

LESSON 1

Getting Started



General Concepts

General Introduction

Group Activities

Sample Deals



GENERAL CONCEPTS

Play of the Hand

- Taking tricks in notrump and trump contracts
- Following suit, discarding, ruffing
- Leads: top of a sequence; low from an honor
- Playing with a partner
- The declarer and dummy

Bidding

- The idea of bidding: the partnership reaches a consensus
- The language of bidding: the level and strain
- The Bidding Scale
- The game-bonus levels

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Since this is the first lesson, start by introducing yourself to the class and introduce the students to one another. One of the best ways to do this is by having the students in turn give their names and one or two sentences to tell about themselves. We could ask the students why they are taking bridge lessons or whether they have played before. The idea is to break the ice and give the students an opportunity to feel at home with the other players at their tables.

We must listen to what each of the students has to say. It may help us recall their names at a later point if we can associate some anecdote with them. (“That’s the man with the three dogs — Harry.”) It’s helpful if we can get to call each student by a first name. Use name tags to get started.

After the introductions, proceed immediately to introducing the game. The idea is to get the students involved right away. You could say something like this:

“We are here to learn to play bridge, so let’s get started.”

GROUP ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE ONE: Taking Tricks

Introduction

“Bridge is a game of taking tricks. It has evolved from a similar game called whist. We are going to start with a simple exercise based on whist to show you what taking tricks is all about and to give you a chance to become more familiar with the basic vocabulary of bridge. For those of you who have some experience with the game, I look forward to introducing you to a new way of recording tricks which you will find useful if you decide to become involved in a form of competitive bridge known as duplicate bridge ... but more about that later.”

Instructions

“North shuffles the deck and deals the cards, starting with the player on North’s left. Deal them clockwise, face down, until each player has 13.”

Information about cutting for partners is in the *Bidding in the 21st Century* student text. Having two decks of cards and going through the ritual of shuffling and cutting is not necessary at this point.

“Pick up your hand and arrange the cards with all of the spades together. Is there anyone who doesn’t know what a spade is? (We hold our breath with this question.) Put the hearts, diamonds and clubs together. It’s easier to see your hand if you separate the black and red suits.

“East leads any card by putting it face up on the table. The other players, proceeding in turn clockwise around the table, play a card of the same suit. This is called following suit. If you can’t follow suit, play a card from another suit. This is called discarding.

“The cards are ranked with the ace high, followed by the king, queen, jack, down to the 2. The player who contributes the highest card to the trick in the suit that has been led wins the trick. The player who wins the trick leads to the next trick.”

In making this statement, I sometimes try my first bit of humor: “The ace is the highest card, followed by the queen, king, jack, down to the 2.” A student will interrupt (I hope) and say “No! The king is higher than the queen.” I now reply, “I was trying to do my part for the women’s movement.” If they don’t laugh, I tell them that was my first joke, and this they do find humorous. Once again, the idea is to break the ice and give the students the idea that the lessons are going to be fun.

We have to use our judgment with the types of jokes we tell. What works for one group may not work with another.

“If you win the trick, turn your card over and place it vertically in front of you. If you lose the trick, turn your card over and place it horizontally in front of you. If you play other card games with tricks, this will be a new way of keeping track of your winners and losers. At the end of the deal, all of the cards you played will be in front of you.

“Play the deal until no cards are left. How many tricks will there be in total?”

Students who have played bridge before may start to ask questions: what is trump? who is the declarer? They may even start to tell the students at their table how to bid. They may express disappointment that the exercise is so simple. As the teacher, we must have the courage to start at the beginning. Many students in the class will find this exercise very beneficial. We might tell the more impatient students that there is a challenge coming up for them in the next exercise.

Some students may be uncomfortable when they don't know which card to play. They may ask for your help. Emphasize that this is an experiment. It's more important to play any card to see what happens than it is to have someone tell you which card to play. Remind them that the point of this exercise is to learn the concepts of leading, following suit, discarding and knowing who won each trick. That's more than enough for their first hand of bridge!

Follow-up

“Turn up the winners — the cards that are placed vertically in front of you. Did anyone win a trick with something other than a high card? Why might a low card win a trick?”

The students should concede that, while most tricks are won with high cards, it's possible for low cards to win tricks because the higher cards have already been played. This usually happens when a player has several cards in a suit.

“Turn up the losers, the cards placed horizontally in front of you. Did anyone have a high card that didn't win a trick?”

Students will notice that sometimes they never got an opportunity to lead and ended up having to discard some of their high cards. At other times a higher card captured their high card.

