

Befriendlement

A glass bead game of deepening friendships, trying new things, and squashing your beefs.

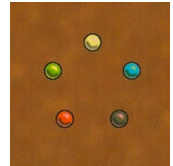
Starter Ruleset

You Will Need

- One pack of [five-color, half-size index cards](#) [[cheaper](#)] (or substitute what you have)
- Pens
- Rubber bands for bundling stacks of cards for later
- Index card box for storage

Setup

1. Place the five different colors of index cards in a circle of five piles at the center of the table.
2. Provide pens on the table.



How to Play

One round of *Befriendlement* has four phases of play:

1. Playing cards
2. Reordering the cards
3. Doing the things written on the cards
4. Shutdown proceedings

The four phases will now be covered in order.

Phase 1: Playing activity cards on a shared stack

In this phase, players write down things they want to do with each other, and then take turns playing the cards. The cards are played atop one another in a pile (or stack) located within the circle made by the five blank stacks of cards.

Card Colors

Befriending works best using colored cards. Colors introduce an additional minigame of trying to assign categories to each card played—but, because these categories are colors and emotions, the assignment is always imperfect, creating an interesting dynamo of productive imperfection.

Here is one way that five+one colors can be used in the game:

Color	Meaning in Befriending	Example Card
Yellow	Easy activities, business-as-usual	Watch TV [like we do every night]
Green	New areas of activity	Start riding bikes [because that would be fun!]
Purple	Wishes (longer-term new activities) & Meta (changes to the nomic rules)	Go on a trip to New Orleans [someday! I wish!]
Blue	Links (movies, books, links to watch/read together or separately)	Watch Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. together
Red	Challenge & teaching	Let me teach you about Jacques Rancière's pedagogical ethics
Black	Grievance (a challenge card rejected 3 times)	Play music together [because we both play and yet for some reason, we can't make time to play together despite my requests]

With the digital variation described below in "Variations", more colors can be used (for example, splitting Purple into two colors, one for Wishes, and one for Meta).

Rejecting Cards

If any player doesn't want to do the activity on a card that is played, they may reject that card when it is played. To reject a card, the rejecting player must provide another card as a value (or reason) why they are rejecting the card. Here are the steps to reject a card. This reason card is played and displayed, but not added to the stack (since it's not an activity to be done). Here are some considerations to keep in mind when rejecting cards:

- The Values card given as a reason for the rejection can contain anything resembling a personal value or reason for the rejection, and can be written on-the-spot. Good Values cards are stated generally, so that they can be reused later.
- Make a tick mark on the card that is rejected, to keep track of how many times it was rejected. See the next section, "Challenge Cards" for more on this.
- Make a tick mark on the Values card, to show how many times it was played as a Values card. This will allow you to notice how your personal values emerge in cards, and which values you tend to refer to more frequently.

Challenge & Grievance Cards

When a card is rejected three times, the player remakes it as a red Challenge card. (You can also make a red Challenge/Teaching card whenever you want, by using a red card.)

When a red Challenge card is rejected three times, the player remakes it as a black Grievance card.

If you collect three Grievance cards from the same person, **the friendship is OVER.**

This is not as harsh as it sounds. This means that it would take twenty-seven events of someone playing the same activity card over and over, and having that suggestion repeatedly rejected, and yet still continuing to suggest the same activity that the other player doesn't want to do. Twenty-seven times (or, if all three activity cards are made starting as red Teaching/Challenge cards, a minimum of nine times.)

So, it is very easy to avoid the destruction of a friendship through the gameplay of Befriending. It takes a consensual, repeated interaction of suggest-reject to erode the friendship to the point of breakage. There are a number of mechanisms which allow this eventuality to be completely and easily avoided:

- One player can choose not to continue playing the same activity cards over and over.
- The other player can get curious and choose to do the activity on the card with the other player.
- One player can forgive one of their Grievance cards, and tear it up.
- The players can stop playing Befriending to avoid recognizing formally the actual rift developing in their friendship. They can live a superficial, false friendship which maintains the rift as an unspoken, taboo topic of conversation and interaction.
- The players can forgive each other, recognizing that their friendship may not extend to all contexts of their interpersonal interaction and experience, and that engagement in some aspects may not be possible.

The rules of Challenge and Grievance cards attempt to make visible (as a current-see) the always-already actual conditions and dynamics of friendship. This engages the players in a process of "meta-politics", in which, rather than disagreeing within a shared space, disagreements can be resolved by backing away into separate spaces, on a per-context basis. This game dynamic subtly interacts with the colors of the cards, helping players to begin identifying the aspects of the friendship (novelty, habit, media consumption, self-improvement, or dreaming) which are less-than-fully shared in vision.

