

# The Exciting World of Bridge – Lesson 3

Last week we finished up our “Opening Bid Checklist” and went through responses and follow ups to 1NT opening bids. This week we are going to look at responding to opening bids of one of a suit but first we going to take a detour into some “tricks” to take more tricks.

## The Finesse

There is a bumper sticker that says “Bridge player do it with finesse”. After tonight’s lesson, you will be allowed to officially call yourself a Bridge player.

A finesse is when you have a chance to promote a smaller card IF the larger card is in the “correct” place. Let’s look at the simplest example:

North: ♠AQ  
West: ♠Kxxxx                      East: ♠xxxx  
South: ♠32

If we simply play our ace it will win the trick but one of our opponents will surely capture our queen with their king. If instead we lead one of our small spades towards the AQ, as long as the “right” person has the king we will be able to win two tricks. In the above example, since West has the king, we can win both tricks. If the West and East hands were reversed, we would not be able to win both tricks. At least by leading towards to AQ we have a 50% chance of winning the two tricks. If we instead simply played the ace our only hope would be if the king were singleton. That’s about a 0.2% chance!

We are also able to take a finesse when missing an ace. Here’s an example:

North: ♠Kxxx  
West: ♠Axx                      East: ♠xxxx  
South: ♠xx

Like before, if we simply lead our king, whoever has the ace will win that trick leaving us with no spade winners. However, if we lead a small spade from South, as long as West has the ace, we will be able to win a spade trick. If they play the ace, we play a small one. If they play a small one, we play our king and it will win the trick. Again, if we reverse the West and East hands we are not going the win a spade trick but a 50% chance is better than 0%.

There are many more finessing positions that we will talk about soon. For now, these ones should be fairly simple to remember.

## Responses to 1 of a Suit Openings

As we've talked about, our goal in our auction is to decide where to play (a major suit, no trump or a minor suit) and how high to play (part-score, game, slam!). We've also touched on the subject of our primary objective is to try to find a "Golden Fit" in a major suit. Major suits pay more so we want to play in one IF we have an 8 card or longer "Golden Fit". If we can't play in a major suit then we'll usually want to play in no trump PARTICULARLY if we're going to bid a "game". Trying to make a game in a minor suit needs two more tricks than in no trump. With all of this in mind, our responses to an opening of one of a minor are quite different than our responses to an opening of one of a major so we're going to handle them separately.

### Responses to 1♦ or 1♣ Opening

The first item on our responding checklist is simple; if we have 0 to 5 points, we're going to pass. There may be hands where doing this looks ugly but we don't want to lie to our partner about the strength of our hand. If we respond, we're telling our partner we have at least 6 points and their rebid will quite often get us too high up the bidding ladder.

If we have 6 or more points, we know that we are going to respond. Here are our options (again, we do them in order as the higher priority ones are at the top of the list):

- 1) Bid our longest suit at the one level if it is 4+ cards long.
- 2) With a 4/4 tie, bid the lower ranking suit. With a 5/5 or 6/6 tie, start with the higher ranking suit.
- 3) If we have a balanced hand, bid no trump. With 6-9 points, bid 1NT. With 10-12, bid 2NT and with 13+ bid 3NT.
- 4) Over a 1♦ opening we can bid 2♣ with 10+ points and a 5+ card suit.
- 5) Lastly, same as #3 but without the "balanced hand" caveat".

Our primary focus is to search for a "Golden Fit" in a major suit. This is why bidding a new suit at the one level is our first option. This keeps the search alive and gives us our best chance of finding a fit. It's very important to then remember, if your partner opens 1♦ or 1♣ and you don't bid a new suit at the one level, **YOU ARE DENYING HAVING A FOUR CARD MAJOR SUIT!**

One thing you may be wondering is why you need to have 10+ points to respond 2♣ to a 1♦ opening. As responder you're going to classify your hand strength into one of three categories. When you combine this with the three categories that Opener will classify their hand as (more on this next lesson), it will be very easy to determine if you have enough to bid game or if you want to stop in part-score. Here are the three categories that we'll put our hand into:

Minimum Response – 6 to 9 points  
Medium Response – 10 to 12 points  
Maximum Response – 13+ points

If you go back and look at the list above, all bids either specifically fit into one of the categories OR they promise one of these categories or better.

- 1) New suit at the one level – Minimum or BETTER
- 2) 1NT – Minimum, 2NT – Medium, 3NT – Maximum
- 3) 2♣ - Medium or BETTER

When Responder makes ANY of the above bids that don't have an upper limit, Opener is not allowed to Pass. They are FORCING bids because Responder has not given Opener enough information yet for them to determine "how high" we will play. Here's a simple "guideline" to remember: "A new suit by Responder is forcing".

### **Responses to 1♠ or 1♥ Opening**

When our partner opens one of a major, our priorities change. Since our primary goal is to find a "Golden Fit" the very first question that we have to ask ourselves is "Do I have a fit for partner?". Since our partner's opening of 1♠ or 1♥ promises at least five cards in that suit, if we have 3 or more cards in that suit, we KNOW that we have at least an 8 card Golden Fit. Once this fit is known, we're going to "re-evaluate" our hand for the very first time. We're going to get to add "Dummy Points". Here's how it's done:

- 1) Take away your "Length Points" so you're now back to just HCP's.
- 2) Add Dummy Points. 5 points for a void, 3 for a singleton and 1 point for a doubleton.

That's it! You now have a new number of points that you're evaluating your hand to be worth. If you don't have a fit with your partner, we stick with our first number that we came up with.

### **Responding with a Fit**

With our re-evaluated points, the response structure is quite simple:

- 1) 0-5 points: Pass
- 2) 6-9 points (minimum): Raise to the 2 level
- 3) 10-12 points (medium): Raise to the 3 level
- 4) 13+ points (maximum): Raise to the 4 level.

Any of these bids gives our partner a great deal of information. Next lesson we'll see how the will now be able to either place the contract immediately OR pass the "captaincy" back to you to make the final decision.

### **Responding without a Fit**

Responding without a fit is quite similar to responding to a minor suit opening but there are a few differences. Here's our list of options:

- 1) 0-5 points: Pass
- 2) With 6+ points (minimum or better), we bid 1♠ over 1♥ if we have a 4 card or longer spade suit.
- 3) With 10+ points (medium or better), we can bid a new suit at the two level. We will bid our longest suit. If it's a minor, it only promises 4 or more cards in the suit

but if we bid 2♥ over 1♠, it PROMISES a 5 card or longer heart suit. Similarly to our responses “up the line”, we would be our “cheapest” four card suit if we don’t have a 5 card or longer suit. If we have a 5/5 or 6/6 tie, we start with the higher suit.

4) With 6-9 points, bid 1NT.

These are our only four options to look through when we don’t have a fit for our partner’s major suit opening. One question you might be wondering is why we don’t have the option to respond 2NT or 3NT like we did over a minor suit opening. The reason is that we’re going to “reserve” them for future expansion of our bidding techniques. They will have special meanings that we can skip over for now. Fortunately, our options above cover all of the possibilities that we will need to deal with.