

Mehrkopf



RULEBOOK



Introduction

Mehrkopf is a tactical card game for groups of two to six players. It is based on the game of Schafkopf that is played mainly in Bavaria, where it is regarded a piece of cultural heritage and part of the Bavarian way of life. Even today, Schafkopf is frequently played in pubs or beer gardens or at official Schafkopf competitions.

Traditionally, Schafkopf is played in groups of four players. And this is often where trouble starts: What if Sepp just this once won't stay outdoors with his sheep, but wants to join the game? According to the official rulebook, it is possible to play Schafkopf in groups of six: The dealer will have to miss one turn.

Mehrkopf was designed to address this problem. This methodical expansion makes it fun to play the game in groups of five or even six players. For Schafkopf veterans, this means: in groups of two, three or four players, everything remains as it is.



Eight completely new cards are added for groups of five players, and four more for six players. These new cards will be described in detail in the section on **card values** (page 7). The section **Variations according to the number of players** (see page 24) contains the most important Mehrkopf rules. If you are familiar with the general Schafkopf rules, this section should be sufficient for understanding how to play Mehrkopf.

What makes Mehrkopf (and the traditional Schafkopf) such a fascinating game are the many tactical possibilities and in the cooperative play within the two teams. Very often, it emerges only in the course of the game to which team each player belongs – and who plays with whom.

This rulebook contains instructions for the basic game only. Numerous regional variants, adaptations and particularities, too numerous to mention here, have their supporters. Of course, any of these local peculiarities can be integrated into the game of Mehrkopf, and it is easy to adapt the game accordingly. For those new to Mehrkopf, we recommend learning by doing, that is, playing their first games with Schafkopf or Mehrkopf regulars.



The game, even if it is not really difficult to play, is quite challenging to explain. If you are able to understand spoken German (with the charming Bavarian accent), you might find it helpful to watch some of our videos at www.mehrkopf.de. In any case, it is useful to keep in mind that basically, there are no more than two main rules:

- Bedienregeln (follow suit rule): When the first player plays the first, the leading card, all players have to follow suit and play a card of the same suit. If the leading card is a trump card, any of the trump cards in each player's hand have to be played. If a player does not have a card of the same suit or a trump card, that player may play any other card. The best strategy will be based on the gameplay situation at that point. Yet anything goes, and no single card is banned.
- Bringregel (bring out rule): If a player's hand contains the called card, that card must be played, brought out. In Mehrkopf, this rule also applies to the Beauty. These two cards decide how the partnerships of the declaring team and the non-declaring team are selected.

These two rules are the two guiding principles of the game. Keep them in mind when learning how to play the wonderful game of Mehrkopf.

To the veteran card players among you, it is crucial to note that even if suit symbols (i.e. Acorns, Leaves, Hearts and Bells) appear on the main trump cards (O, U and G), these cards are (in most cases) not part of a suit. As trump cards, they are separate from the suits.

But now let's start!

Enjoy and have lots of fun playing Mehrkopf!

Tim Parth
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Game objective

The objective of the game is to score a certain number of points. The winning score varies with the game mode and the number of players. As a general rule, the sum of half of the total achievable points plus one additional point scores victory. The following table provides an overview of the winning thresholds for both the declaring and the non-declaring team.

Number of players	Achievable points (total)	Winning threshold f. declaring team	Winning threshold f. non.declaring team	Number of cards in the game
2	120 points	61 points	60 points	32
3	120 points	61 points	60 points	24
4	120 points	61 points	60 points	32
5	148 points	75 points	74 points	40
6	120 points	61 points	60 points	48

When playing Mehrkopf in a group of five players, the total number of achievable points and consequently the winning threshold changes.

If the non-declaring team has gained at least one fourth of the total number



of achievable points, it has become Schneider-frei (tailor-free). Any victory with fewer points is a win mit Schneider (with tailor). When playing for money or points, this has implications for the calculation of the score (see [settling the score](#), page 14). Otherwise it is of no consequence.



