

OPENING BIDS

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OPENING STRENGTH

STRENGTH ATTRIBUTE	DECLARER POINTS	PERCENT OF HANDS	COMMENT
<i>Pass</i>	0 to 6	15 %	Unless you have a very unusual distribution, you should not make an opening bid with this type of hand.
<i>Weak</i>	7 to 12	50 %	If you have a six card or longer suit you may be able to open a weak hand. But most of your weak hands will not qualify for an opening bid. ¹
<i>Medium</i>	13 to 21	34 %	Because 13 points is half way toward the 26 points needed to make a game, you should open the bidding when you have at least 13 declarer points. With one exception, your opening bid will be at the one level.
<i>Strong</i>	22 +	1 %	If you are blessed with 22 or more declarer points, you should open the bidding with a bid that indicates your extra strength. Strong opening bids are at the two-level or higher. ¹

¹ Weak and strong opening bids are covered in the next course.

OPENING SHAPE

When you have an *unbalanced hand*, your initial goal should be a suit contract. When you have a *balanced hand*, your initial goal should be a no trump contract but your final goal will depend on the partnership's trump fit:

- ✓ With a partnership eight card major suit trump fit, it is usually better to play a major suit contract, especially if the balanced hand has an unstopped doubleton.
- ✓ With a partnership eight card minor suit trump fit, it is usually better to play a no trump contract because nine tricks in no trump is usually easier to make than eleven tricks in a minor suit.

SHAPE ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION
<i>No Trump</i>	A hand with a <i>balanced shape</i> that does not have a five card major. ²
<i>Suit</i>	A hand with an <i>unbalanced shape</i> or a hand with a <i>balanced shape</i> that has a five card major.

² Experienced partnerships will often classify a balanced hand with a five card major, especially a five card heart suit, as a no trump hand to avoid rebidding problems. One guideline is to classify a balanced hand with a five card major and *stoppers* in all four suits as a no trump hand.

OPENING MEDIUM STRENGTH HANDS

BID	YOU TELL YOUR PARTNER AND YOUR OPPONENTS		AGREEMENT OR CONVENTION
	DECLARER POINTS	SHAPE OF HAND	
2NT	20-21 HCP	I have a <i>balanced hand</i> with stoppers in all four suits. I (usually) do not have a five card major.	
1NT	15-17 HCP	I have a <i>balanced hand</i> with stoppers in at least three suits. I (usually) do not have a five card major.	
1♠	13-21	I have at least five spades. I might also have five hearts.	Five Card Major
1♥	13-21	I have at least five hearts and fewer spades than hearts.	
1♦	13-21	I usually have at least four diamonds but I might only have three. I have less than five hearts and less than five spades.	Better Minor
1♣	13-21	I have at least three clubs, less than five hearts, and less than five spades.	
Pass	0-12		

Notice several things about these guidelines:

- The guidelines only cover *opening bids*. A hand that does not qualify for an opening bid often qualifies for a *response* to your partner's opening bid.
- The guidelines cover the first 21 possible declarer points which is the point count in about 99% of the hands you will be dealt.

There are opening bid guidelines that you can follow if you are fortunate enough to have more than 21 declarer points. Those guidelines are covered in the next course.

- You should not make an opening bid if you are in first or second seat and you have less than 13 declarer points which will be the case in about 65% of the hands.

There are guidelines that allow you to open the bidding with less than 13 declarer points if your hand has a specific shape. Those guidelines are covered in the next course.

- The no trump bids are based on high card points only. Length might help you make a no trump contract, but it should not be considered when making a no trump opening bid.

