

BETTER BASIC BRIDGE

COURSE PROSPECTUSES

OUTLINE

The series of Better Basic Bridge (BBB) courses is designed to improve the bidding and play of the typical bridge player who knows already how to play bridge with confidence but wants to do better, perhaps with a regular partner. It is stressed that the courses are not suitable for beginners; they are aimed at the level often referred to as ‘improvers’ – that large group of players that realise they can progress but are probably not yet aspiring to be experts.

Each course will take place over one or two evenings depending on the amount of material to be covered. Participants will bid and play many hands during each course followed by an analysis of both the bidding and play. Comprehensive notes are provided, which will cover all the topics on the course with many examples taken from the presentation.

The venue is the function room of the East Dorset Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club at times and dates advertised. Tea and biscuits are provided during the half-way interval.

All courses will require a minimum of 12 attendees and numbers will be limited to 24 as this is the most that can be sensibly accommodated in the space available. If there is a high demand for any of the courses, these can be rerun provided the minimum attendance is achieved.

NO-TRUMPS OPENINGS

Although the conditions for opening 1NT and 2NT are well known, it is fair to say that many of the responses and continuations are not so well understood. The weak takeout after 1NT is widely appreciated, as is the 2♣ Stayman enquiry, but beyond that things tend to go a bit hazy... Is partner inviting game or forcing to game? How many cards is partner promising? Why has partner bid a second suit?

The main purpose of this course is to reinforce suit bidding after a no-trumps opening and clarify exactly what it means, including the correct use of Stayman.

Please note that transfers are not part of this course.

KNOW YOUR BID – PART 1: LIMIT RESPONSES AND REBIDS

One of the key aspects of bidding is to be able to define the strength of your hand accurately thereby enabling partner to assess the likely prospects of game. What does 1♥ ; 2♥ mean? What about 1♥ ; 1♠ , 3♥? How does this differ from 1♦ ; 1♠ , 2♣ ; 3♠ ? These and many more related questions will be answered.

The main weapons in your armoury are supporting partner’s suit (with or without jumps), rebidding your own suit (again with or without jumps), and no-trumps bids. These techniques will be explained along with a recap of basic hand evaluation. Limit bids form the essential foundation of Acol suit bidding as they provide the partnership with such useful information on hand strength and suit length enabling the correct contract to be consistently established.

KNOW YOUR BID – PART 2: WIDE-RANGING RESPONSES AND REBIDS

Of the frequent bidding situations, it is probably fair to say that the use of wide-ranging bids – those where the strength of the hand is not accurately defined within a point or two – are not that well understood. The main difficulty seems to be with Responder who, faced with a strong hand, wants to broadcast the fact to his or her partner by making some unnecessary – and undesirable – jump bid. More often than not, this wipes partner out of any constructive dialogue whereby the correct contract is determined by negotiation rather than by diktat.

Hence the need for understanding ‘forcing’ bids whereby a quiet bid is made allowing partner to describe his or hand further before committing to a definitive contract. Forcing bids go hand in hand with wide-ranging bids and form the backbone of constructive and accurate suit bidding.

COMPETITIVE BIDS

A competitive bid is often made with the sole intention of throwing a rock into the pond just to see what happens. Usually confusion – both for the opponents and your partner! Bridge is a partnership game and competitive bidding forms part of a partnership’s repertoire; if partner does not know what your bid means, how can partner be expected to take the correct action? An experienced opposition will, in any case, see through your ruse and still find the best contract having provided them with useful distributional information. Should partner bid on, you may even be doubled for some exceedingly high penalty brought on by your own rashness in bidding in the first place.

Although using different values, competitive bids should still be based on well-defined criteria, including suit quality in addition to length, understood by both you and your partner. Out of the topics presented on this course – overcalls, takeout doubles and pre-empts – it is probably takeout doubles that is the least well understood. Takeout doubles are, in the main, highly underutilised thereby missing out on one of the most useful and descriptive competitive technique.

