

ALERTING

Bridge is a game of full disclosure: you are not permitted to have private or secret agreements with your partner. You disclose your methods through the system (convention) card, pre-alerting your system (including no-trump range and any unusual methods) before you start, and alerting.

- Alert all artificial calls
- Alert all calls where your opponents will not expect the meaning
- Do NOT alert any doubles (SBU policy)
- Do not alert any calls above 3NT except on the first round of the auction

In general it is better to alert if you are unsure whether to alert or not.

What happens when I FAIL TO ALERT my partner's call or EXPLAIN IT INCORRECTLY?

As soon as you realise that you should have alerted or remember the correct meaning, you MUST call the Director immediately. Failing to call the Director when you realise you've erred is a more serious offence than forgetting to alert!

What happens when my partner FAILS TO ALERT my call or EXPLAINS IT INCORRECTLY?

By failing to alert or explaining the call incorrectly, your partner has misinformed the opponents but you can do nothing immediately.

At the end of the auction, if you are DECLARER or DUMMY, then you MUST call the Director and explain to him what has happened. The Director will permit the opponent's final pass in the auction to be changed and then ask the hand to be played out.

If you are DEFENDING, then you must WAIT until the END of the hand, then you MUST call the Director and explain to him what has happened.

In both cases the Director may adjust the score if he believes that the opponents have been damaged.

You have also received the unauthorised information that your partner has misunderstood your call and you MUST NOT take advantage of this. You MUST continue to bid as if partner correctly alerted and correctly explained your bid. If you do not, then the Director may adjust the result.

What happens when I FORGET our system and misbid, but partner alerts and explains correctly?

This is NOT an infraction. Your opponents are only entitled to know your partnership agreements, they are not entitled to know that you have misbid.

But you have received unauthorised information, from the alert or explanation or even lack of alert telling you that you have misbid. You must continue to bid as you originally thought the bid meant. This is NOT EASY!

What happens when we do not have an agreement but partner says we do?

Suppose you are playing Paul and Helen and they open one club, showing 2+ clubs. You have six clubs and overcall two clubs, but partner alerts and says that this is a Michaels Cue Bid showing the majors. You do play Michaels normally, but you have not agreed to do so over the short one club opener. What should you do?

Firstly, you must ignore partner's alert and bid as if he said that your overcall was natural. Once again you have unauthorised information that partner has misunderstood your bid and you MUST NOT take advantage.

Secondly, at the appropriate time, you should tell the opponents that your partner was wrong and that you do not have an agreement. It is the same as your partner explaining your bid incorrectly, so if you are declarer or dummy then call for the Director at the end of the auction; if defending, at the end of the hand. The Director may adjust the result if the opponents have been misinformed AND damaged.

What happens when you do not know if you have an agreement?

If you know that you have an agreement but cannot remember what it is, then alert and when asked to explain just say that you cannot remember. If the opponents care, then they can call the Director who may ask you to leave the table and let your partner explain the agreement. Your partner will have received the unauthorised information that you have not remembered and must not take advantage of this subsequently.

If you are unsure whether you have an agreement or not, then it is generally better to alert. For example, playing against Paul and Helen's short club again, you may decide to alert partner's two clubs overcall saying, "I don't think we've discussed whether we play Michaels or not over the short club, but we do over a natural club opener". Note that it would be worth checking before you play them in the future.

If you know that you do not have an agreement, then do not alert.

Example

You hold:

S Jx
H xx
D AKQ1096
C Jxx

Your opponent opens 1NT and you overcall two diamonds with this six-card diamond suit. Unfortunately your partner alerts and, when asked, says, "We play Pottage, that shows the major suits". You remember that your partner is right, you play a natural overcall with a different partner. The next hand passes and your partner bids two spades. What are you permitted to do?

Firstly, you must bid as if your partner had not alerted, so this means treating partner's bid as a natural two spades over your diamond overcall. I expect that this is not forcing, just showing a spade suit. You have tolerance for spades and a minimum overcall, so you should pass just as you would if partner had not alerted two diamonds.

This may not be a good score since it might be a 3-2 fit, but bidding three diamonds is taking advantage of the unauthorised information.

Suppose your partner had jumped to three spades? Over a natural two diamonds this is forcing showing a very strong hand with spades. So you must raise to game. even though this might be disastrous because of your misbid. But if you make any call that takes account of this fact then you are using unauthorised information.

If the opponents believe that you have used unauthorised information, then they will call the director. If the director agrees, then he will adjust the score and may issue a fine. In the final example, if you did not raise to four spades over a jump to three spades, this is blatant use of unauthorised information and you should expect a large fine.

There is further information on this subject in the back of the SBU diary.