

Procedural Violations and Penalties

by Nan Ritter

A club director's job requires ruling in several areas of bridge play and player conduct. Among them is the general category of *procedure* on which this article is based.

In order to develop and clarify an understanding of procedural propriety in ACBL-sanctioned contract bridge games, especially at the club level, players as well as directors may wish to review the list in this article.

The following infractions of contract bridge procedures may be penalized according to the director's judgment. In general, a *warning* is given the first time a player/pair commits a violation on the list. The *second occurrence* results in a ¼ board penalty. However, if the violation is *flagrant* (that is, repeated characteristically or with obvious insult to another player) a penalty (also typically ¼ board) is indicated at the *first instance*. A club or unit board may create guidelines for specific issues, such as cell phone use, ½ board in many Ventura County games. Repeating violations may result in further matchpoint penalties or even *eviction/suspension* from the game.

Note that procedural violations, while referred to in *The Laws of Contract Bridge*, are distinct from the categories of law regarding the auction and play of contracts as usually adjudicated by bridge directors in the course of executing their responsibilities (hesitations, failures to alert, play of wrong card, etc.). *Pairs*, let's take a look at some violations:

1. Being late to the game.
2. Not having identical convention cards for the use of the opponents during bidding and play.
3. Referring to one's own convention card during the auction or play.¹
4. Playing too slowly. *Two rounds to catch up may be allowed.*²
5. Continually violating partnership agreements in common auctions (*even with full disclosure*). New players, are you reading this?
6. Showing approval or disapproval of a call or play.
7. Talking loudly.
8. N-S failing to check the E-W pair number.
9. Misplacing cards or a traveler in a board.
10. Indicating expectation or intention of winning a trick (prior to a claim or concession). *Watch this one!*
11. Playing a wrong board (N-S and E-W may both be penalized).

¹ A partnership may alter their defense prior to a round as a result of viewing their opponents' convention card but must announce so and may not re-alter or refer to the changed card subsequently during the round. A player may view an opponent's convention card at the player's turn to bid or play.

² Novice games may offer rounds at 10 min. per hand instead of the usual 7 min. per hand.

12. Boxing one's cards (that is, positioning them in one's hand or on the table so the face(s) may be seen). Example: Stacking the hand with a bottom ace clearly showing to the opponents or a neighboring table.
13. Sitting in an improper direction (e.g., Howell *arrow switch*).
14. Failing to count cards (ending up with wrong number of cards). *Who did this last?*
15. Failing to make the opening lead face down (*even if the right to penalty is waived*).
16. Looking intently at any other player during the *auction* or *play* or at another's hand for the purpose of seeing his cards or of observing the place from which he draws a card.³
17. Commenting or acting during the auction or play so as to call attention to a certain occurrence or to the number of tricks still required for success. *In general, making gratuitous comments / gestures that may offend other players. Some experienced directors might call this "anything that may offend players at neighboring tables."*
18. Touching another player's cards. *Uh-oh, it's a no-no.*
19. Telling partner that quitted tricks (*except a just completed trick*) are pointed in the wrong direction.
20. Paying insufficient attention to the game. An example would be bidding without viewing one's hand.
21. Detaching a card before it is one's turn to play.
22. Mixing tricks together before results have been agreed upon.
23. Prolonging play unnecessarily for the purpose of disconcerting the opponent(s).
24. Being discourteous (NO WARNING—and an apology should be required).
25. Failing to comply with the director's instructions and/or *club/tournament* regulations.
26. *In addition, as dummy*: Calling attention to an opponent's irregularity or commenting on play during the hand. Summoning the director concerning an irregularity during play *unless another player called attention to it first*. Looking at a defender's hand. Exchanging hands with or leaving your seat to watch declarer.

Article submitted by Nan Ritter. Principal sources include *The Laws of Contract Bridge*, Chapter 7, and the *Bridge Director's Companion* by Larry Harris, supplemented by personal experience.

³ It is allowable to act on information unintentionally acquired by seeing an opponent's card(s).