SVEN’S HARDCOPY BRIDGE GUIDE

Self-Study Material

Includes an Introduction to
Sven’s Decision Tables
Sven’s Card Playing Strategies
Plus Information about
Sven’s Bridge Apps for iPhone and iPad

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of *Sven’s Hardcopy Bridge Guide* is to provide you with useful self-study material in hardcopy. It also provides you with an introduction to *Sven’s Decision Tables* and *Sven’s Card Playing Strategies*, both booklets available via [www.mybridgetools.com](http://www.mybridgetools.com).

In addition to this hardcopy guide, or as a good alternative, you may be interested in *Sven’s Bridge Apps* for the Apple iPhone and iPad. These can be downloaded from the Apple App Store. More information available via [www.mybridgetools.com](http://www.mybridgetools.com).

Bridge is an enormously popular card game played by millions of people around the globe. Many are members of a Bridge club, attending regular sessions playing Bridge and generally having a good time, possibly even participating in Bridge courses to improve their skills. It is my impression, however, that there are a great many people who, like me, prefer to play Bridge socially in a non-competitive environment such as their own homes without necessarily attending clubs or courses. People, who would be happy to do a bit of self-study if only they could find a good way of doing it. If you belong to this latter category of Bridge players, I think this document, my two Bridge booklets and my Bridge apps might be just what you need.

I am not a Bridge expert. I don’t even consider myself a Bridge teacher or a Bridge author. I am an engineer, a computer programmer and a skilled technical writer. For this reason, I deliberately did not write yet another Bridge book; there are enough of those already. Instead I designed a couple of practical tools for Bridge players. I decided to uncover some of the logic behind the most common bidding conventions and put my findings into practical, accurate and convenient lookup guides small enough to find space on the Bridge table. My Bridge tools are primarily intended for use when playing Bridge socially. No frills, no science, no waffle, just plain logic.

The trouble with Bridge is that it is too complicated to keep everything in your head. Since you can’t buy more memory you need a good tool that will help you solve at least part of the problem.

As reference material I do expect my Bridge tools to be useful in a teaching situation and certainly privately, where players are quite happy to allocate a little time for other players to find the best possible advice in a given situation. Personally, I am quite happy to wait a few moments every now and then, while my fellow Bridge players look it up, because that makes for a more satisfying game. Occasionally I look things up myself, even though I wrote it all.

Prerequisites

I am going to assume that you are familiar with the general concepts associated with card games, and I am going to assume that you have sat at a Bridge table before and that you are somewhat familiar with the general jargon (without necessarily knowing what it all means). If you want a refresher you might like to skim-read the sections called “Bridge Basics” and “Practical Housekeeping around the Bridge Table”.

This Document

What follows is effectively a guide to playing Bridge socially in the comfort of your own home. It includes a detailed explanation of how to use *Sven’s Hardcopy Decision Tables* and *Sven’s Hardcopy Card Playing Strategies* and is structured into the following sections:

- Bridge Basics
- How to use Sven’s Hardcopy Decision Tables
- How to use Sven’s Hardcopy Card Playing Strategies
- Practical Housekeeping around the Bridge Table
BRIDGE BASICS

This section is intended for players who have played other card games and now wish to have a go at Bridge. If you have already played Bridge for a while, you may not find anything new here, in which case you may as well go straight to the section entitled “How to Use Sven’s Decision Tables”. However, it will only take you a short time to read through the next few pages and familiarise yourself with my particular Bridge jargon.

The Game in A Nutshell

Bridge is arguably the world’s finest and intellectually most satisfying card game. It is not hard, but it does take both time and effort to learn.

Bridge is played by four players forming two competing partnerships (East/West against North/South). A standard pack of 52 playing cards is dealt into four hands, which means each player receives 13 cards. The Ace is the highest ranked card, the Two is the lowest ranked card.

The first phase of the game is called the Auction or the Bidding phase, in which each partnership attempts to predict the eventual outcome of the game (much more about bidding in the following sections). At the end of the auction, one of the partnerships will have declared a contract, a goal if you like, making a final prediction of the number of so-called “tricks” that partnership thinks it will be able to take in the contract they have declared. The opponents will be doing their best to defeat the contract.

