

Ethics of bridge

Bridge Etiquette

Compiled by John Aquino for BAWA

This is an article that has been published on the BAWA website. It does not purport to be a technical interpretation of the Laws of Bridge. Rather it is a generalist article on good practice and etiquette at the bridge table.

Much of the popularity of contract bridge is attributed to the high standard of etiquette which is observed by players. No other modern game leans so heavily on the expectation that participants conduct themselves in a highly civilised manner. The Laws of Contract Bridge (Law 74) deal with the whole question of proper behaviour under the heading "Proprieties". BAWA is keen to promote high standards of bridge etiquette by WA players. The rules of etiquette when playing bridge are based on good common sense. The following summarises the principal areas of etiquette that players are expected to observe at the bridge table.

Courtesy

This is probably the Golden Rule - always be courteous at the bridge table. This applies to how one relates to partner, the opponents and the Director when s/he is called. Carefully avoid any remark or action that might cause embarrassment to any other player - or which might interfere with his/her enjoyment of the game. It is always good practice to greet your new opponents at the table. The Director should always be called to the table in a courteous manner. Using the word 'please' assists in this courtesy. Being mindful of the 'tone' in one's voice when summoning the Director underscores recognition that this official has an onerous task in providing a valued service to bridge players. At the end of a round it is courteous to thank your opponents before moving on to the next table.

Conversation at the Table

Once the bidding has commenced general conversation is not encouraged at the table. Bridge is a competitive game and each player needs to respect the

rights of other players. Before the first board begins it is certainly permissible to exchange pleasantries with partner and the opponents.

Table Manners

The following represents good practice at the bridge table:

- cards should not be taken out of the board before all players are at the table;
- before you look at your cards count your hand and ensure that you have exactly thirteen cards;
- the board should be left on the table during the bidding and play of the hand so everyone can see the vulnerability;
- at the end of a hand ensure that you do not mix up your cards until the result is agreed with the opponents;
- during play you are not allowed, without permission, to touch or handle your opponent's cards. If necessary ask your opponent to show you a particular card;
- when you are making the initial lead or playing to the first trick, play your card before writing down your contract or entering details in Bridgемate. It saves time and is a courtesy to the other three people at the table;
- do not ask for information unless it is your turn to call or play;
- dummy or either Defender may draw attention to a card pointed incorrectly; the right expires when a lead is made to the following trick;
- North player is responsible for the boards and for ensuring the boards are not 'fouled' before they are sent to the next table.

Systems cards and full disclosure

At the start of a round explain the main features of your system (e.g. we play Acol with Benjamin twos). All players should have a completed systems card at the table. This is important as it ensures you disclose your conventions and system agreements to your opponents. Your opponents are entitled to know every system agreement you and your partner have. Having a properly completed systems card at the table also pre-empts unnecessary discussion at the table and saves time. It also protects players from any implication that

partnership has secret understandings and that their system has not been fully disclosed to their opponents.

A player may not refer to his / her systems card during the auction or play. At tournaments it is mandatory that your systems card should match the card presented by one's partner.

Bidding Boxes

Many duplicate sessions these days use bidding boxes. Bidding boxes have been introduced in the game to reduce the possibility of information being communicated between partners by voice intonation or other mannerisms such as eye contact or the way a bid is written on a bidding slip. When using a bidding box try to decide what your bid is going to be before reaching for or touching cards in the bidding box. An extreme example of this impropriety is when you, say, touch a 2♥card and then pull out a pass card.

When using the bidding box the correct protocol is for the bids to be left on the table until the opening lead is made. This is to ensure the defenders are able to review the auction and to ask any questions prior to the commencement of play. The bids may then be returned to the box.

Asking for explanations and not bidding

Do not ask what a bid means unless you are intending to bid. Asking for explanation without bidding could in certain circumstances be construed as passing unauthorised information to one's partner. If one doesn't intend to bid, questions of the opponents should be made after the auction has concluded.

The Opening Lead

The opening lead should be made face down until it is accepted by partner. This prevents irregularities such as leading when it is not your turn. It also enables your partner to ask any questions about the auction or alerts that have been made.

On Play Generally

As declarer, do not call for a card in dummy until LHO has played. Do not detach a card from your hand before it is your turn to play. Any player has the right to inspect a quitted trick (trick turned face over) until either s/he or partner has played to a subsequent trick. So get into the habit of not quitting a trick until you are ready to play to the next trick.

Tempo/Hesitations

Acquire the habit of playing 'smoothly' and in tempo. Avoid mannerisms, meaningful eye contact, sighs, grimaces and using extra words such as "I guess I need to pass".

Avoid hesitations by being consistent and deliberate in your bidding. A hesitation followed by a pass places an extra burden on partner to justify continuing with the bidding as this may have communicated information to one's partner.

If you have a difficult decision you have a right to think but partner cannot take advantage of the knowledge that you had a problem. So if your partner takes time to bid / bids out of tempo and then passes, you should pass too unless that action would be totally illogical considering your hand.

In play avoid 'snapping' the card or playing with undue emphasis as it may reveal special interest to either partner or opponent.

Dummy Play

The following represents good practice when one is the dummy:

- Dummy should lay out the cards before writing down details or entering the contract in the Bridgемate to ensure the other players at the table are not kept waiting;
- Dummy may not ask for a review of the auction;
- The trump suit should be laid out on Dummy right. Cards in each suit should be laid out in sequence from high to low;
- Dummy should not touch a card before receiving instructions from the declarer. This includes playing a card even when it is a singleton;

- Dummy is not entitled to call the director when there has been an infraction of the law or other problem during play. Indeed dummy may not draw declarers attention to anything except that he is about to lead from the wrong hand or ask if he is out of a suit played. Dummy may however call a director after the hand has been played out.

Post-Mortems

Wait until the game is over for post-mortems. Not only could a post-mortem undermine partnership confidence, but it may communicate information to players who have not played the hand at other tables.

Never try to teach or criticise a player at the table unless guidance is requested.

Mobile Phones

In many situations where people are gathered for a particular purpose (such as in the theatre, at an interview, in a formal meeting or in a classroom during a lecture) it is courteous to turn off one's mobile phone. Bridge is no different. Many top level bridge tournaments impose a penalty on players whose mobile phone interrupts a session. It is therefore good practice to adopt a habit of turning off one's mobile phone prior to the commencement of a bridge session. This respects your fellow bridge players and recognises that the distraction of a phone ringing can break concentration. If it is absolutely vital that you have it on, leave it on 'vibrate'.