

There are three official ways to play Bring Your Own Book (though regular players will certainly come up with many more). The Classic rule set—the easiest for new players—is presented here. For the Democratic or Cutthroat rules, head to ironmaus.com.

THE TOOLS AND ROLES

To start, did everyone bring their own book? It's recommended that players use traditional paper books (playtests indicate particularly good luck with late-twentieth century fiction), but you can play with any text: e-book, almanac, newspaper, etc. Whatever you pick, just make sure everyone is on equal footing, and if you're all playing with e-readers, decide ahead of time if you'll allow use of the search function.

The core activity in Bring Your Own Book is scanning through books for words to take out of context. No matter how the prompt is phrased, you're looking for sequential text of any length: a single word, half of a sentence, a whole sentence, multiple sentences. Matching this text to the prompt for each round is how you win cards. Get enough cards and you win the game!

In addition to a book for each player, you'll need a one-minute timer. The game is best with a sand timer (or any timer where the numbers can't be read), but a digital countdown clock or cell phone app will be fine.

There are a handful of roles in Bring Your Own Book, and during each round, players will fill one or more of them:

Picker: The player in the role of Picker draws the top card and chooses between the two prompts, reading it aloud to the rest of the players.

Seekers: In the Classic rule set, everyone except the current Picker is a Seeker. Once the prompt is read, Seekers search their book for the perfect corresponding phrase, announcing "I've got it!" once it's found.

Readers: In the Classic rule set, everyone except the current Picker is also a Reader. Once the seeking is over, Readers give voice to their findings.

Judge: In the Classic rule set, the Picker is also the Judge. Once all Readers have finished with their selections, the Judge chooses the best and awards them the card.

A ROUND OF BRING YOUR OWN BOOK: CLASSIC

1. The Picker draws a card, chooses a prompt, and reads it.
2. All the Seekers begin the hunt.
3. The first Seeker to find their text says "I've got it!"
4. Either the Seeker or the Picker starts the 1-minute timer.
5. Any other Seekers finding their text should also say "I've got it!"
NOTE: Seekers who have found their text should keep their place but not keep looking for an alternate phrase.
6. Any Seeker still looking when the timer runs out must close their book entirely.
7. Starting to the left of the Picker and proceeding clockwise, each Seeker now becomes a Reader.
8. Any Seeker who didn't find a selection before the timer ended becomes a special Random Reader, opening to a random page, putting their finger down, and reading whatever sentence is there.
NOTE: Don't lose your place after reading; the Judge may need a round of repetition.
9. After all the Readers are done, the Picker becomes Judge and selects the Reader with the best phrase, giving them the card as a prize.

The role of Picker now passes to the next player to the left, and a new round is begun. This continues until...

THE RULE OF ROTATION

Once any player reaches three cards, everyone passes their book to the player on their left. This happens any time a player reaches three cards during the game. As such, it can happen as many times as there are players. It is quite possible for players to pass until they have their original book back.

WINNING THE GAME

The game proceeds until one player reaches the set number of cards. With 5-7 players, four cards wins it; with 3-4 players, it's better to play to five.

