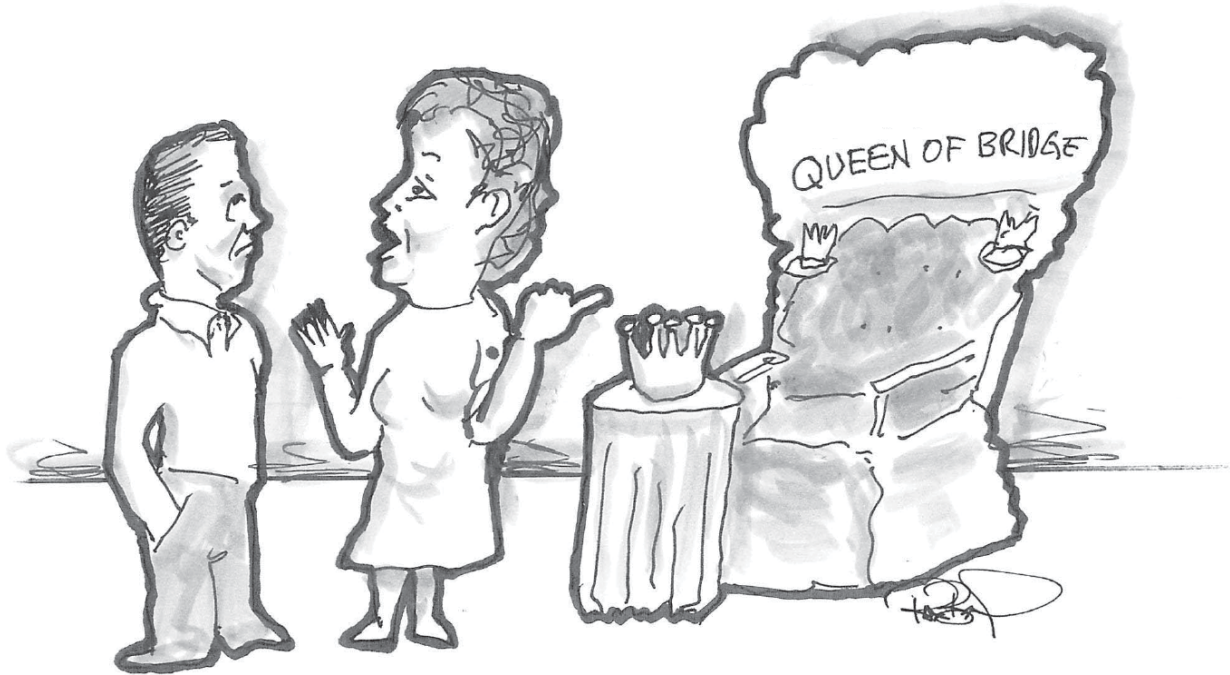

PART 1 – BRIDGE BASICS



A bridge player was in town and asked to play at the local Club. The director asked a woman referred to as the "Hat Lady" to play with the gentleman and she asked him if he had placed in any recent tournaments. His response was yes, 5th. She was appalled to be asked to be placed with a beginner and told the Director he would have to find someone else to play with the gentleman. He ended up playing with a fairly new player and eventually got to the Hat Lady's table. After the bidding on the first board she criticized the bidding and the gentleman's partner told her the gentleman could seemingly make any bid and, indeed, he proceeded to out play her on that particular hand. She then sheepishly asked the gentleman in WHICH tournament he placed 5th and got the reply that it was the World Championships.

Chapter 1 – Bridge Basics

INTRODUCTION

This book is written as if the author were standing in front of a class of students. While reading the book should be beneficial, there is no substitute for actually playing. I encourage you to use this text while also participating in a class which includes playing practice.

When you arrive at your first lesson on competitive bridge, you will find you are in the company of a very diverse audience. There will be people who have had little experience playing card games at all; there will be some people who say “I played 30 years ago and want to start again,” and there will even be some people who say “I have been playing bridge for a long time.”

