

How to Setup and Play a Game of Jenga

Building the tower, stacking blocks, and winning the game

Co-authored by Ashton Wu , Luke Smith, MFA , and 39 contributors

Last Updated: March 27, 2024  Fact Checked

There's nothing quite like the tension and drama of plucking the trickiest of Jenga blocks from the precarious tower. The sweet relief of a successful turn, the glorious destruction when it all comes tumbling down. It's easy to see why Jenga is such a classic, so get in on the fun! We'll show you how to build the tower and play the game, and we'll even offer some prime strategy tips while you're here.

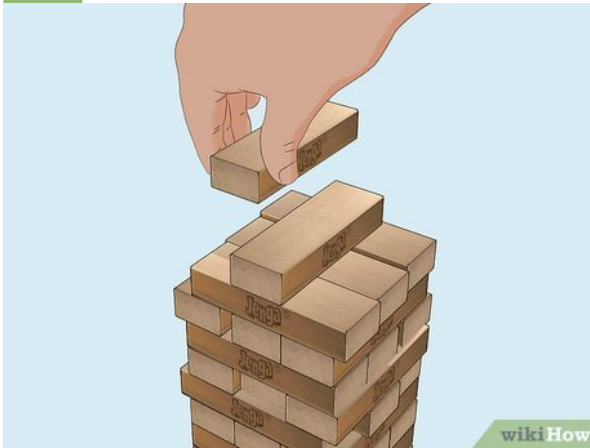
Quick Guide to Jenga

Build the tower by layering 3 blocks in each row, alternating their direction each layer. Then, take turns removing blocks from the middle layers of the tower, carefully placing each block on top the same way you built the tower. The player who topples the tower loses!

Part
1

Part 1 of 3:

Building the Tower



1 Stack the blocks in groups of 3 to build the tower. First, shake the [Jenga blocks](#) out of the box and onto a flat surface. Then, stack the blocks in parallel sets of 3 until you have built a tower that is 18 blocks high. Each new layer of parallel blocks is rotated 90° along the horizontal axis from the last layer.^[1]

- Your Jenga set includes 54 blocks out of the box. If you're missing blocks, simply build the tower as usual and play with the blocks you do have.
- Some Jenga sets include a plastic loading tray to help you build the tower. Stack the blocks into the loading tray, then place the tray upright.

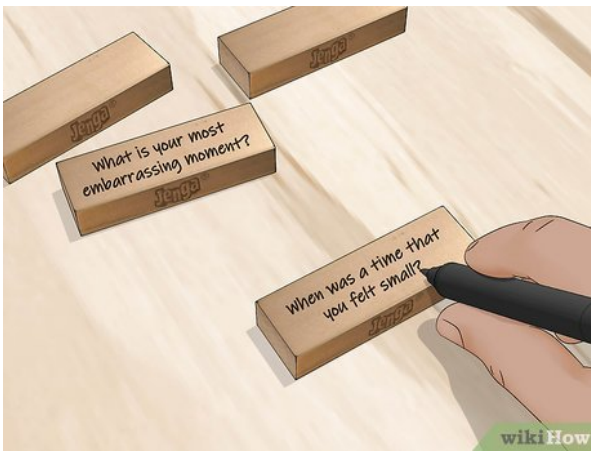


2 Straighten out the tower with your hands or a flat object. Before you play, make sure that the structure is sturdy. The block layers should interlock so that the tower stands tall without any external support. Use your hands or a flat, solid object to smooth out the sides. Push in any pieces that jut out.^[2]



3 Gather any number of players around the tower. There is no strict maximum number of players, and in fact Jenga can be played solo! For a competitive game, find at least 1 other player. Have everyone sit in a circle around the block structure. If you are only playing with one other person, sit facing each other from opposite sides of the tower.^[3]

- While there's no set limit on how many people can play, 4-6 people is a good range that ensures everyone can participate without waiting too long for a turn.



