

Statesboro Duplicate Bridge Basics  
August 2015

1. Quick-start: the absolute essentials. New players please read this if you don't read anything else. Duplicate bridge is played as a series of "rounds" consisting of a certain number of hands to be played by certain pairs at certain tables. In small games like ours (less than seven tables) each round will play two to four hands. The tables are numbered on a placard in the middle of each table. Each game has a director, who should be certified by the American Contract Bridge League. The director is charged with interpreting the rules and awarding penalties when an infraction has occurred. Andrea Leonardi is our only certified director at this time. Bruce McLean and Chuck Johnson share the job of facilitator and scorekeeper, putting the game together during the week and entering the scores from the traveling score sheets (see below) into a program from the ACBL that actually calculates the pair scores and rankings for the session. Each session begins with the scorekeeper announcing the pairings and pair numbers.
  - a. Find your seat for the first round but do not just sit down and start playing whatever boards are there with whoever happens to show up. You, and everyone else at the table, have important, even vital, work to do before you begin play. On the table will be a stack of two to four numbered, slotted, rectangular metal holders called "boards" and a placard with the table number in a plastic cover. The boards hold the hands that will be played during that round and the placards on each table govern the overall progress of the game. The slots on the board are named for the four points of the compass. The arrow always points toward the north slot, with east, south, and west following in clockwise order. Vulnerability is printed on the board and is entirely independent of prior hands.
  - b. Verify all of the relevant information on the card before you begin play. Begin by looking at the number of pairs specified on the card and be sure that it agrees with the number of tables set up for play. This should have been done by whomever set up the room but it doesn't hurt to check, especially on the first round.
  - c. Verify the round and players. Look at the list of rounds to be played. and find the number of the current round; if you don't know what round is about to be played then ask someone. Look beside the number of the round and verify that your pair number appears there and that you are sitting in the correct position, N-S or E-W. Ask your opponents for their pair number and verify that their number appears next to yours in the opposite position.
  - d. Verify the boards. Look at the board numbers listed on the card and verify that they match the boards stacked on the table. Begin play only when you are sure that the right players are sitting in the right direction at the right table playing the right boards. This simple procedure will prevent mistakes that severely disrupt the game and embarrass the players who make them.

- e. Joint and several liability. All players are responsible for each of these crucial verification steps. When one fails all fail, and the game is disrupted, perhaps irretrievably.
2. Dealing and handling the cards. The first, and most obvious, difference between duplicate and rubber bridge is the way the cards are dealt, handled, and passed along from table to table. The cards are shuffled and dealt just once, at the beginning of a session. Count your cards on every hand before looking at them; if you don't have 13 cards then someone has made an error and it must be corrected in order for play to proceed. Each player, when it is his or her turn to play to a trick, places the played card face-up on the table in front of him or her. When all four have played to the trick, each player then places his or her card in an overlapping row, face-down, with the long axis of the card pointing in the direction of the pair that took the trick. During play no player ever touches another player's cards. Declarer does not even touch dummy's cards; declarer calls for the card to be played from dummy at each trick by declarer's partner as previously described. If you habitually toss your cards aside at the end of a hand in rubber bridge please restrain yourself. Gather them and place them carefully back in the correct slot in the board. There should never, never be an occasion for hands to have the wrong number of cards, especially after the first time the board is played; yet, it happens, and when it does it is very disruptive.
3. Bidding boxes. Bids are not announced aloud; rather, we use "bidding boxes." Someone at your table will show you how to use the bidding boxes on your first few hands. They are quite easy to use and offer several advantages: they reduce the general noise level; remove the possibility of conveying information, intentionally or unintentionally, via voice inflection, etc.; prevent information from leaking to nearby tables; and provide a constant, visual record of the entire bidding sequence. No more "May I please review the bidding?"
4. Playing the hand. The scores are written on a "traveling" score sheet that accompanies the board. It is folded in such a way that only the board number can be seen until it is unfolded, then tucked into the slot along with the north hand. At the beginning of play the player sitting north removes the traveling score sheet from the first hand to be played and lays it aside without looking at it. When the hand has been played, every player at the table should agree verbally as to the score before anyone touches the played cards. As long as the played cards remain untouched it is always possible to resolve disagreements as to which tricks were taken by each side. When verbal agreement has been achieved the player sitting north unfolds the score sheet, enters the score for the hand, and shows the completed score sheet to the table. It is the responsibility of every player to verify that the score is correct in every detail: the correct value has been entered on the correct line (N-S pair number) in the correct column and the correct E-W pair number has been written in the correct column. If you are sitting north and are not sure how to keep score, ask someone. When the written score has been verified and agreed to, north re-folds the score sheet, tucks it back into the slot with the north hand, turns that board face-down on

