

FVBC Talk – Bridge Procedures, Rules & Etiquette

1. Hesitation in Bidding

Suppose you are in a competitive auction, with your side bidding spades and the opponents bidding hearts. After several bids from each player, you bid 3S. Your LHO studies her hand for two full minutes and passes.

Is the hesitation a violation, or infraction?

Should the Director be called?

Should penalties be applied?

The hesitation is NOT a violation of bridge rules. Players are entitled to think as long as they need to. However, the hesitation has resulted in UNAUTHORIZED INFORMATION.

All players are entitled to the following information during the auction:

- All legal calls (or “bids”) made
- The meaning of any conventional, or non-standard, bids of the opponents

Unauthorized information may come in many forms. Unusually slow or fast bids. Snapping down a penalty double to distinguish it from a takeout double. Moaning at partner’s bid.

In general, such information is authorized to the non-offending side... they may take the hesitation into account and adjust their bidding. They do so at their own peril. If they take a risky action and it doesn’t work out, the result stands.

The partner of the hesitator is NOT entitled to the unauthorized information. They must act as though the pass was made in tempo.

So, must the hesitator’s partner PASS?

The quick answer is NO. If there is a clear bid that is called for after an in-tempo pass, then partner should make it. If their cards clearly justify the bid, then there is no infraction, and no penalties.

However, if there is more than one reasonable option, then:

- “A player may not choose a call or play that is demonstrably suggested over another by unauthorized information if the other call or play is a logical alternative.”
- “A logical alternative is an action that a significant proportion of the class of players in question, using the methods of the partnership, would seriously consider, and some might select.”

These are bridge Laws 16.B.1.a and 16.B.1.b.

So, if there is an obvious bid that virtually everyone would make, bid it. If there are several reasonable alternatives (e.g., if some would pass after partner’s in-tempo pass) then avoid the choice suggested by the hesitation (choose PASS over 4H). Bidding 4H will end up with one of the following results:

- If you make 10 tricks, then Director will adjust the score to +170, as 3H making 4.
- If you make 9 tricks, then the result will stand and you will score -50 (if not vulnerable).

What is the Director's role?

Whenever an irregularity or suspected infraction occurs, it is a good idea to call the Director.

If a player believes a clear hesitation has occurred, she should say so and confirm that everyone at the table agrees. If they do not agree, then the Director should be called to the table to resolve the dispute.

If everyone agrees that a "break in tempo" has occurred, then there are two options:

- The Director may be called, to explain the laws, options, and consequences, or
- The players may choose to play the hand, and the non-offending side may call the Director at the end of play if they believe they got a bad score as a direct result of the hesitator's partner choosing a bid suggested by the hesitation (their side was "damaged").

The first option is generally better, as it may avoid an infraction from occurring. The Director's job is to intercede to avoid infractions, and to make sure that the non-offending side is not injured when infractions occur.