



*How to improve your  
Bridge Game  
at any level*

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Geeske Joel

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# Geeske Who....???

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- ❖ pronounce it “Gayska”
  - ❖ I am a German native
  - ❖ I lived in the Bay Area for over 25 years
  - ❖ I used to be an excellent soccer player
  - ❖ I have a Ph.D. in Biology
  - ❖ I used to be a professional puppy trainer
  - ❖ I play bridge
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# So what makes me the expert?

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*Well, actually I am **not** a bridge expert...*

- only playing for 10 years
- started way too late in life
- not necessarily a “natural”

*....**BUT** I am very ambitious!*

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# An Expert in “learning” bridge

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It helps if you have a knack for the game but there is hope that not only raw talent determines your success

- M. Gladwell in “The Outlier” argues practice is the key to success and 10,000+ hours will get you there
  - D. Shenk supports the notion talent is overrated and practice makes perfect in “The Genius in all of us”
  - Dr. A. Ericsson (FSU) believes *deliberate* practice is the key to success
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# Bridge is a really, really hard game!

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..and we all know  
the feeling:



# Looking for the magic formula

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Unfortunately there is no magic involved  
BUT





I discovered a few useful tricks, tools and ideas  
of how to maximise your learning efforts.

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# Conventional Wisdom

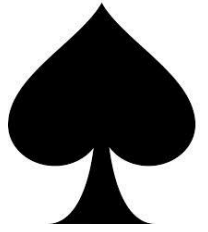
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*When you ask an Expert: “How can I become better?” and you will hear:*

-  *Play a lot*
  -  *Read a lot*
  -  *Focus*
  -  *Find the optimal partnership(s)*
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# Play alot

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*We all love to Play, Compete, and to Win.*

- *BUT* in order to learn we need to realize, playing alone is not enough!

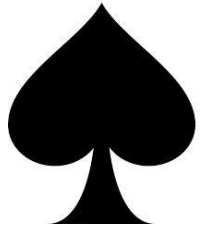
*Understand what happened and why*

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# Play a lot

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View every time you play as a learning opportunity

- learn from your mistakes
    - discuss the boards with better players
    - use the hand records and Bridge Composer Results
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<http://www.paloaltobridge.com/games/gameresults.php>

TGIF AM Bridge (C) (D) (H)

**Board 6**  
 East Deals  
 E-W Vul

♠ A 9 5 4  
 ♥ A 10 8  
 ♦ Q 6  
 ♣ Q J 8 4

♠ 10 6  
 ♥ K Q 9  
 ♦ A J 8 4  
 ♣ 10 7 6 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 8 3  
 ♥ J 4 2  
 ♦ K 7 3  
 ♣ A K 3

♠ K 7 2  
 ♥ 7 6 5 3  
 ♦ 10 9 5 2  
 ♣ 9 5

EW 3N; EW 2♠; EW 2♥; EW 2♦; EW 2♣; Par -600

Contract	By	Made	Scores		Matchpoints		Pairs
			N-S	E-W	N-S	E-W	
3 NT	W	-2	200		17.00	1.00	A4-Bowman-Wheeler vs A7-Banda-Murakami
3 NT	W	-2	200		17.00	1.00	A5-Chambers-Bernstein vs A9-Cassidy-Anderson
3 NT	E	-2	200		17.00	1.00	B3-Robinson-Kridl vs B5-Sharma-Kitchener
3 ♦	W	-1	100		14.00	4.00	B5-Arnold-Ishikawa vs B9-McEleney-Frye
3 NT	W	-1	100		14.00	4.00	B7-Wolf-Brigham vs B6-Lipe-Lipe
3 ♣	E	-1	100		14.00	4.00	B9-Hsu-Tseng vs B1-Chen-Chi
1 NT	W	1		90	10.50	7.50	A9-Kado-Samuels vs A1-Agarwal-Thatte
1 NT	W	1		90	10.50	7.50	A10-Williams-Schwartz vs A3-Zoellner-Livenspargar
1 NT	E	1		90	10.50	7.50	B2-Desu-Shukov vs B2-Shea-Gambelin
1 NT	W	1		90	10.50	7.50	B10-Williams-Kelsey vs B3-Chambers-Herrmann
2 ♥	S	-2	100	8.00	10.00	10.00	A2-Levy-Yates vs A2-Layendecker-Geno
1 NT	W	2	120	5.50	12.50	12.50	A1-Leitstein-Harbatkin vs A10-Atherton-Sheppard
1 NT	W	2	120	5.50	12.50	12.50	A7-Malek-Hafezi vs A6-Baldwin-Palmer
2 NT	E	2	120	5.50	12.50	12.50	A8-Orelove-McLaughlin vs A8-Bockmann-Green
1 NT	W	2	120	5.50	12.50	12.50	B8-Lee-Oliff vs B8-Drew-Bao
2 NT	E	3	150	2.50	15.50	15.50	A3-Singer-Chen vs A5-Tsou-Cheng
1 NT	W	3	150	2.50	15.50	15.50	A6-McLaughlin-Lane vs A4-Andrews-Chasalow
3 NT	W	3	600	0.50	17.50	17.50	B4-Bozzini-Lachman vs B7-Burnett-Luttrell
3 NT	W	3	600	0.50	17.50	17.50	B6-Gumucio-Swenson vs B4-Giancarlo-DeGolia