STRONG OPENINGS

How often have you heard it said ‘you need 21 points to open at the 2-level’. Sometimes ‘yes’ but far more frequently ‘no’. Strong openings are most common with a long, strong suit in a hand rich in playing strength rather than just points. Correct strong openings require a shift away from the simple (and therefore deceptively easy) way of evaluating the playing strength of a hand. Without this shift in perspective, games and slams will frequently be missed as responder will seriously underestimate the real potential of your hand.

The course covers the move to counting playing tricks, which give a reasonable view of the expected number of tricks the hand will make in the absence of any useful support from partner. This will determine whether or not to open with a 2-level suit opening (including the strongest opening of 2♣) and, if this is made, how responder should continue.

Please note that this course does not cover hand evaluation using the losing trick count.

CARD PLAY

Almost all improving bridge players complain that they do not understand how to play the cards well. Two main factors figure predominantly: how to get the best out of typical suit holdings and how to plan the play of an entire hand. Of the two, it is without question the latter that causes the most difficulty but equally it is this aspect of the game that distinguishes the good players from the average.

Both these facets of card play are covered on this course. Mostly, card play will be viewed from declarer's viewpoint but there is also limited coverage of play by the defence. After all, unless you can understand what declarer is trying to achieve, it is very difficult to work out how to bring the contract down.

LEADS, DISCARDS AND SIGNALS

Why is the opening lead so important and why does it cause so much difficulty? It is not as difficult as all that because, once you have chosen the lead suit, the card to select is predetermined. The lead is important because it is your first opportunity to try to show partner which cards you have in your hand. This, combined with the sight of dummy and declarer's play, can be of enormous value in determining where the honours are and what are declarer's and partner's hand shapes.

Helping partner by playing the right card on partner's lead or when discarding if not following suit can be of great benefit in defending as it removes some of the uncertainty. Knowing your partner does or does not want a particular suit led takes away much of the guesswork.

This course will show you which are the correct leads, signals and discards, and what partner may deduce from them. It will show how to use this information in seeking to bring the contract down – or at least limit declarer's overtricks.

SLAMS

Time and time again, biddable slams are missed. Why? Because the bidding that leads to a potential slams are not well understood, so slam bidding deteriorates into partially informed guesswork. Players therefore stay out of slams and settle for game rather than bidding slams with confidence – or for that matter staying out of slams that have poor chances of success. Bear in mind that a biddable slam happens about once in every 25–30 hands, why should they be so frequently missed?

This course seeks to improve your chances of finding – and rejecting – a slam. The main topics are bidding a slam directly, Blackwood (if only you knew what to do with the replies!) and cue bidding. Cue bidding is probably the least well understood but, once mastered, is the most accurate tool available to you.

TRANSFERS

Time and time again you hear the mantra that transfers are easy and allow the weaker hand to be exposed. True, they do permit the weaker hand to be exposed but at what cost? Only the better players can take any real advantage of the exposed weak hand but you have given up the valuable 2♦ weak takeout to achieve it. To what end?

In reality, transfers are neither easy nor is it their primary purpose to allow the weaker hand to be exposed. Their real value is in permitting a much more accurate description of the hand than is available without them, including – but certainly not limited to – a convenient alternative to a weak takeout. In conjunction with Stayman (a necessary prerequisite), this course will show you how to use transfers properly, including as a prelude to a slam – a far cry from the ever-popular weak takeout alternative!

This is more advanced course suitable only for those who are confident with their bidding after 1NT and 2NT openings. Red suit transfers only are covered.

WEAK TWOS AND BENJAMIN TWOS

We are moving on here from the main objective of simply playing better bridge into learning new techniques for describing strong hands more accurately and, at the same time, being able to enhance your competitive repertoire with weak major suit openings. As this style of bidding becomes more popular, some techniques for constructively bidding against weak two opening is also provided.