

Crapaud/Crapette

A competitive patience game for two players

I describe a variant of the game in <https://www.pagat.com/patience/crapette.html>. It is a charming game which requires skill and close attention, but no deep thought, and is notable for the sudden changes in fortune which arise towards the end.

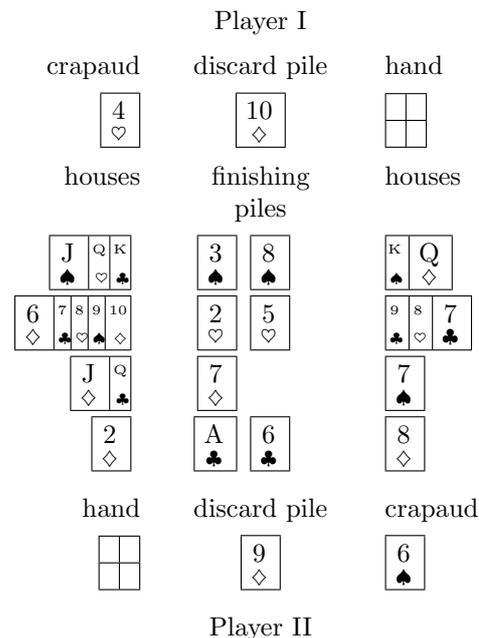
Rules of the game

1. Division of the cards Take two full packs of 52 cards each, and give each player about half the cards from each pack. Each player shuffles her¹ cards and deals them face-downwards into two piles. On reaching her last card, she gives the pile containing that card to her opponent. Each player now has just 52 cards. Each player cuts her pack and proceeds to the deal.

2. Deal Each player deals 13 cards face down into a pile, her *crapaud* or *reserve* or *stock*, and 4 cards face up to start the *houses*. Each now turns up the top card of her *crapaud*; the remaining 35 cards are placed face down as her *hand*. Note that only the eight cards in the houses and the two top cards of the *crapauds* have been seen at this stage by either player.

3. Play The player with the card of lower value on her *crapaud* starts.²

Players take alternate turns; a turn consists of one or more moves. I give a diagram of a possible situation.



Each player has a *hand* (in which all the cards are face down), a *discard pile* (in which the cards are face up, but only the top one is visible) and a *crapaud* (in which the cards are mostly face down, except for the top one, which is face up, and only the top one is visible). Between the players are

— eight *houses*, in which cards are piled, enough of each being visible to identify it, in descending order and alternating colours,

¹The feminine includes the masculine, neuter, binary, in-transition, don't-know and prefer-not-to-tell.

²Ace counts low. Among cards of the same denomination, use the bridge rule – spades over hearts over diamonds over clubs. If the two *crapaud* cards are identical, turn the hands upside down for the moment and compare the bottom cards.

— eight *finishing piles*, two for each suit, in each of which the cards are all of the same suit, in ascending order from the aces.

Any of these 22 piles may be empty; in particular, at the start of the game both discard piles and all eight finishing piles are empty.

The interest of the game comes from the variety of possible moves; the next bit is inevitably complicated. It will be simpler if we keep firmly in mind the principles that every move involves moving just one card from one pile to another, and that no player is obliged to notice more than one legal move.³ Furthermore, there are no secrets; at every point, both players see exactly the same cards, though some of them will subsequently be concealed. I shall classify possible moves into five types:

- (a) A player may take either the top card of her discard pile or the top card of any house and play it either to a finishing pile, if it is the next card due on that pile (an ace goes to an empty finishing pile),
 or to another house, if it is in sequence with the cards already there, or to be a new foundation for an empty house,
 or to her opponent's discard pile, provided that the top card of that pile is of the same suit and exactly one step away, so that $7\heartsuit$ may be placed on $6\heartsuit$ or $8\heartsuit$, but not on anything else,
 or, **provided there is an empty house**, to her opponent's crapaud, if the top card of that crapaud is of the same suit and exactly one step away.

Note here that the empty house must be empty *before* the move; she cannot move a singleton card from a house to her opponent's crapaud unless some other house is already empty.

(b) **Provided that there is an empty house**, she may take the top card from her crapaud and play it in any of the four ways listed in (a). In this case she will turn the next card in her crapaud (if there is one) face up (of course it may already be face up if it has been covered by some previous move by her opponent).

