

Your first case starts here

MIDNIGHT CASE FILES | Beginner tutorial and complete example playthrough
For the Windows Detective's Study preview, version 0.2.1

Your job: discover which of twelve suspects matches the evidence, then accuse that person.
You do not need tabletop gaming experience, physical cards, physical dice, or another player.
The application handles the deck, rolls, and hidden solution.

Start with these six clicks

1. Open the game. If this is your first launch from the ZIP, extract it and run Build-and-Run.cmd. Once built, you can launch bin\MidnightCaseFiles.exe.
2. Select New case. Type a detective name, choose Observation for this tutorial, and select Roll new case. The application creates the mystery automatically.
3. Read the assignment. Select Case files to read the case brief. You can review the setup rolls on the Case journal tab. Select Back to study when ready.
4. Select Draw Card. A number card identifies a lead. You have not collected its clue yet.
5. Select Roll Dice. Choose Observation (+2 specialty), then select Roll 2d6. Read the result and new clue.
6. Select Suspects. Read the dossiers and compare their facts with your clue. Record your deductions in Notebook. Return to the study and repeat steps 4-6 until you can identify one person.

The loop: Draw Card → Roll Dice → Read the clue → Compare suspects.
Finish: select the matching suspect and choose Make final accusation. You do not need to use the whole deck.

This guide describes the current game. Danger, injuries, detective death, and High Stakes mode are proposed additions; they are not present in v0.2.1. This tutorial does not install a game update.

Find your way around the desk

Control or object	What to do with it
New case	Create a fresh mystery. Your previous case is archived.
Draw Card / face-down deck	Find your next lead. Resolve the drawn lead before drawing another.
Roll Dice	Choose an approach, then roll to investigate the pending lead.
Upright clue note	Shows your latest clue category and value. Click it to open the full evidence list.
Suspects	Open Suspects & accusation. Select each name to read its dossier.
Notebook / open notebook	Type your own deductions. These are personal notes, not commands to the game.
Case files / case folder	Open the full text interface, including evidence, suspects, notes, and the journal.
Back to study	Return from the case-file tabs to the illustrated desk.
Hint (F1)	Ask what to do next. Hints do not reveal the culprit or spend investigation time.
Save case / Open case	Save a portable copy or reopen a saved investigation.

The numbers above the desk

TIME 24/24 means 24 investigation points remain. It is not 24 minutes. Reading dossiers, writing notes, or stepping away does not consume those points. CLUES counts leads you have investigated. The line beneath the case information explains the latest draw or roll.

If a button will not work

Draw Card disabled? You may already have a pending lead: select Roll Dice. Roll Dice disabled? Draw a card first. Either action is also unavailable after the case closes or your investigation points run out.

Automatic help appears after about 45 seconds without activity while the game is active. It is only assistance, not a penalty. Uncheck Auto hints (45 sec) if you prefer to ask with F1.

Cards and dice, without the jargon

TTRPG means tabletop role-playing game. Here, you imagine yourself as a detective while the application manages the rules. A dossier is a suspect's fact sheet. A lead is something to investigate; a clue is the evidence you gain from investigating it.

The cards

The twelve Jacks, Queens, and Kings represent twelve suspects. One is secretly guilty. The Ace-through-10 cards provide clues. An Ace counts as 1. No jokers are used.

Suit	Clue category	Compare with the dossier
Hearts	Motive	Possible motive: why might this person act?
Diamonds	Access	Access held: how could this person get in?
Clubs	Trace	Clothing: what material matches the trace?
Spades	Opportunity	Unaccounted-for period: when could this person act?

A Hearts clue does not mean a Hearts suspect is guilty. The number-card suit tells you the evidence category. The suspect's face-card suit is simply an identity. Keep those two jobs separate.

The dice

1d6 means one six-sided die; it chooses the setting at case creation. 2d6 means two six-sided dice added together; these choose the incident and resolve investigations. The app rolls for you.

Your chosen specialty adds +2 when you use that approach. Other approaches add +0. In this preview the three approaches share the same resolution rules, so using your specialty is the strongest choice.

Card rank	Target total
Ace-3	7
4-7	8
8-10	9

Investigation total = die 1 + die 2 + specialty bonus. Meet or beat the target: spend 1 time. Miss by 1 or 2: spend 2 time. Miss by 3 or more: spend 3 time. You recover the clue in every case. A poor roll delays you; it does not make the evidence false.

The first four leads cover all four suits, in a random order. Each suspect has a unique combination of the four dossier facts. Four investigated leads therefore provide enough information to solve the current preview. Later clues in a suit corroborate that same fact.

Example case: the stolen ledger

Teaching example, not a recorded game session. The suspects below have an invented but valid set of profiles, and the cards and dice are chosen to explain the rules. Your randomly generated case will differ. No tutorial save file is required or included.

You create Detective Marcus with Observation. The setting die shows 4: the Ashford Hotel. The incident dice show $3 + 4 = 7$: a stolen confidential ledger. You start with 24 time. Read the brief in Case files, then inspect the dossiers.

For this example, copy the important facts into a comparison table. The shortened entries below mean the same things as the full dossier wording: financial = financial desperation; secret = protecting a secret; staff/guest/service = staff pass/guest invitation/service key. Before/during/after refer to the blackout.

