

Before You Go(to a Larry Cohen cruise or seminar or class)

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My teaching (and most of my writing) is geared towards "Intermediate Players." This can cover a wide range, but it does not mean "beginners." What I often encounter in my teaching is that many "intermediates" somehow got there without learning everything a beginner should learn. In short, there are some holes. (No, not in their head). There is a gap in their basic learning of the fundamentals.

My teaching, I am proud to say, does not focus on memorization. I shy away from lessons/topics which require brute memory. I'd rather teach "thinking." If you can think logically and avoid errors you can be quite a good bridge player.

That said, there is no substitute for knowing the basics. When you first learn bridge, you not only have to learn that an ace is high and how bidding and tricks work, but you have to memorize such things as:

1NT opening = 15-17 balanced

A raise of partner's 1-level suit bid to the 2-level shows 6-9 (or 6-10) points.

There is no substitute for knowing and memorizing what the bids in the first few rounds of the auction mean. You have to know a few basic tenets of declarer play and defense.

I assume (silly me!) that all my students already know everything in this article.

Nobody has to know you are reading this (other than you). But, please--I urge you to keep reading and make sure you know your basics. I hope to see you in my class on land or at sea - - and hope not to have to go over anything in this "review." I look forward instead to teaching some of the beautiful parts of our game and helping you improve while having a great time doing it!

THE BASICS (It is assumed you know all this when entering an "Intermediate" Class):

BIDDING : When counting your points, A=4 K=3 Q=2 J=1.

As far as counting distribution, that is a tough question with no quick answer (it all depends on how the auction develops). In general, I advise to count length points when you pick up your hand, but you have to constantly re-evaluate as the auction develops.

The worst mistake I see: Not reaching game when there is enough for game. If your partner opens the bidding and you have 14 points, please don't ever make any bid which your partner can pass. You absolutely must make sure you get to game. You must know which bids are forcing (partner can't pass) and which are non-forcing (partner is allowed to pass). If you are sure there is a game, don't ever make a non-forcing bid below the game level. You'd think this is obvious, but you'd be amazed how often this basic tenet is overlooked.

Opening 1-level bids :

1NT=15-17 balanced (This can surely include a 5-card major, or a small doubleton--but usually not 2 doubletons)

1♥/1♠ = 5+ cards and roughly 11-20 points (again, don't get crazy over how to count HCP)

1♦ = Natural, usually 4+♦, 11-20. The only time it would be 3♦ is exactly 4=4=3=2 shape (in that order)

1♣=Natural, at least 3♣, 11-20 (with 3-3 in the minors, always open 1♣)

With 5-5 open the higher-ranking suit first. Never reverse with 5-5.

Other Openings: 2♣=[artificial](#) and Strong (not forcing to game, though). It is impossible to assign a point range unless you are balanced.

2♦/2♥/2♠=Weak 2-bid 6-card suit and 5-11. Suit and shape requirements -- no universal answer to this.

2NT=20-21 balanced

3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ = Weak, usually 7-card suit

3NT= Must be discussed by the partnership

4-level = 8-card suit -- still preemptive in nature

Responses: To 1NT : 2♣=[Stayman](#) (this usually shows at least invitational values)

Learn Jacoby Transfers. A Jacoby transfer can be made with 0 points. It just means you have a 5-card (or longer) suit.

There is no universal treatment of 2♠ or higher responses to 1NT -- these bids need partnership agreement.

As usual, if responder holds enough for game he must make sure game is reached (don't make any bids which can be passed).

To other 1-level openings:

Respond on the 1-level in a major if you have one (4 cards or longer)

With 4-4 in majors and responding to 1♣ or 1♦, go up the line

With 5-5 in majors and responding to 1♣ or 1♦, bid spades first

1NT response=6-10 (in "Standard")

Raising to the 2 level=6-10 and support Raising to the 3 level=11-12 and support

Bidding a new suit (lower ranking) on the 2-level promises at least 10 points (and in [2/1 GF](#) at least 13)

Other responses require partnership agreement/discussion

To 2♣: Among the several possibilities, I prefer 2♦ waiting. There is no universal answer.

After 2♣-2♦, the responder must bid again unless the opener bids 2NT (or jumps to game).

Rebids by Opener: Opener rebids 1NT if balanced and less than 15 HCP

Opener rebids 2NT (if the response was on the one-level) if balanced and 18-19 HCP

If not balanced: Opener raises partner (with 4-card support), bids his second suit (with 4+ cards) or rebids his first suit (with 6+ cards).

If opener has extras he jumps (or heaven forbid, he reverses). **Jumpshifts** by opener are forcing to game.

Reverses (don't ask) show extras and are forcing only one round. This topic is tough even for Intermediate players.

Anything else? Sure. There is plenty else. I suggest a good audio review can be found [here](#).

Alternatively, my series called: ["2008-2009-2010 Series on What Should we Play"](#)

DECLARER PLAY At suit contracts, try to figure out what tricks you must lose and see what you can do about it. You must decide if you should draw trumps immediately or postpone drawing trump.

At notrump, try to count winners. See if you can set up enough winners without the opponents gaining the lead to defeat you. In general, set up and develop your long suits -- don't just grab sure winners.

Study basic suit combinations (such as AQ10 in dummy and three low ones in hand)

DEFENSE

Opening Leads: Top from a sequence (such as KQJ or QJ10).

Lead your best suit against notrump (fourth best)

Don't lay down (nor underlead) aces against suit contracts

Playing second to a trick, usually play LOW.

Playing third to a trick, usually play HIGH (but cheapest from equals -- like put in the queen from King-Queen). Don't be in a hurry to grab aces.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING: When the opponents open and you double, it is takeout. You have at least opening bid values (but can have less in balancing seat). Make sure to have at least 3 cards in each of the other 3 suits unless you have a huge hand. With a huge hand (18+) double and then bid your suit.

Your 1NT overcall is about 15-18 balanced with a stopper in their suit.

Your 2NT overcall after they open a weak 2-bid shows the same as a 1NT overcall.

Your 2NT overcall when they open 1-something is the [Unusual notrump](#) (2 lowest unbid suits).

When you open a suit and the opponents overcall in a suit: The responder's double is a [negative double](#) ("takeout").

You must know what bids means after your side makes an overcall. In general, the partner of the overcaller should support with support