

Welcome to the EBU



Welcome to the EBU

We are pleased to welcome you as a new member of the English Bridge Union.

However long you have been playing, and at whatever level you currently play - or aspire to play - you are very welcome as a member of the EBU. We hope you not only have fun playing bridge at your club, county or, perhaps, in national events, but also get benefit and enjoyment from being part of the national organisation.

By joining the EBU you are joining a community of over 50,000 bridge players who are not only keen to play bridge, but also to support the work of the national body for bridge as we develop the game and safeguard its future.

The EBU is a 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.

The EBU was formed in 1936, and is run for the benefit of all members. Aside from a small professional staff, based in Aylesbury, it is run by a network of volunteers, working at national, county and local/club level.

The EBU is a not-for-profit organisation. The majority of its funding comes from its members - mainly through Universal Membership (see page 4), but it also receives revenue from external sources such as advertisers in its magazine, overseas entrants in its competitions, and from sales through its shop, *The Bridge Warehouse*. As it is 'not-for-profit', all profits are invested in providing activities and services for its members, counties and affiliated clubs, or saved in its reserves for future investment in major projects which will benefit bridge players in England.

The EBU works alongside a national bridge charity - English Bridge Education & Development (EBED) - to promote and develop the game in England. Although the two organisations work closely together, and share some resources, they are independent, each with a different remit, priorities and goals. More information on EBED's work is available on page 6 and in the enclosed leaflet.

How the EBU is structured

The EBU is made up of 39 constituent County Associations each with nominees holding shares. The number of Shareholders they have is based on the number of EBU members within the county. The Shareholders currently meet twice a year to assist their elected Board in determining policy in the government of the game and general EBU matters.

At its AGM in November, the Shareholders elect a Board of eight Directors and then, among their number, a Chairman and Vice-Chairman. The Board may then appoint a further two Directors. They also elect an Honorary Treasurer and two committees. The committees, accountable to the EBU Board, are the Laws and Ethics Committee - which oversees matters relating to the Laws of the game, and to any misconduct by members - and the Selection Committee - which is responsible for selecting teams for international events.

In addition, there are sub-committees of the Board such as the Editorial Board which supervises the development of the members' magazine, English Bridge, and the Tournament Panel which assists with the planning of competitions.

All these positions are voluntary, and are supported by volunteers fulfilling similar positions in all counties and the majority of clubs, plus volunteer Tournament Directors, scorers, webmasters, cake makers, and more. There are therefore thousands of people working to keep the Union running smoothly, not to mention all the members who contribute by taking part in the games which are arranged.

The EBU staff in Aylesbury

The national headquarters of the English Bridge Union is in Aylesbury. Around 20 full-time and part-time staff are employed by the EBU (and EBED) to support and advise the committees, help implement policy, and provide professional services to the members, counties and affiliated clubs.

If you need any help or advice then please get in touch with the relevant department and we would be glad to help. The current composition of the staff, and their contact details, can be seen at www.ebu.co.uk/staff-list.

Gordon Rainsford
General Manager

Universal Membership

There are a few ways to become a member of the EBU (including Direct, Junior and Student memberships), but the most common is through Universal Membership.

Those joining through the Universal Membership scheme do not pay an upfront membership fee to the EBU. Instead they join a bridge club which is affiliated to the EBU, and then make a small payment to the EBU each time they participate in a play session at an affiliated club. This is sometimes referred to as a 'pay-to-play' system. The club at which the member plays acts as a conduit for the payment of the Universal Membership Subscription, usually collecting it as part of the 'table money' paid at the start of the session, and passing it on to the EBU as part of a monthly remittance.

As long as you maintain a membership of an affiliated club you will remain a member of the EBU. There is no requirement to play a certain number of times, although there are some benefits of EBU membership which require regular participation (e.g. receipt of the members' magazine - see p. 7).

County Associations

When you join the EBU through an affiliated bridge club you become a member of the County Association to which the club is affiliated. This becomes your county of primary allegiance. Direct Members can choose to join a County Association at the time of joining the EBU.

Each county organises a range of competitions, and other activities, for its members. We encourage you to visit your county's website, and to take part in the events it organises. A list of county websites is at: www.ebu.co.uk/counties

You may have memberships of multiple County Associations, so can opt to join additional counties if you wish - this may be necessary to play in their leagues, for example. Each county can advise on the process for joining them. Should you wish to change your county of primary allegiance, please contact us.

The website and My EBU

The EBU website is at www.ebu.co.uk.

There you will find lots of information on a wide range of topics, whether related to the EBU, or bridge in general. There is too much to list it all here, so we'd encourage you to have a look and see for yourself what you can find.

