

BY INVITATION ONLY

When we open one of a suit and partner supports out suit, a further bid in a new suit by us means (most importantly) that we have an above average opening hand and that we are interested in game. With a minimum opener, we would have passed and played in the known fit.

AFTER we AGREE on a MAJOR, A bid in a different (side) suit means one of two things:

Opener is looking for help-cards in that side suit. If partner has useful honors (or shortness) in that suit, opener wants to be in game in the major. Otherwise, opener wants to stop in Three of the agreed-upon major. This is known as a “help-suit game try”.

Opener	Responder
1 spade	2 spades
3 clubs	

2 spades is a simple raise, typically showing three-card support and 6-10 points in support. 3 clubs is a help-suit game try. The partnership can stop in 3 spades if responder has an unsuitable hand.

Opener is looking for slam and has made a “control bid”, meaning that opener has the Ace or a void in the suit bid. In effect, opener is saying, “I have first-round control in the suit I am bidding, and I’m interested in slam.” Opener is also asking responder, “Are you interested in slam? Do you have any control cards in other suits you want to tell me about?”

Opener	Responder
1 Spade	3 Spades
4 Clubs	

3 Spades is a limit raise, usually showing three-four card support and 11-12 points in support. 4 Clubs is a control bid, showing the Ace or a void in clubs and slam interest. The partnership is committed to at least game, so 4 clubs can’t be a game try. Because our agreed suit is a major, we know that’s where we’re going to play the hand. The only question is how high we’re going to go, below game, game, or slam.

AFTER we AGREE on a MINOR

After we agree on a minor, things get trickier. Though game is possible in five of a minor, the partnership should explore 3NT first. The reasons are clear. Nine tricks vs. 11 tricks is easier. and at matchpoints, 3NT produces a higher score if overtricks are in play. A side-suit bid here still shows game interest, but now shows a stopper in that suit, typically a major. This is not a search for an eight-card major-suit fit, because responder has already denied holding a four-card major. It implies no stopper in the other major. With a stopper in both majors, (and sufficient values) we would just bid NT

Opener	Responder
1 Club	3 Clubs
3 Hearts	

3 clubs is a limit raise, typically showing four-or-five card support and 11-12 points in support. 3 hearts shows a heart stopper and (implicitly) asks for a spade stopper. Stoppers in the majors are our greatest concern because the opponents know responder has fewer than 4 cards in both majors (3 clubs denied a four-card major) and the opponents will strain to lead a major..

Opener	Responder
1 Spade	2 Clubs
3 Clubs	3 Diamonds

3 diamonds shows a diamond stopper and (implicitly) asks for a heart stopper. If responder had bid 3 NT over 3 clubs, they would have diamonds and hearts stopped. If responder bids 3 hearts over 3 clubs, they're asking for a diamond stopper.

NEXT WEEK: IDENTIFYING THE DANGER SUITS FOR NT

QUESTION? There have been three passes to you. What's 2 diamonds, 2 hearts, or 2 spades? It should show six-card suits and minimum opening hands (12-16 points is a popular range). It's foolish to preempt with less than opening values in the pass out seat when all you had to do to avoid losing points was to pass out the hand.

The essence of bridge is judgment and taking tricks. Adopt conventions only when they make sense to both of you. Don't add new ones until you have fully mastered the ones you currently play.