

Adventures in Bridge™ Publications

Robert's Bidding Basics

**An Introduction to Bridge Bidding
for Beginning Players**

Robert S. Todd



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Introduction to *This Week in Bridge (TWiB)*

This *Robert's Bidding Basics* book is an introduction to bridge bidding for players who have been exposed to the game but have not played it before or have not played it in a long time. While we do not cover the basics of trick taking, scoring, or other mechanics of the game here, that information can be found in many other publications. See the AiB website for a recommendation list of "Get Started Playing Bridge" books.

This book is designed to be a pithy introduction to bridge bidding that can help you understand modern bridge bidding and so is not loaded with examples or exercise for you to practice what you learn. We hope you'll gain that experience from playing!

This book also serves as TWiB 0 in the *This Week in Bridge* Lesson Series (see the AiB website at www.advinbridge.com or other books using the *This Week in Bridge* Collections). After you complete this book you will have a solid overview of the basics of a 2/1 Game Forcing bidding system. From there you are in a good place to begin working on Level 1 of the AiB Educational Curriculum.

Using TWiB and the AiB Curriculum

The AiB Educational Curriculum is a level-based approach to teaching bridge. This process gives players a pathway for how to improve their game. Players can choose to do this with the support of a variety of different AiB mentoring options or they may choose to tackle the material on their own.

After players learn the basics of bridge they often feel lost and do not know what they should learn next. It can be overwhelming trying to learn the many different conventions and make agreements about the many different bridge situations. The AiB Educational Curriculum sorts these conventions, agreements, and concepts by level and by category. We use the ACBL convention card as a template to help organize the material. Under each section of the convention card (presented on the AiB website) you will find a list of conventions/agreements/concepts that are appropriate for each level. Next to each agreement you will find the corresponding TWiB lesson document to give you educational material to help learn the topic discussed.

Also available on the AiB website are digital versions of the ACBL convention cards for each level of the AiB curriculum. Players frequently print the convention card that is closest to their level and make small additions or subtractions to the system to fit what they play with a partner.

We hope you find this material educational and useful!



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Getting Started and 1-level Opening Bids

0. Purpose of Bidding

When we bid, our goal is to describe our hand to partner so that the two of us can work together to determine if we have a fit for a possible trump suit and to determine how high to make the final contract (partscore, game, or slam). The first step in starting this process is to evaluate our own hand and determine if it is strong enough for us to open the bidding.

1. Hand Evaluation and Counting Points

To open the bidding (be the first player to bid) we need a hand that has 12 or more *Total Points* of playing strength. We use “points” as a way to approximate the value or quality of a hand. For opening bids, total points are calculated by first counting *High-Card Points (HCP)* and then making adjustments to these values. Adding *Length Points* is the primary adjustment made before opening the bidding.

HCP are values given to a hand for honor cards. These honor cards are valuable because they are likely to take tricks.

- Ace = 4 HCP
- King = 3 HCP
- Queen = 2 HCP
- Jack = 1 HCP

A length point is an upgrade to a hand for a decent-quality long suit. Long suits are useful for producing extra tricks and are thus given additional values.

- 1 length point for a *decent* 5-card suit
- 2 length points for a *decent* 6-card suit
- 3 length points for a *decent* 7-card suit, etc.

Other adjustments can be used to refine your hand evaluation. See TWiB #54 for more info on this topic.



2. Hand Type

When examining our hand before opening the bidding, we count total points, but we also classify our hand by its distribution. This classification is called *Hand Type*.

There are 3 different hand types:

- *Balanced Hand* – A hand with no singletons or voids AND at most one doubleton. There are only 3 possible distributions for a balanced hand:
 - 4333
 - 4432
 - 5332
- *Unbalanced Hand* – A hand with a singleton or void. Many possible distributions.
- *Semi-Balanced Hand* – Two or more doubletons. These are the hands “in between” balanced and unbalanced hands. We often must choose between bidding a semi-balanced hand as if it were a balanced hand or unbalanced hand. It is helpful to know in advance that effectively describing these hands to partner can be a challenge.
 - 5422
 - 6322
 - 7222 (Not common semi-balanced hand).

A 2-card suit is a doubleton, 1-card a singleton, and 0-card a void. See TWiB #1 for more on this topic.

3. Buckets for the Opening Bidder

Categorizing the strength of our hand into ranges helps make it easier to describe the hand to partner.

We refer to these categories as *Buckets*. The buckets for opening the bidding are:

- 12-14 total points Minimum Opening
- 15-17 total points Extra Values Opening
- 18-19 total points Strong Opening
- 20-21 total points Very Strong Opening
- 22+ total points Forcing 2♣ Opening

We will look at these buckets in more detail when we consider balanced and unbalanced opening bids.

See TWiB #3 for more information on this topic.



4. Which Suit to Open the Bidding

When opening the bidding, 1NT is the preferred opening bid. But this bid shows a specific hand type and strength: a balanced hand with 15-17 total points (Extra Values) - *More discussion on this below.*

When opening the bidding with a suit at the 1-level (a hand not appropriate for opening 1NT), Opener generally opens their longest suit. With 12+ total points, Opener's priorities are as follows:

1. Opening a Major suit (1♥ or 1♠) shows 5+cards in that suit. With a 5+card Major suit, open it.
2. Opening 1♦ shows a 4+card ♦ suit. With no 5-card Major suit, open 1♦ with a 4+card ♦ suit.
3. Opening 1♣ shows a 3+card ♣ suit. With neither of the above open a 3+card ♣ suit.

