

Begin contract bridge with Ross

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Class Three

Bridge customs.

Taking tricks.

Tricks that are won should be placed in front of one of the partners, in order, face down, with separation so that everyone can easily count them. Anyone may ask that the last trick taken be turned over for review. But tricks taken before that may not be turned over. You may by now be starting to realize that bridge tends to be a game of good memory. It's good exercise for the mind, why I sometimes feel too lazy to play....

Laying out the dummy.

The person who lays out the dummy should place the cards vertically toward the declarer, high cards to low cards, and the trump suit always on the dealer's left. The good thing about that is that dozing opponents who have few scorable points and so little interest in the round at least can remember the trump suit by glancing at the dummy.

Bidding boxes.

You may encounter bridge players who prefer a bidding box. This is a normally plastic box housing tabbed cards depicting every possible bid. Instead of verbally announcing your bid—and perhaps cheating by suggesting something to partner by voice inflection—you hold up a bidding card. Also this supposedly makes the bid more clear for the hard of hearing, which tends to affect a lot of us aging bridge players. Still, I'm not certain it avoids all possible cheating opportunities, as I guess you can hold the card at a pre-arranged angle to tell your partner something.

Bidding: more on *minimum-value one-bids, responses and re-bids.*

A “one-bid” means that a bidder bids a suit at the one-level. This proposes a suit for trump, (usually) indicates the number of cards a bidder holds in the trump suit, and (usually) indicates the number of points a bidder holds. Reminder: in most modern systems (called “five-card major”), an opener cannot open a major suit without holding at least five cards in that suit.

Responses.

The *responder* is the partner of the person who opened (who was the first bidder). He or she has two goals:

1. Have enough trumps between the two hands, at least eight.
2. Preferably have enough points to reach a game, 26 between the two hands for a major suit contract, and 28-29 for a minor suit contract. (Recall a game in a major is a bid of four, requiring the partnership to take 10 tricks.)

In the last lesson we noted that a response is based on the number of points in the responder’s hand, and the number of cards in the suit that the opener has named. To review:

- Fewer than six points, pass.
- Six to nine points and three or more cards in partner’s major suit, bid partner’s suit at the two level. You are telling partner this: “I have minimum points, but at least three of your suit.”
- Six to nine (some books say 10) points and fewer than three in partner’s major suit, bid one no-trump. You are telling partner: “I have minimum points, and two or fewer cards in your suit.”

Rebids by opener.

After a minimum response as above (presuming partner didn’t pass), the opener with 13-14 points (minimum for opening), has two choices: rebid his major suit at the two level (after a one-no-trump response); pass (leaving the contract at two of the originally opened suit, or one no-trump). Why not bid higher toward game? Count it: you have 13-

14 points. Your partner has up to nine, perhaps fewer. That's about 23. You need 26 for game in a major suit. You don't have it. Quit while you're ahead.

Bidding minors: opening the "short club."

Let's elaborate on that skeleton of rules for what we call "minimum hands." (Not a lot of points. Remember that the average hand has 10 points, so both partners are around average, a little below or a little above.) What if as an opener you have the required 13-14 points, but neither five spades nor five hearts? Then **you must bid a minor suit**. Bid the longest minor you have, even if that suit only has three cards. Often you'll bid one club. Some players call this bidding a "short club," because it promises only opening count, not length in the suit. You may bid one diamond if you have three or four.

Responses to a short club or diamond.

Presuming you have at least six HCP, you realize your partner may have bid a minor suit despite having as few as two cards (but we hope at least three) in that suit. That means you must have **five or more** to support that minor suit at the two level.

You would prefer, however, to be in a major. At your weak point range, you can respond in a new suit, **but only at the one level**. To bid a major suit, you need at least **four cards** in that suit. Bid longest suit first. If you have five in both major suits, bid hearts first. If you have four in both suits, bid spades first. You are telling partner this: "I have four or more cards in this major suit. If you also do, we have a fit. Woo-hoo!" Note: with 6-9 HCPs you can't respond anything at the two level except the suit your partner has already opened. You may have five hearts, and would like to mention them over your partner's one spade bid, but because spades rank higher than hearts you'd have to bid two. But you can't. You are point-challenged. Sad, as the president would say.

Opener rebids after a change-of-suit response.