In the second phase of the game, the Playing phase, all 13 tricks of the contract will be played out (four cards from each player making up a trick, with highest card winning the trick) and it will then become clear if the declared contract has been won or lost. The result (win or loss) will be scored according to an agreed set of scoring rules and then a new set of cards will be dealt for the next game.

What is a Bid?

A bid is an indication by one of the players, designed to communicate some piece of information to all three of the other players, in particular to partner. If a bid is not opposed by any of the other players, it becomes the contract in which one partnership will attempt to make a declared number of tricks (over and above the average of 6 tricks). For example, an unopposed bid of 1S (1♠) is an undertaking to make 6 + 1 = 7 tricks with Spades as the so-called trump suit. An unopposed bid of 3NT (three No Trump) is an undertaking to make $6+3 = 9$ tricks with none of the suits being able to trump a trick.

There are a few ways you can make your bid known to the other players. You can simply say the bid out loud, or you can write it down on a bidding pad, or you can show it by means of special bidding cards (used mainly by professionals and in some Bridge clubs). An even more fancy way of announcing your bids is to acquire a copy of Sven’s Bridge Bidding and Scoring Pad app for the Apple iPad, where you will enter your bids on a touch screen.

Some bids are totally artificial and as such they are intended merely to communicate some useful piece of information to partner, who will then use that information to determine an appropriate response. However, each and every bid follows a certain convention, which is an agreement between you and your partner as to what that particular bid is supposed to mean in a given situation. Unless you agree with your partner about a convention, you may have a hard time understanding what is going on.

The set of conventions you have agreed with your partner constitutes your bidding system. Over the years several “standard” bidding systems have become accepted amongst Bridge players all over the world, but they do vary considerably on certain issues. It does not matter a lot, however, which system you use, as long as it allows you and your partner to have a meaningful “conversation”, hopefully leading to a successful outcome.
Ranking of the Bids

A bid can be “cancelled” by a higher bid. For this reason, the bids are ranked as follows: Clubs ♠ (lowest), Diamonds ♦, Hearts ♥, Spades ♣, No Trump (highest).

How does the Bidding go?

The bidding goes in a clockwise direction starting with the Dealer. Each new bid must be higher than the previous bid, either at the same level in a higher ranked suit or in No Trumps (e.g. 1S beats 1H, 1NT beats any other bid at the 1-level), or at a higher level (i.e. a bid at the 2-level beats any bid at the 1-level). You are not compelled to make a competitive bid, meaning you can Pass (this is sometimes, a little misleading, also called a No Bid). The bidding is finished when a competitive bid is followed by 3 Passes (going, going, gone), whereby a Contract has been established for the Declarer (and his/her Dummy partner) to attempt. During the actual playing of the hands, the Opponents (also known as Defenders) will attempt to put a spoke in the wheels so-to-speak, and (if possible) prevent the Declarer from reaching the declared goal thereby defeating the contract.

The Opening Bid and Subsequent Bids

The very first bid (other than Pass) is known as the Opening Bid. The player making this bid is known as the Opener and his/her partner is known as the Responder. There is only one opening bid in each Auction. However, in response to the Opening Bid, the other partnership may make what is known as an Overcall. An overcall is similar to the opening bid, in fact it is a bid that is designed to compete with the opening bid and may in turn lead to a contract being declared by the overcalling partnership. As an alternative to making an overcall, the other partnership may make what is known as a Takeout Double, which is a communicative bid designed to save bidding space and telling partner that the opening could or should be challenged. A Takeout Double (as opposed to what is known as a “Penalty Double” is usually cancelled out immediately by the opposition or by partner making another bid, but it will have served its purpose of encouraging partner to possibly challenge the opening bid.

After a player has made an opening bid, a series of other bids follow, in which all four players engage in a kind of “conversation”. In each of the subsequent bids the players attempt to provide information, usually on the strength and shape of their respective hands, so that their partners can make good decisions as to whether they wish to pursue a particular contract. The section entitled “How to Use Sven’s Decision Tables” provides much more detail about bidding.

