

REVISED GUIDE TO ONLINE AND CLUB BRIDGE AT CCBC 2019

During and after lockdown we developed a method of playing bridge online which was designed to make it as easy as we could for members who were inexperienced in the use of computers, let alone in playing bridge online. This has served us well and much of the relaxed approach has been adopted at our F2F sessions at the Club.

Over recent months it has become increasingly common for this relaxed approach to be taken rather further than is necessary or desirable. We feel that a restatement is now needed. There is not in fact anything new in what appears below but we are asking all our members to tighten up some of their practices both online and at the Club.

We will do this under headings:

1. Alerts.

Online we have allowed players' partners to alert conventional bids rather than use the more formal and more difficult alert mechanism provided by BBO. We want this to continue. However, we also want to see the practice tightened up. Technically of course we should all have a Systems Card or a System logged in BBO for each partner. We are not going to insist on this but we ask our members, where possible, to have a card available both at the Club and online.

All of us now use conventional bids with regularity as we also use bids which need to be announced like the value of our One No Trump, Stayman and Transfers. We all need to remember that, when a bid does not carry a natural meaning, our opponents need to be made aware of it. In the Club we do this by announcement or use of the alert card by partner. It is important that this is done. Without it the level playing field on which bridge must always be played can be compromised.

Remember that, if a conventional bid is made but not alerted or announced, our opponents will treat the bid as natural. This can have consequences and those affected by a failure to alert should not hesitate to call the Director. You should note that it is not just the bidding which may be affected but the play.

All players must note that, if their conventional bid is not alerted, they **must not** pass comment. There is a time to let the failure to alert be known. This is when you have secured the contract and before play begins. The bidder should notify the opponents that the bid should have been alerted and offer to call the director. If you are defending, you must wait until the hand has been played out but then make the same notification and offer.

In making a judgment on any consequential issue, a Director will always assume an unalerted bid is a genuine bid. It does not take much thought to realise what a substantial effect this can have.

We do recognise that some of our online players have difficulty in using the chat facility. We offer a suggestion. For the most part to type a "c" into the chat to table to alert or announce should be enough. As a failsafe, we are also happy that players should use the BBO Alert button. The important point is that opponents should be aware.

So, we are asking you to tighten up what has become a loose approach and we ask those affected to call the Director either online or in the Club if bids are not alerted when they should be.

2. Undos

Our existing guidelines on "undos" online were put together at the beginning of lockdown. Since then, of course we are all more competent and confident with our iPads or laptops. Our policy has been to encourage you to accept undos in most circumstances. This was to allow for misclicks which were numerous! However, it was never the intention to allow undos for "mistakes". We think that the time is right to stress that our policy online reflects the Laws of Bridge.

The Laws of Bridge as amended in 2017 apply at Law 23. In summary, where the wrong card is taken from a bidding box inadvertently (mechanical error), it can be changed as long as the next player has not bid. If the card was placed through loss of concentration or followed by a change of mind, the bid cannot be changed. In our view this should apply equally online with the proviso that mechanical mistakes are more likely. We have to rely the honesty of the bidder that it was a misclick after which the change would normally be allowed (i.e. the undo should be accepted). Doubt should still be resolved by the Director.

Requests for undos during play should only rarely be granted. Under the Laws once a card is revealed it must be played. There are no qualifications. Online it is possible to imagine a situation where the wrong card is played by genuine mistake, e.g. at the play of the first trick as the cards are being re-ordered by the computer. However, since revokes are impossible online, a player's care should be directed only to the choice of card and the grant of an undo during play should be a rarity.

Finally, of course please do not ask for an undo if you have simply made a mistake!!

3. Incorrect bids and Psyches.

Various bidding systems are in use at the Club. The most common are Acol (Standard English) and Benji Acol. Other pairs play 5 Card majors and/or Strong No trump. As a matter of courtesy, we expect any pair playing such systems will tell their opponents on arrival at the table. For those who play 5 card majors, you should note that the Rules require your partner to "announce" if a bid of 1 Club or 1 Diamond could have fewer than 3 cards.

All bids must comply with the Regulations which are to be found in the Blue Book **. For the avoidance of doubt our Club allows conventions to Level 2. Players putting together their systems should note that the Blue Book contains restrictions on what bids can be made at Level 2 and general restrictions on all bids, for example that a one level

opening bid cannot be made on fewer than 11 HCPs or a minimum of 8 HCPs with a count to 19 with the two longest suits. There are also restrictions on opening two level bids both natural requiring at least 5 cards in the suit opened or “strong” as defined in Rule 5 D 1. Essentially this requires 16HCPs or 13HCPs with two suits of 5 or more cards. Those who use the Benji 2C and weak twos in the major suits need to note that, where the Benji opener is made as a strong suit call, the requirements for a “strong” bid must be met i.e. 16HCPs or 13HCPs with two suits of 5 or more cards. The bid should be alerted by your partner. There is no longer a requirement for a strong two opening bid to have 8 playing tricks. The weak two bid must contain at least 5 cards in the suit bid but there is no minimum strength requirement. The latter should be announced by your partner as “Weak”

Of course, this is all technical and we include it only to show that total carte blanche is not permitted. We ask that players consider the restrictions when putting together their partnership agreement and make their alerts clear.

Pairs should also note that psychic bids are restricted. A psychic bid is a bid made outside a bidding system which does not have a meaning understood by one’s partner (Note: this is not a technical definition). There is nothing wrong with such a bid per se but it can easily become wrong if it is in common use in the pairing such that partner has an understanding of what the bid means outside the normal parameters of their system and outwith the scope of the alert.

These last two paragraphs should be read together. Please ensure that you agree and alert all your conventional bids and any unusual scope to them which needs to be explained on each occasion the bid is made. Failure to do so leads not just to ill-feeling but potential Director calls and penalties.

4. CONCLUSION.

We are a Club keen to maintain the friendliness of its bridge online and F2F. The first two sections apply to us all to make certain we do not risk this and the third section is primarily for those more experienced

players to consider as they put together and use more sophisticated techniques. We are happy that you should do so but we do want you to take special care to preserve the level playing field.

In summary:

- A. Alert or Announce all bids which do not carry their natural meaning.
- B. Do not comment on your partner's failure to alert or announce until the correct time.
- C. Online undos should only be granted for genuine misclicks.
- D. Please do not ask for an undo if you have simply made a mistake or changed your mind.
- E. Ensure you and your partner understand your bidding system, that it complies with the requirements and that you know when you need to alert variations.

**** The Blue Book is the English Bridge Union's (EBU) handbook of permitted understandings. It has been revised in August 2023, particularly on the Rules for Alerting and Announcing, so merits a reread for those who have honed their systems by reference to it. All of us can find it at [www.ebu.uk>documents>law-and-ethics>blue-book>blue>book](http://www.ebu.uk/documents/law-and-ethics/blue-book/blue-book). You will find it an interesting read, albeit occasionally complex!**