

BRIDGE BASICS FOR BEGINNERS

The Deal

High card drawn is the first dealer, who shuffles the deck, offers it to the player to his right to cut and deals. During the deal, the dealer's partner shuffles a second deck and places it to his right. The deal moves clockwise around the table.

Count Your Points

Ace	4
King	3
Queen	2
Jack	1
Void	3
Singleton	2
Doubleton	1

(Instead of counting points for shorts suits, you may alternatively count points for long suits: one point for each card over four in a suit)

Bidding

The purpose of the bidding is to predict the number of tricks your team will take (out of the maximum of 13) and, if you are the high bidder, to name the suit that will be trump. All the elaborate bidding rules and conventions are designed to help you and your partner guess the number of tricks you can take and determine what is your combined best suit.

Dealer bids first, then bidding continues clockwise until there are three passes.

Each bid must be higher than the last, with the understanding that suits are ranked from low to high as follows: Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, Spades, with No Trump being highest.

Bid if you think you and your partner can take more than half the tricks. BOOK = 6 tricks. A bid of 1 means Book + 1, a bid of 2 means Book + 2, etc. The suit you bid becomes trump and beats any other suit. So a bid of:

2 Hearts means "*We can take 8 tricks (book + 2) out of 13 and hearts will be trump.*"

3 No Trump means "*We can take 9 tricks (book + 3) with no trump suit.*"

Generally you can "open" (be the first in your partnership to bid) if you have 12 or more points (15 points for No Trump) and you can "respond" (bid after your partner has opened) if you have 6 or more points.

Spades and Hearts are major suits. Diamonds and Clubs are minor suits.

You generally need five cards to open a major suit. When you open a minor suit, it just means you don't have a five-card major and you can do so with as few as three cards in the minor suit. Length is more important than strength in a trump suit. In No Trump you generally prefer a balanced hand.

The winning bid is the last bid made, followed by three passes. The winning bid determines the trump suit. The hand is played by the person in the partnership who first named the suit in the winning bid.

Since there are bonus points given for making a "game" (3 No Trump, 4 of a major suit or 5 of a minor suit), a partnership should always try to bid game if the combined hands are strong enough. Bidding game requires upwards of 25 points collectively (the equivalent of "opening hand opposite opening hand"). The challenge is how to guesstimate the collective strength of your team's hands, based on the bidding.

If the opponents believe the winner of the bid cannot make the contract, one of the opponents may "double" the bid and one of the partners who won the bid may or may not "redouble." Each of these bids causes a successful game to yield more points to the bidders and a failed game to count more against the bidder. See scoring.

There are a number of "cue bids" in bridge (bids that don't mean what they say and are intended to signal something else to a partner). You don't need to use these signals to enjoy playing bridge. Some are more generally understood and used than others. Partners sometimes agree before a game which of these cue bids they will use. See the list of "Commonly Used Conventions" in the Duplicate Bridge summary for some of these conventions.

The Play

The player to the left of the winner of the bid leads the first card. Everyone must follow suit if they can. High card wins, except a trump beats any non-trump card. The partner of the player who won the contract is "dummy" and lays down his hand after the first lead for his partner to play. Winner of each trick leads next.

Tricks taken by each partnership are accumulated on a single side of the table.

Some basics of the play:

1. If you're playing in a suit, keep count of the 13 cards in that suit. You and your partner should have most of them. In most hands, you lead trumps until your opponents no longer have any.
2. Some players also try to keep count of other suits that are long and strong, in hopes of getting rid of opponents' cards there as well and making small cards in that suit good.

3. Usually it's more effective to lead towards a high card than to lead out a high card. That increases your chance of catching an opponent's high card with your high card.
4. A finesse is leading towards one or more honors (AQ for example) where there is an honor (K) missing, then playing the Q rather than the A in the hope that the K was in the 2nd hand.
5. Rule of thumb: Second hand low, third hand high (Why? Because if you play second, your partner still has a chance to take the trick. If you play an honor from the third hand, it may still be defeated by the last card, but at least the opponents don't get a cheap trick.)
6. Transportation: If you have won the bid, one of your key challenges is transportation. You should try to keep one or more winning cards "on the board" (in the dummy's hand) so you can get back there to lead any low card winners on the board late in the hand. (Not always possible.)
7. In playing a No Trump hand, you worry most about your weakest suit and try to keep a "stopper" (winning high card) in that suit so the opponents can't get in the lead and "run that suit" on you. Since you have no trump to stop them, they could easily make lots of small cards into tricks in a long suit where you have no stopper.

Contract Bridge Scoring

You don't have to know how to score to play bridge. There is just one scorer per table. Also, much of the scoring detail pertains to things like slams and doubles which rarely occur. Still, you need to understand the basics of scoring to bid and play correctly.

In contract bridge, you try to make "games" (100 or more points) and "rubbers" (two games) in order to get bonus points.

Any of these combinations makes a game: 5 Clubs or Diamonds, 4 Hearts or Spades, 3 No Trump

Trick Scores (points bid and made) go below the line on a standard contract bridge scorecard. Everything else goes above the line and does not count towards making game or rubber for which there are bonus points.

If you bid and make less than a full game (a "partial score" or "leg"), it can accumulate towards a full game. However, if the opponents make a game before you have completed yours, the partial game is cut off.

After you complete one game, you are “vulnerable,” meaning penalty points against you are increased if you are “set” (fail to win the number of tricks you bid), but so are bonus points for overtricks and slams. It’s just another way of saying the stakes are higher.