Conclusion

“You have been here for only a few minutes and already you know what a trick is, how to follow suit and how to discard. You've seen that the number of tricks won depends partly on high cards and partly on the length of your suit.”

EXERCISE TWO: Predicting Your Winners

Introduction

“This time, estimate which cards in your hand you think will win tricks. Even if you have played before, this will be a challenge.”

One problem in a basic course is that some students have never played bridge or other card games, and some are advanced beginners. We can challenge the more experienced student with this exercise. We might say, “It’s not often that a student can predict the exact cards that will win tricks.” Encourage the students to let you know if anyone does this.

Instructions

“The dealer moves clockwise around the table. While East is dealing, I’ll tell you more about Exercise Two. You are still playing in what we call notrump — the highest card in the suit led that’s played to the trick always wins the trick. You are playing on your own for now, with no partner. Let’s predict which cards you think will easily win tricks.”

Students usually think aces are good for a trick. They see that a king by itself sometimes will win a trick, but not always. Walk around the room and give a few words of further instruction to those who need it.

“Once everyone has predicted the cards they think will win tricks, play out the deal, with the player on the dealer’s left (South) making the opening lead.”

Follow-up

“Were there any surprises? Was anyone disappointed because a card that was predicted to win a trick didn’t?”

Students start to develop powers of observation. A king didn’t win a trick because the ace wasn’t in the right spot. This isn’t the time to formally develop the idea of a card being offside. However, we can see that the student is acquiring the experience necessary to understand ideas on play which can be introduced as the lesson progresses.

“Was anyone surprised that a card they didn’t think would be a winner did win a trick?”

Students can express, as best they can, why they won a trick with a card that at first glance didn’t seem like a winner.

Conclusion

“It’s difficult to predict the exact cards that will win tricks in your hand. By trying to do this, however, you’ll become curious. When this happens, your memory improves. High cards win tricks most of the time, but sometimes low cards from long suits win tricks.”

EXERCISE THREE: The Opening Lead

Introduction

“So far, you have led any card. You probably were wondering whether to play your high cards right away or save them. Let’s put a hand on the table and assume that it’s your own hand and you have to choose what to lead.”

Instructions

“Each player takes a suit; one will have all the spades, another all the hearts and so on. You could fan the hand out, the way you would hold it, but a traditional way of displaying a hand on the table is to put it in four columns, side by side, with all of the cards in one suit in each column.

“The player with the spades, put the ace, 3 and 2 in a column. Turn the rest of the spades over so you can’t see them. The player with the hearts, put the ace in a column beside the spades. The diamonds are the king, queen, jack, 10, 9 and 8. Put them in a column next to the hearts. Finally, the clubs are the ace, 3 and 2. Put them in a fourth column.”

We ask the students to turn the remaining cards face down because we want them to concentrate only on the hand on the table.

“North, your job is to find out what your group would lead with this hand and how many tricks they would expect to take. You’re still playing in notrump. The high cards win the tricks and you still have no partner.

“Incidentally, as we go through the exercises, we’ll take turns leading the discussions. East can be next, then South, then West.”

Students may be reserved. Some may be reluctant to talk or lead a discussion. Walk around the room and help groups having difficulty getting started.

Follow-up

“Let’s have a report from each group. What would your group lead and how many tricks would they expect to win?”

Students will usually conclude that a diamond is the best lead and they would win eight tricks. The experienced beginner may suggest leading fourth best. Although they’ve heard this rule, they usually don’t know about leading the top of a sequence. Your students should also conclude that in order to win the most tricks, they should not cash their aces right away. If a student comments on leading fourth best, we can move the lesson to the next stage by saying:

“I’m glad you mentioned fourth best. When you have no partner, you may play any diamond. When you are working with a partner, you want to give your partner a message through the card that you lead. There are two guidelines when making an opening lead: the first is to lead the top of a sequence if you have one; the second is to lead a low card if you don’t have high cards

that are touching in rank. Using this guideline, which diamond would you lead? What would you lead if the diamonds were queen, jack, 10, 9, 8, 7? Suppose your diamonds were the king, 6, 4, 3. What would you avoid leading? Which card would you lead if you decided that the diamond suit was your best chance for developing extra tricks?”

Conclusion

“You have decided that it’s best not to play the high cards, the aces, right away but to save them. You’ve seen that, although it doesn’t matter which card in a sequence you choose to lead when you have no partner, when you are playing with a partner, you choose the top of a sequence. This tells partner something about the other cards you hold in the suit. If you don’t have a sequence, play a low card — traditionally your fourth best from the top down.”

