

For February 2025: Why, How and When to Alert

How differently would the Super Bowl play out if the quarterbacks were required to give their playbook to the defending players and then identify the pattern they were about to run? That's pretty much what bridge does. Partners are required to disclose their bidding system on their convention card (standard American, 2-over-1, precision) and then during the course of each hand to alert and explain specific bids that the opponents may not understand.

Why? Requiring disclosure stops partners from making secret agreements that fool the opponents about both how they should respond to the bidding sequence and what strategy is appropriate for play of the hand.

The purpose of an alert is to indicate to opponents that meaning of a bid is something unexpected. Once an explanation is given, everyone has the same information so both defenders and declarer are free to make decisions about how to play a hand based on accurate information.

So how and when should you alert bids? Read the full Question of the Month for an overview. The article includes a link to [ACBL's 14-page Alert Procedure](#) document.

Let's look at "how" alerts are made:

- Pre-Alerts are made when opponents first come to the table to play, before hands are opened by players. This includes announcing that you play precision or play a short club or other examples discussed below.
- Announcements (a specific type of Alert) and Alerts are made by the partner of the person who bid, **not the person who makes the bid**, at the time the bid is made.
- Announcements are made both verbally and with the Alert card but you do not wait for someone to ask for an explanation. You simply explain what your partner's bid means.
- Alerts are made verbally and with the Alert card but you wait to see if the player bidding after your partner wants to inquire for the meaning. That player does so by saying "please explain." The other opponent is also allowed to ask for an explanation, but only when it is their turn to bid.

Sometimes a partner of the bidder knows something should be alerted, but cannot remember what the bid means. The partner should Alert the bid and, if asked, explain that he/she does not remember the partnership agreement.

At other times, the partner of the bidder may by mistake give a wrong meaning for the Alert or even fail to Alert an unconventional bid. **When bidding is complete but before the lead is made, the bidder should inform the opponents that an incorrect meaning was given or that there was a failure to alert.** However, if the partner defined the agreement correctly but the original bidder forgot the agreement or did something different by mistake, it is **not** necessary for the bidder to correct the Alert.

Now let's turn to "when" to announce, alert or pre-alert.

Announce...

- the point range for any 1NT opener ("15-17")
- the minimum length of a minor suit opening if less than 3 ("Could be 2")
- an artificial bid in response to a 1NT opener that requires a transfer to a different suit (1NT, 2D - "hearts")
- any artificial bid that shows length in one specific suit ("spades")
- whether a 1NT response to an opening bid of one of a major is forcing or semi-forcing (1S 1NT, "forcing")

Alert...in general, natural bids do not have to be alerted while many artificial bids should be. There are some very common artificial bids that **do not need to be alerted** (a 2NT overcall that indicates 5-5 in the minors, a Michaels cue bid of a minor suit opener that indicates 5-5 in the majors). But in general, if it is possible an artificial bid will be misunderstood it should be alerted. For example:

- new minor forcing
- fourth suit forcing
- any response to a 1C opener by a precision partnership
- Named conventions (Jacoby 2NT, Ogust, Drury, Cappelletti)

Pre-Alerts...

- those who play Precision should pre-alert that 1C is strong, artificial and forcing and that 1D could be as short as X (1 or 2)

- those who play “short club” as opposed to “convenient minors” should pre-alert that 1C is artificial and could be as short as X (1 or 2)
- those who switch bidding systems based on vulnerability should pre-alert
- those who routinely open hands with 4-card majors when you have a longer minor suit should pre-alert

Last but not least, ACBL says any time an opponent asks for the meaning of a bid, even if there is nothing special about the bid, a player must fully explain their partner’s bid, “including any inferences from related auctions and from partnership experience.”

The goal is to have fair play, not a victory gained by mis-directing opponents about what you and your partner have agreed to.