

FOUR COURTS

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A court-building game for 2-4 players inspired by card games like Four Kings. Four Courts is a multiplayer game where each player is building their own Court in order to score the most points.

Points are accumulated through the number of cards in a player's Court that match the Suit of the King and Queen as well placing bonuses on either monarch. The game ends when a player has filled all 4 positions on their Dais.

Four Courts is played with a standard tarot deck instead of the 52-card standard deck. Tarot decks are made up of 78 cards divided into 22 Major Arcana and 56 Minor Arcana made up of four suits; Cups, Wands, Swords, and Pentacles.

Unfamiliar with a tarot deck? See the FAQ section at the back of this booklet to help you get started.

SET UP

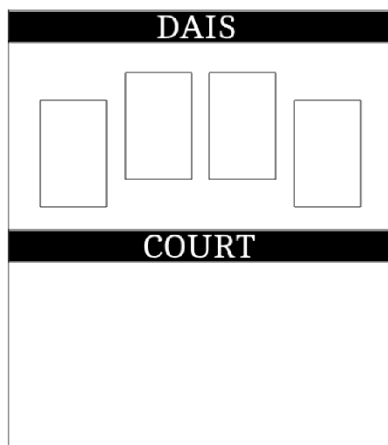
The number of players determines the number of cards in a hand. For 4 players, a hand of 8 cards. For 2-3 players, a hand of 10 cards.

The remaining deck becomes the pickup pile and is put face down within reach of all players with space for a discard pile beside it.

The last player who had a tarot card reading goes first.

PLAYING SPACE

The space immediately in front of the player will be referred to as the playing space which is divided into two sections. The Court is the area closest to the player where they will play card Runs with Minor Arcana. The Dais is above where players will place one King, one Queen, one Knight, and one Page as well as any Major Arcana.



This set-up is recommended but feel free to adapt to better suit the environment. Players need to be able to see the playing spaces of all players.

TAKING TURNS

FIRST ACTION

A player's turn is split into three consecutive actions. For the first action a player places up to two cards on their Dais through the following actions;

- Place a Minor Arcana card on your Dais.
 - You can place a **King**, a **Queen**, or a **Knight** of any suit face up in your Dais.
- Place a Major Arcana card on a monarch.
 - You can place one of the **Major Arcana** cards onto a previously played King or Queen. You can layer Major Arcana on top of each other as long as the number being placed is higher than the Major Arcana already in play.
- The first action can be skipped either wholly or partially.
 - Example; if you are holding two Queens in your deck but are unsure which suit to commit to, you can skip placing these on your Dais but may still put Major Arcana if a King has already been played.

The last card that will be placed on the Dais is the Page. This can only be done in the third action following a run.

SECOND ACTION

Discard up to 2 cards from your hand face down on the Discard Pile. Then pick up cards to replenish to a full hand (8 cards for 4 player games, 10 cards for 2-3 player games).

THIRD ACTION

For the final action you must begin a Run on your Court using Minor Arcana cards. A Run is playing a suit in sequence; Ace being the lowest in the suit, through to Ten, and, for the purpose Four Courts, ending with the Page. These are played from all player's hands.

- You must start the Run by picking the lowest card of any suit in your hand.
- Order of turn depends on if the player has the next numerical card of the chosen suit in their hand.
- All players must participate in Runs using the cards in their hand and placing them in their Playing Space.
- You may end up playing more than one card in a Run.
- Suits must alternate between runs; the same suit cannot be played in back-to-back Runs.
- The run stops if the next numerical number can't be played or if the run reaches the end, the Page.
- A Page must be placed on the Dais by default unless one is already there. Only then can a Page be placed in Court.

A Run ends when no more cards can be played from any player's hands or when the Page of the Run suit is played. When a Run has stopped, the player's turn is over.

DAIS

The Dais is made up of 2 monarchs, 1 Knight and 1 Page from any suit. Kings, Queens, and Knights can be placed as part of the player's **first action**. A Page can only be added to the Dais during the **third action** following a Run. The four cards that make up the Dais do not need to have matching suits.



The monarchs on the Dais can be bolstered by placing Major Arcana on your Kings and/or Queens, they cannot be placed on the Knight or Page. There are 22 Major Arcana cards numbered 0-21 which are identified by the name along the bottom of the card and the number in the top centre.

There is no limit to the number of Major Arcana on a King or Queen, however Major Arcana can only be placed on top a card if the number from the player's hand is higher than the card on the Dais.

