

ABF Alerting Regulations

1. Introduction

It is an essential principle of the game of bridge that you may not have secret agreements with partner, either in bidding or in card play. Your agreements must be fully available and fully disclosed to your opponents. These Regulations set principles and guidelines for the approved alerting procedures.

The ABF System Regulations require each player to have a legibly completed approved system card on the table, with the partnership cards being systemically identical. The purpose of an alert is to draw the opponents' attention to any call that has a special meaning, or a meaning the opponents may not expect. The fact that your system card explains the meaning of a call does not remove the obligation to alert it when required by these regulations. (However see 2.4 below for self-alerting calls)

You should follow the principle of full disclosure (as required by the Laws) in following these Regulations and in explanations of calls. Your principle should be to disclose, not as little as you must, but as much as you can, and as comprehensibly as you can. A careless failure to follow this policy may result in an adjusted score, and possibly procedural penalties, where opponents have been damaged. If you make a positive effort to meet your obligations under full disclosure, you will rarely if ever fall foul of these regulations.

Your agreements include not only specific agreements appearing on your system card but also partnership understandings which have arisen through partnership discussion or experience. The opponents are entitled to know about these understandings. General bridge inferences, like those a new partner could make when there has been no prior discussion, are not alertable, but any inferences that can be drawn from partnership experience must be disclosed.

2. Definitions and General Principles

2.1 Convention

A call that, by partnership agreement, conveys a meaning other than willingness to play in the denomination named (or in the last denomination named), or high-card strength or length (three cards or more) there. However, an agreement as to overall strength does not make a call a convention.

2.1.1 Note that 'other than' is construed to include 'additional to'. So, by definition, any bid that shows the denomination named and another denomination also, is conventional. All opening bids and overcalls that show two or more suits, even if one of the suits is named, are by definition conventional.

2.1.2 It is construed that an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦ which may contain fewer than three cards in the opened suit does not indicate 'willingness to play' and hence such bids are conventional.

2.1.3 Certain calls may not convey any meaning e.g. the enforced 3♣ after a Lebensohl 2NT. Such calls are construed as conventional.

2.2 Natural calls

2.2.1 A **natural suit bid** is one that is not conventional. It follows from the definition of *convention* that a bid is natural if it meets the following criteria:

- Conveys a willingness to play in the denomination named (but does not come under 2.1.1 or 2.1.3)
- Shows high card strength or length (3+ cards) in the suit named.

2.2.2 A **natural NT bid** is a bid that shows a preparedness to play in NT, and conveys no specific information about your suit holdings.

2.2.3 A **natural pass** is a pass that does not convey any conventional message about strength or suit holdings.

Natural calls as defined in these regulations are in general not alertable, but there are important exceptions. (See 3.2.2.)

2.3 Cue bids

For the purposes of these Regulations, a **cue bid** of opponent's suit is defined as a bid of any denomination bid by the opponent or of a suit shown by the opponent's bid. Example: If an opponent opens 1♦ showing spades, then 1♠ and 2♦ are both cue bids. Similarly a 2NT overcall of 1NT is also a cue bid.

2.4 Self-alerting calls

There are five different types of self-alerting calls, *viz.*

- Doubles
- Redoubles
- Cue bids of an opponent's denomination/suit
- All calls at the four-level or higher, except conventional opening bids
- Any 2♣ response to a 1NT opening bid in an uncontested auction.

These calls carry their own alert and should not be alerted. It may be risky to make assumptions as to the meaning of such a call. You are entitled (at your turn to call) to ask for your own protection, but bear in mind that unnecessary questions may be more helpful to the opponents than to your own side, and may convey unauthorised information thereby limiting partner's options.

2.5 Other definitions

2.5.1 A **transfer bid** is an artificial bid, which promises length in a specified suit.

2.5.2 A **puppet bid** is an artificial bid, which requires a particular response by partner, but does not promise a holding in the suit of the forced response.

