

SUIT BIDDING

There are several approaches to bidding including strong club, precision, standard American, standard American yellow card and 2/1. I am not able to give you one bidding system which applies to all systems. Likely, most of you play either Standard American or Standard American Yellow Card. The latter was devised by ACBL to provide a simple generic system of bidding as a default for all new and beginner players. That being said, however, I am going to teach the 2/1 system which most top players play.

The fundamental difference between Standard American and 2/1 is that bidding a new suit at the 2-level in Standard American promises 10 or more points, while in 2/1, bidding a new suit at the 2 level commits to at least game.

Getting back to the theme of my lessons, in a quest to determine whether the magic numbers of 8 and 25 are present, when responder bids a new suit at the 2 level, half the battle is over and the search can quickly proceed to finding an 8-card major suit fit. Whereas, if responder bids a new suit at the 2-level, it is not yet known whether there are enough points for game in the combined hands. Of course, if opener bids one of a suit with 15 or more points, when responder bids a new suit at the 2 level, opener knows there are enough points for game.

Note: There are rare circumstances when responder must bid 1 2 or 3 card suit at the 2 level in order to inform opener that he has a game forcing hand. This is referred to as inventing a 2 level bid to start a game forcing auction. There are also other bids, treatments and conventions to use to initiate a game forcing auction which we will discuss in detail. One convention is called inverted minors. It is used to describe either game forcing, invitational or preemptive hands and is very useful and efficient. Another convention is called Jacoby 2 no trump. It is used when opener bids a major suit and responder holding an opening hand and 4 card support for opener's suit, bids 2 no trump. This is an artificial bid and must be alerted by the opening bidder. If asked to describe the bid, he says responder is showing a game forcing hand with 4-card support for my major suit and is asking for a further description of my hand to determine whether we might belong in slam. We will go forward with a thorough discussion of Jacoby 2 no trump, as it is one of the most useful and efficient conventions we play.

Another convention is called Bergen Raises, invented by pro Marty Bergen. It is used by responder to describe a hand with 3 or 4 card support and invitational, constructive or preemptive values and enables opening bidder to judge whether or not to bid game. The system is based on the Law of Total Tricks, which basically says that notwithstanding the total high card points, a pair should be able to take the number of tricks equal to the combined number cards in the suit. We will discuss Bergen Raises, which is a popular convention used by many players.

Another convention, or treatment is referred to as Splinter Bids. We use splinter bids to describe a hand with invitational or higher values and a singleton or a void in a side suit – thus enabling the opener to reevaluate his hand in light of the hand you described including a singleton or void in a suit you bid by making a triple jump. For example, if your partner opens one heart and you bid 3 spades, you are describing a hand with 4 card support in hearts, invitational values and a singleton or void in spades.

Similarly, if partner opens one spade and you have 4 card spade support, an invitational or better hand with a singleton or void in diamonds, you would bid 4 diamonds (a triple jump).

Note: You would not bid 3 clubs or 3 diamonds to show a splinter in that suit because 3 clubs and 3 diamonds are bids used in Bergen Raises.

Going back to the basics, there are three things I have emphasized in bidding to reach the optimum contract.

1. The magic number 8 is the number of cards in a suit between you and your partner, in order to bid game in a major suit.
2. The magic number 25 is the number of points between you and your partner, in order to have enough points to bid game in a major suit or no trump.
3. Always pay attention to vulnerability.

We started out by using the no trump structure, which makes it fairly easy to discover major suit fits and point totals. However, Using the no trump structure only works when one hand has a hand suitable to open one no trump showing 15-17 points and a balanced hand, bidding a suit then jumping to 2 no trump, which shows 18-19 points and a balanced hand, opening 2 no trump, which shows 20-21 points and a balanced hand or opening 2 clubs and rebidding 2 no trump, which shows 22-24 points and a balanced hand. When you use the bids, you have a great idea as to your total points and need only find a major suit fit using the tools I taught – Stayman, jacoby transfers, Smolen, puppet, Texas transfers and delayed Texas transfers.

Today we are going to enter into a new phase of bidding, finding the 8-card fits and the 25 point hands when you don't have a balanced hand or a hand with the range for bidding no trump. We call this suit bidding. We use suit bidding to start the auction when you don't have a hand suitable for no trump opening.