The basics

Card values



The game contains the following four suits:

Acorns, Leaves, Hearts and Bells. You will need to memorize the four suits in that order. Each suit contains the following symbols:

Card	Symbol	Point value	Note
Ass/Sau (Ace/Pig)	A	11	
Zehn (Ten)	10	10	
Schöne (Beauty)	S	6	♠x5 or x6
König (King)	K	4	
Ober/Geier (Officer/Vulture)	O	3	



Card	Symbol	Point value	Note
Unter/Wenz (Sergant/Wenz*)	U	2	
Gefreiter (Private)	G	1	
Neun (Nine)	9	0	
Acht (Eight)	8	0	♣ x3 to x6
Sieben (Seven)	7	0	♠ x3 to x6
Sechs (Six)	6	0	♥ x6
Preuße (Prussian)	P	-7	♣ x6

The cards Ober (O), Unter (U) and Gefreiter (G) are the main trump cards (Stammtrümpfe in German). The trick value within the group of trumps is determined on the basis of their suit. The main trump cards will take any trick over other cards, even if they do not bring many points. In a normal game, the highest trump card is the Ober of Acorns, followed by the Ober of Leaves, the Ober of Hearts and the Ober of Bells and then by the Unter of Acorns, the Unter of Leaves and so on. Accordingly, the last main trump card is the Gefreiter of Bells.

The point value of the cards Six to Nine is zero, and so, colorful expressions for these worthless cards have evolved: Nichtserle/Nixer (nothingie/nixie),

Luschen (zero count value card, or word for loser), Leere (blanks) or sometimes Spatzen (sparrows). In Bavarian tradition, the public image of Prussians is rather poor. In the game of Mehrkopf, this is even reflected in a negative value, a value less than zero. The Prussian Mehrkopf players among you are kindly asked not to take offense. It is, after all, only a game.

The Ace and the Beauty, the two declarable cards in Mehrkopf, have special roles to play: in the course of a normal game, they can be called out. Whoever has one or both of the two cards in their hand belongs, together with the caller, to the declaring team. Whoever has none of these two cards in hand remains a member of the non-declaring team.

Within each suit sequence, the trick-taking order corresponds to the point value. The sequence is accordingly (with the highest trick to the left):

A, 10, S, K, 9, 8, 7, 6, P

For a Geier, Wenz or Niederer Solo, the order of the former trump cards are again changed according to their point value (see [game modes](#), page 18):

A, 10, S, K, O, U, G, 9, 8, 7, 6, P



10



Shuffling, cutting and dealing

Before starting to play, the starting dealer is determined. Whoever draws the highest value card, or simply the owner of the deck, will deal first. The dealer shuffles the cards and places the shuffled deck in front of the player to his right, who will now cut the cards. Now, the dealer distributes the cards in clockwise direction, giving four cards to each player in the first round and four more cards in the second round. The dealer will start with the player to his left, who is now in the position of the starting player. This position is particularly important for winning solo games.

When cutting the cards, the cutting player has to take a minimum of three cards for every cut. For each deal, the cards can be cut up to three times. Alternatively, a block of cards may be drawn from the center of the pile and laid on top. The cutter may also knock on the pile, thereby gaining the right to change the dealing mode, directing the dealer to deal all eight cards at once instead of four cards in two rounds or backwards, i.e. counterclockwise.

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When the game is over, the positions of the dealer, and therefore of the cutter and the starting player, will cycle in clockwise direction. As soon as

all players have held each position once, one round is completed.

A player who gets six zero value cards (Nichtserle/Nixer) and no main trump card (Ober, Unter or Gefreiter) can refuse the hand. In this case, everybody returns their cards to the deck, the positions change, and the next dealer can try to deal a better hand.

Bidding

Before the first round starts, the game mode and the composition of the teams will be decided. This is done by an auction, where all players get to bid for the game. The player who wins the auction will declare the game and thereby specify the game mode. Beginning with the starting player, each player states whether he will pass or play. If more than one player bids for the game, the player with the higher value (see game modes) gets to call the game mode: He declares the game. A solo game beats a normal game, and a tout game beats a solo. If two or more players call the same game mode, the sequence of players, starting with the dealer, will determine who wins the auction.

11



12 The declaring player will now specify what subtype of the game mode will be played. For a solo game, the type of solo will be identified (see solo game). In a normal game, the Rufsau suit will be stated (see normal game).

If none of the players bid for the game, the last player of the round (the dealer) has several options: He might direct all hands to be returned, which will lead to a change of position and the start of a new game, or enforce a Must-Game, or he could demand a Ramsch (see respective sections).