The suit opened is called the opening bidder's *Primary Suit*.

There can be some confusion about which suit to open when you have no long suit. With no 5-card suit and a minimum opening hand here are some guidelines to help determine which suit to open:

1. With 3-3 in the minors, open 1♣. 4/3-3-3 distribution.
2. With 4/3 in the minors, open your longer minor.
3. With 4-4 in the minors, open 1♦.

Example

♠ AQ94

♥ K2

♦ K932

♣ 873

With 12 HCP and 4-2-4-3 distribution, open the bidding with 1♦. (See *TWiB #2* for more on this topic.)

You may have noticed that there is one problem distribution not covered in the lists above: 4-4-3-2 (4♠, 4♥, 3♦, and 2♣), in which case we have no good opening bid when we hold minimum values (12-14 points). In this case, open your better minor, either 1♣ showing a 3-card ♣ suit OR 1♦ showing a 4-card ♦ suit, whichever lie seems better.

Bidding Tip

As a general rule, when faced with a bidding problem it is best to lie in a minor suit, not a Major suit.



5. The Differences in Notrump, Major Suit, and Minor Suit Contracts

When choosing an opening bid, part of the reason that we give Notrump first priority, Major suits second priority, and minor suits the lowest priority comes from the scoring system in bridge. A *Game Bonus* is given in the scoring for bidding and making a *Game Contract*. This game bonus level varies for different strains of contracts:

- 9 Tricks in Notrump for game (3NT)
- 10 Tricks in a Major suit for game (4♥ or 4♠)
- 11 Tricks in a minor suit for game (5♣ or 5♦)

The lower number of tricks needed for a game bonus gives us an incentive to look for Major suit fits over minor suit fits. A *fit* is when our side has at least 8 cards in a suit, leaving the opponents with at most 5 cards in that suit, and making this suit a good candidate for trump. With a fit, especially a large fit, having a trump suit often makes it easier to play a game contract.

- With enough values for game and a Major suit fit, 4-Major is often the best game contract.
- With enough values for game, but no Major suit, 3NT is usually the best game contract.
- It is rare to play game in 5-minor.

We have structured our bidding, opening “5-card Majors”, to help us find Major suit fits. Finding Major suit fits will be discussed more in *Responding to a 1-level Opening Bid*.

Another bonus, called a *Slam Bonus*, is given for bidding and making a 12- or even 13-trick contract. These bonuses are given at the same level regardless of the strain played in – Notrump, Majors, or minors. A 12-trick slam is called a *Small Slam* and a 13-trick slam is called a *Grand Slam*.

6. Balanced Hand Bidding

It is often easier to describe a balanced opening hand than an unbalanced opening hand. Balanced opening hands have two main pieces of information to communicate to partner early in the auction – their bucket (strength) and their hand type. With different strength balanced hands Opener describes their hand in different ways. With:

- 12-14 points Open primary suit and rebid 1NT (“Half-Notrump” or “Weak Notrump”).
Example 1♣ 1♠
 1NT
- 15-17 points Open 1NT.
- 18-19 points Open primary suit and rebid 2NT (“1.5-NT “Opener”).
Example 1♣ 1♠
 2NT
- 20-21 points Open 2NT.
- 22+ points Open 2♣ -- *More on this auction later.*

Opener only rebids 1NT/2NT without a fit for Responder’s suit. (not 4-card ♠ in above examples)



7. Why We Open the Bidding 1NT

A 1NT opening bid is a “better opening bid” than opening 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠ because it more precisely defines the Opener’s hand both in terms of strength and distribution. Compare:

- 1NT 15-17 points and a balanced hand;
- 1-Suit 12-21 points and many possible distributions.

Since a 1NT opening bid communicates so much more about Opener’s hand we strive to make this bid as often as possible.



8. Unbalanced Hand Bidding

With an unbalanced hand, Opener has more information to communicate in order to describe their hand. Opener must show:

- Bucket (strength of the hand),
- Primary Suit, and
- Secondary Suit
 - With a hand that has only one long suit the “secondary suit” information is replaced by showing “extra length” in the Opener’s primary suit.

With an unbalanced hand it is important for Opener to think about their second bid (called their rebid) before opening the bidding. This is true in all auctions, but particularly with unbalanced hands.

Unbalanced hands are classified based by how many long suits they have (4-cards or longer):

- *One-Suited Hands* – Hands with a 6-card or longer suit (no other 4-card suit). Ex. 6331.
- *Two-Suited Hands* – Many unbalanced hand distributions are two-suited hands.
- *Three-Suited Hands* (rare) -- 4441 or 4450 distribution.

Examples

♠ AQ9432

♥ A42

♦ Q32

♣ 3

With a one-suited unbalanced hand with a 6-card ♠ suit, Opener starts the bidding with 1♠ and plans to rebid ♠ later in the auction.

♠ AQ943

♥ AQ842

♦ 83

♣ 3

With a two-suited hand that has both a 5-card ♠ suit and a 5-card ♥ suit, Opener starts the bidding with 1♠ and plans to bid ♥ later in the auction.

♠ 83

♥ 3

♦ AQ943

♣ AQ842

With a two-suited hand that has both a 5-card ♦ suit and a 5-card ♣ suit, Opener starts the bidding with 1♦ and plans to bid ♣ later in the auction.

