

# Review of ACBL Rules - Convention Charts and Alert Procedure

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The purpose of this review is to make known the ACBL rules for duplicate bridge players who play in any local duplicate bridge club, sectional, or regional event.

**I hope the information provided is helpful and informative – It is based upon the April 15, 2024, ACBL Convention Charts.**

## Opening Bids

The ACBL Convention Charts for opening a bridge hand requires that a **natural or quasi-natural** opening suit bid in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> seats must adhere to the requirement that the hand has a minimum of 8HCP or meets the Rule of N where  $N=17$  (the shape requirement) or a HAND with “Near-Average strength”. However, for the open and open+ convention charts the rule does not apply to opening bids in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> seats.

What is the Rule of  $N=17$ ? You must add together the total length of your two longest suits to the HCP in your hand ( $A=4$ ,  $K=3$ , and  $Q=2$ ), the result must be 17 or more. So, if the two longest suits are for example 6 and 5 for a total of 11 total and the hand has 6HCP, it meets the rule of  $N=17$ .

The ACBL Open Chart specifically states "If an Agreement would be disallowed unless it satisfies a specific High Card Point or shape requirement, a player may not use judgment to include hands with fewer High Card Points or a different shape".

**A weak 2-level SUIT bid with 5-6 cards does have to meet the Rule of N or need at least 8HCP. However, the range of the bid must be noted on the Convention Card for the Open and Open+ CC and cannot exceed 5HCP.**

**For the Basic CC, one may have 4HCP with a range of 7HCP. The Basic+ requires at least 3HCP with a range of 8HCP.**

What about the bid of 1NT opening bids or overcalls?

A NT opening bid or overcall may be made provided the hand (a) contains no voids, no more than one singleton, which must be an ace, king, or queen, (b) does not contain 10 or more cards in two suits combined, and (c) the point count range is NOT greater than 5HCP.

A **natural or quasi-natural** bid is defined as at least 4-cards in a major or 3-cards for a minor suit bid and **quasi-natural** is defined as a 0-2 card minor suit, never a major or meets the definition of a 1NT bid.

**Quasi-natural bids with <3-cards (0-2) must be announced as “may be short and non-forcing” and the quasi-natural FORCING minor suit bidding system requires a Pre-Alert (see below).**

## **Opening Leads and Discards**

What about Opening Leads and Discards? The ACBL Charts are vague on opening leads and discards! The Charts state that:

**Encrypted Signals are never allowed when leading, following suit, or discarding.**

**Otherwise:**

- 1. Opening lead: Any method may be used on opening lead.**
- 2. First discard: Any method may be used on the first discard.**

What does this mean?

The “**LEADS**”, “**LENGTH LEADS**”, “**DEFENSIVE CARDING**”, “**FIRST DISCARD**”, “**OTHER CARDING**” and “**Primary signal to partner’s leads**” sections of your ACBL Convention Card (CC) must be completed.

Your opponents may therefore ask to see your completed CC.

Or the opponent may simply ask: what are your (1) suit leads, (2) length leads and (3) defensive discards?

## **Pre-Alerts – Are required by the ACBL**

Pre-Alerts are designed to act as an early warning of any unusual methods for which the opponents may need to prepare. For instance, if your partnership plays very light openings (fewer than 10 HCP), very light overcalls (fewer than 6 HCP), and **forcing club/diamond** bidding systems (with 8+HCP) require to pre-Alert (e.g., strong club or diamond systems with 16+HCP, the Montreal Relay System with 10/11+HCP, forcing transfer club systems with 10/11+HCP, among others).

Any Canape System or if different bidding systems or NT ranges are used that depend on vulnerability or seat location.

**The ABOVE minimum requirements apply to the Basic, Basic+ charts. Exceptions apply only to the Open and Open+ charts regarding the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> seat openings.**

With the above review, what are the partnerships required to convey/disclose when arriving at the bridge table? As a courtesy to their opponents,

The pair should convey to their opponents (1) the bidding system they are playing, (2) their opening suit and NT leads and discards, and any pre-alerts required by the ACBL – without being asked!

For example, is it sufficient to say, “we are Playing Precision, or we are playing 2/1 or we are playing 2/1 with a short club, or we are playing light opening bids”? **NO!**

**Why? The information provided is not complete.**

Is the forcing precision bid of 1♣ defined as 16+/17+/18+HCP? What are your leads and discards and NT range?

When playing 2/1 you did not explain your carding agreements! If you play a short club, is it forcing or non-forcing?

What is a light opening bid, does it apply to all suits and is it forcing or non-forcing, what about leads and discards and NT range?

The above examples illustrate that the opponents are now forced to ask for additional information.

To avoid asking for more information requires pairs to communicate their full agreements to their opponents.

### **Informative Examples**

We are playing 2/1 with 3/5 leads vs. suit bids attitude vs. NT and standard honor leads. Note, this assumes the bid of 1NT=15-17 and the bids of 1♣/1♦ show at least 3-cards.