Finding a Fit and Choosing a Contract

The typical aim of the initial rounds of bidding is to find out if the partnership has what is known as a fit. A fit is a suit in which the partnership holds 8 or more of the 13 cards in that suit. If no fit can be found, the initial rounds of bidding may instead determine that the partnership holds what is called “No Trump” hands, in which case the final contract might become a No-Trump contract.

The aim of subsequent bidding is to declare and eventually win a contract, whereby the winning partnership will score points on the scoresheet (Scoring Pad).
Declaring a Contract

Once a bid remains unopposed (i.e. is followed by three Passes), the contract is said to have been declared. The contract will then be played by the player who first identified the type of contract now declared. This player is called the Declarer and his/her partner is called Dummy. The players of the other partnership are called the Defenders.

How does the Playing go?

Once the bidding has ended and a contract has been declared, the playing of the cards begins in the clockwise direction starting with the player following the Declarer. That player (in Seat 2) will lead a card to the first trick (the Opening Lead) and at that point in time all cards held in Dummy’s hand (Seat 3) are put down on the table face up and nicely sorted for everyone to see. Trumps (if any) go on Dummy’s right.

For every trick being played each player places a card in front of the player face up for everyone to see, usually and conveniently the card is placed on the pile of tricks already taken. Whenever it is Dummy’s turn, a card will be played from Dummy’s hand at the request of Declarer. Dummy has no further role except to watch out for possible mistakes made by one or more of the other players.

The player (and the partnership) who puts out the highest card wins the trick. At that point each of the four cards making up the trick are turned over but not collected. Instead, the four cards are placed face down in front of each player and orientated such as to indicate which partnership won the trick (this may be helpful should uncertainty arise at a later stage of the game as to who won a particular trick). The player from whose hand the trick was won will then lead to the following trick.

Players must follow suit if they can. If the bidding resulted in a suit being named as the trump suit, then a card from that suit may be used for trumping a trick, but only if a player is not able to follow suit. In that case the player who puts out the (highest) trump card takes the trick and that player will therefore lead to the following trick.

This process now continues until all 13 tricks have been played and the score (win or loss) is then recorded. If the Declarer won the contract (by taking at least the contracted number of tricks), points will be awarded in favour of the Declarer’s partnership. If the Declarer lost the contract (by not achieving the declared number of tricks), points are awarded in favour of the Defenders.
How Strong is Your Hand?

When you first open your hand after counting the 13 cards you have been given, you will immediately be able to see at a glance whether you have a weak, average or strong hand (but don’t let this show on your face and don’t make any comments that could give away information). One indication is the number of “picture” cards, also known as Honour cards (Aces, Kings, Queens and Jacks) held on the hand. However, the presence of high cards is not the only indicator of strength. Just as important is their distribution amongst the suits and the lengths of the suits. This latter indicator is often referred to as the shape of the hand.

To get a useful quantitative measure of hand strength it has become common to perform an initial evaluation of you hand by counting the so-called “High Card Points” (HCPs) as follows:

- **Ace** = 4 HCPs
- **King** = 3 HCPs
- **Queen** = 2 HCPs
- **Jack** = 1 HCP

If you have all four Honour cards in a suit, the strength of that suit is 10 HCPs. Altogether there are 40 HCPs in the pack, but the number of HCPs on a hand may be as low as 0 or as high as 37 (4 Aces, 4 Kings, 4 Queens and 1 Jack).

If all four players turn out to have been given about 10 HCPs each, it is not uncommon for them all to Pass and the hand will then be thrown in as not worth pursuing.

Conversely, it is when one partnership has significantly more HCPs than the other partnership that the game becomes interesting. The secret then is how to communicate the strength and shape of your hand to your partner through the bidding and for that you need a method.
HOW TO USE SVEN’S HARDCOPY DECISION TABLES

We are about to take a good look at Sven’s Decision Tables by means of typical examples.

Making an Average Opening Bid and Responding

Imagine you have dealt yourself the following hand:

Since you were the Dealer, you are also the first person to be given the opportunity to bid.

