

# **PALA**

**by Jeffrey D. Allers**

a colorful trick-taking game for 3 to 5 players  
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## **WHAT'S IN THE BOX**

1 rulebook  
48 cards (8 each of red, blue, and yellow – 1,1,2,2,3,3,4,5; 8 each of orange, green, and purple – 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9)  
1 color wheel / quick rules summary  
2 Impressionism / Pointillism rules summaries  
1 black poker chip (the dealer chip)  
5 poker chips in each of the following colors: white, red, blue, yellow, orange, green, and purple (used only in Pointillism)  
1 double-sided bid board (used only in Impressionism)

## **INTRODUCTION**

As an apprentice painter, you are keen to impress your mentor by creating the purest color blends. But just as you create the most perfect vivid blue, your rival apprentice sneaks some red into it. Scolded by the master for mistaking purple for blue, you plot your revenge...

Pala is two trick-taking games in one. Both versions use the same core rules for dealing out hands, playing cards, awarding tricks, mixing paint together, and smearing your opponents' paint. However, the two versions have very different bidding and scoring mechanisms and, consequently, play completely differently.

## **OBJECTIVE**

In **Pointillism**, the goal is to score points by winning tricks. In **Impressionism**, the goal is to not score points (generally by not winning tricks).

## **RULES COMMON TO BOTH POINTILLISM AND IMPRESSIONISM**

Both games share exactly the same rules for playing cards and taking tricks. But everything else is different - what tricks you want to win, how you bid before each hand, and how you score at the end of a hand. These specifics will be explained later. In general, however, in **Pointillism** you want to win tricks, and in **Impressionism** you don't. The different motivations make a world of difference to both strategy and tactics, but the mechanics of leading and playing on tricks remains identical between the two versions.

## **POINTILLISM – POINTS ARE GOOD**

In Pointillism, you want to score points. The game ends when one or more players hits the Point Goal. Highest score wins.

Note that Pointillism plays very differently depending on the number of players. In all cases, Null bids are an important aspect of the game, but the number of players determines whether a Null bid is a conservative play or an all-or-nothing gambit!

Number of Players	3	4	5
Point Goal	100	70	30
Null Bid	+/- 25	+/- 7	+/- 2

### **IMPRESSIONISM – POINTS ARE BAD**

In Impressionism, you do not want to score points. The game ends when any player reaches or exceeds the game's ending point threshold and then the player with the lowest score wins the game.

Number of Players	3	4	5
Ending Threshold	40	45	50

### **A SECONDARY COLOR CARD**

Secondary Color cards tell you right on the card how they are mixed from Primary Colors; to mix green, for example, you need blue and yellow.

### **SETTING UP FOR EACH ROUND (BOTH GAMES)**

The player who most recently visited an art gallery goes first on the first round and gets the black dealer chip. That player bids first and leads the first trick of the first round (see page 5). After each round, the black dealer chip moves clockwise to the next player until the game ends. The number of cards dealt differs with different numbers of players:

Number of Players	3	4	5
Starting Hand Size	14	11	9
Leftover Cards	6	4	3

Leftover cards are discarded face down and will not be used this round. After bidding is complete (see below for each game), the hand starts.

### **BIDDING (POINTILLISM)**

The dealer bids first, using various poker chips. To bid, play one chip in each color you intend to win a trick in. To score, you must score at least one trick in each color you bid. Bidding a white chip means the bidder intends to win no tricks at all, and is making a null bid. Note that you can never bid a white chip along with a chip of another color.

### **BIDDING (IMPRESSIONISM)**

Bidding in Impressionism is less conventional. Rather than setting goals for what tricks you hope to win, you instead define whether winning cards in a specific suit will be positive, negative or neutral for all players. Lay out the appropriate Bid Board for the number of players. The dealer bids first, with bidding continuing in clockwise order around the table. When it is your turn to bid, you may play a card from your hand onto an available slot on the bid board or pass. You may not bid a card of a color that has already been played to the board. The bid board, once full, determines how cards are scored at the end of the round. The value of a card on the Bid Board is irrelevant; only the card's color matters.

