

Opening bids of 1 of a suit

Common hand shapes:

4,3,3,3

4,4,3,2

5,3,3,2

Other hands with a five card suit or longer (e.g. 5,4,3,1 or 6,3,2,2)

Hands with two five card suits or longer (e.g. 5,5,2,1 or 6,5,2,0)

4,4,4,1

The likelihood of you being dealt these is as follows:

4,3,3,3

10.5%

The fifth most common hand shape

4,4,3,2

21.6%

The most common hand shape

5,3,3,2

15.5%

The second most common hand shape

Other hands with a five card suit or longer

43.8%

Including 5,4,3,1 the third most common hand shape

and 5,4,2,2 the fourth most common hand shape

Hands with two five card suits or longer

5.6%

About once every 18 hands

4,4,4,1

3%

Not all that common, but often the hardest hand to bid and play. Often hands of this type turn out to be rather disappointing.

Some people do play "5 card majors" meaning that if they open 1 of a major suit it guarantees 5 cards. Some of the following will not apply to them (but much will).

Do not feel you have to adopt what I am about to show you

Bidding the 4,3,3,3 hand

This is the classic 'flat' hand

<12 points	Pass
12-14 points	1NT
15-16 points	Bid one of the four card suit (and rebid NT at the lowest level)
17-18 points	Bid one of the four card suit (and rebid with a jump in NT)
19-20 points	2NT
21-22 points	2♣ and rebid 2NT
23-24 points	2♦ and rebid 2NT
25-26 points	2♦ and rebid 3NT

♠ K Q T

♥ Q 9 5

♦ A J 4 3

♣ K J 9

Open 1♦ with the intention of rebidding in NT at the lowest level

♠ A Q 3 2

♥ K 7 4

♦ Q 9 8

♣ A K 4

Open 1♠ with the intention of jump rebidding in NT

♠ 7 4 3

♥ A K Q J

♦ J 3 2

♣ J 4 2

If you open this hand you must open it 1NT rather than 1♥ (although to be honest it is such a poor hand it is probably better to pass)

♠ 6 4 3 2

♥ A Q T

♦ A Q T

♣ K T 9

Open 1♠ with the intention of rebidding in NT at the lowest level is the textbook bid, but with such a poor spade suit it may be better to open this 1♣ and then rebid in NT (or support partner if he bids spades)

Bidding the 4,4,3,2 hand

This is the most common hand shape.

Treat it as a balanced hand.

<12 points	Pass
12-14 points	1NT
15-16 points	Bid one of the four card suits (and rebid NT at the lowest level)
17-18 points	Bid one of the four card suits (and rebid with a jump in NT)
19-20 points	2NT
21-22 points	2♣ and rebid 2NT
23-24 points	2♦ and rebid 2NT
25-26 points	2♦ and rebid 3NT

If you are in the point range 15-18, which one of the two four card suits do you open?

This is a matter of partnership style and understanding, but I would suggest you bid the **LOWER** of the two four card suits first.

♠ K Q T
♥ Q 9 5 4
♦ A J 4 3
♣ K J

Open 1♦ with the intention of rebidding in NT at the lowest level (or supporting partner if he bids hearts)

♠ A Q
♥ K 7 3
♦ Q 9 8 2
♣ A K 4 2

Open 1♣ with the intention of jump rebidding in NT (even if partner bids diamonds it is probably best to hide your support and look for the NT game)

♠ A Q 3 2
♥ K 7
♦ Q 9 8 2
♣ A K 4

Open 1♦ with the intention of bidding 1♠ over 1♥ (or supporting spades if partner bids them) or 3NT if partner bids 2♣

♠ A Q
♥ K 7 3 2
♦ Q 9 8
♣ A K 4 2

Open 1♣ with the intention of bidding 1♥ over 1♦, jump rebidding in NT if partner bids 1♠, bidding 3♥ if partner says 1♥, and raising 1NT to 3NT

♠ J 5
♥ A K Q J
♦ J 3 2
♣ 7 5 3 2

If you open this hand you must open it 1NT rather than 1♥

♠ Q 9

♥ A Q T

♦ A K Q J

♣ 6 5 3 2

Open 1♠ with the intention of rebidding in NT at the lowest level

Bidding the 5,3,3,2 hand

This is the second most common hand shape.

If the five card suit is a **MINOR**, then treat it as a balanced hand.

<12 points	Pass
12-14 points	1NT
15-16 points	Bid one of the five card minor (and rebid NT at the lowest level)
17-18 points	Bid one of the five card minor (and rebid with a jump in NT)
19-20 points	2NT
21-22 points	2♣ and rebid 2NT
23-24 points	2♦ and rebid 2NT
25-26 points	2♥ and rebid 3NT

♠ K Q T

♥ Q 9

♦ A J 4 3 2

♣ K J 7

Open 1♦ with the intention of rebidding in NT at the lowest level

♠ Q 5

♥ Q T 4

♦ A T 8

♣ A T 7 5 3

Open 1NT

(This was the West hand on board 12 last Wednesday and everyone I saw opened it 1♣ but 1NT is the obvious opening bid. It has much more chance of putting the opposition off from bidding)

From an opening bid point of view the other types of hand we can look at are treated as **unbalanced** hands

i.e

5,3,3,2 when the five card suit is a **MAJOR**

Other hands with a five card suit or longer (e.g. 5,4,3,1 or 6,3,2,2)

Hands with two five card suits or longer (e.g. 5,5,2,1 or 6,5,2,0)

4,4,4,1 hands

How do we decide if we are strong enough to open?

