

How to Play FreeCell

See every card, protect temporary space, and move longer runs with the supermove formula.



52 face up

4 free cells

8 columns

The goal: move all 52 cards to four suit foundations, Ace through King. Free cells and empty columns are working space, not destinations.

01 Read the complete opening board

FOUR FREE CELLS

FREE FREE FREE FREE

FOUR SUIT FOUNDATIONS

H D C S

A-K A-K A-K A-K

8 TABLEAU COLUMNS - ALL 52 CARDS FACE UP

7

7

7

7

6

6

6

6

First four columns: 7 cards each | Last four columns: 6 cards each | No stock or redeal

02 What each board zone does

FREE CELLS

One temporary card per cell

Keep one open when possible.

TABLEAU

Build down in alternating colors

Every card stays visible.

EMPTY COLUMN

ANY CARD

Accept any card or legal run

Can double move capacity.

FOUNDATIONS

Build by suit from Ace to King

All four complete the game.

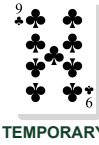
03 Five rules that decide every move

RULE 1

**Alternate colors downward**

A red 6 may land on a black 7. Rank drops by one; suit does not matter.

RULE 2

**One card per free cell**

Any exposed card may wait in an empty cell. Only that card can leave it.

RULE 3

**Foundations rise by suit**

Start with an Ace, then add 2 through King of the same suit.

RULE 4

**Any card starts an empty column**

A legal sequence may also enter if current workspace supports its length.

RULE 5

**Move only what the free spaces support**

A multi-card drag is shorthand for legal one-card parking and restacking. The interface rejects a run that exceeds capacity.

04 The supermove formula

$$(F + 1) \times 2^E$$

MAXIMUM RUN TO A NONEMPTY DESTINATION

F = empty free cells. E = usable empty tableau columns. Each empty column can double the temporary sorting space.

05 Capacity at a glance

EMPTY CELLS	0 COLUMNS	1 COLUMN	2 COLUMNS
0	1	2	4
1	2	4	8
2	3	6	12
3	4	8	16
4	5	10	20

At the opening: 4 empty cells and no empty columns = a maximum run of 5 cards.

Empty-destination caveat: if the run moves into an empty column, that column cannot also provide temporary storage. Use $(F + 1) \times 2^{E-1}$.
Two empty cells plus one empty destination permit 3 cards, not 6.

06 Use this five-move priority order

1

Release Aces and low cards

Trace buried Aces and 2s before building long runs.

2

Keep one free cell open

Before filling the last cell, name exactly how its card will leave.

3

Create an empty column deliberately

Target a short column; one empty column can double capacity.

4

Keep useful landing cards below

A foundation move can remove the bridge an opposite color still needs.

5

Build only a run with a destination

An orderly sequence with nowhere to land is still immobile.

07 See what a legal supermove really does

01 PARK



Use two free cells

02 MOVE



Move the base card

03 RESTACK



Rebuild in order

08 Solvability is not the same as a player result

31,999 of 32,000

CLASSIC CATALOG SOLVABILITY - 99.997%

A winning line exists for nearly every original Microsoft opening.

11.1%

MEASURED PLAYER RESULT - 137 / 1,234 STARTS

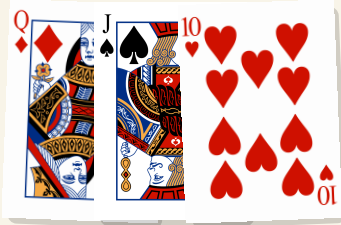
Starts include abandoned and exploratory games, so this is a real-use outcome.

Deal #11982

The famous exception is the only widely accepted unsolvable deal in the original 32,000-deal catalog. Visible information does not guarantee a solution.

09 Practice one three-card supermove

FIXED MICROSOFT DEAL #1113



Move QD - JS - 10H onto KS

Four empty free cells give an opening capacity of five, so this three-card run is legal. The interface performs the parking and restacking as one drag.

playsolitaire.io/freecell?deal=1113

10 Before every move

✓ Locate all four Aces and the low cards blocking them.

✓ Count empty free cells and usable empty columns.

✓ Name how a parked card will leave before using a cell.

✓ Prefer a move that empties a short column deliberately.

✓ Keep landing cards below until both colors are ready.

✓ Confirm a long run has a legal next destination.

11 Compare the reserve-cell games

FREECELL



4 cells / alternating colors

Nearly every classic deal is solvable.
Empty columns accept any rank.

EIGHT OFF



8 cells / build by suit

More reserve cells, but stricter same-suit tableau building changes the puzzle.

12 Reference, data and reuse

Keep the maintained guide with this handout

The online guide adds the playable fixed deal, complete FAQ answers, maintained registry data, and responsive visual lessons. When sharing this PDF online, link readers to the original guide.

playsolitaire.io/how-to-play-freecell

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Data note

Classic catalog: 31,999 of 32,000 solver-proven.
Player result: 137 wins from 1,234 starts. These figures measure different things.

Suggested citation

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