

There is a wide diversity of bridge writing styles in use today, and this includes professional writers as well. The various diagram layouts, card and bid formations, word usages, spellings, etc., desperately need some kind of uniformity to ease the reader, who has enough problems just absorbing the bridge principles.

While no writing method can be arbitrarily decreed as “right,” I have a lot of experience in this area and present what I feel is the best. In the great majority of cases my recommendations follow the consensus of professional writers.

General Considerations

Almost all bridge writing involves the layout of various diagrams—the conditions of a deal, the cards, the bidding, etc.—and it is important to decide on an overall scheme. The work must be neat and readable, and should follow a consistent style throughout. Before getting into specific diagrams and styles, there are some general points to consider.

Formal or Informal?

There are two kinds of bridge writing: formal and informal. Formal writing includes all works intended to be published (books, magazines, newspaper articles, newsletters, lesson material, Internet web pages, etc.). Informal writing includes anything else (notes, partnership systems, letters, e-mail, Usenet correspondence, etc.). Obviously, *formal* writing is the main concern of this style guide, but it is also wise to develop good practices in informal writing.

Make South Declarer?

It is controversial whether bridge deals should be rotated if necessary to make South declarer. I would say yes in most cases with full-deal layouts, especially for bridge columns and instructive material. Adhering to a standard format makes it easier for the reader to follow. Some writers take the trouble to say “rotated for convenience” or words to that effect, but this isn’t really necessary. The physical orientation in which a deal was actually played is just an arbitrary label, like saying “Point A” or “Point B.”

In my view, the only reason for not making South always declarer would be in direct tournament reports, or for analyses of deals that most readers would have played.

Suit Symbols

The use of suit symbols (♠ ♥ ♦ ♣) greatly improves the readability of bridge writing and should be considered routine for any formal work. The use of *color* (black for spades and clubs; red for hearts and diamonds) is unnecessary. The pages of virtually all hard-copy publications (e.g., books and magazines) are printed in black only, and the suit symbols are quite readable. The increased cost of two-color printing is not justified for the slight gain in appearance. In the case of Internet web pages, however, the use of color is the norm since it involves no additional expense.

When preparing a manuscript, it is tedious to insert suit symbols as you type. A convenient method I use is to denote suit symbols with *lower case* letters (shdc). Then it is an easy matter to use the “search and replace” feature of a word processor (specifying “match case” and “whole words only”) to replace the letters with symbols. It is helpful to create a macro to do this, and another to reverse the process for editing.

For informal writing, or if suit symbols will not be available, use *upper case* letters (S H D C).

“T” Versus “10”

A common practice, especially in the computer age, is to use the letter T to represent 10. The advantage is to allow each card to be represented by a single character, which simplifies some programming tasks and layout problems. Nonetheless, this policy will alienate many readers. The actual playing card has the number 10, not the letter T, so the association is clouded. (Note that higher playing cards are indeed marked by a letter, so the use of A-K-Q-J is clear.)

My feeling is that the letter T, while fine for database purposes, should be avoided in bridge writing. The only exception would be for informal writing when cards are given without spacing.

“X” for Spot Cards

Another common practice is to use the letter X to indicate unknown or insignificant spot cards. If doing so, always use a *lower case* x. It is acceptable to use X’s when *bidding* is the only concern. If the play is of any concern, do not use X’s in diagrams because the spot cards usually matter. If you don’t know the exact spot cards, make them up to create a definite deal.

One good case for using X’s is to state *hypothetical* holdings. For example, “South played the king because he figured East would not lead from Q-x-x-x, looking at the jack in dummy.”

Condition Diagrams

While entirely optional, it is good practice to include the various conditions (deal number, form of scoring, dealer, vulnerability, contract, declarer, opening lead) in a diagram for each deal. Some or all of these items are typically arranged with the card diagram, using the free corners. The important point is to design an attractive layout with the minimum amount of clutter, and to keep the same style throughout the work. Below are some recommendations.

Deal Number

The deal number should be stated as simply as possible. For most purposes, just a number and period is adequate. If necessary for clarity, use a short label such as “Board” or “Deal”. Avoid extra adornments (#, No., etc.) as these only clutter the diagram.

1.
Board 3
Deal 12

Form of Scoring

The common forms of scoring are shown below. In many cases, this may be immaterial (or obvious from the nature of the work) and need not be stated.

Matchpoints
IMPs
Rubber Bridge

Dealer

The dealer should be stated in two words as shown below. Avoid excess wording (North is the dealer) and cryptic notations (Dlr: N). If the deal also contains a bidding diagram, stating the dealer is redundant and should usually be omitted.

