

Bridge Is Magic!

Betty Starzec

After my students finish their first complete set of lessons, I give them a simple drill by telling them that they have all become magicians because they now know how to make different bids with the same hand.

Here is an example hand:

♠ AQ65
♥ KJ105
♦ 52
♣ K109

We then go through the following scenarios with me asking for the correct bid with the above hand.

1. You are in first seat. What do you bid? 1♣
2. You are in second seat and RHO opens 1♦.
What do you do? Double
3. LHO opens 1♣ and it is passed around to you.
What do you bid? 1NT
4. Partner opens 1♥ in first seat and RHO passes.
What do you bid? 2NT
5. LHO opens 1♣, partner doubles and RHO passes.
What do you bid? 2♣
6. Partner opens 2♣. What do you bid? 2♦
7. Partner opens 1♣. What do you bid? 1♥
8. Partner opens 1NT. What do you bid? 2♣
9. RHO opens 1♥. What do you do? Pass
10. Partner opens 2NT. What do you bid? 3♣

Then I say: “See you ARE magicians! Isn’t bridge a magical game?”

Eight Over Eight

Linda Green

When you have 8 high card points balanced (no 5-card suit) either a 4-3-3-3 or a 4-4-3-2 shape and are not sure whether to invite over partner's 1NT opening bid of 15-17 you apply the following two guidelines: Add up the high card points = exactly 8
Add up all the number of cards over eight - requiring 8 cards to invite game

e.g. a) ♠ A32 ♥ KJ76 ♦ 765 ♣ 987 = 4 cards over 8

b) ♠ A109 ♥ KJ106 ♦ 1085 ♣ 987 = 8 cards over 8

Hand a) does not fit the requirements- pass 1NT

Hand b) does fit the requirements - bid 2NT

After all: For every 10 attached to an honor- we add an extra half a point in hand evaluation so this applies to this guideline.

Bridge is a Mental Sport

Rui Marques

Bridge is a mental sport. During a tournament you spend precious energy, and it's just normal that during the session your levels of concentration and stamina tend to steadily decrease. To achieve the best possible results, preserve as much energy as possible.

Don't discuss the hand that you just finished. It does not improve the result.

Don't try to fine tune your system during the session. The situation will likely not repeat itself.

Don't chastise yourself about a bad result. It kills your concentration for the next hands.

Don't get overly happy with a nice hand. It also kills your concentration.

Don't try to be right. Try to win.

Don't forget that partner is also trying his best. Pointing to errors only degrades his performance.

Basically, understand that energy conservation is essential for a good result.

One of the top American players had a rule about partner's mistakes: "The more serious the error, the more time would pass until it was discussed". A really big blunder would pass undiscussed for weeks!

Always Protect Humpty Dumpty

Sharon Carter

When working with my students on play of the hand and explaining the concept of the "dangerous opponent" and the necessity for an avoidance play they really get it when I use the analogy of a "Humpty Dumpty suit". A Humpty Dumpty suit is one that is Kx or Kxx....

Once the location of the Humpty Dumpty suit is identified, then Humpty's right hand opponent is designated as the dangerous opponent. Thus, if the HD suit is in North, then West is the one able to lead and knock him off his wall. If HD is in South, then East is the opponent who can get him.

Now when a practice hand comes down, they will say, "Oh, you've got a Humpty Dumpty!"

Don't Just Lead an Ace

Patty Tucker

When explaining to students why it isn't a good idea to lead an Ace without holding the King in the same suit, I tell them "Aces like to win Faces." Aces like to capture the opponent's honor cards whenever possible.

Opening Leads

Jim Ricker

When teaching opening leads to new players, it is explained that leading an Ace promises the King (in that suit) and ASKS PERMISSION (via Attitude) to continue with the King and then a third card in the suit. Partner will play a high card to indicate that he can take the third trick (either with the Queen or with a trump) and give permission to the opening leader to continue. If partner plays a low card, the opening leader is to SWITCH to another suit.

