

What Makes a Successful Bridge Club?

Bridge clubs come in all shapes and sizes – from small to large with a whole range in between. Some people like to play very serious bridge, while others just want a social afternoon or evening out with a bit of bridge thrown in. Most players like a balance of the two. At the end of the day what all players like is a good game of bridge in a comfortable environment with pleasant opponents.

Experience has shown that the most successful bridge clubs have four key elements:

- A friendly and welcoming atmosphere
- A good teaching programme associated with the club
- An enthusiastic and pro-active committee (or proprietor)
- Convenient ample parking

These are the essentials, but there are a number of other factors which can help:

- Publicity and advertising, projecting a friendly image
- A well-functioning host (stand-by) system
- Tournament Directors with good social skills.
- Good, comfortable and clean premises in a central location.
- Making sure that everyone adheres to the standards of courtesy of [Best Behaviour @ Bridge](#)
- Involving as many members as possible in the running of the club, so that the workload is spread and members feel a part of your bridge community
- Helping your members improve their play by providing seminars, etc.
- A website kept up-to-date with results, news and other interesting items
- An Internet emailing list for club members to receive news and results
- The cost of tea, coffee and biscuits included in the table money
- A regular club newsletter
- Instilling a sense of belonging and pride in the club by celebrating teams' and individual members' successes through announcements in the Club, on the website, via the club email mailing list and newsletter
- Holding occasional charity events including taking part in the annual Children in Need Simultaneous Pairs with extra money raised through members' fundraising efforts
- Use of duplimate boards with hand records provided at the end of the evening for those who wish to study individual hands later

- Entering teams in local leagues and competitions, encouraging as many members as possible to take part, and the captains sending out match reports afterwards
- Social events (Christmas party, summer party, AGM, etc.) with food and drink
- Club weekends and holidays away

We will examine some of the above in more detail in subsequent sections of this handbook. Meanwhile, here are some more ideas from successful clubs. What works for one club may not always work for another, but there might be one or more suggestions in this pot-pourri which your club could try:

A pot-pourri of ideas

- Make it friendly and sociable
- Encourage your members to come early to give them time to socialise
- If a member is unwell get everyone at the club to sign a card for them
- Hold an open event where the club invites social rubber players to try their hand at duplicate
- Encourage a culture of friendship with other clubs, e.g. by advertising their events and putting in links on your website – friendly rivalry rather than bitter enmity is better for all concerned
- Try daytime bridge with a more social emphasis playing fewer boards (20 or so) to allow for more conversation between rounds
- Organise a teams-of-four knockout competition at your club, with matches being held at members' homes with supper included
- Set up a 'Player of the Year' award to encourage a friendly atmosphere. The award goes to the player who displays the most sportsmanlike behaviour at the table
- Make some laminated yellow 'Smiley Face' cards, which can be kept in the bidding boxes to be shown if anyone at the table is a bit inconsiderate or aggressive, particularly to newcomers
- Have a permanent sub-committee for planning celebrations and party events
- Celebrate members' successes and landmark birthdays with special events, cards, wine, flowers or whatever else might be deemed appropriate
- Ask members to suggest a good local cause and run a charity event to raise funds for it

Make it welcoming

- Put a welcome sign on the front door of your club
- Ask TDs to regularly remind players to be nice to each other
- Make it as easy as possible for players with disabilities to take part in your duplicates.

- Ensure that the premises have good disabled access wherever that is possible.
- Keep card holders in your equipment box.
- Ask players to sort their cards after they have finished a board if a disabled member will be playing them next.
- If there is a table with a player whose eyesight is poor, allow bids to be spoken. If necessary, purchase a bright table lamp.
- Run ‘No Fear’, ‘Easy Bridge’ or ‘Not So Serious Duplicate’ sessions with participation limited to less experienced players
- Ask your more experienced players to partner the less experienced ones from time to time
- Open up your membership to make it as easy as possible for people to join the club. Don’t create barriers for them.
- Issue novices with laminated ‘L Cards’, so that they can place them on the table to warn their opponents to be especially tolerant and understanding while they learn the ropes
- Inculcate the habit of calling for the Director politely and in a friendly manner – “Director, please!”
- Ask your regular players to invite a rubber bridge playing friend to try out duplicate at the club. Give them the first game free.
- If a newcomer comes to your club without a partner, match them up with a personable partner of a decent standard.
- Make sure that the club has a contact person with contact telephone number on your website for potential visitors and new members to call for information.

