The Bidding System

Determine the Value of Your Hand

1. High Card Points (HCP):

Ace = 4; King = 3; Queen = 2; Jack = 1. There are 10 HCP per suit, 40 in total.

2. Length Points:

Count 1 point for each card in a suit after the 4th card. Count 1 point for the 5th card in a suit; 1 more point for the 6th card in a suit, etc.

3. Shortness points:

Count shortness points only in a suit contract and only when you have at least 3 cards in a suit that partner has bid that you expect will become the trump suit.

- **With 3 trump:** Void in a side suit = 3; Singleton = 2; Doubleton (2 card suit) = 1
- **With 4+ trump:** Void in a side suit = 5; Singleton = 3; Doubleton = 1
- **With more than one short suit:** Count points only for one, the shortest one.

Partnership Total Points and the Contracts They Usually Make

- **20:** 2 in a combined 8+ card suit or 1 no trump
- **23:** 3 in a combined 8+ card suit or 2 no trump
- **25:** 4 in a combined 8+ card suit or 3 no trump
- **29:** 5 in a combined 8+ card suit or 4 no trump
- **33:** 6 in a suit or 6 NT
- **37:** 7 in a suit or 7 NT

This scale is easy to memorize. The increase is 3 points at each level (20, 23, 25, 29) except for the 25 instead of 26. Then the increase is 4 points (the equivalent of an extra Ace) when you get to the 6 and 7 level.

In particular, take note that the partners usually need 25 combined points to make game in NT or a major suit, while needing 29 points to make game in a minor suit.

The Objective of the Bidding System

a) Determine what denomination (which suit as trump or no trump)

b) Determine how high we want to be (what level, from 1 to 7).

The Most Desirable Contracts:

1. **Play in a combined 8+ card major suit.** 1st choice. Usually safest & best contract.
2. **Play in No Trump.** Second choice.
3. **Play in a minor suit.** Last choice. (More tricks required and gives a lower score.)

Small, Medium or Large

Opener: A player should not open the bidding (be the first player to bid something other than "Pass") unless they have more than their fair share of the total points in the deck. We shall classify an opening bidder as small, medium or large (basic, medium or maximum) according to the following scale.

Basic (Small): 12-15 total points
Medium: 16-18 total points
Maximum (Large): 19-21 total points
Monster (Extra Large): 22+ (22 or more) total points

Responder: Once their partner has opened the bidding, a player should not respond (bid something other than "Pass"), unless they expect that their side has about 20 combined total points (about half the total strength at the table) or more. We shall classify a "responding" bidder's strength as follows.

Basic (Small): 6-9 total points
Medium: 10-11 total points
Maximum (Large): 12+ total points

Opening the Bidding for Your Side

The following list shows all the opening bids that you can make along with what they say about the cards that you hold. If your hand doesn't fit any of these cases, you should pass.

- **1C or 1D:** 12-21 total points, no 5+ card major, not appropriate for 1NT or 2NT below. With 3 cards in each minor, open 1C. With 4 cards in each, open 1D.
- **1H or 1S:** 12-21 total points, 5+ cards in the suit that is bid. With equal length in both spades and hearts, bid spades first and bid hearts at your next turn.
- **1NT: 15-17 HCP** in a balanced hand (no void, no singleton, no 5+ card major)
- **With 18-19 HCP** in a balanced hand: Open 1 in a suit, then bid 2NT.
- **2NT: 20-21 HCP** in a balanced hand (no void, no singleton, no 5+ card major)
- **2C:** 22+ total points or 9 1/2 expected tricks (almost game) in your own hand.
- **2D, 2H, 2S:** 5-11 total points and a 6 card suit (a preemptive bid).
- **3C, 3D, 3H, 3S:** 5-11 total points and a 7 card suit (a preemptive bid).
- **4C, 4D, 4H, 4S:** 5-11 total and an 8 card suit (a preemptive bid).
- **5C, 5D:** 5-11 total points and a 9 card suit (a preemptive bid)

Preemptive bids are made to obstruct the opponents' bidding when they likely hold the balance of power, to make it hard for them to find their right place. The preemptive contract is often down 1 or 2 tricks, but this is preferable to the opponents making a contract.

