BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Playing Cards & Board Games Online

Euchre, bridge, chess and Mahjong with your friends — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for card groups, game nights and families

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

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For Trickster Cards, BBO, Chess.com, Lichess & Mahjong apps · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to keeping your card group, bridge foursome, chess rivalry or Mahjong table going online — on the snowy nights when nobody wants to drive, or when friends have moved away. Read it in any order and at your own pace. Each game has its own part, and the last parts cover talking while you play, the scams that hide around online games, and what things cost.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What playing cards and board games online with friends actually looks like, what you need, and which website or app fits each game. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If your euchre night, your bridge foursome, your Mahjong table or your Tuesday chess game keeps getting canceled because of snow, ice, a bad knee or a friend who moved to be near the grandkids — this guide is for **you**. Ohio winters are long. The game doesn't have to stop.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help folks here in Portage County feel at home with theirs. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything. When I use a word like "username" or "private table," I'll stop and explain it right then.

What this guide will do for you

- Show you what an online card or board game with friends looks like, so nothing on the screen surprises you.
- Help you pick the right place for each game: **Trickster Cards** for euchre, **BBO** (Bridge Base Online) for bridge, **Chess.com** or **Lichess** for chess, and an American Mahjong app for Mahjong.
- Walk you through making an account safely and setting up a **private table** only your friends can join.
- Show you how to see and hear each other on a second device while you play, so it still feels like game night.
- Explain what's free, what costs money, and how to cancel a subscription you don't want.
- Warn you, plainly, about real-money "skill game" and sweepstakes casino apps, chatty strangers and gift-card requests.

The big promise: you can't break it by learning

Clicking around a card game website won't hurt your computer, your tablet or your bank account. The worst that usually happens is you lose a hand of euchre to a computer player. The few places where a wrong tap can cost real money — buying game currency, starting a subscription, or answering a stranger who asks for help — I'll mark clearly, every time.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A standing game with friends is about more than cards. It's a reason to talk every week, a reason to laugh, and a way to keep your mind busy through January and February. Moving it online, even for part of the winter, keeps that weekly connection going when the roads say stay home.

I'm only a phone call away

If anything in this guide leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question — especially the first time you try to get four people to the same online table.

Let's start by picturing what game night online actually looks like.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What Playing Online with Friends Looks Like

Playing a card or board game online is simpler than it sounds. Everyone opens the same website or app on their own device, signs in, and sits down at the same virtual table. The cards, tiles or chess pieces appear on the screen. When it's your turn, you tap or click the card you want to play. The website does the shuffling, the dealing and the scorekeeping for you.

The words you'll see

Word	What it means
Account	Your sign-in for a game website: a **username** (the name others see), an email address and a password.
Username	Your table name. It doesn't have to be your real name — and it's safer if it isn't your full name.
Table or room	One game in progress. A **private table** is one only invited people can join.
Invite	A message the website sends to a friend asking them to sit down at your table.
Robot, bot or computer player	A seat filled by the computer, so you can play when a friend is missing.
Lobby	The main screen where you pick a game or a table.
Chat	A box where players type short messages. You can usually turn it off or limit it.

Two screens make it feel like the kitchen table

The game itself is usually quiet — there's no talking built in to most card websites, or only typed chat. Most groups put the game on one device and a video or phone call on another. For example, the game on a laptop or tablet and a FaceTime or Zoom call on a phone propped up beside it. Chapter 7 shows you how.

What changes, and what doesn't

- **The rules are the same.** Euchre is still euchre. The website just enforces the rules, so nobody can renege by accident.
- **Nobody has to shuffle or keep score.** The website does both.

- **The pace can be gentler.** Many sites let you choose a relaxed table with no timer, or a game where you take a move a day.
- **The small talk moves to the call.** That's why the second device matters so much.

TIP

Try it alone first

Every website in this guide lets you practice against computer players. Play a few hands alone before game night, so you know where the buttons are when your friends are watching.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the handful of words above, and knowing that the game and the talking usually happen on two devices, takes most of the mystery out of the first night.

CHAPTER 3

What You Need

You don't need anything fancy. If you already read email and look at photos on a device, you have what it takes.

A device for the game

Device	Good for	Watch out for
Laptop or desktop computer	The biggest cards and the easiest clicking. Every site here works in a web browser.	Make sure your browser is up to date.
iPad or Android tablet	Comfortable in a recliner; the apps are made for touch.	Small cards on smaller tablets; keep it charged.
Smartphone	Fine for chess or a quick practice hand.	Cards and Mahjong tiles get very small. Better for the video call.

A device for the call (optional but wonderful)

A phone or a second tablet for a video or voice call. If you only have one device, a plain speakerphone call on a landline works beautifully too.

Internet

Card games use very little internet. Home Wi-Fi is plenty. A video call uses much more, so if your connection is slow, try a voice-only call instead of video.

An email address you check

Each site sends a confirmation email when you sign up, and invites and password resets go there too.

Website or app?

Most of these games come both ways. You can type the address into a web browser — like **trickstercards.com**, **bridgebase.com**, **chess.com** or **lichess.org** — or download the app from the App Store (iPhone and iPad) or Google Play (Android). Your account works in both, so you can practice on the tablet and play game night on the laptop.

HEADS UP

Get apps from the official store only

Download apps only from the App Store, Google Play or the Microsoft Store, and check the maker's name before you tap Get or Install. Lookalike "free card game" apps are common, and some are built to show ads or push you toward gambling.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You probably already own everything you need. A laptop or tablet for the cards and a phone for the call is the setup most groups end up loving.

