

Bankers Bridge Club : Ethics guidelines

All of us enjoy the informal and relaxed atmosphere in which we play our bridge in the Bankers' Club. However, we must always ensure that this doesn't become TOO relaxed, and that we don't lose sight of the desirability of proper attitude and etiquette at the table – and in particular, how important it is to avoid any action, however inadvertent, that could be construed as unethical. "It is vital that the more experienced members of the club do not set a bad example in this regard, since this is a very important aspect of the game for newer and less experienced players to learn about and take on board as they progress in the game – and it would be unfortunate to introduce them to bad habits".

It is a basic principle of bridge that the only way partners should exchange information with each other during the game is by WHAT bids or plays they make and not by HOW those bids or plays are made, or indeed by any other means. Deliberately conveying unauthorised information (**UI**) is, of course, beyond the pale, but even innocent actions can convey information and cause problems.

The guiding principle in cases of UI is simple – if there is such information available to you from your partner, either in the bidding or play, and you have a choice of reasonable or logical actions, you should NOT choose one that could have been suggested by the UI but should choose an alternative instead. This is not just a question of 'civic responsibility', – it is actually a requirement of Law 16B.

If the opponents feel you HAVE chosen an action that could demonstrably have been suggested by the UI the TD may be called to rule on the matter and an adjusted score may be awarded.

VERY IMPORTANT POINT : The key word in all this is 'COULD' - if a player chooses an action that the opponents feel COULD have been suggested by unauthorised information, then Law 16B can be invoked. The Law DOES NOT say anything about the player's intentions or thought processes, but simply judges events on how they look 'from the outside'.

This has two important implications:

- (1) If you are the 'non-offending side' and call the TD in a UI situation, you should simply ask if Law 16 needs to be applied. You must **NEVER** imply inappropriate intention by an opponent as this could lead to unnecessary unpleasantness or inflame a possibly tense situation.
- (2) If the TD rules against you and/or your partner in a UI situation it **DOES NOT** mean you have done something underhand. As in the case of, for example, the laws on insufficient bids, leads out of turn etc., the penalties must be applied regardless of innocent intentions.

Note : Information garnered from your opponents is authorised and it is perfectly acceptable to use it.

CALL THE TD!!!

It's best always to call the TD when you feel some issue might have occurred, and not to make rulings yourselves at the table. The TD's role is to ensure fairness for everybody and compliance with the Laws (including those on UI) and is NOT primarily one of reproofing or punishing! – so when calling him/her for whatever reason don't imply it as a threat against your opponents. Likewise, when 'the boot is on the other foot' you mustn't show irritation or annoyance if opponents call the TD because of something your side might have done – they have every right to do so.

Here is a list of the more common areas where UI and associated ethical issues commonly arise :

- Hesitations etc.
- Announcements, explanations and alerts.
- Extraneous remarks during bidding and play.
- Using and observing the STOP card.
- Dummy's rights and limitations.

These will be expanded on below, but in the meantime prevention is better than cure! - observing the 'dos and don'ts' in the list below will help you to stay within the law and follow 'best practice' ethically in various UI-related and other situations, and thus avoid most or all problems.

