

§8. Opening Bids and Simple Responses.

By the end of this chapter you should understand the following terms:

Opening Bid: The first bid (other than a Pass) made by any player in the auction.

Response: The first bid made by the partner of an opening bidder.

Limit Bid: A bid that describes your hand within very precise limits; often a bid in No-trumps.

The opening bid of 1NT is a *limit bid*. Other opening bids at the one-level are **not** limit bids, in fact they are *wide ranging* and could be made on a variety of different hands. So if you open the bidding with, say, 1♥ you might have almost anything in your hand and your partner (the *responder*) doesn't really know too much about what you hold. Of course, the same applies to opening bids of 1♣, 1♦ and 1♠.

Here, we set down a few rough-and-ready ground rules for opening the bidding with a one-level suit bid. As a rule of thumb 12 points is a *working minimum* and 10 points is an *absolute minimum* for an opening bid. **Only open the bidding with fewer than 12 points if you have a good, long suit.**

The maximum for opening the bidding with a one-bid is about 19 points. Note the wooliness about this statement and the one about having 12 points as a minimum to open the bidding – *these are grey areas*. However, we will say as a rule of thumb (no more than that) that an opening bid of 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ shows about 12 to about 19 points.

The shortest biddable suit is *four cards* long; **never** open the bidding with a three-card or shorter suit, no matter how tempting. The usual rule for deciding which suit to open is "*length before strength*", so that an opening bid at the one-level guarantees that there is no longer suit in the opener's hand than the one that has been bid.

As examples, here are six very different example hands that would open the bidding with a suit bid:

Ex 1.	Ex 2.	Ex 3.	Ex 4.	Ex 5.	Ex 6.
♠ K J 9 ♥ A J 7 ♦ K J 8 ♣ Q 10 6 3	♠ Q 5 3 ♥ None ♦ A Q 6 5 3 2 ♣ A J 9 7	♠ A 10 7 4 ♥ K Q 9 8 6 ♦ 10 ♣ K 5 2	♠ A K J 10 ♥ A 4 2 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ K 7 2	♠ Q 9 6 5 3 2 ♥ 9 3 ♦ A K ♣ Q J 5	♠ 7 ♥ K Q J 10 8 5 ♦ 8 4 2 ♣ A 10 3
15 points	13 points	12 points	18 points	12 points	10 points
3-3-3-4 shape	3-0-6-4 shape	4-5-1-3 shape	4-3-3-3 shape	6-2-2-3 shape	1-6-3-3 shape
Open 1♣	Open 1♦	Open 1♥	Open 1♠	Open 1♠	Open 1♥

Quiz: Can you say why Questions 1 to 6 below would **not** be opened with 1♥? (Answers below)

Q1.	Q2.	Q3.	Q4.	Q5.	Q6.
♠ 7 ♥ A K J 10 ♦ K 10 7 5 2 ♣ A Q 4	♠ J 9 8 ♥ J 7 5 4 2 ♦ K 9 2 ♣ A Q	♠ 7 6 4 3 2 ♥ A K Q 10 ♦ A J 6 ♣ 4	♠ A J 3 ♥ K 9 8 2 ♦ Q J 10 ♣ Q 7 4	♠ K 8 ♥ A K J 7 ♦ 10 6 2 ♣ J 9 5 3	♠ A 10 3 ♥ K Q J 10 8 ♦ 8 5 2 ♣ 7 2
17 points	11 points	14 points	13 points	12 points	10 points
1-4-5-3 shape	3-5-3-2 shape	5-4-1-3 shape	3-4-3-3 shape	2-4-3-4 shape	3-5-3-2 shape

Let's summarise the main points of opening suit bids at the one-level:

- Opening bids of 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ and 1♠ are very wide ranging (showing *roughly* 12-19 points).
- All opening bids are made in the longest suit in the hand – and always show *at least* four cards.
- Opening one-level bids are **not** limit bids so partner has only the vaguest clue of what you might have. This means that no-one is "boss of the auction" – yet.

Answers to Quiz above.

