

For April 2025: Rule of ...

Bridge is a game of numbers. This is true from the first things you learn (for example, 10 points in each suit, 12 points for an opening bid, 26 combined points for game in a major) to the adjustments you make as you become more experienced (re-evaluating for a massive trump fit, adding points for a void in opponents' suit, etc.).

And then there are the Rules. These are guidelines that have been developed by experts to help you make decisions about bidding and play. Here are a few that you might find useful:

Rule of 7: Used if you are playing a NT contract, especially when you have only one stopper in a suit led by the opponents. How many times should you duck (refuse to take your stopper) to try to cut off communication between the opponents? With the Rule of 7, you add up how many cards you and dummy have in that suit and subtract from 7 to get the number of ducks. If you have 5 total cards in the suit, duck twice. With some luck, by then one opponent will be out of that suit and not be able to lead it to the partner with further tricks in that suit.

Rule of 14: In general, responders have been taught they should have 10+ points to bid at the two level over partner's opener or opponents' interference. But the Rule of 14 advises that you can use suit length to make up for a shortage of high-card points. Add your total high-card points to the number of cards in your longest suit. If the total is 14 or more, respond at the two level. For example, if you have 8 points and a 5-card suit (total 13), bid 1NT or pass if 1NT is not available. If you have 8 points and a 6-card suit (total 14), bid your suit.

Rule of 15: Three passes to you. You are the 4th seat bidder and you do not have opening points. Should you open anyway? The Rule of 15 tells you to add your high-card points to the number of spades in your hand. If the result is 15 or more, open your best suit. If it is lower, pass.

Rule of 17: When partner opens a weak 2 and you have an opening hand, how do you decide if you should jump to game? The Rule of 17 says to add your high-card points to the number of cards you have in partner's suit. If the result is 17 or higher, bid game. (Your webmaster feels compelled to add that she still thinks Ogust is a better guide.)

Rule of 20 or 22: These are guidelines for deciding when to open a distributional hand at the one level when you do not have opening points. Add your high-card points to the number of cards in your two longest suits. If the result is 20 or more, bid 1 of your higher or stronger suit. Some consider the Rule of 22 to be more precise. It requires adding in your quick tricks (aces or ace/king combinations) to reach 22 to open a hand.

Rule of 29: This is a way to open a strong 2C bid even though you do not have the usual 22 or more high-card points. Add the number of cards in your two longest suits to your high-card points. If the result is 29 or more, consider opening 2C but pay attention to strength of your suits and trick-taking ability. The Rule of 29 is a guideline rather than a hard-and-fast rule.