2.5.3 A **pass-or-correct bid** or a **correctable bid** is a bid, which, after partner has shown possession of an unspecified suit, conveys the meaning 'Pass if this is your unspecified suit, otherwise correct to your suit'.

3. Alert Stages

There are three stages of the alerting process. All are important.

- The pre-alert before bidding starts
- Alerts during the auction
- Delayed alerts by the declaring side before the opening lead.

3.1 Pre-alerts

3.1.1 At the start of a round or match, pairs should acquaint each other with their basic system, length of their one-level openings and the strength and style of their opening 1NT. Subsequent questions about these, whilst legal, may be regarded as unauthorised information.

3.1.2 This is the stage where you should draw the opponents' attention to any unusual agreements you have which might surprise them, or to which they may need to arrange a defence. Examples: transfer pre-empts, unusual two level openings, canapé style bidding, very unusual doubles, unusual methods over the opponents' 1NT or strong club openings, unusual cue bids of the opponents' suit, *etc.* Pay particular attention to unusual self-alerting calls. These should appear on your system card, but should also be verbally pre-alerted.

3.1.3 Highly unusual carding (e.g. leading low from doubletons) should also be pre-alerted at this stage.

3.2 Alerts during the Auction

3.2.1 You must alert a call if it is conventional (unless it is self-alerting).

3.2.2 Two classes of natural calls must be alerted (unless they are self-alerting), *viz.*

(a) The call is natural, but you have an agreement by which your call is forcing or non-forcing in a way that your opponents are unlikely to expect. Examples:

- Responder's first round jump shift on weak hands.
- A non-forcing suit response by an unpassed hand to an opening suit bid (whether or not after intervention).
- A pass which forces partner to take action (e.g. SWINE).

(b) The call is natural, but its meaning is affected by other agreements, which your opponents are unlikely to expect. Examples:

- A natural NT overcall in the direct position, which does not promise a stopper in the overcalled suit.
- A jump raise of opener's one-level bid which may be weak or pre-emptive.
- A single raise of partner's suit which may be strong or forcing e.g. 1♦ - 2♦ forcing.
- The rebid in a canapé sequence where the second suit may be longer than the first.
- A 1♥ opening which denies holding 4+ spades.

3.3 Delayed alerts

3.3.1 At the end of the auction, the declaring side should draw attention to any unusual features, particularly any unusual non-alerted calls. Upon inquiry, you must disclose fully, not only the specific meanings of all calls, but also any inferences you have drawn from the auction based on partnership experience (as distinct from general bridge knowledge). These explanations may occasionally need to include negative inferences, such as hand types partner probably does not have for his bidding. Defenders must not, at this time, draw attention to their own calls, nor voluntarily offer explanations (they must of course fully disclose upon inquiry).

3.3.2 Takeout/negative-type doubles and penalty doubles do not require a delayed alert. If interested, the opening leader should enquire before leading, or his partner may enquire after the opening lead has been made face down.

3.3.3 If a possible misexplanation emerges during the delayed alert stage the Director should be called before the opening lead is faced. Defenders however must wait until the play of the hand is completed before calling the Director to report any misexplanation by their partner.

4. Some Common Conventions

4.1 Stayman 2♣ in response to partner's 1NT

This bid is self-alerting because it is almost universally used. The conventional responses to Stayman are alertable, as are natural responses which convey a message about strength or special distribution.

4.2 Transfers in response to partner's NT

The transfer bid is alertable. Acceptance of the transfer, whether or not after interference, is alertable if it conveys any meaning relating to hand strength or length in partner's shown suit.

4.3 Multi 2 bids e.g. 2♦ showing an unspecified 6-card major with or without other options

Alert opener's bid. Alert all conventional responses including correctable bids.

5. Specific Examples

This section provides a number of examples by way of illustration and amplification. The list is not exhaustive. It is not necessary to commit them to memory as they follow the principles specified above. There is an overriding requirement that self-alerting calls should not be alerted.