A1.	A2.	A3.	A4.	A5.	A6.
Your longest suit is Diamonds, so you should open the bidding with them. Open 1♦.	Your hand is too weak (11 points) to open the bidding without a good suit. Pass.	Spades are your longest suit. Despite the poor suit quality, you should... Open 1♠.	You have 13 points and a 4-3-3-3 hand. With a flat hand of this strength... Open 1NT.	Similar to Q4. With 12 points and a 4-4-3-2 (ie balanced) hand you should... Open 1NT.	Your hand is too weak to justify an opening bid without a long, strong suit. Pass.

Responding to Opening Bids.

Since an opening bid of 1♥ (say) shows about 12 to 19 points with at least four Hearts it follows that it is necessary for partner (the *responder*) to keep the bidding alive on fairly slender values. (Note that, in practice, a 1♥ bid may contain anywhere between 10 and 20 points and may have five, six or even seven Hearts). If you Pass an opening bid and your partner has 19 points he will be, like Queen Victoria, distinctly not amused if he has to play the hand at the one-level when the partnership may have enough for game. So, the basic idea is to bid something whenever you can in order that the opener has a second chance to bid in the auction.

A *working minimum* for responding to an opening bid is 6 *points*. This gives us your first rule of responding to partner's opening bid:

Rule 1: Keep the bidding alive whenever you have 6 points or more.

However, to bid a new suit that takes the bidding to the two-level you need a minimum of 10 points.

Rule 2: A response at the two-level promises a minimum of 10 points.

Now, in the past, this second rule has caused some confusion so it might be a good idea to dot some *is* and cross some *ts*. All this rule is saying is that it is dangerous to take the auction up a level with a weak hand. If your suit is of lower rank than partner's (he may have opened 1♥, you may have Clubs or Diamonds, for instance) you cannot show your suit if you don't have 10 points. (*Nice use of the double negative...*)

Thus, bidding sequences such as, for example, 1♥ – 2♦ or 1♠ – 2♣, guarantee that the responder has at least 10 points in order to take the auction up a level in a new suit. What this rule does **not** say is that you must bid at the two-level if you have 10 points; inexperienced players sometimes produce monstrous auctions that start, for example, 1♥ – 2♠, a response which has neither rhyme nor reason behind it. Why bid 2♠ when 1♠ will do nicely? (*Picture of a man who calls a Spade, two Spades...*)

Anyway... responses of suit bids are themselves *wide ranging* so that a response of 1♠ to an opening bid of 1♥ promises a minimum of 6 points and a minimum of four Spades (again, *never* bid a new suit on a three-card holding) but the responder may have much, much more than the minimum. There is no maximum hand that responder might have. It follows that the sequence 1♥ – 1♠ conveys little information and both opener and responder are going to have to bid a few times more in order to get their hands across to their partners.

This last observation is a very important point. The opener and the responder are merely **starting a conversation**; there may be a lot to say before it is over. Some auctions (especially those starting with 1NT) are over very quickly. Other auctions, however, can go on for a long time. A very long time...

Examples 7 to 12 below represent examples of six very different hands that would respond 1♠ to partner's opening bid of 1♥:

Ex 7 ♠ K J 3 2 ♥ 9 7 ♦ Q 7 2 ♣ 9 6 4 2 6 points	Ex 8. ♠ A Q 10 9 6 ♥ K 10 4 ♦ 10 6 ♣ A Q 5 15 points	Ex 9. ♠ 8 7 5 4 ♥ Q ♦ A 9 8 3 ♣ K 10 7 3 9 points	Ex 10. ♠ K 10 5 3 ♥ A K J ♦ K Q 5 ♣ A 6 4 20 points	Ex 11. ♠ J 7 4 2 ♥ Q 3 ♦ 10 4 ♣ Q J 10 8 5 6 points	Ex 12. ♠ A Q 9 8 6 ♥ None ♦ A J 9 6 ♣ K 9 3 2 14 points
---	--	---	---	---	---

There are some players who offer resistance to this idea. How can it be right to bid the same way (that is, respond 1♠ to partner's opening 1♥) on these six very different hands? The answer is that often enough in an auction the most important bid is opener's second bid, known as his *rebid*. You don't know exactly what opener's hand is when he opened the bidding; what you are doing is giving him an opportunity to tell you what his hand actually is by allowing him a second bid. The more room you give him (the more bidding space he is allowed) the easier it will be for him to tell you what he has got in his hand. If you produce some nonsense such as 2♣ or 3♣ on any one of these hands (and many have been tempted, let us tell you) it makes partner's life that much harder to find a descriptive second bid.

