



How to Play

***Winning
Intermediate
Bridge***



Byron Lund

From the Author

*How to play **Winning Intermediate Bridge*** is the first book in a three book series designed for competitive bridge players.

It is designed for players wanting to improve their game beyond what was taught in introductory bridge lessons.

The second book, *How to play **Winning Advanced Bridge***, was designed to provide the conventions and techniques for life masters to advance to the top of the club level.

The third book, *How to play **Expert Bridge***, was designed to players in the top tournament brackets.

Enjoy the game

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Hand Valuation

Most bridge players retain the same rules about hand valuation as those taught in introductory bridge lessons.

Players wishing to play better than average can quickly start their journey by upgrading their hand evaluation.

The following are some of the better hand evaluation methods that the author introduced in his book *How to play **Expert Bridge***.

These are currently the most modern hand valuation methods. They will improve the results of top echelon players, yet are simple enough that intermediate players may apply them.

Once used, these methods take only one or two seconds longer than those proposed in introductory bridge lessons.

The change will quickly improve a player's results while they work on upgrading the rest of their game.

1. High Card Point Count Adjustments

Most bidding decisions are based on the estimated value of the hand. These estimates are originally based on the high card point (HCP) count of the hand.

Having a correct assessment of the value of the hand is critical to making a correct bid. If that assessment is incorrect it may result in a poor bidding decision and a poor score.

Most players use the Works 4-3-2-1 point count system. That system values each ace as 4 points, king as 3 points, queen as 2 points and jack as 1 point. It is easy to use and usually provides a good assessment of the value of a hand.

The following hand is an example of its use:

♠ KQJ
♥ QJ5
♦ QJ6
♣ QJ65

Based on holding one king, four queens and four jacks, most players would assess this hand as having a value of 15 high card points (HCP). Most would open the hand with a 1 NT bid. Some may open with only a 1 ♣ bid. On this hand, an incorrect bid opening bid would have been made because of an incorrect assessment of the hand's value.

This chapter details a method for determining what the correct value of the hand is and what, if any, adjustments need to be made.

On some hands, such as the one above, the Works 4-3-2-1 count needs to be adjusted to provide a better assessment of the hand's value. In order to arrive at a correct value of the hand, a player should develop an understanding of situations when an adjustment is needed and the amount of adjustment to make.

Three situations where the high card points should be adjusted are:

a. Unprotected Honors

Unprotected honors are those that are situated in a suit with either a singleton face card or a doubleton containing a jack or queen. The honor is likely to drop in the first or second round played in the suit. The points assigned to the unprotected honors should be reduced.

In a suit contract, when the honor in the short side suit does promote an honour in their partner's hand, it is redundant unless a loser may be tossed instead of trumping. In order to toss a loser from the hand with the unprotected honor, that hand would also need to hold a three cards side suit which does not contain the queen. If the three cards side suit contains a queen, a discard in the suit will likely not create a future trick.

One point should be deducted for a holding of singleton king or jack or a doubleton queen or jack.

Two points should be deducted for a singleton queen.

Once a suit fit of at least eight cards is confirmed, shortness points may be assigned for the singleton or doubleton. However, the points for the honor cards should still remain discounted.

b. Hands with a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 Pattern

Hands with a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 pattern should have their initial value reduced by one point.

In a suit contract, this hand pattern lacks a short suit. This limits their ability to provide an extra trick through a ruff.

The 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 hand pattern has less of an impact in a notrump contract, but is less successful than either the 4 – 4 – 3 – 2 or the 5 – 3 – 3 – 2 hand patterns.

In an IMP game, a player should gamble on making the bonus points for bidding a game contract. In deciding on whether to accept an invitation to a notrump game contract, the potential game bonus outweighs the disadvantage of the 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 hand pattern. In those circumstances, the player should disregard the deduction for that hand pattern.

c. Imbalance of Honor Cards

The 4-3-2-1 point count undervalues aces. It also overvalues queens and jacks. If the hand contains more than one of a specific honor, an adjustment to the high card point count may be needed to provide a better assessment of the value of the hand.

There are more accurate point count systems. They are seldom used because the 4-3-2-1 point count is much easier to use. Most of those alternate counting systems do not total to 10 points per suit. As such, they would require a major change to the number of points required for different bids, responses and ability to open or bid a game or slam contract.

