



Newcomers to bridge are often confused by the terminology encountered. New words, strange meanings for existing words, and more. Not just convention names (although they can be pretty weird in themselves), but also words to describe hands and plays.

This article is aimed at newer players and provides a potted summary of some of the words and expressions you are likely to encounter at the table.

LHO, RHO – left hand opponent (the opponent sitting on your left), right hand opponent (the opponent sitting on your right)

Honours – A, K, Q, J and T. Many people forget that the Ten is considered an honour.

Tenace – a non-contiguous holding like AQ or KJT

Part-score – a contract that is below game e.g. 2S

Singleton (slang terms include “stiff”) is one card in a suit, and **doubleton** is two cards in the suit

Psyche – a bid that is not in accordance with the hand but is made with the intention of disrupting the opponents’ bids. There is also a term “fielding a psyche” where the psycher’s partner knows that partner has psyched and acts accordingly, and while psyching is legal, fielding that psyche is not.

Cue bid - a bid of a suit bid or shown by the opponents. This is often used to ask partner if they have a stopper in that suit when heading towards no trumps but can also have other meanings like Michaels Cue Bid or Ghestem showing specific suits. Cue bids are not alertable. Bids showing first or second round control in a suit are also termed cue bids but this is a quite different meaning for the word.

Arrowswitch – a board that is played such that the NS players hold the EW cards and vice versa. This is sometimes a mistake but other times the movement might require it.

Average-plus and average-minus – some situations call for the awarding an artificial score in lieu of an actual bridge result. The side/s that are not at fault will receive an “average plus” which is 60% of the maximum score available, and an “average minus” (40%) will be applied to those side/s that are at fault.

Fouled board – a board where the hands in each of the 4 pockets are not the way they were when played at other tables e.g. the North and East hands got swapped. These are scored either in a separate group or by assigning an artificial score, depending on how many tables played the board in that fouled state.

Pass-out seat – the 3rd player to call after a bid or double or the 4th player to bid when no bid has been made is in the pass-out seat. It is called that because if that person passes, the auction is over.

Balancing bid - If the auction has died at a low level, the player in the pass-out seat might make a “balancing bid”. They might not have the right hand shape or even points to make a normal competitive bid but many players relax the rules in the pass-out seat. The rationale is that if the auction is dying at a lower level, your partner probably has points they couldn’t show and either a balancing bid will be successful or the opponents will bid up, either of which can be to your advantage.

Moysian fit – a “fit” in bridge is an 8 card suit between the two hands. A Moysian fit is a 7 card fit and is sometimes the right place to play when there is no practical alternative.

Kibitzer – a spectator watching at the table. Kibitzers must only look at one player’s hand and must not talk during play.

Loser count – a method of valuing your hand to count losers – basically a 3+ card suit with AKQ has no losers and for other suit holdings, every missing A K or Q up to the number of cards held in that suit is a loser e.g. Qx is 2 loser, Jx is a 2 loser and Jxx or xxx are all 3 losers.

Negative free bid – this is a bid that is normally forcing, but by agreement, in certain circumstances it is not. Some players play a bid by responder after an overcall as a negative free bid and this is alertable.

Distributional hand – a hand that has shortages, and length in one or two suits. The opposite is a **flat (or balanced) hand**.

Sacrifice – A sacrifice is when one side bids over the other not expecting to make the contract, but expecting that their negative score will be less than the score the other side will make when they make their contract. A phantom sacrifice is when you sacrifice and earn a negative score but the opponents could not have made the contract they had reached.

Reverse – bidding a second suit that is ranked higher than the first, so that if partner wants to go back to your first suit they have to bid at a level higher. It is

generally accepted that you need additional values to make a reverse bid.

Ruff and sluff – when declarer and dummy are both void in a suit but both hold trumps, they will gain a trick if either defender plays the suit they are void in because declarer can ruff in one hand and discard a loser from the other.

Principle of fast arrival (PFA) – this says that the faster you reach your contract the weaker you are. A sequence of 1H – 4H says that responder is weak (and probably has lots of hearts and that's why they going to game) but a delayed raise like 1H – 2C – 2D – 4H says responder has values. Even if opener has a good hand, they won't want to look beyond game after 1H – 4H, but may well do so after the second example.

Yarborough – named after the Earl of Yarborough, this describes a hand with no honours and that includes no tens.

Weak freak – this is a responder's hand that has poor values but has a very good fit with opener. A weak freak is often a good reason to go straight to game – firstly because the opponents will have a shortage in your suit and most likely a fit in the other major and secondly many weak freak hands are distributional, allowing cross-ruffing opportunities.

Chinese finesse – finessing when you don't have touching honours e.g. if dummy has Axxxx and you hold Qxxx, playing the Queen hoping to find the King with LHO is a chinese finesse. It is a considered poor play because the Jack is held by an opponent and perhaps even the Ten so you will gain nothing from the finesse.

There are also different ways to verbally describe a holding in a suit. "AK to 5" means a 5 card suit headed by the AK. "AKx" is AK and an irrelevant third card, also described as "AK third".

Hand shape is often abbreviated to 4 digits to describe the holding in each suit in order of their rank. If you have a 5422 hand, you have 5 spades, 4 hearts, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs.

Next issue we will look at a very brief summary of some of the weird and wonderful conventions you will encounter at the table.