Playing at Clubs

Bridge is a great game. It can be lots of fun playing casually with friends, family around the table, at clubs, and even at international levels. One of the great things about the game is that it can be enjoyed by so many different levels of players. In the bridge community there are individuals who treat the game casually and those who take it very seriously (some too seriously). There are laws and rules, along with what is etiquette, and sometimes these are not the same. Without a doubt, there will be times when you will inadvertently break some rules, there will be rules you will not even know are rules, and sometimes you will follow the rules, and some people may think that it is bad etiquette. Only experience will help you figure this out. So don’t worry when you have an issue at the table, and also be mindful that when an opponent has done something inappropriate, we’ve all been there.

Please keep in mind that Monday night is a casual, fun, learning environment, so there are many things we allow you to get away with at the Monday night club that are not allowed at a regular club game. Hopefully this list will help you be prepared to play in these games.

Cell Phones – Most clubs will give you a warning, some a penalty if they ring. Most clubs will give you a penalty if you pick up. This is considered highly rude.

Directors – Directors are your friends; be nice to them. You should call them over whenever there is an irregularity (e.g., lead out of turn, revoke, or insufficient bid). Don’t bully people or make suggestions on what should happen, nor let them tell you what should happen. If you have a penalty card, either yours or the opponents, call the director over. That is what they are paid for.

Timing – This is one of the hardest parts of playing bridge for beginners. It is your responsibility to keep up with the speed of the game. If you play too slowly, you may end up slowing down the entire game. Be conscious of how much time is allotted and what is left. If the opponents are playing too slowly, when it is your turn to bid or play, you can ask them to please pick up the pace and let them know you are running low on time. Don’t be mean, just let them know; they might not realize the situation.

Claiming – When the play progresses to a point where you have all of the remaining tricks, you can claim and go on to the next board. The proper way to claim is to face your hand and state your line of play. Be specific. If there are any trump cards out, be certain to mention that and how you plan to deal with them. You will often hear “Play it out!” when someone tries to claim. However, the law is very clear that once a claim or concession is made, play is over; you cannot play it out. If you don’t understand or agree with the claim, call the director.

Bidding boxes – Most duplicate bridge clubs will have bidding boxes. Bidding boxes reduce the chance of conveying unauthorized information during the auction. You should not touch your bidding cards until you are sure what you are going to bid, and avoid slapping the cards.

Using different designations for the same call (without bidding boxes) – You should try hard to avoid using different designations for the same call. For example, lots of times people will say, “I bid one club,” and then on the next board they will say, “a club.” Both are incorrect. Proper bidding is a
number and a suit or NT, no more, no less. One could be conveying information by making a call in different ways. However, please keep in mind that, etiquette-wise, it’s probably overly picky to call the director over this.

**Stop card** - The stop card is used when you “skip” or jump a level (or more) in the bidding. The stop card tells the opponents that you are about to make a skip bid. The next player is supposed to wait about 10 seconds before making his call, so that he doesn’t convey unauthorized information (by passing or bidding quickly, for example).

Either always the stop card or never use it; be consistent. To use the stop card, once you have decided to make a skip bid and you know what the bid is, pull out the stop card and place it on the table, then pull out your bid, pick up the stop card and place it back in the box. If you use the stop card, you should not also verbally say “stop” or “skip bid”.

**Verbal stop** – Some people do not use the stop card and instead say “stop”, “skip bid”, or “skip bid, please wait”. It doesn’t matter what you say, but you must say the same thing all the time.

“**No more, partner?”** – You are allowed to ask partner if they are out of a suit, but if you do, then you must do it all the time (every time partner shows out of a suit, on every hand). It is probably best to avoid asking this at all.

**Commenting at the table** – Avoid commenting on your play, the opponents’ play, or your partner’s play, or on whether the score was good or bad, and avoid talking during the bidding or the play. If you have something important enough to say, write it down and mention it after the session or during the break. If you can’t remember, then really was it important enough to say?

**Bridge etiquette** – It is always nice to sit down at a bridge table and play with friendly people. The popularity and universality of the game of bridge relies heavily upon the players being well-mannered and courteous. Unfortunately, we are only humans with emotions and we cannot be self-disciplined at all times under all circumstances.

We have all met those rude and obnoxious players. It is possible that we have been guilty of doing the same. Perhaps we let our emotions get the better of us, and we simply became rude and obnoxious. If we catch ourselves being less than polite, then that is the time to exercise self-discipline. Take a deep breath, go get ourselves a cup of free coffee, or excuse ourselves and make that trip to the bathroom. If we all make that special effort to be courteous to everyone, then the game, the play, and the atmosphere can be more enjoyable for everyone.

**Conduct** – An essential element of behavior at the bridge table.

A player should maintain at all times a courteous attitude toward his partner and his opponents. He should carefully avoid any remark or action that might cause annoyance or embarrassment to another player or his partner, or any remark or action that might interfere with the enjoyment of another player of the game.

As a matter of courtesy, a player, by the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge, should refrain from:

- Paying insufficient attention.
- Making gratuitous comments during the play as to the auction or the adequacy of the contract.
• Detaching a card from his/her hand before it is his/her turn to play.
• Concealing his/her cards from the sight of other players.
• Arranging the cards he/she has played to previous tricks in a disorderly manner or mixing his/her cards together before the result of the deal has been agreed upon.
• Making a questionable claim or concession.
• Prolonging the play unnecessarily.
• Using different designations for the same call. For example, "A Club" or "I will bid a Club" are incorrect and not allowed; “One Club” is the only proper form.
• Indicating any approval or disapproval of a call, bid or play.
• Indicating the expectation or intention of winning or losing a trick before play to that trick has been completed.
• Commenting or acting during the auction or play to call attention to a significant incident thereof, or to the state of the score, or to the number of tricks that will be required for success.
• Looking intently at any other player during the auction or play, or at the hand of another player for the purpose of seeing his/her cards or observing the place from which he/she draws a card.
• Varying the normal tempo of bidding or play for the purpose of disconcerting the other players.
• Leaving the table needlessly before the round is called.

**Concentration** – An essential skill for declarers and defenders.

Perhaps as much as 50% of your success at bridge depends on your ability to keep your mind on the game. If you are not paying attention at all time, crucial details may escape your notice, like how many trump cards have been played.

Most of the mistakes an expert player makes are lapses in concentration, which he knows to avoid. The difference between the expert and the average player, however, is that the expert keeps his avoidable errors to a minimum.

Here are some ways to help improve your concentration:

• Do not spend too much time on the easy hands.
• Play somewhat in tempo, but avoid playing too hastily.
• Study hands in advance that demand attention to details. Save your mental energy by relaxing between hands during dealing.
• Do not follow the dummy play like Mr. Eagle Eye. Relax and let partner play.
• Do not tire yourself out trying to solve a problem when it is purely guess-work.
• If a card is played or discarded unexpectedly, take a breath and re-think, recoup.

Sources:
Bridge etiquette [http://www.gabrial-ui.com/about_bridge/conventions/BRIDGEET.HTM](http://www.gabrial-ui.com/about_bridge/conventions/BRIDGEET.HTM)