

Online Resources for Learning Bridge

Introduction

Covid lockdowns have changed bridge teaching, perhaps forever. No longer can we huddle round a table with a teacher at our shoulder. Now we use the resources of the Internet to learn and improve our game. At the same time, a combination of Whatsapp calls and online bridge playing has allowed grandparents to teach and play bridge with distant grandchildren they cannot visit.

This guide suggests ideas for how players can use the Internet to progress from rank beginner to playing confidently in online and - when Covid is behind us – face to face tournaments. Please let us have your ideas on bridge education too, so we can share them with our audience.

Of course, it's always best if you can progress helped by a human teacher. Based on material from *Introduction to Bridge* by Paul Marston, the ECBU and the WCBU have together developed an online bridge course using Zoom, RealBridge and some of the material listed on this page. If you - or your grandchildren - would like to attend one of these courses then they should contact Carol Stanton (carolstantonke@gmail.com).

Learning the Basics

The best place to start is to learn Whist. The online Whist website at <https://cardgames.io/whist/> teaches one about tricks, trumps, playing with a partner and getting a positive score for making 7 or more tricks. You will quickly realise that it helps you to do well to have aces, kings, queens and lots of the trump suit. Also, none (we refer to this as a 'void') in a non-trump suit. You can also click [here](#) to play another version of whist.

Click [here](#) to go to a website where you will be given five short, simple lessons to reinforce what you have learned. At the end of each lesson, you will be asked three questions about what you have learned. Once you have answered them correctly you will go to the next lesson.

You are now ready to register on the Bridge Base Online (<https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/> BBO hereafter) website where you will be required to give yourself a BBO name (keep it simple) that you will be sharing with other players and a secret password for your own use only.

Now log on to BBO using your new BBO name and password. Click on **Practice** and then **Mini Bridge**. You can see your hand and your partner's hand. Look at them both, decide if you can make most tricks with a trump suit or No Trumps and then click on the trump suit symbol or NT you want. Now you will be asked how many tricks more than 6 you think you can make with that suit as trumps. Once you have played the hand you will be given a score. You should try to get the highest score possible.

The *No Fear Bridge* website provides a simple, child friendly introduction to evaluating your hand in order to make an opening bid.

https://www.nofearbridge.co.uk/itutorials/minibrIDGE/minibrIDGE_tutorial/story_html5.html

A YouTube video can teach more about bidding and get you started on learning a bidding system. Those produced by the Australian Bridge Federation <https://www.abf.com.au/education/getting-started/> take you systematically into the elements of the game. (Unfortunately, they are aimed at adults and we have still to find a source of bridge videos for kids. Maybe this is where bridge playing grandparents step in with Whatsapp calls to tutor the youngsters).

As you watch and read, take note of the terms used, then Google them to reinforce your understanding starting with: opening bid; overcall; bidding convention; Standard American System; double and redouble; vulnerable and non-vulnerable; opening lead; grand slam and small slam. Incidentally, bridge players talk interchangeably about 'hands' and 'boards'.

Bridge teacher Andrew Robson has written a nice article on the *Rule of Twenty* which players use to decide whether to open the bidding: <https://www.andrewrobson.co.uk/article/articles/792>

Now, log on to BBO and select the *Solitaire / Bridge Master* option and start at the bottom level. You will quickly realize it is just the same as Whist, only you get to see the bidding and to choose the cards played by both your partner (the 'dummy') and yourself. Replay each hand until you master it, then move on to the next, slightly more difficult one.

Developing Your Skills

Ahead of each game they play, bridge partners agree on what conventions they are going to play. In South Africa, most players play the Standard American system where you open with five card majors and make a strong 15 to 17 point 1NT opening bid. Probably the only conventions you need initially are Stayman, Jacoby Transfers and Roman Keycard Blackwood. If those sound like Greek to you, then go to the Bridge Bums website:

https://www.bridgebum.com/bridge_bidding_conventions.php

and look them up. Incidentally, we recommend bookmarking this web page on your cell phone so you can look them up quickly when playing in tournaments against opponents who announce they play conventions unfamiliar to you.

Now go back to the BBO website and select the *Solitaire / Just Play* option. Here you get to both bid and play hands. If your computer opponents bid higher than you and your partner, then you and your partner will be 'defenders' and one of you must make the 'opening lead'. It won't take you long to become comfortable with this form of solitaire – in fact you could easily become addicted!

Playing Socially

Before you start playing with people, you need to know how the scoring system works, even though the computer will calculate the score at the end of each hand. The first section of:

https://www.acbl.org/learn_page/how-to-play-bridge/how-to-keep-score/duplicate/

shows you how to do the calculations. Don't worry now about the sections on *Matchpoint* and *International Matchpoint* scoring; you won't need these until you're playing competitively.

Now you are ready to start playing with real, live human beings. However, it's best to start playing with people you know – unfortunately online strangers can be quite rude when you make a mistake. So, find three friends who play bridge and get them to register to play on BBO. At a time agreed with the friends, go to *Casual / Start a Table* and enter their BBO names. Kibitzers are bridge spectators; we suggest you ban them from your table. When you press *Start Table – Relaxed Game*, each of your friends will receive an invitation to play. Once they have all accepted their invitations, each of you will be able to see the first hand and start bidding and playing. Each of you should also click on *History* on the right hand side of your screen so you can see the scores hand by hand.

Before you start playing, you might want to set up a Whatsapp group with your four numbers and make a group call so you can chat as you play. Obviously, this is not allowed once you start playing in bridge tournaments as it can lead to cheating and even a ban from playing bridge. Don't go there!

