

Your Move From Classes to Competitive Bridge

You have finished your Bridge classes. It's time to expand your experience of playing bridge. What can you do to ease your transition into competitive bridge and help you to develop as a good player?

What you should do

What you must do is to start playing Bridge regularly, at least once or twice a week. Play lots of bridge in a mixture of environments.

- It might be at home in the company of like-minded friends where you can have a good social evening and practice your bidding system.
- Start playing in a club or online. Morning, afternoon and evening most days, there will be somewhere you can play Bridge. Play at the club where you took lessons. Hopefully there will be a session that suits your level of ability. If not, ask a committee member if the club could organise one.
- In smaller clubs where extra sessions are not practical, try badgering the regular players to come round to your home, perhaps once a month to play some bridge. They should keep you playing at a reasonable speed. You can discuss hands with them – not just play but bidding and defence. They can help you understand what tactics and strategy to adopt to make a good score in the differing forms of scoring (aggregate or Butler and match points).
- Play in events that use computer-dealt hands. This will let you look over the hands afterwards and compare your results with others.
- Play in events with better players. You will begin to notice how they don't make bidding easy for you. You will see how they can make more tricks both as declarer and as defender. You will in time start to use their ways in your play.
- Play with a better player as partner. You may feel self-conscious at first but you will find that it both improves your understanding of the basics of Bridge and develops your play.
- Play in events run by other clubs. There are many tournaments throughout the year with a good sprinkling of events for those leaving classes and wishing to develop their competitive experience. Look out for events for beginners and for improvers.

Start to play with a regular partner.

- Bidding at bridge is a conversation between partners and the conversation will become less stilted and more meaningful as you play regularly.
- Agree your conventions. It is worth writing out a convention card that clearly states your conventions.
- As you encounter Bridge situations that your convention does not cover, or on which you regularly disagree, or which come up infrequently and one or other of you tends to forget the convention, revisit the convention card and reinforce and update it.

Continue your Bridge education

- Read more about Bridge. There are some excellent authors at this intermediate level, including Bernard Magee, Andrew Robson and Paul Mendelson.
- There are websites galore that provide advice on play; advice on bidding, advice on defending, information on new conventions you may encounter that your opponents are playing.
- Be careful not to become addicted to playing unsociable Bridge on your own against the computer or others over the world wide web.
- Attend seminars given by experienced players.
- Attend residential Bridge Congresses where you will meet other like-minded players and make good friends. Often such events include discussion of hands when you benefit from hearing how experienced players would bid the interesting hands that cropped up. Often there will be a tutorial session on topics that will help you improve your game.

What your club could do.

Some of the following information will have been overtaken by events, but normality is hopefully being slowly restored!

You've finished Bridge classes. What might your club be doing? Most of what follows would apply to bigger clubs, probably with their own premises. For smaller clubs who rent their premises, it is not viable to add extra events. But look back at the previous section and consider organising home playing where an experienced player comes along. You should be able to play at beginners' events at your club such as the following.

- Play and learn tournaments where you play hands and these are discussed. Some clubs have an experienced player at each table, some hold group discussions after hands are played, some produce handouts with brief commentaries on hands, some have itinerant experienced

players that go from table to table as needs or questions arise. These are particularly useful for players who are some way into their course of lessons.

- Simple systems tournaments where players are restricted to using conventions that broadly fit with the SBU lessons. These are particularly useful for players just emerging from classes.
- Open events at times when classes are normally held. You will have got into the habit of going to the Bridge Club at that time so it is natural to continue.

You should be able to go to short improvers' tutorial regularly, focussed on one concept, given by good players. A thoughtful club will provide these tutorials before beginners' events rather than as isolated sessions.

When you first attend the main club night you should encounter a welcoming atmosphere and positive behaviour by all players you meet so that you are encouraged to come back. Sadly, not all clubs take steps to ensure this first experience.

You will not find it easy. You will be bewildered as to why you have not done as well as you can against less experienced players. But stick with it. Slowly but surely, you will recognise where you can improve your bidding, play and defence and be surprised at how well you perform at the Club.

Clubs should mentor aspiring Bridge players to bring you on at a faster rate.

