

Discover the Fun & Challenge of Duplicate Bridge

by Karen Walker, Champaign IL

Like any game, bridge is more fun if you play it well. Over 160,000 North American bridge players have found that duplicate bridge is one of the best ways to improve their skills *and* enjoy playing their favorite game. These people compete in daily and weekly duplicate games -- some just for novices and newcomers -- held in virtually every city (and many small towns) in the U.S., Canada and other countries. Almost all of these club games are open to anyone who knows how to play beginning bridge.



What's different?

Duplicate bridge is not really a different form of the game than you've already learned. You still play "regular" bridge, but the final score on each hand is determined by a comparison method (called matchpoints) instead of just total points.

It's called duplicate because each hand you play will be played at several other tables during the session, under the same conditions. Unlike rubber bridge, which depends heavily on being dealt good hands to win, your final score at duplicate depends only on how well you bid and play the cards you actually hold, not on how "good" those cards are.

You can play in a duplicate game without knowing anything about matchpoint scoring. As you become more experienced, though, you'll probably want to adopt some strategies that cater to this form of scoring. Later in this brochure, you'll find some tips on how to make "duplicate-style" bidding and play decisions that will improve your matchpoint scores.

Are you good enough to play?

If you know the basics of bridge bidding and can play at a reasonable pace, you can play duplicate.

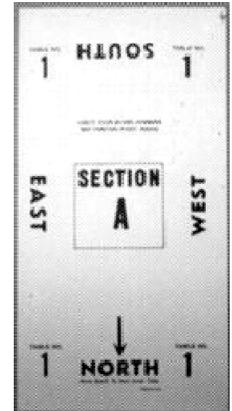
The most common misconception about duplicate is that you have to be an experienced player or even an "expert" to enter the games. In fact, playing duplicate bridge is one of the best ways to *become* a better player.

The setup of a duplicate game gives you the opportunity to play against a wide variety of pairs -- from experts to bare beginners -- and to compare your bidding and play with theirs. Your mistakes (and your triumphs) will be clearer because you'll see how several other players bid and played the same cards you held. And because you have the chance to earn a top score on every hand (even if you hold a "Yarborough" with no honor cards), you'll be paying full attention to every trick!

This brochure will introduce you to duplicate game movements, scoring and strategies, but there's really no need to study before you play. The best way to enjoy duplicate is to just jump in and play in the games.

How a Duplicate Game Works

When you enter a pairs duplicate game, you and your partner will be assigned a table number and a direction (North-South or East-West). Each table will have a large card in the center that designates the table number and which seats North-South (NS) and East-West (EW) should take. You'll also be given a pair number, which is usually the same as your starting table number.



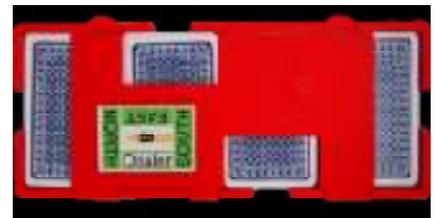
In most movements of 7 tables or more, each NS pair stays at their starting table for the whole session. If you're seated NS, you'll play a round of 2 to 4 hands (also called boards) against the EW pair who starts there, then a new pair and new boards will come to your table for the next round. If you're EW, you'll move to a new table after every round to play new pairs and boards.

Games of 6 or fewer tables usually use a scrambled movement where all pairs change tables and directions after every round. The table cards will give you instructions about where to move for each new round.

The number of hands you play in a duplicate session will vary. You may play as few as 12-15 boards or as many as 28 (most clubs run sessions of 24-28 boards) and you'll play against from 5 to 13 other pairs. You don't need any special knowledge of how the game movement works. The director will handle the movement of pairs and boards, so all you have to do is play the people and the hands that come to your table.

Duplicate boards

Each hand you play will come to your table in a duplicate "board" -- a plastic or metal tray with a deck of cards already separated into the four hands. The board is designed to keep each 13-card hand separate so other pairs can play the exact same deal later in the session.



For the first round, you may receive pre-dealt boards that are ready to play. If not, you'll shuffle and deal the cards and place each hand into one of the four pockets in the board. This is the only time during the session that hands are shuffled.