Here is a little chart which describes the requirements for bidding a suit instead of no trump:

Bidding a suit at the one level – 12-21 points excluding balance hands with 25-17 and 20-21 points or any hand with 12-14 points or 18-19 points.

Bidding a suit at the 2 level:

2 clubs- artificial and forcing, shows a hand with 22+ plus points or at least 8 ½ tricks.

2 diamonds, 2 hearts or 2 spades – weak bid with 6 cards in the suit and 5-10 points

Bidding a suit at the 3 level – weak or preemptive bid with 7 cards in the suit.

As always, keep an eye on the vulnerability. Bidding 2 or 3 of a suit when vulnerable requires a better suit and more points than when not vulnerable.

BIDDING A SUIT AT THE ONE LEVEL

Suits are divided into two categories, major suits (spades and hearts) and minor suits (diamonds and clubs). There are different requirements for opening a major suit or a minor suit at the 1 level.

Let's first look at hand with 12-14 points, which are too weak to open one no trump.

To open a major suit with one heart or one spade at the one level, you need to have at least 5 cards in that suit.

To open a minor suit at the one level, you need at least 3 cards in that suit, unless you are playing a short club convention which allows you to open one club with as few as two clubs. For our purposes, I do not encourage playing the short club convention.

So with 12-14 points, you can open one spade or one heart with at least 5 cards in that suit. If you have 12-14 points and no major suit with 5 or more cards, you must open the bidding with one of a minor suit. Here are some rules on opening a minor suit:

With 3 cards in each minor, open 1 club.

S. A 10 4 2 H. K 7 6 D. Q J 3 C. K 9 2 (Bid 1 club)

With more clubs than diamonds, open 1 club.

S. 7 5 4 H. A 9 6 D. Q 10 C. A K 9 4 2 (Bid 1 club)

With more diamonds than clubs, open 1 diamonds.

S. A 10 9 6 H. K 2 D. A Q 6 3 C. 8 7 6 (Bid 1 diamond)

With 4-4 or 5-5 in the minors, open 1 diamond, intending to bid 2 clubs at your next turn.

S. K 2 H. Q 7 6 D. A 10 9 8 C. K J 3 2 (bid 1 diamond)

With a 6 card minor suit and a 5 card major suit and 12-19 points, bid 1 of the minor suit, intending to bid the major suit twice to describe a 6-5 hand.

S. K Q 10 6 2 H. 2 D. 5 C. A Q J 6 4 2 (Bid 1 club, followed by spades twice)

There is only one situation where you can open 1 diamond with 3 diamonds. That is where your distribution is 4-4-3-2. The rationale is you can't open a major suit, because that would promise 5 and you can't open one club, because that would promise at least 3 clubs.

S. K 10 8 7 H. A Q 7 5 D. 10 9 7 C. A 5 (Bid 1 diamond)

RESPONDING TO OPENING MINOR AND MAJOR SUIT 1-LEVEL BIDS

RESPONDING TO ONE LEVEL MINOR SUIT BIDS

If opener bids 1 club or 1 diamond, he promises a hand between 12 and 21 points either denying a 5-card major, otherwise he would have opened 1 of a major, or a hand with a 5 card or longer major and 6 or more of a minor suit which is longer than the major suit.

Note: It is almost always best to open your longer suit first, even if that suit is a minor suit and you have a 5-card major. By opening 1 of a minor and bidding a major suit twice, you are describing a 2-suited hand with a longer minor than major, such as clubs and 5 spades. This is part of the communication process whereby you exchange information with your partner to arrive at the optimum contract. An exception is where you have a dead minimum hand which is not strong enough to make 3 bids at describe your hand. In such case it may be best to ignore your longer club suit and open 1 of your 5-card major. An example of this would be where you have 6 clubs and five spades but only 11 or 12 points (you upgraded your hand to reflect the favorable distribution). In this case, if you open 1 of your long minor and partner bids one no trump, showing 6-10 points, you would have two bid 2 spades to show your distribution. This could get you too high, since that bid would show a reverse with 18-21 points, but you only have 11 or 12. Of course it would be great if your partner made a one level suit bid over your minor suit opening, but you don't know that he will. Then it would be impossible to show your distribution without lying about your overall strength. So with weak hands having 5-6 or similar distribution, treat your hand as 5-5 or 6-6 and bid your major suit first, reserving the opening bid of one of a minor followed by bidding your major suit twice to show a 5-6, but only with a strong hand. If you have to lie, its better to lie about your shape than your strength.