Please also make sure you visit the website of your club (if it has one), and of your county of affiliation. All counties have a website, and do an excellent job of organising activities and reporting news relevant to players in the area. A list of county websites is available at www.ebu.co.uk/counties.

Please also follow the EBU (and your club/county if they use it) on social media.



www.facebook.com/EnglishBridgeUnion



[@EBUAylesbury](https://twitter.com/EBUAylesbury)

My EBU

My EBU is the members area of the EBU website. Through My EBU you can...

- ...see your results from games played in affiliated clubs, and from county and national competitions
- ...see your Master Point ranking (see p. 13)
- ...see information on your National Grading Scheme grade (see p. 15)
- ...update some of your personal details and preferences
- ...access the online versions of English Bridge magazine (see p. 7)
- ...enter an EBU competition
- ...administer your team in a league or knockout competition
- ...and more

To log in to My EBU go to www.ebu.co.uk/members. If you have not yet set up a password, or have forgotten what it is, follow the link to set/reset it. Please note that we need your email address in order to send you the reset link, so do give it to us if you have not yet provided one.

Your personal details can be updated in My EBU by using the 'Account' menu in the top right corner, and choosing 'My Details'. Please ensure that you keep us informed of any changes, such as a change of postal address or email address.

Data Protection

The EBU complies with UK data protection law, including the General Data Protection Regulation. When you joined the EBU, either through a club or directly, your application form will have given you some information about how your data is used.

Fuller details about this can be found at www.ebu.co.uk/gdpr, including:

- What data we collect
- What we use it for
- Where we get it from
- Who we share it with
- What we do to ensure its security
- What you can do to see what data we hold about you
- What you can do to limit how we use your data
- How you can ask for inaccuracies in data to be corrected
- What we do with your data if you stop being a member

English Bridge Education & Development

English Bridge Education & Development (EBED) was established in 2014 and is the national charity for bridge. It receives an annual donation from the EBU, works in conjunction with it on some projects, and shares some resources (including office space), but is a separate organisation, operating independently.

Its status as a charity enables EBED to gain some financial and reputational benefits, and it can extend its reach to all bridge players in England, not just to those within the membership of the EBU.

EBED is focussed on trying to get as many people as possible playing bridge, and with a particular emphasis on encouraging participation in bridge amongst those in full-time education.

A leaflet outlining the work EBED does is included in your welcome pack, and more specific information on its current activities can be seen on its website:

www.ebedcio.org.uk

English Bridge Magazine

English Bridge is the members' magazine of the English Bridge Union. It contains news, educational articles, quizzes, reports from competitions and international events, and other features hopefully of interest to the members.

It is published every two months. There is a printed version and also an online version which contains additional content and web links so you can easily access information which is referenced in the magazine.

Magazine Points

All new members receive the first magazine which is published after they join.

Thereafter the printed copies are only distributed to those members with sufficient Magazine Points. To receive a printed copy you must have two Magazine Points. A Magazine Point is credited to your account for every session you play at an affiliated club or in an EBU competition, up to a maximum of 12. Two points are then deducted every time a magazine is published.

Therefore in order to receive every issue of the magazine in the year you must play on average once a month. This could be once each month, or could be twelve times in the first month and not at all for the rest of the year. This policy ensures printed magazines are only distributed to those who make an ongoing financial contribution through paying a Universal Membership Subscription.

Direct Members

An exception to the above is when joining as a Direct Member. Direct Members will receive a printed magazine for as long as they remain a Direct Member.

Multicopy Households

From the April 2018 issue it will be our policy to only dispatch one printed copy per household. This aims to reduce costs and resources by encouraging you to share a copy with those with whom you live. We appreciate, however, that for some people this may not be practical, so if you are both want to receive one, then let us know - email postmaster@ebu.co.uk - or tick the box on My EBU. Assuming you are both eligible then you will both be sent one.

The online magazine

The magazine is available online and can be read by all members, regardless of whether they have sufficient Magazine Points to receive a printed copy.

The magazine is accessed through My EBU (see p. 5) - look to the top right of the screen and you will see a menu where you can select from recent issues.

The magazine archive

The six most recent issues are only available to members through My EBU. Older issues are available to everyone at www.ebu.co.uk/englishbridge. This includes not only all copies of English Bridge from 1986 onwards, but also the EBU's previous publications which date back to 1946.

Some articles from previous issues are reproduced at the end of this booklet.

Opting out of the magazine

If you do not read the magazine, or are happy to read it online, then please opt out of receiving a printed copy. It helps us to save money and paper resources if we do not have to print and post a copy which you don't read. To opt out please email postmaster@ebu.co.uk or change your setting on My EBU.

Article index

We have an online index of all 'educational' articles which have appeared in English Bridge since 2007. Whether you are a new player, or are near the top of the game, we hope that there is an article which you will find interesting or useful. The index can be found at www.ebu.co.uk/article-index.