Education! Education! Education!

- Have a short 40-minute seminar or discussion of the previous week’s hands immediately before the club’s regular duplicate session.
- Invite a well-known top bridge player to hold a seminar at your club.
- Find alternative venues for holding courses, e.g. community centres, social clubs, sports clubs, country clubs
- Give a free game to any teacher who brings four students to play at your club
- Get in touch with teachers who are not teaching at your club to see if they might consider giving their final lesson of a course at your club, so that the students may be introduced to the location and perhaps some of your members. Give the students a voucher or two for a free game on a subsequent occasion.
- Link up with a local school or college to teach Minibridge to the students

Opportunities and recognition

- Score your duplicates on a handicap basis as well as in the usual fashion and run periodic handicap competitions with prizes
- Stratify your events

- Run an additional ladder competition (with prizes) in which individuals are encouraged to play with different partners. The winner could be the person with the highest average score having played with at least twelve different partners over a year
- Run an annual individual competition
- Present your newcomers with a special commemorative certificate the first time they win any Master Points

Order! Order!

- Remind everybody from time to time that the Director is there to help and make sure the rules are applied fairly, and that the TD should be called immediately there is an irregularity. This should be done in a pleasant and polite manner.
- Make sure that newcomers know they should call the TD if there is any shadow of a doubt about procedure, and they shouldn't just accept the word of the more experienced player at the table.
- TDs will of course take extra care with newcomers so that they understand precisely why an action has been taken, offering to speak with them after the session if necessary to explain why something has happened.

Refreshments - never underestimate food!

- Provide good (rather than basic) quality tea, coffee and biscuits
- Allow unfettered access to the refreshments, so that players can help themselves at any time
- Run daytime 'Bridge and Lunch' or 'Bridge and Soup' sessions
- Provide home made sausage rolls, sandwiches and/or cakes during the tea break
- If you have beer, soft drinks, nibbles, etc. left over from the club party, include those in the refreshments on club nights until used up

Improve your services

- See if there is anything you can do to improve the quality of your facilities, both playing and non-playing (parking, kitchens, toilets, etc.)
- If the club's finances allow, introduce wireless scoring. This generally proves very popular, not least with the scorer whose workload is reduced.
- Matchmaking: players do lose their partners for one reason or another every now and then – help your members find new partners they can get on with.
- If the décor of your premises is looking a bit tired, organise a work party to provide a spring clean and coat of paint
- Make a simple systems convention card available at the club for last minute scratch partnerships
- Set up a club library by asking members to donate books that they have read and found useful. Avoid ancient, outdated bridge treatises. Appoint a librarian

to set up a system for keeping track of the books. This list can be kept on the club's website.

Publicise what you do

- Produce a small booklet on the history of the club with photographs and illustrations for sale to club members (and others) with proceeds going to charity
- Is there a newsworthy story at your club? Perhaps you have raised funds for charity or one of your members has achieved something in bridge or even outside the game. Try to get the story into the local newspaper and/or on local radio.
- Make sure your club is listed on the EBU Website
- Get your local radio station to do a story on bridge. Have a table playing at the station and the presenter asking questions, switching back to you periodically during the course of the game to explain what has been happening.
- Design a friendly logo for your club and use it on all your media
- Write a bridge column for a local publication
- If your club is listed in the local telephone directory or yellow pages, make it easier to find by putting the word 'Bridge' first, i.e. 'Bridge Club Anytown' rather than 'Anytown Bridge Club'
- Many people take up bridge in order to meet new people. Stress this in your advertising.
- Give vouchers for five or ten free games to anyone who recruits a new member for your club

For 'case studies' please see our regular feature articles from successful clubs in [Club Management Focus](#).