

ACOL OPENING THREE BIDS

An opening bid at the three level is called a PRE-EMPTIVE BID (you are anticipating that the opposition will be bidding, so get your bid in first at a level which makes it more difficult for the opposition).

This is an aspect of the game which has developed significantly since the early days of Acol. It is somewhat like a weapon – only in the right hands can it be handled effectively. So for this exercise we shall assume that you have a pea-shooter – you will only learn the traditional safe basics of pre-empting.

A **pre-emptive** bid is made by opening **three** (sometimes four) of a suit. The theory is that if you have a weakish hand, then there is a good chance of the opponents having the values for game. By opening at the three level, you deny them the bidding space to describe their hands accurately, but at the same time there is a degree of security – with a seven card suit you won't go off too many tricks. The art of pre-empting is to judge that the possibly penalty (if doubled) doesn't exceed the score that the opponents would otherwise get for making game.

For example if you pre-empt and only make seven tricks (i.e. two off) non-vulnerable, and if you are doubled, the opposition will score 300. If they are also not vulnerable and can make game they would score 420 in four of a major, so you would gain on the hand. However if you went three off they will score 500, so you would lose out against their otherwise 420.

There are numerous factors which define a good pre-empt, but the most important is suit quality. I would advocate that initially you keep to tradition and only pre-empt with **a seven or eight card suit with two of the top three honours and point range 6-9 points**. There are more rules but these will be learnt later.

Typical pre-emptive hands would usually yield about five or six tricks.

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|----|-----------|----|------------|
| a) | ♠ 65 | b) | ♠ 98 |
| | ♥ KQJ9876 | | ♥ 7 |
| | ♦ J73 | | ♦ QJ106542 |
| | ♣ 7 | | ♣ AJ7 |

- a) – open 3♥
b) – open 3♦

Responses To Pre-Empts

Normally you would pass partner's pre-emptive bid, unless you have support for partner's suit or a very good hand (16+ points).

You support in two ways – constructively or by further pre-empting.

To support constructively – i.e. with the intention of making game yourself you would normally require about 16+ points. You would normally support partner's suit at the game level (i.e. 3♥ - 4♥, or 3♣ - 5♣), or possibly bid 3NT will the other suits covered.

To support further pre-emptively, you need at least a good three card support for partner and about 8 or 9 points (You shouldn't have too many points otherwise the opponents wouldn't have game on. You and your partner's combined point count should be no more than about 16 points).

In the following examples partner has opened 3♥ and the opponent on your right has passed.

c)	♠ A94 ♥ 5 ♦ AK1076 ♣ AJ53	d)	♠ 103 ♥ AJ2 ♦ 983 ♣ K8752	e)	♠ K104 ♥ 76 ♦ A43 ♣ AQJ64	f)	♠ KQ93 ♥ 4 ♦ AK4 ♣ K10963
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- c) 4♥ - don't worry about your own hearts – partner has plenty. You have the necessary points for a probable game. Your 4 tricks plus partner's probable 6 tricks, should make game.
- d) 4♥ - continuing the pre-empt. In all probability your left hand opponent has a good hand with spades (somebody at the table must have this sort of hand and there is only one person left). Put him on a guess as to whether he should bid 4♠. 4♥ will fail by probably only two or three tricks, making it a good sacrifice.
- e) **PASS**
- f) **PASS** – don't be tempted to bid 3NT – not enough points. If the opponents do bid, you would then double and score a substantial penalty.

Defence To Pre-Empts

The normal defence is:

Overcall if you have a good five card or longer suit, and about 15-18 points. With 18 or more points and a good six card suit, make a jump overcall.

Make a take-out double (as you would against a one-level opening bid) with 14 or more points with a shortage in the opponent's suit and tolerance for at least two of the other suits.

With a balanced 16+ hand, including a stop in the opponent's suit, bid 3NT (this is a slight gamble, but you have to bid it).

You right hand opponent opens 3♥. What do you bid with:

g)	♠ AKJ8 ♥ 98 ♦ AQ76 ♣ Q98	h)	♠ KQ73 ♥ 64 ♦ KJ98 ♣ A74	i)	♠ KQJ64 ♥ 32 ♦ AQ76 ♣ Q6	j)	♠ AK7 ♥ AJ1032 ♦ 95 ♣ 843	k)	♠ KQ5 ♥ A83 ♦ AJ943 ♣ K7
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l)	♠ AQ10763 ♥ 8 ♦ AK8 ♣ AJ2
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- g) Double
- h) **PASS** – you would have doubled 1♥, but not enough points for a double of 3♥
- i) 3♠
- j) **PASS** – you cannot double for penalty – a double would be for take-out.
- k) 3NT – hoping that on balance partner will produce about 7 or 8 points.
- l) 4♠

Four-Level Pre-Empts

Without any further detailed discussion, these tend to be made on an 8+ card suit and 10-14 points.