



# Playing Cards

## What happens most often at the bridge table?

Not a trick question, but something you probably don't realise until you think about it...Playing cards – technically each player will do it about 350 times in a normal session.

So, it is interesting that a lot of players don't know how to do it – or more correctly, don't know what constitutes a played card.

The laws of bridge set down the rules for the director to apply in determining whether or not a card is considered to be played. These rules are different for the **declaring side** and the **defending side**.

**Let's start with the defenders** – as this is usually the simplest. A defender's card is considered to be played when it is in a position where the face of the card could have been seen by his partner. There are several misconceptions often associated with the play of a defender's card:

- 1) Note that it does not matter whether or not the partner has seen the card – the test is whether he *could* have seen it. For instance, if a player is looking out the window while his partner places a card face up on the table and so doesn't see it, nevertheless the card is still considered played.
- 2) The fact that declarer may have seen what the card is, is not relevant to the director's decision. It is not uncommon that a defender may hold a card in such a way that one of the opponents can see it, but no one else can. Also, sometimes declarer may pipe up with something along the lines of "I saw the king of hearts – you have to play it." This is particularly foolish. If the director determines that the defender's partner could not have the face of the card, then it doesn't have to be played. Furthermore, declarer has just told a defender about one of his partner's cards, and that defender is perfectly entitled to use that information.

Note that there is a special rule relating to opening leads out of turn. When a defender places an opening lead face down on the table, that is considered to be a played card and may only be retracted in two situations:

- 1) that player is not actually on lead; or
- 2) the director permits the player to change the lead because he has been given some incorrect information about the meaning of the opponents' auction which only comes to light after the card has been placed on the table.

One poor habit that some players have is that of pulling a card out of their hand, thinking about it, putting it back, choosing another, pulling it out, putting it back, ...and so on. While none of the cards will be considered to have been played until it is possible that their partner can see its face, it is a very bad practice which should be avoided at all costs. The reason is that by pulling out cards and then changing your mind and putting them back, you are making it very clear to your partner that you are unsure of what you should lead and that you have a number of definite possibilities. This places partner under considerable ethical strain to ignore the information which you are conveying, even though you may not be doing it deliberately. If there is the suggestion that partner may have used this information later on in the defence, the director may award an adjusted score.

**Declarer's card:** Here is what the laws say – the declarer's card is considered to be played if it is held, face up, touching or nearly touching the table, or maintained in a position to indicate that it has been played. So, if there is a dispute, the director has to come to the table, hear the “facts” (of which there are usually four versions), and then try to come up with a decision given how the laws instruct him.

Most significant, however, is the incorrect belief of many players that a declarer may take back the card they have just placed on the table. This usually occurs when they play a card and then quickly take it back realising that they have pulled the wrong card from their hand. Once a card has been deliberately faced on the table, then, in most cases, unfortunately declarer is stuck with it. If the declarer has carelessly pulled out the three instead of the ace which he meant to, the three will have to be played. If he has momentarily forgotten that hearts are trumps and has tried to ruff with a spade, then the spade which he played will have to remain as the played card.

There are just two situations where a card once played may be withdrawn and another card played – both by declarer and defender:

- 1) to correct a revoke – if you fail to follow suit when you could have, you may be permitted to change your card;
- 2) following some infraction – for example, if the opponent has revoked and changed their card, you also have the right to change yours. Similarly, if you were given wrong information about the meaning of the opponent's agreements, the director may permit you to change your card provided no one else has played.

Finally, **Dummy's card** is played by declarer naming it, after which dummy picks up the card and places it in the played position. Although not common in Australia, it is also permissible for declarer to play a card from dummy by leaning across and picking it up himself.

When naming a card, it is technically right for declarer to state the suit and rank of the card, eg. two of spades, king of diamonds, etc. Of course, far more usual is for the declarer to say things like, “small”, “big”, “win it”, “trump”, “run the clubs” and so on. The laws recognise this and there are various “rules” for the director to interpret these commands.

A number of issues may arise from the play of dummy's card.

- 1) Declarer makes an “unintended designation”, that is, via a slip of the tongue he names a card which he never intended to play. This in itself is a large and contentious area. I have dealt with it at some length in a previous article. In certain circumstances, if declarer is able to convince the director that he never intended to play the card he named, a change may be permitted.
- 2) Declarer names a card, but dummy plays a different card. The general rule is that the card named is the card which must be played. If a defender plays a card in response to the card which dummy incorrectly plays, then it can be replaced without any penalty.
- 3) A defender mishears or misunderstands the card declarer has called for from dummy, and plays subsequently. Unless dummy has played the wrong card, then the defender is stuck with the card which he has played.