Suspect	Motive	Access	Clothing	Opportunity
Adrian Vale	Financial	Staff	Blue wool	Before
Clara Finch	Revenge	Staff	Blue wool	Before
Edwin Cross	Secret	Guest	Red silk	After
Nora Black	Revenge	Service	Blue wool	During
Felix Reed	Financial	Guest	Black leather	During
Vera Ash	Revenge	Staff	Blue wool	During
Miles Hart	Secret	Staff	Black leather	Before
Iris Bell	Revenge	Guest	Red silk	During
Oscar Pike	Financial	Service	Red silk	After
Lena Frost	Revenge	Staff	Red silk	After
Hugo Gray	Secret	Service	Black leather	During
Alice Wren	Revenge	Guest	Black leather	Before

You do not yet know which of these people is guilty. Having a motive alone is not enough. Jobs and personality traits add atmosphere; the four facts above are what you compare with verified evidence.

Notebook tip: write “Still possible:” and list names. Remove a name from your own list whenever a verified clue contradicts that person's dossier. The game does not automatically cross names off for you.

Playthrough: follow the first two leads

Lead 1: 2 of Hearts - discover the motive

Click: Draw Card → Roll Dice → Observation (+2 specialty) → Roll 2d6.

The 2 of Hearts has a target of 7. Your dice show 2 and 3. With your specialty, $2 + 3 + 2 = 7$. You meet the target, spend 1 time, and go from 24 to 23.

Clue: "A bank inquiry establishes the responsible person's motive as revenge."

Think: the guilty person must have revenge as their possible motive. Select Suspects and compare every dossier. Adrian, Edwin, Felix, Miles, Oscar, and Hugo have a different motive, so rule them out in your notebook.

Still possible: Clara, Nora, Vera, Iris, Lena, Alice. Six remain. Return with Back to study.

Lead 2: 8 of Diamonds - establish access

Click: Draw Card → Roll Dice → Observation (+2 specialty) → Roll 2d6.

The 8 of Diamonds has a target of 9. Your dice show 2 and 3. Your total is $2 + 3 + 2 = 7$: two below the target. You get the clue with a delay, spend 2 time, and go from 23 to 21.

Clue: "An inventory sheet confirms the responsible person used a staff pass."

Think: the culprit must match both revenge and a staff pass. Of the six remaining people, Nora has a service key; Iris and Alice have guest invitations. Cross those three off.

Still possible: Clara, Vera, Lena. Three remain.

Your notebook after two leads

Known facts: revenge + staff pass.
 Still possible: Clara Finch, Vera Ash, Lena Frost.
 Need to distinguish their clothing and opportunity.
 Time remaining: 21.

Notice that a disappointing roll did not stop your investigation. The evidence remains reliable, and your deductions still move forward.

Playthrough: solve the case

Lead 3: 5 of Clubs - find the clothing trace

Draw the next card and investigate with Observation again. The target is 8. You roll $1 + 1 + 2 = 4$, missing by four. This is a setback: spend 3 time, dropping from 21 to 18. You still receive the clue.

Clue: "A scrap in the corridor links the responsible person's clothing to blue wool."

Compare: Clara and Vera wear blue wool; Lena wears red silk. Rule out Lena. Two remain: Clara and Vera. Do not guess yet; their opportunity periods differ.

Lead 4: 3 of Spades - establish the opportunity

Draw and investigate the next lead. Target 7; dice $4 + 2 + 2 = 8$. Clean success: spend 1 time, dropping from 18 to 17.

Clue: "A delivery receipt places the responsible person's action during the blackout."

Compare: Clara is unaccounted for before the blackout. Vera is unaccounted for during it. Only Vera Ash matches every clue: revenge, a staff pass, blue wool, and during the blackout.

Make the final accusation

1. Select Suspects.
2. Select Vera Ash - King of Diamonds in the list (the game may display the card first).
3. Recheck all four facts in her dossier.
4. Select Make final accusation and confirm.

In this teaching case, Vera is the hidden culprit, so the outcome is CASE SOLVED. Read the revealed explanation in the Investigation view or Case journal. You finish with 17 time remaining; there is no reason to spend the rest or draw all 40 cards.

After clue	Suspects remaining	Time
Start	12	24
Motive: revenge	6	23
Access: staff pass	3	21
Trace: blue wool	2	18
Opportunity: during blackout	1 - Vera Ash	17

Keep going, pause, or start again

What happens at the end?

Situation	Current v0.2.1 behavior
Correct accusation	The case ends as solved and reveals the explanation.
Incorrect accusation	The case ends as lost and reveals the true culprit. You cannot make a second accusation in that closed case.
Time reaches zero	Further investigation stops. Read your evidence and make a final accusation.
You close the game	The app attempts to save your unfinished case so you can continue later.
You start New case	The current case is archived before the new one replaces it.

There is no detective death or Danger meter in this version. Also, reading slowly cannot kill your detective or use up the investigation budget. Only resolving leads consumes time points.

Save and return safely

Actions save automatically. Notebook edits save about every 20 seconds and when you close normally. Watch the bottom status line for save errors. Use Save case before leaving if you want an extra copy. On reopening the app, the latest autosaved case should resume; use Open case for a specific saved or archived case.

Archived cases are under %LOCALAPPDATA%\MidnightCaseFiles\Cases. To find them, press Windows+R, paste that path, and press Enter. A previous autosave is also retained as current.mcf.bak in the parent folder; Open case accepts backups. Do not inspect save files in a text editor: they contain the hidden solution.

Common questions

Do I have to invent dialogue? No. You may imagine scenes or write them in your notebook for fun, but free-form text does not change clues or outcomes.

Can clues lie? Not in this preview. Verified clues agree with the hidden solution.

Must I memorize all twelve people? No. Reopen the dossiers as often as you want and keep a short list of remaining names.

What if I am stuck? Press F1. If several people still match, investigate another lead and compare the new fact with all earlier facts.

Your next real game: choose New case, pick a specialty, investigate four leads, and write down the four evidence facts. Find the one dossier that matches all four. Then make your accusation. The clues and answer will differ from this example.