

INTRODUCTION



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Play of the Hand in the 21st Century is an eight-week course focusing on the play of the hand. It's the second in a series of five programs. The first program, *Bidding in the 21st Century (The Club Series)*, concentrates on the fundamentals of bidding and play. The third program, *Defense in the 21st Century (The Heart Series)*, focuses on defense. The fourth program, *Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century (The Spade Series)*, is an introduction to conventions and the fifth program, *More Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century (The Notrump Series)* continues the study of bridge conventions.

Each series consists of three parts:

- Student Text
- Student Activities
- Teacher's Manual

The basic material covered in the course is in the Student Text. The Student Activities, packaged with the Student Text, offers exercises to be done by the students during the class and includes the practice play hands. Each class is designed to be approximately two hours in length. The Teacher's Manual contains general material to help the teacher successfully conduct the lesson series. It also has specific information on each of the lessons. The manual covers what could be taught and suggests an order for presenting the concepts. It has been designed so that it can be used as a basis for classes with varying levels of experience and age. The teacher can adapt the material so that it's suitable for a specific class.

Assumptions

Play of the Hand in the 21st Century is the second step in a five-part series of bridge lessons, and it's generally assumed that the students are familiar with the material presented in the previous program, *Bidding in the 21st Century*. That is, the students will be expected to be familiar with the following concepts:

- Opening bids
- Responses to opening bids
- Rebids by opener
- Rebids by responder
- Overcalls and advances
- Takeout doubles and advances

In this material, when a hand is said to have 13 points, it means total points. Hands valued using high card points, as in 1NT, will be displayed as 15 HCP. The students should be able to follow a simple auction to reach a suitable final contract on pre-dealt hands. The students are not expected to be able to deal with complex bidding situations that involve judgment (*e.g.*, opening light, competitive auctions involving redoubles and penalty doubles) and are not expected to be familiar with conventional bids and treatments (*e.g.*, Flannery, negative doubles).

For the play of the hand, it will be assumed that the students are familiar with the fundamentals necessary to play out a hand. For example:

- Making an opening lead
- Putting down the dummy
- Following suit
- Winning tricks
- The effect of the trump suit

Some of the fundamentals of declarer play will have been discussed in *Bidding in the 21st Century* (e.g., the importance of making a plan, drawing trumps, taking a finesse). However, it will be assumed that we can start from scratch in this area. The focus of the course is declarer play. It is most important to note that students at this stage need a lot of help in the elements of play.

Students will most likely have picked up a basic vocabulary about the game. Terms such as “trick,” “dummy,” “declarer,” “singleton” and “ruff” are familiar to them. This makes it easier to discuss the play of the hand than when they were still grappling with these concepts. However, as will be pointed out later, care must still be taken not to introduce new terms for the play of the hand before they are fully explained.

Although *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century* is designed as a sequel to *Bidding in the 21st Century*, it’s designed also to stand on its own. This allows the course to be used with students who have not taken the Bidding course but are (or assume that they are) familiar with the fundamentals of bidding and wish to improve their play.

As the program is designed to be taught in the classroom, it should incorporate sound educational concepts.

- **Maximum student involvement.** The students should be involved in every step of the learning process. It shouldn’t be a passive activity with the teacher lecturing and the students listening and trying to absorb. The students must be doing, experimenting and discovering the fundamental concepts themselves. They take an active role. The teacher is there as a guide.
- **A spiral approach to the curriculum.** Basic concepts are introduced one at a time, as needed, and the same concepts are reintroduced at a later stage and expanded upon. It’s not necessary to cover everything that could happen the first time an idea is introduced. The students need only concentrate on one new point at a time to tackle the task at hand. As experience and confidence grow, the new concept can be discussed in more depth, and the students’ scope can be expanded.
- **A simple approach.** There’s no need to make things any more complex than they already are. Don’t try to cover everything that could possibly happen for fear that a simple idea is uninteresting for the students. In fact, the opposite is true. When the students can grasp a concept, however small, they feel a measure of success and achievement, and their confidence grows. They start to enjoy the learning experience and hunger for more.

COURSE MATERIAL

Play Concepts

We often hear students say, “I hope I don’t get any high cards. I want to be the dummy.” When students are faced with playing a hand at this point in their education, their general attitude is one of confusion. They don’t know where to start. They vaguely understand guidelines about drawing trumps, finessing and establishing suits. Usually they play out the hand by instinct and find it to be a frustrating experience. Even if they make their contract, they’re not sure whether or not they did the right things and rarely learn anything from the experience. If they’re defeated, the experience is worse. They’re usually convinced that they’ll never “get it.”

We want to give students the chance to play a hand with confidence! They’re presented with a structured approach which is easy to follow. They learn how to formulate a plan and how to execute it. Whether or not they make the best plan initially is not important. They have objectives in mind and can see how their plan works, learning something through doing. Perhaps they’re even getting ideas on how to improve their plan for the next time.

