

Teaching Commonly Used Conventions

By Audrey Grant

Well, *Commonly Used Conventions* is here! Finally. The eight-week course is now available through the ACBL Sales Department and covers the following conventions, all compatible with the Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC):

- The Stayman Convention
- Jacoby Transfers
- Major Suit Openings and Responses — Part I (Jacoby 2NT)
- Major Suit Openings and Responses — Part II (Drury, Truscott)
- Minor-Suit Openings and Responses
- The Subsequent Auction (Fourth Suit Forcing)
- Weak Two-Bids
- Strong 2♣ Openings.

Here's a sample of how the material works:
Chapter 7 — Weak Two-Bids

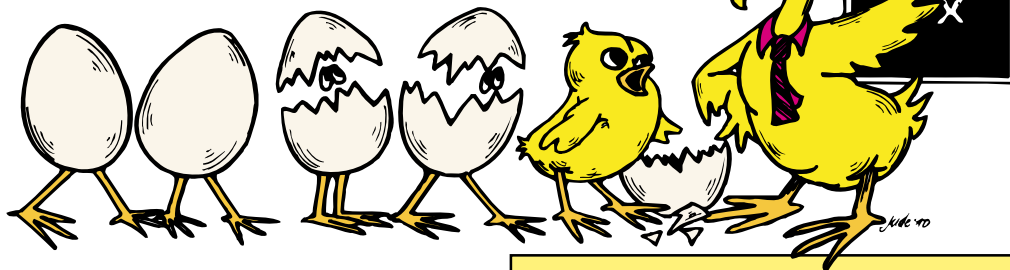
We first get their attention by discussing what is required to open with a weak two-bid. Then we move on to some illustrations of responding to these preemptive bids. To pass a hand with 16 points is most difficult. And yet when the participants talk about it with two hands face-up on the table it makes sense.

Partner has opened 2♠, right-hand opponent has passed and it's our call with the following hand:

♠ 4 3
♥ A 9 8 7
♦ Q 5 4 2
♣ Q 6 3

We pass with this weak hand...no problem. It's an average hand which has no

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particularly good fit with partner — hopefully there's enough combined strength to make the contract or at least to come close!

Let's change the hand. In hearts take away two low cards and add the ♥K and ♥Q. We have a much better hand. Before responding, imagine a hand for partner's 2♠ opening bid.

Our Hand

♠ 4 3
♥ A K Q 9
♦ Q 5 4 2
♣ Q 6 3

Partner's Hand

♠ A K 10 8 7 6
♥ 3
♦ J 10 8 7
♣ 7 2

We're off four top losers, the ♦AK and the ♣AK. There's also a likely loser in spades. Pass is the best call.

Suppose we give ourselves a much stronger hand.

Our Hand

♠ 4
♥ K Q J 9
♦ K Q 5 4
♣ K Q 7 5

Partner's Hand

♠ A K 10 8 7 6
♥ 3
♦ J 10 8 7
♣ 6 2

With 16 high-card points, it's tempting to bid on...but 2♠ is still the best spot. There are three aces to lose, and even if the trump

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suit behaves favorably, there's at least one spade loser. If trumps break unfavorably, even 2♠ could be difficult to make!

How can we bring ourselves to pass with 16 points? If we visualize that partner has a six-card spade suit and a hand without the strength to open at the one-level, it's difficult to imagine a hand that would produce 4♠ opposite our 16 points. On the other hand, what if we had this hand:

Our Hand

♠ Q 4 3
♥ A K J 9
♦ 5 4
♣ K Q 7 5

Partner's Hand

♠ A K 10 8 7 6
♥ 3
♦ J 10 8 7
♣ 6 2

The hand has one less point, but much better support opposite partner's weak 2S opening. We can imagine making a game.

The transitions of these hands are taken from the Teacher's Manual, Commonly Used Conventions, Chapter 7. The lesson plan continues to illustrate responses to the weak two-bid, introducing the 2NT response, and handling interference. By the time one hour has passed, it's on to the four pre-dealt hands.

After two hours, the class has a new understanding of the Weak Two-Bid. They're more comfortable with it and look forward to seeing it in action. They'll want to get out and use it — rather than secretly hoping they never get a challenging hand after partner opens a weak-two bid.

