



Bridge is played by teams of two players or pairs. The players in a pair sit opposite each other at a table of four players or two pairs. The pack of 52 cards is dealt into four hands of thirteen cards. Bridge is played in three stages:

1. An "auction" that sets the target for the declarer; and
2. the play of the cards in thirteen tricks; and
3. scoring and recording the result.

Playing the cards

The first card played to the first trick is known as the opening lead.

The play moves clockwise. The next player must play a card in the same suit as the opening lead if possible.

When four cards have been played, it is noted which card won the trick. The cards are turned over. The pair whose card won the trick turn their cards with the short side towards them. The pair who lost the trick turn the long side of their cards towards them.

The cards are placed so that each new card turned over overlaps the previous card.

This placement is very important. If there is a query about who won which tricks, the cards can be turned over, and the play verified.



When all thirteen tricks have been completed, the players agree the number of tricks won by each side before any player disturbs the cards.

The play may be in "No Trumps", meaning only cards in the suit led can win a trick, or in a "Suit Contract". In a suit contract one of the suits is nominated as trumps. When a non-trump (card from a "side suit") is the first card played to a trick, any player who has no card in that suit, but who has a card in the trump suit, can play the trump card and win the trick.



Some hints about choosing which cards to play

The Opening Lead

Choosing an opening lead is an art, and there will be more on this topic in later lessons.

Top of a sequence of two or more “touching” honours, for example, the King from a suit with King and Queen, does two jobs. Firstly, it is a signal to your partner that you have the Queen, an honour lead promises you have the honour immediately below. Secondly it should either win the trick or cause the Ace to be played making the Queen the highest-ranking card in that suit still in play.

Defender not on lead should always take note of partners lead and consider the implications. It almost always asks for a return of that suit at the first opportunity.

Declarer Play in Trumps Contracts

Declarer should pause and plan before playing the first card from dummy.

In a suit contract declarer should clear trumps early. Count them! Don't use two trumps to find they have all gone. Once the defence's trumps are cleared, use those left to trump side suits.



Declarer Play in No Trumps Contracts

In No Trumps contracts, declarer should plan to play to lose the key missing honours early. This promotes the other cards held by declarer to winners. Declarer can get the lead back to play these cards by keeping most of his high cards until the important winners held by the defence have been played.

General

“The second hand plays low” (Almost Always). Let the third and fourth hands battle it out. The third hand usually co-operates with partner on lead by playing as high as possible. This will either win the trick, or else hopefully make the fourth hand play a winner leaving a new “boss”, or highest-ranking card still not played, in partner’s hand.

Defence Signals

When the defending pair follows suit, or discards, there is an opportunity to send a message to partner.

It is common to use the rank of the card to signal “attitude”.

Potential winners are not used, so signalling cards are usually in the 2 to 9 range. A higher value card, for example 6-9, says: I like this suit; a lower value card, 2-5, says: “not this one please, partner”.