

Bridge Lesson 1

Notes

My name is Jonathan Bittner. I'm a freshman, and I've played some competitive bridge over the past two years. I love to teach; stop and ask questions whenever you're confused. Email me to get on the mailing list; times are in flux now, but there will probably be a consistent Friday night game, and weekly lessons whenever is most convenient if this time isn't. jonathan.bittner@yale.edu

Preliminaries:

- Bridge is a game of four players, played in **partnerships** of two. Players sit in the corners of a diamond or square, and people across from each other are partners.
- A deck of cards has 52 cards in 4 suits. The **suits** are clubs(♣), diamonds(♦), hearts(♥), and spades(♠). Each suit is numbered 2-10, with four “**face cards**”: jack, queen, king, and ace (in rank order.) Higher numbers or stronger face cards are better.
- Each player is dealt a fourth of the deck each “**hand**,” or 13 cards. The entire deck is used. Most people sort their cards by suit, from highest to lowest, with alternating colors.
- There are two stages of bridge. There is the **bidding** stage, and the **play** stage. Bidding is an **auction** that determines who gets to choose the **contract**. The contract determines who is on “offense” and “defense.” The team on offense must win a certain number of “tricks” (see below), and the defense must try and prevent them.

Rules of Play

- During each turn, or **trick**, of the play stage, each person puts down one card in clockwise order, starting with the leader. The person who plays the highest card (in the suit that was lead, or started with) wins the trick. Scoring is determined by how many tricks each partnership has won. There are 13 tricks per **hand**.
- You must follow suit if you are able to. That means if someone leads a spade, and you have a spade, you must play it. If you don't, you must **discard**, which means you cannot (usually) win the trick. **You cannot win the trick if you do not follow suit, (unless you play a card from the trump suit).** If the two of spades were lead by your opponent, and you play the ace of clubs because you have no spades, you will lose the trick.
- The **trump suit** is determined by the bidding, and it is the suit that is “wild,” or better than all others. If you discard a card from the trump suit, it beats all other suits, and the person with the highest trump will win. It also possible, based on the bidding, that there will be no trump suit. There will be many examples of this, don't worry if you are confused.
- The partnership on offense has a **declarer** and a **dummy** (no offense!). The **dummy** plays with his hand face up, and the **declarer** decides what will be played from both his hand AND his partners. Bidding determines who is the declarer and who is the dummy.
- The opening lead is the person to the left of the declarer, to the right of the dummy.

Bidding

- During the bidding phase, players go around in a circle and say either “**pass**” or making a bid. These **bids** determine the trump suit and the number of tricks the offense must take.
- A bid has two parts: the **level** (1, 2, 3, 4...) and the **denomination**, or suit. (clubs, diamonds...).
- The level determines how many tricks the partnership claims they can take. However, since being on offense requires that you take at least the majority of tricks, **you add six, or “book,”** to the number to determine how many tricks the partnership must make. For instance, a bid at the 2 level requires 8 tricks be taken, $3 + 6 = 9$, and so on.
- The **denomination** determines what suit will be the trump suit. For instance, if 3♥ is the highest bid in the auction, the trump suit would be in hearts and nine tricks would have to be taken. “No trump” is also a denomination, which means that 3NT would mean that no suit would be better than any other.
- Each bid must be higher than the last. For the purposes of bidding, **certain suits are considered “higher”** than others. The suits are ranked alphabetically, from lowest to highest:
Clubs(♣), Diamonds (♦), Hearts (♥), Spades (♠) and No Trump (NT)
- Bidding goes in a circle until three people pass; that is, until one person has the uncontested highest bid. When that happens, the contract is set to that level and trump suit, with the offense being the bidding partnership and the other partnership being defense. The person on offense who first bid the suit being played is the **declarer**, the other becomes the **dummy**.

Scoring:

- For each trick (over 6) in HEARTS OR SPADES, you get 30 points. These are called **major suits**.
- For each trick (over 6) in DIAMONDS OR CLUBS, you get 20 points. These are called **minor suits**.
- The offense gets points if they take more tricks than they promised, but those points don't count towards the “game bonus” (see below).
- In No Trump (NT), you get 40 points for the first trick and 30 for each after that.
- If the defense prevents a contract from being upheld, the offense gets no points and the defense gets 50 points for each trick the offense fails by.
- If the offense gets more than 100 points for their contract, they get a huge (about 400) point bonus. This is called the **game bonus** and contracts worth more than 100 are called **game contracts**. A contract worth less than 100 is called a **part score**.

Bridge Worksheet, Lesson 1

1. Imagine you have the following hand:

♠ A 3 2

♥ A

♦ K Q J 10 9 8

♣ A 3 2

- How many tricks should you expect to take?
- If you were the opening leader, what should you lead?

Look at the following contracts:

a) 2♣

b) 4♠

c) 7NT

d) 4♦

e) 1♥

f)

- How many tricks does each of the above represent?
- How many points would you get for taking exactly the right amount of tricks for each of the above (without the game/slam bonus?)
- Which of the above contracts is a game? Which are slams?

You will be dealt two decks of cards to play a game with. But before starting, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which suits do North and South like best? East and West? Who would suggest them first in the bidding?
- How many tricks can you estimate taking? How many can your partnership estimate taking?
- Which partnership can take the most tricks, in what contract?

Then play the hand.