# Every hand is a learning opportunity

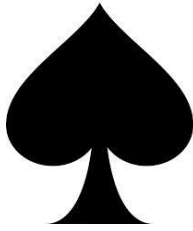
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Bridge is a game of pattern recognition

- Recognize the familiar pattern of a hand
    - This is a hand where I need to establish a long suit
    - This is a hand where I need to cross ruff
    - This is a hand where I have to eliminate suits
    - This is a hand only a bad trump split will set it
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# Distinguish between play and Play

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- without focus there will be no learning
  - try to get mentally into the zone
  - especially on the computer it is easy to “just play for fun”
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# Computers for deliberate Practice

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I personally find it much more engaging to work with an interactive program than to read a book.

- *But you need to make sure you keep your focus and your goal in mind!*
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# For Declarer Play Practice

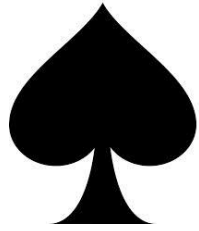
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- Programs I have used
    - Bridge Master 2000
    - Programs by Bergen, Cohen, Kantar, Lawrence, etc.
      - Keep a journal on how you did on the hands; see whether you solved them right away, second try etc. Revisit hands a couple of month later and see your improvement
    - Robots on BBO (Bridge Base Online)
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# BBO is a fantastic Learning Tool<sub>1</sub>

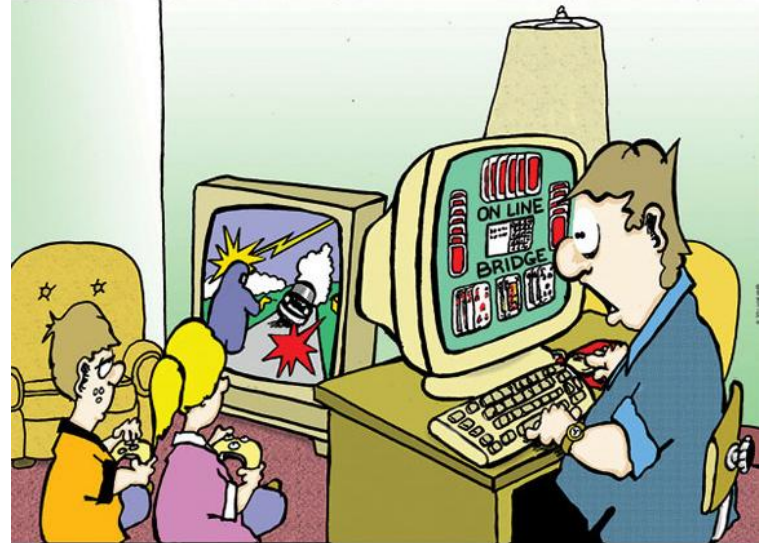
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- Web-based Bridge Club
- Free membership
- Some free play
- Hire robots to play against
- Play in Tournaments (ACBL or not) for a modest fee
- Partnership Bidding Function

**OUT OF HAND**

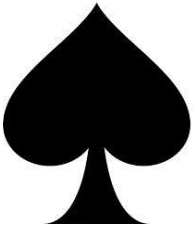
**BY BILL BUTLER**



“ You kids should learn bridge....then you wouldn’t spend so much time in front of that stupid TV ! “

# BBO is a fantastic Learning Tool<sub>1</sub>

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...when used properly!

- Practice against BBO Robots, BUT play very deliberately
    - set a goal and work on specific techniques when playing
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# BBO is a fantastic Learning Tool

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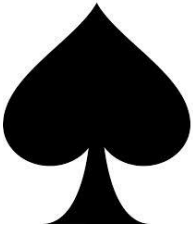


...when used properly!

- set up dates with your partner
  - playing with random people is not really as useful for practice
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# BBO is a fantastic Learning Tool

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- work with a teacher
    - Bidding practice
    - Declarer Play practice
      - the teacher defends by playing the opponents hands
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# Play in Tournaments

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Constantly challenge yourself!

