

Starting the Game – Bidding and Playing

1. The Opening Bid

Once the deck of cards has been dealt (13 cards each), players pick up their cards, count them, and sort them into suits, highest to lowest.

Count points as follows: (HCP means High Card Points)

| Hand Evaluation | | |
|--|--------------|-----|
| Ace | 4 points | HCP |
| King | 3 points | HCP |
| Queen | 2 points | HCP |
| Jack | 1 point | HCP |
| 5 th card or more in one suit | 1 point each | |

Example:



The dealer is the first player who has the opportunity to make a call (pass or bid).

The bidding and playing of the game proceeds to the left (clockwise).

In order to start the bidding, a player should have 12+ points.

(There are some exceptions to this, but for now, it is a good rule to follow.)

If you do not have 12+ points, you should pass.



On rare occasions, all four players will pass in the first round and the game is “passed out.”

Note: It is highly recommended to use bidding boxes. Players will learn faster. First, they can see all the bids available to them. Second, the bids are placed on the table in front of each player facing the center so all players can see all the bids throughout the bidding. No time is lost by verbally repeating the sequence of bidding and asking, “What did you bid?” There is much less confusion and more time is spent on learning the game of bridge.

Note: A “Pass” is not considered a bid.

Each game has only one **Opening Bid**.

The player who opens with the first bid (does not pass) is called the **Opener**.

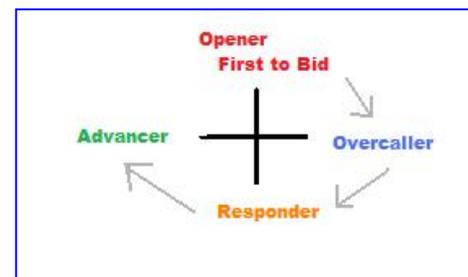
The player who bids higher than the Opener is the Overcaller.

The player who responds to his partner (the Opener) is the **Responder**.

The player who responds to his partner (the Overcaller) is the Advancer.

Note: Sometimes the Overcaller may be in 4th seat after the Responder.

For now, the two important positions to remember are the **Opener** and the **Responder**.



2. The Goal for Bidding

The final contract is established after the last bid is on the table and it is followed by 3 consecutive passes. The last bid becomes the final contract.

The goal for you and your partner is to find the best contract, which is, in order of preference:

#1 - A major suit contract (with 8+ cards in either ♥ or ♠ between you and partner)

#2 - A NT contract (somewhat balanced hands with no 8-card fit in a major)

#3 - A minor suit contract is the least desirable option, but sometimes the only good option.

Important: A contract in ♠, ♥ or NT requires fewer tricks and gives a higher score, compared to a minor suit contract in ♣ or ♦. This is why it is more beneficial to find a major suit contract or a NT contract, whenever it is possible, and why your first goal is to find out if you have an 8-card fit in a major suit.

Note: Refer to the **Bidding Chart** on this website for more details.

Suits are ranked from lowest to highest as follows:

Minor Suits (♣Clubs and ♦Diamonds), then Major Suits (♥Hearts and ♠Spades).

The highest bid available at each level is NT (No Trump).

Once three consecutive passes have occurred and the final contract is established, the bids are put back into the bidding box, and then the play of the hand begins.

3. Starting the Game – First Round

The player who first bid the strain of the contract (the suit or NT) becomes the Declarer.

The player immediately to the left of Declarer, Declarer's Left-Hand Opponent (abbrev. LHO), will make the "opening lead."

Errors are sometimes made as to which player makes the opening lead.

To prevent making the opening lead in error, here are the recommended steps to follow, in this order:

The player making the opening lead should decide on the suit and card to play, based on the bidding and the contents of his/her hand.

Before selecting the card, the player may ask for a review of the bidding from one of the opponents.

The player should take his/her chosen card and place it face down on the table, still holding it.

The player should ask, "Is it my lead?" to ensure it is, in fact, his/her lead.

Another option is to say, "Any questions, Partner?"

- This allows any player an opportunity to stop the player from leading, if it is not his/her turn.
- If it is not this player's turn to lead, s/he can put the card back into his/her hand (no one has seen the card) and the situation has been corrected without any problem.
- If it is the player's turn to lead, then the card is turned over and the game begins. The player is not allowed to change his/her mind on which card to lead at this point.

As soon as the opening lead is made, the partner of the Declarer displays the dummy hand on the table, placing the trump suit on dummy's right (Declarer's left), towards Declarer. Other suits should be placed alternating red and black. When in a NT contract, usually the order of suits, from left to right (Declarer's viewpoint) is spades, hearts, clubs and diamonds, though it is not imperative. Sample dummy hand ↓

Players must "follow suit" unless they have no cards in the suit which was led.

Declarer will call for the card to be played from the dummy hand. The "dummy" will play the card as requested.

Each round that you play and win is called "taking a trick."

There are 13 rounds in each game (13 tricks).