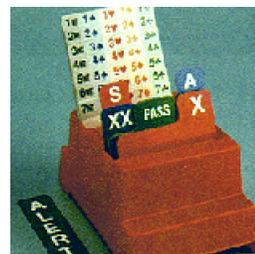
All the boards for the round are stacked in the center of the table to match the directions on the table card.

In duplicate scoring, each hand stands alone. Partscores and vulnerability do not carry over to the next deal. Instead, each board has imprints that tell you the conditions for that hand only -- who the dealer is and whether each side is vulnerable. The NSEW directions are also marked on the board so you know which hand to take.

Bidding boxes

Many clubs and most tournaments use bidding boxes, which allow you to make your bids with printed cards. Each table has four boxes, one for each player.

The back section of the box has a tiered stack of 35 bidding cards -- one for each of the 35 possible bids (1C through 7NT). The front section has several Pass cards (green), Double cards (red X) and Redouble cards (dark-blue XX). The box also includes a light-blue "A" card for use when you



make an alertable call.

Instead of saying your bid out loud, you take the appropriate bid card (and all the cards behind it) from the back section of the box and place it on the table in front of you. If you want to open 1NT, for example, place your thumb on the tabbed 1NT card and pull it and all the cards behind it out of the box. You'll have a stack of five cards labeled 1C through 1NT, with the 1NT card on top.

As you make subsequent bids, place the new stacks of cards on top of those you've already used, overlapping them so everyone can see all your previous bids.

Pass, Double and Redouble cards are in the front of the box. If you want to make one of these calls, pull just that card out and place it in front of you, overlapping it with previous bidding cards.

When the auction is over and you're ready to begin play, return all the bidding cards to the back of the box (they'll already be in proper order). If you've used the smaller Pass, Double and Redouble cards, place them in the front of the box.



Players like bidding boxes because everyone at the table can always see all the bids made in the auction. In addition to helping hearing-impaired players, this method also saves time, reduces noise and prevents you from "mis-hearing" a bid. Learning to bid this way takes just a minute or two. If your local club has bidding boxes, the director or another player will show you how to use them.

The play

The bidding starts with the hand marked Dealer and progresses normally. Once play begins, though, all four players must keep their original hands intact so other pairs can play the exact same deal later. To keep your cards together and separate, play to each trick by placing your card face up in front of you instead of in the middle of the table.



When the trick is complete, turn your played card face-down (still in front of you). If your side won the trick, place the card vertically (pointing toward you and partner). If you lost the trick, turn the card horizontally (pointing toward your opponents), overlapping cards as you finish tricks. This allows you to see how many tricks each side has won at any point in the play.

Although dummy doesn't make decisions during the play, he is responsible for handling his own cards and keeping track of the tricks won and lost. When you're declarer, you don't need to reach across the table to play from dummy. Just tell partner (dummy) which card you want to play to each trick ("small spade" or "play the ace", for example) and he'll detach the card for you.

All four players' played cards stay face-down in front of them, lined up so everyone can always see how many tricks each side has won. When the play is complete and both sides agree on the score, count your cards (to be sure none got mixed in with another hand) and put your original hand back into the proper pocket on the board.

The game director

The director sells entries, makes coffee, sets up the movement, scores the game and handles dozens of other jobs involved in running a duplicate game. The director will help you score, fill out a convention card and read the final tallies. Most will even answer your questions about bridge bidding and play.

The director is also there to make sure the game is fair for everyone. If something unusual occurs at your table -- a rule violation, a hand with only 12 cards, an incorrect score on a traveler, anything -- you should call the director to handle it. He uses a rule book to make standardized adjustments for irregularities in the bidding or play (a revoke or a bid out of turn, for example).

How a Duplicate Game is Scored

Scoring each deal

Since each deal is scored separately, duplicate gives no rubber bonus. Instead, you score an immediate bonus for each contract made, whether it's a partscore, game or slam. The bonuses are:

For all partscores: Trick score + 50 points

Non-vulnerable games: Trick score + 300 points

Vulnerable games: Trick score + 500 points

Penalties are the same as rubber scoring. Duplicate does not award points for holding honors.

The score for a 3D contract that makes exactly 3 would be +110 -- 60 for the trick score (3 x 20) plus 50 points for making a partscore. A vulnerable 4H game that makes an overtrick would be +650 -- 150 for the trick score (30 x 5) plus the 500-point game bonus.