With two 5-card suits, open the higher-ranking suit, leaving room to cheaply bid the lower suit later in the auction.



9. Goals After Opening the Bidding

After one member of the partnership opens the bidding, the partnership has two main objectives:

1. Look for a fit (a suit in which the partnership has at least 8-cards);
2. Determine how high to play the final contract – partscore (less than game), game, or slam.

To determine in which strain to play the final contract (a Major suit, Notrump, or a minor suit), the partnership must determine if there is a fit, and this begins by looking for a Major suit fit. In order to determine how high the final contract should be played, the players must determine the combined values (total points) of their two hands. All of this must be done while keeping the auction at a relatively low level, so as not to bid to a contract that the partnership cannot make.

The primary objective on most hands is to find a Major suit fit, either ♥ or ♠, and then (whether a fit is discovered or not) the partnership determines if they have enough combined values to bid game – usually about *24 combined points* for a 3NT, 4♥, or 4♠ contract. Responder's tools for finding a Major suit fit or for exploring game differ based on Opener's first bid. These tools are discussed in more detail in the upcoming *Responding to Partner's 1-level Opening Bids* section.

The partnership's combined total points usually determine the type of contract bid:

- Fewer than 24 total points Partscore Contract
- Good 24 to 32 total points Game Contract
- 33 to 35 total points Small Slam Contract
- 36+ total points Grand Slam Contract

Bidding Tip

When our side has enough values to bid game we look for a Major suit fit first. If none is found then we usually simply play 3NT (a 9-trick game contract). It is extremely rare to play game in a minor suit (an 11-trick game contract) when we are not in a competitive auction.



Responding to Partner's 1-Level Opening Bid

After partner opens the bidding with a minor suit, a Major suit, or 1NT, Responder has the responsibility of searching for a fit, primarily focusing on a Major suit fit. Responder also is best positioned to know the combined values of the partnership and is generally responsible for stopping the auction at a low level with few values, inviting game when it is possible, bidding game with good values, or even bidding higher (slam) when the partnership has enough values to make taking lots of tricks likely.

10. Responding to 1-Minor Opening Bids

When Opener starts the bidding with a minor suit opening bid, they usually do not have a 5-card Major suit, but could still have a 4-card Major suit. Responder's first priority is to look for a Major suit fit. These Major suit fits can be 4-4, 5-3, 6-2, or an even larger fit. Responder starts the process of looking for this Major suit fit by bidding a 4-card or longer Major suit at the 1-level.

New suits by Responder are generally forcing for at least 1-round (meaning Opener may not pass this bid and must further describe their hand), while notrump bids and raises of Opener's primary suit are generally non-forcing bids (meaning Opener may pass). A bidding rule that applies to most auctions is that bids by Responder that are unlimited in values are forcing bids, and bids that are limited in values are non-forcing bids.

a. Responder's Buckets

We classify Responder's hand into buckets similarly to the way we did for Opener's hand:

- 0-5 points Weak Hand (usually does not respond)
- 6-9 points Minimum Hand (sometimes a bad 10 points)
- 10-11 points Invitational Hand (sometimes a bad 12 points)
- 12+ points Game Forcing

b. Responding 1-Major, New Suits Forcing

Responder frequently does not narrow their hand or place it into a bucket on the first round of the bidding. When Responder has a 4-card or longer Major suit, then bidding that suit is Responder's first priority.

Example

1♣ 1♠

This shows a 4+card ♠ suit, 6+ points, and is a forcing bid, meaning Opener may not pass because Responder's hand is unlimited. This response is forcing for 1-round. Responder now waits to see how Opener further describes their hand, in terms of bucket, fit, and/or hand type.



c. Raising Opener's Minor-Suit Opening, Non-Forcing

When Responder has no 4-card or longer Major suit, they are not interested in exploring a Major suit fit after a minor suit opening by partner. (Opener usually does not have a 5-card Major suit when they open the bidding with 1-minor.) With a fit for Opener's primary minor suit and no 4-card Major, Responder's raises Opener's suit.

When Opener starts the bidding with 1♣, Responder needs 5+card ♣ support to have a likely fit. When Opener starts the bidding with 1♦, Responder needs 4+card ♦ support to have a likely fit.

Raising Partner's 1♣ Opening Bid

- 2♣ *Simple Raise*, 5+card ♣ suit, 6-9 points, non-forcing
- 3♣ *Limit Raise*, 5+card ♣ suit, 10-11 points, non-forcing

Raising Partner's 1♦ Opening Bid

- 2♦ *Simple Raise*, 4+card ♦ suit, 6-9 points, non-forcing
- 3♦ *Limit Raise*, 4+card ♦ suit, 10-11 points, non-forcing

Playing standard methods, with a hand containing Game Forcing values, no 4+card Major, and a large fit for Opener's minor suit, Responder must "*make something up*" in order to find a forcing bid. Again, when we are stuck for a bid and need to force the auction, we often lie in a minor. In this case, we often bid the other minor suit to force the auction and give Opener a chance to tell us more about their hand.

d. Notrump Responses, Non-Forcing

When Responder has no 4-card or longer Major suit, no large fit for Opener's minor suit, and is not extremely distributional, Responder bids notrump to show the value of the hand.

Example

1♣ ___?