When converted to a 10 point scale, however, the more accurate point count systems all¹ value the honors at, or close to:

- Aces at 4.5 points each
- Queens at 1.5 points each
- Jacks, if unaccompanied by tens, at .75 points each

The Works 4-3-2-1 count can easily be adjusted to those more accurate values if and when needed. These adjustments are simple.

The amount of the undervaluation of aces is the same as the amount of the overvaluation of queens. The amount of the overvaluation of jacks is offset by the undervaluation of tens.

To correct any imbalances, a player should;

- i. add 1 point if the hand contains two or three more aces than queens,
- ii. add 2 points if the hand contains four more aces than queens,
- iii. subtract 1 point if the hand contains two or three more queens than aces,
- iv. subtract 2 points if the hand contains four more queens than aces, and
- v. subtract 1 point if the hand contains three or four more jacks than tens.

An illustration of the effect of a high card imbalance is shown in these two hands:

(a) ♠ KQJ	(b) ♠ QJ52	(c) ♠ AJ52
♥ QJ5	♥ KQ	♥ AK
♦ QJ5	♦ Q1054	♦ A1054
♣ QJ65	♣ QJ7	♣ A107

On hand (a) the original count is 15 HCP. There is a 1 point initial deduction for the flat 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 distribution. Since there are

four more queens than aces, there is a further 2 point deduction. There are four more jacks than aces which warrants another 1 point reduction.

Once those adjustments are made, this hand has an adjusted value of 11 HCP.

This is the hand shown in the example at the beginning of this chapter.

On hand (b), the original HCP count is 14 HCP. There aren't any point deductions for a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 distribution or unprotected honors. There are four more queens than aces so the hand should have a 2 point deduction. The final adjusted value of the hand is slightly under 12 HCP since the hand contains more jacks than tens.

On hand (c) the original HCP count is 20 HCP. There aren't any point deductions for a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 distribution or unprotected honors. The hand contains four more aces than queens so should be adjusted up to 22 HCP.

Once the adjustments are made, the corrected high card point (HCP) values are used for opening bids, responses, games, slams, conventions, etc. to provide a more accurate value.

In summary, a player should continue using their 4-3-2-1 point count method. It is easy to use and provides the correct assessment most of the time. When needed, the following adjustments should be made to that number;

- a. if the hand contains an unprotected face card, deduct 2 points for a singleton queen (Q) or 1 point for a singleton king or doubleton queen or jack (K, Qx, or Jx),
- b. in the hand has a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 pattern, subtract 1 point, and

- c. if the hand contains an imbalance of honor cards;
- i. subtract 1 point if the hand contains two or three more queens than aces,
 - ii. subtract 2 points if the hand contains all four queens and no aces,
 - iii. add 2 points if the hand contains all four aces and no queens,
 - iv. add 1 point if the hand contains two or three more aces than queens, and
 - v. subtract 1 point if the hand contains three or four more jacks than tens.

The benefit of making these adjustments to the high card point count is that more hands will be played at the appropriate level.

If a player realizes that a situation requires an adjustment but cannot remember if the adjustment is one or two points, they should make a one point adjustment. It is the most likely of the adjustments. After the game, they should review this chapter to ensure that they make the correct adjustment the next time.

¹ *Alex Martelli is credited with the $4\frac{1}{2}$, 3, $1\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{4}$ point count, which values the hand to within one eighth of a point and is considered the most accurate point count. He did so by multiplying the Four Aces (3,2,1, $\frac{1}{2}$) point count by 1.5 and adding a $\frac{1}{4}$ point for the ten, bringing the total to 10 points.*

When converted to a 10 point scale, the Kleinman Point count, or the Little Jack Points from which it is derived, closely resemble Martelli's figures. So does Zar Points.

2. Minimum Response Points

Introductory bridge lessons taught students that when a opening bid is made, the minimum strength that a hand needs to respond at the one-level is 6 HCP.

While the 6 HCP is a good, simple rule, it does not consider the inaccuracy of the Works 4-3-2-1 point count system or that all 6 HCP hands are not equal.

At the higher levels in their development, a player should adjust the 6 HCP minimum number to one which more accurately reflects a hand's value.

Below are suggestions for a more accurate assessment of whether a hand contains sufficient value to respond to a suit opening bid made at the one-level.

Even though, excluding length points, the hand only contains **4 HCP**, a five cards major suit headed by the ace is sufficient to respond if the suit can be bid at the one-level.

The contract will play well if the opener raises the suit.