4 Write questions or dares on the block for a fun twist. This is an optional variation of Jenga. Before you stack the tower, write something on each block: a question, a "dare," or some other action. Then, shuffle the blocks and stack the Jenga tower as usual. When each person pulls a block from the tower, they must do whatever is written on the block.^[4]

- Questions might be flirtatious ("Who do you most want to kiss in this room?"), thoughtful ("When was a time that you felt small?"), or humorous ("What is your most embarrassing moment?")
- Dares might be anything from "Trade one item of clothing with the person beside you," to "Drink a shot of hot sauce," to "Make a scary face."

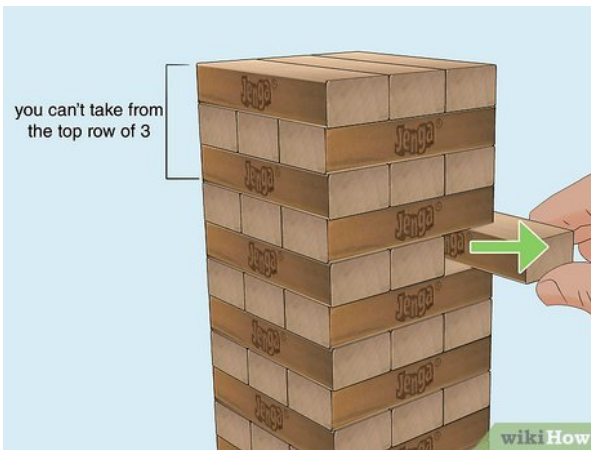
Part
2

Part 2 of 3:

Playing the Game



1 Pick a person to pull the first block. Traditionally, the person who built the tower goes first.^[5] You might also choose the person with the next birthday, or the person who most wants to start. If you're having trouble deciding, play [Rock, Paper, Scissors](#) to determine the first player.



2 Remove a block without toppling the tower. Steady your hands and carefully take one block out from any level below the last completed level—meaning you can't take from either the top row of 3, nor the row in progress above it. Look for the block that is the loosest, or the easiest to remove, or that will least disturb the stability of the tower. Push or pull the block away, depending on the angle and the location in the stack.^[6]

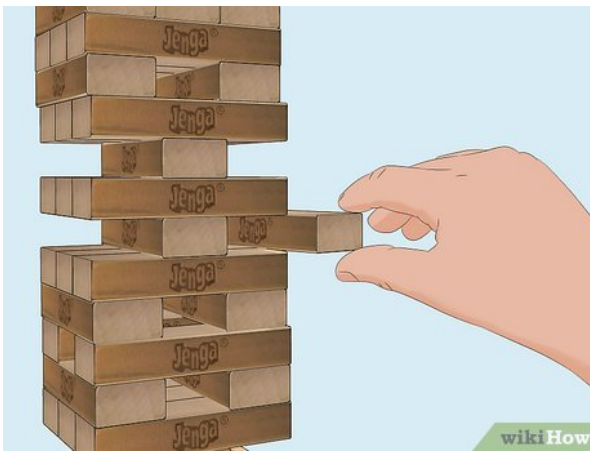
- Remember: you may only touch the tower with one hand at a time. This rule keeps players from holding the tower steady while they pull their blocks.^[7]



3 Place each pulled block atop the tower, perpendicular to the last row. The player that pulled the block puts it back on top of the tower to continue the pattern of layering in groups of 3. Stack them neatly so that the tower stays strong. As the game goes on, the tower will grow higher and higher until it teeters and becomes precarious.



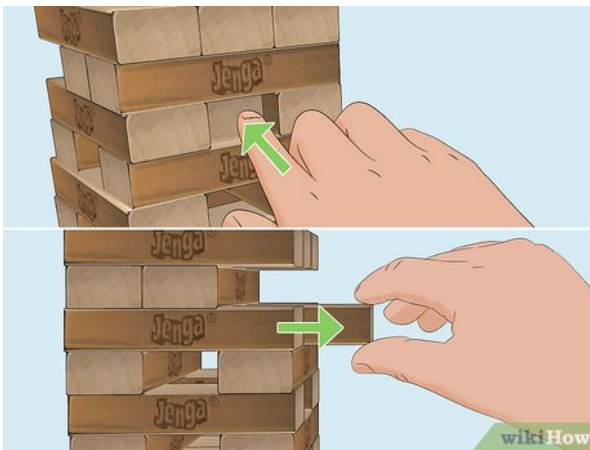
4 Play until the tower falls. The winner of the game is the last person who successfully placed a block on top of the tower without toppling it. Conversely, the loser is the one who made the tower fall. Whatever the outcome, rebuild the tower to play again!^[8]



