

Five-Card Majors

Ipswich & Kesgrave
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The Great Divide

- ▶ 'Four or Five' divides the bridge world on geographic and historical lines.
- ▶ Not everyone plays 5-card majors – but most do. Certainly the Americas and continental Europe except for a few in Netherlands, Scandinavia and Germany. Easier to list where 4-card majors predominate:
 1. Great Britain
 2. New Zealand
- ▶ And that's really only club players; the overwhelming majority of internationals in those countries are 5-carders, near 50-50 for tournament players.
- ▶ Teaching programmes in Britain perpetuate the approach – why is that?

Why Do We Teach 4-Card Majors?

- ▶ Because that's what the club plays.
- ▶ It is important that inexperienced players understand the auctions around them without depending on their confidence to ask.
- ▶ Though we recognise it's unlikely that our students might play with 'someone from the club' we should equip them to do so.
- ▶ At the very beginning it is easier to *teach*. It stresses the importance of suit-length over high-card concentrations, establishes biddable suits and the importance of a 4-4 fit.
- ▶ And the EBU course (and resources) support that system – for the same reasons as above but on a national scale.

So Why 5-Card Majors Now?

- ▶ How can I break this to those of you who have sworn by (at?) 4-card majors all your life?
- ▶ **5-Card majors are better for you.**
- ▶ If a 4-card suit isn't good enough to overcall, why is it good enough to open? Looking at it another way, will not the uncertainty about major length worry opener's side when opponents compete?
- ▶ Those concerns apply whether you've been playing 4-card majors for decades or you are a recent student.
- ▶ But isn't this a big undertaking, and don't 5-card majors go with a strong no-trump?

The Big Four

- ▶ Four-card majors weak no-trump.

- ▶ Five-card majors strong no-trump.

- ▶ Four-card majors strong no-trump

- ▶ Five-card majors weak no-trump

4CM / 12-14 NT (Pluses)

- ▶ 1-Major is only ever four when opener has 15+ HCP*
* 4-4-4-1s excepted, terms and conditions apply.
- ▶ This is 'Majors First': a simple, direct approach to solving the problem of finding major fits, without recourse to artificiality.
- ▶ After 1♣ – 1♥; 1NT...
- ▶ Responder never has to worry there might be a 4-4 spade fit. This is good for beginners and for everyone it avoids letting in the opponents who don't get the opportunity to double artificial bids.
- ▶ When responder has a 4-card support or better the job is done and there has been no leakage of information to the opponents.
- ▶ There some opportunity for pre-emption when responder has distribution and a big fit (usually 5+ cards).

4CM / 12-14 NT (Minuses)

- ▶ **But...**
 - ▶ When you open a good hand (15+ HCP) with a four-card major you often don't know how to proceed in these two common situations:
 1. 1♠ – 1NT; is 16 HCP enough to raise to 2NT? Probably not; it's best to pass in the long run but you would rather not have this problem.
 2. 1♠ – 2♠; is 16 HCP enough to make a move, say 2NT? Again probably not. This is further exacerbated if partner raises with only three trumps as the 4-3 fit won't be comfortable if you have to play 3♠.
 - ▶ When opponents intervene, especially with weak jump-overcalls, responder often has to act in dangerous circumstances otherwise opener, with a strong balanced hand, will be awkwardly placed, for example:
 - ▶ ♠ K62
 - ▶ ♥ QJ96
 - ▶ ♦ K7
 - ▶ ♣ 8765
- After 1♠ (3♦) ??
- ▶ Pre-emptive actions will always cause problems (otherwise, why would we use them ourselves?) but 4-card majors reduce responder's options.

4CM / 15-17 NT (Pluses)

- ▶ 1-Major is only ever four when opener has 12-14 (perhaps 18-19)*

* 4-4-4-1s excepted, many pairs with this method open differently with 18-19, other terms and conditions apply.

- ▶ Very aggressive: many hands suitable for a weak no-trump now open 1♠ or 1♥ – so relatively little of the obstructive nature of 12-14 is lost.
- ▶ Simple and direct, when raised freely opponents cannot easily protect as opener's side might only have a 4-3 fit. But it might be 5-4...
- ▶ Opening a 4-card major on weak hands can steal the suit: after auctions such as 1♠ – 1NT; Pass, opponent's best fit might be in spades!
- ▶ In competition responder can simply 'give up' without shortness in opponents suit because when opener cannot act again, he just has a balanced 12-14.
- ▶ When responder has a 4-card or better fit the job is done and there has been no leakage of information to the opponents.
- ▶ There are more opportunities for pre-emption when opener strikes responder with a big fit (usually 5+ cards) because opener is only ever weak with 4-major.

4CM / 15-17 NT (Minuses)

- ▶ **But...**
 - ▶ The strong no-trump requires a significant adjustment: because responder might have a balanced 12-count for 1♠, responder must take care. That almost obliges a wide-range 1NT response. If you thought 6-9 was unwieldy, how do you sort out 6-11, perhaps 6-12?
 - ▶ When opponents intervene with simple overcalls, especially 2-minor over 1-major, both opener and responder can find themselves badly placed.
 - ▶ ♠ KJ62
♥ J9
♦ J97
♣ AK65
- After 1♠ (2♦) X (P); ??
- ▶ Whilst it is possible to play this system in a free-wheeling way it takes a lot of experience and courage. Practitioners often employ significant artificiality.

