

INTRODUCTION TO BIDDING

LAST REVISED ON MARCH 4, 2018
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The game of bridge has a number of rules that tell you how to deal, bid, play and score a hand. The game does not have any rules that tell you what you must bid or why you should make a specific bid.

BIDDING SYSTEMS

During the bidding, a partnership's main goal is to try to win a contract that they can make and that will reward them with the largest possible score. Since the hands are not exposed, partners must use their bids to precisely and concisely describe their holdings with each round of bidding providing a bit more information.

Each bid is limited to one or two words from the fifteen words in the bidding language. These words, which must be used without inflection, are:

*one, two, three, four, five, six, seven,
clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, no trump,
pass, double, redouble*

Experience has shown that there are *bidding guidelines* which often, **but not always**, point the way to the best contract and the largest score. A specific set of related bidding guidelines is called a *bidding system*.

To be successful, both partners must agree on a bidding system and both partners must understand the guidelines in the system.

STANDARD AMERICAN BIDDING SYSTEM

There are a number of bidding systems and there are often a number of variations within a particular bidding system. This course is based on a popular variation of the *Standard American Bidding System*, the bidding system that is most often used in this country.

The bidding guidelines in the *Standard American Bidding System* are based on a point count system that assigns points for high cards, long suits, and short suits. Each bid conveys information about the points in the hand (the hand's *strength*) and the length of one or more suits in the hand (the hand's *shape*).

BIDDING AGREEMENTS AND CONVENTIONS

A *natural bid* describes a point count range and the length of the suit mentioned in the bid or, in the case of no trump, the absence of a suit long enough to make a suit bid. An effective partnership will have agreed on the point count range and suit length implied by a natural bid within a specific bidding sequence.

For example: Partners who use the *Five Card Major Agreement* in the *Standard American Bidding System* agree that a **1♠** opening bid is a *natural* bid that usually describes a hand with 13-21 points and at least five spades.

Over the years, bridge experts have developed ***bidding conventions*** that specify agreements and guidelines for a series of related bids. These conventions usually start with or include at least one ***artificial bid***. An artificial bid replaces a natural bid and does not necessarily say anything about the holding in the suit that was bid.

For example: Partners who use the *Strong Two Club Convention* in the *Standard American Bidding System* agree that a **2♣** opening bid is an *artificial* bid that usually describes a hand with at least 22 points and a good five card or longer suit, but the suit may or may not be clubs.

HAND EVALUATION

Every bid that you make either directly or indirectly describes the *strength* and the *shape* of your hand **in the context of the previous bids in the bidding auction.**

STRENGTH

Strength refers to the trick-taking potential of the hand. Strength is usually estimated by assigning points to features of the hand that are valuable for taking tricks. These features include:

- ✓ ***High Cards:*** Ace, King, Queen, and Jack ***high cards*** are more likely to take tricks than low ***spot cards***.
- ✓ ***Long Suits:*** A long suit is useful as a trump suit and spot cards in a long suit can take tricks after the high cards are played.
- ✓ ***Short Suits:*** A short suit in the ***dummy*** can allow the ***declarer*** in a trump suit contract to take tricks by ***ruffing*** (trumping) losers after the dummy is ***void*** in the suit.

SHAPE

Shape refers to the distribution of the cards in the hand. The basic shapes are:

- ✓ ***Balanced Hand:*** A hand with no ***voids***, no ***singletons***, and at most one ***doubleton***. This means that a balanced hand can have one five card suit but it can not have a six card or longer suit.
- ✓ ***Unbalanced Hand:*** A hand with any other shape.

There are only three balanced shapes: 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, and 5-3-3-2. All of the other shapes are unbalanced.

————— COUNTING HIGH CARD POINTS (HCP) —————

Because an Ace is more likely to take a trick than a King which is more likely to take a trick than a Queen which is more likely to take a trick than a Jack, the top four cards are assigned the following point values which are called *high card points*.

	High Card				Total Points	
	Ace	King	Queen	Jack	Suit	Deck
Points	4	3	2	1	10	40

For example, this hand has a total of 13 high card points (HCP):

♠	5	K = 3; Q = 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px; display: inline-block;">SOUTH - YOU</div> <p>♠ K Q T 7 2</p> <p>♥ A J T</p> <p>♦ T 2</p> <p>♣ K T 5</p>
♥	5	A = 4; J = 1	
♦	0		
♣	3	K = 3	
TOTAL	13		

You must use common sense when you count your high card points:

- ✓ A singleton **A** is always worth four high card points.
- ✓ A singleton **K** is not worth three high card points unless it is in partner's suit.
- ✓ A doubleton **Kx** is counted as three high card points but they are weak points.

Solid sequences are better than broken sequences:

- ✓ **JT9** is better than **J97** (1 weak high card point)
- ✓ **QJT** is better than **KT3** (3 high card points)

————— COUNTING LONG SUIT POINTS (LSP) —————

The number of cards in each suit also contributes to the trick taking value of a hand. Long suits make excellent trump suits and they can be a source of tricks in other situations. The most common way to value the strength of a long suit is to add one length point for each card beyond four in a suit. For a five card suit add one point, for a six card suit at two points, and so on. Note that a *balanced hand* can have at most one long suit point.

The hand in the previous example is a balanced hand with a 5-3-3-2 shape and has one long suit point because of the five card spade suit.

DECLARER POINTS

Long suits are most valuable when they are in declarer's hand. If you are making a bid **and you expect to be the declarer** if your partnership wins a suit contract, you should value your hand by adding your long suit points to your high card points to get the total strength of your hand. This total is the number of *declarer points* in the hand.

For example, this hand has a total of 18 declarer points (HCP + LSP):

	HCP	+	LSP	=	DEC	
♠	6		0		6	<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">SOUTH - YOU</div> <p>♠ A Q 4</p> <p>♥ A Q T 8 7 2</p> <p>♦ 9</p> <p>♣ K J T</p>
♥	6		2		8	
♦	0		0		0	
♣	4		0		4	
TOTAL	16		2		18	

BIDDING GOALS

The goal of the partnership's bidding is to determine their best contract. Because of the large bonus for making a game and the even larger bonus for making a slam, the ideal contract is a game contract or a slam contract. Because it takes fewer tricks and fewer points to make a game in no trump or a major suit, most bidding systems focus on leading the partnership to a no trump or major suit contract.

———— GAME POINT GUIDELINES ————

The guidelines for the total points that a partnership needs to make a game or a slam are:

GAME CONTRACT	TRICKS	MINIMUM POINTS
3 No Trump	6 + 3 = 9	25+ HCP
4 in a Major (♥ or ♠)	6 + 4 = 10	26+
5 in a Minor (♣ or ♦)	6 + 5 = 11	28+
SLAM CONTRACT	TRICKS	MINIMUM POINTS
Small Slam	6 + 6 = 12	32+
Grand Slam	6 + 7 = 13	36+

———— TRUMP FIT GUIDELINES ————

It is almost impossible to make a trump suit contract if a partnership does not hold the majority of the trump. It is difficult to make a trump suit contract if a partnership only holds seven trump against defenders six trump. But a partnership with an eight-card trump fit, called the *golden fit*, has a comfortable majority because the opponents only have five. Without a golden trump fit, your partnership should strongly consider a no trump contract.