Phase 2: Consensually sequencing the stack

After all players run out of ideas and pass on their turn, play advances to the second phase, that of sequencing the cards. (If players have new ideas for activities, they can write them down on cards and save them for later, or interrupt the current phase and ask the other players if they may add a new activity card to the stack now.)

Players take turns proposing moving a card from its current location in the stack to another location in the stack. If the other players consent, the reordering is made—that is, the card is moved up or down in the ordered stack of cards. This means the activity will be done before or after other activities in phase three (next section).

This phase can take on a very informal flow, as players will often feel in agreement on resequencings they would like to make to the stack, and so it can be unclear whose turn it is, or who is making the suggestion to resequence a card. Just do your best to be polite and take turns.

When all players pass, because they have no more suggestions of reorderings to make to the stack, this phase is over. It's not always necessary to perfectly order the whole stack—depending on time available for phase three, players may feel it is necessary only to choose and sequence the top few cards of the stack. But, as long as one player has additional suggestions of reorderings to make, this phase continues.

Phase 3: Doing the activities on the cards

Now, as much as time permits, the players do the activities on the cards, in the order in which they occur on the stack.

Pausing the Game

Very often, it will occur that there are many more ideas for activities than there is time to do them. In this case, the stack of cards can be rubberbanded, and saved for later. One of the players (the one who is less likely to lose the cards) can take responsibility for saving the cards and keeping the stack safe and in-order until the next time the players begin to play. (If the stack is lost—no big deal! Just start play again from phase one.)

If there is doubt or fear about the possibility of pausing the game, instead follow the shutdown proceedings in phase four, which gives each player the opportunity to copy any card before ending the game.

Phase 4: Shutdown proceedings

After doing all the activities on the cards, or, when a close to the game is desired, shutdown proceedings can be begun. Shutdown proceedings are simple:

1. Stop adding new cards to the stack. If players have new ideas, they can silently write them down on cards that they keep private until the next game (otherwise, the game never ends—not following this etiquette has put people in the hospital).
2. One player can lead shutdown proceedings, or players can take turns, or an informal quick shutdown can take place, if players are respectful.
3. During shutdown, every card still on the table is announced or brought to all players' attention, then put away in the deck or card box of the player who wrote the card. They get to keep the cards they created.
4. Any player may copy any card that they like or want to save.

Additional Considerations

This section contains some additional rules which help games to run smoothly.

Beginning the Next Game

It works best to begin each game from phase one; this gives players a chance to clear their mind of new ideas, excitements, or stressors they are experiencing, before moving on to prioritization or activity.

Interrupts—Reverting to an Earlier Phase

If the other players consent, it is perfectly possible to mix the phases up a little bit, by reverting to an earlier phase of the game temporarily. Most often, this occurs when a player becomes inspired or struck by a new idea for an activity, and wants to make a new card and share it with the group. Normally, any player can take a blank card of any color at any time to make a card, but technically, cards are only added to the stack during phase one. But, if no one objects, it works best to allow all players to express their excitement, and add new ideas to the collective stack as they occur—depending upon the natural balance of personal excitement, collective eagerness to move forward, and time constraints.

Building a Personal Deck

Through repeated play, each player will discover their favorite cards: the activities, questions, favorite books, movies, or papers, or favorite concepts they like to share with new

people they play with. These cards can be saved and stored in an index card box as a personal deck. Developing a personal deck over time makes one a "Decker", part of an elite class of glass bead game players or decentralized organizers. For more on this, see [Holochain Application Developer Educational Outreach Framework](#), or other writing in [Anders' #oeuvre](#), particularly pages from his [Decentralized Organizer's Binder](#), a page-sized version of the person index card deck.

Variations

Following are some variations and options on play which players can use. Befriending is a subset of the glass bead game, so new rulesets can be discovered through play!

The Productivity Glass Bead Game (aka Recursive Scrum or Pirate Scrum)

The productivity game is a powerful collective tasking and prioritization practice that closely resembles something between [gameshifting](#) and a [community mastery board](#). It also closely resembles a non-authoritarian version of [Scrum](#) with recursive elements, hence "Pirate Scrum" or "Recursive Scrum". It is non-authoritarian because there is no Scrum Master (although the person teaching and guiding or enforcing the "rules" of the glass bead game, known as the proctor or master, is a similar but officially non-authoritative role, since the game is a nomic), and because any player may interrupt to play a counter-card (see above, "Rejecting Cards"), including purple Meta cards that may suggest changes in the rules of play, which may be subsequently and immediately accepted by other players. The way in which the game is recursive will be covered below.