5CM / 15-17 NT (Pluses)

- ▶ This is what the world plays! No-one dare laugh at you.
- ▶ Popularity based on its 'out of the box' simplicity to play; very often the choice for first-time and irregular partnerships.
- ▶ When responder has 4-card support, because a 9-card fit is established, the options are all great:
 1. Pre-empt to 4-major (or even 3-major).
 2. Suggest a slam.
 3. Differentiate between invitational raises (so opener knows what to do without helping the opponents).
- ▶ Find 4-4 major fits after auctions that start with 1-minor missed by weak-no-trumpers.

5CM / 15-17 NT (Minuses)

- ▶ **But...**
- ▶ All those hands that would have opened a weak no-trump (except 5M-3-2-2) now open 1-minor – and that means the opponents walk in...
- ▶ Unable to open your best suit of ♥AKJx and 4-4-3-2 you must choose a minor – possibly only three cards – your ox-like partner is sure to lead badly.
- ▶ The strong no-trump problem is still there, the wide-range 1NT response is lurks in the bushes. The problem is that unless responder's 2♣/♦/♥ promises enough strength, opener has no rebid with 12 HCP and 5♠-3-2-2 except 2♠.
- ▶ There are many divergences here:
 1. A forcing 1NT response
 2. A game-forcing two-over-one (yes, that means 1♠ – 2♣ is *game-forcing*)
 3. Continuing forces, say two-over-one is forcing to 2NT
 4. 1♠ – 2♣; 2♠ can be passed but if opener bids again, that's forcing (maybe with some exceptions to keep it interesting)
- ▶ All that is an anathema to those brought up on Acol, limit-bids, 'the more you have the more you bid' naturalness.

5CM / 12-14 NT (Pluses)

- ▶ The weak no-trump makes life difficult for opponents.
- ▶ Retains the advantages of recognising early 9-card-fit (pre-emption / slam-investigation / game-approach).
- ▶ Simplifies competitive decisions when responder has 3-card support. Indeed, even in uncontested auctions it enables less-experienced players to make 'judgement' raises with three trumps.
- ▶ Whilst the strong no-trump may have considerable repercussions, simply insisting on five cards for 1♥ and 1♠ is really quite easy.

5CM / 12-14 NT (Minuses)

- ▶ **But...**
- ▶ Opening 1-minor with a good hand (15+ HCP, strong NT or better) means opponents can disturb your plans when your side has more at stake. Not only is opener's first action lower so is responder's; the other side have it doubly easy to interfere.
- ▶ The minor openings (possibly your third-best suit) do not necessarily indicate a good lead.

The Big Four

- ▶ Four-card majors weak no-trump
- ▶ Simple to understand
- ▶ Constructive auctions badly flawed; awkward in competition
- ▶ Four-card majors strong no-trump
- ▶ Hard to play against
- ▶ Difficult to play requiring judgement and experience
- ▶ Five-card majors strong no-trump
- ▶ Simple to play
- ▶ 'Soft' – easy to play against; requires new mindset as responder
- ▶ Five-card majors weak no-trump
- ▶ Simple to play
- ▶ 1-Minor with good hands creates new problems

4CM / 12-14 NT (Variants)

- ▶ '4-Card Minors': open 1-minor with 4-minor and 4-major, ex.

♠ A4
♥ KJ96
♦ Q73
♣ AJ92

1♣ [rather than 1♥] - 1♠; 1NT

- ▶ But what about 1♣ - 1♦; 1♥ or 1NT?
- ▶ Wait! Can't we educate our partner to respond in a major (abandoning 'up the line') even with 4♦?
- ▶ ...But that won't save us here: ♠ KJ96
♥ A4
♦ Q73
♣ AJ92 1♣ - 1♥; 1♠ or 1NT?
- ▶ And the problems in competition persist. In fact, if you only open 1-major with 15+ HCP and 4-3-3-3 (or 1♥ with 4♠-4♥-3-2) partner tends to assume you always have five - but that's when it's most costly to bid on with a flat shape in competition.
- ▶ There are other choices: at the club '5-card spades' can be seen. That means that 4♠-3-3-3 opens with a short (3-card) 1♣.
- ▶ It's pretty clear that all these are trying to play 5-card majors (and experiencing many of the difficulties) without the benefits.

Let's Play Five-Card Majors!

- ▶ Most openings are unchanged:
 1. Open a five-card suit, higher-ranking if you're fortunate enough to hold two
 2. Open a weak no-trump with 12-14 HCPs [we'll talk about 5M-3-3-2 later]
- ▶ But bidding balanced hands with 15+ HCPs has changed.
 - You have to open a minor with no 5-card suit.
- ▶ 4-4-4-1s are simple – open a minor! [The problems come later...]