If the suit is raised by the opener and the pair is not vulnerable, the hand is strong enough for a three-level sacrifice bid if necessary. This is because of the ace and the nine cards fit.

If the opener replies with a notrump bid, the responder should pass and allow the hand to be played in a notrump contract. The opener's points will likely provide stoppers in the other suits. The ace and length in the responder's suit should provide the declarer with sufficient stoppers.

When the opener has three cards support in a notrump contract, they will likely be able to set up the responder's suit by playing the ace on the third round. That will place them in the responder's hand where

they can play the two established tricks and toss losers from the declarer's hand.

When the response is made and the opponents win the contract, the bid has provided a good suit lead indicator for the opener.

A four cards major suit headed by either the KQ or the AJ10 are sufficient to respond even though the hand only contains **5 HCP**, when the bid can be made at that one-level.

The suit will play reasonably well if raised by the opener.

In a notrump contract, the king and queen provide reasonable stoppers. With their opening points, the opener is likely to hold either the ace or jack to compliment the responder's KQxx holding, or the king or queen to compliment the AJ10x holding. The opener will hold both of the missing honors in the responder's suit about one-sixth of the time.

If the suit splits 4 – 3 – 3 – 3, there is a chance that the suit will provide an extra trick.

When the opponents win the contract, the bid provided the opener with a good lead indicator.

Unless they also have suit with at least five cards in length, the only hands containing **6 HCP** that the responder should bid are those which contain either two kings, or an ace and a queen.

Any hand opening with **7 HCP** should contain either an ace or a king.

Any other 7 HCP holding does not contain enough stoppers to warrant a response.

At **8 HCP**, a hand containing three queens and two jacks may respond. In those cases, the opener's points will be in high honors and will likely promote the honors in the responder's hand.

3. Short Suit Points

Shortness in one suit is only helpful if it is helpful in making the contract.

Points should be only be counted for shortness in a suit if;

- a. the pair has established a suit fit of at least eight cards in length,
- b. the contract is likely to played in the suit with the long fit, and
- c. the shortness is not in the trump suit.

Points should not be counted for doubletons, singletons or voids in the trump suit.

When counting points for a short suit, any high card points relating to length should be removed from the high card point count. Counting points for both shortness and length is double-counting since any suit with at least five cards length in one suit will always contain one or more doubleton, singleton or void (i.e., a hand containing a five cards suit will contain at least one other suit which contains two or fewer cards. When counting the points for the side suit, the point originally assigned for the fifth card should be removed.).

The value of the shortness in a side suit is usually dependent on the number of rounds that the hand may trump that suit. Points assigned for shortness in a suit are suggested to not exceed the number of cards held in the suit fit.

Once a suit fit is found, each of the two hands should count;

- a. 5 points for each side suit void,

- b. 3 points for each singleton in a side suit, and
- c. 1 point for each doubleton in a side suit.

The restrictions on the short suit count are:

- a. With five or greater cards in the trump suit, voids are worth five points, singletons are worth three points and doubletons are worth one point.
- b. With four cards in the trump suit, the maximum points assigned for a void is four.
- c. With three cards support for the trump suit, the maximum points assigned for a singleton or void is three.
- d. With two cards support for the trump suit, the maximum points assigned for a singleton or void is two.

Placing short suit point restrictions based on the number of trump cards held in that hand provided a better assessment of the hand's ability to provide tricks through ruffs in the short suit.

4. Double of an Opening Bid

A double of an opening bid implies a desire to compete in the bidding. It usually* indicates shortness in the suit opened and at least three cards in each of the other suits.

- * A double followed by a bid is also used with a hand that is too strong for an overcall

The double requests their partner to bid their longest unbid suit unless they hold six or more cards in the opened suit.

The minimal requirement for a double in the direct seat is at least 10 HCP greater than the length of their holding in the opened suit. These are;

10 HCP with 0 cards in the opened suit *

11 HCP with 1 card in the opened suit **

12 HCP with 2 cards in the opened suit ***, or

13 HCP with 3 cards in the opened suit ****

* The void will count for at least 4 points once a (likely) eight or nine cards fit is found

** The singleton will count for 4 points once a (likely) eight cards fit is found, bringing the total to 14

*** The doubleton will add 1 point if an eight cards fit is found

**** This is usually a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 hand so needs 14 honor points

In the fourth seat, three fewer points are required to make a double.