In the productivity glass bead game, instead of the main content of cards being "activities you want to do with the other player(s)", the content of the cards is "tasks, stressors, and blocks", i.e., productive tasks or things that are stressing the players out or blocking the completion of productive tasks. These things can be individual or collective, but it is important to allow both individual and collective content into *every* instance of the productivity game. This is vital for two reasons: first, because individual blocks or stressors directly reduce productivity and carve into cognitive bandwidth available for collective tasks, and second, because if players are not allowed to express whatever is on the top of their "personal stack" of internal stressors, that itself functions as a major block in both personal and collective productivity. Much as in Befriending, the initial part of phase one of the productivity game often resembles "clearing", a practice in which coworkers take turns expressing whatever stressors or emotional blocks they are feeling. In clearing practices, there is often more attention paid to mere expression of blocks or stressors, and less to taking action to resolve the stressors or ameliorate the underlying conditions which gave rise to the stressor. In

contrast, one of the wonderful things about playing the glass bead game with index cards is the creation of persistent physical (or digital) artifacts for each block, task, or stressor—this not only ensures that the content will be remembered and repeatedly handled during play and personal curation of card collections, but also results in the longer-term juxtaposition of related complexes of tasks and stressors, increasing the likelihood that a player will notice a pattern involving multiple cards, and have an insight into a new abstraction or underlying issue causing the repeatedly stressful conditions—which can then be made into a new action or block card.

Recursion: The productivity glass bead game is red as a whole, because the entire game focuses on work, challenges, blocks, productivity, and frictional stress or tension. This “angry” or forceful energy associated with “work” in general defines the overall mood or mode of the productivity glass bead game. (Similarly, other games expressing a pure color could be discovered—see below in “Discovering New Rulesets”.)

In large groups, or during events, the productivity glass bead game can be recursed to split-off one part of the game into a different space or subgroup. Thematically, this can be conceptualized as splitting-out or “aspecting” a particular color into a subgame, but practically speaking, both the subgame and its parent game use all five colors¹. To split-off a recursive subgame, players choose who will go to start the subgame and what its topic will be. Then, they take enough blank cards of every color² to start the game, and move to a different table or space to play the separate subgame. When the subgame reaches a stopping-point, it is important, in most cases, to spend time re-synthesizing the split-out games, so that all players have a chance to see the output of the various games. If time is limited, this can be accomplished through public shutdown proceedings, so that all players can see and hear each card being quickly read off, and request cards they would like to copy (or quickly photograph). This resynthesizing step is more appropriate in some cases than others—sometimes, subgames are split off because of a lack of cohesion of interest in the original topic—in other cases, subgames are split off so that a subgroup can focus on a particular aspect of a topic and share the results of their research later with the whole group. Think carefully about how much resynthesis needs to be done, depending on the context of your game.

¹ More experimentation is needed on this. It might be very fun to give away all of the blank cards of one color from the parent game to the subgame (or vice versa), so that, when a player of the parent game wants to use that color enough, they have to walk over to the other table or room to get a blank card. This encourages frequent small acts of cross-pollination and jovial (but functional) table-chat amongst the various split-off games.

² See previous footnote—it might also be interesting to have a subgame which is defined, for example, as “blue” (rather than a specific topic) take blank cards of every color *except* the topical color, so that the subgame represents an elaboration of that color into multi-coded cards—all of the cards created in a “blue” game would be “blue”, but in actuality, they would have a secondary color, which would be the actual color of paper the card was written one. In this way, large issues could be broken down into five, affect-sensitive aspects, each focus-grouped by a separate recursive subgame. In this case, mark the cards created in the subgame with B, Y, G, V, R, to show their origin as thematically multi-colored cards.

Split-off games need not be thought of as “subgames”—that is, they can be thought of as wholly-separate, peer games, with equal authority and full rein over their topic (and ultimately, absolute rein in any topic the players of that game choose to cover). Subgames can also be split off of subgames, which is what makes this non-authoritarian, card-based version of Scrum recursive.

The Glass Bead Game Proper

Befriendlement and *the productivity game* are finite subsets of the [infinite game](#) that is the [glass bead game](#). In the glass bead game proper, it is not about playing activity cards on a stack. Instead, cards can contain anything, and the more usual and interesting mode of play is building chains of multiple, meaningfully-related cards. This functions as an incredibly generative brainstorming tool, rapidly developing and interbreeding the concepts of the players, whilst affording insights and abstractions of higher-order cards. Eventually, a Decker’s cards will come to resemble abstract linguistic or diagrammatic protocols, expressing abstract geometries of play which are slices of a holographic geometry of pure play, or *ludigon*.

