

How to get into competitive Pokémon TCG play

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All of this information is gathered from a [variety of sources](#) as well as my experience as a player, Happy reading 💕

-Kora

P.S: If you have any issue or feedback with this document please DM me in discord

@xsimplykorax or twitter @xsimplyTCGx

1.Formats

Formats are the way you play the game, there are 2 main ones that have tournaments that are officially sanctioned by The Pokemon Company International: Standard and Expanded!

Both formats have their advantages and disadvantages. Standard has a smaller pool so it's easier to learn but that pool changes every year so new challenges arise in figuring out meta. Expanded has the same cards and never changes but it is a vast pool to learn and there is a ban list, furthermore it is not supported much as a format from TPCi.

1a) Standard

This format is the most commonly played one. It features a card pool that rotates (makes illegal) the oldest sets released every year to keep an ever changing pool of cards. The competitive season for this format runs from July to August every year.

Currently, as of 27/04/2025, the rotation allows cards with the regulation marks G, H, I and onwards. This encompasses the sets from Scarlet & Violet base onwards including Journey Together. Sets become legal for tournament play 2 weeks after the official release date (up to 4 weeks from prerelease)

Rotation is an annual change of the cards available to be played in the standard format, rotation happened this season in March 2025, where all F cards rotated out. The next rotation will remove the G regulation cards at some point next season.

There are no banned cards in the standard format at the moment.

1b) Expanded

This format is less commonly played. The cardpool is eternal/evergreen, meaning there is no rotation or anything so cards released from Black and White Base Set are legal to play but there is a ban list to keep the format healthy, which can be found here:

[Pokémon TCG Banned Card List | Pokemon.com](#)

1c) Other formats

Pokemon has released an official document with alternative formats that you can play in, whilst they're not official tournament types, they are great ways to experience something different within the TCG:

<https://assets.pokemon.com/assets/cms2-en-uk/pdf/trading-card-game/tcg-alternative-play-handbook-en.pdf>

2. Play! Pokemon points, ID and regions

2a) Pokemon Regions

Pokemon events are split into 2 big regions that are managed by 2 different companies:

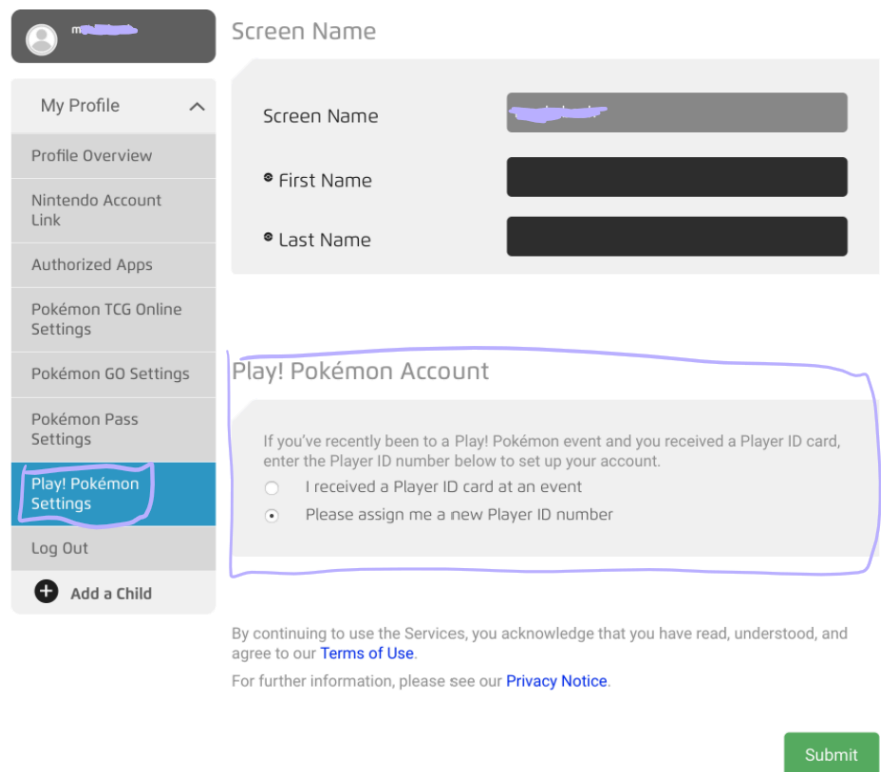
- The Pokemon Company (TPC) manages all the events in Asia, including Hong Kong, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, China, India, Thailand etc.
- The Pokemon Company International ("the west"/TPCi) manages all the events in the rest of the world, splitting the regions into: North America, Latin America/South America, Europe, Oceania and groups the Middle East and South Africa together.

