

Bridge is similar to golf: the rule book is large and comprehensive and most only know the laws that come up regularly. Very few know the obscure laws. The tournament director is available in a bridge club or competition to help us through all the laws and regulations.

Use the tournament director rather than more experienced players: they are rarely up to date with the current laws and tend to reinforce their personal views of how the game should be played. A lot of laws have changed since they started playing!

Further reading:

<https://berwickbridgeclub.co.uk/etiquette-guide>

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/cmh/Club%20Etiquette.pdf>

SBU Better Behaviour at Bridge campaign -

<https://www.sbu.org.uk/admin/79-laws-ethics/better-behaviour/199-better-behaviour-campaign>

Bridge Table Etiquette

Remember – IT'S ONLY A GAME, and meant to be enjoyed! However, there are some basic elements of etiquette which, if followed, can add to the enjoyment and also create a favourable image of our Club if you're playing somewhere else!

First, please pay particular attention to the following:

BOARDS AND MISBOARDING

The board to be played should be left in the centre of the table so that everyone can see the vulnerability, other boards may be put to the side.

Do not remove your cards from the board until all four players are present at the table. Count your cards before you look at them.

At the end of the auction, all bidding cards must remain on the table until the first lead is placed face down on the table. At this stage the board must not be moved from the table, but may be moved a little from the centre, never turned.

When players complete a board with time to spare, they often wish to look at the other hands and quietly discuss the board. This is fine but you may only remove your own hand from the board, never another player's hand.

Ensure that your hand is restored to the correct slot.

Misboarding spoils the board for anyone yet to play it, so the Director will issue a penalty to any pair misboarding a hand, even for the first offence. At matchpoints this penalty is 10% of a top.

Other main points:

- Be friendly – greet your opponents politely, don't continue to discuss a previous hand.
- Count your cards before looking at your hand.
- Decide on your bid before touching the bidding box.

→ LAW 25 A. UNINTENDED CALL

- ◆ 1. If a player discovers that he has not made the call he intended to make, he may, until his partner makes a call, substitute the call he intended for the unintended call.
- ◆ 2. If the player's original intent was to make the call selected or voiced, that call stands. A change of call may be allowed because of a mechanical error or a slip of the tongue, but not because of a loss of concentration regarding the intent of the action.

→ You may **not** change an unintended CARD that is played.

LAW 45 1. A defender's card held so that it is possible for his partner to see its face is deemed played to the current trick.

If you accidentally drop card(s) to a trick, call the Director!

- Try not to make it obvious if you're unhappy with Partner's bid. (This also applies to Partner's lead or play!)
- You can ask the meaning of an opponent's bid, but **ONLY** when it is your turn to bid **OR** at the end of the auction. Partner of the player on lead can ask **ONLY** once the lead card has been placed face down on the table.
- Bids must remain on the table until the opening lead has been made.
- The opening lead must always be placed face down on the table. This prevents irregularities and allows Partner to ask any questions regarding the bidding. This should be done before you write the contract details on your card.
- Once the declarer has nominated or deliberately touched a card in dummy, he/she may not change his/her mind, **UNLESS** it would be illegal to play that card.
- Dummy can only do as declarer instructs, **EXCEPT** to point out if declarer is about to lead from the wrong hand or to ask if declarer has a void when not following suit.
- Dummy, or either defender, may point out if a player has stacked a completed trick the wrong way, but **ONLY** until the lead to the next trick has been made. Declarer, however, may point that out at any time, and may require any of the other three players to stack their tricks correctly.
- Do not gather up your cards until the score for the hand has been agreed.
- Shuffle your cards and return them to the board before marking your card.

My bugbears

Do NOT make up your own rulings at the table, call the director

Whenever there is a bid out of turn, insufficient bid, revoke, lead out of turn, exposed card, or any irregularity you SHOULD call the director. Very few players know the rules and you should not make your own ruling. Do not bully the others at the table and do not let yourself be bullied by an experienced player, call the director and let them do their job.

Do NOT offer advice on how to bid or play a hand without being asked

Law 74A2: A player should carefully avoid any remark or action that might cause annoyance or embarrassment to another player or might interfere with the enjoyment of the game.

Law 74B: As a matter of courtesy a player should refrain from:

- *making gratuitous comments during the auction and play.*
- *summoning and addressing the Director in a manner discourteous to him or to other contestants.*

Comments like “you should have done this”, “you are not allowed to bid that”, “that was lucky, they should have beaten me”, “that was okay, they can make two hearts/three hearts/game/slam” are disrespectful and unnecessary.

Telling opponents how to play the game, especially to less experienced players, can come across as bullying even if you have the best intentions.