Before you ask why someone who has been playing bridge for years would come for lessons, I will give you an analogy: If someone had been playing poker for years and decided to play for money, the strategy would change. He would be accustomed to playing a game that did not penalize the player when he used a demeanor which was either overly aggressive or overly conservative. A different analogy would be a trapeze artist performing with and without a net. You can do many things WITH a net that you would never dream of doing without. In short, many people who have been playing bridge for a long time still benefit from lessons to learn how to bid in a competitive bridge setting.

In addition to a variety of experience levels, your bridge class will also have a moderate age variation. We have had youth in the class who are under 10 years old (it is VERY difficult to accept when they beat you) and we have attendees who are... um, more mature. Your choice to join, or further your involvement in the Bridge community is a good decision. The nationwide community of bridge players number in the millions, and the ACBL (American Contract Bridge League) is merely in the 200,000 range. The bridge community as a whole is currently in a renaissance and the trend has returned to an ever increasing number of players.

There will be many people who come for lessons with partners (some brave souls even come with spouses 😊 - I did). Most people come without a partner and many of them establish life-long partners/friends in their beginning class. When I learned bridge, I had no idea that I was joining a new community, a new family of friends. What a wonderful surprise that has been.

Since we have touched base on partnerships here is a message that will be repeated several times in this book:

Your partner from time to time will make a BAD bid/play. He NEVER EVER does it expecting it to produce BAD RESULTS.

There is a CHICK FLICK, as my wife refers to them, called *Hitch* where Will Smith plays a secret pseudo-matchmaker who helps a guy find his way into the Heart of the girl of his dream. He finds roles reversed and he is the one interested in a girl and sets out to win her Heart. On their first date, he takes her to Ellis Island (New York) and has secretly arranged not only for a private tour but also to have the sign in log open to the page where her great great grandfather signed in. At the moment of truth, when she looks down and sees her ancestor's signature, she gasps and Will Smith is absolutely beaming with pride that he was this clever. Suddenly, the girl screams and runs off crying – obviously distraught. Will Smith looks over at the tour guide and says “I saw that ... going differently in my mind.”

YOUR PARTNER NEVER MAKES A BAD BID or PLAY on PURPOSE. Be kind and patient.

Be patient with your partner, as well as with your opponents. Some of your opponents will be new and nervous. They may take more time than necessary. They may say things aloud that they shouldn't. Please be gracious and kind as well as patient.

Lastly, be patient with yourself. I have had so many students approach me and ask “When am I ever going to get this?” My response is “the good news bad news” is... you will never stop learning/improving your bridge game. Just focus on having fun and trying to improve.

CARD GAMES

A deck of cards is made up of 52 cards: 4 different suits:

(Spades, Hearts, Diamonds and Clubs)



and each suit has 13 sequential ranking cards (from highest to lowest)

A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2

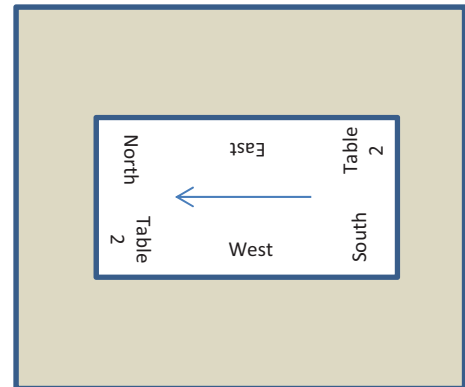
BRIDGE

In bridge, all 52 cards are distributed equally to four players, meaning everyone gets 13 cards. In competitive bridge, there are usually several tables of players (4 per table).

If you are reading this book it is possible that you are also taking a class composed of several tables of students. Bridge isn't always played with multiple tables. There are millions of bridge players who simply play with 4 people around a kitchen table. In bridge, the person you are facing (whether you are still speaking or not) is your partner. Players to your left and right are your opponents (enemies 😊). Strangely enough, your opponents are not your competitors. Your competitors are the people at other tables playing the same direction as you. Your opponents are merely obstacles on the path to success (or lack thereof).