This guide focuses on TPCi events and qualification but I am going to be starting a graphic/info sheet for TPC events to make the community more visible for us.

2a) POP ID

This is a chain of numbers attached to your trainer club account, this allows for points to be tracked with your trainer club account, which can be made here (this is the US site so be careful): <https://club.pokemon.com/us/pokemon-trainer-club/sign-up/>

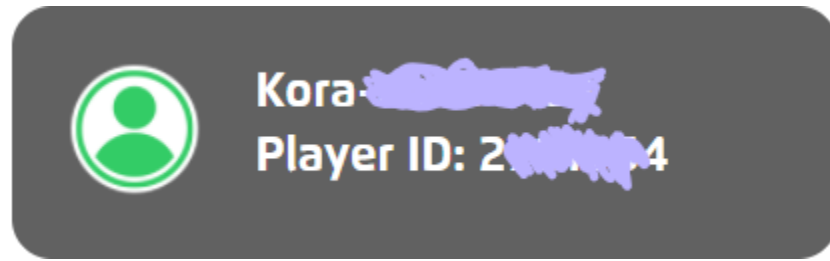
To get a POP ID you need to click on the Play! Pokemon Settings tab:



The screenshot shows the Pokemon Trainer Club sign-up page. On the left is a sidebar menu with options: My Profile, Profile Overview, Nintendo Account Link, Authorized Apps, Pokémon TCG Online Settings, Pokémon GO Settings, Pokémon Pass Settings, Play! Pokémon Settings (highlighted with a red box), Log Out, and Add a Child. The main content area is titled 'Screen Name' and has input fields for Screen Name, First Name, and Last Name. Below this is the 'Play! Pokémon Account' section, which is also highlighted with a red box. It contains a message: 'If you've recently been to a Play! Pokémon event and you received a Player ID card, enter the Player ID number below to set up your account.' followed by two radio button options: 'I received a Player ID card at an event' and 'Please assign me a new Player ID number'. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'Submit' button and a footer with terms of use and privacy notice links.

And tick the box when it asks you if you need a new POP ID, alternatively you can insert the one that your local game store gives you when you attend a tournament without one.

If you have already done this then your POP ID should show up under your user name in your trainer club account:



2c) Championship Points

These are points that will earn you a World Championships invite. You can earn them in league cups, league challenges, regionals and international tournaments. The amount you earn will scale with your placement in the tournament, with the number increasing from the size of the tournament (so challenges have less points for the winner than cups).

2d) Play! Points

These points do not track for anything apart from the events that you have played in, they can be used in tiebreaker situations for awards such as travel awards or other extraordinary circumstances.

3. How to find your local league and region of play

There are several things to do when looking for your local league, finding it is the easy part ;)

3a) Where to find local leagues and events

This is the pokemon event and store locator, it shows which are the closest brick and mortar stores near you that sell pokemon and host sanctioned pokemon tcg events:

[Pokémon Events \(pokemon.com\)](https://pokemon.com/events)

They typically will host league play sessions where you can meet with other players, trade cards and play in a no-stakes tournament. Leagues also host League Cups and Challenges which are the local competitive events that earn championship points towards a Worlds Invite. More on that in the later sections :P.