Typically, each player will bid exactly 1 card. However, if a player does not bid, just skip that player and keep going around the table until the Bid Board is full.

### **LEADING A TRICK**

Like most trick-taking games, the player who wins a trick leads the next trick. To lead, play any one card from your hand to determine the initial color of that trick. Each player, in clockwise order, must match the suit if possible. The rules for how you match depend on whether it is a Primary Color trick (red, blue, or yellow) or a Secondary Color trick (orange, green, or purple).

### **PRIMARY COLOR TRICKS**

- If you have any cards in a Primary trick's color, you must 'copy' by playing a single card in that color.

- If you do not have any cards in the trick's color, you must either 'smear' (see 'Smearing' below) or 'junk' by playing any single card. If you smear, the trick's color will change.

### **SECONDARY COLOR TRICKS**

- If you have any cards in the trick's color, you must either 'copy' by playing a single card in that color, or 'mix' (see 'Mixing' below).

- If you do not have any cards in the trick's color, you must either 'mix' to match the trick's color or 'junk' any single card.

### **JUNKING**

To 'junk' play a single card of a different color onto the trick. This card will automatically lose, regardless of its number, unless another player later 'smears' and changes the trick into your card's color.

### **TIES**

If you matched the trick's color with your play (either with a single card, a mix, or a smear), and you are tied for winning the trick, then you must immediately decide if you are winning or losing the tie. Players usually choose to win ties in Pointillism and to lose ties in Impressionism, but it is up to you.

### **MIXING -TRICK COLOR STAYS THE SAME**

If the trick is a Secondary Color (orange, green, or purple), you may 'mix' by playing the two Primary cards that combine to form that color (yellow and red to make orange, yellow and blue to make green, red and blue to make purple). For purposes of determining the trick winner, add the values of the two primary cards you play together as if it were one card of the Secondary Color you are matching.

You are playing on a purple trick. You have a purple 3, a purple 4, a red 3, and a blue 5. You may either play one purple card (but not both) or you can mix your red 3 and blue 5 to create a purple 8!

Note that you may not mix to junk (playing a red and a blue on a green trick, for example), nor are you ever obligated to mix if you don't want to.

You are playing on a purple trick. In your hand are a yellow 1, a red 3, and a blue 5. You may junk the yellow, junk the red, or junk the blue. You could instead mix the red and blue, to form a purple 8. You cannot mix the yellow and red to junk an orange. Nor are you obligated to match by mixing red and blue to form a purple; since you have no purple cards, you do not have to match purple.

### **SMEARING - TRICK COLOR CHANGES**

If the trick is a **Primary Color** (red, blue, or yellow) and you **cannot** 'copy' the trick's color (by playing a single card of the trick's color), then you have the option to play two cards and '**smear**'. The first card must be a Primary Color that is different from the current color of the trick. This card is placed on whomever's card is currently winning the trick. That player is considered to have mixed those two cards (summing their values and melding the colors). The second card must be in the Secondary Color made by combining the two primary colors. The Secondary Color card is placed in front of you, and only the value of that card counts for you when determining if you win the trick.

Note that by smearing you have changed the color of the trick to your Secondary card's color. This changes how players who play on the trick after you must match if able. It also changes who wins the trick - now, the highest card in the new Secondary Color will win the trick.

Also note that both you and the smeared player have played in the trick's new color, so either of you might win it!

Red + Yellow = Orange

Blue + Red = Purple

Yellow + Blue = Green

Vincent leads a blue 2, then Claude copies with a blue 4. Since you have no blue cards, you have the option to smear. Your hand is a yellow 2, a green 5, and a green 7. You play the yellow 2 onto Claude's blue 4, turning the trick green. You then play the green 7 as your own card. Claude now has a green 6 in front of him (2+4=6, yellow + blue = green), but you have a green 7. You are winning the trick. Had you instead played the yellow 2 and the green 5, Claude would now be winning the trick. Vincent's blue 2 cannot win the trick, however, since his blue card was not the one smeared.