CHAPTER 4

Picking the Right Place for Each Game

There are hundreds of game websites. These are the well-known, long-running ones that card groups and clubs actually use. Each game gets its own part of this guide.

Game	Where to play	Cost to play with friends	Chapter
Euchre (and other card games)	Trickster Cards	Free, with a short ad before each game	8–10
Bridge	BBO (Bridge Base Online)	Casual tables free; club-style games cost BB$ (game money)	11–14
Chess	Chess.com	Free account; optional paid memberships	15–16
Chess	Lichess	Free, no ads, run on donations	17
American Mahjong	Real Mah Jongg, NMJL Online and others	Varies; you'll need this year's card	18–20

How to choose when there's more than one

- **Ask your group first.** The best website is the one your friends already use. If one person already plays bridge on BBO, start there.
- **Pick one and stick to it** for a few weeks, so everyone learns the same buttons.
- **Free first.** Every site above lets you play friends without paying. Decide about extras later, once you know you like it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Euchre is an Ohio game

Euchre is especially popular across Ohio and the Midwest, and Trickster Cards is one of the places built for it: it handles the trump calling, going alone and the scoring the way you're used to. If your group plays a house rule, look in the table settings before you start (Chapter 9).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One short table tells you where to go for each game, so you can skip the searching and the ad-filled lookalike sites.

PART 2

Accounts, Friends & Talking While You Play

Making a safe account, finding your friends on the site, and setting up a video or voice call on a second device so game night still feels like game night.

CHAPTER 5

Making an Account Safely

Every site in this guide asks you to make a free account before you can sit at a table with friends. It takes about five minutes. Do it on a calm afternoon, not five minutes before the game starts.

Before you start, have these ready

- Your email address and access to it (the site will send a confirmation message).
- A **username** idea. Something your friends will recognize but that isn't your full name — for example *MargeEuchre* or *KentBridgeBob*. Many popular names are taken, so have a second choice.
- A **password** you don't use anywhere else. A short sentence works well, like three or four unrelated words.

The usual steps

1. Go to the site in your web browser, or open the app you downloaded.
2. Look for **Sign Up**, **Join** or **Create account**. (Not **Log In** — that's for later.)
3. Type your email, choose a username and a password. Some sites also let you sign up with an Apple, Google or Facebook account instead; that's fine if you already use one.
4. Open your email, find the message from the site, and tap the confirmation link if there is one.
5. Write your username and the site's address on the Cheat-Sheet in Chapter 27. Store the password the way you store your others — a password manager or a notebook kept at home.
6. Send your username to your group by text or email, so they can find you.

What not to share in your profile

- Your full name, home address, phone number or birthday.
- That you live alone, or when you'll be away.
- A photo of the front of your house. A friendly picture of your dog or a deck of cards is plenty.

GOOD TO KNOW

Trickster Cards keeps it short

Trickster Cards' own help guide says an account needs only a name and an email address, and that signing up keeps your statistics, friends and achievements with you on every device you use.

HEADS UP

Free means free

You never need a credit card to make an account on any site in this guide. If a "free card game" asks for card details just to sign up, close it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A safe account takes five minutes, and with it your friends can find you, invite you, and pick up where you left off from any device.

CHAPTER 6

Friends Lists, Chat and Privacy

Once you have an account, you'll want to add your group as **friends** on the site. That's what lets you see when they're online and invite them to your table with a tap.

Adding a friend

1. Get your friend's exact username — by text, email, or on the phone. Spelling counts.
2. On the site, look for **Friends**, **People** or a little silhouette icon.
3. Search for the username and choose **Add**, **Add friend** or the plus sign.
4. Your friend may have to accept. Once they do, they'll appear on your list.

Chat: keep it to people you know

Most game sites include typed chat. With friends, that's fun. With strangers, it's where most trouble starts. Look in the site's **Settings** or **Privacy** area for choices like who can message you, who can challenge you, and whether chat shows at all. Setting chat and messages to **friends only** is a good choice for most people.

Block and report

Every well-run game site has a way to **block** someone (so they can't reach you again) and to **report** them (so the site can look into it). It's usually found by tapping or clicking the other player's name. Use it without guilt. You don't owe a stranger a conversation.

SCAM ALERT

A friendly stranger is not a friend yet

Some people use game chat to strike up a friendship, move the conversation to texting or another app, and later ask for money, gift cards or help with an "investment." If someone you met at a game table asks to move to another app or brings up money, stop replying and block them. Chapter 24 has more.

TIP

Grandkids can help

If a grandchild already plays chess online, ask them to sit with you for ten minutes and set your chat and messages to friends only. It's an easy, kind job for them.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With your group on your friends list and chat limited to them, the site becomes your private card room — and strangers can't interrupt.

CHAPTER 7

Seeing and Hearing Each Other on Another Device

This is the part that turns an online game into a real game night. The cards go on one device. Your friends' faces and voices go on another. You don't need anything new to do it.

Pick the simplest call that works for your group

Call	Best when	Good to know
Phone call on speaker or a three-way call	Two or three people; anyone with a phone	No video, but nothing to set up.
FaceTime (Group FaceTime)	Everyone has an iPhone, iPad or Mac	Up to 32 people besides you. Friends with Android or Windows can join from a FaceTime link in Chrome or Edge.
Zoom	Mixed devices, or a bigger group	The free plan ends each meeting at 40 minutes — just start a new one, or use a paid plan.
Google Meet, WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger	Your group already uses one	All have free video calls.