Another difference is that a pass-out deal is not redealt, even if you're the first table to play the hand. The score is recorded as 0 for NS and EW.

You don't need to memorize the scores or even know how to figure them. Instead, you can refer to a printed scoring table that will be available at your club, or you can ask your opponents to score for you. If your club uses bidding boxes, you'll find all the scores for each contract on the back of the corresponding bidding card. A table of scores for all contracts is here: <http://cdn.baronbarclay.com/downloads/Info/AAG.pdf>

The player sitting North records the score for each deal. Many tournaments and clubs use wireless tabletop scorepads (photo at right) that transmit the contract and result to a computer. Other clubs use paper pickup slips, which are collected after each round.

Another method is traveling scoreslips, one for each board, which is folded and put back into the board with the cards. When the board is played by other pairs, they'll enter their scores on the same traveling score. In later rounds, you'll be able to see the results from other tables and compare your scores with theirs.



Here's an example of a completed traveler from a 7-table game. If your club uses wireless scorepads, the printout of each table's results will be similar to this format.

TRAVELING SCORE: BOARD # 1

NS#	Contract	BY	Made	Down	SCORE		EW#	Match points
					NS +	EW +		
1	4H	S	5		450		1	6
2	4H	S	4		420		3	4 1/2
3	4H	S	4		420		5	4 1/2
4	3NT	N		2		100	7	0
5	3NT	N	3		400		2	3
6	4S DBL	E		2	300		4	2
7	3H	S	4		170		6	1

Each of the seven North players filled in the contract, declarer, number of tricks made or down, the score and the pair number of their EW opponents. The last column shows the N-S matchpoint score, which the director (or the club computer) figures after the game.

North scores on the line number that matches his pair number. He fills in the East-West pair number in another column on the right. If North-South earns a plus score, the result is recorded in the NS+ column. If East-West gets the plus score, it's placed in the EW+ column.

The last column has each NS pair's matchpoint score for this board. This score, which shows the number of pairs you beat, is figured by the computer (or manually by the director) after all scores are in.

If you'd like to learn more about how matchpoints are figured, see "How to Matchpoint" on the Baron-Barclay site: <http://cdn.baronbarclay.com/downloads/Info/bulletin7.pdf>

Tallying the final game scores

At the end of the game, the scores on the travelers are used to determine each pair's matchpoint score. On each hand, you receive 1 matchpoint for every pair you beat and 1/2 matchpoint for every pair you tie. If a board is played 7 times, the top score is 6 -- 1 matchpoint for beating each of the other 6 pairs who played the hand -- and average is 3.

Your result on each hand is compared only with the pairs who held the same cards and sat the same direction (NS or EW) you did. On the traveler above, if you were NS #1, your +450 (for 4H making 5) would earn you a top score of 6 because it beat all six of the other NS scores. Your opponents on this hand (EW #1), scored 0 because all other EW pairs did better. EW #7 earned the EW top score of 6.

The matchpoints for each board are added up and pairs are ranked by total score. If you play 28 hands in a 7-table game, the average total score is 84 (28 hands x 3, the average matchpoint score on each hand). Players call this average score a "50-percent game". A 60-percent score will usually win; 55 percent will place in the top three or four.

The director may do all the scoring by hand, but most clubs use computers. The computer takes results from each table (sent by wireless scorepads or entered by the director from the paper scoreslips) to figure

matchpoints, total scores and rankings of all pairs. The final scores will be available within minutes (or seconds) after you play the last hand.

All pairs' scores and rankings will be displayed on a large "recap sheet" the director will post after the game. In most games, there will be separate sheets for NS and EW. Each sheet will list all the pairs that played that direction, their matchpoint scores and percentages, their ranking in the section, and the number of masterpoints they won. Below the pair listing will be grid that shows the result and matchpoint score for every hand at every table. Ask the director or another player for help if you'd like to learn more about how to read the results.

The computer can give you a computer printout of your pair's results and matchpoint scores on each hand. Many clubs also post the scores -- sometimes with hand diagrams -- on the Internet.

Winners and runners-up in each game are awarded official masterpoints from the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL). If your club uses a computer and if you're an ACBL member, your club director will send your points directly to ACBL. A report of points you've won is printed in every issue of the *Bridge Bulletin*, the monthly magazine that's mailed to all members.

