

A FEW NOTES ON DUPLICATE BRIDGE ETIQUETTE

by Chuck Johnson (Dec 28, 2018)

We all know that ours is not, and never will be, an ACBL-sanctioned game. However, most of us want it to proceed at a level distinctly above that typical of party bridge and ladies' daytime games, where often the cards serve merely to fill pauses in the conversation. We want there to be an element of genuine competition on a level playing field among people who want to play the game to the best of their abilities. The basic structure of duplicate bridge levels the playing field by factoring out the luck of the deal and giving every hand the same scoring weight. Another important part of leveling the playing field is adherence to a coherent set of rules, including a code of conduct. Without those the game devolves into an undisciplined scrum where the score is largely meaningless (think Calvinball). Fortunately, we don't have to invent our own set of rules and code of conduct because the ACBL has already written good ones and fine tuned them through countless millions of club games and thousands of tournaments.

The following outline merely hits the high spots of the ACBL rules related to conduct. It is a work in progress and all suggestions are welcome. The complete rules are readily available online but they are highly convoluted and very difficult to read and understand. However, anyone who wants to dive into the gristly details certainly is welcome to do so.

1. All players at all times

- a. The overarching rule of duplicate bridge is that there can be no information passed between partners that is not shared with the opponents.
- b. Be elaborately courteous at all times when you absolutely must speak. However, the most courteous thing you can do is to keep silent.
- c. The duplicate bridge table is not the place for idle chit chat. The bidding boxes remove the need for most speaking and the attendant opportunity to pass information via voice inflection. Ideally, the silence should be broken only rarely, and then only by the occasional need directly related to the game. Examples include the bidder's partner announcing "transfer bid," the opponent whose turn it is to bid asking the bidder's partner what a particular bid means ("Is that a weak two or a strong two?"), and correcting the placement of played tricks on the stack by another player. If your need to talk is so

compulsive that you can't completely stifle it, then at least try to avoid long stories told in a voice that carries throughout the room. (If you play in an ACBL tournament you will find that the "silence is golden" rule is pretty strictly enforced; your opponents will call the director and you will be publicly humiliated.)

- d. When it's your turn to act then go ahead and do it. Act in tempo without long pauses. Do not dither, make faces, sigh, frown, etc. (repeated several times below for emphasis). Maintain a passive, neutral countenance.
- e. When play commences, do not detach a card from your hand until it is your turn to play and you have decided to play that card. Do not pull up a card, push it back into your hand, and then pull up another card. Nor should you detach a card and then replace it to play another card. Also do not detach your card before it is your turn to play and never rearrange your hand when you are out of a suit. All of these actions provide additional valuable information to the declarer. When one separates a card from his or her hand with the evident intent of playing it, then that card is considered played and must be laid on the table. As in most card games, a card laid is a card played; no take-backs or do-overs, no "I didn't turn it completely loose." That kind of stuff is for kids playing Old Maid or Go Fish, not for adults playing duplicate bridge.

2. **During the bidding**

- a. Bid in tempo without long pauses. Pauses tell your partner that you have something to pause about, and your partner is not entitled to that information. Do not dither, make faces, sigh, frown, etc. Maintain a passive and neutral countenance.
- b. Do not speak, aside from limited exceptions specified in the rules, such as saying "skip bid" after laying down the "Stop" bidding card or "alert" when your partner has made an alertable bid. No other words need be or should be spoken, not to your partner, your opponents, or even yourself.
- c. Decide what to bid before you touch the bidding box, then remove your bid from the box and place it on the table in such a way that your complete bidding sequence is visible. Do not fiddle with the box and do not remove a bidding card from the box, even partially, and put it back. Once you pick up a bid from the box, even part way, you are obliged to place it on the table, and a bid laid is a bid played. As with

a card played, no take-backs or do-overs except in the case of an insufficient bid.

3. **All players during play**

- a. Try not to drift away. Pay attention to the game, ignoring all distractions.
- b. Resist the temptation to check your phone for calls, instagrams, texts, tweets, or whatever else phones do these days.
- c. Stack tricks taken with the long axis facing your partner and tricks lost with the long axis facing your opponents, notice that all other players do the same, and bring it to their attention if they do not.

4. **During play as declarer**

- a. As in bidding, act in tempo without long pauses. Do not dither, make faces, sigh, frown, etc. Long pauses are not likely to clarify your thought processes very much and they slow down the game, thus annoying everyone in the room.
- b. Call the play from dummy in a clearly audible voice.

5. **During play as dummy**

- a. Try to remember that one of the common meanings of the word “dumb” is “mute.” The dummy should never speak, aside from a few exceptions like “No diamonds, Partner?” when declarer fails to follow suit, or correcting declarer when he or she is about to lead from the wrong hand.
- b. Do not make faces, sigh, frown, etc. Maintain a passive and neutral countenance.
- c. Do nothing to suggest what your partner should play from the board or touch your cards before your partner tells you what card to play.

6. **During play as defender** - Play in tempo without long pauses. As in bidding, pauses tell your partner that you have something to pause about and your partner is not entitled to that information. Do not dither, make faces, sigh, frown, etc. Maintain a passive and neutral countenance.

7. **At the end of the play of a hand**

- a. Do not touch your stacked tricks until all four players have agreed as to the result. Disagreements can be resolved only by the players revealing one trick at a time as directed the declarer, beginning with

the first trick, and obtaining agreement as to who took that trick before moving on to the next trick. It cannot be done any other way, and if one or more players have disturbed their stacked tricks then it cannot be done at all. If you choose to resolve it with a shouting match then please take it outside.

- b. North should score the hand, asking for help from one or more players at the table if he or she is unsure how to score it (that's how we learn how to keep score). North should show the result to all of the other players and obtain agreement that it is correct. The correctness of the score is the joint responsibility of all four players, not just North, so don't just pretend to check it even if North is the most experienced player in the room. Even the best of us is human and can err.
- c. Do not discuss the hand at the end of play. It slows the game enormously and passes information to pairs who have not yet played the hand.

8. **At the end of a round**

- a. When the last board has been played move on to the next table, following the directions on the guide card or from the director. Some social chat is expected during the change but don't block the aisles with your visiting; keep moving so as not to prolong the change.
- b. On arriving at your next table check to ensure that you are at the correct table playing the correct boards against the correct opponents. If you don't know how to do that then learn. Failure to do so is one of the deadly sins of duplicate bridge, as it can ruin or seriously damage the entire game for everyone.

9. **Most people who play duplicate bridge** do so because they want a well ordered game that produces genuine competition among players who feel the same way. Some may complain that these rules, particularly the no-talking rule, "take all of the fun out of it." If you truly believe that then perhaps you should limit yourself to ordinary rubber (party) bridge.