



The Deck

There are 52 cards in the deck. There are four suits, each with 13 cards:

- ♠ Spades
- ♥ Hearts
- ♦ Diamonds
- ♣ Clubs

The highest card is the Ace, then the King and so on, so the order is:

Ace King Queen Jack Ten Nine Eight Seven Six Five Four Three Two

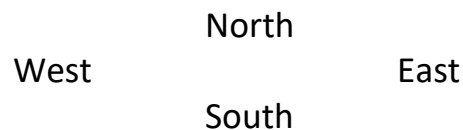
The Deal

Bridge requires four players. One player is chosen as dealer, typically by choosing a card, high card is the first dealer. Everything in bridge goes in a clockwise direction, so the dealer will rotate clockwise. After the first hand is dealt and played, the person to the left of the first dealer becomes the dealer for the second hand. This continues as long as you play.

The dealer deals out all the cards, so 13 cards to each player. The first card goes to the player to the dealer's immediate left, and then around the table in a clockwise direction (everything clockwise!). The dealer gets the 4th card, and so on until all 52 cards are dealt. The last card will be dealt to the dealer.

The Players

There are four players at the bridge table. The player across from you is your partner. The player to your right and left are your opponents. In order to talk about bridge, each player has a “direction”, North, South, East and West. North and South are always partner’s and so play across from each other. They are called a partnership or side. So East and West are partner’s, and they are called a partnership or side. On the page we show this as follows:



The player to your left can be referred to as your left hand opponent (LHO) and the player to your right can be referred to as your right hand opponent (RHO).

Tricks

A bridge hand is composed of 13 tricks (52 cards in the deck, 4 cards per trick $52/4=13$). Each trick has a leader; the leader can play any card from their hand to start the trick. Each player (in a clockwise! fashion) plays a card to the trick. They must play a card of the same suit as the leader. If they have no more cards in the suit that was led, they can play any card in their hand. The highest card in the suit led wins the trick. The player that wins the trick becomes the leader for the next trick. Bridge is a partnership game, when your partner wins a trick, you win the trick! The object of every hand of bridge is for you and your partner to take as many tricks as possible.

Trump

Trump is the master suit. For every trick, the highest card of the suit led wins the trick UNLESS a trump is played. In that case the highest trump played wins the trick. So it is a big advantage to be able to name trump. You want trump to be a suit that you have a lot of cards. You can also name “notrump” as the suit. That means there will not be a trump suit, in which case the highest card of the suit led will always win the trick. The order or rank of the suits (from highest to lowest) is:

- NT Notrump
- ♠ Spades
- ♥ Hearts
- ♦ Diamonds
- ♣ Clubs

The Bidding (also called auction)

Bidding will be covered more extensively starting in the next module. Bidding is a competition to name the trump suit and the number of tricks that you think you and partner can take. The dealer makes the first bid. It is assumed that you can take $\frac{1}{2}$ of the tricks. There are 13 tricks, so $13/2 = 6\frac{1}{2}$. Since you can not take a $\frac{1}{2}$ trick, you must win 6 tricks (also called book) PLUS the number of tricks you bid. Each bid has a number and a suit. To make a bid you must “beat” the previous bid, by either naming a higher ranking suit at the same level, or going to a higher level. You can also “pass” saying that you don’t think your side can take more tricks than the previous bid.

The dealer makes the first bid, if they don’t think that their side can take 7 tricks they can pass. If they think their side can take 7 or more tricks, they say so by naming the number of tricks and the suit they want to be trump. Then each player (in a clockwise direction) has a chance to bid or pass. The auction ends when there are three passes.

Example Auction

This is how we write out an auction. You can see why we assign players a direction, so it makes it easier to write out:

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♣	1♠
1NT	2♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

The side that makes the last bid is called the **declaring side**. The other side is called the **defending side**.

This auction could be described as follows. North was the dealer and passed. North did not think that North/South could take 7 tricks. East then bid 1♣, thinking that East/West could take 7 tricks with clubs as trump. South then bid 1♠ (a higher ranking suit than clubs), thinking that North/South could take 7 tricks

with spades as trump. West then bid 1 notrump, thinking that East/West could take 7 tricks with no trump suit. North then bid 2♠, liking the spade suit that partner suggested, and saying that North/South could take 8 tricks with spades as trump. Everyone then passed ending the auction.