Making partner's life easy is one of the ways to play this game well. Come to think of it, it's not a bad observation about life in general...

§8. Quiz A on Opening Bids (and Simple Responses).

In each case you are **South**

Quiz A focuses on Opening Bids.

What is the best opening bid on each of these hands?

1.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ J 9 7 5 2
♥ A K Q 10
♦ Q 10 3
♣ 8

2.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ K 9 4
♥ A K Q
♦ 10 8 6 5
♣ A Q 10

3.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ 7 5 3
♥ A K 7 6 4
♦ A 7 5
♣ 9 4

4.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ 7 5 3
♥ A K 7 6 4 2
♦ A 7 5
♣ 9

5.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ A Q J 9 7 6
♥ A K
♦ A 4
♣ J 7 6

6.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ K 9
♥ A J 9 8 7
♦ A J 9 8 7
♣ 2

7.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ K
♥ A K 9
♦ J 9 7 6 4
♣ 9 7 6 4

8.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ A J 10 6 5
♥ K Q 10 6
♦ J 10 8
♣ 2

9.

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ J 6 4
♥ Q 9 4
♦ Q 8
♣ A K Q 10 3

10.*

	N			
	W	E		
	S			

West North East South
?

♠ A K Q 10 3
♥ Q 9 4
♦ Q 8
♣ J 6 4

§8. Quiz A on Opening Bids (and Simple Responses). Answers

1.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ J 9 7 5 2
♥ A K Q 10
♦ Q 10 3
♣ 8

1♠. You have 12 points, so have enough to open the bidding. Always open your longest suit and here you have a five-card Spade suit. You can show Hearts on the next round, always assuming there is a next round. You do need partner to *respond* to your opening bid.

2.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ K 9 4
♥ A K Q
♦ 10 8 6 5
♣ A Q 10

1♦. You have a curious assortment here – a good hand (18 points) but a lousy suit. Nevertheless, you should start off by bidding your longest suit and hope to describe this lot after partner's response. Being left to play in 1♦ would be both unfortunate and irritating.

3.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ 7 5 3
♥ A K 7 6 4
♦ A 7 5
♣ 9 4

Pass. In general, don't open the bidding with 5-3-3-2 hands containing 11 points. Such collections contain an awful lot of losers and tend to play poorly. If the hand belongs to your side North will be opening the bidding and you will get to bid your Heart suit.

4.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ 7 5 3
♥ A K 7 6 4 2
♦ A 7 5
♣ 9

1♥. This hand has the same number of points as Q3 but there are key differences. One is the attractive 6-3-3-1 pattern, the other is a good six-card trump suit. This type of hand has far fewer losers than an arid 5-3-3-2 hand. This is a clear-cut opening bid.

5.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ A Q J 9 7 6
♥ A K
♦ A 4
♣ J 7 6

1♠. Do not be tempted to say "I am too good to open 1♠, I must bid 2♣ or even 3♠". A one-level opener covers everything from about 12 to about 19 points. This hand shows why you want partner to respond with a poor hand, so you are not left high and dry in 1♠.

6.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ K 9
♥ A J 9 8 7
♦ A J 9 8 7
♣ 2

1♥. When you have two *adjacent* suits (Spades and Hearts, Hearts and Diamonds, Diamonds and Clubs) you always open the **higher-ranking** suit. We'll explore this in greater depth later, but here you'll be able to show Diamonds next, allowing partner a choice.

7.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ K
♥ A K 9
♦ J 9 7 6 4
♣ 9 7 6 4

Pass. A ghastly hand with all the honour-cards in the short suits. Yes, the hand is 5-4-3-1 (miles better than a featureless 5-3-3-2 shape) but the long suits are poor and contain no obvious *source of tricks*. This hand is nowhere near an opening bid. Now look at Q8.

