

Bridge – The Greatest Card Game!

Introduction:

Welcome to the most wonderful card game ever invented. In five short lessons, our hope is to get you playing. Have fun!

Lesson 1 – Getting Started with Tricks

Some readers will already have a partial/vague knowledge of bridge. They will know there is bidding, a dummy, a trump suit and more.

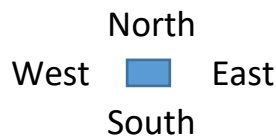
We will get to all of that.

Let's try a few pieces of the puzzle at a time. By the end of this series, we'll put it all together.

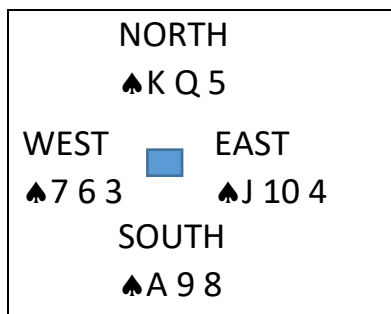
Bridge uses a normal 52-card deck with four suits (clubs, diamonds, hearts and spades). Each suit has 13 cards, and their order (from highest to lowest) is ace, king, queen, jack, ten and then the nine down to the two.

Ace>King>Queen>Jack>10>9>8>7>6>5>4>3>2.

Bridge is played with four people at a table, two partners against two other partners. You sit at a table (preferably square) for four, facing your partner. We will use compass positions, so it will look like this:



North and South are partners. Their opponents are the partnership of East and West. Everyone at the table gets dealt 13 cards, but we'll start by just looking at the 12 cards shown below (three cards for each player):



The players would be holding their cards in hand (so nobody else can see them).

TRICKS

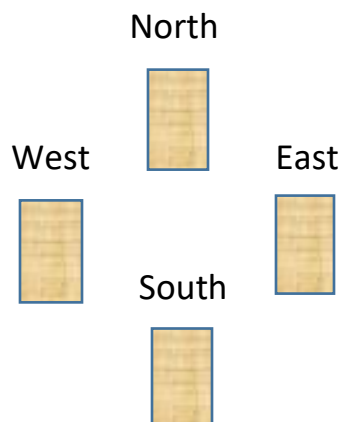
Bridge play consists of “tricks.” Tricks are a part of many card games, notably Whist (a predecessor of bridge), Euchre and Hearts. A trick consists of each player contributing one card—so four cards are in a trick. The highest card of the suit played wins the trick.

One player (let’s assume for now it is West—we will explain later how the person who starts the trick is determined) leads (plays) any card. Let’s say West chooses the ♠7. She places it face up in front of her. Every other player clockwise around the table must contribute a card in the suit led. For now, we have only one suit, so there won’t be an issue as to which suit must be played. Suppose North chooses to play the ♠K, again placing it face up in front of her.



East can’t possibly win the trick because she has no spade higher than the king. Accordingly, she will play her lowest card, the ♠4 (saving the higher cards for later). South can beat the king (with the ace), but there is no need for her to win this trick. North is her partner. North is already winning the trick with the king. South therefore contributes her ♠8 to the trick. North’s ♠K king wins the trick for the North-South partnership.

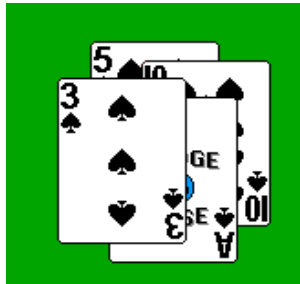
Those four cards are then turned face down in front of each player like this:



In the diagram, the cards are lengthwise towards North-South. They are placed to point toward the partnership who won the trick (so at the end, you can count everything up and see which partnership won how many tricks).