The Convention Card

Just like the pairs you play at rubber bridge, duplicate pairs vary in their bidding styles and agreements about the meanings of certain bids. As their opponent, you have a right to know about their special agreements, so each player fills out a card that summarizes his pair's bidding system.

Filling out this card before the game is a good way for you and partner to discuss your bidding system. The card's main purpose, though, is to inform your opponents about your agreements.

During the game, you can consult your opponents' convention card (or ask them directly at your turn to bid) if you have a question about the meanings of any of their bids. The card will tell you about key areas of their bidding system -- for example, the point range for their opening notrump bids and if they use Weak or Strong Two-Bids, Negative Doubles and other conventions.

The card contains space for all the possible agreements a pair might have. Beginners who play a simple Standard American system need to mark only a few boxes. The first time you play, the director or another player can help you fill out the card, which takes just a few minutes.

Blank convention cards will be available at your club or you can copy the card here. It's already filled out for a basic system with Weak Two-bids, Jacoby Transfers, Jacoby 2NT, limit raises and 15-17 1NT openings. If you're filling out a blank card, or if you want to add to the sample card, the main sections to mark are:

- NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS:** The point range is filled in for 1NT, 2NT and 3NT opening bids. There are also checkmarks in the boxes for Stayman (2C response to 1NT) and Jacoby transfers (2D and 2H).
- MAJOR OPENINGS:** The marks in the "5" boxes indicate that you promise 5+ cards for 1H and 1S openings. The checks in the "Inv" boxes show that a double raise of opener's suit (1S-3S) is invitational. The check in the "2NT: Forcing" box is for the Jacoby 2NT forcing raise.
- MINOR OPENINGS:** The "3+" boxes show the minimum length for 1C and 1D opening bids. Mark "Inv" (invitational) to show that a double raise (1C-3C) is invitational. Below this are the point ranges for responses of 1NT, 2NT and 3NT to a minor-suit opener.
- 2C, 2D, 2H, 2S:** The card is filled out for Strong 2C openings and Weak Two-bids with the 2NT asking response. If you play all your two-bids as strong and forcing, mark the "Strong" boxes and add "2NT weak" for responses.
- OTHER CONVENTIONAL CALLS:** If you play Low Minor Forcing, check the box here. You can use this space to note any other bidding agreements that aren't covered by other areas of the card.
- SPECIAL DOUBLES:** Check the "Negative" box if you play negative doubles and indicate how high they are "on" (common is through the 3S level).
- NOTRUMP OVERCALLS:** These are point ranges for a direct 1NT overcall and a balancing 1NT in the pass-out seat (1C-P-P-1NT). If you play Unusual 2NT overcalls, check the "2 Lowest" box.
- SIMPLE OVERCALL:** This is the point range you promise for a simple (non-jump) suit overcall (usually around 8-17 points).

SPECIAL DOUBLES Direct (Passive) Double: <input type="checkbox"/> Negative: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 Unusual: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 2NT: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 3NT: <input type="checkbox"/> 15		NOTRUMP OVERCALLS Direct: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 Balancing: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 Unusual: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 2NT: <input type="checkbox"/> 15 3NT: <input type="checkbox"/> 15		NAME: CHUCK & BETTY GOREN STANDARD GENERAL APPROACH 1NT: 15-17 2NT: 20-22 3NT: 25+	
SIMPLE OVERCALL 1NT: 8-17 2NT: 20-22 3NT: 25+		DEFENSE VS NOTRUMP 1NT: NATURAL 2NT: FORCING 3NT: INVITATIONAL		NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS 1NT: 15-17 2NT: 20-22 3NT: 25+	
JUMP OVERCALL 1NT: 8-17 2NT: 20-22 3NT: 25+		OVER OPNS TWO DOUBLES Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H		MAJOR OPENINGS 1H: 5+ 1S: 5+ 2C: 5+ 2D: 5+ 2H: 5+ 2S: 5+	
OPENING PREEMPTS 1C: <input type="checkbox"/> 3+ 1D: <input type="checkbox"/> 3+ 1E: <input type="checkbox"/> 3+ 1F: <input type="checkbox"/> 3+		VS Opening Preempt Double In Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 4S Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 4S Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 4S		MINOR OPENING 1C: 3+ 1D: 3+ 1E: 3+ 1F: 3+	
SEAM CONVENTIONS Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H		LEADS 1H: 5+ 1S: 5+ 2C: 5+ 2D: 5+ 2H: 5+ 2S: 5+		DEFENSIVE CARDING Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H	
OTHER CONVENTIONAL CALLS Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H		OTHER CARDING Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H		RESPONSES 1NT: 15-17 2NT: 20-22 3NT: 25+	
SPECIAL CARDING <input type="checkbox"/> PLEASE ASK		OTHER CONVENTIONAL CALLS Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H		OTHER CONVENTIONAL CALLS Stayman: <input type="checkbox"/> 2C Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2D Jacoby: <input type="checkbox"/> 2H	