An opening bid of one of a suit also denies a balanced hand with either 15 to 17 high card points or 20 to 21 high card points, otherwise he would have opened 1 no trump or 2 no trump.

So what do we have left?

Opener can have:

1. A balanced hand with 12 to 14 points;
2. A balanced hand with 18-19 points; or
3. An unbalanced hand with 12 to 21 points.

Why? Because with a balanced hand with 15-17 or 20-21 points, opener would bid 1nt or 2nt, respectively.

So when your partner opens 1 club or 1 diamond, you know he has one of these 3 hands, but you don't know which type of hand he has. You only which type of hand he doesn't have. This is what we call taking an inference from what your partner doesn't bid.

Responses to one of a minor suit.

If partner opens 1 club, with 6 or more points you are required to respond at the one level. You have several choices. If you have a 4-card or longer major suit, you should bid 1 of that suit. Lacking a 4-card major, you should bid 1 diamond with 4 or more diamonds. Lacking a 4 card suit in diamonds or a major suit, you should bid no trump, showing 6-10 points but no suit to bid.

Bidding a suit at the one level over partner's one club opening, promises 4 or more cards in that suit and anywhere between 6 and 21 points. It is absolutely forcing, for at least one round, which means that opening bidder must bid again, after which the point totals and suit fits can be clarified.

You will recall that we spent several sessions going over the beauty and symmetry of the no trump structure for its limited description. That principle also applies here. A one no trump response to partner's one club opening bid promises a hand with a precise range of 6-10 points. Moreover, by inference, it denies having a 4-card major suit, since with 6-10 points and a 4 or longer card major suit, you would have bid 1 of that suit, not no trump. Always keep in mind whether we open one no trump, one of a minor suit or one of a major suit, we are always in pursuit of the magic numbers 8 and 25, so your first obligation is to bid a major suit with 4 or more cards if you have one in response to partner's opening bid of 1 club.

Similarly, with 11-12 points and no suit to bid over your partner's opening minor suit bid, you should bid 2 no trump, which shows precisely a hand with 11-12 points and no suit to bid, necessarily denying a 4-card major. Armed with the information conveyed by your 2 no trump response, opening bidder can make a decision. With a minimum hand containing a good 11 to a bad 13 points, opening bidder can pass your 2 no trump bid, since there is not likely enough combined points for game. But with a good 13 or more points, opening bidder may bid 3 no trump.

Note: in this sequence, 11-12 points opposite an opening bid of one of a minor suit is considered an invitational hand as opposed to 8-9 points when partner opens one no trump.

A few caveats. You should determine from the strength of your hand and your distribution, whether you have enough strength to make two bids when partner opens the bidding. For example, if you have a minimum hand with 6-7 points, you probably have one bid in your hand, while if you have 10 or more points, you probably have at least two bids in your hand. With 8-9 points, whether you have enough to bid once or twice will depend on how strong partner's hand is based upon his rebid after you respond.

Thus, if partner opens 1 club, you respond one of a suit, and partner rebids one no trump, partner has limited his hand to about 12-14 points, so you should not bid again unless you have a very good reason to do so.

Further bidding after an opening bid of one of a minor and a one level response by partner.

Again, if partner opens one of a minor and you bid one of a major suit, you promise at least 4 cards in that suit and at least 6 points, since opener can have 19-21 points, which is enough for game.

If opener rebids one no trump, he is limiting his hand to 11+ -14 points, a minimum opening bid. If you have 6-10 points, you should pass the rebid. If you have 11-12 you can invite by bidding again, possibly raising to 2 no trump, rebidding your suit with 5 or more or bidding a new 4+ card suit.

If opener raises your suit to the two level, he is usually promising 4-card support and a minimum opener. If he raises your suit to the 3 level, he should have 4 or more card support and an invitational hand 14-15 points, inviting you to bid game with a good 10 or more points.