The first thing you do is count your High Card Points (HCPs), remembering that Ace= 4 HCPs, King = 3 HCPs, Queen = 2 HCPs and Jack = 1 HCP:

$$4 + 3 + 3 + 1 + 1 + 4 = 16$$

In this case you have 16 HCPs on your hand, which is well above the average of 10, so there is little doubt that your hand qualifies for an opening bid.

Which one?

Here is the first half of the OPENINGS decision table from Sven’s Decision Tables booklet:

This page shows the lower ranges of the opening bids (less than 20 HCPs). The grey area at the top tells you something about opening bids. The lower ranges of opening bids are called “Weak Hands” (6-9 HCPs) and “Average Hands” (10-19 HCPs).
Your hand fits the description shown under 15-17 HCPs:

Your hand is perfectly balanced, you don’t have a 5-card Major and you have 16 HCPs. You are clearly entitled to Open 1NT.

The player on your left (in Seat 2) is now given the opportunity to make a bid. Let’s imagine that player has been dealt the following cards:

This hand of 4 HCPs is obviously not strong enough to oppose your opening bid of 1NT, so it will be Passed (had the hand been stronger it might have qualified for a so-called “overcall”, but we won’t go into that just now).

Your 1NT opening bid is therefore unopposed so far, and it is now your partner’s turn to bid. Both you and your partner know exactly what that opening bid means. In addition, your partner has been given the specific instruction “To respond, partner goes to 1NT table”.

Therefore, your partner will now turn to the 1NT Decision Table, which begins like this:

Again, the grey bit at the top is worth reading.
In the 1NT decision table your partner will take a look at the **Your Hand** column to determine if a response should be made.

Let’s imagine partner’s hand looks like this:

![Partner’s Hand Image]

As you can see, your partner happens to have a hand that matches **Hand B** (4-card Major suit, 9+ HCPs). Looking in the **You can now Advise Your Partner** column your partner therefore bids 2♣, which is the conventional way of asking if you (the Opener) have a 4-card Major suit on your hand (this is called the “Stayman” convention, but don’t let that bother you at the moment).

Because of partner’s 2♣ bid, you (the Opener) are directed to **Go to 1NT 4** for your next bid a bit further on in the same table (row 4):

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**WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN AFTER 1NT OPENING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opener’s Second Bid After 1NT Opening</th>
<th>1NT 1-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your Partner’s Bid was</strong></td>
<td><strong>You can now Advise Your Partner</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2NT: Your partner has 8-10 HCPs and wants to leave NT game decision to you.</td>
<td>With 15-16 HCPs: Pass closing off. With 17+ HCPs: 3NT closing off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 4♣ (Gerber): Your partner has 13-14 HCPs and wants you to indicate the number of Aces in your hand to assist in assessing the possibility of a Small Slam in NT.</td>
<td>With 0 or 4 Aces: Bid 4♥ inviting Small Slam Go to 1NT 9. With 1 Ace: Bid 4♥ inviting Small Slam Go to 1NT 9. With 2 Aces: Bid 4♥ inviting Small Slam Go to 1NT 9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 8NT: Your partner has 15+ HCPs and wants you to consider Grand Slam in NT.</td>
<td>With 15-16 HCPs: Pass closing off at Small Slam. With 17+ HCPs: 7NT attempting Grand Slam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 2♠ (Stayman): Your partner has 9+ HCPs and a 4-card Major. Your partner wants you to indicate your best 4-card major (if any).</td>
<td>With a 4-card major: Bid 2 of 4-card Major leaving decision to your partner Go to 1NT 6. Without a 4-card major: Bid 2♣ denying 4-card major Go to 1NT 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 2♣ or 2♥ (Jacoby Transfer): Your partner has a long ♥ or ♦ suit and wants to prevent your strong hand from becoming Dummy. Prior to making your bid you are obliged to “alert” the opposition as to the meaning of your partner’s Transfer bid. You will do this either by saying “Alert” (or by encircling the bid on the bidding pad), indicating that your partner has just made a bid with a special meaning. Only then may Opponents request clarification, if required.</td>
<td>If your Partner bid 2♣: Bid 2♥ Go to 1NT 8. If your Partner bid 2♠: Bid 2♠ Go to 1NT 8.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For your second bid, the **1NT 4** row gives you two options to choose from.

