

# General Overview and Terminology

Bridge is a card game played by four persons, two sets of partners. One partnership, labeled North-South, sit opposite one another at the table; the other partnership is labeled East-West.

Bridge is played with a modified (usually slightly narrower) deck of playing cards – minus the Jokers. A deck contains four suits (clubs ♣, Diamonds ♦, Hearts ♥, and Spades ♠) with 13 cards each suit ranking in order, from the top, **A**[ce], **K**[ing], **Q**[ueen], **J**[ack], 10 [or **T**], 9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2. ♣ and ♦ are designated Minor suits while ♥ and ♠ are designated Major suits. The significance of this separation has to do with scoring which we postpone the discussion of until later. Majors score more points. There are two kinds of points: scoring and card value, which is abbreviated HCP or High Card Points.

A dealer shuffles the deck and deals them out, one at a time, to each player. Each player then has a random set of 13 cards (holding this many is the reason Bridge decks are narrower). In Duplicate Bridge, hands are preserved, in card-holding boards, to be played by other tables. Many times the cards may be pre-shuffled and dealt by a machine.

## Suit Rank

In Bridge the suits are not only separated into Major and Minor they have, for bidding purposes, a fixed ranking: with Clubs being the lowest rank followed by Diamonds, Hearts and Spades. Note the ranking ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ happens to be in alphabetical order – if that help you remember **C D H S**. Note also that the the Majors have 1 Red and one Black suit. Same for the Minors.

## Tricks

Once the bidding is complete, cards are played in clockwise fashion one from each player. Each round of 4 played card is called a trick much as in the children's card game, WAR. Everyone is required to follow the suit of the card led and the card of that suit with the highest rank wins the trick. If a player doesn't have a card in the suit led, she may play any card of her choice but it, if not Trump, can not win the trick. If two Trump cards are played the higher ranking Trump wins the trick. Since each player starts with 13 cards, there are a total of 13 trick available in one hand.

## Trump

If at the end of the bidding sequence a Trump suit has been nominated, then when a person doesn't have a card in the suit led she may, but is not obligated to, play a Trump card. The highest Trump card played on a trick wins the trick. You can not play a Trump card when you hold a card in the suit that was led.

## NoTrump

In the bidding sequence it is possible to suggest that the hand be played with no suit designated as the Trump suit. In the rank of suits NoTrump is higher than all the others. Since NoTrump is not a 'suit' it is common to refer to suits and 'NoTrump' as the 'strain'. Thus the strains in ranking order are ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ and NT being the highest.

## The Contract

While the object of the game is winning tricks, competitive organization in Bridge arranges the game into several periods, two of which are at the heart of the competitiveness: the bidding period and the Play-of-the-Hand period. We will see that, in the bidding period, bids serve two purposes: description of one's hand and establishment of the contract. The bidding is finished when there are three consecutive Passes. At that point the Contract is the last non-pass bid. The team that first mentioned the strain of that last non-pass bid become the offense, the other team the defense and

the contract is in the last mentioned strain. The offense is said to have made an agreement to fulfill the terms of the contract. More later!

## Bidding

The only legal method that players have to discuss their hand with their partner is through legal 'calls'. The bidding sequence always starts with the dealer and progresses clockwise with each player required to make a Call. Bids are CALLS that suggest a contract, thus, 1♣ is a bid as are 4♥ and 6NT. There are three other possible Calls: Pass, Double and Redouble. More on the last two later. Pass is used, obviously, when a player has nothing to say about his hand and doesn't want to risk having his side be required to fulfill a contract, he Passes. Double is designated by **X** and Redouble by **XX**. **To Be Continued** below: (under the heading) The Auction.

## Play of the Hand [POTH]

The team that makes the last legal bid 'wins' the contract and the first person on that team who mentioned the contract strain becomes the DECLARER, his partner is termed 'the Dummy'. This is not meant to be disparaging, the term derives from a French term meaning 'silent'. The person to the left of the DECLARER is charged with making the opening lead. Once the opening lead is 'faced' the Dummy exposes his cards on the table in ranks with the Trump suit on his right (DECLARER's left). After that the Dummy must, silently, play his cards as directed by the DECLARER. As with bidding, cards are played in a clockwise fashion.