If opener bids a new suit at the one level or two level (without jumping) his bid is non-forcing. You should only bid again with an invitational hand or better with 10 plus points.

If opener jumps to 2 no trump over your bid of one of a suit, he is showing a hand with 18-19 points. Opener's hand should be balanced (that sequence describes a balanced hand with 18-19 points which fills the gap between opening bids of 1 no trump (15-17) and 2 no trump (20-21). It is possible that opener lacks support for your suit or may have 3 card support for your suit. If your major suit contained 5 or more cards, you may wish to play in game in your suit, but only if your partner has 3-card support in your suit, which brings us to the magic number of 8. There is a way to find out if partner has 3 card support for your suit.

We use a convention called new minor forcing. Here's how it works. Partner opens one of a minor. You respond one of a major. Partner jumps to 2 no trump, showing 18-19 points. With only 4 cards in your major, either pass with a very weak hand or bid 3 no trump with 7 or more points. With a five card major, you bid 3 of the minor suit your partner didn't open. Opener must alert this bid as "New Minor Forcing, asking him to bid 3 of partner's major suit with 3 card support or to bid 3 no trump, denying 3 card support for partner's major suit. Here's the sequence:

One club pass one spade pass
2 no trump pass 3 diamonds (A) pass

* With 3 spades, opener bids 3 spades. With fewer than 3 spades, opener bids 3 no trump.

Note: In this sequence, if opener bids 3 spades, promises 3 card support for partner's suit, partner can bid 4 spades. However, if partner has a balanced hand, with scattered values and a weak 5 card suit, he may bid 3 no trump even though there is a 5-3 fit in spades, leaving it up to partner whether to pass 3 no trump or bid 4 spades. Opener knows from this bidding sequence that partner has 5 spades, but since partner has given him the option of playing 3 no trump or 4 spades, opener should reevaluate his hand to determine which contract is more suitable.



For example:

Opener:	S. J x x	H. K Q 10	D. A Q J x	C. K Q x
Responder	S. A x x x x	H. x x	D. K x	C. J x x x

Responder has 8 points, opposite opener's 18 points. 26 points is enough for game. By using New Minor Forcing, responder knows there is an 8-card spade fit, but his spades are weak, with no texture or intermediate spots. He also has 4 of his 8 points outside the spade suit, which might be suitable for no trump. So after opener bids 3 spades, promising 3 card spade support, responder cooperates by offering opener the option of playing in 3 no trump. Opener will know responder has a hand like this. Otherwise, responder would simply bid 4 spades once the 8-card fit is found.

Note: In no trump, opener would have 9 or 10 tricks in no trump after knocking out the ace of clubs and the ace of hearts. (1 spade, 1 or 2 hearts, 4 diamonds and 3 clubs), while in 4 spades, responder must lose the ace of clubs, the ace of hearts and probably 2 spades for 9 tricks and down one. But change the hands to:

Opener:	S. K Q x	H. A 10	D. A Q x x	C. A x x x
Responder	S. A x x x x	H. x x x	D. K x	C. J x x x

This hand plays better in spades than in no trump, because opener has a ruffing value due to his doubleton heart, which adds one more trick than is available in no trump. Responder would make 5 spade tricks (unless a defender had J x x x in spades), a heart ruff in opener's hand, 3 diamonds and one club for 10 total tricks, while there are only 9 tricks available in no trump).

A popular convention which I use to describe hands with minor suits is called inverted minors. The feature of inverted minors is that when opener bids one diamond or one club and responder has a game forcing hand with at least 4-card support for opener's suit, but no four card major, he raises to 2 of the opener's suit. The efficiency of this bid is that it is known at the lowest possible level that the pair will bid game and leaves room to explore for slam or to see if there are stoppers in all suits to bid game in no trump. Conversely, a jump to 3 of the opener's minor suit is preemptive. It denies a four card major and is used not only to describe responder's hand but to force opponents to enter the auction at the 3- level, making it more difficult for them to find a fit. The third component of inverted minor is responding with an invitational hand, 10-12 points and 4+ card support for opener's minor. There are several ways to do this, but I prefer a treatment called criss-cross. The way it works is for responder to make a jump shift in the other minor to show a limit raise in opener's minor.