Contract

When the auction ends, the last bid is called the contract. In the example auction above, 2♠ is the contract (also called final contract). North/South is the declaring side, because they named the trump suit. East/West are called the defending side, because they will try to stop North/South from taking their 8 tricks. If East/West are successful in taking 6 or more tricks, the contract will go down. We also say the contract was not made or the contract was set. If North/South are successful they will take 8 or more tricks and we say the contract made.

What is a contract?

- Number of odd tricks (Tricks above 6) you are going to take = 1,2,3,4,5,6,7
- Trump suit? = ♣, ♦, ♥, ♠
- NoTrump (NT) = Only high card wins

Contract Examples

1♣ = 7 tricks with ♣s as trump

2♦ = 8 tricks with ♦s as trump

3♥ = 9 tricks with ♥s as trump

4♠ = 10 tricks with ♠s as trump

3NT = 9 tricks with no trump suit (only high card wins)

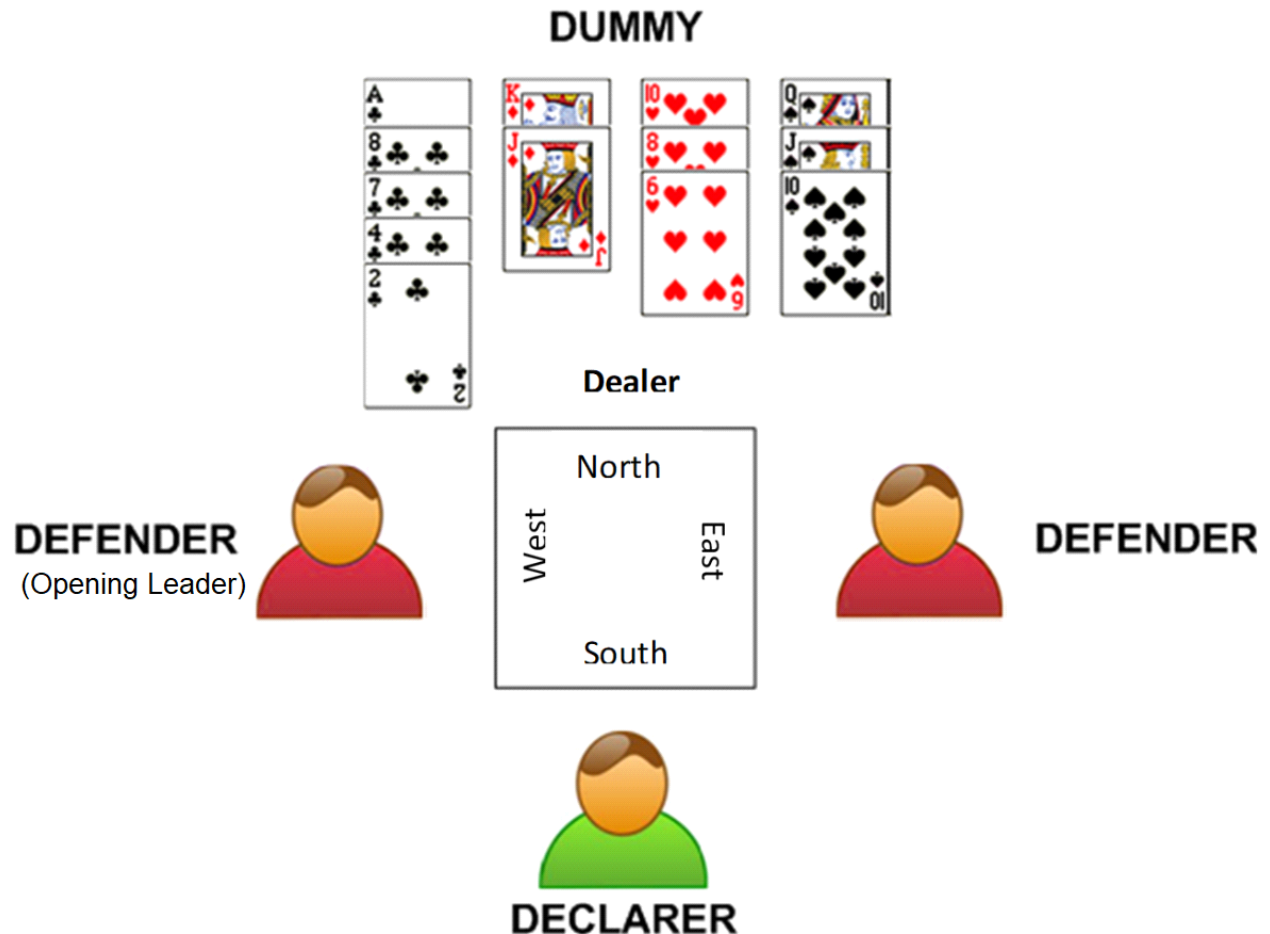
Declarer and dummy

The declaring side has a declarer. The declarer was the first person that bid the suit (or notrump if you are playing in a notrump contract). In the example auction above, South was the first player to bid spades, so South is the declarer.

Declarer's partner is called dummy, because they will not play their cards. The dummy will put their cards face up on the table for declarer to see. Declarer will play both the cards from dummy and from their hand. This is a big advantage because declarer knows what cards the partnership has.

Opening Leader

The defender to the left of declarer is called the opening leader. They get to lead to the first trick by playing any card from their hand. This is the one advantage the defending side gets. After the opening lead is made, dummy puts their hand face up on the table and then declarer decides what card to play to the first trick. The opening leader's partner then plays a card, and finally declarer plays last to the first trick. Whoever wins the first trick is the leader for the next trick, and so on until all 13 tricks are played.



Score

Each hand of bridge is scored and only one side scores points. If the declaring side takes the number of tricks they contracted, then they score points. They get points for each trick over six that they took, and they can also get bonus points. If they fail to take the number of tricks they contracted, then the defending side scores points. The defending side gets points for each trick that they took that the

