

**"Esther's Bridge Bible of 'Tips' About
Bridge Bidding and Play:
Everything (or At Least All the Basics) that
the New or Advancing Bridge Player
Needs to Eventually Know"¹**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen²

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

During the Auction:

1. Always focus during the auction, even if you have found a Minor-Suit fit, on finding a Major-Suit "fit". If you as Responder have a 4-card Major you can bid at the one-level, always in some way show it to Partner. And, in general, playing a 4**H** or 4**S** contract will yield a *better* result than playing a 3**NT** contract. However, when Partners *both* hold 4 of a Major if as Responder you hold 8-11 HCPs setting a 4**H** or 4**S** contract will yield a result superior to playing a 3**NT** contract, while if as Responder you hold 12-14 HCPs setting a 3**NT** contract will yield a result superior to playing a 4**H** or 4**S** contract.³

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¹ Many of the ideas presented here are drawn from Karen Walker's web article, "Quick Tips for Improving Your Bridge Game": <https://kwbridge.com/tips.htm> and Ron Klinger's 100 WINNING BRIDGE TIPS for the Improving Player. Klinger is the inventor of the Ron Klinger "Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score", and has been a bridge columnist for decades at several major Australian newspapers.

² 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.

³ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see Lesson #81:
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/NTvsMajor.pdf>

2. Do not make your first bid during the auction, even if you hold ~13 HCPs, unless can see at that time a reasonable second bid that you can later make, such as a re-bid of your opened Suit, a second bid of a "side" Suit, or a **NT** bid.
3. If your Hand meets the requirements to open **1NT** (15-18 HCPs, no void, no singleton, no more than 1 Doubleton, hopefully "protected" "stoppers" across all or most Suits), you should *almost always* open with a **NT** rather than a Suit bid, even if you hold a 5-card Suit, even if the 5-card Suit is in a Major, which you can show Partner later in the auction. This is because:
 - a. When you hold a **NT** Hand, and you *deny* this holding by not bidding **1NT**, you are "lying" to Partner by telling Partner you do not hold this Hand, and once you derail the auction train in this manner, you can almost never get the train back on track later in the auction.
 - b. When you are the first person not to PASS in the auction, and you bid **1NT**, you may well discourage your Opponents from competing in the auction, even if they might have otherwise bid.
4. During a "competitive" auction in which *both* Pairs are bidding, think *even then* about what you will lead if the Opponents set the contract and you are "on lead". This will help to *inform* your bidding decisions during the auction. Do not wait to think about your lead until after the contract is set.
5. If you and Partner find a "fit" in a Minor, always consider instead playing **3NT**, because if you can make a **5C** or **5D** contract, you quite often *also* make **3NT**, assuming you have "stoppers" across all Suits, because (1) you can lose more Tricks and still make your contract the 3 level, and (2) **NT** yields a higher score per Trick than a contract in a Minor.
6. If you know that you hold "extra" Trump cards, meaning **1 or more** Trump cards more than an 8-card "fit", you should feel comfortable bidding at the 3 level.
7. In general, *if possible*, do not let Opponents play a 2-level Major contract when Opponents have supported each other in a Major, because they are going to make that

contract all day, assuming they are bidding rationally, and they will inevitably earn a "positive" bridge score. In duplicate bridge numerous "positive" Bridge Scores = a high ranking in the overall competition, while *conversely* numerous "negative" Bridge Scores = a low ranking in the overall competition.

8. If you hold a "minimum" Hand and insufficient support for Partner's bid Suit, and Partner does not support a "side" Suit that you bid, *quickly stop* bidding. Unless you are super "strong", do not then bid (1) a third Suit or (2) **NT**.
9. If you hold a "Trump stack" in the Opponents' bid Suit, and no other obvious bid, simply PASS, and pray that Opponents do not switch to another contract, so that you can earn a "positive" (and potentially large) Bridge Score by playing on Defense.
10. Always assume that Partner has only the *minimum* HCPs sufficient to make his bid (i.e., **~12-14** HCPs as Opener, and **6-10** HCPs as Responder), *unless and until* Partner tells you otherwise.
11. Do not bid above the 1 level *unless*:
 - a. You are supporting Partner's bid Suit or **1NT** opening bid; or
 - b. You are re-bidding your bid Suit to show 1 or more "extra" cards not previously shown by your first bid; or
 - c. You are bidding to show Partner a second Suit that you hold that is *lower in "rank"* than your first-opened Suit.
12. Once you "limit" your Hand by showing Partner (1) a highly specific HCP range and (2) Suit distribution "shape", do not bid again *unless and until* Partner demands a further bid or the answer to a Partner "query".
13. Bidding is not about throwing "*bridge spaghetti against the wall*" as *guesses* about optimal contracts, and *instead* is about communicating to Partner precise information about your (1) HCPs and (2) distribution "shape".