- 1NT Minimum values, no 4-card Major, 6 to 9 points (or a bad 10 points).
- 2NT Invitational values, no 4-card Major, 10+ to 11 points (or a bad 12 points).
- 3NT Game Forcing values, no 4-card Major, 12-15 points.

With 16+ points and no 4+card Major suit, Responder has some interest in bidding a slam and must find a forcing bid – often lying in the other minor suit to keep the auction from ending.

e. Summary of Responder's Priorities After a Minor-Suit Opening

When responding to a minor suit opening bid, Responder's priorities are as follows:

- Bid a 4-card or longer Major suit.
- Raise partner's minor suit with a fit and no 4-card Major.
- Otherwise, bid notrump to show their values.



11. Responding to 1-Major Opening Bids

When partner opens the bidding with a Major suit, the process of the partnership looking to find a Major suit fit has significantly begun. Responder's goal of finding a Major suit fit starts with raising Opener with 3+card support. When Responder does not have a fit for Opener's Major suit, Responder focuses on showing the values of their hand. This can be a challenge because after a 1-level Major suit opening bid there is less room to communicate with Opener than after a 1-level minor suit opening bid.

a. Responder's Buckets

We classify Responder's hand into the same buckets as when partner opened 1-minor suit.

- 0-5 points Weak Hand (usually does not respond)
- 6-9 points Minimum Hand
- 10-11 points Invitational Hand (sometimes a bad 12 points)
- 12+ points Game Forcing

b. Raise Partner with a Fit

With a fit for partner's Major suit opening bid, Responder's first priority is to show that fit as quickly as possible, by raising Opener's primary suit. In addition to a *Simple Raise* and a *Limit Raise*, Responder has a *Preemptive Raise* and a *Game Forcing Raise – Jacoby 2NT* (a special conventional bid discussed below).

Raising Partner's 1♥ Opening Bid

- 2♥ *Simple Raise*, 3-4 card ♥ support, 6-9 points, non-forcing
- 3♥ *Limit Raise*, 3-4 card ♥ support, 10-11 points, non-forcing (usually 4-card support)
- 4♥ *Preemptive Raise*, 5+card ♥ support, 0-8 points, non-forcing.
- 2NT* *Jacoby 2NT*, 4+card ♥ support, 12+ points, GF values (special conventional bid)

Raising Partner's 1♠ Opening Bid

- 2♠ *Simple Raise*, 3-4 card ♠ support, 6-9 points, non-forcing
- 3♠ *Limit Raise*, 3-4 card ♠ support, 10-11 points, non-forcing (usually 4-card support)
- 4♠ *Preemptive Raise*, 5+card ♠ support, 0-8 points, non-forcing
- 2NT* *Jacoby 2NT*, 4+card ♠ support, 12+ points, GF values (special conventional bid)

The preemptive raise to 4-Major is usually a weak bid, but it can be a bit stronger (has a wider range than 0-5 points) because it is a jump to game.



c. Notrump Responses to Major Suit Openings – 1NT Semi-Forcing, 2NT, 3NT

Notrump bids in response to a Major suit opening can be used in similar way as responding to a minor suit opening. Remember, when responding to minor-suit opening bid:

1m ___?

- 1NT Minimum Hand, 6-9 points
- 2NT Invitational Hand, 10-11 points
- 3NT Game Forcing Hand, 12-15 points.

We have a NT bid, after a 1-minor opening bid, for each of Responder's buckets.

But when Responding to a Major suit opening bid the modern style is to use 2NT for a conventional bid called *Jacoby 2NT*. Let's not focus on the details of *Jacoby 2NT* at this moment, instead let's examine how not having a natural 2NT bid affects the meaning of our other bids.

If we allocate 2NT to be used as this conventional bid then we can no longer use it for our invitational hands (10-11 points) with no fit. We must now determine what to do with those hands. The best solution is to expand our 1NT response to a Major suit opening from 6-9 points (minimum hands) to a larger range, 6-11 points (both minimum hands and invitational hands). This expanded range for a 1NT response to a Major suit opening has a special name, called *1NT Semi-Forcing*, but is not that different from a normal 1NT response. This change can improve our bidding because it gives Opener a chance to pass 1NT and play at a low level with a minimum opening hand opposite Responder's minimum or invitational (at best) hand.

The modern style is to use notrump responses to a Major suit as:

1M ___?

- 1NT *1NT Semi-Forcing*, 6-11 points, often no fit for Opener's Major suit.
- 2NT* *Jacoby 2NT*, a special conventional raise (12+ points, 4+card support, Game Forcing)
- 3NT Game Forcing Hand, 12-15 points, balanced with 2-card support for Opener's Major



d. 2-level Responses to 1-Major Openings – “2-Over-1 Game Forcing”

Since we now respond 1NT (1NT Semi-Forcing) with most hands that do not have a fit for Opener’s Major suit and have minimum or invitational values (6-11 points), a new suit bid at the 2-level (*not* a jump, simply a new suit) is left as a natural bid showing game forcing values (12+ points). We call these strong 2-level responses to a Major suit opening “Two-Over-One Game Forcing” bids, denoted 2/1 GF.

2/1 GF Responses to 1♥ or 1♠ Opening Bids

When we bid a new suit at the 2-level, it shows at least an opening hand (12+ points) and similar length in that suit as opening the bidding at the 1-level.