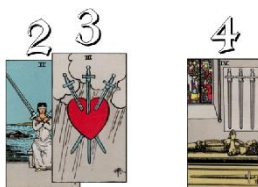
In the following example, both the King and Queen's Major Arcana number is too high to place the Hermit (9) on to either monarch.



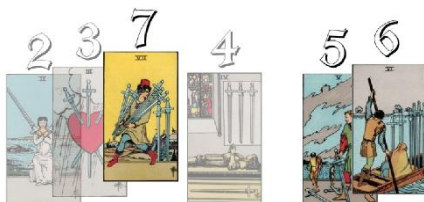
The suit of the cards on the Dais do not have to match. Placing Major Arcana on your King and Queen as well as the significance of their suits will come into play later when scoring.

COURT

For the **third action**, the player must play the lowest card of any suit to begin a Run. You may play more than one card if your lowest cards are consecutive numbers. The suit must be different to the previous Run. All players must play the next number in that suit if it is in their hand.



In the example above the player starting the run has played their lowest card of the Swords suit, Two of Swords and Three of Swords. They had consecutive numbers so must play two cards. The next player has the Four of Swords so must play that card in front of them into their Court.



As the run continues, another player puts down two consecutive cards in sequence: the Five of Swords and the Six of Swords. It loops back to the original player who started the run as they have the Seven of Swords. And so on.

On a good run players may go from the Ace of any suit up to a Page if all cards are present in player's hands at the time of the Run.

A Run is over when the next sequential card is in neither player's hands. These natural stoppers can occur in many ways;

- The card has not yet been pulled from the pickup deck or is in the discard pile.
- The card was played in a previous Run so is already in Court.

This signifies the end of the Run and the turn end.

GAME END

The game is over when one player has a full Dais: they have two monarchs, a Knight and a Page in front of them. When the last card is played to fill the Dais they may continue their turn to the end of their third action – at the end of a Run.

The person to end the game may not be the winner, the winner is determined by the score calculated by the cards in front of each player.

SCORING

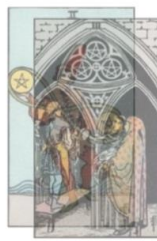
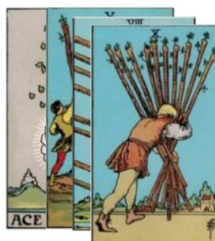
To determine the winner, all players must calculate their score and the highest score wins. During gameplay players must take into account the suits of their Kings and Queens, the suits played in their runs as well as any Major Arcana upgrades. At the end of the game the play space in front of you will look something like this;



A full or partial Dais with Major Arcana piled on the King and/or Queen as well a Minor Arcana in Court. Let's breakdown all the ways a player can score points from this.

CARDS IN COURT

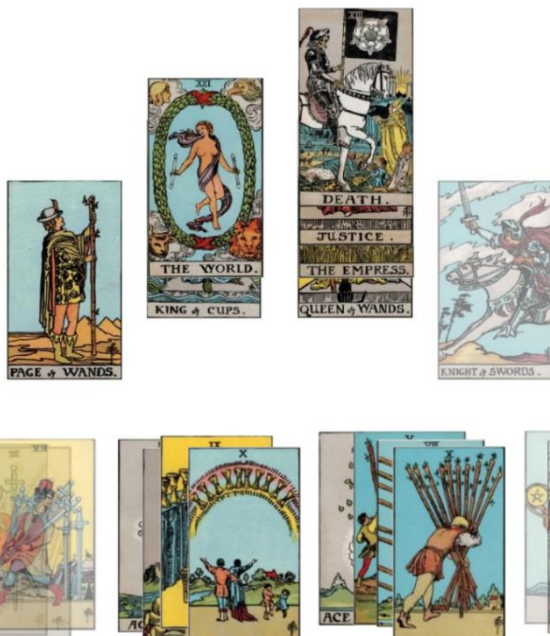
Count the Minor Arcana cards that match the suit of your King and Queen that were played in the bottom half of the Playing Space during Runs, your Court.



In this example, the player has the King of Cups and the Queen of Wands. During Runs, they played 4 Cup cards and 4 Wand cards during Runs. This is a total of 8 points from the Court for this player.

CARDS ON THE DAIS

The Kings and Queens are 1 point each towards the score total as well as any Knights or Pages that match either suit of your King or Queen. Each Major Arcana successfully placed on top of a King or Queen adds another point per card



In this example, the player gets 2 points for placing the King of Cups and the Queen of Wands on their Dais. They have also earned another point from the Page of Wands which matches the Queen's suit making 3 points so far.

