

Teaching pétanque to beginners & groups

Pétanque is so simple that there's no need for a manual.

But these tips may help speed things up at the start, with larger groups, and with children.

Most important is to (a) **keep it simple** and (b) **make it fun**.

Terrain

An «open» terrain (no boundaries) is recommended. Pick an area (dirt, gravel, hard sand,..) large enough where you can have several games going on at the same time. Baseball diamonds at schools are ideal.

Nobody likes theory. Explain as you go.

The sooner the group understands the 2 main rules, the better:

1. which team gets to play, and why.
2. which team scores, how many points, and why.

Pick 4 or 6 group members and make two teams. If applicable pick a ladies/girls team and a men/boys team. Or white shirts and blue shirts. Or pants and shorts. Anything to easily identify the two demonstration teams, so you can name them.

Beginners tend to get confused with the boule patterns. So try to give each team very different boules. At this stage it is not important for each player to have his/her own set. One team plain, the other team striped is the easiest. Or one with single stripes, the other with doubles. That way, within minutes, you have e.g. a boys team with plain boules and a girls team with striped boules playing their first round.

Best catch phrase to use after the first boule is thrown:

«The girls are winning!» To which the boys will invariably reply in chorus:

«Yeah, yeah, that's because they're the only ball out there.»

«You think you guys can do better?»

The ice is broken and the competitive spirit emerges right there.

After each boule, ask the bystanders which team should play now. Make sure everyone understands.

When it's time to count points, ask the group to come and stand around. Explain the score, but – more important – spend a minute or two simulating different scenarios - while moving the boules accordingly - and ask the bystanders: «How many points would the 'blue' team get in this case?». «And what if the 'white' team had done this?». «Or if they had hit the target ball?». A good term for the winning boule(s): «inside» the circle defined by the best boule of the losing team.

Now everyone will want to play. As a good teacher, you will have noticed who got the 2 main rules right away, and who took a bit longer. Keep that in mind when assembling teams for a first «tournament». If you don't have a pair number of players, make uneven teams – as long as they have the same number of boules. Even teams of 4 or 5 players if necessary. If you don't have enough boules for everyone, shorten the games to e.g. 7 points, so the others don't have to wait too long.

Though tempting at times, as a teacher it is best not to play in any team, but to move around, watch, explain continuously and give tips to the players while they're playing:

- the importance of the landing spot
- a long, smooth arm swing
- use an opposing teams' boule as a backstop
- push forward one of your own teams' boules already in place
- read the terrain, and walk over to the target area to see the boules layout from another angle
- have a «cutter» in place, to prevent the other team from piling up points
- throwing two boules in a row is good (muscle memory!), etc...

Have fun

Use comparisons with golf and other sports. If one of the players really goofs, propose to the other team to give him/her a mulligan. When you see a team losing badly, «coach» them. Point out the best landing spot. Encourage them. Make jokes. A bit of bantering is a main ingredient of pétanque.

Later on, or the next time around, you can talk about dead boules, the diameter of the throwing circle, distance from obstacles, a target ball out of bounds, etc... Because then you're no longer talking to beginners!



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