Hesitations and the Stop card

It is **not** an infraction to hesitate during the bidding or play if you have a bridge reason to do so, but it can place constraints on your partner. This is one of the most complex and most understood of legal areas in bridge and only Sandy Duncan and Paul at the club understand them. As a player, your obligation is to try and not take advantage of your partner's hesitation - this normally means only make obvious decisions on what to do next; do not assume partner has points/values or support because they have hesitated.

If you hesitate, as we all do occasionally, it is generally better to take action rather than pass. If someone else at the table says, "Your partner hesitated, you must pass", then call the Director: the TD will explain your options, but there is no regulation that you must pass. This is a common myth.

The Stop card is used solely to ensure that the next player pauses for 5-10 seconds before they take a call. It is **not** to warn your partner that you have a good hand or try to wake them up - this would be cheating.

What is the difference between these auctions?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>		<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	<i>Dbl</i>	3♥	<i>long think ... Pass</i>		1♥	<i>Dbl</i>	3♥	<i>Pass (quickly)</i>

The Stop card is used to try and prevent these irregularities.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	<i>Dbl</i>	3♥	<i>(5-10 seconds) ... Pass</i>

Alerting

Disclosure of agreements between partners is an important element in Bridge etiquette. It is **not** a game of hidden agreements and the most famous cheating cases in the last 10 years have been because of hidden, illegal, agreements.

Alert your partner's call when it is an artificial call (like Stayman, transfers). The SBU regulations say that you do not alert artificial bids above 3NT unless it is the first round of the auction, so normally you will not alert Gerber, Blackwood, etc.

All alerts are to inform the opponents, they are **not** to wake your partner up. Another common myth is, "I did not alert because it would wake my partner up". Admirable though the sentiment is, it unlawful not to alert conventional agreements. If it wakes your partner up, then they must strive not to take advantage.

Authorised and Unauthorised information

When an opponent alerts, you have the right to ask why they have alerted. Try to ask open questions, like "what does this call mean?" or "Please explain"; do not ask closed questions that require a Yes/No answer, like "Does this show diamonds" or "Does this promise four hearts"?

Open questions allow the alerter to fully explain the call and you will have shown no interest in the call alerted. If you ask a question like "Does this show diamonds" then you may be showing some interest in the diamond suit for partner's benefit or expressing doubt about whether it is true.

In general it is better not to ask until the end of the auction unless you need to know, but at times it is unavoidable because you do need to know. At the end of the auction, ask about all the alerts if you are on lead. If your partner is on lead, wait for them to select their lead and then you can ask questions. Again, ask open questions and do not focus on one bid. I often say, "Please explain the auction" or, even more open, "What have you both shown [during the auction]?"

Do not ask, "What did three clubs mean?", especially when you want a club lead - this will be interpreted as cheating.

You may ask about any call in the auction, whether alerted or not. But take particular care when asking about unalerted calls as you may be in danger of passing information to your partner.

2NT	Pass	3♣!	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	?

Three clubs was alerted, but before passing over 3NT you ask, "What did three clubs mean?". The opener responds "It was Stayman". You follow up with "So it does not show clubs then?" and they reply, "No". You pass and so does everyone else.

Your partner leads a club from a small doubleton. Do you think this is acceptable?

2NT	Pass	3♣!	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Partner asks no questions and selects their lead. Now you can ask questions. Does this seem fairer?

A more difficult case

Law 73 B. Inappropriate Communication between Partners

1. *Partners shall not communicate by means such as the manner in which calls or plays are made, extraneous remarks or gestures, questions asked or not asked, or alerts and explanations given or not given.*
2. *The gravest possible offence is for a partnership to exchange information through prearranged methods of communication other than those sanctioned by these Laws.*

Law 73 C. Player Receives Unauthorized Information from Partner

1. *When a player has available to him unauthorized information from his partner, such as from a remark, question, explanation, gesture, mannerism, undue emphasis, inflection, haste or hesitation, an unexpected alert or failure to alert, he must carefully avoid taking any advantage from that unauthorized information.*

From the club earlier this month.

West	North	East	South
2♠ ¹	Dbl	Pass	3♦
Pass	Pass	Pass	

¹After West made his opening bid, there was lots of spluttering and an exclamation of “Oh no”. East, and everyone else, thought that West had made a mistake with his opening bid. Systemically the 2♠ opener showed 8+ tricks with good spades and East had a normal 3NT bid opposite that hand.

However he knew that his partner had made a mistake and passed out three diamonds. East used **Unauthorised Information**: he was not entitled to know his partner had made a mistake (through his partner’s body action and comments) and should not have taken advantage.

East bid as if partner had a weak two bid and not the Strong Two bid he’d made. East should have thought, “What would I have done if my partner had a Strong Two bid?”.

Even the top players struggle with doing this, so just try your best.