

10 Common Errors and Solutions to Avoid Them

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1. **Playing too fast.**

Many errors, such as winning the opening lead in your hand when you should have won it in the dummy, can be prevented by just slowing down. If you are the declarer, make a plan. So if you're planning to take an immediate finesse for the king of trumps by leading the queen from dummy, try to win the first trick in dummy!

2. **Cashing tricks, especially aces, too early.**

Planning ahead is good for defenders, too. Aces should capture kings and queens, not 2s and 3s. When the dummy, on your left, tables a suit such as K-J-5-4, decide ahead of time that when declarer leads toward that suit, you will duck smoothly. You will lose your ace once in a while, but when your partner has the queen, she will score it most of the time. Try to establish extra tricks, not just cash the ones you were dealt.

3. **Trump mismanagement.**

a) Getting your winners ruffed because you didn't pull trumps. Solution: If your hand or the dummy is going to be full of good tricks after you knock out one of the opponent's high cards, then you should usually pull trumps so your winners won't be ruffed.
b) Pulling too many trumps. Solution: When you're planning a crossruff, or simply need to ruff losers in your hand or dummy, don't pull trumps, or at least not enough to thwart your plan.

4. **Bad bidding – part 1.**

Tell your partner what you've got instead of making her guess. Example: Opening one bid on your left, double by your partner, pass on your right:

- a) With game values (opening hand), bid game or cuebid
- b) Jump one level with about 10-11 dummy points.
- c) Jump two levels to show length but not much strength.
- d) Bid a suit at the lowest level to show a bust up to about 9 points. But with 6-9 points you can bid again if you get the chance.
- e) Bid 1NT with 7-10 HCP, 2NT with 11-12, and 3NT with 13-15, showing stoppers in opener's suit.

5. **Misusing conventions.**

Many people play conventions without knowing the follow-ups. For example:

- a) The unusual notrump and Michaels cuebid were designed to show two suiters with one bid. You need a few high card points and decent suits. If you are vulnerable, your hand should have more strength.
- b) Blackwood and Gerber were invented to keep you out of slam off two aces, not one. If you find you are off an ace, you should bid six.
- c) If responder bids a minor suit at the three level after partner has answered the Stayman inquiry, is it forcing, invitational, or describing a bust? All three treatments are playable, but discuss follow-ups like this with your regular partner, and don't forget to discuss if conventions are on or off in competition.

6. **Bad Penalty doubles.**

Don't double for penalty just because you have a strong hand. You need tricks and, usually, some trump tricks.

7. **Captaincy issues.**

When you have basically described your hand, leave the competitive decisions up to partner. Assume your partner is the boss any time you open the bidding or overcall. Why? Consider auctions that begin with 1NT openers. Responder adds her points to yours. It's usually easy to decide if you belong in a part score, or if you are in game or slam range. Auctions that start with a suit are similar. The opener describes her hand and usually narrows her point range on her second bid, so responder can often place the final contract.

8. **Telling the same story twice.**

Resolve to stop rebidding five-card suits if there is a reasonable alternative. After a Jacoby Transfer, don't rebid a five-card suit. Rebidding the known five-card suit should promise six!

9. **Bad bidding – part 2.**

Missing games and part scores because you didn't respond to partner's overcall. Support with support. Treat an overcall as if it were an opening bid until you find out differently. So, even with modest values, raise if you can at your first chance or bid 1NT. With a traditional limit raise, you should cuebid.

10. **Physical or mechanical errors.**

Before playing to any trick, take a quick glance at the table, left to right. If you are following to a trick, look to see what has already been played. If you are leading to a trick, make sure you are on lead. Then, as you pull your card out, check again that it's the one you meant to play.