

HOW TO PLAY MINIBRIDGE



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Contents

WHAT IS BRIDGE?	1
WHAT IS MINIBRIDGE?	1
INTRODUCTION TO TRICK-TAKING CARD GAMES.....	1
HOW TO PLAY MINIBRIDGE.....	2
CHOOSING THE CONTRACT	3
Choosing the Denomination (suit or No Trumps).....	3
Part Score Contracts	4
Summary Of Minibridge Contracts.....	5
Expected Number Of Tricks.....	5
PLAYING AS DECLARER IN NO TRUMPS	6
Making a plan example – 9 tricks in no trumps.....	6
Making Small Cards Into Winners	7
Count Down The Missing Cards	8
Finessing.....	8
Unblocking	9
PLAYING AS DECLARER IN SUIT CONTRACTS.....	10
Ways Of Making Extra Tricks.....	10
PLAYING AS A DEFENDER – OPENING LEADS	11
Top of a sequence	11
4th highest from a longest suit.....	11
Take note of partner’s lead	11
PLAYING AS A DEFENDER – 2 nd AND 3 rd HAND PLAY.....	12
Win a trick as cheaply as possible.....	12
Second hand low.....	12
Third hand high	12
GUIDELINES SUMMARY FOR CHOOSING MINIBRIDGE CONTRACTS....	13
MINIBRIDGE SCORING SUMMARY	14
GLOSSARY	15

WHAT IS BRIDGE?

Bridge is a game for four people playing in two partnerships. An exchange of information between the partners called **bidding*** establishes a **contract** where one partnership agrees to try to win a certain number of **tricks**) with a given **suit** as **trumps** (or with no suit as trumps). The partnership scores points for achieving or exceeding their target and loses points if they fail.

WHAT IS MINIBRIDGE?



MiniBridge is a version of bridge where the system of determining the contract (in MiniBridge, sometimes called the **target**) is replaced with a much simpler process. This enables people to start playing bridge right away. Everything learned in MiniBridge is relevant to playing bridge, so it's a great way to get started.

INTRODUCTION TO TRICK-TAKING CARD GAMES

Bridge and MiniBridge are trick taking card games. Trick-taking card games have the following characteristics:

1. A standard pack of 52 cards is used. There are four suits: ♠ Spades, ♥ Hearts, ♦ Diamonds and ♣ Clubs. Each suit has thirteen cards **ranking** in the order: A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2. Ace is high.
2. People generally sort their cards into suits, alternating red-black, and then put cards in each suit in rank order.
3. One player takes a card from their hand and places it visibly face up on the table. This is called 'making a lead'
4. Other players take it in turns to play a card in order, clockwise from the first player.
5. Players must play a card of the same suit as the card led if they can. This is called **following suit**). If they cannot follow suit they are allowed to play any card.
6. In many cases there is a special suit designated as **trumps**. Any trump card ranks higher than all non-trump cards. A trump card can be played when a player cannot follow suit. This is called **ruffing**.

* Words in bold are described in the glossary.

7. When everyone has played a card, the 4 cards form a 'trick'. If no trump cards have been played, the winner is the highest card of the suit led. If one or more trumps have been played, the highest trump wins.
8. At the end of the trick each card is then turned over and placed in front of the player. The card is placed vertically like this by the pair who won the trick  or horizontally like this if by the pair who didn't win the trick. 
9. The winner of a trick makes the lead to the next trick.

HOW TO PLAY MINIBRIDGE

1. The partners sit opposite each other. One partnership is North-South, the other East-West). Each player is dealt 13 cards.
2. Each player estimates the value of their hand by using a scale of points called **High Card Points (HCP)**. Ace = 4, King = 3, Queen = 2, Jack = 1.
3. Each player announces their points total, starting with the dealer and going clockwise round the table. The overall total should add up to forty.
4. The pair with the most points between them becomes the declaring side, the other pair become the defending side. If both sides have twenty points, redeal the cards. The person on the declaring side with the most points becomes the **declarer** and their partner becomes the **dummy**. If both players have the same number of points, then declarer is the one who announced their points first.
5. The dummy's hand is put down on the table for all to see and declarer chooses the **contract**. He announces either **part-score** or **game** and either no-trumps or a specific trumps suit. The goal for a part-score is 7 tricks, and the goals for game contracts are 9 tricks in no-trumps, 10 tricks in ♥ or ♠ and 11 tricks in ♣ or ♦.
6. The first person to lead a card is the player on the left of the declarer. Each person plays a card in turn clockwise and whoever puts down the highest card wins the trick, any trump beating any card in another suit. If either defender wins a trick, it counts as a trick for their side.