In addition to having guidelines on how to make a plan, the students need the appropriate tools with which to carry out their plan. The various techniques should be presented one at a time, allowing the students to become familiar with them in various guises before moving on to the next technique. Slowly, students build up a toolbox of techniques that will help them carry out their plan. For the approach to be successful, students must be given deals to play which reinforce the concepts they have learned.

In practical terms, the letters PLAN have been used to help the students plan the play of the hand. It works both with notrump and trump contracts. It helps to organize the play of the hand into four basic steps:

- *Pause to consider your objective*
- *Look at your winners and losers*
- *Analyze your alternatives*
- *Now put it all together*

There’s a difference in the approach to the play in notrump contracts and the play in suit contracts. The play in notrump usually centers around winners. The play in suit contracts usually centers around losers. Nonetheless, the basic steps remain the same, and the students can learn to follow them through for any deal.

The various techniques to be taught for play in notrump (for the third planning step) are:

- Promoting high cards (*e.g.*, developing a sure trick when holding the king and the queen in a suit)
- Suit establishment (*i.e.*, developing tricks through length)
- Finessing (*e.g.*, attempting to develop a second trick when holding the ace and the queen in a suit).

Additional techniques which need to be introduced when playing in a suit contract are:

- Ruffing losers
- Discarding losers on extra winners

Once the basic techniques are mastered, the students can be introduced to some of the concepts involved in putting it all together (*i.e.*, for the fourth planning step). These include:

- Being aware of entries
- Watching out for the opponents (*e.g.*, avoiding the dangerous opponent, using the hold-up play)
- Combining techniques

The students can apply the planning concept and use the various tools to play out a bridge hand. The PLAN provides an environment for spiral education. As the students become familiar with the basics, more advanced techniques can be introduced. For example, more complex variations of finesses or suit establishment can be discussed at later stages in this course and/or in subsequent courses. The students don't have to unlearn anything, but can build on to the established concepts.

Bidding Concepts

It's assumed that the students know the basic bidding concepts needed to reach a reasonable contract. The material still offers a good opportunity to reinforce the bidding theory covered in *Bidding in the 21st Century*.

The students are given an opportunity to bid the hands. To ensure that the play concepts are covered, the exercises should be designed to make certain the deal is played out in the appropriate contract. To do this, the deal could be discussed before it is played. The students could be given some time to bid to the best contract, and then the teacher could say that the suggested final contract is 3NT. That way, the whole class is playing the same contract and the discussion is easier.

The instructions in the Teacher's Manual recommend that the students put all four hands face-up on the table at the beginning of each play exercise. The class discusses how the bidding and play should go before actually bidding and playing each hand. In this fashion, everyone — not just the person who has to make the actual bid or play — gets the full benefit of both the bidding and the play points. As the students get more comfortable, you can leave them with less and less introduction up front. Each class progresses at a different rate, and you'll have to judge how much help the students need.

At first glance, it may appear that going over everything before the students actually play the hand is too much hand-feeding. But most students who are involved in bridge classes want you to guide the bidding to the best contract and show them the focus of the hand. They'll have many confusing thoughts going through their minds based on the large number of new concepts they are encountering. It would be easy for them to miss the entire point of a hand by getting too bogged down in all of the details. There wasn't time in the Bidding course to cover all of the fundamental bidding situations; concepts such as slam bidding were found in the appendix (*i.e.*, for the curious student only). The *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century* course offers an opportunity to fill in the missing gaps, even though it's fundamentally a series on play.

The following bidding concepts are introduced and expanded in the latter half of the lesson series:

- Stayman
- Strong 2♣
- Slam bidding
- Preempts, including weak two-bids

These concepts are incorporated into the teacher's overview of the bidding for the lesson and are reinforced by having the practice hands designed to use these concepts. The ninth chapter, the bonus chapter, features Jacoby Transfers. The chapter's focus is on understanding the convention and making the appropriate adjustments to Stayman.

Lesson Format

The course consists of eight lessons of approximately two hours each (the ninth lesson is optional). The lessons consist of four parts:

- Introduction to the particular play concepts being covered (approximately 40 minutes),
- Introduction of a useful guideline for the defenders (approximately 10 minutes),
- Review of some of the bidding concepts covered in *Bidding in the 21st Century* (approximately 10 minutes) or the introduction of a new bidding concept (approximately 20 minutes),
- A set of four pre-dealt hands which utilize the concepts that have been taught (approximately 60 minutes).*

The first 40 minutes involve the teacher discussing the concepts with the students (laying out some practical examples on the table) and the students doing simple exercises from the workbook which reinforce the particular concept. In most lessons, there are four exercises to help cover this material. With about 10 minutes per exercise, there should be lots of time for discussion among the students and an opportunity to answer any question they might have.

A defensive concept is introduced next, and there's an exercise to reinforce the idea.

In the first four lessons, a bidding review follows. Two or three exercises reinforce the essential concepts. To avoid losing the focus on the play of the hand, discussion should be kept to a minimum. If there are a lot of questions, students can be referred to the *Bidding in the 21st Century* textbook. If you're falling behind schedule, some of the exercises can be left as homework.

