

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 who bid what. There is much less confusion and more time is spent on learning the game of bridge.

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

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

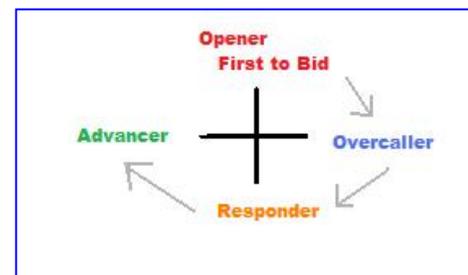
If a player (opponent) bids higher than the Opener, that player is an Overcaller.

If a player responds to his partner (the Opener), that player is the Responder.

If the partner of the Overcaller responds, that player is the Advancer.

For now, just knowing who the Opener and Responder are is sufficient.

The Opener “opens” the bidding and the Responder (the partner) responds.



2. The Goal for Bidding

The final contract is established after 3 consecutive passes. The last bid becomes the 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.

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).

Important: A contract in major suits (♠ or ♥) 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 meets the criteria.

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

When partners bid and make a game-level bid, they get bonus points to their score at the end. This is why, whenever possible, players want to bid to “game” level, if they think they can take enough tricks to make it. They base their trick-taking ability on the number of points in the combined hands between their partner and themselves. So, the purpose of bidding is two-fold: (1) to find an 8-card fit in a suit and (2) to determine how many points they have in total. If they cannot find an 8-card fit in a suit, they may end up in a No Trump contract. The level of their bidding (how high they go) is dependent upon how many combined points they have.

Using High Card Points (HCP) and length, partners should assess their trick-taking potential:

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 making a NT or major suit game-level 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). That’s because neither side (not North/South nor East/West) has enough points to make “game.” Sometimes, you can bid to game level without 25 points, based on distribution. This is more complicated and will be introduced slowly as you learn the game.

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).

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. Here’s how to help prevent this from happening.

Simply, the player on lead places the card on the table face down and pauses to be sure it’s their turn.

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.

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

The player should take their 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, their lead.

Another option is to say, “Any questions, Partner?” (This is commonly heard in duplicate games.)

Why do this? (I teach this method because it establishes good habits right from the beginning.)

- This allows any player an opportunity to stop the player from leading, if it is not their turn.
- If it is not this player’s turn to lead, they can put the card back into their 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 their 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.

Someone will win each round and this is called "taking a trick."

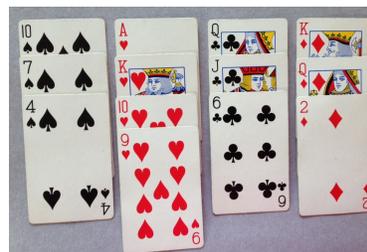
There are 13 rounds in each game (13 tricks).

A "book" is considered 6 tricks and is the basis on which to determine the number of tricks required to make the contract. ("Book" + contract level = number of tricks required.)

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

To make a contract of 4♥, a player 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.



At the end of the first round, each player keeps their own played card and places it face down at their own side of the table. Do not throw all 4 cards in the middle of the table.

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?" (naming whichever suit was led). If your partner has a card of that suit in their 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 (called duplicate boards), players should shuffle their own hands (13 cards each) before putting their cards back into the slot in the board from whence they came.

If playing "social bridge," all 52 cards are shuffled by one player and the dealer distributes the hands for the next game.

Some common bridge terms you should know:

Void – no cards in that suit

Doubleton – two cards in a suit

Singleton – one card in a suit, (a “Stiff Ace,” means a singleton Ace.)

Balanced Hand – contains all four suits, 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 cards are also considered to be stoppers, but based on the number of cards in the suit needed to protect the high card:

 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 card and how many you need in a suit to stop that suit safely, especially if opponents are bidding.

A trump card can be a stopper so it's only in a NT contract when players need to be concerned.

Honor cards – Ace, King, Queen, Jack

Spot cards - any card below an honor card (some consider the 10 to be an honor)

LHO – Left-hand opponent

RHO – Right-hand opponent

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

“Ruff” – If a player “ruffs” a card, that means the player has a void and uses their trump card to take the trick.

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