

WU3A Beginners' Bridge Lessons

Introduction to Bridge

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1 WU3A Beginners' Course

The Beginners' course runs for 12 weeks and is spent in teaching and then playing sample hands. The rest of the year is spent in general play reinforcing what you have learnt (and for fun!!).

The Beginners course is followed next year by an Improvers course when further more advanced lessons are given.

These notes are designed to give a general overview of the game. The main points will be repeated many times during the next year so don't worry if you don't immediately understand everything written here.

2 How Bridge is played

Bridge is played by 4 people playing as 2 pairs, called North/South and East/West. There are 2 main forms of the game that you will come across, **Rubber** and **Duplicate**.

In Rubber Bridge hands are dealt randomly during the session and a "rubber" is won by the first pair to win 2 games and a game is won by the first pair to reach 100pts.

There is also Duplicate Bridge which is played in a club room (or more recently on-line) and each table in the room plays the same hands which can then be scored and ranked.

In the Beginners class we concentrate more on Duplicate Bridge but the basics are appropriate to either version.

3 What are the suits

All 52 cards are dealt so that each player receives 13 cards. Once you have received your cards you need to sort them into suits arranged in alternate colours red / black / red / black with the high cards on the left within each suit, lowest on the right. In Bridge Aces are always high. The suits are spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs. The spades and hearts are known as the major suits and score more than diamonds and clubs which are known as the minor suits. The ranking order of the suits is:-

- Spades -highest
- Hearts
- Diamonds
- Club- lowest

The highest card in a pack is the Ace, followed by the King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9 and so on down to 2.

4 The Object of the Game

The object of the Game is to score the maximum numbers of points. Points are scored by each partnership bidding for, and then making, a 'contract' which is the number of tricks you and your partner think you can make with the cards you have been dealt.

A contract might be 8 tricks with hearts as trumps, 9 tricks with spades as trumps etc. When the cards are played if you have made your contract then you score points and if you haven't then you incur penalties. Generally the partnership with the better cards will play the contract but this is not necessarily the case.

After the cards have been played and scored then a new hand is dealt by the next dealer in turn and the bidding starts again. Game continues for as long as time allows and the winning partnership is then declared.

5 How to evaluate your hand

For you and your partner to bid and make a '**contract**' you need to think that you and your partner combined have been dealt more powerful cards than your opponents. A method of working this out is by looking at how many of the four highest cards in each suit you have in your hand. The "**High Card Points**" convention has it that each :-

Ace is 'worth' 4 points,

King 3 points,

Queen 2 points

Jack 1 point.

In a whole pack of cards there are four Aces, four Kings, four Queens, and four Jacks, so using their 'worth' above you can see that a total pack is 'worth' 40 points. (i.e. $4 \times 4 + 4 \times 3 + 4 \times 2 + 4 \times 1$).

Once the cards have been dealt, by the law of averages you would expect that in your hand of cards you would have 10 points (i.e. 40 divided by 4 = 10). This means that if you have more than 10 points, your hand is better than average.

6 ACOL bidding system

Deciding whether to bid is determined by how many points you have in your hand and the bidding system used. Partners cannot see each others hands so to come up with the best contract they must communicate using a code. ACOL is the system most widely used in the UK and must obviously be the same for both partners so they can “communicate” with each other.

If you have 12 or more points in your hand then the ACOL system states this is good enough to open the bidding. A bid is an undertaking to win a certain number of tricks with a specified trump suit (or in “no trumps” where there is no trump suit) and if a suit is nominated as trumps it then acquires a greater power than the other suits.

You look at your hand to see in which suit you have the most cards and the ‘longer’ the suit (ie. the more cards you have in the suit) the better it becomes.

Because it is assumed that you should make at least half the tricks easily, bids are made on the basis of how many tricks over **SIX** you think you can make. If you think you can make 7 tricks with diamonds as trumps then you bid 1 diamond. 8 tricks with hearts as trumps you bid 2 hearts etc.

In ascending order of ranking, suits are bid as Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts and Spades. After one Heart you cannot bid 1 Club or 1 Diamond but you could bid 1 Spade. If you really want to bid clubs after 1 Heart you would have to bid 2 Clubs. You can also bid ‘no trumps’ where no trump suit is specified. ‘No trumps’ are ranked higher than all the other suits when bidding.

