

chapter

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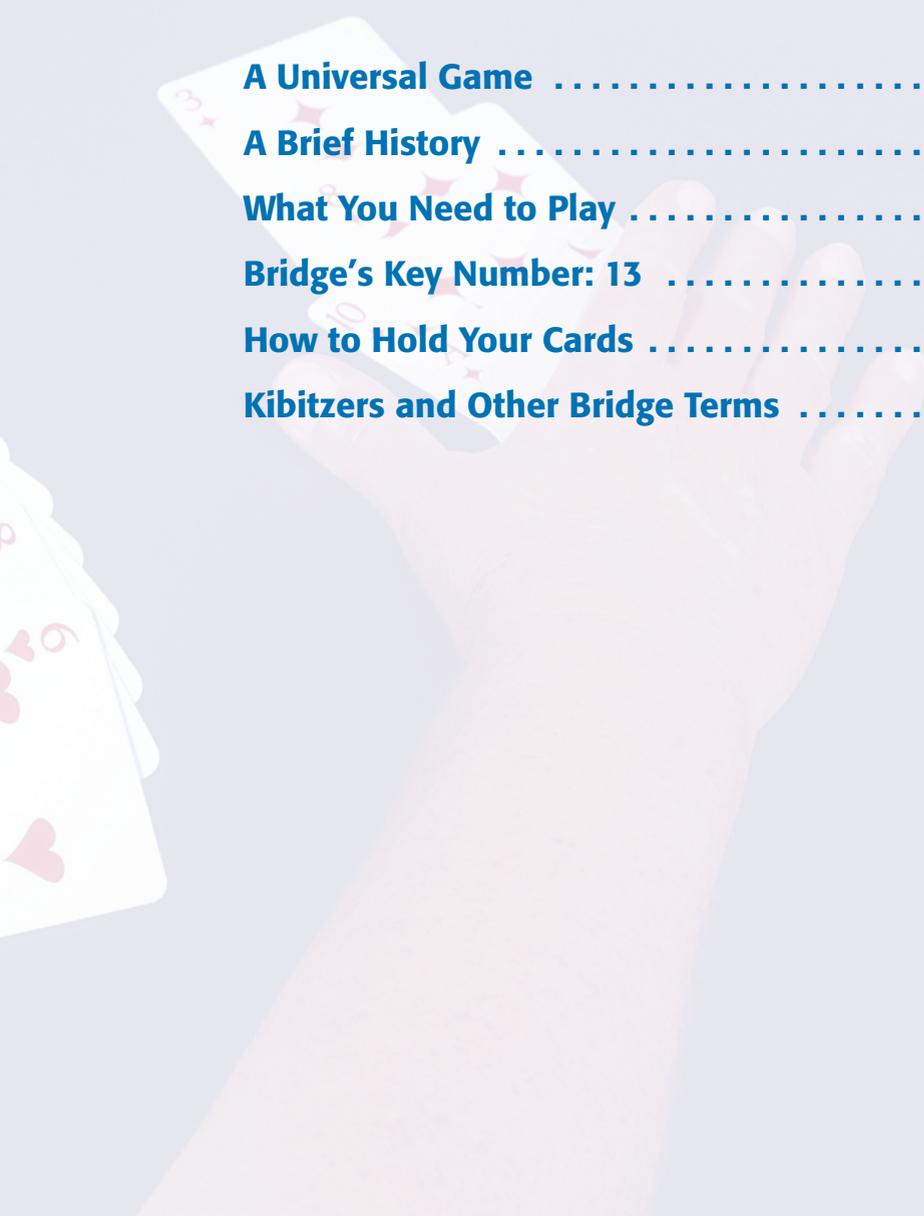
The Game of Bridge

Bridge is a challenging card game that never ceases to fascinate. One of its unique features is that you are not alone. Instead, you have a partner sitting across the table from you, and the two of you play together against another pair.

You may not be a star bridge player the first few times you play. However, the more time you can put into learning and practice, the better player you'll be and the more you'll enjoy each new deal. In this chapter, you will get your first glimpse of the game as you pick up a few basic concepts.



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A Universal Game

The game of contract bridge—or simply bridge—has been popular for more than 80 years and is played by millions of people around the world. You can enjoy it whether you are young or old, big or little, rich or poor.

A typical game involves four people playing at home. People also play bridge in bridge clubs, filling large rooms with many tables of four players.

