



Bridge on Sundays **Guide to Procedure and Etiquette**

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Bridge Etiquette- a foreword

Bridge is a highly social game that is played at many levels. All games, and bridge is no exception, have rules and conventions. When you play socially you often relax many of the rules especially when playing with inexperienced players. Beginners are helped if you go over some of the bids with them at the time to improve their bidding, and during the play allow them to take back the occasional card. However relaxed the game is, and especially if you do waive some of the rules, knowledge of the correct procedures is important to avoid getting into persistent bad habits. In bridge leading from the wrong hand breaks the rules, whereas an undue long hesitation may well be 'unethical'. Persistent "offences", (like leading from the wrong hand as Declarer) by the same pair or player hardly helps you to concentrate. At bridge drives where you expect to play against players from outside your circle, a slightly more formal approach is the norm. Playing duplicate bridge at a club, congress, or organised holiday weekend requires you to better observe the laws of the game and they are likely to be enforced fairly strictly (depending on the organisers). Letting your opponent get away with a revoke for example may be fine at duplicate until later that evening when you revoke against new opponents and have to pay the penalty yourself! Few players infringe the laws deliberately; so most transgressions are accidental, often as the result of bad habits from social play. Most plays classed as 'unethical' arise out of ignorance or habit and not as a deliberate intention to cheat!

This pamphlet is not about the laws of bridge, but is about using the correct procedures to avoid where possible, infringements of the laws or making unethical plays. It is expected to be particularly useful to those players with a good basic knowledge of bridge, but with relatively little playing experience. It also deals with the conduct at the table so you and your opponents get enjoyment from playing the game. We have all met the offensive players who derive pleasure from upsetting weaker opponents, and these are often have a poor knowledge of the actual laws themselves, and rely on bluster to intimidate. It serves also as a reminder to more experienced players who have developed some mannerisms and other habits that could give offence to other players. It points out where you can easily infringe the laws through lack of knowledge, and how to avoid plays that may be deemed 'unethical'. However it is not a catalogue of the laws themselves as these are too complex to be dealt in so short a manner. It is written primarily with rubber bridge players in mind, but a small section points out some important extra procedures you would need if you play duplicate bridge at a club. In addition there is a section on using bidding boxes because these have become popular both at clubs and at home.

Every time we play, we unintentionally offend some of the laws or conduct of bridge. This booklet shows us how we could avoid doing these things. Remember it is only a game and a gracious approach to partner and opponents alike wins friends.

NB!. Etiquette is a French word that means 'label'. Think carefully, as you read these notes, how you would like to be labelled at the bridge table!

Bridge - a guide to some procedures and etiquette

Bridge is a social game so both politeness and good behaviour is paramount to an enjoyable time for all players. Always greet your opponents as soon as they arrive at your table. Social chat is very desirable but avoid delaying the start of the game by too much chat. Some of the more important procedures are dealt with here:

The cut, shuffle, and deal in rubber bridge.

- Cutting for deal. If you are cutting for deal (or for partners), fan the cards out on the table so that every card is accessible. Each player chooses in turn. The player who draws the highest card becomes the first dealer. For choosing partners it is usual for the two highest to play together.

- The winner has choice of cards if there are 2 packs. The person to the left of dealer shuffles the cards and the person to the right cuts the pack into 2 parts.

- The dealer deals the cards clockwise starting with the person on the left until the 52 cards are dealt. Whilst the deal is going on, the dealer's partner shuffles the 2nd pack if 2 packs are in use, and places the cards on the right, ready for the next deal. Do not pick up the cards until the deal is completed.

- Check that you have 13 cards in your hand. If a card is exposed during the deal it is abandoned and the cards re-dealt. In social bridge it is custom to only re-deal if an honour card is exposed. For subsequent deals the deal proceeds clockwise around the table.

The auction

- The dealer has the first choice of bid. The bid must say the level and the denomination of the suit (i.e. one heart). You are *not allowed* to say for example 'a club' or 'I bid a club' instead of 1 club

- Bidding procedures clockwise around the table. Each player in turn may bid. A player not having a bid must say either 'no bid' or 'pass'. Each bid must raise either the suit denomination or the level or both. Bidding may miss out any number of

bidding levels. Bids must be made in a clear voice such the other 3 players can hear the bid clearly. *A bid out of turn at any stage of the bidding is an infringement of the laws.* A pass out of turn is also an infringement but during the auction this may be overlooked especially if 1 side only is bidding.