For example, if opener bids one club, a jump to 2 diamonds by responder shows a limit raise in clubs. Similarly, if opener bids 2 diamond, a jump to 3 clubs shows a limit raise in diamonds. Again, the principle here is the law of total tricks. With an 8 or 9 card fit in a minor suit, the opener should be able to take 8 or 9 tricks in that suit, regardless of points.

Your choices are to bid one of a major suit containing 4 or more cards in that suit. If you lack a 4-card major suit, you may bid 1 diamond

You can bid 1 of a suit higher ranking than partner's suit. Responding with a new suit at the 1 level is absolutely forcing for at least one round, since an unpassed hand can have anywhere from 6 to 17 points. If you do respond to partner's opening bid by bidding a new suit at the one level, partner must bid again, since you are unlimited. However, if you respond to partner's opening bid at the 1 level by bidding 1 no trump, you are limiting your hand to 6-10 points, which partner may pass. Again, this is the beauty of the no-trump structure which limits your hand and enables partner to make an informed decision.

For example, if partner opens one club and you respond one no trump, showing 6-10 points, partner will pass with 14 points, since the maximum combined point total is 24 points. But if partner has 15-17 points, he can bid 2 no trump asking you to bid 3 no trump with 8 or 10 points or pass with 6-7 points, since there would not be a sufficient point total to make game.

But you can only bid a suit or 1nt, which is higher ranking than the suit your partner opened in. For example, if partner opens one club, with 6 or more points you may bid 1 diamond, 1 heart, 1 spade or 1 nt.

You should bid 1 of your longest suit with 4 or more cards. If you have 2 or more 4 card suits, bid your lowest ranked suit first. If you have a 5-card suit and a 4 card, bid the longer suit first. If you do not have a long suit of your own you may bid 1 no trump or raise partner's suit to the 2 level with 6-10 points. NOTE: responding 1 no trump is a limited bid, Similarly, raising partner's suit at the 2 level is also limited, while support your partner's suit at the 2 level, but only if you Otherwise you would have to bid at the 2 level. Here is another inference. If you raise your partner's bid to the 2 level, it denies having a 4-card major suit of your own, otherwise you would have responded in 1 of your major suit. If you respond 1nt, to partner's opening bid, you are describing a balanced hand with 6-9 points and no 4-card major.

With fewer than 6 points you should pass, since if you bid, partner will expect that you have at least 6 points and bid accordingly. One exception to this rule is that if you have an ace or KQ in a suit, you may respond at the one level, since your partner may on occasion have as many as 21 points, which is enough for game opposite and A or KQ.

One other caveat is that partner's one level response is forcing for at least one round. While he may have as few as 4, 5 or 6 points, he may also have a very strong hand. As opening bidder, you don't know responder's strength, so you must bid again awaiting further clarification from responder. Some people play strong jump shifts by agreement over partner's opening bid to signify a good suit and a strong hand. Other people play weak jump shifts over partner's opening bid to signify a long suit (usually 6 cards) and a weak hand. My preference is to respond at the one level and make a forcing bid with your next bid. There are special bids we can use to clarify your hand at subsequent rounds of bidding.

The exception to forcing bids at the one level is where the responder is a passed hand, in which case opener may pass responder's bid or make another bid, but a one level bid by responder who is a passed hand is non-forcing and may be passed. The rationale here is that an unpassed hand is unlimited, while a passed hand is limited to a hand with less than an opening bid.

A 1-level response in a suit to an opening 1 level bid is forcing for at least 1 round. Because it is forcing, opener must bid again. Why is this so? Because responder has not limited the strength of his hand. He has merely indicated that he has at least 4 cards in the suit in which he responded and has 4 or more cards in that suit. Responder will further describe his hand to opener at his next turn to bid by passing or bidding again.

The only 1 level response opener may pass is 1nt. Why? Because responder has limited his hand by bidding 1nt to having a balanced hand with no 4-card suit ranked above the opener's bid suit, with 6-8 points. In order to bid over responder's 1 notrump bid, he would have to have a long suit with 6 or more cards in the suit, in which case he would simply re-bid his suit at the 2-level or, if he had 2 good suits, he would bid his second suit at the 2-level. Partner's rebid at the 2-level following a 1nt response from his partner is generally non-forcing, so that responder should now pass opener's second bid, or simply bid 2 of partner's first bid suit. This is not a strong supporting bid. Rather it is showing a preference to which of opener's two suits he has better support for.

