

Approach at the Table Nigel Rosendorff

About 200 years ago Benjamin Franklin decided to improve his character. Each week he stressed one virtue that he wished to acquire. For example, one week he would concentrate on being frugal. The next week he would focus on avoiding idle gossip. When he finished his long list of self-improvements, he repeated the list many times over. He knew from personal experience that vague attempts to improve several behaviour patterns simultaneously would not work.

The trick is to work on one aspect of your game at a time, then when you are happy with that aspect move on to another. Here is a list of self improvements to make you a better player.

- Be a good partner. We are all striving to do the right thing. When we make a mistake it is not up to partner to correct what you have done wrong. Be a good partner do not say a word and get on with the next hand.
- Show no emotion when dummy comes down and **never comment when putting dummy down.**
- Detach your emotions from the previous hand. Treat each hand as though it is the first hand of a session.
- Think and plan before playing to trick one.
- Bid and play in an even and confident manner. The worst bid or play will often succeed if done confidently. Develop a confident, professional and well mannered table presence.
- Concentrate properly. The ability to concentrate is a vital bridge attribute. We are all limited as to how much intense concentration we can muster when applying ourselves to any task. A secret of playing well is not to be “wound up” all session long. Concentrate only when you need to. Several ways to conserve energy are.
 - As dummy, relax and perform dummy’s simple duties. Do not scrutinise everyone’s play or fret about the contract. Relax and recharge.
 - Incessant rehashing of hands between deals is counter-productive and energy consuming. No post mortems.
 - When playing in a tournament, relax and recharge between sessions. Go for a walk, get away from your partner. Do not rehash hands or plays unless there is a major partnership misunderstanding that needs to be addressed. Learn to concentrate properly, drink water, avoid alcohol and coffee.
- Protect your cards.
- Do not be intimidated. Learn to play the cards not the people.
- Treat your opponents with respect, like snakes. You have no friends at the table, only opponents. You are there to play bridge not to improve your social status or to catch up on gossip.
- Be a tough competitor.
- Act decisively.
- Stick to your system. If a bid is not in the system notes then don’t make it.
- Be selective in using and choosing conventions. When choosing a convention you should decide. Is the convention easy to remember?
 - Do both partners understand and know the follow ups and what to do if the opponents intervene?
 - Does the convention occur frequently enough to warrant the effort to remember it?
 - Does the convention have technical merit?Only use a convention when no natural bid is available. The simple bid is often the best bid.
- Do not lose interest when holding a terrible hand. Always look attentive.
- Do not teach during the session, it’s bad manners.
- Develop a killer instinct. Bridge is intended to be a competitive game. Doubles and other maximum score tactics are the very heart and soul of bridge. You can and should be a friendly, courteous competitor both at and away from the table. But while the hand is in progress – develop a killer instinct.
- Develop a positive mental attitude. If you are defending then always assume the contract is defeatable. If you are a declarer assume the contract is makeable. Assume your finesses will work be positive all the time!!!
- Strive to improve. Ask questions of better players. Read worthwhile books. Participate with and against the strongest players possible. The game will be more stimulating and interesting if you strive to improve.

- Develop a bridge sense of humour. Don't take the game too seriously learn to laugh at some of our silly stuff ups, develop a bridge sense of humour.
- Be a practical player. Bridge is an imperfect game played by humans!!!! You cannot expect to land on the head of a pin on every hand. The auction is an estimate of the trick-taking potential of the hand. It is not an exact science (no matter how hard some players try to make it so). When the bidding indicates that some contract has a reasonable chance of success, the practical player will just bid what he thinks he can make.
- Don't waste time between hands, especially with post mortems!
- Improve your bridge etiquette.
 - # Be courteous to partner and opponents at all times.
 - # Avoid remarks or actions that might annoy or embarrass another player.
 - # A call for the director should be made, when necessary, in a manner that is courteous to the other players and to the director.
 - # Don't take offense at inadvertent or ignorant breaches of etiquette by other players, especially inexperienced ones.
 - # Maintain a pleasant demeanour.
 - # Refrain from unnecessary talking during a hand or between the boards of a round.
 - # Be a good sport. Compliment your partner or the opponents when it is deserved.
 - # Avoid gloating after a good result.
 - # Avoid griping after a bad result.
 - # Abide by the director's decisions with graciousness.

Good bridge etiquette will make you a popular player and enhance the reputation of the game. We are all ambassadors for the game of bridge.

By having good etiquette you are promoting the game of bridge that we all love.

Habits are hard to change to be a better player takes time. One step at a time.