

Bampton Bridge Club Etiquette

Points of Law, Etiquette and Procedure

This list is prepared mainly for the benefit of new members, particularly since the club is not affiliated to the English Bridge Union and therefore has a number of local procedures that may differ from an affiliated club. Whilst most existing members will already be aware of the majority of these points, we hope that the list will provide a useful reminder. More experienced players are asked to be tolerant of those who are still learning their way around the intricacies of duplicate bridge and to provide gentle help and guidance where necessary.

1. General procedure and keeping to time

Among other things, these points help to make sure that play proceeds at a reasonable speed and that there are no mechanical errors, e.g. cards getting mixed up between hands.

Please aim to arrive at 7.15pm to be seated by 7.25pm for a 7.30pm start. If you arrive after 7.25, please do not expect to be accommodated since the movement will probably already have been set up. Dress code is smart casual. Please switch off your mobile phone or set it to 'silent mode' before play begins. Always count your cards before looking at them. If you don't have 13 cards, call the tournament director (TD).

Leave the board in play on the table, pointing in the right direction, until the hand is finished. This makes it much more difficult to put the hands back in the wrong slots afterwards! When you're on lead, make your lead face-down in case your partner wants to ask a question. It is good practice to make a lead before putting your bidding cards away. Similarly, when you're dummy, put your hand down first and then put away the bidding cards. Try not to take too long over calls or when playing a card. Best practice is to always try and play in tempo. It is discourteous and unfair to keep other pairs waiting. Where possible, players should leave the table (e.g. to make coffee) only when dummy, rather than between rounds. Unless dummy has left the table, declarer should never touch dummy's cards, even to rearrange them. This avoids arguments about whether a card has been played or not. As declarer, if you can clearly see that all the remaining tricks are yours, claim them rather than play on. You must specify clearly your line of play, including a statement about drawing any remaining trumps. At the end of a board, make sure that all players are agreed on the result before putting the cards away. North should be careful to record the score on the traveller fully and accurately, and East or West should verify it. It is best not to remove more than one traveller from the boards at any one time, and North should always make sure that all travellers have been returned to the correct boards at the end of the round. Don't spend time talking about a hand until you have finished all the boards in that round. And if you do want to discuss a hand at the table, do it very quietly (otherwise people who haven't yet played it might hear you).

When a movement card is provided, both pairs should check the card at the beginning of each round to make sure that they are playing at the correct table, against the correct pair, and using the correct boards.

Seven minutes is allowed for each hand to be bid and played. A bell is rung after each 7 minute period to help pairs judge their progress and to speed up play if they are falling behind the time.

If a board is passed out AND it is the first time the board has been played then currently the club permits the board to be re-dealt once assuming time permits.

2. Bidding and play

These points help to make sure that everyone bids and plays as fairly as possible. Using bidding boxes at least stops us from using our tone of voice to indicate whether our partner should bid on or pass - but it's still all too easy to pick up inferences, known as 'unauthorised information', either from an unguarded comment, from a facial expression, or even from the speed at which someone bids or plays. You are perfectly entitled to try to take

advantage of this if your opponents do it, but NOT when it's your partner – and, of course, you should try to avoid doing anything yourself which might give away any information of this sort to your partner.

If you play anything more complicated than a fairly basic ACOL system, please ensure you briefly explain your system to the pairs you play against and alert any non-natural bid. Don't touch the 'bid' cards in the bidding box and then take out a card from the other section, or vice versa. In fact, try not to touch the box at all until you are sure of your bid. Avoid looking directly at partner or opponents or their hands during the bidding and play. Use the 'STOP' card when making a jump bid (including opening bids): take it out, leave it on the table for ten seconds and then put it away. The next player shouldn't bid whilst the 'STOP' card is still on the table. This automatically creates a short pause for thought, avoiding the inference that a player who passes quickly has nothing to think about. When alerting a call, it is your responsibility to make sure that both opponents see the 'ALERT' card. The EBU rules on Announcing and Alerting are not enforced but do announce your opening 1NT range.

During the bidding, you can only ask an opponent for an explanation of a bid made by their side when it's your turn to call. And you must ask the partner of the player who made the bid, not the player who made it. Avoid asking questions about the bidding while it is continuing, unless you really need to know the answer in order to decide what your next call should be (because if you then pass, your partner might draw an inference about your strength, or your interest in the suit bid). Otherwise, wait until the auction is finished. The opening lead should always be made face down. At that point the leader's partner has the opportunity to ask questions about the opponents' bidding. If there are none, the partner should say "No questions". Once the opening lead has been made it can't be changed, but it shouldn't be turned over until partner has asked anything he/she wants to know. For this reason, all four players should leave the bidding cards on the table until any questions have been asked and the opening lead has been faced. If there has been a misunderstanding during the bidding by declarer or dummy, this should be explained to the opponents after the final bid has been made but before play starts. If the defenders think they have been damaged, they should call the TD. However, defenders mustn't say anything about misunderstandings in their own bidding until the play of the hand has finished, when they should call the TD. If there is any hesitation in the bidding or the play, the partner of the player who hesitated must be very careful not to draw any inference from this and must bid/play as he/she would have done if there had been no hesitation. This is particularly the case if a player hesitates during the bidding and then passes. You should not say anything about the hand while the auction is in progress, or during the play – unless asked for an explanation of a call, or lead/signalling/discard system, by an opponent. You should not touch other players' cards. You may ask them to show you. You should shuffle your cards after the hand before returning them to the board.

Thank your opponents at the end of the round and move promptly to your new table. Don't forget to enjoy the game!

3. Calling the director

Do call the director at any time if there is a problem during the bidding or the play – he or she is there to help, so don't try to sort things out yourselves. The director has been trained to help you when something goes wrong and will use the guidance set out by the English Bridge Union to make sure that any problems are dealt with fairly and consistently. Please call the director in a courteous manner. Agree the necessity or politely explain to your opponents the reasons for calling the director first. Please call the TD immediately if you spot an error on a traveller. Please do not argue if the TD makes a ruling you do not agree with. You do have the right to make an appeal if you so wish.