We are playing Precision with 16+/17+HCP, weak NT with 10-12 or 12-14HCP, Rusinow leads vs. suits 4<sup>th</sup> best vs. NT and all other bids show 10+HCP.

We are playing weak/light opening bids, open all 11HCP hands, 14-16HCP is 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> seat, 15-17 in 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> seat, 3/5 leads vs. suit BOSTON vs. NT, Uda, standard honor leads.

**The above examples avoid asking for additional information!**

For more information, please review the details provided by the ACBL regarding the ACBL Convention Charts.

The link below may be used:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Convention-Charts.pdf>

## ACBL Alert Procedure

**I hope the information provided is helpful and informative – It is based upon the April 15, 2024, ACBL Alert Procedure.**

### Alerts – Often in Red on the Convention Card

Per the ACBL, “the objective of an Alert is to indicate to the opponents that the meaning of a call is unexpected. In an ideal world we would just Alert “what the opponents don’t know.” In the real world, we don’t know what the opponents know, so we must use a set of rules instead.”

Alerts must be made verbally by saying the word “Alert” and visually by tapping the “Alert” strip or showing the “Alert” card in the bidding box. When a call has been Alerted, an opponent, at their turn to call may ask about its meaning. The preferred form of the question is a simple “Please Explain.”

**However NEVER explain an alert without being asked!**

An explanation requires more than just a single word – explanations like **fsf, inverted, Jacoby and nmf, etc. are NOT adequate explanations.**

**Why?** These do not EXPLAIN the alert/agreement in sufficient detail and may have different meanings for the opponents.

Is fsf to game or for one round?

Is inverted minor bid invitational with 10+ points or a GF bid with 13+ points?

Is Jacoby a GF bid or invitational to slam with  $\frac{3}{4}$  card support and how many fit/support points?

If you are not sure whether to Alert a call, err on the side of Alerting it. You should Alert a call that requires (or may require) an Alert even if you do not remember its meaning.

The ACBL alert procedure is complicated since it may depend on your partnership agreement. For example, some play 1NT -2♠ and a transfer to clubs with a possible correction to diamonds while others play 4-way transfers where 2♠\*=Clubs and 2NT\*=Diamonds. In the later both bids require (2♠\* and 2NT\*) require an **Alert** (4-way Transfers); while it the former 2♠ requires an **Announcement** (see below) and 2NT as an invitational bid to 3NT requires neither an Alert or an Announcement.

### Announcements – Often in Blue on the Convention Card

Per the ACBL, “the objective of an announcement is a word or a short phrase that describes the meaning of partner’s call. Announcements are a form of Alerting, and you must still visually

Alert the call. Calls that require announcements must be immediately announced, even if the call would otherwise not be alerted or if the Alert would be delayed.

Announce the following Agreements:

1. The minimum length of any non-Forcing minor suit Opening that could be fewer than 3 cards. Use the form, “Could be X” where X is the minimum length of the suit as the announcement.
2. The HCP Range of any Natural 1NT Opening.
3. Any Artificial bid that primarily shows Length in one specific suit and any double or redouble that shows Length in one specific suit. Use the name of the suit being shown as the announcement. This does not apply to suits in which you or your Partner have already shown Length.
4. After a 1-level major suit Opening in first or second seat, a 1NT response that is Forcing or Semi-Forcing. Also announce “could have 4 spades” in the unopposed auction 1♥ - 1NT if you routinely bypass a 4-card spade suit.

**However NEVER announce a bid/call that requires an Alert.**

For more information, please review the details provided by the ACBL regarding the Alert Procedure regarding specific bids/calls.

The link below may be used:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Alert-Procedures.pdf>

## **RED ALERT REVIEW and CHANGES**

### **Alert Changes**

No natural jump shifts (whether, weak, intermediate, or strong) require an alert; however, this is not the case for non-forcing natural bids, for example negative free bids.

Any direct cue bid that is NOT Michaels requires an alert.

Support doubles and redoubles require NO alert.

Bids of 2♣ that DO NOT meet the requirement of “Very Strong” must be alerted (e.g. it **DOES NOT MEET** the requirement of at least 4 quick tricks and 4 or less losers).

### **Announcement Changes**

You must now say TRANSFER and the suit (e.g., 1NT- 2♥, must spades, or 1NT-2♥, must say clubs if ONLY clubs; however, if either minor must now ALERT with or without a correction).

Negative doubles that show ONLY hearts saying nothing about spades must be announced (e.g. 1♣-1♦-X=only says hearts). No alert if both majors.

Lengths of an artificial short suit bid (e.g., 1♦\* in Precision must now say how short) must be announced as may be short, forcing, and how short.

If the bid of 1NT\* (forcing or semi-forcing) over 1♥ routinely bypasses a 4-card spades suit must now announce, “May have 4 spades”.

Over the Flannery bid of 2♦\*/2♥\* you must now announce the bid of 2♥/2NT over 2♦ as “forcing” or “semi-forcing” and over 2♥ a Pass/2NT as “forcing” or “semi-forcing”.