

52 FACTS OF BRIDGE LIFE

Good Advice To Give Your Partner

By Eddie Kantar

Surely a player of your bridge skills is familiar with most or all of the following tips you are about to read. But is your partner?

Tips 1-20 are bidding tips.

1. When partner bids two suits and you have an equal number of cards in each suit, take partner back to the first suit even if it means increasing the level. Just do it!

You hold: ♠ Axxx ♥ K10x ♦ Jxx ♣ xxx

Partner You

1♦ 1♠

2♥ ?

Bid 3♦. Raising hearts (see next tip) or passing partner's reverse, a one-round force, puts you back in kindergarten.

2. A direct raise of a second suit promises four card support (in blood).

You hold: ♠ xx ♥ A10x ♦ A10x ♣ K10xxx

Partner You

1♠ 2♣

2♥ ?

Rebid 2NT showing 11-12 high-card points. Don't even thinking of raising hearts with only three.

3. With two five-card suits: open with the higher ranking suit, respond in the higher ranking suit, and overcall in the higher ranking suit. Do not worry about which is the stronger suit.

You hold: ♠ x ♥ J10xxx ♦ AKQxx ♣ Kx

Open 1♥, not 1♦. Respond 1♥ to an opening 1♣ bid and overcall 1♥ if the opening bid to your right is 1♣.

4. When the bid to your right is strong, a jump by you is weak; when the bid to your right is weak, a jump by you is strong.

If partner opens 1♣ and RHO doubles, a jump to 2♠ by you is weak. If RHO opens 2♥ (weak), a jump to 3♠ by you is strong.

5. After you open 1♥ or 1♠ and partner responds 1NT denying support for your major, don't rebid your major unless you have a six-card suit.

6. When holding three four card suits and a singleton, open the bidding 1♦ unless your singleton is in diamonds! If it is, open 1♣. You should have at least 12 HCP to open the bidding with this distribution.

You hold: ♠ AKxx ♥ KJxx ♦ J10xx ♣ x Open 1♦.

7. A takeout double by a passed hand shows 9-11 HCP with shortness in the opener's suit. If the opponents have bid two suits, the double promises at least four-card support for both unbid suits.

You hold: ♠ AJxx ♥ xx ♦ KJ10xx ♣ xx

South (you)	West	North	East
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♥
Dbl.			

You show both unbid suits with your double. A 2♦ overcall might lose a spade fit.

8. A good idea when playing Blackwood is to count the king of the agreed suit as an ace! This is called 'Key Card Blackwood' or 'Five Ace Blackwood'. When using this convention do not contract for slam unless you have at least four of the five 'aces'.

9. When responding to a takeout double, jump the bidding in your long suit with 9-11 'revalued' points. An unbid five-card suit is worth 1 extra point and an unbid six-card suit is worth three extra points. Do not count points for jacks and queens in suits they have bid.

You hold: ♠ AQ10x ♥ Kxx ♦ xx ♣ 10xxx

West	North	East	South (you)
1♦	Dbl.	Pass	?

Jump to 2♠. Do not bid 1♠ which shows 0-8 points. Also, your jump is not forcing.

10. When responding to a takeout double with 12+ HCP, cuebid the opponent's suit to show a strong hand and then bid your suit(s) later. After you cuebid, any new suit bid by you is forcing.

You hold: ♠ KQxx ♥ AJxx ♦ Qxx ♣ xx

West North East South (you)
1♣ Dbl. Pass ?

Bid 2♣ to show a big hand (12+HCP). You and partner then bid four-card suits up the line until you connect in a 4-4 major-suit fit. If partner bids 2♦, bid 2♥; if partner bids 2♠, raise to 4♠. The one who knows, goes.

11. A 2NT response to a takeout double shows 10-12 HCP and is not forcing. A 1NT response to a takeout double shows 6-9 HCP similar to a 1NT response to an opening bid. Notrump responses to a takeout double guarantee at least one stopper (hopefully two), in the opponents' suit.

You hold: ♠ KJ9x ♥ xx ♦ Q10x ♣ Jxxx (or AJxx)

West North East South (you)
1♠ Dbl. Pass ?

With the ♣ Jxxx, respond 1NT. With the ♣ AJxx, respond 2NT. You don't need stoppers in the other suits. Partner is supposed to have them for the double.