8.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ A J 10 6 5
♥ K Q 10 6
♦ J 10 8
♣ 2

1♠. Compare and contrast with Q7. The same 11 points but... your suits are the majors (everybody loves Spades), the honours are in the long suits, where there is an obvious *source of tricks*, and you have a lovely 5-4-3-1 pattern. A clear-cut, if minimum, opening bid.

9.

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ J 6 4
♥ Q 9 4
♦ Q 8
♣ A K Q 10 3

1NT. In general (note the caveat, not always) 5-3-3-2 hands in the 12-14 point range are best opened 1NT rather than with one of a suit. Here, the Clubs are best ignored in order to bid the higher-scoring No-trumps. This is a common theme. Make a *limit bid* if you can.

10.*

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S						
N										
W E										
S										
		<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="width: 25%;">West</td><td style="width: 25%;">North</td><td style="width: 25%;">East</td><td style="width: 25%;">South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">?</td></tr> </table>	West	North	East	South				?
West	North	East	South							
			?							

♠ A K Q 10 3
♥ Q 9 4
♦ Q 8
♣ J 6 4

1♠. This hand illustrates the point that we treat majors and minors unequally. With five excellent Spades we often prefer to bid the suit rather than open 1NT. With a poor five-card Spade suit in a 5-3-3-2 hand we might open 1NT (it is a moot point), but here 1♠ is normal.

§8. Quiz B on Opening Bids (and Simple Responses).

In each case you are **South**

Quiz B focuses on Responses to Opening Bids.

What is the best response on these hands after partner has opened the bidding?

1.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	?	?

♠ K 7 6 4
♥ Q J 3
♦ 10 8 6
♣ 9 5 2

2.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	?	?

♠ J 9 7 6
♥ 3
♦ A K Q 8
♣ J 8 7 5

3.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	?	?

♠ 7 5 3 2
♥ A K 10
♦ 9 7 5
♣ Q 9 6

4.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	?	?

♠ A Q 10 8
♥ J 9 6 4
♦ 10 7
♣ 6 5 3

5.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	?	?

♠ Q 9 7 5
♥ 10
♦ 10 9 6
♣ A Q 8 6 5

6.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	?	?

♠ Q 9 7 5
♥ 10
♦ A J 6
♣ A Q 8 6 5

7.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	?	?

♠ 2
♥ K 10 7 5
♦ A 9 8 7
♣ A 9 8 7

8.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	?	?

♠ A K Q 8 6
♥ Q 9 7 5
♦ A 9 6
♣ A

9.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	?	?

♠ 6 5
♥ A K Q 10 8 5
♦ 9 8 5
♣ 8 3

10.*

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	?	?

♠ 7 6
♥ A Q 10 9 8
♦ 10 8
♣ K 10 7 6

§8. Quiz B on Opening Bids (and Simple Responses). Answers

1.

N		E
W		S

♠ K 7 6 4
♥ Q J 3
♦ 10 8 6
♣ 9 5 2

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	?

1♠. You should strain to keep the bidding alive with 6 points – and here you are as poor as you could be. A 1♠ response says you have at least four Spades and at least 6 points. Partner may be disappointed that you are rock-bottom minimum, but he can't complain.

2.

N		E
W		S

♠ J 9 7 6
♥ 3
♦ A K Q 8
♣ J 8 7 5

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	?

1♠. You should try to make the cheapest response you can (the bid that takes up the least amount of bidding space). Never mind that your Diamonds are better than your Spades – 1♠ takes up less “bidding room” than a 2♦ response. Let's see what partner's next bid is.

3.

N		E
W		S

♠ 7 5 3 2
♥ A K 10
♦ 9 7 5
♣ Q 9 6

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	?

1♠. For sure, your Spades are pathetic – but that isn't the point. You are promising North at least four Spades (and at least 6 points). Your hand qualifies under that description and you have nothing to be ashamed of. Spades won't be trumps unless partner likes them.

4.

N		E
W		S

♠ A Q 10 8
♥ J 9 6 4
♦ 10 7
♣ 6 5 3

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	?

1♥. When holding two (or three!) four-card suits you should respond “up-the-line”, making the cheapest bid that you can. Suit quality is irrelevant – the aim is to explore all options. As is the case with all opening bids and responses the conversation is only just beginning.