Play Conventions You Are Totally Comfortable With

Randy Baron

“Once somebody called me the Simple Simon of bridge.” I said, “Thank you very much. I appreciate the compliment.” Charles Goren

Stayman and Blackwood are the only conventions that are absolutely necessary for most players (I’ll add Jacoby Transfers and Negative Doubles close behind). The important point is that if you place a new convention on your card, make sure you understand it and you have discussed it at length with your partner. Many players think it makes them look “cool” or experienced to have all the new bids on their cards. Sure, many of the top players use complex bidding systems, but they study and practice constantly. If you don’t play often or have various partners, KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid).

I recently played against two students who had just finished a few beginner lessons and afterwards decided to try the open game at our local club. Surprisingly, this pair had numerous advanced conventions that even experienced players rarely play, such as upside-down signals and a complicated version of Blackwood. As they demonstrated during the boards they played against us, they hadn’t yet learned the basics. Instead of discussing the fundamentals and focusing on standard bidding, declarer play and defense, they wanted to show everyone all the new conventions they had found to put on their convention card. Not quite the best way to proceed in their budding bridge careers.

Besides the four conventions I have mentioned as being somewhat essential, here is a list of others that should prove worthwhile once you reach a level at which you feel comfortable with a simple Standard American system:

- *A proven method for competing when opponents open 1NT(15-17)
- *A more advanced version of Blackwood
- *Fourth-suit forcing (Checkback)
- *Inverted Minor raises
- *Jacoby 2NT
- *Lebensohl after your 1NT opening when opponents compete
- *Michaels and Unusual 2NT
- *New-minor forcing (Checkback)
- *Ogust Responses to Weak Two-Bids (or 2NT to ask for a feature)
- *Splinter raises
- *Two over One Game Force (I’m a huge proponent: it makes life easy)

The most important question your partnership should answer when deciding which conventions to add to your system is how much time you are going to spend discussing them. Make sure you go over the details when you decide to add a new wrinkle to your card. It is really helpful if you actually write each convention down with all of the variations and possibilities. This is especially important if you frequently play with different partners. It's not a bad idea to agree to play the same convention card with everyone if you have several partners.

Captaincy During an Auction

Sharon Carter

When teaching the concept of "captain" and "describer", I have a captain's hat that I use and will hold it over the head - not placing it on - of the person who has been identified as the captain. This is a really fun way to get students to understand how to determine if they should go to game.

Show And Tell

Joan Johnson

Use the Bidding Box and Cards on the Table to Review and Reinforce bidding.

- 1) Call off the bids and have the students SHOW the bids with their bidding boxes.
- 2) Have the students TELL what each bid means – the point count, shape and what it denies having.

Examples:

1NT – 2C	1NT – 2C	1NT – 2D	1NT – 2H
2H – 3H	2S – 4S	2H – 2NT	2S – 3C

Next have the students make-up hands that show these bids and place the hands on the table.

These are just samples of responses to NoTrump bids, but the same concept can be used to review and reinforce any bidding sequence.

4NT: Ace Asking or Quantitative?

Ray Parnell

Confusion about whether a 4NT bid is ace asking or quantitative is easily resolved by teaching that if the 1st or last bid is a notrump bid, then Gerber, 4♣, is the ace asking mechanism. This is true even if clubs have been bid in the interim.

For example, this means that in a 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 4♣ bidding sequence, 4♣ is ace asking.

The same is true in this sequence: 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♦ - 3NT - 4♣. 4♣ is ace asking, not a rebid of the ♣ suit by opener.

