

Beginners lesson 1



Bridge is a game for four players, two on each side, the partners facing each other. Each player is dealt thirteen cards and the play, like at Whist, consists of a series of tricks. Each player contributes one card to each trick, and the player who plays the highest card wins the trick for his side. The player who won the last trick leads to the next trick, the player playing in clockwise order. The rules demand that the player must follow suit if he can. If he has none of the suit, he can either discard something or attempt to win the trick by trumping.

This brings us to TRUMPS, the suit selected as the master suit for that particular deal. Even the lowest trump – the two – can beat any card in the other three suits.

The bidding is often described as the AUCTION in which the partnerships bid for the right to choose trumps (or not to have a trump suit) and to forecast how many tricks they could win. During the auction the players are only allowed to use the words one to seven – relating to spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs and No Bid (or pass); Double and Redouble. This is a total of thirty-eight different bids to describe literally millions of different possible hands, which shows how efficient the language of bidding is. The suit and the denomination of no-trumps have the following ranking order; -

No trumps
Spades
Hearts
Diamonds
Clubs

This means that a bid contracting to win eight tricks with spades as trumps outbids a bid to win eight tricks with hearts as trumps. In order to outbid the spade bid, the heart bidder would have to contract to win nine tricks.

The next few lessons will show how by using the bids in different sequences we can gradually impart information to partner about our hand so we finish up choosing the best trump suit for the partnership rather than a trump suit that only one of the partnership likes.

It is time to explain the meaning of the bids. The first six tricks, which are effectively taken for granted, are known as THE BOOK, and the bidding and the scoring start with the seventh trick. Thus when you bid “One heart” you contract to make seven tricks. If you bid “Two hearts” you contract to make eight tricks; Three hearts would be nine tricks, and so on.

There are two kinds of contract bridge, tournament bridge and rubber bridge, the main difference being the method of scoring. We are going to concentrate on rubber bridge, the variation that is played at home. In this form of bridge the basic objective is to bid and make a Game. Game is 100 points or more and only successful bids count towards this.

Spades and hearts	(known as the MAJOR SUITS)	score	30pts per trick
Clubs and diamonds	(known as the MINOR SUITS)	score	20pts per trick
No-trumps	(no-trump suit)	score	40pts for the first trick And 30 pts for each subsequent trick

You do not need to score the 100 points all in one go. For example, if you bid and make "Two spades" (eight tricks) you score 60 points and then in a later hand you bid and make "One no trump" scoring 40 points, a total of these two PARTSCORES comes to the 100 points you need for game. If you win more tricks than you forecast you get a small bonus for the OVERTRICKS, but lest you think that you can bid what you like you should remember that there are penalties for failing to make your contract. Also your opponents are allowed to DOUBLE, effectively doubling the stakes on that deal. We will not worry about the exact scoring for now, it will be sufficient to bear in mind the target of 100 ' points for game. When you have won a game you become VULNERABLE and a RUBBER is won by the side that first wins two games.

Let us imagine we are about to play. To commence a pack of cards is fanned out face down and each player draws a card. The players with the two highest cards play against those with the two lowest cards. The player with the highest card has the right to choose seats and which pack of cards (red or blue) he will deal with.

Imagine the players are sitting North, South, East and West with South having cut the highest card. The correct etiquette is that West shuffles the pack to be used, passes the pack to East who cuts the pack, whereupon South deals the cards one at a time in a clockwise manner, starting with West. The other pack has meanwhile been shuffled by North and placed on his right. Then the dealer always picks up the cards he is to deal on his left.

When the deal is completed you pick up your hand, and the first thing is to sort it into suits. I would suggest that you sort it into alternate colours, which helps to avoid unnecessary errors of not following suit when able. This is known as REVOKING and it incurs severe penalties. Having sorted your hand, we now need a method of valuation to decide whether or not we should make a bid. The following simple points scale is used by nearly all bridge players the world over:

Ace	= 4 points
King	= 3 points
Queen	= 2 points
Jack (or Knave)	= 1 point

You will probably notice this means there are 40 high-card points in the pack. Since there are thirteen tricks to be won, this means approximately three points equals one trick.

An average hand contains 10 high-card points, but because a bid undertakes to win more tricks than the opponents, if you have a trick (that is three points) above average you should clearly open the bidding. As you become more experienced you will often open with twelve points, but while twelve points could be described as an optional opening, thirteen points is a compulsory opening bid.

High cards are very nice but they are only part of the story. When choosing a trump suit it is clearly best to have as many trumps as possible, so we allow for this in valuing our hand and award ourselves bonus points for long suits. This will be discussed more fully in a future lecture on bidding.

It should be stressed that the method of valuation, both high cards and DISTRIBUTION, is simply a guide line to the value of your hand.

Remember the point count is your servant not your master, and you will find that clear thinking and common sense will solve almost all the problems that you come up against.

To conclude this lecture, it should be stated that in contract bridge after the opening lead is made the opening leader's left hand opponent puts his hand on the table face up. To clarify we can seat one pair of players as North-South and the other as East-West. If we call South the DECLARER (the player who first mentions the final denomination, that is to say the trump suit or no-trumps) then West makes the opening lead whereupon North becomes the Dummy and simply watches the play. South plays the cards from his own hand and from dummy and East-West are known as the DEFENDERS who try to stop South from fulfilling his contract.

You will now play a few hands but we will dispense with the bidding and simply familiarise you with the play. At first it may seem a little strange, but you will soon get used to it.

The next lesson will deal with opening bids using the valuation method mentioned in this lecture to try to help us to decide what to do.