THE BRIDGE TABLE

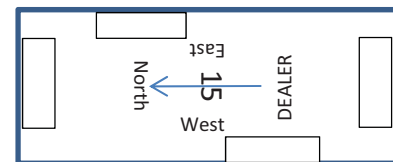
Before you start playing, you should notice that there is an indication in the middle of the table showing the direction associated with each seat and the table number. In future lessons, East/West players will move to the next table number; the point being sure we know WHO East/West are and that they sit similarly oriented at the next table.



Bridge Table with Table Identifier

THE CARD CONTAINER – BOARD

Also, when you arrive at a table, there should be one or more “Boards” (the card containers) at the table. A Board shows East, West, North and South directions; the Board “Number” and the direction that is designated as the Dealer. The cards are separated in slots aligned for each intended player. It is as if someone sat down with a deck of cards and dealt a hand to everyone, who then put their cards in the slot before them.



Board 15 – Card Container

PLAYING BRIDGE

There are two very distinct elements of Bridge: the Auction and the Play.

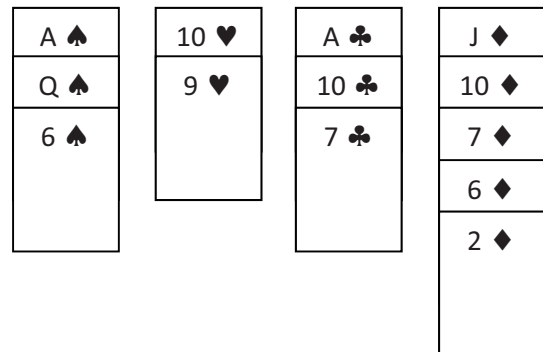
There once was a game show on TV called “Name that Tune.” During the first part of the game the contestants were given a clue about a song and they each decided, in turn, what the fewest notes they could hear and still name the song correctly. Each contestant had to either commit to a more difficult (fewer) number of notes than the previous contestant or that part of the competition was over – meaning the “challenge” was set. The next part was simply could the contestant actually name the tune in the number of notes he claimed was sufficient.

In bridge, the participants’ only hint (differing from the game show) is the cards they are dealt. Given that information, they compete for the right to play the

hand. The partnership that wins then has to play the hand and succeed or fail in making the number of tricks they agreed to in the auction.

In the next lesson we will discuss bidding and suit ranking, but for now we will discuss playing the cards.

Once the auction is over, the person who “won” the auction is called the Declarer. The person to the left of the Declarer gets to pick the first card to be played. Once he plays that first card, the partner of the Declarer puts his cards on the table (face up) so everyone can see. These cards placed face up are called the “Dummy.” Only the partner of the Declarer is allowed to place his cards face up. Usually cards are arranged in suits, highest on top to lowest, and the suits usually alternate in colors. When there is a trump suit, that suit is usually placed furthest to the Dummy’s (player) right.



Arranging the Dummy on the Table

When someone plays a card, everyone else (in clockwise rotation) must also play. If they have a card in the same suit as the card first played, it must be played. The person who played the highest card in the original suit wins the trick (except when trumps are involved and we will cover that later). So if the first person played the 5 of Spades and no one else even had a Spade, the 5 of Spades wins the trick (a trick is 4 cards played – one by each player). The person who wins the trick picks the first card of the next trick (from their remaining cards). When a hand is over (all 13 cards have been played), each team counts the number of tricks it took and determines if the person who won the auction succeeded in making as many (or more) tricks than the auction committed him to make.

TRUMPS

In bridge, there are times where one suit becomes more powerful than the others. We refer to this suit as trumps (we will be going over HOW a suit becomes trump later). When this happens, the highest trump played on a trick wins. The basic rules of following suit still apply but when you cannot follow suit you have the option of playing a trump. In the example above where the 5 of Spades was played and no one else followed suit, if everyone who did not follow suit played a Heart (let's say that in this situation Hearts are trump) then the highest Heart played wins the trick. If NO ONE played a Heart, then the 5 of Spades would still win the trick.

COUNTING TRICKS WON/LOST

After all the cards have been played, they are replaced in the board. We want the cards that were in each direction when you pulled them out of the board to go back in the same place. This means that we do not put the cards in the middle of the table when we play them. Each player keeps them separated so we don't have an issue of making sure the cards go back in the original slot. Since that is true, we keep track of the tricks won/lost as we play them by orienting them on the table in front of us a specific way. We place tricks (the partnership) won vertically **|** and tricks lost horizontally **—** and we place them in the sequence they were played.

