

How to play bridge

A introductory guide to the basics

Basics

- Bridge is a card game played with a standard deck of 52 playing cards.
 - There are four suits in a deck: spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs.
- There are 4 players, divided into two pairs.
- Each player has 13 cards.
- The players sitting opposite each other are a pair and are partners in the same team.

Basics

- There are two main phases of each game, or deal:
 - The auction (or bidding)
 - The play
- The play only occurs after the auction is completed.

Tricks

- The objective in bridge is to win “tricks”.
- A trick consists of four cards, one from each player, played clockwise around the table.
 - Hence, there are 13 tricks to be won.
- The first card played to each trick is called the “lead”.

Tricks

- If it is your turn to lead, you may play any card in your hand.
- After the lead, the next three players must play a card of the same suit as the lead if possible.
- If you have no more cards of the same suit, you may play any card in your hand.

Tricks

- The trump suit (a master suit that is higher than all other suits) is determined in the auction (discussed later).
- The winner of each trick is determined as follows:
 - If a trick contains no trump card, it is won by the highest card of the suit led.
 - If a trick contains a trump card, it is won by the highest trump played.
 - In order from highest to lowest, the cards are: A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2.

The auction

- In this phase, players bid for the minimum number of tricks they can win and determine the trump suit.
- Each level (the number) is a commitment to winning six plus that number of tricks.
 - e.g. bidding 1 Spades is a commitment to win $6+1=7$ tricks with the trump suit set in spades.
- There are four suits. In the auction, they are ranked in order: clubs (lowest), diamonds, hearts, spades (highest). These set the trump suit for the play.
- There is also NT (no-trumps) which sets no trump suit. The NT bid is ranked higher than all suits in the auction.



The auction

- The dealer makes the first bid.
- The auction then proceeds clockwise.
- Players may opt to “pass” if they do not want to make a bid. The dealer may also pass.
- The auction ends when three players in succession decide to pass.
- The final bid becomes the “contract”



The play

- The players:
 - The “declarer”: the player of the pair who first mentions the suit, or no-trump, that becomes the final contract.
 - The “dummy”: the declarer’s partner
 - The “defence”: the opposing pair

The play

- Step 1: the opening lead
 - The player to the left of the declarer makes the “opening lead”.
 - They may choose any card in their hand to play.
- Step 2: the dummy lays out his cards
 - After the opening lead is played, **the dummy places down his 13 cards face-up on the table.**
 - Everybody at the table can see the dummy’s hand.
 - The declarer (the dummy’s partner) gets to play both his own hand and the dummy’s hand.
 - The dummy does not get to do anything.

The play

- Step 3: winning tricks
 - Each trick is played, in turn, until everybody runs out of cards.
- Step 4: the end of the deal
 - If the declaring pair wins the number of tricks (or more) it committed to, they win a certain number of points
 - If the declaring pair do not win enough tricks, the other pair scores a certain number of points

Games and slams

- Certain contracts provide additional points (game bonuses and slam bonuses)
- Game contracts are 3NT, 4 Hearts and Spades, 5 Clubs and Diamonds and above.
 - 4 Clubs and Diamonds are not game contracts.
- Small slam contracts are all contracts in the 6 level
- Grand slam contracts are all contracts in the 7 level (winning all the tricks!)
- Hence, there is a benefit to bidding to a higher level, as you gain more points if you obtain these bonuses.

Conventional bidding

- We always aim to play in game or slam if possible, to maximise the points obtained.
- Hence, the lower-level bids are used to convey information in order to determine if these higher-level contracts are appropriate.
- Some bids may not even mean what they say! (e.g. 2 Clubs opening bid rarely means the person is holding clubs, but more likely that it is an “artificial” bid stating that a person is holding a strong hand)
- A convention is an agreement about an artificial call or a set of related artificial calls.

Hand evaluation

- We mainly use lower-level bids to inform our partner on what our hand is
- The strength of a hand can be conveyed with “high-card points”
 - An Ace is worth 4 points
 - A King is worth 3 points
 - A Queen is worth 2 points
 - A Jack is worth 1 point
- Typically, only a hand with 12 high-card points is worth an opening bid. (i.e. most hands with less than 12 points should be passed)

Conventions

- In Imperial, the standard convention used is Standard Acol.
- A brief sheet with all the standard bids in this convention can be seen [here](#).
 - A detailed breakdown of all the bids in this convention can be seen [here](#).
- Don't worry if you don't understand some of the sheet, as we'll be able to explain them further as we come to them.
- Other conventions are also in use, but these require a varying amount of understanding and knowledge of the game.

The End

- We have sessions at Blackett 741 every Tuesday in the school term from 6-8pm
- Questions? Don't hesitate to come down and ask them, or drop us an email
- Hope to see everyone around soon!