2-Level Responses to 1♠ Opening Bid	2-Level Responses to 1♥ Opening Bid
2♣ 3+card ♣ suit, 12+ points	2♣ 3+card ♣ suit, 12+ points
2♦ 4+card ♦ suit, 12+ points	2♦ 4+card ♦ suit, 12+ points
2♥ 5+card ♥ suit, 12+ points	2♠ 6+card ♠, 0-5 HCP (<i>not</i> 2/1 GF Bid)

e. 1♠ Response to a 1♥ Opening Bid

When partner opens the bidding with 1♥ (instead of 1♠), Responder has an additional bid available at the 1-level: 1♠. This 1♠ response after a 1♥ opening bid is similar to a 1♠ response after a 1-minor opening bid.

1♥ 1♠ 4+card ♠ suit, 6+ points, forcing for one-round.

Responder shows a 4+card ♠ suit, to look for a ♠ suit fit, instead of bidding 1NT with 6-11 points.

With 12+ points and a 4-card ♠ suit, Responder may choose to make a 2/1 GF bid to show their values and create a GF auction, instead of starting with a 1♠ response.

f. Responder’s Priorities after a Major Suit Opening

When responding to a Major suit opening bid, Responder’s priorities are as follows:

- Raise Opener’s Major suit with a fit.
- Make a 2/1 GF bid with 12+ points.
- Bid 1♠ over a 1♥ opening bid with a 4+card ♠ suit and 6+ points.
- Bid 1NT (called 1NT Semi-Forcing) without a fit and 6-11 points.



12. Responding to 1NT Opening Bids

When partner opens the bidding with 1NT, their hand is much better defined in terms of both shape and strength than when partner opens the bidding with a suit at the 1-level. After a 1NT opening bid we know that partner has 15-17 points (a nice small range) and a balanced hand (at least 2-cards in each suit). This means that Responder knows a lot about the combined strength of the partnership's hands and is well positioned to determine the final contract. Here, Responder is the *Captain of the Auction*, making Responder mostly responsible for ensuring the partnership gets to the best final contract.

a. Responder's Buckets

Since a 1NT opening bid shows more values than other 1-level opening bids, Responder's buckets for evaluating their hand strength are different opposite a 1NT-opening bid.

- 0-7 points *Minimum Values*, not interested in game.
- 8-9 points *Invitational Values*, planning to invite game in some way.
- 10 to 16- points *Game Forcing Values*, strong enough to bid game but no slam interest.
- 16+ to 17 points *Quantitative Values*, strong enough to invite a small slam.

With more values Responder bids at least a small slam and may even explore a grand slam.

Note: "16+" points means a "good" 16 points and "16-" points means a "bad" 16 points.

b. Types of Major Suit Fits over 1NT

Responder's primary objective is to look for a Major suit fit. Since the Opener has promised at least 2-cards in every suit, by opening 1NT, then Responder is looking for fits at least as large as:

1. 4-4 Major suit fit. Both Responder and Opener have a 4-card Major.
2. 5-3 Major suit fit. Usually Responder has a 5-card Major suit and Opener has 3-card support.
3. 6-2 Major suit fit. When Responder has a 6-card Major suit, then Opener must have a fit.

In order to continue the auction, Responder needs tools to describe their hand and ask Opener questions about their hand – to ask about Opener's Major suit shape and overall strength.

Since the opening bidder has a stronger than normal opening hand, 15-17 points, we want this hand to be the declarer in most of the final contracts. (The first player on our side to bid a suit becomes the declarer if that suit becomes the strain of our final contract.) It is generally better to have the stronger of the partnership's two hands as the declaring hand. Responder's bidding tools after a 1NT-opening bid are designed to accomplish this.

Note: We use similar bidding tools when partner opens the bidding with 2NT for similar reasons.



c. Stayman Response of 2♣

After a 1NT opening bid, a 2♣ response is an artificial bid, called *Stayman*, that asks Opener if they have a 4-card Major. This bid usually shows invitational or better values, 8+ points, and Opener further describe their hand as follows:

1NT 2♣
___?

- 2♦ no 4-card Major
- 2♥ 4+card ♥ suit (could still have a 4-card ♠ suit)
- 2♠ 4+card ♠ suit (denies a 4-card ♥ suit)

After exploring for a 4-4 Major suit fit by bidding Stayman, Responder shows the value of their hand, inviting game with only 8-9 points, and bidding at least game with 10+ points.

Examples

1NT 2♣
2♥ ___?

- 3♥ *Invitational Values with a fit, 4+card ♥ support, 8-9 points.*
- 4♥ *Game Forcing Values with a fit, 4+card ♥ support, 10 to 16- points.*

1NT 2♣
2♥ ___?

- 2NT *Invitational Values with no fit, 4-card ♠ suit, 8-9 points.*
- 3NT *Game Forcing Values with no fit, 4-card ♠ suit, 10 to 16- points.*



d. Jacoby Transfer Responses of 2♦ and 2♥

After a 1NT opening bid, Responder uses artificial bids of 2♦ and 2♥, called *Jacoby Transfers*, to show a 5+card Major suit and to look for a 5-3 Major suit fit.

1NT ___?

- 2♦ *Jacoby Transfer*, 5+card ♥ suit, 0+ points (“Transferring” to ♥)
- 2♥ *Jacoby Transfer*, 5+card ♠ suit, 0+ points (“Transferring” to ♠)

After using a Jacoby Transfer to show a 5+card Major suit, Responder shows Opener the value of their hand – minimum, invitational, game-forcing, or more values.

