**Begin contract bridge with Ross**
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**Class One**

**Preparation and customs.**

*Seating.* Four players face each other. Each is designated by his or her orientation in the room: north, south, east and west.

*Shuffling the cards.* We use two decks per table, one person shuffling while the other deals, to save time. You may shuffle using the overhand style or the fan style, as you wish. The partner of the dealer always shuffles. After shuffling, he or she lays the cards to the right, in preparation for the next dealer. The deal moves clockwise.

*Dealing.* The cards are all dealt face down one at a time clockwise. The dealer begins by dealing to the person to his or her left.

*Arranging.* Each player arranges his or her hand by suit, in order of rank. The rank of cards begins with Ace as highest; king, queen, jack, 10, etc., and 2, low. It is conventional to arrange the suits red-black-red-black to avoid possible confusion. Count to make sure you have 13 cards.

*Partners.* Bridge is always played with partners. The person who sits across from you is your partner. You try to take tricks together. Note: do not take a trick or trump if your partner has already played the winning card! It will annoy your partner, and you want to keep your partner as serene as possible. (Divorces have occurred over the bridge table, and undoubtedly murder has been contemplated.)

*The goal.* Four played cards is a *trick*. The highest card played, or the highest *trump* (or *ruff*) card takes the trick. The goal of bridge is always to take as many tricks as possible. One person in the partnership collects and keeps the tricks, arranging them on the table so they can be easily counted by both partnership and opponents.

**Play.**

*Taking tricks.* You may take tricks in three ways: playing the highest card, playing the highest trump card, or playing a long suit after everyone else holds no more cards of that suit, and also is out of trump.

The hand that takes a trick must lead the next card.

If you have cards in the suit that was led, you must play that suit. If you have no more cards in that suit, you may play a card from the designated trump suit. Trump is always higher than any other "side suit," and so will be more likely to take the trick. If you play a trump and an opponent plays a higher trump, called *overruffing*, the opponent wins that trick. Note: you do not have to play trump.

If you have no cards in the suit led, and either do not have trump or do not wish to play trump, you can play any other suit. This is called a *sluff*.

*No trump.*
An alternative to playing with a trump suit is playing without one. This is called no-trump play. (Or no-ruff if you're a member of my bridge group which does not want to utter the word "trump" for good reason.) In no-trump play, you only have two ways to take tricks: play high cards of a suit, or play the suit until no one else has any more cards in it. This is called "establishing a suit." It is one of the main strategies players use to develop tricks.

**Scoring**.

The first six tricks that a partnership takes do not count. These are called *book*. After the book, each trick counts a certain number of points. Suits are ranked according to the number of points they earn. Clubs and diamonds are the *minor suits*. Each trick above six counts 20 points. Hearts and spades are called the *major suits*. Each one above six counts 30 points. No-trump scores as follows: the first trick above six counts 40 points. Subsequent tricks count 30 points.

A game requires a partnership to accumulate 100 points, making the partnership *vulnerable*. Two games is a *rubber*.

The actual ranking of each individual suit is as follows: clubs (lowest); diamonds; hearts; spades (highest). This rank has no significance in play of the hand, but does have significance in the auction that will be covered in the next class.

The trump suit (or no-trump) established by the auction is called a *contract*. The person who named the suit is the *declarer*. He tries to make his bid, or make his contract.

**Basic strategy.**

It is useful to remember how many cards (of 13 per suit) have been played, and which high cards have been played, as a strategy for deciding what card to play. Otherwise you risk losing a high card to an even higher card or a trump. For example, if you play your king, but your opponent still holds the ace, you will lose your high card. Wait until your opponent has played the ace, making your king good.

A good way to remember number of cards played is to consider this: each round produces four cards of a suit (presuming nobody sluffs). A suit has 13 cards total. So if everyone follows suit for two rounds, you know eight cards have been played, and so only five are left. You can see how many of those five you have in your own hand and in the dummy (see Class Two) to calculate how many the other players hold. If the answer is "not very many," consider it likely that someone is out of that suit, and so will trump your suit if you try playing it again.

Note that based on scoring it is easiest to make a game in no-trump, because you only need three tricks above book (40+30+30=100). In a major suit you need four above book; in a minor suit, five. While it is desirable, therefore, to play in no-trump if you can, the majority of the time it is not the best contract, because you have no trumping alternative. You have to rely on having a lot of high cards and/or long suits (lots of cards in one suit).

Obviously, every player wants trump to be named as the suit in which he or she has the most cards and the highest cards. But how much do you want it? You can show your passion for that through an *auction*, in which the highest bidder designates the trump suit (or no-trump). This will be considered in the next class.