5.

N		E
W		S

♠ Q 9 7 5
♥ 10
♦ 10 9 6
♣ A Q 8 6 5

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	?

1♠. As *opener* you should always bid your longest suit. The same is **not** true for responder. Here, you lack the necessary 10 points to bid at the two-level, so a 2♣ response is off the menu. Instead, you have to reply with 1♠ and keep the auction at the one-level.

6.

N		E
W		S

♠ Q 9 7 5
♥ 10
♦ A J 6
♣ A Q 8 6 5

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	?

2♣. Here, with 13 points, you are quite in order to take the bidding to the two-level (cf Q5). 2♣ is your natural response (Clubs are your best – as in longest – suit) and you have no reason to bid anything else. Partner's next bid may help decide the outcome of the auction.

7.

N		E
W		S

♠ 2
♥ K 10 7 5
♦ A 9 8 7
♣ A 9 8 7

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	?

2♣. You have enough strength (11 points) to take the bidding to the two-level, and have three four-card suits to choose from. As *responder* you should bid them **up-the-line**, so here you should respond with 2♣, allowing partner to bid either 2♦ or 2♥ – should he so wish.

8.

N		E
W		S

♠ A K Q 8 6
♥ Q 9 7 5
♦ A 9 6
♣ A

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	?

1♠. No need to do anything more dramatic. True, you have a hand way different from Q1, but that doesn't mean you have to make an exuberant response. Nothing can be gained from rushing around madly in all directions. Best is to listen to what partner says next.

9.

N		E
W		S

♠ 6 5
♥ A K Q 10 8 5
♦ 9 8 5
♣ 8 3

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	?

2♥. Yes, we said you needed to have 10 points to respond at the two-level and here you have just 9. Well, rules are meant to be bent, if not actually broken at this game. With such a lovely suit you just have to upgrade this collection and bid your luscious suit.

10.*

N		E
W		S

♠ 7 6
♥ A Q 10 9 8
♦ 10 8
♣ K 10 7 6

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	?

2♥. Again, (cf Q9) this hand calls for an upgrade to 10 points and a 2♥ response. The key is the strength of the Heart suit in its ♥10 9 8, giving it a rich *source of tricks*. Upgrading (and downgrading) hands from an initial point-count rating is an important part of bridge.

§8. Miscellaneous Example Hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1 Dealer North

♠ 10 4 ♥ A 8 4 2 ♦ A J 5 2 ♣ K 5 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S	♠ Q 9 ♥ Q 10 7 ♦ 10 7 4 ♣ A 9 6 4 2
N	E					
W	S					
♠ J 8 7 ♥ K 9 6 3 ♦ 9 8 ♣ Q J 10 8		♠ A K 6 5 3 2 ♥ J 5 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ 7				

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	4♠
4♠ by South	Pass	Pass	Opening lead: ♣Q

Bidding. North has a minimum but respectable opener of 1NT (12 points with a 4-4-3-2 shape) and South has to find a response. With 13 points and a six-card Spade suit it is clear to play in Spades and that game is the right level. Accordingly, South bids 4♠ without stopping to pick the daisies.

Play. West's ♣Q lead makes mincemeat of dummy's ♠K, illustrating why we lead the top-of-a-sequence. South must **Count** and **Plan** and should note that he must lose a Club, a (slow) Heart and at least one trump. So, everything hinges on the Spade break. If they are 3-2 then 4♠ is hunky-dory. If not, there would be four losers. South ruffs the second Club and plays the ♠A K. When all follow, 4♠ is secure.

Hand 2 Dealer East

♠ K 9 ♥ 10 9 6 4 3 ♦ 8 2 ♣ J 10 9 2	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S	♠ A 6 3 2 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ K J ♣ K Q 6 5
N	E					
W	S					
♠ J 4 ♥ Q 2 ♦ A Q 7 5 3 ♣ A 8 7 3		♠ Q 10 8 7 5 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 10 9 6 4 ♣ 4				

West	North	East	South
3NT	Pass	1NT	Pass
3NT by East	Pass	Pass	Opening lead: ♠7

Bidding: West has a slightly awkward response to East's 1NT holding a 2-2-5-4 hand but there is little alternative to 3NT. Bidding Diamonds is a waste of time and effort. 5♦ would be miles away.

