

## Bridge According to Hoyle

Bridge is the Chess of card games (and with that statement we will enrage millions of devoted Bridge players, who would argue that Chess is the Bridge of board games). Chess has a long history, and, as befits a game of similar depth and complexity, so does Bridge. Bridge begins with a game called Whist, in a country called England, in an era called "The Restoration."

### ***How the Game Is Played***

Contract Bridge is played by four people in two partnerships with a standard 52-card pack. The cards in each suit rank from ace (the highest) to the 2 (the lowest). The suits rank in this order: spades, hearts, diamonds, and then clubs.

Cards are dealt one at a time, face down, clockwise until each player has received 13 cards.

The bidding or *auction* stage comes next, beginning with the dealer. The various things you can do are known as *calls*:

**Pass:** You may pass rather than make a bid.

**Bid:** This is your declaration that you intend to win a certain number of *odd* tricks (odd meaning more tricks than six; the first six tricks are called *the book*). You must either name a trump suit or choose *no-trump*. The lowest possible bid is one, the highest is seven. (There are 13 tricks in all, but remember that the first six don't count in this process.) For example, you might say "one diamond," "one no-trump," "four spades," and so on.

Your bid must *overcall*, or top the preceding bid (if any). This is also called making a *sufficient* bid.

Overcalling a bid means you must name a higher number of odd-tricks and/or a higher-ranking denomination: no-trump (high), spades, hearts, diamonds, and then clubs. One spade will overcall one heart; two clubs will overcall one spade; two diamonds will overcall one no-trump; etc.

**Double:** You can double the last bid, so long as one of your opponents made that bid, and no one has yet called a double. What a double does is to double the value of tricks taken. However, if the bid doubled was for, say, three spades, any player in the rest of the bidding could overcall it with three no-trumps, four clubs, etc., thereby canceling the double. A particular bid can be doubled only once.

**Redouble:** A player may in turn redouble the last bid, if a) the bid was made by that player or by that player's partner; b) if the bid has been doubled by an opponent; and c) if the bid hasn't already been redoubled. This further increases the scoring values, but, like the double, it can be canceled by a higher bid. A particular bid can be redoubled only once.

The auction begins when any player makes a bid. If all four players pass the first time around, the cards are thrown in and the next dealer in turn deals. When a bid, double, or redouble is followed by three consecutive passes, the auction is closed. The suit named in the final bid is the trump suit for that hand (if the final bid was a no-trump, the hand will be played without trumps). The player who first bid the suit

(or the no-trump) is the *declarer*. The number of odd-tricks named in the final bid is that player's *contract*.

The player to the declarer's left leads the first card. The declarer's partner then places his or her hand face-up. This hand, and declarer's partner, are called the "dummy." The declarer's partner takes no further part in the hand. The declarer selects the cards to play from the dummy hand.

The object of play is to win tricks. A player is required to follow suit if possible. A trick is won by the highest trump, or, if no trumps come out, by the highest card of the suit led. The player that wins a trick leads the next. Play continues until all 13 tricks have been taken.

### **Keeping Score**

Bridge score sheets are halved by a horizontal line. The *trick score* goes below the line; all other scores (usually called the *honor score*) go above the line. If the declarer fulfills the contract, winning as many or more odd-tricks than the contract called for, he or she scores below the line for every odd-trick named in the contract. Any trick won by the declarer in excess of his or her contract is called an *overtrick* and is scored above the line.

When a side has scored 100 or more points below the line (*trick points*), it has won a *game*. A game may require more than one hand to decide the outcome. The next game begins with both sides back to zero.

A side that has won a game is said to be *vulnerable*. A vulnerable side receives increased bonuses in some cases and is subject to higher penalties if it does not fulfill a contract.

Games are played best two out of three. When one side wins two games, they have won the *rubber*. All points scored by both sides, both above the line and below the line, are then added up. The side that has the greatest number of points wins the difference between its score and its opponents' score.

### **The Contract Bridge Scoring System**

#### **Trick points (scored below the line by declarer)**

Each odd-trick bid & made in $\clubsuit$ or $\spadesuit$	20
Each odd-trick bid & made in $\heartsuit$ or $\diamondsuit$	30
First odd-trick bid & made in NT	40
Subsequent odd-tricks, NT	30

*If bid was doubled, multiply trick score by two.*

*If bid was redoubled multiply by four.*

#### **Overtrick points (scored above the line by declarer)**

Each trick over contract in $\clubsuit$ or $\spadesuit$ , undoubled	20
Each trick over contract in NT, $\heartsuit$ , $\diamondsuit$ , undoubled	30

Each trick over contract in any suit:

