

# Zen and the art of bridge

By Bruce Greenspan

1. Here's the No. 1 rule of bridge: there are no rules, only guidelines.
2. How many of you play better after partner whines and complains about your play? Assume this is true of your partner as well.
3. Keep the bidding in mind as you play a contract. Remember the bidding. I know it happened so long ago, but it is highly informative. Declarer play is much easier when you know where the opposition high cards are hiding. If there is an overcall or double, put most of those points in that hand. If the opponent makes a two-suited overcall such as Michaels or the unusual 2NT, it can give you a road map on how to declare.
4. Stay in the present. Worry about a mistake you made last deal, and on the next one you'll soon be worrying about another error. This as much as anything separates the experts from the rest: the ability to remain focused in the present. Michael Rosenberg, one of the top players in the world, wrote a wonderful book entitled "Zia and Me." He spent an entire chapter describing mistakes he made in world championships. Trust me, if he's going to make them, so are you. Learn from your errors and move on. Dwell on them and you and your partner are in for a long night.
5. If you really want to learn how to play this great game, call me for lessons (just kidding). Move up in level as soon as you are ready. Start with the Intermediate/Newcomer game to learn the structure. As soon as you're comfortable, move up to the open stratified game. Finally, move up to Flight A. Play against the best players and learn from them. In the Blue Ribbon Pairs against Zia, vulnerable against not, I held:  
♠ K 7 6 ♥ A Q J 7 6 5 4 ♦ 7 6 ♣ 6. Zia opened 1♦, and my partner doubled. Zia's partner bid 3♦ (weak) and somehow I found the 4♥ bid. Zia sized me up, not realizing he was destined to be in this article, and bid 4NT. My partner passed and Zia's partner bid 5♣, no aces. Zia was trying to steal the hand, but rather than bidding 5, he attempted to show a huge hand and throw Testosterone Boy off track. TB didn't fall for it and bid 5♥ (making), but what a great earning experience. Next time I'm in Zia's shoes, I'll bid 4NT.
6. Be flexible. Adjust as the contract is being played. Preconceived notions can be deadly. When partner is on lead and plays a 9, don't assume it is top of nothing. Look at your cards, dummy's cards and the card declarer plays. A 9 may be the lowest of three cards.
7. Search out the top players in your area. For the most part, they will be happy to offer advice on bidding and play. Avoid players who think they are the top players and give unwanted lessons at the table.
8. Count, count, count. Audrey Grant says that there are three types of bridge players, those who count and those who don't. Which are you? The more you count, the easier the game becomes. Be aware, however, that when you start counting, your game may hit a speed bump. You're so involved with counting that the basics may disappear in the tall grass.
9. Don't get discouraged. This is a most humbling game, and sometimes it seems you get sucked in to a Black Hole and will never get out. Don't worry. As the doctor said to the patient with a kidney stone, "This too will pass."
10. Cherish your partner. Without him or her, you would be playing solitaire.

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