

Learn to Play 42 - A Game of Dominos

OVERVIEW: The domino game 42 is similar in strategy to the card game Bridge; however, it is not as complicated. Some folks say 42 (also called Texas 42) was conceived by a lad in east Texas because his parents would not let him play cards; others say 42 originated in Georgetown (central Texas). The most widely publicized story, however, says 42 started in Garner, Texas in 1887. The rules discussed in this document reflect the game as played by and taught to me by friends who reside in the south Texas town of Devine.



Forty-two (42) is played by four people. A set of double-six dominos is required. Players sitting opposite each other are partners. The dominos are "shuffled" face down. Players draw seven (7) dominos apiece at random and conceal the dot (pip) sides from each other. Each player "bids his/her hand" in rotation. The highest bidder may designate "trump" and begins play by "leading" a domino. Each player, in turn, must follow "suit" (if possible). The person playing the highest domino takes the "trick" and leads the next domino. This process continues until all 28 dominos are played, the bid is made, or the high bidder is "set." Partners work together (without "talking across the table") to make their bid or to set the opposing team.

THE PLAYERS: Who will be partners is determined by mutual agreement or by drawing dominos. When drawing, the dominos are shuffled and each player draws a domino. The player who draws the highest domino will be the scorekeeper, and the next highest domino holder will be his partner. The two lowest domino holders will be the opposition partners. In case of tie(s), those players each draw another domino to break the tie. Partners sit opposite each other at the table.

THE SHUFFLE: All 28 dominos are shuffled face-down. The scorekeeper shuffles ("shakes") the dominos to start the game. Thereafter, the shuffle rotates to the left (clockwise) after each "hand" has been played. (The shuffler always draws his/her dominos last.) If multiple games are played at one sitting, and the same partners are retained, then either of the previous winning player partners shuffles to begin a new game.

BIDDING: The player to the left of the shuffler begins the bidding. He may bid or pass (not bid). The bid rotates clockwise to the next player until all have had an opportunity to bid. Each bid must be higher than any preceding bid(s). If all

players pass, the dominos are reshuffled by the next player and the bidding process repeated.

The minimum bid allowed is 30. Bids higher than 41 must be in marks. The first bid in marks can be one or two marks. Subsequent players may bid one mark more than the number previously bid. When one or more marks are bid, the high bid partners must take (win) all seven tricks. If they lose one trick, they are set, and the opposing team partners get the mark(s) they bid. (Trick values have no special significance when the bid is one mark [42] or multiples thereof.)

OPENING PLAY: Following the bidding process, the high bidder declares a trump suit (or no trumps) and starts the hand by leading a domino. Each player, in turn (clockwise), must follow the suit led if possible. For example, if a  is led, sixes (high end of the domino) is the suit led unless the high bidder had declared treys (threes) the trump suit. (See TRUMPS below for clarification.) The player who wins the trick leads the next domino. Scoring for each hand is recorded after all seven tricks are played or the high bidder is set (doesn't make his bid).

SCORING: Each trick is worth one point. Dominos divisible by five (5) are worth their face values, e.g.,  or  is 10 points and  or  is five points. (The other three count-dominos are ,  and 

TRUMPS: Trumps are like a suit in cards. When declared, the trump suit outranks the other domino suits. If a player gets the bid and calls "treys" (threes) trump, then the seven dominos with three dots (pips) on one end are trumps. Doubles may also be declared a trump suit. When a trump is led, each player must play a trump if he has one. High trump wins any trick. If a non-trump domino is led, and a player cannot follow suit, he may (does not have to) play a trump if he has one.

Trump Suit Options (ranked highest to lowest in suit)							
Sixes							
Fives							
Fours							
Treys							
Deuces							
Aces							
Blanks							
Doubles							

A player who gets the bid may elect no trump ("follow me"). When "follow me" is called, each player, in turn, plays the "suit" corresponding to the high end of the

domino led in each trick. The double in each suit is high. A player may play any domino if he cannot follow suit.

STRATEGY: If your bid is the highest, you have the advantage of calling trumps and leading the first domino. The object is to bid wisely, make your bid, or help your partner make his bid. If the opposing team partners get the bid, then you and your partner try to set them. This is done by preventing them from making their bid, if possible, by "catching" (winning) tricks with "count." (If the bid is in marks, you can set the opponents by taking any trick.) For example, if an opposing player leads the double-five (fours are trump), and you do not have a five, you can play a four (trump) on your turn and win the trick (if nobody else "overtrumps" you). By winning the trick, you and your partner get 11 points (the trick plus the ten-count), or 16 points if the five/blank (5:0) is also played in the same trick (or you trumped-in with the four/ace [4:1]). This is sufficient to set a bid greater than 31 (42-11=31) or, with the additional five-count, set any bid (42-16=26).

