



Gary Brown's

LEARN TO PLAY BRIDGE

A MODERN APPROACH TO STANDARD BIDDING WITH 5-CARD MAJORS



*"Gary Brown's approach
to learning bridge is
refreshing. You are
going to love this book."
Marty Bergen*

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See www.ozbridgetravel.com

email Gary: brownbridge@ozemail.com.au

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GET INTO THE CONVERSATION

Aspiring bridge players, you are about to learn a new language, Bridgese. This sounds daunting, but it is a language of few words. Bridgese is your key to a conversation you will want to be in.

The approach and philosophy of this book is to present the game of Bridge to aspiring players in the way it is played today, not yesterday. As a full-time Bridge teacher, I've had a constant uphill battle bridging the gap between the old-style ideas prevalent in more dated teaching material versus the many modern approaches which are in actual practice across the country.

old: 16-18 NT

new: 15-17 NT

old: Strong twos

new: Weak twos (with strong 2♣)

old: 1♥ - 4♥ = 13+

new: 1♥ - 4♥ = weak freak

When I first started teaching Bridge I taught the old way. That was because most of the published textbooks, manuals and guides were still teaching old-style ideas. However, because I am in it for the long haul, teaching old ways in a new world has come back to haunt me. I have started producing my own material, as well as networking with Bridge organizations and teachers around the world who are leading the charge and blazing new trails into the new millennium of Bridge.

There may be ideas in this book which are not completely in sync with your style. I have stayed true to modern Standard American Bidding, with one personal preference (1NT - 3♣/♦ as invitational). Whenever there is a choice of multiple accepted ways (invitational, weak or strong) I have let the frequency factor guide me.

Bridge teachers can download a PDF teacher's manual from www.masteringbridge.com to use with this book in introductory classes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Muchas gracias to my wife Joanne, Jo Ann Lynds, Kathie MacNab, Joe Hortie and Judith Wood, for their tireless efforts in editing this ever-evolving manuscript.

Also, a nod to every student I have had the privilege to teach to play Bridge.

To my father, Avon Brown. Your literary influence was there after all. Love you, Dad.

Bridge is a partnership game. Don Aylward, Gylfi Baldursson, Joe Hortie, Leo Weniger and Eric Balkam: thank you, gentlemen.

“First learn the meaning of what you say, then speak.”
Epictetus, AD 55

And then speak only when you have something to say...

“Give every man thine ear, and few thy voice.”
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

I quote others only in order to express myself better.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Introduction	9
1 Mechanics of the game	11
2 Hand evaluation, opening one bids	21
3 Scoring, responses to a 1NT opening	33
4 Responses to openings of one of a suit	51
5 Opener's second bid	67
6 Two conventions: Stayman and Blackwood	81
7 Competitive bidding	93
8 Opening at the two-level	103
Glossary	115

FOREWORD

Writing this book was something I thought about doing for twelve years. I was delighted and honored to see it named 'Book of the Year' by the American Bridge Teachers Association in 2007. It is an introduction to Bridge through the eyes of Standard American, the most popular bidding system in the world. Not everything you will eventually learn about Bridge is in this book, but what you need to know to get both oars in the water is here. Let enjoyment be your guide as you relax and take in what you can. The game will captivate you all by itself. If you enjoy cards, you will love Bridge.

One of the exciting things about teaching Bridge is the opportunity to develop and implement new teaching methods. I do not think there are 'dumb' questions and I like the challenge of making things understandable. My style of teaching is a blend of seizing the teachable moments while entertaining the class. I know that feeling uptight and tense stifles the student, while feeling loose and comfortable facilitates the learning process, creating a nice energy in the room. Some people ask, 'Don't you ever get sick of teaching Bridge day in and day out?' I say, 'I love Bridge and I love teaching.' They say, 'Oh.'

I have created several learning aids and written several Bridge books including the one in your hands. My most recent book, *Standard American: With a Limit Bidding Structure*, is a comprehensive compilation of the bidding system you will learn in this book. I am also the creator of the popular learning aid Flash Cards. On top of all this, for people who love to combine travel with Bridge, I organize and host Bridge tours all over the world, through my company Oz Bridge Travel. For more info on Flash cards and travel, visit www.ozbridgetravel.com.

AM I PERSPIRING?

There will be times when you will feel overwhelmed while learning Bridge. This cannot be avoided. Do not let this get you down as it is part and parcel of learning the game. As with anything worth its while that you want to accomplish, you must put in an effort to learn Bridge. Take it one card, one hand at a time and stick with it. Learning Bridge happens at what I would call a glacial pace, but persistence will defeat resistance. Eventually you will get a grasp of the basics. The game will capture your imagination, intoxicate you, and finally become a big part of your life. However good you get, remember that **lesser players are not lesser people**.

