

OPENING LEADS

Bob's Quick Guide for Beginners

Knowing the common bridge dictum that the most important card in the deal is the Opening Lead may only add to a beginner's terror, but since Declarer's LHO (Left Hand Opponent) **must** lead, **Just Do It**.

Your goal is not necessarily to **take** the trick—else you would lead your aces, rarely a good idea. More often, you want to set up tricks for you or Partner.

DO's (against a suit contract):

- 1) Lead Partner's bid suit. (A teacher once told me, "The only two times you do **not** lead Partner's suit are when you are void, or when you are dead."
 - a) Low from 3+, especially with an honor; Partner may lead back to your honor.
 - b) High from 2; Partner may take AK and lead back for you to trump.
- 2) Lead high from touching honors: **KQJ** is terrific. True: all three in one hand are equal, but if you lead J or Q you mislead Partner who might waste an ace.
- 3) Lead Fourth-from-High in your best suit; you probably won't help Declarer much, and if you do finesse Partner—always a danger—it may set up Q or J in your hand.
- 4) Lead Dummy's bid suit if Declarer did not support it: **Through** strength **To** weakness.
- 5) Lead Trump if opponents struggled to find a Fit, especially if you are long-or-short in Trump. Declarer will probably hope to cross-trump; so deplete their ammo.

DON'T's: (Never say "never" or "always" but remember Declarer usually has most HCP and is likeliest to have voids and singletons.)

- 1) Don't **underlead** A or K unless in Partner's suit; lie in ambush for Declarer to lead into you.
- 2) Don't **lead** A or K unless you hold both. An A wants to capture a K, not a deuce or trey.
- 3) Don't lead a suit Declarer has bid naturally (see #4 in left panel).
- 4) Don't lead a singleton or doubleton unless it is Partner's suit or unless you have a high Trump to quickly retake the lead in hopes of getting the lead to Partner so as to lead back for you to trump. Get it? Else, odds are good you will set up their long suit (and they rarely even say thank you.)

Against a NT Contract:

Except for #5, I suggest the same DO's and DON'T's for all the same reasons but with DO's #1 & #3 even more important. Your goal is to set up your own or Partner's long suit, Declarer's nemesis without trump to wrest the lead away from you. Often, therefore, you may decide to ignore DON'T #1.

Lead mnemonics you may or may not find useful

BOSTON stands for "bottom-of-something, top-of-nothing," a cutism more than a helpful mnemonic (IMHO) since **TON** confuses the High-Low signal.

MUD stands for "middle-up-down" which I find useful when forced to lead from three worthless cards, often a dreadful must, considering the DON'T's and lacking a promising DO. Since "High-Low from a Doubleton" is a common lead—and often a great lead when Partner has bid your doubleton—MUD is a sensible way to honestly show Partner 3+ without an honor.

BRIDGE FOR BEGINNERS

♣♦♥♠ STANDARD AMERICAN ♠♥♦♣

by Robert Locke

Beginners: Just do it. Don't belabor every decision but be quick, smooth, and play your cards close to your chest; your partner and opponents are waiting. Keep It Simple, Sweetheart: **KISS**.

TRICK-TAKING

There are two halves to every deal: Auction first, then Trick-Taking, with 13 tricks possible, 52 cards divided by 4 players. You and your partner try to win as many tricks as you can—with High Cards and Trumps—following suit when possible in clockwise rotation. The first 6 tricks are called *Book* and do not count. 7 tricks=**1**; 8=**2**; 9=**3**; 10=**4**; 11=**5**; 12=**6**; 13=**7**.

HCP: First, evaluate your hand's strength by HCP (High Card Points): A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1.

GOLDEN FIT: Second, search during your bidding auction with Partner for your best suit FIT of 8+: hearts or spades most advantageously. You want to make this suit *TRUMP*, giving yourselves 8 or more *wildcards* while leaving opponents only 5 or fewer.

AUCTION

With 12+ HCP, open the bidding. If Partner opens, respond with 6+ HCP. **Promise each other this!** If partnership has 25+ HCP, bid **GAME**. **Promise!** Later, learn to re-evaluate your hand, but for beginners—for now—**KISS** and use HCP only.

