Bidding Balanced Hands with 15 – 19 points

Balanced hands have :

- No Void
- No singleton
- No more than ONE doubleton

Hands of this type with 12 – 14 points are opened **1 No Trump**

So how do we deal with balanced hands with 15 to 19 points?

You are **too strong** to open 1 No Trump. In these cases, you would:
- open a suit and
- rebid either 1 No Trump, 2 No Trumps, or occasionally 3 No Trumps.

If you have two 4-card suits which do you open?
- With a major (Spades or Hearts) and a minor (Diamonds and Clubs) open the **major.** This is to ensure that a fit in the majors is not missed.
- With **both majors** open **1 Heart.** If partner has **4+ hearts** your **Heart fit** will be found. If partner has 4+ Spades he will respond **1 Spade** and your Spade fit will be found.

Why is it important to find the fit in the majors?
Statistically, the most successful game contract is either **4 Spades or 4 Hearts.**
Thus, finding a fit in the majors which could lead to a major suit game is very important.

Bidding in detail
- If you have a balanced or semi-balanced hand and **15 – 16 points** you open a suit and if partner bids you will usually rebid **1 No Trump** – this shows exactly 15 – 16 points and a balanced hand.

- If you have a balanced or semi-balanced hand and **17 – 18 points** you open a suit and if partner responds you reply **2 No Trumps** – this describes your hand.

- If you have a balanced or semi-balanced hand and **19 points** you open a suit and if partner bids you reply **3 No Trumps.**

Case 1   Suppose you hold the following hand:

♠ A 7   ♥ Q J 9   ♦ Q 7 6   ♣ A Q J 10 9

This looks like the kind of hand you would want to open 1 No Trump on, but you have 16 points – if you open 1 No Trump, your partner will assume you have got 12 – 14 points, and will bid accordingly. So you open this hand 1 Club since clubs is your best suit.

Here are three possible hands your partner could have:

1)   ♠ K10 9 8 ♥ 8 7 6 ♦ K 10 9 ♣ 8 7 3

2)   ♠ K Q 8 5 ♥ A 10 9 5 ♦ 10 8 5 ♣ 7 6

3)   ♠ K Q 8 5 ♥ A K 9 ♦ K 5 3 ♣ 7 5

Hand 1) is the very minimum you need to reply – your partner has bid 1 Club, you now have just enough points to bid 1 Spade and then when your partner replies 1 No Trump, you know they have **15 or 16 points**, and when you add their points to your **six,** you realize that the most you can have between the two hands is **22 points** – you **pass** 1 No Trump at once.

Hand 2) also bids 1 Spade in response to partner's 1 Club bid. When partner responds **1 No Trump,** this hand counts their points, 9, adds them to 15 or 16, and **invites** the game of **3 No Trumps** by bidding 2 No Trumps. This says to partner, if you are maximum for your 1 No Trump, 16 rather than 15, then go on to 3 No Trumps. In this case, your partner with 16 points, would be likely to accept and you would be in the Game Contract of 3 No Trumps. If partner has only 15 points, they should pass 2 No Trumps.

Hand 3) On this hand, you would also respond 1 Spade, then, when partner rebids 1 No Trump, you would realize that you had either 30 or 31 points between the hands, and would immediately bid 3 No Trumps confident you would make at least nine tricks.

Case 2   Let us change the hand of the first bidder by adding the Ace of Diamonds and taking away the Queen of Clubs - This now becomes

   ♠ A 7   ♥ Q J 9   ♦ A Q 7 6 ♣ A J 10 9

This hand now opens with a bid of 1 Diamond.

The following hands would all bid 1 Spade

1)   ♠ K 10 9 8   ♥ 8 7 6 3 ♦ K 10 9   ♣ 8 7

2)   ♠ K Q 8 5 ♥ A 10 9 8 ♦ 10 8 5 ♣ 7 6

3)   ♠ K Q 8 5 ♥ A K 9 ♦ K 10 5 3 ♣ 7 5

 Your rebid on the opening hand would now be **2 No Trumps**. Hand 1) would **still pass this bid.** Even if partner has 18 points, you have a maximum of 24 points between the hands. Hands 2) and 3) would both bid 3 No trumps. Again, it's simply a matter of counting the points – you know that the rebid of 2 No Trumps means 17 or 18 points, so at most 1) would

have 24 points, on 2) the total would be 26 or 27, and on 3) 30 – 31.

This time, you have a really good hand;

♠ A 7   ♥ K J 9   ♦ A Q 7 6   ♣ A J 10 9   - a balanced 19 points. The person with this hand would open 1 Diamond(in general, one opens the higher ranking of two four card suits especially if one is a major and the other a minor) and rebid 3 No Trumps if partner bid anything, since partner should have at least six points to bid.   19 plus 6 equals 25, which will usually make 3 No Trumps.

As with all of life, there is room for judgement – a good 15 points can make more tricks than a poor 16 – but on the whole it's safer to rely on the rules than to make it up as you go along!

Summary

Opener	Responder	Opener's Rebid	Means
1 Heart	1 Spade	1 No Trump	Opener has 15-16 points balanced
1 Heart	1 Spade	2 No Trump	Opener has 17-18 points balanced
1 Heart	1 Spade	3 No Trump	Opener has 19 points balanced

Examples   South is dealer in each case

1.