Setting up the two-device game night

1. Charge both devices, or plug them in. A video call drains a battery quickly.
2. Prop the call device up so it can see your face — a book stand, a tablet stand, or leaning on a sugar bowl.
3. Start the call first, ten minutes early, so everyone can say hello and sort out sound.
4. Then open the game on the other device and join the table.
5. Turn the **game's** sound down or off, so the beeps don't drown out conversation. Keep the **call's** volume up.
6. If you hear an echo, the culprit is usually two devices in one room both on the call. Mute one.

A Zoom habit for long games

On Zoom's free plan, a meeting ends after 40 minutes. Many groups simply agree that the host will start a new meeting with the same link at the break. If your bridge game runs three hours, a voice-only phone call or FaceTime may be simpler.

TIP

Don't show your cards on camera

Point the call device at your face, not at the screen with your hand on it. Everyone will laugh the first time someone forgets.

GOOD TO KNOW

Our FaceTime and Zoom guides go deeper

Our **FaceTime** and **Zoom** guides cover making group calls, links for friends on other devices, captions and sound settings in detail.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Two devices — one for the cards, one for the faces — gives you the jokes, the groans and the table talk you'd have in person, without anyone driving on icy roads.

PART 3

Euchre on Trickster Cards

Signing up, hosting a private euchre table for your group, and practicing against computer players when a friend can't make it.

CHAPTER 8

Getting Started with Trickster Cards

Trickster Cards is a card-game website and app that's popular with euchre players. You can play in a web browser at **trickstercards.com** or in the Trickster Cards app for iPhone, iPad, Android and Windows. Besides euchre, it offers several other classic trick-taking card games.

What it costs

Trickster is free to play. If you play for free, the site says you'll see a brief ad before each game. That's the whole trade-off: a short ad, then cards.

Signing up

1. Go to **trickstercards.com** in your browser, or install **Trickster Cards** from your app store. Check that the maker listed is Trickster Cards.
2. Choose **Sign Up**.
3. Enter your name and email address, and choose a password. That's all Trickster's help guide says it needs.
4. Confirm from your email if asked.
5. Send your username or sign-up email to your group, so they can invite you.

With an account, Trickster keeps your statistics, friends and achievements with you on every device.

A quick tour of the table

- Your hand is along the bottom of the screen. Your partner sits across from you, at the top.
- When it's your turn, the cards you're allowed to play stand out. Tap or click one to play it.
- During bidding, buttons appear for your choices — pass, order it up, pick a suit, or go alone.
- The score and the trump suit are shown at the side or top of the table.

GOOD TO KNOW

Age rating

The App Store lists the Trickster Cards app as 17+. That's an app-store rating, not a warning about the card games; it's a good reminder to keep chat set to friends when grandkids borrow your tablet.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With one free account, euchre is a tap away on any of your devices — no cards to shuffle, no score pad, and no arguing over who reneged.

CHAPTER 9

Hosting a Private Euchre Table for Your Group

A **private game** is a table only the people you invite can join. It's the online version of the card table in your basement. One person — the host — sets it up, and the other three accept the invitation.

If you're the host

1. Sign in to Trickster Cards and choose **Euchre**.
2. Choose the option to play with friends in a private game rather than with strangers.
3. Look over the game options and match your group's usual rules as closely as you can.
4. On the pre-game page, choose **Invite Friends** and pick the three people you want.
5. Trickster lets each friend know with an in-game notification, a notification on their phone or computer, or an email.
6. When everyone has sat down, start the game.

Inviting someone who isn't on Trickster yet

You can type a friend's email address instead of a username. Trickster's help guide says it will send them an email invitation on your behalf. They'll follow the link, sign up and land at your table.

If you're a guest

1. Watch for the invitation: a notification on your device, a message inside Trickster, or an email.
2. Tap or click it. Sign in if asked.
3. You'll be taken to your friend's table. Wait for the host to start.

Talking at the table

In a private game, there's full typed chat. Most groups prefer a phone or video call on another device for the talking (Chapter 7) and use chat for the occasional "nice lay down!"

TIP

Same time, same host

Agree on a regular time and one regular host. Then everyone just waits for the same person's invitation every week, and nobody has to learn how to host until they want to.

TIP

Odd number of players?

If only three of you can make it, fill the fourth seat with a computer player, or rotate who sits out each game while they chat on the call.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once the host has done it two or three times, setting up the weekly game takes a minute — and the group gets to keep playing with the same partners all winter.

CHAPTER 10

Practicing Alone and Table Manners Online

One of the nicest things about online cards is that you can play any time, even at 2 a.m., against computer players. It's also the best way to learn the buttons before game night.

Practicing against the computer

1. Sign in and choose the game.
2. Choose the practice or solo option, where the other seats are filled by computer players.
3. Play a few hands. Try bidding, ordering up, going alone — see what each button does.
4. Leave the table when you're done. Nobody minds; they're computers.

Playing with strangers

Trickster and most card sites also let you join tables with people you don't know. That can be a pleasant way to play when your group is busy. A few habits keep it pleasant:

- Keep chat to the game. Don't share where you live or personal details.
- Finish the game you started if you can; leaving in the middle spoils it for three other people.
- If someone is rude, block them and move on. It isn't personal.
- If someone is *very* friendly and wants to keep in touch off the site, be careful (Chapter 24).