14. *2-Suited* Hands are *ideally* shaped for playing Suit contracts, and seasoned bridge players open the bidding sitting in *any* seat if their Hand meets the requirements of Marty Bergen's "**Rule of 20**", which says "open the bidding if the sum of (a) your HCPs and (b) the number of cards in your longest 2 Suits is **20** or more."
15. If you are brand new to bridge, it is not yet time for you to learn about "Not-for-Penalty DOUBLES"⁴, but you should learn about these as soon as you feel comfortable doing so, because you will eventually use these about 2-4 times in every competition involving 21-27 Boards.

When You Are **Declarer**:

16. Make every effort to "*listen to the auction*" for every bit of information that you can suck out of the auction! For example, the auction may tell you *which Opponent* you should run finesses through, or which Opponent hold Suit honors such that you can play through that Opponent and win Tricks with some of your "lower" Suit cards.
17. Once the Dummy comes down, formulate your initial "Line of Play" focusing on (1) when you are playing Suit contracts counting "losers" and dumping "losers", and (2) counting "winners" when you are playing **NT** contracts. But be prepared to abandon your initial "Line of Play" when prompted to do so by information you later acquire during the play of the Hand.
18. When you are "drawing" a Suit, either as a Trump Suit in a Suit contract, or in a **NT** contract, *ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS* "draw" the cards in a Suit by playing "Low to High", and **NEVER** "High to Low", unless you are positive that an unfortunate "split" will not derail your Line of Play. For example, if you hold 11 cards in a Suit, including A,K, playing "Low to High" becomes obviously and certainly

⁴ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "Convention #14: 6 Not-for-Penalty Doubles":
<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf>

irrelevant. Do not under any circumstances *ineptly*⁵ assume that cards will "split" in the most likely fashion (e.g., 3-2 versus 5-0), because if you play "High to Low" and you confront a very unfortunate "split", you will have compromised your ability to deal with the situation! Instead, determine *early* by playing "Low to High" to actually find out what the actual (not the probable) card "split" is. Playing "Low to High" encourages Opponents to play intermediate cards, and thus allows you to "promote" your own intermediate cards into "winners"!!!

19. A finesse has only a 50-50 chance of succeeding, so *only* finesse if (1) you must do so to make your contract that otherwise will be "set", or (2) you acquire information during the auction that tells you which Opponent to run your finesse through.
20. Always, always remember that in duplicate bridge, unlike in social bridge, taking a *single* "extra" Trick can make a *large* difference in your Matchpoints (MPs) on a given Hand. For example, if out of 9 N/S Pairs there are 8 N/S Pairs against whom you are competing, the total number of MPs awarded on every given Board will equal:
$$[9 \times (9 - 1)] / 2 = [9 \times 8] / 2 = 72 / 2 = \mathbf{36.0}$$
 MPs.
If you make **1** "extra" Trick more than the other 8 N/S Pairs playing the same contract, you will be awarded $(9 - 1) = 8.0$ MPs on the Board, a "top" Board, and every one of your 8 competing tied N/S Pairs will receive $[(36.0 - 8.0) / 8] = [28.0 / 8] = \mathbf{3.5}$ MPs. Your Pair will receive a Board Percentage of $8.0 / 8.0 = \mathbf{100.0\%}$, and *all* the other 8 N/S Pairs will receive a Board Percentage $3.5 / 8.0 = \mathbf{43.8\%}$. If instead *all* 9 N/S Pairs had exactly made the same contract, *all* 9 N/S Pairs would have earned 50.0%. The *difference* in you scoring a 100.0% Board versus a 50.0% Board is 50.0%, and if you played 18 Boards in the competition, your **Total Percentage** in the competition will improve by $50.0 / 18 = \mathbf{2.8!!!}$ ⁶

⁵ And stupidly.