Opening Balanced Hands

▶ ♠ AKQ9
♥ Q87
♦ 95
♣ AJ94

▶ 1♣ – what could be simpler? You'll bid no-trumps next, just as you would after opening 1♠ in 4CM.

▶ ♠ AKQ9
♥ Q87
♦ 954
♣ AJ9

▶ 1♣ again. Four spades – even good ones – do not cut the mustard.

Opening Balanced Hands (2)

▶ ♠ AKQ9
♥ Q87
♦ AJ9
♣ 954

- ▶ Clubs are weak, diamonds strong – should we switch allegiance?
- ▶ No – 1♣ again.

▶ ♠ AKQ9
♥ Q874
♦ 954
♣ AJ

- ▶ Open a 2-card suit?
- ▶ No – 1♦. In 'longer minor' all suits show at least three. This precise distribution is the only time 1♦ is opened on three.

Balanced Hands

- ▶ For balanced hands of 15-19 HCP, too strong to open 1NT, which have no 5-card suit (that's a no-brainer) open a minor:
 - 4-3 Minors open longer
 - 3-3 Minors open 1♣
 - 3-2 Minors open longer
- ▶ Don't alert – or announce!
Opening a 3-card suit is 'natural'
- ▶ The idea of depending on longer minor – not stronger – is to 'contain the shortness doubt'.
 - ▶ 4-4 minors? It's not very important and there are some "angels on the head of a pin" debates. You can make your own mind up. If you find it easy to remember, same length, open 1♣ otherwise longer minor then you would be doing no harm (and possibly some good).
 - ▶ That's it for opening bids: the prepare-to-rebid-no-trumps openings are 1-minor not a 4-card major.

1NT with a 5-card Major?

- ▶ I think so but opinions differ.
- 1. Auctions that start with 1NT are simple and direct; they avoid giving information to opponents that may help with the opening lead and subsequent defence.
- 2. You'll find better part-scores especially when opener has hearts and responder spades. 1NT is very attractive with 3♠-5♥-3-2 because responder won't rush to rebid spades after 1♥ – 1♠; 2♥ as she'll believe opener has six hearts.
- 3. Opponents have no take-out double of 1NT and it's often difficult for them to enter the auction. 'Stealing' with the weak no-trump is one of its attractions and adding to its frequency by mixing it up a little can't hurt.
- ▶ But there is always a risk of missing a 5-3 or 5-4 fit.

Responding

- ▶ This is where more significant changes appear. The principal areas are:
 - Supporting partner's major now you know it shows five.
 - Responding to 1-minor, knowing partner could have one or two 4-card majors.

Raising Opener's Major

- ▶ Raises:
 - ▶ Simple raise: 9 losers, 3/4/5 trumps
 - ▶ Jump raise: 8 losers, 4+ trumps, 8-11 HCP
 - ▶ Game raise: 7 losers or less, four (often five+) trumps, 5-9 HCP
 - ▶ 2NT game-forcing raise: 7 losers or less, 4+ trumps, 11+ HCP
- ▶ Do **NOT** cheat on trump length. That is do not make jump raises with only three trumps.

Raising Opener's Major (2)

▶ ♠ KJ976	♠ Q54
♥ K4	♥ 1083
♦ 94	♦ A10762
♣ AJ53	♣ 86

▶ 1♠ 2♠

- ▶ With a minimum hand, if responder does not raise opener, she denies 3-card support.

▶ ♠ 2	♠ A10764
♥ AKJ973	♥ Q54
♦ K4	♦ 1083
♣ A953	♣ 86

▶ 1♥ 2♥
4♥

- ▶ Even with five spades responder supports. After 1♥ – 1♠; 2♣ – 2♥; Opener will expect two trumps; picture the ♣Q instead of ♥Q.

Raising Opener's Major (3)

- ▶ With 3-card support and better hands, say 8 losers (usually 10-12 HCP) you shouldn't raise to the 3-level immediately because partner will expect four trumps and will evaluate incorrectly. Instead bid a suit and subsequently jump-support to 3-major. Many auctions will be similar to those with 4CMs.

▶	♠ AJ976	♠ K54
	♥ 94	♥ A103
	♦ AJ53	♦ 96
	♣ K4	♣ QJ762

▶	1♠	2♣
	2♦	3♠

- ▶ East marks time with 2♣ before supporting spades to the value-level (8 losers, 2+2+2+2). West can bid a close game if in the mood.

Raising Opener's Major (4)

- ▶ With stronger hands responder must be sure to bid game.
- ▶ Finding 5-3 fits is good but don't overbid without a good side suit and/or a shortage. There is a big difference in tricks between 8- and 9-card fits.

▶ ♠ J2	♠ AK107
♥ AK973	♥ Q54
♦ KJ5	♦ Q832
♣ A93	♣ 86

▶	1♥	1♠
	1NT	4♥

- ▶ Responder doesn't have a convenient raise available (3-card support and 7½ losers) so stalls with 1♠. Opener's rebid is 15-16 and responder judges hearts will play better.