INTRODUCTION

Bridge is the fastest growing game amongst people aged 45 and over. That is not to say that young people do not play, because they do; there are World Junior Championships! Of all the card games in the world, Bridge is by far the most popular and the most intellectual. Bridge offers a social outlet as you meet new friends and enjoy new experiences, which results in your social landscape changing. Bridge keeps your mind sharp and your people skills honed. There seems no in-between for Bridge players — either you are an addict or you are not. As an addict, you will share a common bond with millions of people the world over. It is said that playing Bridge forces you to think in ways that actually fend off senility. Also, did you know that Bridge players live longer?

There is a famous Zen story about the learned professor of Oriental Studies who visited a master in a temple in Japan. The master received the professor in his private room, and an attendant served tea. As soon as he seated himself, the professor began talking on and on about Zen philosophy. The master said nothing as he poured tea into his guest's cup. The professor hardly noticed, and kept talking and talking — he felt, in fact, wonderfully inspired. Suddenly he realized that the Zen master was still pouring tea even though the cup had long since overflowed, and the tea had spilled out on to the tatami mat. Yet still the master continued to pour.

'Stop, stop, what are you doing?' cried the professor. The master looked up. 'Just as the cup cannot hold any more tea when it is already filled,' he said, 'I cannot give you anything when your mind is already filled.'

What the Zen master is suggesting is that to facilitate the learning process we must first empty our minds of any preconceived notions and ideas. If you feel a bit anxious, that is okay. But let go of what you think you know about Bridge. If you feel in a bit of a fright, then let go of that too. Now you can just relax and take it all in.