North Deals
West Deals

I don't believe a word of this BS.



Vulnerability

The vulnerability should be stated in two words as shown below. Note that “Vulnerable” is abbreviated without a period. Avoid excess wording (Neither side is vulnerable) and cryptic notations (Vul: 0). Also, avoid colloquialisms like “Red vs. White” and British phraseologies like “Love All,” although I don’t want to start a war with England.

None Vul
N-S Vul
E-W Vul
Both Vul

Contract and Declarer

The contract and declarer should be given as shown below. Avoid using a label such as “Contract:” as this is obvious, and a label may create spacing problems. Note the use of a small “x” to denote a doubled contract (“xx” for redoubled), separated from the bid by a space. Stating the declarer is unnecessary if your practice is to make South always declarer.

6 ♦
4 ♠ x by East
1 NT xx by West

Opening Lead

The opening lead should be given in a simple format as shown below. A label is necessary, but avoid using “Opening Lead:” which is bulky and likely to cause spacing problems.

Lead: ♠ K
Lead: ♥ 10

Sample Layout

Below is an example of a condition diagram (with a card diagram) that I often use in my writing. Note the simplicity, which keeps it friendly to the reader.

1. 4 ♥ None Vul

♠ 3 2 ♥ Q 8 2 ♦ 8 6 5 4 3 ♣ K 7 3	♠ Q 10 4 ♥ 7 6 5 4 ♦ K J 10 2 ♣ Q 6	♠ K 7 6 5 ♥ J ♦ A Q 9 7 ♣ J 8 5 2
--	--	--

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 9 8 ♥ A K 10 9 3 ♦ — ♣ A 10 9 4		
--	--	--

Lead: ♥ 4

Card Diagrams

Full deals should always be in the compass format (North at the top) as in this layout:

<p>♠ Q 10 4 ♥ 7 6 5 4 ♦ K J 10 2 ♣ Q 6</p>	<p>♠ 3 2 ♥ Q 8 2 ♦ 8 6 5 4 3 ♣ K 7 3</p>	<p>♠ K 7 6 5 ♥ J ♦ A Q 9 7 ♣ J 8 5 2</p>									
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	<p>♠ A J 9 8 ♥ A K 10 9 3 ♦ — ♣ A 10 9 4</p>										

Note the space between cards to improve readability. The space after each suit symbol is actually a *tab* so the first card of each suit is vertically aligned. Also, note the representation of South's void; the em dash is much clearer than leaving the suit blank and is more pleasing than the word "void" as is sometimes used.

For informal writing in plain text (as for Internet communication), it is important to use a fixed-width font (such as Courier) to keep the alignment. Avoid using tabs since there is no universal display practice and some text programs convert them to a single space or suppress them entirely. Use the space bar for indentations. For example:

	North	
	S 3 2	
	H Q 8 2	
	D 8 6 5 4 3	
	C K 7 3	
West		East
S Q 10 4		S K 7 6 5
H 7 6 5 4		H J
D K J 10 2		D A Q 9 7
C Q 6		C J 8 5 2
	South	
	S A J 9 8	
	H A K 10 9 3	
	D --	
	C A 10 9 4	

Note how the player designations are shown above each hand and vertically aligned with the actual cards, making it easier to distinguish the cards from the suit indicators.

When writing to a bridge audience in plain text, it is acceptable and probably desirable to eliminate the suit and/or player designations. For example:

	3 2	
	Q 8 2	
	8 6 5 4 3	
	K 7 3	
Q 10 4		K 7 6 5
7 6 5 4		J
K J 10 2		A Q 9 7
Q 6		J 8 5 2
	A J 9 8	
	A K 10 9 3	
	--	
	A 10 9 4	

Any experienced bridge reader would assume that North is at the top, and the suits are given in descending order, starting with spades.

It is also acceptable to omit the space between cards, but then you must use "T" for "10" to avoid the sloppy appearance of, say, "A1094." For example:

	North	
	S 32	
	H Q82	
	D 86543	
	C K73	
West		East
S QT4		S K765
H 7654		H J
D KJT2		D AQ97
C Q6		C J852
	South	
	S AJ98	
	H AKT93	
	D --	
	C AT94	

Or more simply:

	32	
	Q82	
	86543	
	K73	
QT4		K765
7654		J
KJT2		AQ97
Q6		J852
	AJ98	
	AKT93	
	--	
	AT94	

Two-Hand Diagram

When creating a card diagram for a partnership only, use the West and East hands if possible. This conserves room and also provides a convenient layout to place a bidding diagram beneath. If I wanted to illustrate only the North-South hands of the previous deal, I would rotate 90 degrees clockwise to produce:

