

1. **Assessing the strength of your hand and responding with a fit**

The strength of a hand is based on its high cards and its shape.

High card points Aces =4, Kings = 3, Queens = 2, Jacks = 1.

Shape is based on the number of cards you hold in your 2 longest suits.

**The Rule of 20**         If your high card points + the number of cards in your 2 longest suits = 20 or more you are strong enough to open the bidding.

You may of course hold a much stronger hand. We divide unbalanced opening hands as follows:-

            Weak opening hand           14 high card points or less

            Intermediate Hands          15-17 high card points

            Strong Hands                   18-19 high card points.

**All these hands you should open your longest suit at the one level.**

If opener’s partner holds 6 High card points they must respond with a bid. If they also hold 4 cards in partner’s suit they should respond as follows.

6-9 points ( weak) bid to the 2 level

10-12 (intermediate) bid to the 3 level

13 points + (Strong) bid to the 4 level

As responder knows that the partnership has a “Fit” ( at least 8 cards between them they can add points for shape.

A void (No cards in the suit) is worth 5 points

A singleton ( 1 card in the suit) counts 3 points

A doubleton (two cards in the suit counts one pont.

After hearing their partners response the opening bidder can add points for shape and knows the combined strength of the partnership hands and can judge whether they have the 25 points they need to bid game if the trump suit is Hearts or Spades

**Playing the hand**

Once Dummy has been tabled, declarer counts the number of certain winners. If they do not have enough certain winners to make their contract it is more important to develop potential winners than to cash certainties