

Notes on polling and consulting

Often, but not always, when we need to poll it is to determine the logical alternatives to an action that was taken.

Law 16B1(b) defines an LA as follows:

A logical alternative is an action that a significant proportion of the class of players in question, using the methods of the partnership, would seriously consider, and some might select.

The White Book expands on this further:

8.16.6.1 Is an action a logical alternative?

When deciding whether an action constitutes a logical alternative, the TD should decide two things.

1. The TD must decide whether a significant proportion of the player's peers, playing the same methods as the player, would seriously consider the action.

What is a 'significant proportion'? The laws do not specify a figure, but the TD should assume that it means at least one player in five.

If fewer than about one player in five of a player's peers would consider the action, then it is not a logical alternative.

Serious consideration is more than a passing thought

2. If a significant proportion would consider the action, then the TD must next decide whether some would actually choose it.

Again the laws do not specify a figure for 'some', and the TD should assume that it means more than just an isolated exception.

If no one or almost no one would choose the action having considered it, the action is not a logical alternative.

We need to be polling players of similar "class" to the player in question and we need to be providing those we poll with details of the methods used by the partnership. Note that "class" in this context does not just mean standard of player but also includes things such as how aggressive a bidder the player is, and even any misapprehension they may have been labouring under at the time.

So, if a player makes a 3♣ overcall believing it to be a natural WJO, that is what we tell any players we poll, even if their agreement is really that it is Ghestem. Similarly, do not tell players of the unauthorised information they have received (and tell them to discount it if they start to guess). What we are trying

to establish is what the logical alternatives would have been *without* the unauthorised information.

Ideally we would like to have a large number of players to poll, who belong to the right “class” and have not previously seen the hand. In practice this can be hard and we have to make do with what we can. For most of our events we don’t have lots of sitting out players or non-playing captains, so even if we get to ask a player who has finished a round early, they are likely to know the hand already.

Some players are good at putting out of mind what they already know about a hand, particularly if presented with a different scenario, but others find this harder. Occasionally you will be lucky enough to find a player who was presented at the table with precisely the situation you put to them; then you can simply ask what they did and whether they considered anything else.

It is a good idea to lead the players through the entire auction and ask them what they would do on previous rounds of the case in question. If they choose the same earlier call/s that were chosen at the table, this supports the case for the pollee being a peer of the player. If they would have chosen a different earlier call, ask if they could accept making the call that was made at the table. The answer to this might lead you to discount the person in question as not being a peer of the player.

In some cases, it can be hard to find anyone who agrees with earlier actions and then you are left with your own analysis, assisted by TDs and players with whom you consult, rather than having an objective poll result to quote.

Some TDs build up a list of appropriate players to ask by text message. This is a good idea as long as you remember to exclude anyone who is playing in the event in question and might not yet have played the hand!

One possibility for finding players to poll is to poll TDs: the advantage is that they are available, not playing and usually haven’t already seen the hand in question. However, there are a few potential pitfalls with this.

- You need to ensure that the TD is of the right class of player; in many cases this will not be hard since we have a range of abilities on the TD panel, but at very strong events (eg Premier League) the TDs are unlikely to be considered by the players to be of the appropriate standard.
- You should poll a TD exactly as you would anyone else: ask one TD at a time, showing them only one hand and not telling them what was the UI. Do not show a hand to a group of TDs (or any other group of players) when you are polling as this will influence their responses and reduce their usefulness. Once you have their poll answers you can show them the whole hand and widen the consultation.
- If a player gives you an immediate answer as to what they would do, ask them if they considered anything else.
- If they don't give you an immediate answer, ask what calls they are considering and then give them time to decide which one they would select.
- Alternatively, (and closer to the wording of the law) start by asking them which calls they consider and then ask which they would/might select. It is possible for a player to consider a call but then decide that they definitely wouldn't select it; such a call does not meet the standard of "might select".
- One of the problems with polling is that players may give a different answer to the one they might find at the table because they answer too quickly; conversely they might think about it rather more deeply because it has been presented as a problem.



We might also need to determine what is "demonstrably suggested" by the unauthorised information in a given situation. For that we do need to tell the players with whom we are consulting what the nature of the UI is, and ask them what they think it suggests. Do still show them just the one hand as sometimes we may think that what is suggested by UI does not match the hand of the player who provided it.

If you need to find out what the LAs are as well as what is suggested by the UI, you should poll first for their choice of call and then you can ask the same player afterwards what they think is suggested by the UI. Remember, the

phrase is “demonstrably suggested”, which is quite a high standard. If they think it could be either one of two quite different things that are suggested, then neither is “demonstrably suggested”.

The White Book also has some advice on this question of what is suggested:

8.16.2 What does a hesitation mean?

The L&EC considers that:

- (a) A hesitation followed by a pass would normally be willing to hear partner bid on
- (b) A hesitation followed by a minimum bid after RHO’s pass would normally have something in hand
- (c) A hesitation followed by a penalty double is normally willing to see it removed

However, in cases such as

Example	W	N	E	
	1♠	Pass	3♠	(slow)

East might be considering a number of actions, i.e. the pause could have suggested either a 2½♠ or a 3½♠ bid.

To the above list one might also add:

- (d) A hesitation followed by a takeout double suggests imperfect shape for the action and therefore may well be more willing for it to be left in.



One other situation when you might need to poll is in the case of misinformation. You should ask the players what they would do with the information that was given at the table, then ask them what they would do with the correct information. If they give the same answer to both questions, ask them whether they would be more inclined to do something else with one explanation than with the other. Having received this answer, you might also tell them the argument put forward by the player in question and ask whether they think this argument is logical or persuasive.

Note that the correct information to which they are entitled may not be that which the player intended when making the call, but may often be something much more vague like “we haven’t discussed this exact situation but in an uncontested auction this would be a transfer bid”.



Finally, you might poll players to find out whether an action seems to be an “extremely serious error” (note that this would need to be unrelated to the infraction), or “gambling” under L12C1(e). You would probably ask your pollees about this after you have already asked them what they would call/play. Robin Barker & I have what we call the “shudder test”: we have noticed that sometimes when you tell a pollee what the player at the table did, they physically recoil or ask you to confirm what you have just said! That’s quite a good indication that the action could be considered an extremely serious error or a gambling action!



When polling, do start by thinking it out for yourself before asking any players so that you will be able to question them further or challenge them if you think they have missed something or they give a surprising answer. Of course you are not trying to persuade them to your point of view, just checking that they have thought it through sufficiently.

How many should we poll?

There’s no hard and fast rule about this, but in most cases the more the better unless it seems very clear-cut. When a case does seem clear-cut and your first two or three polling results confirm your initial opinion, it may well not be necessary to continue polling further.

In WBF and EBL events where they no longer have appeals committees and therefore rely to a greater extent on the TD’s ability to poll usefully, a minimum figure of five pollees has sometimes been given, but even then I have been told by one of the main EBL reviewers that this is not as important as ensuring that the correct questions are asked.

There are no plans for us in the EBU to go down a similar route and do away with appeals committees, but we can certainly learn correct procedure from those who have, to ensure our rulings are robust and stand up to scrutiny by appeals committees.

- Take note of who you asked and what questions you asked
- Do write down the answers
- Do come prepared with as much information about the players' methods as possible, as well as any other relevant information about the case, so that you can answer any questions you might be asked by those you are polling
- Do ask follow-up questions if they are suggested by the initial answers; this can avoid you having to go back to the same person again later
- Do not be intimidated by stronger players – if they give you a surprising answer, question them further and go on to ask others what they think
- Do not allow this to become a search for as many as possible to agree with you! Be prepared to change your mind.