5. Suit Overcalls at the One-Level

An overcall made at the one-level is usually made with a suit of at least five cards in length.

The overcall should be either, or both, a lead directing bid or a desire to compete for the contract.

If the hand was strong enough to open, it is strong enough to overcall because it is competing for the contract. It does not require any honors in the overcalled suit.

At the low end of the range (6 to 8 points not-vulnerable, or 8 to 9 points vulnerable), the suit overcall is mainly a lead directing bid and should contain either the ace or the king and queen. In the direct seat following an opening bid the king is usually a sufficient stopper because the opener has indicated that they hold a significant portion of the points that are not held by the overcaller. The opener is likely to hold the ace in the overcaller's suit.

For an overcall made with a hand containing 10 or 11 honor points, the suit bid should contain either the ace or two of the top four honors. Those hands are good for lead directing and for sacrifice bids.

The advantages of following these suggestions are that they often prevent poor leads, contracts and sacrifice bids.

Bidding: Conventions and Agreements

Upon becoming an intermediate player, the person has experience with the bidding basics. They have also acquired, and likely have comfort in using, a few conventions.

One of the main areas of development in this phase is to expand their communication with their partner so that they can reach the optimal contract. They do so through expanding the number of conventions that they use.

Understanding these conventions also provides a player with a better understanding of the opponent's hands when they use those conventions. This may be useful to the way that a contract is played or defended.

An added benefit that this brings is that it develops a player's memory. Better memory is a useful asset for a bridge player. Players are often tasked with trying to determine what was communicated during the auction phase, which card was led, what lead or length signals the opponents have provided, the number and value of cards outstanding in one or more suits and the number of points an opponent has already shown.

The number of new conventions added in this phase may be substantial and materially affect a player's convention card.

The following shows which conventions a player should already be using, which they should be adding at this phase, and what their final convention card should look like:

	<u>Prior</u>	<u>Addition</u>	<u>Final</u>
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General approach

Standard American	✓		
Two-Over-One Game Force		✓	✓

1 NT opening bid and responses

Opening bid - 15 to 17	✓		✓
Redouble		✓	✓
Double of 2 ♣ overcall		✓	✓
Double of a one suited overcall		✓	✓
Double of a two suited overcall		✓	✓
Systems on after double or 2 ♣		✓	✓
Stayman	✓		✓
Jacoby transfers	✓		✓
2 NT response	8 or 9	9	9
3 ♣ response		✓	✓
3 ♦ response		✓	✓
Major suit superaccept rebids	✓		✓
4 NT response	✓		✓
5 NT response	✓		✓

Other notrump opening bids and responses

2 NT opening bid	✓		✓
3 NT opening bid	✓		✓
Stayman responses	✓		✓
Jacoby responses	✓		✓

Suit opening bids and responses

Better minors	✓		✓
Major suit opening bids	✓		✓
Frequently bypass a 5+ ♦ suit	✓		✓
2 NT response	13 - 15		11 - 12
3 NT response	15+		13 - 15
2 NT rebid	✓		✓

Drury		✓	✓
Jacoby 2 NT		✓	✓
Inverted minors		✓	✓
Weak jump shifts		✓	✓
Reverse bids		✓	✓
2 NT Jordan/Truscott		✓	✓
New suit response after a double	✓		✓

Two level opening bids and responses

2 ♣	✓		✓
2 ♦ waiting	✓		
2 ♥ negative convention		✓	✓
2 ♦/♥/♠ opening bids	✓		✓
2 NT feature ask		✓	✓
Suit response to 2 ♦/♥/♠ opening		✓	✓

Doubles

Double of opening bid	✓		✓
Double of suit contract		✓	✓
Double of a 1 NT opening bid	✓		✓
Double of a weak 2 or 3 level bid		✓	✓
Double of opponent's overcall		✓	✓
Support doubles and responses		✓	✓
Redouble of the opening bid		✓	✓
Double of a 4-level major suit bid		✓	✓

Overcalls and Responses

Direct seat overcall	✓		✓
Weak jump overcall	✓		✓
1 NT overcall	✓		✓

2 NT game invitation overcall	✓		
Unusual 2 NT		✓	✓
Michaels cue bid		✓	✓

Defensive Bids

DONT		✓	✓
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Slam conventions

Blackwood	✓		
1430 Blackwood		✓	✓
Gerber	✓		✓

Other conventions

Fourth suit forcing		✓	✓
Cue bid invitational raise		✓	✓
Help suit game try		✓	✓
Western cue bid		✓	✓

The chapter focusses on the conventions which a competitive intermediate player should consider adding.