The material has been well tested and you can look forward to great results! Your students will appreciate your keeping them up-to-date.

Coming Soon:

More Commonly Used Conventions

- Negative Doubles
- Other Doubles
- Overcalls and Responses
- Two-Suited Overcalls
- Blackwood and Gerber
- Finding Key Cards
- Leads and Signals
- Two-Over-One Game Forcing

NOTE: If you plan to attend the Toronto NABC, don't miss the Teacher's Update Seminar on Monday, July 23rd at 10AM at the Royal York Hotel. Audrey will talk about the new course material.

Teaching Online

By Sue Himel

I have been teaching online for several years. Recent new developments in online teaching software are making online teaching much easier, but prior to the development of OKBU and BBO teaching online was not so easy.

All of my online teaching has been on OKBridge. Before each lesson, I email the lesson with exercises to each student signed up for a class. They are asked to read the lesson and try to do the exercises before attending the class meeting on OKBridge. Using a text book would greatly reduced my preparation time, but I have taught only from lessons that I have written.

Prior to a class meeting, I would convert the main points of the text of the lesson into a file that could be used as an OKBridge convention card and post it when I opened a teaching table. This allows students to look at the lesson points while at my teaching table. Since OKBridge offers the option of either a text or a graphic convention card, this was relatively easy to do with the text format. It also permitted students with no printer to take a look at the lesson points during the lesson.

During online classes, I refer to each section of the lesson and ask for questions about the material first. Then we proceeded to go over the exercises related to that section which are usually hands to bid or a question about which card to play. After a student gives an answer to an exercise, I ask if they could give a reason for the bid or play then ask if everyone agrees or disagrees with an answer. These questions usually generate most of the discussion and are an integral part of the learning process for the material.

After each lesson, I email a copy of the right answers to the exercises, along with an

explanation, to each student.

I have never worked with the option of being able to input a hand or part of a hand in a bridge format for a student to bid or play or to be able to demonstrate a play or defensive technique. Because that option is not available to me, I spend a lot of time putting hands into a format that I can email with the original lesson. I also spent a great deal of time in the lesson typing in adjustments to hands we were discussing. Many times students get disoriented about which hand is which since I cannot put the hand into a bridge hand format. I have to type in a linear format. N: ♠ A K 5 4 3, ♥ Q J 4 2 etc..... Students generally have to spend time writing the hand down in a format with which they are comfortable.

Keyboarding and written communication skills are absolutely essential for the teacher in an online teaching situation. If a teacher is using email to send lessons, then a thorough knowledge of the types of font and pitch available in browsers and in various word processing software and how that text appears in various files is necessary. In addition to those skills, the teacher must be completely familiar with the software being used and know how to communicate that knowledge online. Online students are sometimes new to the internet or computers and may have a very limited knowledge of how the software works. I would get students that did not know how to look at a convention card at an OKBridge table, for example. And, a teacher must be comfortable with the internet and all the problems associated with internet connections – students that disappear with lost connections, delays caused by poor connections, etc.

Teaching Bridge Online

by Lynn Berg

I have recently started teaching bridge online. There are many similarities to teaching face to face, as well as some major differences.

First, the similarities. You have to identify your target group and plan lessons which will feed a need. Or you have to create an awareness of need and then respond to it. You have to set prices and schedules which are practicable. You have to be prepared. All the issues of not overloading your students with too much information are magnified online.

The biggest difference, the obvious one, can't be overstated. You will be communicating with the written word. You won't have the luxury of gesture and expression and intonation to back up your words, nor will you usually be able to "unsay" errors very quickly. You need to prepare even more carefully and thoroughly than when your "lecture" is actually the printed word. If you are not an accurate typist, if you are not used to having to marshal your thoughts in good order, expressing them with some economy, you will not enjoy the process of teaching online, and neither will your students. Your responsibility for fair

attribution of the materials of others is also greater when everything you produce is the written word rather than oral.

My classes fall into four parts, as far as my preparation is concerned.

1. I prepare an e-mail "lecture" before hand, which I send out at least two or three days ahead of our scheduled meeting. If you are using a textbook, you might not have to send an extensive prefatory e-mail, but I am actually preparing my own material. It's easier to use a book and then simply introduce the material and try to focus the students' attention where you want it.
2. When we meet as a class, in what amounts to a chat room, I have prepared examples of hands which I put up, one at a time, for the students to analyze and comment on. We have a discussion as we go along. I use an online version of Audrey Grant's "cards on the table" approach often, in which I put up a hand, then keep changing it by just a card or two as we consider various aspects of the bidding question at hand. I have been teaching on OKbridge's class site where it is easy to load hands for this purpose. This element makes up 80 to 90 minutes of a 150-minute session.
3. Next, the class plays hands I have prepared in advance and loaded, again using the OKbridge class site's facilities. They can ask questions and I can kibitz and comment as I wish. What OKbridge calls "free play" usually goes on for 40 minutes to an hour or more.

4. After the class is over, I e-mail copies of the hands to everyone with suggested bidding and comments.

You can see that preparing a class for the first time is quite time-consuming. I am hoping that when I offer a class for the second time (and after) that I will not need to do too much new editing of the prepared material. Always, I think that when we re-read material we can see ways of improving, but these modifications should not take as long as creating wholly new lessons.

If you want to teach online, you should prepare carefully. Your material will be out there in print for the world to see (and to copy, by the way). Your ability to lead a class when you are being bombarded with typed comments and questions requires new skills, quite separate from standing in front of a class. And you will be typing in "real time," when it is difficult to correct typos and "misspeaking." There's no "undo" button for your pronouncements as you lead the class discussion. If you were only posting your lecture notes for the students to read, you could avoid the peril of live typing, but then you would not be offering the immediacy and spontaneity which are the best part of teaching on the Internet.

And don't forget the thrill of having students in California and Calgary, Alabama and Australia, Peoria and Pakistan! It's exciting and fun to deal with a diverse student population.

NOTE: Join Fred Gitelman at the Toronto NABC (Monday Noon – Royal York) for more information on teaching online.



TORONTO 2001

Special Seminars and Programs You Will Want to Attend in Toronto, Ontario at the Summer NABC

Friday, July 20

MINIBRIDGE SEMINAR — Sandra Landy of England introduces you to the teaching method that is causing a sensation in English schools. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Teacher manual and MiniBridge software included in price of the course. Fee: \$30 U.S. Site: Royal York Hotel – Saskatchewan Room.
1st Session: 1:30–4:30 PM
2nd Session: 7–10 PM

Saturday, July 21

BRIDGE FOR ALL — Sandra Landy of England will talk about the new EBU (English Bridge Union) national bridge program, Bridge For All. Sandra developed both the program and the teaching materials used in the program. An excellent opportunity to get some new teaching ideas and tips. Time: 10 AM–12 noon
Fee: None
Site: Royal York Hotel – Library

Sunday, July 22

**TIPS ON SCORING HIGH AS A BRIDGE
CRUISE INSTRUCTOR** — Audrey Grant, host of the Crystal Symphony Cruises, shares her secrets for success as a teacher/game director on a cruise ship. This seminar provides an interesting morning program.
Fee: \$25 U.S. at door Time: 9 AM–12 Noon
Site: Royal York Hotel – Library

ACCREDITED TEACHERS DUTCH TREAT SOCIAL

ACBL Accredited Teachers are invited to network with fellow teachers from all areas of ACBL at this new get-together. Join us for a good time over cocktails and dinner. No business tonight! Check the Daily Bulletin for location. Bring your guests. Time: 5–7 PM
Fee: Dutch Treat Site: To Be Announced

Monday, July 23

ACCREDITED TEACHER UPDATE MEETING

Join Audrey Grant and the Education Department Staff to hear more about the new textbooks and teacher manuals. You'll want to teach these courses, so don't miss Audrey's tips and comments on *Commonly Used Conventions* and *More Commonly Used Conventions*. Fred Gitelman will be available at noon to demonstrate his software for teaching online.

Time: 10 AM–12 Noon

Site: Royal York Hotel – Library

Tuesday July 24 through Thursday July 26

EDUCATION LIAISON WORKSHOP

Liaisons, IN Coordinators, Club Managers, Teachers, Unit Officials are all invited to attend these three sessions dedicated to ideas, programs, and tips for increasing membership, retaining members, and growing your local bridge attendance at games and tournaments. Join Betty Starzec and the ACBL Education Department staff.

Tuesday: Sandra Landy of the UK & Mini Bridge

Wednesday: Betty Starzec & Unit Growth Program

Thursday: IN, New Player Services, Mentoring
Fee: None. Site: Royal York Hotel – Library
Time: Tuesday 9 AM – 12 Noon
Wednesday/Thursday – 10 AM – Noon

SPECIAL NOTE: If you are interested in running games for your students, contact Judy Cotterman (judy.cotterman@acbl.org) to register to work with the IN Directors during the IN Program at the Toronto NABC. This offer is open to all certified directors at all NABC tournaments, so take advantage of this opportunity whenever you can.

In this modern age of computer-generated statistics, we are surrounded by numbers that range from energy efficiency ratings and fuel mileage data to most anything in between. It seems everyone is out to prove or show something significant with numbers, and it is up to us to filter out what is important. The ACBL is right there giving us data, numbers, and statistics relating to membership in its Quip Report. This quarterly report provides us with current membership information such as each unit's total members, the average years of membership per unit, and the average age of each unit's members.

There is one statistic on the Quip Report that I have found to be the most important to me. It is *New Member Retention by Unit* which indicates the percentage of members who have renewed their membership in the *second* year.

A membership organization grows because it is constantly recruiting new members while retaining its old members. As teachers, you are vital to the ACBL, because you are the one of its main sources of new members. In the last three years, the ACBL has retained 50.02% of its first year members (as of 3/31/2001). This means that of the 38,232 new members who were brought into our organization during that time, 19,108 members, many of them your students, did not find value in membership in our organization. Why?

If we are quick to answer, our first instinct is probably to think that first-year members don't rejoin because of the increase in dues. New ACBL members

currently receive their membership at half price. In the second year, their dues doubles. After numerous general surveys, ACBL has found that this was *not* a main reason why the more than 49% of first year members elected not to renew. (Unfortunately, the surveys could not define what the main reason was.)

The message found in these numbers is that our organization failed to meet the *needs* of 19,108 members during the past three years when they were at the most critical juncture of their bridge careers. We know that after the first year of membership, most new players have not yet developed a love of the game. The ACBL believes that a love of the game of bridge evolves when the students enjoy the entire experience – from the cards and the people to the clubs and our tournaments.

If you listen, this statistic (as it applies to your unit) will speak volumes about the new player activities available at the local level. As bridge teachers, you have known for years that your students may come to you wanting to learn the game, but that they are also there because they want to meet new people and have fun. When your students leave your classroom to attend their first club game, do they enjoy the experience?



Listen to the Numbers

by Betty Starzec

Are they welcome at your local clubs or are they ignored when they walk in the door? Do they have access to beginner games? Do they have the opportunity to be mentored by more experienced players? Are they invited to attend the local tournaments? (Don't forget a *tournament* to a newcomer is something for the "good" players, not them!) Check the Quip Report (your membership chairman has a copy) and look at the *new member retention statistic* for your unit. It will tell you if the new players in your unit are exposed to the experiences that have been proven to help ease these newcomers into the local bridge family. How does it stack up against the ACBL average retention rate of 50.02%?

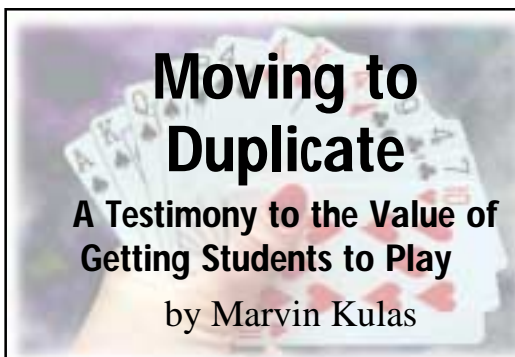
Sadly, some ACBL members feel that too much is already being done for new players. If, as teachers, you hear this in your unit, find out what your new member retention percentage is. I'll bet it will help you make a strong case for doing more to help students become active members of the unit. (continued)

In order for the ACBL to grow and to be a healthy, viable organization, it would like to have a retention rate of around 60%. Until the retention numbers in each of our units is close to 60%, we can honestly say we are NOT meeting the needs of our newer players. By the way, some units do have high retention figures. And, it is not surprising that in these units, they are always looking for *more* ways to assist new players; they are **not** trying to lessen their efforts.

As teachers, we can champion the cause of our students in order to help them become long-term ACBL members by working with them outside of the classroom. If you don't teach at a bridge club, organize a field trip and take your students to your local bridge studio, or take them to a tournament. You can work with your local clubs to provide the welcome atmosphere that new players need by establishing a *New Player Services program* and, most of all, you can help your unit understand how it can benefit by meeting the needs of your students.

TORONTO NABC WORKSHOP

If this article "spoke" to you, join us for the Education Liaison Workshop in Toronto this summer. For three mornings, we will talk about ACBL programs designed to ease your students into the local bridge community. Don't miss this opportunity. The sessions are from 9 am to 12 Noon on Tuesday and from 10 am to 12 noon on Wednesday and Thursday mornings at the Royal York Hotel.



Last year about this time, I was concerned that I was finishing up my Heart and Diamond classes and that I would never see these students at the bridge table again. Many of them attended the classes but never played bridge outside of class. They were overwhelmed with all of the material we had gone through in the 24 lessons. I had heard the comment that they felt ready to go out and play after taking *The Club Series*, but now felt totally inadequate after trying to absorb all of the material in the Diamond and Heart classes.

I decided the only way to get these students involved with a duplicate game was to have them play together. I went to the supervisor of the Senior Center where I was teaching and asked if it was OK to continue

holding one of the classes after its scheduled end. She agreed and I spent the next 12 weeks doing a thirty-minute to one hour lesson followed by an afternoon of duplicate play. My plan was to pick interesting boards from the Monday game I run and then let them compare their scores to the actual game. I also made up hands for some of the lessons.

In the fall, I told them I had to go back to my regular teaching schedule and that they would have to come to my Monday game to get in their bridge. The end result? I now have built up my Monday game from 7 to 9 tables to usually 10 to 12 tables and they are all enjoying it. I have a retired school teacher, who claims to have never played a hand of party bridge now hooked on duplicate.

I am not a natural born teacher and never thought I would teach anything. I was always more of a teacher's pest — teachers had their best days when I was absent! I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Audrey and her bridge series for being considered a successful teacher.

Let's Research Conventions

You are known to be a solid, accredited ACBL teacher and at your local bridge club you teach many a novice. Today, however, an unfamiliar but friendly woman approaches you about lessons. She introduces herself as Sherri and describes herself as a fairly solid player who wants to move from the ranks of the average player to a more advanced one. So you first decide to meet after the game and chat more.

Indeed Sherri is as she described and maybe better, given she and partner placed a solid second in a good field. She seems to have her declarer and defensive styles blossoming with a real grab on the essence of the two-over-one system. But Sherri feels that useful conventions will enhance her game. So we begin with the student's learning agenda and respect that, although it may change as you come to work together.

There is one hitch. Sherri lives at least an hour's drive from the club, and with young children and a husband who frequently works late, she wonders if some of the work together can be done via the Internet. "No problem," you tell her as you yourself have ventured into online teaching — a vast new territory given so many players wanting to learn from one teacher living in New York while the students are from as far as Los Angeles and as close as a fellow ten minutes away by car who takes the evening shift with the kids while his wife works nights.

Conventions. Just think of responder's bid to partner's one no trump opener: Jacoby trans-



fers, Texas transfers, forcing versus non forcing Stayman, four-way Stayman, minor suit Stayman, puppet Stayman, Smolen and more. How many books have been written about conventions? Surely there are more than one could count offhand, starting with the newly published addition to the ACBL Bridge Series, *Commonly Used Conventions* by Audrey Grant, Eddie Kantar's *Bridge Conventions*, and Pavlicek and Root's *Modern Bridge Conventions* up to Barbara Seagram and Marc Smith's award winning *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* plus their new *25 Ways to Compete in the Bidding*. But even Amalya Kears's *Bridge Conventions Complete* doesn't address some of the new gadgets that have arrived in recent years.

The information flow can only be as up to date as the whirling wind of the Internet where

within minutes a new convention or variation thereof can be made. It is now time for you, the teacher, to update yourself on the cornucopia of sites where conventions can be found. It is not so transparent given such are found on so many different types of sites. By way of example, there are websites solely devoted to conventions; expert pages with conventions explained; and playing sites with convention notes.

An example of a web site devoted to conventions is Conventional Wisdom (well, sorta) by Hank Eng <http://chemistry.ohio-state.edu/~heng/personal/conv/c.html> is a current site, and will give info on many standard conventions as well as Sharples, Romex Stayman, and Weissberger over 1NT.

Many sites devoted to bidding systems will also have conventions explained that are important to their system. Among those are the Internet Bridge Archive <http://rgb.anu.edu.au/Bridge/Bidding/Conventions/> which has variations on DONT and Jacoby 2NT that are of interest. A similar site is available through the Culbertson Bridge Club www.culbertsonbc.com/conventions. Bridge Passion www.bridgepassion.com has whole lesson notes on basic conventions, in English and French. Karen's Bridge Library www.prairienet.org/bridge includes notes and examples for Drury, new minor forcing, and lebensohl. Beginners Bridge has a library with notes on conventions for advancing players found at <http://beginnersbridge.com/library.htm>.

Expert pages can also be a source of new ways of looking at conventions and bidding systems. Richard Pavlicek's site has about a

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half dozen different convention cards, from Standard American to Eastern Scientific and even the one he plays with Bill Root. You'll find this source at www.rpbridge.net/rpbr.htm#09.

Of course we wouldn't want to forget ACBL Online's site, www.acbl.org, which shares many of the features of e-bridge, www.e-bridgemaster.com with extensive notes and articles by top players including Ron Klinger, Mike Lawrence, and Eric Kokish, with Kokish and Beverly Kraft editing the site's material. You may also click on "about" on the left side of ACBL Online's home page to reach the ACBL page with its extensive list of system and convention sites.

Now it is time for you and Sherri to find those conventions which will enhance her game rather than clutter it with unnecessary conventions most often forgotten by partnerships!

The **BRIDGE TEACHER**



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WARM SOCKS FOR COLD FEET

by Prent Glazier

We all have to learn how to deal with the fear of appearing foolish or not gaining acceptance from our bridge playing peers, so here are some psychological tips you might like to pass on to your students about "anxiety management".

New players often wear their insecurity like a badge. They keep calling attention to their own fears of inadequacy. If you have been asked to make up a fourth by people who don't know you, tell them ONCE that you are still learning. Then assume that you belong there until proven otherwise. Repeated comments about your inexperience do not make it easier for the other players, or gain sympathy, which you don't want anyway. Sometimes a confident manner and bearing will cause others to believe you do know what you are doing. Believe me, everyone likes that better.

Your teacher has seen it all before: whatever you do, he can remember seeing someone do something worse—maybe even himself! No decent bridge teacher will think

you are stupid or anything else like that because you make a mistake. You're smart at some things your teacher can't do, and he knows it. So his knowledge of bridge, whether vast or half-vast, merely levels the playing field. And many teachers say they like the people they teach better than any other group they have to deal with. The class know-it-all does usually know something, but he can be wrong in what he tells you. So only if what he says makes immediate perfect sense should you listen to it. If it gets to be too much, move away. And there's nothing wrong with telling the instructor.

The other class members feel just as unsure of things as you do. They just don't let it show. You shouldn't either. Do not underbid because you think you can't play the hand as well as Bob Hamman. Your opponents can't defend as well as Bob Hamman either. Those 13 tricks have to go somewhere! Rarely will a well-thought-out bid or play prove to be really wrong — it may not work, but it won't be theoretically all that unsound, and even a much more experienced partner will probably feel it was reasonable. I can feel quite comfortable with even a very new player if it is clear that he has his thinking cap on.

Finally, keep a perspective on the ups and downs of the game. It's meant to feel good when you succeed. And the pain of failure can seem sharp in its immediacy. But nobody remembers who won, or lost, for long. It's only a game!