Etiquette with your own group

- Say on the call when you need a moment away — the website may play a card for you if your turn times out.
- Settle house rules before you start, not halfway through a hand.
- Be patient with the newest player. Everyone tapped the wrong card the first night.

GOOD TO KNOW

If your time runs out

Some tables use a turn timer. If you're slow, the game may make a move for you or count you as away. Look for a relaxed or untimed option when you host a game for friends.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Ten minutes of practice against the computer means you'll walk into game night knowing exactly where to tap — and you can enjoy a hand any time you can't sleep.

PART 4

Bridge on BBO (Bridge Base Online)

Free casual tables with your foursome, playing with robots, what BB$ are, and the ACBL club games that award masterpoints.

CHAPTER 11

BBO Basics

BBO, short for **Bridge Base Online**, is the largest bridge website and the one most clubs use. You can play at **bridgebase.com** in a web browser, or with the BBO app for iPhone, iPad and Android. Signing up is free.

Three ways to play on BBO

Where	What it is
Casual	Free tables you set up yourself. This is where your own foursome plays (Chapter 12).
With robots	Computer players called robots fill the other seats. Some practice games are free; some games cost BB$ (Chapter 13).
Club-style games and tournaments	Organized games, including ACBL games that award masterpoints (Chapter 14). Most cost a small fee in BB$.

Signing up

1. Go to **bridgebase.com** and look for the button to play or sign up, or install **Bridge Base Online - BBO** from your app store.
2. Choose to become a member, or **Register**.
3. Pick a username (BBO calls it your username or nickname), a password and your email address.
4. Fill in your profile. Many players list their experience level and the bidding system they play.
5. Send your username to your partner and the rest of the group.

TIP

Your club may already be on BBO

Many bridge clubs run their own online games on BBO. Ask your club director or a club member — they may already have a game you can join, and someone who can show you around.

GOOD TO KNOW

Website for hosting, app for playing

Many bridge groups find it easiest to set up casual tables on the website on a computer. Once the table is ready, others can join from the app or the website.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One free BBO account opens the door to casual games with your foursome, robots at any hour, and your club's online games.

CHAPTER 12

A Casual Bridge Table with Your Friends

Casual tables on BBO are free. One person hosts, reserves the other three seats for friends, and invites them. These steps come from BBO's own guide to playing with friends. The buttons may look slightly different in the current version, but the idea is the same.

If you're the host

1. Sign in to BBO. On the website, choose **Casual**.
2. Choose **Start a table**.
3. Pick a relaxed game (no scoring pressure) or a competitive one. Both are free.
4. Reserve the other three seats for your friends by typing their BBO usernames, so strangers can't sit down.
5. Use **Invite** to send each friend an invitation, or wait for them to arrive at their reserved seats.
6. When all four are seated, the first deal begins.

If you're a guest

1. Sign in to BBO a few minutes before the agreed time.
2. Go into the **Casual** area too. Your host can only see and invite you once you're there.
3. Accept the invitation when it pops up, or find your host's table and take your reserved seat.

Why the invite sometimes doesn't arrive

The most common reason, according to BBO's own forums, is that the friend isn't in the Casual area yet, so BBO shows them as unavailable. Ask everyone to click **Casual** first, then send the invitations again.

> TIP
>
> **Agree on bidding first**
>
> Before the first deal, agree with your partner on the system you play, just as you would at the club. BBO lets you fill in your system on your profile so partners can check it.

TIP

Three players and a robot

If one of your foursome can't make it, the host can let a robot take the empty seat, so the other three still get to play.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your regular foursome keeps its partnerships and its weekly game, at no cost, from four different living rooms.

CHAPTER 13

Robots and BB$, BBO's Game Money

BB$ (Bridge Base dollars) is BBO's own currency. You buy it with real money and spend it on certain games, such as robot tournaments and club and ACBL games. Casual tables with friends don't need it.

How BB$ works

- You buy BB$ from the BB$ button on the BBO website, or inside the app.
- BBO's own pages describe 1 BB$ as worth about one U.S. dollar.
- Buying inside the iPhone or Android app is often more expensive. For example, one App Store bundle listed 20 BB$ for $33.99 in November 2026. If you can, buy on the website.
- Each game shows its entry fee before you join. Club and ACBL games typically cost a few BB$ per session, and some are free.

Buying BB$ the careful way

1. Decide on a small amount you're comfortable spending this month.
2. Sign in on the website and choose the BB$ button.
3. Pick an amount and pay with a credit card or the payment method offered.
4. Check your balance shown on BBO before you join a game, and watch the entry fee on each game.

SCAM ALERT

BB$ come only from BBO

Nobody legitimate sells BB$ by text, email or chat, and BBO won't ask you for gift cards. If someone at a table offers you cheap BB$, or asks you to send them some, decline and report them.

GOOD TO KNOW

Price changes

Entry fees for ACBL games on BBO were updated on October 27, 2025, under a new ACBL pricing policy. Fees can change again, so always look at the fee on the game itself.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing that BB$ are only for certain games — and that buying on the website is usually cheaper — keeps the hobby inexpensive.

CHAPTER 14

ACBL Online Games and Masterpoints

If you play duplicate bridge at a club, you probably know the **ACBL** (American Contract Bridge League) and its **masterpoints**. BBO runs ACBL-sanctioned games online, so you can keep earning points from home.