**MEDIUM STRENGTH
OPENING BID PRIORITIES**

- ✓ Open no trump if hand qualifies.
- ✓ Open a 5-card or longer major suit.
- ✓ Open higher ranking of two 5-card or longer suits.
- ✓ Otherwise:
 - Open longest minor
 - Open **1♦** with two 4-card minors
 - Open **1♣** with two 3-card minors

- A **stopper** is a card or a combination of cards that can "stop" opponents from taking tricks in the suit. For example, an **A** is a definite stopper and a **KQ** combination is a definite stopper. But a singleton **K** is not a stopper because the King will fall if the Ace is played. The **Kx** combination is counted as a stopper for bidding purposes. But it is not a definite stopper unless the lead comes from your left hand opponent. Likewise, **Qx** combination is not a stopper but a **Qxx** combination is counted as a stopper for bidding purposes.
- The "agreement and convention" column gives a name that is often used to refer to one or more of the guidelines. If someone says "I open five card majors" you can safely assume that when they open **1♥** or **1♠**, they have at least five cards in the major.

————— OPENING BID EXAMPLES —————

EXAMPLE 1	EXAMPLE 2	EXAMPLE 3																														
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">SOUTH - YOU</div> <p>♠ A Q J 7 3 ♥ K 9 6 ♦ Q T 8 ♣ T 7</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">SOUTH - YOU</div> <p>♠ K Q 5 4 ♥ A J 9 ♦ K Q 7 3 ♣ T 7</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">SOUTH - YOU</div> <p>♠ A K Q J 7 ♥ 9 4 3 ♦ 9 5 4 2 ♣ 6</p>																														
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OPENING BID: 1♠	OPENING BID: 1NT	OPENING BID: PASS																														

Example 2: Although this hand also qualifies for a **1♦** opening bid, a no trump bid gives much more information to your partner. No trump opening bids have higher priority than opening suit bids.

Example 3: This hand has a beautiful five card major but it does not have enough declarer points to make an opening bid in the first or second seat. However, advanced players might open this hand in the third seat.

EXAMPLE 4

SOUTH - YOU	
♠	7
♥	K Q 6 2
♦	K Q 9 4
♣	A K 8 4
STRENGTH: MEDIUM	
High Card Points:	17
Long Suit Points:	0
Declarer Points:	17
SHAPE: UNBALANCED	
Five Card Major:	NO
Stoppers:	3
Doubletons:	0
Singletons:	1
Voids:	0
OPENING BID: 1♦	

EXAMPLE 5

SOUTH - YOU	
♠	J 9 5 3 2
♥	A K J T 8
♦	A Q 3
♣	
STRENGTH: MEDIUM	
High Card Points:	15
Long Suit Points:	2
Declarer Points:	17
SHAPE: UNBALANCED	
Five Card Major:	YES
Stoppers:	3
Doubletons:	0
Singletons:	0
Voids:	1
OPENING BID: 1♠	

EXAMPLE 6

SOUTH - YOU	
♠	A Q 9 6 3
♥	8
♦	K Q T 7 5 2
♣	5
STRENGTH: MEDIUM	
High Card Points:	11
Long Suit Points:	3
Declarer Points:	14
SHAPE: UNBALANCED	
Five Card Major:	YES
Stoppers:	2
Doubletons:	0
Singletons:	2
Voids:	0
OPENING BID: 1♠	

Example 4: This hand has the high card points and the three stoppers required for a 1NT opening bid but that would be a lie because the hand has an unbalanced shape. With two four-card minors, opening 1♦ has a higher priority even if the suit is weaker than the club suit.

Example 5: With two five-card or longer suits, open the higher ranking suit. In this example, your spades are weaker than your hearts but with two five-card or longer suits, **open the highest ranking suit.**

Example 6: Although your diamond suit is longer, opening the five-card major has a higher priority.

————— LISTEN TO THE BIDDING —————

Because bidding is a conversation between partners, it is imperative that you listen carefully to your partner's bids. Since most players use some variation of these guidelines, it is also imperative to listen to your opponents bids. For example:

- If your partner opens 1♠ you know your partner has at least 13 declarer points and at least five spades. At least one of the declarer points is a long suit point.
- If your left hand opponent opens the bidding with 1♦ you know that your opponent has at least 13 declarer points, probably has four diamonds but might only have three, and does not have a five card major.