DO		DON'T
DO make a reasonable call that is a logical alternative to what may have been suggested by your partner's hesitation.	Hesitations <----->	DON'T make a bid that could be construed as suggested by your partner's hesitation if there is a reasonable alternative.
The above principles in fact apply not only to hesitations but to all extraneous information, regardless of how innocently it was acquired.		
DO state the range e.g., "12-14" when your partner opens 1NT ; DO say "could be short" when your partner opens a short minor; Do say "Transfer" if your partner bids 2D or 2H as a Transfer.	Announcements <----->	DON'T offer information about your partner's bid unless asked ; DON'T say "5 card" in response to your partner's Major opening; DON'T announce minor suit or 3 level Transfers.
DO carefully phrase your questions to ensure that no information is imparted to your partner ; DO postpone questions to after the auction when possible.	Explanations Asking <----->	DON'T ask a question if it is not your turn to bid or play ; DON'T ask a question that might prompt your partner.
DO give a full explanation of your partner's bid when asked ; DO say you don't know if you don't know ; DO, as declarer/dummy, clarify your partner's incorrect or incomplete explanations at the end of the auction ; As a defender do so at the end of the play of the hand.	Explanations Answering <----->	DON'T assume that the name of the convention will suffice; DON'T prefix an explanation with "I'm taking it as ..." ; DON'T react in any way if your partner's explanation is unexpected.
DO alert all your bidding conventions : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately in the auction first round ; • Immediately for all bids up to 3NT ; • At the end of the auction for bids over 3NT. DO alert all assumed conventions ; DO alert by silently displaying the Alert card ; DO make sure both opponents see the Alert card ; DO acknowledge your opponents' Alert.	Alerts <----->	DON'T explain your Alert unless you are asked ; DON'T alert the three things you are supposed to announce (i.e., NT range, short minor, 2D or 2H as a Transfer) ; DON'T ask for an explanation when it is not your turn.
DO strive to avoid chatter except for necessary questions, explanations and announcements.	Extraneous <---remarks--->	DON'T make any gesture, sigh, or comment that could imply anything about your hand, bid, or play.
DO place the Stop card on the table with any jump bid and leave it there for about ten seconds.	Stop Card <----->	DON'T bid or pass while a Stop card is faced.
If your right-hand opponent neglects to display the Stop card, or removes it prematurely, it is good practice, though not obligatory, to observe the ten seconds. Observing the ten seconds does not constitute a hesitation.		
DO try to prevent any irregularity before it happens ; DO wait until the end of the hand before calling attention to any irregularity you were unable to prevent ; DO ask your opponents' permission if you must leave the table.	Dummy <----->	DON'T claim remaining tricks no matter how obvious ; DON'T suggest any play no matter how obvious ; DON'T play any card, not even a singleton, until declarer calls it.
DO call the TD whenever you feel an infringement may have occurred.	Call the TD <----->	DON'T show disapproval when a player calls the TD ; DON'T make a ruling on your own game.

1. Hesitations etc.

You are perfectly entitled to hesitate if you have something to think about. However, even if you have to take some time over a bidding decision DO have your mind made up when you go to the bidding box, DON'T for example finger several different bids, or a pass and then bid.

But note that, in line with the principle above, if your partner's hesitation suggests a particular call or play for you, then you are obliged to make a logical alternative play or call if there is one. A typical example would be when your partner hesitates and then passes. Even if you had intended to make a particular bid, you now have to consider whether passing or making a different bid is a reasonable alternative, and if it is then you must do so irrespective of your prior intentions.

And the other side of the coin! – be aware that unusually quick and/or decisive actions can also convey UI, so always strive to make all bids and plays in as even a tempo as possible. (Law 16B)

2. Announcements, explanations and alerts

Announcements: In general, volunteering information about your partner's bids **during the auction** without being asked is highly irregular. (If you become declarer or dummy, though, you can volunteer such information to the defenders if you wish before the opening lead). However, the CBAI requires announcements in these, and only these, three clearly-defined situations :

- (1) When your partner opens 1NT, you state the point range e.g., 12-14, 15-17 or whatever ;
- (2) When your partner opens a 'short' or 'prepared' minor you say 'could be short' ;
- (3) When your partner responds to your 1NT with 2D or 2H as a transfer to the next suit up, you say 'transfer'.

No other bids should be announced during the auction. This means in particular that you do NOT announce any of the following : the length of a major-suit opening ; the point range of a 1NT over-call or re-bid, or a 2NT opening ; Stayman ; any transfer bid other than the 2 listed above. (CBAI Regulations)

Explanations Asking : During the auction, PROVIDED IT IS YOUR TURN TO CALL, you may ask questions of either opponent about any of THEIR PARTNER'S calls or about any features of their bidding system. However, you are only entitled to know about their bidding agreements – if they don't have one for the sequence in question, you are NOT entitled to know what they think the bid might mean. (Law 20F)

You may not ask an opponent during the auction about the meaning of their own calls – and of course, you may not ask any questions until it is your turn to call. (Law 20F)

You are entitled to a complete and thorough explanation of their agreements– however, you must avoid to the extent possible any lengthy interrogations, or 'pointed' questions e.g., concerning particular suits, as these can convey UI to your partner and constrain their actions. You should be aware also that even the act of asking at all can likewise convey UI in some situations. (Law 16B, Law 20F3, Law 73B1)

Explanations Answering : When being asked by the appropriate opponent about your partner's calls, give as precise and complete an explanation as they require – don't assume that just giving the name of a convention will always be enough. (Suggestion : when explaining an artificial call, especially one the opponents might not be familiar with, it's a good idea to begin with 'artificial – nothing to do with the suit named...' as this can help to avoid pointed follow-up questions). If an opponent asks you about your own calls, just refer them to your partner for the answer.

