

Bridge as a Second Language

What's that "X" on the bidding card mean? What's a crossruff? What's a masterpoint? What's a matchpoint? Oh, what's the point?

Don't despair...you, too, can learn to speak bridge! No one was born knowing this language. Here are some terms that you might find confusing:

Opener. Who is the opener? The first person in the auction to make a call other than "pass" is the opener. There's only one opener in any auction. If South opens and West then makes a bid, West is the **overcaller**.

Responder. When South opens the bidding and then North bids, North is the responder. There is also only one responder in any auction. If West overcalls and then East bids, East is called the **advancer**. (Yes, we have names for everybody and everything in bridge! How many words do the Eskimos have for snow?)

RHO, LHO. Right-hand opponent, left-hand opponent.

Board. The metal or plastic carrier that holds the cards in a duplicate game. The complete deal is also referred to as a board; i.e., "What did you bid on Board 7?"

Those X's. The "X" card in your bidding box stands for **Double**. You can use it when an opponent was the last person to make a bid other than pass. It doubles the plus score for them if they make their contract, and doubles (and then some!) the penalties if they go down. The "XX" card stands for **Redouble**. Redouble doubles the rewards and penalties yet again.

There are many kinds of doubles, but the two most common are the **takeout double** and the **penalty double**. The takeout double shows support for all the unbid suits and is meant to be "taken out" by your partner. You make a penalty double when you expect to set the opponents a bunch for a juicy plus score. (Also known as "a telephone number.") How can partner tell the difference? That's a topic for another column!

Vulnerable, Nonvulnerable. (Or "red vs. white.") Vulnerability affects scoring: when you're vulnerable, you get a bigger bonus for making a game or slam, but if you fail to make your contract, the opponents score 100 points for each undertrick instead of 50. In duplicate bridge there are no "legs" (ask your mother), so we assign the vulnerability to each board. If you are vulnerable, it will say "vul" next to the pocket where you pull your cards from, and the pocket may be red. When you aren't vulnerable but the opponents are ("favorable" vulnerability), you can bid more aggressively than when you are vulnerable and the opponents aren't ("unfavorable" vulnerability).

Cue-bid. An artificial bid of an opponent's suit (1C by RHO, 2C by you). It is never to play and your partner should *never pass!* The exact meaning of the cue-bid depends on the auction. The term "cue-bid" is also used to describe a bid that shows a specific ace.

Crossruff. When instead of drawing trumps, you use your trumps to ruff losers in both hands, crossing from one hand to the other and back.

Entry. Any card that can win a trick to provide transportation into a hand: a high card or a trump.

Blocking, unblocking. Say you have Ax of spades in your hand, and KQJx in dummy. If you play the king on the first spade trick, and the ace on the second, the suit is blocked: you can't get back to the board unless you have an entry in a different suit. You can unblock by playing the honor from the short side first. Defenders also need to consider unblocking when they hold an honor in their partner's suit.

Masterpoints. Point awards for winning or placing (also called "scratching") in a duplicate-bridge event sanctioned by ACBL.

Matchpoints. A form of scoring used in pairs games. On each board, you receive one matchpoint for each pair sitting in your direction that you scored better than, and half a matchpoint for each pair you tie.

Top. The maximum number of matchpoints you can earn on a board. You get one point for every pair sitting in your direction whose score on a board is less than yours, and half a point for every pair whose score you tie. If a board is played eight times in a duplicate session, "top" is 7 because the best you can do is beat the other seven pairs who played it.

Bottom (or zero). The opposite of a top. What if your scores are all tops and bottoms? We call that a pajama game!

Stratified. An event that offers extra masterpoint awards to newcomer and intermediate players. Players of all skill levels play against each other, but each pair is classified into a stratum (A, B, C) depending on their masterpoints, i.e. 50/20/5. Point awards are given to the top pairs in each stratum.

IMPs (International Match Points). A form of scoring usually used in team games. On each board, the difference between your score and your opponents' score is converted to IMPs, which can be positive or negative. The team with the most total positive IMPs on all boards wins the match.

Swiss teams. An event for teams of four players. Each team plays short matches against several other teams and scores the results by IMPs. Masterpoints are awarded for each match won.

Knockout teams. A multi-session team event. In each session, one team plays against one other team and scores the results by IMPs. The loser is eliminated; the winner advances to play another winning team in the next session. Matches continue until there is one winner.

For more on these and other terms, Karen Walker provides an excellent glossary at:
<http://www.prairienet.org/bridge/glos.htm>