O N E

Mechanics of the game

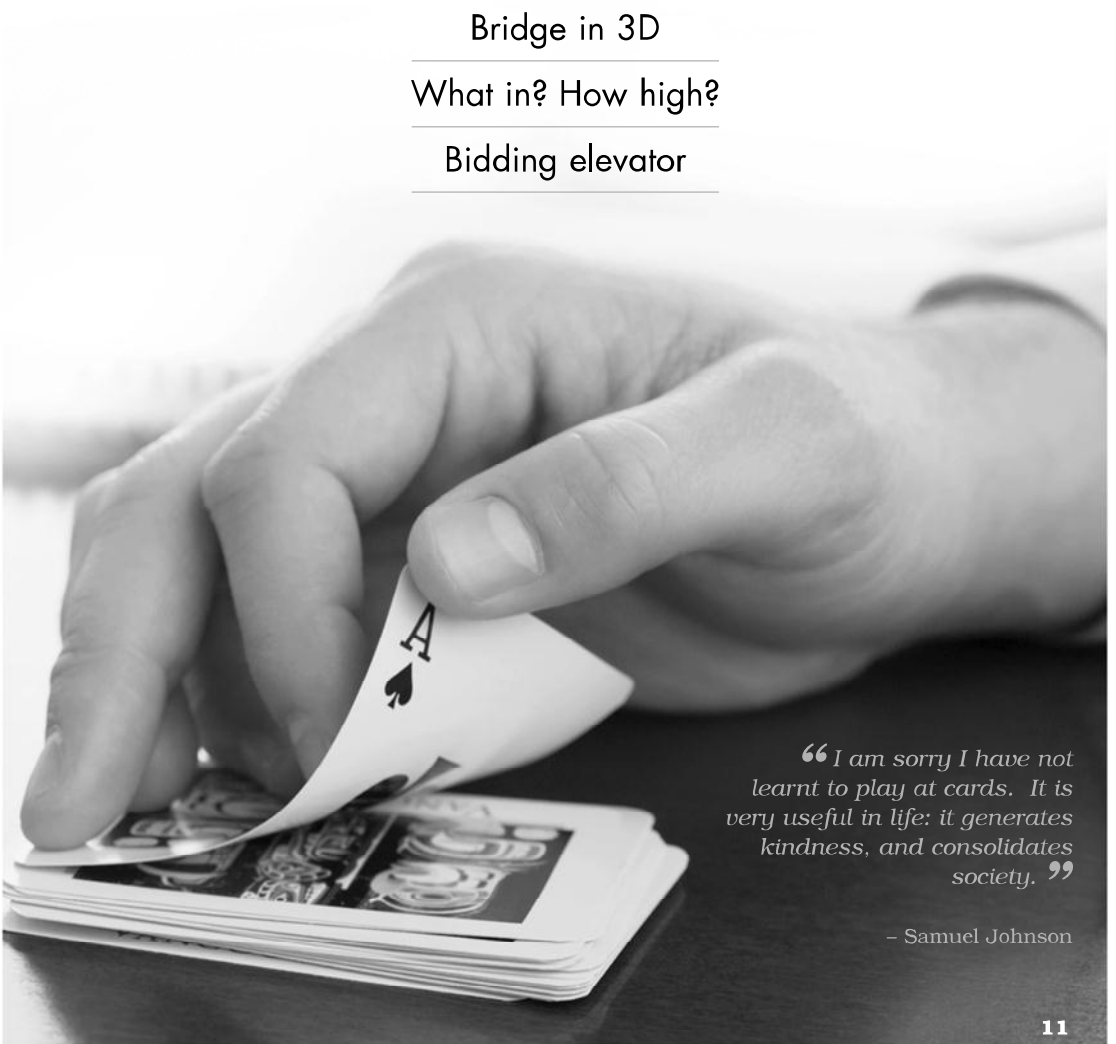
The book

Bridgese

Bridge in 3D

What in? How high?

Bidding elevator



“I am sorry I have not learnt to play at cards. It is very useful in life: it generates kindness, and consolidates society.”

– Samuel Johnson

THE FUNDAMENTALS

THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Players

Four people are needed to play a game of Bridge. North and South are partners, against East and West who are partners. The use of geographic positions (**N**, **S**, **E** and **W**) is appropriate as Bridge brings people together from all over the world. It transcends religious and cultural differences, and even prejudices.

Tools

A square table with four chairs. A packing crate and four bales of hay will do in a pinch. A deck of standard playing cards. There are 52 cards in the deck, with each player getting 13 cards each.

Cards

The cards are divided into four suits. There are thirteen cards in each suit, ranking in descending order from the ace down to the two. Cards are represented as: A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2.

Suits

There are four suits and their rank in descending order is: spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs. Notrump (NT) is higher ranking than any of the suits. Spades and hearts are the major suits and diamonds and clubs are the minor suits. You will come to understand why the major suits are more important than the minor suits. Hence the titles, **major** and **minor**. Each suit is represented by a symbol:

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

Tricks, revokes and discards

A trick is complete when each player has contributed one card face up on the table. You must follow suit to the card that was first played. The person who wins a trick must lead a card to the next trick, each player following in a clockwise direction. If you do not follow suit and you could have, this is called a **revoke**. It is not legal and will cause you sadness. If you cannot follow suit, then you must make a discard from another suit.

The book

There are thirteen tricks to be won in every Bridge hand. The first six tricks are called the book. The book is similar to an 'ante' in poker or a reserve price when putting an item up for sale. It is expected — a given. So if you bid 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 1♠ or 1NT you are contracting to make the book (six tricks) plus the one you bid, which makes seven tricks in total. The highest bid you can make is 7NT. To make 7NT you must take all thirteen tricks — the book, plus the seven you bid ($6 + 7 = 13$). Think of the book as an entry fee and think on it no more.

Bridgese (the bidding)

A bid consists of a number and a symbol. 1♥ is a bid. If you have nothing to bid, you pass. The dealer has the first chance to bid with the bidding continuing clockwise around the table, each player getting an opportunity to bid or pass. The bidding must adhere to the hierarchy of the bidding elevator (Figure 1:1 on page 17). If all four players pass, the hand is not played. If the auction is opened, it stays open until there are three consecutive passes, at which time the auction is closed. The highest bid buys the contract. If the last bid was 4♠, then 4♠ is the final contract.

Bridge in 3D (the players)

The end of an auction determines the roles of each player for that hand.

You are designated as the **D**eclarer, one of the **D**efenders or as **D**ummy.

Declarer: In a contract of 4♠, the player who first introduced spades for the partnership that won the auction will become the declarer. Declarer plays the cards from both her hand and partner's.

Defenders: If the opponents win the auction, you and your partner are the defenders. As defenders you will work in concert to take as many tricks as you can in an attempt to defeat declarer in her contract. The person to the left of declarer leads the first card, face up on the table.

Dummy: Declarer's partner is dummy. After the opening lead is placed face up on the table, dummy then places all of her cards face up on the table in four neat columns for all to see. (Figure 1:2)

There are two questions which you should ask yourself during the course of any auction:

What denomination?

There are five possible denominations in which you can play a contract: clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades or notrump. You discover your preference by exchanging information with your partner during the auction.

How high?

The bidding takes place somewhere between the one-level and the seven-level. The decision of how high to bid is determined by the collective strength of both hands.