♠ A J 9 8	N	♠ 3 2
♥ A K 10 9 3	W	♥ Q 8 2
♦ —	S	♦ 8 6 5 4 3
♣ A 10 9 4	E	♣ K 7 3

Or informally in plain text:

West	East
S A J 9 8	S 3 2
H A K 10 9 3	H Q 8 2
D --	D 8 6 5 4 3
C A 10 9 4	C K 7 3

Or more simply:

A J 9 8	3 2
A K 10 9 3	Q 8 2
--	8 6 5 4 3
A 10 9 4	K 7 3

Or single-spaced using "T" for "10":

West	East
S AJ98	S 32
H AKT93	H Q82
D --	D 86543
C AT94	C K73

Or simplest of all:

AJ98	32
AKT93	Q82
--	86543
AT94	K73

Single-Hand Diagram

When giving only a single hand, it is preferable to diagram it in four lines as below. If space is a problem, it is acceptable to use a single separate line or include it in-line with the text (explained later).

♠ A J 9 8
♥ A K 10 9 3
♦ —
♣ A 10 9 4

Bidding Diagrams

One of the most flagrant errors in bidding diagrams is always to start with the dealer. Alas, this is still being done by some prominent bridge columnists, or at least by their publishers. The problem is that when North or East is the dealer this crosses the relationship of the East-West hands. Bidding diagrams should always start with *West* or *South* (I prefer to use West throughout for uniformity). Simply place the first call under the player who is the dealer. For example, if East is the dealer, the diagram should look like this:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 NT	Dbl	Rdbl
2 ♦	2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	4 ♥	All Pass	

The point is always to keep West to the left of East so the reader can associate the bidding with the card diagram. Bridge is difficult enough without having to flip-flop your thinking just to follow the bidding.

Note the recommended call designations: Bids have a space between the level and denomination; "Pass" is spelled out; double and redouble are abbreviated by omitting the vowels; and "All Pass" is used to terminate the auction. This style is followed exactly by the ACBL Bulletin. The Bridge World magazine differs slightly by spelling out "Double" and "Redouble." Bridge Today elects to use lower case for "pass, double, redouble, (all pass)" which I find less attractive.

Informally in plain text, the same auction is:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 H
Pass	1 NT	Dbl	Rdbl
2 D	2 H	Pass	2 S
Pass	4 H	All Pass	

It is also acceptable to use the extremely abbreviated style shown below. This would be understood by any bridge player. Note the use of "X" for double and "XX" for redouble.

W	N	E	S
		P	1H
P	1NT	X	XX
2D	2H	P	2S
P	4H	AP	

Call Annotations

In bidding diagrams, it is sometimes desirable to annotate a call with a brief explanation. If the diagram has only one such instance, use an asterisk:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 NT*	Dbl	Rdbl
2 ♦	2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	4 ♥	All Pass	

*Forcing one round

If two or more calls require annotations, use numerals in the style of footnotes. The reference numeral is set in smaller type and elevated (like an exponent).

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 NT ¹	Dbl ²	Rdbl ³
2 ♦	2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	4 ♥	All Pass	

1. Forcing one round
2. Lost his mind
3. Smelling blood

It is also acceptable to use an exclamation point to indicate an exceptionally good call, or a question mark to indicate a poor or dubious call, without explanation. Warning: Do this sparingly, and don't torture the reader with junk like "!" or "?!" as I sometimes see. In the auction below, the annotations mean that East's double was poor and North's 4 ♥ bid was excellent:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 NT	Dbl?	Rdbl
2 ♦	2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	4 ♥!	All Pass	

For informal writing, the use of an asterisk (to explain a single call), a question mark or an exclamation point would be the same. The obvious problem is the use of reference numerals. Probably best is to enclose them in parentheses:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 H
Pass	1 NT(1)	Dbl(2)	Rdbl(3)
2 D	2 H	Pass	2 S
Pass	4 H	All Pass	

1. Forcing one round
2. Lost his mind
3. Smelling blood

Play Diagrams

If a play diagram is used, it should follow the exact order in which the cards are played. That is, each trick should begin with the lead and follow with the next three plays in turn, as in this example:

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ 4	2	J	K
2. S	♠ 8	10	2	5
3. W	♥ 5	8	♦ 9	3
4. N	♠ 3	6	A	4
5. S	♠ 9	Q	♥ Q	7

Numbering the tricks and showing the direction of each leader are optional but desirable for clarity. Cards are shown by suit and rank (with space between) except when following to the suit led, then only the rank is given. Observe how this method makes it easy to spot discards and ruffs.

