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This Week in Bridge

(506) Problem Opening Bids

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Level: 4 of 10 (1 of 6)

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General

There are certain types of opening hands that are easier to describe than others. The most difficult distributions tend to be unbalanced hands. To give us the best chance of describing our hand when we have these problem distributions and strengths, we need to make a plan about our likely rebid. Our expectation is that partner will respond in our short suit (because that is what partner does most of the time) and we will have to be prepared for what to rebid once that happens. Let's look at these problem opening bid hands and work on making a plan for our first and second bids.

Opening Bids Basics (1st and 2nd Seat)

These are the expected lengths that partner has for us when we open the bidding in the 1st or 2nd seat.

1♠/1♥	Usually a 5-card suit
1♦	Usually a 4-card suit
1♣	Usually a 3-card suit

With these assumptions we are left with one problem distribution that we have no way to describe. That is a hand with 4-4-3-2 distribution (4 ♠, 4 ♥, 3 ♦, and 2 ♣).

With this problem distribution and 15-17 points we open 1NT. With this distribution and a good 19+ to 21 points open we can open 2NT. But with 12-14 points or 18-19 points we have a problem opening bid and a decision to make. We should try to find the "least lie" to try and describe our hand. Basically, if our ♣ looks more like a 3-card suit we bid 1♣ and if our ♦ looks more like a 4-card suit we open 1♦.

Example 1

♦ xxx

♣ AQ

We open 1♣. This is the least lie. We want partner to lead a ♣ if we end up on defense and we would rather partner raise ♣ with 5-card support than raise ♦ with 4-card support.



Example 2

♦ KQx

♣ xx

We open 1♦. We clearly prefer ♦ to ♣ with this hand.

Example 3

♦ Jxx

♣ Jx

We open 1♦ as default. This is not a good bid, but it is the best that we can do.

Try to Avoid Rebid Problems

Balanced hands provide fewer rebid problems. The modern style is with 15-17 points and balanced hand, we open 1NT with all balanced shapes, including those with a 5-card Major. This practice avoids rebid problems and usually makes the stronger hand the declarer. We may even choose to do this with some semi-balanced hands (5422 or 6322) if this helps us avoid a rebid problem. We open 2NT with a balanced 19+ to 21 pts, even with a 5-card Major (for the same reasons).

A good habit to develop when we choose an opening is to ask ourselves what we plan to rebid if partner bids our shortest suit. If answering that question is a problem, we consider another opening. Certain hand shapes and strengths are not easily described using “standard” bidding system and these hands often create problem auctions. Many of these bidding problems are Opener’s rebids. Often, we make a small “lie” when opening to avoid rebid problems as Opener and simplify the rest of the auction.

Many of these bidding efforts are made to avoid reversing on our rebid. Here are some strengths and shapes that are classic problem hands:

Minimum Opening Hands (12-14 points)

Hands with 4♦ and 5♣

- Distort Shape - Open 1♦ so we can rebid 2♣ - show both suits and avoid reverse.
- Rebid a 5-card suit – With a strong 5-card ♣ suit open 1♣ and rebid 2♣ (e.g. KQT9x).
 - “Frequently bypass 4+♦” makes finding ♦ fit difficult.

1-4-3-5 OR 1-4-5-3 Hands

- Open and rebid 5-card suit to avoid reverse if Responder bids our shortness, 1♠.
- (Extreme) Bid both minors. Open 1♦ and rebid 2♣?
- (Extreme) Rebid 1NT with stiff Ace or King?

4-5-2-2 Hands

- Open 1♥ and if partner responds 1NT we must “lie” by rebidding a 2-card ♣ suit, avoid reverse.
 - If playing 1NT Semi-Forcing we can pass 1NT with 12-13 points.



Extra Value Hands (15-17 points)

5-Card Majors – 1M vs. 1NT

- Balanced hand with 5-card Major – modern style 1NT.
- Semi-balanced with 5-card Major (5422) – usually open 1M and rebid second suit, no reverse.
- 4-5-2-2 difficult hand with 15 to 16- points -- choose between 1NT and 1M, avoid reverse.

Hands with 4♦ and 5♣

- With 15 to 16- points, same problem as with 12-14 points. Reverse with 17 points.
- With 2-2-4-5, consider opening 1NT to solve rebid problem - stopper in one Major enough.

1-4-3-5 OR 1-4-5-3 Hands

- With 15 points, downgrade and open our 5-card minor and rebid it (same as 12-14 issues).
- With 17 points, reverse.
- With a stiff Ace or King (or maybe Queen), open 1NT – more reasonable with this strength than 12-14.

Semi-Balanced Hands - 6322 with 6-card minor

- Open 1m and rebid 3m.
- With 14-15 HCP, consider opening 1NT – or open 1m and rebid 2m. 1NT usually best.

Semi-Balanced Hands – 2/4-2/5

- *With 2-4-2/5, avoid reverse by opening 1NT.
- With 4-2-2/5, often rebid 1♠, so opening 1m reasonable. 1NT opening when best description.

Strong Hands (18-19 points)

Balanced Hands

- Open our primary suit and rebid 2NT.

Unbalanced Hands

- Open primary suit and reverse or jump shift into secondary suit when unbalanced 2-suited hand.
- 1-suited hand bid suit twice.

Semi-Balanced Hands

- Semi-balanced 5/4 - Choose between showing two-suits or rebidding NT based on hand.
- Semi-balanced 6-card minor – Choose between rebidding suit or 2NT.
- Semi-balanced 6-card Major – bid Major twice.



Other 6-card Suit Hands

6-card Minors Hands – 1-Suited

- 12-14 points - Open 1m and rebid 2m if unbalanced. Semi-Balanced could rebid 1NT.
- 15-17 points - Open 1m and rebid 3m if unbalanced. Semi-Balanced could open 1NT.
- *18-19 points - Open 1m and jump shift into 3-card suit if unbalanced. Semi-Balanced rebid 2NT.
- *20-21 points – Open 1m and jump shift into 3-card suit if unbalanced. Semi-Balanced open 2NT.
- Stronger – Open 2♣.

6-card Major Hands – 1-Suited

- 12-14 points - Open 1M and rebid 2M if unbalanced.
- 15-17 points - Open 1M and rebid 3M if unbalanced.
- *18-19 points - Open 1M and jump shift into 3-card suit if unbalanced.
- 20-21 points – Open 1M and jump shift into 3-card suit if unbalanced or open 2♣.
- Stronger – Open 2♣.

So what does 1M-1NT-4M show?

- 18-19 pt hands are already shown with a reverse or jump shift.
- With only a 6-card Major, 3NT might still be the right contract, so we don't want to bid 4M.
- Thus, 1M-1NT-4M shows a hand with 7+card Major and 11-15 HCP. It looks like a 4M opening bid that had a few too many HCP to open 4M. This is an example of a "Picture Bid."

*Note: The examples that are * are some of the classic problem opening bids and rebids.*

Conclusion

Making a plan is an important part of successful bidding. Preparing your rebid helps you recognize potential problems and can help you avoid them. There are a variety of opening bid strengths and shapes that are classic bidding problems. Learning to recognize these problems is an important part of avoiding the auction getting to a "no win situation". Make sure that you work to solve these classic problems.