

INTERMEDIATE BRIDGE 1

Lesson 1

REFRESHER--OPENING AND RESPONDING

From the Introduction to Bridge series, you've already learned what it takes to start the bidding and how much you'd need to respond when partner has opened. You've also heard about bidding games and how much you need between the two hands to entertain such a notion (25-26 HCP for 3NT/4H/4S and 28-29 for 5C/5D).

Even with having been advised to bid games and slams when you have the assets to do so, people have trouble grasping the importance of doing so, mostly because they're not completely familiar with the mechanics of scoring. That's why we prefaced the first class by emailing all the participants a document on the topic of scoring. The game and slam bonuses are so rewarding that you definitely want to be there if you can find out through the bidding that you have the values.

Before getting into further detail, there are some widely-held notions about bidding that are not entirely true. Let's explore them in a "true or false" format.

Any time you have 15-17 HCP, the bidding should be opened 1NT

Only partially true. You'd also need a balanced hand. In the Audrey Grant and Barbara Seagram lessons, a balanced hand is described as no voids, no singletons and not more than one doubleton. Other lesson series list the various distributions by category. There are three basic types:

- **Balanced** 4333, 4432, 5332
- **Semi-Balanced** These hands have no singletons or voids, but contain two doubletons. There are two such distributions, 5422 and 6322
- **Unbalanced** Any hand containing a singleton or void.

Some players might decide to open 1NT with the semi-balanced hands as well, but that is not a good policy. With the 6322 hands, you'd want to bid your long suit twice, and with the 5422 hands, it's best to show both suits and increase the chances of locating a playable fit.

The 1NT opening guarantees a high card in every suit

False. Any of the hands below can comfortably be opened 1NT.

S-- K107	H-- A42	D-- K862	C-- AQ7
S-- K1073	H-- A4	D-- K862	C-- AQ7
S-- AK107	H-- 94	D-- K862	C-- AQ7

Although some players might be nervous about opening the last hand 1NT, it meets both requirements of 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand. If you chicken out and open 1D instead, you might feel good at the moment, but won't have a rebid that accurately describes the strength and distribution of the hand once partner has responded.

The 1NT opening denies a five-card suit

False again. 5332 is one of the balanced hand patterns, so by all means open 1NT with either of:

S-- AK10	H-- Q94	D-- K8652	C-- A7
S-- AK10	H-- 1094	D-- KQ865	C-- A7

It's okay to open 1NT with a five-card major and a balanced hand

That's a matter of opinion. Audrey Grant says it's perfectly all right. Patty Tucker and Melissa Barnhardt of Whirlwind Bridge say that all hands with a five-card major should be opened in that suit.

We're suggesting the latter treatment just to avoid confusion and overthinking. Any hand with a five-card major gets opened in that suit, period. The rebid is usually not a problem, with one exception. What you achieve by going this route is to find out quickly when you have a 5-3 fit in hearts or spades, and also knowing that when partner opens 1NT, hi might have four of one (or both) majors, but never five.

If you have a great hand, jump in response to partner's opening bid

Absolutely false. If partner opens 1D you'd respond 1H with any of:

S-- K4	H-- AJ93	D-- 1085	C-- 762
S-- A96	H-- KQ92	D-- 54	C-- AQJ5
S-- A1085	H-- AQ976	D-- 6	C-- KQ4

On the second and third hands, you might ask, why doesn't responder just bid a game or at least jump in a suit to announce a very good hand?

The answer is that good bidding is like a play in two acts. The first stage in the absence of one is determined, the partnership then settles on the level of the contract, whether

it will be game or a partscore. That is why a new suit response to an opening bid is a one-round force, to enable to partnership to quickly locate a fit if one exists.

We always need five cards to bid a major suit

That's true for **opening** 1H or 1S, but false otherwise. Responder is entitled to bid a major with a four-card suit, and if opener bids another suit on his second turn, that could also be just four of them.