7. The cards are then turned over and the winner of the trick leads the first card for the next trick.
8. Declarer controls the play of dummy's cards and if the winning card comes from the dummy, the first card for the next trick comes from the dummy but the declarer names the card to be played from dummy.
9. After all the cards have been played, the players agree how many tricks were won by each side and calculate the score.
10. The position of the dealer moves round the table clockwise.

CHOOSING THE CONTRACT

The choice of contract is very much influenced by the scoring method so we need to learn about this next.

The declaring side only scores points if they win the target number of tricks or more.

No points are won for the first six tricks. For each additional trick, points are scored according to the contract, as follows:

Denomination	Points Per Trick
No Trumps	40 points for the first trick 30 points for each subsequent trick
♥ or ♠ (the major suits)	30 points
♦ or ♣ (the minor suits)	20 points

Choosing the Denomination (suit or No Trumps).

First we identify if there is a suit that would be good as the trump suit. We are looking for a suit that has at least 8 cards between the two hands. This is known as having a **fit** in the suit.

8-card major suit fit ♥ or ♠	Choose this suit as trumps.
8-card minor fit ♦ or ♣	Choose this suit as trumps but consider No Trumps if all suits have high cards
No 8-card fit	Choose to play No Trumps.

Game Contracts

A game contract is when the score for the tricks we have announced and made adds up to **at least 100**. When our partnership has at least 25 high card points we usually choose a 'game' contract as follows:

Contact	Trick Points
9 tricks in No Trumps	40+30+30 (= 100)
10 tricks in ♥ or ♠	4 x 30 (= 120)
11 tricks in ♦ or ♣	5 x 20 (=100)

Notice that we need 11 tricks for game in ♦ or ♣. This normally needs 27 or more high card points. When we have a 8 card fit in ♦ or ♣ it is sometimes better to choose game in No Trumps if we have some high cards in every suit.

Part Score Contracts

A part score is when the score for the tricks we have announced and made adds up to **less than 100**. When our partnership has less than 25 high card points we choose a target of 7 tricks.

There is no advantage in choosing a target of 8 tricks over choosing a target of 7 tricks. A contract for 8 tricks making exactly 8 tricks scores the same as a contract for 7 tricks making 8 tricks.

If a game contract has been announced *before the play of the cards* and it is achieved we gain a bonus of 300 points.

If part score contract has been announced and 7 or more tricks have been made we gain a bonus of 50 points.

If we don't reach our goal, we don't get any points for the tricks that we make. Instead, the defenders get 50 points for each trick that the we are short of our target.

Summary Of Minibridge Contracts

No points are scored for the first six tricks.

Type	Contract	Trick Points	Bonus	Total
Game	9 tricks in No Trumps	40+30+30 (= 100)	300	400
Game	10 tricks in ♥ or ♠	4 x 30 (= 120)	300	420
Game	11 tricks in ♦ or ♣	5 x 20 (=100)	300	400
Part Score	7 tricks in No Trump	40	50	90
Part Score	7 tricks in ♥ or ♠	30	50	80
Part Score	7 tricks in ♦ or ♣	20	50	70

Expected Number Of Tricks

The table below shows number of tricks we normally expect to make from our partnership's combined High Card Point count. It is important to know by heart the ones shown in bold.

Points	Tricks (in No Trumps)	Tricks (Suit contract with 8+ card fit)
21-22	7	8
23-24	8	9
25-26	9	10
27-28	10	11
29-30	11	11
31-32	11	12
33-36	12	12
37+	13	13

'Part Score' 50 points bonus

'Game' in No Trumps 300 points bonus

'Game' in ♥ or ♠ 300 points bonus

'Game' in ♣ or ♦ 300 points bonus

PLAYING AS DECLARER IN NO TRUMPS



MAKE A PLAN!

