

## How to Play Petanque (Rules of Petanque)

April 22, 2015 by Jessica | 0 Comments



Pétanque (French boules) is the 10th most popular sport in France and is also played by millions of French people for pleasure, especially during summer holidays where tournaments organised in the camping / holiday resorts are very common (I remember enrolling in some "tournois de pétanque" myself as a teenager).

Last July, my husband and I spent a few weeks in France and playing pétanque again revived fond childhood memories. I eventually had a set delivered to Australia – the “boules” are so heavy it would have been a shame to take them back in our luggage as we would have lost some precious weight allowance, much needed for my new French books and the many packets of all my favourite French biscuits!

On our annual picnic in the park last February, I introduced the game of pétanque to my students. The rules of petanque are quick and easy to learn and it was great to see them get so into it, cheering, competing, debating over the score and having a good time!

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So many students of French are afraid of learning the subjunctive; it's now time to remove the fear around it! No, the French subjunctive is not hard ; you just need to understand how and when to use it because it doesn't translate the same as in English (that is the main difficulty). In this...

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## Petanque : Introduction and Vocabulary

Pétanque is a century-old game originating from Provence, in the South of France. The name comes from "pieds tanqués", which means "feet anchored / feet firmly grounded". Indeed, in an older version of the game, the ball was thrown after a 3-step run (a bit like in a bowling game). To accommodate one of the players who was suffering from rheumatism and could not run, the rule was changed and all players had to throw the ball with both feet riveted to the ground. Pétanque was born !

- *Une boule de pétanque* = a pétanque ball

They are hollow and made of metal (usually carbon steel or stainless steel). Some sets for children to play on the beach are made of colourful plastic though and filled with sand. (But they suck.)

Competition boules must weigh between 650 and 800 grams and be 70.5 cm to 80 cm in diameter. (Players can have their personal preference, but the choice also depends on the size of their hands or whether they mainly use them for pointing or shooting (I'll explain that later).

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This is the first part of a long interview with Pol Corvez, a fascinating man with many strings to his bow! Pol and I both love languages and photography, so there was much to talk about. In this episode, we'll talk about Pol's origins (on a linguistic and historic point of view) and the surprising...

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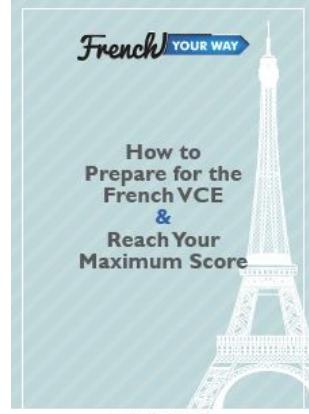
When I used to teach in various traditional French schools and centres, I noticed some problems and inconsistencies which made me increasingly frustrated (that's actually how I became independent and created French Your way and my two podcasts!). I observed, listened and tried to address these issues so I could make the whole experience of learning...


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The boules have different patterns on them so we can know whose player they belong to (it's also possible to have your initials carved on the boule).

- *Le cochonnet / le bouchon / le petit / le but / le gari* = the piglet, the jack (a small wooden ball)

The team score points for having their boule(s) the closest to the cochonnet. The cochonnet is therefore what you need to aim at when throwing your boule.

- *Un bouliste, un joueur de pétanque* = a pétanque player

In pétanque, two teams play against each other. The number of boules used for the game depends on the number of players in each team :

Type of game	Number of players	Boules per player	Boules in the team
Triplette	3 players / team	2 balls each	6 balls in total
Doublette	2 players / team	3 balls each	6 balls in total
Tête-à-tête	1 player / team	3 balls	3 balls in total

- *Le terrain, le boulodrome* = the area/field/ground on which pétanque is played.

Pétanque is best played on small gravel, but can also be played on sand or grass (my least favourite, because then the balls can't really roll).

It is forbidden to touch or remove any obstacle on the terrain (a pebble, a leaf, a twig, etc). However, it is allowed to fill back an impact hole which has been made by one boule thrown before.