12. If you play 'five-card majors', a short diamond should only be opened with 4-4 in the majors, three diamonds and two clubs.

The incidence of a 1♦ opening bid with this exact distribution is less than 3%.
Translation: When partner opens 1♦, assume partner has four or more diamonds.

13. After partner opens the bidding and second hand overcalls 1NT to show the strength of an opening 1NT bid, double for penalty if you have 9 or more HCP. Bidding a suit denies the strength to double.

You hold: ♠ 10x ♥ KJxx ♦ AJxxx ♣ J10

North East South (you) West
1♠ 1NT ?

Double. You have them outgunned. You should be able to defeat 1NT easily. If you bid 2♦, you are showing fewer than 9 HCP with at least five diamonds, usually six.

14. It is dangerous to count extra points for short suits or long suits before the bidding starts.

If partner bids your short suit, that reduces, not increases, the value of your hand. If one of your opponents bids your long suit, that decreases, not increases, the value of your hand. If you let the bidding develop, you will see whether your long or short suits are working for or against you.

You hold: ♠ Axxx ♥ x ♦ Qxxxx ♣ xxx

What is this hand worth? If partner opens 1♥, it is a minus 6-point hand. If partner opens 1♠, it is a 9-point hand (3 points for the singleton with four-card support). If LHO opens 1♦ and partner overcalls 1♥, the ♦Q has lost its value not to mention the fifth diamond. You are now looking at a minus 4-point hand! Be patient with distributional evaluations until you hear the bidding.

15. It is dangerous to use Blackwood holding a void. If you are missing two aces and partner shows one ace, you won't know which it is. It is usually better to cuebid when interested in a slam. Also, when responding to Blackwood, do not count a void as an ace. With one ace (or three) and a void, jump to the six level of the void suit if it is lower ranking than the trump suit. If the void suit is higher ranking than the trump suit, jump to the six level of the trump suit. With two aces and a void, respond 5NT.

16. When responding to an opening bid with two four-card majors, respond 1♥ and give partner a chance to rebid 1♠. If partner doesn't rebid 1♠, assume partner does not have four spades and bid accordingly.

You hold: ♠ AJxx ♥ KQxx ♦ Jx ♣ xxx

Partner	You
1♦	1♥
2♣	?

Rebid 2NT and limit your hand to 11-12 HCP. Do not rebid 2♣. Partner does not have four spades.

17. When the opponents bid and support each other and you have the jack or queen of their suit, do not count points for those honors. They are not worth the cardboard they are printed on.

Secondary honors may take tricks on defense, but seldom do when you are the declarer.

18. When all your honor cards are in your two long suits, add 1 extra 'purity' point.

You hold: ♠ AKJxx ♥ KQxx ♦ xx ♣ xx

All your high-card points are in your two long suits, so add 1 extra point to your hand. Think of having 14 points. If partner supports spades or hearts, your hand increases in value. If partner does not have support for either suit, your hand stays at 14 points. Hands that have eight-card fits or longer add extra distributional points. Until the fit is uncovered, distributional points should not be added. It doesn't make sense. Hands that are misfitted should not add extra points, they should subtract points!

19. When RHO uses Stayman and you, fourth hand, have five clubs or six clubs headed by three of the top five honors, double to alert your partner you want a club lead against any eventual contract. A double of an artificial bid is a lead directing double.

You hold: ♠ xxx ♥ xx ♦ xxx ♣ AKJxx

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♣	?

Double. You want a club lead against any eventual contract the opponents may land in. Do not double with club length (Kxxxxx) unless you have the necessary honor strength.

20. Also use the lead-directing double when the opponents go through Blackwood. If the response to 4NT is a suit you want led, double! Important!

You hold: ♠ xx ♥ xxx ♦ KQ10x ♣ xxxx

West	North	East	South (you)
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	?

Double 5♦ to alert partner you want a diamond lead against an eventual spade contract. At the four level or higher a double of an **artificial** bid can be made with a strong three or four card suit (KQx(x), KJx(x)). If you don't double 5♦, partner will make a negative inference that you didn't want a diamond lead.

Tips 21-40 are defensive tips:

21. When leading a suit partner has bid and you have supported, lead your highest card with three or four small cards.

The high card lead denies an honor, partner knows of your length. If you haven't supported, lead low from three or four small cards to deny a doubleton. The lead of a high spot card in partner's unsupported suit shows shortness. With three or four cards headed by an honor (10, J, Q or K) lead low whether or not you have supported. If you plan to lead partner's suit holding the ace, lead it.