Members Diary

Each year a diary is sent with the August magazine to all members who have enough Magazine Points to receive that issue. It covers eighteen months to include both the bridge season which runs from September to September, and the calendar year, and includes information on the EBU, contact details for staff and officials, and details of forthcoming events and competitions.

If you do not want a diary to be sent to you, please opt out of receiving one by emailing postmaster@ebu.co.uk or by change your setting on My EBU.

Best Behaviour at Bridge

We strongly believe that everyone should be welcome at the bridge table, and that a game of bridge should be enjoyable for everyone involved.

Whilst we are sure that all players naturally behave appropriately, we know that there are times when concentration and pressure can take their toll. *Best Behaviour at Bridge* is the EBU's 'Code of Conduct', and we expect all bridge players follow to it, even if nerves become frayed or emotions start to run high. You can see it in full at www.ebu.co.uk/bbatb or in the EBU Members' Diary.

If you feel a fellow player is falling short of these standards, please bring it to the attention of a Tournament Director immediately - it is much harder to address the matter if you only raise it at a later time.

Please remember to be polite at all times. You should not criticise your opponents or publicly admonish your partner. You should never gloat over good results, dispute a director's ruling, or make any personal and disparaging remarks. An observation about an opponent's play may have good intentions, but may not be welcome - only share your opinions if you are asked for them.

Other matters of etiquette

When sitting North

Although not all of these things are required by the Laws of Bridge, it is traditionally expected of those sitting North that they ensure:

- The correct boards are played each round, that they are placed in the correct direction on the table, and that each player removes his/her cards.
- The result is entered in to the scoring device, or on to the traveller, by North or South, and is approved by the opponents.
- The cards are returned to the board correctly by each player.
- The boards are passed to the correct table (or put in the correct place for a 'relay') at the end of the round.

If you are not comfortable fulfilling these tasks, either switch with your partner and sit South, or ask the TD if you and your partner can be an East-West pair.

When scoring

When scoring at the end of each hand, you should ensure that:

- Everyone at the table has a chance to see the scores from other tables.
- The scores are discussed quietly, so you are not overheard by those at other tables - don't spoil the enjoyment of those at the next table by saying loudly "it looks like there's 12 top tricks in hearts"!
- The scoring is completed promptly. Whilst a 'postmortem' can be enjoyable, please save it until the end of the round, otherwise you may risk finishing late, delaying the movement, and spoiling the game for others.

Making a claim

Once a certain stage is reached in the play of a hand, it is common that everything has been revealed about it – finesses have been won or lost, suits have been established, trumps drawn - and so there is nothing more to be discovered by continuing play further. It is common in those circumstances for a player to claim, by stating a number of tricks and a line of play. This is generally a good thing as it saves time for the next hand, but only if the claimer has explained the claim clearly and correctly.

If your opponent makes a claim and you think it is incorrect, or you are not sure, the best thing is to politely call the tournament director to verify it. If the claim is correct the TD can explain it to you and if it is not correct, the proper result will be awarded to you. Any doubtful points will be resolved in your favour.

Although you are allowed to continue play after a claim if the non-claiming side ask and all four players agree to it, this is not generally advisable as the claimer may well recover from a poor claim based on your objection to it, so it is usually better to ask the TD to verify the claim.

When you make a claim yourself, put your hand face-up on the table, explain your line of play and the reason for your claim clearly and completely, and allow your opponents to examine it until they understand it properly. Claims save time for everyone – but only if done properly!

Announcing and alerting

Depending on where you have previously played bridge, you may be familiar with alerting or announcing bids.

Bids are generally 'alerted' when you need to make your opponents aware that the bid is not natural or has a meaning that may be unexpected.

Some bids are "announced" instead of being alerted: the partner of the caller will make a brief statement of the meaning of the call. These include: opening NT bids – eg "12-14"; Stayman responses to 1NT or 2NT opening bids; transfers to major suits in response to opening NT bids – say "hearts" or "spades" to show which suit has been indicated; the strength of natural opening two bids.

You can find out more about alerting and announcing in the Blue Book at www.ebu.co.uk/documents/laws-and-ethics/blue-book/blue-book.pdf and in the EBU diary.

Note that while most affiliated clubs follow these regulations, they are not required to and it would be perfectly in order, for example, for a club not to have announcements. If you are unsure ask a TD at your club.

The Tournament Director is your friend

Players, when faced with an irregularity like a lead out of turn or a revoke, often say "what should we do?" The answer is almost always "call the TD"!

Players are not expected to know the rulings that apply for infractions – that's one of the roles of the Tournament Director – and things generally get sorted more quickly, correctly and amicably if it's the TD who makes the ruling than if one of the players, no matter how experienced, tries to do it.

