

Life at your local Bridge Club

This is a guide for newcomers to Bridge who have been learning to play and now wish to get involved by joining and playing at a real life Bridge Club.

WHO WILL YOU MEET?

Here we are discussing life in a face to face (F2F) bridge environment, though the concepts will be mostly applicable to online play.

The Members

These are a crossmix of society united by a passion for Bridge. They are human like the rest of us, with the normal failings and good points. Duplicate Bridge is a competitive sport, and some are more competitive than others. During a game some of them may become too obsessed to remember their manners. Be tolerant, do not expect too much at first, take time to get to know them. Some of them will be good players, others no better than you, but more experienced. The ones who talk loudest are not necessarily the best players – look at the results!

The Tournament Director (TD)

This is the overworked person in charge of the tournament. They allocate starting positions to each pair and decides how the tournament will run. When something goes wrong (eg a revoke, a lead out of turn, or a board played in the wrong direction) they must be called to the table to sort it out. Never be afraid to call them if something is troubling you. If your opponents call them do not worry – they know that you are new and will be patient and understanding.

If someone tries to impose their version of the Rules ask, politely but firmly, if you may call the TD. Call them even if permission is refused.

Convention Cards, and exchanging System Information

In beginner tournaments, you probably won't have to complete a card but it's still a good idea. Your teacher can provide an SBU Standard Card ready filled in for you. A Convention Card makes it easier to exchange information, gives the Director something to refer to in the event of a dispute, and is quite good at reinforcing the system you play in your own head!(though you musn't refer to it during play).

Be ready to exchange information with opponents when you sit down to play against them, so agree the basics before you start so you both make the same explanation, e.g. if asked about the strength of a jump overcall say "weak", "intermediate" or "strong".

At the start of each round you announce your basic system, notably:

- The range of your opening 1NT e.g. "12-14" or "Weak"
- What sort of 2-openers you play e.g. "Acol Twos" or "Weak Twos"
- Your leading and signalling style e.g. "4th highest, normal count and attitude"

Your opponents also announce their basic methods – look out for Weak 2 bids and Upside Down (Reverse) signals. If you don't understand what your opponents tell you, ask! You are entitled to understand.

Be prepared to answer questions on your bidding and card play. Explain your general agreements, not what you think a specific bid or card actually shows e.g. when asked about your leads say "4th highest, second from poor suits, top of a sequence" even if you know from your own hand that partner has just led King from Kx.

How should you behave?

- Follow the TD's instructions (if you do not understand them ask for clarification, they won't object).
- Normally all boards are dealt at the beginning of the first round, and you should not deal during later rounds unless instructed to do so by the TD.
- Keep the same position throughout the evening: if you start as North you must be North whenever your partnership sits North-South. (In some forms of duplicate you will be asked to sit in both directions in the course of the evening.)
- When one pair sits at a table for the entire evening it is North's responsibility to see that the board is correctly placed on the table, and that the boards are passed to the next table at the end of a round as instructed.
- Either North or South must fill in the travelling score sheet, or the Bridgmate (ask for advice if necessary).
- Try to keep up a fair rate of play.
- The normal allowance is 7 minutes per board, plus one minute for moving tables.
- Play the boards first, then make polite conversation if there is time.
- When dummy, remain at the table if possible, and play your cards as instructed. Do not walk round the table to have a look at partner's hand, or exchange hands with partner before play starts.
- Try not to discuss the boards at the wrong time. If players from other tables who have not yet played a board overhear you their game is spoiled. Make a note of the board in question and find a sympathetic expert to discuss it with later (most players are flattered to be asked for advice.)

Some things which may come as a surprise

During the auction

- Anyone can ask questions about the meaning of any or all bids at his turn to bid (or play). Some players may sound rather aggressive when doing this. Do not let it faze you – tell them what the bids mean to the best of your knowledge. If you do not know – apologise and say "I don't know, this has never happened before".
- Do not be afraid to ask what opponents' bids mean – you can do this whenever it is your turn to bid or play. If you do not understand the explanation ask for clarification.
- Bids should be made in tempo. Long pauses give partner information to which they are not entitled, and may help opponents unnecessarily. However, everybody hesitates from time to time, so do not be upset if someone accuses you of doing so. Apologise, promise to try to do better in future, listen politely to whatever the TD has to say, take a deep breath and get on with the game.

