsletter is the "journal of record" of best scores for the 1000 games in Brain Jam. Players are encouraged to send in their BRAINJAM.INI files (see Submitting your Best Scores).   Best overall solutions for each game will be published.

For information on obtaining the Newsletter, see Registration and Ordering

Registration and Ordering

Orders, registrations, BRAINJAM.INI files, fan mail, hate mail, article submissions, bug reports, suggestions, and all other correspondence should be addressed to:

> Brain Jam Publications
> P.O. Box 62024
> 1448 Lawrence Ave. East, #19
> North York, Ontario
> Canada M4A 2W1

To order or register, please select the "File" menu of this Help window and then "Print Topic" to print this form.   Then fill out the form, enclose payment and send to the above address.

(Please print clearly)   BJ1.6

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Where did you get Brain Jam? (circle one)

> - friend - online service - BBS - shareware disk

If   other than "friend" please specify   name of source _____

Submitting your Best Scores

If you are submitting a BRAINJAM.INI file, simply send either a 3.5" or 5.25" diskette.   A 3.5" diskette is preferable because it is more robust and can be sent in an ordinary envelope.   There is no need to register or order the newsletter.   If any of your solutions are the best submitted they will be published in the Brain Jam Newsletter, along with your name which, if you like, can be a pseudonym, nickname, the name of a group, or anonymous.   Please write the desired name or pseudonym clearly on the diskette label.

Submitted disks will not be returned, and become the property of Brain Jam Publications.

Game Selection Dialog Box

The Game Selection dialog box allows you to type in the number of the game you wish to play.   There are 1000 games, numbered from 0 to 999.   You can also select a game from the list box, or by selecting one of the Next or Previous buttons.

The list box in the lower left of the dialog box shows all games between 0 and 999.   Following each game number is one of the following:
a) your best score for that game (i.e. the number of moves in your shortest solution so far)
b) the word "winnable" if the game is one of the known winnable games in the first 50.
c) a question mark, indicating that you have not previously won that game.

The lower right corner of the dialog box shows further information on the winnability of the highlighted game.   For games between 0 and 49, the ones that are known to be winnable are indicated.   If you have already won a game, your best (shortest) solution so far is shown in the lower right corner of the dialog box.   Sample solutions (and how to decode them) are shown for six games in Best Scores.

Not all games are winnable.   However, it is conjectured that overall about 70% of games are winnable. For an up to date list of winnable games see The Brain Jam Newsletter.