

To become a “compleat” bridge player, one marked by high proficiency, you must develop good “technique.”

There is a term used to describe bridge players that is often heard. A competent player is said to possess or exhibit good “technique”. The definition is not listed in The Encyclopedia of Bridge. In Webster’s Dictionary “technique” is defined as, “The systematic procedure by which a complex problem or scientific task is accomplished.” Just how does that translate into this game we play? My favorite bridge author, Victor Mollo, published the only good reference I could find. In his *The Compleat Bridge Player* he observes that the technician knows just what to do, though not always what makes him do it. It does not involve psychology, ego, greed, cunning, or daring. Mollo concludes that “technique” comes in three parts. A true student of the game needs to master these three accomplishments. To become a “compleat” bridge player, one marked by high proficiency, you must develop good “technique.” The first element consists of **simple mechanics**. This is the easiest of the three. Here is a simple test to rate you with regard to mechanics.

As South in a Swiss Team match, you are in 6S. Plan the play with the 10 of Hearts lead.

North

S AQ103

H AJ5

D A63

C QJ3

South

S 98742

H KQ7

D 8

C AK62

The answer is to focus only on your goal. Your goal is twelve tricks. With no losers outside of trumps your objective should be to minimize the chance of losing more than one spade trick. If you decided to take two finesses then your chances of success are about 75% but you failed the mechanics quiz. The proper play is to cash the ace then return to the South hand and lead towards the Q103. Your chances are significantly better, in fact 83%. An 8% better line is not to be trifled with. Good mechanics can be achieved through basic study of card combinations.

The second element consists of **intelligent anticipation**. Each decision you make with regard to bidding, play, or defense must be analyzed with regard to the bids or plays that may follow it. Do you ask yourself what the opponents will do in response to your plays? How about your bids? Often I have seen students pause at the wrong time. If you use Blackwood and then pause to think only after hearing the response you are not doing things in the proper order. The time to think is before using Blackwood. What responses can partner make and what will you do in each case? Mollo presents this hand as an example of intelligent anticipation. You are in 6NT in a matchpoint game with a Heart lead.

North

S A102

H KQ

D A105

C AQ954

South

S KJ983

H A94

D QJ

C K63

You win the heart in the North. . Using good mechanic skills you realize the best play in spades is to finesse East, not West, for the spade queen (Qxxx can be picked off with East after first cashing a top honor to protect against singleton Q with West, while the reverse is not true). You cash the spade ace and run the spade ten. All follow low to both plays. What now? With the contract assured how do you play?

If you cashed the remaining spade tricks you might have a problem. Did you assume that the clubs were running and discard two low diamonds? If so you will be surprised when the hand is as follows:

North
S A102
H KQ
D A105
C AQ954

West	East
S 75	S Q64
H J10753	H 862
D K9864	D 732
C 8	C J1072

South
S KJ983
H A94
D QJ
C K63

Only the diamond finesse will get you the thirteenth trick. How would a player with good “technique” play this hand? After winning the spade ten, stop and test clubs. If the club suit is 3-2 you have thirteen tricks. If not, then you can safely discard clubs on the spades and try the diamond finesse. Learn not to play without thinking ahead. In a hand such as the example, before cashing spades, decide on the discards you will make. Then consider what effect that might have on future play.

The third element is **simple experience**. You must learn from past experience and see the proper play

4S with the king of diamonds lead.

North
S 107642
H AJ6
D 105
C J83

South
S AKJ95
H Q43
D A7
C KQ2

An inexperienced novice would see only three potential losers (1 heart, 1 diamond, and 1 club). As a result he would win the first trick and begin on trumps. When East immediately shows out, the novice cashes a second top spade and plays the king of clubs. East wins the ace and leads the nine of hearts to dummy’s jack. Our novice declarer cashes the two club winners and then puts West on lead with the trump queen. West wins and leads a diamond over to East. Another heart now produces the fourth winner for the defense. The complete hand:

	North	
	S 107642	
	H AJ6	
	D 105	
	C J83	
West		East
S Q83		S —
H K1072		H 985
D KQ62		D J9843
C 96		C A10754
	South	
	S AKJ95	
	H Q43	
	D A7	
	C KQ2	

To avoid this, all our declarer had to do was duck the first diamond. It is now impossible for East to gain the lead twice and lead hearts each time. Does the expert duck the opening diamond lead because he can see the end position at trick one? The answer is no. The expert ducks the opening lead because experience has taught him a lesson. The expert sees that a diamond loser is inevitable. To duck the opening lead removes from the defenders the ability to choose which one wins the second diamond later in the hand. He ducks in case that becomes important or is of value to the defense. To remove this option cuts the defenders' communication and there is no reason to leave them this ability.

Work on your mechanics and intelligent anticipation. The experience will come. Watch carefully how expert players play when at your table and learn to emulate their "technique". You will be better for it. Let me hear from you.