

HANDBOOK FOR LESSON GAMES AND BRIDGE PLUS+ GAMES



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I. HANDBOOK FOR LESSON GAMES AND BRIDGE PLUS+ GAMES

Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook offers teachers and club directors an opportunity to understand the logical progression of the ACBL Education Program. It outlines the steps that must be taken to convert bridge enthusiasts into bridge players. It emphasizes the importance of following these steps and of offering proper games for students.

Stationary duplicate games (using the ACBL “Play” courses) and Bridge Plus+ games are discussed in depth. These are games that teachers can run for their students to help them progress to newcomer games at the club level. These two types of student games are discussed in depth. Other ideas for getting students to practice and play also are provided. The various roles of the teacher/director in running student games are defined.

There is a plethora of material that will be useful to those running student games. Section V explains step by step how to give a bridge tip before a Bridge Plus+ game. Section VI contains a discussion of the laws applicable to Bridge Plus games. Section VII discusses other types of student games teachers might want to use.

Additional Information

Although most of the material needed to run student games is included in this handbook, hands-on training is available from the directors of the Intermediate-Newcomer (IN) Program at each NABC (contact Education@acbl.org for more information) and through the Easybridge! Presenters course (contact mronemus@suscom.net) where many of the techniques for giving bridge tips are demonstrated.

II. OVERVIEW

The ACBL Education Program

Bridge has a history of being difficult to learn. The ACBL Education Program was introduced with the aim of teaching bridge in a way that gives students confidence. In order to make the game easier to learn, a “hands-on” approach was introduced. Instead of using the blackboard as a way to display a deal, the table is used and the students, directed by the teacher, create the hands they are going to discuss. There is an emphasis on a balance between bidding and play. Traditionally, basic lesson programs focused on the bidding although students are motivated by the play. In the ACBL Bridge Series, the lesson plans are structured so that at least half of the lesson is play. The further the student goes, the more opportunities the student has to play and practice.

Although the ACBL Education Program provides material for those who want to learn the game, the more important focus is to provide material and training for those who want to **teach** the game. It is only through its network of teachers that the ACBL can reach students and bring them into the world of bridge. Teachers are one of the ACBL's most important assets. The more prepared and the better trained the teachers are, the more likely it is that the bridge community will grow and prosper. The ACBL's teacher training program (the TAP) and its teacher manuals are outstanding and are proven products.

Let's take a look at all of the steps in the ACBL Education Program:

The ACBL Bridge Series courses (five texts and teacher manuals)

The “Play” courses (stationary duplicate to ease students into the game)

Bridge Plus+ games (controlled duplicate with free game sanctions for teachers)

Newcomer games (and the ACBL IN Program)

The TAP (teacher training)

The ACBL Bridge Series Courses

The ACBL Bridge Series consists of a progression of five courses, each focusing on a different aspect of the game. They bring the students from absolute beginners through to the point where they can confidently play in any bridge game. People already familiar with the game can, of course, start at any point in the series, but most will benefit from the complete set of lessons. The five courses are:

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Bidding</i> (<i>The Club Series</i>) | This course focuses on introducing the student to the basic concepts of the game. There is an emphasis on the bidding (opening bids, responses, rebids, overcalls and takeout doubles), but sufficient elements of play and defense are introduced to allow the students to start playing right away. |
| <i>Play of the Hand</i> (<i>The Diamond Series</i>) | This series concentrates on the play (making a plan, promoting winners, finessing, trumping losers, etc.). The initial bidding concepts are reviewed and a few new concepts are introduced (Stayman, strong two-ids, preempts, slam bidding). |

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Defense (The Heart Series)</i> | Now the attention turns to the defenders. This course contains more detailed discussions of opening leads against suit and notrump contracts, second- and third-hand play and defensive signals. The bidding and play concepts from the earlier series are reviewed and new ideas are added. |
| <i>Commonly Used Conventions (The Spade Series)</i> | The focus is on beginning (basic) conventions. The student learns about the conventions most likely to be encountered in a duplicate game for newcomers. The student is introduced to duplicate strategy and the relationship of bids and plays. The course covers Stayman, Jacoby transfers, Jacoby 2NT, weak two-bids and strong 2♣ openings. |
| <i>More Commonly Used Conventions (The Notrump Series)</i> | This course continues to introduce students to some conventions they will encounter as they start to play in clubs and tournaments. The course covers negative doubles, the unusual notrump, Michaels cuebids, slam bidding, leads and signals and two-over-one. |

Each course is designed for eight two-hour lessons. Each lesson is designed to be approximately 50% discussion and 50% play. In the later courses, the emphasis swings even more toward play.

For each course there is a student text that covers all of the concepts discussed in the lesson and provides additional examples. It also covers all of the activities (exercises and sample deals) discussed during the class, so that the students can review them later.

For the teacher, there is a teacher's manual for each course showing, in detail, how to present all of the material and what points should be emphasized during each activity. There is also a set of E-Z Deal cards for each course that makes it easy for the teacher or the students to deal out the example deals at the end of each chapter.

The ACBL "Play" Courses

Since the basic approach to the learning process is to provide students with an opportunity to play and practice whenever possible, a series of supervised play (stationary duplicate) sessions is included in the program. This step provides a break between the lesson courses, since it is unlikely that a student will want to start right in on the next series after having just completed an eight-week course.

Each "Play" course has been fashioned as a four-week series with eight deals per two-hour session. The four-week "Play" courses introduce stationary duplicate, where each student remains in the same seat throughout the session but the results are scored in duplicate fashion. Each "Play" course comes with a deck of E-Z Deal cards and a booklet which contains analyses of the deals and provides an opportunity for the students to score their results duplicate-style. The students also have an opportunity to see how they would have fared by checking the comparison scores entered on a traveling score for each deal found in the "Play" course booklet.

Most teachers will only want to schedule three or four lesson series per year, starting at the classic times: in the fall, after the kids go back to school; in January, after the holiday season; in the spring, just in time for summer; during the summer holidays. In the interim, supervised play sessions help to sustain the level of interest.

Supervised play courses have been designed to run following each of the first three lesson series:

The Club Series “Play” course

The Diamond Series “Play” course

The Heart Series “Play” course

Two play courses have been added to help the students practice before going on to conventions:

The “Play” Course for Advancing Players 1

The “Play” Course for Advancing Players 2

The last two “Play” courses (Play Course for the Advancing Student 1 and 2) allow the teacher to offer more practice to the students when it seems needed. These courses can also be used by the students to practice at home or to enjoy with friends.

Bridge Plus+ Games (0 to 5 MP)

Bridge Plus+ games are “controlled” duplicate games run for students with 0 to 5 masterpoints. They are run in a fashion similar to regular duplicate games except that they are still part of the educational process. They are usually preceded by a bridge tip that gives the students a chance to review or learn something new. The game is sanctioned (without fee) to an ACBL Accredited teacher (TAP teachers, Easybridge! Presenters, Better Bridge teachers) and may be run in cooperation with a club director. Throughout the game, the teacher is present to encourage the students and to discuss the deals and the bids or plays that should have been made. The laws of duplicate bridge are less stringently applied. The games last only a couple of hours (duplicating the lesson environment) and the players are free to leave at any point when they have “had enough.” Few, if any, conventions are used in these games.

Newcomer Games (0 to 20 MP)

Participation in these games transforms a student into a “bridge player.” Newcomer games (0 to 20 MP) are usually run on a regular basis by an experienced club director in a club-type atmosphere. The main difference from open games is the level of experience of the players and the length of the game. (They usually play between 14 and 16 boards, no more than 20 or 21.) The laws of the game start to be enforced more stringently, although still with some leeway for the level of the participants.

Newcomer games are the first step in the ACBL’s Intermediate Newcomer (IN) Program designed for players with 0 to 299 MP. For more information on this program, IN sectionals and regionals and suggestions for ensuring that new players enjoy themselves and continue to play on a regular basis can be found online in the IN Tournament Planning Guide at <http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/units/PlanningAndOrganizingAnINTournamentorProgram.pdf>.

