

Limit Bids

A limit bid is one which finely describes your hand into a narrow point range as well as often describing the distribution of the hand as well. Limit bids are useful to help the partnership quickly decide whether to stop in a part score or push toward game or even slam. Limit bids helps stop the partnership from overbidding. Overbidding leads to poor scores so you want to avoid this. Basic bidding systems already utilise many limit bids.

Limit bid examples

- 1NT
 - Point range 15-17 HCP
 - Distribution is balanced
- 2NT
 - Point range 20-22 HCP
 - Distribution is balanced
- 1♥- 2♥
 - 6-10 points
 - 3+ hearts
- 1♥- 3♥
 - Actually named "limit raise"
 - 11-12 points
 - 3+ hearts
- 1♣- 1NT
 - 6-10 HCP
 - No 4 card major
- 1♣- 2NT
 - 11-12 HCP
 - No 4 card major
- 1♥- PASS
 - Passing can also be a limit bid
 - 0-5 points

NOT limit bid examples

- 1♥
 - Point range 8-23 HCP (very wide range)
 - 5+ hearts but many distributions
- 1♥- 1♠
 - Point range 6+ HCP (unlimited)
 - 4+ spades but many distributions
- 1♣- 1♥- 1♠
 - Point range 8-19 HCP (very wide range)
 - 4+ spades and club length
- 2♣
 - Very strong hand (but unlimited)
 - Unknown distribution
- 2♣- 2♦
 - Waiting bid (wide range HCP in most systems)
 - Unknown distribution

Bids that are not limited are usually forcing, especially if their strength is unlimited. Limit bids are often non-forcing, especially if they are natural bids.

Once someone makes a limit bid they have usually described their hand narrowly enough that the main decision making is to be made by their partner. Their partner we say is now the “**captain**” and the player who has limited their hand is the “**crew**”. The captain has the most accurate combined information about the two hands. Therefore the captain makes the final call on how high and what suit to play in and the crew follows the captain's orders.

The captain should be able to look at their own hand and combine with their partner's limited range to decide the partnership should stop in a part score, invite to game or bid game/slam.

Often with the choice of playing a partscore at the 2 level vs needing partner to have near perfect cards to make game, the captain should choose the safe part score and take a positive score. The idea of limit bids is to **NOT OVERBID**. Making a game invite at the 3-level you want to be fairly confident you can make 9 tricks even if partner is minimum. If you are inviting to game in a minor you also want to be careful. Playing in 4 of a minor is a poor contract as you are bidding to make exactly 10 tricks, your invite should have stopped at the 3 level.

The same applies in no-trump. 1NT and 3NT are good contracts. 2NT is not a good contract because you are bidding to make exactly 8 tricks and especially in no-trump you cannot be sure how many tricks the defenders can establish before you can establish your tricks. Try to either stop low in 1NT partscore or bid on to 3NT game.

When making slam level decisions you do not want to bid past game unless you are confident above that level (often just needing to check on keycards). You should only be playing a contract at the 5 level in an non-competitive auction (e.g. 5H) if you had enough strength but were missing key cards to make a slam.

Captain uses the combined values to assess. When the contract is no-trump then points should be the same as HCP (with length points added for good long suits). For a suit contract then points are HCP plus shortage points.

Part Score	Less than 26 (25 for advanced players) combined points
Major Game	At least 26 (25 for advanced players) combined points
Minor Game	At least 29 combined points
Slam	At least 33 combined points (and check key cards)
Grand Slam	At least 37 combined points

Dlr: North
Vul: E/W

♠ K 9 3
♥ A J 7 5 3
♦ 2
♣ A Q J 2

♠ A Q 10
♥ 9 8
♦ 9 7 6
♣ 10 7 5 4 3

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
9

♠ J 7 6 2
♥ K 10 2
♦ A K J 8
♣ 8 6

♠ 8 5 4
♥ Q 6 4
♦ Q 10 5 4 3
♣ K 9

15 6 12 7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	1	1	3	1	1
S	1	1	3	1	1
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

1H - 2H - 3H is the correct auction.