A Strong Raise

- ▶ So you don't play 1M – 2NT as a strong raise?
- ▶ You really should you know, whatever system you play. But if you adopt 5CM, not to do so passes up a significant advantage.
- ▶ Because 9-card fits come to light sooner, differentiating between 'game on shape' and 'game on strength' provides two big opportunities:
 1. 1♠ – 4♠ and 1♥ – 4♥ seriously pre-empt opponents – no matter how good they are.
 2. Slam for opener's side is a strong possibility and 2NT is a great base to find out if either player has extras.

A Strong Raise (2)

- ▶ 2NT is **game-forcing** and shows:
 1. 4+ trumps
 2. 7 losers or less
 3. 11+ HCP
- ▶ The best way to respond – because responder is likely to be balanced (with shortage he splinters via a double jump) – is for opener's new suits to show **shortage**. If you are uncomfortable with bidding shortages opener rebids lengths. Keep these principles in mind:
 1. Opener only jumps to 4M with a very poor hand.
 2. A 3NT rebid shows 15-16 but can be passed
 3. Rebidding 3M is forcing and shows some extras
 4. Opener's jump bids describe 5-5 hands (whether or not simple bids are lengths or shortages)
- ▶ Even those simple agreements will be an improvement over 1♥ – 4♥; or immediate Blackwood (after all, if you're a Blackwood fan, you can use it after 2NT).

Responding to 1-Minor (1)

- ▶ In principle there are few changes – responder's duty is to bid a major whatever the system. But omissions using 5CMs are more likely to be costly; remember with 5CMs, opener's 1-minor could be her third-best suit.
- ▶ If you have a hand with a single long (5+) suit, you bid it. If you hold clubs and partner opens 1♦, you'll need at least 9+ HCP to respond at the two-level – and usually more [warnings about this sequence later].
- ▶ 'Up the line' is out.
- ▶ 'Up the majors' is in.

Responding to 1-Minor (2)

▶ ♠ AJ97 ♠ K542
♥ K1043 ♥ 85
♦ J3 ♦ A962
♣ AQ4 ♣ 975

▶ 1♣ 1♠
 2♠

▶ Even though East has four diamonds 1♠ is correct. In this sequence opener will often have a strong no-trump (15-16 HCP) but shouldn't overdo it. Better trust in the LTC and raise accordingly.

▶ ♠ AJ97 ♠ K542
♥ K1043 ♥ 85
♦ J3 ♦ A9652
♣ AQ4 ♣ 97

▶ 1♣ 1♠
 2♠

▶ This is almost the same: just because East has five diamonds doesn't change very much – it's still right to bid the major.

Responding to 1-Minor (3)

- ▶ If responder is stronger he can bid a longer diamond suit first, intending to follow with his second suit:

▶ ♠ AJ97	♠ K542
♥ K1043	♥ Q52
♦ J3	♦ AQ962
♣ AQ4	♣ 9

▶	1♣	1♦
	1NT	2♠
	3♠	4♠

- ▶ How strong? Enough to force to game opposite a 15-16 1NT rebid, say 10+ HCP.
- ▶ Even with strength it will often still be right to respond with a 4-card major with 5♦-4M-2-2 and high-cards in the doubletons because 3NT is more acceptable.

Responding to 1-Minor (4)

- ▶ It should come as no surprise given that, if after $1\clubsuit$, responding 1-major is right even with five diamonds, after $1\diamondsuit$, 1-major is preferred even with five clubs (this isn't so far from 4CM world).

▶	♠ AJ97	♠ K542
	♥ K10	♥ A2
	♦ J1032	♦ 65
	♣ AQ4	♣ KJ876

▶	$1\diamondsuit$	$1\spadesuit$
	$2\spadesuit$	$4\spadesuit$

- ▶ Note that responder is quite strong and might think he has the values for $2\clubsuit$, nevertheless $1\spadesuit$ is much better.
- ▶ **Avoid responding $2\clubsuit$ to $1\diamondsuit$.**
- ▶ Imagine partner with 4-4-4-1 \clubsuit – she opens $1\diamondsuit$ and over $2\clubsuit$ rebids...
Much rather spare partner: prefer any reasonable alternative to $2\clubsuit$.

Responding to 1-Minor (5)

- ▶ So when can you support partner's minor?
- ▶ Certainly **any raise of 1-minor denies a 4-card major**.
- ▶ Curiously a single raise needs better support than a double raise. because after $1\clubsuit - 2\clubsuit$; opener will pass with a balanced 15-16 HCP. A 3-4 fit won't be much fun and will score poorly in a pairs game.
- ▶ But as a jump raise shows more values (10-11 HCP), whenever opener has a short minor (and 15+ HCP), she will be bidding 3NT anyway.
- ▶ So:
 - $1\clubsuit - 2\clubsuit$; shows five
 - But four diamonds suffice for $1\diamond - 2\diamond$;
 - Both $1\clubsuit - 3\clubsuit$; and $1\diamond - 3\diamond$; show 4+ support and 10-11 HCP.

Responding to 1-Minor (6)

► Difficult hands...

