

# Teaching Bridge Online

by Lynn Berg

I have recently started teaching bridge online. There are many similarities to teaching face to face, as well as some major differences.

First, the similarities. You have to identify your target group and plan lessons which will feed a need. Or you have to create an awareness of need and then respond to it. You have to set prices and schedules which are practicable. You have to be prepared. All the issues of not over-loading your students with too much information are magnified online.

The biggest difference, the obvious one, can't be overstated. You will be communicating with the written word. You won't have the luxury of gesture and expression and intonation to back up your words, nor will you usually be able to "unsay" errors very quickly. You need to prepare even more carefully and thoroughly than when your "lecture" is actually the printed word. If you are not an accurate typist, if you are not used to having to marshal your thoughts in good order, expressing them with some economy, you will not enjoy the process of teaching online, and neither will your students. Your responsibility for fair

attribution of the materials of others is also greater when everything you produce is the written word rather than oral.

My classes fall into four parts, as far as my preparation is concerned.

1. I prepare an e-mail "lecture" before hand, which I send out at least two or three days ahead of our scheduled meeting. If you are using a textbook, you might not have to send an extensive prefatory e-mail, but I am actually preparing my own material. It's easier to use a book and then simply introduce the material and try to focus the students' attention where you want it.
2. When we meet as a class, in what amounts to a chat room, I have prepared examples of hands which I put up, one at a time, for the students to analyze and comment on. We have a discussion as we go along. I use an online version of Audrey Grant's "cards on the table" approach often, in which I put up a hand, then keep changing it by just a card or two as we consider various aspects of the bidding question at hand. I have been teaching on OKbridge's class site where it is easy to load hands for this purpose. This element makes up 80 to 90 minutes of a 150-minute session.
3. Next, the class plays hands I have prepared in advance and loaded, again using the OKbridge class site's facilities. They can ask questions and I can kibitz and comment as I wish. What OKbridge calls "free play" usually goes on for 40 minutes to an hour or more.

4. After the class is over, I e-mail copies of the hands to everyone with suggested bidding and comments.

You can see that preparing a class for the first time is quite time-consuming. I am hoping that when I offer a class for the second time (and after) that I will not need to do too much new editing of the prepared material. Always, I think that when we re-read material we can see ways of improving, but these modifications should not take as long as creating wholly new lessons.

If you want to teach online, you should prepare carefully. Your material will be out there in print for the world to see (and to copy, by the way). Your ability to lead a class when you are being bombarded with typed comments and questions requires new skills, quite separate from standing in front of a class. And you will be typing in "real time," when it is difficult to correct typos and "misspeaking." There's no "undo" button for your pronouncements as you lead the class discussion. If you were only posting your lecture notes for the students to read, you could avoid the peril of live typing, but then you would not be offering the immediacy and spontaneity which are the best part of teaching on the Internet.

And don't forget the thrill of having students in California and Calgary, Alabama and Australia, Peoria and Pakistan! It's exciting and fun to deal with a diverse student population.

NOTE: Join Fred Gitelman at the Toronto NABC (Monday Noon – Royal York) for more information on teaching online.