Four	Spades
4	♠
(how high)	(what in)

The bidding elevator

When a bid is made, locate that bid on the bidding elevator to the left. Any subsequent bids must be made at a higher level. It is that simple. If someone bids 1♥ and you then bid 1♦, you have made an **insufficient bid**. To compete against 1♥ with a diamond bid you must go to the two-level or higher.

On the bidding elevator you can see that there are several levels. Game in notrump is at the three-level. Game in the majors is at the four-level. Game in the minors is at the five-level. A small slam in any denomination is at the six-level, and at the seven-level you are in a grand slam!



Figure 1.1

AT THE TABLE

“Of course I have played outdoor games. I once played Bridge in an open air cafe in Paris.”

Oscar Wilde

The auction is over. We now have a declarer, a dummy and two defenders. The player to the left of declarer, left-hand opponent (LHO), makes the opening lead (a card is placed face up on the table). Dummy is now placed on the table in four neat columns facing declarer. If the final contract is a suit contract, then that suit (trumps) should be placed to dummy's right (declarer's left). Declarer nominates which card to play from dummy, right-hand opponent (RHO) then plays a card and declarer decides which card to play from her own hand. With all four people having played a card, this is the first trick. Dummy can never suggest, hint or assist declarer in the play of the hand. It is not only frowned upon, it is illegal. Dummy simply plays the card declarer verbally directs her to play. The hand that wins the trick must lead to the next trick. This continues until all thirteen tricks have been played.

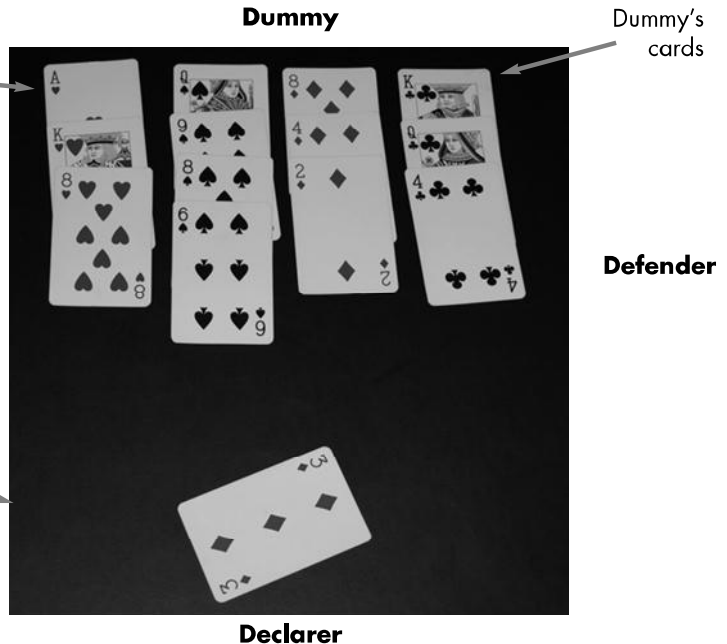


If there is a trump suit, it is placed in this column

Defender
Opening Lead:
♦ 3

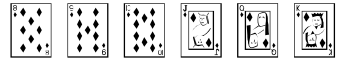
Bridge table

Figure 1.2



When the opening lead (♦ 3) is placed face up on the table, dummy places her cards on the table in four neat columns, facing declarer.

CARD PLAY TECHNIQUES



Lead from weakness toward strength

When you are declaring a contract you have to play the cards from both your hand and from dummy. Knowing how to play your cards to best advantage is truly rewarding. A good card play technique is to lead from the hand that has weakness in a suit toward the hand that has strength in the same suit.

In Figure 1.3, the correct way to play the spade suit is to **lead from weakness toward strength** (play a card from the South hand first). Because West has the ♠A, and must play a card before dummy, you will win two spade tricks. If West takes her ♠A, you will play the ♠5 from dummy, making the ♠K and ♠Q both high.

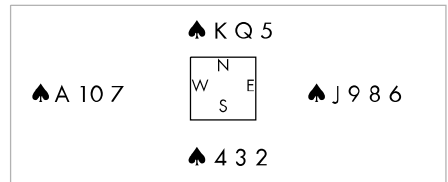


Figure 1.3

If West follows with the ♠7, you will play the ♠Q from dummy, which wins the trick. Upon the lead getting back to South in another suit, South will lead a second spade, again forcing West to play a spade before you have to commit one from dummy. South was lucky and played the spade suit properly.

