**South African Guidelines for Online bridge for Players and Tournament Directors**

**Introduction:**

This document has been compiled as a guideline both for players and tournament directors for online bridge, in particular on the bridge base online platform. The goal is to clarify some of the rules for play on this platform and to highlight areas that are unique to playing online. We wish to make the game fair and enjoyable for all participants. The Laws of Duplicate Bridge (2017) supersede this document and will be applied primarily when settling disputes.

**Behaviour at the table online**

1. Players are expected to greet their opponents at the start of each round. If your BBO profile does not include your real name, please disclose this to your opponents.
2. Swearing, using capital letters to indicated displeasure or shouting at your partner, badgering your partner are not permitted and make the game unpleasant for your opponents and will be dealt with under the rules of zero tolerance for bad behaviour
3. Delaying the game while teaching your partner is not permitted. No table chat is permitted once the next hand has appeared. Private chat with your partner is generally permitted between rounds and you may use this time to discuss the hand with your partner without annoying your opponents.
4. Extraneous communication eg using whatsapp, cellphones, dropbox or emails are not permitted and is illegal and will be considered to be cheating.
5. If you suspect your opponents are cheating or passing illicit information, **NEVER** confront them at the table. Send any suspicious hands to the tournament director who will then take the matter forward. Spreading rumours about players cheating will be dealt with severely under the rules of zero tolerance.
6. Director’s rulings must be obeyed and failure to do so will attract severe procedural penalties. It is possible to appeal rulings within the correction period.
7. Reading system notes during the hand cannot be monitored but the feeling is that this is against the spirit of the game. If you want to play complicated methods you should be able to remember these. If you do consult your notes this may lead to delays and all hesitations may carry unauthorized information.
8. Once you have entered a tournament you are expected to complete all the boards unless something happens that is beyond your control. Robot substitution may be permitted in some tournaments under these circumstances. Leaving the tournament because you are angry with your partner or opponents will be viewed in a very serious light under the rules of zero tolerance for bad behaviour.

**System disclosure and announcements**

1. Basic system, leads, signals and discarding methods should be given to your opponents prior to staring play.
2. Unusual opening bids such as Multi, transfer pre-empts, unusual 2NT and 3NT openings, conventional 4 level openings, Dutch twos (and many more) should be disclosed before starting play
3. It is especially important to announce all potentially destructive methods prior to starting play. Eg 2H showing both majors at least 4-4 less than 10HCP or 2C opening either strong game force or weak in diamonds.
4. We recommend that a BBO convention card should be filled in giving more details regarding your systemic understandings. This may protect you in cases of systematic irregularities.

**Alerting**

**UNIQUE TO ONLINE BRIDGE, ALL CONVENTIONAL BIDS MUST BE ALERTED BY THE PLAYER MAKING THE BID (SELF-ALERTING).**

You should type in your explanation of a bid prior to clicking on the bid. This ensures that the explanation is received prior to your opponent making his bid. Delayed alerts and explanations may carry a penalty.

Players may request information on ‘table chat’ (please avoid using this method) but the replies should never be given to the table. Use private chat or type within the alert box. Any information disclosed to the table will be deemed unauthorized information and may carry a penalty.

The following list of common conventions can be used as a guideline:

1. Standard Stayman, Puppet Stayman: All these must be alerted online. Full disclosure requires that players additionally inform opponents if their version of Stayman does not promise a 4-card major. Responses to puppet Stayman must be alerted.
2. Artificial bids showing trump support -eg Jacoby 2NT, Bergen raises, Drury, 3NT showing support, fit jumps and splinters
3. Blackwood, Gerber and its responses and continuations. Please note that for ‘at the table’ events, bids higher than 3NT were not alertable. This does **not** **apply** to online bridge as all conventional bids are alertable.
4. When alerting bids avoid using named conventions eg. Do not alert your bid as a Ghestem 2 suited overcalls. Rather state which suits you are showing. Other examples are Hamilton, DONT, Drury, Michaels, unusual NT, Bergen.
5. Negative free bids. These are natural bids but opponents should be alerted to the fact that the bid is not forcing.
6. Transfers must be alerted.
7. Splinters and fit jumps must be alerted.
8. Lebensohl must be alerted but remember to alert bids made in new suits when you could have gone lebensohl. Although these bids are natural they carry the additional meaning of showing some values when lebensohl applies. Therefore, in situations where you are playing lebensohl and you have made a 3 level call you should state that it is natural but promises a minimum of 7-8 HCP.
9. 1NT openings. It has become fairly standard practice in South Africa that a 1NT opening can contain a 5-card major or 6-card minor and this fact does not need to be alerted. However, you should indicate your point count range and if you commonly open 1NT with a small singleton.
10. Jump overcalls should be alerted as weak, intermediate or strong and point count range should be given if you have a partnership agreement.
11. Strong opening bids such as 2C, precision 1C and responses must be alerted – eg. 2D relay or 2D promising values or 2H showing a double negative.
12. If you play a strong club system you should alert that opening bids in the other suits are limited in point count to your minimum for a 1C opening. Eg 1S – alert as Maximum 15 HCP if that is your agreement.
13. Leads and signals are not alertable but opponents may request an explanation for these.
14. Doubles and cue bids – these must all be alerted.