5.1 Opening bids

Alert:

- (a) 1♣ or 1♦ if it may contain fewer than three cards in the suit named.
- (b) 1♥ or 1♠ if it may contain fewer than four cards in the suit named. Also if a 1♥ bid systemically denies four spades, this is alertable (conveys a surprising message about another suit).

- (c) Opening two bids which do not promise a holding of 4+ cards in the suit named, or which promise a holding in the suit named and another suit. Examples:
 - Alertable: 2♥ showing hearts and another suit (whether specified or not).
 - Alertable: 2♣ where, if there are only 5 clubs, also shows a four-card major.
 - Strong artificial 2♣, 2♦ openings are alertable.
 - Note that a 2♥ bid, which promises only hearts, is not alertable, whether strong or weak.
- (d) Any opening bid which is not natural e.g. transfer pre-empts.

5.2 Development of the auction

Alert:

- (a) Weak jump responses
- (b) Inverted minors (1♦ - 2♦ forcing, 1♦ - 3♦ weak)
- (c) Forcing 1NT response
- (d) New suit rebids by opener which may be made on a suit of fewer than three cards in a minor or four cards in a major
- (e) Jacoby style 2NT over a major
- (f) Bergen raises
- (g) Fourth suit forcing
- (h) Splinter bids (below 4♣)
- (i) Transfer bids (below 4♣)
- (j) Forced bids in a 'pass-or-correct' sequence
- (k) Conventional responses including 'pass-or-correct' bids after a multi-two opening
- (l) Trial bids
- (m) Non-jump natural suit responses to 1NT (opening or overcall) which are invitational or forcing
- (n) A 1♠ response to 1♥ if it shows at least five spades
- (o) A pass which conveys a special meaning as to strength or distribution

5.3 Competitive auctions

5.3.1 Overcalls

Alert:

- (a) All overcalls which show two suits, even if one of them is the suit named
- (b) Unusual NT bids that show 2-suited hands
- (c) Natural NT overcalls of RHO's opening suit bid which may not have a stopper in that suit
- (d) Transfer overcalls and multi-meaning overcalls

Do not alert:

- (a) Single suited overcalls showing only the suit named, whether weak, strong or intermediate
- (b) 1NT in the pass-out seat which may not contain a stopper in the opener's suit

5.3.2 Over opponent's takeout double, alert:

- (a) Any bid in a new suit which is non-forcing (except by a passed hand)
- (b) Preemptive jumps
- (c) Fit showing jumps

5.3.3 Over an opponent's suit overcall, alert:

- (a) Any bid in a new suit which is non-forcing (except by a passed hand)
- (b) Any natural NT bid which does not promise a stopper in the opponent's suit
- (c) Lebensohl type responses after interference over your 1NT

5.3.4 After partner's takeout double, alert:

- (a) Any bid that conventionally shows weakness (Lebensohl, Herbert, *etc.*)
- (b) Any minimal natural response that shows some strength

6. Bidding Styles

Be aware that there are some different approaches in bidding style in natural systems after a minor suit opening, especially a 1♣ opening. Some players bid 'up the line', some prefer to show a major ahead of a 4 or even a 5-card minor. Further, some players may skip a 4-card major in making a NT rebid. These approaches are commonly used, and these regulations do not require them to be alerted during the auction. You are advised to be aware of these different approaches, and protect yourself by asking where necessary.

7. Alerting Procedure

7.1

Alerts are compulsory - you may not ask the opponents not to alert. The requirement to alert applies even though the convention or other agreement may be listed on the system card.

7.2

Self-alerting calls should not be alerted.

7.3

You alert partner's calls, not your own (except when screens are in use). Alerts should be made immediately after the alertable call has been completed.

7.4

Alerts are made by audibly saying, "Alert" and, if written bidding is in use, circling the call on the bidding pad. Circling a call provides prima-facie evidence that it has been alerted. (If bidding boxes are in use, an alert card should be placed across the relevant call.)

7.5

Delayed alerts should be indicated by a small plus sign (+) in one corner of the appropriate square of the bidding pad as evidence of the delayed alert. (If bidding boxes are in use, the declaring side should verbally indicate which unusual calls require a delayed alert.)