The Bidding Box

- If you have not used one before get someone to show you – it is not complicated. You should decide what you are going to bid, then place the appropriate cards on the table in front of you. Do not get into the bad habit of fiddling with the box while thinking, even though you see others doing so.
- If you pull the wrong bid you should say that you have done so and correct it – there is no penalty provided you do so before the next player has called.

Stop Bids

- The Red "Stop" Card in the bidding box is used to indicate that you are about to skip a level of bidding. You place it on the table, then place your bid on top of it and overlapping (if playing without bidding boxes, say "Stop" before making your bid).
- After a pause of about 10 seconds replace the Stop Card in your box and the next player may bid. This is supposed to help with the tempo of bidding. When someone makes a pre-emptive bid it gives the next player time to bid. You should try to use this time for thinking, even if you know what you are about to do. It is unethical to think for ages, or to make it clear that you have nothing to think about.

Alerting

- The blue "Alert" Card in the bidding box is used by the partner of a player who has made a conventional bid, or a bid which opponents may not fully understand. It must be clearly shown to both opponents. If there is no Alert Card draw attention to partner's bid by tapping the table and saying "Alert".
- You alert bids which are not natural, like Stayman or Transfers. Using the SBU Standard System you will not need to alert very often. Do not alert doubles, or anything above 3NT. You must never alert your own bid (unless playing on BBO, where each player alerts their own bid. This is just the way the software works. In RealBridge you follow the advice as if at a real life table).
- If partner forgets to alert, or alerts a natural bid, say nothing. Assume they have forgotten to alert, not that they have forgotten the system. If you are declarer or dummy tell opponents after the bidding is over and before the opening lead is made.
- If you are defending say nothing about the mistake till the end of the hand – you cannot tell opponents without also giving unauthorised information to partner.
- When opponents alert you may ask about their bid, but need not unless you want to. Sometimes it doesn't make any difference to what you do, so why ask? If it matters to you, then do so.

The Opening Lead

- All bids should be left face up till the defenders have run out of questions and the opening lead is exposed. The Opening Leader should ensure that they have understood the bidding fully by asking any necessary questions before selecting their opening lead.
- The Opening Lead is made face down, allowing partner to ask any questions they may have.
- The partner of the Opening Leader may not ask questions until the lead has been selected.

- Once partner has run out of questions they indicate that the lead can be turned over by saying "no further questions", or "thank you, partner".
- You can save time by making your opening lead before filling in your personal scorecard. Everyone then has time to write the contract and lead while dummy is being put down.

The Play

Declarer

- Should call for the cards they want dummy to play, NOT lean across and touch them.
- Dummy picks out the nominated card and lays it in front of him, then turns it over like everybody else.
- Try to be precise: say "King of hearts" rather than vaguely pointing towards a card.
- If you say "heart" dummy should play the smallest heart they have.

Dummy

Dummy takes little part in the play, and must not comment on partner's play, nor suggest which card to play.

They may do any of the following:

- Prevent partner from revoking when playing a card from dummy - ask "having no hearts (clubs etc)?" when partner shows out in that suit
- Stop declarer if they are about to lead from the wrong hand. Note that if declarer has already led from the wrong hand dummy should not draw attention to it – it is up to the defenders to decide what they want to do.
- If dummy spots any other irregularity they may not draw attention to it until the board has been played out.

Defenders

Defenders should not communicate by word or gesture during the play. If you think partner may have revoked, say nothing till the play is over, then investigate.

Is it worth it?

The people who play bridge week in and week out believe it is!

Make up your mind to enjoy your tournaments.

Accept that newcomers may appear to be a disruptive element to long-standing members.

It is worth persevering – you will be surprised how quickly you are accepted into the fold.