

Pontoon

A card game for practising quick addition!

Here is a version of Pontoon without the hard edged gambling side usually associated with the game! We think of it as 'Pontoon Lite'. It's a great game for helping children speed up their addition skills for numbers up to 21.

You will need a pack of cards. The idea is to be the player that gets cards to the value of 21 or the nearest to 21 for that particular round. If you like, have some low-value coins or counters that players can win at the end of each round.

Shuffle the cards and deal 2 cards to each player, face down. The player to the left of the dealer goes first. Usually they play their cards so other players cannot see them. However, with younger children, they could play them face up so you can help them with the addition. For this game, the court cards count as 10, and aces count as either 11 or 1 - the player can choose, depending on how close they are to the target of 21.

The first player counts up the value of the cards in their hand. Now's your chance to help them with their numeracy skills, and here are a few strategies to help. Choose a method suitable for your child's ability and preferred learning style:

- Draw a number line from 1-21. Encourage your child to count on from the larger number to find the total.
- Use counters or other small objects. Ask your child to count out the larger of the 2 numbers into one pile. Make another pile of the other number. Now count up the total.
- Encourage your child to use their knowledge of number bonds to 10 and 20, eg $7 + 3 = 10$; $17 + 3 = 20$ and so on. If they have a 7 and a 4 for their cards, point out that the 4 can be thought of as $3 + 1$, and the sum becomes $(7 + 3) + 1$. There's a number bond to 10 there! Now add the 1, to give a total of 11.
- Use doubles and near doubles, a popular method that teachers encourage children to use. If they are dealt a 7 and an 8, point out that double 7 is 14, so $7 + 8$ can be thought of as $(7 + 7) + 1$, which is $14 + 1$, giving a total of 15.
- If they are dealt a court card or a 10 plus another card of a lower value, encourage younger children to count on 10 from the second card, either using counters or their fingers. As their understanding of place value increases, they should be able to understand that if you add 10 to a number, the 'units' number remains the same, and the 'tens' number increases, so $10 + 9$ becomes 19. The aim is that your child should not have to work out how to add 10 - they just understand why it happens and can do it in their head!
- Similarly, if a child can add 10 to a number, they can be encouraged to add 9 by first adding 10 and then subtracting 1, eg $4 + 9$ is $(4 + 10) - 1$, to give 13.

Once the player has added up the total of their 2 cards, they can then ask the dealer for another card by saying 'Twist' to get nearer to the target of 21. They can do this as many times as they want unless they think another card might make them go over 21. Perhaps discuss the chance of this happening the nearer they are to 21 - a quick intro to probability! Then they say 'Stick' and place their cards face down on the table. If the new card takes the total to over 21, the player is said to have gone 'Bust' and hands in their cards. They are then out for the rest of that round

Once the first player has said 'Stick' or gone 'Bust', play turns to the next player and so on. The dealer is the last player to play their cards and plays them face up for all the other players to see.

Any player that scores 21 wins a coin or small counter. Any player that scores 21 with a pontoon (that is, they were initially dealt an ace and a ten or a court card) gets 2 coins or counters. If a player scores 21 or less with 5 cards, they have a five card trick and win 3 counters or coins. If no one scores 21, the player that gets nearest to 21 wins a coin or counter.

Shuffle the cards again, and let the player to the left of the first dealer deal the cards for the next round.