If your partner responded one of a major, and you have four cards in that major, support that response by bidding two. If not, bid one no-trump, denying four cards in that major, and glumly realize nothing

Note the standard bridge scorepad above includes a line in the middle. Points that don't count toward a game are scored above that line. Points that *do* count toward a game are scored below that line. Only bids you contracted to take count toward game. For example, if your contract is two spades, but you actually make four spades, two spades count below the line (60 pts) and two count above the line (another 60 pts). You need 100 or more points below the line for a game (See Class One).

In the above example, you would have scored a game had you bid four, because that's what you ended up making. Alas, you didn't bid that, so now will have to try again to reach game.

If, on the other hand, you bid four spades and made only two, your opponents would score 50 points above the line for each trick under the number you promised you'd take. In this case, they'd score 100. In fact, they'd score double that if you had already won one game, and were working on a second game, because you were vulnerable. Worse, you'd have to endure that annoying gloating of the opponents who defeated your contract.

If you win a rubber in two games, you receive 700 bonus points.
If you win a rubber in three games (opponent wins one), you receive 500 bonus points.

Basic strategy.

The finesse.

Normally declarers determine their ability to make a contract by counting the number of tricks they expect to win, or the number they expect to lose. (We'll talk more about that in Class Five.) If that number does not reflect what they have bid, they have to find a way to avoid possible losers. A common way to do this is to try a *finesse*.

A finesse is played in hopes that a specific opponent holds a high card you want to capture with a higher card. Let's say you have three small clubs in your hand. The dummy has the ace and queen of clubs. Who has the king? If you lead a small club from your hand, and

then take the ace on the board (the dummy hand is also called the *table* or the *board*), your opponent's king will be *promoted* and able to take a trick. You may have to force it out by losing your queen. That means you only get one trick, the ace.

Often better in such a situation to play low from your hand, hoping your left hand opponent has the king. If the opponent plays the king, you play the ace to capture it. If he plays low, you play your queen, winning the trick. And you still have your ace to spare!

Note, of course, if your right-hand opponent holds the king, he or she will play it over your queen, and you'll lose the queen. That's the risk. Presuming you infer nothing else from the bidding or play, a finesse gives you 50-50 chance. (See below for examples of finesses.)

Counting winners.

We normally count winners in no-trump contracts, and losers in trump contracts (See Class Four). High cards and long suits win tricks, high cards for obvious reasons. Length because you can run your opponents out of a suit and, presuming they can't trump, take the rest. In bridge, as in life, even a two takes a trick now and then.

Examples.

Counting winners.

Example One:

Dummy: ♠ 4 3

Declarer: ♠ A K Q J

You can win all four spades. You'll need to discard from dummy on the last two tricks.

Example Two:

Dummy: ♥ Q 6 7

Declarer: ♥ A K J

You have the top four hearts. But you can only take three tricks, because you must follow suit. That forces you to waste two high cards on one trick.

Example Three:

Dummy: ♣ K 7

Declarer: ♣ A Q 5

You can take three tricks, but need to play carefully. Usually we play the honors from the short suit first, so in this case you'd play king from dummy, throwing the 5 from your hand, and then play 7 from dummy to get back to your hand to play the other two high cards.

Example Four:

Dummy: ♦ 2 6

Declarer: ♦ A K Q J 9 4 3

This long suit of nine cards will take seven tricks, because by the time you've taken the high cards your opponents will be out of the suit.

Finesses.

Example One:

Dummy: ♠ A Q 6

Declarer: ♠ 9 7 4

Play low to the queen, hoping your left-hand opponent holds the king.

Example Two:

Dummy: ♥ K 6

Declarer: ♥ 8 4

Play low toward the king. If your left-hand opponent plays the ace, play the six from the board. Your king is promoted, as the ace has now been played. If that opponent plays low, try playing the king from the board. It will win a trick if the left-hand opponent holds the ace, but chooses not to play it.

Example Three:

Dummy: ♣ 9 4 2

Declarer: ♣ K Q 6

You know you can get one trick: play a high card and force out the ace, making your other high card good. But can you get two tricks? Try a finesse! Play low from dummy, hoping your right-hand-opponent holds the ace. If the king wins, get back to dummy and try the finesse again. You may win two tricks.