- Bidding continues until 3 players consecutively say 'no bid'. The last bid made becomes the contract

The first player to bid the denomination (e.g. diamonds or no-trumps) plays the contract as Declarer. The Declarer's partner becomes Dummy

- Bidding should proceed at an even pace and players *must not* change the pitch or inflexion of their voice to emphasise a bid, *nor must* they hesitate unduly without good reason. It is *unethical to hesitate* for a long time then pass on your opening bid. You should not make any comments during the bidding like "partner I do not know what to bid" Such comments are an *infringement* of the laws. Do not say for example 'two clubs that's Stayman' during the bidding because partner may have forgotten you agreed to play Stayman!

- You may ask for a re-cap of the bidding at *your turn*, or ask any questions concerning an opponent's bid. *Avoid* asking questions if you have no intention of bidding. A full explanation of any of the bids made by an opponent, must be given by the bidder's partner, if so asked. Do not volunteer explanations unless asked about the bid. During the auction you may not ask questions any other time, but may do so at the end after the first lead has been selected.

The play of the contract

- The player on the left of Declarer must lead a card. To avoid the wrong player leading to the first lead, it is a good idea to select a lead, place it face down on the table and ask partner if there are any questions. Partner may then ask any further questions or query who should lead. If there are no questions and the lead is in the right place, the faced card must be led. The card cannot be changed once faced, but it can be returned to the player's hand if it is not correct for that player to lead. In social bridge this procedure is usually overlooked.

- Once the lead is tabled, Dummy's cards are placed on the table in suits with the highest card in the suit being farthest from Declarer. Trumps are always placed on Dummy's right. Make certain that the cards are in their correct suits. Dummy can *only* play a card on the instruction of Declarer. Dummy must not play a card otherwise, nor indicate to Declarer which suit or card to lead. Declarer must name both the suit and the card to play. Do not say for example 'lead the nine' without specifying the suit. If no card is specified in a named suit the *lowest* must be played. It is in order to say for example 'lead clubs from the top'. Declarer can choose to play both hands and not involve Dummy at all.

- Play proceeds in order clockwise round the table. Do not play before it is your turn. The winner of the trick gathers the trick up and leads to the next trick. It is conventional for only 1 player of the partnership to gather up the cards. Allow adequate time for all 4 players to inspect the cards played before turning the cards over. Once a trick is gathered up, both sides may inspect that trick until the side has played to the next trick but not after. This should always be done courteously by asking the trick holder. It is not permitted to look back at previous tricks.

- Players must follow suit where possible, but may play a trump if void in the suit. Playing a card in another suit when you could have followed suit is called a revoke, and can be subject to a penalty of at least 1 trick, and often 2 tricks.

- The cards played by any player should be placed carefully on the table and not played in an aggressive manner or 'skated' across the table. It should be obvious as to the last card played. Declarer must not play a card from Dummy at the same time as a card from hand. The defender must be allowed to play a card before Declarer plays Dummy's card.

- Declarer must play from the correct hand, or correct it immediately if for example a card was played from hand when it should have been led from Dummy. Leading from the wrong hand by *defenders infringes* the laws and may be subject to a penalty.

- Do not 'finger' any of dummy's cards unless you intend to play it.

- Play continues until all 13 tricks are decided. Either Declarer or any defender may 'claim' the remaining tricks if it is obvious that the claim would stand. You should claim as soon as this becomes apparent. If making a claim you should state any line of play you intend to use (i.e. drawing trumps, and running off a suit, discarding...)

- Both sides must agree as to the total tricks made by each side.

- *Undue hesitation or delay by defenders to deceive Declarer is unethical*
Anything that is deemed 'unethical' is also against the laws.

Some dos and don'ts

- Do not criticise your opponent's bidding or play. Only comment if invited to do so by the player concerned

- Do not 'pull faces' or make any facial expressions if partner leads wrongly, makes a bid you do not like, or plays the wrong card as Declarer. *Above all you must not comment on play or bidding by your partner during the game.*

- Always thank partner for the dummy however 'bad' it may be, and however different it may be from your expectations. As dummy you are free to comment on your hand and wish partner 'good luck' but keep comments short and relevant. Do not dwell on the bidding! Seeking to justify any bids may give Declarer help in playing the contract. In particular do not refer to any difficulties or advantages the

hand may present.

