u3a 'Classic' Canasta rules

The object of the game is to outscore the opposing team, or players. Points are scored by forming **melds** - combinations of three or more cards of the same rank, with or without the help of wild cards. A meld with at least seven cards is called a **Canasta**.

Card values

4 – 7, black 3's	5
8 – king	10
ace, 2	20
joker	50
red 3's	100

Jokers and 2s are wild cards

Basics

1. If playing in pairs these are selected by cutting the cards. The 2 players cutting the highest cards are partners. Aces count high whilst Jokers do not count in the cutting. The player sitting on the right of the player who cut the highest card deals.

2. Each Player is dealt 11 cards; the remainder being placed face down on the table to form the Stock. Each player checks their cards and any RED 3s are exposed and replaced from the Stock. Then the top card is turned over and placed beside the Stock to begin the Discard pile. If this card is a Joker, a 2, or a red or black 3 then a further card is taken from the stock and placed over it. If this proves to be a second wild card, etc., then they are returned to the pack which is reshuffled.

3. Each player tries to build Melds leading to Canastas. A Meld is a sequence of 3 or more cards of the same value, e.g. three 8s, four 10s, etc. Melds may contain wild cards but only in certain proportions. a Meld of 3 cards may contain one wild card; a Meld of 4 cards only 2 and a Meld of 5 or 6 only 3 wild cards. (In other words, a meld must have more natural cards than wild cards) Canastas are in effect a 7-card Meld. A Canasta made up of only natural cards is called a Natural Canasta and scores its points value + 500 bonus points. A Canasta made up with the help of wild cards is called a Mixed Canasta and scores its points value +300 bonus points. A Mixed Canasta may not contain more than 3 wild cards. A wild card may be added to a Mixed Canasta as long as there are no more than 3 in total. It may be added to a Natural Canasta which then counts as a Mixed Canasta. Completed Canastas are displayed face up in piles on the table. A Natural Canasta has a red card on top and a Mixed has a black.

4. The first Meld a player makes must amount to a certain minimum value depending on the team's score at that stage of the game:

Up to a score of 1,500 it must have a value of 50 points

Up to a score of 3,000 it must have a value of 90 points

Over a score of 3,000 it must have a value of 120 points

Minus score it must have a value of 120 points

A complete Canasta from the hand can be used as a first Meld, and the top card of the Discard Pile may be used to make up the Canasta. If the first Meld is a Canasta, no minimum value applies.

5. The player on the dealer's left begins. Each turn consists of the following stages:

a. Drawing

The card that is drawn is either the top card of the Stock or the top card of the Discard pile. A player can draw from the Discard Pile only if he can use that card to make a Meld: in other words if he has at least two matching cards in his hand. In the case of the first Meld, he needs two matching natural cards and the total value of the cards concerned must of course amount to at least the minimum value prescribed, whereby the card from the Discard Pile is counted towards the value of the Meld. If the player uses the top card of the Discard Pile to make a Meld, he must display the cards from his hand on the table first and then add the card from the Discard Pile.

To take the top card from the Discard Pile, a player needs 2 matching cards in the case of the first Meld, otherwise these can be one natural and one wild card. The top card of the Discard Pile may also be added to a previous Meld, without needing two cards in the hand, but not to a complete Canasta. When a player takes the top card of the Discard Pile, he MUST take the whole of the Discard Pile into his hand.

b. Melds

A player is not obliged to put down a Meld unless he wants to take the Discard Pile. Instead of making a Meld he can add natural or wild cards to his own or his partner's Melds (complying with the limits for numbers of wild cards in a Meld). He cannot however, add to an opponent's Melds. There are no Melds consisting of wild cards alone. Once a Meld is on the table, no card may be withdrawn from it

c. Discarding

When a player has completed such of the above steps as he wants, he discards one card from his hand, placing it on the Discard Pile.

6. Special rules apply to the red and black 3s

a. Red Threes

are not used in play. When a player is dealt or draws one, he puts it face upwards on the table in front of him and replaces it with a new card from the Stock. (If this again is a red 3 he repeats the process). If a red 3 is drawn with the Discard Pile it is also exposed on the table but is not replaced from the Stock. For scoring each red 3 counts 100 points and if a team has all four, then 800 points are awarded. If a team has failed to make a Meld before the other team goes out, then red 3s count as minus. A player who fails to expose a red 3 is penalized with -500 points.

b. Black Threes

are used to block the Discard Pile for the next player, i.e. when a player discards a black 3 the next player cannot take the Discard Pile. This is effective for only one player. Black 3s may not be used to make a Meld but three or four black 3s (without wild cards) may be melded to end a hand.

7. Blocking the Discard Pile

As we have seen a black 3 blocks the Discard Pile for the next player. There are other ways of blocking it:

• If at the beginning of the game, the first card turned over from the Stock and placed on the Discard Pile is a red 3 or a wild card, the Discard Pile is "stopped".

• The Discard Pile is “stopped” when a player discards a wild card. When the Discard Pile is “stopped” it cannot be taken by the next player but only by a subsequent player with a pair of natural cards to match the uppermost natural card. A wild card on top of the Discard Pile may not be taken with 2 wild cards from the hand.

When a player can pick up a blocked pile they take all the cards in the discard pile.

8. Going out

The hand ends when one of the players goes out; i.e. when he places all his remaining cards on the table or all but one, discarding the last card. A player may go out only if his team has at least two Canastas. Going Out scores a bonus of 100 points. The hand also ends when there are no cards left in the Stock and the player whose turn it is cannot take the Discard Pile. If he does take the Discard Pile, the hand ends with his discard. In the last two cases no bonus points are awarded. If the last card of the Stock is s red 3, the player who draws it exposes it on the table, makes such Melds as he wishes but cannot discard. The hand is then over. If a player only has one card left but cannot go out, he may not take the Discard Pile.

9. Scoring.

After each hand the team scores are added up and then added to the team totals. The game is won by the first team to reach 5, 000 points. If both teams reach 5,000 points in the same hand, that hand is completed and the team with the highest total wins. All cards on the table count plus points. Canastas score 500 for a Natural, 300 for a Mixed, red 3s = 100, or 800 for all four. All cards remaining in players hands at the end of the hand are scored as minus points.

10.Canasta for different numbers of players

The rules for play are as stated above, with the following exceptions:-

a. For 2 players: either 15 cards to each player, and 2 Canastas are required to go out; or deal 13 cards to each player and only 1 Canasta is required to go out.

b. For 3 players: deal 13 cards to each player. There are no teams.

c. For 5 players: deal 11 cards to each player. Cut for teams, the players cutting the highest 3 cards playing against the remaining 2. The players on the 3 man team take it in turns to sit out one hand.

d. For 6 players, deal 11 cards to each player. Cut for teams, the players cutting the 3 highest cards playing against the others. Then either play in teams of three (seated alternately) or play in teams of two with players on both teams taking it in turns to sit out around.