The essentials

- Only games with **ACBL** in the title award ACBL masterpoints.
- BBO reports the masterpoints earned to the ACBL at the start of each month, so they won't show up on your ACBL record right away.
- Online games usually award black points. During special events, BBO says some games can award colored points.
- Many ACBL games cost a few BB$ to enter (Chapter 13). Some games for newer players cost less.

Finding a game

1. Sign in on BBO and look for the ACBL area of the lobby (BBO has called it ACBL World).
2. Browse the list. Each game shows its start time, the number of boards, any masterpoint limits and the entry fee.
3. Register with your partner — or choose a game where BBO assigns a robot or a partner.
4. Be signed in a few minutes before it starts.

Your own club's game

Many ACBL clubs run their own "virtual club" games on BBO for members. Ask your director. Playing your own club's online game keeps the money in your club and the faces familiar.

> **TIP**
>
> **Questions about your ACBL number**
>
> If you're not sure how your ACBL membership connects to BBO, ask your club director or the ACBL. They handle these questions all the time.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Through the snowy months you can keep your game sharp and keep earning masterpoints, without the drive to the club.

PART 5

Chess on Chess.com and Lichess

Challenging a friend on Chess.com, what the paid memberships add, and Lichess, the free, ad-free alternative.

CHAPTER 15

Playing a Friend on Chess.com

Chess.com is the biggest chess website, with an app for iPhone, iPad and Android. A free account is enough to play your friends, solve puzzles and play the computer.

Two kinds of games

Game	How it works
Live	You both play at the same time, with a clock — anywhere from a minute to an hour or more each. Good for a game during a phone call.
Daily	You make a move whenever you like, usually with a day or more per move. Perfect for an old friend in another state, or a grandchild at college.

Challenging a friend

Both of you need a Chess.com account (the free one is fine).

1. Sign in to Chess.com.
2. Choose **Play**, then **Play a Friend**.
3. Search for your friend's username and select them.
4. Choose the type of game — a Live time control or Daily — and your color, or let it pick at random.
5. Send the challenge. Your friend gets a notification and taps to accept.

Another way: open your friend's profile and choose **Challenge**. And there's a shortcut — type **chess.com/play/** followed by their username into your browser's address bar.

Seeing your Daily games

Daily games stay on your home screen until they're done. When it's your move, you'll see it there, and the app can send you a notification. There's no rush — that's the point.

TIP

Ask for a slower clock

If fast games feel stressful, choose a longer Live time control, or play Daily. There's no prize for speed among friends.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A Daily game lets you keep a running chess match with a friend or grandchild anywhere in the world — one move with your morning coffee.

CHAPTER 16

Chess.com Memberships: Do You Need One?

Chess.com offers paid memberships on top of the free account. They're entirely optional. You can play friends for years without one.

The levels

- **Gold**, **Platinum** and **Diamond** are the three paid levels. Each adds more lessons, puzzles, game analysis and fewer ads; Diamond includes the most.
- A **Friends & Family Plan** lets up to six Chess.com members share one Diamond yearly membership — handy if the grandkids already play.
- Chess.com changed its prices for new members in the past, so check the current price on the membership page before you pay. Paying for a year is usually cheaper per month than paying monthly.

A sensible way to decide

1. Play friends on the free account for a month.
2. Notice what you keep wishing for: more lessons? Reviewing your games? Fewer ads?
3. Only then look at the membership page and compare.
4. If you buy, put a reminder on your calendar a week before it renews, so you can decide again.

HEADS UP

Buying in the app vs. the website

If you subscribe inside the iPhone or Android app, it's billed through Apple or Google, and you cancel there (Chapter 25). If you subscribe on the website, you cancel in your Chess.com settings. Write down which one you used.

GOOD TO KNOW

Gift memberships

Chess.com sells gift memberships, which can make a nice present for a grandchild who loves chess. Buy them only on chess.com itself, never from a seller in a chat or an ad promising a big discount.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll know you can play your friends for nothing, and you'll only pay for extras if they're truly worth it to you.

CHAPTER 17

Lichess: Free Chess with No Ads

Lichess (at **lichess.org**, with apps for iPhone and Android) is a free chess website run as a charity. It promises never to show ads, never to sell your data, and to stay free. It's paid for by donations from players. People who donate get a **Patron** badge, but every feature is free for everyone.

Playing a friend with a link

1. Go to **lichess.org** and sign in (making a free account is a good idea so your games are saved).
2. Choose **Play with a friend**.
3. Pick the kind of game — the time control, or a correspondence game where each move can take days — and **Casual** (no rating) or **Rated**. Casual is friendlier.
4. Choose your color, then create the game. Lichess gives you a link.
5. Copy the link and send it to your friend by text or email.
6. When they open the link, the game begins.

Chess.com or Lichess?

	Chess.com	Lichess
Cost	Free account; optional paid memberships	Completely free; donations welcome
Ads	Ads on the free account	No ads
Playing a friend	Both need accounts; Play a Friend	Send a link from Play with a friend
Feel	Lots of lessons, videos and features	Simpler and quieter

TIP

Use the one your friend uses

Both are excellent. If your friend or grandchild already plays on one of them, join them there.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Lichess gives you a full chess club with no ads and no bills — just send a link and start playing.

PART 6

American Mahjong Online

The yearly card, the Real Mah Jongg app, the League's own NMJL Online, and other places to play Mahjong with your group.

