

# Guidelines for BBO Vugraph Commentators

by [Roland Wald](#) Aug. 22

Given the recent commentary on what is proper behavior for Vugraph commentators, I felt it was a good time to post what I wrote to Vugraph commentators six years ago (the DO's and DONT's), with an introduction by Fred Gitelman. I have conferred with Fred and he agrees that this is still valid after I made a few minor adjustments.

Dear Vugraph Commentator,

Please accept my sincere thanks for volunteering your time and bridge expertise to be a vugraph commentator on BBO. I know I can speak on behalf of many thousands of bridge players from every corner of the world in telling you how much your service to our game is appreciated.

Over the years BBO vugraph has greatly increased the awareness and interest level in top-level bridge among average players. The efforts of commentators such as yourself has helped to enhance the enjoyment and level of understanding that average players have toward our game. These are obviously good things for bridge. In order to ensure that your contributions to future broadcasts help further these goals, I would ask you to read this document carefully and to always adhere to the guidelines it contains.

I would like to add a few requests of my own:

- 1) It is very important that we do everything we can to paint high-level bridge in a positive light. Please do not use the platform we provide for publicly attacking players or tournament sponsors that you do not like. Please do not try to make the players look stupid even when, like all of us sometimes do, they make stupid mistakes.
- 2) Please always keep in mind that you are a much, much stronger bridge player than the vast majority of audience members could ever hope to be. The primary purpose of your comments should be to educate, enlighten and entertain the masses, not to impress your peers.
- 3) Try to help make our vugraph broadcasts fun for the audience. Adding a little humor to your comments or offering interesting stories about the players when the play is going slowly will be appreciated by the spectators.
- 4) Our worldwide audiences consist of people representing every imaginable country, culture, and age. It is not difficult to unintentionally offend people. Please be extremely careful about not making comments that might be perceived as being racist, sexist, vulgar, or in any other way offensive to some people.

Thanks again for your support of our vugraph program. I hope you enjoy the time you spend as a BBO vugraph commentator.

Best regards,

Fred Gitelman

Over to Roland .....

**DON'T:**

- (1) Say: "I would lead a club" without explaining your reasoning.
- (2) Say: "GIB says that the contract can't be defeated". You may state that declarer has a counter to any defense, but only as long as you are prepared to go into detail once a defender has made a play. GIB is a reference to check an analysis, not the star of the broadcast. Remember that GIB is also looking at all four hands.
- (3) State definitively what a bid means unless you know that to be the case.
- (4) Make the session a showpiece for your ability with statements like: "I pointed that out before GIB confirmed it" and don't ignore your colleagues' chat to repeat what they have just said. It is OK to cancel your own chat if it's redundant although often the comments will be typed simultaneously and come up one under the other.
- (5) Criticize a bid or play without trying to understand why the player made it. Blunders will occur and may be explained as blunders, but no one wants to see commentators put down the players who make them.
- (6) Sign up for a session of an important event without doing at least a bit of research on the players, methods, format, and current information sources.
- (7) Expect the spectators to know who you are unless you are a well-known world class player or writer; be prepared to introduce yourself with genuine humility.
- (8) Treat your personal profile as a joke. Spectators want to know they're listening to an authority or at least a strong, experienced player. "Novice" or "Intermediate" for skill level may be OK for your everyday activities (if you must) but not when you do a broadcast that thousands of bridge enthusiasts will be watching. Reveal yourself and insert your proper skill level in your profile.
- (9) Engage in gratuitous banter with colleagues just for the sake of filling the chat box, especially when the nature of the banter is meaningful only to the commentators.
- (10) State the obvious, or (worse) repeat it.
- (11) Forget to explain how the software works, access to "movies" and how to review the play at the other table, how to use Vugraph Archives for other events, and so on.
- (12) Be afraid to explain how a convention or treatment works and/or the reasons why you believe the method is good or bad (or both). If you suggest a different treatment, it should not be prefaced simply with "I play...", especially if that treatment would work better on the current deal. Rather, if you are discussing alternative methods, treatments, conventions, do so from an unbiased perspective, stating the pros and cons.
- (13) Forget that these shows are supposed to be both informative and entertaining and that there will often be vast numbers of spectators whose first language is not English.

(14) Be afraid to say that Mr X is going to bid 5♦ because it's his style to be aggressive in the slam zone, especially if you know that to be true. Don't send a chat, "5♦", without explanation or with the comment "I would bid 5♦".

(15) Say that a spectator points out that the hand can be made by blah blah. If that seems sensible, you can say it yourself and sometime during the broadcast thank the spectators for their often valuable ideas, suggestions and analyses. The audience expects expert analysis and commentary from the panel, not from the audience. It is not plagiarism or improper to use a spectator's comments yourself; in theory, the spectator is speaking to you privately to help you do your job well.

(16) Point out that fireworks are coming later in the session; spectators may be looking at the other room simultaneously or checking upcoming results in the movie mode, but others look forward to seeing the deal come up fresh with a current review of what happened at the other table, but without the crystal ball technique.

(17) Dominate the "microphone" – let the audience think you're a group dedicated to what you're doing. Make your comments count.

(18) Forget to provide interesting anecdotal and informative commentary. If you're working on a Zonal Trials speak of the event they're qualifying for, how many teams will be at the WC, defending champions, teams already qualified, upcoming other zonal events, any thoughts on dark horse contenders, favourites, etc.

**DO:**

(1) Treat your voluntary sessions as if you were getting paid for them.

(2) Treat the players and other commentators and the game itself with respect. Put yourself in that player's seat and try to figure out why s/he did what s/he did even if it may turn out to be unsuccessful.

(3) Your homework.

(4) Recognize achievements of merit past and present.

(5) Look at the operator's explanation of alerted calls, but be skeptical when they appear unlikely; operators have a difficult job and do make errors. The same can be said for inconceivable results. Try to confirm with the operator in private chat. The best operators are invaluable resources for the commentators.

(6) Project possible competitive actions rather than say something like "An easy 4♠ here"; uncontested auctions are increasingly rare these days. Always look for traps and obstacles that could affect the normal result. When more than one bid/contract/competitive action exists, discuss the possibilities without prejudice or the advantage of seeing all four hands. When discussing the play, discuss the percentage line, alternative lines, safety plays, and only then the successful line if it is different.

(7) Refrain from stating what you would "lead", especially if it is a difficult lead or blind lead, and your lead is the best (or only) one to defeat the contract. Similarly, when discussing the defense, do try to understand and explain the meaning behind the cards the defenders play. If you know their methods, this can be very enlightening for

the audience, especially where the plays relate to spot cards early in the defense. You may say "East has played a middle card to ask for the continuation of his suit. He has essentially denied interest in a switch to either side suit." Or "Some pairs play suit preference in this situation, but this pair employs obvious switch". Explain how that works.

In situations where you do not know the meaning of a signal, allow someone else to comment. Don't say "heart now" because that is the winning play. You may say "We can see that a heart now would defeat the contract, but East has only the xxxx information, and he may play a spade instead." Or "West gave an attitude signal on East's club ace that involved the diamond suit as well. West would have encouraged a club with the king if he did not want to ruff a diamond." In other words, explain the bridge plays, not your choice for a play.

Realize that good defense requires a complicated blend of partnership carding agreements, common sense, card reading, and the ability of the defender to "read" declarer's intentions. If you make a statement about the defender's next play while he is thinking, explain why you think he will arrive at a particular position.

Roland Wald

Former BBO Vugraph Coordinator