

TIP OF THE WEEK

The difference between PRE-ALERTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS and ALERTS

A recent TIP OF THE WEEK (26 April) might have created some confusion, so let's try again.

Pre-alerts refer (i) to your system, (ii) to unusual conventions, and (iii) to unusual carding agreements. After greeting a new pair when they come to your table (i) you should say for instance, "*we play Standard, with 5-card majors, a 4-card diamond suit and 1C may be as short as 2; our 1NT is 15-18*". (ii) if you play unusual conventions you should say for instance "*our 2D opening is Multi; it is a weak two in hearts or spades*". (iii) if your carding is normal, say so. The **Pre-Alerts** period expires at the commencement of the auction on the first hand, and the **Announcements** and **Alerts** periods begin.

Announcements are curiosities that are made during the auction despite the fact that you have already made the information available during the **Pre-Alert** period: (i) When partner opens 1NT, you should announce "*12 to 15 hcp*", or whatever. (ii) When partner opens 1C, you should announce "*may be as short as 2 or 3*", or whatever.

Alerts: Long, long ago when I learnt bridge, it was a rule of thumb to alert any bid that the opponents might not understand. Not much has changed. The most significant change is the concept of **self-alerting** bids. **Self-alerting** bids include: (i) all doubles & redoubles, (ii) a Stayman 2C after partner has opened 1NT, (iii) cue-bids of an opponent's suit, (iv) any bid higher than 3NT — except bids of 4C or 4D that show suits other than club or diamonds. (It is a silly thing to say but I'm going to say it anyway: "*don't alert a self-alerting bid*".)

Please follow correct alerting procedure: (i) When partner bids something that the opponents might not understand, you should **alert** by saying "alert" and/or by placing an alert card alongside partner's bid. (Be sure that your opponents are aware of the alert.) (ii) Don't offer an explanation of the alerted bid unless asked. (iii) When asked, it is not sufficient merely to name the convention; you should give a fuller explanation, e.g. "*that is the unusual no-trump showing both minors*". (iv) If asked about partner's bid and you have no agreement, say so; it may be a good idea to call the director. (v) If asked about partner's bid and you have forgotten your agreement, say so; and call the director. (vi) It is a messy situation if partner gives the wrong explanation of your bid (see TIP OF THE WEEK, 19 April). (vii) It is probably better to over-alert than to under-alert. But it's a fine line. In the unlikely circumstance that an opponent objects to your concept of alerting, ask the director to rule. (viii) Should you, as a defender, wish to know something specific about the auction before playing to the first trick, you cannot ask a specific question; you must ask for an explanation of the entire auction.

The Laws of Duplicate Bridge are extremely abstruse. So don't be dismayed if sometimes you are confused. It happens to everyone. (There are probably only a handful of people in the world who can confidently and correctly interpret every Law in the book.) If you need further guidance, your best option is to consult Ian Robison or Sebastian Yuen. They are both international-level directors, they both have a comprehensive knowledge of the Laws and their application, and both are amongst the most approachable people in the club. Your second-best option is to send me an email. I will respond as best and as quickly as I can.

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