Responder's Bidding

Keep in mind the **25 total combined points needed for game**. If partner opens 1NT (15-17), your 10 points are enough for game. If partner opens 2NT (20-21), your 5 points are enough for game. If partner opens 2C (22+), your 3 points are enough for game. If partner opens 3D (5-11), your 16 points might not be enough. If you as responder can see enough for game, it is your duty to make sure that you get there. The one who knows, goes.

The rest of this lesson focuses on the bidding when your side opens 1 in a suit. The same principles apply when your side makes one of the other opening bids. The details are too much for this first bridge course. You can learn these details in subsequent bridge courses or ask the Internet.

Responder's bids after partner opens the bidding with 1 in a suit.

Responder with 0-5 total points:

- **Pass:** This is the usual response with 0-5 total points.
- **Jump to 2, 3, 4 or 5 in a new suit:** These jumps are preemptive like the opener's opening bids of 2, 3, 4 or 5 in a suit. They show a long suit in a weak hand.

Responder with 6-9 total points:

- **Responder with 6 or more points should not pass. They can bid at the 1 level or they can bid 2 of a suit previously bid by their side.**
- **Raise opener's major to the 2 level:** Shows 6-9 points and 3+ card support.
- **1 in a new suit:** Shows 6+ points (no upper limit) and 4+ cards in the suit. Bid 1 in a 4+ card major rather than raise opener's minor. It is better to search for a 4-4 major suit fit. With both majors, bid hearts, leaving room for opener to bid the other major if they have it. Raise partner's clubs with club support rather than bid 1D. Show the fit rather than going off in a new direction.
- **Raise opener's minor to the 2 level**: Shows 6-9 points. Responder should have 4 diamonds to raise diamonds (since opener often has only 4) and should have 5 clubs to raise clubs (since opener often has only 3).
- **1NT:** Shows 6-9 points and denies the ability to make one of the bids above.
- **Examples:**
  - **1H-2H:** Responder's 2H shows 6-9 points and 3 or more hearts.
  - **1C-1S:** Responder's 1S shows 4+ spades and 6+ points (no upper limit).
  - **1D-1NT:** The 1NT shows 6-9 points, denies 4 hearts or 4 spades or 4 diamonds.
  - **1D-1S; 1NT-2S:** Responder with 6-9 can repeat their own 6+ card suit.
  - **1H-1S; 2D-2H:** Responder with 6-9 should revert to opener's first suit if they prefer it to opener's second suit or have equal length in the two suits.

Responder with 10-11 total points:

- **Responder with 10-11 points will continue bidding up to the 2 level or 3 of a suit previously bid by their side.**
- **Raise opener's major to the 3 level:** Shows 10-11 and 3+ card support.
- **1 in a new suit:** Shows 6+ points (no upper limit) and 4+ cards in the suit. With both a 5 card suit and a 4 card suit, bid the 5 card suit first, then the 4 card suit. Otherwise bid the lowest unbid suit, up the line. Do not jump to 2 of a new suit, which is preemptive, 0-5 points.
- **2 in a new suit; not a jump:** Shows 10+ (no upper limit). Bidding 2H over 1S promises 5 hearts. Bidding 2C or 2D over partner's major promises 4+ cards. Bid 1S over 1H in preference to bidding a minor at the 2 level.
- **Raise opener's minor to the 3 level**: Shows 10-11 points. Should have 4 diamonds to raise diamonds and 5 clubs to raise clubs. Denies a 4-card major.
- **2NT:** Shows 10-11 points and denies the ability to make one of the bids above.
- **Examples:**
  - **1H-3H:** Responder's 3H shows 10-11 points and 3 or more hearts.
  - **1C-1S:** Responder bid 1S to show 4+ spades and 6+ points. Responder will then bid again to show the 10+ points.
  - **1S-2H:** The 2H shows 10+ points (no upper limit) and 5+ hearts.
  - **1H-2C:** The 2C shows 10+ points (no upper limit), denies 3 hearts or 4 spades.
  - **1D-3D:** The 3D shows 10-11 with 4+ diamonds, denies a 4-card major.
  - **1C-2NT:** The 2NT shows 10-11 points, denies 4 hearts, denies 4 spades.
  - **1D-1S; 1NT-3S:** Responder with 10-11 repeats their 6+ card suit at the 3 level.
  - **1D-1S; 1NT-2H:** Responder with 10+ can show a second new suit.

