



ALL ABOUT BRIDGE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GREAT GAME OF BRIDGE

Bridge is one of the most enduring and popular games in the world; for over 100 years, people of all types and from all walks of life have been fascinated by the game. It is one of the most popular leisure activities in Britain, with around 300,000 people playing on a regular basis.

Marge Simpson – “Which part of the morning paper are you reading, Homer?”

Homer Simpson – “The bridge column...[laughing] ...Oh, that South – you never know what he’ll do next.”

Who plays bridge?

Certainly not Homer Simpson, but different people and ages are hooked by bridge, and it is a rapidly growing pastime with ever more individuals enjoying what the game has to offer. Simply anyone can play - you don't need to be Albert Einstein to do it!

In these days of electronic entertainment, including DVDs, iPods and the Xbox, more and more people are returning to board and card games as families see the value of learning and playing together in a more social, interactive environment.

Why play bridge?

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.” - Henry Ford

Primarily, bridge has been proven to be very good for the mind, and each game played will offer a unique set of problems and solutions. Every single deal is different; each one poses a new problem and can challenge the players until they find the best solution!

The American Jazz composer Duke Ellington famously said, “a problem is your chance to do your best”, and it won't come as a surprise to know that bridge players soon develop special skills in problem solving! It can be really frustrating for a player when they cannot work out the problem and rise to the challenge, but equally tremendous when they are successful – whether through finding a great technical play,

Many couples attend classes together, because bridge is a great inexpensive activity, and it's a wonderful way to make new friends.

Bridge is also prominent throughout the celebrity and political world: from Bill Gates to Winston Churchill, and Omar Sharif to Radiohead and Damon Albarn! Sharif is quoted as saying, “Acting is my living, but bridge is my passion.”



by outwitting their opponents, or by co-operating really well to achieve success with their partner.

Secondly, bridge is an excellent social game and can be played by everyone - players will meet new people, make new friends, and learn the game through the many bridge clubs and teachers.

Finally, it's possible to play bridge anywhere! Locally and nationally; in open, women's and mixed competitions; at a senior or a junior event.



Turn the page to find out how you can get started...

How does it work?

Bridge is a partnership game for four people deriving from the much older game of whist. It uses a standard pack of 52 cards in four suits, 13 of which are randomly dealt to each player in each deal.

The objective is for each partnership to win as many **tricks** as possible, each trick comprising one card from each of the four **hands** dealt. Tricks can be won by high cards – aces are high, followed by the other honour cards: king, queen and jack and then the 10 down to the 2 – or by **trumps**, cards of a designated suit which always outrank cards in any other suit.

Each deal consists of two distinct stages – the **bidding** and the **play** of the cards to the tricks. During the bidding the trump suit is decided and a target number of tricks is set, which must be won before any points can be scored for the side winning the **contract**.

What makes bridge different from whist is that there is a **dummy** – one of the four hands which is placed face up for all to see during the card-playing stage. This is always the hand which partners the **declarer** – the player who has won the auction and contracted to take a particular number of tricks – always more than half the total of 13 available. The other two players are the **defenders**, whose aim is to prevent the contract being made.

The bidding is conducted in a special bridge language where the words are the same all over the world, but the meanings given to the **bids** can vary enormously. Much of the skill at this stage is in making sure you and your partner 'talk the same language' – that you mean the same things by your bids. There's plenty of scope for misunderstandings, and bridge players have been known to be quite vociferous in arguing for their own interpretation!

The card play stage requires all kinds of skills – planning, counting, reasoning, working out probabilities and often a bit of cunning and deception as well. Again there's a need for teamwork – the defending side has to pull together if it is to do well.

When a player first looks at his hand, he needs to assess how good it is – how likely is it to take lots of tricks in conjunction with partner's hand?

Obviously, the honour cards are important, so we assign a value to each of them: four points for an ace, three for a king, two for a queen and one for a jack. The total points in a hand give a pretty good idea of its strength, though possession of a long suit – five or six or more cards in one suit – can also be very useful, especially if you can contrive for that suit to be trumps.

This same method of valuation is used in Minibridge as well – the simplified form of the game, which is taught as an introduction to bridge (see our separate leaflet). Minibridge has also successfully been taught in a number of Primary Schools throughout the UK.

Isn't it just a game of luck?

Absolutely not. There is some luck in any one deal, though over a period of time this should even out. But there is a form of the game – **duplicate bridge** – which eliminates the luck element.

This is because the same deals are played by different partnerships – the hands are duplicated to allow this, which sounds rather complicated to organise but actually isn't at all. So you are just trying to do better than others holding exactly the same cards – pure skill, in fact.

Some bridge facts & figures

Mrs Anthony Fly, of Little Rock, Arkansas, filed a petition for divorce, on the grounds that her husband refused to make up a four at bridge.



The odds against four players each holding all thirteen cards in a suit are 2,235,197,406,895,366,368,301,559,999 to one. Such a deal was first claimed in March 1892, and has been claimed many times since!



A number of literary heroes played bridge, including: Phileas Fogg, James Bond and Hercule Poirot.