A "book" is considered 6 tricks and is the basis on which to

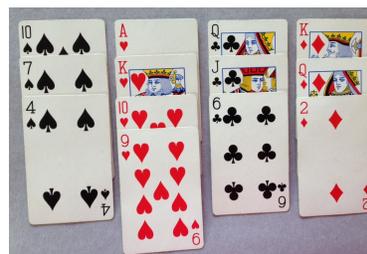
determine the number of tricks required to make your contract.

(Book + contract level = number of tricks req'd.)

E.g., To make a contract of 1♥, you must take 1 trick over book (6 + 1 = 7 tricks in total).

To make a contract of 4♥, you must take 4 tricks over book (6 + 4 = 10 tricks in total).

Refer to the Bidding Chart to see the number of tricks required to make each contract.



Take notice of the following information:

Bonus points are given for reaching game level and higher.

A game of 4♠ or 4♥ (Major Suit) requires 25+ points (10 tricks).

A game of 3NT requires 25+ points (9 tricks).

Fewer tricks are required for 3NT compared to 4♠ or 4♥, but 3NT can be more difficult to make.

A game 5♦ or 5♣ (Minor Suit) requires 29+ points (11 tricks).

A minor suit contract is less desirable than a major suit or NT contract.

The score is higher for bidding and making a NT or major suit contract, compared to a minor suit, and fewer tricks are required.

Most often, you will be able to reach only a Partscore (any contract below Game level).

The highest scores are obtained by bidding and making a Slam contract.

A Small Slam is reached by bidding and making a contract at the 6 Level (any suit or NT).

A Grand Slam is reached by bidding and making a contract at the 7 Level (any suit or NT).

At the end of the first round, each player keeps his/her played card and places it face down at his/her own side of the table. If you have been playing social bridge, you may be accustomed to playing a card by placing it (or throwing it) in the middle of the table and the winner of the trick taking all the 4 cards for him/herself. It may require concentration and some time to break this habit.

The card is placed "straight up" (pointing towards the winner and partner) if winning the trick.

The card is placed "sideways" (pointing towards the opponents) if losing the trick.

Easy way to remember: "Stand up -- you win; lie down -- you lose." (See picture below.)

4. Continuing the Game (12 more rounds) and Finishing the Game

The player who won the first trick, now leads the first card for the next round.

This continues as each round is played.

Helpful Hint: If your partner does not follow suit, ask this question: "No more spades, partner?" (replace the word, "spades," with whichever suit was led). If s/he has a card of that suit in his/her hand and fails to play it, this is called "reneging" or "revoking." If this mistake is caught immediately, the penalty is minimal. If playing in a sanctioned game, it is best to call the Director.

If the mistake is not caught immediately, at the end of the game, a 1- or 2-trick penalty could be assessed on the offending side, depending on the situation.

When the game is finished, all players should count their tricks and verify that the count is correct and agreed to by all before moving their cards in any way.



This display shows how cards are placed in front of a player whose side won the first 4 tricks, lost the next 4 tricks, won the next 2, lost the next 2 and won the final trick. This player (and his partner) won 7 tricks.

Scores should be calculated and recorded.

If using prepared boards, players should put their cards back into the board slot from whence they came.

If playing "social bridge," cards are shuffled and the dealer distributes the hands for the next game.

Some common bridge terms and other information that is helpful to know:

Void – no cards in that suit

Doubleton – two cards in a suit

Singleton – one card in a suit, sometimes referred to as a “Stiff”
(e.g., a “Stiff Ace,” means a singleton Ace.)

Balanced Hand – no voids, no singletons, maximum of one doubleton

Stoppers – a stopper in a suit is a high card that will stop the opponents from running their suit. An Ace is always considered to be a stopper. These are also considered to be stoppers: a King in a doubleton suit or longer, a Queen in a suit with 2+ other cards, a Jack in a suit with 3+ other cards.

Judgment is needed to assess what you need to stop a suit safely, especially if opponents are bidding. Stoppers are significant when playing in a NT contract. Stoppers need to be considered when deciding whether a NT contract is “safe” above the 1 level and are important when settling for a 3NT contract (game level) or higher.

Honor cards – Ace, King, Queen, Jack

Spot cards - any card below an honor card (some consider the Ten to be an honor)

LHO – Left-hand opponent

RHO – Right-hand opponent

A notation such as 3+ cards means 3 cards or more; 12+ points means 12 points or more.

Designation of seats:

There are 4 seats at a bridge table.

The dealer is considered the 1st seat. (The dealer changes for each round.)

The next seat, moving clockwise, is the 2nd seat, then 3rd seat and the last player to bid or pass in the first round is designated the 4th seat.

Bidding rules can change slightly, depending on which seat opens the bidding.

For example, a player sitting in 3rd seat after two passes may open “light.” That means opening with fewer than 12 points. More information on this later.

For now, if you prefer, always have opening points to open the bidding.

Partnership Agreement – Many different bidding methods and philosophies are used in bridge. Whatever set of conventions and practices which you and your partner agree to use is called “partnership agreement.”