Why is that? Of the possible eight-card fits, the most common by far are the 5-3 and the 4-4 combinations. Five-card major suit openings give our side an opportunity to locate the 5-3 fit quickly. Meanwhile, it's responder's job to get to the 4-4 fits, and therefore he is permitted to introduce a major with four of them. Similarly, when opener introduces a second suit, it may well be agreed upon as trumps.

Here are some pairs of hands to illustrate the process of locating a fit and then determining the level of the contract:

Opener:	S-- 72	H-- K1076	D-- AKQ3	C-- Q104
Responder:	S-- 954	H-- AQJ8	D-- 76	C-- AJ93

Here the eight-card fit is in hearts, and the hand belongs in game. 4H will make while 3NT might be off the first five spade tricks. Opener can't bid 1H as that would promise five of them. A major suit response, by contrast, can be done on a four-card suit, as that is the only way for the partnership to get to the 4-4 fits.

Opener:	S-- KJ96	H-- K4	D-- AJ87	C-- Q62
Responder:	S-- Q973	H-- A1085	D-- 63	C-- AK4

This time, it's spades where the partnership has a good fit. The auction begins with 1D, and responder bids his four-card majors up the line, showing the hearts first. Partner can't support but will then mention the spades, whereupon responder vaults into game.

On both of these hands, responder was eventually going to bid game, but needed to go through the first act of the play, which is to discover if there is a playable trump suit.

Opener:	S-- J104	H-- KQ107	D-- 97	C-- AQJ8
Responder:	S-- K753	H-- J962	D-- A42	C-- 73

Not quite as many points for responder this time, but still worth a bid since the opening bid in a suit could be as many as 20-21 HCP.

Once again, the cheaper of the two four-card majors is bid and opener can agree on hearts as trump. Although the final contract will be a partscore, it's vital to get to the eight-card fit as notrump will not fare well on a diamond lead.

Opener: S-- K106 H-- KQJ73 D-- A1042 C-- 4
Responder: S-- J2 H-- 73 D-- QJ97 C-- A8653

Now the eight-card fit is in diamonds, but it won't be until opener's continuation that it will be found, assuming he remembers that a four-card suit can be introduced on the second bid.

A 1NT response is a different breed of cat from a 1NT opening

This is true. A 1NT opening is very good news for the partnership, showing 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand.

If you'll recall from the Introduction to Bridge series, you have the following priorities in responding when partner opens one of a major:

- 1) Raise immediately with three-card or longer support..
- 2) You can bid a major suit at the one-level with 6+ HCP (only happens when partner opens 1H and you have four or more spades).
- 3) Bid a new suit at the two-level with 11+ HCP.
- 4) Respond 1NT with most other hands.

In essence, then, if you respond 1NT, you'll have at least 6 HCP. But it denies a fair number of things as well. You won't have support or a suit that you could bid at the one-level. You'll also lack the points to go to the next level in a suit. The bottom line is that you'll have 6-10 HCP with no fit and no major suit to introduce.

If partner were to open 1H, what should your choice of response be on each of these hands?

S-- A7 H-- J94 D-- 10764 C-- QJ53

2H. Partner has at least five, you have three so that's your trump suit. The single raise shows 6-9 HCP

S-- K986 H-- 52 D-- A943 C-- 1065

1S. With 7 HCP, the hand is good enough to respond and without a heart fit in sight you can first bid spades and see if opener likes them.

S-- QJ8 H-- 97 D-- K96 C-- AJ1075

2D. This will tell partner you have a long suit and 11 or more HCP. Your side is very close to having enough for game if opener has anything extra.

S-- J84

H-- 92

D-- QJ842

C-- A103

1NT. Can't agree hearts, no major to bid, and insufficient points to go to the two-level in your long suit. That leaves 1NT, showing 6-10 HCP and no interest in either major suit.

Hand 1

North dealer

North

S-- AQ3

H-- 95

D-- J87

C-- Q10832

West

S-- 975

H-- Q1063

D-- K54

C-- A95

East

S-- K10862

H-- J8

D-- A1062

C-- 76

South

S-- J4

H-- AK742

D-- Q93

C-- KJ4

Auction

North	East	South	West
pass	pass	1H	pass
1NT	pass	pass	pass

North has long clubs, but a two-level response promises 11 or more HCP. Without three-card support for partner's suit, he responds 1NT to show 6-10 HCP and no fit.