♠ 932
♥ 876
♦ AJ9
♣ Q542

1♣ - ??

- You would rather not bid 1NT with no stop in either major (not because you are afraid to lose tricks there but because it could be critical for the lead to come up to your partner's major holdings). Raising to 2♣ requires five – what else is left?
- Respond 1♦. You wouldn't have misgivings were the ♣2 the ♦2; this is the smallest distortion.
- Also...

♠ 932
♥ 876
♦ AJ9
♣ Q542

1♦ - ??

- Now you really have to respond with an uncomfortable 1NT. And the same with ♣9 instead of ♦9. 1♦ – 1NT implies something in clubs.

Opener's Rebids

- ▶ All shapely hands, those with two suits, rebid normally. Likewise with a single-suiter (6+). However there is much less temptation to rebid a 5-card suit (always something to avoid if possible):
- ▶ If partner didn't support 1-major knowing of five opposite, why carry on?
- ▶ Do not worry about "partner not knowing you have clubs (diamonds)" if you only have five – she's really not interested.
- ▶ The established practice with 6M-4m is to rebid the 6-card suit when minimum but bid the minor with extras.

▶ Thus

♠ 8
♥ AQ9876
♦ K9
♣ Q542

1♥ 1♠
2♥ ...

▶ But

♠ 8
♥ AQ9876
♦ K9
♣ AQ52

1♥ 1♠
2♣ 2♥
3♥ ...

- ▶ But the principal differences occur when opener is balanced (and has therefore opened 1♣ or 1♦).

Opener's Balanced Rebids (1)

- ▶ ♠ A93 ♠ K542
♥ KJ72 ♥ A5
♦ J103 ♦ 65
♣ AQ4 ♣ KJ876

- ▶ 1♣ 1♠
 1NT 3NT

- ▶ Opener rebids 1NT with 15-16 HCP. You'll say "but we're wide-open in diamonds...". That's true but if diamonds are 4-4 you'll make 3NT (2♠+2♥+5♣) and no other game is attractive.

- ▶ ♠ AJ97 ♠ K2
♥ K102 ♥ A985
♦ J103 ♦ 65
♣ AQ4 ♣ KJ876

- ▶ 1♣ 1♥
 1NT 3NT

- ▶ Again West rebids 1NT with 15-16 HCP – but this time, with 4♠. Should they have rebid 1♠?

Opener's Balanced Rebids (2)

- ▶ Should a balanced hand bid 1♠ over 1♥?
- ▶ No.

That's my advice but this is not a universal treatment. The downside is clear, when responder has 4♥ and 4♠ and responds 1♥, a spade fit may be missed. But it's not as simple as that.

1. Opener has a strong no-trump and ensuring that hand is declarer is important. Auctions like 1♣ – 1♥; 1♠ – 1NT *wrong-side* no-trumps.
2. Another shortcoming of that auction is that responder's 1NT rebid is ill-defined – do you know when opener can raise?
3. Bidding two suits implying 5-4 is a cornerstone of modern bidding and there is a cost at the partscore and slam level of not knowing what hand-type opener has. Even with a conservative opening style, opener can be 5-4 with 11 HCP – that's quite different to a balanced 16-count.
4. When there is a spade fit it is far from lost. If responder has invitational values opposite 15-16 (so 9+) he can bid spades if he has them. This is much more likely than for strong no-trumpers who need 11/12+ opposite their (weak) 1NT rebid, consequently it is more in their interest to bid suits.

Opener's Balanced Rebids (3)

- ▶ ♠ AJ97 ♠ K542
♥ K102 ♥ AQ85
♦ J103 ♦ 65
♣ AQ4 ♣ J63

- ▶ 1♣ 1♥
 1NT 2♠
 3♠ 4♠

- ▶ East is 4-4 in the majors and starts with 1♥ ('up the majors'). When West rebids 1NT East should check for a 4-4 spade fit. They can do that via 2♠. But wait! Doesn't that show 5♥ and 4♠? No; there is no way of bidding 4-4 majors other than bidding the hearts then spades.
- ▶ This situation is a blind spot for many club-players – don't let anyone tell you different. You see it also in 1♣ – 1♥; 2NT – 3♠. The omission might be due to 4CM experience; there had opener held a major it would have been opened.

Opener's Balanced Rebids (4)

▶ ♠ K1032	♠ A9
♥ 2	♥ QJ54
♦ J92	♦ 8763
♣ AKQ94	♣ J85

▶	1♣	1♥
	1♠	1NT

- ▶ This is simple but something is going on: West is not balanced with four spades. Had she been, the rebid would have been 1NT. So "clubs then spades" shows (usually) 5+♣ and (shorter) but 4+♠ and a baseline 11 HCP ('usually' is fingers-crossed against the 4-4-4-1 curse).
- ▶ Should East rebid 2♣ or 1NT? Clubs is a fit and where securing a plus-score is important (money or IMPs) 2♣ is quite sensible. But at matchpoints, 1NT scores more and is always tempting.

