

4441 shape hands

These hand shapes seem to cause a problem with many bidding systems, and especially with minimum opening hands when playing Acol 4-card majors with a weak no-trump. Principally because if you bid one suit and then rebid in a lower ranking suit, you show 5 of the first bid suit.

There are different principles considered by many people, and never total agreement. I will try to outline my thoughts below. (I make the suit quality appear to be unfavorable for the best bid!)

Many people say always open the suit below the singleton, others say open lowest, others say open middle suit! So, what is correct? Whatever scheme you use you sometimes have to 'lie' with your 2nd bid. Advice:

- It is preferable to lie about a minor than it is about a major
- Always consider your next bid if Partner makes the most awkward response – and he/she does

If the bidding were to go:

1♥ – 2♣

2♦

How many hearts does Opener have?

1♣ – 1♥

2♣

How many clubs does Opener have?

1♦ – 1♥

2♣

How many diamonds does Opener have?

Using the Rule of 20

If you have a 4441 hand and only 11 HCPs it is best to pass ($11+8 = 19$) – Use the rule of 20. . We are always looking for a 8-card fit or better and you often find one with 4441 hands, the problem seems to occur that the distribution of the other outstanding 5 cards will often split 4-1 (28%) instead of the normal 3-2 (68%).

Weak and strong 4441 hands

There is a major difference between opening weak (<15 HCPs) and strong (>15 HCPs) hands. With the *weak* variety you have to be very careful which suit you open (never a major in my view) but when strong (opening a major is permissible) you have the fall back of being able to rebid NTs if Pard bids your singleton.

Examples of weak variety

Let us consider examples of all of these 'problem' hands.

i.4414 shape

♠	KQ86
♥	AQ96
♦	J
♣	9753

An easy distribution to start with.

You open 1♣ (yes even with your poorest suit). What can hurt you?

- If partner bids 1♦ you bid 1♥ – no problem.
- If partner bids 1♥ you bid 2♥ – no problem.
- If partner bids 1♠ you bid 2♠ – no problem.
- LHO bids 1♦ followed by two passes – you balance with a double; if partner had the penalty double hand with say ♦KJ975 you defend when it is correct to do so.

Would **you** have opened a major and heard partner respond 2♦.... Not me.

If you opened 1♥/1♠ you didn't think about your rebid when you first opened.

Yes, you want to play in a major whenever possible – but not in a 4-3 or 4-2 fit when the defense attacks your weak suit (♦s on this hand)!

Opening the lowest minor suit is OK – and bidding diamonds holding both minors. In fact, opening ♦s when you have them is nearly always the best bet, unless your suit is very weak.

ii.4144 shape

♠	KQ86
♥	J
♦	AQ96
♣	9753

An easy shape.

Open 1♦. If Partner was to bid 1♥ you have a convenient rebid of 1♠. With a semi-balanced weak hand he would prefer 1NT to rebidding 2♣.

Opening the lowest minor is also good, you have a chance of finding your best fit. But it is best to open 1♦ planning to rebid 2♣.

iii.4441 shape

♠	K986
♥	KQ96
♦	A986
♣	J

You open 1♦. What can hurt you?

Partner bids 2♣ (worst case) and you make a small lie by bidding 2♦. OK you have lied about your length in a minor, but partner has indicated a number of values (10+ points). The worst scenario now is that he passes; otherwise, he bids again and you are in a good situation. (Note: playing a strong no-trump this hand isn't a problem, you just bid 2NT over partner's 2♣ bid.)

If you had opened 1♥ (middle of suits suggested by many players) then you now have to bid 2♦ over partner's 2♣. This shows 5-4 (at least) in ♥s and ♦s respectively. Do you fancy partner now bidding 2♥ on a doubleton? (This is the system I was taught many years ago – **it doesn't work**. So, take a voice of experience and don't mess about with this idea.)

Lie in a minor and not in a major.

Opening a minor is correct on all 12-14 HCP hands

iv.1444 shape

♠	6
♥	K1097
♦	KQ86
♣	AJ43

Getting more difficult.

You have a choice:

- Open 1♦ and rebid 2♣
If partner should make the most awkward bid of 1♠ you rebid 2♣ indicating a 5-card ♦ suit.
- Open 1♣ followed by 2♣
If partner should make the most awkward bid of 1♠ you rebid 2♣ indicating a 5-card ♣ suit.

However, if there is nothing in it, a 1♣ opening allows more latitude for responder and enables a ♣ fit to be established immediately. And if partner was to bid 1♦ then you can bid 1♥ having a fall back of the ♦ suit.

The small advantage of always opening 1♦ on these hands is that when Opener opens 1♣ and rebids 2♣ you know he has at least a 5-card suit. However, if the ♦ suit was of poor quality and the ♣ suit good then I would be happy to open 1♣.

Opening the strongest minor suit may be correct.

However, if the quality of the minor suits indicates that you wouldn't be too put out to be playing in a 4-3 (4-2) fit in a strong suit, then opening the better minor may be better. Typically:

♠ 6	or	♠ 6
♥ K1097		♥ KJ109
♦ AKQ7		♦ 9765
♣ J765		♣ AKQ7

Conclusions

So, with 4441 type hands we keep it simple and always bid a minor suit, unless 15+ HCPs. And if you play Acol then you have to be sensible and realize that you cannot always open a 4 card major in preference to a 4 card minor.

There is one 'undisputed' golden rule in bridge:

When you make your opening bid, have your rebid ready.

If you have to subsequently think about (or simply cannot find) a sensible rebid then you probably made the wrong opening bid.

Acol players simply have to accept that opening with the lowest suit is best – and that will be a minor.

Bid & Play hands

Dlr: South Vul: All	♠ K Q 5 4 ♥ 8 ♦ A K 10 2 ♣ A J 3 2	
♠ J 10 2 ♥ K 9 7 3 2 ♦ 7 6 5 ♣ K 8	Board No 23	♠ 6 ♥ A Q J 4 ♦ 9 8 4 ♣ Q 9 7 6 5
	♠ A 9 8 7 3 ♥ 10 6 5 ♦ Q J 3 ♣ 10 4	

Now since you have 15+ HCPs and can rebid in NTs if Pard bids your singleton, you could now open your major (1♠) with the North hand. And if Responder were to bid 2♥ you have a NT bid available.

On this hand the bidding would then continue:

1♠ – 2♠
4♠

But you would also get to 4S via:

1♣-1♠//4♣ or
1♦-1♠//4♣