(c) Even if there is no empty house, she may take the top card from her crapaud and play it to a finishing pile, if it is the next card due on that pile (e.g., an ace onto an empty finishing pile).

(d) She may take the top card from her hand and play it either according to the rules in (a) or onto her discard pile.

(e) **If her hand is empty and there is no empty house**, she may convert her discard pile into her hand by turning it over and play the new top card as in (d). (If she has emptied her hand while there is still an empty house, she must first occupy that house with a move as in (a) or (b), before turning the pile and playing from it.)

A turn ends when either a player plays from her hand onto her discard pile, or both her hand and her discard pile are empty (but her crapaud is not).

The game ends when a player's hand, discard pile and crapaud are all empty; and she is then the winner.

4. Example moves

In the diagram given, Player I has the following moves:

- (i) She can play the $10\spadesuit$ from her discard pile either onto the $9\spadesuit$ on Player II's discard pile or onto the $J\heartsuit$ at the top of the first-left house.
- (ii) She can move the $J\heartsuit$ from the $Q\heartsuit$ in the first-left house onto the $Q\spadesuit$ in the first-right house.
- (iii) She can move the $6\spadesuit$ from the second-left house to the second-right house.
- (iv) She can move the $7\clubsuit$ from the second-right house either onto the $8\spadesuit$ in the bottom-right house or onto the $6\clubsuit$ on the bottom-right finishing pile.
- (v) She can move the $7\heartsuit$ in the third-right house to the bottom-right house.

³This is the principal point on which the rules I am describing differ from those which you are likely to find elsewhere. My reasons for preferring the variation I describe are (i) that I do not like to legislate against oversights which don't interfere with the evolution of the game (ii) that I wish to give maximum scope for the exercise of ingenuity.

(vi) She can move the $8\heartsuit$ in the bottom-right house onto the $9\heartsuit$ on her opponent's discard pile, or onto the $7\heartsuit$ on the third-left finishing pile.

This is just a list of possibilities. A reasonably sensible sequence would be

$8\heartsuit$ onto the $7\heartsuit$;

$7\spadesuit$ onto Player II's crapaud;

(note that these cannot be played in the reverse order)

$10\heartsuit$ onto the $J\spadesuit$;

$7\clubsuit$ from the second-right house into the (now empty) third-right house;

$8\heartsuit$ from the second-right house into the empty bottom-right house;

$9\clubsuit$ from the second-right house onto the $10\heartsuit$ now in the top-left house;

$8\heartsuit$ from the bottom-right house onto the $9\clubsuit$;

$7\clubsuit$ from the third-right house onto the $8\heartsuit$.

(The reason for these manoeuvres is the fundamental rule: one card at a time. You can move stacks only if you have enough empty houses to provide temporary resting places.) Now she has three empty houses; probably she will use these to take cards from her crapaud (depending, of course, on the card exposed by moving the $10\heartsuit$ from her discard pile). Only when your crapaud is empty does it become normal play to play from your hand or your discard pile when you have an empty house.

If, in the diagram, it is Player II to move, she might do the following:

$8\heartsuit$ onto the $7\heartsuit$;

$7\clubsuit$ from the second-right house onto the $6\clubsuit$;

$7\spadesuit$ onto the $8\heartsuit$ in the second-right house;

$6\heartsuit$ onto the $7\spadesuit$;

$7\clubsuit$ from the second-left house into the empty third-right house;

$8\heartsuit$ from the second-left house into the empty bottom-right house;

$9\spadesuit$ onto the $8\spadesuit$;

$10\heartsuit$ onto the $J\spadesuit$;

$7\clubsuit$ onto the $8\heartsuit$ in the bottom-right house;

$6\heartsuit$ onto $7\clubsuit$;

$7\spadesuit$ back into the empty third-right house;

$8\heartsuit$ from the second-right house onto the $9\spadesuit$;

$9\clubsuit$ onto the $10\heartsuit$;

$8\heartsuit$ from the second-left house onto the $9\clubsuit$;

$7\spadesuit$ onto the $8\heartsuit$ in the top-left house

also getting three empty houses to help evacuate her crapaud.

Remark In the example I have been assuming the standard ordering king-queen-jack. The Portuguese custom is, or used to be, king-jack-queen.

