

Reactor 21 — Rules (Version 5)

1. Objective

You and your teammate work together to stabilize four nuclear reactors by bringing each one to a total of exactly 21. Stabilize all four reactors to win. The team loses if the system suffers 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.
- Three red meltdown tokens.
- Five yellow instability tokens.
- Four green stabilization markers to indicate permanently completed reactors.

3. Card Values

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

4. Setup

Shuffle the deck thoroughly. Deal one card face-up to each reactor. Place the remaining deck face-down as the draw pile. Flip the top card to begin the discard pile. Set the meltdown, instability, and stabilization markers nearby. All reactors start active.

5. Turn Structure

Each turn follows this sequence:

1. Draw a card from either the draw pile or the top of the discard pile (only if the discard card can be legally placed).
2. Place the card onto a reactor if possible.
3. Resolve failure if the card is unplaceable.
4. Stabilize any reactor that reaches exactly 21.
5. End the turn.

6. Placing Cards

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

- If more than one reactor allows legal placement, the team decides which reactor receives the card.
- If only one reactor can accept it, the card must be placed there.
- A reactor total of exactly 21 immediately triggers stabilization.

7. Reactor Stabilization

When a reactor reaches exactly 21, immediately:

1. Clear all its cards into the discard pile.
2. Place a green stabilization marker on that reactor.
3. Mark the reactor as permanently complete; it no longer receives cards or affects failure conditions.

Stabilizing all four reactors wins the game instantly.

8. Unplaceable Cards

If the drawn card cannot be placed on any active reactor without exceeding 21, it is considered unplaceable. The team must choose one of the following consequences:

Instability:

Reveal and discard the card. Place one yellow instability token.

Meltdown:

Choose any active reactor to overload. Place the card onto that reactor, then clear all of that reactor's cards into the discard pile and place one red meltdown token. The reactor's total resets to zero.

If placing a token fills its track, the game ends immediately in a loss.

9. Reshuffling the Deck

If the draw pile empties, shuffle the entire discard pile to form a new draw pile. Place it face-down, then flip the top card of the new draw pile face-up to begin a new discard pile.

10. Winning the Game

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

11. Losing the Game

The team loses immediately if either:

- All three meltdown tokens have been placed, or
- All five instability tokens have been placed.