EXERCISE FOUR: Playing with a Partner

Introduction

“You have a wonderful experience in store for you. You’re going to be working with the person sitting opposite you, your partner. I’d like to urge you to cherish your partner, to love the things your partner does, to be fascinated by the way your partner thinks. How well you do in the game is a combination of luck, skill and your relationship with your partner.”

Instructions

“South deals the cards. You’re still playing in notrump — the high card in the suit led wins the trick. West, lead from your longest suit to try to develop extra tricks. If your long suit is headed by a sequence, lead the top card; otherwise, lead a low card.

“After West has led, turn your cards face down and take a moment to look at the lead. What is West’s longest suit? What is the minimum number of cards that West must have in that suit? What does the card led tell you about the other cards that West might hold in that suit?”

This reviews the procedure for making the opening lead. Students usually want to know whether every player leads the top of a sequence. The idea of returning partner’s lead can be introduced.

“Now play out the rest of the deal, this time working with the person opposite you, your partner, to win as many tricks as you can. If your partner is going to win a trick, you don’t need to try to win the trick as well. Cooperate with your partner.”

Let the students work with a partner to take tricks. They’ll block suits, win tricks twice, forget to return partner’s lead and in general understand little about what’s happening. We can feel very uncomfortable at this point, but we don’t need to. The object of the exercise is to work with a partner to take tricks and to follow a few guidelines for leading in notrump.

Follow-up

“Tell me some stories about your first experience playing with a partner.”

Take a few minutes to hear the pleasures and problems of working with a partner.

Conclusion

“Partner’s opening lead tells a story about the suit partner thinks has the best trick-taking potential. When playing in notrump, partner picks the longest suit in the hand. Partner leads the top of a sequence if there is one or a low card if there isn’t. You want to cooperate with your partner, helping to take tricks in the suit that partner led. Between the two of you, you want to win as many tricks as possible.”

EXERCISE FIVE: Playing in a Trump Contract

Introduction

“So far, all deals have been played in notrump — the highest card played in the suit led wins the trick. Now you are going to have a trump suit. I’m going to pick the trump suit this time, although later you’ll learn how to work together with your partner to decide on the best trump suit for your side.

“This time hearts are trump. Hearts are the premium suit. Ruffing (playing a trump on a non-trump trick) is similar to discarding — you can play a trump if you have no cards left in the suit led. When you discard, you give up on winning the trick. When you play a trump, you expect to win the trick. There are four things to remember about playing with a trump suit:

- You have to follow suit. You can play a trump on a trick only if you have no cards left in the suit led.
- You don’t have to ruff. If your partner plays the \spadesuit A and you have no diamonds, you can discard another suit since your partner’s ace will win the trick, provided the opponents don’t play a trump.
- If more than one player ruffs a trick, the highest-ranked trump wins the trick.
- The trump suit doesn’t have to be led at any particular time. It’s up to the discretion of each player when to lead trump. We’ll develop rules to guide you as we play.”

Instructions

“West deals. You’re playing with a partner with hearts as trump. For now, lead the same way you did when you were playing in notrump. We’ll talk about leads in a trump contract after the deal.”

The focus of the exercise is to become familiar with playing in a trump contract. Students usually see that it’s helpful to lead from shortness (one or two cards) in a suit that isn’t trump.

Follow-up

“Do you like playing in a trump suit or do you prefer playing in notrump?”

Answers usually will vary depending on which side held the majority of the trump suit.

“What was the difference?”

Students tend to discuss that their short suits were useful, if the short suit wasn’t trump.

“When you have no cards in a suit, it’s called a void; one card is a singleton; two cards are a doubleton. These short suits can be helpful in a trump contract.”

The lead of a singleton or doubleton is often overrated. You can mention that a singleton can be a good lead against a trump contract, although it’s still a sound idea to lead from your longest suit.

Conclusion

“There are two ways of playing: in notrump, the high card in the suit led wins the trick; in a trump contract, the high cards still win tricks, but the highest trump card played on a trick beats all other cards.”

EXERCISE SIX: The Language of Bidding

Introduction

“When you sit down with your friends to play, you will still be describing your hand to your partner during the bidding, but you have to do this using a special language. We’re ready to see how this works.

“Here is the good news about the language of bidding: there are very few words. A bid consists of two parts: the first is a number from one to seven; the second is one of five words: clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades or notrump. 1 ♠ is a bid since it combines a number and a word.”

Instructions

“Think of a bid, any bid, combining a number and a word and let’s hear how it sounds.”

Students will say anything from 1 ♣ to 7NT.

