

Sam's Golden Rules (revised Dec 2005)

Points to ponder:

1. *Bridge is a game of mistakes. It also is a game of probabilities.*
2. *In the long run, bridge is 60% bidding (some would say 70%), 20% defense, 10% opening lead, 5% dummy play and 5% luck.*
3. *How can you improve your bridge skills over time?*
 - *Read lots of books*
 - *Watch experts play - ask yourself what you would do if you were in their positions*
 - *Reflect on problem hands and consult fellow players (if nobody bids or plays like you did, then chances are that you are wrong!)*
 - *Learn from bad results and mistakes*
 - *Develop abundant agreements with your regular partner*

Bidding

1. Rule Number One – for every rule, there are always exceptions. Do not apply them blindly.
2. Nothing can replace homework and lots of discussions, bidding practices and agreements with your partner.
3. **Always try to describe your hand accurately and leave the decision to partner. Do not mastermind the bidding.**
4. **When you are faced with several alternatives, choose the less risky and more flexible one.**
5. Do not invent bids at the table. Partner will never be able to work it out.
6. Try to picture all four hands around the table when there is vigorous competition.
7. **Learn the Law of Total Tricks: five-four fits are very powerful.**
8. Be alert and make lead-directing bids in competition.

9. **Always ask yourself – have I shown my hand in full in the previous rounds (or – have I got a maximum or minimum given my previous bids)? You see, every bid is a ‘sub-set’ of your earlier bid...**
10. Distribution is more important than high card points.
11. Pay special attention to suit textures and playing strength.
12. **Honors in long suits carry their weights, while those in short suits should be discounted.**
13. Aces and Kings are undervalued while Queens and Jacks are overvalued.
14. **Honors in partner’s suit are nice, not so when you hold them in opponents’ suit(s).**
15. **Consider this when you overcall - does the hand belong to your side or to the opponents?**
16. Never preempt and bid again.
17. When your side has a fit, always bid to the limit, do not daisy-pick along the way and allow room for opponents to sacrifice.
18. **Bid games aggressively, and slams conservatively.**
19. Think twice before making the final pass.
20. **Don’t overuse Blackwood. Learn to employ attitude cue-bids as much as possible. Blackwood is a convention for you to avoid bad slams, not reach good ones.**
21. When you are about to make an ingenious bid, think about whether this would be the normal bid at the other table/in comparison with the field.
22. When you want to accept an invitation and bid game, consider this – could partner have shown a stronger hand by cue bidding or by going through another sequence?
23. **When you are short in opponents’ suit, you can afford to bid more aggressively.**
24. Stay low when your side has a potential misfit.

24. Two suit fits are very powerful. In competitive situations, bid one more for the road.
25. When you have a freak hand, remember the suits are going to break badly for opponents.
26. Don't let opponents push you around.
27. Think about whether your overcall will take away bidding space for opponents.
28. Simplicity is good.

Defense

1. Do you want to attack (active), or do you want to defend (passive)?
2. **Don't be lazy – ALWAYS count declarer's points, distribution and winners. Use your toes if necessary!**
3. Don't go by your hunch. Logic is more superior. Try to be a good player before you become a great player.
4. Form a clear picture of both declarer and partner's hands before playing a card.
5. Signal to your partner only when it matters.
6. Attitude before count. Count before suit preference. Suit preference only when obvious.
7. A good understanding in signaling philosophy between you and your partner is important.
8. Use the process of elimination to decide which card to play. This will often simplify your decision.
9. **Always draw trumps when declarer announces two suits, one of which fits dummy.**

10. **Don't be prone to leading/returning short suits in low level contracts – this will create slow winners for declarer.**
11. Play the 'known' card.
12. A little bit of camouflage won't hurt.
13. Do not play a card automatically in the middle of the game, even when the decision is obvious, remember rule Number Two.
14. **When declarer has refrained from playing dummy's long suit, be careful, he may be hoping to swindle/snatch the game-going trick.**
15. Make desperate plays only when you are desperate.
16. **Discipline prevails in the long haul. Avoid heroics unless you are 95% certain it will get you a spectacular result.**
17. When you are long in trumps (or when you think your partner is long in trumps), adopt a forcing game.
18. When you have made a bad shift and blown a trick, do not panic.
19. Consider the hold-up when you are dealt the trump ace.

Opening Leads

1. Always try to form an opinion of all four hands before selecting your lead.
2. Whenever possible, try to lead from a sequence.
3. Slams must be attacked, you only have one chance – says Benito Garozzo
4. When trumps are breaking badly, play a forcing game.
5. Do not be eager to lead a short suit, looking for a ruff, against a low level contract.
6. Against low-level contracts, leading a trump is often a good idea.

7. Learn and adopt 'Journalist' leads against no-trumps, i.e. coded 10s and 9s promising zero or two higher honors.
8. Avoid heroics, like under-leading aces in a suit contract unless nothing else appeals.
9. When opponents reached no-trump contracts without going through Stayman, always consider leading a major suit.
10. In imps, lead the suit that requires least from partner to defeat the contract.
11. When you have a weak hand and are on lead against 3NT, consider finding your partner's suit.
12. When you have to lead from QJ10XX or KQJXX or J109XX or KQ10XX etc., lead 4th best against NT if (a) you have a side entry and (b) the bidding tells you either declarer or dummy has 4 cards in the suit.
13. Always take into consideration about partner's silence, in other words, his failure to overcall or double an artificial bid or cue bid – the dog that didn't bark in the dark is usually a good enough hint.
14. Play with the 'field.'
15. Don't lead a singleton (side suit) when you also have a singleton trump.