Don't think of it as calling the TD "on" someone; just think of it as asking the TD to help the table sort out the problem that has arisen. If the ruling does involve any sort of adjustment that is not in your favour, don't take it personally and do accept it graciously. Remember, bridge is a game, with rules, and inevitable consequences if the rules are breached, no matter how unintentionally.

Competitions & Simultaneous Pairs

The EBU has a large programme of competitions, as do most of the Counties, including some which are aimed at less experienced players. So even if you are new to the game there are likely to be events offering an alternative to your usual club night. EBU events can be found via www.ebu.co.uk/competitions - please check your county website for details of their competitions.

Simultaneous Pairs

The EBU runs Simultaneous (Sim) Pairs competitions during the year, and there are additional events run by counties, or for charity. In a Sim Pairs competition you play at your club, against your normal opponents, but the scores are then compared across the country, meaning you are playing in a large, nationwide/county-wide competition, without leaving your club.

An additional perk of playing in a Sim Pairs is that most come with a hand analysis and commentary, written by a leading player. You can therefore see what you could, or should, have done differently, so it's an extra learning opportunity. The EBU website has the commentaries from all EBU Sims, plus an analysis tool allowing you to replay each hand to see what you the best line of play might be.

Sim Pairs are great events to play in - keep an eye out for one at a club near you.

Hand records

Hand records are available at most competitions, as part of Sim Pairs events, and at quite a few club sessions.

They usually include a grid showing the maximum contract that could be made in each suit. Whilst this can be interesting, do take them with a pinch of salt. They are based on perfect play by all players with a transparent pack of cards - e.g. declarer will know when to finesse or play for the drop. Just because you *could* make a contract, doesn't mean you *should*, or that everyone else will.

In instances where it says East can make 3♣ but West only 2♣, the difference will be due to the opening lead - e.g. it allows a finesse through dummy.

System cards

A system card - often referred to as a 'convention card' - is a sheet outlining to your opponents what systems, conventions and agreements, you play with your partner. This helps to ensure that your opponents understand what your bids or carding methods mean - you are not allowed any 'secret methods'.

In EBU competitions, and in most competitive events run by clubs and counties, each member of the pair should have a completed system card. They may not be required at some club sessions.

Blank system cards, and some 'pre-completed' with common agreements, can be downloaded at www.ebu.co.uk/laws-and-ethics/system-cards.

Master Points

The Master Point Scheme is run by the English Union and is a method by which you can track your lifetime achievement in bridge.

Master Points are awarded for finishing in the top places (usually the top third) in competitions run by the EBU, counties and affiliated clubs, or in external competitions which have been licensed by the EBU. The points are awarded on a scale which varies according to the size and status of the competition.

Master Points are credited to your account automatically – you do not need to do anything (though for some events it may take a while to process them).

Local (Black), Blue, Green and Gold Points

Local points (sometimes known as 'black points') are typically awarded in club competitions and competitions at a local level. Blue points are awarded in some club and County competitions, some minor national competitions, and in the EBU's Simultaneous Pairs events (see p. 12). Green points are awarded in most national events, and select county competitions.

Gold Points are not part of the main Master Point scheme. They are a separate scheme, used to recognise the current 'form' of elite players.

Rankings

There are over a dozen different rankings which you can achieve, from those achieved by most beginners, through to those achieved by only a small percentage of members in their lifetime.

A list of rankings can be seen at www.ebu.co.uk/masterpoints/ranks.

To reach some rankings you must earn green points, thereby rewarding those who take part in higher level competitions. 3 blue points = 1 green point, though only 150 blue points can be 'converted' when your ranking is calculated.

Your ranking is calculated automatically, and can be seen on My EBU.

Promotions

All promotions (other than for those members who have chosen not to be listed) are on our website, with a new list posted every month. It is available at www.ebu.co.uk/masterpoint-promotions.

Promotion to one of four landmark ranks is recognised by a listing in English Bridge magazine, and the receipt of a certificate and pen. Those achieving the rank of Master receive free entry to the annual Masters Pairs event - www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/masters-pairs.

If you do not wish to appear on any promotions list, you can change the setting on your preferences in My EBU.

Annual competition

There is an annual Master Point competition, with prizes for winners in various categories and covering all ranks. For details see www.ebu.co.uk/masterpoints.

Overseas Master Points records

Master Points from the following countries can be credited to your EBU Master Point ranking: Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Australia. If you have a Master Point record in these countries which you wish to transfer to your EBU record, please write to masterpoints@ebu.co.uk. We do not accept Master Points from any other countries, as typically systems are not comparable to the EBU's.