“What does a bid mean? If you had to guess, what would you say?”

Students usually will conclude that the number has to do with the number of tricks that your side is predicting it will win, and the word suggests the strain: a trump suit or notrump.

“You should be able to commit to winning all of the tricks if you want to, so the number seven should be a commitment to win all 13 tricks. Since you must win more than six tricks for a majority, the number you bid is added to six to determine the number of tricks you are contracting to win. These first six tricks are referred to as *book*.

“Work with the others in your group to decide how many tricks each of the bids in Exercise Six represents.”

- | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1) 2 ♣ | 2) 4 ♠ | 3) 7NT | 4) 3NT |
| 5) 5 ♦ | 6) 1 ♥ | 7) 6 ♣ | |

This may be the first time the students have worked directly from the Group Activities section, and it may be necessary to point them to the right place.

Follow-up

Discuss the answers to the exercise. Then:

“An auction is conducted by giving each player, clockwise in turn starting with the dealer, an opportunity to make a bid. A player may choose to bid or pass. The auction continues until three players in a row pass. The last bid then becomes the contract.

“Each bid must be higher than the preceding bid. For this purpose, the strains are ranked with clubs as the lowest, then diamonds, hearts, spades and notrump. If you want to bid in a strain that is lower-ranking than the preceding bid, you must move up at least one numerical level. This is easiest to see by looking at the Bidding Scale.”

Refer the students to the diagram of the Bidding Scale in the student text in chapter 1 and show them how the bidding moves up the scale.

Conclusion

“Each bid suggests the number of tricks to be won, with an assumed six tricks included, and the strain that the bidder is suggesting. Each bid must be higher on the Bidding Scale than the preceding bid. As the auction progresses clockwise around the table, each player may choose to bid or pass. Three passes in a row end the auction. The last bid becomes the contract, and the player who first mentioned the strain of the contract for the side that won the auction is the declarer.”

EXERCISE SEVEN: Trick Scores for Partscores and Games

Introduction

“When you win the number of tricks you commit to, you get points. If you don’t win enough tricks, your opponents get points.”

Instructions

If time is short, this exercise can be left for homework. The students can be assigned the appropriate section in the text to read.

“The points given for the tricks bid and won (in excess of book) when the play is completed:

- 20 points for each trick (above six) in clubs or diamonds
- 30 points for each trick (above six) in hearts or spades
- 40 points for the first trick (above six) in notrump, and 30 points for each trick after that.

“What would the trick score be for the contracts in Exercise Seven?”

- | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|
| 1) 2 ♠ | 2) 4 ♥ | 3) 4 ♠ |
| 4) 5 ♣ | 5) 3 ♦ | 6) 1 ♥ |
| 7) 3NT | 8) 4 ♣ | 9) 5 ♦ |

Follow-up

Discuss the answers to the exercise.

Conclusion

“Points are given for each trick bid and won. If the points add up to 100 or more, an extra bonus, called a game bonus, is given. There is one catch, however. In order to get the game bonus, you not only have to win the number of tricks required, but you have to have bid to that level in the auction. We’ll be learning how to do this in the next lessons.”

Now wrap up the lesson with a quick review of the concepts we have introduced. Don’t go into a lot of detail. Refer the students to the text, so they can get used to using it as a reference. The text provides many additional examples of what has been covered in the lesson.

tricks could West estimate winning? (Three or four.) What is the total number of tricks predicted by East and West? (Four to six.)

“Which partnership predicted the higher number of tricks? (N-S.) What would the contract be? (3 ♠ or 4 ♠.)”

Instructions

“You and your partner will talk across the table to decide which suit you would like to have as trump. You can’t say ‘ace,’ ‘king,’ ‘queen,’ ‘jack’ or mention a specific number. Suppose you have six hearts with some high cards. You could start by saying, ‘I like hearts.’ If your partner suggests another suit, you might say, ‘I really like hearts ... a lot!’ If your partner continues to suggest other suits, you might be more emphatic; ‘If you really care about me, you’ll concede that hearts should be trump.’ At any rate, you and your partner must agree on which suit you would like to have as trump if you were given the opportunity. All the players can talk at once.”

The students may comment that they can hear the other players and this influences their own discussion. Remind them that both sides have the same advantage. The students may say that they don’t know which suit they like better, the short, strong suit or the long, weak suit. Mention that generally we pick the longest suit in our hand as our favorite.

“Once each partnership has settled on its own trump suit, estimate how many tricks each partnership can win with that suit as trump. Then notice which partnership has estimated the most tricks with their suit as trump.”

