



I've had a grumpy old man whinge in an earlier column (and subsequently found that many others shared my feelings), but this time I have a few specific gripes about some matters of the Laws of Bridge that are flouted in our club sessions.

Telling opponents the meaning of partner's bid without being asked. Regulations require "announcing" like this in only two cases, and are very specific about what is to be said. After partner opens a natural 1NT, you simply state the range, e.g. "15 to 17". And after partner opens 1C you either state the minimum number of clubs if it's natural (e.g. "2 plus" for short club, "3 plus"

for better minor, "4 plus" for Acol), or if you're playing a system like Precision, you state "strong, 16 plus". Do not add any embellishment to these announcements unless the opponents ask. All other bids by your partner should be alerted if necessary, but you must say nothing unless the opponents ask you about it. By explaining the meaning without being asked, you are telling partner how you interpret their bid, and this sort of communication between partners is clearly not allowed in bridge.

Removing cards from the board before either opponent has arrived. Wait until at least one opponent has arrived at the table before you remove your cards from the board. It's a matter of courtesy, but is also a requirement under the laws.

Rotating the board or covering the vulnerability information. The laws require that the board remain on the table, in the right compass direction, and be visible at all times. This is because any player is entitled to check the vulnerability at any time through the play. (This is in contrast to the bidding slip which can and should be covered after the 3rd player has played to the first trick. This is because no one is entitled to a review of the auction after this point.) Rotating the board is also a sure way of the cards being replaced in the wrong pockets at the end of the hand, leading to board-fouling and headaches all round.

Discussion about the hands that can be overheard. If a player overhears a comment about a board they are yet to play, their chances of getting a valid result are significantly reduced. This spoils the game for those players and is unfair on the rest of the field. If you need to discuss something about the hands, do it in a way that can't be overheard.

Turning a played card over before everyone has played to the trick. Apart from being contrary to the laws, this is confusing to other players and can lead to cards not being played to tricks or too many cards being played to a trick. A similar issue is when a player wants to see the cards just played to the trick after they have been turned over. The laws allow a player to ask others to re-face the card played to the last trick until such time as they have turned their own card

over. Once they have done that, they can't ask to see the other cards played to the trick even if they turn their own card back over.

Looking at your own system card during the auction or play. Your system card is for the benefit of your opponents. You are meant to know the agreements you have with your partner!

Dummy taking part in the play. Dummy can take no part in the play. Examples of things they can't do are: suggesting a card before one is named by declarer; being the first to call attention to an infraction; looking at an opponent's system card (this suggests to declarer that there might be something they should be aware of); and moving dummy's cards to fill a gap created by a void.

Asking questions for partner's benefit. If you need to know more details about an opponents' call or play, you are entitled to ask at your turn to call / play, but you can't ask that question just because you want partner to know the answer.

Taking a phone call at the table. You may have permission from the director to have your mobile phone turned on if there is a good reason, but if it rings, leave the table immediately to answer it. It is the height of bad manners to have a phone conversation at the table.

Making gratuitous comments after seeing the Bridgmate results. In spite of many requests by clubs, some players still make comments that cause offence to others, like "top board, partner". Some players also insist on reading out the results. Apart from the risk of this information being overheard at a table yet to play the board, some players don't want to know the other results, especially if they know they've messed up. If you're interested yourself, have a look at the Bridgmate, and pass the Bridgmate to anyone else who is interested.

In conclusion, these points are covered in the laws and regulations of bridge in one way or another, and offenders can find themselves with an adjusted score or a penalty.