

Playing Faster!

Gloria Tsoi – January 29, 2013

Bleeeeeeeep!

It's the 3 minute warning and a computerized voice tells you to not start any more hands, and sadly you are still in the midst of your second out of three boards. The director is hovering by your table waiting for you to finish, which does not help the situation. Well, it looks like you will have to take a late play. Again. You and your opponents are grumpy they will have to stay late, the pair waiting for you is annoyed that they have been waiting all night. Slow play is detrimental to everyone in the room.

But, you protest, "bridge is not an easy game – there are lots of things to think about: What's the right bid? Did I draw all of the trump? What's the contract again? I'm a new player and I need time to think!" This is all true, and with time and experience your bridge skill will improve and you will be able to play faster. However, the truth is most of the time wasted has nothing to do with "skill," after all there are plenty of experienced players who are chronically slow/late.

95% of the time wasted is not due to people thinking about how to execute a triple squeeze to brilliantly make a contract. Time is lost on more mundane things that are not even relevant to the play! The good news is with a couple of minor changes in your habits, you can improve the pace of the game, giving you more time to think about the hands when you actually need it.

So, here are a few simple tips and suggestions that help you speed up your bridge game with zero effort:

1. Don't talk about the hands until after the game. "Post-morteming," takes a great deal of time and usually broadcasts to the rest of the room what happened on the board. If there is something noteworthy, circle it in your convention card to review later. Hand records are a life saver. It is okay to politely remind your opponents that you are behind in time if they will not stop talking about the previous hand.
2. Learn to pick up and put down your cards all at the same time. There is no need to pick them up one by one to sort them.
3. If you are the Dealer, you have the ability to set the pace for the bidding, so try to start the auction quickly. It is tempting to think and ask questions about the previous hand, but that will take up valuable time. Again, hand records are really helpful later.
4. Unless you plan on entering the auction, wait until the end to ask for explanations about the alerts. If you ask questions in the middle of a live auction for no reason, you can only help the opponents if they have forgotten a convention.

5. You can ask the opponents to leave the bidding cards out for an extra moment while you process the bidding. Don't be the person that asks for a review of the auction, 10 seconds after the bidding cards are put away.
6. If you are on lead, choose your lead before you write contract down in your personal score.
7. If you are the dummy, put down the dummy on the table as soon as the lead is face up. 3 people should not have to wait for you to write the contract down. You can write it down when everyone is thinking. Additionally, there is no need for the one by one card reveal, just flop quickly them on the table, so the declarer can plan the play and the defenders can plan a defense.
8. When the board is over, if you are North, write the contract and result down in the traveler first, before your own personal score sheet, then place the traveler in the middle of the table so that everyone can see. Do not read off all the scores and comment on how you did. It will only make someone feel bad. Let them see for themselves. After a few seconds, put it back in the board and flip the next board up. You are North, you have the power to set the pace at the table.
9. If you are East/West and you are done with the round and the pair following you is also done, get up. Let them get a head start on the next round. They might need the time to execute a triple squeeze.
10. However, if you are E/W, do not go wandering far off while you wait, your opponents should not have to go looking for you.
11. If you are still playing when it is time for the next round and someone at the next table asks for a board, be gracious and supply it promptly. There's no reason to make that table wait unnecessarily.
12. Conversely, if the new round has started and you have not received your boards, don't be shy about asking the next table or someone standing close by to give you a board. No need to delay the start of play at your table.

None of these tips requires you to improve your bridge skill; they are simple, thoughtful and efficient ways that only require mindfulness on your part. Remember that everyone is responsible for the pace of the game, and even if you are following the slowest pair in the room and are forced to start 5 minutes late, you should still make the effort to finish within the allotted time. It will make for a more pleasant game for everyone.