22. If you lead ace from AKx(x) against suit contracts you should know: (1) The lead of the ace is a trick one convention. (2) After trick one, the king is led. (3) If the suit has been supported, the king is led. Leading the ace in a supported suit or in any suit partner has bid, supported or not, denies the king. (4) If the opponents wind up at the five or six level, the king is led. The lead of an ace at the five or six level, in theory, denies the king. (5) From AK doubleton, everything is reversed.

23. To lead top of a sequence at notrump, the suit should have three adjacent honors (KQJx(x)). However, the third card in the sequence can be missing by one place-KQ10x(x) is considered a sequence, KQ9xx is not and fourth highest should be led.

If the third card is missing by more than one place, lead fourth highest. From QJ942, lead the queen, but from QJ842, lead the four.

24. To lead an honor at a suit contract, only two adjacent honors are necessary and the top honor is led.

Lead the ace from AKx(x), the King from KQx(x), the Queen from QJx(x), the Jack from J10x(x), and the ten from 109x(x). At notrump, lead fourth highest from these combinations holding four or more cards in the suit. If you happen to have three cards headed by two adjacent honors (QJx), and think that is the suit to lead, lead the top honor and hope partner can work it out.

25. In general the lead of a low card shows strength and the lead of a relatively high spot card shows weakness. (See tip #29)

26. When partner leads low from length and dummy has small cards, third hand plays high. However, if third hand has two or three equal high cards, third hand plays the lower or lowest equal. (From K10x, play the king, from KQx, play the queen, from KQJ(x), play the jack.)

27. When returning the suit partner has led, with two cards remaining return the higher; with three cards remaining, return the lowest.

Say partner leads low and dummy has low cards. If you have A-10-5, play the ace and return the 10. If you have A-10-6-5, play the ace and return the 5.

28. When partner leads low from length and dummy comes down with an honor and you have a higher and a lower honor, insert the lower honor if dummy plays low.

Say dummy has the Q-5-4 or the J-5-4 and you have K-10-6(x). If dummy plays low, play the 10. Say dummy has the K-7-6 or the Q-7-6 and you have A-J-3(2). If dummy plays low, play the jack.

29. If partner leads a low card in one suit, gets in and shifts to a low card (showing strength) in another suit, partner wants a return in the second suit. If partner shifts to a high card in the second suit (top of nothing perhaps), he is asking for a return in the first suit. Got it?

30. One doesn't lead the same against 3NT as against 6NT. Against 6NT avoid leading from an honor unless you have a sequence.

With: ♠ K10763 ♥ J108 ♦ 85 ♣ Q92 Lead the ♠6 against 3NT, but the ♥J against 6NT. (If they have about 33 HCP, guess how many partner has!).

31. At notrump it is important to keep communications with partner's hand. If partner's lead looks like top of a doubleton, it's usually a good idea not to take the first trick. Let partner keep that second card so when he gets in he can return your suit.

This tip comes in very handy when you have A-K-x-x-x(x) with no outside entry. If you duck the first trick, partner will be able to return the suit when he gets in.

32. When declarer ignores a strong suit in dummy lacking one honor, assume declarer has the honor. If he doesn't, that would be the first suit he would be leading - the rule of 'Unattended Strong Suits'.

If you see something like the K-Q-J-10-(x) or A-Q-J-10-(x) in dummy and declarer plays other suits, assume declarer has the missing honor.

33. When there is a short side suit in dummy and declarer draws all of dummy's trumps, the inference is that declarer doesn't have any losers in that suit to ruff. Translation: It is safe to discard that suit.

34. When discarding, keep length parity with the dummy.

If dummy has four cards in a suit (A-K-Q-8), and you have four cards (9-4-3-2) one of which (the 9) could **conceivably** take a trick, be careful about discarding from that suit. Be very careful! Don't!

35. It is important to count declarer's tricks as the play progresses. If you find yourself on lead and can see that declarer has enough tricks in three suits to make the contract, shift to the fourth suit. Some chance is better than no chance.