declaring side needed. So in our example above where North/South contracted to take 8 tricks with spades as trump, if East/West took 7 tricks, they would score points for 2 tricks, since North/South only took 6 tricks so their contract went down by 2 tricks (8-6=2).

Part Score Contract

When the final contract is lower than 3 notrump, or 4♣ or 4♦ then the contract is said to be a part score contract. When the declaring bids and makes a part score contract they get 50 bonus points.

Game Contract

When the final contract is 3NT, 4NT, 5NT, 4♥, 5♥, 4♠, 5♠, 5♣ or 5♦ the contract is said to be a game contract. The declaring side gets a much bigger bonus for making a game contract. The size of the bonus varies and will be discussed later.

Slam Contracts

When the final contract is 6♣, 6♦, 6♥, 6♠ or 6NT the contract is said to be a small slam contract. The declaring side gets an even bigger bonus for making a small slam contract. The size of the bonus varies and will be discussed later.

When the final contract is 7♣, 7♦, 7♥, 7♠ or 7NT the contract is said to be a grand slam contract. The declaring side gets the largest possible bonus for making a grand slam contract. Grand slam contracts are rare, and every bridge player loves to be able to score a grand slam! The size of the bonus varies.

Basic Play of the Hand Strategy

Now that the basics are out of the way, we will talk about play of the hand strategy for declarer. Our first module concentrates on the play of the hand, because being able to play the cards well is the foundation of a good bridge player. We will start by just considering a notrump contract. Once we have the basics of notrump play, we can start thinking about trump contracts.

Counting Sure Winners

The first thing declarer needs to do in a notrump contract, is to count your sure winners. What is a sure winner? An Ace is a sure winner. If you have the Ace in your hand, or in dummy, then the King is a sure winner. If you have the Ace and the King then the Queen is a sure winner, and so on and so on. Here are some examples, dummies cards are on top, and declarers cards are underneath:

♠A Q J T 3

♠A Q J T 3

♠A Q J

♠A 9 4 3

♠K 8 2

♠8 2

♠K 8 2

♠K 8 2

5 sure tricks

1 sure trick

3 sure tricks

2 sure tricks

The third example is important. Even though you have the top four cards in spades, you only have 3 sure tricks because dummy and declarer both have to follow suit when spades are led three times. The last trick crashes two of your honors together on the same trick.

