

Introduction to bridge

Lesson 5: Opening the bidding with a balanced hand

Lesson 5 looks at opening the bidding with strong balanced hands.

There are opening two bids that are used to show strong balanced hands – 1NT and 2NT.

What is a balanced hand?

A balanced hand is a hand that has void, no singleton and not more than one doubleton.

Hand shapes are 4333, 4432 and 5332.

Balanced hands usually make more tricks in no trumps while unbalanced hands play better with a long trump suit.

Opening 1NT

With **15-17 HCP and balanced hand** open the bidding with 1NT.

Don't worry about a weak doubleton, always open 1NT. You can also open 1NT if you have a five-card major.

1NT tells your partner exactly the type of hand you have, making it easy to find a game contract or to play in a part-score contract.

Responding to 1NT

Because the 1NT opening bid is so precise, the partner of the 1NT opener usually decides that contract.

With a balanced hand

If responder also has a balanced hand it is best to play in a no trump contract.

All you need to consider is what level contract to play in by adding your HCP points to opener's HCP:

- **0-7** – pass as there is not enough points for game even if opener has a maximum ($7 + 17 = 24$ at best)
- **8-9** – bid 2NT, inviting partner to bid game if they have 17HCP ($8 + 17 = 25$)
- **10+** – bid 3NT as you know your side has at least 25 HCP ($10 + 15 = 25$)

With a strong hand of your own you can look for slam in no trumps (but that is another lesson!).

PS: Don't bother looking for a minor suit fit when you have a balanced hand and your partner opens 1NT – remember, we never want to play in 5 of a minor if we can play in no trumps!

With unbalanced hands

When your partner opens 1NT and you have an unbalanced hand with a suit of your own, you may not want to play the hand in no trumps.

Because you know the shape of partner's hand, you know that **partner will have at least two cards in your long suit.**

- With **0-7HCP** bid your suit at the 2 level (partner will know you are weak and pass). A suit contract is more likely to make when responder is very weak.
- With **8-9 HCP** bid 2NT or bid a 5-card major at the 3 level to invite partner to bid game in no trumps or in four of your major suit if they have 3-card support.
- With **10+ HCP** bid 3NT or 4 of your major suit if it is a 6 card suit (you know you have a fit and 25 total points so bid game).

Remember, prefer to play in game in a major suit rather than 3NT, unless both hands are balanced. Avoid playing in 5♦ or 5♣ where possible.

Looking for a major suit fit after partner opens 1NT – the Stayman convention

The Stayman convention is used by responder after their partner opens 1NT.

After a 1NT opening bid, a bid of 2♣ is **artificial** (it says nothing about responder's club suit) and says: **'partner, do you have a 4-card major?'**

Use Stayman with invitational hands (8-9 HCP) or better and at least 1 four-card major.

Use even with a balanced hand as a 4-4 major suit fit is likely to make one more trick than NT but prefer to play in NT if you have a 4,3,3,3 hand shape. *With two balanced hands no trumps will play better!*

Replies to 2C

2♦ says "Partner I have no 4-card major"

2♥ says "Partner I have four ♥, I could also have four ♠"

2♠ says "Partner I have four ♠, but I don't have four ♥".

If opener bids 2♦ or the major you don't have, rebid 2NT showing 8-9HCP or 3NT with 10 or more HCP.

The 2NT opening

Opening 2NT shows a balanced hand and exactly 20 to 21HCP.

A response of 3♣ is Stayman as shows at least 5 or 6 HCP and at least one 4-card major.