The Play:

East will lead the 6 of spades, fourth-best from his longest suit, which declarer can win either in dummy with the Jack or in hand with the Queen.

Declarer has two spades and two hearts, but needs three more tricks to get to seven. The suit that offers the best possibility is clubs, where the only missing high card is the Ace. North will attack the suit by playing the two honors from dummy and persisting until West takes the Ace. Now he'll get four club tricks in addition to the four major-suit winners, making an overtrick.

Hand 2

East dealer

North

S-- 82
 H-- 8642
 D-- 53
 C-- AJ1087

West

S-- AK107
 H-- QJ93
 D-- AQ4
 C-- Q2

East

S-- Q653
 H-- K10
 D-- KJ1098
 C-- 54

South

S-- J94
 H-- A75
 D-- 762
 C-- K963

Auction:

North	East	South	West
	pass	pass	1D
pass	1S	pass	3S
pass	4S	pass	pass
pass			

East has adequate support for partner's diamonds, but that can wait as the first objective is to learn whether there is a 4-4 spade fit. Since 1S is a one-round force, responder can always go back to diamonds if spades don't pan out.

However, opener is able to raise spades and jumps to 3S, showing a hand of 16-18 points. Responder has 9 and that adds up to 25 or more, so hi bids game.

The Play:

Hearts and clubs are the unbid suits, and leading unsupported Aces is not usually a productive tactic (they were made to capture Kings and Queens). A club might surrender a trick as well but if partner has any high honor, it should be an effective lead.

The defense takes the first two club tricks and then will shift to a red suit. East can draw trumps and with nine tricks in the back, can promote dummy's hearts into winners by using the K of hearts to force out the Ace.

Hand 3

South dealer

North

S-- J97542

H-- K108

D-- K10

C--94

West

S-- K1083

H-- 9

D-- 7542

C-- QJ106

East

S-- AQ

H-- 754

D-- A863

C-- 8752

South

S-- 6

H-- AQJ762

D-- QJ9

C-- AK3

Auction:

North	East	South	West
		1H	pass
2H	pass	4H	pass
pass	pass		

Despite having a six-card suit, North should raise to 2H, knowing there is an eight-card or better fit in that major. Opener, with 17 HCP and a six-card suit, will then leap to game.

The Play:

West's lead is the Queen of clubs, top card from a perfect sequence. As hi is in a suit contract, declarer will count possible losers and there are three of them, one each in spades, diamonds and clubs. However, since dummy has just two clubs, the opportunity exists to ruff South's third card in the suit. Declarer can afford two rounds of trump, but when they don't break, hi will then have to trump the third round of clubs before extracting the last spade. Later on, when all the trumps are drawn, hi will proceed to knock out the Ace of diamonds and promote two winners in that suit.

Hand 4

West dealer

North

S--10962

H-- AK5

D-- 643

C-- A85

West

S-- KQ75

H-- J1043

D-- 8

C-- J932

East

S-- 4

H-- Q986

D-- AKJ72

C-- Q107

South

S-- AJ83

H-- 72

D-- Q1095

C-- K64

Auction:

North	East	South	West
			pass
pass	1D	pass	1H
pass	2H	pass	pass
pass			

When responding to an opening bid, suit quality doesn't particularly matter, you should attempt to show your cheapest length. "Up-the-line" is the credo for responder in bidding with two four-card majors. By doing so, West catches partner with four-card support and his side ends up playing in a 2H contract.

The Play:

North has two reasonable choices of lead. One is the 10 of spades while the other is three rounds of hearts, attempting to prevent a crossruff. On the latter defense, declarer can win the Queen of hearts on dummy and play a spade up to the KQ. If South takes the Ace, two spade tricks are set up, and if he plays low, declarer wins and forces out the top clubs to promote two tricks. Either way, all the defenders can take is five tricks and the contract will make.