

POKER SQUARES



A VIDEO GAME BY BRIAN WATSON
INSTRUCTION MANUAL

POKER SQUARES

A SOLITAIRE GAME OF POKER

The object of the game is to arrange 25 cards in a 5x5 grid, in order to make the best 12 (or 10) poker hands possible, counting each row, each column, and (optionally) the two long diagonals as a poker hand.

STARTING THE GAME

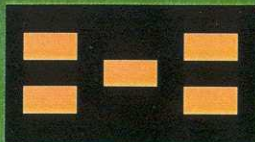
Poker Squares uses the joystick controller. Plug in the joystick, insert the Poker Squares cartridge, and power on your VCS. When you turn on your VCS, it will begin shuffling the cards.



While the cards are being shuffled, you can select the game type with the *Left and Right difficulty switches*. To start the game, press the joystick button. You can also press *Select* during the shuffle to see the scoring screen (see "Scoring the Hands", page 4).

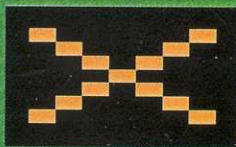


When the *Left Difficulty* switch is set to "Pro" (or "A"), you will see an icon on the screen that looks like:



Starting the game while this icon is visible will make the VCS deal the first five cards to the corners and center of the grid. This makes for a *much* more difficult game.

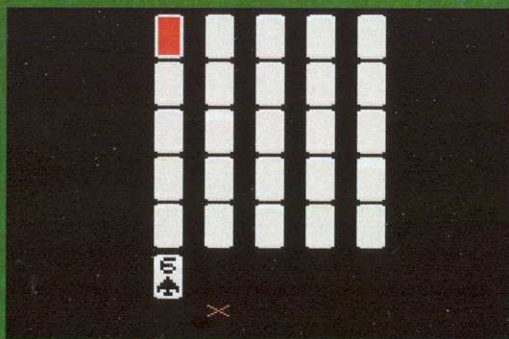
When the *Right Difficulty* switch is set to "Pro" (or "A"), you will see an icon on the screen that looks like:



This mode controls whether the diagonals are counted towards your score. Turning off the diagonals makes the game slightly more difficult.

When you're ready to play, press the fire button on your joystick. Once you start the game, you won't be able to change the difficulty settings.

GAMEPLAY



Once the game has started, you'll see an empty 5x5 grid, with one card face-up at the bottom (the 6 of Spades, in this picture). This card is the one you're about to place somewhere on the grid.

On the grid there's a flashing cursor. This controls where the next card will be placed. Move the cursor with the joystick until it's where you want it, and press the button to place the card. You'll hear a "blip" noise to let you know you've placed the card.

After you place each card, the next card will appear face-up at the bottom of the screen. You must place each card in an empty space. When you've filled the grid with 25 cards, the game is over and your hands will be scored.

At any time during game play, you may press *Game Select* to see the scoring screen (see "Scoring the Hands", opposite). You may also start the game over (returning to the Shuffle screen) with the *Game Reset switch*.

If you try to place a card in a space that already has a card, you'll hear a warning "buzz" sound. If this happens, move to an empty space and try again.



SCORING THE HANDS

At the end of the game, your score will be counted up. Each of the 12 (or 10, if diagonals are off) hands of five cards will be scored on the following table:



PAIR	1
2 PAIR	3
FLUSH	5
3 OF KIND	6
FULL HOUSE	10
STRAIGHT	12
4 OF KIND	16
ST. FLUSH	30

Notice that the scores are not in the same order as the hands in regular poker. In particular, a Flush beats a Straight, a Full House, or a Three of a Kind in regular poker. However, a Flush is a lot easier to get in Poker Squares, so its point value had to be decreased to make the game more balanced. This scoring system is known as the English system, according to Hoyle.

At any time during the shuffle, while playing the game, or after the game is over, you may press *Select* to see the scoring screen. This displays the above table. Be careful not to press the joystick button if you're looking at the scoring screen during gameplay: it will place the next card, even though you can't see what's happening.

After your hands are scored, the total score will be displayed. Your score is color-coded:

RED - 25 points or less. You need practice, or you're just having a bad day.

YELLOW - 25 to 39 points. You did OK, but you should rethink your strategy

GREEN - 40 or more points. You did great!

Note: the author of the game usually scores 35-45. However, there are some really good players out there who have gotten over 100 points.

STRATEGY

"You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em"

-- Kenny Rogers, "The Gambler"

At the beginning of the game, it's best to place cards in and near the center of the grid. This give you more options later.

There is no time limit, but there's no "undo" either. Take as long as you need to make up your mind, since you can't change your decision later.

New players usually go for Pair and Two Pair hands first. Try not to make more than one or two Pairs early in the game: there will be plenty of opportunities later and, meanwhile, you should concentrate on higher-scoring hands. However, don't avoid Pairs entirely: there's a decent chance that a Pair made early in the game can end up as a Three of a Kind, Full House, or even a Four of a Kind.



Memorize the score table. Although you can look at it any time you need to, it might derail your train of thought.



Flushes are good, but not that good. Remember that they're worth less than they are in regular poker: here, even a Three of a Kind is worth more than a Flush. Don't be afraid to "bust" a flush, if it gets you closer to making a Straight.

If you've got four of the cards you need to make a Straight Flush (say, 10, Jack, Queen, and King of Diamonds), and a card of the correct value but wrong suit comes up (say, the Ace of Spades), don't be too proud to demote your possible Straight Flush to a Straight, especially if it's late in the game.

A more general form of the previous tip: Any hand that depends on an *exact* card coming up (both suit and value) is a bad gamble. Remember that the game is only played with 25 of the 52 cards, so there's a better than 50% chance that your one perfect card will never come up. On the other hand, this *is* a poker game, so sometimes you have to gamble! If you make it, those 30 points will definitely be worth it.

Don't forget the diagonals if you're playing with them turned on. Sometimes they make the difference between a good game and a great one.

You might want to designate one row or column as your "junk" hand, to give yourself a place to put cards that don't fit anywhere else. Towards the end of the game, it's usually possible to convert the junk hand into a pair, so it's not always a total loss.

For a two player game, you and your friend can compete for the highest score. However, there's another way to play a two-player game: one player tries to score points, and the other tries to keep him from scoring anything. Pass the joystick to the other player after each card is placed. After each game, the players can switch roles. You and your friend can play a set number of games, or play to 100 points (it takes longer than you think!)

Above all, have fun!

Brian Watson
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Poker Squares game code and graphics
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Label and Manual design by David Exton
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