Trick taking

Once the game mode has been settled, the starting player (at the dealer's left) will play a card. In clockwise direction, all players will add one card. When all players have played their card, the winner of this trick is determined, who will take the cards and place them face-down on the table in front of him. The winner will then play the next card, starting a new trick. The game will continue in this way until all cards have been played. This is the case after 8 rounds. (In a two-player game, this happens after 16 rounds.)

13 The first card that is played in one trick determines the leading suit. It controls which cards have to be played in the course of the trick. If the leading card is a trump card, then all players also have to play one of their trump cards. If it is not a trump card, then all players have to follow suit and play a card of the same suit. This is – as mentioned above – basically the first of no more than two rules: the leading suit and/or the played trump have to be followed (**Bedienregel / follow suit rule**). Whoever is unable to follow suit, having no appropriate card, is now free to play any card. It might be a clever move to grab a trick by playing a trump card into a normal game. Another possibility would be to conspire with a partner by playing a card with a high point-value. But be careful not to give your points to the enemy!

Trump cards can only be trumped by other trump cards of higher point value. A trump card always takes the trick over a card of the leading suit.

It is important to keep in mind that the main trump cards are not part of the suits. If, in a normal game, the Nine of Acorns is the leading card, then the Gefreiter of Acorns, the Unter of Acorns and the Ober of Acorns still remain



14 remain trump cards! Exceptions to this rule apply for the three solo modes of *Geier*, *Wenz* and *Niederer* (see there).

If a player plays an incorrect card, for example by not following suit when he can, that player immediately loses the game. A falsely played card (i.e. a revoke) will very soon become apparent to somewhat experienced players in the course of a game, when the cheater plays a card of the leading suit during one of the following tricks. In the depths of Bavaria, such swindlers might well find themselves with the contents of their beer stein in their face instead of their belly (*Bier ins G'sicht*).

Settling the score

When all cards are on the table, the points that have been scored by both the declaring and the non-declaring team are added up. Taking into consideration the number of players, the total of points and the game mode, the winner is determined.

Depending on how venturesome the players are feeling, they may count the number of tricks each

player has won – or they could spice up their game by playing for game units. Obviously, the player who has gained the highest number of units at the end of the evening is the winner.

The score is settled as follows:

After a game is finished, the point values of the cards in both piles, that of the declaring and that of the non-declaring team, are summed up. According to the winning thresholds mentioned above, there will be winners and there will be losers. The game units will be credited to the winning team and deducted from the losing team, taking into consideration the game mode, the strength of the victory and any additional ratings.

For a normal game, one unit is credited, and for a solo game, five units. This so-called base rate (*Grundtarif*) is credited for the game mode. If the non-declaring team has not become *Schneider-frei* (i.e. has scored less than one fourth of the total achievable points), one additional unit is added. If that team has not been able to take even one single trick (and have therefore been *played black – schwarz gespielt*), then two units are added to the base rate. This so-called *demand rate* (*Leistungstarif*) is paid for the strength of





the victory. Each member of the losing team will relinquish the sum of all rates to the group of winners, who will distribute the resulting total units evenly among themselves. In case of a solo win, the soloist will receive units from every other player, who will in turn each claim the respective units from a losing soloist.

In addition, extra credit is commonly calculated for the so-called Laufende (*ongoing*). The Laufende is a collection of main trumps that have been in the possession of a team throughout the course of a game. The sequence of these trumps descends from the Ober of Acorns or from a solo game's highest trump card. If a team has more than three Laufende, they may claim one unit for each Laufende. It is necessary to keep track of the Laufende throughout the course of the game in order to calculate the correct number of units in the end. Newbies may prefer to forego this extra rule, also called premium rate (*Prämientarif*) for their first few games.

If, in the course of a game, any player makes a mistake that leads to the abortion of that game, the trick is immediately considered as lost and that player's points are deducted as defined above.



Again, there are numerous regional variants. Each group of players will need to sort out the rules for settling the score before they start playing. Otherwise, confusion (or worse) will ensue.

Game modes

The basic game – how to determine which player has taken a trick – remains the same in all Mehrkopf variants. However, some things change with the game mode that is determined at the start of a game: Which players will team up, or which cards count as trump cards or as suit cards, may vary from game mode to game mode. In this booklet, we mention only the most popular variants. There are countless other regional game modes that can also be played with Mehrkopf.