In Competition

- ▶ I acknowledged earlier that a downside of 5CM is more frequent $1\clubsuit$ and $1\diamondsuit$ openings. That only invites the opponents to overcall; they exploit lack of definition of the minor-suit opening as well as the additional opportunity.
- ▶ Where $1\heartsuit$ shows four then a $1\spadesuit$ overcall has less to gain; the opening side already has their major in the picture. That doesn't much influence overcaller's decision (everyone likes to bid and uncertainties over strength and length remain) but it does mean the opening side won't be too inconvenienced. Compare to $1\clubsuit$ [could be 3] ($1\spadesuit$) ??; now it's responder's job to ensure the major fit isn't missed.
- ▶ Responder will often double overcaller to show the unbid major. None of this is new, indeed playing 4CM you would act the same in the almost all cases, but these situations are much more frequent when the minor-opening can hide a major suit.

Second Hand Overcalls (1)

▶	♠ AJ9		♠ 75
	♥ K1072		♥ AQ93
	♦ J103		♦ 65
	♣ AQ4		♣ J8762

▶		1♣	(1♠)	X	(P)
		2♥			

▶ West might be tempted to raise clubs and, to be fair, in a competitive auction, even minor fits merit greater attention. But double is best, catering to the 4-4 heart fit. Clubs can wait.

▶ Double of 1♠ says "I would have bid 1♥ but I lack the strength and length to bid 2♥" (2♥ over 1♠ needs at least 9+ HCP and 5+♥). West rebids as if she had heard "1♥". That would mean 'raising' to the 3-level with a 6-loser hand – but opener is almost minimum ($2+2+3+1-\frac{1}{2} = 7\frac{1}{2}$ losers).

▶	♠ K1072		♠ AQ93
	♥ AJ9		♥ 75
	♦ J103		♦ 65
	♣ AQ4		♣ J8762

▶		1♣	(1♥)	X	(P)
		2♠			

▶ This is exactly the same with the major suits swapped – wait a mo'! East can bid 1♠ over 1♥...

▶ But you shouldn't. Double of 1♥ shows exactly 4♠ – no more, no less. If you have five or more then you would bid 1♠. You exploit the intervention; the extra call (double) is put to good effect. Is this all new? No. You've just forgotten; it's bridge and nothing to do with 4/5CMs.

Second Hand Overcalls (2)

▶	♠ AJ9		♠ 75
	♥ K1072		♥ AQ93
	♦ J103		♦ 65
	♣ AQ4		♣ J8762

▶		1♣	(1♦)	1♥	(P)
		2♥			

▶ But over a lowly 1♦ overcall it *is right* to bid your 4-card suits. Why? Now double is reserved for both majors. It is a small gain but being able to show both suits immediately is a protection against a pre-emptive diamond raise.

▶ A rare exception to "don't enter a contested auction with only a 4-card suit". Possibly the only one.

▶	♠ K1072		♠ A94
	♥ AJ9		♥ 752
	♦ J1032		♦ 65
	♣ AQ		♣ KJ762

1♦ (1♥) ??

▶ Well this awkward. Double shows 4♠, 1NT shows a heart stop, 2♣ shows a better hand, Pass doesn't do the 8 HCP justice. Least bad of the bunch?

▶ Perhaps 2♣. If responder chooses to pass what should opener do? Not 1NT that's for sure – that shows a much better hand opposite a passing partner (18+). In a pairs game opener might double.

Second Hand Overcalls (3)

- ▶ When they overcall opener's 1♥ or 1♠ you are in much better shape because now you can more readily support partner's major. In fact, if you were thinking of making a simple raise, you will do just that (anything else would deny 3-card support).

- ▶

♠ KJ976	♠ Q54
♥ K4	♥ 1083
♦ 94	♦ A10763
♣ AJ53	♣ 86

- ▶ 1♠ (2♥) 2♠

- ▶ Responder would have raised to 2♠ without the intervention and 2♥ changes nothing. Raising to 2♠ is correct over 1NT, 2♣ or 2♦.

- ▶ Just like responder's increased use of double when opener's 1-minor is overcalled, the **cue-bid** – bidding their suit – gets more of an airing in 5CMs. I suggest you use it to distinguish between three- and four-card raises. This distinction is important: with 3-card support, responder needs more in high cards as there are fewer trumps to take-tricks. When opener knows the degree of fit (and what high-cards can expected opposite) she will make much better judgements in critical 'bid on or not' situations.

Second Hand Overcalls (4)

▶ ♠ KJ976 ♠ Q54
♥ K4 ♥ 1083
♦ 94 ♦ AQ863
♣ AJ53 ♣ K6

▶ 1♠ (2♥) 3♥* (P)
 3♠

- ▶ 3♥ shows at least a high-card raise to 3♠ with just three trumps. If North had passed, East would respond 2♦ and later support spades to the 3-level. As before, avoid bidding another suit with a known fit. Why?
- ▶ 3♦ implies more strength as, initially, it sounds fitless and therefore must be supported by high-cards
- ▶ Opponents may pre-empt and the fit (♠) in which we are most likely to out-bid them is only known to one partner
- ▶ The cue-bid solves the problem. Like the doubles of the previous slides, these aren't the preserve of 5CM. But because fits come to light earlier, they are more common. However, if you just bid 3♠ on the East cards that's not the worst thing in the world. Though – to me – it sounds like 4+ spades, it's a better call than 3♦.