Each trick is won as already described and each player puts the card from the completed trick in front of himself, face-down, with the long side in the direction of the team winning the trick. The player whose card won the trick then provides the lead for the next trick. The process continues until all 13 tricks have been completed.

## The Auction

The bidding sequence is referred to as the auction because the process is, in reality, a competitive bidding atmosphere where the contestants are, in an escalating fashion, attempting to outbid the opponents so as to win the contract and the right to determine the playing conditions for that hand. An auction might go like this:

North (dealer)	East	South	West
1♥	1♠	2♦	P
2♥	P	4♥	P
P	P		

Hence the contract is 4♥ by North. North was the first to mention ♥ and South's 4♥ bid was followed by 3 consecutive Passes. North is the DECLARER; South, the Dummy; and East is "on lead". By the way, technically, in this bidding sequence East as the first opponent of the Opener to make a bid (1♠) is termed "the Overcaller" his partner is termed "the Advancer". The partner of the Opener is "the Responder".

## Vulnerability

Vulnerability effects scoring. If you are Vulnerable and fail to make your contract the penalty is higher. If you succeed the reward is higher. More on scoring, later.

## Object of the Game

As with any game the object is winning and winning is achieved by gaining the highest score. The highest score is achieved by bidding and making the best contract available using the cards dealt to you; conversely if your cards are not good enough to compete for the better contract then your object

is to keep the opponents from winning tricks. The glory of Duplicate Bridge, as opposed to 'Party' or "Kitchen" Bridge, is that you are not competing against the players sitting at the same table as you. Everyone sitting E-W are going to get the same cards as you; therefore your aim is to bid and play those cards better than every other E-W in the room.

## The Bidding Ladder

When competing for the contract, you are using bids to both compete for the contract and to also describe your hand. Any subsequent bid after the opening bid must progress up the bidding ladder, The top of which is:

- 7NT All bids at the 7 level are called **Grand Slams** – The defense wins 0 tricks
- 7♠ Bonuses = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not + additional 1000 for bidding & making Grand Slam
- 7♥
- 7♦
- 7♣
- 6NT All bids at the 6 level are called Slams or **Small Slams** – The defense can win only 1 trick
- 6♠ Bonuses = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not + additional 500 for bidding & making Small Slam
- 6♥
- 6♦
- 6♣
- 5NT
- 5♠
- 5♥
- 5♦ ← Game in a Minor Suit – Bonus = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not
- 5♣ ← Game in a Minor Suit – Bonus = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not
- 5NT
- 4♠ ← Game in a Major Suit – Bonus = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not
- 4♥ ← Game in a Major Suit – Bonus = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not
- 4♦ ← this level is sub-game, Bonus = 50 for making and having success in such a contract
- 4♣ ← this level is sub-game, Bonus = 50
- 3NT ← Game in a NoTrump – Bonus = 500 if Vulnerable 300 if not
- 3♠ All bids below this level are **sub-game Bonus** yielding a **50** point bonus.
- 3♥
- 3♦
- 3♣
- 2NT
- 2♠
- 2♥
- 2♦
- 2♣
- 1NT
- 1♠
- 1♥
- 1♦
- 1♣

You can make bid at the same level so long as it is in a higher ranking suit. For example, you can bid 1♥ if the previous bid was 1♦ or 1♣. If the bid before yours was 3♣ and you want to make a bid in ♦ your bid would have to be 4♦. because ♠'s rank higher than ♦'s.

## Book

The contract in the above example, 4♥, could be stated as: I entered this agreement on the condition that I will be rewarded if I fulfill the contract and my opponents will be rewarded if I fail. So the obvious question is how does one fulfill the contract. The designers of the game suggested that if the game were to be sufficiently challenging with the bidding reflecting contract proposals then anyone entering a contract should be able to win half the tricks before 'working on their contract'. Since there are 13 possible tricks, 6 is close to half. This lower half is referred to as 'the Book', thus to fulfill the 4♥ contract the DECLARER is required to win 6 (book) +4 = 10 tricks; to be victorious. The defense must win  $(13-10)+1 = 4$  tricks; meaning the offense only won 9 tricks.