Trick Score (tricks bid and made)

Each minor suit trick (above book) = 20 points

Each major suit trick (above book) = 30 points

Each No Trump trick (above book) = 40 points first trick, 30 points subsequent trick

Bonus points above the line

Overtricks (extra tricks made but not bid): 30 for trick if in a major suit or No Trump, 20 for each trick in a minor suit. If doubled: 100 per trick if not vulnerable, 200 per trick if vulnerable. If redoubled: 200 not vulnerable, 400 vulnerable.

Bonus for fulfilling doubled contract: 50 (“for the insult”)

Rubber: 700 points if opponents won no games; 500 points if opponents won 1 game

Honors: 100 pts for four honors in one hand in trumps; 150 pts for five honors in one hand in trumps; 150 for all four aces in one hand in No Trump.

Slams bid and made: Small slam (winning all but 1 trick) 500 points if not vulnerable; 750 points if vulnerable. Grand slam (winning all tricks) 1000 pts if not vulnerable; 1500 points if vulnerable.

Penalty points (bonus points above the line for your opponents)

Undertricks (tricks short of bid): 50 pts per trick if not vulnerable, 100 pts if vulnerable

If doubled, not vulnerable: 100 first trick, 200 2nd and 3rd tricks, 300 each subsequent trick

If doubled and vulnerable: 200 first trick, 300 each subsequent trick.

If redoubled and not vulnerable: 200 first trick, 400 2nd & 3rd tricks, 600 subsequent tricks

If redoubled and vulnerable: 400 first trick, 600 subsequent tricks

DUPLICATE BRIDGE

How is duplicate bridge different from contract bridge?

Each hand stands alone. There are no extra points for winning a rubber.

Each hand is scored by comparing it only with others who have played the same hand. If two teams play the same hand, the one with the highest score gets one match point and the other gets zero. If four teams play the same hand, the highest scoring team gets three points. You get one point for each team you beat and ½ point for each team you tie.

As a result of the scoring, bidding tends to be a bit more aggressive, since you are trying to do better than someone else would with the same hand.

For the same reason, minor suits are orphans in duplicate bridge. The scoring tends to disfavor minor suits. Therefore, if a game is possible, you prefer to find a fit in a major suit or in No Trump. When someone opens in a minor suit, it usually just means they don't have a five-card major.

Tricks aren't gathered in the center of the table as they are in contract bridge. Each person plays their card directly in front of them (including the dummy who plays at the direction of their partner who is playing the hand), the winner of the trick is declared and then each card is kept by the original holder of that card.

Cards that have been played are placed face down at the edge of the table directly in front of you, starting at your far left. Tricks you have won are placed vertically (pointing toward your partner) and tricks you have lost are placed horizontally (pointing toward your opponents).

The duplicate board, where the cards are kept, will tell you and your partner whether you are North-South or East-West and also whether you are vulnerable.

Bidding

The basic rules and sequencing of bidding are the same as in contract bridge. However, most duplicate players use the "Standard American Yellow Card" bidding conventions instead of the "Standard American" bidding conventions. The major difference is that you bid a bit more aggressively in duplicate.

See Commonly Used Conventions below.

Duplicate Bridge Scoring

Duplicate is scored the same as contract bridge except that there is no bonus for making a rubber and there is no bonus for holding honors. Instead of recording your points above and below the line, as you do in contract, total points for each hand, including tricks bid

and made, overtricks, slam bonuses or penalty points, are added and recorded on the pink traveling scoreslip.

In addition to trick points, you get game or part-score points for each hand you win as follows:

Game and Part-Score Bonuses:

Game bonus: 300 pts if not vulnerable; 500 pts if vulnerable.

Part-score bonus: 50 pts, whether vulnerable or not.

Commonly Used Conventions

Blackwood: 4 NT bid asks partner for number of aces held. 5 Clubs means none or four aces; 5 Diamonds means one ace; 5 Hearts means two aces; 5 Spades means three aces. A subsequent bid of 5 NT asks similarly for kings.

Stayman: A response of 2 clubs after partner's opening of 1 NT asks partner to name a four-card major suit if he has one. To make this 2 club response, one should have at least seven points and at least one four-card major suit. If the opener has no four-card major, he bids 2 diamonds.

Five-Card Majors: It is now generally agreed that a major suit cannot be opened unless you have at least five cards in it. A minor suit opening, on the other hand, just shows no five-card major and can have as few as three cards in the suit opened.

Preemptive Bid: This is an unnecessarily high bid in a long suit, usually with a hand of limited high-card strength. The idea is that you have so many cards in your chosen suit that you won't get set too much and may prevent your stronger opponents from ever getting established. The classic preemptive hand would contain a seven-card suit and about 8 -10 points and you would open with three in your suit.

Weak Two Openers: These days most bridge players use the "weak two bid" system, which is a type of preemptive bid, indicating a weak hand and a long suit. A weak two bid shows a six-card suit as opposed to the standard preemptive opening at the three level, which shows a seven-card suit. Weak two bids may be made only in Spades, Hearts or Diamonds. Two Club openings are reserved to show an especially strong hand (22 or more points) and tells you nothing about which suit is longest.

Take-Out Doubles: This is a double early in the bidding (as opposed to the typical double at the end of bidding) which reflects an opening hand, but not an appropriate bid to make. It forces your partner to bid his best suit, preferably a major suit with five or more cards.