

Esther's Miscellaneous Bridge Bidding/Play "Rules" --Revised--

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#1. If you open a Minor, and I bid **1H**, and you are holding 4 Spades, even if (a) your Spades are pretty *bad*, and (b) you are holding 5 killer cards in your Minor, you still ****MUST**** bid **1S** after my **1H** bid. You can later rebid your Minor to show its strength.

#2. If you are leading against a **NT** contract, and you hold a suit with 4 of more cards, **always** lead that suit. If you hold touching honors at or near the top of the suit, lead the top honor. If you do **not** hold touching honors, lead the **4th from the top** of the suit, so that I can use the most important Rule in bridge, the **Rule of 11**.

#3. If I double the Opponent's opening bid at the 1 level (called a "demand double"), and

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

your RHO passes, I am the Captain (showing **no 5-card suit**, and **shortage** in opponent's bid suit), and you ****MUST** bid** your longest and strongest suit (unless you have fewer than 4 points, OR you hold a "trump stack" and you know we can set the doubled contract). However, if I double after BOTH the opponents have bid 2 different suits, I am showing length in **BOTH** the unbid suits (either 5-4 or, preferably, 5-5).

#4. Do not double unless you hold (1) an opening or near-opening hand, (2) **no** 5-card suit, (3) only 1 or 2 cards in the opponent's opening suit, and (4) if the opponent's opening is of a Minor, at least 1 4-card major with at least a 3-card major in the other Major, or hopefully two 4-card Majors.

#5. No matter in what seat you are sitting, if the number of your HCPs plus the number of cards in your longest TWO suits equals **20**, or more, you ****MUST** open** ("Rule of 20").

#6. Do **not ever** bid a "weak 2", unless you hold (1) less than an opening hand, and (2) **2 of the top 3** cards in your suit, or **3 of the top 5** cards in your suit.

#7. Once you have "*limited*" your hand (described both your point count and card distribution within a narrow range), do **not ever** bid again unless your Partner, who is therefore now "captain," asks you a question. For example, if you open **1NT** (i.e., showing "balanced"

distribution, 15-17 HCPs), do not bid again unless Partner asks you a question (e.g., 2**C**, "Do you have a 4 card Major?"; 2**D**, "I demand that you bid 2**H**."; 2**NT**, "Are you at the 'top' of your 1**NT** opening bid? If so, bid 3**NT**."). For example, if you as Dealer open 2**S** (i.e., a non-opening hand with 6 Spades, 2 of the top 3, or 3 of the top 5), DO NOT BID AGAIN, unless Partner bids 2**NT**, which says, "Do you have a side feature Ace or protected King? If so, bid the side feature. Otherwise, rebid your first-bid suit."

#8. Do not lead an Ace, unless you hold and are promising the "touching" King. Remember: "*Aces are for killing Kings!!!*" **Possible Exception:** You hold an Ace singleton, with trumps, in which case you can later "kill" the King with a trump card. **Exception:** If you are defending against a slam suit contract, lead your Aces to make sure you get to play them.

#9. If I open 2**C**, do not bid a suit showing that suit, unless you have (1) at least 8 HCPs, and (2) at least 5 cards in your suit, including 2 of the top 3, or 3 of the top 5 cards in your suit. In general, it is important to "right side" the final contract to be in the hand of the 2**C** opener, which is what this does.

#10. We are playing "*inverted attitude*" for me to tell you my "attitude" toward the suit you are leading: "low" = "yes", "hi" = "no". When you lead, my FIRST obligation is to show whether

I like, or do not like, the suit you lead, and specifically *whether or not I can take the 3rd trick*. If you are holding touching A/K, and you lead the Ace, and then the King, if I play low, and then "echo" with a higher card (e.g., 4, 7, or 7, 9), then you know I either (a) hold the Queen, assuming the Queen is not in Dummy, or (b) I can trump the third card you lead in this suit, and you ****MUST**** lead the suit for a 3rd time. Otherwise, switch suits.

#11. In situations in which the Dummy is void, or soon will become void, at least when the Declarer is playing a Suit contract, I can then show "**Suit Preference**." For example, if you lead the Ace of Clubs against a 4^H contract, I know that you are going to next lead the King of Clubs, unless the Dummy has a Club void or Singleton. So I know, and you know, that a suit switch is going to be needed either for your second or your third lead. I can tell you *which suit to lead to me* by what I play on your first lead. If I play a **low** (6 or lower) Club, that means I want you to lead to me the lower of the 2 suits, not including Clubs, and not including Hearts as trump (i.e., lead a Diamond). If I play a **high** (7 or higher) Club, that means I want you to lead to me the higher of the 2 suits, not including Clubs and not including Hearts as trump (i.e., lead a Spade).

#12. If I slough early in play, the suit I slough may well show a "suit preference" for you

to lead that suit back to me, if you get in the lead.

#13. If you are Declarer, and the Dummy only holds 1 or 2 trump, try to create a void in the dummy before you draw trump, so that you can create "extra" tricks by first using Dummy's trump to themselves alone win tricks (rather than being "spent" and wasted as discards on Declarer's trump when Declarer draws trump).

#14. Do not "ask for Aces" unless you have **first or second round control** in every suit. And it can be dicey to ask for Aces if you have a void, because then it is hard to interpret Partner's response.

#15. If there are 3 Passes to you, or 2 Passes to you if your LHO bid something other than Pass, so that if you Pass the contract is finalized or Passed Out, you are in what is called the "balancing" position. If there are 3 Passes to you, you may bid with HCPs "*plus a King*", or only **10** points. However, if Partner bids in the 4th seat after 3 Passes, and Partner does not open **1C** or **1D** (when responding to Partner's **1C** or **1D**, you usually must bid to show whether you have 4+ cards in a Major, even if you have very few points), you would be wise to respond to either a **1H** or a **1S** opening as if you were "*minus a King*" (i.e., bid only if you have the required points for your bid, plus 3 extra points).

#16. If you open 1**NT**, I can "transfer" to a Major if I have at least 5 cards in the given Major. Some pairs mutually agree that I can transfer with virtually *no points*, while other partners mutually agree that I can transfer only if I have at least a specified number of HCPs (e.g., 4), with at least a specified number of honors in the suit to which I am transferring (e.g., 1).

#17. If I open 1**NT**, and you "transfer" me to a Major, if I hold (1) 4 of that Major, and (2) I am "at the top" of my bid, I ****must** SUPER ACCEPT** the transfer by bidding 3 of the Major to which you are transferring. If I do not meet both these conventions, it may be safer for me to respond with a 2-level bid of the Major, and thus let you tell me more about how many points you have. [If I have 3 of the Major, rather than 4, I know that we have the "magic" number of 8 of the trump, and I can SUPER ACCEPT, but it could be dicey.]

More NT Bridge Rules

#1. When playing a **NT** contract as Declarer, if you hold stops in all suits, give up the lead early by playing low cards in the suit in which you hold the most cards across both your hand and Dummy's, to try to "promote" the low potential winners in your longest suit that you can take later. This is especially important if you have high cards in other suits that allow

you to get back to the hand with a long suit containing low cards.

#2. If you are Declarer playing a **NT** contract, and the opponents start leading the suit in which you are shortest, do not take the first trick. Follow the "**Rule of 7**": Subtract (the number of cards in the led suit that you have in Dummy plus your hand combined) from 7, and "hold up" playing your winner in that suit for at least that number of rounds. **Exception:** If you can take your winner immediately or early, and safely make your contract, but otherwise your contract is endangered, then "take your tricks and run."