GAME is your goal: you get a bonus for making a **GAME** contract, but not unless you bid it. (over)

GAME=100 SP (Score Points, as opposed to HCP)

Major Suit: per-trick = **30 SP**

4♥ or 4♠ = GAME: 10 tricks

Minor Suit: per-trick = **20 SP**

5♣ or 5♦ = GAME: 11 tricks

Notrump: **40 SP** first trick, **30 SP** later tricks

3NT = GAME: 9 tricks

HCP PATTERNS and ODDS

Partnership:

25-26 HCP — GAME in a Major or NT (25%, 1 in 4)

28-29 HCP — GAME in a Minor (6%, 1 in 17)

33-35 — SLAM (6 tricks; .7%, 1 in 144)

37+ — GRAND SLAM—(7 tricks; .02%, 1 in 5848)

Opener: Opening Hand (O.H.) = 12+ HCP

12-14 HCP (21%); 15-17 HCP (10%);

18-19 HCP (3%); 20-21 HCP (1%)

Responder:

1-5 HCP (14%)—Pass

6-10 HCP (42%)—Single Raise or 1NT

10-12 HCP (26%)—Limit Raise options

8-9 HCP (18%)—Stayman Response

SUIT DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS and ODDS

4432 (22%); 5332 (16%); 5431 (13%); 5422 (11%);

4333 (11%); 6332 (5%); 6421 (5%); 6331 (4%);

5521, 4441 (3%); 6430, 5440, 5530 (1%)

Longest Suit: 5=44%; 4=35%; 6=17%; 7=4%; 8+=.5%

Cards in Suit: 3=29%; 4=24%; 2=21%; 5=12.5%

6=4%; 1=8%; 0=1.3%; 7=.9%; 8+=.1%

There are **53,644,737,765,488,792,839,237,440,000** deal possibilities in bridge. Call it 53 googolplexillion. You will not run out of challenges.

BIDDING VOCABULARY

The Trick-Taking half of each deal is relatively simple compared to the Auction half which is often likened to learning a new language, filled with complex dialogues comprised of only fifteen words: *1,2,3,4,5,6,7, clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, notrump, pass, double, redouble*, e.g., this simplistic but not atypical dialogue:

“1♠ Partner, I have 12+ HCP and 5+ spades.”

“2♠ I have 3+ or your suit, Partner, and 6-10 HCP. We have found our Trump Fit!”

“3♠ Upon re-evaluation, I have a bit more than minimum O.H. of 12-14 HCP, about 16. You?”

“4♠ I am toward the top of my range, 9 HCP. 9+16=25. Let's try Game to get the bonus! You will be a strong Declarer; I, a supportive Dummy.”

The panoply of bridge “systems” of bidding is overwhelming, the above example being only one—Standard American (S.A.)—in which an opening bid of a Major suit usually promises 5+. ACOL, the system commonly used by British players, often opens 4-card Majors with different HCP ranges.

In S.A. lacking a 5+ Major but with 12+ HCP, you open a Minor or 1NT (with 15-17 HCP and using the Stayman Convention) hoping to find a 4-4 major suit FIT leading to Game: **always the same first goal**. Partner responds according to HCP and suit distribution. Notice the percentage of hands in Suit Distribution Patterns in which you can expect either a 5-card or 4-card major. Hmm.

Notice how few voids or singletons; even fewer 7+ in a suit. Hmm again.

SCORING MATTERS IN DUPLICATE BRIDGE

Since your goal is simple—to bid and make GAME to get the SP bonus—recognize that in only 25% of deals will your partnership have the 25-26 HCP to do so. Far more often, you will be forced to content yourselves with only a PARTSCORE bonus: 50 SP.

SP Bonuses:

NV (non-vulnerable): Game=300; Slam=500;
Grand Slam=1000; Partscore=50.

V (vulnerable): Game=500; Slam=750;
Grand Slam=1500; Partscore=50.

Recognize, too, the penalties for **NOT** fulfilling your contract: 50 SP per trick (NV & undoubled).

SP Penalties:

NV: 50 per-trick; **Doubled:** per-trick 100, 300, 500, then add 300 each: 800, 1100, 1400, etc.

V: 100 per trick; **Doubled:** per-trick 200, then add 300 each: 500, 800, 1100, 1400, 1800, etc.

Vulnerability (introduced in 1925 on a cruise through the Panama Canal) abruptly ended the centuries-old evolution of whist, biritch, auction bridge, plafond (“ceiling”) and numberless earlier trick-taking games all culminating in Contract Bridge in which penalties and bonuses are balanced to more fairly defy luck. In Duplicate, vulnerability is indicated by red slots in the bridge boards or the notation V or VUL. Doubling adds excitement and SPs to the game and has a few more wrinkles not discussed here. The complex scoring of Contract Bridge accrues to the fabulous game it has become. You don't **need** to memorize all bonuses and penalties, but you will never develop effective strategy until you have a handle on them.