Example

1NT 2♦ *Jacoby Transfer*, showing a 5+card ♥ suit

2♥ ___?

- Pass *Minimum*, 5+card ♥ suit, 0-7 points
- 2NT *Invitational Values*, 5-card ♥ suit, 8-9 points
- 3NT *Game Forcing Values*, 5-card ♥ suit, 10 to 16- points

After Responder’s rebid Opener now has the information needed to place the contract in notrump or ♥, depending on if Opener has a ♥ fit or not. Opener generally chooses to play in notrump with a 2-card ♥ suit and play in ♥ with a 3+card ♥ suit (when the partnership has at least an 8-card ♥ fit).

e. Texas Transfer Responses of 4♦ and 4♥

After a 1NT opening bid, Responder uses artificial bids of 4♦ and 4♥, called *Texas Transfers*, to show a 6+card suit and enough values to play a Major suit game, either 4♥ or 4♠, in the known 6-2 or larger Major suit fit. With a 6-card Major suit, Responder knows that the partnership has a Major suit fit since Opener has a balanced hand for their 1NT opening bid.

1NT ___?

- 4♦ *Texas Transfer*, 6+card ♥ suit, 10+ points (“Transferring” to ♥)
- 4♥ *Texas Transfer*, 6+card ♠ suit, 10+ points (“Transferring” to ♠)

Responder’s Texas Transfer shows a 6+card Major suit and game forcing values. With enough values to be interested in slam, Responder can bid more on the next round of the bidding.

Example

1NT 4♦ *Texas Transfer*, showing a 6+card ♥ suit

4♥ ___?

- Pass *To Play*, 6+card ♥ suit, 10 to 16- total points
- Any Bid *Slam Try*, 6+card ♥ suit, 16+ total points



f. Responding to 1NT without a Major Suit – Exploring Notrump

When Responder does not have a 4-card or longer Major, then they are primarily focused on playing the proper level of notrump. Responder's options are:

1NT ___?

- Pass 0-7 points
- 2NT Invite Game, 8-9 points
 - This invites Opener to bid 3NT with a maximum, good 16-17 points, for opening 1NT.
- 3NT To Play, 10 to 16- points
- 4NT *Quantitative*, 16+ or 17 points (Invite Slam)
 - This invites Opener to bid Slam with a maximum, good 16-17 points, for opening 1NT.

Note: With more values Responder bids at least a small slam.

g. Responding to 1NT without a Major Suit – Long Minor Suits, “3-Suited Transfers”

When Responder has a long minor suit of at least 6+cards, Responder shows this suit depending on the strength (bucket) of their hand:

- 10+ Points, Game Forcing Values
 - With enough values to bid game and no Major suit interest, no 4-card or 5-card Major suit, Responder usually just bids 3NT.
- 8-9 Points, Invitational Values
 - With no 4+card Major and invitational values, Responder makes a natural and invitational jump to 3♣ or 3♦.
- 0-7 Points, Weak Values (“3-Suited” Transfers)
 - With a weak hand, Responder wants to sign off in their long minor suit, even if they have a 4-card Major. With a long Major suit this can be done at the 2-level, by making a Jacoby Transfer and passing, but with a minor it must be done at the 3-level. Responder bids 2♠ as a relay to 3♣ (similar to a Jacoby Transfer bid). Responder can either pass 3♣ or correct to 3♦ to play there.

Examples

1NT 2♠

3♣ ___?

- Pass With a Weak hand, 0-7 points, and a 6+card ♣ suit, Responder wants to play 3♣.
- 3♦ With a weak hand, 0-7 points, and a 6+card ♦ suit, Responder wants to play 3♦. This correction to 3♦ is not invitational and should end the auction.

1NT ___?

- 3♣ Invitational, 8-9 points, 6+card ♣ suit, no 4-card Major
- 3♦ Invitational, 8-9 points, 6+card ♦ suit, no 4-card Major



Other Common Bidding

This section is an introduction to other common situations in bridge that are an everyday part of playing the game.

13. Conventional Bids

All of these artificial bids: *Stayman*, *Jacoby Transfers*, *Texas Transfers*, and *Jacoby 2NT* are examples of *Conventional Bids*. These are bids that do not promise the suit that is actually bid. Conventional bids are a valuable part of modern bridge bidding; think of these as your extra tools for describing your hand and communicating with partner.

14. 2NT Opening Bids

An opening bid of 2NT shows a balanced hand with 20-21 total points and Responder uses tools similar to responding to 1NT to describe their hand, just at a level higher than in response to a 1NT-opening bid.

- 3♣ Stayman
- 3♦, 3♥ Jacoby Transfers
- 4♦, 4♥ Texas Transfers

15. 2♣ Opening Bids

A 2♣ opening bid is a strong, artificial, and forcing bid showing a hand too strong to open at the 1-level.

A 2♣ opening bid shows enough values to be close to making game in Opener's hand. This shows:

- A balanced hand with 22+ total points.
- An unbalanced hand that is within one trick of game (or better) in Opener's hand.
 - 9 winners with a long Major suit or 10 winners with a long minor suit.

a. Balanced Hands that Open 2♣

With a balanced hand that is too strong to open 2NT, 22+ total points, Opener starts the bidding with 2♣ and rebids the appropriate level of notrump.