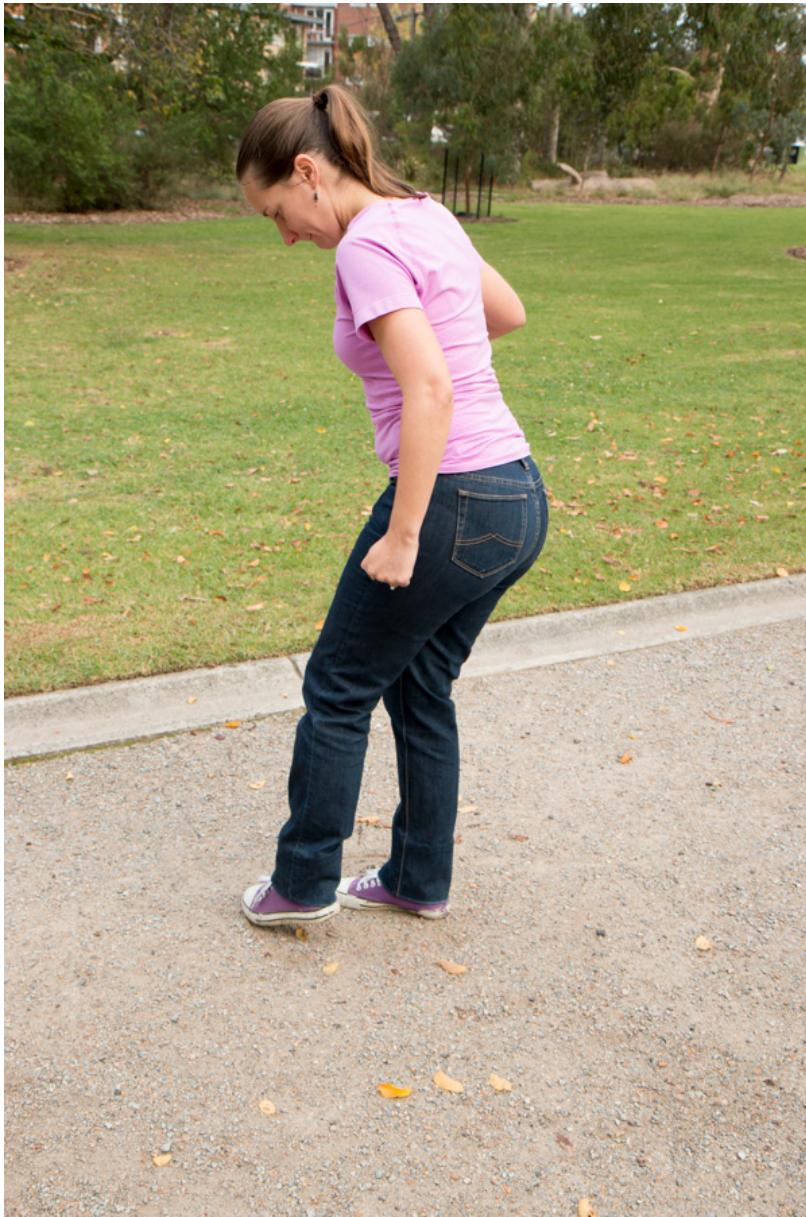
- *Une mène* = a round, an end

A round ends when both teams have played all of their boules. Pétanque is played in as many rounds needed for the first team to score a total of 13 points.

## Rules of Petanque

At the very start of the game, for the first round ("la premiere mène"), we randomly draw which team goes first.

1. The starting team draws a small circle on the floor. (There are also small prefabricated plastic or metal circles that can be bought and used. But usually, tracing a circle with your foot or a stick in the dusty ground works just fine!)