In a subsequent lesson we will talk about the Golden Fit. Basically, you and your partner have a Golden Fit in a Major Suit – spades or hearts – if you have 8 or more cards in the suit between you. You have a Golden Fit in a Minor Suit – diamonds or clubs – if you have 9 or more cards in the suit in the combined hands

When you respond to a 1 club or 1 diamond opening bid, your first obligation is to try to find a Golden Fit, if there is one. So with 6 or more points, you bid your 4 card suits up the line, beginning with your lowest ranked 4 card suit at the one level. Your first response tells partner you have at least 6 points and at least 4 cards in the suit bid.

Let's say your partner opens 1 club and you bid 1 heart, your lowest ranking 4 card suit above clubs. If your partner also has 4 hearts, he will raise to 2 hearts, confirming the existence of a Golden Fit in hearts. By bidding 2 hearts, your partner is also limiting the strength of his hand to about 15 points. If he had 16 or 17 points, he would bid 3 hearts. With 6 points you would raise to 4 hearts 8 or more points and pass with 6 or 7, since you know that 25 points are required for game.

If you had 10 or 11 points and your partner raised to 2 hearts, you would bid 3 hearts, inviting partner to bid 4 hearts with 14 or 15 points. He would pass with 12 or 13 since you do not have 25 combined points in both hands.

If, as responder, you have 6 or more points, no 4 card major and a balanced hand, you should bid no trump. With 6-9 points, bid 1 no trump. With 10-11 points, bid 2 no trump. With 12-14 points, bid 3 no trump. If you bid 1 no trump and partner has 12-15 points, he will pass, since there are not enough points for game in the combined hands. If he has 16 or 17 points, he will raise to 2 no trump, inviting

you to bid 3 no trump if you have 8 or 9 points, or pass with 6 or 7 points. If he has 18 to 21 points, he will bid 3 no trump, since you have enough combined points to make game in no trump.

If you have 6 or more points and higher ranked 4-suit and a 5-card suit, bid your 5-card suit first. Then, if partner responds 1nt to your bid, you can, if convenient bid your 4-card suit at the 2-level. So, if partner opens 1 club and you have 7 points, with 5 spades and 4 hearts, you would respond by bidding 1 spade. This bid does not promise 5 spades. All it shows is that you have 6-8 points, at least 4 spades and more spades than hearts. It does not yet deny 4 hearts. If you have 4 hearts and 4 spades, you would bid hearts first (with 2 4-card suits, bid up the line – lowest rank first).

If partner bids 1 nt in response to your 1 spade bid, he is limiting his hand to a minimum, say 12-15 pts. He is not denying 4 spades, because he must have 4-spades to raise your 1 spade response. Why? Because you are in search of a Golden Fit, and by raising your 1 spade to 2 spades, it promises 4-card support and confirms a Golden Fit.

So if partner responds 1nt to your 1 spade bid, he is limiting his hand, denying 4 spades (since if he had 4 spades, he would raise spades immediately), but not denying 3 spades. Now over 1nt, you can bid 2 hearts? What does this promise? You still have a minimum hand, but it promises at least 5 spades and at least 4 hearts, but more spades than hearts, since if you had 4 hearts and 4 spades, you would bid hearts first. Now over your 2-heart bid, partner knows you have at least 5 spades and at least 4 hearts, but a minimum hand. With 4 hearts, your partner can raise your hearts if he has a maximum or invitational hand. With 3 spades, he can raise your spades with 3 and a maximum or invitational hand, since he knows you have 5 spades and the partnership has a Golden 8-card fit.

If you had 10 or more points, you would handle the bidding a little differently. If you responded 1 heart or 1 spade to partner's opening 1 club bid, and partner responded 1 nt, you would make an invitational bid with 10 or 11 points and you would make a game forcing bid with 12 or more points. We can examine these bids at a later time. However, the point I am making is that bidding consists of exchanging information with your partner by the bids you both make in an effort to reach the optimum contract.

In the next lesson, we will talk about no trump bidding and responses.