- 1 Be patient and move slowly.** Do not rush Jenga! Take your time to pull the right block when your turn comes around. If you try to go too quickly, you will be more likely to topple the tower.^[9]
 - Don't force a block if it doesn't seem loose. It may loosen up later as the game progresses. Patience is key.

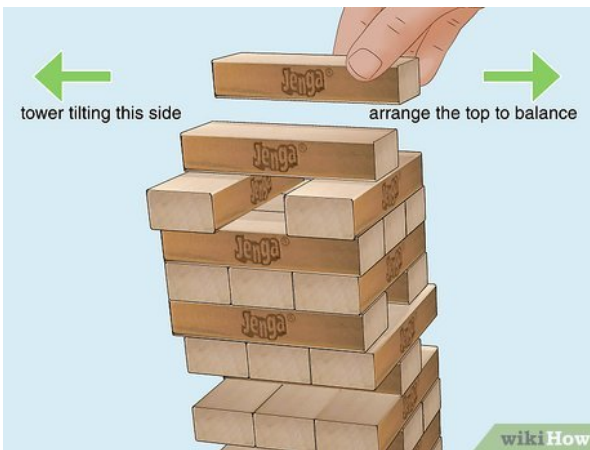


- 2 Search for easy blocks by poking the tower.** Gently test each block with your finger to find the loosest pieces of the tower. Look for the loose blocks and the blocks that are already sticking out of the tower. Be careful as you go, and always keep an eye on the overall stability of the structure. Make sure to maintain the balance, and reposition any blocks you don't take.^[10]
 - Each layer of the tower has 3 parallel blocks: two on the outside, and one in the center. If you go for a block in the middle, you're generally less likely to set the tower off-kilter.
 - Take blocks from the top or the middle of the stack, since the bottom blocks are often hard to remove, and the blocks at the top often pull other blocks with them.



3 Push or pull with only 1 or 2 fingers. Make as little contact with the tower as possible. If you're taking a block from the middle, gently poke it through the tower from one side. If you're taking a block from the outside edge, pinch the ends between your thumb and forefinger, then wiggle the piece back and forth until it comes loose.^[11]

- Use a combination of tapping and wiggling to remove difficult blocks.



4 Place blocks strategically to balance the tower. Take note of which way the tower is tilting after you have removed your block from the stack. Then, carefully arrange your block on top to balance the tower in the other direction so that the extra top-heavy weight won't send the tower toppling down.^[12]

- Alternately, if you think you can get away with it, place your block on the weaker "leaning" side so that it is that much harder for the next player to pull a block.



5 Play to win, not to build a high tower. If you care about the competitive aspect of the game, then you don't want the tower to fall on your turn. Don't work together to see how high you can build; plan out your moves to destabilize the structure so that it will topple on someone else. Remove important pieces from near the bottom of the stack to trip up your opponents.^[13]

- **Be a good sport.** Respect other players, and do not go out of your way to mess them up while they're taking their turns. Remember: if you lose this time, there's always the next game to prove your skill!



Community Q&A

Question

How do you win if playing with 3 players? Whoever loses the first game sits out the second to see who wins that game?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

With more than 2 players, the "winner" is the last person to successfully remove and stack a block without toppling the tower. In other words, the person immediately before whoever made the tower fall.

Helpful 14 Not Helpful 10

Question

Can you stand the blocks upright instead of placing them flat?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

That'd make for quite the tricky game of Jenga! For a typical game, lay them flat, but go ahead and stand them up as an experiment!

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 9

Question

If you're playing Jenga and the other person pulls the block out for you and they make the tower fall, who wins?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

The player who caused the tower to fall loses the game. Players shouldn't be removing blocks on other players' turns.