Digital Cards Using a Spreadsheet

A collaborative spreadsheet program such as Google Spreadsheets makes a surprisingly good shared card space.

Use the first column to write the name of the person who created the card, and the second column for the contents of the card. If possible, avoid using a header column, so that cards must speak for themselves (otherwise, the table begins to resemble a database instead of more tactile cards). Additional columns can be invented, or use Google Spreadsheets’ commenting function to make notes and hold side conversations.

	A	B
1	Anders	Hear or read more detail from Jakub about his "useful conversations" project
2	Anders	How to make the #binder protocol easier & more fun with less reading and writing?
3	Jakub	Discuss possible ways how to be useful and get involved with Holo (hackatons etc.)
4	Anders	Metamaps videos—Jakub watch

Using a digital shared space that includes comments or other rich metadata, the entire game can potentially be played asynchronously, without needing a live video or audio conversation (normally recommended). When holding the game via a live video or audio call, announce each card as it is added to the stack, so that all players notice every card that is added. This ensures that all players remain aware of the current state of the game, and gives every player the chance to veto cards using the rejection and values system.

In Google Spreadsheets, click a row number to select the entire row, and then you can drag the row to any other location. (This way, you don't have to create blank rows or copy and paste rows just to reorder cards in the stack.)

Rapid Digital Clearing: Using a spreadsheet, phase one can be completed extremely rapidly by allowing everyone to take all of their turns at once, asynchronously. To set this up, label the first few rows with each player's name, in turn, and repeat this labeling about five times, creating blank cards for about five turns of play. Then, go wild! Players can quickly fill out all their ideas simultaneously, saving a lot of time. Then, take turns quickly reading through your ideas, adding any additional verbal comments you'd like.

When using a digital cards system, it is important to choose a color for each card. Make sure that each player chooses the color for each of their own cards, using the Fill Color option in the spreadsheet (the pastels at the top of the columns in Google Spreadsheet work nicely).

***ALWAYS COLORIZE YOUR CARDS—
WHITE CARDS ARE AS DANGEROUS AS WHITE COLONISTS.***

Digital Cards Using a Mind-Mapper

To be written.

Atomized Incremental Resequencing

This variation³ can be used with paper cards, but works particularly well with the spreadsheet variation described above. Rather than making proposals of moving one card to a particular location, players take turns moving one card up one place in the stack; this is the same as saying players take turns swapping adjacent pairs of cards in the stack. This atomizes the resequencing proposal system described above (in "Phase 2"), creating a different flavor of play which draws players' attention to their feelings of prioritization. This mode of play may also require less verbal communication, so it can be a good variation when a video or voice call is not possible.

In Google Spreadsheets, click a row number to select the entire row, and then you can drag the row up one position to swap it with the row above. (This way, you don't have to create blank rows or copy and paste rows just to reorder cards in the stack.)

This mode of play can introduce some tension, because sometimes it becomes clear where a card should be located only after one player uses their turn to undo the previous move

³ Thanks to Ray Powell for discovering these rules, and for suggesting the use of a spreadsheet as described above in "Digital Cards Using a Spreadsheet".

of the other player. This shows a rejection of the previous move, that is, one player does not want a particular card to move any higher in the stack than it was already moved.

When both players are just undoing each other's' moves over and over, or when both players run out of moves they want to make and pass their turn, this version of phase two is over.

Rapid Concept-Sharing of Personal Decks

In this mode of play, two players who have each accumulated a personal deck simply take turns playing the front card of their deck onto the shared stack. This makes it very quick to work through entire decks, allowing both players to review their cards and perhaps to sort, reorganize, discard, or elaborate on their cards, in the encouraging and open-minded company of another Decker.

Phase 3.5: Opening and Closing Cards

Private chat before card-playing round to develop initial ideas

Discovering New Rulesets

The fundamental approaches or values which undergird this presentation of the glass bead game as *Befriendlement*, those of *turn-taking* and *atomization*, afford a rich and progressively-intriguing meta-game of discovering new rulesets and modalities of play. The natural affordances of cards, and the natural affordances of non-authoritarian, peer-to-peer turn-taking delimit the possibilities of play "vertically", whilst allowing infinite room for them to spread into new niches of play *laterally*. Without clear rules on the finality of authority, rules, or purpose in play, the determinative gestures of the game become political, and these gestures gradually become codified (or captured, à la Pokémon) on new, increasingly holistic and expressively dynamic cards. These emergent grammars articulate modes of relationality amongst players, within a meta-context which could, perhaps, most *properly* be rendered as a *game of etiquette*.