Responder with 12+ total points:

- **Keep bidding new suits until best game or slam is found, then bid that game or slam. Opener should not pass a new suit by an un-passed responder.**
- **Raise opener's major to the 4 level:** 12-15 points and 3+ card support.
- **1 in a new suit or 2 in a new suit (not a jump):** Same as earlier. Open ended.
- **3NT:** Shows 12-15 points and the knowledge that there is no 8+ card major suit fit.
- **With 16+ points:** First bid a new suit. Then hear whether opener is small, medium or large. Add your own points to know whether you belong in slam or only in game.
- **Examples:**
  - **1H-4H:** Responder's 4H shows 12-15 points and 3 or more hearts.
  - **1C-1S or 1S-2H:** Same as in the sections above. Responder will keep bidding new suits until responder knows the best contract, then bid that contract.
  - **1D-3NT:** The 3NT shows 12-15 points, denies 4 hearts, denies 4 spades.

Opener's Second Bid:

- **Pass:** You know responder's size, are in a good spot, nothing more to show.
- **Rebid your 1st suit with a 6+ card suit.** Rebid a major before bidding a new minor. Bid a new major before rebidding a 6 card minor.
- **Bid a 2nd 4+ card suit.** Show major suits before showing minor suits.
- **Raise responder's suit with adequate support:** Need 4+ cards if responder showed a 4 card suit or 3+ cards if responder showed a 5 card suit.
- **Bid NT with none of the above.** Bidding NT may be better than raising a minor.

- **Examples for a Basic Opener (12-15 points):**
  - **1H-2H; Pass:** 12-15 opposite 6-9 cannot add up to 25, so no point going higher. The 8 card major is the best place to play.
  - **1C-1NT; Pass:** Maximum combined points are 24. With no 2nd suit, play 1NT.
  - **1H-1S; 2H:** Opener has 6 hearts. Denies having 4 spades.
  - **1H-1S; 2D:** Opener has 4 diamonds along with the 5 hearts. Denies 4 spades.
  - **1H-1S; 2S:** Opener has 4 spades. The 4-4 spade fit is the best place to be.
  - **1C-1S; 1NT:** With no fit for partner's major, bid 1NT.

Opener's 2nd Bid Clarifies Whether Small, Medium or Large

- After **1H** (Opener) **- 2H** (Responder), the next bid by opener is:
  - **Pass** (basic 12-15); **3H** (medium 16-18); **4H** (maximum 19-21)
- After **1D** (Opener) **- 1S** (Responder), the next bid by opener with 4 spades is:
  - **2S** (basic 12-15); **3S** (medium 16-18); **4S** (maximum 19-21)
- After **1S** (Opener) **- 1NT** (Responder), the next bid by opener with 6 spades is:
  - **2S** (basic 12-15); **3S** (medium 16-18); **4S** (maximum 19-21)
- After **1D** (opener) **- 1S** (responder), the next bid by opener is:
  - **1NT** (basic 12-15); **2NT** (special case that shows 18-19)

Tweak 1: 1H-3H & 1S-3S show 4 card support (and 10-11 points).
With 3 card support, responder bids a new suit and then bids 3 of opener's major.
Why? A 9 card trump suit often provides an extra trick. If responder distinguishes 4 cards from 3, opener can better judge whether to bid game or pass at the 3 level.