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 6

Question

When it is my turn, how many blocks must I remove?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

You only remove a single block from the tower, then carefully place it on the top layer.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 2

Question

Do we have to complete three blocks on top before we stack any higher?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

Yes, you must complete a row of 3 before you place blocks on a new row. That said, you can place blocks anywhere in that row that you wish.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 1

Question

Can you poke multiple blocks before you take one out?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

You can manipulate the position of the blocks, yes, but if you're testing a block with your finger you must attempt to place it back in its starting position if you end up not taking it.

Helpful 1 Not Helpful 0

Question

Can I sit during Jenga?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

Yes! You can sit, stand, and move around the tower however you wish, so long as you don't touch it with 2 hands.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 1

Question

How to make the opponent lose?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

Try taking particularly tricky blocks to set the tower off-balance, so that when your opponent makes a move they're more likely to topple the tower.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0

Question

Once the game is started can you touch and straighten the stack?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

You can use one hand, and one hand only, to manipulate the tower. In the spirit of the game, though, it's best to let the tower lean as it may.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 1

Question

Do you have to always take from the bottom?



wikiHow Staff Editor
Staff Answer

You can take any block from beneath the last completed row. You can't take blocks from the top 2 rows.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 2



Tips

- The name of the game, Jenga, comes from the Swahili word for "to build." [14]
- Middle blocks are typically the easiest to take; try those first.
- If the center brick has been removed from a layer, you may knock the other 2 bricks toward the center to make 1 of them easier to take.

- Remember that you are not allowed to take a block from the top completed layer, or the layer in progress.



Warnings

- Avoid playing on a glass table! It might not stand up well to a bunch of falling blocks.

References

1. ↑ <https://gamerules.com/rules/jenga/>
2. ↑ <https://www.hasbro.com/common/instruct/jenga.pdf>
3. ↑ <http://www.hasbro.com/common/instruct/Jenga.PDF>
4. ↑ <https://www.teachingexpertise.com/classroom-ideas/jenga-games/>
5. ↑ <https://www.hasbro.com/common/instruct/jenga.pdf>
6. ↑ <https://www.rookieroad.com/games-for-kids/jenga-basic-rules-for-0055024/>
7. ↑ <https://www.hasbro.com/common/instruct/jenga.pdf>
8. ↑ <https://www.hasbro.com/common/instruct/jenga.pdf>
9. ↑ <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/how-to-beat-anyone-at-jenga>
10. ↑ <https://www.hasbro.com/common/instruct/jenga.pdf>
11. ↑ <https://www.gamesver.com/20-must-know-jenga-tips-become-the-best-you-can-be/>
12. ↑ <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/how-to-beat-anyone-at-jenga>
13. ↑ <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/how-to-beat-anyone-at-jenga>
14. ↑ <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2011/07/how-to/how-to-beat-anyone-at-jenga>
15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwhUXNRDZSo>

About This Article



Co-authored by:
Ashton Wu
Board Game
Expert

This article was co-authored by [Ashton Wu](#) and by wikiHow staff writer, [Luke Smith, MFA](#). Ashton Wu is a Board Game expert at Shelfside. After delving into the Yugioh tournament community while growing up, Ashton launched himself into the board gaming community in 2014 and went into reviewing board games as a career full-time in 2019. His YouTube channel Shelfside has over 35K subscribers and over 4 million views, assisted by written reviews on the Shelfside website and BoardGameGeek.com. He also consults with gaming companies to build high-quality gaming products. Ashton is a tournament commentator, board game playthrough director, and host of the Shelfside Podcast, where he talks about board games with his business partner, Daniel. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Economics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in addition to the Technology Management Certificate. This article has been viewed 990,450 times.

★★★★★
63 votes - 92%

Co-authors: **39**
Updated: **March 27,**
2024
Views: **990,450**

Categories: [Featured Articles](#) | [Games](#)

<https://www.wikihow.com/Play-Jenga>

If you buy through links on our site, we may earn a commission