	North ♠ 6 4 2 ♥ K 10 6 3 ♦ Q 7 5 ♣ Q 9 2	
♠ K 10 7 5 ♥ J 5 2 ♦ A ♣ J 10 8 7 3	Board No 1	♠ A Q 3 ♥ 9 8 4 ♦ K 8 4 3 2 ♣ 6 5
	South ♠ J 9 8 ♥ A Q 7 ♦ J 10 9 6 ♣ A K 4	

Here, South is just too strong to open 1 No Trump so opens **1 Diamond**.

North bids **1 Heart**and

South rebids 1 No Trump

 North then passes.

The two hands have a maximum of 23 points between them, 7 tricks should be the limit.

2.

	North	
	♠ A Q 10 3 ♥ 10 5 ♦ Q 10 4 ♣ J 10 6 4	
♠ 7 6 2 ♥ J 9 6 3 ♦ A K 5 2 ♣ A 9	Board No 2	♠ K 5 4 ♥ 8 4 2 ♦ 8 7 6 ♣ 8 7 5 3
	South ♠ J 9 8 ♥ A K Q 7 ♦ J 9 3 ♣ K Q 2	

South opens **1 Heart**

North replies **1 Spade**

South rebids **1 No Trump**, and

North (with 9 points) makes an **invitationa**l bid of **2 No Trumps**.

South with 16 points accepts, and bids the game of **3 No Trumps**.

This will probably not make, because on a diamond lead there will be 3 diamond tricks, the Ace of Clubs and the K of Spades for East/West to bid.
If, however, West leads a heart rather than a diamond, the contract is likely to make.

3.

	North ♠ K J 9 8 7 ♥ 8 2 ♦ J 4 ♣ J 10 6 4	
♠ 10 4 ♥ Q 10 7 4 ♦ A 10 8 7 5 ♣ Q 9	Board No 3	♠ A 6 3 2 ♥ 9 6 3 ♦ 3 2 ♣ A 7 3 2
	South ♠ Q 5 ♥ A K J 5 ♦ K Q 9 6 ♣ K 8 5	

South opens **1 Heart** and North replies **1 Spade**. South rebids 2 No Trumps, and North probably passes. (maximum of 18 points plus 6 = 24). On the likely lead of the 7of Diamonds 3 No Trumps might well make, which doesn't mean it would have been right to bid it.

4.

	North ♠ K Q 9 3 ♥ A Q J ♦ J 8 6 ♣ 10 5 4	
♠ 10 6 5 ♥ 10 7 6 5 ♦ 10 9 2 ♣ A K 2	Board No 4	♠ J 8 7 ♥ 9 8 4 2 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ J 7 3
	South ♠ A 4 2 ♥ K 3 ♦ A Q 7 5 ♣ Q 9 8 6	

South opens 1 D, North bid 1 S, South rebids 1 No Trump, and North, with 13 points, has no hesitation in going to 3 No Trumps. South should make at least 10 tricks in 3 No Trumps.

5.

	North ♠ A J 10 6 5 2 ♥ 10 6 3 2 ♦ 3 ♣ J 7	
♠ 8 7 4 ♥ Q 9 4 ♦ 4 2 ♣ K 8 6 4 2	Board No 5	♠ Q ♥ A 8 7 ♦ K Q 9 8 6 5 ♣ Q 5 3
	South ♠ K 9 3 ♥ K J 5 ♦ A J 10 7 ♣ A 10 9	

Here, South opens 1 D, North bids 1 S and South responds 1 No Trump. North, with six points, has an unbalanced hand, and should bid 2 Spades this is not **invitational,** but tells South that the hand should be played in spades.

6.

	North ♠ 4 ♥ K Q 9 8 6 4 ♦ A 4 2 ♣ A 5 3	
♠ 9 7 6 5 3 ♥ 3 ♦ Q 10 7 6 ♣ 9 8 7	Board No 6	♠ Q J 10 2 ♥ A 10 2 ♦ J 9 5 3 ♣ Q 10
	South ♠ A K 8 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ K 8 ♣ K J 6 4 2	

South opens 1 C, North bids 1 H, South rebids 1 No Trump, and now North bids 4 H. North knows South has at least 2 hearts for his rebid of 1 No Trump, which means they have at least eight hearts together. With 28 points together, North decides on the game in hearts.

7.

	North ♠ 9 7 ♥ A Q 10 3 ♦ 9 6 4 ♣ 9 5 4 3	
♠ K 10 6 4 2 ♥ J 9 ♦ A 7 5 3 ♣ K Q	Board No 7	♠ J 8 3 ♥ 8 7 5 4 2 ♦ J ♣ 10 8 6 3
	South ♠ A Q 5 ♥ K 6 ♦ K Q 10 8 2 ♣ A J 7	

Here South opens **1 D** and when North responds **1 H**, South jumps straight to **3 No Trumps**. This should make on the normal lead of the 4 of Spades.

8.

	North ♠ Q 6 5 3 ♥ K Q 10 8 ♦ 7 ♣ A Q 9 7	
♠ 9 7 4 ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ K J 9 4 ♣ J 5 2	Board No 8	♠ A 8 2 ♥ 9 4 2 ♦ 10 8 6 3 ♣ 6 4 3
	South ♠ K J 10 ♥ A J 7 ♦ A Q 5 2 ♣ K 10 8	

Once again, South opens **1 D** and North bids **1 H**. South rebids **2 No Trumps,** and North finds it easy to go on to **3 No Trumps**. It is easy to develop at least 11 top tricks in 3 No Trumps.