Normal game

The normal game – as the name suggests – is the basic game. Here, the declaring player calls a suit (a Rufsau) of which he has at least one card. (Trump cards don't count!) The suit's Ace does not count: the Ace is the Rufsau, the card being called. When playing in a group of five or six, the Beauty is automatically called together with the Ace. Whoever has either the Ace or the Beauty or both in their hand is, together with the caller, in the declaring team. As any player might be in the possession of both Ace and Beauty, it is always 2 against 3 (for groups of 5 players) and 3 against 3 or 2 against 4 (for groups of 6 players).

If in a normal game a suit was declared and the leading card (of that suit) is played, then whoever has the Ace of leading suit on their hand is obliged to play it. The same applies to the Beauty. If a player has both the Ace and the Beauty, then that player must play the Ace in the first turn and the Beauty in the second turn. An exception to the rule is what is commonly referred to as *Umspielen* (playing around): If the Rufsau's owner has so many cards of the leading suit that it is obvious that the trick would be taken by another player, both the Ace and Beauty may be kept back and another card of the same suit may be played. When at the end of such a trick the Rufsau has not



been played, it is immediately apparent that either one of the players has made a mistake, or the Rufsau was kept in a player's move of *Umspielen*.

If the owner of a Rufsau declares the Rufsau suit, the Rufsau must be played as the leading card. The same rule applies to the Beauty. In the normal game mode, all Ober, Unter and Gefreite as well as all heart cards are trump cards. Accordingly, the highest trump is the Ober of Acorns and the lowest is the Seven of Hearts or the Six of Hearts (in groups of 6 players).

As in the normal game, all heart cards are trump cards, the Ace of Hearts (and consequently also the Heart-Beauty) cannot be called. Only suits, which are separate from trump cards, can be called.

Whoever declares the leading suit in a normal game now belongs to the declaring team. The players who have been called (i.e. the players with the corresponding Ace and/or Beauty in their hands) also belong to the declaring team. The rest are in the non-declaring team. The team composition has an effect on the winning threshold.





Solo game

Different varieties of solos are possible. What they have in common is that one player wages a solitary battle against all other players. The best position to win a solo is that of the starting player (to the left of the dealer), who is able to optimize the sequence of cards brought to the game. A very good hand, of course, is also very useful.

In the suit solo, the soloist declares a suit, turning that suit into the trump suit (thereby replacing the Hearts as trump cards). (It is, of course, also possible to play a *Red Solo*, where Hearts remains the trump suit.)

For the Geier (Ober), Wenz (Unter) and Niederer (Gefreiter) solos, only the four corresponding trump cards will take the trick. All other trump cards are ordered according to their point value in the corresponding suit.

Accordingly, in the example of the Geier-Solo, only the four Obers are trump cards, and the Unter and Gefreite cards are ordered into the suits as follows:

A, 10, S, K, U, G, 9, 8, 7, 6, P



Tout game

If a player hopes to take all tricks in a deal with his hand, he can call a tout game. (Tout is French for everything and in some Bavarian regions has been interpreted as Du (you) game). If another player is able to take just one single trick, the soloist has immediately lost. When settling the score, the tout game winnings will be doubled.

Sie game

The *Sie* game is a special and a very rare case. In this game, a player's hand is composed of all eight of the highest main trump cards (ranging from the Ober of Acorns to the Unter of Bells). Traditionally, the cards in this hand will be framed and, furnished with the player's name and the date, used to decorate the wall. The *Sie* game is not played out; the cards are immediately placed face-up on the table.





Wedding game

If a player has only one single trump card, he can offer a Hochzeit (*wedding*) by placing his only trump card face down on the table during the auction. If another player now agrees to enter into the marriage, he will exchange his own non-trump card with the card on the table and thereby join the giver of the trump card in a team. It is obvious to all players that the former does not have any further trump cards, but can only gift his partner with points. The accepting player should in turn have plenty of trump cards so as to be able to pull her partner along. A wedding game scores the normal rate.

Ramsch game

A *Ramsch* game is often played as the last game of the evening. It may also be called by the dealer if none of the players before him are willing to bid for a game. This is only possible if the dealer is able to declare a normal game. (If he has, for example, all Aces or no single suit card in his hand, he is unable to do so.)