In Figure 1.4 the hands have been altered slightly so that East now holds the critical card, the ♠A. South should play the spade suit the same way as in Figure 1.3. (Remember, at the table you cannot see all the cards and therefore do not know who has the ♠A.) This time South will win only one spade trick as East can take dummy's ♠K with the ♠A. South was unlucky, but still played the spade suit properly.

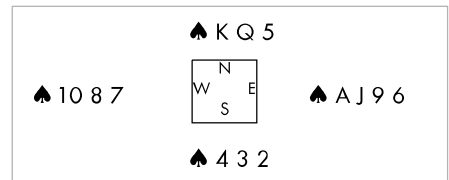
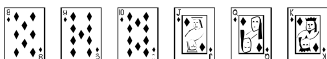


Figure 1.4



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Opening leads

The opening lead can be the most important decision a defender has to make. Declarer has a huge advantage over the defenders in that she can see her partner's cards, while you and your partner cannot see each other's hands. There are, however, ways in which the defenders can communicate with each other. The foundation of this communication lies in the first card a defender leads.

Top of a sequence (headed by an honor)

A sequence is when you hold three cards in a row, in numerical order. The sequence must include an honor (ace, king, queen, jack or ten). When you lead a card from a sequence, lead the top card of the sequence. From each of the following spade holdings, lead the card in bold.

♠ **Q** J 10 8 4

Lead the ♠Q Suggests that you hold the ♠J and ♠10.

♠ **J** 10 9 4

Lead the ♠J Suggests that you hold the ♠10 and ♠9.

♠ **K** Q J 3

Lead the ♠K Suggests that you hold the ♠Q and ♠J.

♠ **9** 8 7 3

Lead the ♠8 To be deemed a sequence you must have an honor in the suit. The lead of the ♠8 is called MUD, or second best from three or more rag cards, and you will learn more about this in Chapter Six.

Play Bridge at least twice a week...

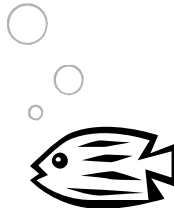
“How use doth breed a habit in a man.”

Shakespeare,
The Two Gentlemen of Verona

SUMMARY

- Bridge is a partnership game — North-South versus East-West.
- Spades and hearts are the **major suits** while diamonds and clubs are the **minor suits**.
- A **trick** is complete when all four players play one card each in a clockwise direction. There are thirteen tricks in every deal of Bridge.
- You must follow suit when you hold a card in the suit led. If you don't follow suit, and you could have, you have **revoked** and will incur a penalty.
- **Bridgese** is the language of **bidding** the players use to compete for the contract, with the highest bid winning.
- There are many clever tricks in the way you can play the cards. **Leading from weakness towards strength** is a card play technique that allows you to capture the maximum number of tricks from a given suit.
- A good opening lead is the **top of a sequence**.

Finessa the Fish says: *If partner makes a nice play, a kind mention at the end of the hand is akin to planting an acorn in partner's garden of self-confidence. Be nice to partner.*



“I have always believed that your attitude towards your partner is as important as your technical skill at the game.”

Rixi Markus,
multiple World
Champion

EXERCISES

Answers on p.118. [To Answers](#)

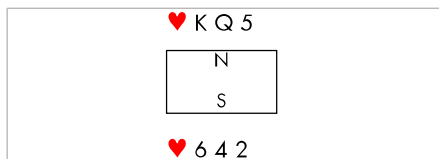
A. True or False?

1. Every deal has a dummy.
2. Hearts are the highest ranked suit.
3. You do not have to follow suit.
4. A revoke is an illegal bid.
5. 2♦ is a higher bid than 2♥.
6. Declarer plays two hands.
7. Lead small towards big.
8. A 6♥ contract requires eleven tricks.
9. 7NT is the highest bid.
10. Whoever wins a trick leads next.

B. Which card would you lead from each of the following holdings?

1. ♦ A K Q 7
2. ♦ J 10 9 3
3. ♦ K Q J 5
4. ♦ Q J 10 9 3
5. ♦ 10 9 8 3 2

C.



1. In the example, which hand would you lead from first — North or South?
2. Which card would you lead?
3. If West plays a small heart, which card do you play from the North hand?

D. State the number of tricks needed to make each of the following contracts:

1. 7♥
2. 4♣
3. 1♠
4. 5♦
5. 2♥
6. 6♦
7. 3♠

T W O

Hand evaluation

High card points and length points

Opening bids at the one-level

Opening 1NT

Rule of 15 and Rule of 20



*“There are three kinds of
Bridge players.
Those who can count, and
those who can’t.”*

- Alfred Sheinwold