

Alerting Regulations

Bridge is a very ethical game. We don't use mannerisms or gestures to give our partner extra information, we try to avoid looking at an opponent's cards and we don't have secret systems. Every technique in our game - bidding and play, is disclosed to our opponents, and that's where alerting comes in. The reason for alerting a bid is to let your opponents know that you know something about your partner's hand that they might not, and it could be a good idea to ask what's going on. But there's a bit of confusion in our club about;

- Which bids must not be alerted
- Which bids must be alerted
- When and how do you alert
- When can you ask questions

Which Bids must not be Alerted

Some bids don't have to be alerted because it's blatantly obvious that something funny is happening. These bids are called 'self alerting bids'. It's not a case of them not being alertable, it's simply that they don't need to be alerted because they are considered to be automatically alerted. There is no penalty if you do alert accidentally, but if you keep doing it, you might get a gentle reminder from the director to learn the rules.

There are four groups of bids that you do not alert;

- All Passes, Xs and XXs
- All bids over 3NT except artificial 4 or 5 level openings
For example, a 4♥ opening which promises 6-9pts and 8+ spades, must be alerted.
- A response of 2♣ to a 1NT opening in an uncontested auction
But DO alert 2♣ if the auction is contested, eg (1H) – 1NT – (P) - (2♣)
- All cue bids of the opponent's suits
(1♦) - 2♦...is sometimes genuine, but more often than not, it's an artificial bid showing a 2 suited hand (and there are lots of variations on this), so you simply ask what it means at your turn to bid.

Which Bids must be Alerted

The following bids must be alerted;

1. Artificial Bids (sometimes called 'Conventional Bids') where the bidder is not showing a willingness to play in that denomination (it can be either a suit or NT). For example;
 - a. 2♣ or 2♦ opening which promises a big hand
 - b. Waiting or negative responses to the strong 2♣ or 2♦ opening
 - c. 2♦ response to Simple Stayman
 - d. All responses to Extended Stayman
 - e. Transfers after partner opens 1NT
 - f. Transfer acceptances if the NT opener is playing super-accepts
 - g. 2NT opening which shows 5+ in both minors and 6-9pts
 - h. A jump response that is weak and non-forcing e.g. 1♦ – 2♥ showing 0-5pts and 6 hearts
 - i. All Bergen raises and 4th suit forcing
 - j. A forcing 1NT response in a 2/1 system
 - k. A bid in a 'Pass or Correct' sequence, e.g. 1NT - (2♠) - (3♣) - ?
2♠ is a transfer to a minor, the NT bidder doesn't know which minor his partner holds but must bid 3♣ and his partner will Pass with clubs or Correct to 3♦ with diamonds.

2. Natural bids which have a different meaning from that commonly expected. For example;
 - a. 1♦ - 2♦ which shows 5 card diamond support and 10+ points (Inverted minors)
 - b. 1♣ - 3♣ which shows 5 card club support and 6-9 points (Inverted minors)
 - c. 1♥ - 3♥ which shows 4 card heart support and 0-5 points (Bergen Raises)

When & How Do you Alert

You must alert immediately the bid is completed. You do not wait until it's your turn to bid or until an opponent asks if there is something funny going on, do it the instant your partner finishes writing.

You alert by circling your partner's bid and saying "Alert". Both of these things must be done. It's actually to your advantage to say "alert" as soon as partner makes the bid even before you have circled it because if you're a bit slow to move your hand to the bidding pad and an opponent makes their bid and then requests a change because of a supposed late alert, having said "alert" as soon as the bid was made is your protection.

If your partner forgets to alert, do not say anything at the time, but keep bidding as though the alert was made. The opponents should be advised of the failure to alert either at the end of bidding if your side is declaring, or at the end of the hand if your side is defending. The director should be called if damage may have resulted from the failure to alert.

When Can you ask Questions

Either player can ask about an opponent's bid, at their turn to bid. This is true for all bids, alerted or otherwise. But don't do it frivolously. If you need to know what's going on because you want to bid, then by all means ask. However, asking about an artificial bid (for example 2♦ in the sequence 1NT - (2♦)) and then passing, could be construed as signalling to your partner that you would like them to lead diamonds.

If you are simply curious to understand the opponent's bidding system, wait until the bidding has finished and the declarer should give you a full explanation. If he doesn't, and you'd like to understand what's going on, now's the time to ask.

A Little More about Alerting

While most of us are familiar with alerting during play, there are a couple of other stages of alerting.

Pre-Alerts

When you first sit down at the table, you are expected to **Pre-Alert** your opponents to your basic system and any bids that you use that could be misinterpreted. While most of us play Standard American, 2 over 1 is gaining in popularity and some pairs play Acol or Precision. So let your opponents know from the outset.

Also tell them a little about the quirky aspects of your system. If you play 5 Card Major Stayman, it's important to mention that as your responses to Stayman may be misunderstood. Let the opponents know if you play Multi 2s, Bergen Raises and Inverted Minors as well as they can look quite natural at the time, but the meaning is very different from what is expected.

Delayed Alerts

When you are declarer, before your LHO makes his opening lead, it is courteous to offer your opponents a full explanation of the bidding. This is particularly true with self-alerting calls and calls over 3NT. Your opponents can always ask but it is in keeping with the spirit of Bridge to be as open and as transparent as possible.