3b) What language cards you can use in your deck

Each region of play has its own languages that you can use in your decks, here is the ruling from the pokemon rulebook on this:

5.2.3 Legal Languages

Pokémon Trading Card Game cards are available around the world in a variety of languages.

To ease the linguistic complexity of tournament interactions, Pokémon Organized Play limits which languages are legal for play at Premier Events according to the rating zone in which that Premier Event is held.

For all other tournaments and League sessions, the decision regarding which languages are legal for play is at the discretion of the Organizer or League staff.

5.2.3.1 Legal Languages for Premier Events, by Rating Zone

Rating Zone	Legal Languages
North America	English
Latin America	English, Spanish
Europe	English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish
Oceania	English
Russia	English, Russian
South Africa	English

5.2.3.2 Additional Legal Languages for Premier Events, by Country

Country	Additional Legal Language
Canada	French
Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru	Portuguese

All countries are allowed to use English and some areas are allowed a secondary language. There are some exceptions to this language rule that are outlined in the rulebook but for now this is it.

3c) How to put together a decklist and why this is important

So for most sanctioned and most unsanctioned events, you'll need to submit a decklist of the 60 cards in your decks. This is done so judges can deck check your decks later on and make sure you're not cheating.

Most people print this template so they can write their lists up:

Letter Paper: [play-pokemon-deck-list-85x11-rcl.pdf](#)

A4: [play-pokemon-deck-list-a4-rcl.pdf](#)

You need to put the set abbreviation next to the pokemon you're using so they can see the exact copy you're using and what it does as pokemon often have multiple versions of the same pokemon legal. This isn't needed for trainers because there is only 1 version of that trainer and all art copies count as the same version, same for basic energy and special energy.

4. Officially sanctioned tournament types

There are several types of tournaments that you can attend that have different prizes. You need to attend many events to meet the points requirement for a Worlds Invite. How many championship points you get from each event can be found here: [Pokémon TCG Championship Points | Pokemon.com](https://www.pokemon.com/us/competitive/tcg-events/ranking)

No matter what tournament you play in, a win equates to 3 points, a loss 0 points and a tie 1 point. These points will determine your place in the leaderboard and if you advance to day 2 or not.

4a) League Challenges

These are monthly tournaments that are usually local to the area, with a very small entry fee. They'll be standard and you show up and hand the entry fee and decklist in. These challenges are played in a swiss style so no player is eliminated- you are matched to people with a similar win-loss ratio.

4b) League Cups

These happen once a quarter, are bigger and will attract more people from the surrounding areas. Make sure to register beforehand as showing up on the day will not guarantee a spot to play. As always, bring a decklist. The first few rounds (roughly 4-5 in my experience) will be swiss, which is followed by a top cut of the top 4 or 8 players in a single elimination bracket.

4c) Regionals

Big events that happen several times a year in each region. Loads of people from all over the country will go and the entry fee is pretty steep on these. Phase 1 is usually a 8 round swiss, to progress to Phase 2 you need a record of at least 16 or 18 points (depending on the size of the event). The second phase is 3 or more additional rounds of swiss followed by a top 8 cut. Other side events will be happening at the same time like cups, challenges and other fun TCG formats as well as other games going on (VGC, GO). Registration and decklist submission is done through RK9 Labs.

4d) Internationals

These work the same way as Regionals but on a much much bigger scale, with players coming from several different countries together to compete for points. However, Day 1 starts Friday, Day 2 starts Saturday and Day 3, Sunday, is for Finals for all age categories and the other games.

4e) Worlds

The biggest tournament Pokemon TCG has to offer, you will need to meet the point requirement to receive an invite to play at Worlds otherwise you can attend as a spectator and take part in all of the side events going on. It's a 3 day celebration of pokemon tcg and the location is always different. For example, for the 2018-2019 season, Worlds happened in Washington, D.C, USA, in 2022 Worlds occurred in London, England, in 2023 there were Worlds in Japan, Yokohama. For the 2024-2025 season, Worlds is happening in Anaheim with a major change to the invite system.

