

# The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders (September 2005)

One of the most common causes of bridge disasters is forgetting a partnership agreement. Even more frustrating – and preventable – is a misunderstanding, where each of you has a different idea of a bid’s meaning. No pair is immune from these errors, but the most successful partnerships use strategies to reduce their occurrence. The habit they share is:

### 3. They have system notes.

Those who play complex systems run a greater risk of memory lapses and misunderstandings, but even pairs who play standard systems can benefit from developing system notes. Your document provides a basis for making future changes, and it’s an invaluable tool for refreshing your memory before you play. It also provides written proof of your agreements in the rare event that you need to explain a bidding decision to an appeals committee.

Probably the biggest benefit, though, is that the actual process of writing your notes can help you correct structural problems in your system. As you work through each section of your notes, you’ll be able to identify auctions that need more discussion, duplicated methods (two bidding sequences that describe the same hand type) and “idle” bids that can be assigned useful meanings.

### Who’s the author?

Ideally, both you and partner would consult on every section as you write. In practice, though, one person (probably the better typist) usually volunteers to put together the first draft. If that’s you, be aware of the first rule of writing system notes: Don’t include anything you haven’t already discussed with partner. There’s a natural temptation to incorporate your favorite bidding toys, agreements you have with other partners, and conventions that you’ve both said you might add “someday”. If you want to propose a new idea, put it in a separate section for future discussion.

After you’ve both agreed on the final version of your notes, appoint one partner to be in charge of any future revisions. Don’t make any changes or additions until you have time to write them into your notes, and never change your system in the middle of a session.

### How to begin?

The first section to compile is your general approach. This includes your system definition and an outline of the information from your convention card. If you’re reviewing your notes before a session, the list format offers a quicker, more organized reference than a convention card.

The second part of this section should be notes on your bidding “style”. This is a short description of your general tendencies and preferences that either vary from or expand on standard guidelines. It can include your partnership’s approach to hand evaluation and other principles that apply to a wide range of auctions. An example of a style writeup:

Opening bids: Generally sound. Rule of 20 openers require two quick tricks.

Walsh-style responses to 1C.

Preempts: Sound at unfavorable vulnerability.

Overcalls: 1-level may be light or a 4-card suit. Very sound at 2-level.

Takeout doubles: May be light with classic shape and/or opposite a passed hand. Will rarely have a 5-card major unless 17+ pts.

2-over-1 auctions: Lawrence-style rebids. Auction can stop at 4 of a minor. Forcing NT denies forcing-to-game strength.

Principle of “game before slam” applies at 2- and 3-level.

Aggressive balancing style; OBAR bids.

Competitive decisions based on Law of Total Tricks.

Carding: Attitude favored over count on partner’s lead. Frequent suit-preference signals.

### How much to include?

The length of your document depends on how thorough you want to be. Many top pairs have hundreds of pages of notes, but most partnerships can probably cover their major agreements in 20 pages or so.

To keep your notes manageable, don’t bother writing up descriptions of standard opening bids and responses. Focus instead on defining how you play your conventions and non-standard agreements.

Don’t skimp on the details when outlining the follow-up bids to conventional calls. Go through all the possible hand types and bidding sequences and define each in terms of point-count, suit length, intended meaning and inferences. This is an area of discussion that’s often neglected when you’re filling out a convention card. Lebensohl 2NT (used after partner doubles a weak two-bid), for example, is a couple of words on your card, but covering all its uses may require a full page or more in your system notes.

### Putting it all together

So how do you organize all this material? We’ll look at a sample outline and the specific types of information you can cover in Part 2.