

FAQs About On-Line Play at Eastern Iowa Bridge Clubs

April 25, 2020

1. Who can play in the Eastern Iowa Bridge Virtual Club games?

Our games have been created through BBO to serve the 'regular' patrons of our local clubs. The ACBL has a list of who has been playing at which clubs, and the roster of eligible players begins with the list of our recent masterpoint winners. If you've been away for a while (or didn't win points at the Club in the last year), you can request us to place you on the roster, but the intent is to re-create the normal Club experience on-line, not to recruit outside players.

For the time being, all Virtual Club games are Open games (no masterpoint restrictions).

2. Must the players be ACBL members?

No. However, (1) members without an ACBL number are placed in the A (highest) scoring strata, and (2) non-ACBL members will not be able to play in limited-point games, when we are able to have them.

If you have not entered your ACBL number with BBO, you should do so before registering for the virtual Club game. (To do this, log on, click on "ACBL World", and locate the blue tab that indicates "Update Your ACBL Number".)

3. Why Should I be an ACBL member?

There are several reasons why you should want to be an ACBL member. You cannot receive masterpoints from ACBL without the membership link. Additionally, ACBL membership gets you automatically included as a player eligible to play in all of our affiliated Eastern Iowa bridge clubs. Stratification in these games is based upon your current masterpoint holding. BBO stratifies the field by thirds. Top third. Middle third. Bottom third. The *Bridge Bulletin* alone is worth the price of membership. And, finally, the staff of the ACBL has done an immense amount of work making it possible to play sanctioned duplicate bridge online during the pandemic – they deserve your membership support.

To join or renew your ACBL membership, go to acbl.org. The "join" and "renew" buttons are right at the top of the home page. Or you can contact us.

4. Do I get assigned a partner, or can I bring my regular partner?

You should bring your regular partner (or a new partner) to the game, assuming they have registered with BBO for on-line play. There is an on-line 'Partnership Desk' for each event. It is best if you arrange a game with someone you know. Unattached partners can see each other and can communicate with each other by chatting. If you recognize someone, invite them to be your partner. If you are unsuccessful in getting a partner let us know and you will be assigned a partner from the BBO substitute list.

5. Are robots used in the Club play?

No. You must play with a real person.

6. Can I earn regular ACBL masterpoints for playing at the Virtual Club?

Current ACBL members can earn masterpoints at virtual club games. So long as 18 boards are played, virtual club games currently award ACBL black points at 150% of the standard club award. The games are stratified according to the Masterpoint holdings of the registered pairs. Awards are (as at physical Clubs) by stratification.

7. Okay, how many boards will we play?

In this early rollout of virtual club games, we are scheduling 18-board games, 7 minutes per board, 3 boards per round; this will result in a game of about two hours. Based on BBO experience, we will likely move the board timing to 6 minutes. Based on your feedback, we may increase the number of boards played. Please share your preferences with by sending us email. Eighteen board games award a full club rating with black points.

8. *7 minutes per board!?! What happens if I can't keep up?*

The computer is keeping track of the time, and if the time runs out in a round, you will be taken directly to the next round (even in the middle of a hand). If that occurs, the computer will determine what would have occurred, and will assign a score. In the event the outcome is not determined, the computer will ask the presiding Director for a ruling, just as at the Club. But play will not be delayed if a table does not keep up a proper pace.

But don't be overly concerned. Online, you don't move boards, count your cards, sort your cards, keep score, or even write down your contracts. All that is done by the computer. After one session of play on BBO, it isn't hard at all to average six minutes per board.

9. *So, is there a Director?*

Yes. Your on-line game Director will be one of the regular Directors at the Club. This means that you will probably know the Director. The bad news? They will also know you. So, much like the physical Club, please treat your game Director with respect.

10. *How much does a session cost to play?*

A virtual session of Eastern Iowa Bridge costs \$4.00. 80% of revenues collected by BBO are returned to the local clubs to help keep the clubs in business until the CoronaVirus has retreated. Your support is truly appreciated.

11. *... and how do I pay?*

Payment on BBO is made at registration time when you invite your partner and they accept your invitation. Payment is through the use of BridgeBase dollars (BB\$).

12. *What are BridgeBase dollars (BB\$), and how do I get them?*

BB\$ are simply credits that a player may purchase (through the BBO site). There are several methods by which one can purchase BB\$ -- credit card, PayPal, etc. Information can be found on the BBO site by clicking on the BB\$ tab at the top right of your screen (next to your name) after logging on. For details, watch [this video](#).

We encourage you NOT to buy BB\$ through an app such as the Apple store or Google Play. There is a significant upcharge added by those stores.