7.6

Do not explain your alerted calls or delayed alerted calls unless a request has been made.

7.7

If you know that partner's call is alertable but you have forgotten its meaning, you should nevertheless alert. If asked, explain that you have forgotten the meaning. The Director should be called immediately. His normal action would be to send you away from the table and have your partner explain the meaning of the call.

7.8

When a player makes any call in tempo, and an opponent then alerts (late alert), the director may allow the player to retract the call and substitute a legal call without penalty, provided that his partner has not subsequently called, and it is probable that his action might be different after the alertable bid's meaning has been explained [Law 21B1(a)]. Any call retracted in accordance with the provisions of this Law is authorised information to the partner of the player retracting the call (Law 16D), but not to the opponents.

8. Enquiring about an Alerted Call

8.1

When opponents make an alerted or self-alerted call, you are entitled to ask specifically about that call, but only at your first turn to call after the alert. Otherwise any questions should be directed at the whole auction, not a specific call; an appropriate method of asking would be "Please explain the auction".

8.2

Any questions about a call or calls must take into account the Laws covering unauthorised information: *After a player makes available to his partner extraneous information that may suggest a call or play, as for example by a question..., the partner may not choose from among logical alternatives one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another by the extraneous information* [Law 16B1(a)].

Hence whilst the Laws grant you the right to ask questions, unnecessary inquiries, or questions directed at particular calls, may limit partner's options in the subsequent bidding or play. It is therefore advisable not to ask questions if your intention is to pass regardless of the answer.

8.3

Questions may be asked only for your own benefit. It is improper to ask questions for the benefit of partner.

9. Explanations

9.1

If an enquiry is made, a full explanation of the call must be given. This includes any conventional or partnership agreement, whether the agreement is explicit or based on partnership experience. Explanations may well include distributions and point ranges specifically excluded by a call, as well as those shown directly. When giving explanations, it is not necessary to repeat information given earlier in the hand, unless such information is requested. When explaining an alerted or self-alerting call, you should indicate if this same call may have a slightly different meaning (e.g. different point range) due to a variation of vulnerabilities and/or position around the table.

9.2

If there is no partnership agreement as to the meaning of a call, you must say so (by saying, "Undiscussed", for example), and not attempt to offer a possible explanation. When, however, as a result of partnership experience and style, you are able to form a cogent view of the likely meaning of an undiscussed call, that information shall be given to the opponents. Where a call is undiscussed, you should not offer statements such as "I take it to mean...." or "I'm treating it as....". Such a response is improper as it gives unauthorised information to partner.

9.3

Merely to name a convention (e.g. Michaels, Lebensohl, etc.) is not an acceptable explanation. There are many variations of most conventions, and a more specific explanation is normally required. Similarly, the use of "Standard" or "Natural" to describe calls, signals or leads is rarely sufficient - nor are the terms "Weak", "Strong" or "Intermediate" - without appropriate qualification.

9.4

An explanation given in response to an enquiry about the meaning of any call should avoid reference to the meaning of any response yet to be made to that call (unless requested by an opponent).

9.5

You need not divulge knowledge or conclusions you have reached based on your own card holdings, or as a consequence of your general bridge knowledge.

10. Irregularities in Procedure

10.1 Misinformation

Pairs who frequently forget their system or conventions have a damaging effect on the tournament. The Director is empowered by these Regulations to require such a pair to play a simpler system or convention. In extreme cases he may apply a procedural penalty under Law 90A.

10.2 Late Alert

In the case of a late alert (i.e. a member of the non-offending side has taken action before the alert is made), the Director should be called immediately before any further action is taken. (See 7.8) He may be able to take steps to prevent damage at this time. If the non-offending side fails to call the Director at this time, they may jeopardise their rights to obtain redress for damage later.

10.3 Failure to Alert / Mistaken Explanation

When there has been a failure to alert, or a mistaken alert, or misexplanation given, the following principles apply.

