

Guidelines for playing at Farnborough on BBO

We are trying to make Farnborough Bridge Club a friendly and pleasant environment in which to play online. The following guidelines have been built up from experience and feedback over the past few months and are an attempt to make our tournaments an enjoyable experience for all involved. Please feel free to send feedback so we can continue to adapt and improve.

General etiquette

Be friendly to your opponents, your partner and the Director.

Familiarise yourself with how to communicate via Table Chat and Private Chat. If someone asks you a question in chat, please do your best to answer.

A bit of table chat / banter is great, and actively encouraged where both pairs are happy to engage in it (this is a social gathering, after all). However, please don't chat excessively with your partner at the table whilst the opposition are bidding the hand. A detailed post-mortem of the previous hand can be quite distracting for the opposition whilst they are trying to bid the current hand!

A "well played opponents" or "wpo" is a really nice message to the table if you feel it's something they've deserved! Obviously, "wpp" is good, too. But try to avoid any criticism or over-analysis during the round, as this only slows things down and can detract from the enjoyment of the session for others. If you finish the round early, you are able to private message with your partner until the next round begins.

If it is your turn to bid or play a card, then this should be your priority. ***Do not waste time sending messages to the table whilst it is your go, please!***

At the start of each round

Write a short message to the table, saying hello, introducing yourselves when it might be necessary (also ***make sure your names are clear in your BBO user profiles***), and giving a brief summary of your methods, including CARDING and LEADS.

Perhaps something like, "Hello both, Bill and Ben here, we're playing Acol, 12-14 NT, 4CM, 3 weak twos, standard carding, 2nd and 4th leads."

Obviously, only one of you needs to do this, and the other can just write "hello" or "good evening", or something more personal towards the opposition you are facing. You can prepare the message in advance of the session and copy it to your clipboard to save time. (There is also a Chat Manager on BBO, where you can save messages for your User Account – click in the area where messages appear and it should come up as an option.)

During the auction

All explanations should be written BEFORE you send the bid to the table, i.e. you should

click on Alert if necessary, then
write in the Explain Box if necessary, and ONLY THEN
click on the actual bid.

This saves a lot of time in the long run - even if it takes a few seconds longer to make the bid - and makes it a much nicer experience for your opponents, who get the information they need in real time and will have less need to ask questions during or at the end of the auction.

Write in any ranges of natural NT bids (even if you've just explained them in your system summary!), including NT responses (5-9, 6-9, 5-10, 11-12, 13-15 etc) and rebids (11-14, 12-16, 15-17, 15-16, 18-19, 17-18, 15-19, 23-24, etc.). Alert and explain any bids that are artificial (including Stayman and the 2D response to Stayman). And most importantly,

Explain bids that may at all have a meaning that could be in doubt.

This includes bids above 3NT.

Avoid using Conventional names in your explanations (e.g. Asptro, Halmic, Michaels, Ghestem, Flannery), but rather explain what the bids actually mean (e.g. "spades and another, 5-4 either way" rather than "Asptro", or "spades and a minor, at least 5-5" rather than "Michaels"). Probably Stayman and Blackwood/RKCB are sufficient explanations for a 2C response to 1NT or when asking about aces!

If a bid is not explained - or you, yourself, have made a bid that you want to add an explanation to - then you can click on the bid where the auction is displayed. This brings up an Explain Box where information can be given. It is also possible to Private Message "opponents" or one specific opponent. ***Please do not chat to the Table about anything regarding the current hand whilst the auction is live.***

At the end of the auction

The player on lead - not their partner!! - may, if they need to, ask questions about the auction. But please don't ask questions that may possibly send Unauthorised Information to your partner. Simple questions, like "what do you open with a 15-19 balanced hand and two 4-card suits" or "what is the minimum shape for declarer on this auction?", etc.

Either opponent (declarer or dummy) can answer these questions, as it is just pertaining to system/agreements. If there is absolutely no previous discussion, agreement or experience of the situation in question, then the answer "no agreement" or "undiscussed" is the proper response (not a guess at what you might think the agreement is or should be!).

Information can still be found out by private messaging. If you are asked privately, please respond privately.

During the play

Questions may still be asked privately at any point, or to the table when it is your turn to play (but again, avoid asking to the table if it has any chance of creating UI).

By the way, if you miss some cards played during a trick due to a technical issue (maybe they disappeared before you saw them), then you can replay the previous trick at any time up to the moment you play to the next trick by clicking on the current trick count (next to where the contract is written).

Claiming

The Claiming process can potentially really help with the pace of play. But ***please make your claims very clear***. If a short message of explanation for your line of play is needed, then please write it in the Claim Box. For example, please state that you are drawing trumps if there are any left to be drawn.

We suggest you don't claim too early if it may be difficult for your opponents to assess the situation. And ***always be on the look-out for someone making a claim*** – sometimes claims have been missed by the opposition and in the end it would have been faster to just play out the final tricks!

Calling the Director

In the Menu (the blue box with three horizontal white lines), there is a “Call Director” option. If there are any problems that may need the Director's help, then please call. An alert is sent to them, and they will come to the table as soon as they can.

It may take a few seconds for them to see what is going on, and normally they will ask the person who has called them how they can help.

If it is a technical issue, then they will do their best to sort it out. They also get a notification if someone gets disconnected, so no need to call them straight away if this happens as they should see it. If 30 seconds passes and nothing has happened, then this would be a good time to call them!