Looking at your hand again you see this:

![Your Hand Image]

You determine that you do indeed have a 4-card Major Spade suit, in this case even a good one, so you bid 2♠ hoping for a fit with partner’s hand.
Partner is given the specific instruction **Go to 1NT 6:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Partner's Bid was</th>
<th>You can now Advise Your Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>With a Fit Bid Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With 0-7 HCPs and a 5+ card Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bid 3 of 6-card Major closing off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>With 0-7 HCPs Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With 0-7 HCPs and 5-card Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bid 2NT closing off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>With all 4 Aces: Bid 5-6: asking for Kings (Gerber Convention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go to 1NT 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With 8-10 HCPs and 5-card Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>raising Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go to 1NT 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With 11+ HCPs and 6-card Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>raising by 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go to 1NT 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Without all 4 Aces: Bid 3NT closing off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, as we have seen, partner only has three Spades, which means there is no fit with your 4-card Spade suit. Partner therefore chooses to **Bid 2NT** and this bid is followed by 3 Passes.

This is how the bidding went: 1NT, /, 2C, /, 2NT, /, /, /. Three players have passed which means the bidding has gone from an opening bid of 1NT to a contract declaration of 2NT.

Because you opened with a bid of 1NT and the contract ended up in your favour as 2NT you are deemed to be the Declarer and your partner will be Dummy. The contract you declared was 2NT and you will now try to take at least 8 tricks to win this contract.

Looking at this screenshot showing you the entire bidding trail on a bidding pad you may wonder where that came from. To find out you might like to visit [www.mybridgetools.com/apps](http://www.mybridgetools.com/apps). There you will see that I have created a few Bridge applications for iPads and iPhones. This particular screenshot was produced by means of my **Bridge Bidding and Scoring Pad** (Bridge BSP), which is an administrative tool to help you keep track of the bidding and scoring.

**CONGRATULATIONS:**

That’s it in a nutshell. You have used Sven’s Hardcopy Decision Tables to move forwards from table to table based upon decisions made earlier. In the process of doing so, you and your partner have been exchanging specific information helping your partnership to arrive at the best possible contract.

In the same manner you can use Sven’s Decision Tables to make a Strong or a Weak opening, or an Overcall, or a Double or a Response to any of these. The methods are the same and hopefully you now have a good idea of how the tables are constructed and how they can help you.
What if Opponents Interfere in the Bidding?

By now you may have developed the false impression that Sven’s Decision Tables will always lead you from one bid to the next in perfect logical progression. You may be disappointed to learn that this is not necessarily what will happen, especially if the opponents interfere in the bidding.

Unfortunately, opponents do interfere in the bidding for about 50% of the time. After all they are called the opposition for a reason. What then? Well, the decision tables may still help but you may suddenly find that the recommended bidding is not available or obviously just plain wrong. This is where you suddenly have to start thinking instead of merely looking it up.

The problem is that if opponents interfere in the bidding they will usually rob you of bidding space. Your perfect opening bid of 1H cannot be followed by partner bidding 2H, if opponents have interfered with a 2S bid. Your partner has been robbed of valuable bidding space and what the decision tables tell him/her to do cannot be done. However, as mentioned, in many cases the decision tables are still useful. All you need to do is interpret them in a slightly different manner, usually by an appropriate increase in the level of bidding. Obviously, this needs to be dealt with in an intelligent manner and on a case-by-case basis. You can’t just “bid 3 instead of 2” without thinking about it, because that may be raising the bidding to an unsustainable level and, worse still, it may indeed send the wrong message to your partner.

There will be a number of cases where you will be looking in vain for your next bid. Imagine you have made a weak 2D opening bid and your left-hand opponent suddenly overcalls 4NT because he/she is staring at 25 HCPs and just needs an Ace and a King in your hand to go for a Slam contract. In trying to respond to your weak two opening your partner can forget trying to look it up in the decision tables because there simply won’t be anything in there to cover a situation like that.

Summa Summarum

Sven’s Decision Tables constitute an eminently practical tool that you can use at the Bridge table (if the other players are happy with it) to quickly look up what your bidding options are in a given situation.

