



by Laura Cecilia Porro

Bridge Apps

THIS article aims to review some bridge apps easily available on our mobile devices. If you go to the Apple App Store or Google Play and type in 'bridge', what comes up? Is what comes up any good? How do you know what to download? This is exactly what I did. I tried several apps and will report on the most interesting ones. The final selection encompasses a variety of types of apps: bidding and play practice, tricky play problems, count and probability practice.

This review compares and describes different apps on the basis of the following criteria:

GRAPHICS: ease of visibility (buttons' size, card design, resolution, contrast).

ACCESSIBILITY: easy to use, navigate, find things.

WHAT YOU GET: amount of free content.

CUSTOMISABILITY: convention cards, strength, speed, card face, background, colours.

TEACHING LEVEL: amount of teaching input from the app.

BRIDGE INTELLIGENCE: does it play, bid, defend well?

Each app gets a mark from 1 to 5 on each criterion, where 1 is lowest and 5 is highest, and then an **overall average** mark, followed by a comment.

MinuteBridge

Amongst all the apps I tried, the one that particularly caught my interest for its combination of originality and usefulness is MinuteBridge. This is not an app to practice one's play or bidding. It encompasses a variety of useful bridge games which make it suitable for a broad range of players:



- Simple distribution: the user can see a bridge hand, with a suit missing. The user has to calculate the number

of cards in that suit, given the rest of the hand. For instance, if the hand has 5 hearts, 3 spades and 2 clubs, then the remaining will be 3 diamonds.

- Count HCP: the user has to count the High Card Points a hand has (e.g. A532 K87 QJ5 Q93 = 12 HCP).
- Estimate KNR: the user has to re-evaluate the previous hand based on the *Kaplan and Rubens* hand evaluation system. The Kaplan and Rubens evaluation system is based on the standard method for counting points (A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1), but it introduces adjustments based on the shape and location of the points. For instance, it subtracts 0.5 when the shape is 4333 and it adds 0.5 for a jack accompanied by two higher honours. The app encompasses K&R hand evaluator, which can also be found at <http://www.jeff-goldsmith.org/cgi-bin/knr.cgi>. Details of all the K&R adjustments can be found at <http://www.jeff-goldsmith.org/knr.txt>.
- HCP range: the user is shown his own hand, dummy and an opponent's point range. The task is to estimate the fourth player's point count.
- Distribution probability: the user has to associate a hand pattern (e.g. 4-4-3-2) with its probability of occurring (e.g. 21.55%)
- Specific break: the user has to associate a suit break (e.g. 4-2 with a specific hand holding the four cards) with its probability of occurring (e.g. 24.22%).
- *A Posteriori* odds: the user has to guess how a suit is most likely to break, given the break of another suit (e.g. given that a suit breaks 5-4 in opponents' hands, how will this affect the break of a side six-card suit?).

GRAPHICS: the graphics are simple, clear and elegant. 4.5

ACCESSIBILITY: buttons are big and the font is dyslexics-friendly. MinuteBridge is currently avail-

able for Android devices only. **4.0**

WHAT YOU GET: the app and its whole content are free. **5.0**

CUSTOMISABILITY: none available. **0**

TEACHING LEVEL: the app teaches the user the probabilities of the most likely breaks and point count frequencies. **4.0**

OVERALL MARK: 3.5

I would recommend downloading this, because each exercise lasts only a few seconds: this means the app can be used flexibly, on the go (whilst waiting for a train, or on the tube). The games get progressively more difficult and this allows beginners to stop when they are out of their depth, whereas experts get a nice warm up before getting into the more complex probability problems. The app is also a repository for many useful bridge odds and it is thus great for refreshing the expert's memory (or for sorting out a post mortem debate).

iBridge plus



This is an app for playing bridge, and it allows users to declare, defend and bid. The user can partner a robot against other robots in a team game, or rubber/chicago, or online.

GRAPHICS: the graphics are clear. The user cannot visualise or review the bidding during play; the vulnerability is not very clearly displayed. **3.0**

ACCESSIBILITY: buttons are big and clear, and the font is dyslexics-friendly. Cards are big and clear, but in a non-dyslexics-friendly font. It is reasonably easy to navigate and find things. iBridge plus is currently available for Apple devices only and it works offline (apart from the online play functions). **3.5**

WHAT YOU GET: 16 free hands are included at download; users can purchase 100 hands for £0.79 or a lifetime subscription for £10.49. Users need to purchase a subscription to access the online games. **2.0**

CUSTOMISABILITY: users can choose amongst a vast selection of convention cards, signalling methods, leading styles, computer's playing strength, speed of card play, the deck language, background colours. **4.5**

TEACHING LEVEL: users can request hints and explanations during bidding. If the user rejects the hint, the app explains what the user is getting wrong, but the explanations are often brief and not fully helpful. No comment is available on the play, but if the user tries to make a play that leads to the obviously avoidable loss of one or more tricks (e.g. playing small in a suit headed by A-K-Q), a warning appears asking user to confirm the play. **2.0**

BRIDGE INTELLIGENCE: the AI is accurate both in defence and dummy play. **4.0**

OVERALL MARK: 3.16

The app is pleasant and works smoothly. However, the teaching functions are too limited and thus in my opinion not worth paying for. When it comes to online play, I prefer joining a bigger server, such as Bridge Base Online, rather than paying for joining a small community of players.