It is not a good idea to continue play diagrams for all 13 tricks. Once the important plays have been shown, or when the play becomes trivial, it should be curtailed. My practice is to add a one-line concluding statement, such as "Win the rest," or "Lose the high trump."

Don't worry, partner.
The rest are mine!



For informal writing in plain text, the play diagram would look like this:

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	H 4	2	J	K
2. S	S 8	10	2	5
3. W	H 5	8	D 9	3
4. N	S 3	6	A	4
5. S	S 9	Q	H Q	7

Or abbreviated even further:

<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
H4	2	J	K
S8	10	2	5
H5	8	D9	3
S3	6	A	4
S9	Q	HQ	7

Card Formations in Text

When a single card is specified in the text, there are two acceptable ways to write it. One is to spell out the card by suit and rank, using two words from this list: spade, heart, diamond, club, ace, king, queen, jack, 10, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two. Note the use of the number 10 rather than “ten”; this may seem inconsistent, but it adheres to the standard practice of using numerals for two-digit numbers. Avoid using variants like “deuce” or “trey” which serve no purpose but to confuse; and avoid clumsy phrases like “seven of diamonds”—unless you get paid by the word.

Example: Declarer led the spade nine and discarded the heart 10 from dummy.

The other way to write a card is to use a suit symbol and rank abbreviation, exactly as in diagrams. This is preferred when writing to a bridge audience.

Example: East won the ♠ K and shifted to the ♦ 5.

The space between the suit symbol and card is controversial and may be omitted. To the eye, it may seem too wide, but leaving no space looks cramped. Further, the space is *grammatically* correct since these are two words. For typeset works, use a *non-break* space to prevent separation between lines.

For informal writing (without suit symbols) it is normal to omit the space within a single card.

Example: West cashed the HQ and led the C10.

When stating *two* or more cards in the same suit, the abbreviated format is always better, and cards should be separated by a hyphen. Suit symbols may be omitted when obvious or immaterial.

Examples: Holding ♠ 10-9, West led the nine to fool declarer. What do you lead from Q-J-8-4-2? This is a two-way finesse: A-10-2 opposite K-J-3.

A full hand should be shown by suits in descending order, starting with spades. Cards should be separated by a hyphen, and suit symbols by a space.

Example: Holding ♠ A-K-J-3-2 ♥ K-10-2 ♦ 9-8-7 ♣ 3-2, would you open the bidding in first seat?

Always spell out a suit name when used *without* a card rank. In other words, suit symbols should never be used alone just to indicate a suit (i.e., South led a ♠) as most readers find this annoying—to be sure, any writer who does this might as well go for total contempt with lines like, “I almost had a ♥ attack at the bridge ♣.”

Examples: South led a spade. West won the ♠ A as East pitched a heart. Later, South ran the diamonds to inflict a spade-club squeeze against West.

Call Formations in Text

When a single bid is specified in the text, there are two acceptable ways to write it. One is to spell it out using two words from this list: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, club(s), diamond(s), heart(s), spade(s), notrump. The singular form is used for suit bids of one, and the plural for suit bids of two and higher. Note that notrump is always singular.

Example: South opened one spade, West overcalled two clubs, and North bid three notrump.

Bids may also be abbreviated in the same way as in bidding diagrams, and this is preferred when writing to a bridge audience. Exception: Do not abbreviate a bid at the start of a sentence.

Example: Four spades would not be my choice; 1 ♠ is clearly the right bid, though 4 ♠ does make it more difficult for the opponents, who can make 5 ♥.

Note the space between the level and denomination. As with card formations, this is controversial and may be omitted. Similar issues apply; I believe the space looks better, and it is grammatically correct. For typeset works, use a *non-break* space.

For informal writing (without suit symbols) it is normal to omit the space within abbreviated bids.

Example: West opened 2S, North jumped to 5D, and East bid 6NT.

Note that proper usage will eliminate any confusion between cards and bids. With cards, the suit is given *first*; with bids, the suit (or NT) is given *last*. Also, the use of abbreviated bids as a general style eliminates the potential confusion when describing suit lengths.

Example: Against 3 ♣, West led the ♣ 3 because he held three clubs.

If a *spelled-out* bid is used as an adjective, always use the singular form and include a hyphen. (Never hyphenate abbreviated bids.)

Example: West overcalled the two-club opening, and East found the great six-spade sacrifice.

A single call that is not a bid (pass, double or redouble) should always be spelled out in lower case.

Example: South’s redouble was crazy; any sane person would pass the double.

Short bidding sequences may be included in the text if easily understood. In this case it is best to abbreviate pass as “P” and omit the final “All Pass.” Use a semicolon to separate rounds of bidding.