Previously, to earn a worlds invite you would need to reach a points threshold to qualify, allowing an unlimited number of players in all TPCi regions to qualify. In the 2024/2025 season, it was changed to a Top X system - where players had to place in the Top X in championship points in their region to be granted a worlds invite. This is the same system being used for the current 2025/2026 series.

Pokémon TCG Championship Invitations

Age Division	Junior	Senior	Masters
USA & Canada	75	100	125
Europe	75	100	125
Latin America	50	50	100
Oceania	10	10	20
Middle East & South Africa	5	5	10

This Top X system puts TPCi in alignment with TPC regions for the invite system and means that Worlds as a tournament is smaller but much more competitive.

5. How to register and find regionals

All regionals are located on the pokemon website here:

<https://www.pokemon.com/us/play-pokemon/pokemon-events/pokemon-tournaments/regional-championships/>






International championships have also been announced, dates and locations can be found here:

<https://www.pokemon.com/us/play-pokemon/pokemon-events/pokemon-tournaments/international-championships/>

5a) What is RK9labs?

RK9labs is the system that regionals, internationals, and worlds use to post pairings, register for tournaments and show your past tournaments. You will need to create a Google account and link your POP ID number to ensure you can record championship points onto your account.

When registration for a tournament comes up, it will show up on the main page e.g.

Upcoming Pokémon Events			
Dates	Event	City	Links
November 12-13, 2022	 Warsaw Pokémon Regional Championships 2022-2023 Registration is open	01-222 Warszawa, PL	GO TCS Specifications
November 25-27, 2022	 2023 Pokémon Latin America International Championships Registration is open	São Paulo - SP BR	GO TCS Specifications
December 3-4, 2022	 Stuttgart Pokémon Regional Championships 2022-2023 Registration is open	70629 Stuttgart, DE	GO TCS
December 2-4, 2022	 Toronto Pokémon Regional Championships 2022-2023 Registration is open	Toronto, CA	GO TCS Specifications
December 16-18, 2022	 Arlington Pokémon Regional Championships 2022-2023 Registration is open	Arlington, US	GO TCS Specifications

5b) How do I register?

Actual registration occurs in RK9 - usually a Wednesday at 7pm regional time about 8ish weeks from the regional date. The process is the same for all age groups but the RK9 account must be in the child's name and details:

- The day of the registration opening, you should be on the registration page ready to refresh and click the "Go to registration" the second it turns the hour for it to open as the spots fill very fast.
- Once you are in this page, you need to tick all the boxes agreeing to: COVID policy, Standard Appearance Release form and acceptance of all the policies/code of conduct/venue rules then click "register" once all the information you have checked is correct.
- You then get put in a virtual line, where you will click "proceed to payment" once it is your turn to pay. This can take 5 mins or so to get to, just wait until you click the page.
- You can breathe now cause you have a 15 minute window to review everything and pay for the registration. Once you have paid, it will bring you to the confirmation page which looks like this:

Congratulations, you're registered for the Liverpool Pokémon TCG Regional Championship!

1. Your deck list must be submitted online with the [RK9 Labs Deck List Creator](#) by 8:15 AM GMT (Europe/London) on Saturday, January 21, 2023 in order to participate in the tournament.

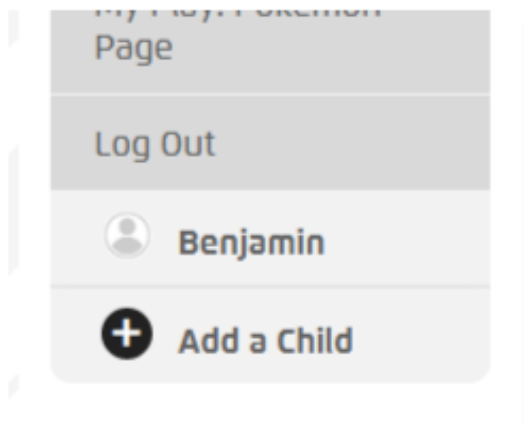
- Deck list submission will open Monday, January 16, 2023.
- Once you have submitted your deck list, you can verify that it was submitted and view your list in three places.
 - Your registrations in [Deck List Creator](#)
 - Deck list submission in your [Player Tournament Dashboard](#)
 - [Live Roster](#)

Please verify that your deck list has been submitted and is correct before list submission closes.

