

The Exciting World of Bridge – Lesson 4

For those of you that are returning from our first set of lessons, we left off with covering all possible responses to opening bids of one of a suit. This week we are going to look into Opener's rebids but before we do, I want to talk about "bidding messages".

Every bid that's made, whether it's an opening bid, a response or any rebid will convey information about your hand. Based upon what the bid "says", it will also contain one very specific message. There are three types of bidding messages; forcing, invitational and sign-off. When you make a forcing bid your partner is not allowed to pass. As much as they might wish to pass, they can't. There may be a variety of reasons why this is the case which we will explore in more depth later. The opposite case is a sign-off bid. When we make a sign-off bid we are telling our partner that we've decided where we are going to play and they **MUST** pass. An example of this would be an auction that goes 1NT-3NT. The 3NT bid is a sign-off bid. We're not asking any questions of partner, we're telling them to pass.

For Opener, the only opening bid that they can make that is forcing is a 2♣ opening bid. When we open one of a suit or 1NT, our partner is allowed to pass. Therefore, these opening bids would be considered "invitational". Partner is encouraged to bid but isn't forced to. As Responder, any bid we make that doesn't limit our hand needs to be forcing. So as an example, if we respond in a new suit after partner opens one of a suit, this has no upper point limit. Due to this, the response must be forcing. Other responses will limit our hand such as responding in some level of no trump or raising Opener's suit. When we make a bid like this that does have an upper limit, it is always considered invitational. Going forward, the main thing you should always know when you're making a bid is if it's forcing, invitational or sign-off. We'll practice this as we go along.

Point Ranges

We talked last time about Responder's point ranges; minimum, medium and maximum. This week we will also create the same ranges for Opener. With their rebid, Opener will narrow down which of the point ranges they have such that we will be very close to being able to decide "how high" we want to play. By the time Responder has made their rebid (next week's topic), we'll either have placed the contract or be prepared to do so.

Once we've opened one of a suit, we know that we have shown anywhere from 13 to 21 points. We divide this nine point range into one of three categories:

- 13-15, minimum
- 16-18, medium
- 19-21, maximum

As a quick review, for Responder, we made their ranges 6-9 (minimum), 10-12 (medium), 13+ (maximum). Once we put these two ranges together, we can usually know whether we want to play in game or stop in a part-score.

Opener's Point Count	Responder's Point Count		
	6-9 (min.)	10-12 (med.)	13+ (max.)
13-15 (min.)	Part-score	Invite Game	Get to game
16-18 (med.)	6-7 part-score 8-9 Get to game	Get to game	Game or Invite Slam
19-21 (max.)	Get to game	Invite Slam	Get to Slam

We will now explore Opener's choices for rebids using these point count ranges to guide us. Depending on what Responder's initial response was, Opener may already be prepared to make a sign-off bid and place the final contract. If not then we will continue to describe our hand. The primary thing to keep in mind is that we're looking for a "golden fit" in a major suit. As we go through these options, it will continue to become clearer how we're always focused on achieving this goal.

The thing that becomes harder as we go deeper into the auction is that the possibilities start to branch out to the point that it is difficult to explain every possible one as we were able to do in no trump auctions and in openings and responses. The following options may be more vague than in the past, just remember that we're looking for a fit in a major suit and we're trying to describe our point count as clearly as we're able to.

Opener's Rebid with a Minimum Opener

Assuming partner didn't raise your opening suit:

Option #1 – raise partner's major suit with 4 card support. Once we've found a fit in a major suit there's no reason to muck about looking for another fit. We have a major suit fit – we're going to play there. Now all we need to do is decide how high we're going. To show partner that we have a fit AND a minimum opening hand, we raise their major to the cheapest level. Why am I not just saying "raise their major to the 2 level"? We are using this rule to cover all possibilities. Maybe we opened 1♠ and our partner was able to respond 2♥. If that was the case, with a minimum opening bid our rebid would be 3♥. Remember as we talked about last time, if we know we have a major suit fit we should re-evaluate our hand with Dummy points. Our minimum opener might not be minimum anymore!

Option #2 – bid a new four card suit at the one level. Our quest for a major suit never ends (until we know that there definitely isn't one)! If we opened and our partner responded with a new suit on the one level, if Option #1 didn't apply then we still need to show that we have a four card suit that we weren't able to open with. An example hand for this would be

♠AJxx ♥Qx ♦Kxx ♣Axxx. We would open this hand 1♣. If partner responds with 1♦ or 1♥ we would rebid 1♠. Partner hasn't denied having 4 spades so we still need to show them that we have 4 of them.

Option #3 – bid 1NT with a balanced hand. Bidding 1NT at this point shows that you just weren't quite good enough to open 1NT.

Option #4 – bid a 2nd suit at the two level that is LOWER RANKING than your first suit. An example of this would be a hand like ♠Kx ♥xx ♦AQxxx ♣QJxx. You have 13 points and would open 1♦. When your partner responds 1♥ or 1♠ you would rebid 2♣. You cannot rebid a suit higher ranking than your first suit with a minimum hand as that promises more strength. As an example, if you switch the heart suit and club suit from the previous hand and your partner responded 1♠, you would not be able to rebid 2♥. Here you would be forced to rebid 1NT even though your hand isn't really balanced.

