Duplicate Customs (per ACBL)

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.

**Active Ethics**

Actively ethical bridge players do everything they can within the scope of the game to defeat their opponent at the bridge table while making that experience an otherwise enjoyable one for them.

A primary objective of the ACBL is to continue the concerted effort that was inaugurated at the Fall 1986 Atlanta NABC to try to instill in all players the concept that vigorous efforts should be made to insure equity and enjoyment are benchmarks of Bridge.

Every player should strive to make sure that opponents have in no way been harmed through incomplete or misleading information as to the meanings of his pair’s coventional calls and treatments. An aggressive approach along these lines on the part of each and every individual will do much to make sure that Bridge remains the game that you enjoy so much.

Principle of Full Disclosure

The philosophy of active ethics tells us that winners should be determined solely by skill, flair and normal playing luck. Actively ethical partnerships take pains to ensure that their opponents are fully informed.

A major tenet of active ethics is the principle of full disclosure. This means that all information available to your partnership must be made available to your opponents.

Let’s take a look at weak two bids from the point of view of full disclosure. When an established partnership opens a weak two bid, they have a great deal of information of which their opponents are not aware. The convention card discloses the point range, but little else. However, the partners are aware of the range of hands on which the bid can be made (discipline?, suit quality requirements?, five-or-seven card suits allowed?, side four-card major ok?, void ok?, positional variations?, etc). Full disclosure requires that all these inferences, restrictions and tendencies be made known to any opponent who inquires about their style.

If you are interested in knowing these things about your opponent’s bid, merely say to the bidder’s partner, “Would you tell me more about your style?” You may use the style inquiry’ to ask about any call your opponent makes.

The actively ethical player will often go beyond what is technically required in volunteering information to the opponents. Quite often, the declaring side in an actively ethical partnership will volunteer such information before the opening lead is made. (But remember, when there has been misinformation given, such as a failure to alert or a mis-alert, there is a LEGAL obligation on the player whose partner misinformed the opponents. He, the bidder, must give the opponents the correct information at the end of the auction if his side is the declaring side or at the end of the play if his side is defending.)

New players or infrequent partnerships usually will not have understandings about the items discussed here and , of course, it will be perfectly proper for them to reply “We have no agreement as to style.”

Social Behavior

Active ethics enables players to compete on equal terms. In addition, the actively ethical player contributes to the enjoyment of all players by continuously striving to maintain a courteous attitude toward both his opponents and his partner and by avoiding any behavior that would make anyone uncomfortable. These social attributes are VITAL to the game of bridge and duplicate bridge.

Slow Play

Failure to finish on time can do a great deal to chase players away from the game and is extremely distressing to waiting players. Bridge is a timed event. If a pair takes more than their share of the allotted time for each round, they are inconveniencing their fellow competitors, as well as gaining an unfair advantage over them. When a pair has fallen behind it is incumbent on them to make up the time lost as quickly as possible whether at fault or not.

The actively ethical player makes a concerted effort to catch up when they have fallen behind, regardless of the reason for their lateness. All players are expected to develop this good habit.

Remember: Slow play is subject to penalty, and the penalties are well earned when slow pairs disrupt the normal progression of the game.

Additionally, players should be available to start each subsequent round promptly, avoiding wherever possible, being late to a table for non-bridge reasons.

At the discretion of the TD, slow play penalties will be deemed to be either disciplinary (and unappealable) or procedural. If the latter, appeals committees should tend strongly to reject all routine appeals against slow play penalties. When they do deny such an appeal, they should consider imposing an additional penalty for a frivolous appeal. The burden is on the appellant to demonstrate that some unusual circumstance makes the penalty inappropriate.

Statement on Conventions

The latest version of the Laws of Duplicate Bridge defines a convention as a call that, by partnership agreement, conveys a meaning other than willingness to play in the denomination named (or in the last denomination named), or high-card strength or length (three cards or more) there.

All ACBL events are “governed” by the appropriate convention chart which lists those conventions permitted in the event. Conventions not included on the chart are not permitted in the event.

Part of the “right” to use a convention is the responsibility of deciding when it applies in probable auctions. The opponents may be entitled to redress if you did not originally have a clear understanding with your partner of when and how to use a convention you are playing.

For example, a partnership that chooses to play conventional bids over opponents notrump opening bids is expected to have discussed at least the following:

1. Does it apply over strong notrumps?
2. Does it apply over weak notrumps?
3. Does it apply in the direct seat?
4. Does it apply in the balancing chair?
5. Does it apply when used by a passed hand?

We all occasionally encounter situations where we are not sure what partner’s bidding means. There exists an added responsibility if that uncertainty arises from a convention you and your partner have agreed to play. In these situations, you should tell your opponents all you know. Sometimes, the director will even ask you or your partner to step away from the table so that the opponents can talk openly with the remaining player.

Actively ethical players do everything possible in these situations to bring their opponents back to even terms — to remove any possible disadvantage accruing to them from their side’s failure to have a complete conventional understanding.

**Zero Tolerance Policy**

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