They also have 1 Major Arcana on the King and 3 on the Queen. This is a total of 7 points on the Dais.

BONUS POINTS

The player that places the highest value Major Arcana on their King or Queen out of all players' cards will earn an extra 3 points.

In the example used, The World (No. 21) was played – this is the highest value Major Arcana so when played is guaranteed to earn the bonus points.

SCORE BREAKDOWN

Adding the score from each category together will give the player their total score. The player with the highest total score is the winner.

From the example used for scoring, the total score looks like this;

Matching Court Suit Cards	8
Monarchs	2
Matching Dais Suit	1
Major Arcana Bonuses	4
Bonus Points	3
Total Score	18

The game can be replayed to find the best out of three, five, and so on. Enjoy playing!

FAQs

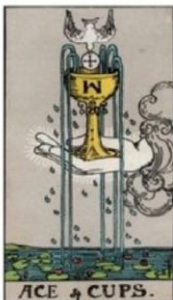
What are Major Arcana cards?



The Major Arcana are the named cards in a tarot pack. There are usually 22 cards in a standard 78-card pack, typically numbered from 0 to 21. In a classic tarot deck these can be identified by the text banner on the bottom of the card. The number of the card is located at the top of the card in the centre. Example; 0 is The Fool.

What are Minor Arcana cards?

The Minor Arcana cards are numbered Ace to Ten and made up of four suits: Cups, Wands, Swords, and Pentacles. The Page, the Knight, the Queen, and the King are also Minor Arcana, but for the rules of Four Courts, when it states to play a Run with Minor Arcana we specifically mean Minor Arcana from Ace though Ten and including the Page.



In a classic tarot deck the suits can be identified as; Cups are illustrated as a golden goblet, Wands as long brown sticks with small amounts of leafy foliage, Swords are long silver swords with a hilt and Pentacles are golden orbs with a star inside them.

Why does my deck not look like the cards illustrated here?

Four Courts is inspired by the standard Rider-Waite tarot deck as this is the most identifiable and well-known deck. Decks can deviate through different illustrative artwork as well as number of cards. We can't confirm if Four Courts can be played on a non-standard tarot deck.

What if the pickup card pile runs out?

If the pickup card pile runs out, the discard pile can be used as the new deck to replenish hands from after being shuffled.

Do the cards on the Dais need to match?

No. The suits of the King, Queen, Knight and Page do not have to match any cards that have already been placed on the Dais.

Can I have two Kings or two Queens on the Dais?

Yes.

The Fool is number zero, can I place them on a monarch on the Dais?

Yes. Kings and Queens are numberless. The Fool can be placed on either Monarch presuming there is no other Major Arcana already in play.

I don't have any Minor Arcana cards; how do I start a Run?

If a player does not have Minor Arcana cards of any suit, they must defer to another player to start a run on their behalf. Player's choice. Turn order resumes as normal after the Run ends.

When starting a Run for my third action, what if my lowest suit is a high number or a Page?

The rule is lowest of any suit. If you have no lower cards of that suit then play that as the start of your run. For example, if you only had the Two of Cups and Seven of Swords it is valid to play the Seven of Swords as that is the lowest Sword in hand.

Does a Page in my Court count towards points?

Yes. Treat it like other Minor Arcana card and award one point if it matches the suit of the King or Queen.

What happens if I play the Page in a Run but already have a Page on my Dais?

The Page must be played as part of the Run. By default, it should go to the player's Dais if there is space. If this space has already been filled play the Page in Court like any other Minor Arcana card.

All Pages are in play but my Dais is missing one, how do I fill this spot?

If a player is in need of a Page but four are already in the Playing Space of other players, the player in need must negotiate a trade with a Page in a Court (not on a Dais).

Before the first action, negotiate a trade for the Page you want. Trade should be one card for one card and must be selected from Court, not the hand. First action commences after the trade has finished successfully or unsuccessfully.

Can I ask for more than one card in a Page trade?

Our original rules say no; the trade should be one card for one card. However, if all players agree to bend this rule and raise the stakes then go with the majority vote. This is not tried and tested so we are unsure how long gameplay or friendships will last as a result.

THANK YOU FOR PLAYING!

Created by Fiona Nichols

PLAYTESTERS

Matthew Nichols.

FONTS

Medieval Sharp by Wojciech Kalinowski.

Blackletter by Dieter Steffman.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Rider-Waite tarot cards as illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith.