

The Twelve Day Crash Course (in progress)

How does one win a game of bridge? The answer is pretty straightforward, but executing what is required is not. Winning bridge requires

- Get the most points out of each hand to have the greatest amount of points over all hands

This is accomplished by a couple things:

- Having zero partnership misunderstandings
- Executing ideal judgment in bidding the best contract (which includes knowing when to pass/double)
- Playing the hand in a way that minimizes losses

Bid well, play well, and keep the score in mind.

Bidding Fundamentals

Recall that hands are evaluated by assigning point values to high cards:

A = 4 K = 3 Q = 2 J = 1

Some details that are pertinent to evaluating a hand but are not quite quantifiable include:

- Honors are worth more together than in separate suits
- Honors in longer suits are more valuable than honors in shorter suits
- The same distribution in each hand (mirrored distribution) is bad

Bidding serves as a way to “get your two cents in”. Your partnership is working to find the highest scoring contract possible on the given layout of cards. Considering the nature of scoring and how card play pans out, bidding has two prime objectives:

- Determining if the partnership has an eight-card or longer fit in a suit (particularly hearts or spades)
- Determining if a game contract can be bid and made successfully

As a benchmark, 24 or more combined points are needed to bid games confidently. Do not expect to make all the games you bid (mathematically, if you are then you are not bidding enough game contracts).

Naming the best suit is most important, as it is applicable irrespective of the plans of the opponents. This is why bidding typically revolves around mentioning long suits and naming fits. With particular emphasis on the majors, one may choose to start the bidding with any of the following:

Pass 0-11 HCP

1♣ 11+ HCP 3+ ♣

1♦ 11+ HCP 4+ ♦

1♥ 11+ HCP 5+ ♥

1♠ 11+ HCP 5+ ♠

Notice that the major suit bids promise at least five cards, more than the minor openings. This highlights the emphasis placed on the major suits in the bidding and scoring.

After an opening, the objectives remain the same. Now, responder knows that opener has at least 11 HCP and a minimum suit length. So, if a major suit fit is known, he makes a bid that shows it. If a major suit fit can be explored reasonably, then this is what responder does. Otherwise, responder decides between NT or a minor suit. Depending on aspirations for game, the level of the bid may change. Responder may decide to start with a low-level bid planning to bid game later. These are the most common scenarios, w/ commentary as needed:

Opener: 1♥

Responder's Options: 2♥ 6-9 HCP, 3+♥ (confirming an 8-card fit AND saying "no game interest".

3♥ 9-11 HCP, 3+♥ (confirming an 8-card fit AND suggesting game is possible opposite the right hand)

4♥ 11+ HCP, 3+♥ (as before, but game is certain)

1♠ 5+ HCP, no ♥ fit (that is shown in preference), 4+♠

Notice that 1♠ promises only four. This allows 4-4 fits to be found quickly (they are more common). Responder, with 5♠ and an invitation or better hand, will have ways to determine a ♠ fit later in the auction. This is just a rule made based on historical evidence that it works.

1N 6-10 HCP, none of the above hand types

2N 10-12, as above

3N 12+, as above

NT is typically an easier game to make than a minor suit, so preference is given to NT over the minors in the bidding

2♣ 4+♣s, game forcing

2♦ 4+♦s, game forcing

Notice the strength restrictions on the minor suit bids. They promise at least 12 points (they demand game must be bid). The minor suits are not mentioned quickly without good reason, or better alternatives.

Opener: 1♠

2♥ 5+♥, game forcing

"Wait," you may ask, "why does this not show only four? Why is it game forcing?" Again, this is an idea that has been proved through practice. If there is a heart fit to be found, then responder can only mention a five card or longer suit and have intelligent auctions with partner. With four hearts, responder will choose between some number of NT or a minor suit (if game forcing strength). Notice that there is not a 1♥ bid available to responder – and even then, it would still be best to bid as described

Opener: 1♣

1♥/♠ 4+ cards, 5+ HCP

The emphasis is STILL on finding a major suit. Yes, opener does not have a five-card major, but who is to say he doesn't have a four-card major? Responder must show a four-card major to start the conversation. If he has five, there are ways later on in the bidding to get to a 5-3 fit. The HCP limit is very low, again because major suits get special treatment.

1♦ ...

You will rarely use this bid. Think of it as a catchall for what is left: No major suits, no preference for NT, and no desire to raise clubs.

The Art of Rebidding

Rebidding follows similar biases for major suits and some principles regarding showing strength. Jumps in new suits are game forcing, while other bids are passable and correspond (HCP-wise) with level. For instance,

- 1♥ - 1♠
- 2♠ 11-14 HCP
- 3♠ 14-17 HCP
- 4♠ 17+ HCP

These are all raises of spades, implying a fit. The difference is in the strength.

Generally speaking, bidding becomes more complicated when there are more bids, or more conventional meanings. Understanding these situations can be very useful, but it can also waste precious time. It is better to understand the basics enough to bid games and partials accurately (slams to a lesser extent). Knowing sequences through responder's rebid is typically sufficient for intermediate players.

*These principles are in place barring SPECIFIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT to the contrary

Competitive Bidding Principles

Basically, bid as without interference with the following exceptions:

- Any available bid of an opponent's suit (a cuebid) is artificial and forcing. It typically implies support for partner's suit and invitational or better values.
- Jumps immediately after an overcall or double (i.e. not in the pass-out seat) are always weak (in partner's suit or otherwise)
- Doubles are takeout, unless specifically defined otherwise
- 2/1s are forcing one round (NOT to game). They do not promise a rebid.

A Note About Scoring in IMPS and How Bidding Works

Tired of the major suits getting so much say in the bidding? It makes things a little complicated, but for good reason. Consider the risk/reward calculations below:

Vulnerable M		Nonvul. Game		Vulnerable NT	
Game				Game	
620	140	420	140	600	120
170	-100	170	-50	150	-100
450	240	250	190	450	220
0.652174	35%	0.568182	43%	0.671642	33%

These odds (highlighted) indicate how often a particular contract should make to profit in the long run. So, bidding game requires very little assurance, while other decisions do. **Hence, it is important for bidding to be organized around maximizing the frequency of bidding games.**

Diff. in Pts.	IMPs
20 – 40	1
50 – 80	2
90 – 120	3
130 – 160	4
170 – 210	5
220 – 260	6
270 – 310	7
320 – 360	8
370 – 420	9
430 – 490	10
500 – 590	11
600 – 740	12
750 – 890	13
900 – 1090	14
1100 – 1290	15
1300 – 1490	16
1500 – 1740	17
1750 – 1990	18
2000 – 2240	19
2250 – 2490	20
2500 – 2990	21
3000 – 3490	22
3500 – 3990	23
4000 and up	24

The figure to the left illustrates how points earned in play translate to IMPs. The idea here is that the size of the swing is what matters, so the points earned for game are weighed more than the points earned for an overtrick (10 IMP v 1 IMP). Raw scores are illustrated in the figure below.

One item often overlooked is how partscore swings can have a large impact on a match. These 4-6 IMP swings add up over a normal session. Just because a little caution needs to be exercised does not condone passing all the time. Be aggressive!

One strategy that is toned down is the idea of making a sacrifice, a bid that will go down doubled less than the value of the opponent's contract. Avoid this unless it is 100% clear. Similarly, highly distributional hands are so unpredictable, it is safer to "bid one more" to avoid very large swings.

EZ Score		Not Vulnerable			Vulnerable		
Contract	Made	—	X	XX	—	X	XX
1♣/♦	1	70	140	230	70	140	230
	2	90	240	430	90	340	630
	3	110	340	630	110	540	1030
	4	130	440	830	130	740	1430
	5	150	540	1030	150	940	1830
	6	170	640	1230	170	1140	2230
	7	190	740	1430	190	1340	2630
1♥/♠	1	80	160	520	80	160	720
	2	110	260	720	110	360	1120
	3	140	360	920	140	560	1520
	4	170	460	1120	170	760	1920
	5	200	560	1320	200	960	2320
	6	230	660	1520	230	1160	2720
	7	260	760	1720	260	1360	3120
1 NT	1	90	180	560	90	180	760
	2	120	280	760	120	380	1160
	3	150	380	960	150	580	1560
	4	180	480	1160	180	780	1960
	5	210	580	1360	210	980	2360
	6	240	680	1560	240	1180	2760
	7	270	780	1760	270	1380	3160
2♣/♦	2	90	180	560	90	180	760
	3	110	280	760	110	380	1160
	4	130	380	960	130	580	1560
	5	150	480	1160	150	780	1960
	6	170	580	1360	170	980	2360
	7	190	680	1560	190	1180	2760
2♥/♠	2	110	470	640	110	670	840
	3	140	570	840	140	870	1240
	4	170	670	1040	170	1070	1640
	5	200	770	1240	200	1270	2040
	6	230	870	1440	230	1470	2440
	7	260	970	1640	260	1670	2840
2 NT	2	120	490	680	120	690	880
	3	150	590	880	150	890	1280
	4	180	690	1080	180	1090	1680
	5	210	790	1280	210	1290	2080
	6	240	890	1480	240	1490	2480
	7	270	990	1680	270	1690	2880
3♣/♦	3	110	470	640	110	670	840
	4	130	570	840	130	870	1240
	5	150	670	1040	150	1070	1640
	6	170	770	1240	170	1270	2040
	7	190	870	1440	190	1470	2440
3♥/♠	3	140	530	760	140	730	960
	4	170	630	960	170	930	1360
	5	200	730	1160	200	1130	1760
	6	230	830	1360	230	1330	2160
	7	260	930	1560	260	1530	2560
3 NT	3	400	550	800	600	750	1000
	4	430	650	1000	630	950	1400
	5	460	750	1200	660	1150	1800
	6	490	850	1400	690	1350	2200
	7	520	950	1600	720	1550	2600
4♣/♦	4	130	510	720	130	710	920
	5	150	610	920	150	910	1320
	6	170	710	1120	170	1110	1720
	7	190	810	1320	190	1310	2120
4♥/♠	4	420	590	880	620	790	1080
	5	450	690	1080	650	990	1480
	6	480	790	1280	680	1190	1880
	7	510	890	1480	710	1390	2280

EZ Score		Not Vulnerable			Vulnerable		
Contract	Made	—	X	XX	—	X	XX
4 NT	4	430	610	920	630	810	1120
	5	460	710	1120	660	1010	1520
	6	490	810	1320	690	1210	1920
	7	520	910	1520	720	1410	2320
5♣/♦	5	400	550	800	600	750	1000
	6	420	650	1000	620	950	1400
	7	440	750	1200	640	1150	1800
5♥/♠	5	450	650	1000	650	850	1200
	6	480	750	1200	680	1050	1600
	7	510	850	1400	710	1250	2000
5 NT	5	460	670	1040	660	870	1240
	6	490	770	1240	690	1070	1640
	7	520	870	1440	720	1270	2040
6♣/♦	6	920	1090	1380	1370	1540	1830
	7	940	1190	1580	1390	1740	2230
6♥/♠	6	980	1210	1620	1430	1660	2070
	7	1010	1310	1820	1460	1860	2470
6 NT	6	990	1230	1660	1440	1680	2110
	7	1020	1330	1860	1470	1880	2510
7♣/♦	7	1440	1630	1960	2140	2330	2660
7♥/♠	7	1510	1770	2240	2210	2470	2940
7 NT	7	1520	1790	2280	2220	2490	2980
Defeated Contract	Down	Not Vulnerable		Vulnerable			
	1	50	100	200	100	200	400
	2	100	300	600	200	500	1000
	3	150	500	1000	300	800	1600
	4	200	800	1600	400	1100	2200
	5	250	1100	2200	500	1400	2800
	6	300	1400	2800	600	1700	3400
	7	350	1700	3400	700	2000	4000
	8	400	2000	4000	800	2300	4600
	9	450	2300	4600	900	2600	5200
	10	500	2600	5200	1000	2900	5800
	11	550	2900	5800	1100	3200	6400
	12	600	3200	6400	1200	3500	7000
	13	650	3500	7000	1300	3800	7600

Play Fundamentals

The Five Lines of Defense (and why some leads are dumb)

During the play of the hand, only a couple of different general permutations exist. That is, the way the hand is played overall can be categorized by one of the five lines of defense

1. Active
 - a. They have a source of tricks (a long, running suit)
 - b. Favorable breaks for declarer
 - c. They have shown a lot of strength
2. Passive
 - a. No clear source of tricks
 - b. Declarer has a lot of points compared to dummy

- c. Misfits, bad breaks for declarer
- d. Vs 6N, 7any
- e. Lacking a good suit to attack with in NT
- 3. Forcing Declarer to Ruff
 - a. Declarer has a two-suited hand
 - b. You (or partner) has four trumps
 - c. They have a Moysian (4-3) trump fit
 - d. Anytime this can be done quickly
- 4. Creating Trump Tricks
 - a. Very short or very long in their suits
 - b. No better alternative to any of the other four lines
 - c. Possibility of promoting a trump honor (in your hand or partner's)
- 5. Cutting Declarer's Trumping Power
 - a. No fit shown, playing after a preference (5-2 fit)
 - b. Defense has strong trumps
 - c. Misfits
 - d. Dummy has a ruffing potential
 - e. Values in their long suits
 - f. Sacrifices

Below is what you typically lead based on the line of defense

1. Sequences, Aces, low from honors (if you cannot set up your suit, try to guess partner's suit)
2. Top of a sequence, xxx(xx)
3. The partnership's strongest suit (when declarer is short, he is helpless)
4. Lead trumps
5. To or from shortness

Declaring

The worst thing declarer can do is lose hope in the hand (or be completely inattentive... it is hard to decide which is worse). Consider this [hand](#). Where did declarer go wrong?

At trick 1, declarer did not give enough thought to the entire hand. There are potentially five losers (1♠, 1♥, 2♦, 1♣). There are also (potentially) 10 winners (5♥, 3♠, 2 Aces). The key is in the timing. The spade lead establishes three of declarer's winners, which puts him ahead in the race. He needs to make sure he can cash all his tricks – and he can by overtaking the spades later on in the play.

Instead of accepting this gift, declarer thought that he needed to stop subsequent spade leads and “false-carded”. This was not only ill thought out, but unnecessary. Ten tricks are ten tricks – if the defense finds the right line, so be it. A thoughtful declarer will observe that the lead gave the hand up – a potentially big swing was missed due to some carelessness.

The secret to being thoughtful is simple: Always ask “What can go wrong?” and actually think about it.

So, playing with constant enthusiasm and attention, what else can go wrong? Some declarers are susceptible to thinking about little details that cannot matter. This is partially resolved by a clear set of goals/questions before playing to trick 1:

1. How many tricks do I need for the contract?
2. How many tricks are there for certain?
3. How do I make up the difference?

Remember, there are only four suits, so the possibilities (though they can seem otherwise) are limited. Look at each suit in isolation, then consider what order to combine chances in. Problems will jump out at you that may or may not be resolvable.

There's a saying in chess circles that if you cannot see the right move after a minute, you won't see it. The point is that each player is limited in their capacity to "see" the point of a hand. So, give it a good shot with the process above, and if you cannot figure it out, at least try something that looks reasonable.