13. *What else is different about playing on-line?*

There are several things that you should be aware of when playing on-line. The pace of play is a bit 'brisker' than at the club. While there remains a social aspect, it usually occurs after the hands in the current round are concluded. And we expect that if you can claim (or concede) the rest of the tricks, you will do so promptly to keep the game moving. There is a "Claim" button on the screen when you are playing or defending a hand.

Additionally, players 'self-Alert' their artificial bids. Unlike the Club, where you Alert your partner's bids, on-line we Alert our own bids and calls. You do this by entering the meaning of Alertable bids on the line provided when it is your turn to call; then hit the Alert button before actually entering the call you are making (bid, pass, double, or redouble). YOUR PARTNER WILL NOT SEE YOUR ALERTS. When you receive an Alert from an opponent, they are NOT CHEATING -- their partner cannot see their information to you. A short video on alerting and announcing bids is [here](#).

If you make a slip of the tongue or bidding card at a physical table, you can normally say "oops!" and correct it, so long as you are just correcting a "mechanical error". That is not true on BBO. Once you have clicked, you have bid or played, so take your time and practice safe clicking. And it is not legal to chat to the table that you made a mistake. You CAN go into the OPTIONS dialog at the top of the screen and, under "Table Options", turn on Confirm Bids or Confirm Cards, so every bid or play takes at least two clicks. On the bright side, when on BBO, you cannot make an illegal or insufficient bid, bid or play out of turn, revoke, or make a scoring error.

At a physical club, if there is an odd number of pairs, we play a movement with a half table and sit-outs. Online, we will not be doing that. We will find subs online and ask them to play at an incomplete table. Also, if a player loses connection, drops out, and can't reconnect in a minute or two, the director will place a sub in their place. This may be only for one or two hands; once the original player gets reconnected, they will be "re-seated" at their table. If you would like to be a sub, see below for how.

Chatting at the table is permitted (there is a message button available at the bottom of your screen), but anything you say to the Table is public information and can be seen by all parties. You can communicate privately with either or both opponents, but not privately to your partner.

And (fortunately for the game Director) there is no Bridgemate upon which you can enter or approve wrong results. All results are recorded automatically, so you don't have to worry about checking the accuracy of the final results.

14. When should I expect to find games on-line?

We are starting with games at 11:30 AM on Monday, April 27 and at 6:30 PM on Tuesday April 28. If these games are successful, we will add additional games at the normal times for each of the participating clubs. What we add will be based on our experience and your comments.

Remember that the scheduled games will not show up on the BBO website until 2 hours before the start of the game. Registration will be available at that time.

15. And where, exactly, do I pre-register for a game?

Log in to www.Bridgebase.com. Find the section for "Play or Watch Bridge" (blue stripe). Click on "Competitive". Under "Tournaments" (green stripe), click on "ACBL Virtual Clubs". Look for games identified as Eastern Iowa Bridge. Click on the game to see details about the game or to send an invitation to your partner for play in the event. Hint: Unless you plan to pay for your partner, your registration will be pending until your partner also logs on and accepts your invitation to play. Please stay on-line until this occurs and you receive a confirmation that your entry has been completed. Once the registration is complete, you do not need to stay on-line. But if you log off, please log back on a bit prior to the game start time to make certain you have no connection issues. If you are not logged on when the game starts, you will be automatically unregistered.

16. Is there a partnership person available ?

Not a person; it's more like computer dating. All scheduled games will show up on BBO under 'Competitive', then 'ACBL Virtual Club' two hours before the scheduled game. There is a partnership link just to the right of 'register'; look upper section of the tournament information. Register there if you are looking for a partner.

17. I'd like to play, but have never done this before, how can I learn ?

If you would like to get familiar with BBO, you can play for free via their casual play. You can play with your own partner, or have one assigned to you. We encourage you to feel comfortable with the BBO software before joining a virtual club game.

A good way to learn BBO if you don't want to jump into a game with strangers is to host a game with three of your friends. Set a time and learn their BBO ids, and set up a game from the logon screen like this:

1. Play or Watch Bridge – **Casual**
2. Find Your Own Game – **Start a Table**
3. Pick the **Scoring** method – **Total Points** (This is Chicago scoring)
4. Privacy Options – **Permission Required to Play** and **Invisible** ON, all others OFF. If you forget to turn Invisible ON, you are likely to have strangers try to join the game.
5. **Reserve Seats** for the four players by clicking on each direction and entering their BBO ID's.
6. **Start Table – Relaxed Game**. Your friends will be invited to your table as soon as they log on to BBO.

