

# Quick Tips for Improving Your Bridge Game

## When you're declarer:

**Don't play to the first trick too quickly.** Force yourself to stop and think when dummy comes down.

**Concentrate on the opening lead** for a few seconds so you'll remember it later. Decide what it tells you about the leader's length or strength in that suit.

**Mentally review the bidding.** If one of your opponents has bid, try to come up with a general picture of his point-count and his length in the suit bid.

**For *most* suit contracts,** your general plan should be:

- 1 - Count your losers.** Decide which ones can be disposed of or turned into winners (by trumping, by finessing or by discarding them on a side suit).
- 2 -** If your plan calls for trumping one or more of your losers in the short-trump hand (usually dummy), do that *before* you lead trumps -- even if you have to give up tricks to set up the trumping position.
- 3 -** Next, lead out your trumps, counting as the opponents follow to each trick. (This will usually be your best approach if you have good honor strength and/or length in one or more of the outside suits.)
- 4 -** Attack your longest side suit. Give up your losers early.
- 5 -** Last, cash honors in your short suits.

**For *most* notrump contracts,** your general plan should be:

- 1 - Count your winners.** If you don't have enough top tricks to make your contract, decide which suit offers you the best chance of creating more winners.
- 2 -** Attack that suit first (it will usually be your longest side suit). Give up the tricks you have to lose early.
- 3 -** Stick with one suit at a time. Keep leading it until you've established your tricks (counting the defenders' cards as you go), then cash your winners in the suit. When you move to a different suit, start counting again.
- 4 -** Last, cash honors in your short suits.

## When you're a defender:

**Lead attacking combinations** (suits with touching honors -- QJ10x, KQxx, etc.).

**Don't lead unsupported aces** (Ax, Axx, Axxx) *unless* it's the suit partner has bid.

**When in doubt about what to lead**, lead the fourth-best card in your longest suit. Leading from length is the "standard" lead to a notrump contract, and it's often the safest lead to a suit contract.

**Count cards and points** as you play. Use clues from the bidding, the opening lead and the play to try to come up with a mental picture of partner's or declarer's hand.

**Think ahead**, and be ready for critical plays. Indecision will often tell declarer what you hold in a suit, so try to decide in advance which card you'll play when declarer leads a suit toward or from dummy.

Use **defensive signals** to help partner during the play:

- When discarding or following suit, signal with the highest card possible in a suit you want partner to lead. Play a low card if you have no interest in the suit.
- When following suit, use count signals to help partner figure out how many cards you hold in the suit. Playing *high-low* in a suit tells partner you have an *even* number of cards. Playing *low, then high* shows an *odd* number of cards.

### **When you're bidding:**

**Always search for a major-suit fit** if one is possible, even if you've already found a minor fit. If you have a 4-card major you can show at the one-level, always bid it.

**Consider playing 3NT** instead of 5C or 5D when you have the strength for game, but your only fit is in a minor suit.

**If you have length in the opponent's suit** and are in doubt about what to bid, pass. Don't show your problem by thinking too long about what to do.

**Keep the bidding simple.** If you have a fit for partner's major, always raise.

**If you have a fit for partner's suit**, "stretch" to raise, especially in a competitive auction. If you have extra trumps (one more than you need for an 8-card fit), feel free to compete to the 3-level if the opponents bid over your 2-level partscore.

**Always assume partner has a minimum** until he tells you otherwise. A minimum range is 13-15 pts. If partner opened the bidding; 6-9 pts. If he responded to your opening bid.

**If you have a minimum hand** (13-15 pts. for opener, 6-9 or 10 pts. for responder), keep the bidding low until you find a fit. ***Don't go past the one-level unless:***

- You're raising partner's suit.
- You're rebidding your own long suit.
- You're bidding a second suit that's ***lower in rank*** than your first suit (1D by you-1S by partner-**2C** by you) or (1D-1S-1NT-**2H**).

**Once you've decided to raise partner's suit, rebid your own long suit or bid notrump**, be sure you show your point-count by bidding at the proper level:

- If you know you have 25 combined points, jump to game in your suit or notrump. Don't give partner a chance to pass.
- If you have an invitational hand (16-18 pts. if you're opener; 10-12 pts. if you're responder) and you think you and partner ***might*** have 25+ points, make your bid one level higher than necessary. This usually means you'll freely take the auction to 2NT or 3 of your suit.
- If you have a minimum hand, show it by making your bid at the lowest level available.

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