

It's not known for sure where Shut the Box originated. Most theories point to a source in Northern France and give Normandy or the Channel Islands as the specific location. It appears that it has been played in this region for at least two hundred years and is a game popular with sailors and fishermen. There is only evidence for the game in England from the middle of the twentieth century, and since most games of a similar ilk spawned references in a variety of literature, this would seem to be a good indication that it did not originate in that country. In fact, Timothy Finn in his "Pub Games of England" says that the game was brought to the South of England from the Channel Islands in 1958 by a Mr. 'Chalky' Towbridge. Apparently the game has several names, one of which is Canoga.

An old pub gambling favorite, Shut the Box uses two dice and a special wooden playing tray. The tray features the numbers 1 - 9, 10 or 1-12 in a row, each of which has a hinged or sliding cover. A turn involves repeatedly throwing the dice and shutting or covering a number or multiple numbers every throw. The turn ends when no numbers can be covered upon the throw of the dice at which point the player's total is calculated. The overriding goal is to completely cover all numbers or "shut the box" which results in the best possible score of zero.

THE PLAY; Shut the Box can be played by any number of players although it is most enjoyable with multiple players. Some people even play the game solo as a pastime akin to patience. As played traditionally in English pubs, Shut the Box is a gambling pastime with each of the players paying an agreed amount into the "pool" at the beginning and the winner collecting the pool at the end of each round. However, it isn't necessary to gamble in order to play the game.

A round of the game consists of each player taking one turn. A player takes a turn by repeatedly throwing the dice until the player cannot continue. Each throw of the dice is taken as follows:

The player throws the dice into the box and adds up the pips. The player must then cover up a set of unique uncovered numbers that add up to the sum thrown. So for instance, if the total pips is 8, the player may choose one of the following sets of numbers as long as all of the numbers in the set are available to be covered:

- 8
- 7 & 1
- 6 & 2
- 5 & 3
- 5 & 2 & 1
- 4 & 3 & 1

The player then does exactly the same thing with a second throw and so on.

Once a number is covered up, it stays covered so, eventually, the player will throw a total for which it is not possible to find a set of uncovered numbers. When this happens, the player scores the sum of the numbers that are still uncovered. So if the numbers 1, 5 and 9 are uncovered and the player throws a 4, with options 4 or 3 & 1, the turn finishes and the player's score is 15.

If anyone succeeds in shutting the box, i.e. closing all the numbers, that player has a perfect score of zero. After each player has taken one turn, the winner of the round is the player with the lowest score. If two players tie with the lowest score the game will continue with another round. Players may agree to ante up again, if gambling. This is called "2-tie-all-tie."

VARIANTSA popular variant for two players is called the 'long game.' The player who goes first attempts to shut the box exactly as above. When the turn ends, the other player takes over the board as it is and attempts to uncover all the covered numbers using exactly the same rules. When a double is thrown, the player gets an extra turn. The player who shuts the box or uncovers the box first, wins.

Another way of playing is to add the number of points each round to a player's score. A player has to drop out when that player's score reaches 45 and the last player remaining wins the game. Some people play that a single die option comes into force once the total of the remaining numbers is less than six.

An alternative way of calculating the score is occasionally used whereby the number read directly from the available digits on the box is the score for the player. E.g. if the numbers 1, 5 and 9 are uncovered, the score is 159.