- **JUMP OVERCALL:** The "Weak" box shows that your jump overcall (1S on your right, 3C by you) is a weak preempt (6+-card suit, 5-9 points).
- **OVER OPPONENT'S TAKEOUT DOUBLE:** If partner opens and your RHO makes a takeout double, your 1-level bid of a new suit forces opener to bid again. A 2-level bid does not (it promises a long suit and 5-9 points). Redouble by you shows 10+ points and implies no fit for partner's suit.
- **DEFENSE VS. 1NT:** This describes the meanings of your overcalls after an opponent opens 1NT. "Natural" means you play no conventional meanings.
- **OPENING PREEMPTS:** Most players mark the "Light" box. If your opening 3-bids routinely show as many as 10 points, though, mark the "Sound" box.
- **DIRECT CUEBID:** This explains the meaning when you bid the suit your opponent opened (1H on your right, 2H by you, or 1C-2C). If you play Michaels two-suited overcalls, mark those boxes.
- **LEADS:** Circle the card you would lead from each of the listed examples. The standard lead from each holding is printed in boldface, so if that card is the one you would lead, you don't need to mark it. At the bottom, circle "4th Best" to indicate the card you lead from a long suit.

The private score

On the back (inside) of the convention card is space for you to record your score on each hand. This part of the card is "unofficial" -- it's for your use only, so you can write in anything from the contract and score to a description of your opponents.

The private score is a handy reminder if you want to discuss the hands with your partner or other players after the game. Since this part of the card has information on hands your opponents may not have played yet, be sure to keep your card folded so this part isn't visible to anyone else during the game.

In minor suits, though, this one-trick advantage doesn't produce a higher score. 5C making 5 (+400) will score fewer matchpoints than 3NT making 4 (+430). For this reason, 5C and 5D contracts are somewhat rare at duplicate. Players will stand on their heads to bid 3NT, even if a minor-suit game might be safer.

Choose the safest partscore.

If you're stopping in a partscore, your first choice should still be the major suit, but your choice between a minor and notrump isn't as critical. You should almost always play in the major if you have an 8-card fit -- 2S making 2 (+110) beats 1NT making 1 (+90) or 2C making 2 (+90).

If your partscore decision is between notrump and a minor, though, it may be better to play in the suit contract if you have a fit, especially if you have bare-minimum points. Getting a plus score is important, so when you have limited high-card strength, you'll usually want the safety of a trump suit.

Go for the big reward.

Don't settle for a sure contract if you think the odds are good of making a higher-scoring one. Duplicate players tend to bid more "close" games and slams than you might at rubber bridge, so you may want to be a little more aggressive in your game and slam bidding, too.

At rubber bridge, if you bid a vulnerable 4H and win all 13 tricks, you may be satisfied with bidding your game and winning the rubber, even if you and your partner had 35 high-card points. At duplicate, though, this will be a poor matchpoint score. With this much combined strength, most of the other pairs will be bidding and making 6H or 7H with your cards, and you may earn 0 matchpoints for your 4H contract.

Make more overcalls.

Duplicate players often stretch to compete after an opponent opens, so you may want to liberalize your rubber-bridge overcall requirements somewhat. If you're not vulnerable and have a decent 5-card suit, feel free to make a one-level overcall with as few as 8 or 9 points (depending on suit quality).

You'll want to be a little stronger at higher levels, especially if you're vulnerable. Be sure your 2-level overcalls are *very* sound (usually a good 6-card suit, or a very strong 5-carder and good high-card strength).

Be more aggressive on partscore deals.