How and where do I learn?

The English Bridge Union (EBU) has created a complete "Learn and Play" programme called: *Bridge for All* and it's advisable to look for a teacher who uses this system. But what is it?

Bridge for All is one of the most exciting developments in bridge since the game was invented. It is the ideal way to learn, providing students with colourful notes, carefully devised hands and innovative methods to develop their bridge skills combined with special clubs to let them practise.

Key elements of *Bridge for All* are:

- Nationwide network of EBU-trained teachers
- Standard English Acol bidding system
- A structured course
- Clubs for friendly games of organised bridge
- Automatic membership of the English Bridge Union with special services for new players

Why learn the *Bridge for All* way?

Bridge for All courses use professionally produced material, designed by the country's top bridge teachers.

There is a structured programme, so that the student can progress from learner through intermediate to expert. You go as far as you want. Even if your teacher changes or you move to a new area, you will carry on learning with the same system.

What is included?

Students who sign up for the first book *Beginning Bridge*, become EBU members for one year, and this includes:

- Book 1 – Beginning Bridge.
- Notes, exercises and hands for use in class and at home.
- The magazine *English Bridge*.
- A special magazine, *The Ruffian* - for students.
- A help-line for all your questions, from finding a teacher in a new area to buying software.

Who teaches *Bridge for All*?

Bridge for All recognises that teachers are the key to successful learning of the game. It is the teachers' skill and the quality of what they provide that ensures that students enjoy themselves whilst gaining new skills and a hobby for life.

Bridge for All teachers are members of the EBU Teachers Association (EBUTA), which provides all the training needed to be a successful teacher.

Most important of all, *Bridge for All* teachers recognise that learning should be fun. Students should look forward eagerly to the next class.

Finding a *Bridge for All* class

The English Bridge Union holds complete details of all accredited teachers and can put you in touch with your nearest class. If you find a teacher in your area, ask if *Bridge for All* is being used. Give Lisa a ring on 01296 317 217, and we will help.

Courses start throughout the year, although more often in September. They are available all over England and are held in bridge clubs, village halls and teachers' homes, etc., as well as at Adult Education centres.

Some more bridge facts & figures



The modern form of contract bridge was invented in the Twenties by American billionaire Harold Vanderbilt, who developed an early scoring system for the game.

The Soviet Union tried to replace the kings, queens and jacks of court cards with heroes of the revolution.



Mahatma Gandhi, not only played bridge, but used the game to illustrate the relationship between karma (fate) and dharma (the action of man).

In 1995, the International Olympic Committee admitted the World Bridge Federation as part of the Olympic movement.



Educational advantages

Bridge and Young People

It has long been believed by those who teach and are also involved in bridge that learning the game will benefit school pupils not only in their education but in later years when they have more time available and look to a leisure pursuit which will have benefits to their health. See: www.ebu.co.uk/minibrIDGE/ for details of our initiative for Primary Schools.

Bridge and Older People

It has been proven that undertaking some form of activity that tests mental agility on a daily basis helps to protect our older population from dementia and Alzheimer's. There is also a body of research which demonstrates that social interaction amongst the elderly can stave off cognitive decline.

Further reading

First stop should be to visit the English Bridge Union website: www.ebu.co.uk for information about bridge, local lessons and much more.

The EBU website has an on-line "Learn to Play Bridge" programme available for anyone to download, which is offered free.

In addition, a whole range of materials, expanding all the time, has been produced to help you learn. These include:

The *Really Easy* book series, which includes: *Really Easy Bidding*, *Really Easy Play in No Trumps*, *Really Easy Mistakes*, etc...

All these products can be bought from the Bridge Shop on 01296 397851 or 317200.

What is the EBU?

The English Bridge Union Limited (EBU) is a non-profit, membership-funded organisation committed to promoting the game of duplicate bridge. It is also a National Bridge Organisation in its own right affiliated to the European Bridge League and the World Bridge Federation. New players are the lifeblood of the game, and the EBU is keen to encourage them. The EBU:

- Organises bridge via its 39 county associations
- Runs competitions for players at beginner, local, county and national level
- Publishes magazines about bridge
- Trains teachers, tournament directors and others who work in the game
- Publishes the laws of bridge and looks after the formalities of the game
- Supports educational initiatives in schools and universities
- Maintains a Master Points scheme to give players a lifetime achievement record
- Selects the England international teams for European, World and Olympic events - bridge is a sport at which England excels
- Disseminates information via the web site. Look here for details of teachers and clubs as well as the latest news and results
- Informs the press of happenings in the world of bridge
- Supports a network of over 600 clubs throughout England
- Uses its influence to lobby for greater national recognition of the game.

To obtain more help or advice on learning bridge, contact the EBU Education Department on: 01296 317217 or email bfa@ebu.co.uk or visit www.ebu.co.uk. The EBU also runs the Really Easy Bridge website, which helps beginners develop their bridge and includes details of lessons, please see: www.reallyeasybridge.com

For more information on bridge and the EBU, please contact the Press & Communications Officer on: 01296 317 200 or Matt@ebu.co.uk.