A simple guide as to whether a hand is worth opening is the Rule of 20

If the number of cards in the two longest suits added to the high card points = 20 or more, the hand may well be worth an opening bid. However, judgement is still needed.

♠ K Q T 9 8

♥ A J T 8 7

♦ 9 4

♣ 7

With high cards in the long suits and good intermediates, this hand is worth an opening bid. Open 1♠, planning to rebid in hearts

♠ A T 4 3 2

♥ J 7 6 4 3

♦ Q 8

♣ K

This hand is not worth an opening bid. The major suits are both poor quality, and the queen and king in the minors are of uncertain value. Pass.

Bidding 5,3,3,2 when the five card suit is a **MAJOR** and

Other hands with a five card suit or longer (e.g. 5,4,3,1 or 6,3,2,2)

Hands with a long major suit:

Where the major suit is the only 5-card or longer suit then there is no real problem. Unless the hand has the strength to open with an Acol 2-bid, the opening bid is 1 of the major.

When there is a second suit, then the opening bid is in the longer suit. Depending on the strength of the hand, it may be convenient for the second suit to be shown subsequently in the bidding.

Hands with a long minor suit:

Similar considerations apply when the long suit is a minor. The main difference is that, since game in a minor suit requires 11 tricks, there is more incentive, with suitable combined strength, to explore for an alternative game contract of 3 no trumps.

This explains why, when the hand is relatively balanced, it may be treated as a No Trump type and bid accordingly.

♠ K Q 9 8

♥ A 7

♦ K 9 6 4 3

♣ J 4

Open 1♦, the longer suit. You will rebid 1♠ over a response of 1♥, but over 1NT or 2♣ a rebid of 2♦ is correct. You would not rebid 2♠ as this would take the bidding past 2 of your long suit, and so show a stronger hand.

Bidding Hands with two five card suits or longer (e.g. 5,5,2,1 or 6,5,2,0)

The general rule is as follows:

- Where the suits are not of equal length, open the longer suit
- With two suits of equal length, open the higher-ranking

♠ K Q T 9 8

♥ 3

♦ A J 7 5 4

♣ K 7

Open 1♠. You hope to get an opportunity to show your diamond suit later in the auction, but the first priority is to look for a major suit fit

♠ A Q 8 4 3

♥ A 4

♦ 9

♣ K J T 7 2

The correct opening bid is still 1♠. You may not have the chance to show your club suit.

With 5-5 in the black suits, there will be times when starting with 1♠ would turn out better in an uncontested auction. However, if the opponents get into the bidding you risk losing a spade fit. On balance, 1♠ is the best opening bid.

Bidding three suited hands i.e. 5,4,4,0 or 4,4,4,1 hands

With one 5-card suit and two 4-card suits, it will almost always be right to open in the long suit.

♠ K Q 9 8

♥ void

♦ K J T 6 4

♣ A J 6 5

Here it is best to open 1♦

With three 4-card suits and a singleton, there are two good rules to be remembered when deciding which suit to open:

- With three suits "in a row" open the middle suit
(this hand will have a black suit singleton)
- With a "gap", open the suit below the gap
(this hand will have a red suit singleton)

♠ A Q 9 8

♥ 7

♦ K Q 9 6

♣ Q 9 7 4

Open "the suit below the gap". Here, the "gap" is in hearts, so open the suit below this. Open 1♦, then bid 1♠ over a 1♥ response, 2♣ over 1NT. Raise a response in spades or clubs.

♠ 8

♥ A K 8 7

♦ T 9 4 3

♣ A Q J 4

With three suits "in a row", it is best to open the middle of the three suits. Bid 1♦. Even if the suit is not very strong, it is usually right to bid it.

Summary

- If the hand is not suitable for an opening bid of 1NT, open 1 of your longest suit (which may be only 4 cards). If your hand is balanced, you will usually show this by rebidding in no trumps
- If the hand contains two suits, open with a bid in the longer suit. This is nearly always correct even if the longer suit is not as strong as the other suit
- With two 5-card suits, open with a bid of 1 of the higher ranking suit. Depending on your strength, you may get the chance to bid the other suit later in the auction
- With two 4-card suits, open with a bid of 1 of the lower ranking suit (do check that this is the same style as your partner)
- With a 3-suited hand containing a 5-card suit, open with 1 of the long suit. Rebid naturally, raising a response in one of your other suits according to strength
- With three 4-card suits, open 1 of the suit "below the gap" or, if the suits are "in a row" open 1 of the middle suit
- As a general rule, any 4-card suit may be bid, even if it is a poor suit. A suit that is bid twice should be at least five cards long.

Always have in mind the way that the bidding might develop when opening a hand. Plan ahead.