5. Draws Very occasionally the game ends in a draw; typically because some vital cards have got bottled up in a crapaud underneath a pile of 'gifts'.

6. Sportsmanship Crapaud is not an Olympic sport and there is therefore no need for an elaborate set of rules & penalties against unsportsmanlike behaviour. The following, however, make for a cleaner game.

(i) When you have let a card go, it's played. (This applies especially when you have played a card from your hand onto your discard pile, noticing too late that you could have put it somewhere else, thereby prolonging your turn. Of course you can sometimes play a card back again if you were just re-organising the houses, as in paragraph 4 above.)

(ii) Keep your discard pile tidy so that neither you nor your opponent can see any but the top card.

(iii) I have not felt any need for a rigid touch-and-move rule (as in chess – 'if you touch a piece you must move it'), but of course if you have lifted a card from your hand enough to see what it is, then you must play it.

(iv) You need to agree with your opponent on whether a ‘stack’ can be moved from one house to another without following the formal move sequence. (With one open house you can move a stack of two; with two open houses, a stack of four, as in the example above.) If you have not played with your current opponent recently, I suggest lifting the stack you have in mind, gesturing to where you wish to put it, and if your adversary shows any hesitation, putting it back and going through the full set of moves.

(v) Note that a turn continues until the player on move either exhausts her hand and discard pile, or plays from her hand to the discard pile (if she has an empty hand and only one card left in her discard pile, a gesture will suffice). Of course moving cards repetitively back and forth among the houses counts as time-wasting and is deprecated, though not exactly forbidden, as it may be the result of innocent confusion. Draws occur when there are hardly any cards left in the hands and discard piles, and a game enters a sterile cycle of repeated moves; if neither player wishes to break the sequence this will soon become apparent, and a draw should be agreed.

(vi) The sequences suggested in the worked example above (especially that for Player II) show that a bit of thought may be required to find the best route (though with practice you will find that there is a rather small number of basic situations). Accordingly you will quite often want to sit and stare at a position for a while, which is very dull for your opponent, especially if you’re doing well and getting a particularly long turn. The only means I know of settling the question of who is thinking too much is to use chess clocks. An ordinary setting would be 15 minutes for each player for the whole game.

7. Tactics and strategies My own experience suggests that the following points should be borne in mind.

(a) Spend a bit of time in private preparation working out which stacks can be moved, and how, when you have open houses. (With three open houses, for instance, you can move a stack of eight.)

(b) Emptying your crapaud is a slow business, and consequently takes high priority when you have an open house. Correspondingly, you usually take any opportunity to add cards to your opponent’s crapaud.

(c) It is however usual for both crapauds to be empty before the game ends, and kings in the discard pile seem to be the most serious problem in the later stages. So I think it is sometimes worth playing a king from your discard pile to an empty house even if there are a few cards waiting in your crapaud.

(d) It is certainly worth giving your opponent as many court cards as possible. Note however that if you move cards from houses onto her discard pile, she is quite likely to be able to move them straight back at the beginning of her next turn; so you should consider whether they may be more use to you where they are.

(e) Similarly, when you see a card which can be moved from a house to a finishing pile, remember that neither you nor your opponent will be able to move it back, and it is not always obvious who will benefit most from leaving it where it is.

(f) It is probably worth keeping houses ‘tidy’; in particular, if you have two houses

$$10 \ 9 \ 8 \ 7 \qquad 8 \ 7 \ 6 \ 5$$

(with the sevens of the same colour) and an empty house, it is usually worth changing them to

$$10 \ 9 \ 8 \ 7 \ 6 \ 5 \qquad 8 \ 7 \ .$$

The reason for this is that your turn will end with taking an unknown card from your hand, and there is a better chance that it will give you a route to an empty house if there are some short piles in the houses.

(g) Accurate play (which is mostly a matter of noticing your opportunities) becomes more important towards the end of the game, when the turns become longer and a single open house can tip the balance between winning and losing.

(h) Since you can hope to have a choice of exactly when to turn your discard pile and play from it, it is worth remembering the two or three cards at the bottom of it. Peeking is illegal.

(i) The diagram situation in paragraph 3 is not one which would be expected at the beginning of a turn in a game between competent players. Why not?