



Bridge Etiquette At the Table

Seven rules that make you the pair people are glad to see — and keep you on the right side of the Laws.

1 Be polite

Be polite, courteous and sporting — to your partner and to the opposition. Greet the opponents when they arrive at the table. As declarer, thank partner when they put down the dummy. Congratulate the opponents on good play or defence, and be quick to commiserate with partner when things don't work out.

2 Don't delay

Bid and play as speedily as you can, and above all don't dally at the table when others are waiting. Social interaction matters, but it comes second to the bridge, and you have a responsibility to the other players to keep things moving.

3 Communicate with partner only through the bids and the cards

The bids you make and the cards you play are the whole conversation. Avoid looking at partner (walk into a bridge room and you'll notice the fixed stare at the wall, the floor or the ceiling), and avoid sighing, glaring, snarling and every other form of self-expression. Try to lose mannerisms such as tapping your fingers or adjusting your glasses, which can look like an attempt to influence partner. As declarer you are off the hook — dummy is out of commission — but the obligation stays with both defenders.

4 Don't hesitate in bidding or play

Bid and play **in tempo** — at a consistent pace, as far as you can. Any unnatural hesitation tells partner you are undecided, and that **unauthorised information** can compromise partner in any decision they face afterwards. Bridge is a complex game and we all need extra thinking time sometimes; keep it to a minimum, and remember that your pause may tie partner's hands.

After partner hesitates, you must ignore the pause and act strictly on the merits of your own hand. A pause isn't an offence in itself, but if partner acts on it, the Director can adjust the score.

Don't touch the cards in the bidding box until you have decided what to bid. Fumbling between several cards sends the same message as a hesitation.

5 Observe the Alert and Stop cards

The bidding box holds two cards that are not bids but go with them.

Alert. There are no secrets at the bridge table: every partnership must explain its system to the opponents and draw attention to bids that are not standard. If **partner** makes a non-standard bid (most conventional bids included), place or wave the Alert card so both opponents see it. Say nothing more until asked; either opponent may ask at their turn to bid, or when the bidding is over, and you then give a full, honest explanation of the agreed meaning.

The bidder's partner explains, never the bidder. Non-standard bids above 3NT are not alerted at the time — explain them when the bidding ends.

Stop. Used with a skip or jump bid — one that misses out a level, such as 1♥ – 2♠. Place the Stop card on the table as you make the jump; the next player must pause for a noticeable period (about ten seconds) before bidding. The purpose is to enforce a pause after a surprising jump, so the pause itself gives nothing away.

6 Make the opening lead face down

When the bidding is over, the opening leader places the chosen card **face down** on the table. It gives the leader's partner a chance to ask about the bidding, and it protects against the wrong defender leading: face down, the card simply goes back in the hand; face up, the defending side may face penalties. Make it a habit.

7 Call the Tournament Director — the golden rule

If you are in doubt about anything in the bidding or the play, call the Director. They are there to adjudicate in cases of uncertainty, or where the rules have been broken. Explain the situation calmly and let the Director rule; once the ruling is made, accept it graciously and move on. Treat calling the Director as a routine way to get information or sort out an irregularity — not as a diplomatic incident, and never as an assault on anyone's integrity.