Option #5 – Rebid a 6+ card suit at the cheapest level.

Option #6 – Pass a 1NT or 3NT response. If your partner made a 2NT response (medium response) you would need to decide whether to pass (with 13, maybe 14) or bid 3NT (with 15, maybe 14).

If partner did raise your opening suit:

Option #1 – if they've shown a minimum hand or a maximum hand, we will pass.

Option #2 – if they've shown a medium hand (raising to the 3 level), we will need to decide what to do. If we have 13 (or maybe 14) we should pass. If we have 15 (maybe 14) we will raise to game (either to 4 of a major or to 3NT if it's a minor suit we are bidding).

Opener's Rebid with a Medium Opener

Assuming partner didn't raise your opening suit:

Option #1 – Jump raise partner's major suit with 4 card support. What this means is don't just raise it to the cheapest level, raise it an extra level to show that you have more than a minimum hand. Again, don't forget to recalculate with Dummy points.

Option #2 – bid a new four card suit at the one level. This is the same as we were able to do with a minimum opener. It's important to remember – this bid shows a minimum or a medium opener but not a maximum. Since you have now limited your hand, this bid is invitational.

Option #3 – bid 2NT with a balanced hand and 18 points. Why not with 16 or 17? Because in that situation you would have opened 1NT. This is a very important concept to remember – when you open one of a suit and your partner responds with 1 anything (ie one of a suit or 1NT), rebidding 2NT shows 18 or 19 points and a balanced hand. NEVER FORGET THIS!

Option #4 – bid a 2nd suit at the two level. This no longer has to be lower ranking than your first suit. An example of this would be a hand like ♠Kx ♥QJxx ♦AQxxx ♣Ax. You have 17

points and would open 1♦. Now if your partner responds 1♠ or even 1NT you can rebid 2♥. The chances are low that your partner has four hearts but you want to convey the message that you have a very good hand. This bid is **FORCING!!**

Option #5 – Jump rebid a 6+ card suit.

Option #6 – Pass a 3NT response. Raise 1NT to 2NT. Raise a 2NT response (medium response) to 3NT.

If partner did raise your opening suit:

Option #1 – if they've shown a minimum hand we will raise one level to invite game.

Option #2 – if they've shown a medium hand (raising to the 3 level), we will bid game (either 4 of a major or 3NT).

Option #3 – if they show a maximum hand, for now it's best to pass.

Opener's Rebid with a Maximum Opener

Assuming partner didn't raise your opening suit:

Option #1 – Raise partner's major suit to game with 4 card support. Don't forget to recalculate with Dummy points.

Option #2 – Jump bid a new four card suit. This **PROMISES** a maximum hand and is therefore not only forcing for now, it's forcing to game.

Option #3 – bid 2NT with a balanced hand and 19 points. Why not with 20 or 21? Because in that situation you would have opened 2NT. This is a very important concept to remember – when you open one of a suit and your partner responds with 1 anything (ie one of a suit or 1NT), rebidding 2NT shows 18 or 19 points and a balanced hand. **NEVER FORGET THIS!** (if this last paragraph sounds repetitive, it was done on purpose ☺).

Option #4 – bid a new suit at the three level. Again, doing this promises a maximum opener and it's game forcing. Here's an example: ♠Ax ♥AKxxx ♦KQJx ♣Kx. Here we have 21 points and would open 1♥. If partner responds 1♠, 1NT or even 2♣ we would rebid 3♦ to show our maximum hand.

Option #5 – Rebid a **VERY** good 6+ card major suit at the four level.

Option #6 – Raise 1NT or 2NT to 3NT. Raise a 3NT response 6NT if you're feeling lucky.

If partner did raise your opening suit:

Option #1 – if they've shown a minimum hand we will raise to game.

Option #2 – if they've shown a medium hand (raising to the 3 level), we will bid game (either 4 of a major or 3NT).

Option #3 – if they show a maximum hand, pick some sort of slam and bid it.

More on Finessing

Last time we looked at a few basic finesses. As a reminder, a finesse is when you have a chance to promote a smaller card IF the larger card is in the “correct” place. This week we’re going to look at a couple more examples:

North: ♠Qxxx
West: ♠Kxx East: ♠xx
South: ♠Axxx

This is a different type of a finesse for a king than we looked at last week. Here our best bet to win the most tricks available is to lead a small spade towards the queen hoping that it’s West that has the king. If East has the king it will capture our queen but as long as West has it, our queen will win the trick. In fact, in the above example we can win 3 spade tricks.

Repeating a Finesse:

North: ♠KQx
West: ♠Axx East: ♠xxxx
South: ♠xxx

As you’ll recall from last time, we would want to lead a small spade towards our king on this hand. The important thing to remember is that in order to take our two tricks in this suit we will need to do it a second time. So it’s a small spade from South, assuming West plays low we play the king and it wins. We need to play another suit to get the lead back in South. Now we play another small spade and if West plays low again we can win our queen. If West decides to play their ace on either of these two tricks we will always be able to win our two spade tricks. If East has the ace – then we’re only going to get one spade trick.