In a *Ramsch* game, the game objective is reversed. The aim now is to take as few tricks as possible. The player with the highest point score loses the game and settles the score with the normal rate.

Must Spiel

A *Muss-Spiel* (Must game) may be called by the dealer if none of the other players are willing to bid for a game. The dealer does this by specifying one card (usually the old man, the Ober of Acorns). Whoever is in possession of this card is obliged to call the game.





Variations according to the numbers of player

2 players

A game with two players is also referred to as *Offiziersschafkopf* (*Officer's Sheephead*), *Offiziersmuck* (*Officer's gig*) or *Bauernschafkopf* (*Farmer's Schafkopf*). For a two-player game, only the following cards remain in the game:

O, U, A, 10, K, 9, 8, 7

After shuffling, the dealer places 8 cards in two rows of four face down in front of the opponent, and another two rows of four in front of himself. Then, another two rows of four are placed on top of the opponent's face down rows – this time, face up. The remaining eight cards are placed face up on the dealer's own cards. This way, half of the cards are visible for both players, and the other half is not.



The opponent then decides whether he wants to play or to pass. If he passes, then the dealer will declare the game. Only normal games are possible. Trump cards are Ober or Unter and the corresponding suit cards. What makes the game interesting is the fact that half of the cards are visible. Right after the auction, one already needs to plan one's first moves.

When laying out the tricks, one card is placed face up on the table, and the opponent responds with an appropriate card. As soon as the trick has been taken, any face down card that might have been underneath the used card is flipped and can now be used. All other rules remain the same.

3 players

When playing in groups of three players, only the following cards will remain in the game:

O, U, A, 10, K, 9

All other cards are put aside. Only solos are possible. All other rules remain the same.



**4 players**

When playing in a foursome, only the following cards remain in the game:

O, U, A, 10, K, 9, 8, 7

With four players, there are no changes to the rules set down above.

5 players

In groups of 5 players, only the following cards remain in the game:

O, U, G, A, 10, S, K, 9, 8, 7

The Gefreiten cards are now considered to be the third and lowest rank of main trumps, lower than the Unter card and higher than the respective trump suit cards (usually Hearts). The Beauty is sorted according to her point value of 6 between the Ten (10) and the King (K). If in a normal game the Ace of one suit is called, then the Beauty of the same suit is automatically called as well and must also be played, *brought out*.



As the Beauty (S) with 6 points and the Gefreiten (G) with one point each are added to the deck, the total of achievable points increases to 148. The winning threshold becomes 74 for members of the non-declaring team and 75 for members of the declaring team (who always need one additional point, *see card values*, page 7).

6 players

In groups of six players, all 48 cards remain in the game:

O, U, G, A, 10, S, K, 9, 8, 7, 6, P

The Six is ranked below the Seven as an additional zero point value card (Nichtserle/Nixer). The Prussians follow one rank below. Whoever takes a trick containing a Prussian receives 7 minus points. A Prussian is just the card to play to blight a trick that one expects the opponent to win.

As the Prussians cancel out the additional points gained by the Beauty and the Gefreiten, the number of achievable points returns to 120 points – and the winning threshold is 61.



7 players

A game with seven players is played exactly like a game with six. The dealer, however, has to miss one turn...

The language of Schafkopf

In the traditional conversational mode of *Schafkopf*, and by extension of *Mehrkopf*, a distinct set of expressions and designations has evolved which, for devout players, is simply part of the game. In the following, we will present a very small segment of the existing vocabulary. Some of the commonly used terms are not suited for the eyes and ears of our younger players and need to be excluded here. Further notations for special cases may be developed and distributed at the players' own discretion.

*And now for some of the milder examples:*

The Ober of Acorns is *der Alte* – *the old one* or *the old man*. The Ace of Acorns, however, is *die Alte* – the female form of *the old one* or *the old woman*.



The green suit of Leaves is traditionally also referred to as *die Blauen* – *the blue ones*.



„Schmier‘ nicht viel, schmier‘ nicht wenig – spiel‘ nen kleinen König“
 („Don't give a lot, don't give a trifling – try to play a little king")

For a comprehensive collection of expressions (in German), please visit the German Wikipedia at de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schafkopf-Sprache



Mehrkopf



www.mehrkopf.de

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14 years +



2-6 players



**NÜRNBERGER-
SPIELKARTEN-
VERLAG GMBH**