Second Hand Overcalls (5)

▶ ♠ KJ976	♠ Q54
♥ AJ65	♥ K83
♦ K4	♦ AQ863
♣ 94	♣ 86

▶	1♠	(2♣)	3♣* (P)
	3♥	(P)	4♠

- ▶ I favour the cue-bid again. True, you can bid 2♦ – as you would with no intervention – but against active opponents this could go wrong. "Support with support", that's my motto.
- ▶ With nothing wasted in clubs opener makes a game try with 3♥ and responder knows all his cards are working.

Second Hand Overcalls (6)

- ▶ Higher interventions – not easy whatever you play.
- ▶ The differences between openings grow: after a minor opening it's awkward and you may be in difficulty, over a major you're much better placed.
- ▶ Any hand that offers play for game opposite a strong no-trump (15+ HCP) should take action – most often via a takeout double. However, when you have length in their suit don't stretch: if partner is short she will protect (again, with a takeout double) and if she isn't, you don't want to declare.
- ▶ Many considerations in dealing with simple overcalls apply – but more so.
 - Be wary of bidding new suits.
 - Double shows values and 4-other-major (but you may not always have it!).
 - Support partner's major; be prepared to be pushed up one level with 4-card support or a half-level with three trumps (that is, 8½ losers).
 - Cue bids: opposite a minor these look to 3NT and say, "have you got a stop in their suit", opposite a major (and now forcing to game), they show stronger raises than bidding to the same level directly.

Second Hand Overcalls (7)

- | | | |
|---------|--|----------|
| ♠ KQ94 | | ♠ A753 |
| ♥ 104 | | ♥ 82 |
| ♦ AK2 | | ♦ J10764 |
| ♣ A1053 | | ♣ KQ |
- | | | | | |
|--|----|------|---|------|
| | 1♣ | (2♥) | X | (3♥) |
| | 4♠ | | | |

- East's double is a typical minimum and has the four spades West will expect. When it comes to West, South's 3♥ means that 3♠ won't be enough; with a maximum and great cards (1+2+1+2 less ½ on LTC) the jump to game is in order. If West only bids 3♠ East will pass.
- These situations are not easy; East could have a less suitable hand, say with a club more and a spade fewer, what then of 4♠ on a 4-3 fit? It may be the best spot. Whatever, doubling almost always yields better results than bidding poor suits.

- | | | |
|----------|--|----------|
| ♠ KQ4 | | ♠ J10832 |
| ♥ AJ8762 | | ♥ Q53 |
| ♦ 9 | | ♦ K64 |
| ♣ Q53 | | ♣ K6 |

- | | | | | |
|--|---------|------|----|-----|
| | 1♥ | (3♣) | 3♥ | (P) |
| | Pass/4♥ | | | |

- Responder takes a push to the 3-level and, despite the sixth heart, it's no better than 50-50 for opener to bid game (poor hearts, bad club holding). Take away responder's third heart (make ♥3 the ♦3), one couldn't argue with pass (though risk/reward will change at different vulnerabilities).

Second Hand Overcalls (8)

4♦ should be alerted.

After the opening bid, if any of the next three calls is an artificial suit bid it should be alerted regardless of level (you will be the only person at the table who knows this).

▶	♠ AQ976		♠ KJ54
	♥ Q4		♥ AJ83
	♦ 94		♦ 64
	♣ AJ53		♣ KQ9
▶	1♠	(3♦)	4♦* (P)
	4♠		

▶ 4♦ simply says "I am bidding 4♠ to make, if they bid again, we double them or bid on".

▶ As here, the cue-bid doesn't promise a control (ace, king, singleton or void) but it may help the partnership look for a slam. By contrast had East simply raised directly to 4♠, with a so-so hand (as here) opener wouldn't necessarily double 5♦.

▶ Does the cue-bid promise four trumps? Probably not. As ever, East shouldn't search for another fit when she knows of one already. Showing strength via the cue-bid will usually be more important than trump-length. The alternative (with say 3=4=2=4) would be double; it could get murky if South raises diamonds.

▶	♠ ---		♠ 6
	♥ AK1092		♥ 754
	♦ KQ96		♦ A7
	♣ 9532		♣ KQJ10876

▶	1♥	(2♠)	3♥	(4♠)
	P	(P)	5♣	

▶ This deal arose in a club game. 3♥ might strike some as taking the major-fit principle a bit far and 3♣ is hardly a blunder. However, it's easy to imagine opener with long hearts and short clubs and 3♣ leading to mishap (for example West doubling 4♠ or bidding 3NT when South passes).

▶ Responder shouldn't give up. 3♥ limits the East hand so 5♣ shows lots of clubs with heart tolerance. Responder has great playing strength but poor defensive potential – this problem is passing that message. Here West has an amazing hand for clubs and only the fear that 6♣ might undo partner's good work prevents him from raising to slam.