Note that you may not smear if you do not have the appropriate Secondary Color card (you may not smear then junk, smear then mix, or smear then play no card in the secondary suit you have just created). This means that you can never smear when you have just one card left in your hand. Note that this also means that a player who junks a card in a secondary suit can still win the trick if the trick is later smeared into that secondary suit!

Berthe leads a yellow 5. You have no yellow cards, so you junk a green 8. Pierre-Auguste smears the yellow 5 using a blue 1 and a green 7. It is now a green trick, and you are winning with an 8. Instead of losing a yellow trick, you are now winning a green trick!

### **AWARDING THE TRICK**

Once each player has played onto a trick, the player with the highest value in the trick's final color wins the trick.

The final color of the trick will be the color of the card that was led, unless a smear has changed it. What card or cards the trick winner takes (and then scores) depends on which game you play (see below).

In each game, the trick winner always leads the next trick.

### **ENDING THE ROUND**

Note that because players are sometimes playing 1 card and sometimes playing 2, players will run out of cards at different times during the round. Players who run out of cards just sit out until the round finishes.

The round ends after a trick is completed if either:

- The winner of the previous trick has no cards in hand, or
- Only one player still has cards in hand.

When a round ends you score. The game may then end. See *Pointillism* or *Impressionism*, below.

If the game has not ended, pass the black dealer chip left, shuffle all cards back into the deck (including leftover cards not used in the previous round), then play the next round. You'll need a pen and paper to track scores, and it is possible for players to have negative points.

### **SCORING IN POINTILLISM - POINTS ARE GOOD**

Each time you win a trick, add one card from the cards just played that matches the final color of the trick to your score pile and discard the rest. Note that the value of the card doesn't matter for scoring in Pointillism, only the color. Also note that no matter how many cards are played onto a trick, and whether the trick color changes, exactly one card is awarded to the trick winner, and the trick winner has no choice about the suit of that card.

A trick was led as yellow, but it got smeared and ended as an orange trick. Whoever wins the trick puts one orange card in their score pile (if someone mixed to play orange in that trick, the winner still takes an orange card – even if the winning card played was a mix!).

At the end of the round, if you bid null and do not win any tricks, you win a number of points based on the number of players (see table above); if you win any tricks, you lose that many points.

In a three-player game, you bid null and win one trick. You lose 25 points. You previously had 21 points, so you now negative 4 points.

If you bid colors and win at least one trick in each color you bid, you win points equal to the total number of tricks you win multiplied by the number of colors you bid. But if you don't win at least one trick in each color you bid, you get zero points for the hand.

You bid green, red, and yellow. You win a green trick, a red trick, two yellow tricks, and two orange tricks. You make your bid, and score 18 points (6 won tricks times 3 bid colors). Note that it doesn't matter that you didn't bid orange – as long as you make your bid, all tricks you win will score you points! Also note that for scoring, the value of each card does not matter at all; only the color of each card matters.

Now let's say you bid orange and green. You win four orange tricks, a red trick, and a purple trick. You score zero points because you do not make your bid.

Bidding all 6 colors is called 'chasing the rainbow'. If you successfully make your rainbow, you score an additional bonus 100 points, and therefore will almost certainly win the game. Losing a rainbow bid is worth 0 points.

If the round ends and there are still cards in your hand, discard those cards. Do not score these cards, regardless of your bid.