In a duplicate game, even low-level bidding can be quite lively because the players compete more actively for partscores. If your opponents stop at a low level, you should be more willing to balance and try to bid your own partscore (especially if you're short in the opponents' suit and you're not vulnerable). If the opponents can make 2H, your 2S contract may be a winner even if you go set -- your -50 or -100 will beat the pairs who lost -110 defending 2H with your cards.

If you're vulnerable, though, be more careful about competing with minimum values. Going down 2 (or down 1 doubled) may be a disaster. Losing 200 points is sure to be worse than the score for letting the opponents make their partscore.

Sacrifice more often.

Duplicate players are quite willing, even happy, to make sacrifice bids when their opponents are vulnerable and they are not. At rubber bridge, if you make a non-vulnerable sacrifice over the opponents' vulnerable game and go down 3 doubled, you lose 500 points. That's better than letting them have their 700-point rubber bonus, but you've still suffered a sizable loss.

At duplicate, however, this minus score could earn you a top matchpoint score. If all the other pairs who held your cards allowed their opponents to bid and make their vulnerable game, your score of -500 will beat their -620's.

Look for overtricks.

A simple overtrick can also make a big difference in your matchpoint score. If other pairs holding your cards bid 3NT and make exactly 9 tricks, they score +400. If you can make 10 tricks, you'll score +430, beating all the other pairs and earning a "top".

Unlike in rubber bridge, you may even make a somewhat risky play to try for an extra trick. The search for the "elusive" overtrick is often the explanation if you see a declarer go set in a game that appeared to have a sure 9 or 10 tricks.

However, if you think you're already in a high matchpoint-scoring contract, you can play it safe. Suppose you're declarer in 4S. When dummy comes down, you see you're going to make 10 tricks, but that partner made a very aggressive bid and you have only 21 high-card points between you. Just making your contract will probably be a good matchpoint score, since most other pairs won't bid the game with your cards. In this situation, you'd want to take your 10 sure tricks and not risk your contract trying for 11.

Play with the "field".

If you're confronted with a key decision during the bidding or play, you should rely on your own bridge judgment, but you may also want to think about the other players holding your cards. Based on what you know about them, do you think they'll be trying for the overtrick, accepting a game invitation, bidding the slam? If so, it may be wise to go for a similar result.

Use 15-17 points as the range for your 1NT opening bid.

1NT is one of the most desirable opening bids because it gives such a good description of your hand and because all the responding bids are so well defined. To increase the number of hands that can be opened with 1NT, modern players have given up the old 16-18 point range and now use 15-17 for 1NT and 20-22 for a 2NT opener. Some use 15-18 for 1NT, and other pairs use lower ranges.

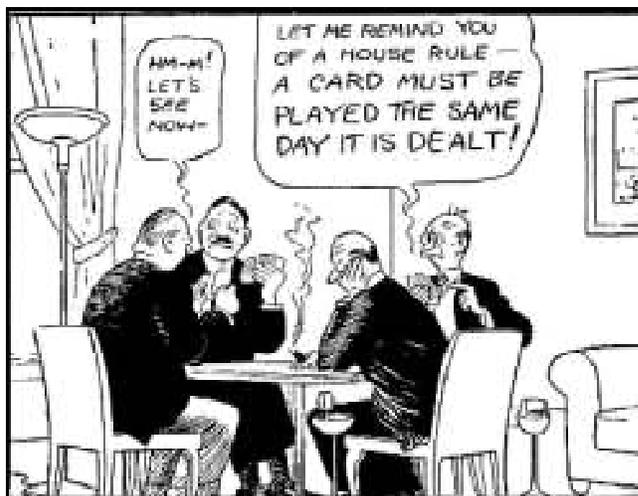
Using the 15-17 range will put you on more even footing with the rest of the players in your duplicate game. If you've played 16-18 in the past, you don't need to learn a new bidding system. Just add 1 point to the old range requirements for responder's bids.

Add other modern bids to your system.

When you're comfortable with the basics, consider adding other bidding tools played by duplicate pairs. Some of the most popular -- and easiest to learn -- are [Weak Two-bids](#), [Jacoby Transfers](#) and two-suited overcalls ([Michaels cuebids](#) and the Unusual 2NT). Among the most valuable are [New Minor Forcing](#) and [Negative Doubles](#). Take care, though, not to overload your brain with too many new toys. Add just one new bid at a time and practice with it until you feel ready for another challenge.