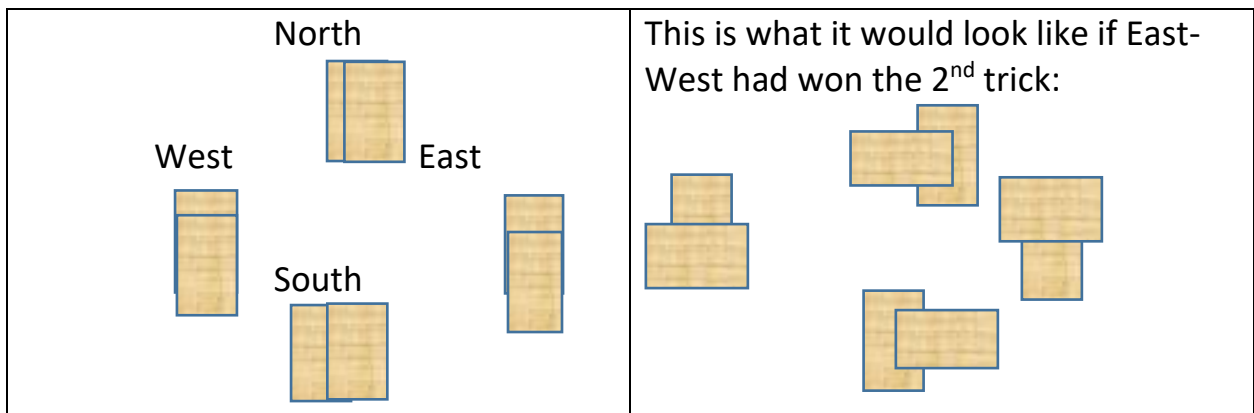
Who plays the first card for the next (second) trick? The player who won the previous trick. In this case that is North because her ♠K was the highest spade

played to trick one. Let's say that North chooses to place the ♠5 face up in front of her. East plays the ♠10 and South can win the trick with the ♠A. West has to contribute a spade to the trick, even though South will be winning it.



Note: In bridge writing, a card is designated by a suit symbol (♠, ♥, ♦, or ♣) followed by anything from 2-10 or J for Jack, Q for Queen, K for King and A for Ace. So, ♥Q is shorthand for the queen of hearts.

Everyone turns that trick face down in front of them (again pointing towards the side who won the trick) overlapping the first face-down card so it looks like this:



Now South leads to the third trick (since she won the second trick). She plays her last card (♠9). West plays her last spade, the ♠6. North has the ♠Q remaining and plays it. Since it is the highest spade on the trick (East follows suit with her last spade), North wins the trick. Again, everyone turns over the cards and places them face-down in front of them, oriented towards the side that won the trick.

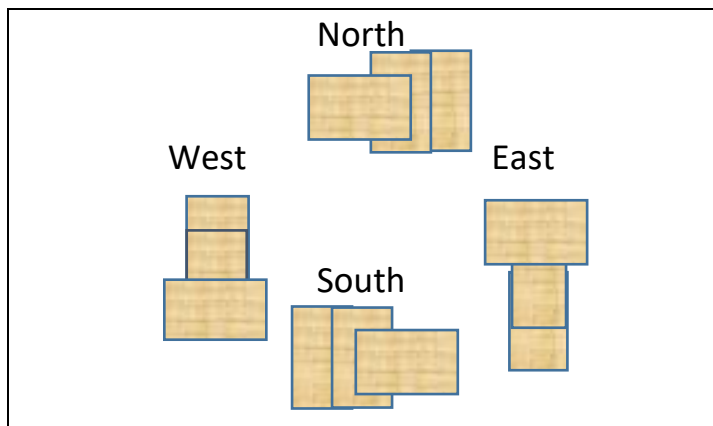


In the scenario above, the North-South partnership won all three tricks.

Let's mix up the cards for a new partial deal, producing, say, this layout:

NORTH	
♠ 7 6 4	
WEST	♣ EAST
♠ J 10 3	♠ K 9 5
SOUTH	
♠ A Q 8	

Let's again assume West starts (down the road, we'll explain the rule to determine who leads to the very first trick). Suppose he chooses to play the ♠J. North plays low, the ♠4, and no matter what East does, South will get to win tricks with both his ace and queen. If East plays the ♠K, South can take it with the ace. If East plays the ♠5, South can capture the jack with his queen (there would be no need to waste the ace when the queen would do the job). South takes two spade tricks



and at the third trick plays his ♠8. Both East and West will have a higher spade, so the East-West partnership wins the third trick. In this layout, North-South took two tricks and East-West took one trick.

It never matters in which order the tricks are won. At the end of each deal, all that counts is how

many tricks each side takes in total.

Let's now put a second suit into the mix. Include the 12 highest hearts in the deck and deal out six cards to each player. Lay out the cards like this:

NORTH	
♠ 7 5	
♥ A 8 6 5	
WEST	♣ EAST
♠ K Q J 8	♠ 10 9 6 3
♥ K 3	♥ 7 4
SOUTH	
♠ A 4	
♥ Q J 10 9	

Let's again suppose West will start. He elects to lead his highest spade, the king. North and East contribute low cards. South wins the trick with his ace. Since South is leading to the next trick, he can choose any suit and any card. Suppose he leads his highest heart, the queen. Maybe West plays his king, attempting to win the trick. North takes it with the ace as East follows suit with a low heart.

