

Bridge Tips/Tactics

When Bidding

1. Don't make the same bid with a strong hand as with a weak hand.
2. Just bid more.
3. Preemptors should not bid again.

When Declaring (Playing the Hand)

1. Don't ruff on the "long" side.
2. Don't waste dummy's 5 card suit.
3. Don't turn a slow loser into a fast loser.
4. When throwing a loser, don't throw a card that can be trumped.
5. Don't be afraid to take a finesse.
6. In a suit contract, eliminate a suit. Good things often follow.

When Defending

1. Follow partner's lead (take your cues from partner).
2. Lead towards weakness; lead through strength.
3. When dummy's long suit is ready to run, cash your winners.

When Declaring or Defending

1. Lead low cards towards high cards.
2. Play high cards from the short side first.
3. 2nd hand low; 3rd hand high.
4. But: 2nd hand should cover an honour with an honour.
5. And: 3rd hand should keep the Ace to capture the King (or Queen).
6. If you have a trick to lose in your long suit, lose the first one.
7. Avoid breaking new suits.
8. If both sides are leading the same suit, one side is confused.

Disclaimer: There is no "always" in bridge. These are tips, not absolutes.

Bridge Tips/Tactics

When Bidding

1. Don't make the same bid with a strong hand as with a weak hand.

If you open 1H and rebid 2H with both 13 points and 17 points, how will partner know the difference? How will a partner with 8 points know whether they should pass or bid game? Learn the ranges for basic, medium and maximum opening hands and bid accordingly. The same goes for basic, medium and maximum responding hands.

2. Just bid more.

Defence is hard. Almost all players score 5-10 percentage points lower on hands where they defend compared to hands where they play the contract. If you want a better score, play more hands and defend less often. Just bid more.

3. Preemptors should not bid again.

When you preempt, bid as high as you are willing to go on your first bid and do not bid again. If you start low and then bid again, you give your opponents more room to find their fit. If there is no interference and partner bids a new suit, this is forcing. Then you can either raise partner's suit with support or go back to your own long suit without support.

When Declaring (Playing the Hand)

1. Don't ruff on the "long" side.

You have AKQ432 of trump in your hand and a side void. Suppose you ruff twice with your small trump. You have gained nothing. These tricks were yours all day long. You have not generated any extra tricks. This is like taking money from your left pocket to put into your right pocket and thinking that you are getting richer. To generate extra tricks you must ruff in the hand that has fewer trump. Tip for the defence: make declarer ruff on the long trump side; this is good for the defence. Declarer: don't do this bad thing to yourself.

Two exceptions: (1) It is OK to ruff on the long side if you are cross-ruffing (ruffing back and forth on both sides). (2) It is OK to ruff on the long side if this will set up a suit on the other side which will then provide extra winners in the end game.

2. Don't waste dummy's 5 card suit.

A 5 card suit is an asset. Even if you have to give 3 tricks in the suit to the opponents, cards 4 and 5 in the suit often become winners. Set up the suit for those extra tricks

instead of throwing those cards away. If you have to discard, discard something from a short suit, not from a long suit. (P.S. Don't waste declarer's 5 card suit either.)

3. Don't turn a slow loser into a fast loser.

You have A,2 of hearts in your hand and 9,3 in dummy. Do not voluntarily play your Ace and turn your slow loser into a fast loser. You might be able to discard it somewhere.

4. When throwing a loser, don't throw a card that can be trumped.

If you can trump a card, it is not really a loser. Pitch some card that is really a loser.

5. Don't be afraid to take a finesse.

A 50% chance at making an extra trick is better than a 0% chance. If you lead low towards AQ and insert the Queen, you have a 50% chance that the Queen will win the trick. If you play the Ace, you have close to a 0% chance that the Queen will take a trick.

6. In a suit contract, eliminate a suit. Good things often follow.

Suppose you have Ax in your hand and xx in dummy. Play the A and then a small one, letting the opponents win the trick. With the opponents now on lead, you might get a ruff and sluff if they lead that suit again. If they lead some other suit, you will be playing last, with the advantage to you.

When Defending

1. Follow partner's lead (take your cues from partner).

Playing the hand is easier because declarer can see all 26 cards for their side. Pay special attention to what partner is doing so that you can overcome this disadvantage. If partner bid a suit, lead that suit. If partner led a low card indicating they like a suit, continue that suit to help partner set it up. Do not take away partner's entry in another suit. If partner led a high spot card indicating they have nothing in a suit, then lead some other suit. If partner led a trump, continue leading trump. Perhaps partner knows something about the hand that you can't see. Play in tandem or in concert with partner rather than in some other direction.

