

EBUTA



Bridge Software  
for  
home computers



This is an attempt to summarise some of the many computer software products and services available to bridge players. Since there are many such products, I have selected those that are more likely to appeal to the English market, mostly the Acol-based bidding.

The comments are my own. Please do not blame English Bridge Union if you don't agree with me!

June 2011

John Pain

## Bridge software for home computers

The best way to select bridge software is to see it working. If none of your friends owns a copy or if it's too far to make your way to the **London Bridge Shop**, 44 Baker Street, London, W1U 7RT.

☎ 020 7388 2404, email [info@bridgeshop.com](mailto:info@bridgeshop.com) then most packages have an Internet site from which you can download a demo copy. If you don't know the web site address, use a search package (Google is very good for this) and just type in the package name.

The following list is not comprehensive and you will undoubtedly find more



software by browsing round bridge sites. But, beware — a lot of software plays Standard American. Here we are covering packages offering an English option.

The prices given are mostly from the London Bridge Shop catalogue ([www.bridgeshop.com](http://www.bridgeshop.com)). You may well do better by buying online; some bits may be free, others on special offer, but the usual caveats about online purchase do apply, especially from little-known sites.

You should remember that computers are not as clever as human players. The computer may bid quite well but the card play and defence are still not up to your standard, particularly when it comes to drawing inferences.

In this booklet, three areas are covered:

- bridge-playing software, where the computer acts as electronic partner and opponents
- software to improve your skills in a given area
- online services available via the Internet

## **Learning to play bridge**

The English Bridge Union has a version of the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) '**learn to play bridge**' package, available free from <http://www.ebu.co.uk/education/ltpb>. It is based on Standard English Acol – the system used by the EBU's own *Bridge for All* course.

**Blue Chip Bridge** (£65) has a learn bridge course and is the only other one that teaches a Standard English Acol system and follows it with a card-play course using MiniBridge. Both the Blue Chip Bridge CD and the booklet *All about MiniBridge* are available from English Bridge Union.

**Begin Bridge (Acol version)** learn to play with Bernard Magee (£66) has 20 interactive chapters covering all aspects of the game. Contact Mr Bridge : <http://www.mrbridge.co.uk/>

## Bridge-playing software

This section covers the software where you play a proper game of bridge with the computer providing partner and opponents as needed. All programs offer a choice of systems — Acol, five-card majors, Standard American.

Nearly all the programs are for PC. There is little available for the MAC. Best for the MAC is **Bridge Baron** <[www.bridgebaron.com](http://www.bridgebaron.com)> currently on version 21 and costing about £50 for the MAC and PC versions. It has good beginner and advanced features. There are seven skill levels, and over two billion deals are stored and can be replayed as often as you want.

For PCs only is **GIB (Ginsberg's Intelligent Bridge v6.1)** at £50 probably the best card-playing software. Definitely not for the inexperienced player, and it's not so good at Acol, since, like most Americans, it doesn't

really understand the method. Wonderful database of 11,000 deals from top tournaments. Good at signalling.

For all levels of player **Blue Chip Bridge**

<[www.bluechipbridge.co.uk](http://www.bluechipbridge.co.uk)> at £65 is a good buy.

After looking at many others, English Bridge Union selected this as the only package for sale through its Bridge Shop. It has lots of help available for the inexperienced but can assist even the experienced player to think more clearly. The bidding database is available to tailor the system exactly to your methods. Much of this package was developed in conjunction with EBU staff, and Blue Chip has successfully bid every hand in the Standard English books.

**Q-Plus** [http://www.mrbridge.co.uk/](http://www.mrbridge.co.uk) more expensive at £86. Version 10 has added Standard English to the systems offered. You can even ask the computer to tell you if you have made a poor bid or play. One of the market leaders. Order from **Mr Bridge, 01483 489961**.

**Jack v5.01 (£60)** Jack is by far the strongest and most versatile bridge program available. Jack is developed for bridge players by bridge players, paying special attention to ease of use. Jack offers a friendly user interface, with settings to vary almost anything, from different colours on the screen to large-print playing cards. It's up to you to determine Jack's looks.

**GOTO Bridge (£70)** Practice at bidding and card play together with 140 themed quizzes

**Fun Bridge (basic service is free, premium service about £8.50 a month).** Excellent interactive game playing package. <http://www.funbridge.com/uk/>

**Bridge Base Online (FREE)** a wonderful service provided free of charge by some very enlightened bridge players. You can also watch live play from tournaments all over the world.  
<http://www.bridgebase.com/>

## **Instructional software**

Much of the instructional software appears to be American (or occasionally French). This means auctions provided will feature non-Acol bidding, but as most concentrate on card play, this matters less. It is a shame that none really aims at the beginner market, nor do the developers truly understand how to make the most of interactive techniques for educational software — too many bridge experts, not enough teachers do the development. All products are available over the web.

An exception is the **Mr Bridge** software. In addition to the Begin Bridge and Q-Plus packages there are several others in the suite – on defence and declarer play, for example – from £66.

