

Reactor 21 — Rules (Version 3)

1. Objective

Two players work together to stabilize all four reactors by bringing each one to a total of exactly 21. The team wins when all four reactors are stabilized. The team loses immediately if the system accumulates too many meltdowns or too much instability.

2. Components

- One standard 52-card deck (remove jokers).
- Four shared reactor zones labeled A–D.
- A face-down draw pile and a face-up discard pile.
- Red meltdown tokens.
- Yellow instability tokens.
- Optional green markers for stabilized reactors.

3. Card Values

- 2–10 = face value
- J, Q, K = 10
- Ace = 1 or 11 (chosen when placed)

4. Setup

Shuffle the deck. Deal one card face-up to each reactor. Place the rest face-down as the draw pile, then flip the top card to start the discard pile. Set all tokens within reach.

5. Turn Structure

Each turn follows this sequence:

1. Draw one card from either the draw pile or the top of the discard pile (only if you intend to place it).
2. Place the card if legal.
3. Resolve consequences if the card is unplaceable.
4. Stabilize any reactor that reaches exactly 21.
5. End the turn.

6. Placing Cards

A card may be placed on any reactor whose total will not exceed 21 by accepting that card.

- If multiple reactors can take it, the team chooses.
- If only one reactor can accept it, it must be placed there.

- A total of exactly 21 stabilizes that reactor.

7. Stabilized Reactors

When a reactor reaches exactly 21, clear all of its cards into the discard pile and mark the reactor as stabilized. Stabilized reactors are complete, no longer accept cards, and count toward the victory condition.

8. Unplaceable Cards

If the drawn card cannot legally be placed on any reactor without exceeding 21, the team must choose one of the following outcomes:

Instability:

Reveal and discard the card, and place one yellow instability token.

Meltdown:

Choose a reactor to overload. Place the card on it, clear all of its cards into the discard pile, reset its total to zero, and place one red meltdown token.

If placing a token would exceed the limit, the team immediately loses the game.

9. Draw-Pile Exhaustion

If the draw pile becomes empty, shuffle the discard pile to form a new draw pile and flip the top card to restart the discard pile.

10. Winning

The team wins immediately when all four reactors have been stabilized.

11. Losing

The team loses immediately if either:

- The meltdown tokens reach their limit, or
- The instability tokens reach their limit.

The loss thresholds in this version may be set by the players before the game begins.