

When and How to Ask Questions

From Suzanne Goodall



The subject of when and how to ask questions regarding the auction is an interesting one.

You have the right according to The Law to ask questions whenever it is your turn to bid.

Having said that one should be careful in exercising that right.

A good rule to adhere to is to refrain from asking questions if you have no intention of bidding.

There are several reasons for this approach.

1. It simply wastes time and interrupts the natural flow of the auction.
2. You may be aiding the opponents by allowing them to exchange information. Say you ask for the meaning of an alerted *2D bid and are told it is the partnership's Game Force Bid. One of your opponents may well say to himself, 'Thanks, I forgot that we were using *2D and not *2C as our Game Force Bid.'
3. There is also the consideration of what is ethical. If you are holding AKxx of clubs and query an alerted *2C opening you may open the door to being admonished by the Director. Even if you are not on lead and partner makes a dubious club switch mid-defence your question may come under scrutiny. It is best to avoid what I call 'lead-directing questions'. May I suggest that if you are guilty of this you replace this type of questioning with a lead-directing X. With most of my partners I double artificial bids at the Two Level or higher to say 'When you are on lead partner please lead that suit'. This is a legal way to tell partner about your holding in the suit and you can't be faulted.

You may be thinking of bidding so you make an enquiry. Occasionally the answer you are given will determine whether or not you will bid.

Say the opponents open *2H and you would like to enter the auction if their bid is a 6 carded heart suit with 6-9hcp. You enquire and learn that the bid can be weak or strong and a variety

of suit combinations. Now there is no problem if you have asked about the bidding and subsequently pass.

On the other hand asking about a bid only to learn it is weak and then passing reflects poorly on you. If you were just curious then you have interrupted the auction unnecessarily. Sometimes I see players use this as 'I don't have a bid partner but I do have values.' Obviously this type of player is not a candidate for the best and fairest player award.

When defending or declaring you do need to have access to the opponents' agreements. Say, you have been courteous and not interrupted the auction. Now, before you lead or after partner has selected their lead, ask for a review of the entire auction no matter how silly that seems. NEVER ask about a specific bid such as a *5H response to an *4NT bid. You could be approaching unethical territory. Declarers or their partners can offer you a review of the entire auction before you lead. Since the auction is complete one person can explain the bidding. This is less awkward and also less time-consuming.

Now on to how to ask questions. Avoid pointed questions such as 'Is it weak?' Prefer phrasing your enquiries 'What does the 2S bid show.....What do you understand by the.... Or how do you play the..... Or what is your partnership agreement? This or similar is good for asking about a specific bid. If you have politely waited until the end of the auction, simply ask for a review (or revision) of the entire auction. Never be afraid to ask a second time if the explanation is unclear.

This may all seem a bit complex but if you keep in mind that you should not ask questions if you have no intention of bidding then you are halfway there.

Remember, if either side thinks something has gone wrong in the questioning process **ALWAYS call The Director.**