

ASKING QUESTIONS

This article is to give you a general insight into when you should ask questions, what questions you should ask and more importantly when you should not ask questions.

1) General Principles

Although you are allowed to ask questions during the auction, see 3 below, you should refrain from doing so when you have no intention of bidding, wait until the auction has been completed.

Once the auction has been completed if you are on lead then you may ask as many questions as you like, see 2 below as to how you should phrase these questions. If however you are not on lead, your partner may ask questions first, once he/she has asked their questions, and made the lead face down, you are entitled to ask any follow up questions for clarity.

2) What Questions should I ask?

The general accepted principle is that you should ask the opposition to explain the auction in full, do not ask them about one specific bid in the auction.

For example the auction has gone

2NT 3S*
4C 6C

3S was alerted in the auction, you should ask about the auction in general not specifically about the 3S bid. The opposition should then proffer the following explanation of the auction

2NT – 21-22 balanced
3S – Minor suit stayman
4C – I have 4+ clubs and I am interested in a slam
6C – To play

The danger of asking about the 3S bid during the auction; when you have no intention of bidding, is bringing attention to the fact that you may be interested in spades, if your partner now finds a spade lead from say 2 or 3 small when other leads would be more indicated, declarer would be fully in his rights to call the director as your questions have potentially given your partner unauthorised information – **Be very careful when asking questions and then passing!**

If however you had doubled 3S for a spade lead then there would be no problem with your partner leading a spade.

3) Asking Questions during the auction

You are entitled to ask questions during the auction when **it is your turn to bid**. However, you must be very careful as any potential question you ask could give unauthorised information to your partner. If your partner makes a lead which **could** have been indicated by your question and it subsequently transpires that this was an unusual lead, do not be surprised that the director is called.

The main time to ask a question in the auction is when you need to know whether a particular bid is weak or strong, or where it has an artificial meaning –e.g. a 2C bid over 1NT which has been alerted and could have potentially many different meanings; however this is also **potentially fraught with danger**, because if you ask a question and find out the explanation for the bid **and then pass**, you are indicating to partner that you had a potential interest in entering the auction if you had received a different answer. If your partner now takes action he will have to justify this on the merits of his **own** hand as if you had passed in tempo without having asked a question.

4) What is Authorised and Unauthorised Information?

Law 16 of the Orange Book refers to this, a copy of which is shown below.

In summary

You are entitled to know your opponents system and the meaning of any bids that have been made between them during the auction. This is authorized information. You are not entitled to know what the person meant by the bid if there is no agreement.

Any information that is transferred from you to your partner or visa versa about the hand; that suggests a line of defence or a particular call is unauthorized information, e.g. asking questions about a bid or group of bids.

Any unauthorized information that you obtain should not be acted on and the action **actively avoided**. If you do use that unauthorized information the opponents would be fully within their rights to call the director and your side **could be penalized**. The opponents will be given the benefit of the doubt.

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LAW 16: AUTHORIZED AND UNAUTHORIZED INFORMATION

A. Players' Use of Information

1. A player may use information in the auction or play if:
 - (a) It derives from the legal calls and plays of the current board (including illegal calls and plays that are accepted) and is unaffected by unauthorized information from another source; or
 - (b) It is authorized information from a withdrawn action (see D); or
 - (c) It is information specified in any law or regulation to be authorized or, when not otherwise specified, arising from the legal procedures authorized in these laws and in regulations (but see B1 following); or
 - (d) It is information that the player possessed before he took his hand from the board (Law 7B) and the Laws do not preclude his use of this information.
2. Players may also take account of their estimate of their own score, of the traits of their opponents, and any requirement of the tournament regulations.
3. No player may base a call or play on other information (such information being designated extraneous).
4. If there is a violation of this law causing damage the Director adjusts the score in accordance with Law 12C.

B. Extraneous Information from Partner

1. (a) After a player makes available to his partner extraneous information that may suggest a call or play, as for example by a remark, a question, a reply to a question, an unexpected alert or failure to alert, or by unmistakable hesitation, unwonted speed, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement, or mannerism, the partner may not choose from among logical alternatives one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the extraneous information.
- (b) A logical alternative action is one that, among the class of players in question and using the methods of the partnership, would be given serious consideration by a significant proportion of such players, of whom it is judged some might select it.
2. When a player considers that an opponent has made such information available and that damage could well result he may announce, unless prohibited by the Regulating Authority (which may require that the Director be called), that he reserves the right to summon the Director later (the opponents should summon the Director immediately if they dispute the fact that unauthorized information might have been conveyed). It is not an infraction to call the Director earlier or later.
3. When a player has substantial reason to believe that an opponent who had a logical alternative has chosen an action that could have been suggested by such information, he should summon the Director when play ends. The Director shall assign an adjusted score (see Law 12C) if he considers that an infraction of law has resulted in an advantage for the offender.

C. Extraneous Information from Other Sources

1. When a player accidentally receives unauthorized information about a board he is playing or has yet to play, as by looking at the wrong hand; by overhearing calls, results or remarks; by seeing cards at another table; or by seeing a card belonging to another player at his own table before the auction begins, the Director should be notified forthwith, preferably by the recipient of the information.
2. If the Director considers that the information could interfere with normal play he may, before any call has been made:
 - (a) Adjust the players' positions at the table, if the type of contest and scoring permit, so that the player with information about one hand will hold that hand; or
 - (b) If the form of competition allows of it order the board re-dealt for those contestants; or
 - (c) Allow completion of the play of the board standing ready to award an adjusted score if he judges that unauthorized information may have affected the result; or
 - (d) Award an artificial adjusted score.

3. If such unauthorized information is received after the first call in the Auction has been made and before completion of the play of the board the Director proceeds as in 2(c).

Information from Withdrawn Calls and Plays

When a call or play has been withdrawn as these laws provide:

1. For a non-offending side, all information arising from a withdrawn action is authorized, whether the action be its own or its opponents'.
2. For an offending side, information arising from its own withdrawn action and from withdrawn actions of the non-offending side is unauthorized.
3. A player of an offending side may not choose from among logical alternative actions one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the unauthorized information.