North, having won the previous trick, leads to the next trick. North decides it is a good idea to play another heart. Why would he choose a heart instead

of his other spade? This is where strategy enters the game. North's opponent (West) earlier chose to lead a high spade, and likely wants that suit played. North's partner (South) led the ♥Q and that is probably the suit he likes. As we will see down the road, when you lead to a trick by playing an ace, king, queen or jack (called an "honor" or "picture card,") you are telling your partner you have the card immediately below. North therefore suspects South has the ♥J so he plays another heart. South can win the trick with his ♥J. Not only that, but he can also win subsequent tricks with his ♥10 and 9. Since those are the highest hearts remaining, they will each win a trick. It is true that West has a jack and a queen, but those cards are in spades—not hearts. The highest card in *the suit led* is what wins the trick.

What do East-West do when hearts are led to the trick, but they have no more hearts? They can't "follow suit." If they had a heart, they would be required by the laws of the game to play a heart. But, when they are out of hearts, they are allowed to play any card from any suit. Since West or East can't possibly win the trick when hearts are led, they might as well throw away their lowest cards (in spades) and save the high ones in case spades are led to a future trick. Eventually (at the sixth trick), South will be left with a low spade. He will have to lead it, and East-West will take the sixth trick. North-South won five tricks and East-West won only one.

From the example above, you can start to see that not only high cards (like aces and kings) win tricks. Low cards (if they are the only cards left in the suit) are also potential winners. A suit such as ♠AKQJ65 is typically worth six tricks. After you take the ace-king-queen-jack (and the opponents have to "follow suit" to each one), they are unlikely to have any more cards in the suit. The ♠6 and ♠5 can be led and will both take tricks.

Let's introduce a new term as we take one more look at a six-card (with only spades and hearts) deal:

NORTH [Dummy]	
♠ A J	
♥ Q J 10 9	
WEST	EAST
♠ 8 7 6 5	♠ K Q 10 9
♥ A K	♥ 6 4
SOUTH	
♠ 4 3	
♥ 8 7 5 3	

Suppose West is to lead and starts by playing one of his high hearts. So far, we haven't mentioned one of the intriguing parts of bridge. There is a dummy. No jokes, please. What does that mean? One of the four players faces his cards and "sits out" the play. His partner (called the "declarer") plays the cards for both players in the partnership. (When we later discuss bidding, you will find out how the dummy and declarer are determined. All four players always participate in the bidding phase of the deal.) Let's assume that North is the dummy. He puts all his

cards face up on the table immediately after West leads to the first trick. All the other players can now see those cards. This is a huge help with strategy. Here, if West sees those nice hearts in dummy, he might change suits at the second trick. Why? West can see that if he plays his other high heart, it will be a trick but would set up ("establish") heart tricks for North-South, his opponents. After taking the ♥AK, West would have to next play a spade. North could win with the ace (though, really, South, the declarer, would be doing this for North—since North is the dummy). Then, North would have two "established" hearts that would win tricks.

Much better is for West not to take his other high heart at trick two. Even though the high heart is a sure trick, he should play a spade instead, hoping he and his partner can get some spade tricks. West can always get his other high heart later (on a different trick).

When West plays a spade to the second trick, suppose North (dummy) takes the ace. (In reality, South is controlling both hands, so he just asks North to move the ♠A from the face-up cards into played position). Being dummy means no talking and no strategic involvement, but still, you pull out and play the cards your partner asks for. After the ♠A is played, East and South contribute low spades to the trick. Now what? No matter what South calls for from the dummy, he will take no more tricks. If he asks for a heart from the dummy, West wins the ♥K and plays another spade (all he has left). East wins and plays spades from the top. All of those spades win tricks and East-West end up with five of the six tricks.

What would have happened if West had taken both high hearts on the first two tricks? When he next played a spade, the ♠A would win in dummy. Then two good hearts would be played from the North hand. North-South would take three tricks instead of only the one they were entitled to.

NORTH	
♠ A 4 3	
♥ K Q J 10	
♦ A 5	
WEST	EAST
♠ K Q J 10	♠ 9 8
♥ A 3	♥ 9 7 6
♦ K 7 6	♦ Q 10 4 3
SOUTH	
♠ 7 6 5	
♥ 8 5 4	
♦ J 9 8	

Let's try with three suits (still missing the clubs and missing the two in each suit) as shown.