Example: At the other table a much simpler auction, 1 ♠ P 2 ♠ P; 4 ♠, led to a better contract.

Using Numbers

In general, the numbers zero through nine should be spelled out, and 10 and above should be written with numerals. This includes ordinal numbers (first, second, third, ... ninth, 10th, 11th). Some exceptions follow.

Never start a sentence with a numeral. Either spell out the number or rearrange the sentence. The latter is usually preferable.

Bids and cards, when shown with a *symbol* (or NT), should always use numerals. That is, you may write either “2 ♥” or “two hearts,” but never “2 hearts” or “two ♥.” Similarly, with cards, you may write “♣ 4” or “club four,” but never “club 4” or “♣ four.”

When stating point count, matchpoint scores or IMPs, always use numerals.

Examples: He opened a lousy 9-point hand and she passed with 7 points. We got only 4 matchpoints for beating them four tricks. We lost the final by 5 IMPs.

When stating a signed number, degree or percent, use numerals with an identifying *word* (plus, minus, degrees, percent). Only use symbols (+, -, °, %) in tables and diagrams, or for multiple signed numbers within a sentence.

Examples: Our plus 690 was a top. On Board 3 we were minus 200. We turned the table 45 degrees. Our sacrifice, down two, scored only 2 percent. Our last three results were +450, -300 and +790.

When combining two or more numbers as a noun or compound adjective, always use numerals.

Examples: What do you open with 4-4 in the minors? All declarer needed was a 3-2 trump break.

When stating the pattern of a bridge hand, separate the numbers with hyphens to mean any such pattern. Use equal signs to indicate a specific order, starting with spades. That is, “4-3-3-3” means the four-card suit could be anywhere, while “4=3=3=3” means the four-card suit is spades.

Using Emphasis

Sometimes it is desirable to emphasize a word or phrase in the text. Warning: Do this sparingly; try to let words speak for themselves. If emphasis is overused, the appearance of the text becomes unfriendly to the reader. For typeset works, emphasis should be set in *italic type*. Never use boldface type, oversized type or all capitals, as these look hideous.

Examples: South was the first ever to use Gerber *and* Blackwood in the same auction. East-West made a grand slam missing three trumps including the *king and queen*. Declarer won the first trick with the *ace* in an effort to dupe the opponents.

If italics are unavailable, as in plain-text writing, emphasis should be indicated by using the underscore character before and after the emphasized word or phrase. When two or more words are involved, also replace each interior space with an underscore.

Examples: The spectators were aghast when declarer _ducked_ the opening lead. The horrible contract was cold _without_a_heart_lead_ if declarer just bothered to draw trumps.

Common Errors

The most frequent error in bridge grammar is the misuse of the words “bid” and “call.” A bid states a number and denomination. A call can be pass, double, redouble or any bid. In casual speaking it is OK to say, “What is your bid?” when you really mean, “What is your call?” but *not in writing*. Every time you write the word “bid,” ask yourself if it shouldn’t be “call.”

Deal vs. hand. A deal is 52 cards; a hand is 13 cards. In casual speaking we often use “hand” when we mean “deal” as in, “Board 12 was the craziest hand I’ve ever seen.” In writing, however, be careful to use the proper word. Every time you write the word “hand,” ask yourself if it shouldn’t be “deal.”

Do not use the words “big” and “small” to describe a card — all playing cards are the same size. When referring to a card’s rank, the proper words are “high” and “low.”

Lead vs. play. When referring to the first card of a trick, use the word “lead”; for subsequent cards of the same trick, use the word “play.” I often see writing like, “West won the ♦ A and played a club.” Technically, this is OK, but it’s much clearer to say, “... led a club.” Also note the proper past tense of “lead” (drop the “a”); it is easy to get careless and use the same word since it rhymes with the metallic element, lead.

Weak vs. preemptive. A weak bid is one based on few high cards. A preemptive bid takes away bidding space, *regardless* of its strength. Suppose North opens 1 ♠ and East jumps to 3 ♥. Some writers would describe this as “preemptive,” which is true by definition but says nothing about the meaning of East’s bid. The correct description (probably) should be “weak.”

Psych (psychic call) vs. tactical call. These terms can be used interchangeably, but “psych” implies a greater risk. I recommend that only *initial* partnership actions be called “psychs.” For example, if North opened 1 ♠ and East overcalled 2 ♥ without a heart suit, it is a psych; but if *South responded* 2 ♥ without a heart suit, it is a tactical bid.