### **SCORING IN IMPRESSIONISM - POINTS ARE BAD**

When you win a trick, take all cards from that trick into your score pile. At the end of a round, add your hand to your score pile. Each card in your score pile has a value depending on whether or not its color is represented on the Bid Board (note that the available spaces vary depending on the number of players – check the Bid Board):

- If the color is not on the Board, discard all cards of that color in your score pile. These cards score no positive or negative points.
- For each card that matches the color on the 'Cancel' space, discard one other card of your choice from your score pile; if you run out of cards to Cancel, any remaining 'Cancel' cards are worth -1 point each.
- Each card that matches the color on a '+0' space is worth 0 points. • Each card that matches the color on a '+1' space is worth 1 point. • Each card that matches the color on a '+2' space is worth 2 points.

- Each card that matches the color on the '+Face' space is worth a number of points equal to the number on the card in your pile (not the number on the card on the bid board).

Pierre-Auguste, Mary and Vincent are playing Impressionism. During the bidding round, Pierre-Auguste plays a yellow card to the '+Face' space, Mary a purple to the +2, and Vincent a red to the Cancel. At the end of the round, everyone discards all of their scored cards except for their yellow, purple, and red cards. Vincent has a yellow 4, a purple 3, a purple 5, a red 2, and a red 3. The two red cards allow him to Cancel two cards. He removes the yellow 4, which otherwise would have been worth 4 points, and the purple 3, which otherwise would have been 2 points. He is left with the purple 5, which is worth 2 points – his final score of the round. He adds those 2 points to his running score, and prepares for the next round. Mary has just 3 red cards and a yellow 5. She uses one red card to Cancel the yellow card, and the other two count as -1 each. She subtracts 2 points from her running score. Pierre-Auguste wins no tricks, and so he scores zero points.

#### **THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:**

- The color of a secondary trick will never change. Once a primary trick is smeared, its color will never change again (since it has become secondary).
- The 5 of each Primary Color will win a trick of its color unless someone smears, and nobody can smear if they have a card of that Primary Color. So primary 5's are likely to win early in a round, while players will still be forced to match by copying.
- The 9 of each secondary trick will win unless someone mixes to a 9 or 10 (both of which require having a primary 5). So, secondary 9's are likely to win later in a round, after players have played their primary 5's.
- Players will always lead with exactly 1 card (you cannot mix when leading). Later players in the round will always play exactly 1 or 2 cards (you cannot mix and smear at the same time). You cannot junk 2 cards by mixing. You cannot junk after smearing.
- The card or cards awarded for winning a trick are put in your score pile face down, and cannot be seen by any player once the next trick starts.

#### **THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND: POINTILLISM**

- If you are bidding colors, try to win every trick you can – there's nothing to be lost and possibly many points to be gained. Winning tricks in colors you didn't bid is still worth points!
- Smear to win tricks in colors that other players won't lead. So a hand with a lot of red and yellow cards but no orange may be able to support an orange bid!

- Bidding null is very risky and difficult in a 3 player game, but very easy in a 5 player game. In either case, watch for cases where several players earlier in the turn order have bid null; that's a good time to make an ambitious bid, since they will essentially be helping you win the tricks you need! Similarly, if players earlier than you have all made high bids, you might lean more towards going null even if your hand contains high cards.

### **THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND: IMPRESSIONISM**

- The only cards you want to win are 'Cancel' cards, but trying to win those tricks can be risky – players may mix or smear to mess up your plans. Note that because colors have specific relations to other colors, some plays are much riskier than others because of the way a trick color may be mixed or smeared.

- Bidding first is good because it gives you the most flexibility. The first bid should either be onto the 'Cancel' or the '+Face' slot. However, bidding last offers a different kind of control, since you will have perfect information about what colors will end up being worth 0. Being the second to last bidder is typically the worst position.

### **THE DESIGNER:**

Jeffrey D. Allers lives with his wife and twin sons in Berlin, Germany and has worked there as an architect, youth pastor, and director of a community center. In 2001 he became obsessed with German games and since 2008 has had his own games published in Europe and the United States. He also enjoys writing about game design and his experiences as an American expatriate on his blog, Berlin Game Design, and in the "Postcards From Berlin" article series he began in 2005, which now appears on The Opinionated Gamers website.

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