National Grading Scheme

The National Grading Scheme (NGS) aims to give a measure of an individual's current level of performance when playing duplicate bridge.

Unlike the Master Point Scheme, which reflects lifetime achievement, the NGS reflects an individual's current standard of play, and can go down as well as up.

Your grade is calculated automatically based on the results submitted to the EBU, and is updated each time you play. In simple terms, your current grade is the scheme's estimate of the average percentage score you would achieve if partnering a player with the same current grade in a field of average strength.

Grades are divided into 13 bands, ranging from 'Two' through to 'Ace'. The Ace category is then subdivided, with only very few players reaching Ace of Spades.

At first you will not have a grade as you have not played enough boards for one to be calculated. Your grade is not published, and your partner's NGS will not be affected, until you have played 150 boards. Once you have played 150 boards, but less than 1000, your grade is considered to be 'evolving'. Once you have played 1000 boards you have a 'mature' grade.

You can see your grade, how recent results have affected it, and the grade of your different partners and partnerships, on My EBU. Grades are displayed publicly at www.ebu.co.uk/ngs. If you wish to hide your grade so it is not made public, you can change the setting on your preferences in My EBU - your grade will still be calculated, and you will still be able to see it in My EBU.

What affects your grade?

Your grade is affected only by how well you (and your partner) perform relative to expectations. It doesn't matter if you play with an international or a beginner, and in a club game or a national competition. All that matters is whether you got a better score than the scheme thinks you should have done, given who you were playing with and who you were playing against.

There are some myths that the NGS doesn't work in certain scenarios - they are dispelled at: www.ebu.co.uk/documents/miscellaneous/ngs/clark-article.pdf.

The following articles are from content previously published in English Bridge magazine*. We hope they are of interest to most new members.

There are more articles by these, and other, authors in the magazines in the online archive - www.ebu.co.uk/englishbridge - and you can look for specific topics and authors in the article index - www.ebu.co.uk/article-index.

* - Minor amendments may have been made to these articles to aid formatting.

Avoiding over-ruffs - by Paul Bowyer

There are various pitfalls in trump contracts that can trap the unwary. Perhaps one of the most common is the 'tight fist' syndrome when ruffing. We'll start with an easy example where brilliance in bidding may be eclipsed by a lapse in card-play. As East you do well to reach a grand slam in spades and South leads the two of diamonds.

East plays in 7♠; South leads ♦2			
♠ 863		♠ AKQJ107	
♥ 8		♥ A52	
♦ AJ8764		♦ 3	
♣ AKQ		♣ 732	

Count – Plan – Execute. There are eleven top tricks so, as declarer, you realise that you have to ruff the two heart losers on the table. So, win the ace of diamonds, play off the ace of hearts, ruff a heart, cross to hand with a trump, ruff a heart. We are down to:

♠ -		♠ AKQJ7	
♥ -		♥ -	
♦ J8764		♦ -	
♣ AKQ		♣ 732	

If you now ruff a diamond to hand with the seven of spades South overruffs with the nine! One down. Is it unlucky that the diamonds break 5–1 and that South has the nine of spades? No, it's just bad play. You can afford to ruff that diamond with a high trump

(the ace of spades for choice – if you've got it, flaunt it) and then draw trumps. Why ruff low? The only reason is that you are too tight-fisted to 'waste' a top trump on the menial task of ruffing a low card. From the days of whist comes an appropriate aphorism: 'Don't send a boy on a man's errand.'

The same principle of ruffing high when you can afford to do so applies to ruffs in the dummy:

East plays in 4♠; South leads ♣A			
♠ 982		♠ AKQJ106	
♥ A5		♥ K732	
♦ J8632		♦ -	
♣ 975		♣ J84	

The defenders lead three rounds of clubs and try to cash the ace of diamonds, ruffed by East. Now, plan the play from here. Count – Plan – Execute. The formula never varies.

You can see that you can ruff two heart losers in the dummy, so should play off the top hearts and lead another. Now, it is sheer carelessness to ruff the third heart with the two of spades. If North is also out of hearts he will overruff and the deal will be transferred to the archives of the Guinness Book of Butchered Contracts.

The hand is secure if declarer ruffs his two hearts with the eight and nine of spades as North will not be able to overruff.

This deal follows similar lines but is more subtle (we'll show all the hands for a change). West leads the king of spades against your contract of 4♥. How should you play?

South plays in 4♥; West leads ♠K

♠ 874		♠ 10632
♥ A73		♥ 654
♦ Q9853		♦ AJ104
♣ 106		♣ Q3
♠ KQJ9	♠ N	
♥ 82	W	E
♦ K6		S
♣ J9842		
	♠ A5	
	♥ KQJ109	
	♦ 72	
	♣ AK75	

As declarer you spot three obvious losers in spades and diamonds, so you should be able to see that you have to ruff your losing clubs in the dummy.