RESPONDING TO 1-LEVEL MAJOR SUIT BIDS

If partner opens 1 heart or 1 spade, he promises 12 to 21 points, at least a 5-card suit and no longer minor suit. It is a non-forcing bid, which you can pass with fewer than 6 points.

If you have 6 points or more, you are required to respond. If you have fewer than 10 points, you may not bid a new suit at the 2-level, but you may raise partner's suit at the 2-level with 6-9 points. To bid a new suit at the 2-level, you must have at least 10 points and 5 cards in the suit. With 6-9 points and a balanced hand you can bid 1nt, which describes your hand perfectly. It denies support in your partner's suit and denies 10 or more points. By limiting your hand in this way, your partner will know how to proceed. If partner opens 1-heart, you can bid 1 spade with four or more spades. This is not a limited bid, since it says nothing about your point count. It only says that you have 4 spades and enough points to respond, so it is forcing for one round. Partner must bid something to further describe his hand when you respond 1-spade to his 1-heart bid. What further action you take after partner responds, depends on partner's response and how strong your hand is. If partner responds 1nt to your 1-spade response, he is limiting his hand to a minimum, so you should proceed with caution. If you have 12 or more points, you should bid again. If you have 6-9 points, you should pass, unless you have 6 or more spades, in which case you should bid 2-spades over your partner's 1nt response.

If you have 10-12 points, you can bid 2nt with a balanced hand and no support for partner's suit. This is a very specific bid, which limits the strength of your hand. Partner will know you have specifically 10-12 points and either bid again or pass based upon his strength.

If you have 10-12 points and at least 4-card support for partner's major suit, you can make an invitational bid of 3 in partner's suit. This is a very specific limited bid. Partner will know what you have and bid or pass based upon the strength of his hand and what he knows about your hand. We call this, 1H-3H or 1S-3S, a limit-raise in partner's suit.

There is an approach to bridge called 2 over 1 game force, which I am not going to teach at the beginner level, but I will review it at the intermediate level. If you want to learn about it, feel free to attend an intermediate class and see it its within your grasp. Very simply, the system says that after partner opens the bidding at the 1-level, if you bid a new suit at the 2-level, you are forcing the partnership to game, so your partner will know that he cannot stop bidding until a game contract is reached. Bidding a new suit at the 2-level in 2 over 1, is a little like bidding a new suit at the 2-level in standard bidding, except that in standard bidding, your 2-level bid only promises 10 or more points whereas in 2 over 1, a 2-level bid promises at least a good 12 points and a hand, which when combined with opener, will produce enough tricks to make game,

For now, we are using a standard bidding system.

Q & A: When trying for slam, how is it best proceed?

Thank you for your question. When exploring for a slam after you have agreed upon a suit, you have several choices, depending on your hand. One choice is to use key card Blackwood, which not only tells you the number of aces in your hand, but includes the king of Trump as well (5 key cards). If you have all the key cards, you can then ask for kings (by agreement either specific kings up the line or number of kings - whichever you choose). Alternatively, you can ask for the queen of Trump by bidding the next higher suit (not the trump suit). To show the queen, partner will either bid the next higher suit below the trump suit in which he has the king (that shows the queen of trump and the king of the suit bid. Without the queen, partner will bid the trump suit. With the queen and no king, partner will bid no trump. Note: if partner has 6 trumps when 5 are expected or five when 4 are expected, that should be counted as having the queen since you have a 10-card fit and opponents trumps are likely to be 2-1, so the queen will drop.

Cue bidding controls are used in two instances. 1. At low level of bidding to inquire whether there is slam interest. If there is slam interest after cue bidding, you can then use keycard Blackwood since you also need to know about kings and the queen of trump.

If you have a void, key card is not helpful since you do not need to know about the ace of that suit. In that case, cue bidding is better. You should always cue bid up the line. (Spades first if you have agreed on hearts, then clubs and diamonds). Discuss if cuebids should include voids. Second round cuebids should include singletons and kings.

As an alternative, if you have agreed in a suit and you have a void in a suit, consider using exclusion Blackwood by jumping to 5 of your void suit. Partner will respond with 3014, not counting the ace of your void suit. Whether you use cuebids or exclusion Blackwood is up to you in a given situation.

Hope this helps. Bart.