When we see the opening lead, we **STOP** and ask three questions:

1. How many tricks do I need to make the contract?

We then look carefully at our hand and the dummy:

2. How many tricks could I make without losing the lead?

3. How will I get the extra tricks?

Making a plan example – 9 tricks in no trumps

Dummy

♠ A 3 2

♥ J 10 4 2

♦ K 9 5

♣ 10 6 3

Lead ♦ 6

Our Hand

♠ 8 7 6

♥ K Q 3

♦ A 4 3

♣ A K Q 2

We need to make 9 tricks in No Trumps. The lead is the 6 of diamonds. First we count **top winners** in each suit. Top winners are tricks that we can win without needing to lose the lead.

We have 1 top winner in ♠, 2 in ♦, 3 in ♣, 0 in ♥ (no top winners in hearts as we first have to lose a trick to the Ace). We have a total of 6 top winners and need 3 more. The extra three tricks will come from hearts but we must first force the defenders to play their Ace to **promote** our high cards.

We win the first trick with the Ace of diamonds then immediately play a heart. If the defenders don't play the Ace of hearts the first time round, we continue playing hearts until they play the Ace. We can then take our other winners.

The wrong way to play is to take our spade and diamond winners **before** knocking out the Ace of hearts. If we do this the defenders will have enough winners in spades and diamonds to defeat the contract.

So: When we have to lose the lead in order to promote some high cards, we must do it early while we still have winners in all the other suits so that we can win back the lead whatever the opponents play.

Making Small Cards Into Winners

In a No Trump contract (or in the trump suit) even the lowly two can become a winner when we have a long suit with high cards.

By playing our high cards we can **draw** out all of the opponents cards in that suit. In a trump contract this is called **drawing trumps**.

Here we have 8 of the 13 cards in the spade suit. How many tricks will we win?

Dummy
♠ 5 4 3
Our hand
♠ A K Q J 2

The answer is **nearly always** 5 tricks. There are 5 spades in the opponents hands, they might be divided 3-2, 4-1 or 5-0. The chances of a 5-0 split are very small so *usually* after we have played the ♠A, ♠K, ♠Q and ♠J there will be no spades left in the opponents hands and the ♠2 will be a winner.

Even if we have the same cards but missing the Jack there is still a high chance that after we have played the ♠A, ♠K and ♠Q there will be no spades left and the ♠6 and ♠2 will be winners.

Dummy
♠ 5 4 3
Our hand
♠ A K Q 6 2

How are the missing cards most likely to split?

If there is an **odd** number of cards missing they will more often split as **evenly** as possible.

e.g. 5 missing are most likely to split 3-2

If there is an **even** number of cards missing they more often split **oddly**.

e.g. 6 missing are most likely to split 4-2 (not 3-3)

Count Down The Missing Cards

When we have a long suit (it could be the trump suit or a long suit in No Trumps) we often want to **draw** the opponent's cards:

1. First count how many cards the opponents have in that suit.
2. Then we count down the missing cards as we see them played.

Dummy
♠ 5 4 3
Our hand
♠ A K Q 6 2

Here, let's assume that the missing spades split 3-2.

First, we say to ourself 'We have 8 cards, the opponents have 5'.

We play the ♠A and watch what the opponents play. They both play a spade so we say to ourself 'the opponents now have 3 spades left'.

We play the ♠K and watch what the opponents play. They both play a spade so we say to ourself 'the opponents now have 1 spade left'.

We play the ♠Q and see the opponents play the last spade. Now our ♠3 and ♠2 are winners.

Finessing

We can sometimes take advantage of the position of a missing honour card to give ourselves a 50% chance of making an extra trick.

A **finesse** is an attempt to win a trick with a card that is not a certain winner, usually by playing it as the third card to a trick hoping the second play holds the missing high card.

When we are missing a higher honour it is normally right to lead a low card towards the honour or honours we are hoping to make.

	A Q 5										
K J 10 6	<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td>N</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td></td> <td>E</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>S</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		9 8 7
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	3 4 2										

Here we have the Ace and Queen in dummy, so we play a low card toward the Queen and plan to play the Queen if West play low. If West has the King the Queen will win. Of course if East has the King the Queen will lose. The chances are 50-50.

Unblocking

Sometimes we can't make all the tricks of a suit because of a **blockage**. A suit is blocked when there are high cards in the way, preventing us from transferring the lead from one hand to the other in that suit

Dummy
♥ A K
♠ 3
Our hand
♥ Q J 5 2
♠ A

We can recognize the threat of a blockage by the presence of isolated **honours** in one of the two hands.