Suppose it is West's turn. An ace wins the trick, but is the ♥A the card West should choose to lead? Better strategy would be to lead the ♠K. Why? If West plays his ♥A, he might be setting up heart tricks for his opponents. Likely, he can always get his ♥A later. Better is to try to set up some tricks by leading the ♠K. If his partner has the ♠A, that will mean four immediate tricks. Even if the opponents have the ♠A, they are always entitled to it—and by making them take it now, it sets up three spade tricks for West to later enjoy. Remember that the order you take the tricks in is not relevant. There is

no special bonus for taking the first trick. Better is to give up one now and

take many later. Let's say the ♠K is led at trick one. Assume South is declarer again and North is the dummy. Declarer asks for the ♠A from dummy. What should he do next? Following the logic above, he should be in no hurry to release dummy's ♦A. Better is to play the ♥K and try to set up tricks for later. When North's ♥K is played, West wins the ace and gets to take his three good ("established") spades. On the final spade (the fourth round of the suit), dummy (North) will have no spades left. South should ask for a low diamond to be played. That leaves dummy with the ♦A and the good hearts. Whatever West plays next (he has only hearts and diamonds remaining), North will win and have all high cards remaining. If you had any trouble following the description above, try actually laying out the cards and playing along.

On this deal, West took four tricks (three spades and the high heart). North took five tricks (three hearts and the two aces). So, the East-West partnership would be credited with four tricks and the North-South partnership with five.

Now, let's include the twos ("deuces") and the clubs and deal out all 52 cards (13 to each player):

NORTH (dummy)	
♠ A Q J 8 7	
♥ 7 5 3	
♦ K Q 2	
♣ 8 7	
WEST	EAST
♠ K 9 5	♠ 10 6 2
♥ J 10 9 8 	♥ K 6 2
♦ 8 7 6	♦ 9 5 3
♣ J 6 3	♣ K Q 4 2
SOUTH	
♠ 4 3	
♥ A Q 4	
♦ A J 10 4	
♣ A 10 9 5	

Let's assume again that West plays first and chooses the ♥J. North lays out his cards in suits, so the ♠AQJ87 are placed together and each other suit is also laid out vertically as shown in the diagram below:

♠	♥	♦	♣
A	7	K	8
Q	5	Q	7
J	3	2	
8			
7			

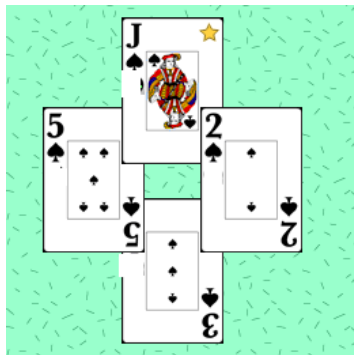
The bidding (to be explained later) determines who makes the first play and who is the dummy.

After the lead of the ♥J, declarer calls for a low card from dummy. Let's say East also plays low. South can play the ♥Q to win the trick (he

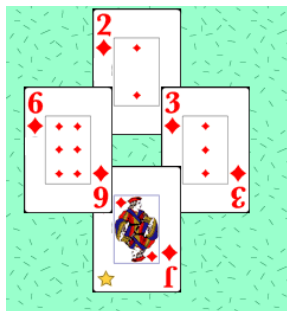
should save the ♥A for later).

What next?

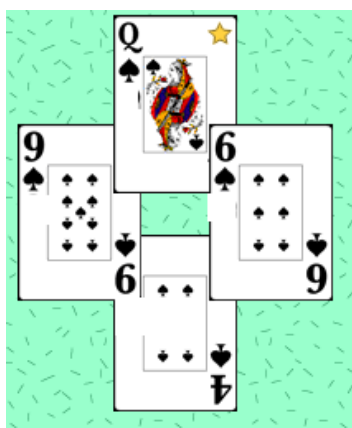
South can see there is lots of potential to take tricks in the spade suit. He leads a low spade from his hand and since dummy has the ace-queen-jack, West can see that it is useless to play his king. So, West plays low and South could guarantee winning the trick by asking for the ♠A from dummy, but he uses a technique



called a "finesse." He asks North (the dummy) to put out (play) the ♠J (or queen—the same play in effect since they are "touching" cards and serve the same purpose). If the ♠J loses to the ♠K, no big deal (the ace and queen will be good later). But, when the ♠K happens to be in the West hand (as in the diagram), the ♠J will win the trick. East plays a low spade since he can't beat the jack.



Now what? South would love to repeat that spade finesse. He would like to lead a low spade from his hand and “finesse” the ♠Q in dummy. But, since North just won the trick with the ♠J, the next trick must be started from the North hand. South’s best move now is to play a low diamond from dummy and win it with the ♦J in his hand. He can see all the high diamonds and knows that the ♦J is a trick-winning card and will also place the lead in his hand for the next trick.