Example

2♣ 2♦

- 2NT 22 to 24- points.
 - Responder uses Stayman (3♣) and transfer bids (3♦, 3♥) to describe their hand.
- 3NT 24+ to 26 points
 - Responder uses Stayman (4♣) and transfer bids (4♦, 4♥) to describe their hand.

Note: Responder's 2♦ bid, an artificial waiting bid, leaves room for Opener to describe their hand.



b. Unbalanced Hands that Open 2♣

With an unbalanced hand that is too strong to open the bidding at the 1-level, Opener starts the auction with 2♣. This shows a hand that expects to take at least 9 tricks if their long suit is a Major or 10 tricks if their long suit is a minor. The idea is that if partner can produce one trick, then the partnership is likely to make game.

Opener's hand strength is generally more trick-based than HCP-based, but when estimating the playing strength of the hand, Opener generally has:

- At least 20 HCP with an unbalanced hand that is 1-suited (at least a 6-card suit).
- A least 22+ HCP with an unbalanced hand that is two-suited (at least 9 cards in two suits).

16. Preemptive Opening Bids

Since we use a 2♣ opening bid for all strong hands, then we are free to use the other 2-level suit opening bids, 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠, and other high-level suit bids, for destructive bidding. These are called *preemptive opening bids* and show hands with a long suit and not enough points to open the bidding at the 1-level. We use preemptive bids to get in the way of the opponents and take away their bidding space to make it more difficult for them to communicate with each other.

a. 2-level Preempts - 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠

These 2-level opening bids show 6-card suits and less than opening values.

- 2♦ 6-card ♦ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 2♥ 6-card ♥ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 2♠ 6-card ♠ suit, 5-10 HCP

b. 3-level Preempts

3-level opening bids are similar to 2-level opening preempts, generally showing 7-card suits and less than opening values.

- 3♣ 6-7 card ♣ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 3♦ 7-card ♦ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 3♥ 7-card ♥ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 3♠ 7-card ♠ suit, 5-10 HCP



c. 4-level and Higher Preempts

Opening bids at the 4-level show similar hands to other preempts, with even longer suits. Preempts that are actually game, 4♥ and higher, can be made with a few more values than other preempts.

- 4♣ 7+card ♣ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 4♦ 7+card ♦ suit, 5-10 HCP
- 4♥ 7+card ♥ suit, 5-12 HCP
- 4♠ 7+card ♠ suit, 5-12 HCP
- 5♣ 8+card ♣ suit, 5-12 HCP
- 5♦ 8+card ♦ suit, 5-12 HCP

d. Responder Extends Opener's Preempt – “The Law of Total Tricks”

There is a general idea in competitive or preemptive bidding called *The Law of Total Tricks (LOTT)*. This idea is “We should compete (or preempt) to a level equal to the size of our fit.” That means:

- With an 8-card fit we compete to the 8-trick level, the 2-level.
- With a 9-card fit we compete to the 9-trick level, the 3-level.
- With a 10-card fit we compete to the 10-trick level, the 4-level.

Responder uses this strategy to further extend Opener's preemptive bids.

Example

If Opener starts the bidding with a preemptive 2♠ bid, Responder can extend Opener's preempt by applying the LOTT:

- Bidding 3♠ with 3-card support and any hand not interested in game.
- Bidding 4♠ with 4-card support and any hand not interested in slam.

17. Simple Overcalls

When the opponents open the bidding, we need a way to enter the auction and compete for the contract. The most common way we compete in these auctions is by bidding a long suit, called making a *Simple Overcall*.

A low-level simple overcall does not promise as many values as an opening bid. The values that an overcall promises increase the higher the level of the bidding.

- 1-level Simple Overcalls 5+card suit, 8-17 points
- 2-level Simple Overcalls Good 5+card suit, 12-17 points

Making an overcall allows our side to start searching for a fit and compete in the bidding even when the opponents have opened the bidding in front of us.

Note: The LOTT will often be applied to these competitive auctions as well.



18. Jump Overcalls

After the opponents open the bidding, a jump in a new suit is called a *Jump Overcall*. This bid is similar to an opening preempt, showing a long strong suit but limited values.

- 2-level Jump Overcalls 6-card suit, 5-10 points
- 3-level Jump Overcalls 7-card suit, 5-10 points
- 4-level Jump Overcalls 8-card suit, 5-12 points (jumps to game can be a bit stronger).

These jump overcalls are destructive bids, aimed at taking bidding space away from the opponents.

Partner applies the LOTT and extends our jump overcall preempt as if we had opened with a preemptive bid.

19. Takeout Doubles

When the opponents open the bidding another way for us to compete in the bidding is by making a double. This double is called a *Takeout Double* and asks partner to bid – usually one of the unbid suits.

A takeout double traditionally shows:

- About opening bid values.
- Shortness in the opponent's suit.
- 3+card support for all the unbid suits.

Common distributions for takeout doubles are 4450, 4441, or 4432.

20. Dealing with the Opponent's Overcalls

When partner opens 1-minor or 1-Major and the opponents overcall a suit, as Responder we have a variety of ways to compete in the bidding.

- We can raise partner's suit (see below).
- Bid a new suit (called a *freebid*), showing 5+cards and forcing.
- Bid NT, showing values and a stopper in the opponent's suit.
- Make a double (called a *Negative Double*), showing values and asking partner to compete in the bidding.



