

TABLE ETIQUETTE

The following notes

have been put together following one or two requests for clarification on some issues. The laws of bridge can seem very complicated at times, but here are some of the dos and don'ts, and if we all attempt to comply with them, it will make the game fairer and more enjoyable for all concerned.

Courtesy - the absolute key to an enjoyable night's bridge. Always be courteous at the bridge table, both to the opponents and to your own partner. Avoid any remark or action that might offend or embarrass. Greet your opponents politely, but in the interests of avoiding slow play, keep general chit-chat to a minimum until you have finished the boards, and above all, do not hold a post mortem on the hands you have just played - it can be very frustrating for others nearby to hear details of boards they have yet to play! At the end of the round, thank your opponents, even if they have just given you a series of bottoms. It is also considered poor form to congratulate your partner effusively on a good contract in front of your opponents, as you might seem to be gloating at their correspondingly poor result. If you need to call the director, do so in a courteous manner, remembering that (s)he is out to enjoy a night's bridge too. Please remember also, that mobile phones should be turned off where possible, and set to vibrate where it is vital that they remain on.

Bidding - Do not remove your cards from the board until all four players are present at the table. Count your cards before you look at them. The board should be left in the centre of the table so that everyone can see the vulnerability. Decide on your bid before reaching for the bidding box - you must not touch a bidding card and then change your mind and pass, as that clearly conveys illegal information to your partner. (You are permitted to change your bid if you put the wrong one out by mistake, provided you do so immediately.) Similarly, do not, whether by comment, sighs, body language or facial expressions, let your partner or opponents know that something has gone amiss with your bidding, or that you feel forced into making a particular bid. Avoid comments like "Oh well, we're not vulnerable" or "I suppose I'll have to ...". Such comments clearly may unfairly influence partner's next bid. Try to maintain the same demeanour and tempo at all times. If you hesitate before passing, your partner is placed in a difficult position as any positive bid by them must be a clear and logical choice, otherwise your opponents can complain to the director, claiming your hesitation conveyed information to your partner. If the director agrees, you can be penalised. At the end of the auction, all bidding cards must remain on the table until the first lead is played face down on the table. Do not ask the meaning of a bid during the auction unless it is your turn to bid and you intend to make a bid other than pass. You may ask questions after the bidding ends and before the lead is faced (turned up).

Play - Dummy should lay their cards on the table, with the trump suit (if any) to the declarer's left and each suit arranged in descending sequence from high to low nearest declarer. As with the bidding, try to maintain an even pace and demeanour, although a prolonged pause before playing to the opening trick is normal, as you assess dummy and plan a course of action. Avoid playing a card with undue emphasis as it may be construed as an attempt to alert partner to a particular interest in that suit or the play

of a singleton for example. It is up to your partner to be alert to your discards - you are not permitted to draw attention to them. You must not say "not holding" when you fail to follow suit - that is your partner's responsibility. Do not rearrange your hand after the play of a card, as that could be taken to indicate that you are now void in the suit just played. You may not look at the cards you played to previous tricks during the play of the hand. After you have turned your card over, it is too late to turn it up again and ask to see everyone's card - you must ask before turning your card over. You may check the last card you played, but only until the lead to the next trick has been made. Technically, declarer should not touch the cards in dummy. They nominate a card and their partner plays it - under no circumstances can dummy take the initiative, even if there is only a singleton in the suit in dummy, they must wait for declarer to call for the card. Once a card has been nominated, it is deemed to have been played - you may not change your mind. Similarly, once a defender places a card on the table, even if it is face down, they cannot change their mind. Do not detach a card from your hand until it is your turn to play. Do not select a card in your hand, then push it back into place and choose another one. Make up your mind before choosing a card in the first place. Do not hesitate unduly where you have no option in which card to play - if you have a singleton in the suit led for instance, then you must play it at your normal tempo. To do otherwise would be seen as a deliberate attempt to mislead the opposition and is subject to penalty.

The director should be called at once if there is any infringement. Do not feel offended if an opponent calls the director - it is perfectly normal practice where there is any question of an irregularity, however minor or unintentional. Calling the director means that no-one is put at an unfair disadvantage. Dummy may not call the director until the hand is ended. In fact, the only thing dummy is allowed to do is to draw declarer's attention to the fact that (s)he is about to lead from the wrong hand or fail to follow suit..

Once the hand is over, leave your cards on the table until both partnerships have agreed the score - after the cards are gathered up it is very difficult to reconcile any disagreement on the result. North should fill in the traveller, and East should check it. Shuffle your cards before returning them to the board. Avoid post mortems as these can not only give information to others at neighbouring tables, but can also damage morale within a partnership. You are not permitted to look at another player's hand without their express permission, and only one hand should be removed from the board at a time to avoid the risk of the hands going back into the wrong places.

Remember - it is only a game and meant to be enjoyed!

A summary of some of the key points of table etiquette.

Be friendly - greet your opponents politely, don't continue to discuss a previous hand.

Don't remove your cards from the board until all four players are at the table.

Count your cards before looking at them.

Once play has started, keep banter to an absolute minimum until you've finished the hands for that round - avoid post mortems.

Decide on your bid before touching the bidding box.

Try not to make it obvious if you are unhappy with partner's bid - or your own for that matter!

No speech play at any time. It is illegal to qualify a bid with a comment, facial expression or body language.

Try not to hesitate unduly before bidding or, especially, passing. Get into the habit of bidding (and playing) at a steady tempo.

You can only ask the meaning of a bid when it is your turn to bid or at the end of the auction.

The opening lead must always be played face down.

Bids must remain on the table until the opening lead has been made.

If you cannot follow suit, you must not say anything to draw attention to that fact. You should, however, say "Not holding?" if you partner discards.

Do not rearrange your hand in such a way as to make a void obvious.

Do not look at the cards you have played to previous tricks.

Once declarer has nominated or touched a card in dummy, (s)he may not change their mind, provided they can legally play that card.

Decide what you are going to play before touching any card in your hand - do not finger several cards while making up your mind.

Do not select a card until it is your turn to play.

Dummy can only do as declarer instructs - not suggest a card to play! He may, however, alert declarer if (s)he is about to lead from the wrong hand, or fail to follow suit.

Do not indicate either pleasure or anger with partner's lead - adopt a neutral expression until the hand is over.

Do not gather up your hand until the score has been agreed.

Shuffle your cards before returning them to the board.

Do not gloat!