Play: South leads the ♠7 (his fourth-highest) and East surveys the dummy, **Counting** and **Planning**. There are eight *on top* (a Spade, four Diamonds and three Clubs) with an extra (or two) coming from a favourable split in one of the minors. Since Diamonds are *tangled up* they must be tackled first. Declarer takes the ♠A, cashes the ♦K J, crosses to the ♠A and takes the ♦A Q. Is the ♦7 a master? **Yes**, so he takes it pronto before cashing the ♣K Q. Had Clubs been 3-2 there would have been an overtrick.

Hand 3 Dealer South

♠ K 5 4 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 ♦ 8 7 ♣ 10 8 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S	♠ 10 9 3 2 ♥ A 6 ♦ A 5 3 2 ♣ A 6 5
N	E					
W	S					
♠ Q J 6 ♥ K 5 ♦ K 9 6 4 ♣ K 9 4 2		♠ A 8 7 ♥ 7 4 3 2 ♦ Q J 10 ♣ Q J 7				

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
2NT by West	Pass	All Pass	Opening lead: ♥Q

Bidding: West opens 1NT with a minimum 12 points. East, holding a bare three Aces, prudently raises to 2NT as an invitation, one which West declines.

Play: North leads the ♥Q (top-of-a-sequence) and West performs his mandatory **Count** and **Plan**. He can see six "toppers" (two Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs) so needs to set up two extras – and they are available in Spades. Right, that's the **Plan**, time to **Execute** it. Declarer wins the Heart (somewhere) and plays a Spade to the Queen. That loses and back comes a Heart. The ♠J now loses and North-South gorge themselves on Heart winners. No matter, there is rubbish to put in the bin as this is going on. West regains the lead and has eight tricks.

Hand 4 Dealer West

♠ A 9 3 ♥ A Q 7 ♦ 10 8 4 3 ♣ A 9 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S	♠ Q 10 6 4 ♥ 10 9 8 2 ♦ A K 2 ♣ J 6
N	E					
W	S					
♠ K J 7 ♥ J 5 3 ♦ Q 5 ♣ Q 8 7 4 2		♠ 8 5 2 ♥ K 6 4 ♦ J 9 7 6 ♣ K 10 5				

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
Pass	1NT by North	Pass	Opening lead: ♠4

Bidding: North opens 1NT after West Passes and that buys the contract. Simple stuff.

Play: East leads the ♠4 (his fourth-highest Spade) and North surveys a modest dummy. Declarer's **Count** and **Plan** reveals six *top tricks* (one Spade, three Hearts and two Clubs) so he is one trick short. The extra trick has to come from Diamonds – a long-term strategy. North takes the ♠A and plays a Diamond. East-West win and cash their Spades before playing a Heart (say). Another Diamond loses and another Heart is led. Finally, a third round of Diamonds sets the suit up for a trick with both a Heart stopper and two Club stoppers left to regain the lead. All done by **not** cashing winners too early.

§8. Miscellaneous Example Hands 5 to 8.

Hand 5 Dealer North

<p>♠ K 9 6 4 ♥ 10 5 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ A K 4 2</p> <p>♠ J 5 2 ♥ K J 7 ♦ 8 3 ♣ Q J 9 8 7</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N		W	E		S	<p>♠ Q 10 8 ♥ A 9 8 3 2 ♦ 10 7 5 ♣ 6 5</p> <p>♠ A 7 3 ♥ Q 6 4 ♦ A K 6 4 2 ♣ 10 3</p>
N								
W	E							
	S							

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	
3NT by North		Opening lead: ♥3	

Bidding: A routine 1NT from North (13 points and a 4-4-3-2 shape) and an easy 3NT raise from South.

Defence: East leads the ♥3 (fourth-highest) and North pauses to **Count** and **Plan**. From his viewpoint things are looking rosy – he has nine *on top*. However, East-West have the *tempo* with this Heart lead. Dummy plays a low Heart at trick one and West has to do two things right. First, he has to play the ♥J at trick one (not difficult with the ♥Q on table) and then, when on lead at trick two, he has to do the right thing. That's lead the ♥K, following the twin principles of *return your partner's suit* and *play the higher card from two remaining*. All the Hearts are winners now and the defence have the first five tricks.