Spelling and Usage

The spelling of many bridge related words is inconsistent, and in some cases there is no absolute right or wrong. Probably most notable is the word “notrump.” Most dictionaries show it with a hyphen (no-trump), but the consensus of bridge writers is to omit the hyphen because the word is so common. I agree, and eventually the lexicographers will catch up.

Below are listings of common bridge terms, organized by parts of speech. I believe the spellings are the consensus of professional writers, though in a few cases I am not 100-percent sure. In any event, I believe these should be the correct spellings.

Nouns or Verbs

The following words can be used as nouns or verbs. Irregular verb conjugations are shown (otherwise just add -s, -ed, or -ing).

bid (-s, bid, -ding)
control-bid (-s, bid, -ding)
coup
crossruff
cue-bid (-s, cue-bid, -ding)
deal (-s, dealt, -ing)
diagram (-s, -med, -ming)
double (-s, -d, doubling)
endplay
falsecard
finesse (-s, -d, finessing)
lead (-s, led, -ing)
matchpoint
misdeal (-s, misdealt, -ing)
misguess (-es, -ed, -ing)
misplay
overbid (-s, overbid, -ding)
overcall
overruff
overtake (-s, overtook, overtaking)
preempt
psych
rebid (-s, rebid, -ding)
redouble (-s, -d, redoubling)
ruff
sacrifice (-s, -d, sacrificing)
semiforce (-s, -d, semiforcing)
sluff (the word “slough” is rarely used)
splinter
unblock
underbid (-s, underbid, -ding)
underlead (-s, underled, -ing)
underruff
uppercut (-s, uppercut, -ting)

Four words above (double, matchpoint, sacrifice, splinter) are also commonly used as adjectives. Some others can be *contrived* as adjectives; e.g., “They use a complicated overcall structure,” or, “He played the contract in crossruff fashion.” These phrases are acceptable, but it is preferable to use nouns; e.g., “He played the contract as a crossruff.”

Nouns or Adjectives

These words can be used as nouns or adjectives. All nouns form the plural by adding -s except as noted.

backwash (-es)
board-a-match (no plural)
bye-stand
checkback
come-on
crisscross (-es)
cut-in
double-dummy (no plural)
holdup
IMP
knockout
loser-on-loser (no plural)
major
masterpoint
minor
nonjump
notrump
partscore
passout
penalty (penalties)
pickup
round-robin
ruffout
runout
shutout
sign-off
sit-out
stepping-stone
subminimum
takeout
throw-in

It is important to understand that none of the above words can be used as verbs. (OK, “major” and “minor” can, as “He majored in math,” but there is no such usage in the bridge sense.) Many of the words (holdup, ruffout, shutout, sign-off, etc.) are *derived* from verbs, but the verb form is always two separate words.

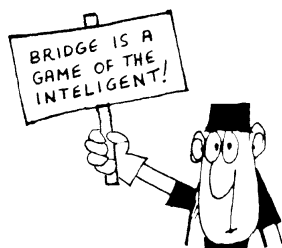
Examples: Never hold up with a king. He tried to ruff out the suit. My bid shut out the opponents. I tried to sign off. I wanted to throw in my left-hand opponent.

Nouns

These words are nouns only. All form the plural by adding -s unless noted otherwise. Words starting with a *number* also include higher numbers as appropriate in a bridge sense.

counterplan	reentry (reentries)
four-bagger	reevaluation
four-carder	reevaluation
HCP (no plural)	one-bid
intrafinesse	one-suiter
mini-splinter	overtrick
misanalysis (-lyses)	screenmate
misdefense	superacceptance
misfit	teammate
misinformation	tenace
nonforce	undertrick
non-offender	Yarborough
notrumper	
postmortem	
preacceptance	
preemptor	

The campaign for
better spelling...



Verbs

These words are verbs only. Irregular conjugations are shown (otherwise just add -s, -ed, or -ing).

misanalyze (-s, -d, misanalyzing)
misdefend
mistime (-s, -d, mistiming)
misvalue (-s, -d, misvaluing)
outbid (-s, outbid, -ding)
outplay
outscore (-s, -d, outscoring)
overplay
overtrump
preaccept
prebalance (-s, -d, prebalancing)
reenter
reevaluate (-s, -d, reevaluating)*
reevaluate (-s, -d, reevaluating)*
revalue (-s, -d, revaluing)*
reopen
right-side (-s, -d, right-siding)
superaccept
undertrump
unguard
unprotect
wrong-side (-s, -d, wrong-siding)

*These three words all have the same meaning. I prefer the simplest "revalue" and never use the others.