In the last four lessons (and the bonus chapter), a new bidding concept is introduced. A little more time should be devoted to covering these exercises to make certain the concept is understood. This will be compensated for (hopefully) by the students getting quicker at playing the pre-dealt hands. However, avoid going more than 10 minutes into the second hour.

* Teachers, please note that Lesson 1 has 8 deals. Information on the final four deals isn't found in the student text.

During the second hour, the students bid and play hands designed to use the concepts (and only those concepts) which have been discussed. It's essential to the success of the lessons that the students get to play all four of the pre-dealt hands, so everyone gets an opportunity to be declarer. If you're running behind at the end of the first hour, skip the remaining exercises and move on to the play. As mentioned earlier, the teacher should first walk the students through the bidding, the choice of opening lead and how declarer should formulate a plan. Then the hand is bid and played.

At about 15 minutes per deal, the students will get through only the four pre-dealt hands in a lesson period. However, some classes progress more rapidly than others and may be able to handle more deals. There are many additional deals in the Student Text which can be used. (Note: Four extra deals are analyzed and included at the end of Lesson One in the teacher manual and on the E-Z Deal Cards as Hands 5 to 8 for Lesson One.) Knowing the speed of the class, the teacher can pre-deal as many extra deals as are necessary. The deals in the text are all designed so that they can be bid to the appropriate contract by using the bidding concepts already covered.

After the first few lessons, students will start to play more quickly, and the teacher won't need to take as much time to walk through the deals. As the students become familiar with the planning steps, they can be given less direction and allowed to experiment more on their own. Once the basic planning steps have been covered and reviewed, the introduction of new play concepts doesn't take up as much time. With their increased confidence, students can grasp concepts much more quickly.

Student Text

In theory, students could read the text and then do the workshop exercises. In practice, since the text is part of a classroom program, students first do the workshop exercises with the assistance of the teacher. Then they use the text to review the concepts covered and fill in any missing details.

The Student Text can stand on its own as a complete description of the basic principles of card play. Each lesson contains a narrative description of the concepts involved, supplemented with ample illustrations to help the students absorb the ideas. It's essentially the basis of the material covered by the teacher in the first hour of each lesson.

Student Activities

This section of the program contains the classroom exercises and practice hands. For each lesson, approximately four exercises are introduced covering the play fundamentals. One exercise focuses on defense; three exercises concentrate on bidding.

The remaining exercises consist of the deals themselves. The design of the deals is a key element to the success of the program. The following ideas are incorporated:

- The hands move sequentially from one concept to the next and don't involve concepts which have not yet been covered. Within each lesson, the hands sometimes move from one-step problems (*i.e.*, involving only one concept such as a finesse), to two-step problems (*e.g.*, combining a finesse with ruffing a loser), to three-step problems (*e.g.*, watching entries while taking a finesse and ruffing a loser). In addition, deals in subsequent lessons incorporate the material from previous lessons as the students build up confidence and ability.

- The deals contain an element of excitement and drama for the students. This doesn't mean that they are complex. Instead, they focus on the concepts the students will encounter with considerable frequency, rather than some exotic situation that rarely occurs. The students get excited seeing the concept in action and learning that they would be unable to make the contract without utilizing it.
- The deals need to be authentic in the sense that the students are taught to play the hand in the same manner as an expert would play it. There should be no scope to deviate from the recommended line of play to improve on the result. Even though the hands are pre-dealt, the students shouldn't be given the impression that the situation is artificially contrived.
- *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century* presents a good opportunity to reinforce the sound bidding practices that were introduced in *Bidding in the 21st Century*. The deals are representative of the various contracts that one would encounter during a session of bridge: a mixture of suit and notrump contracts; a mixture of partscore and game contracts with the occasional slam contract (after slam bidding has been discussed); a mixture of bidding situations including overcalls and takeout doubles.
- The deals illustrate the points they were intended to make. If the students apply the appropriate principle, they make the contract. Otherwise, they are defeated.
- The deals give each student at the table an opportunity to be declarer. While it's easier for students to understand a deal presented in a textbook with South as declarer, the pre-dealt hands are presented with declarer in various positions at the table. The dealer isn't always the declarer, and the declarer doesn't automatically rotate clockwise around the table. This format ensures that the deals more closely simulate real action at the table, and it adds an element of drama to each deal.

SUMMARY

Play of the Hand in the 21st Century is designed to focus on the play of the hand. Although bidding is discussed, the exercises move students quickly through the material, so that it doesn't take over the lesson. Some concepts on defense are introduced and lay the foundation for the *Defense in the 21st Century* course.

It's important that the hands be pre-dealt so that there's time for the students to play the hands. ACBL has developed E-Z Deal decks of cards for each course. These coded cards allow the students to form the practice deals for each lesson in class. (In Lesson One, the students can form eight deals, but only the first four are discussed in the Exercises in the Student Text.)