Accordingly, after winning the spade lead with the ace of spades, you should cash the top clubs and ruff one in the dummy – but with which trump? As you are intending to ruff two clubs, you should ruff the first low club with the seven of hearts and the second with the ace of hearts. If you carelessly ruff the third round of clubs with the three of hearts, you will be overruffed with the lowly heart four and suffer an embarrassing defeat.

In detail, then, win the ace of spades, play off the ace and king of clubs, ruff a club with the seven of hearts, play the three of hearts to hand, ruff the last club with the ace of hearts. That's six tricks and you have four top trumps to come.

This principle can be extended to more difficult hands:

East plays in 4♥; South leads ♦A

♠ A8653		♠ 4
♥ K10		♥ AQ9876
♦ 8743		♦ J6
♣ K6		♣ A753
	♠ N	
	W	E
		S

Now, to be certain of making 4♥ you must ruff the two club losers in the dummy. So, king of clubs, ace of clubs, ruff a club . . . with what?

If you try the ten of hearts, then North just might be able to over-ruff with the jack of hearts and return a trump, leaving you with a club loser.

The defence has slipped badly by not leading trumps, you mustn't give them another chance. To be completely secure you must ruff the third round of clubs with the king of hearts, return to hand by cashing the ace of spades and ruffing a spade (actually, you ought to ruff that high as well) and ruff the last club with the ten of hearts.

The defenders will make the jack of hearts at some time at their convenience but the power of your trump intermediates means that you can lose no other trick. Your losers are confined to two diamonds and a trump.

Did you know...?

The number of possible deals from a standard deck of cards is 53,644,737,765,488,792,839,237,440,000 (or 53 octillion)

The odds of seeing the same deal twice make the chances of winning the lottery look excellent.

Forcing or not? - by Michael Byrne

One of the problems that the improving player struggles with is when a bid can be passed (non-forcing) and when it can't be passed (forcing). In general, 'new' suits are forcing and 'old' suits (support, or preference) are limit bids showing the strength of the hand. Also, there are some situations where you mustn't pass, otherwise a game or slam will be missed.

This is a situation I see people get wrong quite often:

♠ KJ87
♥ Q32
♦ 7654
♣ J7

Partner opens 1♣ and you respond 1♠ (ignoring the poor diamond suit); partner rebids 2♥; what now?

You cannot pass. Partner's bid is a reverse bid, showing 16+ points, and is forcing for one round. He could have 21 points and you might even have a slam on (though that is very unlikely!). The right bid is to give preference to 3♣, following the idea of putting partner back to the 5-2 fit rather than leaving him in the 4-3 fit. Partner will pass 3♣ with a minimum reverse (16-17) and press on to game with a bit more.

What about a different situation, where people want to bid on when they should be passing?

♠ 72
♥ K9864
♦ QJ984
♣ 5

Partner opens 1♣ and re-bids 2♣ over your response of 1♥; what do you do?

As hard as it seems, the only sensible call is to pass. It may not be pretty, and 2♣ might go down, but quite simply, if you carry on bidding, you will get too high. Changing the suit to 2♦ is forcing for one round, and you will only get out alive

if partner supports your diamonds. In all probability partner will rebid clubs and you will have 'rescued' partner from 2♣ to 3♣!

You should reserve the change of suit for hands where game is on the radar, such as this one:

♠ A2
♥ KQ984
♦ QJ983
♣ 8

What about when partner produces more than just a feeble re-bid of his own suit at the two level?

Partner opens 1♣ and jumps to 3♣ over your response of 1♥; your choice?

♠ K3
♥ AJ986
♦ KJ764
♣ J

You have a great hand, and your jack of clubs will be just what partner needs to fill in the gap in his suit. Should you leap to 4NT, or perhaps to 4♦?

As usual, there is no need: although partner's 3♣ bid is non-forcing (showing a good 15 to a poor 18), any continuation is game forcing; simply bid 3♦ and await developments. At this stage you have no idea what you want as trumps: it could be diamonds, hearts or clubs (or even no trumps!) so tread gently and see where the tide takes you.

Are there any times when a new suit might be non-forcing? There are a few cases, mostly when the opener has had a choice of whether to rebid two or three of a suit, and has chosen to rebid two.

Partner opens 1♥ and rebids 2♦ over your 1NT response; what is your call?

♠ K83
♥ 8
♦ Q43
♣ J98654

This time a hasty pass is in order. Partner could have jumped to 3♦ if he had enough for game facing the 6 points you have shown by responding, and he has chosen not to do so. However lowly a contract of 2♦ is, it's always better to stop low and take the points in the bank rather than aim high and miss.