10.3.1 If a member of the offending side becomes declarer/dummy:

Before the opening lead is faced, declarer and/or dummy are required by Law to call the Director and, in his presence, correct the failure to alert, the mistaken alert, and/or the misexplanation.

10.3.2 If the offending side become defenders:

No correction may be given until the end of play, at which time the Director must be called.

10.3.3 When there is reason to believe that a failure to alert has caused damage, the Director will consider awarding an adjusted score, providing there is a direct link between the irregularity and the result achieved at the table.

11. Tournament Director's Responsibility

11.1

Tournament Directors will not allow players to manipulate these Regulations to their advantage. For example, opponents must be allowed enough time to alert; a speedy action out of tempo followed by a claim for a late alert will receive little sympathy. Likewise, experienced players claiming damage through a technical failure to alert will need to present a strong case.

11.2

Directors are urged, when giving a ruling at the table, to consider whether the players have adhered to the principle of full disclosure.

12. Alerting when Screens are in Use

When screens are in use, the alerting procedures outlined above do not apply. Refer instead to the ABF Screen Regulations and the Supplementary Regulations of the event for details of alerting procedures.

13. Summary and Guidelines for Players

This summary constitutes part of the regulations, but is intended only as a brief guide to players. Players should be familiar with the full regulations.

13.1

The Laws and these regulations require full disclosure of your agreements. You should make active efforts to ensure the opponents are aware of your agreements. You do so by pre-alerts (before the auction), alerts during the auction and delayed alerts at the end of the auction.

13.1.1 The pre-alert is the stage where you warn opponents of any very unusual agreements. Pay special attention to self-alerting calls that may surprise the opponents, (e.g. unusual doubles, unusual cue bids of opponents' suit) and to any unusual agreements to which the opponents may need to devise a defence.

13.1.2 Calls are alerted during the auction by audibly saying, "Alert" and by circling the alertable call on the bidding pad.

13.1.3 At the end of the auction, the declaring side should draw attention to any unusual undisclosed features by placing a plus sign (+) in one corner of the relevant square(s) of the bidding pad.

13.2

Self-alerting calls include all doubles and redoubles, calls at the 4-level or higher, cue bids of an opponent's suit and any 2♣ response to a 1NT opening bid. These should not be alerted during the auction, but may need to be alerted in the pre-alert or the delayed alert stage. Be aware that such calls by opponents may not mean what you assume, and ask if necessary.

13.3

All conventional calls (other than self-alerting calls) must be alerted. Note that an opening 1♣ or 1♦ bid that may contain fewer than three cards in the suit is conventional. Note also that any call showing two suits is conventional, even where one of the suits is named, e.g. 2♥ showing hearts and a minor.

13.4

A natural call must be alerted if it is forcing or non-forcing in a way the opponents might not expect (e.g. inverted minor raises, preemptive raises, negative free bids) or if its meaning is affected by other agreements (e.g. a 1♥ opening that denies 4+ spades).

13.5

Your policy should be to alert any call by partner (other than a self-alerting call) that the opponents could reasonably misunderstand.

13.6

In explanations, do not use the names of conventions; give specific explanations. For example, do not just say "Michaels", but explain the meaning of the bid by saying "At least 5-5 in hearts and a minor suit, any strength". Similarly, refrain from using the terms 'weak', 'strong', 'intermediate', 'natural' or 'standard' if there exist, from partnership experience, certain expectations of suit quality and/or point count. The opponents' views of these descriptive terms may differ from yours.

13.7

You may ask questions only at your turn to call or play. It is improper to ask questions for the benefit of partner.

13.8

Irregularities

13.8.1 Any misexplanation, alert or failure to alert by partner is unauthorised information to you, and you must avoid taking any subsequent action suggested by that unauthorised information.

13.8.2 If you realise that you have given a wrong explanation during the auction or failed to alert, call the Director immediately.

13.8.3 If you believe your partner has given a wrong explanation or there has been a material failure to alert, call the Director before the opening lead if you are the declaring side. If you are defending, you may not call until the end of the hand, whereupon you are required to do so.