The great thing about playing on BBO is that the players at your table could be situated anywhere in the world. It's a great way to bond with family members and friends distanced from you by Covid lockdowns.

After you have finished playing, you and your partner can still view and discuss the hands you played previously by clicking on *History* and looking at *Recent Hands*.

Migrating to Competitive Bridge (Optional Step)

Once you and your friends are comfortable playing casually on BBO and are starting to feel happy with your skill level, then it's time to start thinking of playing competitively with a larger circle of players, most of who you have never seen or heard of before.

If you can, find four more players and agree a time to play a team of four match with them. Each team consists of one pair playing North – South and the other pair playing East - West.

Before you start the game, log in to BBO, click on the *People* tab on the right hand side and list each of your players as friends; this way you can make sure they are online before you start the match. To set up the game, go to *Competitive / Team Matches / Create Team Match*. This pop-up window will appear.

Do NOT click on *Create Team Match* until you have given a name to your match, reserved seats and chosen from the Options.

After giving a name to your match, click on Reserve Seats and enter the BBO names of the players in each team, then click on Options and select number of boards and, again, disallow kibitzers. Only now should you click on *Create Team Match* and an invitation will be sent to each participant. Note, if you do this prematurely, BBO can get confused so be extra careful.

As with your game with three friends, you should all click on *History* as you start so you can see the results from both tables hand by hand as they are played. Now is the time to go back to:

https://www.acbl.org/learn_page/how-to-play-bridge/how-to-keep-score/duplicate/

and understand match point scoring. And, once again, after the match is over, you can go to *History* and analyse your performance.

Playing Competitive Bridge

Instead of setting up your own team of four competition we suggest you contact Mark Kenyon (markkenyon25@gmail.com) with a view to playing in the teams of four competitions the J&M Club arrange each afternoon. He will be able to arrange for you and your partner to play initially with other competition novices or with more experienced players charged with mentoring new players. Obviously, during these matches you are not allowed to communicate with your partner by Whatsapp or cell phone.

In pairs tournaments, all the participants play the same hands in blocks of two or three against different opponents. All the North – South pairs compete to get a better score than all the other North – South pairs on each board. Similarly, each East – West pair strives to beat all the other pairs playing the same way on the same board.

You'll probably get a shock the first time you play against Robots, especially since they bid and play extremely rapidly. The secret to success against them is to relax and take your time. And they're not perfect so you can get top board against them.

The J&M Club is planning to organise pairs tournaments for beginners and these will be advertised on our Upcoming and Calendar web pages.

By now you are ready to take the plunge and start playing in the BBO and Real Bridge pairs tournaments organised by the WCBU and the J&M Club, the details of which can be found on the Upcoming and Calendar pages of the WCBU website <https://www.wcbridge.co.za>. As a first step you will need to register and join the South African Bridge Federation (SABF); a small annual fee needs to be paid.

However, when you play in these and other non-beginner tournaments you need to understand that the tournament director requires that you complete each hand within seven minutes which can be a challenge till you are comfortable. The results of most of these tournaments are recorded on the WCBU website and you can log on to Pianola for an analysis of your bidding and play.

We look forward to seeing you in our tournaments, not just playing, but winning!

Resources

The WCBU newsletters <https://site.pianola.net/western-cape-bridge-union/sabf-and-union-newsletters> include articles written by local experts that will be of value to intermediate and advanced bridge players.

YouTube contains a host of bridge education videos. We are going to list those recommended by our players here starting with:

The Australian Bridge Federation <https://www.abf.com.au/education/getting-started/>.

We are awaiting further recommendations from our players.

Three new bridge teaching articles are posted each day on the Andrew Robson website <https://www.andrewrobson.co.uk/> and we recommend you bookmark this page for a regular visit. Come December, you might even like to buy your partner(s) a celebratory copy of *The Times Bridge Calendar* for the next year where they can read an article a day. (Note, many of Andrew's audience are in the United Kingdom playing the Acol system, which includes four card majors and 12-14 1 NT opening bids, rather than Standard American, but this shouldn't be a problem).

Here are some bridge books we recommend (some are out of print but you can regularly find them in second hand bookshops or reprinted in electronic format) in order of difficulty:

Card Play Technique (or the Art of being Lucky) by Victor Mollo and Nico Gardener (Faber and Faber)(although published decades ago, still regarded as the best introductory book on declarer play and defence)

Bridge Play Unravalled by Freddie North (B. T. Batsford) gives a nice, simple analysis of declarer play

Accurate Cardplay and *Imaginative Cardplay* both by Terence Reese and Roger Trezel (digital versions of both these books are available)

Victor Mollo's Winning Double published by Faber and Faber (now called *Victor Mollo's Bridge Quiz Book* and available in electronic format) poses declarer problems that force you to think

Killing Defence at Bridge by Hugh Kelsey (Cassell) (this classic, which turned top level defence upside down back in the 1980's, has been reprinted but needs intense concentration to read)

Bridge Teachers:

The Western Cape is fortunate in having a wide selection of bridge teachers. We are in the process of contacting many of them to check if they teach online and will then list them on the WCBU website. In the meantime, if you are a bridge teacher then log on to the WCBU Pianola website and update your profile to show you are a teacher.

Finally:

Thank you for reading this far. Please note that all the web pages and publications listed in this guide have been selected for their value; no payment has been made by any of them.

We welcome your feedback and ideas on this guide! If you like it, please send it on to friends and relations, including grandchildren, whom you think could benefit from joining our wonderful bridge playing community.

And may all your finesses succeed, as bridge players are wont to greet one another.

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