CHAPTER 18

American Mahjong Online: The Basics

American Mahjong (often written Mah Jongg) is the version played with the card from the **National Mah Jongg League**, or NMJL. It's different from the Chinese and Hong Kong styles, and different again from the one-player "Mahjong solitaire" tile-matching games you see in app stores. Make sure the app you choose says **American** Mahjong and works with the League's card.

The card comes first

- The League publishes a new card every year, usually around late March or early April. The hands change each year.
- Most American Mahjong apps ask which year's card you're playing, and some ask you to own the current card.
- The card itself costs about $15 to $20 depending on the size, as of November 2026. Order it from the National Mah Jongg League or a shop you trust.
- Keep your physical card beside you while you play online. It's much easier than squinting at a small screen.

What playing online looks like

Your rack of tiles appears at the bottom of the screen. The app handles the Charleston (the passing of tiles at the start), the dealing, the wall and the jokers. You tap a tile to discard it, and the app asks whether you want to call a discard when you can.

HEADS UP

"Mahjong" games that aren't Mahjong

Search "Mahjong" in an app store and you'll mostly find tile-matching solitaire games full of ads, and some that lead to real-money play. They aren't American Mahjong and you can't play your group's game on them.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing about the yearly card and the American-versus-solitaire difference saves you from downloading the wrong app — the single most common Mahjong mix-up.

CHAPTER 19

Playing with Your Group on Real Mah Jongg

Real Mah Jongg, from Mattron Entertainment, is an app for iPhone, iPad and Android that plays American Mah Jongg with the official National Mah Jongg League card for the current year. You can play live players, computer players (bots), or a mix of both — so three friends and one bot works fine. It also has an online community for meeting new players.

What it costs

The app is free to download, with in-app purchases. The app store listing shows what each purchase is before you buy. Read it carefully, and see Chapter 25 before you pay for anything.

Getting your group to one table

1. Everyone installs **Real Mah Jongg** from their app store. Check that the maker is Mattron Entertainment.
2. Each person opens the app, sets up their player name or account, and sends it to the group.
3. Make sure everyone is set to the same card — normally the current year's.
4. One person — the host — sets up a game with friends and invites the others.
5. Fill any empty seat with a bot.
6. Start a phone or video call on another device for the table talk (Chapter 7).

TIP

Practice the Charleston alone

Play a game or two against bots first. The Charleston is the part that feels most different on a screen, and it's nicer to learn it without anyone waiting.

GOOD TO KNOW

Alternate cards

Besides the League's card, the app's listing mentions other cards some groups play. Agree on one card before the first game.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your Mahjong group keeps its weekly game with the current year's hands, and a bot can sit in when someone can't make it.

CHAPTER 20

NMJL Online and Other Places to Play Mahjong

Real Mah Jongg isn't the only choice. Here are others your group may hear about. Each has its own sign-up and costs, so choose one together.

NMJL Online — the League's own game

The National Mah Jongg League has its own official app, **NMJL Online**. Its app-store listing says you need the physical annual card *and* an online game membership from the League, plus an internet connection. The membership price is shown when you sign up; check it before you pay.

I Love Mahj

I Love Mahj (ilovemahj.com) is an American Mahjong website with games, lessons and tournaments. Its help pages say you need a card listing the winning hands to play, and that it accepts National Mah Jongg League cards from 2019 through 2026.

Mahjong Time

Mahjong Time (mahjongtime.com) is a long-running Mahjong site that offers several styles, including American rules. Signing up is free, and it also sells VIP memberships. Check the current terms on the site before paying.

Other American Mahjong apps

Several smaller apps teach or let you practice American Mahjong, and many charge a few dollars a month or a yearly fee. Before you pay, read the listing for what's included, and whether the price renews automatically.

TIP

Choose as a group

Every app here needs all four players on the same app. Have one person look at two options, then everyone agrees before anybody pays.

HEADS UP

Watch for automatic renewal

Monthly and yearly memberships renew on their own unless you cancel. Note the date on your calendar a week ahead (Chapter 25).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll know the real options for American Mahjong online, what each one asks for, and how to pick one together without paying for three.

PART 7

Keeping the Group Going & Staying Safe

Running a weekly online game night through the winter, fixing the usual hiccups, steering clear of real-money game apps and scams, and keeping costs under control.

CHAPTER 21

Running a Winter Game Night

The technology is the easy part. What keeps a group going from Thanksgiving to the first spring thaw is a simple routine everyone can count on.

A simple routine that works

1. **Pick a regular night and time**, the same as your in-person game. Tuesday at 7:00 every week is easier to remember than "whenever."
2. **Choose one host** who sets up the table and starts the call every week. Have a backup host too.
3. **Start the call ten minutes early** for hellos and sound checks.
4. **Agree on a stop time**, and a break in the middle to stretch and refill the coffee.
5. **Have a snow-day plan for the snow-day plan:** if the internet goes out at someone's house, the others carry on with a bot and that person calls in by phone.

Bringing in a new player

- Send them this guide's Chapter 5 and the chapter for your game a few days ahead.
- Offer a 20-minute practice session on a call the day before.
- Seat them with a patient partner for the first night.

Using a group calendar invite

If your group uses email, the host can send a repeating calendar invitation with the call link in it — for example a weekly Zoom or FaceTime link. Then everyone's phone reminds them, and the link is always in the same place.

Mixing in-person and online

Some groups meet in person when the weather is good and online when it isn't. Others have one or two members join from far away while the rest sit at a real table: the far-away player joins the online game, and the people in the room play on their own devices around the kitchen table. Do whatever keeps everyone playing.