If I looked down and saw:

| — — | | | — — — | | |

You can easily tell that we won the first trick, lost the next two, won the next 3, lost the next 3 and won the last 4 (going left to right) and overall we won 8 tricks and lost 5. The first thing you do after the last trick is played is agree how many tricks were won/lost. If there is ever a disagreement you can look at everyone's cards and see who has one turned differently and then turn over that card to determine who actually won the trick.

SUMMARY

Each hand begins with an auction. The Dealer is the person who makes the first bid (by the way, since the cards come to the table prearranged in a board, the “Dealer” is predetermined and indicated on the container which holds the cards). Once the auction is completed, play begins. After playing the hand, tricks are counted to determine if the Declarer made as many or more tricks as the auction committed him to make. Based on the results, the hand is scored, the result recorded and you move on to the next hand.

PLAY A FEW HANDS

In your first lesson, you won't be bidding. Your instructor should say “Play the first board (Board Number 1) and North will be the Declarer. This hand will have no trumps, meaning it is a No Trump hand. Take as many tricks as you can.” Be sure to agree how many tricks your partnership took after all the cards have been played.

JUST A NOTE ON PLAYING A HAND OF BRIDGE

In both examples below, the shaded hand cannot be seen by the opponents while the unshaded hand represents the visible Dummy.

North

West East

South – Dummy
(the opponents
can see these
cards after the
first card is lead)

♠ 954
♥ KJ87
♦ AK95
♣ K8

♠ AQ6
♥ 109
♦ J10762
♣ A107

When you have one or more Face Cards (Face Card = A, K, Q or J) on one side of the table (the Dummy is one side and your hand is the other side), it is best to lead TO that/those Face Card(s).

For example, given the hands on the left, if you are in the Dummy (meaning the Dummy won the last trick) and lead with the A of Spades then next trick lead the Q of Spades. It is a reasonable assumption that the opponent's K will take the Q. BUT if you lead from your hand to the AQ (meaning you play any Spade from your hand – 9, 5 or 4) with the intention of playing the Q if the East player does not play the K. If the East player has the K you can take both tricks. Note: if the West player has the K you will never get both tricks. The same thing happens when you play the 10 of Hearts from the Dummy (South). If West has BOTH the A and Q, he has to make a decision. If you were to lead the K out of your hand first, you make it easy for the opponent to get both the A and the Q.

A significant part of Bridge is to make your opponents make decisions and hope they make a bad one.

North - Dummy

West East

South

♠ 653
♥ K943
♦ A973
♣ Q5

♠ KQ107
♥ A2
♦ KQ84
♣ J106

Let's look at another example.

You decide to lead the 3 of Spades from the Dummy (this time the Dummy is North) to your hand. East plays the 8 and you play the K then West plays the 2 (where is the A? East has it, right?). So instead of playing the Q of Spades next, play the 4 of Diamonds from your hand and take it with the A in the Dummy. Now you can play another Spade. East MUST play the A or give you another trick.

Another generalization to make is that if you are missing an honor, play TO your honors (meaning play a card in that suit from the other hand). This ONLY helps if the opponent who plays before your hand has the missing honor. But if you play the top card first you cannot improve your chances.

PART 2 – BASIC OPENING BIDS



At a recent bridge tournament in Pigeon Forge, TN a Director was called to a table to help resolve an issue.

Apparently, prior to playing the 5th trick, it had occurred to one of the players that SOMEONE should be the Dummy.

Chapter 2 – Hand Evaluation and Scoring

Now that we have covered how the bridge table is set up, how to play a hand and discussed the concept of trumps, we will discuss how trumps (or possibly no-trump) are determined. Every hand of bridge begins with the auction: the players make bids to determine how the hand is to be played.