What about bids in no-trumps? Almost exclusively these are non-forcing limit bids, which mean you can pass them if you don't think game will make. Let's see one in action:

♠ KJ65
♥ Q10874
♦ A2
♣ Q4

This time you are the opener and your 1♥ opening is greeted by a 1NT response; what now?

It is absolutely crystal clear to pass. Partner has denied a four-card spade suit and won't have four-card support for hearts or three-card support and a ruffing value as he could have raised. Partner's range is 6-9, so there is no chance of game. Believe it or not, I have seen quite sensible players rebid 2♥ on a hand like this.

Let's review a few points about forcing and non-forcing auctions:

Don't:

- Pass when partner makes a reverse bid, as it is forcing for one round.
- Carry on bidding when there is no chance of game and the hand is a horrible misfit.
- Jump the bidding when you are in a forcing auction and you haven't worked out what will be trumps; just keep the bidding low and consult partner.

Do:

- Pass when there is no chance of game and partner could have shown a strong hand but has chosen not to.
- Bid the full value of your hand; remember a raise of partner's suit is a non-forcing limit bid.

Club bidding quiz - by Julian Pottage

In each of the following bidding problems you are West. What should you bid with each hand on the given auction at pairs, Love All?

The answers are on page 21.

♠ J1043 ♥ K8653 ♦ J3 ♣ 96	Hand 1			
	W	N	E	S
			1NT	Pass
	?			

♠ K10 ♥ A9853 ♦ Q10987 ♣ J	Hand 2			
	W	N	E	S
			1♣	1♦
	?			

♠ A852 ♥ A1076 ♦ K ♣ K874	Hand 3			
	W	N	E	S
	1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
	?			

♠ J1075 ♥ K108 ♦ KJ8 ♣ AK6	Hand 4			
	W	N	E	S
	1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
	?			

♠ 653 ♥ A62 ♦ AKQ103 ♣ K6	Hand 5			
	W	N	E	S
	1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
	?			

♠ AQ643 ♥ 63 ♦ AJ ♣ Q1082	Hand 6			
	W	N	E	S
	1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
	2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
?				

A suit-preference signal - by Neil Rosen

Consider this problem. After the auction...

W	N	E	S
	1♦	1♣	2♥
Pass	4♥	All pass	

...as West you decide to start proceedings by leading your singleton diamond instead of partner's suit and this is what you see:

	♠ K84
	♥ AQ75
	♦ KQJ86
	♣ 7
♠ 963	
♥ 862	
♦ 5	
♣ Q86432	

So, you have led your diamond, and lo and behold partner produces the ace and returns one for you to ruff. Can you do even better?

Yes, remembering the bidding, you now play a spade to partner's ace and he gives you a second diamond ruff to defeat the contract by one trick. But wait a minute...not so fast... the actual deal was as follows:

	♠ K84	
	♥ AQ75	
	♦ KQJ86	
	♣ 7	
♠ 963		♠ QJ1072
♥ 862		♥ 3
♦ 5		♦ A973
♣ Q86432		♣ A109
	♠ A5	
	♥ KJ1094	
	♦ 1042	
	♣ KJ5	

So if you did indeed return a spade, declarer would win, draw trumps and claim his 4♥

contract. If instead you had played a club, partner could have won and given you a second diamond ruff to defeat the contract.

So how do you determine whether to play a spade or a club back? The answer lies with suit-preference signals.

The principle here is that in obvious ruffing situations [it should be obvious here as you haven't led partner's suit and chose to lead the first suit bid by the opponents], the size of the card which partner returns for you to ruff indicates the suit he would like you to return after you win the trick.

If partner returns a low diamond, he is asking you to return the lower remaining suit excluding the trump suit and the led suit (clubs not spades, in our example hand).

If he returns a high diamond, he is asking for the higher remaining suit (spades not clubs).

So when partner gives you your diamond ruff you should watch eagle-eyed since by returning the ♦3 on this occasion he will be asking you to return a club and not a spade as would have been suggested by the bidding (for a spade he would have returned ♦9).

Sometimes partner doesn't have a side-entry and therefore has no desire to signal for one suit or another. In such situations they should play back a 'middle' card suggesting no preference. Needless to say, sometimes partner may have a limited choice, so I recommend that a high card is always a signal whereas a low card might be a signal for the lower suit or might simply be a neutral message.

A look at your hand and dummy may make things clearer, however. If you can see 987 between the two hands then partner's six is the biggest they have, so is likely a signal.

Club bidding quiz - by Julian Pottage

Answers to the problems on page 19

♠ J1043 ♥ K8653 ♦ J3 ♣ 96	Hand 1			
	W	N	E	S
			1NT	Pass
	?			