TIP

Write the plan down

Put the site, the host, the time and the call link on one sheet and send it to everyone. The Cheat-Sheet in Chapter 27 has room for it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A steady routine means nobody has to remember how it works each week — they just show up, the way they always have.

CHAPTER 22

When Something Goes Wrong

Almost every game-night hiccup is one of a handful of problems. Work through them in order, calmly — your friends will wait.

"My invitation never came"

1. Check that the host has your exact username. A single wrong letter is the most common cause.
2. Make sure you're signed in and in the right area. On BBO, go into **Casual** first (Chapter 12).
3. Check your email, including the spam or junk folder, for Trickster's email invitations.
4. Ask the host to send it again.

"I got disconnected" or "the game froze"

1. Wait 20 seconds. Many sites reconnect on their own.
2. Refresh the page in your browser, or close and reopen the app. Sign in again if asked.
3. Go back to the game or table; most sites hold your seat for a short while.
4. If your Wi-Fi is down, use your phone's cell connection for the game, or let a bot take your seat and stay on the call.

"I can't hear anyone" or "they can't hear me"

- Check the mute button on the call — it's on the call device, not the game.
- Turn the volume up on the call device's side buttons.
- If there's an echo or a squeal, two devices in one room are on the call. Mute or hang up one.

"I forgot my password" or "I'm locked out"

1. On the sign-in screen, choose **Forgot password** or **Reset password**.
2. Type the email address you signed up with.
3. Open the email from the site and follow the link. Make a new password.
4. If no email arrives, check the junk folder and make sure you used the same email you signed up with.

"The cards are too small"

- On a computer, zoom in: hold **Ctrl** and press **+** (on a Mac, **Command** and **+**).
- Move the game to the biggest screen you have, and the call to the phone.
- Turn the tablet sideways.

TIP

Play a card by mistake?

Most sites don't allow take-backs in a game with others. Laugh it off — in a casual game among friends, ask whether the group wants to replay the hand.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With these few fixes in your pocket, a hiccup costs you a minute, not the evening.

CHAPTER 23

Real-Money "Skill Game" and Sweepstakes Casino Apps

Once you start playing cards on a phone or tablet, you'll see ads for card, solitaire, bingo and Mahjong apps that promise you can **win real money**. Some call themselves **skill games**. Others are **sweepstakes casinos** that use two kinds of coins, one of which can supposedly be turned into cash. They are not the same as the friendly sites in this guide.

How they usually work

- Ads show someone winning a large cash prize playing a simple game.
- Winnings are often shown in a bonus currency or "bonus cash" that can't actually be withdrawn, or only after you reach a high minimum or deposit money of your own.
- Entering "cash" tournaments means paying an entry fee with real money.
- Sweepstakes casinos offer free coins at first, then push you to buy coin packages.

In Ohio

As of November 2026, real-money online casino games aren't legal in Ohio. Sweepstakes casino apps operate in a gray area: Ohio hasn't passed a law banning them, a bill to do so was stalled, and some sites have pulled out of the state while others face lawsuits. Laws change, and this isn't legal advice — but for our purposes the simple answer is the same: they're a way to lose money, not to make it.

Signs you're looking at one

- "Win real cash," "cash out," "withdraw to PayPal" or "instant payouts" in the ad or the app.
- Slot machines, roulette or "spins" anywhere in the app.
- Buying coins, gems or "gold" that you're told can turn into money.
- Pressure: countdown timers, "limited-time bonus," "you're one game from a payout."

SCAM ALERT

Paying to get paid is a red flag

The FTC's advice on game-like "earn money" apps is plain: if you have to pay or deposit your own money before you can withdraw winnings, it's a sure sign of a scam. Close the app and don't send more.

HEADS UP

Free friendly games don't pay out

Trickster Cards, BBO casual tables, Chess.com, Lichess and Real Mah Jongg are for fun. None of them pay cash prizes for an ordinary game with friends. If an app promises cash, it's a different kind of app.

GOOD TO KNOW

If gambling has become a problem

If you or someone you love is spending more than they meant to on these apps, help is free and confidential. Your doctor can point you to it, and Ohio runs a problem gambling helpline you can find with a quick search.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the signs keeps your card hobby a hobby — and keeps your savings in your bank account.

CHAPTER 24

Chatty Strangers, Gift-Card Asks and Account Safety

Most people you meet at an online game table are just people who like cards. A few are not. Scammers go where lonely, friendly people are, and a game table in January is one of those places.

How the stranger scam usually goes

1. A friendly player chats with you game after game. They're kind, funny, and very interested in you.
2. They suggest moving to texting, WhatsApp or another app, "so we can talk more."
3. Weeks later there's a sudden crisis — a hospital bill, a stuck inheritance, a plane ticket — or a wonderful investment opportunity.
4. They ask for money, often as **gift cards**, a wire transfer, cryptocurrency or a payment app.

SCAM ALERT

Gift cards are for gifts, not payments

The FTC says no real business or government agency will ever tell you to pay with a gift card. Once someone has the card number and PIN, the money is gone. Anyone — a stranger or a "friend" — who asks you to buy gift cards and read them the numbers is running a scam.

When the message seems to come from a friend

Sometimes a scammer gets into a real friend's account and messages the whole friends list asking for help. If a friend messages you on a game site asking for money, gift cards or your password, **call them** on the phone number you already have. Don't reply inside the game.