After playing that diamond (and winning his ♦J) he is in his hand to lead another spade. West plays low and the ♠Q is successfully played, winning the trick.

Next comes dummy’s ♠A. Both East and West will have to play their last spade on this trick. South has no more spades, so can play a card from any other suit. He shouldn’t play a low diamond (that will soon be a trick). Let’s say he plays (“discards”) a low club.

If South is watching/counting the spades, he knows that the two low spades in dummy are the only ones left. How does he know? There are 13 spades in the deck. Between the dummy and his hand, he started with seven spades. Each opponent has played three spades. Because $7+3+3=13$, declarer knows that no more spades can remain in the opponents’ hands. He can now lead those low spades from dummy and they will win tricks! The ♠8 is played from dummy and nobody else has any spades. All three players will discard a low card that is of no value to them. Next comes the ♠7, which will also win the trick. Even if East or West play an eight (or higher) of another suit, that won’t win the trick, since spades were led.

Declarer can next play dummy’s ♦K to win a trick and then the ♦Q as well.

Then declarer can play a heart from dummy and win the ♥A in his hand. He will also have the good ♦A to play for his 12th trick. He has won the first 12 tricks but will be left with a low (losing) card in his hand. When he plays it, the opponents will be able to win trick 13.

By finessing in spades and carefully transporting himself between the North and South hands, declarer was able to win 12 of the 13 tricks available.

Before proceeding, please make sure you follow the descriptions in this section. It would be a good idea to lay out a deck of cards and play along.

In the next lesson, we will introduce one final main element of the play: trump.

Quiz:

- 1) If West leads the ♠6, North is out of spades and plays the ♥9, East plays the ♠5 and South plays the ♠8, who wins the trick?
- 2) If South has ♦543 and North (dummy) has ♦AKQ2, how many tricks will North-South win?
- 3) If North (dummy) has ♠432 and South has ♠AKJ, how many tricks will North-South win?
- 4) If West is on lead with ♠A and ♥KQJ10, which card should he lead?

Answers:

- 1) South wins with the ♠8. The ♥9 is higher, but since it is in hearts (not the suit led), it can't win the trick.
- 2) At least three. Possibly four. If East and West each have three diamonds, they will have to play them on the ace, king and queen. Then the two can be led. It will be the only diamond remaining, so will win the trick!
- 3) At least two, maybe three. This is another opportunity for a "finesse" as mentioned above. The two can be led from North and the jack played from South. If the queen is in the right place (with East), the jack will win the trick. A finesse is a 50-50 proposition.
- 4) ♥K. Leading the ♠A gets a trick, yes. But leading the ♥K paves the way to later win three heart tricks.

Glossary of terms in this introduction to bridge:

Auction: The bidding (where all 4 players bid for the contract).

Balanced Hand: 13 cards distributed 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2.

Bid: A prediction of how many tricks (with which trump suit if any) will be taken.

Bidding: The first part of the game, where the contract is determined.

Contract: The number of tricks (and trump suit, if any) that were bid for.

Defender: Either of the two players that is not Declarer or Dummy.

Declarer: The player who bid the contracted suit (or notrump) first—he plays both his hand and the dummy.

Discard: To play a card not in the suit led (because you have no more).

Dummy: The (face-up) 13 cards of the partner of declarer (faced after the opening lead is made).

Game: A level bid for that gives a bonus (3NT, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣ or 5♦).

Finesse: An attempt to win a trick with a lower card when a higher one is outstanding.

Hand: The cards held by each player.

Lead: To play (face-up) a card that starts a trick.

Make: Succeed in a contract.

Opener: The person who bids first.

Overcall: A bid after the opponent has started the bidding.

Overtrick: Tricks beyond what are needed for making the contract.

Partscore. A contract below the level of Game.

Play: To put out a card into a trick.

Preemptive Bid: A bid that shows a weak hand with a long suit.

Raise: To “support” partner by bidding the same suit a level(s) higher.

Set: Take enough tricks so that the opponents don’t make their contract.

Slam: A level bid for that gives an additional bonus (more than game bonus)—these are bids on the 6 level (small slam) or 7 level (grand slam).

Suit: Clubs, diamonds, hearts or spades.

Trick: A collection of 4 cards played, clockwise around the table.

Trump: The “wildcard” suit—determined in the bidding. A trump beats any card in a non-trump suit.

Void: “Holding” of no cards in a suit.