<u>Bid</u>	<u>Can't lose more than</u>
30	Two tricks, one 10-count*
31	One trick, one 10-count*
32	Five tricks, one 5-count
33	Four tricks, one 5-count
34	Three tricks, one 5-count
35	Two tricks, one 5-count
36	One trick, one 5-count
37	Five tricks, no count
38	Four tricks, no count
39	Three tricks, no count
40	Two tricks, no count
41	One trick, no count
42**	(Must take all tricks)
** one mark * or two 5-counts	

When trying to make your bid, normally, you should call in the trumps (or try to find out where they are) by leading them early in the hand. You want to put count on tricks you and your partner take. When possible, you may want to take the lead to allow your partner to get rid of (unload) "off" dominos which would otherwise jeopardize making the bid. In this regard, knowing what to do comes with experience and playing the odds on domino distribution. It helps to keep track of which dominos have been played and which ones are still held.

INDICATING: Many 42 players interpret a 30-bid to mean that the bidder has doubles and/or count dominos that could help his partner make a higher bid. In other cases, however, a 30-bid simply means that the bidder thinks 30 is the highest bid he can make.

Some players also try to indicate to their partners which doubles they're holding by what they play when they are unable to follow the suit led. The two most common practices are [1] playing the double itself to indicate they're holding the next highest domino in that suit, or [2] playing a domino whose high end indicates they're holding the double in that suit. (When more than one double is held, players usually indicate their highest doubles first if they can.)

Whereas the latter style for indicating doubles is frowned on by many "pure 42" advocates as being unwise, it is nonetheless commonly practiced and completely

legal. Realistically, these common indicating styles cannot be legislated out of the game. Prearranged secret indicating and bidding signals between partners, however, are considered cheating.

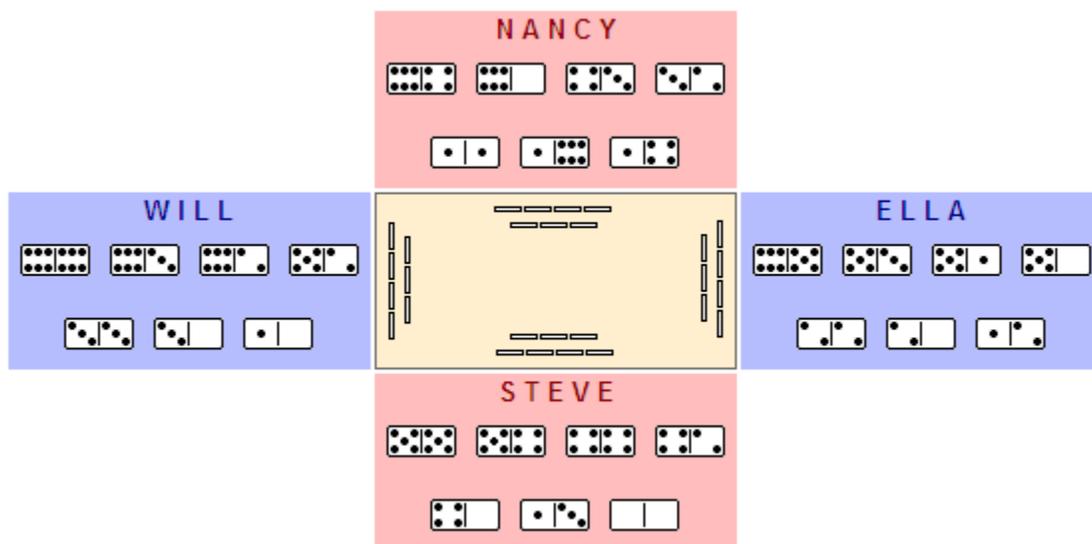
False indications can occur, sometimes with undesirable results. Playing count or some other domino is often more prudent than indicating. Even without indicating, a bidder normally expects some kind of help from his partner, whether it's donating count or having an important double. In any 42 game, experience and observation skills are helpful to correctly interpret bidding practices and play action on the board.

PROTOCOL: Players agree on the rules **before** beginning a game. The shuffler draws his dominos last. The partner of the high bidder normally gathers in the dominos at the end of each trick they take. The opposing partner team gathers their own tricks taken and keeps them separate from the other team's. The tricks are stored face up, off to the side of the playing surface. When one or more marks are bid, the dominos are stacked so only the last two tricks can be viewed (dot sides). (This makes domino tracking more dependent on players' memories.)

INDISCRETIONS: When a player plays out of turn or reneges (doesn't follow suit led when able), the hand is ended and the opposition partners get the mark(s). Once a domino has been played, it cannot be retrieved (taken back). Talking across the table about the hand in play is strictly prohibited. If a domino is inadvertently knocked over (exposed), it must remain face up and played at the first valid opportunity. If a player bids out of turn, the bidding process resumes normally, but he cannot change his bid. If his bid is not higher than previous bids when it is his turn, then he must pass.

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SAMPLE HAND (with indicating): *Nancy*, *Steve*, *Will* and *Ella* are from Austin. They play 42 every Friday night. **Nancy** shuffles, and each draws seven dominos (Nancy last). **Ella** bids first.



Ella (sits left of shuffler Nancy) begins the bid. She has four fives she could call trump, but she doesn't have the double-five (a ten-count) so she passes. (I would have bid 31 since I could afford to lose the trick with the double-five; however, trying to get back in the lead to "walk" my deuces would be risky. In this hand, Steve has the double-five, would win the trick when it was played, and could come back with his double-blank [] lead and set me.)

