

Starting Your Own Bridge Group

If you wish to get together with a beginner group to play and practice bridge, here are some ways that you may be able to get started:

- Contact a local bridge club. The managers may introduce you to some new beginners or refer you to a group that is looking for extra players.
- Contact your local service clubs or community groups — e.g., the community centre, a Newcomers' Club (they often have interest groups for bridge players), or a seniors' centre.
- Put up a notice in the grocery store, convenience store, post office, the library or a common area in an apartment building asking for bridge players to contact you if they wish to join a group.

Once you have a group together, here are some suggestions on how to start:

- Invite the group to an informal meeting to start.
- After the usual "getting to know you" introductions, try to find out the skill/knowledge level of all the players in a friendly way.
- Make sure everyone knows the basic information about bridge (e.g. bridge terminology, the bidding sequence, difference between a trump and no trump contract).
- Decide on a plan to learn and/or review the rules so that everyone in the group is playing with the same rules and can communicate as partners.
- Refer to the website www.ATeacherFirst.com for easy lessons, quizzes and guidelines to help you get started and in sync with each other!
- Start playing bridge and having fun!

Here are my recommendations for two important bridge supplies to help everyone learn faster. They are not necessary, but they sure are helpful! Once you start using them, you will not want to play without them. Both items are available from bridge suppliers on the Internet.

1. Bidding Boxes



Purchase a set of bidding boxes and learn to use them appropriately. Make sure when you buy them that each bidding card has the scores on the back of each bid. Some of the cheaper boxes may not have that feature.

Bidding boxes are normally sold in sets of four. The approximate cost for four boxes is \$40. Many bridge groups purchase enough sets for their group (4, 8 or 12) and divide the cost among the players. One person keeps them and brings them to each game.

The boxes then belong to the group. Players may come and go from the group, but the boxes would stay with the group.

Another way to do this is to have each person buy his/her own bidding box; then no one needs to have the responsibility of bringing all the sets to each game. Also, the box belongs to each player and is his/her own responsibility. If the group does not continue, each person keeps his/her own bidding box. We did that with our group and it worked well. Some of us still play together from time to time and we always bring our own bidding boxes with us. I like to have my own bidding box as an easy way to compare bidding scores and study at home. We also personalized our own box with stickers so we would not mix them up.

Benefits to using a bidding box:

1. It is normal for beginning players to take longer to bid than experienced players. Because of the lapse of time, it is easy to forget what everyone bid. This can be confusing and a nuisance to everyone as it takes time to continually repeat and review the bidding. Having the bids on the table means there is one less thing to think about and any player can check at any time to confirm who bid what. It helps to move the game along so more time is spent learning and less time is spent asking questions about the bidding sequence.
2. Knowing how to use a bidding box prepares you for playing duplicate bridge should you ever wish to advance to that level and compete with others to challenge yourself. Many at-home groups also use bidding boxes so it is helpful to be familiar with them and know the proper way to use them. It will help to give you confidence if you are invited to spare for a group and then find out they are using bidding boxes and you are not familiar with them.
3. The scores are on the back of each bid so it is not necessary to learn how to score or to have a separate scoring sheet with you. Eventually, you will likely get to know the scores for each bid and contract very well, but at first, it's just easier to look it up on the back of the card. If you are a beginning group, you may not wish to bother with scoring until you have played for awhile, but the scores are easy to see, when and if you wish to use them.
4. The bid of the final contract can be turned slightly askew in the bidding box, so that you can remember what the final contract was. Sometimes the bidding process may have taken several bids and you may forget that you are in a suit contract when, in fact, you are in a NT contract, or vice versa. It happens!

2. Card Holders

If you wish to speed up and help the learning process even more, purchase card holders. Card holders are more expensive than bidding boxes, but they are worth it. This will require several decks of cards, also, to fill the holders. Cards can be purchased quite cheaply at the dollar store, but be careful that you get the size that fits the holders.



Benefits of using card holders:

1. Valuable time is not lost in shuffling — more time is spent bidding and playing, which means you will learn more and learn faster. All the boards can be shuffled at the end of the session, ready to go for the next session.
2. The holders can be set up with the cards organized in such a way to illustrate or practice certain bids. Once you have learned the Weak Two and Pre-emptive Bids, for example, you can set up the cards so each player gets a chance to open with those bids, practicing and reviewing what you just learned.
3. All players can see who the dealer was, so there is no doubt as to which player bids first and next.
4. Everyone can easily see which side is vulnerable or not vulnerable at all times throughout the bidding process. Again, one less thing to remember. This is important to determine how high to bid if you are considering a “sacrifice” (e.g., bidding higher and not making the contract, giving the opponents 50 or 100 pts for each trick rather than allowing them to take the contract and make more points than what you would lose).
5. If you have two tables or more, you can exchange the cards, record the scores and compare contracts and results. This can help you to become more competitive and aware of other bids that were possible. Why did another pair score higher than you and your partner? You can also discuss strategies to bid and play each hand better and learn from each other.
6. This also forces each player to keep their own cards, laying them face down in front of them to indicate whether the trick was made or lost as the playing of the hand progresses. This is a good habit to initiate and maintain, for many reasons.

Note: The card holder for the game currently being played should remain on the table at all times until that game is finished. It may seem to get in the way, but you will get used to it. Again, this helps to prepare everyone for the eventuality of playing duplicate bridge.