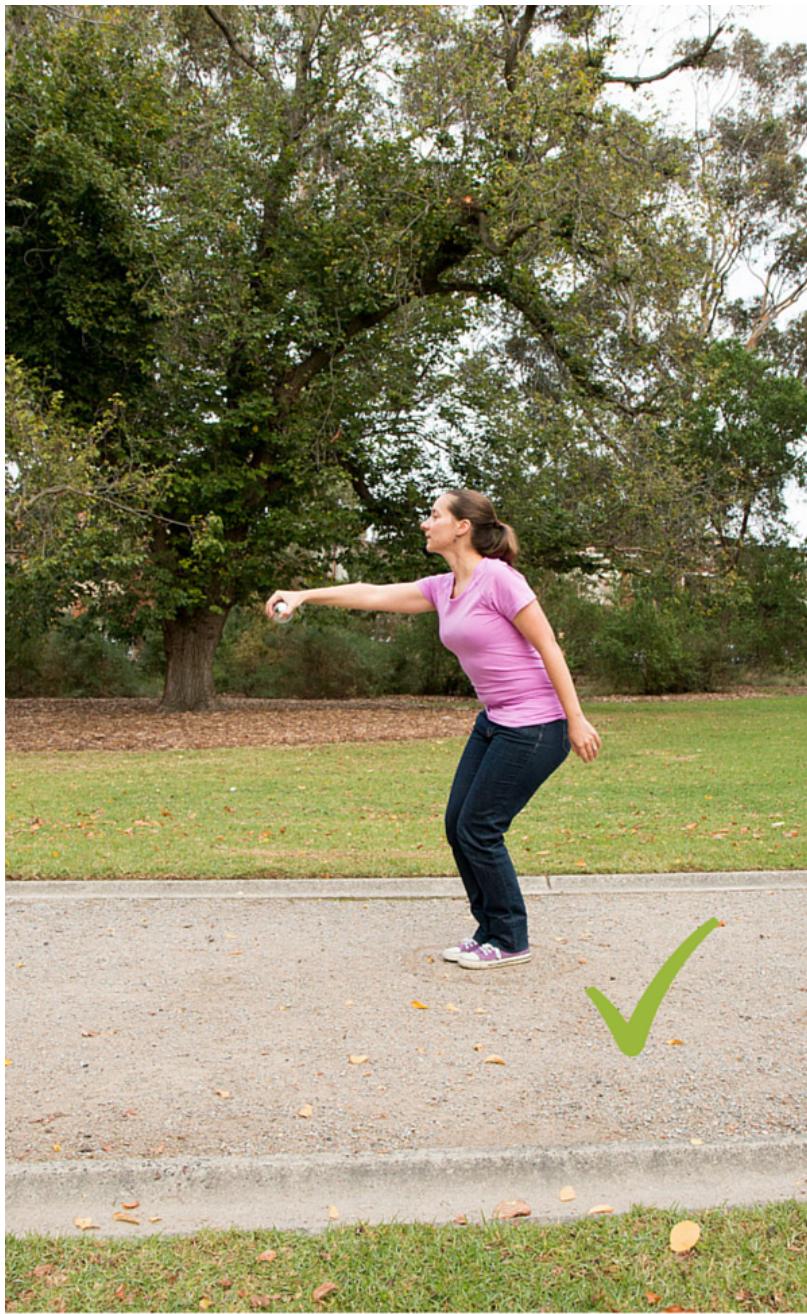
Every player will then have to throw their boules from the circle during that round (in other words, this will be the starting point for all players).

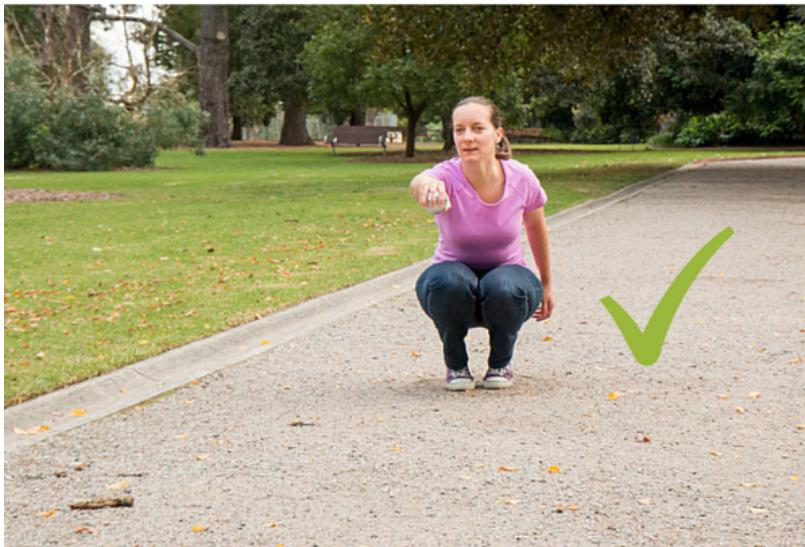
**2.** The first player throws le cochonnet, which must land anywhere between 6 meters and 10 meters from the starting circle (otherwise it's too easy / too hard and you need to throw the cochonnet again.)

**3.** A player from the opposing team throws their first boule, as close to the cochonnet as possible (since that is how you win the game!)

Remember the rule for throwing your boules when playing pétanque:

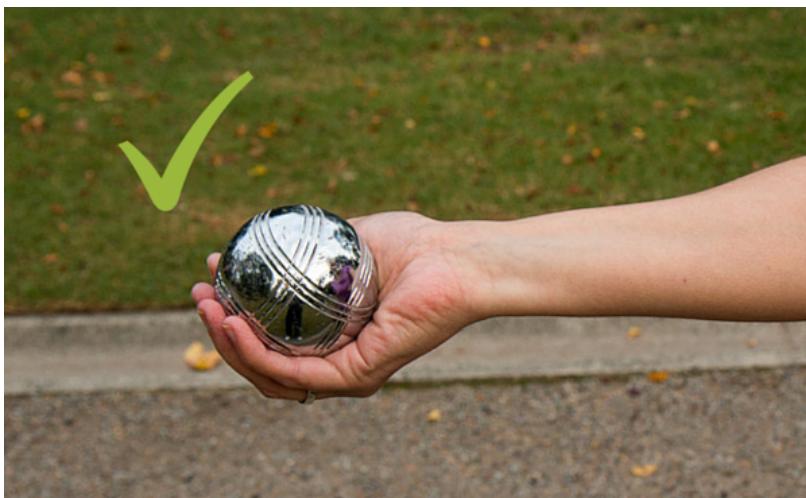
**Both feet** need to be within the circle and on the **ground**. (Therefore, there is no running before throwing the boule!)