Bridge is the most fascinating indoor game in the world, a social asset and an everlasting source of enjoyment. It is a game worth the candle and you will enjoy the process of learning. These two pages are designed to outline the rules and mechanics of the game

The bridge pack contains 52 cards and there are 4 suits of 13 cards each. The highest card is the Ace, followed by the King, Queen and Jack and ten down to the two, which is the lowest card.

Bridge is a game for 4 players, forming two partnerships. These are determined by the "cut", and the 2 drawing the highest cards play against the 2 with the lowest cards. The player drawing the highest card is the dealer. He chooses the seats and the cards. The 2 packs have different coloured backs, normally blue and red. The chosen pack is shuffled by the dealer's left-hand opponent and cut by his right-hand opponent. Then the deal starts. 13 cards to every player, one card at a time, starting with the player on his left. Simultaneously dealer's partner shuffles the other pack and places it on his right. When the players have arranged their cards, there is an auction starting with the dealer, and the 2 sides compete for the right to make their own trumps or no-trumps. Bidding is the language of a partnership - the medium for transmitting information. Every bid is designed to show partner a feature of his hand, emphasising for example a good hand or a long suit.

With a bad hand, a player says "No Bid" or "Pass". With a good hand he "Opens the bidding", usually with one of a suit, for example 1 Spade or 1 Diamond, indicating what he wishes to make trumps. The bidding and scoring start with the seventh trick. The first six are taken for granted. To bid 1 Spade, therefore, means a promise to make 7 tricks (1 over 6) with Spades as trumps. The bidding proceeds clockwise round the table, and the side making the highest bid wins the auction and plays the hand. Once the auction is over the player who first called the suit in which the hand is played becomes "declarer". He is in charge of the contract - final bid.

His partner becomes "dummy", who exposes his cards on the table and declarer plays the cards for his side - his own and dummy's. The other pair - the opponents - are called the "defenders", and the opening lead, the first card to be played - is made by the defender on declarer's left.

Each player in turn follows to every lead and the 4 cards constitute a trick. This is won by the side which has played the highest card of the suit led. A player is obliged to follow suit; if he has no more, he can discard something else, or ruff - win the trick with a trump.

The objective at bridge is the rubber, which is won by a partnership scoring 2 games. To make game, the side that plays the hand needs 100 points. The value of Spades and Hearts called the major suits is 30 points; of Diamonds and Clubs - the minor suits - 20 points. No Trumps enjoy a peculiar privilege. The first trick counts 40 but after that they are 30 points each, the same as Spades and hearts.

To score a game at one fell swoop, a player must promise to make enough tricks to reach 100 points or over, and there are 3 ways of achieving it. To bid and make:-

- 1) 3 No Trumps, 3 over 6 = 9 tricks counting 40 + 30 + 30 = 100 points.
- 2) 4 Spades or Hearts, 4 over 6 = 10 tricks amounting to 4 times 30 = 120 points and
- 3) 5 Diamonds or 5 clubs, 5 over 6 = 11 tricks, totalling 5 times 20 = 100 points

A game can also be reached in stages– through a few part scores, which, between them, add up to 100. See chart below:-

		1 TRICK	2 TRICKS	3 TRICKS	4 TRICKS	5 TRICKS
	NO TRUMPS	40	70	100	130	160
MAJOR	SPADES	30	60	90	120	150
SUITS	HEARTS	30	60	90	120	150
MINOR	DIAMONDS	20	40	60	80	100
SUITS	CLUBS	20	40	60	80	100

As soon as one side gets game, it becomes what is known as **VULNERABLE**. Opponents lose any part score they may have made towards their own game or rubber– and must start afresh towards the 100 mark. Having made game, it is usual to draw a line across both columns, **WE** and **THEY**. The part-score points, as all points scored during the play, count in the final reckoning. Declarer's side can only take credit below the line for tricks it undertakes to make; extra tricks– called overtricks – if any, are inscribed above. Often enough, the contract is broken. Declarer goes down. This time they do the scoring. If declarer's side is not vulnerable going down costs 50 a trick. Vulnerable, the rate is 100. Besides Overtricks and Undertricks, other scores above the line are as follows:-

- 1) **PENALTIES**. This is an undertrick only more so. When one side believes the other side has overbid – has contracted for more tricks than it can win– either defender can **DOUBLE**. For the first trick – one down – the **DOUBLE** means exactly what it says. The rates go up 200 for every further undertrick non-vulnerable, and by 300 vulnerable. See chart below:-

	NON- VULNERABLE	NON-VULNERABLE	VULNERABLE	VULNERABLE
	UNDOUBLED	DOUBLED	UNDOUBLED	DOUBLED
1 DOWN	50	100	100	200
2 DOWN	100	300	200	500
3 DOWN	150	500	300	800
4 DOWN	200	700	400	1100
5 DOWN	250	900	500	1400
6 DOWN	300	1100	600	1700

- 2) **Making doubled contract**. Sometimes of course, the defenders misjudge or misdefend – the hand, and a doubled contract is made. Then the figures below the line are doubled and declarer also takes 50 points above the line for the ‘insult’. If he makes overtricks he collects 100 points a time if non-vulnerable and 200, if vulnerable. No hand can yield more than one game, but there is such a thing as being doubled **INTO GAME** for, if the contract is made, the figures below the line are also doubled.
- 3) **Redouble**. Sometimes the double is followed by a **REDOUBLE**. This reflects confidence on declarer's part that it will be made. This time even a mathematician can work it out. All that need be done is multiply by two the double score, which makes it twice as large. Only the ‘insult’ remains unchanged at 50– if declarer makes his contract.
- 4) **Slam Bonus**. The bonus for a small slam, bidding and making twelve tricks is 500 non-vulnerable and 750 vulnerable. A grand slam, bidding and making all thirteen tricks, is 1000 non-vulnerable and 1500 vulnerable.