Keeping your own account safe

- Use a password you don't use anywhere else.
- Never tell anyone your password — not a player, and not someone claiming to be from the site. Game sites don't ask for it.
- Turn on two-step verification if the site offers it.

- Beware emails saying your account will be closed unless you click a link. Go to the site yourself instead.

If you've already sent money or gift cards

1. Stop sending anything more, even if they promise to pay you back.
2. If you paid with gift cards, contact the company that issued the card right away. If money is still on it, they may be able to freeze it.
3. If you paid by card or bank, call your bank or card company now.
4. Report it at **reportfraud.ftc.gov**, and report and block the player on the game site.
5. Tell someone you trust. You're not the first, and it's not your fault.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You can enjoy friendly games with strangers without ever being the person a scammer hoped to find.

CHAPTER 25

What It Costs, and Canceling Subscriptions

You can play every game in this guide with friends for nothing. Here's where money can come in, and how to stop paying for something you don't want.

Where money comes in

Site or app	Free	Costs money (as of November 2026)
Trickster Cards	Playing, including private games (a brief ad before each game)	Any ad-free option is shown in the app
BBO	Account, casual tables with friends	BB$ for robot and club/ACBL games; optional No Ads
Chess.com	Account, playing friends	Gold, Platinum, Diamond memberships
Lichess	Everything	Donations, if you'd like
Real Mah Jongg	Download and play	In-app purchases
NMJL Online	—	Annual card plus online membership

Canceling on an iPhone or iPad

1. Open **Settings** and tap your name at the top.
2. Tap **Subscriptions**.
3. Tap the subscription, then **Cancel Subscription** (you may need to scroll down).
4. If there's no Cancel button, it's already canceled, or it's billed somewhere else.

Canceling on Android

1. Open the **Google Play Store** app and tap your profile picture.
2. Tap **Payments & subscriptions**, then **Subscriptions**.
3. Choose the subscription and tap **Cancel subscription**.

HEADS UP

Deleting the app doesn't cancel

Removing an app from your phone does not stop the payments. Cancel first, then delete. If you subscribed on the website, cancel in your account settings on that website.

TIP

Ask for a password on every purchase

In your phone's settings you can require your password, Face ID or fingerprint for every purchase. That stops accidental taps — and a grandchild's — from buying game coins.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll keep game night free, pay only for extras you truly use, and know exactly how to stop a charge.

PART 8

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep beside the card table.

CHAPTER 26

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you and your group can get playing on your own. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves time and frustration. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Getting the whole group set up** — accounts, friends lists and the first private table, so the first game night actually starts on time (Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 9).
- **Setting up the two-device game night**: the game on the laptop or tablet, the video call on the phone, the sound working on both (Chapter 7).
- **Moving your bridge game online**, including a casual BBO table for your foursome (Chapter 12).
- **Making the cards bigger** and the screen easier to see.
- **Checking a charge** or a subscription you don't recognize, and canceling it (Chapter 25).
- **Something about a game app or a new online friend doesn't feel right** (Chapter 23 and Chapter 24). Call before you send anything.
- **You'd simply rather have a patient person handle it.** That's always a good enough reason.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace — no rushing, no talking down, no jargon. I explain what I'm doing in plain words, and I'll always tell you honestly when something isn't worth the money. Home visits are here in Portage County, Ohio; remote help reaches you wherever you are, which is handy when the roads are bad. I've been doing this work for more than 30 years.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042**, or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is free to read and share with everyone in your card group.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may be greeted by Sophie

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might first meet **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. The actual help always comes from me.

Thank you for keeping your game — and your friends — going through the winter. That's worth every bit of the effort.

— Bill

CHAPTER 27

Your Online Game Night Cheat-Sheet

Keep a copy of this beside the card table or the laptop. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

Remember	
Euchre	**Trickster Cards** — trickstercards.com. Free; host chooses **Invite Friends**.
Bridge	**BBO** — bridgebase.com. Casual > Start a table, reserve seats. Free. BB$ only for paid games.
Chess	**Chess.com** (Play > Play a Friend) or **Lichess** (Play with a friend, send the link).
Mahjong	**Real Mah Jongg** or **NMJL Online**. Have this year's League card.
Talking	Game on one device, FaceTime, Zoom or a phone call on another.
Zoom free plan	Meetings end at 40 minutes. Start a new one at the break.
Real-money apps	"Win cash" card, bingo or sweepstakes apps are not the same. Skip them.
Gift cards	Anyone asking you to pay with gift cards is a scammer.
Canceling	Cancel in Settings or Google Play first, then delete the app.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Our game and night/time	_____
Website or app we use	_____
My username there	_____
Email I signed up with	_____
Our host (and backup host)	_____
Call we use and the link	_____
Friends' usernames	_____
Paid memberships and renewal dates	_____
Paid in the app or on the website?	_____
Bill's Home Tech	(330) 200-8042 · billshometech.com/book

When something's wrong, in order

1. No invitation: check your username with the host, sign in, go to the right area (BBO: **Casual**), check junk mail (Chapter 22).
2. Game froze: wait 20 seconds, refresh or reopen the app, go back to the table.
3. Can't hear: check mute and volume on the **call** device, not the game.
4. Forgot password: **Forgot password** on the sign-in screen, then check your email.
5. Strange charge: look in Settings > your name > Subscriptions, or Google Play > Subscriptions (Chapter 25).
6. Someone asks for money or gift cards: stop, call your friend on their known number, report it (Chapter 24).
7. Still stuck: call Bill at **(330) 200-8042**.