When you are self-alerting it is important to describe the bid according to agreements that you have with your partner. You do not need to say what you actually have but just what meaning the bid will have for your partner. Deviations from your system are allowed without disclosure provided you have no agreement with your partner. Eg. You can open a 5 card 2 weak without announcing it provided this is not common practice in your partnership.

1. Unlike the rules for Face-face bridge, all conventional bids including those made above 3NT such as Blackwood or Gerber and responses and cue bids must be alerted.

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**Problems with self-alerting**

1. If you have inadvertently given an incorrect explanation of a bid, you need to correct this as soon as you become aware of this. Click on the bid and retype the correct explanation. This should be done before a defender has led to your final contract. Penalties may be applied if you have given a wrong explanation that has not been corrected timeously.
2. It is possible to give the wrong explanation when you are self-alerting. If for example you have forgotten your system or you feel that your explanation should include the hand you actually have. This may lead to damage to your opponents as your partner’s actions may not be compatible with the explanation given. This may lead to an adjusted score being awarded.

**Misclicking and undo’s**

Allowing undo’s is at the discretion of the tournament director and the organising committee and will be announced at the start of an event or on the entry form.

1. Undo’s are generally not permitted during the play. Unfortunately, misclicks during the play give unauthorised information and cannot be permitted by the defenders. Do not call the director for misclicks during the play as this may prejudice your side (just calling the director gives unauthorized information). Just accept it and get onto the next trick. Instructions have been given to players on how to minimize the risk of misclicking.
2. Misclicks during the bidding: If allowed by the tournament committee, opponents should always accept an undo request automatically if they have not yet bid. There is no need to call the director. Call the director if an undo has been requested and you have already bid. No undo’s are permitted and should not be requested if your partner has already bid (as this passes unauthorized information).
3. When the director allows an undo, there can be no claim of unauthorized information as it must be assumed by all players that the misclick was a random bid carrying no meaning. Problems arise when the undo is not allowed. In this case there is unauthorized information (you will be able to deduce that partner had a change of mind) and the offending side may be penalised or awarded an adjusted score.
4. After you have misclicked, do not chat to the table or discuss what you wanted to bid. Rather wait for the director and if the undo is allowed, make your planned bid. Any chat will be deemed to carry unauthorised information and may prejudice your side.

**Timing**

Players are required to play to time. The director will assess uncompleted boards and will assign a score based on the likely result. This result is determined automatically by the platform base on a double dummy analysis. If the result is dependent on a view in a particular suit, a split score may be given depending on the likelihood of declarer or defenders taking the correct view (as the platform automatically takes the correct view, this result can be appealed by the players). Deliberately slowing down the play to avoid making a guess will be viewed negatively by the director and an adjusted score may be given penalizing the offending side.

**Claims**

1. If either opponent does not accept the claim, play continues. If the rejection of a claim may have indicated an unusual line for declarer, the director may award an adjusted score. Call the director for any disputes. To protect yourself, always state your line of play when making a claim.
2. Concessions by defenders. This follows the same procedure as for declarer however a problem can arise if the defender’s partner does not agree to the concession. In doubtful cases the concession will be granted by the director. It is therefore advised that defenders should not concede unless they are 100% sure they cannot take any more tricks.
3. Please remember that while claims sometime save time, when there is a dispute more time is wasted sorting this out. Rather play out the hand if you have time remaining unless it clear cut. Do not get impatient with opponents if they cannot see that your claim is valid. Continue the play until it becomes obvious which tricks you can take and then claim again.