- Experienced players you meet on club nights will help you understand where you have gone wrong in bidding, play or defence. Some players will be delighted to play with you to help you develop.
- On occasional events you could have the chance to play with more experienced players.
- Longer seminars on specific topics such as slam bidding would help you develop this aspect of your game. Finding and making games is hard enough as a new player. The aspiring player should feel comfortable with the tools for finding and bidding slams. Other topics might include No Trump play and tactics in playing in matches versus match pointed duplicate.

Your Club will likely have its annual championships and these might include an event for players up to Club and/or Local and/or District Master level.

While these championships would be for members only there may also be annual open events run by your club for different levels of Players. Look out for other open event at other clubs.

What your district could do

West District initiatives aimed at those wishing to improve their tournament Bridge experience include the following.

- Division 5 of about 12 Teams for players emerging from classes where teams of 4 play 20 boards in a match.
- Bronze Cordial Congress held at Seamill Hydro over two days for players up to District Master. Includes Pairs and Teams, quiz, review of hands and tutorial. Evening sessions are more cordial and light hearted.
- Bronze Challenge is held over one week and allows Bronze level players to challenge themselves against other players of similar experience. This is a Pairs event for all West District players from Novice to Senior Master. It is especially aimed at those players with limited experience in competitions outside their home club events and for those emerging from Bridge classes. Last year, some 240 players from six clubs took part.
- Bronze Congress held alongside the WD Annual Congress in March.

East District each year runs two open event ("No Fears" for those in early stages) and ("Next Steps" for more experienced), both for up to Local Masters.

Districts hold their own regular events. Results are generally published on the District website but the results do not generally distinguish the differing level of players (Club Masters, Local Masters, District Masters, Senior Masters, Scottish Masters, etc). District results might be published to show the ranking of Bronze level players separately as well as the standard amalgamated results, particularly if there is a prize for Bronze players. This would encourage more Bronze level players to participate in District events.

What "Your SBU" could do

The "Your SBU" Initiative took place in first half of 2013. It was clear that the vast majority of SBU members are among the Bronze level players where the main growth of members is coming from classes. Two years on there is still much that could be done.

A Welcome Pack when you join the SBU would provide encouragement to play in competitions. Suggested contents of the pack:

- A welcome letter from the President.
- A convention card that gives the basics of SBU taught system.
- Explanation in terms suitable for new members of the Master Point system and how you gain MPs.
- Encouragement to play – perhaps based on the “What you should do” section of this Note – plus specific examples of District and SBU events suitable for new Players.
- Events which aspiring players might consider where there are prizes for Bronze category players

All SBU congresses have a Bronze Congress running alongside in the same venue.

Reintroduce SBU teaching weekends. These were discontinued as SBU events about 5 or 6 years ago. The attendance was typically 15 pairs with tutelage provided by Liz McGowan. Bernard McGee held a teaching weekend in North Queensferry about 2 years ago that was attended by over 50 pairs!

Adapt the way results are published. In view of the substantial percentage of bronze (and silver) category players within the SBU membership and the small number of these who participate in national events, in addition to the full list of results being posted on the website, conveners should publish separate lists for both silver and bronze pairs/teams participating. The argument is that this would encourage more participation from these players as their performance could then be displayed against that of their peers.

Increase the number of ranked events. There are two ranked pairs events for Bronze players in the SBU calendar. Some 80 pairs took part in the qualifying events for the Kennedy for up to Local Masters. In contrast 11 pairs played in the Johnstone for up to District Master with 1 pair playing in the WD heat and 10 in the ED heat (both heats were combined with Jesner for Master and Senior Master). Why the disparity?

Adapt MP regulations to better accommodate bronze players.

- Be less rigorous about MP entitlement in bronze competitions. As an example, where a competition for up to District Masters uses the same boards but on different days as in the WD Bronze Challenge, the rules could be relaxed to allow MPs to be awarded.
- Allow stratification in simultaneous events. The EBU runs Sim Pairs with four Strata with Stratum D for up to District Masters. The top third overall **and** the top third in each strata gets Blue points and Local points.

You are entitled to overall points and points for your Stratum but not both. SBU could operate MPs similarly.

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13th July 2015