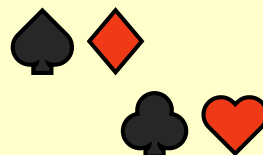


Bridge on Sundays



Undue Hesitation

There is actually no rule in bridge as to how long you should take to bid and play a hand. Organisers may impose their own rules to ensure that the session is completed in the allotted time. As a rough guide, 7 minutes per hand is a reasonable allowance.

Players should bid and play as far as possible at an even tempo. It is recognised that some players are naturally slower than others and established players should be tolerant of beginners' slow play. Players need thinking time and most players should use this, for example, when dummy first goes down to plan the play or defence. Deliberate slow play to gain an advantage is an offence, especially if it causes opponents to lose concentration or the hand cannot be completed in time. Hesitating during the play when you only have one card you can play or when you do not hold a key card with the intention of deceiving declarer etc is unacceptable. Equally, playing too fast to confuse opponents is an offence.

Undue hesitation is probably the greatest source of *unauthorised information* to partner. For example, the following should be avoided:

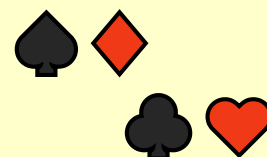
- a long hesitation followed by a pass when deciding whether to open the bidding
- a long hesitation before supporting partner's suit or changing suit
- a long hesitation when a suit has been agreed, then bidding no-trumps

Fiddling with the bidding box, taking cards in and out, is another practice which gives partner unauthorised information.

If partner hesitates unduly this does NOT mean that you are barred from bidding. You are forbidden to take advantage of this hesitation but, if you clearly intended to bid, then make the bid. A good rule of thumb is *would 70% of the better players have made that bid?* If the bid is marginal, you will avoid any recriminations by passing.

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Undue Hesitation

If a long hesitation occurs call the Tournament Director. He often has the difficult task of establishing whether one or more players hesitated, especially if all four players do not agree. Players sometimes defend their partners by saying *I did not notice the hesitation*. This is no defence because he should have been concentrating! The TD has to decide whether any advantage of this situation was taken by the offender's partner. If the hesitation is established, then the TD must look later to see if the non-offending side were damaged. He can alter the contract and result if damage has occurred. The offending side must not gain any advantage but the other side must not benefit if they were not damaged.

If there is an undue hesitation in the play the TD should look to see if this was deliberate, to deceive, and whether the non offenders had an alternative line of play. Clearly, if declarer needs a finesse to make the contract and it would fail, the unnecessary hesitation by the offender does not affect the play. If, on the other hand, declarer had another option (a two way finesse or playing for the drop of an honour), then the TD should rule in favour of declarer and the results should be altered. Declarer can be equally guilty by hesitating to *pretend* that he holds more cards in the suit, with the intention of causing defenders to discard wrongly.