Sure, a normal Bridge book might also provide you with the same information, but you won’t be able to find it quickly enough for it to be practical at the Bridge table (in fact, you’d need to have more than one book handy, which would not be practical at all).

Sven’s Decision Tables cannot always be taken literally. In many cases their interpretation needs to be modified or adapted to suit changing circumstances.

However, using Sven’s Decision Tables is likely to vastly improve the quality of your bidding, because you and your partner both agree upon what your bids are supposed to mean.
HOW TO USE SVEN’S HARDCOPY CARD PLAYING STRATEGIES

The truth is that you can be brilliant at bidding, but it is all to no avail, if you can’t follow it up with equally good playing of the cards.

Playing to Win a Contract

The bidding is over and done with, and you have declared a contract. Now it’s time for a bit of planning, but you’ll have to wait until your left-hand opponent has produced the opening lead (card led to first trick). Once that has happened your partner’s cards go down on the table open for you and everyone else to see. Your partner, also known as Dummy, has no role in the playing of the cards, except to make sure that none of the three other players make a mistake, such as leading from the wrong hand.

This where many players get blinded by Aces and Kings into thinking that they have to start taking tricks right away. Instead, I recommend that you spend a minute or two taking stock of what you have in your own and Dummy’s hand. If the contract requires you to win 9 tricks and you can see only 7 certain tricks, obviously you’ll have to make 2 more tricks somewhere and that can best be recognised and planned right at the beginning.

Sven’s Card Playing Strategies provide annotated examples of recommended Declarer Strategies under the following headings:

- **Counting Certain Tricks (6 Examples)**. In each suit you will be able to count certain tricks and find out if and where you have losers.
- **Taking Certain Tricks (3 Examples)**. Your certain tricks in long suits may not all be successful if you don’t do it in the right sequence.
- **Predicting Trump Split (3 Examples)**. How are the missing trumps split between the two opponent hands? Is it 2-3, 1-4 or 0-5?
- **Ruffing (3 Examples)**. Taking a trick by trumping with low cards needs to be considered before pulling the trumps.
- **Pulling Trumps (3 Examples)**. At the right time in a suit contract, weaken the opposition by pulling some or all of the outstanding trumps.
- **Finessing (3 Examples)**. An attempt to win the current trick and/or a later trick with a certain card of the suit led, although the opponents hold a higher card in the suit, by taking advantage of the positioning of particular cards in opponent hands.
- **Early Leads Using “Rule of Eleven” (2 Examples)**. Leading 4th best ending up winning the trick on a fairly low card.
- **Taking Long Suit Tricks (3 Examples)**. It may be possible to make even small cards of a long suit win a trick once the high cards have gone. The secret is to take the tricks in the short hand first.
- **Promoting Honours (3 Examples)**. Once the opponents’ high honour cards are out of the way your promoted honours may win.
- **Retaining Entries (3 Examples)**. How to make sure you can get back into a hand where tricks can still be taken.
- **Holding Up Play Using “Rule of Seven” (3 Examples)**. At times holding back and ducking one or more tricks may not be a bad idea.
Example of a Declarer Strategy (Counting Certain Tricks)

Let’s look at what Sven’s Card Playing Strategies booklet says about this:

Here we see in the “My Strategies” column that a Certain Trick (CT) is defined as a trick that can be taken without losing the lead. The recommendation is to count your combined CTs in your own and Dummy’s hands.

In the “Examples of how to do it” column we see 6 examples of holdings in your own and Dummy’s hands. Try to work through the 6 examples and see if you agree with the CT counts.

Playing to Defeat a Contract

The bidding is over and done with, and the opponents have declared a contract. Together with your partner your task is to defeat that contract, if possible.

Sven’s Card Playing Strategies provide annotated examples of recommended Defender Strategies as follows:

• **Opening Lead to a No Trump Contract** (4 Examples). The contract is often won or lost already at the first trick. So, try to come up with a good opening lead.

• **Opening Lead to a Suit Contract** (4 Examples). Again, the contract is often won or lost already at the first trick. So, try to come up with a good opening lead.