There are two ways of avoiding a blockage. First we play the honours which are blocking (this is called **unblocking**) then we use an **entry** in another suit to cross over to get the winning tricks in the other hand.

In this example we play the Ace and King of hearts first, then lead the low spade to the Ace. We are now back in our hand to play the winning Queen and Jack of hearts.

Dummy
♠ A Q
Our hand
♠ K J 5

Sometimes we can **overtake** one of the blocking cards. First we play the Ace then overtake the Queen with the King. In this way we can make a trick with the Jack without needing an entry outside the suit.

To avoid an unnecessary blockage:

Play The High Card/s From The Short Side First.

Dummy
♠ A 4
Our hand
♠ K Q J 2

In this case we could accidentally cause a blockage by playing the King first and then the Ace – we are then stuck in the wrong hand. When we have honour cards in both our hand and dummy always **play the high card (or cards) from the short side first**. If we start with the Ace in this example, there is no problem.

Try out some of the examples with a pack of cards.

PLAYING AS DECLARER IN SUIT CONTRACTS



MAKE A PLAN!

We don't play a single card until we have made a plan to make the number of tricks required for the contract.

The plan will influence decisions we will have to make during the play, for example knowing when to delay drawing trumps instead of drawing them all at the beginning.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| STEP 1. | Know how many tricks are needed to make the contract! |
| STEP 2. | Estimate how many tricks in trump suit (assume most likely split). |
| STEP 3. | Count top winners in the other three suits. |
| STEP 4. | Calculate how many extra tricks needed to make the contract. |

Ways Of Making Extra Tricks

In addition to the ways of making extra tricks that we looked at for No Trumps, we now also have the advantage of a trump suit.

We can often make extra tricks by **ruffing** in the hand with the shorter trump suit, usually **dummy**. We look for short suits in dummy that we can eventually ruff.

We rarely make **extra** tricks by ruffing in the hand with the longer trump suit (usually our hand) as we have already counted these trumps as winners.

**Don't Forget To Count Down The
Missing Trumps As They Are Played.**

PLAYING AS A DEFENDER – OPENING LEADS

Picture cards are called **honours**. For the purpose of leads, the ten is also considered to be an honour.

Top of a sequence

The very best choice of opening lead against No Trump and Trump contracts is the top card from a sequence of honours - **top of sequence**.

The reason for leading the top of a sequence is that we hope to *promote* some winners for our side by knocking out the declarer's high cards.

Against **No Trumps** contracts it must be a sequence of **three** i.e. AKQ6, KQJ32, QJ105. It is also correct to lead the Jack from J1094.

Against a suit contract it only needs to be a sequence of two e.g. AK43, KQ43 etc

**Do not lead an honour card without the card below it!
The lead of an honour promises we hold the next highest card.**

4th highest from a longest suit

Normally the next best choice is the 4th highest of our longest suit e.g. K9852. Our aim is to force out declarer's high cards in the suit so that we can promote our own high cards and maybe also make tricks with our small cards (especially in No Trump contracts).

Take note of partner's lead

Always make a mental note of which suit and which card partner played on the first lead. They will usually want us to lead this suit again when we get the chance. Especially notice if they led an honour, promising the one below it.

PLAYING AS A DEFENDER – 2nd AND 3rd HAND PLAY

Win a trick as cheaply as possible

If we have the Ace and King, we win with the King. It helps partner work out what cards we don't have. If we win a trick with the Ace partner knows we don't have the King. If we win a trick with the King partner knows we don't have the Queen.

Second hand low

If we are the second person to play to a trick we should normally play a low card. Even if we can win the trick, it is still correct most of the time to play low to give partner a chance to win the trick. If in doubt play low!

Third hand high

Even if we can't win the trick, we should nearly always play high. We may set up winners for our partner. When playing 3rd hand high with equally high cards, we play the lowest of the equal cards (see 'Win a trick as cheaply as possible').

