

12 THINGS YOU CAN DO BEFORE PLAYING YOUR FIRST CARD

1. Welcome your opponents and if you don't know them, introduce yourself.
2. Check the board numbers, direction you are sitting and both pair numbers (especially in a Howell).
3. Jot down the opponents' names and pair number. It will help to visualize the hand later and to greet the players next time you play.
4. Take out your hand, face down and count the cards. If you get more or less than 13, tell the opponents and call the Director, hopefully before anyone has looked at a hand.
5. Turn your hand over and suit it. Make a mental note of the distribution, e.g., 5, 1, 5, 2 (or as some players remember it 51,52). Make sure that it adds up to 13 so that a card is not hidden (it's always an Ace that you find after you've passed your "10-Point" hand).
6. Bid all hands at the same speed and in the same manner. Don't quickly pass 2-point hands or slowly pass 11-point ones. Take the same length of time for each one.
7. When the bidding is over make sure the correct person makes the opening lead.

Let's assume now that you are the Declarer.

8. Write down the contract and if you have a poor memory like mine jot down "51,52" next to "4S - N").
9. The face-down opening lead is made, any questions are fully answered, and the dummy comes down.
10. While it is coming down you have nothing to do so use the time to count: first the HCP points and then the distribution, say to yourself: *13 points and 3, 3, 4, 3*. Add the points to your points and subtract from 40. Remember these numbers. Do you have a headache yet? Wait, you ain't even started with the mental gymnastics.
11. Always say "Thank you Partner" enthusiastically even if it is the worst dummy you have ever seen. Always say it with confidence or else the opponents will say to themselves, "*Hey we can defeat this.*" Never say, "Where is the hand you had during the bidding?"
12. Do NOT call for a card from Dummy even if it is a singleton, until you have used ARCH.

A. R. C. H.

- **A – Analyze the Lead.** Is it 4th best, three small, a singleton, doubleton, top of a sequence, why did he lead a trump, etc.?
Remember the card.
- **R – Review the Bidding.** Do this to help you visualize and count the opponents' hands.
- **C – Count:** Let's say you are in 4 Spades. Add your spades to dummy's spades: $5 + 3 = 8$; subtract 8 from 13 = 5; remember this number; assume the outstanding spades are split 3-2; remember these numbers and adjust them as play proceeds as they may change to 2-3, 1-4, 4-1, 0-5, 5-0. Do the same for the other three suits. If they have bid hearts, for example, adjust the heart distribution to 5-4 or 4-5 depending on which side bid the hearts first. (Notice I place the possible distributions from left to right to help in the recall.) Count your winners in a No Trump contract and your losers in a Suit contract. Revise these numbers as the play progresses and you see more of the cards.
- **H – How in the Heck Can I make this Contract?** If the previous trick count doesn't come to 9 in No Trump or you have 4 or more losers in your 4 Spades, you have to figure out where you are going to get an extra trick or get rid of one or more of your losers. In the above example you probably want to trump two hearts before taking out trump and maybe setting up diamonds while getting back to your hand.

Now you can say to Partner, “The 6 of Hearts, please.”

With practice, practice, practice this should only take a minute or so. Take the same amount of time on each hand even if you have 10 tricks off the top. Carry aspirins with you until all this becomes automatic.

“But what do I do when I'm on defense?” Would you believe you have to do the same 12 Steps, except you want to down the contract? Now three people have headaches. (A note to Dummy: Relax and save your mental energy for the next hand. You can practice counting but just make sure you don't say at the end, “Partner, didn't you know that the 3 of Clubs was good?”)

13. The Most Important Thing: Have Fun!