2H showed 6-10 and 3+ hearts. This was a limited bid.

Opener is now captain and can see the partnership may still have game in hearts if responder is maximum, but not if they are minimum for their limit bid. They bid 3H which asks responder to continue to game with a maximum. Responder passes with a minimum. Note 3H is still makable contract so the partnership did not get too high.

Dlr: West
Vul: N/S

♠ 3 2
♥ A Q J 8
♦ Q 6
♣ J 9 6 5 4

♠ K Q J
♥ 7 4
♦ 9 8 5 2
♣ A 10 7 3

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
12

♠ A 8 6 4
♥ K 6 5
♦ K J 4
♣ Q 8 2

♠ 10 9 7 5
♥ 10 9 3 2
♦ A 10 7 3
♣ K

10 10 13 7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	-	1	-	-
S	-	-	1	-	-
E	2	2	-	2	2
W	2	2	-	2	2

P - 1C - 1NT is the correct auction.

1NT shows 6-10 HCP and no 4 card major (a limit bid).

East can now make a judgement that the partnership does not have enough points for game even if West has a maximum. Also the partnership does not have an 8 card major fit. Playing in 1NT is good safe spot so east passes.

Dlr: East
Vul: N/S

♠ J 8
♥ A K Q 9 8
♦ J 8 3
♣ A Q J

♠ Q 7 4
♥ 10 7 3
♦ A K 5 4
♣ K 9 5

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
18

♠ K 10 5 2
♥ 6 5 4 2
♦ 7 2
♣ 10 4 3

♠ A 9 6 3
♥ J
♦ Q 10 9 6
♣ 8 7 6 2

18 12 3 7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	4	4	3	2	3
S	4	4	3	2	3
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

P - (1D) - X - 1S - 2H - 2NT - 3NT is a well bid auction.

North decides their hand is too good for a simple 1H overcall and decides to make a "power double" intending to bid hearts over whatever partner bids.

1S was a limit bid showing 0-8 points and preference for spades. Then 2H after double shows 18+ and hearts. It asks responder to keep bidding with upper end of their point range or a fit. South shows values but no heart fit by bidding 2NT. North being captain decides game is worth bidding as there may be 25HCP combined.

Dir: North
Vul: E/W

♠ 10 7 4
♥ K Q 10 3
♦ 9 6 4
♣ Q 6 2

♠ A K J 5
♥ A 6 4
♦ Q J 5
♣ A J 9

NORTH
25
SOUTH

♠ Q 9 8 6
♥ J 9 5 2
♦ A 8
♣ K 7 5

♠ 3 2
♥ 8 7
♦ K 10 7 3 2
♣ 10 8 4 3

7 10 3

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	3	2	4	4	4
W	3	2	4	4	4

P-2NT-3C-3S-4S is a good auction.

2NT is a limit bid showing 20-22 HCP balanced. East is now the captain.

East can see the side is likely just short of slam values, but definitely enough for game. They just need to know what strain to play in. They use 3C stayman to ask about majors. 3S shows a 4 card spade suit. East bids 4S. Note since East is captain, West should under no circumstances make any more bids.

Dir: West
Vul: All

♠ K 6 5 3
♥ 7 6 2
♦ K 7 6
♣ 10 7 3

♠ A 10 7 4
♥ 9 5
♦ J 5 4 2
♣ Q 9 5

NORTH
4
SOUTH

♠ Q 9
♥ K J 4 3
♦ A Q 3
♣ K J 6 2

♠ J 8 2
♥ A Q 10 8
♦ 10 9 8
♣ A 8 4

6 16 11

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	2	2	2	2
W	2	2	1	1	1

P-1NT is the correct auction

1NT was is a limit bid showing 15-17 and a balanced hand. West becomes the captain.

West should see the partnership cannot not quite have enough values for game. Even though it is possible the partnership has a spade fit, there is no easy way to find it without going too high. West passes and east thanks them for leaving them in a comfortable 1NT contract.