PLAY BASICS

Declarer

<u>Always</u> stop and plan the play once the opening lead has been made and dummy has been tabled - before you play a single card,

then:-

count the tricks you hope to make;
count the tricks you are likely to lose;
is there a way of creating more tricks - perhaps a finesse or a ruff in short trump hand?
is there a way of getting rid of any losers - perhaps an early discard;
are there any suits which would play better if you could get the opponents to lead them first?
what can go wrong? E.g. was the lead a singleton looking for an early ruff;
try to maintain communication - getting backwards and forwards between the two hands.

Suit contracts

If you can count enough tricks then plan to clear trumps before the opponents ruff your outside winners;
if you need a cross-ruff for extra tricks then avoid clearing too many trumps and take your outside winners first.

No trump contracts

Set up tricks in long suits or suits missing top cards before taking all your aces and kings.

Defence

The opening lead

is generally accepted as the most difficult part of bridge.

Listen to partner's bidding;
listen to the opponents' bidding;
prefer to lead though a suit bid by dummy rather than towards a suit bid by declarer;
top of a three-card honour sequence is usually good.

Suit contracts

Singletons in a side-suit are usually good;
doubletons are more often than not not good.

No trump contracts

In the absence of an honours sequence a lead of the fourth highest of a five-card or longer suit is usually good.

The ongoing defence

<u>Always</u> stop and plan your defence once the opening lead has been made and dummy has been tabled - before you play a single card.

How many tricks do you need to make to tale the contract down - where might they be?
Try to thwart declarer's plans (e.g. take out trumps if he is looking for ruffs in dummy, or remove an entry if he is setting up a long suit in dummy);
if you have a clear message for partner then make a clear signal;
watch for partner's signals;
be ready for declarer's next move - don't give anything away with long pauses - what will I do if he leads through my King? - etc.;
try to place other cards based on leads, cards played, total points, and any other information available.