Adjectives

These words are adjectives only. No inflected forms are allowed.

aceless	semibalanced
anti-percentage	semiconstructive
anti-positional	semiforcing
anti-systemic	seminatural
bicolored	semipositive
biddable	semisolid
cashable	subminimal
conventional	subpar
counterintuitive	systemic
entryless	three-suited
finessable	tricolored
laydown	two-suited
makable	ultraconservative
misfitting	ultralight
Moysian	ultrasafe
multicolored	ultrathin
multinational	unagreed
multisession	unambiguous
non-bridge	unambitious
noncompetitive	unassuming
nonconstructive	unbid
nonconventional	unbiddable
nonforcing	uncapturable
nonmaterial	uncontested
non-playing	understrength
nonserious	undiscussed
nonsimultaneous	undoubled
nonstandard	unfinessable
nonsystemic	unmakable
nonvulnerable	unpassed
one-suited	unplayable
overactive	unplayed
overambitious	unpromised
overstrength	unpromotable
playable	unraised
preemptive	unreachable
promotable	unshown
psychic	unsubstantial
rebidable	upside-down
right-side-up	world-class

The word "conventional" is a paradox. Relating to bridge, it means *nonstandard*, as in "conventional bid." In plain English it means *standard*, as in "conventional manner" or "conventional warfare." Yikes! I guess we better hope there's no bridge player in control of our nuclear missiles.

"Unconventional" and "immaterial" are common words but should not be used in a bridge sense to mean not conventional (as a bid) or not material (as a squeeze). Proper bridge words are "nonconventional" and "nonmaterial" as listed above.

Adverbs

These are adverbs. No inflected forms are allowed.

conventionally	psychically
offside	systemically
onside	

“Offside” and “onside” can also be adjectives, but I can think of only one rare bridge instance, as in “offside double” (we’re not talking about an “onside kick” in football). It is grammatically OK to write, “He dropped the offside king,” but it is better to use the adverb form, “He dropped the king offside.”

“Double-dummy” (noun or adjective) can also be an adverb, as “He played double-dummy to win 13 tricks.”

Coined Verbs

It is acceptable to manufacture a compound verb, provided its meaning is clear. This is often done with an adjective and noun that are normally two words but joined by a hyphen to form a descriptive verb. Do this sparingly, as overuse makes a work unfriendly.

Examples: Declarer is a master of the strip squeeze, but he couldn’t strip-squeeze me this time. Eschewing the textbook, he backward-finessed spades. Having just learned the negative double, he negative-doubled every time it was his turn.

Coined Nouns

Similarly, it is acceptable to manufacture a compound noun if its meaning is clear. This is typically done with a generic prefix such as anti, non, pseudo, semi or un, though it is not restricted to these. If the resulting word is not in a dictionary or listed here, it must be hyphenated. Again, do this sparingly.

Examples: If West leads a non-spade, declarer faces nonstop frustration. My pseudorandom bidding results in many psuedo-psychs. His jump bid was not only undiscussed and unknown but a tribute to un-bridge. South opted to make a semi-preempt, risking only 2 ♠ with a semisolid eight-bagger.

A hyphen should not be used for a normal adjective-noun pairing (two words), as “I opened a short club.”

Compound Adjectives

When two or more words are used together as an adjective, they should be hyphenated.

Examples: I held two four-card majors and three cards in clubs. They use long-suit game tries, but he never bids a long suit. Our five-level sacrifice was a disaster, like every time I bid at the five level. We use key-card Blackwood, but I never hold any key cards. We play two-over-one game forcing, hence any bid of two over one creates a game-forcing auction.

Exceptions: Do not use a hyphen if the modifying phrase could never stand alone as a noun phrase, or for adverbs ending in “ly” or the word “very.”

Examples: This is a bridge related story. They play an overly complex system. I held a very long suit.

Speaking of “very,” the best advice is not to use it. For example, it is poor to write, “I held a very strong hand,” because it represses the word “strong.” *Strong is strong*. Keep it that way. If you use “very” once, the next time you write “strong,” people will wonder if you really mean it. If you feel “strong” is inadequate, find a colorful alternative such as, “I held a rock crusher.” I hope I’ve made this very very clear.

Another exception: Do not hyphenate phrases containing one or more proper words.

Examples: We played in the Wednesday night game. I hosted the July Fourth tournament. Going for the squeeze was a typical Edgar Kaplan play.

Capitalization

As in general writing, always capitalize the first word of a sentence, proper names, geographic places, organizations, companies, etc.

For titles, headings and subheadings, capitalize the first and last words, and all important words (including important parts of hyphenated words). Unimportant words are conjunctions (and, or), articles (a, an, the) and most prepositions (at, by, in, of, to, with, etc.).

