



## **Top Tips for teaching bridge to schoolteachers**

A guide for bridge teachers and assistants

### **Introduction**

This guide will help you introduce bridge to schoolteachers in a way that's fun, engaging, and effective. Remember, your primary goal isn't to create expert bridge players overnight - it's to spark interest and build confidence through enjoyable card play! The schoolteachers will model their teaching approach with the children on the basis of how you teach them bridge. For this reason, this guide was created with both schoolteachers' current learning and pupils' future learning in mind.

### **Key goals of the initiative**

At the heart of this initiative are four key aims:

- First, we want to empower teachers with the confidence and knowledge they need to make bridge a lasting part of their school's activities. By building their understanding and enthusiasm for the game, they'll be able to create sustainable bridge programmes that flourish long after our initial support.
- Second, we believe bridge should bring joy and professional growth to our teachers. Whether it's developing new problem-solving skills, enhancing their teaching toolkit, or simply enjoying a break from their routine, we want bridge to become a valuable part of their personal and professional lives.
- Third, we intend for this initiative to be an exercise in co-production where we seek feedback from everyone involved (both you, the bridge teachers and assistants, and the schoolteachers), and we adapt our approach to the context of the school.
- Finally, we're building a bridge community within the school. We want to foster a convivial atmosphere and to create a supportive community where everyone feels welcome to participate in the way that they would like, whether that's through playing or observing (at first).

## Why This Approach Works

The methods outlined in this guide are based on successful programmes from Norway, Denmark, and other countries where bridge has been successfully introduced into schools. The key insight from these programmes is that a gradual, fun-first approach works better than diving straight into technical details.

## Core Principles

### 1. Fun comes first

- Bridge is a game, first and foremost, and people expect games to be fun
- If teachers aren't having fun, they won't want to teach bridge to their pupils
- A relaxed atmosphere helps everyone learn better: teachers can be quite busy at times, and we wouldn't want to add to their stresses, but to instead provide opportunities for relaxation
- Repetition is okay. Teachers can ask the same thing multiple times.

**Example:** If someone plays an ace and loses to a trump, rather than saying "You should have drawn trumps first," try saying "Oh, that was unlucky! These trumps can be quite sneaky, can't they?" This keeps the mood light while hinting at strategy.

### 2. Slowly does it

- Less is more when it comes to information
- Build confidence through simple successes
- Allow natural learning through play rather than instruction

**Example:** Rather than explaining all the honour card values at once, start with "The ace is highest, then king, then queen". They will learn about counting points in later lessons.

Present information in manageable chunks and provide opportunities for lots of practise after a new principle is introduced.

### 3. Let mistakes happen

- Resist the urge to correct every error
- People learn best from their own discoveries
- Too much correction can be embarrassing and demotivating

**Example:** If someone leads out of turn, don't make a big deal of it. Simply say, "Actually, it's North's turn to lead this time," and carry on.

**Don't ask:** "Why didn't you draw trumps first?"

✓ **Do ask:** "What might happen if we play our highest cards first?"

**Don't say:** "That's the wrong lead."

✓ **Do ask:** "What made you choose that card to start?"

## Practical tips for teaching sessions

### 1. Setting up

- Arrive 15 minutes early to arrange the room
- Create a casual, non-classroom atmosphere if possible: Push desks together to create square playing surfaces
- Ideal ratio: One helper per 3-4 teachers (it is ok to play at the table whilst helping in order to make up a four)
- Keep initial talking to 5-10 minutes maximum
- Get cards into hands as quickly as possible: try to make sure it doesn't feel like a lesson so that they are learning by doing/playing

### 2. During play

#### First 30 Minutes – taking tricks without a partner

1. Quick welcome (5 mins)
2. Use the dealt boards from Lesson 1 or deal cards for simple trick-taking (25 mins)
3. Example Exercise: "Trick-Taking Basics"
  - Each player sorts their 13 cards. No trumps
  - Player left to dealer plays any card to start
  - Highest card of the suit led wins – turn cards over: vertical if won, horizontal if lost
  - Winner leads to next trick
  - Let players discover which cards tend to win (at end of hand they turn over the tricks that won so they can see that high cards usually win, but long suits are good too)

#### Second half of lesson – taking tricks with a partner

Learning to cooperate together to win tricks. Use dealt boards from Lesson 1.

#### Common phrases to use:

- "Let's see what happens if we do this..."
- "That's an interesting choice!"
- "What do you think about..."
- "Would you like to try..."
- At least at first, avoid bridge jargon. New terms take time to catch on, and terms that have multiple names can be confusing!

### After each hand:

- Reflection: what did you think of that game/hand?
- Maximum 1-2 teaching points
- Keep feedback positive
- Use cards to demonstrate
- Celebrate good plays

### Teaching points to observe:

- Solid grasp of the basics (ie. who leads, play clockwise, trick piles in front of them, highest wins, North/South and East/West are partners). Do not teach more until players cover it in later lessons, eg. They later learn about declarer/defenders/dummy, evaluating strength of hand, tactics)
- How players handle and sort their cards
- Understanding of following suit
- Recognition of high cards winning
- Understanding of partnership dynamics (cooperating together to win tricks)
- Scoring (later on) – just the side with the most tricks wins that hand

### And if things get confused:

1. Take a breath
2. Return to basics
3. Focus on fun
4. Ask what they think
5. Let them play: **if in doubt, play it out!**

## Why this approach matters

Teachers will use these same techniques when teaching their pupils. By experiencing this supportive, mistake-friendly environment themselves, they'll understand why:

- Gentle guidance works better than strict correction
- Confidence builds through successful experiences
- Fun leads to better learning

## Example Success Story:

"A teacher in Norway was nervous about cards initially. By focusing on fun rather than rules, she became confident enough to start a school bridge club within two months!"

## Key considerations

Remember that you're not just teaching bridge - you're helping create future bridge teachers! Your patience and encouragement will multiply as these teachers pass on their knowledge to their pupils. Every time you resist the urge to correct a mistake or decide to let someone figure something out for themselves, you're modelling excellent teaching behaviour.

The logistics of running a bridge initiative at school will also merit on-going review and consideration. While the involvement of the bridge teachers and assistants will reduce over time as the schoolteachers gain confidence, volunteers will still be needed at the tables to help out the schoolteachers once they are trained and once they start teaching their pupils. It is challenging to teach a classroom of children without table helpers. A rota can be set up from the pool of volunteers so that there is on-going support for the schoolteachers.

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Keep it light, keep it fun, and enjoy watching the teachers discover the joy of bridge!

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More info on **Bridging Schools**: <https://bridgemindsport.org/home/research/bridging-schools/>

**Have questions? Need support? Please do not hesitate to reach out to us at [bamsa@stir.ac.uk](mailto:bamsa@stir.ac.uk)**

