White Elephant rules

1. Agree the cap and the freeze number first. Say what the cap includes, such as tax and wrapping, before anyone shops. Each person brings one wrapped gift. This page's generator does not record what is inside or who brought it.

2. Draw the turn order at random. Read the order out loud, then start. The first person can only open a wrapped gift, because nothing is unwrapped yet.

3. On a turn, open or steal. Each later person either opens a wrapped gift or steals an opened one that is not frozen and that they are not already holding.

4. If your gift is stolen, you play again immediately. Open a wrapped gift or steal a different opened one. You may not take back the gift that was just stolen from you.

5. A gift freezes after the steal limit. The default here is 3 steals. Two is also common: Wikipedia describes a limit of two or three. The steal that reaches the limit is allowed, and then that gift stays put.

6. One scheduled turn each, then the chain. Everyone gets one turn in the drawn order. If they steal, the person who lost the gift goes next, and that can continue. The chain ends when someone opens a wrapped gift, and the next person in the order starts.

7. Optional last swap for the person who went first. On by default, because they had no choice at the start. They may exchange with any gift, even a frozen one. The other person receives what the first player was holding. Nobody plays again. Turn it off before you draw the order if your group skips it.

8. The link is the board. It shows who holds each gift, how many times it has been stolen, and which gifts are frozen. Copy the link to open the same board on a TV. There is no account, and the server does not store the game. A second phone does not update on its own: open the link again after a steal if that screen should catch up. New game clears it.

Yankee Swap

Same rules. Yankee Swap is the usual name in New England. Wikipedia notes that Yankee Swap gifts are more often practical, while White Elephant gifts are more often gag gifts. The last swap for the first player is a common Yankee Swap house rule.

Dirty Santa

Same steal game. Dirty Santa is a name used in parts of the southern United States. It is not a different ruleset. Secret Santa is the other game: you buy for one person you drew.

The name Chinese gift exchange

In Canada and parts of the United States that name is used for this same steal game. Write-ups of the name trace it to a mistaken idea that the game is Chinese, and they do not cite a historical link to China. A Chinese auction is a different event, a raffle. Some people find the name offensive. Write White Elephant or Yankee Swap on the invitation.

Not this game

Dice games and left-right story games move gifts differently. This board does not track them. A Secret Santa name draw, where each person buys for one named recipient, is the other tool on this site.

Play it on one phone: the White Elephant generator at secretsanta.name/white-elephant/