⁶ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "How Duplicate Pairs Bridge is Scored":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/scoring.pdf>

...as Declarer Playing a Suit Contract:

21. If you see an opportunity to ruff a "short" Suit in the Hand holding the *fewest* Trump cards, *usually* the Dummy, execute or set up that ruff before you "draw" Trump. Ruffing in the Hand holding "long" Trump, while possibly useful *only* for transportation purposes, will not give you *any* "extra" Tricks. Ruffing in the "short" Trump Hand *before* drawing Trump means you will *later* be spending 1 versus 2 Trump cards in each round of "drawing" Trump.
22. For each "loser" try to develop a *specific* plan for dumping "losers", either by (1) ruffing "losers", (2) finessing, or (3) sloughing "losers" on a "side" Suit.
23. Lead Trump **early** once you gain the lead, as long as you cannot gain "extra" Tricks by ruffing in the Hand with a "short" Trump holding! Do not let Opponents get to win Tricks with their Trump cards, which will be fewer in number than yours.
24. If you have "drawn" all but 1 of Opponents' Trump cards, and an Opponent holds the highest missing Trump card, do not draw the final Trump card by losing the Trick, unless if you do "draw" the last Trump card you see you can (1) later regain the lead and (2) then "run" a long "side" Suit.
25. After you have "drawn" all the Opponents' Trump cards, lead your longest "side" suit, giving up your losers *early* as long as you know you can later regain the lead.

...as Declarer Playing a NT Contract:

26. If you see a way to make your **NT** contract quickly, and you also see profound danger that Opponents can "set" you if they gain the lead, take all the Tricks you can immediately "off the top".

As another example, if you and Partner find a genius makeable contract that will make a "top" Board if played correctly, and you as Declarer make errors when playing, and earn a "bottom" or zero Board, if you are playing 18 Boards in the competition, this *one* Board will lower your competition **Total Percentage** by $100.0\% - 0.0\% = 100\% / 18 = 5.6!$

27. If you hold "control" cards across all Suits, and there is a "long" Suit holding across Dummy and your Hand, attack this "long" Suit relentlessly until you "promote" even low cards into "winners". Paraphrasing Marti Romenus' VuBridge lesson on playing **NT** as Declarer, **NEVER** underestimate in **NT** contracts the importance of "promoting" even 4s, 3s, and even 2s into "extra" Tricks! But be sure to maintain "transportation" back to the Hand holding "promoted" low card "winners"!
28. When you are "running" a Suit, stick with one Suit at a time to force Opponents to make potentially inopportune "discard" decisions.

...as **Defender**:

29. When you are unsure what to lead, because Partner did not bid or the auction does make a choice obvious, lead the 4th from the "top" of your "longest and strongest" Suit, especially when playing a **NT** contract, so that Partner can use the "**Rule of 11**"⁷ to discern Declarer's holdings.
30. If Partner bid a Suit during the auction, and you are "on lead" initially, unless you see some obvious reason not to do so, lead your *highest* Honor in Partner's bid Suit, and if you win the Trick, then lead that Suit again.
31. Lead from the top of 2 "touching" Honors in a "long" non-Trump Suit (e.g., K from K,Q,9,8,7) against a Suit contract, or from 3 "touching" Honors (e.g., Q,J,T,8,5) or a "tenace" (e.g., Q,J,9,7,6) in a 4+ card Suit against a **NT** contract. Leading an Honor alerts Partner that you are holding the "touching" Honor so that Partner can later lead this Suit back to you.
32. Leading an Ace in a non-Trump Suit (1) promises Partner that you will next lead the King, unless Dummy has a void or a singleton, and (2) **demand**s that Partner immediately tell you using "signaling" whether Partner can take the

⁷ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**", see: "**Lesson #25: 40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'**"

third Trick in the Suit either by (a) playing the Queen or (b) ruffing.⁸

33. Do not lead “unsupported” Aces (e.g., Ax, Axxx) *unless* Partner bid this Suit. Reserve “unsupported” Aces for “killing Opponents’ Kings”!
34. As you learn more about bridge, use “signals” to tell Partner your Suit “attitude” (e.g., “I like this Suit”), and later as you become more proficient to “signal” Suit “preference”, or Suit “card count” (odd or even).⁹
35. Use your first slough on a Suit to play a Suit that you want Partner to lead to you, using your agreed system (e.g., fairly high card says, “Please lead this Suit to me once you obtain the lead”, while a low card says, “This doesn’t mean anything, I just have to slough some card from some Suit”).

⁸ For example, I prefer to play “inverted” or “Up Side Down” (U.D.A) “attitude” signals, where “low” = “yes”, and “hi” = “no”, so if I play a 3 on Partner’s initially-lead Ace, I am telling Partner, “Yes, I can take the 3^d Trick in this Suit!”

Leading an Ace against a Suit contract and then not playing the King should alert Partner that you held an Ace singleton, and that Partner upon obtaining the lead should then lead this Suit back to you to ruff.

⁹ Within the “**Bridge Bruce’s Way Lessons**”, see “Lesson #6: **Communicating with Partner While on Defense**”: https://esther-bridge.com/bbw/lesson_06.pdf