1. General Approach

a. Two-Over-One Game Force

Two-Over-One Game Force (2/1) is a more advanced bidding system that incorporates much of the SAYC system. Most players upgrade to this upon advancing from the beginner and novice levels to the intermediate level.

The major change, and hence the name, is the two level non-jump response to an opening bid. In Standard American, it shows an invitational (11 or 12 HCP) or better hand. With 2/1, a non-passed two level response promises 13 HCP, unless it is a major suit response to a minor suit opening bid. If the responder has previously passed, the two-level response reverts to the General American meaning of invitational.

The 2/1 bids that are game forcing are:

- 1 ♦ pass 2 ♣
- 1 ♥ pass 2 ♣/♦
- 1 ♠ pass 2 ♣/♦/♥

To accommodate this change, the points for jump notrump responses to a minor suit opening bid change;

- i. the 2 NT response to a minor suit opening is changed from a game force (13 to 15 HCP) bid under Standard American to an invitational (11 to 12 HCP) bid under 2/1, and
- ii. the 3 NT response is changed from a slam invitational bid (16 to 18 HCP) under Standard American to show a balanced 13 to 15 HCP hand under 2/1.

The jump notrump bids still retain their denial of a four cards major suit.

Another major difference is that if the responder has not already passed, in 2/1 a 1 Notrump bid over a major suit opening is forcing for one round. This enables the partnership to possibly find a fit in the opener's longest lower ranking suit. This is very helpful in finding a fit in the heart suit after a spade suit opening.

The advantages of upgrading to 2/1 are;

- i. it prevents the partnership from signing off in a part score contract when a game contract is likely to make,
- ii. it preserves bidding space,

This makes it easier to find the likely best contract.

- iii. the forcing 1 NT bid usually results in the stronger hand becoming the declarer and playing the contract,

This often gains a trick through a "free finesse" off the opening lead or through hiding the declarer's honor holdings from the defenders.

- iv. the forcing 1 NT bid also allows the responder to play in their six card or longer suit, and

If the responder's suit ranks higher than the opener's second bid suit, they may bid it at the two-level to show a long suit with insufficient points to invite game (i.e.: 1 ♥, 1 NT (forcing), 2 ♣, 2 ♦ shows a long diamond suit with insufficient points to play in game). It requests the opener to pass.

With an invitational hand, the responder would respond 3 ♦ after the 2 ♣ bid.

v. with the forcing 1 NT bid, most contracts which begin with a major suit bid result in the opener becoming the declarer.

This often gains a trick because;

a) the stronger hand is hidden, and

Opponents will not be able to see where the majority of the honors, and the gaps in honors lie.

b) the lead will come from the opponent on the left hand side (LHO) of the stronger hand.

This often provides a free finesse into the stronger hand's tenace.

2. 1 Notrump Opening Bid and Responses

a. 1 Notrump Opening Bid

A 1 NT opening bid is used to show a strong, balanced hand.

Balanced hands are ones which do not contain a singleton or void and with no more than one doubleton.

For a 1 NT opening bid:

- i. 15 to 17 HCP,
- ii. balanced (usually 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2) hand patterns, and
- iii. may include a five cards major suit.

b. Redouble

If the 1 NT bid is doubled, a redouble shows at least seven HCP.

With seven HCP, the redoubled contract is likely to make. It will likely make an overtrick. If the opponents leave the redouble in, the opener will likely score a top board since it adds the contract bonus on top of the redoubled points.

After the redouble, the opponents will likely try to reduce their losses by escaping to a suit contract. If they do so, all doubles of any the opponents' rescue bids are for penalty. If the opponents escape in a suit contract, they will have transportation problems. The opener's side holds the balance of points (BoP). Therefore, it is unlikely that the opponents will make their doubled contract.

The advantages of the redouble is that it;

- i. usually yields a better score when the opponents either pass or are forced to play in a doubled contract, and
- ii. preserves bidding space.

c. Double of a 2 ♣ Overcall

This double is a “stolen bid”. This means the bid is the one that the responder was going to make. So, the double has the same meaning as a 2 ♣ Stayman bid that the responder would have made had the opening bid not been doubled.