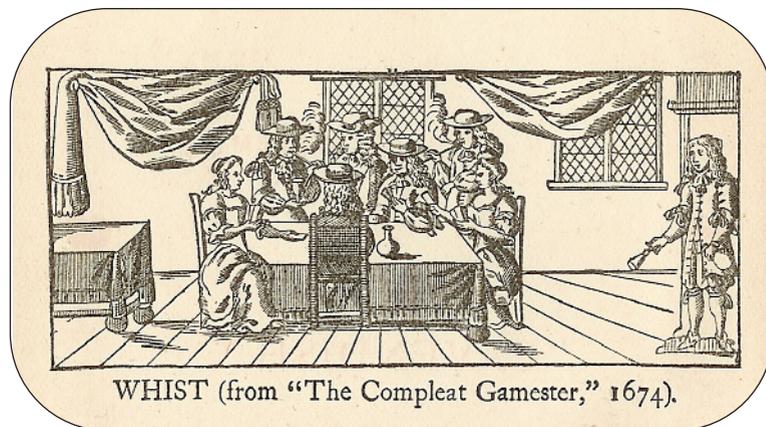
Of course, with a computer you can play bridge whenever you want. You can play on your own, using installed software, or play online with both friends and strangers.

Most major newspapers also publish a regular bridge column. Chances are you may have seen such columns in your local newspaper and wondered what was going on in them. After reading a few chapters of this book, you'll be able to follow them yourself. Reading the bridge columns is great for learning about the game!



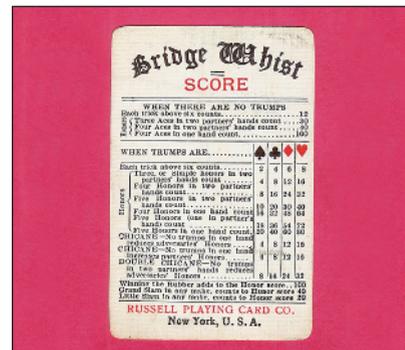
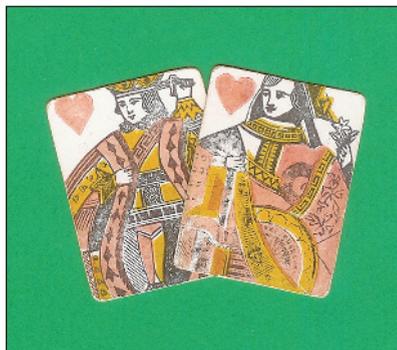
*Bridge is widely enjoyed both at home and at tournaments attended by many.
Right photo courtesy of the American Contract Bridge League.*

In the 1600s people played a 13-card ancestor of bridge called *ruffe & honours*. By the 1700s this game had evolved into the popular *whist* (see photo). In the 1880s a more sophisticated whist became known as *bridge whist*, then simply *bridge*. In the early 1900s bridge added an auction where all four players had a say as to which suit would be trumps. By the mid-1920s *auction bridge* evolved into an even better game, *contract bridge*—the game we know today.

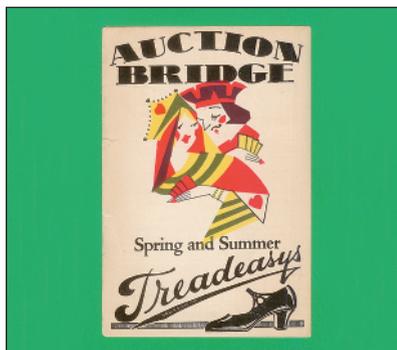


WHIST (from "The Compleat Gamester," 1674).

Ruffe & honours was mostly a game of luck. Hearts were the supreme *trump suit* (see Chapter 2) in early whist; in later years the last card turned up decided trumps. The dealer named the trump suit or declared no suit trump in bridge whist. In early bridge, the first team to win two *games* earned a *rubber* (see Chapter 3). Bridge also borrowed from *dummy whist*—where a player's hand is placed openly on the table and the player's partner chooses cards to be played from it (see Chapter 2).



Although auction bridge was itself a great leap forward, contract bridge was even more exciting. Credit for popularizing contract bridge's new scoring method, which greatly added skill to the *auction* part of bridge, goes to Harold S. Vanderbilt, a leading sportsman and industrialist of the day. Contract bridge also introduced *vulnerability*, a key factor within this new scoring scheme (see Chapter 3).



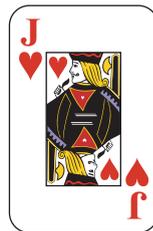
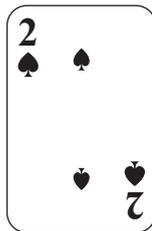
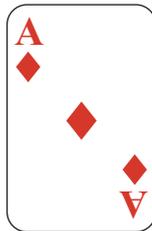
Harold S. Vanderbilt.
Photo courtesy of the American Contract Bridge League.