SharkBridge

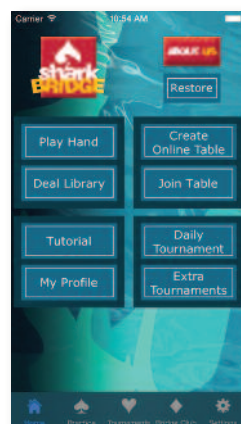
This is an app to play bridge, which allows users to declare, defend and bid. Users can also join daily tournaments online.

GRAPHICS: cards are easy to see, the vulnerability is well displayed, the bidding is visible during play, some buttons are quite small. **3.7**

ACCESSIBILITY: it is easy to use, navigate, easy to find things. SharkBridge is currently available for Apple devices only and it works offline (apart from the hand analysis function). **3.5**

WHAT YOU GET: only a limited amount of deals are playable for free. **2.0**

CUSTOMISABILITY: users can choose the card face and back design, language and colour; users can choose how cards are played (tap or touch and hold) and the playing speed; the choice of bidding systems is limited, for instance users can only choose amongst 14-16, 15-17 and the very old fashioned 16-18 NT;



the choice of signalling methods is limited too. **2.7**
TEACHING LEVEL: there is no comment on the play, but hints are available without explanations; the bidding tips tell users the number of HCPs, but the comments on the shape and the number of losers are not accurate and not useful; the tips on what to lead are helpful. **2.0**

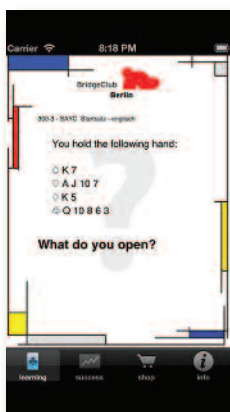
BRIDGE INTELLIGENCE: the hands analysis does not count losers well; it calculates the par score, but the remarks on the distribution are not helpful; the AI plays and defends reasonably well. **2.0**

OVERALL MARK: 2.6

The app is pleasant and works smoothly. The ability to play offline is helpful when on the tube. I would not recommend it to those who hope to learn from it.

Bridge Doddle

This is an app to improve one's bidding. It allows users to learn the bidding rules by using flashcards. A bidding problem or question appears on one side: the user has to think about the answer, check whether he was right or wrong by flipping the card and then rate himself.



GRAPHICS: the graphics are nice and the cards are easy to read and see. **4.5**

ACCESSIBILITY: the app is easy to use and navigate. The font used is dyslexics-friendly. Bridge Doddle is available for Apple, Android and Amazon devices, and works offline. **4.0**

WHAT YOU GET: one set of flashcards with the free download (SAYC). Other sets can be purchased, which contain different bidding systems (including Acol) and specific topics, arranged by skill level. **3.5**
CUSTOMISABILITY: none. **0**

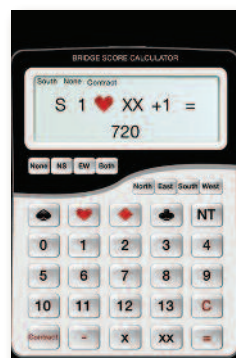
TEACHING LEVEL: the explanations at the back of the cards are detailed and accurate. **5.0**

OVERALL MARK: 3.4

I would recommend this to students who find this learning style effective. It is worth downloading the extra cards for Acol. The user can decide to have as long a practice as he wants, so it is a good pastime for livening up the commute.

Bridge Score Calculator

This is an app to calculate bridge scores according to the modern duplicate system. It allows users to insert a contract with the number of tricks taken, and it returns the score.



GRAPHICS: buttons are big and clear. **4.5**

ACCESSIBILITY: easy to use and navigate. The font is dyslexics-friendly. Bridge score calculator is currently available for Apple devices only and it works offline. **4.5**

WHAT YOU GET: the whole product is available for a free download. **5**

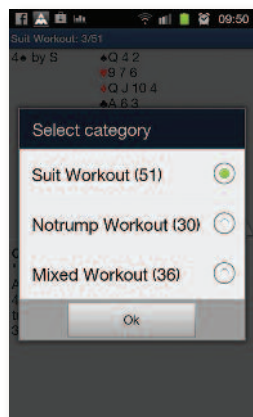
CUSTOMISABILITY: none available. **0**

OVERALL MARK: 3.5

This app is useful for those who are learning duplicate scoring and do not have bidding boxes at home. Students would find it more helpful if the calculator broke down the score calculation steps. Nonetheless, it is a useful app, which I would recommend to learners.

