

Cards just fall out of my hands sometimes

You accidentally drop a card from your hand face up on the table or somewhere where it can be seen eg the floor or into your coffee cup (very bad form), what happens next?

It depends upon when and what is going on.

If it happens before the bidding has commenced or during the bidding, the card stays face up on the table so that the opposition can know what it is, but your partner has to respond as if they have not seen it, another case of your partner not being able to take advantage of your indiscretion (Unauthorised Information UI). After the auction, if you are Declarer or Dummy, the card re-enters your hand. If you are in defence then it becomes what is known as a penalty card (see below for details)

If it happens during the play then again, if you are Declarer it goes back into your hand. There is no UI here as you are in charge of Dummy and hence you are not passing information to your partner! Of course the opposition now knows that you have that card and can use the information.

If you are in defence, not so good, your partner now has UI as they know, when they should not, that you are in possession of that card.

There are 2 types of penalty card, a Major and a Minor. If you drop a small card (less than a 10) it becomes a Minor Penalty card and if you drop more than one card or a large card (any card from an Ace down to a Ten known as honour cards) then it or they become Major Penalty card(s).

If it is a Major penalty card your partner may have a lead restriction ie Declarer can insist that your partner when they are next on lead, either does or does not lead the suit of that card.

If you have dropped more than one card, it gets worse as Declarer now can choose which suit to prohibit or insist on, from the suits of your dropped cards. But if Declarer does choose to ban or insist on a certain type of lead, the card goes back into your hand, and you do NOT have to play it, at the first legal opportunity (*some good news after all*)

If Declarer insists on a lead that your partner cannot make eg they are void in that suit, then your partner can lead what they like. Say you dropped a diamond and your partner does not have one, Declarer then misses out as they only get one go!

With Major Penalty cards, you must play it at the first legal opportunity, ie you must follow suit but if you cannot follow the suit led then you must play that card (Declarer will get to choose which one, if there is more than one)

(It has happened that someone put down what they thought was dummy when they were in defence and ended up with 13 Major Penalty cards !!)

With a Minor Penalty card you can substitute an honour card when following suit instead of the one showing face up on the table, and if discarding then like the Major penalty card, it has to be played at the first legal opportunity.

NB You can only have 1 Minor Penalty card.

(If you had dropped 2 small cards they are both Major Penalty cards and stay that way even after you have had to play one of them, sorry about that.)

The moral of the tale is try to keep your cards in your hand as being a butterfingers can be a painful experience especially if your partner gives you a lecture later on!