36. When dummy tables, add declarer's likely point count to dummy's known point count.

The bidding has gone 1NT-3NT. Partner leads and dummy has 10 HCP. Say the opponents are playing a 15-17 notrump range. Assume declarer has the middle count, 16, and proceed from there. The opponents have 26 HCP, give or take 1 point, leaving you and partner with 14. You know how many you have, so it is easy enough to figure out how many partner has. Do it!

37. When defending a suit contract, there are two main techniques declarer uses to garner extra tricks: (1) setting up a long suit in dummy, (2) ruffing losers in the short hand (usually the dummy.) If dummy comes down with a long and a short suit and you have the long suit bottled up, lead trumps because the long suit is not usable. If it appears that the long suit is usable, play an attacking defense going for outside tricks quickly. If the dummy comes down balanced, declarer has no place to get rid of losers and will eventually lose them, therefore you and partner should adopt a passive defense. Avoid breaking new suits if possible. Let them have what they have coming. Sit back and wait for your tricks. Your day will come.

38. The best time to lead a short suit is with trump control. A-x(x) or K-x-x are great trump holdings to lead from shortness. However, if ruffing will cost you a trump trick, leads from shortness with trump holdings such as J-10-x-x, Q-J-9-x or K-Q-9-x are counter productive.

39. When signaling encouragement with equal spot cards, signal with the higher or highest equal.

With A-9-8-7, signal encouragement with the 9 (which denies the 10). If you lazily signal with the 8, you are denying the 9! Some partners actually watch stuff like that.

40. When giving partner a ruff, the card you lead is suit preference telling partner which suit to return after the ruff.

The return of a relatively high spot card asks for a return in the higher ranking of the two remaining suits. A return of your lowest card asks for a return in the lower ranking of the two remaining suits. The return of a middle card is designed to drive partner crazy. It actually means you have no preference.

Tips 41-52 are playing tips.

41. Before playing to the first trick, review the bidding and make sure you remember the opening lead.

Sometimes the opening lead is a small spot card and it is important to know exactly how small. If the opening leader later plays another small card in that suit, you really want to know whether it is a higher or lower card than the original lead. You really do!

42. If one (or both) of your opponents is a passed hand, assume that player has fewer than 12 HCP. If that player turns up with 10 HCP early on, play the partner for any missing queen, king, or ace.

43. There is nothing more important than counting your sure tricks before you begin to play.

At notrump count your sure tricks **outside** of the suit you plan to establish. This tells you how many tricks you need in your main suit and then play accordingly.

44. As declarer, when you can take a trick with one of two equal honors, take the trick with the higher equal. It is far more deceptive.

Say you are playing notrump with the ♠ KQx. If a low card is led and RHO plays the jack, assuming you wish to take the trick, take it with the **king**. Do the same with the A-Q-J. If a low card is led and the 10 comes up on your right, take it with the **queen**, not the jack! If you take tricks with lower equals, you might as well be playing with your cards face up on the table!

Major exception: With A-K-x-(x) at notrump take the first trick with the king. If you win with the ace, it is too suspect. If your only stopper is the ace, why aren't you holding up?

45. As declarer, when possible, withhold any spot card lower than the one that has been led or lower than the one played to your right.

If the opponents are playing standard signals, this tip is sure to screw them up. Say the 3 is led against notrump and dummy has the A-K-5 and you have the Q-6-2. You play the king from dummy and third hand plays the 4. If you play the 6, concealing the deuce, consider the confusion you have caused: fourth hand won't know if partner has led from a four- or five-card suit (can't see the deuce) and the opening leader won't know if partner is signaling with something like Q-4-2. (can't see the deuce). If you play the deuce at trick one, East knows that West has led from a four-card suit and West knows that partner's 4 is discouraging. For shame.

46. When leading from the dummy to take a finesse with a number of equal honors in your hand, finesse with the higher or highest equal.

Say you have the A-Q-J-10 in your hand and x-x in the dummy. When you lead low from dummy and second hand plays low, play the queen. You give away too much information if you play the 10. If the 10 loses to the king, second hand will **know** you still have the Q-J. If the queen loses to the king, second hand won't **know** you have the J-10. If the 10 wins, and second hand has the king, second hand knows you still have the Q-J. However, if the queen wins, second hand can't be sure you have the J-10.

47. When you have all the tricks but one and you are playing in a trump contract, play off every single one of your trump cards before you play your other suits. Keep the suit you have the loser in until the bitter end. Make them suffer!