- Praise your partner's play whenever possible, but do not patronise partner with false praise for bad play.
- Praise your opponent's play if it has been exceptionally good.
- Do not ignore your opponents by talking about a previous hand when they are waiting to start the current hand
- If you and your partner have a 'disagreement' then ensure that it does not become too loud and so spoil the enjoyment of others. It is better to resolve this matter away from the bridge table. Healthy discussion should be brief.
- Excessive slow play is against the spirit of the game and an offence to your opponents.
- A display of displeasure at your opponent's good fortune does not improve the 'atmosphere' at the table.
- Do not distract opponents by 'finger tapping' or by counting your tricks out loud
- Do keep your hand hidden. Opponents might either take advantage or be embarrassed by seeing your hand. If you accidentally drop a card then the opponents are entitled to take any advantage of seeing the card but your partner is not.
- Do nothing to suggest any action by partner. Whistling "We three kings..." at a Christmas do may be festive but open to misinterpretation by other players

Duplicate at a club

Duplicate bridge is where each hand is played at least twice and on different tables. *At a duplicate session the laws are likely to be enforced more strictly than in a social game.*

•At duplicate it is usual to deal the boards (into which are placed the hands) before play commences. Each player often deals only some of the hands and therefore the 'dealer' and 'vulnerability' (red for vulnerable) is marked on the board. Players should count the cards, face down, before inspecting them. If there is a wrong number, immediately tell the other players and call the Director.

•Both rubber and duplicate bridge require you to acquaint your opponents with your bidding methods (system, and significance of any special bids). *Duplicate* players should have a convention card which sets out their basic bidding methods. *Secret understandings between partners are strictly forbidden.*

•In addition *duplicate* bridge requires you to alert any bids made by partner that do not have a 'natural' or well understood meaning. You should also say 'stop' before the bid if it skips one level of bidding (i.e. a jump to a level higher than the next available)

•At *duplicate* you may not inspect your opponent's or partner's card once the

trick is quitted (turned over)

- Care must be taken to return the cards correctly to their allotted slot in the boards. The boards should remain on the table near the centre, and if they have to be moved, the board must be kept in the correct orientation to avoid mis-boarding. Once the hands are returned to the board, do not remove from the board for any discussion of the hand.

- If 'curtain' cards are provided, please fill in clearly the first time the board is played. Check that your hand matches that on the curtain card. If not ask the other players if their hands match the curtain card, and if there has been misboarding, call the Director. Do not discuss the card details (i.e. avoid saying 'I'm missing a spade etc.').

- Players are assigned positions N, S, E, W. It is usual for N-S to be the stationary pair and E-W to move. Check that the position you are playing matches that of the hand in the board before picking up the cards.

- Any 'travelling' score-sheet must be filled in clearly. Always check that the correct pair numbers are entered for both N-S and E-W pairs and the board is scored in the right place. Also make sure that the Declarer is put in the 'played by' column. North has the responsibility for ensuring the details are correct, and should show them to E as a matter of courtesy. North also should ensure that the boards are passed to the correct table (often the next one but not always)

- If *you have to* call the tournament director for any reason other than mis-boarding (the commonest reason), do so after informing the players at the table you are asking for help in resolving the matter to avoid any possible bad feeling. Do not accuse any player of a misdemeanour. Revokes, bids out of turn, and wrong person leading are the next most common reasons for calling the tournament director and the remedies are better applied by a 'neutral'.

- It is especially important to listen to any announcements from the Tournament Director concerning the movement.

Using bidding boxes

Bidding boxes have become more popular because they eliminate the need for a recap of the bidding, and reduce the noise in a crowded room. The larger compartment contains cards for the bids from 1 club to 7 no-trumps. The smaller compartment contains cards for 'pass', 'double', 'stop' etc.

- To make a bid take out *all the cards from the back of the compartment up to and including the bid you wish to make*. Place the cards with the bid upwards in front of you. If you make subsequent bids including passes, place these overlapping on the first bid such that the sequence of bids is clear to the other players.

- If you are passing throughout, you may put only 1 pass card on the table and tap

it to denote a later pass. If surprisingly you bid for the first time in an auction after several rounds of bidding, put a couple of pass cards before the cards for the bid so it is evident that you had previously passed a number of times.

- When the auction is complete, wait until the first playing card is led before returning any cards to the bidding box.

- Deliberately 'fiddling' with the bidding cards before placing the bidding card on the table is 'unethical' because it might indicate to partner that you have a choice of bids.

See how much more enjoyable an evening of bridge is when everyone follows these guidance notes.