- You can re-submit your deck list multiple times, but all deck list submissions are final as of the list submission deadline.
 - If you do not submit a deck list via Deck List Creator by the deadline, you will not be included in Round 1 pairings.
- 2. The first day of play will begin at 9:00 AM GMT (Europe/London) on Saturday, January 21, 2023. Players should be inside the venue ready to play at this time.**
- 3. All attendees will need to clear the Play! Pokémon COVID-19 Protocols verification before they will be allowed inside the venue. Please arrive early and allow extra time for this process.**

5c) How do I register a child?

The process to register a child is the same as above however some other changes need to be made. Any child under the age of 13 must be registered under a parent's Trainer account which can be done by clicking this link in your trainer account:



Once the child has been added you can generate a POP ID for them using the process outlined in section 2 of this document. You must link this POP ID to the child's RK9 account for any points to be added/counted.

When on RK9 you can pre fill out the parent/guardian information which helps with registering the children faster as this information will then autofill for any registrations:

Parent/Guardian Spectator Pass	
<p>Players under 18 will receive one free parent/guardian spectator pass. Your accompanying parent/guardian's information is required in the fields below. Please note, cell phone number is optional and would only be used in case of emergency.</p>	
<input type="text"/> Guardian first name*	<input type="text"/> Guardian last name*
<input type="text"/> Guardian email*	<input type="text"/> Guardian cell phone

5d) Who are the organisers for regionals?

Each regional event is not hosted by pokemon, but several companies that host for TPCi:

TO for NA Tournaments:

[in process of renewing]

TO for Oceania:

<https://eslpkm.com.au/regionals-home-2023/>

<https://twitter.com/ESLAustralia>

TOs for Europe:

<https://tournamentcenter.gg/>

<https://twitter.com/PlayTheChamps>

<https://pokemon.twentytwentytwo.de/>

<https://twitter.com/2022tournaments>

TO for Latin America:

<https://copag.com.br/pokemon>

<https://twitter.com/CopagPokemon>

5e) How do I know when registration is opening for events?

Unfortunately, pokemon themselves do not announce when registration will open up for these regional events. The best way to find when registration happens is by following the social media accounts of the organisers as well as following other pokemon people in the community, the preferred social media is twitter (all the organisers above have twitters to follow for announcements).

Some fine folk to follow for TPCi event information:

<https://twitter.com/Pooka311> (TPCi employee)

<https://twitter.com/cschemeanske>

<https://twitter.com/WillPostTweets>

<https://twitter.com/pokestatstcg>

<https://twitter.com/pokebeach>

6. What to bring to a tournament

So you signed up and are getting ready, here's some common stuff you'll bring along with you!

6a) Sleeves

Sleeve your cards when playing to avoid damage to your deck! The rule book states that sleeves are to be of "a solid, plain, single colour or have official pokemon art on them" (so sleeves from elite trainer boxes or from the pokemon centre themselves). They must also be in the same condition, as marked sleeves can signify cheating.

Double and triple sleeving are allowed as long as every card in the deck is the same and meets the criteria above.

I recommend getting the Ultimate Guard Katana sleeves, Dragon Shields or Ultra Pro sleeves.

6b) Dice

You will need dice for 2 reasons: 1) to act as your coin flip/randomiser dice and 2) as damage counters for your pokemon. Dice are preferred over coins and damage counters as it's easier to "flip" and count.

For coin flips: It needs to be a translucent, 6 sided die that have opposite sides add up to 7, and be big enough to read by both players. Typically even=heads and odd=tails

For damage counters, 1 pip is 10 damage and you can use d6 but other size dice can be used as long as both players agree to this decision.