2♣. By using Stayman, you give yourself two possible chances of finding a fit, in spades and hearts. If partner bids 2♦, denying a four card major, you will rebid 2♥.

♠ K10 ♥ A9853 ♦ Q10987 ♣ J	Hand 2			
	W	N	E	S
			1♣	1♦
	?			

1♥. Playing for a penalty at the one level rarely proves rewarding. Whether you are playing penalty or negative doubles, it is better to go after your own best contract when you have this sort of shape. You may get a chance to defend at a higher level; indeed that is what happened at the table.

♠ A852 ♥ A1076 ♦ K ♣ K874	Hand 3			
	W	N	E	S
	1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
	?			

1♥. You should make the most economical rebid because this maximises your chance of a fit. Although you have stoppers in the unbid suits, a 1NT rebid would be wrong on two counts: (i) you are a point light and (ii) your singleton suggests that a suit contract will play better if a fit is present.

♠ J1075 ♥ K108 ♦ KJ8 ♣ AK6	Hand 4			
	W	N	E	S
				1♣
	1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
	?			

Pass. You have shown a balanced 15-17 HCPs or maybe 15-18. Your partner's raise to 2NT invites you to bid 3NT if you are at the top of the range. Since you have a minimum for your overcall, you should decline the invitation.

♠ 653 ♥ A62 ♦ AKQ103 ♣ K6	Hand 5			
	W	N	E	S
	1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
	?			

1NT. The rebid shows a balanced hand with 15-17 points (15-16 for some). This describes your hand's shape and strength. While you would prefer to have a spade stopper, nothing else fits the bill. A jump to 3♦ would overstate the diamonds as well as making it hard to find a 5-3 heart fit. A raise to 2♥ would be an underbid.

♠ AQ643 ♥ 63 ♦ AJ ♣ Q1082	Hand 6			
	W	N	E	S
	1♣	Pass	1NT	Pass
	2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
	?			

Pass. You do not have to bid on. By bidding 1NT first rather than starting with 2♥, partner has shown a hand too weak for an initial 2♥ response. Having already shown five spades and four clubs, you have nothing to add. Bidding higher is likely to result in a minus score.

Mistakes at trick one - by David Bakhshi

Trick one is often the most important trick. Let's look at common mistakes declarer can make when playing from dummy.

The opening lead is an honour card Common mistake: 'Always cover an honour with an honour'

When the opening lead is a high card, there is no problem if dummy cannot beat it. However, if dummy has a higher card, declarer must decide whether it should be played. A simple mistake to fix is the idea 'always cover an honour with an honour'. This is often useful when defending but may be applied erroneously by a declarer. As declarer, you can assess whether there is any advantage to covering the opening lead. Consider this example:

East plays in 4♥; South leads ♠Q

♠ K82		♠ 765
-------	--	-------

An assumption can be made that South does not hold ♠A. Therefore there is no advantage to covering with ♠K. North will win with ♠A, and none of declarer's remaining cards will be promoted. Declarer should instead play low from dummy. If North has the singleton ♠A, ♠K will be promoted. However, it is more likely that the ♠Q will win the first trick, after which South will likely continue spades. Whether he plays a low spade, or a second high spade, dummy should again play low. Again, there is no advantage in playing the ♠K, while playing low might promote the ♠K if North has to play ♠A at trick two.

But just because you shouldn't always do it, doesn't mean you should never do it

Although you should not automatically cover an honour at trick one, there are situations where it can be a mistake not to beat the opening leader's card. This can seem confusing

but knowing why a play should be made is often key to making right decisions. Consider this example (only relevant suits shown):

East plays in 4♥; South leads ♠J

♠ Q74		♠ 9
♣ K54		♣ 986

When it comes to winning tricks in a suit, declarer's play to the first trick may be irrelevant. Dummy may, however, have another suit which will be vulnerable if attacked by South, but not by North. Here, if South wins trick one with ♠J and switches to clubs, declarer may lose three tricks in that suit if North has ♣A. If North is forced to win trick one, however, he cannot attack clubs without allowing ♣K to win a trick. Covering the honour which is led is therefore correct.

The opening lead is a low card Common mistake: 'Second player always plays low'

This strategy is intended for defenders. When declarer leads a low card, the second player tends to play low, saving his high cards to beat a high card. However, it is often misapplied when playing as declarer. Seeing his partnership's combined assets allows declarer to decide if it is a good idea to play high or low from the dummy (second player).

East plays in 3NT; South leads ♦4

♦ K7		♦ 965
------	--	-------

Though South would tend not to lead away from ♦A against a suit contract, he could have done so against no-trumps. Playing low from the dummy gives no theoretical chance of winning a trick with the ♦K, while playing ♦K at trick one gives at least a 50% chance of winning that trick.



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