



Durak, meaning fool, is the card game of choice in the majority of Russia. It is mainly played as a drinking game with the 'fool', the loser, required to drink a large glass of vodka. Despite its drinking game origins it is a game of skill and is a great game for between two and six players.

The game uses the Russian pack of 36 cards: 6 low to Ace high inclusive, with the 2-5 removed. Each player is dealt six cards, then the top card of the remaining deck is revealed and placed face up and visible underneath the pack (which is called the 'talon') - this card gives the 'trump suit' for that round.

HOW TO PLAY (Simplified Podkidnoy / 4-PLAYER VERSION)

Player A the player with the lowest card (6 of clubs is the lowest) begins the game by 'attacking' the player to their left. They do this by playing any one or more cards of the same number from their hand face up on the playing area. **Player B**, the player to the left, must 'defend' by playing higher card(s) on top of the first, to beat each card. If another player (**A**, **C**, or **D**) has the same number cards played by **B** they can then play those cards which **Player B** must also beat - either by playing a higher card or by playing any card of the trump suit (or a higher trump if the 'attacking' card is a trump). Up to six cards may be played to attack **Player B**.

If the defending player is unable, or chooses not to defend, they declare this, and take all the played cards to their hand. The other players (starting with the main attacker) draw back up to six cards. If **Player B** successfully beats all the attacking cards, the attack is declared 'completed', the played cards are discarded from the game, and all players draw back up to six cards in clockwise order starting with the defending player. Then it is **Player B's** turn to attack and **Player C** defends.

If **Player B** was unable to defend, then their turn to attack is SKIPPED and instead **Player C** attacks **Player D**. Players **A** and **B** may join in any further attacks on **Player C** if their cards match any played.

At the end of each turn, whether or not the defense was successful, the following action is performed: starting from the main attacker, followed by anyone else who contributed cards, and culminating with the defender, each player with fewer than six cards in their hand must draw cards from the deck until they have six cards in their hand. When the deck runs out of cards, play simply carries on without any more cards being drawn. At this point, when someone runs out of cards, they are done with the game, and everyone else continues. Each player draws as many cards as they need (e.g. if there are six cards left in the deck and the attacker has just spent their entire hand, they draw the entire deck and no one else draws any cards). The order in which this is done is strategically important since the last card in the deck is by definition a trump. No players may examine the discard pile at any point.

Play continues until there are no more cards left to draw from the deck (including the up-turned trump card), at which point it is a race to get rid of all the cards.

WINNING THE GAME

There are no winners in Durak — only one loser. The last person with cards left in their hand is the loser (the fool or "durak"). That person is the dealer for the next game, and the person to the left of the fool is the first attacker of the next game. This player is the fool (durak) and is ridiculed by the other players. In the partnership game, when one team has played all of their cards, the team which is left holding cards loses.

TIPS AND TRICKS

The strategy in this game comes from deciding when to attempt to complete a defense, and when to simply pick up the attacking cards and forfeit the next turn. This decision will depend upon your knowledge of: The cards in the opponents hands - what did they pick up last? What cards are in your own hand? Which cards have been played and discarded? and Which are left in the deck?

Generally speaking it is sensible to hold on to trump cards until the latter stages of the game when they will enable you to go out quickly. Another viable strategy is to, attack your opponent with high cards or trumps they cannot beat thereby keeping them picking up cards to their hand, stopping them from playing, and allowing you to draw better cards from the deck.

The 2 player game is more skillful and card counting can be crucial. In 3 and more players it is also essential to keep a constant view of play in order to place cards during another players' defense. With only 6 attack slots, there is often a rush as all the attacking players scramble to play worthless cards from their hands. A slow player, or one not anticipating what will be played, may quickly fall behind.