

Official Rules: Freelance

Patrick Richard

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The Game

1. A *game* of Freelance is played by 3 players seated in a circle, with a standard 52-card deck of cards. Aces are high, and there are no bowers or jokers.
2. A player's objective is to win the game.
3. All players begin the game with a *score* of zero.

The Draw

4. A game begins with a *draw*, during which all cards are placed face down, and each player draws a card.
5. During the draw, if each player draws a card of a different rank, then the player who draws the highest-ranking card is the *first dealer*.
6. If there is a tie between multiple players for the highest ranking card drawn, then cards are turned face-up one by one until a card is turned face-up with a suit that matches that of one of the cards drawn by the tied players. The player who drew a card of that suit is the first dealer.

The Hand

7. After the draw, the remainder of the game consists of a series of *hands*, which continues until a winner of the game has been declared.
8. The first 6 hands in the game are *round-robin* hands, and the remaining hands are *sudden-death* hands.
9. Each hand consists of four components in the following order: the *deal*, the *auction*, the *declaration*, and the *campaign*. A hand ends when the campaign ends.

The Deal

10. During the deal, the *dealer* shuffles the deck, asks the player to his/her right to cut, deals 13 cards to each player, and deals 13 cards to the *freelance deck*. The deal ends when all cards have been dealt.

11. Players are permitted to see only the cards that they have been dealt, until a card has been *played* or made *face-up*.
12. For the first hand, the first dealer is the dealer. For all other hands, the player to the left of the dealer of the previous hand is the dealer.

The Auction

13. Each player begins the auction with 13 tokens.
14. Players must lay their tokens on the table in a way that is easy for other players to count.
15. The auction consists of 13 consecutive *bidding rounds*, and ends when all bidding rounds have been won or forfeited.
16. A bidding round starts with the dealer placing the top card remaining in the freelance deck face-up. The players take turns placing *bids* on the card, starting with the *bidding round leader*, and continuing clockwise until one player wins the bidding round, or the bidding round is forfeited.
17. At the start of the auction, the dealer is the bidding round leader. When a player wins a bid, he/she becomes the bidding round leader.
18. At the start of each bidding round, the *leading bid* is set to 0.
19. A bid can either be (a) a number of tokens which is (i) greater than 0, (ii) greater than the leading bid, and (iii) less than or equal to the number of tokens that the player making the bid has remaining; or (b) “pass.”
20. If a bid is not “pass,” then it becomes the leading bid.
21. If a player bids “pass,” he/she must bid “pass” for the remainder of the bidding round.
22. The bidding round ends when 2 players have bid “pass” and the other player has made a bid. The player with the highest bid wins the bidding round. If no player made a bid other than “pass”, the bidding round is forfeited and the face-up card in the freelance deck is moved to the *discard pile*.
23. If a player wins a bidding round, he/she must relinquish the number of tokens that he/she bid. He/she may then either move one of his/her cards face-up to the discard pile and take the face-up card from the freelance deck, or move the face-up card from the freelance deck to the discard pile.
24. If a player takes the face-up card, it is no longer face-up and can no longer be seen except by the player who takes the card, until it is played or made face-up again.

25. Throughout the auction and the declaration, all cards in the discard pile remain face-up.

The Declaration

26. The declaration begins with the dealer making a *statement*. Following that, each player takes turns making statements, continuing until one player has won the declaration or the declaration is forfeited.

27. The number of the *leading statement* is set to 0 at the start of the auction.

28. A statement can either be “pass,” or consist of a number and a *trump*.

29. For the first statement that a player makes in the declaration, the trump can be any of the four suits, or it can be “no trump.”

30. For consecutive statements in the declaration made by the player, the trump must be the same as that of the player’s first declaration, unless the player states “pass.”

31. The number in a statement must be greater than 0 and less than 14.

32. The number in a statement must be no less than the number of the leading statement.

33. Unless a player has more tokens remaining from the auction than does the declarer of the current leading statement, the number in a statement made by that player must be greater than that of the leading statement.

34. A player’s *lag* is defined as the amount by which that player’s score is less than the score of the player with the highest score.

35. A player is not permitted to make a statement such that the player’s lag plus the number of the statement is greater than 38.

36. Any statement that is not “pass” becomes the leading statement.

37. If a player states “pass” in any statement, then that player must state “pass” in all consecutive statements in the declaration.

38. The declaration ends as soon as two players have stated “pass,” and the other player has made a statement. The player that made the highest statement wins the declaration, and the number and trump of his/her statement becomes the *contract*. If no player has made a statement other than “pass,” the declaration is forfeited and the hand ends without a campaign.

The Campaign

39. The campaign starts once all players agree that they have had a chance to view the discard pile.
40. The discard pile is placed face-down when the campaign starts.
41. During the campaign, the winner of the declaration is called the *attacker*, and the other players are called the *defenders*.
42. The campaign consists of 13 *tricks*. Each trick starts with the *trick leader* playing a card face-up. The player to the left of the trick leader then plays a card face-up, and then the remaining player plays a card. The trick ends when each player has played a card face-up.
43. The trick leader may play any of his/her cards to start a trick.
44. Each other player must play a card of the same suit as played by the trick leader unless the player does not have any cards of that suit, in which case the player can play any of his/her cards.
45. A *trump card* is defined as a card with a suit that is the same as the trump of the contract, unless the trump is “no trump.”
46. During a trick, if a trump card, as specified in the contract, is played, then the player that plays the highest trump card wins the trick.
47. During a trick, if no trump card is played, the player that plays the highest card of the suit that the trick leader played wins the trick.
48. For the first trick, the winner of the declaration is the trick leader. For all other tricks, the winner of the previous trick is the trick leader.

The Score

49. If, during the campaign, the attacker wins a number of tricks greater than or equal to the number in the contract, the attacker’s score increases by the number in the contract. Otherwise, the attacker’s score decreases by the number in the contract. The campaign ends once the attacker’s score has changed.
50. At the end of a hand, a player wins the game if (a) the player has the highest score immediately following the campaign, (b) the player was the attacker during the campaign, and (c) the hand was a sudden-death hand.