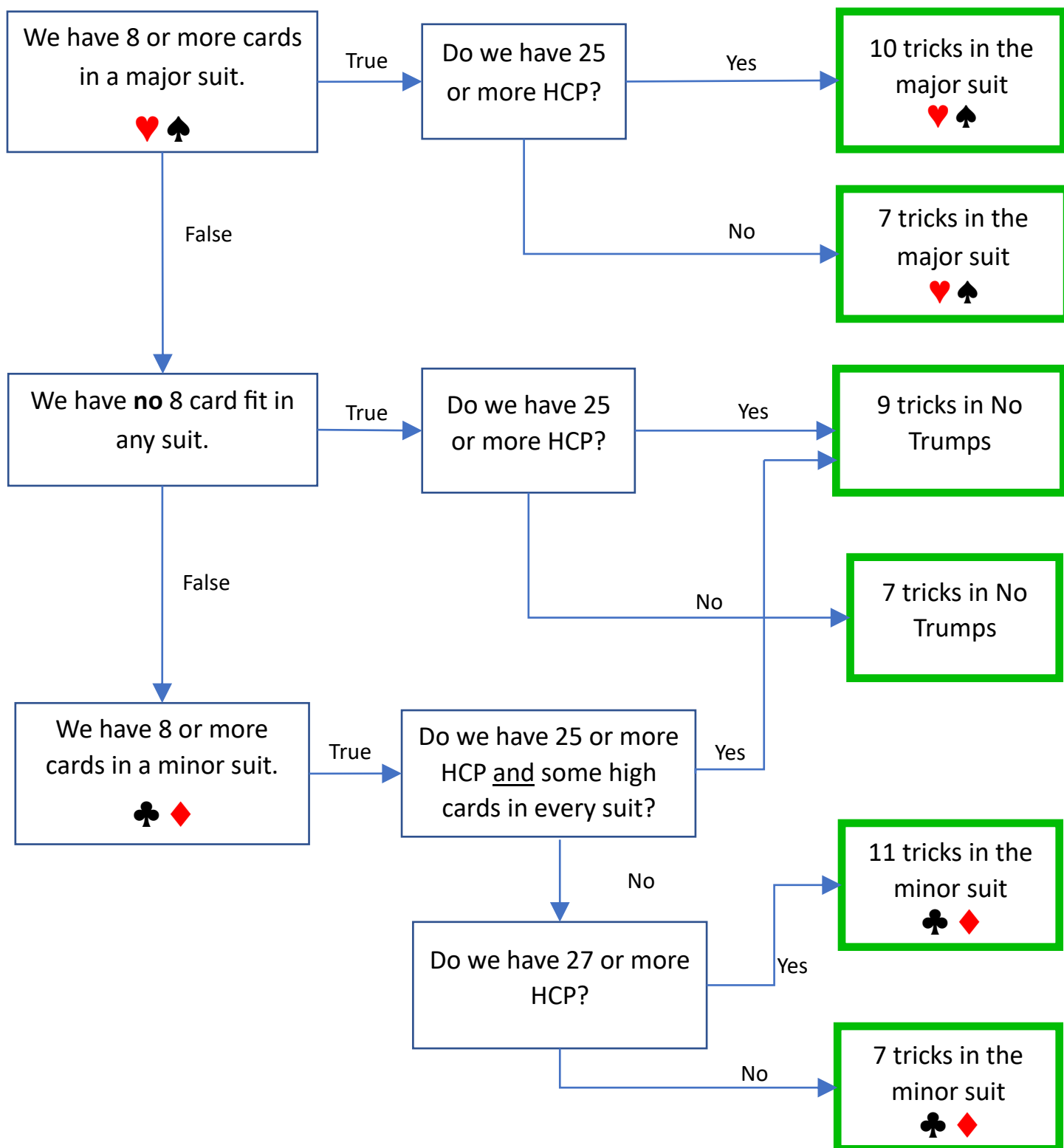
GUIDELINES SUMMARY FOR CHOOSING MINIBRIDGE CONTRACTS

Bear in mind that if the hands are very distributional (e.g. long suits, **voids** etc) we can sometimes make game contracts with less than 25 HCP.





1. CHECK DISTRIBUTION

2. CHECK HIGH CARD POINTS

3. CHOOSE CONTRACT



MINIBRIDGE SCORING SUMMARY

1	Declarer only scores points if they make the contract.
2	The first six tricks won don't score any points.
3	All the subsequent tricks won do score points.
4	Points per trick vary by denomination:  and  20 points per trick  and  30 points per trick No Trumps: 40 points for the seventh trick and 30 for each subsequent trick.
5	All contracts that are made score bonus points in addition to points from tricks.