The bid rotates clockwise to *Steve* who has a good helping hand (three doubles). He bids 30 since he can indicate two of his doubles to his partner. (If his partner passes and he ends up having to take the bid for 30, he would probably call fours trump or call no-trumps ["follow-me"] in hopes of making his bid. In this case, unbeknownst to Steve, his partner [Nancy] has the other three trumps if he called fours as trump. If Nancy/Steve played their dominos wisely, they wouldn't have any problem making 30.)

Will is strong in treys and sixes, so he bids 31. If he gets the bid, he could call either treys or sixes as trumps. In this case, he wants to try sixes, hoping his partner has the six-four () trump, and/or it falls on the first trick when he leads the double-six (). (Treys might be a safer trump since the five-deuce [] "off" domino makes Will more vulnerable to being set, especially if he didn't take in the six-four [] trump in the first trick. In this case, Nancy would surely play her six-blank [] on the first trick and then she would be holding the high trump [a ten-count] and the double-ace [] for taking subsequent leads and setting Will.)

Nancy (last bidder) is strong in aces. Since her partner (Steve) indicated he had a helping hand, she bids 32 and calls aces trump. (Bidding more than 32 was not necessary since Nancy had last bid, and the previous high bid was 31. If Nancy would have had to bid higher than 32 to get the bid, she could have bid as much as 35 without being set [as demonstrated below].)

Here's how the players could play the above hand after *Nancy/Steve* got the bid (aces trump, indicating demonstrated):

D O M I N O S P L A Y E D				P O I N T S		
Trick	<i>Nancy</i> (Bid 32)	<i>Ella</i> (Passed)	<i>Steve</i> (Bid 30)	<i>Will</i> (Bid 31)	N/S	E/W
#1	(Takes trick)				1	0
#2	(Takes trick)				1	0
#3	(Takes trick)				0	1
#4		(Takes trick)			0	6
#5	(Takes trick)				6	0
#6			(Takes trick)		1	0
#7			(Takes trick)		26	0
Led	★	★	★	★ Totals:	35	7

Trick #1: *Nancy* leads her highest trump (), and each player, in turn, follows suit by playing a trump. *Nancy* takes the trick.

Trick #2: *Nancy* leads the second highest trump () to call in the other trump and, hopefully, get an indication from her partner (Steve). Her partner cannot follow suit so he indicates he has the double-five () by playing the five-four (). Will cannot follow suit, so he "throws off" the trey-blank (). *Nancy* takes the trick.

Trick #3: *Nancy* does not have a five, so she cannot "come" to her partner by leading a five. Since Nancy has the (a ten-count), it is relatively "safe" for her to lead the (it won't draw the out). Her partner (Steve) cannot follow

suit, so he indicates his double-four (☐•••☐) by playing the ☐••☐. *Ella* takes the trick with the ☐•••☐. Her partner (Will) could have taken the trick with his ☐•••☐, but decided to save it in hopes of "catching" the ☐•••☐ later.

Trick #4: *Ella* leads her double-deuce (☐••☐), and everybody follows suit. *Ella* takes the trick which includes the five-count (☐•••☐) that Nancy had to play.

Trick #5: *Ella* leads the ☐•☐ (a "walker" since the other six deuces have already been played). *Nancy* "trumps in" with the four-ace (☐•••☐), a five-count, and takes the trick.

Trick #6: *Nancy* leads the ☐•••☐ so her partner can take the lead (assuming the ☐•☐ he played in Trick #3 was not a false indicator). Her partner (*Steve*) takes the trick with the double-four (☐•••☐).

Trick #7: *Steve* leads the double-five (☐••••☐) to take the last trick and make the bid. Nancy was able (fortunate) to play the ☐•••☐ on this trick, and Ella had to play the last five-count (☐••☐).

Nancy/Steve get a mark on the score pad, and *Ella* shuffles ("shakes") the dominos for the next hand.

GAME VARIATIONS: Non-tournament 42 may be played with variations not sanctioned by the National 42 Players Association (N42PA). For example, my house rules allow a bid to be twice as many marks as a previous high bid in marks. The forced bid Nel-O option is also popular among social players who enjoy a little twist in the game and don't like to reshuffle every time everybody passes:

GOING LOW (Nel-O): When the last player in the bidding process (the domino shuffler) has the bid "dropped" on him (everyone before him passed), he has to bid at least 30. He also has the option of bidding one or two marks "low." If he goes low, there are no trumps, his partner does not play (turns his dominos face-down), and he tries to take no tricks. He begins play by leading a low domino and hoping one of the opposing players takes the trick (and the lead). Doubles are a suit of their own. If a double is led, then doubles have to be played by the opposition if they have any. If he can stay out of the lead (take no tricks) for the remainder of the hand, he makes his bid. If, however, he takes one trick, the hand is ended, and the opposition partners get what he bid. Count-dominos have no special significance in Nel-O.

Forty-two (42) may also be played with variations not discussed in this document, e.g., Plunge or Splash, Sevens, and Nel-O variations. Three-handed 42 (Moon) can also be played. More information and links are at Texas42.net.