HIGH CARD POINTS

The first thing to determine is whether you can make a bid. Basically, does your hand have enough strong aspects to allow you to start the bidding? Counting your hand's High Card Points (HCP) is generally where the assessment begins. Each face card (also called an honor) is assigned a value. A's = 4 HCP, K's = 3 HCP, Q's = 2 HCP and J's = 1 HCP. If your hand had two A's, one K and two Q's your total HCP would be 15 (A's = $4 \times 2 = 8$, K's = 3 and Q's = $2 \times 2 = 4$; totaling 15).

HAND EVALUATION

The given "strength" of any hand is based on three elements: 1) how many HCP are in the hand; 2) the "shape" of your hand (do you have suits that are very long or very short); and 3) does your partner's hand complement yours or does his hand's strengths contrast/conflict with yours. There is no way to determine #3 before the bidding begins (at least not honestly). For that reason, it is generally recommended that you initially focus on HCP to determine your ability to make an opening bid. Beginners should use 12 HCP as the minimum HCP needed to make an opening bid. Let's look at a couple of examples:

♠ 954
♥ KJ87
♦ AK95
♣ K8

To the left:

This hand has 1 A, 3
K's and 1 J.
 $1 \times 4, + 3 \times 3, + 1 \times 1 =$
14 HCP

♠ KQ107
♥ A2
♦ KQ84
♣ J106

To the left:

This hand has 1 A, 2
K's, 2 Q's and 1 J.
 $1 \times 4, + 2 \times 3,$
 $+ 2 \times 2, + 1 \times 1 = 15$ HCP

♠ 653
♥ K943
♦ A973
♣ Q5

To the left:
This hand has 1 A, 1 K
and 1 Q.
1 x 4, + 1 x 3, + 1 x 2
= 9 HCP

♠ AQ6
♥ 109
♦ J10762
♣ A107

To the left:
This hand has 2 A's, 1
Q and 1 J.
2 x 4, + 1 x 2, + 1 x 1 =
11 HCP

TRICKS VERSUS CONTRACTS

Before discussing possible opening bids, let's point out the difference between tricks and contracts. In the first lesson, we played some hands and simply counted how many tricks the Declarer won. You were playing hands without a "contract" established. While there are many benefits to being the Declarer, one "cost" of being Declarer is that you always have to take 6 tricks before you start getting credit towards any contract. If you bid 1 Heart (more will be covered later about allowable bids) you are implying that you can take at least 7 tricks if Hearts are the trump suit. Since there are only 13 cards in each player's hand that means the maximum contract level is 7 (the 6 required plus a contract of 7 = 13).

SUIT RANKING

There is a value/ranking to each suit. This allows us to establish a hierarchy used to determine which bids are considered higher than the last bid made. After a player makes a bid, in order for anyone else to bid it must be a "higher bid." Suits are ranked lowest to highest in alphabetical order: Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, Spades; and No Trump. Each level of the contract is also higher – i.e., 2 Clubs is higher than 1 Club.

THE BIDDING LADDER

The complete order of ranking bids is as follows:

1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7
♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT

At any point if a bid is made, only bids to the right of the bid that was made (using the chart on the bottom of the previous page) are valid AND you can make ANY bid that is higher (if the first bid is 1H you can bid 1S). If you choose not to make a higher bid you must Pass (you will learn some other options later in the class). Three consecutive Passes ends the bidding.

MAJORS, MINORS AND NO TRUMP

Most of the strategy of bridge bidding is directly related to how the game is scored (details below). The suit involved in the bidding is one of the factors that determine the score.

For the rest of this book you will see references to Majors, Minors and No Trump. Majors are simply Spades and Hearts. Minors are Diamonds and Clubs. No Trump is the absence of a trump suit.

SCORING

The reason there is a differentiation between Majors and Minors is mostly due to how the score is calculated (after each hand of bridge).

There are two components in scoring a hand of bridge, the score you receive for each trick that was taken and the bonus you receive for making the contract.

Trick scores (ONLY applied to the tricks after the minimum 6 you must take):

- Minors = 20 points per trick
- Majors = 30 points per trick
- No Trump = 40 points for the first trick and 30 points for each additional one.