6c) Playmat

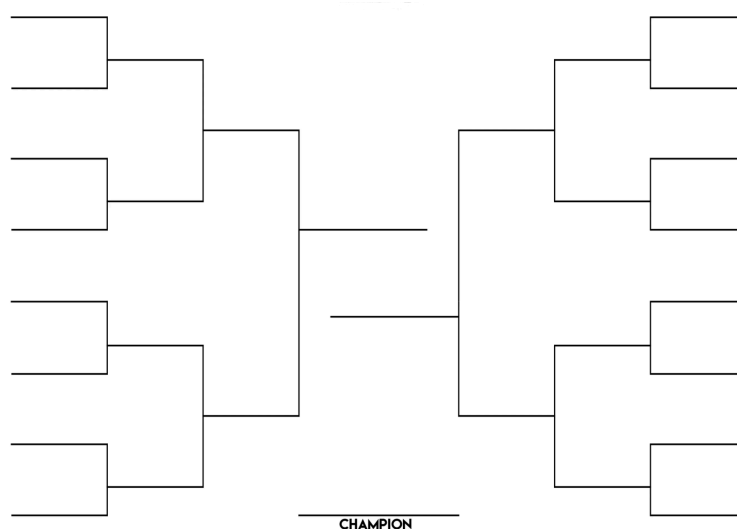
Playmats are largeish (60cmx30cm/23inx11in) rubber/fabric mats that people play on to make it easier to pick cards up as well as keep the cards clean from the stuff that can be picked up from the table. If you want to bring one then it can be of any design as long as it is kid and family friendly, this is because Pokemon events ultimately means that there will be children there.

6d) Other stuff

My advice is to bring a deck box like the Ultimate Guard Flip 'n' Tray to store your deck, dice and status markers in one container or bring a smaller deck box and a separate dice box to carry with you so you don't have to go into your bag every match. I personally wrap my playmat around my deck box and carry it around like that with my other things in my backpack.

Bring a large bottle of water and some snacks to be kept in your bag because whilst there is a lunch/dinner break in the bigger events, having something to keep you going is important, as well as staying hydrated

Bringing a binder full of cards you want to trade away is also recommended so you can trade with others to complete a collection or get new cards for decks. It is the Pokemon **Trading** Card game after all!



In major events like regionals, internationals and Worlds an asymmetrical top cut takes place where all players who have the same match points as the player in 8th place will play another game to secure top 8. Think of it as a Top 16 match for those who could be 8th or above.

7d) Reaching Time?

A round of Pokemon TCG is either going to be a best of 3 with 50 minutes or best of 1 in 30 minutes - outlined in the tournament rules handbook. If you are reaching time in a best of 3 game, multiple things can happen:

- When time is called, the player's current turn will finish and there will be 1 additional turn. You have up to 10 minutes to conclude these turns but this may not be necessary.
 - Basically whoever draws next for the start of turn is the final turn of the game.
- If by the end of this a winner has not been decided, then a tie is called.
- If a player has won a game and the game just concluded ends in a tie, then player A wins the round.
- In a Single Elimination situation - the player who is ahead on prizes wins that game in the round or the game is carried on until a player has a prize card advantage.

Sources used in this document:

Official Ruling Compendium: <https://compendium.pokegym.net/compendium-bw.html>

Official Rules and Resources:

<https://www.pokemon.com/us/play-pokemon/about/tournaments-rules-and-resources/>

Official Rules Handbook:

<https://assets.pokemon.com/assets/cms2/pdf/play-pokemon/rules/play-pokemon-tournament-rules-handbook-06192020-en.pdf>

Meta Deck/Tournament Decklists: <https://www.limitlesstcg.com/>

Pokemon Event Statistics: <http://www.ptcgstats.com/>

Beginner's Guides and general Pokemon information: <https://www.justinbasil.com/>

PokemonTCG Discord Server: <https://discord.gg/pokemontcg>

Not a source used but a good learning resource- Top Deck Academy by TPCi:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQWzKlaERirxVR9fganliJvfnKoZ0_k2Z