the bottom of the stack, removes the score sheet from the next board to be played and lays it aside, and play begins on the next hand. Play proceeds in this fashion until all boards in the stack have been played. When all of the boards have been played look once again at the card in the middle of the table. Along the edge nearest you will be printed your destination (table and direction) for the next round; e.g., “Go next to Table 3 E-W.” Move to your next table and repeat the entire verification process before beginning play.

5. Scoring. Scoring is similar to rubber bridge in that minor suit tricks count 20, major suit tricks and no-trump tricks after the first count 30, and the first no-trump trick counts 40. When the made bid is less than game the declaring side gets the points for all tricks taken plus a 50 point bonus. When the made bid is game or higher the declaring side gets a bonus of 300 points if not vulnerable or 500 points if vulnerable. Vulnerability is printed on the board. If you get stumped on how to score a hand, the reverse side of the card in the bidding box for the contract just played has scores for all of the possible outcomes. Unlike rubber bridge, there is no above-the-line and below-the-line. Each hand is a complete, independent entity with no carry-over to the next hand.
6. Why duplicate bridge is such a great game.
  - a. Removing the luck of the deal. Its aficionados would rather play duplicate bridge than rubber bridge because the quality of the cards you get really does not matter. We all have suffered through interminable mornings, afternoons, and evenings of rubber bridge where we got nothing but bad hands and the resulting bad scores. Duplicate . The game is set up to remove the luck of the deal. The way in which duplicate bridge is played and scored breaks the causal link between bad cards and bad scores. You will still have sessions with bad cards, of course, but your score is determined only by how well you play those rotten hands compared to the other pairs who played the same hands; you actually can win with those awful cards.
  - b. Each hand has exactly the same weight as every other hand in determining the overall scores and rankings for the session. The scores that are entered on the traveling score sheets are converted to “match points” at the end of the game by using either a manual spreadsheet or a computer program. You get one match point for every pair whose score you beat, taking into account only those pairs who played the same hands that you played. Thus, each hand is converted to a common scale; the top board you get for taking an extra trick in defense against a one club bid has exactly the same weight as the top board you get for bidding and making a grand slam, doubled and re-doubled. Contrast that with all of times when you spent the evening trying to dig your way out of the hole you fell into when your partner went down four, doubled and vulnerable.
7. Duplicate bridge etiquette. Rubber bridge is played at various levels of concentration, decorum, and seriousness. In some games the players sit down and play bridge with little extraneous talk and commotion. In others the cards serve merely to fill gaps in the conversation; these games are often referred to as “party bridge” and really should not be

called “bridge” at all. Duplicate bridge should lean much more toward the former than the latter. The reason most players are there is because they enjoy the competition and mental stimulus that duplicate bridge provides. People who actually want to play party bridge should seek another venue. After “good evening” and “how are you,” just sit down and play bridge. Idle chit-chat should be saved for another time and place. Do not rehash the hands at the end of play. Never engage in loud or boisterous talk or laughter. Mature adults should know, without being told, that such behavior is extremely rude and inconsiderate.