Duplicate Customs

Local duplicate clubs offer a social, friendly atmosphere, but the bridge played there is a competition, so the players follow rules designed to ensure an even playing field. The "coffeehousing" that is sometimes accepted in a home game is understandably off-limits at duplicate. Some other customs and matters of "etiquette" you'll want to follow include:



Keep the play moving.

You're expected to play the boards in a reasonable amount of time -- about 7-8 minutes per hand (sometimes longer in novice games). To give yourself maximum time for the play, try to score quickly and move promptly when a new round is called.

Limit the "post-mortem" discussions.

Duplicate players enjoy discussing the results after a hand or (better) after the round is over. During the round, they try to keep these conversations short (to save time for playing the remaining boards) and *soft*. The hand you just finished will be played later at other tables, so it's important that others in the room not overhear anything that might affect their bidding or play of the hand.

Lead first, write later.

When you're the opening leader, three people at the table are waiting on you to start the play. If you want to write down the contract in your private scorecard, do so *after* you've made your lead, while dummy is putting his cards down and declarer is planning the play.

Make your opening lead face-down.

This gives partner a chance to ask questions if he needs information about the opponents' bidding. It also keeps you from leading when it isn't your turn. If it wasn't your lead, someone will tell you and you can put the unseen card back in your hand.

Stay in your seat if you're dummy.

You're actually a participant, so stay at the table to turn the cards for partner. Don't look in his hand until after the play. If you remain neutral in this way, you're allowed to warn partner if he's revoking or leading from the wrong hand.

Play your cards in tempo.

Try to play in an even tempo, without hesitations that can give away information about your hand. When you play to a trick, place your card on the table in front of you. Don't show your satisfaction (or lack of it) by "snapping" or tossing the card.

Claim early, claim often.

If you're declarer, don't be afraid to "claim" before all the tricks are played out. Just face your hand and state your line of play -- "I'll pull trumps and run the clubs" or "You get a heart at the end", for example. Claiming saves time and is a courtesy to your opponents, who will appreciate it if you quickly end a routine hand where they have no decisions to make.

Make your bids in an even tempo.

Try not to use mannerisms or voice inflections that might convey unauthorized information. Sighs, grimaces, slow passes and loud doubles aren't appropriate. Neither are extra words in your bids -- "I guess I have to pass" or "I'll double you" aren't proper bids.

If you have a tough decision to make during the bidding or play, you're entitled to take extra time to think. Your partner, however, *cannot* take advantage of the knowledge that you had a problem. He must bid his hand normally, ignoring any information that might be suggested by your pause for thought. In most cases, if your partner thinks for a while and then passes, you should pass, too, unless that would be a *totally* illogical action with your hand.

For example, suppose you open 3S and your left-hand-opponent bids 4H. Your partner thinks for several seconds, then passes. No matter what action he was considering, you must make your normal bid of Pass. Bidding again after making a preempt would be highly unusual, especially since your partner's hesitation gave you "unauthorized" information that he was considering a bid.

Don't be offended if your opponents call the director after a hesitation, especially if you think a long time and then pass. The director was *not* called because you violated a rule -- it's a standard practice that protects everyone's rights, yours and theirs. The director will affirm that you were entitled to think and he'll remind your partner that he can't use any inferences suggested by your hesitation. If your partner bids normally, that's the end of it. If the opponents question his action, they may ask the director to adjust the score.

Make the best use of bidding boxes.

Bidding boxes remove the possibility of voice inflections, but they still require you to be careful about communicating extra information.

Place bidding cards on the table in the same way you place played cards. Be sure you don't show any emotion by tossing or slamming the cards.

Decide on your bid *before* you reach into the box. If you're still thinking when you start touching the bidding cards, you may inadvertently communicate unauthorized information to partner. If, for example, you start to pull the 2S card and then change your mind and pull out the Pass card, that may suggest that you have "almost enough" to bid 2S. This amounts to thinking out loud, and it puts a lot of pressure on partner to ignore it and bid his hand normally.

As you pull cards from the box, look at the top of the stack to be sure it's the bid you want to make. Occasionally, your thumb may slip and you'll pull a wrong card. If this happens, you're allowed to take it back -- just say "oops" or the equivalent as soon as you see the wrong card and replace it with the correct one. Note that this applies only to mechanical errors, not to mental ones. If you intentionally pull a bidding card and then change your mind, no matter how quickly, you're not allowed to change your call.