21. Raising Partner's Primary Suit After the Opponent Overcalls

When we open the bidding and the opponent makes a simple overcall, the opponents have interfered in our auction and have changed the nature of the auction from *constructive bidding* to *competitive bidding*. In competitive bidding auctions, we change our approach to bidding to allow Responder more options for raising Opener's primary suit and to give Responder more destructive (preemptive) bidding options.

a. Preemptive Raises After the Opponent Overcalls - LOTT

The primary way that we change our bidding agreements in competitive auctions is to make jump raises by Responder weak bids instead of invitational bids. This allows Responder to apply the Law of Total Tricks and take away as much bidding space from the opponents as possible (by preempting the bidding.) This type of competitive bidding applies whether Opener began the auction with a Major suit or minor suit opening bid.

Example

1♠ (2♣) ___?

- 3♠ 4-card ♠ support, 0-6 points.
- 4♠ 5-card ♠ support, 0-8 points (jumps to game can be a bit stronger than other preempts.)

b. Limit Raises After the Opponents Overcall – “Q=LR+”

Since jump raises in competition apply the LOTT and are weak bids, Responder now needs a way to show a good hand with invitational or better values and a fit for Opener's suit. This type of hand is shown by Responder bidding the opponent's suit, a special bid called a *Cuebid*.

Example

1♠ (2♣) ___?

- 3♣ 3+card ♠ support, 10+ points (showing at least an 8-card fit)

3♣ is an artificial bid, showing a *Limit Raise or better* in Opener's suit and is often denoted “Q=LR+”, short for “A Cuebid equals a Limit Raise or Better.” This applies when responding to a minor or Major suit opening.



22. Conclusion and Summary Tables

This concludes our introduction to bridge bidding. There are a large number of topics covered in this small document, and many other fundamental topics are not discussed or only briefly touched upon. I hope that reading this has given you some insight into how to communicate with your partner at the bridge table and how the fundamentals of modern bridge bidding work.

Here are some *Summary Tables* of what has been discussed in this *Learn Bridge Bidding* document:

- a. Opening Bids Summary Table
- b. Responding to 1-Level Opening Bids Summary Table

a. Opening Bids Summary Table

Bid	Description
1♣	3+♣, 12-21 points, Balanced or Unbalanced (not Balanced 15-17 or 20-21)
1♦	4+♦, 12-21 points, Balanced or Unbalanced (not Balanced 15-17 or 20-21)
1♥	5+♥ 12-21 points, Balanced or Unbalanced (not Balanced 15-17 or 20-21)
1♠	5+♠, 12-21 points, Balanced or Unbalanced (not Balanced 15-17 or 20-21)
1NT	15-17 points, balanced hand
2♣	<i>Strong, Artificial, and Forcing.</i> 22+ points if balanced OR “Game-1” or stronger if unbalanced
2♦	5-10 HCP, usually 6-card ♦
2♥	5-10 HCP, usually 6-card ♥
2♠	5-10 HCP, usually 6-card ♠
2NT	20-21 points, balanced hand
3♣	5-10 HCP, 6+card ♣
3♦	5-10 HCP, usually 7-card ♦
3♥	5-10 HCP, usually 7-card ♥
3♠	5-10 HCP, usually 7-card ♠
3NT	(Not Discussed)
4♣	5-10 HCP, usually 8-card ♣
4♦	5-10 HCP, usually 8-card ♦
4♥	5-11 HCP, usually 8-card ♥
4♠	5-11 HCP, usually 8-card ♠



b. Responding to 1-Level Opening Bids Summary Table

Responses	1♣ Opening	1♦ Opening	1♥ Opening	1♠ Opening	1NT Opening
1♦	4+♦, 6+ pts.	-----	-----	-----	-----
1♥	4+♥, 6+ pts.	4+♥, 6+ pts.	-----	-----	-----
1♠	4+♠, 6+ pts.	4+♠, 6+ pts.	4+♠, 6+ pts.	-----	-----
1NT	6-9 pts, no M	6-9 pts, no M	SF, 6-11 pts.	SF, 6-11 pts.	-----
2♣	5+♣, 6-9 pts	3+♣, 12+ pts	3+♣, 12+ pts.	3+♣, 12+ pts.	Stayman, 8+ pts.
2♦		4+♦, 6-9 pts	4+♦, 12+ pts.	4+♦, 12+ pts.	Jac Trs, 5+♥, 0+ pts
2♥			3+♥, 6-9 pts.	5+♥, 12+ pts.	Jac Trs, 5+♠, 0+ pts
2♠				3+♠, 6-9 pts.	3♣ relay, 6+minor
2NT	10-11 pts	10-11 pts	*4+♥, 12+ pts.	*4+♠, 12+ pts.	8-9 pts., no M
3♣	5+♣, 10-11 pts				6+♣, 8-9 pts.
3♦		4+♦, 10-11 pts			6+♦, 8-9 pts.
3♥			3+♥, 10-11 pts		
3♠				3+♠, 10-11 pts	
3NT	Play, 12-15 pts	Play, 12-15 pts	Play, 12-15 pts	Play, 12-15 pts	Play, 10-16 pts.
4♣					
4♦					Tx Trs, 6+♥, 10+ pts
4♥					Tx Trs, 6+♠, 10+ pts
4♠					
4NT					Quant, 16+/17 pts.