Hand 6 Dealer East

<p>♠ A J 7 ♥ Q 6 2 ♦ Q J 10 9 ♣ 9 6 5</p> <p>♠ Q 6 4 ♥ A J ♦ 6 5 2 ♣ A K J 7 2</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N		W	E		S	<p>♠ 10 5 ♥ K 7 5 3 ♦ A K 7 ♣ Q 8 4 3</p> <p>♠ K 9 8 3 2 ♥ 10 9 8 4 ♦ 8 4 3 ♣ 10</p>
N								
W	E							
	S							

West	North	East	South
3NT	Pass	1NT	Pass
3NT by East	Pass	Pass	Pass
3NT by East		Opening lead: ♠3	

Bidding: A minimum 1NT from East (12 points and a 4-4-3-2 shape) and a simple 3NT raise from West.

Defence: This hand has echoes of Hand 5. South leads his fourth-highest Spade and dummy is intimidating with 15 points and a strong five-card suit. Still, North-South can take the first five Spades. Dummy plays low at trick one and North must play the Jack, not the ♠A. Playing the ♠A is guaranteed to give East-West a Spade trick, playing the ♠J might not, depending on the location of the King. When the ♠J wins it is relatively easy for North to lead the ♠A at trick two and follow with another Spade, allowing South to cash out the suit. This way the defenders take the first five tricks to beat the hand.

Hand 7 Dealer South

<p>♠ 9 5 ♥ A K 9 ♦ K 6 5 2 ♣ K J 10 7</p> <p>♠ Q 10 8 6 2 ♥ 5 3 ♦ A 9 7 ♣ A 5 3</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N		W	E		S	<p>♠ J 4 3 ♥ 10 8 7 6 2 ♦ J 10 3 ♣ 4 2</p> <p>♠ A K 7 ♥ Q J 4 ♦ Q 8 4 ♣ Q 9 8 6</p>
N								
W	E							
	S							

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT
3NT by South		Opening lead: ♠6	

Bidding: 1NT from South (14 points and a 4-3-3-3 shape) and an clear-cut 3NT raise from North.

Defence: West leads his fourth-highest Spade (the ♠6) and this deal is all about *tempo*. South's **Count** and **Plan** shows that he has just five *top tricks*, so needs to knock out the Aces in Clubs and Diamonds to set up three extra Clubs and one extra Diamond. However, before he can do this East-West can set up three Spades and two Aces. It's a **race**, and, crucially, the defence get to go first. South wins the ♠K at trick one and leads Clubs. West takes his Ace and plays a top Spade (to crush the ♠9). South takes the ♠A and takes lots of winners but West's last few cards are the ♦A and winning Spades, so 3NT fails.

Hand 8 Dealer West

<p>♠ 6 3 ♥ 8 5 ♦ Q 10 8 4 3 ♣ A 9 7 5</p> <p>♠ K J 7 ♥ K 10 7 2 ♦ A 6 5 2 ♣ Q J</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N		W	E		S	<p>♠ A 5 4 ♥ A 4 3 ♦ 9 7 ♣ K 10 8 6 4</p> <p>♠ Q 10 9 8 2 ♥ Q J 9 6 ♦ K J ♣ 3 2</p>
N								
W	E							
	S							

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
3NT by West		Opening lead: ♦4	

Bidding: 1NT from West and East passes the buck with 2NT. With 14 points, West accepts the invitation.

Defence: North leads the ♦4 against 3NT and West's **Count** and **Plan** shows that he appears to be in Easy Street. He has two Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and four (slow) Clubs to take. However, a Diamond lead has hit him in his weak spot. Best play is to hope the opponents make an error, so he holds back the ♦A. South should *return his partner's suit* at trick two and West still keeps his ♦A. Now it's up to North to save the day. He must realise that it is safe and necessary to **overtake** the ♦J with the Queen to continue the Diamond attack. When North gets on play with the ♣A he has winning Diamonds to take.