If it is a bridge-related issue - then they will try to gather the facts as best they can and will normally ask play to resume as soon as possible. If a ruling is requested or score adjustment is needed, they will make it at some point in the next round or two and inform the players accordingly.

As ***we don't allow Undos***, if an unfortunate mis-click occurs, then we're sorry, but you have to just live with it. If it occurs at the very end of a hand, then it may be possible to adjust when the situation is completely obvious. But whenever there is any doubt at all, there will be no adjustment for a mis-click. If you do mis-click, please call the Director and they can have a look at it, but be aware that it can't be undone so take care with this as best you can. (In Settings, “Confirm Bid”/“Confirm Card” is available for those worried about mis-clicks.)

Unfinished boards

We are currently playing 8 minutes per board if 2-board rounds and 7 minutes per board for 3-boards rounds. Our pace of play has been pretty good on the whole (please keep this up!) and rounds frequently finish early.

If a board is unfinished, however, with 4 or fewer cards to play, the computer will normally assign a score for that board. The Director will often be monitoring the slower tables in each round, so may be watching at this point (but obviously not necessarily if there are several tables still in play). They will try to check all unfinished boards to see if the assigned result is fair.

If there are 5 or more cards left in the hand, the computer will normally assign an average. The Director will definitely look at these boards and try to assign a score if it is possible to do so. This will not always be possible if it is too early in the play to determine an outcome. If there is still a big decision to be made in the play (e.g. a two-way finesse to find a queen), then, with all other things being equal, the Director may assign an artificial score that takes into account that situation (or the closest that it can be approximated to using the BBO software).

If any player feels that they have been assigned a score that is unfair, then they can Private Message the Director and they will look into it. Please do this as soon as you possibly can, as if you wait until the end of the session it gives them very little time (20 minutes) to deal with everything that might be going on.

Results

Once the 20-minute period of possible scoring corrections is over, then there is no further chance to adjust the results. A few minutes after this, the results ranking list on the BBO website will go final. And this really means final!

Then, as soon as the data for the boards are available from BBO, the Director will process the data and upload it onto the Farnborough website. An email will be sent out to everyone who played when the results are up so that they don't have to keep checking.

If averages have been assigned at some point during the session, then the results might very marginally differ from those on BBO. This is because we are using the Neuberg Formula in our scoring, which is recommended by the EBU and considered a fairer method. BBO currently does not use Neuberg, hence the possible difference.

Examples of bids that should be explained

We should think, “*what would I like to see if I was sitting in the next seat*” and use that as a basis for when and how we explain our bids.

A 2D overcall over a 1NT opener (and similar situations to this) – please say what this bid means EVEN IF NATURAL – this clearly gives the next player the best experience. To just see the bid 2D arrive with nothing else there would leave some doubt. They would have to assume it is a natural bid, but would wonder if the opponent has forgotten to alert and explain. 2D can have many different meanings!

Strength of jump overcalls, as well as 2-level openers

Bids over 3NT (in an online environment, these should also be alerted and explained as well, for the purpose of full disclosure)

Two-suited overcalls, but with the suits they show, rather than “Michaels” or “Unusual NT”, write “majors”, “minors”, “red suits” or “hearts and a minor” etc

Alert a completion of a transfer (it is not natural), and we also suggest you write “transfer completion”

Alert a break of a transfer and explain its precise meaning (e.g. min/max and whether it shows something specific in the suit bid, say)

A pre-emptive raise of partner’s suit, or in fact a clarification of strength for any bid that might have various different meanings, e.g. 1H-(X)-3H might be explained as “weak 0-5” or “like a raise to 2” or “shaded raise to 3” or “invitational”

If you play 5CM and open 1m, please explain 1C as “2+” or 1D as “4+” or 1m as “better minor” etc

If you play a wide-ranging 1NT response, definitely write this in as it is not normal in our field of players, so 1M-1NT might need “5-11” or “5-10(11)” or “5-11(12)”, and if you play it as forcing, then this should also be written

In a situation where there might be different meanings for a double (even if the regulations state that the double does not need alerting), we still suggest you explain it. For example:

(1NT)-X-(2H)-X; (2S)-X

Hopefully the 1NT range was explained.

Let’s say the first double here is penalties. Probably that doesn’t need explaining (it definitely doesn’t need alerting). But there’s no harm in writing “pen” or “penalties” before clicking on Double.

The 2H bid is another case where you might want to write its meaning, whether it's natural or not (it could be natural, or transfer, or even both majors, depending on agreements - the latter two options need an alert as well as an explanation, of course). Assuming it's natural...

The X of 2H is sometimes played as take-out, sometimes played as penalties. So this is a good case where an explanation is helpful. "Take-out" (no alert needed), "Penalties" (alert needed, as this is a penalty double of a natural bid).

If the 2H had been a transfer, then maybe the options for the double become "values" (alert needed) or "hearts" (no alert needed, as this is a double of an artificial bid, which is expected to show the suit bid) or "take-out of spades" (alert needed).

Assuming the 2H bid was natural, and opener has decided to try to play in their own spade suit instead, then the third double in this auction is likely to be penalties, in which case, this should be alerted and explained as "penalties".

If the 2H bid was a transfer and the double of 2H showed values, then many play the double of 2S as take-out, in which case an alert is not needed (as it is a double of a suit the opponents have shown naturally), but still an explanation of the bid "take-out" would be helpful for the opposition.

Basically, if in doubt, explain your actions as much as you can!