## Standard American

The bidding system we are going to introduce you to is called Standard American or Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC). The appendage comes from the fact that in an earlier day all bids considered 'Standard' were printed on a yellow card carried by all players – so that there would not be arguments as the system was its infancy. All Players are required to have a Convention card filled out and made available to opponents and/or the Director on request. Convention card of partners must be the identical. The reason for this is that all bids have specific meanings that should be understood by all players; Opponents are entitled to know the meaning of all bids that do not have **the** standard meaning. The game of Bridge excludes secrecy – this assures that results are due primarily to skill, not chicanery. The playing field is level. If a bid knowingly does not have a standard meaning the partner of the player making the bid must ALERT the opponents to that fact; and is obligated to explain the meaning to the satisfaction of the opponents. Standard American is probably the most popular system but it is not the only system. What this means is: if during the course of the bidding there is a bid you think you don't understand you can, at your turn to bid, AND SHOULD ask the meaning. Don't be shy, your opponents won't be offended; they expect it.

The structure that SAYC imparts to the bidding process was designed, and redesigned considerably to give a partnership a reasonable chance of arriving at the 'right contract'. Using the system requires good hand evaluation.

## Hand Valuation: High Card Points (HCP)

There could be many schemes for hand evaluation but since the object of the game is trick taking a system that emphasizes the trick taking ability of a hand rises to the top. Too long ago to remember Milton Work suggested the system we will use. It was slightly modified by Chas. Goren but it's simplicity allows it to survive to this day. Pick a suit, any single suit and deal it out into 4 hands. If done in this manner there are going to be 4 tricks available to be won. Three tricks will have 4 cards in it and the last only one. And if the cards are played judiciously each trick with 4 cards in it will have been won by the **A**, one by the **K**, one by the **Q** and one by the **J**. Basically, out of the 13 cards in a suit there are only 4 "trick-takers"; rightfully they won't always be the **A, K, Q, and J** but the chances that **A** will win a trick is highest, followed in a diminishing manner by the others. So it makes sense to value the **A** as 4, **K** as 3, **Q** as 2, **J** as 1; all other cards have 0 value as a high card. Due to their trick-taking prowess these four cards (**AKQJ**) are called **Honors**. Since in normal play the **T**, because of promotion, has a reasonable chance of taking a trick it is also considered an Honor, but has 0 HCP value.

Note that each suit then has 10 HCP and that the total HCP count is 40. On average one can expect that their hand to have something in the neighborhood of 10 HCP's. And if a partnership is to take more than half the tricks; they should have somewhere in the vicinity of half the points (i.e. 20). Keep that in mind. To make a 1-level contract (7 tricks) a team likely needs a bit more than 20 (HC)Points.

## Hand Valuation: Distribution

Another way to add trick taking power to a hand is via distribution. If one side holds 11 cards in a single suit it only takes a maximum of 2 tricks to remove that suit from the opponents hands. When that is the case then all the cards in the longest suit can be counted as trick-takers. The point is: **there is** trick-taking potential in extra length. When the contract is in a suit then short suits can become a trick taking asset; but this requires trickier evaluation criteria so we will leave short suit evaluation for later. For the moment, It is recommended that you can add 1 point to your HCP count for each card over 4 in any suit. For example, if your holding is 5-5-2-1 with 12 HCP you can extend your hand evaluation by 2 points and treat your hand in the same way you would a 14 HCP hand. This supplemented count is referred to as 'Playing Points'. Distribution points should only be applied in hand re-evaluation, **not** in the initial evaluation.

## 'Good' Suit

The general definition of a "Good suit" is one that has either 2 of the top 3 Honors or 3 of the top 5 Honors.

## SCORING, BIDDING AND THE MAGIC-8

In perusing the Bidding Ladder you might have noted that Game in a Major requires a 4-level contract and it was different for the Minors and NoTrump. How can we make sense of that. Easy!

Each trick, after winning the 6 'book' tricks, in a Minor suit contract is worth only 20 scoring points.

The first trick, after winning the 6 'book' tricks, in NoTrump yields 40 scoring points.