The bidding starts with the dealer of the cards who may bid for a contract or pass as they think fit. There is no obligation to bid, but bidding continues and progresses clockwise until three people have passed. The final bid becomes the ‘contract’ for that hand.

7 Playing the hand

The first person in the partnership to bid the contract suit (or no trumps) is known as the **declarer**. The person to the declarer’s left leads the first card and the declarer’s partner puts his cards face up on the table, becomes the dummy, and plays no further part as the declarer then plays **both** hands. Each of the remaining three players can obviously see **half** the pack but the subtlety of the game is that the opposition can see a different half, their own hand and the dummy, whilst the declarer can see all the cards in his own hand and the dummy and therefore has an advantage in playing the cards.

A trick is a set of four cards, one card contributed by each of the four players. The person who has played the most powerful card wins the trick. Power comes from whether the card is the highest card or the highest trump. The winner of the trick plays the first card of the next trick.

After all 13 tricks have been played they are counted to see whether the contract has been achieved.

8 Scoring

We have already seen that there are major and minor suits as well as no trumps, and this is reflected in the score given to the suits.

1. With a major suit (spades or hearts) you get 30 points for each trick over 6 that you make.

2. With a minor suit (clubs or diamonds) you get 20 points for each trick over 6 that you make.
3. With No trumps you get 40 points for the first trick over six and 30 for tricks thereafter.

If you fail to make the contract your side will incur a penalty of 50 points for each 'undertrick' by which you fail to make the contract.

9 Requirements for Bidding Game

Game is when you bid and make 100 points from a hand. Ideally, with a strong hand you bid a contract that scores 100+ points.

As clubs and diamonds score only 20 points for each trick bid, you need to bid and make **five** clubs or diamonds to score 100 points and it is reckoned you need at least 29 high card points between the partnership PLUS at least eight cards in the trump suit to achieve this.

As hearts and spades score 30 points for each trick bid, you only need to bid and make **four** hearts or spades to score 120 points and it is reckoned you need at least 25 high card points between the partnership PLUS at least eight cards in the trump suit to achieve this.

As no trumps score 40 points for the first trick and 30 points for each subsequent trick bid, you need only bid and make **three** no trumps to score 100 points and it is reckoned you need at least 25 high card points between the partnership with balanced hands overall.

It follows that it is generally easier to achieve three no trumps than any other and easier to achieve four hearts or spades than five clubs or diamonds.

The skill in bidding is to work out how many points your partnership has and which is your best suit, or perhaps no trumps if there is no strong enough suit to bid.

Summarising :-

3 No Trumps require	25 high card pts	to make 9 tricks = 100 points
	+ balanced hands	
4 hearts or spades require	25 high card pts	to make 10 tricks = 120 points
	+ at least 8 trump cards (called a fit)	
5 clubs or diamonds require	29 high card pts	to make 11 tricks = 100 points
	+ at least 8 trump cards (called a fit)	

Once you have a fit in trumps you can take into account any shortages in other suits as this makes it easier to trump an opponents card.

For each VOID you can add 5 points to your High Card Points

For each SINGLETON (one card suit) you can add 3 points to your High Card Points

For each DOUBLETON (one two suit) you can add 1 points to your High Card Points

10 The Game of Mini Bridge

If the 9 sections above make the game seem complicated that is because it is! Bridge takes a while to learn but then becomes fascinating and almost addictive. To get started, however, we try and simplify things by missing out the 'bidding' until players are more familiar with the overall game.

To do this we play **mini-bridge**. In this shortened version of the game when the cards are dealt the partnership with the majority of the high card points display their cards, face up, on the table and everyone looks to see and discuss what is the best contract to be in.

If the partnership has at least EIGHT cards in a suit between them then that suit becomes TRUMPS. If no suit has eight cards then we play in NO-TRUMPS. Initially we just try and make as many tricks as possible but later we try and predict, in advance, how many tricks we are going to make based on the AKQJ point count and any additional points for short suits.

After a few weeks we move on to using the ACOL 'bidding' system.