Light Overcalls Are Fun and Frequently Helpful

Randy Baron

“If you opt for a safe life, you’ll never know what it feels like to win.” Richard Branson
There are two schools of thought on bidding:

- *you should have very solid values when you open the bidding, overcall or preempt
- *you should enter the auction whenever you can

Many players stand somewhere in the middle of these extremes. I don’t think there is a right or wrong philosophy; it simply depends on your personality and what feels right to you. It doesn’t take a genius to realize that you are taking more risks when you have minimum values and choose to bid. You will suffer some setbacks and your poor boards will usually be blamed on you. On bad days, you might wonder why you stuck your neck out, and the negative results can be frustrating, even embarrassing. Look at the bright side: you can participate in more auctions, make life difficult for the opponents, and on a good day, the victories will accumulate hand after hand. Let’s look at the advantages and disadvantages of light overcalls:

Advantages:

1. It usually makes life more difficult for the opponents, especially in auctions when the overcall takes away a level of bidding. Overcalls such as 1C-1S, 1D-2C, 1H-2D or 1S-2H take away an entire level, giving the opponents less space to investigate. When you take away bidding space from the opponents, especially when they are vulnerable, they might be reluctant to bid. If you had passed, they have an easier call.
2. Your partnership may find a fit in your suit right away; if you pass, you may have a tough time describing your hand later or you may be shut out of the auction. You could even make a game or push the opponents too high.
3. Your bid may make it easier to find a sacrifice.
4. You might get your partner off to a helpful lead or help him avoid a disastrous one.
5. The opponents may evaluate their hands incorrectly and reach the wrong contract.
6. You may buy the contract at a reasonable level for a positive result whether making a partscore or a small minus.
7. When you don’t overcall, your partner has valuable inferences in the auction and during the defense when the opponents play the hand.
8. Declarer may play the hand incorrectly, thinking you have more values than you actually do.
9. If you are playing against weak opponents, you may be able to steal the board.

There are only five major reasons for solid overcalls, but they are significant.

Disadvantages of light overcalls:

1. The opponents may double and you may be set for a (sometimes large) penalty.
2. Your partner may make an unfortunate opening lead.
3. You may give away valuable information to the opponents.
4. Because your overcall range is wider than with solid overcalls, your constructive bidding isn’t as accurate.
5. You may go down in your contract for a poor result.

Why We Do What We Do

Agnes Lee

Pete, an occasional player in my *Mentored Play* session is an accomplished poker player. He plays well and his bidding is somewhat "non-standard/traditional." He had a two-suiter with 4 cards each. He wanted to bid the higher-ranking suit first because it was stronger. I informed him, "With 4-4, you bid **up the line**." He persisted and wanted to know why. My pat answer, "That's what we do." Of course, Pete was dissatisfied with my answers. I was equally unhappy with my mouthing pat answers without understanding the reasons for them.

I came across some bidding principles in Ron Klinger's book: *Guide to Better ACOL Bridge*¹. The **Skip-over Principle** explains "The practice of bidding 4 card suits **up the line** means that when either player skips over a suit, he denies having 4 cards in that suit."² Most bridge books recommend that our first priority when responding to a minor opening is to show a 4-card or more major and we marked "*Frequently bypass 4+♦*" on our convention card. The **Barrier Principle** states "After an opening bid of 1B, opener may not make a rebid in a suit above 2B unless extra values are held."³ Similarly, **The Barrier Principle for Responder**, "After a suit opening at the one-level, responder's barrier for a two-level response in a new suit is 10 HCP or more. (You may shade this to 9 HCP for a strong 6-card suit or 8 HCP for a good 7-card suit.) With fewer points, responder may support opener's suit, if suitable, or bid at the one-level only."⁴ This is in sync with Larry Cohen's advice of responding with the major if only four cards in the major and 4 or more in the minor with less than 13 HCP. With 13 HCP or more, Larry recommends responding with a minor when holding four cards in the major and four or more decent cards in the minor.⁵ I certainly could use learning more about bridge theory. Maybe that is an area that we need to hone in as bridge teachers.

¹ Klinger, Ron, *Guide to Better ACOL Bridge*, in association with Peter Crawley by Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1988, p.8.

² <http://www.jazclass.aust.com/bridge/br07a.htm>.

³ <http://www.columbridgeclub.com/docs/lesson7.pdf>.

⁴ Klinger, Ron, *Memory-Aids and Useful Rules Flipper*, published by Cassell in association with Peter Crawley, The Orion Publishing Group Ltd.

⁵ Cohen, Larry, "Bidding Basics: Responding to 1♣", *Bridge Bulletin*, September 2017, p. 49.