Suit Leads and Signals
The Play of the Week
Responses to One Notrump
Learning To Bid (“to bid” is a verb)
A Tale of Two Throw-in Plays
Winning at Board-a-Match Teams

It is also acceptable to capitalize only the first word of titles, headings and subheadings, as in “Suit leads and signals,” provided it is distinguished from ordinary text by a larger or bolder font. This is commonly done in newspapers and magazines. An advantage is that it retains normal capitalization, e.g., “Using modified Landy in balancing seat” shows that only “Landy” is a proper word. Whichever way you choose, the main point is to be consistent throughout any work.

If a hyphenated word is capitalized only because it starts a sentence, capitalize just the *first* letter.

Example: Board-a-match team events have dropped in popularity.

Capitalize the directions: North, East, South, West. Note, however, that these words are not capitalized when used in a non-bridge sense; e.g., “Our club is located one mile west of the Broward Mall.”

Capitalize *official* bridge ranks or titles, but not the prefix “non” (which requires a hyphen).

Life Master	1999 Interclub Champion
non-Life Master	World Grand Master

Capitalize names of bridge tournaments and *official* names of events, except interior unimportant words (as in titles).

Southeastern Regional
Vanderbilt Knockout Teams
Blue Ribbon Pairs
Duke of Cumberland Swiss Teams

Do not capitalize generic names or references to events (except proper words), e.g., “We played in the Tuesday flighted pairs and the weekend Swiss teams.”

Capitalize the names of bidding systems, except interior unimportant words (as in titles).

Standard American
Precision
Ultimate Club
Big Diamond
Little Major
Every Hand an Adventure

Do not capitalize the names of bridge conventions, except words that are proper names or derived from proper names.

gambling three notrump (or 3 NT)
negative free bids
Michaels cue-bid
pinpoint Astro
reverse Drury
Roman key-card Blackwood

If the name of a bridge convention might be confused with ordinary text, the best solution is to enclose it in quotes.

Example: Proponents of “fourth suit forcing” would probably agree.

Capitalize any specific reference to a deal number, a diagram, or a trick number in a play diagram.

Examples: Almost everyone bid a slam on Board 5. Refer to Diagram 12 for another example. Note the clever play at Trick 3, which insures the contract.

Never write in all capitals, except for acronyms. This is true even for typeset titles and headings — use a larger font with a bold typeface, but only capitalize the first letter of words.

Acronyms

In bridge, as in other fields, certain phrases are used so frequently that it is torturous to spell them out each time. An acronym* abbreviates two or more words (or distinct parts of a compound word) and is written in all capitals without periods. Virtually any acronym may be used if explained the first time. The following acronyms need no explanation:

HCP	LHO
IMP	RHO

*Contrary to popular belief, an acronym does not have to be pronounceable (like IMP); Merriam-Webster’s 10th edition even gives FBI as an example acronym. Further, pronounceability is a subjective issue; you could pronounce almost anything if you tried hard enough. The distinction of an acronym versus an abbreviation is that *no period* is used.

British Spelling

The spelling of many English words differs depending on which side of the Atlantic you live. This guide assumes American spelling — despite our hurricanes, the last I checked, Florida was still on the left side of the pond. Listed below are American words often used in bridge writing, followed by their British spelling. (Australian spelling is usually like the British.)

analyze — analyse
color — colour
criticize — criticise
defense — defence
enrollment — enrolment
favorable — favourable
fit (verb past tense) — fitted
fulfill — fulfil
honor — honour
humor — humour
judgment — judgement
leaped — leapt
learned — learnt
maneuver — manoeuvre
meager — meagre
memorize — memorise
offense — offence
panelist — panellist
practice (verb) — practise
program — programme
psych — psyche
signaled — signalled
signaler — signaller
signaling — signalling
skillful — skilful

traveled—travelled
traveler—traveller
traveling—travelling

Derivatives of any base word listed above will also be affected, e.g., multicolored becomes multicoloured, and misjudgment becomes misjudgement.

British (and Australian) spelling also uses a hyphen more often. Below are some notable differences:

crisscross—criss-cross
holdup—hold-up
postmortem—post-mortem
preempt—pre-empt
preemptive—pre-emptive
preemptor—pre-emptor
reenter—re-enter
reentry—re-entry

Anomaly: The British term “vice squeeze” (named by Terence Reese) should be our “vise squeeze,” but the British spelling is generally kept despite the misnomer in American English.

Feedback Welcome

This article is not complete and, like any language related work, will never be. I often think of new things that should be included, especially in regard to the expanding bridge vocabulary. I welcome any feedback—suggestions, recommended additions or corrections, and opposing viewpoints. Please contact me by e-mail (richard@rpbridge.net). Thank you.

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