Follow-up

“Place your cards face up on the table in columns in front of you. Let’s look at all four hands.”

North and South should predict taking nine or 10 tricks with spades as trump. East and West should predict taking five or six tricks with diamonds as trump.

“The side predicting the most tricks with their suit as trump gets to choose the trump suit. The number of tricks they predicted is their contract. The contract is played with their suit as trump, and the partnership that chose the trump suit must try to win the number of tricks they predicted.

“On this deal, North and South would win the bidding auction because they are willing to try to win more tricks with their suit as trump than East and West are with their suit as trump.”

Conclusion

“The purpose of the bidding is to decide on a trump suit. It starts with you and your partner talking back and forth to see which suit you would choose for your side if given the chance. The best trump suit for the partnership isn’t necessarily the favorite suit of both players. Reaching an agreement is a delicate process, but it allows you to see the beauty of your partner’s ideas and for you to come closer to an agreement through your bidding conversation.

“For you and your partner to be pleased with the trump suit, you need a comfortable majority of cards in the suit, at least eight cards between the two hands.”

EXERCISE NINE: The Play

Introduction

“Once both partnerships have agreed on their trump suits, the deal is played out. On this deal, North and South have won the auction, and spades have been named as the trump suit. Let’s say, as a challenge, they have estimated that they can win 10 of the 13 tricks. Now we are going to see how a bridge deal is actually played out.”

Instructions

“Who first mentioned the suit that ended up being trump? (South.) South is to be the declarer. The player to the left of the declarer, West in this case, makes the opening lead. Now the new part! Declarer’s partner (North) is the dummy and, once West has made the opening lead, the dummy’s hand is placed face up on the table in columns. The trump suit is traditionally placed in the column on dummy’s right, declarer’s left. Declarer now plays the cards from both hands and tries to win as many tricks as possible.

“Declarer doesn’t need to reach across the table to play the dummy’s cards but can ask the dummy to play them. For example, declarer might say ‘Play the diamond six please, partner.’ In some obvious situations ‘six’ or ‘a diamond’ is all that is necessary.

“Now let’s play the contract and have South try to win as many tricks as possible with spades as the trump suit.”

Watch the students play out the deal. South will probably end up winning 10 tricks, but this isn’t important. The idea is to play out a full deal with a dummy and a declarer.

Follow-up

“How many tricks did declarer win? Was this the number predicted by North and South (10)? Did declarer fulfill the contract or did the opponents (defense) defeat the contract?”

The idea is to introduce the terms declarer, dummy, contract, defense, etc.

Conclusion

“Before a deal is played, the players talk back and forth to decide on the contract. The declarer is the player who first mentioned the suit that is trump (or notrump if the contract is played in notrump). The player to the left of the declarer starts by leading a card. Declarer’s partner is the dummy; the dummy’s cards are placed face up on the table. The declarer plays both hands and tries to take the number of tricks contracted for.”

Instructions

“Repeat the earlier exercise to decide on a trump suit.”

Give the students a couple of minutes.

“You probably had a little more trouble deciding on a trump suit. Let’s look at all four hands. Put your hands face up in columns in front of you, as though your hand were the dummy.

“In deciding on a trump suit, you normally want to have at least eight cards in the combined hands. Does either partnership have an eight-card fit? (No.) What strain would a partnership choose if they could not agree on a trump suit? (Notrump.) On this deal, how many tricks can North and South predict winning in a notrump contract? How about East and West?”

The students should agree that East and West can win about nine tricks in notrump.

“Did East or West suggest playing in a notrump contract first? (It doesn’t matter which — suggest West if no one is sure.) Let’s play out the deal in a notrump contract with this player as declarer. As a challenge, let’s say East and West have contracted to win nine tricks in notrump.”

Let them play out the deal. West should have no trouble winning nine tricks, but this isn’t important. The exercise is just to reinforce the ideas of the declarer and the dummy and to see that the contract is sometimes played in notrump.

Follow-up

“Now you look like bridge players. There you are with the dummy on the table — you look wonderful. Do you have any questions about the mechanics of the game?”

Students will make a few brief comments, and you can use this as an opportunity to make certain that everyone understands that each hand has two phases — the auction to determine the contract and the play to try to fulfill the contract.

Conclusion

“You are getting used to the general idea of bridge. It’s a game of bidding and playing. It’s a game with a declarer, a dummy and a defense.

“The way we have conducted the auction so far is a little haphazard, with everyone talking at once. What if both sides predict the same number of tricks? Which side gets to name the strain of the contract? It’s time to move on to the language of bidding that will help us conduct a more orderly auction.”