• **Second Hand Play** (3 Examples). Often, but not always, the second person plays low.

• **Third Hand Play** (4 Examples). Often, but not always, the third person plays high.

Example of a Defender Strategy (Opening Lead)

Let’s look at what Sven’s Card Playing Strategies booklet says about this:

In the “My Strategies” column we see some comments about the opening lead, followed by a list of popular opening leads.
In the “Examples of how to do it” column we see 8 examples of hands from which to make an opening lead. Try to work through the 8 examples and see if you agree with the recommended opening lead in each of the 8 examples.

In exactly the same manner Sven’s Card Playing Strategies provide recommendations for Second Hand Play and Third Hand Play. By studying Sven’s Card Playing Strategies you and your partner are likely to be more successful in preventing Declarers from winning their contracts.

**Summa Summarum**

**Confession:** Just as I did with the bidding I would have loved to present you with a set of decision tables for the playing of the cards. I am still working on it, but part of the problem is the immense number of different deals you may come across. You may be surprised to learn that that there are no less than 53,644,737,765,488,792,839,237,440,000 different deals you may be asked to play. Over 53 octillions! A staggering number indeed. I found it in the Help file of Jack 4.0, the best computer Bridge program I know ([www.jackbridge.com](http://www.jackbridge.com)).

So far, the best I have been able to come up with are carefully selected examples of strategies that I believe will help you to win tricks more often than not.
PRACTICAL HOUSEKEEPING AROUND THE BRIDGE TABLE

Bidding for a contract and playing to actually win it are certainly the main objectives in a game of Bridge. However, there are a few items of housekeeping you will also need to master as part of your ability to play Bridge, for example how to deal the cards. What’s so difficult about dealing 52 cards into 4 hands I hear you say, and you may indeed consider these things to be a bit tedious and of little importance. The fact is, however, that Bridge players who are not mere beginners expect you to automatically do things in a certain way in order to speed up the game. For example, they don’t like to waste time on trying to figure out who is supposed to deal the cards for the next hand, instead they place the shuffled cards in a specific location making it quite clear who is the next dealer.

Shuffling the Cards

After shuffling the cards, the shuffler puts them down in a pile on his/her right, ready for next deal. This helps to keep track of who is to deal the next hand.

Cutting and Dealing the Cards

After a game has been scored, the new Dealer takes the new pile of cards on the left and moves it over to the player on the right asking for the pack to be cut in half (this is intended to prevent cheating by Shuffler, who does theoretically have the opportunity to determine what the last card in the pack is (but of course you would never do a thing like that). The cards are then dealt into four hands right in front of the dealer, beginning with the hand intended for the player to the left of Dealer. If no errors have been made during the dealing, the last card should fall in Dealer’s position. It is customary for each player to count the cards before looking at them to make sure that exactly 13 cards have been received. That way any error in the dealing can easily be resolved. If you don’t develop a habit of counting the cards before beginning the bidding, the game may have to be abandoned during the playing once it is discovered that one player had 14 cards, and another had 12 to start with.

Using the Bidding Pad

Sven has designed a convenient Bridge Bidding and Scoring Pad (Bridge BSP) app for shared use on an iPad tablet computer in the middle of the Bridge table. For more information on Bridge BSP see the My Bridge Tools website at www.mybridgetools.com.

If you do not have an iPad tablet computer or if you prefer a good old-fashioned hardcopy bidding pad a PDF version can be found at webpage www.mybridgetools.com/downloads. The document is designed for double-sided printing on A4 paper.

Making Sure the Opening Lead is Made by the Correct Player

As soon as the contract has been declared, the first card needs to be played by the correct player, namely the player to the left of Declarer. To avoid the opening lead inadvertently being played by the wrong player, the selected card is first placed face down on the table until partner has confirmed (usually by nodding) that the card is indeed being played by the correct player. If you are using Bridge BSP, the app will tell you who is to deal.