6	If points for the tricks specified in the contract add up to 100 or more, there is a Game bonus of 300 points if the contract is made.
7	If points for the tricks specified in the contract add up to less than 100, there is still a Part Score bonus of 50 .
8	If we can't get the game bonus there is no point in choosing a contract for more than seven tricks.
9	Points scored for overtricks don't count towards the game bonus.
10	Defenders score 50 points for every trick that they defeat the contract by.

E.g. Contract is 9 tricks in No Trumps. Declarer made 10 tricks.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
						40	30	30	30

No Score for the first 6 tricks

Plus 300 game bonus for making the contract. Total = **430**.

E.g. Contract is 7 tricks in Spades. Declarer made 10 tricks.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
						30	30	30	30

No Score for the first 6 tricks

Plus 50 part score bonus for making the contract. Total = **170**. Note that the game bonus isn't scored as the contract only specified 7 tricks.

GLOSSARY

Blocked	A suit is blocked when there are high cards in the way, preventing us from transferring the lead from one hand to the other in that suit.
Bonus points	Extra points won for making the contract.
Contract	A target for number of tricks to win in a particular denomination
Dealer	The first person to announce points in MiniBridge.
Declaring side	The partnership that has the majority of the points.
Defenders	The declarer's opponents i.e. the pair who are not declarer or dummy.
Denomination	The 4 suits and No Trumps are the 5 denominations.
Draw trumps	Playing trumps until neither defender has any left.
Dummy	Refers to the player or the hand opposite declarer. Dummy's cards are visible to all.
Entry	An entry is a high card that allows us to transfer the lead from one hand to the other.
Establish	Turning lower cards of a suit into winners by drawing all the opposition's cards of that suit.
Finesse	An attempt to win a trick with a card that is not a certain winner, usually by playing it as the third card to a trick hoping the second player holds the missing high card.
Fit	A 'fit' means a total of 8 or more cards in a certain suit between our hand and dummy.
Following suit	Requirement to play card of same suit as the first card led to the trick.
Game Bonus	300 points for making a game contract.
Game Contract	A contract where the points for tricks is 100 points or more. Scores a game bonus of 300.
High Card Points (HCP)	A way to assess the strength of a hand by giving values to the high cards: Ace: 4, King: 3, Queen: 2, Jack: 1

Honour	The five highest cards of each suit: Ace, King, Queen, Jack, Ten.
Lead	First card played to the trick.
Major suit	Spades and hearts are the major suits.
Minor suit	Clubs and diamonds are minor suits.
No Trumps (NT)	When no suit is chosen as trumps.
Part Score Bonus	50 points for making a part-score contract.
Part-score contract	A contract where the points for tricks is less than 100. It scores a part-score bonus of 50 points.
Promote	A card is promoted when the opponents' higher cards have been knocked out.
Rank	2 to 10, Jack, Queen, King and Ace.
Ruffing	Playing a trump to win a trick when we can't follow suit.
Second hand low	A guideline for following suit when defender is second to play to the trick.
Sequence	Two or more consecutive cards in a suit: usually honours e.g. KQJ.
Split	The way in which the defenders' cards in a particular suit are divided between their two hands.
Suit	Clubs, diamonds, hearts or spades.
Top of sequence	Highest of two or more consecutive cards in a suit: usually honours e.g. <u>K</u> QJ.
Top winners	Tricks that we could win without needing to lose the lead.
Trick	Four cards, one from each player, played in clockwise rotation.
Trumps	A suit that is designated to rank above all other suits A trump card beats all cards of any other suit.
Unblock	Playing high cards from the short side first to prevent blocking a suit.
Void	Having no cards of a particular suit.

PROGRESSING TO BRIDGE

Most of the things we have learned in MiniBridge also apply in bridge but unlike MiniBridge we don't announce our High Card Points or choose our contract after the dummy has been revealed. Instead there is a **bidding** process to determine the contract.

To help you in your next steps towards learning bridge you'll find more resources at www.nofearbridge.co.uk

We have a set of interactive video courses for complete beginners including:

- Basic bidding.
- Planning the play as declarer.
- Essential information for defenders.

The courses include key points after each video, progress quizzes, practice hands and certificate of completion.

In addition to the courses there are lots of other resources and practice activities. Some of the most popular are:

Bidding Crib Sheet: An A4 printable ready-reference for use when practicing with friends.

Daily practice hands: For declarer play and defence.

Weekly Quizzes: Bidding and opening Leads.

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