Bridge Quizzes

This is an app to test one's ability to solve bridge problems. It allows users to tackle a variety of play problems. The user can solve them and then check the answer. This is not a playing app.



GRAPHICS: the graphics are clear and simple. **3.5**

ACCESSIBILITY: easy to use, navigate, easy to find things. The font is dyslexics-friendly. Bridge Quizzes is currently available for Android devices only and it works offline. **4.0**
WHAT YOU GET: the app is free and users get 106 play problems. **4.0**

CUSTOMISABILITY: users can change the font size and choose between suit practice, NT practice or mixed. **2**
TEACHING LEVEL: the explanations are detailed and clear. **5.0**

OVERALL MARK: 3.7

This app is targeted at advanced players. It has very interesting playing problems and it presents a range of most expert techniques and coups. Each hand is a unit: the app is thus very flexible and nicely fills the gap in our daily lives (e.g. waiting for trains).

Bridge Baron

This is an app for playing bridge, which allows users to declare, defend and bid.

GRAPHICS: cards and buttons are clear and easy to see. The vulnerability is not visible during play: users have to review the auction to see it. **3.5**

ACCESSIBILITY: easy to use, navigate, easy to find things. The font is dyslexics-friendly. Bridge

Baron is currently available for Android and Apple devices. It works offline (except if in online mode). **4.0**
WHAT YOU GET: the app is not free. Downloading it costs £12.99 for Android and £14.99 for Apple. **2.0**
CUSTOMISABILITY: users can choose amongst a few conventions available (e.g. 3 levels of Acol and 3 levels of French Five-card Major); however, the app does not reveal what those conventions entail; users can choose the speed of closing tricks and the bidding/play speed; no graphics customisation is available. **1.5**

TEACHING LEVEL: the tips on what to lead are poor, e.g. it suggests to lead and underlead honours in RHO's bid suit even when safer alternatives are available. The bidding tips are short but clear; though sometimes they are too conservative (e.g. opponents have bid freely to a to slam, user has a void and side ace, and the app suggests not to double). No comments or hints on play. The bidding interpretation function is helpful. **2.0**

BRIDGE INTELLIGENCE: the AI is reasonably good in defence and declarer play. **4.0**

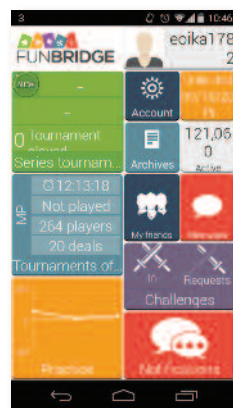
OVERALL MARK: 2.8

The app is considerably more expensive than most bridge apps on the market. Given this, the teaching input and bidding systems availability are disappointing. Playing on it is pleasant and enjoyable, but for this money I was expecting a bit more.



FunBridge

This is an app to play bridge, and it allows users to declare, defend and bid. The user partners a robot against other robots in practice games and tournaments. As the app works online, users' results are compared against other real players'. The app offers engaging competitive tournaments, where users are ranked in leagues depending on their past scores.



GRAPHICS: the graphics are simple, clear and elegant. It is easy to visualise the bidding during the play. **4.5**
ACCESSIBILITY: buttons are big and the font is dyslexics-friendly. It works only online. FunBridge is available for Android and Apple devices. **4.5**

WHAT YOU GET: downloading FunBridge is free and includes 100 deals. Users can then purchase deal packs (e.g. 100 more deals cost \$4.99, or £3.30). **3.0**
CUSTOMISABILITY: users can choose among a variety of conventions cards, i.e. SAYC, Five-card major French style, Acol, Polish Club and a custom system. For each system the user can choose a beginner, intermediate or competitive level. The app gives a description of the approach used by the AI at different levels. Users can also choose among a number of options, such as playing speed. **4.0**

TEACHING INPUT: the user can request bidding tips during the auctions. The tips offer clear and accurate explanations. At the end of each deal, the app offers a thorough analysis, including: most played contracts; how many tricks the user took compared to the rest of the field; par; comments on bidding. The app does not make suggestions on how to play the hand. **4.5**

BRIDGE INTELLIGENCE: the AI plays, defends and bids well. **4.0**

OVERALL MARK: 4.1

I would recommend downloading this because it offers both good teaching input and playing practice. Users can choose whether to tune the app into teaching mode and use it as a learning tool, or to play only. The users' leagues are fun and compelling, and make you want to go back to maintain (or improve) your rank. □