Teacher Accreditation Program (TAP)

The TAP is one of the ACBL's most successful programs. Its purpose is to continue the development of bridge teachers who will in turn help to perpetuate the game of bridge. The TAP is offered at all NABCs, and regional programs can be arranged through the ACBL Education Department.

Established in 1986, the TAP demonstrates successful methods of teaching the game of bridge which can be used with any teaching materials. The TAP uses the ACBL's popular Bridge Series texts and teacher manuals for demonstration purposes. It offers a 10-hour interactive learning environment with three hours of hands-on experience with one of the ACBL's premier teachers. Participants leave with the tools needed to develop a successful teaching career. Discussions include information on the business side of teaching bridge, getting students into duplicate and 64 weeks of class material.

III. THE PHILOSOPHY OF RUNNING STUDENT GAMES

Keep It Simple

The purpose of student games is to give new players a chance to practice what they have learned in the lessons. These games provide opportunities for students to play, talk, observe, discover, draw conclusions and develop ways of thinking about the game. They are a link between each lesson series and provide a pathway to duplicate games at the club level.

Teachers should begin these games with a short bridge tip that reviews the material from the lessons. Although it is appropriate to touch on the “Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge” when getting students started, it is not the time to give detailed information. It is not the time to give students one extra round to play. It is not the time to introduce conventions. Student games are short, pleasant experiences where bridge is played in a structured format.

Introductory games are a challenge. The proof of this is seen in the dropout rate of players who come to play duplicate for the first time. After one or two experiences, they are over their heads and decide to take up another leisure activity. Teachers have to keep things simple for their players. Most teachers running student games, in spite of good intentions, impart too much information and make the experience too complicated. The players themselves try to move too quickly. Many newcomer players, for example, start to play transfers, weak two-bids and negative doubles before they have a sound understanding of something as basic as the Stayman convention.

While it’s easy for teachers to agree that it is important to keep things simple, it takes courage to put it into practice. For example, in a practice duplicate game, a question about negative doubles comes up and this is the teacher’s favorite subject. Stop! It is time to make a ruling in a Bridge Plus+ game and the teacher is distressed by the thought of giving a ruling that is not technically correct, or of not giving the players enough value for their money, or of leaving them unaware of what “real” duplicate is. Stop! Resist the temptation to move too quickly and to be too content-centered. Student games are a time for **student exploration**.

Create a Learning Environment

Since bridge is competing with other leisure activities, it is necessary to make play experiences user-friendly. Players have to leave the game filled with excitement, enthused about having made new friends, eager to bring their old friends to the next game and fascinated with the possibilities of bridge. If this is to happen, teachers must focus on the needs of the new players who have come to experience duplicate. And teachers must remember that what is left out may be more important than what is included.

Most teachers are duplicate players and, when students start to play, they are tempted to try to push them too quickly into the world of duplicate bridge. Think carefully about the readiness of students. If, after taking only the *Bidding* (Club Series) course, students play in a newcomer game and play only 16 boards, they will be playing four times the number of hands they are used to playing at one time. Remember that at the end of their first set of lessons, many students will have been declarer on only seven hands in their entire bridge-playing career.

Proper opportunities for play have to be provided early in the student's learning. Although there are newcomer games available in many bridge clubs, most students are not ready for that experience after ten or twenty lessons. The teacher should accept the responsibility of either providing student games or leading students to playing experiences that they will enjoy. Every teacher knows that students who practice what they learn will be more interested in taking new courses and improving their games than students who don't play.

Student Games

Student games are an important link in the education program. They hold everything together and make it possible for students to comfortably enter the world of duplicate bridge. These playing experiences have to suit the needs of the students.

Many students will practice on their own if they know their classmates or have a place to gather to play. Passing out name tags and enhancing the social side of the classroom can help the students bond. Making arrangements to keep the classroom open and available for a short time before or after the lesson will encourage the students to come early or stay late to play. As a rule, the more the students play, the more they will want to play. By getting them started in a casual manner, the teacher can more easily lead them into various types of student games.

Student games fall into two basic categories: stationary duplicate (supervised play, the ACBL "Play" courses) and controlled duplicate (Bridge Plus+ and newcomer games).

Stationary Duplicate

Teachers need to provide opportunities for students to gradually increase their stamina for playing deals. Teachers should try to provide playing opportunities that will bridge the gap between the students' beginning bridge lessons and the duplicate games the students will find at the local club. The stationary duplicate does just this.

Here are three types of stationary duplicate games to try. Whichever method you choose, stationary duplicate is a fun and easy way for students to practice playing the game. It gives them the opportunity to develop speed and confidence in a pleasant and controlled environment. Stationary duplicate affords students the opportunity to compete against more advanced players without the obvious disadvantages.

Practice Duplicate

This idea comes from Jerry Helms, a well-known teacher, player and TAP Trainer. He reuses selected boards kept intact from one of the regular duplicate games he runs locally. The matchpointed traveler remains with each board.

A group of four students can play these deals and experience a type of duplicate bridge. They can see what other players have done and they can see the number of matchpoints awarded for a particular score. The students enter their result on the traveler and see whether the result is above or below average. When Jerry has several tables, he rematchpoints the students' scores in with the results from the regular game. This gives them a total score which can be compared with the results of the players from the original game.

The number of boards played can vary with the experience level of the players. They should, however, be encouraged to move toward playing a deal every 10 minutes before they can be comfortable in a student-type game.

Appendage Tables

Suppose there is a regular newcomer or open game but there are also four or more students who want to practice playing in a duplicate game. There is no need to interrupt the regular players or put added pressure on the students by having them play directly in the game. Instead, set up an appendage table.

For each group of four students, set them up at their own table next to a table with experienced North-South players who normally play very quickly. Now have the student table relay the boards with the regular table during each round. There is no need for the students to play all the boards in the round. For example, they might play only one of two boards, or two of three.

Give the students pair numbers which are much higher than those in the regular game. They can then score up their result on the traveling score without interfering with the other results. For example, in an eight-table game, assign pair #11 to both the North-South and East-West student pairs.

This allows the students to feel like they are playing in the game. They play the same boards (although not as many of them) as the regular players. They get to enter their scores. They get to see their comparative results. An experienced teacher/director can even calculate their matchpoint scores at the end of the game, if desired. At the same time, the players play at their own speed and do not disrupt those in the regular game. (Keep an eye on them to make sure they are not unnecessarily delaying the table with which they are relaying.) The students can leave whenever they have had enough.

If there are five or six students, they can swap in and out at the table. If there are enough students for two tables, a second appendage table can be set up. It is not difficult to accommodate an entire class in this fashion.

ACBL "Play" Courses

Since the basic approach to the learning process is to provide students with an opportunity to play and practice whenever possible, a series of stationary duplicate sessions (the "Play" courses) are included as part of ACBL's Education Program. Since these sessions are designed for teachers to use as interim courses, they are discussed in depth in the next chapter

Controlled Duplicate (Bridge Plus+ and Newcomer Games)

The next step in student games is the most important. Chapter V is dedicated to running effective Bridge Plus+ games for student players. Check also the next section in this chapter which discusses the role of the teacher in running student games.

Newcomer games are held at many clubs and sectional tournaments throughout ACBLand.

When students have acquired a background in playing through practice, stationary duplicate and Bridge Plus+ games, they are ready for their first “real” duplicate experience, a 0 to 20 MP newcomer game.

IN (Intermediate Newcomer) programs are run at all NABCs. The games are run by directors who are specially trained to work with new players. The IN program incorporates the ten features of a good newcomer program. Teachers can learn a lot about this stage of student development by visiting with the directors in an NABC IN Program.

The Role of the Teacher/Director

When running student games, teachers have to wear many hats. In addition to directing the session, it is necessary to facilitate the learning process and to be an entertainer and a salesperson as well. Teachers have to become comfortable in all of these roles.

The Teacher/Director as a Facilitator

The teacher/director and the players are partners in learning. Student games are not designed to be separate lesson programs. They support the lesson series. It is a time to consolidate, rather than to introduce a block of new information. Think of it in terms of “lab work” in a science course. Tips given before the games should review concepts which have already been introduced in the lessons. If the players want instruction on such things as using conventions, they can be referred to a lesson program on this topic or directed to more advanced newcomer games such as a 0 to 20 MP game.

During the student games, teachers can think of themselves as coaches. They work with the students as the students become more familiar with the mechanics of the game and increase the speed of their play. Teachers coach the students to develop curiosity and confidence.

In the business world, it is common to have formal presentations followed by workshops which give participants a chance to apply new concepts. Student games are workshops for the lesson series. The teacher/director becomes a facilitator.

The Teacher as an Entertainer

Duplicate bridge provides a forum for those who want to experience competitive play. Experienced players tend to want more structure. Open duplicate games are designed for those who want a competitive atmosphere. Newcomer games offer the same basic product but provide an opportunity for players to enjoy the duplicate format in a more relaxed atmosphere. The directors smile more, are more pleasant and are more understanding. Bridge Plus+ games, however, focus on entertainment. What does this mean? The Collins English Dictionary says:

An entertainer provides amusement for a person or audience; an entertainer shows hospitality to guests; an entertainer causes people to laugh or to smile.

Think about how the teacher's role as an entertainer translates into actions as a teacher/director in a student game. A sense of humor and entertaining style are assets for the teacher/director. But there is more to this than smiling and having the aura of being pleasant. Teachers have to give the players the tools to have a good time. This can start with the opening remarks.

If teachers put themselves in the place of the player who is new to duplicate, it's easy to assume that many of them hope they can be the dummy – the position at the table that would give them the most comfort. Take advantage of this information during the opening remarks and say something like this:

Welcome to our bridge game. Are you hoping that you will get as few high cards as possible so that you can be the dummy? I have a favorite quote that I would like to share with you. It has helped me when I've had similar feelings. "Fear is a dark room where negatives are developed." Tonight, I don't want to see any photographers developing negatives. Don't be afraid to play the dummy; think of it as an interesting experiment. I hope you all have an enjoyable evening. We're ready for our first challenge, so let's get started.

When making announcements in student games, teachers can say things that promote a mind set which is conducive to having a good time. They might make a joke during the game, but since teachers are not stand-up comedians, they have to be moderate and they have to be aware of how the players are reacting.

What else do teachers know about new players? They are usually uncomfortable about their skill level. Start your opening remarks like this:

Which famous baseball player was among the all-time strike-out leaders? (Give them a chance to offer some suggestions.) One of the players who comes to mind is Babe Ruth. You might wonder what this has to do with playing bridge. Well, if you feel at any time during the game that your opponents or your partner have not been pleased with the way you bid or play, you might say, "I play bridge the way Babe Ruth played baseball ... sometimes I hit a home run, more often I strike out."

(Usually the players will smile or laugh and you can then get them started by saying), *With that remark we can get started. We're ready for the first inning.*

When running student games, teachers provide an atmosphere where the players are comfortable gaining the experience they need to advance their games. A sense of humor and entertaining style are assets.

The Teacher as a Salesperson

In order to run successful student games, teachers have to give some thought to their role as a salesperson, because if teachers aren't selling their services, they are unlikely to have customers. Teachers are selling opportunities for students to gain experience with play in a relaxed atmosphere.

There are the mechanics which have to be dealt with in a professional manner for our customers to have an enjoyable experience. In a "Play" course practice duplicate session, teachers use E-Z Deal cards or pre-duplicate the lesson deals. They provide travelers (with analyses) for each board. In the Bridge Plus+ game, teachers have to provide all of the services given to newcomer and open players and more.

The Bridge Plus+ director needs to be on the floor. If a player leaves the room, the director sits and plays the dummy. If a player is late returning, the director sorts the cards and starts the bidding. The director can score the deal if the players do not finish on time. Water or coffee can be delivered to the table. Hands can be pre-sorted to help a slow pair catch up. In short, teachers must consider themselves on call during the two hours that they are running the game.

A good salesperson is aware of behavior that could be offensive to a customer. For example, the Bridge Plus+ games are non-smoking but the teacher/director might be a smoker. Obviously the teacher cannot smoke in the room, but should the teacher smoke in the designated smoking area during a break? It is possible that some of our players will be offended if the teacher smokes at all. The good salesperson would make it a point not to smoke in the presence of a customer ... even in a smoking area.

IV. RUNNING STUDENT GAMES — THE “PLAY” COURSES

The General Format

Each of these five “Play” courses gives students the opportunity to discover the mechanics of duplicate bridge and provides an opportunity to play deals duplicate-style.

There are four sets of eight deals in each of the “Play” courses. Each session is designed to be two hours long. The play sessions simulate duplicate games (although the students remain stationary), and the deals reinforce the lessons learned in the previous series course. Playing eight deals per session allows the students to improve their stamina, preparing them for the Bridge Plus+ games.

There are two additional “Play” courses that can be used to provide more practice deals for the students. They are The “Play” Course for the Advancing Player 1 and 2.

In the “Play” courses, the students focus is on the mechanics of scoring and filling out a (student) convention card. A traveling score slip with sample results comes with each deal. This is a useful tool when the class is very small, perhaps only one or two tables. It gives the students enough results for comparison to make them feel like they are playing in a real duplicate game. The students can also record their actual results on the travelers, adding to everyone’s fun.

At the beginning of each session, the teacher should offer a mini-lesson. This 15 or 20 minute lesson can review the concepts covered in the previous lesson series or it can be designed to cover some of the aspects of duplicate mechanics. This presentation is a mini-bridge tip ... with the added advantage of having the play sessions available for the students to practice.

When using the “Play” courses, a deck of E-Z Deal cards for each table allows the students to all play the same deal at the same time. To introduce more of the feel of a duplicate game, the teacher can have the East-West pairs change tables periodically.

Alternate Use for the “Play” Courses

When the teacher is unable to schedule a “Play” course or when students are asking what they can do to get more practice, consider this. A deck of E-Z Deal cards and a “Play” course booklet can be used by any group of four players practicing on their own. They can produce the deals with the E-Z Deal cards, bid and play and then check their results in the booklet. These materials can provide many hours of entertainment for the students.

Sample Deal

Each deal in the “Play” courses is accompanied by a sample traveling score. Here’s a sample deal:

| | | |
|--------------|-------|------------|
| ♠ 9 8 4 | N | ♠ 10 7 3 |
| ♥ 10 9 5 4 2 | W E | ♥ J 8 3 |
| ♦ A Q 9 | S | ♦ K J 5 |
| ♣ 6 4 | | ♣ Q J 10 9 |
| | | ♠ Q 6 2 |
| | | ♥ A Q 7 |
| | | ♦ 10 8 3 2 |
| | | ♣ 8 7 3 |

After the players have bid and played the deal, they take out the traveler and enter their score. A “bridge tip” presented at the beginning of the session should give the students enough information for them to be able to calculate and enter their score, although the teacher may have to guide them through the first couple of times. The students also should be able to compare their score to the others on the traveling score and figure out, or estimate, their matchpoints on the board. They should at least know whether they were better or worse than average.

The traveling score, with the sample results filled in, will look like this:

| Table No. | Contract | By | Made | Down | N-S Score | E-W Score |
|------------|----------|-------|------|------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | 4 ♠ | North | | 1 | | 50 |
| 2 | 2 ♠ | North | 3 | | 140 | |
| 3 | 2 NT | North | 3 | | 150 | |
| 4 | 1 ♣ | North | 3 | | 110 | |
| 5 | 3 NT | South | 3 | | 400 | |
| 6 | 2 NT | South | 3 | | 150 | |
| Your Score | | | | | | |

The teacher can discuss the results, using the suggested bidding and play information in the “Play” booklet. An analysis of the results is offered in the “Notes” section following the score slip. The teacher does not need to spend much time analyzing the deals or answering individual questions, since the student can be referred to the “Play” booklet. Instead, the teacher can concentrate on ensuring the students are having an enjoyable “duplicate” experience.

The “Play” courses offer an excellent opportunity for the students to play deals duplicate-style and allow them to compare their scores to those of other players.

V. RUNNING STUDENT GAMES — BRIDGE PLUS+

The General Format

Bridge Plus+ games provide a social and controlled duplicate game for students. Unlike the “Play” course practice duplicate games, the deals are not (normally) pre-dealt. Random hands are used. In the Bridge Plus+ game, the players move as in a regular newcomer or open game.

Bridge Plus+ games can be run as part of a lesson program or as part of the regular activities at a bridge club or at a tournament. While the ideal situation is to have games available for the students on a weekly basis, circumstances may dictate that the games be run bi-weekly, monthly or at some other frequency. The teacher/director should try to match the frequency to the needs and demands of the customers (students).

A Bridge Plus+ game is normally divided into two segments:

- ♣ Bridge Tip This starts 30 minutes prior to the game and lasts about 20 minutes.
- ♣ Bridge Plus+ Game This is a two-hour duplicate game. The students play between 12 and 16 boards.

The game should never run longer than two hours. Shorter is better than longer. Whenever possible, the movement should be structured so that the players do not need to play or, at least, complete the last round if things have been going slowly.

Running the Game

Real estate agents know that the three most important features of a house are location, location and location. The three most important things about running a Bridge Plus+ game are timing, timing and timing.

Start on Time

Here’s a tip for starting games on time. Before each game, set the room up as follows:

- ♣ Place guidecards on the tables.
- ♣ Place supplies (pencils and personal scores) at the front of the room.
- ♣ Insert travelers in the North position of the duplicate boards.
- ♣ Have the boards ready to place on the tables.

As the players come into the room, stand near the door and welcome the players. Do not sit down and “sell” entries. It is very difficult to start a game on time from a sitting position. If the director is selling entries, some of the control necessary to get started promptly has been lost.

About two minutes before the game is scheduled to start, say something like this:

Welcome to our Bridge Plus+ game. Glad to see you back. Find a seat. The game will start in about two minutes. If you would like to score, sit in the North-South direction. If you are not eager to score, then choose East-West. Fill the tables in order. For example, table one has to have four players ready to play before you sit at table two. All players find a seat. If you don't have a partner, I'll be able to see this by the empty chair opposite you and will arrange a partner for you. We'll be starting to play promptly at two o'clock.

For the next two minutes, look over the room and make the necessary adjustments. For example, if players are sitting at table six when table five has a space in the East-West position, ask them to move to fill up table five. Arrange partnerships. It is easy to see who needs a partner. Decide how many boards to put on each table (there are usually only two choices, either two boards per table or three boards per table). At game time, make an announcement such as this:

It is now game time, ladies and gentlemen, so we are going to start to play. I'd like to draw your attention to the clock. We are playing two boards per round. Every fifteen minutes, the East-West players will move to the next higher-numbered table. You can see the clock (draw their attention to the clock), but, to help you out, I will let you know for the first few rounds when you should have finished the first board. If you are still playing the first board, I might come over and help by sorting the cards for you in the second board while you are finishing up. At any rate, we will be moving every 15 minutes. Have a pleasant afternoon.

Lighten the mood by saying:

Do remember what granny says ... "If you can't play well, play fast."

How were the names filled in on the recap sheet? How were the entry fees collected? What happened to players who wanted to reserve a North-South position? This will be discussed later. At this point, consider some of the preconceptions about sitting North-South which should not be encouraged in a Bridge Plus+ game.

When players are allowed to reserve North-South positions, they may come into the room, pick up the entry and then get a coffee, talk to friends and arrive at the table a few minutes after starting time. Often it is thought that the better players sit North-South. One player wanted to know how the East-West players could be protected from a better pair who sat East-West to collect more masterpoints since the East-West players were assumed to be weaker players. The informality of not purchasing or being given an entry had an excellent affect on the atmosphere of the game. No pecking order was in place.

If players wanted to sit North-South, they had to physically be sitting at the table at game time. If they came in after game time, everyone was sitting down – not milling around at the entry table. After a few games, players will make a point of arriving on time.

Call the Rounds on Time

Stay with the game to make sure the players move promptly. If it has been decided that the rounds are to be called every 15 minutes, then this has to happen. What about slow pairs? Suppose the game started promptly at two o'clock and, about seven minutes after the game has started, the director announces that the players should be on the second board.

Take an active part in making sure the game keeps moving. Walk to each table and see how they are doing. If one table is slow, stand at the table and sort the hands of the second board into suits. Then, when the first board is finished, ask the result of the board, take the board and the traveling score aside, physically take the hands out of the next board for the players and tell them they are a bit behind. Score the first board while they play the second board. The cards are sorted for them. They will want to see the result and they can – after they finish the next deal. The director needs to be friendly, but efficient.

Finish the Game on Time

Being late comes in two aspects – starting late and finishing late. If a game starts 15 minutes late, expect complaints. A game finishing 15 minutes late should be seen in the same light. Suppose every round has been finished on time and some of the players would like to play more boards, another round. Why not? I'd like to refer to an article in the June, 1991 issue of *The Bridge Teacher* newsletter: "I'd Pay Twice as Much to Play Half as Many Boards."

In an open duplicate game at one of the bridge clubs in Toronto, my partner and I arrived at our position for the last round. The player sitting South said, "I'd pay twice as much to play half as many boards." We have all heard words to that effect – a new duplicate player looks at us dolefully and says, "Can I go home now?" But this wasn't a player new to the game.

More can be less. Some restaurants give huge portions. What a bargain! For some this is true; for others, too much food on a plate detracts from the enjoyment of a meal. Many gourmet restaurants around the world specialize in keeping the volume of food down, relying on quality rather than quantity.

If a bridge student with the background of two-hour lessons and four deals a session goes to try a "real" game, discovering that a minimum of twenty boards are to be played in three hours is a shock! Think how tired the students would be at the end of the game. All they will remember is being exhausted. The fun will have been secondary.

When teachers give students too much for their money, it may result in the students not wanting to play again. This should be food for thought for teachers. If students aren't eased into Bridge Plus+ games for their first duplicate experiences, they may get away.

When the Teacher Is Called to the Table

Student games provide an opportunity for students and players new to bridge to practice the game in a comfortable situation. There are danger zones which need to be avoided. Suppose, for example, during a session a student calls the teacher to the table to ask a question about the bidding or the play.

Think back to your own experiences in a similar environment. Everyone has been in the position of being given a lesson by a partner who is a better player – an opportunity for enlightenment. No matter how pleasant this partner is, it is unlikely that we learn anything significant. There is a sound reason for this. Usually the better player starts with the conclusion, making the concept difficult or impossible to understand. A good lesson, like a good essay, has an introduction, a body and a conclusion. It is not sound educational theory to introduce any point in the conclusion that has not been carefully stated in the introduction and developed in the body of the discussion.

When a student calls for advice, the teacher needs to answer in “essay” form to be clearly understood. The explanation may seem straightforward. If it is not carefully developed, however, the student will smile and pretend to understand so the teacher will leave the table.

It helps to avoid the pitfalls of giving too much information by using pre-dealt hands closely related to what the students already have learned. When called to the table, the teacher can help the player remember what was known and move the student to the next level. The result may not be the best possible bid but the **best bid possible**. Teachers cannot deliver new information casually. They have to allow students to gain the experience necessary to understand more advanced concepts.

Bridge Plus+ Games and the Laws

Suppose in a student game, in a typical director-player interaction, the teacher is called to the table because a player has led out of turn. In an open or a newcomer game, the director is expected to make a ruling that restores fairness to the game. The director has the role of referee. But this is not the appropriate role in a student game. What do you think will happen when the director gives a ruling to a student that would be appropriate in an open or newcomer game? Two things come to mind:

- ♣ New players are not likely to have sufficient experience to remember, or even comprehend, the options provided for in the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge.
- ♣ If they could remember and understand the options, it is unlikely the students are experienced enough to make the best choice for their side.

Effective Bridge Plus+ directors know this and often give rulings which are more suitable for the beginning player. (See suggestions in Chapter VII.) Some may feel uncomfortable about giving an “incorrect” or incomplete ruling. If teachers are to run effective Bridge Plus+ games, however, they must use the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge that are suitable for the game. There will be times when teachers will have to use their imagination; there will be situations which come up that are not covered in the Laws. Teachers have to be prepared for such predicaments and flexible enough to provide guidance suitable to the situation. They must make the customers feel comfortable, letting them know that these things “happen all the time.”

Running student games is not for everyone. If the teacher is uncomfortable or frustrated when the student fails to understand or is unable to follow a careful explanation, running a Bridge Plus+ game may not be something that the teacher should do. In these situations, the teacher should consider recruiting a club director to run the actual game.

Bridge Plus+ Game Sanctions

The ACBL Bridge Plus+ games are sanctioned by the Club and Member Services Department. There is no new club fee or yearly sanction fee for ACBL Bridge Plus+ games when run by an ACBL Accredited Teacher (TAP teacher, Easybridge! Presenter, Better Bridge teacher).

The game may be added to an existing club sanction if the accredited teacher assists the club manager or is the club manager. Each sanctioned ACBL Bridge Plus+ game must submit a monthly club report with a fee of \$1.25 per game and \$.65 per table. If your ACBL Bridge Plus+ game does not meet for an entire month, you must still submit a report with the notation "No Game Held" on the report.

Teachers running Bridge Plus+ games should submit monthly club masterpoint reports listing the players' names, ACBL numbers and total points earned for the month. ACBL Bridge Plus+ games using the ACBLscore computer program must submit monthly masterpoint reports on diskettes, electronically or on hard copy. If the players are not members of ACBL, MP receipts must be issued to the winners. (Remember that the best time to sell a student an ACBL membership is after that student has won a masterpoint!)

All the regulations governing the location and play of sanctioned Bridge Plus+ games are described in The ACBL Handbook of Rules and Regulations (Chapter 4). This information can be accessed at ACBL's web site <http://web2.acbl.org/handbook/handbook/chapter%204.pdf> and should be checked regularly for updates.

Supplies

The Bridge Plus+ game is a separate product from newcomer and open games. For that reason, a unique set of supplies is needed. If the teacher/director is alert to the products that fit the needs of the players, it will be easier to run Bridge Plus+ games.

Entries

As discussed in the previous section, a Bridge Plus+ game can be started much more effectively if entries are not sold before the game. Now the director can run the game from a standing position and take a leadership role, right from the beginning. If there are no entries, the players get to their favorite spot by physically going to the table and sitting down. This is a help in starting the game, since the players are in place ready to play. How does the director collect the money and fill in the recap sheet with no names?

Consider adopting a system used frequently in England. An envelope is placed on each table with the entry inside. On the outside of the envelope is a place to record how much money each player has put in and how much change is required. When the director collects the entries, after the game has started, the names can be entered on the recap sheet. In some clubs, the players fill out their names on the recap sheet when they initially come in and choose their spot.

Traveling Scores

The computer age of scoring has made the traveling score almost obsolete in open games and even in newcomer games. For the new player, the fun is in seeing how another pair played the same cards. To wait until the end of the game is inappropriate for Bridge Plus+ players. Traveling scores are part of the game.

Private Scorecards

Private scorecards have the same function as the inside of a regular convention card. They provide a place for players to record the results of a board. Why not use the standard convention card? First of all, Bridge Plus+ players are not expected to be playing many conventions, so the information on the outside of the convention card is unnecessary and may be overwhelming. Also, the information printed on the convention card is too advanced. You will find the IMP scale, the VP scale and a reminder to *Always Disclose, Never Abuse, Don't Intimidate, Practice Active Ethics*.

The ACBL offers a new player convention card (item # SS4) that is more appropriate or you can create a student convention card for your group on your computer. The messages on the inside of the new player card set the tone for future use and the students can be told to ignore the other side of the card. The current messages are:

For your information –

1. The convention card can help you plan your own game and understand your opponents'. The convention card reflects what you and your partner have agreed to play.
2. Regulations require that your opponents provide you with enough information to fully understand any convention or treatment they are playing. If you have a question and don't seem to be able to understand the answer, call the director to help you.

Bridge Plus+ Score Summaries

It is suggested that you create Bridge Plus+ score summaries using only the most common scores. It's possible to give the students what they need, a simple start, by removing the "redoubled" column from the ACBL Duplicate Instant Scorer. In Bridge Plus+ games, it is rare that a contract is redoubled. If we remove the "redoubled" column, the ACBL Duplicate Instant Scorer has over two hundred fewer numbers and is not so cluttered. On the rare occasion that they need to calculate a redoubled score, the director can help out by consulting a "regular" ACBL Duplicate Instant Scorer.

Order some ACBL Duplicate Instant Scorers and "eliminate" the redoubled and maybe even the doubled columns by putting thin opaque tape over them. It makes it visually easier for the students to handle.

VI. GIVING A BRIDGE TIP BEFORE A BRIDGE PLUS+ GAME

Content

Bridge Plus+ bridge tips need to be simple and conceptual. This is not the time to introduce new conventions or complicated bidding conversations. Bridge tips are an opportunity for the students to recall what they have studied and to become more confident in what they already know.

It is expected that the players will have finished some of the ACBL Bridge Series courses, participated in “Play” course sessions or had some playing experience (rubber bridge, social bridge, etc.). At the same time, even the experienced duplicate player may find simple bridge tips informative. The basics can be temporarily forgotten when new information is being assimilated.

The tips should be more than “facts”. They should contain bits of information that will encourage the customers to be comfortable and confident.

Teachers want to give their students/players value for their money and so it is tempting to try to supply them with a lot of facts. What would these players find valuable? They are likely to want a pleasant, comfortable experience. To the participant in a new activity, value is not quantity. It is being given an experience that is appropriate to their expectation.

Put the Students at Ease

It is not enough to be cheerful and enthusiastic. The speaker has to practice techniques which make social players comfortable. For example, suppose this question is posed:

You are the dealer and have the first opportunity to bid or pass. What information would you like to give to your partner?

How will the audience feel? Probably uncomfortable because they think that someone from the audience will be called upon to answer the question, and many people would not want to answer in front of the group. A simple statement can help put them at ease. Tell the audience:

I won't ask you to share your thoughts. I'd be delighted if you would, but that will be your choice. Raise your hand to let me know that you would be willing to make a comment.

This may seem unnecessary. Surely people are not that sensitive. When the situation is handled this way, the teacher may be surprised at the visible sigh of relief.

Another technique to put people at ease is to let them know that what they might be feeling or thinking is not unique. This statement usually brings laughter if used with a Bridge Plus+ tip:

You are such a good audience. You're smiling at me. You look as if you really understand what we're talking about. You look the way I think I look when my insurance agent is telling me the details of a policy. The more I don't get it, and the more he looks at me, the more I smile and nod my head. Are any of you feeling that way?

It is doubtful that this kind of statement would be as effective during bridge tips for a newcomer or open game as with new students. Remember at all times who the audience is.

Style

When giving bridge tips for a Bridge Plus+ game, it's reasonable to assume that the audience wants a delicate duplicate experience. Include sentences which help to put them at ease. Work with the players to help them recall what they know. Start by saying something like this:

You are the dealer and it is your turn to make the first call. Have you ever hoped that you wouldn't have any points in your hand so that you could pass? I'd like to convince you that opening the bidding can be straightforward and fun. Think about what you want to tell your partner about your hand. By the way, I won't ask you to answer ... but I'd welcome your thoughts. Raise your hand to let me know when you have an idea you would like to share. What would you like to tell your partner when you make your first call?

A variety of ideas will be put forth. The players will tend to say that you want to tell partner something about the strength of your hand and something about the shape of the hand – you want to describe which suits you like. By recalling what they know about opening the bidding, the players will be involved in the learning process and that is a good way to start the bridge tip. We can move forward based on their suggestions.

Keeping It Simple

Bridge Plus+ tips are for the basic student. Suppose a student asks a question like this:

If you have five spades and five clubs, should you open with clubs instead of spades?

Even world-class experts would disagree on the answer to such a question. Bridge Plus+ is no time to get involved in long drawn-out explanations. A detailed technical answer to this kind of question is not appropriate for the Bridge Plus+ tips. A simple answer will suffice, such as:

If you have two five-card or longer suits, start with the higher ranking — even if the suits are spades and clubs.

VII. BRIDGE PLUS+ LAWS

The Concept of Bridge Plus+ Laws

Since there are not any laws written specifically for Bridge Plus+, the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge have to be the source for ruling the game. If there were special laws for Bridge Plus+, they would be similar in their intent to the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge. They are there to provide fairness and to get the game moving when there is an irregularity. Players in a Bridge Plus+ game need to know that the rules being applied are similar to, but not the same as, the rules applied in a newcomer or open game.

Remember the focus of the Bridge Plus+ game when applying the rules. The teacher/director is dealing with unique customer expectations. Avoid knowingly giving information to a student that can't be understood. For the new duplicate player who is getting used to the mechanics of the game, it is usually not possible to comprehend all of the options which the Laws allow after an irregularity. The new player rarely has enough experience to be able to make a good choice of options. A simplified version of the ruling should be used.

Making a Bridge Plus+ Ruling

The manner in which the laws are delivered should be less formal. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from Duplicate Decisions (the ACBL's version of the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge written in every day language):

Law 9: Procedure Following an Irregularity

The Director must be summoned at once when attention is drawn to an irregularity. No player should take an action until Director has completed his explanation regarding the irregularity.

We need tools to promote “social” duplicate thinking. This law could be re-stated as follows:

The director is there to help the players continue with the game after an irregularity has occurred.

Some of the laws are too strict for the atmosphere of social bridge. For example, one player during a Bridge Plus+ game dropped the ♣A on the table and it became a penalty card. Declarer led a heart from the dummy and this exposed card now had to be played. The player who dropped the card didn't think this was fair. When called to the table, the teacher/director has to judge carefully what is appropriate, considering that the Bridge Plus+ game is advertised as an **introduction** to duplicate bridge. The laws need not be as strictly enforced as they would be in an open, or even a newcomer, game.

Faced with the above situation, the teacher/director might let the player pick up the card, if no one objected. If declarer seems adamant that the penalty card rule be applied, consider compensating the player who lost the ♣A with some small prize, accompanied with some humorous announcement to the rest of the group. For example:

*I only give a consolation prize to the **first** ace dropped on the table in my game. You'll have to think up something more ingenious if you want another sympathetic ruling.*

It's necessary to be creative because there are situations that will come up that would not occur in newcomer or open games. Suppose the director is called to the table for a lead out of turn and finds four cards face up on the table – one contributed by each player.

Directors are often faced with a single lead out of turn, usually as the result of a player having forgotten the bidding. In this situation, it seems that all four players have forgotten the bidding. The teacher/director could display an air of patience and calm endurance and even learn over a period of time not to show disappointment, internalizing any annoyance. This attitude, however, will not provide for genuine interaction between the director and the customers. What does a director do in this situation? What would the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge suggest?

First, the director must identify who should be on lead. Then the director must decide if one lead was made before another. Since all four players have led, the person actually on lead makes the opening lead (if the leads were simultaneous). The declarer can't have an exposed card, so that card goes back into the declarer's hand. Likewise, the card belonging to the dummy goes back into the dummy. The declarer will have rights on the disposition of the remaining lead out of turn which becomes a major penalty card.

The director knows that the resolution of this complex situation won't be easy and the director doesn't want to slow up the game. It becomes even more complicated if the players can't remember the bidding (quite likely) or don't agree on what the bidding was or are unclear which player led out of turn first. "In Bridge Plus+ games, such situations are to be expected. These players are new to duplicate. It is not possible to restore fairness to a game when the players do not have the experience necessary to understand what they are being told. The director is there to make the players feel comfortable and to get the game moving when an irregularity occurs. The director could say something like this:

This happens all the time. Let's pick up these cards. North, you are the dealer and it is your turn to bid first. Imagine that this is a new hand. Don't spend any energy trying to remember what your first bid was. I'll stay here until the auction is finished.

The players may try to say things like, "Now I remember." But the director stays at the table to make sure the bidding is completed as if this were a new deal and makes sure the hand is played in a timely fashion.

Don't be uncomfortable saying, "This happens all the time." In genuine social games, irregularities like this do occur all the time. The players do forget the bidding. They do lead out of turn. They do forget to put down the dummy. It is important not to appear shocked or bothered by anything that happens and to treat each irregularity as though "It happens all the time." The goal is to make the customers feel as comfortable as possible while they are still in a learning environment. There's plenty of time for them to find out about the "real" world when, and if, they get there.

Gently Stated Laws for Bridge Plus+ Games

The ACBL publication, *Duplicate Decisions*, offers many insights into handling the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge and presents the laws in every day language. But *Duplicate Decisions* is only a reference book. Special considerations have to be made for Bridge Plus+ games. Some of the more relevant sections are highlighted below, with appropriate comments.

Law 4: Partnerships

Note that three-person “pairs” are allowed for:

*At the discretion of the club or tournament chairman, **three-member pairs may be permitted in newcomer events which are held for players with less than 20 masterpoints.** Masterpoints earned shall be apportioned among the three players in approximate ratio to the number of boards each played. For example, a pair consisting of A, B and C (all newcomers) finish first in a 10-table Mitchell newcomer game with a certified, non-playing director. According to published award charts, each player of a two-member pair is entitled to 50 club masterpoints. In this three-member pair, A, B and C divide 100 club masterpoints according to the number of boards each played.*

Law 5: Assignment of Seats

Although the law makes no allowance for players changing direction, and this should not be encouraged, if a player wants to change direction the director should be lenient.

In pair events, players normally select their specific compass position. Other than in Howell (one-winner) movements, the Laws require players to retain the same position throughout the session. As an example, if a player starts as West, he should continue as West throughout.

Law 9: Procedure Following an Irregularity

When the director is summoned, Bridge Plus+ players usually like to hear the director called by name rather than “director”. Suggest that, if the players need help, they are free to get your attention by using your name.

Law 10: Assessment of a Penalty

It is not necessary to explain fully to beginners all the options available if the director feels that the options will not be remembered or understood.

Law 11: Forfeiture of the Right to Penalize

Bridge Plus+ players are encouraged to be very comfortable in an informal duplicate experience. If a kibitzer calls the director, the director should not try to ascertain which players are responsible for the kibitzer but proceed as though one of the participants had called attention to the irregularity.

Law 12: Director's Discretionary Powers

The director should have many more discretionary powers running a Bridge Plus+ game than a newcomer or open game. The attitude should be casual when an adjusted score is given and few will be assigned. Laws 23, 27, 47 and 64 are unlikely to apply to Bridge Plus+ games. If players are concerned, for example, about an insufficient bid being corrected without penalty and thereby giving information to the offender's partner, they should be playing in the newcomer (0 to 5 MP) game.

There will be artificial adjusted scores. It is sufficient to assign average scores to both pairs.

Law 16: Unauthorized Information

The Bridge Plus+ games often have a player making a remark, asking a question, replying to a question, playing with unusual speed, bidding with special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement. These actions should be ignored. Assume that players in Bridge Plus+ games do not intend to give unauthorized information to partner and that partner will not make any use of the unauthorized information given.

Law 18: Bids

Although Bridge Plus+ players are not encouraged to say, "I am about to bid 1 ♠," we do not consider these bids as being the type of situation that would be dealt with under unauthorized information. The atmosphere is kept casual in the Bridge Plus+ games.

Law 19: Doubles and Redoubles

The double and redouble will rarely need to be addressed in Bridge Plus+ games. Since redoubles are not mentioned in the early lesson series, suggest that players who are using doubles and redoubles with any regularity move into the 0 to 5 MP or open games.

Law 20: Review and Explanation of Calls

Be flexible with all of the guidelines in this section.

Law 21: Call Based on Misinformation

Do not get involved with any "Failure to Alert" situations.

Laws 22 – 40

All irregularities during the auction are treated with the "it happens all the time" attitude. The assumption is that the players in a Bridge Plus+ game are not going to have enough experience to be able to take advantage of cards exposed, illegal changes of call, insufficient bids, calls out of rotation or partnership understandings.

Laws 41 – 71

The same concepts apply for irregularities during the play. The assumption is that players do not have well-enough developed skills or a competitive-enough attitude to want to take advantage when the rules have not been closely followed. Consider Law 54: Faced Opening Lead Out of Turn. This law starts with the suggestion that the director should begin with this statement to declarer:

You have five options. They are:

1. *You may accept the lead from the wrong hand and see the dummy before playing in proper sequence from your own hand.*
2. *You may accept the lead and become the dummy.*
3. *You may require the lead (one time only from the proper opening leader) of the suit that was improperly led, and the penalty card is returned to the offender's hand.*
4. *You may prohibit the lead (from the proper leader for as long as he holds the lead) of the suit that was improperly led, and the penalty card is returned to the offender's hand.*
5. *You may leave the improperly led card on the table to remain a penalty card. The opening leader may lead as he chooses. If the correct opening leader retains or regains the lead, however, and his partner still has the penalty card, you will, each time before the defender leads, have the choice of exercising option 3, option 4 or option 5.*

It is difficult for even an experienced player to select an appropriate option. In a Bridge Plus+ game, everyone will be better served if the erroneous lead is picked up and the correct player makes a natural opening lead. Mention the merit of face-down opening leads to try to reduce future occurrences.

VIII. A SAMPLE BRIDGE TIP

The material for 10 bridge tips can be found online at www.acbl.org (Resources for Teachers, Teaching Materials). In this section, the information found in the first tip is presented step by step with a dialogue to help the teacher understand the process. The other tips follow a similar format. The screens suggested can be produced in a power point format for presentation to the group.

Bridge Tip #1: Opening the Bidding

Content

Review of hand valuation and requirements for making an opening bid at the one level.

Suggested Presentation

Have students tell what they know about opening the bidding. They will probably make some comments about high cards, long suits and short suits. You can continue:

You are right. We want to tell partner something about the strength and shape of our hand.

Put up the first screen:

| High-Card Points | |
|------------------|----------|
| Ace | 4 points |
| King | 3 points |
| Queen | 2 points |
| Jack | 1 point |
| Length Points | |
| 5-card suit | 1 point |
| 6-card suit | 2 points |
| 7-card suit | 3 points |
| 8-card suit | 4 points |

We can value our hand by counting high-card points and length points.

At this point the students may ask about giving value for short suits ... void, singleton, doubleton. Suggest giving value to the long suits.

You have brought up a good point. Short suits are important ... if we have a fit with our partner. For example, if partner bids spades, we are not encouraged if we have a void in the spade suit. On the other hand, if partner bids spades and we have a void in hearts, we are delighted. Voids are not valuable if the hand is played in a notrump contract. When we are about to make the opening bid, we are not sure what the final contract will be. We don't know if a void is going to be an asset or a liability. For this reason, it might be a better idea to take the distribution of the hand into account by giving value to your long suits.

Let the players know that there is room for a variety of ways of viewing a hand. If a player is used to giving value for short suits when making an opening bid, it is unlikely to make much difference.

The good news is that it makes very little difference on most hands whether you give value to your long suits or your short suits. And if it does make a point difference ... let's not let a point or two come between friends.

Once you know the value of your hand, you are in a position to decide on the opening bid. Instead of trying to memorize a lot of rules, consider what you would like to tell your partner. You would like to tell partner whether your hand is better or worse than average. An average hand has 10 points. In England, they say a better than average hand is a Queen better ... 12 or more points. In North America, it is usually considered that a better than average hand is a King better ... 13 or more points.

If your hand is better than average, you want to bid something. Otherwise you are usually satisfied to pass. Suppose your hand is better than average and you have decided that you are going to bid. The next question is what will you decide?

Sometimes, especially if you are unsure of your bid, there seem to be so many choices ... far more than are actually possible. If your hand falls between 13–21 points there are only five choices ... 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 1♠ or 1 NT. Only five. Let's look at the priorities.

Display the second screen.

| |
|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">OPENING THE BIDDING Open at the one level with 13-21 points.</p> <p>First Priority: 1NT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balanced hand• Narrow point-count range <p>Second Priority: One-of-a-suit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose your longest suit• Higher-ranking of two suits of equal length• To open a major suit, you generally want to have a five-card or longer suit ... otherwise, open a minor suit. |
|---|

If you have the requirements, you want to start with an opening bid of 1 NT because it gives a very specific message. It paints a clear picture of your hand for your partner. Your hand is balanced and has a narrow point count range.

Here is another opportunity to be general. Rather than insisting that the range is 15 to 17 or 16 to 18, discuss the concept of an opening 1 NT bid.

Most players agree that a balanced hand is one with no voids, no singletons and no more than one doubleton. When it comes to deciding the point-count range, there is more than one opinion. In North America, players like to play either a 15 to 17 or 16 to 18 point-count range. In England a 12 to 14 point-count range is popular. The concept is that the range is usually within 3 points. You and your partner decide the strength of the 1 NT opening bid.

It may seem irrelevant or confusing to tell the players what is used in England when it is unlikely that they will be playing there, but it underlines the concept that there is no hard and fast agreement on the point-count range. An open mind is a valuable asset for a developing player.

Let's look at ten hands and decide on the opening bid.

Display the third screen. The hands come from the *Bidding (Club Series)* text.

| OPENING THE BIDDING | |
|--|--|
| 1. ♠ A K 6 ♥ Q 8 6 ♦ Q J 10 6 ♣ A 3 2 | 2. ♠ A K 6 ♥ Q 8 6 ♦ Q J 10 6 5 ♣ A 3 |
| 3. ♠ A K 6 ♥ Q 8 6 ♦ Q J 10 6 5 4 ♣ A | 4. ♠ 6 5 4 ♥ Q 8 6 ♦ Q J 10 6 5 4 ♣ A |
| 5. ♠ A K 8 7 6 ♥ A K 8 7 6 ♦ 3 ♣ J 10 | 6. ♠ A K 8 7 ♥ A K 8 7 ♦ 3 ♣ J 10 5 4 |

Look at the first hand:

♠ A K 6
♥ Q 8 6
♦ Q J 10 6
♣ A 3 2

Is it better than average? (Yes.) What is your choice for an opening bid? Consider the shape and the point-count range.

Players should be directed toward the advantage of starting with 1 NT with this balanced hand with 16 points.

Suppose we take away the ♣2 and add another small diamond. Look at the second hand:

♠ A K 6
♥ Q 8 6
♦ Q J 10 6 5
♣ A 3

What are your thoughts now?

Direct them to the idea that 1 NT is still a good choice with a balanced hand with 17 points ... counting the length.

In the third hand, we remove the ♣3 and add a small diamond:

♠ A K 6
♥ Q 8 6
♦ Q J 10 6 5 4
♣ A

Is the hand balanced? (No.) How many total points are there? (18.) What opening bid would you like to make? (1♦.)

In the next hand we take away the ♠A and ♠K and replace them with two small spades:

♠ 6 5 4
♥ Q 8 6
♦ Q J 10 6 5 4
♣ A

How many points are there? (11.) Since you do not have 13 points, what would you do? (Pass.) You know the first rules for opening the bidding: with fewer than 13 points, pass; with a balanced hand and 16, 17 or 18 points, bid 1 NT. Otherwise, with 13 or more points, bid your longest suit.

Sometimes there is a tie in the length of your longest suit. Consider the fifth hand:

♠ A K 8 7 6
♥ A K 8 7 6
♦ 3
♣ J 10

This is a dilemma. Would you start with 1♥ or 1♠? There is a rule: open the higher-ranking of your two five-card (or six-card) suits. So which would you open? (1♠.) To see why, let's look at the bidding ladder.

Display the Bidding Ladder screen:

| BIDDING LADDER | | |
|----------------|-----|--------------------|
| | 7NT | |
| | 7♠ | |
| Seven Level | 7♥ | GRAND SLAMS |
| | 7♦ | |
| | 7♣ | |
| | 6NT | |
| | 6♠ | |
| Six Level | 6♥ | SMALL SLAMS |
| | 6♦ | |
| | 6♣ | |
| | 5NT | |
| | 5♠ | |
| Five Level | 5♥ | GAME |
| | 5♦ | GAME |
| | 5♣ | |
| | 4NT | |
| | 4♠ | GOLDEN GAME |
| Four Level | 4♥ | GOLDEN GAME |
| | 4♦ | |
| | 4♣ | |
| | 3NT | GOLDEN GAME |
| | 3♠ | |
| Three Level | 3♥ | |
| | 3♦ | |
| | 3♣ | |
| | 2NT | |
| | 2♠ | |
| Two Level | 2♥ | |
| | 2♦ | |
| | 2♣ | |
| | 1NT | |
| | 1♠ | |
| One Level | 1♥ | |
| | 1♦ | |
| | 1♣ | |

Let's see why we start with the higher-ranking suit. Suppose we start with 1♥ and partner bids 1NT. We want to show our spades and bid 2♠ on the rebid. If partner prefers hearts we have to move to the three level. Let's do it the other way around. We start with 1♠. Partner bids 1NT. Now we can bid 2♥. Partner can pass or bid 2♠. Either way we have a chance to stay at the two level. We can bid two suits more economically if we start with the higher-ranking and follow with the lower-ranking suit.

Put the third screen with the *Bidding* (Club Series) course hands back up.

So far we have always had a five-card suit or longer. If we take away a small heart and a small spade and replace them with two small clubs, we have no five-card or longer suit:

♠ A K 8 7
♥ A K 8 7
♦ 3
♣ J 10 5 4

Again we have a rule to help us out. To bid 1♥ or 1♠, the major suits, we need at least a five-card suit. If we don't have five cards in a major suit, we open the longer minor suit. What would you bid? (1♣.)

Display the fourth screen:

| OPENING THE BIDDING | |
|--|---|
| 7. ♠ A K 8 7 ♥ 7 ♦ A K 8 3 ♣ J 10 5 4 | 8. ♠ A Q 8 7 ♥ A 10 7 ♦ K 8 3 ♣ J 5 4 |
| 9. ♠ 9 8 ♥ A K Q ♦ Q J 9 8 ♣ A J 4 3 | 10. ♠ A 8 7 ♥ J 10 ♦ A K Q J 8 ♣ Q 6 4 |

In the seventh hand, we have two minor suits of the same length:

♠ A K 8 7
♥ 7
♦ A K 8 3
♣ J 10 5 4

With two four-card minor suits, open the higher-ranking. What would you bid? (1♦.) Some players may tell you to open the lower-ranking, the clubs. There are many different styles of bidding. What would you say to this? `That's interesting.' Remember that bidding should never be more than a pleasant conversation between friends. We don't want to become involved in hard feelings over a difference of opinion at the bridge table.

On rare occasions, you have to bid a three-card suit. Consider the eighth hand:

♠ A Q 8 7
♥ A 10 7
♦ K 8 3
♣ J 5 4

The hand is balanced but it does not have the strength to open 1 NT. If we can't bid spades or hearts since we do not have a five-card suit, then we must choose either diamonds or clubs. It is usual to pick clubs.

Have you heard of the short club? Rather than focusing on the short club, it is better to consider why the short club came to be. If we are playing five-card majors and we don't have a five-card major to bid, but we do have enough points to open the bidding, we might have to bid 1♣ ... the short club ... as in the hand above. This is not usual, however. If our partner starts the bidding 1♣, our first priority is to search for a major suit if we have enough points to respond. We could bid a four-card or longer major suit at the one level if we have one. We could respond 1♦ with four cards or longer. We also have the choice of responding 1 NT. To choose to raise clubs, we would need five cards or more and not have a better bid.

Let's look at the next hand:

♠ 9 8
♥ A K Q
♦ Q J 9 8
♣ A J 4 3

Let's consider the steps for opening the bidding. Do you have a better than average hand? (Yes.) Can you open 1 NT? (Yes.)

There may be a difference of opinion since some players will avoid a 1 NT opening with the useless doubleton in spades. Emphasize that it is still a good idea to say 1 NT. But if you feel you just can't do it, you should choose another bid and observe the results. Remember what Grandmother says ... if you can't play well, play fast!

And the last hand:

♠ A 8 7
♥ J 10
♦ A K Q J 8
♣ Q 6 4

Do you have a better than average hand? (Yes.) Do you have the requirements for a 1 NT opening bid? (Yes.)

Again, there may be some discussion since some players at this level would like to start with the five-card diamond suit. Encourage them, but don't force them, to choose 1 NT.

This should be enough material for the first Bridge Tip – a gentle review of opening the bidding with a few pieces of philosophy: “let's not let a point or two come between friends;” “remember that bidding should never be more than a pleasant conversation between friends;” “remember what grandmother says ... if you can't play well, play fast;” “don't be afraid to choose your opening bid ... fear is a darkroom where negatives are developed.” Choose any of your favorite sayings to sprinkle through the bridge tips.

VIII. E-Z Going Bridge Games

If your students are basically social players and shy away from the word “duplicate,” consider starting with this type of game. It will work for new players who aren’t interested in masterpoints, social players who want more, students new to duplicate and passengers on cruise ships, although these principles can be applied in any type game. Remember, teachers, the key to running a successful student game is to offer **what the players want and not what you (the director) want to give them.**

Here’s how it works:

- **Post only the winners and runners-up.** Respect the players’ privacy and never post all the results. No one wants it known that they didn’t do well.
- **Don’t let the same person win the prize each time.** Sometimes give a prize for overall; vary this with a prize for the person with the best result on a randomly drawn traveling score.
- **There are no masterpoint restrictions.** New players and LMs are welcome.
- **There are no conventions except Stayman and Blackwood.** The format is to basically “Bid What You See.”
- **The Mitchell movement is always used.** There are no relays and bye-stands and no Howell movements for any reason.
- **No more than 16 boards are played and there are no formal rulings.** If there is an infraction such as a lead out of turn, the director restores order without penalty or choice. (Return the card/play from the right hand.)
- **Declarer is not expected to play dummy’s cards if the person who puts down the Dummy has to leave the table.** The director should be ready to sit in to avoid that situation.
- **This game cannot be held at the same time as an open game.** There is no situation that qualifies as an exception.
- **The game always starts on time.** No reservations and no entries sold in advance. Train the players to know that the game will begin promptly.
- **The game is never stopped to adjust the movement for a late table.** A new table and boards are simply added at the end.
- **Gear the game for success by cherishing the tables you get rather than hungering for more by looking longingly toward the door.** Disguise the room to look like you expect half the number of tables that could show up. Put books, flowers, plants and newspapers out. Make extra tables available if needed — but not “empty” if not needed.
- **Give the same ten basic bridge tips over and over and over.** Promote players who ask advanced questions. Don’t raise the level of the game.
- **Let the players know they are slow.** If the first hand isn’t finished in 7 minutes, quietly sort the second board into suits. After 8¹/₂ minutes, tell the players there may not be time to play the second board.