If you're not sure about the meaning of a call, or have no agreement for it, and you've been asked about it during the auction, just say exactly that – DO NOT reply by saying 'I'm taking it as....', since this amounts to, in effect, 'prompting' your partner. (Law 20F1)

If your partner gives an explanation of your call which is incorrect or incomplete, or does not tally with your understanding of it, you MUST NOT DO ANYTHING about it while the auction is still in progress. In fact if you end up as a defender you must not do anything until the play of the hand is over! – but then you must correct or clarify as necessary. If you end up as declarer or dummy, though, you MUST make any such correction before the opening lead is made. If the opponents feel they might have been damaged they should ask the TD for a ruling. (Law 20F5)

N.B. If you hear your partner giving an incorrect explanation of your - correct - bid, you must put that out of your mind and continue the auction as if both of you were still 'on the same page'. The same applies if you're the one who has made the mistake i.e., made a wrong bid – you are not allowed to use your partner's alert or explanation or non-alert to 'wake you up' to the situation. Of course this can be very hard to do in practice so the TD may be required to give a ruling. (Law 73C)

Alerts : In general, you should alert any call by your partner which is artificial or conventional - OR which although natural is unexpectedly weak or strong (e.g., 1H-3H played as weak : 1D-2D played as 'inverted'). You do this by silently displaying the Alert card, making sure it is seen by both opponents. (CBAI Regulations)

However, other than on the first round of bidding (when all conventional bids must be alerted) you should NOT alert any call above the level of 3NT, i.e. from 4C upwards, until the auction is over and then you must alert any such calls. Dummy or declarer alert before the opening lead is made, defenders alert after the opening lead is made but before it is faced. (CBAI Regulations)

3. Extraneous remarks during bidding and play

While none of us would wish to change the generally relaxed and convivial atmosphere in the club, we should be aware that remarking or commenting on the auction or play as it progresses can convey UI or distract or mislead opponents – e.g., even light-hearted or innocent-seeming remarks such as 'what the heck, we've had no luck so far' or 'it's the last hand of the night, let's go for it' when bidding game. And making any such remarks or comments on our own side's actions while the auction is still in progress is especially to be avoided, and is in fact against the Laws of Bridge! (Law 16B1, Law 74B, Law 74C)

4. Using and observing the STOP card

When making a jump bid you should place the STOP card on the table and then follow immediately with the bid. The STOP card should stay there for about ten seconds after the bid is made. The next player may not bid until it is removed.

When your right hand opponent makes a jump bid you are entitled to bid once the STOP card has been removed. However if the STOP card is not displayed, or is removed prematurely, then as a courtesy to your opponents and partner alike, and as an example to other players, you should still refrain from bidding for the 10 seconds. (CBAI Regulations, Law 73A2)

5. The rights and limitations of dummy

As dummy you :

- must not participate in the play in any way, except to play cards as directed by declarer. Note that, according to the laws, if declarer names a suit but not a rank when calling for dummy's card, e.g., just says 'a club', this means the lowest card in that suit – so you must not query it or say 'which one?' (Law 43A) ;
- may and should try to prevent any irregularity before it happens, but if an irregularity has already happened you must wait until the end of the hand before calling attention to it. You may ask declarer, if they fail to follow suit, if they have any cards in that suit but you MAY NOT ask either defender. (Law 43B2) ;
- must not claim remaining tricks, suggest any play, or play any card until declarer indicates it, not even a singleton. (Law 43A1)

And although this is a question of courtesy rather than ethics – if you are dummy it is a good idea not to leave the table unnecessarily, and you should ask the opponents' permission if you do want to leave.