Place your bidding cards on the table in the same way you place your played cards -- overlapping, so everyone can see all the bids you've made in order. Be sure that you don't communicate any extra information by tossing or slapping the cards.

Pause after your opponent makes a jump bid.

If your opponent skips a level in the bidding (an opening preempt or jump overcall, for example), wait around 5-10 seconds (no longer) before making your bid. This gives you a few extra seconds to think after an unexpectedly high bid. The pause also reduces the chance that you'll make a fast pass or slow double that could convey information to your partner.

Use the "Alert" procedure if you play special conventions.

If you and your partner use conventions that are not part of basic Standard American, you must "alert" your opponents to this fact when one of these bids comes up during an auction. To do this, the *partner* of the person who made the conventional bid says "Alert" and taps the blue flag on the bidding box as soon as the bid is made. This tells the opponents that your partner's bid is artificial or conventional and has a different meaning than they might expect. The next player to bid can then ask *you* about the meaning of your partner's bid.

You probably won't hear many Alerts in a novice game, and you may not use any bids that require them. Stayman 2C, Weak Two-bids, Unusual Notrumps, Michaels Cuebids and Negative Doubles are so common that they are *not* Alerts. Popular bids that require alerts or announcements are:

Jacoby 2NT (forcing major-suit raise). All of opener's rebids after 2NT are also alertable.

Jacoby Transfers (after partner opens 1NT). When this bid is made, the partner of the bidder *announces* its meaning by saying "Transfer" (instead of "Alert").

1NT opening bids. Since different pairs play different point ranges for 1NT, the partner of the 1NT opener announces the point range ("15 to 17" or "12 to 14", for example).

Forcing 1NT response (used in the 2-over-1 system after partner opens 1H or 1S). This is another "announceable" bid. To let you know he is forced to bid again, opener will simply say "Forcing" when his partner responds 1NT.

The list of alertable bids changes from time to time, and beginners aren't expected to be experts on them. If you're in doubt about whether or how you should alert a bid, just ask the club director or the other players for help.

Ask questions when it's your turn.

If you want an explanation of an alert or any other call made by your opponents, you're entitled to look at their convention card and ask for more details. To save time and be courteous, do this only at your turn to call. If the explanation doesn't affect your bidding decision, wait until the auction is over to ask questions.

Rely on the director's help.

Don't be shy about calling the director. The players should never make their own adjustments for revokes, leads out of turn, insufficient bids or any other irregularities. The director is there to do it for you, so call if anything unusual happens.

Have fun and enjoy the social atmosphere.

Duplicate clubs are social groups, too, so greet your opponents when you start the round and, time permitting, enjoy a conversation with them. You'll find that duplicate players are intelligent (and often fascinating) people who welcome newcomers. Just by trying duplicate, you have something in common with every person there, so take advantage of the chance to get to know the players and learn from them. Most are happy to answer questions and will be flattered if you ask their advice after a hand.

You're ready!

Club and tournament players will tell you that once you experience the excitement and challenge of duplicate, party bridge will pale by comparison. The only way to find out is to try it for yourself.

Duplicate bridge is love at first deal for many rubber-bridge players. For others, it's an acquired interest that takes some time to develop. To find out how much enjoyment the game can offer, you need to give it a chance and play several times.



You can play in both the novice and open games at your local club. If you don't have a partner, call the director and ask to be matched up. If there's a tournament in your area, don't be afraid to give it a try, too. Tournaments are *not* just for experts. In fact, almost all tournaments cater to newcomers by offering special novice sections and point awards.

You probably won't win the first few times you play. And if you're like most new players (remember that everyone at the game was a once a first-timer), you'll come in last. But as you get to know the people and become more comfortable with the scoring and play -- and experience the excitement of winning your first masterpoints -- you'll be glad you kept trying. And you'll probably find your rubber-bridge game improves dramatically, too!

And finally . . . a quotation to give you inspiration:



"Of all competitive activities, bridge is unique because it offers you the opportunity to improve by competing against better players.

The amateur golfer can't play a foursome with Nicklaus; the average tennis player could never hope for a match against Navratilova. But even novice bridge players can sit down at a tournament and play against experts and world champions."

-- Mike Lawrence, bridge author & world champion

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