The palm of your hand usually faces down (upper-hand throw), but this is not compulsory. However,

throwing this way will allow you to get more control when giving your boule a slight spin.



4. The opposing team also throws one boule. This way, we can see who is "having the point", i.e which team is leading thanks to having their boule closest to the cochonnet.

Sometimes, the boules can look at equal distance from the cochonnet and it can be really tricky to tell which team gets the point. We therefore use a meter, a piece of string or a compass to measure and find out. (In the official rules of petanque, using your feet to measure is forbidden, but many people do it anyway when playing informally.)



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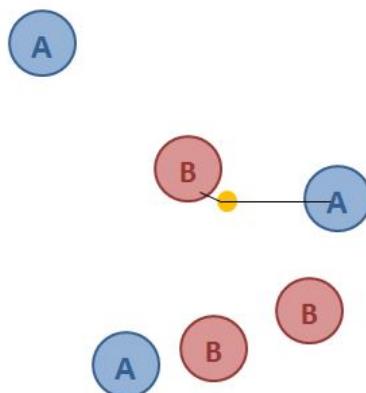
5. The team who does not have the point throws the next boule and continues to do so until they gain the point or run out of boules.

The players within one team can play in any order, depending on whether they require the skills of one of their "pointeurs" or "tireurs"!

- **Pointer** = to point (to throw the boule so that it gets as close to the jack as possible)
- **Un pointeur** = a pétanque players whose task is to point / to aim at the jack.
- **Tirer** = to knock away an opponent's boule – a good way to get rid of the boules of the opposing team that are close to the cochonnet! By the way, if the cochonnet is moved/knocked away by a ball, the game still goes on (but it's not very ethical to do so deliberately!)
- **Un tireur** = a pétanque player who is skilled at knocking away the opponent's boules (that is, not me!)

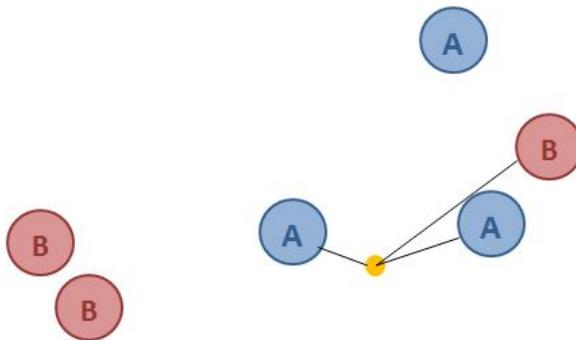
6. At the end of an end, the team with the boule closest to the cochonnet scores one point for each of its boules that is closer than the opposing team's closest boule.

## Rules of petanque : how to count the points (example)



Round 1:

Team B is winning this round, because the closest boule to the cochonnet is theirs. They only get one point though, because the second closest boule belongs to the opposing team. (who scores nothing for this round).



Round 2:

This time, team A wins the round, because the closest boule to the cochonnet is theirs. The second closest boule also belongs to them, but not the third closest. Team A therefore scores 2 points for this round (Team B scores nothing.)

The score at the end of these two rounds is:

A = 2 points  
 B = 1 point

7. The starting circle for the next round is positioned where the cochonnet was on the round that just ended (so we have a new starting point).

8. The game ends when one team reaches 13 points.

- **Etre fanny / faire fanny : if a team loses 0 to 13**, meaning they didn't score a single point over the whole game, they are said to be/make "fanny", in reference to an old custom where the losers must kiss the naked buttocks of "Fanny" a woman – or rather her representation as an image or a small sculpture. (Gross, I know....It represents the humiliation of losing the whole game!)

If you'd like to buy your own boules de pétanque from France, check out [Obut website](#) (Obut is the most famous brand for quality boules). You can also have them engraved, find a glossary with more pétanque-related vocabulary, read tips on how to choose your boules and hold them properly, etc.

You can also get your set of boules from [Amazon here](#)(affiliate link).



And you, have you played pétanque before? Share your last experience below!

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