If you were out of work and looking for a job, you would PREFER to find work that pays the highest wages (in bridge we try to find contracts in the Majors over the Minors). If the only work you can find pays the least amount of money, you will roll up your sleeves and be happy to be employed.

Contracts:

- Part Score – the bonus is 50 points for making a below game contract
- Game – the bonus for bidding and making a game contract is either 300 or 500 based on vulnerability. Vulnerability is predetermined by the board number and is permanently marked on the board (the card container – for example on board number 2 N/S is ALWAYS vulnerable and E/W is non-vulnerable). The bonus for game when vulnerable is 500 and the bonus when not vulnerable is 300. Think of the game show “Jeopardy.” On any given board, one pair may be playing Double Jeopardy while the other pair is playing regular Jeopardy. The increased scoring only applies to game contracts (or slams) and penalties.

A “game” score is awarded when the trick scores add up to at least 100 points:

- Major game = 4 Hearts or 4 Spades ($4 \times 30 = 120$)
- Minor game = 5 Clubs or 5 Diamonds ($5 \times 20 = 100$)
- No Trump game = 3 No Trump ($40 + 30 + 30 = 100$)

You must bid game to receive the bonus. Back to the job analogy – someone wants a house built in 60 days. He will pay you a bonus if you COMMIT to getting it done that quickly (committing would mean there would be a penalty if he fails to complete the job in the committed time). After careful consideration, he decides he cannot take the risk and simply promises to get it done as quickly as possible. Just because he actually finished in 60 days, does not get him the bonus. He had to accept the commitment (along with the risks) to receive the bonus. So bidding 3 Hearts and making 4 does not earn you a game bonus (you would have needed to bid 4 Hearts).

- Slams – You expect to take 12 out of 13 tricks – (a 6-level bid called a “small slam”) or all 13 tricks (a 7-level bid called a “grand slam”). We won’t be covering this until Chapter 27. These bids do have increased bonuses.

Penalty:

You might make a bid that results in a contract you cannot make – suppose you ended up in a 4 Heart contract (requiring you to take 10 tricks with Hearts as trump) and you only take 8. You are short two tricks (i.e., down 2) of making your contract. There is a penalty for failing to make a contract (no blood involved). The penalty per trick is either 50 points or 100 points depending on vulnerability. If you are vulnerable the penalty is 100 points per trick and non-vulnerable is 50 points per trick. If you were short 2 tricks and you were vulnerable your penalty would be 200. In bridge, a penalty of 200 means you receive a score of -200. Also, remember that vulnerability is permanently pre-assigned by board number and means game contract bonuses AND penalties are higher.

Score Examples:

Bid 1NT, make 1 (7 Tricks) = 90 Contract bonus = 50 Trick score = 40 (40 for first trick)

Bid 2 Hearts, make 3 (9 Tricks) = 140 Contract bonus = 50 Trick score = 90 (3 X 30)

Bid 3NT (vulnerable), make 4 (10 Tricks) = 630 Contract bonus = 500 Trick score = 130 (40 for first trick, + 3 X 30)
--

Bid 5 Diamonds (non-vulnerable), make 6 (12 Tricks) = 420 Contract bonus = 300 Trick score = 120 (6 X 20)

Bid 1NT (vulnerable), down 1 (6 Tricks) = -100 In other words, bidding 1 NT requires 7 Tricks. Down 1 means 1 short of contract.

Bid 3 Diamonds, make 4 (10 Tricks) = 130 Contract bonus = 50 Trick score = 80 (4 X 20)
--

SCORING STRATEGY

There is one aspect about scoring in competitive bridge that has a very significant impact on the bidding strategy. In competitive (duplicate) bridge, if your opponents get a positive score, you receive a negative score. Every hand has a zero net score. Let's review a couple of scoring details. If the opponents bid 3 Hearts and take 10 tricks, they would receive a score of 170 (50 for the part score

contract and 4 X 30 for the trick score = 170). If instead of ALLOWING the opponents to stop at a 3 Heart bid, you and your partner push the bidding to 3 Spades. Given your 3 Spade bid, the opponents decline to bid higher. Unfortunately, you fail to make that contract, falling short by three tricks, non-vulnerable, resulting in a penalty score of -150.