There is information about playing on BBO all over the internet. There are 28 videos about how to play on BBO from Paul Gipson of the Berwick Bridge Club [here](#). There are several tutorial videos from the ACBL [here](#). Look [here](#) for tutorials from BBO.

18. Can anyone kibitz a game ?

Security issues here - no kibitzers, no chats except to the table while hands are being played.

19. Are games stratified ?

Currently the BBO software stratifies games proportionally based on the players in each specific game. One third of the game is assigned to each of three stratifications. Later, the BBO software may be able to stratify in our more traditional fashion, though it is not yet available.

20. Can I play on any device ?

We know you can play on a computer and on an iPad. You will probably find playing on a computer easier.

21. Why can't we have 299er games ?

We plan to, if this effort proves to be successful. And we aren't yet ready to take on more than one section of on-line bridge per club.

Keep in mind that all games are going to be stratified. We encourage you to play, both for fun and to support our Bridge Clubs. If this effort is successful, we will be able to expand and add some limited-point games in the future.

22. Where will the results be shown ?

You will see your percentage scores for individual boards right after each 3-board round. That is right – everyone is playing the same boards at the same time, so after a round is complete, the scoring for that round is done. BBO will post total scores and rankings shortly after the game. You'll also receive an email from ACBL Live that has a link to results. And you can click the History tab (far right on your home screen) to see your personal results and all the hands from recent games.

23. Do you need substitutes ?

You can sign up as a substitute once the game begins. You will see the substitute button towards the bottom left of your screen. Let the game host know that you'd like to sub for us, Eastern Iowa Bridge. Substitutes are not charged. As a sub, you may play for a hand or two, for most of the game, or not at all.

24. Game time issues can be a problem.

If you are not online when a game begins you will not be seated. We encourage all registered players to be ready to go about 10 minutes before the announced start. Please do not wait until the last minute to register, it is a busy time for your directors.

Also, be aware that BBO has seen immense growth in use since the pandemic struck, and its resources are stretched to the limit. There are times it will be hard to log on, and getting dropped from games happens occasionally. If that happens, log off and back on, and you will be re-seated at your table. But don't be surprised if a glitch or two happens during a session. We'll figure out how to work through it.

25. How do I create and load a convention card ?

- Click Account (tab on far right of the BBO home page), then Convention Cards from the top menu. You can use a stock card (2-over-1, SAYC and others are available) or you can edit a custom card for each of your partnerships (click New ACBL Convention Card at the top of this screen).
- Fill in the card, save it and load it when the game begins. If you don't specify a card, your convention card will default to the SAYC system.
- If you fill in your partner's login name (top of editing screen), the card will automatically load every time you play with that partner.
- Once the game begins, you can see your opponents' convention card (and your own) by clicking the blue box with three lines (top right of your table).

See this [video tutorial](#) for step-by-step instructions.

Remember: During the game, you alert and explain your own calls, not your partner's. Your partner will not see your alert. If your opponents ask questions, reply with private chat.

26. Convention Card?

Casual players have been known to play without a convention card. In sanctioned duplicate games, they really should have one. If you don't have your own card, BBO defaults you to Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC). SAYC is more complicated than how most casual players bid. For example, SAYC includes Michaels cue bids. If you are using the default convention card and not playing Michaels, you are misleading your opponents about the meaning of your bids. You should really fill out a card. At a minimum, let your opponents at each table know, via chat, that you are not playing the conventions on the card they see if they look at yours.

27. How do I "talk" during a game?

- Use the chat box at the bottom of the screen to type a message to everyone at the table or privately to an opponent. Private chat with partner is not allowed.
- Feel free to greet your opponents when you go to a new table and, if there's time after the last board, have a conversation. Please save "non-bridge" chat until the end of the round.
- If you want to inquire about an opponent's bid -- or if an opponent asks you a question -- be sure your message does not go to the whole table. Before you type, click the blue box next to the chat line, change it to Private and select the opponent's screen name.
- To see who is playing at your table, click the opponent's screen name above his hand. A box will pop up with his profile. Click the X at the top right of the box to close it.
- You are encouraged to add your real name to your profile. We are a community, and the atmosphere is friendlier (and more "human") if we aren't anonymous. To change or add your name, click the Account tab, then Profile. Click Save (blue box at bottom) after you make changes.

28. Very Important

If you and your partner are playing at the same location, you are honor bound not to discuss the hands, bidding or play during the game. BBO has ways of identifying cheaters and they will not be tolerated.

We are standing ready to pass along any information as it comes our way. If you have other questions please feel free to write to EasternIowaBridge@gmail.com.