

How to play an online match

We hope that the information below is correct, but this is not guaranteed. If you have comments on or corrections to these notes, please email davidhull99@gmail.com and/or lbhcba@gmail.com.

BBO is certainly the platform to use. Matches are free. All players need to register first. Paul Gipson has done some excellent work enabling people to get online. Start by watching this excellent video by Paul Gipson:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kiuLfsQRIY>
- Very pertinent: [Three common mistakes when creating team matches on BBO](#) (note the tip to include '+private+' in table description, to allow an unreserved seat without being overrun by random sitters – see [forum post](#)).
- There are more available from this playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9IOXJf9R9em-kAdxhUGxQniqZJm1PpCl>
- Also text help from [Berwick Bridge Club's BBO page](#)

Guide from the EBU:

- https://www.ebu.co.uk/ebuscore-wiki/_media/bbo_guide.pdf

Unless you are playing in an EBU tournament, skip the payment section – LBHCBA matches and friendlies are free. There is no need to involve the EBU in team matches (and it will possibly cause complications).

All players should familiarise themselves with alerting, explaining, claiming, the chat area, etc. You alert your own bids, and your partner does not see your alert. Before a match, you could try a short game of Solitaire (still bridge, but your opponents and partner are robots, who play Standard American). The default settings are probably OK but see what you might want to change.

When alerting, click alert BEFORE making your bid. There is no announce button (BBO is not a UK platform) but adding '15-17' (no 'alert') by way of explanation is equivalent. The opponents can click on any bid and ask the bidder to explain, which he does by clicking there and typing. Bids with explanatory text remain highlighted throughout and clicking displays the text.

Do not use the chat area at the bottom to ask questions and provide explanations, since that can convey unauthorised information.

Be careful when using the chat area as it is easy to upset your opponents. For example, playing online they cannot tell from your body language that you are joking. Do not chat during a hand.

We should not worry about the risk of cheating, e.g. communicating with partner by phone. But the LBHCBA will consider any incidents that are reported, as well as trying to help on technical problems and pass on information to teams. Obviously, the LBHCBA will take a dim view of any poor behaviour or unfair attempts to gain an advantage. To reduce the risk of abuse, the person setting up the match should opt for no barometer scoring, to hide the running score.

There is an undo button, for both bids and cards played, to cater for mis-clicks. Find it in the upper left part of the screen, on the Menu (which looks like a piled-up burger). In fact, find the undo button before the match starts, since you want to be able to make any change quickly. If you click undo, the opponents can accept or reject this request. Can you click undo after the next player has bid or played? We believe that you can. In a friendly game, it is polite to accept a request to undo, and for nobody to take advantage of what they have seen.

Actually, it is better for all players to watch all relevant videos before the match. If you have only played in organised tournaments before, bear in mind that a head-to-head match is slightly different.

Do not pressure any individuals or teams to play online – it is not something that appeals to all. If you are new to online bridge, or if you have previously only played pairs, you might like to play a practice match between yourselves (i.e. one table only) first.

In online game, the rules of bridge apply, supplemented where appropriate by the website's rules.

Agree a date and time for the match. Offer players options as to the time and date and have one organising player (captain) on each side. You may have heard about certain duplicates being cancelled by BBO. Do not worry about this: the restrictions imposed recently do not apply to one-off teams matches. But BBO does get busy if you try to begin after 5.00 UK time, and there is a slight risk of not being able to log in. If possible, agree an early afternoon start.

It is sensible to swap system cards by email in advance, since trying to summarise methods at the start of the game is less straightforward in an online match.

Make allowances for players not being familiar with things, and that the electronic form of communication is more likely to lead to misunderstandings. Example 1. One player suggested that an opponent hesitated over playing a singleton King. It was probably due to his PC, or maybe his cat walked onto the keyboard. We do not know. Example 2. A player was pulled up for not alerting his bid, which he thought was natural. When asked, his partner disagreed. They just had a misunderstanding; they were not trying to disadvantage their opponents.

