

A Brief Guide to Bidding Alerts and Announcements in BBO Tournaments

When playing online in a tournament, you have to alert or announce your own bids, when in “normal” bridge, your partner makes that announcement. This is a big difference between the online form and the normal form, and one that people sometimes have difficulty with. So here are some (hard-learned) tips.

How to alert or announce. The way to alert or announce is to enter text on the “Alert” line when it is your turn to bid, before you complete your bid. If, like me, you have to confirm your bid (keeps you from mistakes), the best time to do it is after you’ve made the bid but before you have hit the “OK” button. If you forgot to do it and only realize after your bid has appeared on the screen, then click on your own bid. A little window will open up, asking you to “explain.” So that’s your chance to correct your oversight. Because all of your alerts and announcements are intended to be seen by opponents but not by your partner, DO NOT send a chat message to the Table explaining your bid. That is technically a violation of BBO rules and a director could sanction you if you do it and your opponents call the director.

When to alert or announce. You should alert or announce any time your partner would normally say something about your bid. So, for example, if you open 1NT, your partner would normally give a point count range, so you should do so. If you make a transfer bid where your partner would normally say “transfer,” then you type it in yourself. If you are playing 2/1 and you bid 1NT over a partner’s opening of one of a major, you must announce “semi-forcing” or “forcing” depending on which you play. If you play neither, you have nothing to announce (see below). If you and your partner play New Minor Forcing, then if you make that bid, you type in either the word “Alert” or “New Minor Forcing” (just like regular bridge, if somebody says “Alert,” there is no obligation by opponents to ask what it means, but if they do, then an explanation must be provided). For common conventions that are not alertable (Stayman, Michaels, Blackwood, Unusual No Trump)), you do not have to announce or alert, but if asked, you must explain what your partnership agreement is. In any event, if you are asked to explain a bid, saying that there is no explanation available is not a good reply. But see immediately below.

What you don’t have to say. Alerts and announcements are about partnership agreements. You are NOT required to describe your hand if an opponent asks you what a bid means, only what your partnership agreement is. So if you make a bid and are asked what it means, you don’t have to tell what your distribution and point count are, but you should say instead “no partnership agreement” if that is an accurate description of your bid. However, if you are playing 2/1 game forcing, your partner opens 1H and your response is 2C and you are asked to explain, you reply “2/1. Forcing to game (or wherever you are forcing to).” If your partnership agreement says nothing about the number of quality of clubs you hold, you don’t have to tell opponents about that suit. If you play 2/1 and don’t play either forcing or semi-forcing, then if asked about your 1N bid (see above), just reply “no partnership agreement.”

When should you ask for an explanation? Any time you don't believe you understand a bid, you should ask for an explanation. You do this by clicking on the bid. Typically, you won't get an answer right away. If you click again, you'll get the message that [opponent] is preparing an answer, which may or may not be true. If the response is not satisfactory, you can send that opponent a private chat message asking for further clarification. If the response is downright evasive or turns out to be lying, then you can call the director.

How do you call the director? There is a blue box with three white lines. Options inside that box include your team's convention card, opponent's convention card, and calling the director. If you call the director, a dialogue box appears asking why you are calling. At the director's discretion, you will be contacted by private chat or the director will address the entire table.