Tweak 2: 1H-4H & 1S-4S are preemptive with 0-5 points and 5 card support.
With 12+ points, responder bids a new suit and later bids 4 of opener's major.
Why? The opponents likely have about 25 points and 8 cards in the other major (game in the other major). Use up all the bidding room so they can't communicate. With a combined 10 trump, you will be down only 1 or 2 tricks most of the time.

Caution: Do not make partner bid at the 3 level (a **"reverse**") without 23 combined points.
After 1D-1S, if you bid 2H, partner with maybe only 6 points must bid 3D to return to diamonds. You need 17 points to make this bid. With less than 17, bid 1NT, not 2H.

Suit Lengths

- **Opener bids 1C:** 3 or more clubs. Exactly 3 a good portion (20-30%) of the time.
- **Opener bids 1D:** 4+ diamonds 95% of the time. (Only 3 diamonds 5% of the time.)
- **Opener bids 1H or 1S:** 5+ cards in the suit.
- **Opener bids a 2nd suit:** 4+ cards in the suit. (Only occasionally more than 4.)
- **Responder bids a suit:** 4+ cards in the suit, except 1S-2H promises 5+ hearts.
- **Bid same suit twice without support from partner:** Shows 6+ cards in the suit.
- **Responder bids a 2nd suit:** 4+ cards in the new suit. If responder bids a major and then another suit, this shows 5 cards in the major. This is how responder shows a 5 card major (as opposed to 4 or 6+). With 4-4 in the minors, responder can bid 1D then 2C. With a 4 card major & another 4 card suit, 2nd bid is usually in NT.

Wide Point Ranges, Narrow Point Ranges, Who is the Captain?

- **All NT bids (by opener and responder) show a narrow point range:**
- **Opener:** Open 1 in a suit and then bid 1NT: **12-14**. Open 1NT: **15-17**.
- Open 1 in a suit and then bid 2NT: **18-19**. Open 2NT: **20-21**.
- **Responder:** 1X-1NT: **6-9**. 1X-2NT: **10-11**. 1X-3NT: **12-15**.
- **Opener's 1st bid, if not in NT, shows a wide point range:** 12-21.
- **Opener's 2nd bid shows a narrow range:** Small, medium or large. (See above.)
- **Responder's immediate support and NT bids show a narrow range:**
  1H-2H (6-9); 1H-3H (10-11); 1S-1NT (6-9); 1D-2NT (10-11).
- **Responder's new suit bids show a wide range:**
  1D-1S (6+); 1H-2D (10+); 1D-1S; 1NT-2C (10+).
- **Captain: When one partner makes a "narrow" bid, the other partner is captain.** The other partner knows the combined total within 2-3 points and takes charge. This is usually the responder. The captain makes forcing bids to continue searching for the best contract, or places the contract or makes an invitation. The non-captain can make an invitation but should not make any further unsolicited voluntary bids.
- **Forcing Bids:**
  - A new suit by an un-passed responder is unlimited. Opener should not pass.
  - Once a trump suit has been agreed, a new suit by opener is forcing.
- **Invitation:** A bid below game by the captain, usually 3 in a major or 2NT.
  - **If opener invites:** Responder stops below game with 6-7; bids game with 8-9.
    - **1C-1S; 3S-??:** Opener's has 16-18. Responder with 8 points can "see" 24 or 25 or 26. It is more likely than not that game is there, so bid it.
  - **If responder invites:** Basic opener declines with 12-13; bids game with 14-15.
    - **1H-3H; ??:** Responder has 10-11. Opener with 14 can "see" 24 or 25. Looks like a 50-50 guess. But don't be timid. Bid the game with 14 points.