

# BRIDGE BASICS

## Players

Bridge is a trick-taking card game played by 4 people in 2 pairs or partnerships. Partners sit across from each other. One player is the North/South pair and the other is the East/West pair.

## Cards

The deck consists of 52 cards in 4 suits: spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs. There are 13 cards in each suit. Aces are high, and their rank from strongest to weakest is A K Q J T 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2.

## Deal

Shuffle the deck, and deal out 13 cards to each player. Keep your cards to yourself; do not show them to the other players.

## Play

A card is led (put on the table) by one player. Each player in turn, clockwise, plays a card until all 4 players have played. Each set of 4 cards played by the 4 players in this manner is called a "trick". You must follow suit if you have a card in the suit that was led. If you cannot follow suit, you can play any other card (which will not win the trick).

After the trick is over, everyone turns over the card just played. The player winning a trick plays first to the next trick. Remember that your partner (across from you) is on your team! So don't bother trying to beat their cards.

## Exercise 1: Basic Play

Try it out! Deal 13 cards to each player, and play out a round of 13 tricks. Take as many tricks as you can.



To keep track of which tricks have been won by each side, turn them facing you and your partner, or the opponents. See the image below as an example.



Your tricks



Their tricks

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## Trump

Next, we'll introduce the concept of trumps. Each round of bridge, there is sometimes a "trump" suit, which can be used to win a trick in the case that a player is out of a suit.

1. If a trump is led as the first card, the play continues as usual. Everyone must play a trump if they have one. Highest trump wins the trick.
2. If a non-trump is led, all players must follow suit. If a player does not have that suit, that player can play a trump card and it will win the trick. If there are multiple trump cards played, the highest one wins.

In situations where there is not a trump suit defined, we call this "notrump". This is what we did in Exercise 1.

## Exercise 2: Basic Play with Trumps

Shuffle the deck and re-deal 13 cards to each player. Repeat Exercise 1, except this time, we will define **diamonds** as the trump suit.

When you're finished, don't re-shuffle the deck yet!

## Hand Evaluation - High Card Points

In the last exercises, you might've noticed that certain hands were better positioned to take more tricks than others. In particular, hands that had lots of high cards (Aces, Kings, Queens, etc.).

One common heuristic we can use to evaluate hands is with **high-card points**. In this scheme, we assign the following values:

A = 4 points  
K = 3 points  
Q = 2 points  
J = 1 point

All other smaller cards are worth 0 points.

## Exercise 3: Hand Evaluation

Let's practice hand evaluation! Pick up your hands from the last round and add up the number of high-card points in each hand. The sum of everyone's high-card points at the table should sum to 40.

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## Contract

Being able to determine the trump suit is highly advantageous, as the number of trumps you hold often affects the number of tricks your side is able to take. At the beginning of each round, a **contract** is determined that states:

1. The suit that is trump (or No Trump)
2. How many tricks a side needs to take to fulfill the contract\*
3. The person who is responsible to take these contracts (declarer)

For example, the contract of 4 Hearts by South states that the North/South side is responsible for taking  $4 + 6 = 10$  tricks and that South is the declarer. Why do we add 6 to the number? Whenever a certain side wins the contract, they are obligated to take at least half of the tricks. Therefore, the lowest contract is 1 Club, where the declarer must take  $1 + 6 = 7$  tricks.

## Auction

At the beginning of each round, an auction is held to determine the contract. The order of the suits is Clubs (C), Diamonds (D), Hearts (H), Spades (S), No Trump (NT). Thus, the full sequence of possible contracts:

1C 1D 1H 1S 1NT  
2C 2D 2H 2S 2NT  
3C 3D 3H 3S 3NT  
....  
7C 7D 7H 7S 7NT

Each round in the auction, each player can either make a bid or pass\*\*. A bid is a number followed by a suit or no trump, as described above. Each subsequent bid must be higher than the previous. For example, if a bid of 1D is made, the next player can bid 1H (since hearts is higher ranking), but if the player chooses to bid clubs, they must bid 2C (since clubs is lower ranking).

The auction continues until there are 3 consecutive passes. At this point, the final bid becomes the contract, and the first person to bid that suit is the declarer.

\*minus 6

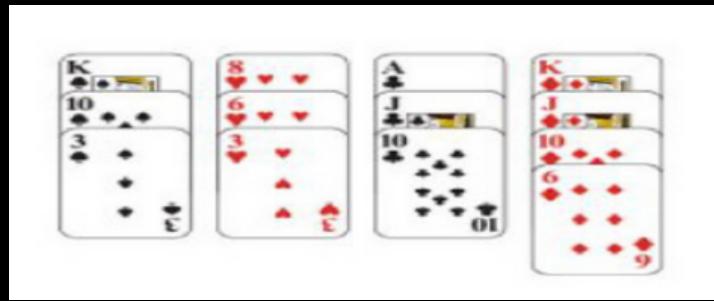
\*\*There are other options that will be explained at a later date

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## Declarer and Dummy

The pair that wins the auction is said to “play” the hand. The player that first bid the final suit is the “declarer” and their partner is the “dummy”. The opposite pair become the “defenders”, as their goal now is to prevent the first pair from making the contract.

After the contract finishes, the person to the left of the declarer leads the first card. Next, the dummy places their entire hand down on the table, like shown below.



Declarer now tells dummy what cards to play for the rest of the hand. Play continues as normal.

## Exercise 4: Basic Bidding and Play

Let’s put everything we learned together! Re-deal 13 cards to each player. Run the auction as instructed above, until 3 consecutive passes. Play the hand as indicated by the final contract.

### Tips

- 💡 Use the number of high card points in your hand as a rough indicator of how high to bid. 10 points is the average number of points each hand has, so if you have an above average hand, this may be a sign to bid higher.
- 💡 The length of each suit might also indicate how high to bid. For example, if I have a lot of spades, I might bid some number of spades.
- 💡 Don’t forget about partner! If your partner bids a certain suit, this usually means they have some length. Consider supporting partner’s bids if you have some length as well.