Try to be patient if there are technical or other problems. Do not accuse the opponents of cheating if they are slow to bid, for example.

We do not know how the Call Director button works, since we have not used it. Our advice is that, if there is a problem, complete the hand, find the rules on the EBU website, agree an outcome, etc. – rather than trying to communicate with some American whom you do not know, cannot see and cannot communicate normally with. There is a list of Directors for rulings on the EBU website

You want one match organiser, not eight, so nominate one player to set up the match. The match organiser should fill in the following table before the match and email it to all players. Apparently, anybody who has done more than 100 logins or has been a BBO member for fewer than 2 weeks could have a problem on setting up a match, so choose somebody who does not meet those criteria.

Player	BBO login	Phone	Email
A1			
A2			
A3			
A4			
B1			
B2			
B3			
B4			

You must have the logins right. For example, we played a match where one player seemed to be Fred Smith³. He was a late substitute, and the organiser did not have his contact details – which was a mistake. It took some time before we realised that the 3 was some sort of BBO symbol, and not part of his login.

Should you have teams of five? That would cater for one player having a technical fail, but we suggest sticking to four players a side. Substitutions during a match are not easy to do.

However, you could create a list of your main bridge contacts (email/phone/BBO login), so if you have a technical problem you can try to get a substitute, who is not currently online and playing already.

Players should have their phones and email accounts on/open during the game, to deal with any technical problems. Reboot your PC well ahead of the match, and do not browse the internet when you are dummy, using other tabs. It is just possible that BBO will crash, but that would be unavoidable. However, you can ensure that your PC is clear of junk.

All eight players should be logged in 5 minutes before you start playing and told to ensure that they do not get timed out at this stage.

The organiser should log into BBO and go to Competitive, Team matches, Create team match.

Identification: put in e.g. Test Only*, Smith vs. Jones, Smith, Jones in the four boxes.

*This is designed to deter possible interlopers but ensure that all players in the match know that the match is real.

Options: Choose number of boards, form of scoring, etc.

Unless agreed otherwise, go for random deals, no kibitzers, no barometer scoring (this means that you do not see the running score), allow undos.

Comment from one colleague: "You may get a message "X is not online". I got that even when X said he was online. I asked him to go offline and log in again, and when he did so all was well. I also experienced failure, with some message such as "you have used all your permitted tournaments". When that happened, I logged off, started again, and we were quickly into play."

Reserve seats: your team all at table1, your opponents all at table 2.

Only when all players are seated should you click **Create Team Match**, NOT before. (Do not click Close at any stage.). Hopefully, you are then whisked to the right tables and start to play.

We are unaware of and facility to swap opponents at half time. So we suggest you play 'straight-though' against only one pair (home team has seating rights). If you try to play two 12-board (or 10 or 8) matches in succession, do not be surprised if you find that you cannot start the second half, due to BBO restrictions or robots invading your table.

What about two 12-board stanzas, on two days? Try that if you want to. But it is difficult enough to gather eight players together at the same time once, under changed circumstances (i.e. online), so why do it twice?

A short pause at half-time (without changing seats) could be agreed but ensure that you are not timed out. You can take a break when you are dummy – send a message to the table when you leave, and again when you return.

Teams should not concede, even in a knockout match. Everybody has agreed on a certain number of boards, and you should not curtail others' entertainment, unless this is unavoidable. If you do agree to stop, though, you may find it difficult to 'leave the table', so you should pass out the remaining deals, which will not take long.

For matches of less than 24 boards, see this. <https://www.ebu.co.uk/laws-and-ethics/vp-scales>. If you enter the number of boards and click Discrete Scale, you can see what will apply.

After the match, you can find the hand records, sequence of play, swing, what happened at the other table, etc. – go to the History tab on the right. After you have logged out, you can recover details via 'Myhands': <http://www.bridgebase.com/myhands/>.

David Hull

25-April-2020