Each subsequent trick in NoTrump and all tricks a Major suit contract are worth 30 scoring points.

If we define a "Game" score as 100 points we see how 3NT (100 pts); 4♠ and 4♥ (120 pts); 5♦ and 5♣ (100 pts) are "Game" contracts..

To avoid confusion between scoring points and evaluation (both distribution and HC) Points we will always refer to evaluation points as HCP. The word points (pts) will always refer to scoring points.

We now know how many points we get if we bid and make Game (100 or more); but how many HCP do we need 'to bid Game'.

A comment: We might be fortunate in a NoTrump contract to make what are termed long-suit tricks, but reasonably most tricks in a NoTrump contract will come from trick-taking honors, i.e. from HCP. Some say you need 25 HCP; others insist that 26 are needed. That's 25/26 (total = HCP and long-suit) points. More important – you need 9 trick-winners. Consider this: (in the two hands) 4 A's, 4Q = 24 HCP are likely only 8 tricks.

Likewise, in a major suit (10 tricks) contract you have the potential advantage of 1 or 2 additional tricks from your 'excess' trump, so 25/26 is still a good estimate on points (total) needed.

In a Minor Game (11 tricks) one can expect to need 28/29 total points.

Small Slams (12 tricks) , in general, requires 33 HCP (total) that's equates to missing 1 K and 1 A

Grand Slams (13 tricks) requires 37 HCP (total) that's equates to missing 1 K. Note: you need to have all the A's.

**Note: that making Game in a Major yields the most points!!! More that Game in NT and even more than Game in a Minor despite the fact that 1 more trick is needed in a Minor contract.** This is a very important matter. It is the essence behind the manner in which the SAYC bidding system has been devised. The SAYC system focuses on finding the best possible contract with an emphasis on Major suit contract. Within this scheme is a system aimed at finding an 8-card trump fit. We will see how this plays out as we learn the bidding system. Something to keep in the

back of your mind is the 'MAFIA' rule; *MAFIA* stands for MAajor suits FIrst Always.

## RULES versus LAWS

In the language of bridge you will often here the word 'rule'. This generally refers to a “rule of thumb”, a guiding principle as opposed to a law that must be followed. The game is full of laws, such as “following suit (that's why games have Directors), and probably has even many more rules (of thumb). In this writing we always use this distinction.

## How do we Know How High to Take the Bidding?

We will eventually learn several tools that aid us in determining the answer to that question. (1) *Losing Trick Count* is one such tool; (2) and the *Law of Total Tricks* is another. But we need to get comfortable with the general system before we can employ these. Thus we must concentrate on trying to figure how close our partnership is to the HCP count necessary for Game and on finding the *Magic-8*.

As soon as it is clear that there is insufficient HCP and/or no 8-card fit it is recommended that the bidding stops appropriately.

Based on HCP we will separate hands into 4 opening types and 3 responding types, with the opening bid defined as the first non-Pass call made on a hand, and responses being the first bid by the partner of the Opener.

Type	Minimum	Medium	Big	Huge
Opening Hand	12-14	15-17	18-19*	20+**
Responding	6-10***	10-12	13+	

Note all but 2 types have a 3 HCP range. \*\* Traditionally this is value is 22+, we will provide explanations when we learn and discuss this type of hand. \*\*\*traditionally this value was 6-9 but the trend is to extend the upper limit to 10. This is a judgment call (note it overlaps with the medium response hand). I suggest one differentiate the 10's as follows: for min the 10 is a bad 10 (ex. 4 Q's and 2 J's hardly any trick-taking power); to consider a 10 HCP hand a medium hand it must be a good 10 (ex. 2A' and 1 Q).

Examination of this table shows that a (NoTrump or Major-suit) Game contract (25/26 HCP) requires both the Opener and Responder to essentially have medium hands. A Minimum opener and a Medium response with both at or near the top of their ranges might 'squeak' enough HCP to be successful. The bidding system we will learn helps us quickly decide what sort of hands a partnership holds if we keep the concept expressed in this table in mind.

Note: None of this is 'hard and fast' what we give you are guidelines and as you gain experience you will learn how good these guides are and how much your actual ability will allow you to “cheat” these “baisc” guideline definitions.