**BridgeMaster is an interactive package on bidding and play.** It sets play problems and only allows the right line to succeed. Hands at five skill levels and extra disks available. Not for beginners. The top level was found to be pretty tough, but very addictive.  
<[www.bridgemaster.com](http://www.bridgemaster.com)>

## **Playing hands from real life**

**Deep Finesse** <[www.deepfinesse.com](http://www.deepfinesse.com)> can settle all your play arguments. This program takes a deal and tells you whether the contract can be made. It is never wrong; it plays perfect double dummy bridge. Double dummy is the name given when you can see all four hands so you know when to do unusual things like dropping singleton kings when they are offside.

## **Online bridge playing**

This has grown very fast. The sites and facilities have been multiplying and the range of play options is quite impressive. Most sites offer you a trial membership, so you can give them a go before paying their subscription. With some, it's only a week, whilst others offer a month.

Some subscribers use a connection system like the one offered by BT, which disconnects you after two hours. This means your invisible partner can suddenly disappear in the middle of a hand, very frustrating and perhaps a reason to choose another phone supplier.

All sites say that a range of systems can be played but, of course, the American sites are heavily into American bidding. Most offer pairs, teams and Chicago. You turn up and look around to find a table you want to join. Some are hosted to maintain discipline; others can be a bit disorderly. At the best sites you can book a game with your regular partner or a table for a team match or practice.

When you acquire a partner, you have to agree what system you are playing. Standard English, that is good basic Acol, is one suggestion. Better to start with something simple that you understand. When you have played more you can add conventions. A lot of people want you to play discarding systems. Say you don't know Dodds or whatever it is. Find out more about your partner first.

Online bridge is huge. The American Contract Bridge League and English Bridge Union both have what they call On line Points for the duplicates, although these do not entirely count equal with Master Points. Rightly so, since it is clear that the system is not foolproof.

**Bridge Club Live** at <[www.bridgeclublive.com](http://www.bridgeclublive.com)> is the best Acol site for EBU members. You can pre- arrange a partner or just turn up to play; there is a host system to find you a partner.

**OKBridge** – this is one of the most popular American run networks and can be busy at times when there can

be up to 1,000 players online. It sponsors events, like matches with top players that you can watch. Go to <[www.okbridge.com](http://www.okbridge.com)> for information but remember American time is 5-to-8 hours behind UK time, so the best games may not be when you want to play. However, it is popular with the Irish, too, so you should find a game at most normal hours. Basic cost is \$99 a year.

<[www.topbridge.com](http://www.topbridge.com)> is running individual competitions where you all play the same system and you don't know who your partner is. This solves security problems, which occur in many Internet competitions.

This gives you three to get started. There are many others and perhaps the best way to find an up to date site is to use a search engine like Google and put in 'play bridge on line'. But do remember to check that they have Acol based rooms, cater for novice and less experienced players.

## **Online bridge resources**

Playing bridge is not the only thing you can do on the Internet. There are many sites; each national bridge organisation has its own (use them to find clubs when you go on holiday). The European and World organisations allow you to follow the top international

tournaments as they happen – log on to see how the English are doing.

<[www.ebu.co.uk](http://www.ebu.co.uk)>, EBU's own site, provides a link to the European and World sites and they take you on to all their member countries. The EBU site has lots of useful things: recent results, convention cards, links to each English county, and all Standard English articles from *English Bridge*. Try it and see.

Many keen players have their own sites. The easiest way to find them is to log on to one and then follow the links to others. Or use your search engine — for instance, just type Sandra Landy and over 200 references will come up. But you won't find her web site; she doesn't have one!

David Stephenson's site

<[www.blakjak.demon.co.uk](http://www.blakjak.demon.co.uk)> is the best English one, particularly if you are interested in the Laws of the game, and bad jokes!

**Bridge Great Britain** <[www.ecats.co.uk](http://www.ecats.co.uk)> is the site where all the Sim Pairs results are found. It's maintained by Anna Gudge and has lots of bridge news.

<[www.acbl.org](http://www.acbl.org)> is the **American Contract Bridge League** site. It's quite interesting to see how they do things — like education, young people — but the presentation is rather boring.

<[www.bridgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.bridgemagazine.co.uk)> and  
<[www.bbarclay@igloo.com](mailto:www.bbarclay@igloo.com)> are the major English  
and American suppliers of bridge materials.  
<[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)> has a large online bridge  
bookshop.

## **Play Bridge Face to Face**

Every year Bridge Club Live organises a face-to-face congress so all the on line players can get together for a weekend of bridge. It is usually held in January at a hotel in the Midlands. Details from Bridge Club Live.

# EBUTA



English Bridge Union  
Broadfields, Bicester Road  
Aylesbury HP19 8AZ  
tel: 01296 317200 fax: 01296 317220  
email: [ebuta@ebu.co.uk](mailto:ebuta@ebu.co.uk)