Now let's show an example of counting all of the sure winners in your hands, you will need to count the sure tricks in each suit and add them together.

Dummy

♠K 7 3

♥A T

♦K Q J T 2

♣9 8 3

Declarer

♠A Q 8 2

♥Q J 3

♦7 4 3

♣A Q J

In these two hands, the declaring side has 5 sure tricks, 3 in spades, 1 in hearts, none in diamonds and 1 in clubs. $1+3+1=5$. Counting your sure tricks is something a good declarer does on every hand they play, so mastering this skill is the first step on the way to being a good bridge player.

Establishing sure tricks

As declarer you will almost never have enough sure tricks to make your contract. You will need to establish lower ranking cards as winners by forcing out the higher cards. Consider the diamond suit in the hands above. You have zero sure tricks, but if you play the ♦K to force out the ♦A, then you have established 3 sure winners, the ♦Q, ♦J and ♦T.

Long Suit Tricks

When declarer has a long suit, then once the defenders have no more cards in that suit, even 2's and 3's are sure tricks! When you are declaring in a notrump contract, you want to establish tricks in your long suit. Consider the example hands above. You have 8 ♦'s between the two hands. That means the defenders only have 5. Once you play the ♦K to force out the ♦A, then you have 3 sure tricks in diamonds, and if all the defenders diamonds are gone, the ♦2 will be a sure trick as well! You will get 4 tricks in the diamond suit to go with your 5 sure tricks in the other suits. You will make 3NT, a game contract, and if you bid it, then you will get the game bonus.

Making a plan

Once the opening lead is made, and dummy's cards are exposed on the table, declarer must make a plan. You should do this on every hand you declare. Not making a plan is a sure way to fail to make your contract. Suppose you were declarer in 3NT with the hands above. West leads the ♠5. As declarer you would count 5 sure tricks, and then look where else you could establish 4 more tricks to make your 3NT contract. You should see your long diamond suit as a source of tricks, so your plan should be to win the first spade with your ♠A, and then lead diamonds to draw out the ♦A. Then no matter what suit the defense returns, you can win the trick, and cash your 4 diamond tricks and your other sure winners to make your 3NT contract. In summary:

- Count your **SURE** winners
- Identify where you can establish more tricks
- Make a plan
- Execute the plan

Play Strategy Practice - Contract is 2NT

Dummy

♠K 9 3

♥K 7 4

♦K 6 5

♣A Q J 2

Declarer

♠A 7 4

♥A Q 8 5

♦Q 7 4

♣T 9 6

How many tricks do I need? _____

Sure Winners _____

Sources of tricks 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

What's my plan _____

Playing the honor cards from the short side first

When taking your sure winners, you want to make sure you take them in the proper order, so you can cash all your winners. Consider these two hands:

♠A 7 4

♠K Q J 3

Here you have 4 sure tricks in spades. However if you play the ♠K, and then the ♠Q, you will be forced to play the ♠A on the third round of spades. This will block you in the dummy hand, and if you don't have a sure trick to get back to declarer's hand, you will not be able to cash your ♠J. You have just turned 4 sure tricks into 3 tricks. It will happen to every declarer, so don't feel too bad. However, the solution is simple, and covered by the title of this section, **PLAY YOUR HONOR CARD IN THE SHORT SIDE FIRST**. If you play the ♠A on the first trick in spades, and then lead the ♠7 to the ♠K, you are now in declarer's hand and can cash the ♠Q and the ♠J.

Example 2:

	NORTH (DUMMY)	
	♦ A Q J 10 9 8	
	♣ 3	
WEST		EAST
♦ 7 3 2		♦ 6 5
♣ K 10 9 6		♣ Q J 7 4
		♥ 8
	SOUTH (DECLARER)	
	♦ K 4	
	♣ A 8 5 2	
	♥ 4	

In this example declarer needs the rest of the tricks. When West leads the ♣K, you must win the ♣A, and then play the ♦K. Then you can play the ♦4 and cash the remaining 5 high diamonds in dummy, winning 7 tricks. If you carelessly win the ♦A in dummy first, then you have to win the ♦K on the second diamond trick and have no way to get to the good tricks in dummy. Instead of winning all 7 tricks, you will only win 2! A good reason to play high cards from the short side first!