Remember, the most you can lose is the last trick.

48. At a suit contract holding A-x-x facing x-x-x and the suit is led, it is usually right to win the second round of the suit.

If one of the opponents has a doubleton, you cut the communications between the two hands. It is also right to duck when dummy has x-x and you have A-x-x-(x). Ducking allows you to keep control of the suit. Do the same when dummy has A-x-x-(x) and you have x-x. Take the second trick with the ace. This assumes you have no place to put these losers.

49. Play the cards you are known to hold from the lead and third hand's play.

Say the queen is led and dummy has x-x-x-x. You, the declarer, have the K-J doubleton. When third hand plays the ace, the king and jack are **equals**; however, third hand knows you have the king from the lead of the queen, but doesn't know you have the jack. If you play the king under the ace, the jack remains a mystery card. The opening leader also knows you have the king from partner's play of the ace. Get rid of that king! Remember, you are not costing yourself a trick when you make these plays because you have an equal to the card you are unloading in either your hand or dummy. Say the jack is led, dummy has 9-x-x-x, and you have Q-10 doubleton. When third hand plays the king, drop the queen. Why? The queen is a card they **both** know you hold. Third hand knows it from the lead of the jack and the opening leader knows it from the play of the king. You might as well show them your hand if you don't play that queen!

50. When fortunate enough to have a powerful trump suit and being forced to ruff, tend not to ruff with your lowest trump. That tiny trump might be your only way to get to dummy.

51. When drawing trumps try to keep a flexible entry position after trumps are drawn.

Ideally you want to be able to enter dummy in the trump suit and also be able to enter your hand with a trump. Say you have the K-Q-J-4-3-2 and dummy has the A-10-5. If you play the ace and king, you have an entry to dummy with the 10 and you can get back to your hand by overtaking the 10. If you play the K-Q, you block the trump suit. You can get to dummy with the ace, but you can't get back to your hand with a trump.

52. If you have a number of equal honors and you want second hand to cover the first honor, lead your highest equal honor. If you don't want second hand to cover, lead your second highest equal honor. It works!

Say you have the Q-J-10-9-x of trump and dummy has the K-x-x. If there is a danger of a ruff, lead the jack. If second hand has the ace, he may duck thinking partner has the queen and the ruff may be lost. Say dummy has the A-Q-x-x without a side suit entry and you have J-10 doubleton. If you need three tricks in the suit, lead the 10. Second hand, holding the king, is apt to play low thinking partner may have the jack. You can then lead to the queen for three tricks. If second hand covers, the suit is blocked and you can take only two tricks.

#53 When dummy is expected to have a long strong suit at a suit contract and there are two unbid suits, lead from the stronger. However, if one of the suits is headed by the ace, lead from the other. If the two unbid suits look like: K-J-x-x and K-x-x-x, lead from the K-J-x-x suit. If the two suits are A-J-x-x and Q-x-x-x, lead from the queen suit.

#54 If you can see that there are no possible defensive tricks coming from the side suits, give declarer a ruff and a sluff. It often promotes a defensive trump trick.

#55 When declarer bids two suits, particularly if the first suit is a major, a 'tentative count' is available. Using that tentative count along with partner's opening lead often allows you to get a complete count on declarer's hand at trick one!

Example:	Opener	Responder
	1♥	1♠
	2♦	3♦
	3NT	Pass

Declarer is presumed to have five hearts and four diamonds. If partner's lead (♣2, say) gives you a count in that suit, you will have a count on the hand at trick one!

#56 Defenders take tricks with their lower or lowest equal. If you can take a trick with a jack or the queen, take it with the jack. Taking it with the queen denies the jack and can screw partner up.

#57 After partner has described his hand and you know what the final contract should be, bid it! The one who knows, goes! Say partner opens 1NT (15-17) and you have 18 HCP points, balanced. There are least 33 points between the two hands so bid 6NT! If leaping so high scares you, go to a mirror and say 6NT out loud. Do it!

#58 Best Bonus tip of all: DON'T BID THE SAME VALUES TWICE. DON'T PLAY WITH SOMEONE YOU DON'T LIKE. DON'T SCREAM AT YOUR PARTNER AND DON'T FORGET TO USE THESE TIPS UNLESS YOU WANT TO SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE STRUGGLING TO GET TO FIRST BASE....AMEN