Doubled	100 (200 if vulnerable)
Redoubled	200 (400 if vulnerable)

**Undertrick points (scored above the line by defenders)**

***Not vulnerable***

First undertrick	50
First undertrick, doubled	100
First undertrick, redoubled	200
Second and third undertrick	50
Second and third undertrick, doubled	200
Second and third undertrick, redoubled	400
Each subsequent undertrick	50
Each subsequent undertrick, doubled	300
Each subsequent undertrick, redoubled	600

***Vulnerable***

First undertrick	100
First undertrick, doubled	200
First undertrick, redoubled	400
Each subsequent undertrick	100
Each subsequent undertrick, doubled	300
Each subsequent undertrick, redoubled	600

**Bonus points (scored above the line by declarer)**

Making doubled contract	50
Making redoubled contract	100
Small Slam (6 odd-tricks bid & made)	500
	(750 if vulnerable)
Grand Slam (7 odd-tricks bid & made)	1,000
	(1,500 if vulnerable)

***Rubber Bonus:***

If the opponents won 1 game	500
if the opponents won no games	700

**Honors points (scored above the line by either team)**

Four trump honors in one hand	100
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Five trump honors in one hand	150
Four aces in one hand (NT contract)	150

### **Strategies**

The importance of learning to bid effectively cannot be overemphasized. A proper bid provides substantial information to your partner, as his or her response should to you. Unfortunately, you are also conveying the same information to your opponents, just as their bidding provides some guide to you as to how you should play your hand to make the bid or defend against your opponents' bid.

Effective bidding of necessity is based on an understanding of what "points" are. The two kinds of points are high-card points and distribution points.

<b>High card points</b>	<b>Distribution points</b>
Ace = Four points	Void in a suit = Three points
King = Three points	Singleton in a suit = Two points
Queen = Two points	Doubleton in a suit = One point
Jack = One point	

In reaching your total points you cannot count both high-card points and distribution points for the same card

### **Opening Bids**

The opening bid is a team's first bid. The general rule in bridge is that if you have 13 points (combined high-card points and distribution points) and you want a happy partner, you should find a bid somewhere, even if it is in a four card minor suit. Opening bids are invariably on your longest suit. If suits are of equal length, bid the highest ranking suit.

Generally if it is the first (opening) round and your hand has only 11-12 points (combined high-card and distribution points) and you do not have a fairly strong biddable suit (for example, five or six cards headed by at least two face cards and a singleton or doubleton in the other suits) then the appropriate bid would be a pass.

### **Response to Opening Bid**

If you're a beginner, keep it simple. If you have some strength in a suit your partner has bid, always raise. Strength can be defined as at least six points in your hand and three cards in your partner's suit.

This hand contains six points (A, J, J) and at least the minimum three cards in spades, hearts, and diamonds. If your partner bid one club, however, your hand is too weak, and you should pass.

Any suit of five or more cards is always biddable.

### **Bidding No-trump**

A bid of no-trump is best when you have 15 high-card points, and your hand's distribution is balanced, meaning a 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2 combination. You should also have all suits stopped, meaning you have the A, the K-Q, the Q-J-10, and/or the J-10-9-8 in each suit. These card combinations will prevent your opponents from taking a run of tricks in one suit. Most of the time, however, you'll have to make do with "probable" stoppers, such as K-x, Q-J-x, Q-10-x, or even Q-x-x.

Your 5-3-3-2 suit combination gives you a balanced hand. You have guaranteed stoppers in diamonds and clubs, and probable stoppers in spades and hearts.

### ***Playing***

If you're the defender and you can't decide what to lead, here's an old bit of Bridge lore: when in doubt, lead the fourth-best card from your longest suit. This is called *leading from length*. It's considered the standard way to lead in a no-trump contract, and it's a safe way to proceed in a suit contract.

Typically, an unbalanced hand is more suitable to play a trump contract. A balanced hand is good for a no-trump contract. Whenever a player has a balanced or an unbalanced hand, it is very common for more than one of the other hands to have a similar distribution, and it's something to plan for in the play of the hand.

If you are defending (your team lost the bid) and have a six-card suit as shown, even though it contains the ace, there is a good probability that the ace will be trumped on the first round. The preponderance of diamonds in your hand makes it more likely someone else has a void in diamonds. Likewise, if your hand is balanced, it is probable that other players also have balanced hands.

The partnership playing a trump contract should be in command of the trump suit. Decades of Bridge experience have demonstrated that the partners playing the contract should have at least eight trumps between them (the best distributions are 5-3, 4-4, and even 6-2).

The best lead is a card from a combination of top cards in any suit.