

2017 Handbook of EBU Permitted Understandings (the “Blue Book”)

The More Important Changes

Definition Of A Strong Hand

A new, simpler and wider definition of a ‘strong’ hand (for the purpose of regulating agreements) and a new approach to disclosing strong opening bids have been introduced. The old (and convoluted) ‘Extended Rule of 25’ regulation no longer applies and instead, to be considered a ‘Strong’ opening bid or overcall, the minimum allowed by agreement is:

- (a) any hand of at least 16 HCP; or
- (b) any hand of at least 12 HCP with at least five controls. An Ace is counted as two controls and a King one. There are 12 controls in any one deal.

So any hand that conforms to one, or other, of these criteria may be opened with a strong, artificial bid like a Benjamin 2♣, but it may not be described as ‘strong’ without further explanation if it may be made with a hand that would not historically have been considered worthy of a forcing opening, such as a balanced or semi-balanced hand with fewer than 18 HCP, or a hand with a lot of playing strength but limited high cards. This must be disclosed clearly both on the system card and in response to questions, by describing it as something like ‘a strong, artificial opening but may have less high-card strength than traditional strong hands’. This applies even though the minimum agreed strength must be in line with (b) above.

There is no restriction on the strength of a natural two-level or higher opening bid but similar requirements for full disclosure apply.

These changes can be summarised by saying there is now greater freedom to open a wider range of hands as ‘strong’ (though this should not be taken as a recommendation to open all hands within the limits as strong bids) but greater responsibility to ensure that your opponents are properly informed about your style.

Announcements of short minor openings

As before, if your partner’s minor-suit opening might be shorter than three cards long, you should make an announcement of the form ‘Could be two/one/none’. However, if it is possible for the hand to have an outside five-card suit, such as if you open 1♣ with a 3352 shape, then you should extend the announcement to say ‘May be two and may have another five-card suit’ or ‘May be two and may have five diamonds’ as appropriate.

Alerting Of Some Non-forcing Responses

Owing to their potentially unexpected meaning, you should alert a non-forcing new suit response, to a non-forcing suit opening at any level, below game, unless responder has previously passed, bids over a natural NT overcall, or makes a double jump. This now includes situations such as non-forcing change of suit responses to opening pre-empts.

For further reference please see <http://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/laws-and-ethics/blue-book/blue-book-2017.pdf>.