2. Lead through strength; lead towards weakness.

When dummy is on your left, lead suits where you see broken strength in dummy, like AQ or AJ or KJ. Partner might have the honour(s) in between. These suits must be led from your side. If partner leads them, it will give away a trick. Do not lead dummy's solid suits or weak suits. If dummy is on your right, lead a suit where dummy has only small cards, so that dummy will not be able to beat the card that your partner plays.

3. When dummy's long suit is ready to run, cash your winners.

Dummy has QJTxx in hearts. Declarer leads a small heart from the board to the King in their hand, which you capture with the Ace. Dummy is now ready to cash 4 heart tricks on which declarer will pitch losers. If you have any winners in your hand, you had better cash them now (or watch them disappear on dummy's hearts).

When Declaring or Defending

1. Lead low cards towards high cards.

You hold two low cards in your hand opposite Kx in dummy. If you lead a low card from your hand towards the King, you will score the King half the time (when your left hand opponent has the Ace). If you lead the King from dummy, you will never score it, regardless of which opponent has the Ace.

2. Play high cards from the short side first.

You hold KQx in your hand opposite AJxx in dummy. Suppose you play the Ace first (a high card from the long side first). You will of course play the small card from your hand on the Ace. This will leave you with only KQ in your hand. How will you get back to dummy to use the Jack? If dummy has no other entry, the Jack will be stranded. To avoid standing your high cards, play high cards from the short side first.

3. 2nd hand low; 3rd hand high.

In general, on each trick, the first two players play low and the last two players fight it out for the trick. There is generally no need for player 2 to play high. The "threat" of a high card in player 4's hand will make it necessary for player 3 to play high. (Play "in tandem" with partner rather than all by yourself.)

4. But: 2nd hand should cover an honour with an honour.

If declarer leads the Queen from hand towards the Ace in dummy, put your King on the Queen. Your King (3 points) will cost declarer the Ace and the Queen (6 points). A nice day's work for your King. If you are declarer, don't do this bad thing to yourself. Don't lead the Queen towards the Ace unless you have the Jack and the Ten to back up the Queen and to continue running the suit. (If you can see touching honours in dummy, it is generally best to cover the last of the touching honours.)

5. And: 3rd hand should keep the Ace to capture the King (or Queen).

An important card like the Ace should not capture only small cards. Why waste the most

important part of your arsenal to capture nothing? If you can see the King (or Queen) in dummy, keep your Ace to capture that card. If you play the Ace on a small card, the other side will score both the King and Queen. If you keep your Ace behind the King, pinning it down, the King will never score. Their side having fewer tricks is good for your side.

6. If you have a trick to lose in your long suit, lose the first one.

You hold AKxxxx in a suit. Partner will often have 2 cards in the suit. If you start with A and K, partner will have no more. If partner wins a trick later, partner cannot lead the suit back to you. If you start with a small card, partner will have one left and can lead the suit back to you. The same is true for declarer if the long suit is in dummy with no other entry. If you have to lose a trick in this suit, it is generally better to lose trick 1 rather than to lose trick 3.

(Nothing is 100% sure in bridge. This is “generally” better, not “always” better. Sometimes partner will have the Queen. Sometimes partner will have 3 cards in the suit and the Queen will fall. But this safety play is right more often than not. It is especially right when you have no other entry.)

7. Avoid breaking new suits.

The player who plays “last” to a trick has the advantage. The 4th player can capture a high card played by the 3rd player. Or the 4th player can watch a high card fall from the 3rd player without having to use a high card themselves. Continue a suit that you or your partner have already started to set up in preference to starting a new suit. Of course, if you have a KQJxx in a suit that has not been played yet, it is OK to switch to that suit. The point is: avoid breaking a new suit unless you have a “reason” to do so.

8. If both sides are leading the same suit, one side is confused.

You are on defence and declarer starts leading clubs. Why is declarer leading clubs? Usually declarer is trying to set up extra tricks in clubs. You win a trick and lead ... wait for it ... a club. What are you doing? You are helping declarer. Now your partner has to contend with a left hand opponent, a right hand opponent, and a centre hand opponent (you).

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If you follow these tips, you will do the right thing most of the time (60%, 70%, 80% of the time). But some of the time, you have to go against the general advice. You will learn to detect these situations the more you play. You learn how to play in one day, but you keep getting better the more you play.