Putting Dummy’s Cards Down on the Table

As soon as the opening lead has been played by the correct player, Dummy’s cards go down on the table open for everyone to see. To make it easier for Declarer to play Dummy’s cards it is customary to sort them into suits and to place the trump suit (if any) on Dummy’s right. In each suit the cards are sorted with the lowest cards being on top and arranged such that Declarer has a good view of all the cards, especially the honour cards.
Placing of Cards to a Trick

The card played by each player to a trick is most conveniently placed in front of the player (rather than thrown into the middle of the table). Each card played is placed down face up in front of the player open for everyone to see (do not hide it with your hand). When playing a card to the second and following tricks, it is convenient to place the card open on the pile of tricks already played in front of the player. This makes it clear that the card has been played (especially for Dummy). When all four players have played a card to a trick it is clear who won it. To indicate this, each of the four cards are turned over and orientated such that they point with the long side towards the partnership who won the trick. This makes it easy to count the tricks won by each partnership so far, as well as at the end of the round. Since all four players do this separately, it is easy to resolve any disputes over who won a given trick. Dummy usually takes responsibility for checking that the cards are orientated correctly so as not to confuse the players.

Using the Scoring Pad and the Scoring Tables

For more information about Sven’s Bridge Bidding and Scoring Pad app for the iPad, see the My Bridge Tools website at www.mybridgetools.com.

If you do not have an iPad tablet computer or if you prefer good old-fashioned hardcopy, a PDF version a convenient set of Scoring Tables for scoring three Rubbers and a Scoring Pad and can be found at webpage www.mybridgetools.com/downloads.

After the thirteen tricks have been played, the scorer will agree with the other players what the contract was (perhaps even recording this on the Scoring Pad). It will be agreed what the outcome was (won or lost and by how much) and the score will be recorded above and/or below the red line on the Scoring Pad in the appropriate column (the actual scores can be found using Sven’s Scoring Tables).

At the end of each rubber the scorer will award rubber bonus, add it all up and transfer the totals to the top portion of the Scoring Pad. Eventually the final ranking can also be recorded, if you wish.
Common Sense Etiquette

Playing Bridge socially is usually less formal than playing Bridge in a club. However, etiquette applies in both cases. You are expected to be well-mannered and courteous. Beyond that, probably the most important etiquette rule to live by is never to verbally or otherwise give away information. For example, when you first open your new hand, don’t shake your head in disgust because that tells the other players something they shouldn’t know at this stage. It is probably best to keep conversation to a minimum, although in a social setting this would vary a lot depending on player preference. Here are a few other “Do’s and Don’ts”:

- Pay attention to the game (otherwise you might miscount the trumps or make other silly mistakes). In a social setting this is often hard to do because intermittent conversation is permissible though undesirable.
- Always be aware of which hand took the trick, so that you will know from where to lead to the next trick. Always leading from the correct hand demonstrates that you are “in the game”. Frequently leading from the wrong hand demonstrates the opposite.
- Don’t make any comments (gratuitous or otherwise) during the bidding or the playing of the cards. Even the slightest comment can carry information the opponents shouldn’t have.
- Bid and play at a steady speed. Hesitation gives away information. Also, don’t mislead by time-wasting. Taking too long can make the game a bit boring for the other players.
- Don’t detach a card before it is your turn to play and don’t give away information by rearranging the suits on hand. Doing so gives the opposition information they shouldn’t have.
- At the end of playing a hand don’t collect the cards for shuffling until the score has been recorded on the score sheet.
Giving Up Bridge?

I can't stand the hassle, I can't stand the pain. I'm getting those bad cards again and again. I'm giving up Bridge – Tonight is a bad night. Declarer is horrid - Nothing's gone right.

I'm giving up Bridge – Tonight is my last night. It's Amen to Stayman – Yes, I give up the fight. So for now it's all over - I'm off to the backwood. I'm bidding goodbye to Gerber and Blackwood.

My partner's a dope and I'm losing all hope. When he says "double" I know we're in trouble. My points are not high and I wonder why he keeps on bidding right into the sky.

You force your partner and yet he passes, you deny, and yet he still bids high. The score on the other side amasses, and yet, you do not utter even a sigh.

We're in Seven Spades and all hope fades, when surprise, surprise, the high bidding pays. We're winning all tricks; the defenders feel sick, I have to admit my partner's a brick.

Anon (slightly edited)