



# How to Win the BOLLI Lottery

To give everyone an equal opportunity to get into their preferred class choices, BOLLI uses a lottery system (rather than first-come, first-served). The system works very well, with 95% of members receiving their first choice and 97% receiving their first or second choices. Even with these terrific odds, there are sometimes disappointments. Understanding how the lottery works can help you plan your registration strategy.

## How the Lottery is Conducted

1. After early registration closes, every registrant is randomly assigned a lottery number for the first round. The date you registered makes no difference, as long as you apply by the early registration deadline.
2. Before the lottery commences, all member study group leaders are placed in their choices without going through the lottery as a benefit for the time they contribute to BOLLI.
3. The first round proceeds in order, lowest number to highest, and each person is assigned the first course on their list. If your first choice is closed by the time your number comes up, you are assigned your second choice, and so on down your list. Some extremely popular courses do fill up during the first round, even before it is over. But only one course (or 10-week equivalent) per person is assigned in the first round.
4. Everyone gets a new random number for the second round and is then assigned the courses to complete the full course load (two 10-week equivalents — so could be two 10s, a 10 and two 5s, or four 5s). This round takes some human discernment because courses fill up, and the program does not use algorithms because of the unique way BOLLI runs. In any case, the lottery team proceeds through each person's registration—in number order—and tries to assign a full course load based on people's preferences and the courses available. Of course, as that round proceeds, courses fill up, so you may wind up getting courses lower on your list.

## Is There Any Strategy?

1. Maximize your choices - You will notice during registration that you are asked to choose at least 6 courses, and you should put them in order of your priorities. Some people don't understand this and only put 2 or 3 courses on their registration. If they don't get their choices, they can be left without a full course load, and they will get a chance to

choose other courses only after the lottery is complete and only after others who listed six or more get a chance to do so. So, it is to your advantage to select **at least six options.**

2. Size May Matter - In-person courses generally have a lower enrollment cap to fit comfortably in the classrooms, so they may fill sooner than the on-line courses. Classes based primarily on facilitated discussion or hands-on learning (such as writing courses, AI courses) may also have a lower cap. Thus, putting these higher on your list may be a good idea.
3. Seek Help Before You Choose – While it’s not possible to predict your lottery number or which courses will fill early, there is a group of volunteer course advisors who can help you decide what courses to select. They will often know the perennial “high demand” courses that tend to fill first, as well as which courses may have been offered previously. This information may help you decide the order that you rank your choices on your registration.
4. So, while none of this is an exact science, understanding how the lottery works can guide your course selection and give you the best chance at getting into your courses of interest. Of course, with a rich offering of more than 60 diverse courses, everyone who registers actually wins the BOLLI lottery.

*Compiled by Marlene Hobel, December 2025*