Fourth Hand Overcalls

- ▶ After fourth-hand's **one-level overcall** opener makes her normal rebid if she can; that means raising partner, rebidding length or bidding no-trump with a stopper in the opponents suit.
- ▶ With a balanced hand but without a stopper, opener **doubles**. That shows at least strong no-trump values (15+) with no stopper (or perhaps the ace which is an ineffective guard). [These considerations are different for strong no-trumpers.]
- ▶ When fourth-hand bids at the **two-level** (or, commonly, raises second-hand's suit) opener can be exposed with a strong no-trump. Bidding 2NT shows values commensurate with that level (17-18 HCP) and again, double is best reserved for a "2NT bid without a stop", with the same 17+ values.
- ▶ What do you do if you have 'only' a balanced 15-16 HCP? Well you had better pass and hope the cavalry, in the form of partner's takeout double, keeps your side alive. Remember, when opponents have a fit, double is never penalties, even though here you'll have a good hand – just that you won't have a trump-stack. If you've got one of those, keep quiet. If partner has values and shortness she'll double and you can pass and collect a score.

Fourth Hand Overcalls (2)

▶ ♠ 975	♠ Q87
♥ K4	♥ 107532
♦ AK93	♦ Q64
♣ AQ53	♣ K8

▶	1♣	(P)	1♥	(1♠)
	X	(P)	1NT	

- ▶ Opener planned to rebid 1NT but the overcall introduces a danger suit. Without a spade stop opener cannot bid no-trumps and doubles to say she "has a 1NT rebid without a spade stop".
- ▶ Responder does have a stop of sorts and converts to 1NT, knowing of at least 15 HCP opposite. With more high cards herself, she would bid higher. 2NT would show enough to raise a 15-16 HCP 1NT to 2NT, about 9-10 HCP.

Fourth Hand Overcalls (3)

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| ♠ AJ | ♠ K98654 |
| ♥ 106 | ♥ 3 |
| ♦ AK108 | ♦ Q97 |
| ♣ AQ1086 | ♣ 952 |

- | | | | |
|----|------|----|------|
| | (P) | P | (P) |
| 1♣ | (P) | 1♠ | (2♥) |
| X | (3♥) | 4♠ | |

- No doubt opener would rebid 2♦ over her partner's 1♠ (perhaps 2NT over a 1♥ response) but once opponents introduce hearts, double showing enough for 2NT (balanced 17-18 HCP) without a heart stop describes the hand nicely. By contrast, a 3♦ rebid would imply a much more distributional hand, say 6♣/5♦.
- With hearts bid and supported it looks as if responder's cards are working nicely and 4♠ is a good shot. The combined 23 HCP or so in three suits figure to take ten tricks.

“Five-Card Majors, Weak NT”

- ▶ Moving to 5CM/Weak NT is straightforward.
- ▶ Opening bids almost look after themselves: easiest scheme for balanced hands is ‘longer minor’.
- ▶ There are no changes to alerting or announcing – though polite to say “5-Card Majors, Weak NT” at the start-of-round.
- ▶ But responding changes significantly:
 - Absolutely essential that responder bids a 4-card major, even with a longer minor.
 - Similarly in competition; responder frequently doubles to show 4-unbid-major.
 - Raise partner’s major with 3+ cards but don’t jump without 4-card support or better.

Planned Engineering Work

- ▶ You don't have to do any of these but once you've got used to 5CM the benefits will accrue
- 1. **1NT rebid is 15-17:** These auctions are more frequent as the awkward with 1-major – 1NT. That means jumping to 2NT can be 18-19 HCP and you have more space and definition for slam investigation. It also frees 1-minor – 1-major; 3NT for something other than a balanced 19-count. You can responder lighter too.
- 2. **Check-back after 1NT rebid:** This is a bit like Stayman after a 1NT opening. Responder uses it to check on major fits and make invitations. It's independent of the above but not wholly unrelated; if a 1NT rebid could be 17 HCP then you will want to make more game-invitations. There are several options on the market with varying demands on memory and concessions (contracts you can no longer reach, like 2♣ and or 2♦).
- 3. **Bergen Raises:** This is a scheme of raises after 1-major, using responder's 3♣ and 3♦ as well as 2NT to show 4-card support with different ranges. These allow you to pre-empt opponents with an immediate 3-level raise. Some variants cater for 3-card raises, avoiding having to bid another suit before supporting partner.

Credits

- ▶ *Building a Bidding System* by Roy Hughes, shortlisted for bridge book of the year 2005, is not a direction toward any pet method but a dissection of what bidding systems entail. Hughes has written a companion volume *The Contested Auction at Bridge*, book of the year in 2012.
- ▶ Legendary bridge coach Eric O Kokish – possibly the individual who has thought more about bidding than anyone in history – is a rare devotee of the weak no-trump. EOK's 383-page 2008 system (with life partner Beverly Kraft) is freely available on the Internet.
- ▶ If 300-odd pages are too much for you, download an old-fashioned system card from the club website – while stocks last.