Hmmm, if the opponents make their bid plus an extra trick your score would have been -170, but if you bid higher and fail to make your score (short by 3) your score is -150. Which is the better result (hint: the larger negative number is worse)? So, something to consider when bidding is which result would be better? Remember, you are playing against everyone else who plays that hand.

Let's go back to money. If you had to stick your hand in your pocket and pull out money to pay the IRS (making sure you know this is not what you want to do), which is better paying the IRS \$150 or \$170?

Two completely different approaches ON THE SAME HAND give negative scores – the better score is the one that “takes less money out of your pocket.”

Chapter 3 – Basic Opening Bids

BID BOXES

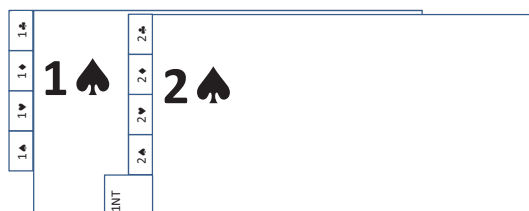
Let's discuss how we physically make a bid. On every table you will find four "bid boxes." Every possible bid you can make is found in those boxes. The bid box is used in lieu of verbally making your bids for several reasons:

- Keep in mind that others around you will also be playing that board. Since they are your competitors it would be best that they not hear you announce your contract.
- If everyone is announcing their bids audibly, the noise level would be significant.
- People simply put too much inflection in their voices that convey their attitude about the bid – saying "umm... I guess 1 Diamond" is not the same as saying "1 DIAMOND!!!"



The arrangement of the bids in the bid box is that if you put your thumb on the bid you want to make and put your index finger on the back of the bids, when you pull out the bid to place it on the table all of the lesser bids come with the bid you want to make. This allows a very easy method of putting the bids back in the box and retains the visual bidding hierarchy.

Also, when you make a second bid, you arrange the two bids on the table so that everyone at the table can easily see both bids in the sequence they were made.



In addition to the bids that are shown on the bidding ladder (bottom of page 10), there are a few other cards in the bid box – most of which we will cover later (Pass, Double [X], Redouble [XX], Alert and Stop). The only one we will cover now

is one that gets me in more trouble than others. It is the Pass card. The Pass card is used when there isn't a bid you want to make. I get in more trouble (with either my partner or the resulting bad score) by not using the Pass card when I should. I simply get too aggressive and bid too high. Some of you will have discussions with your partner when you Pass when you should not Pass.

THE THREE BASIC TYPES OF OPENING BIDS

Opening a Major:

With 5+ Spades or 5+ Hearts and 12 – 19 HCP, you would open the bidding with 1 Spade/Heart (the one with 5+ cards in the suit). In the next chapter we will go into more detail regarding Major openings.

Opening in No-Trump:

A 1NT opening is the most descriptive bid in bridge. It says you have 15-17 HCP. You do NOT have a 5-card Major (this is what we teach – it is not universal). You do NOT have a singleton or void (exactly 1 or zero cards in a suit) and at most you only have 1 doubleton (exactly 2 cards in a suit). This is referred to as a “balanced hand.” In Chapter 6 we will discuss how to respond when your partner opens 1NT.

Opening a Minor:

When there are no high paying jobs available, you have to put in a bid for any work you can get 😊 but there is always a chance your partner can help you get a better paying job. Lacking a 5-card Major and also lacking the ability to bid 1NT (either the HCP or the shape of

There is a Charles Schulz (who was an avid bridge player) cartoon strip called Peanuts.

In one strip you can see Woodstock (a small bird) going into the doghouse with 3 friends to presumably play bridge.

Shortly thereafter you see:

PASS!!! You PASSED?? I have 20 HCP and you PASSED??

Then you see one of the birds being booted out of the doghouse.

From our perspective, we hope it is the player that yelled at his partner who was removed.

your hand won't allow it) you will need to open a Minor. In Chapter 5 we will cover Minor openings.

BOOK SEQUENCE

This book will cover the above basic openings including the various responses before we begin to cover competitive (opponent interference) bidding.