- Look for better competition
  - Try to focus on how you played not how you placed
  - Don't be shy to ask better players for advice
    - Having dinner with a group of good players can be very educational
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# Read a lot

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We cannot avoid reading if we want to learn!

## OUT OF HAND

BY BILL BUTLER



“ Did you notice not one of your bridge partners forgot you? -  
FOURTEEN new books on improving your play !! “

# Read a lot

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- There are great books out there
  - Better Bridge Magazine by Audrey Grant
  - Bridge Bulletin has something for everybody
  - Bridge World is challenging but rewarding
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# Reading on the go

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- Some books or book pages are great
    - E. Kantar's "Take your Chances", "Take your Tricks" books are perfect for reading while waiting for the doctor (you might even cut out a few pages at the time if you do not want to carry the whole book)
  - Calendar Pages are perfect for on the go
  - Bridge Quizzes as phone apps
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# Read a lot

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## Bridge Sites on the Internet

- Bridge Blogs
- Vu-Bridge Newsletter
- BBO Forum
- My favorite site: [BridgeWinners.com](http://BridgeWinners.com)

*Go explore for yourself*

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# Test Your Knowledge

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- Use index cards to test yourself on Bidding Questions and Suit Combinations
  - Computer program with Phone app. instead of index cards “Anki”
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# FOCUS

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*You probably would improve your bridge game by at least 25% if you had 100% **Focus!***

- Exercise your brain
  - Meditate
  - Work on visualization
  - Develop Routines and Mantras to REfocus between boards
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# Exercise Rooms for your Brain

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I have played with a few online sites that offer brain exercises to enhance Concentration and Focus

e.g. Lumosity  
BrainHQ

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# Meditate

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Not that I really know what I am talking about...

- I use guided meditation to relax between sessions
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# Visualize

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Studies have shown.....

- that athletes who visualize success before competition are more likely to succeed in real life.
  - that athletes who go into competitions with a positive mind set are more likely to succeed.
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# Develop Mantras

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It is very helpful to have code words or phrases to gather one's mind back to the table.

e.g.

- **Bidding, Count, Distribution**
  - **Watch the Spots**
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# Take deep breaths

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- Taking three deep breaths after taking a new hand out of the board is helpful
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# Take deep breaths



- Especially after a bad result, take three deep breaths and consciously let go and move on!



# Growth Mindset and more

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- There are many good books on how to maximize your efforts learning a new task and competing in pressure environments.
  - If Athletes benefit from working on Focus and Concentration and Mental Toughness, imagine how much we bridge player would
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# Put your Focus to work



Verily I say unto thee that he who  
observeth not, nor keepeth track of  
the count, he shall not find  
/ eternal peace !



## The Four Big C's

- Count high cards
- Count trump
- Count distribution
- Count tricks

# The “best” possible partner(s)

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- The best partner is not necessarily the best bridge player you can find
  - Find the strongest bridge player you are most compatible with
    - good chemistry
    - same ambitions
    - mutual respect
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# The “best” possible partner(s)

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*The better a partner you are (patient, supportive, understanding and a good player), the more good partners will want to play with you.*



# Partnerships do need work

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- *Write System Notes* for your serious partnership
    - e.g. discuss every bid after 1NT opening
  - Conventions are only as good as their followups are
  - M. Lawrences Partnership Booklet is a great tool
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# Partnerships do need work

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- Use the Magazines for bidding practice
    - Bidding Box in Bridge Bulletin
    - Challenge of the Champs in Bridge World
  - Use BBO for Bidding practice
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# Some Homework

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What is your main goal playing Bridge?

- e.g. become as good as possible
  - e.g. having a good time
  - e.g. keep your mind nimble and sharp
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# Whatever your goal is....

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...by improving your game you should get closer to it.

- Even if you just want to have a good time, you will have more fun when you do well.
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# Think about the future...

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Where do you want to be in 5/10 years

- e.g. Compete for placing in the club
  - e.g. Become a life master
  - e.g. Win at least a Bracket K.O. at a regional
  - e.g. Scratch/Place in a National event
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# A list of goals as motivation

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Start with short term goals (next 3 month), e.g.:

- ❑ not forgetting a certain convention
- ❑ never to miscount trump
- ❑ Coming in 1st in your strata

Move on to intermediate goals, then long term goals and eventually Dream Goals. Write them down and revisit them ever so often. It does help to see progress.

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# Define your weaknesses

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Make a list of areas you need most improvement

- ❖ We tend to work on our strengths and it is easy to skip over our weak points.
  - ❖ Think about how to best practice specifically those weak areas
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# Summary

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- Deliberate Practice and Play
- Improve Concentration and Focus
- Use the Computer wisely
- Explore the Literature on Sports-Psychology



- Be a good partner - Find a good partner - Cherish a good partner



# after all, the best game there is!!

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