What You Need to Play

Bridge is a game for four people, two playing against two. Traditionally, partners sit across from each other at a square table about 30–33 inches per side. Of course, any table will do, and you can even play outdoors if it's not windy.

You'll need a regular deck of 52 cards, but having two decks available is even better. You'll also need pencil and paper to keep score during the game. You can buy pre-printed score pads, which divide each score sheet into columns headed *WE* and *THEY*. The left-hand column (*WE*) is for your side and the other is for the opponents (*THEY*). Usually at least one player on each team keeps score, however, all four players may well want to keep score. See Chapter 3, "Bridge Scoring," for more about keeping score.

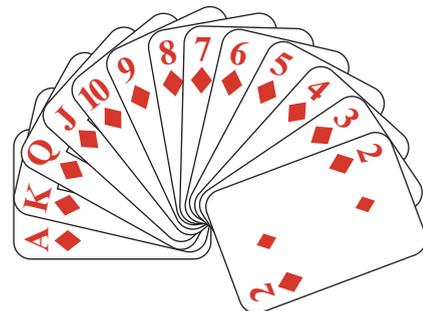
One pair can oppose the other pair the whole time, or the four players can *rotate* partnerships, with everyone getting to play with everyone else. If picking partners, a tradition from the days of whist is for each player to turn up one card from the pack. Those drawing the two high cards play against those with the two lower cards. In the figure below, the two players drawing the high cards, ace and king play against the two drawing the lower cards, jack and deuce.



TIP

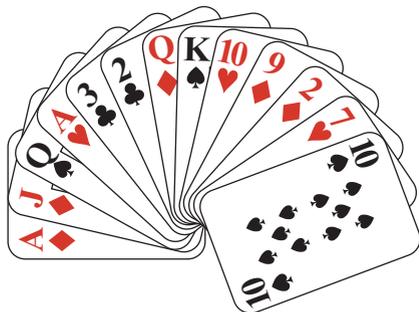
Have a side table or two nearby for snacks and drinks. This will help keep both the playing surface and cards clean.

While many numbers are important in bridge, the number 13 is the most important of all. For starters, each suit contains exactly 13 cards. Shown here is a fan of the 13 cards in the diamond suit: ace down to deuce.

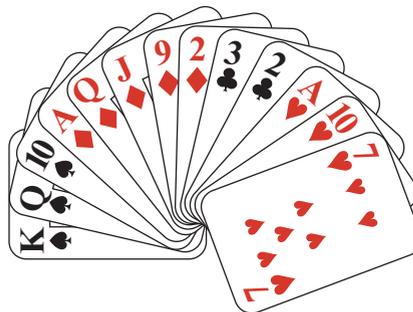


13 Cards: Dealt (Unsorted) and Sorted

In bridge, each player is dealt a hand of 13 cards. Usually a player rearranges—or *sorts*—his or her 13-card hand into suits, alternating red and black. This makes it easy for the player to see all 13 cards at once. That way, the player knows how many cards he or she possesses of each suit, and makes it easy to find or select a card to play. It also makes it easier to count total high card points (see Chapter 4 for more on high card points). Of course, you are free to arrange your cards in any way you choose.



A dealt hand, unsorted.



The same hand, sorted.

There are also 13 *tricks* in a game of bridge. You'll learn about tricks in Chapter 2, "Basic Bridge."

FAQ

Should I always order my suits the same way in my hand?

No. It's good practice not to always sort your hand the same way each time. For instance, don't put one particular suit always on the left, or your longest suit always on the right. If your opponents know your sorting habits, they might even take advantage of it! Some players don't sort their cards at all. In this book, suit order changes with each new chapter. You should vary your suits more often than that, however!

How to Hold Your Cards

There are right and wrong ways to hold your cards at bridge. Your basic concern is that only you see the cards that you hold. Don't let either opponent see your cards.



All players are holding their cards correctly at this table.



Kibitzers and Other Bridge Terms

The Game of Bridge

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Because bridge is quite interesting, people like to watch it being played. Onlookers are called *kibitzers*, one of several terms in bridge's unique vocabulary.

Often a group of 5 or 6 can be involved in a game of bridge, although only four play actively at once. Anyone who's out can sit at a table corner and watch—or *kibitz*. Kibitzing can be a good way to learn about the game. As long as it's okay with all four players, anyone can be a bridge kibitzer.

Bridge even seems to have its own language. In fact, observing your first game, you may feel a bit confused and overwhelmed! Many familiar words like *open*, *jump*, *lead*, *make*, and *signal* have their own meanings in bridge, which you will learn in upcoming chapters of this book.

Meanwhile don't worry about memorizing vocabulary. As you learn and play bridge, its language will become quite familiar to you.