The advantage of using a double of the opponent’s 2 ♣ overcall in this way is that the opponent’s double does not interfere with the partnership using the Stayman convention.

d. Double of a One Suited Overcall

A double of a one suited overcall is for penalties and invitational to game. It shows 9 HCP and does not promise a stopper in the opponent’s suit.

The double provides enough information for the opener to decide, based on the probable best results, whether to;

- i. allow the opponents to play in a doubled contract,

With a minimal hand for their 1 NT opening bid, with or without length or strength in the overcalled suit, a game contract is not likely to make for the opponents. The double will usually score better than a part-score contract would have.

ii. bid 3 NT with a maximum hand and stoppers in the overcalled suit, or

iii. with maximum points and shortness in the overcalled suit, attempt to find a major suit game.

This may be done either by;

a) bidding a five cards major suit at the three-level, or

b) cue bidding the opponent's suit showing four cards in all other major suits.

This allows the responder to either;

1) bid a major suit game with a four card holding in that suit,

2) bid 3 NT with stoppers in the opponent's suit, or

3) play in a part-score major suit contract if holding only three cards in that suit.

e. Double of a Two Suited Overcall

This double shows a hand with stoppers in either;

i. the overcalled suit if that is one of the overcaller's two suits (i.e.: 1 NT, 2 ♥ (showing hearts and spades), double (shows stoppers in the heart suit)), or

- ii. one of the two suits if the overcalled suit is not one of them (i.e.: 1 NT, 2 ♦ (showing hearts and spades), double (shows stoppers in either hearts or spades)).

If the second meaning, the opener either doubles their right hand opponent (RHO)'s bid for penalties or passes and leaves the decision to the responder.

f. Systems on After a Double or 2 ♣ Overcall

If the 1 NT opening bid is either doubled or overcalled with a 2 ♣ bid, systems are still on. A bid of a new suit by the responder carries the same meaning as it would had the double or overcall not have happened.

This treatment allows the partnership to use Stayman after the double. It also allows them to use Jacoby transfers or game invitation bids after either a double or 2 ♣ overcall.

g. 3 ♣ Response

The 3 ♣ response shows a weak (0 to 7 HCP) hand with at least five cards in each minor suit.

The 3 ♣ response to a 1 NT opening bid asks the opener to either pass or to correct to diamonds if that is the opener's longer minor suit.

The advantages of this agreement are;

- i. to prevent the opponents from finding their major suit fit, and

The opponents are likely to have at least one eight card or greater fit in a major suit. They are less likely to bid over the 3 ♣ response than to a pass.

ii. to find a contract which is likely to make or score well if set.

The responder's distribution contributes to setting up tricks in the opener's shorter minor suit and allows for trumping of the opener's losers in the major suits.

h. 3 ♦ Response

This bid shows a strong (ten or more points) hand with at least five cards in each minor suit.

This allows the pair to explore a minor suit game or slam.

This bid asks the opener to bid their longest minor suit. After the opener's minor suit bid, the responder bids their singleton major suit. This allows the opener to decide whether to play the contract in a minor suit or in a notrump game contract.

i. Major Suit Superaccept Rebids

Major suit superaccept rebids are a convention used by the opener in response to a Jacoby transfer.

Using this convention, the opener's jump response to a Jacoby transfer (i.e.: 1 NT – 2 ♦ [transfer to hearts] – 3 ♥) shows the following;

i. four or five card support for the responder's long major suit,

ii. a maximum (17) HCP hand, and

This may be a 16 HCP hand which contains five cards support.

iii. a doubleton in a side suit.

The advantage of this agreement is that more major suit games are found and bid. The responder may bid game with either eight total points or an eight loser hand.

Without the superaccept bid, the responder would likely have passed the transfer with eight total points or an eight loser count.

j. 4 Notrump Response

This is used to invite a slam contract.

The responder makes a 4 NT bid to show a balanced 16 or 17 HCP hand and asks the opener to bid 6 NT if they are at the top of their notrump range.

With a combined 33 to 34 HCP, a notrump contract will likely take as many tricks as a suit contract. A notrump contract will score better in a Matchpoint game. Therefore, the 4 NT bid does not restrict the responder's major suit holdings to three or fewer cards in each.

k. 5 Notrump Response

This is used to tell the opener to bid a slam in notrump.

The responder uses this bid to show a balanced 20 point hand and asks the opener to bid 6 NT with the minimum and 7 NT with a maximum notrump opening hand.

With 18 or 19 HCP, the responder would raise the opener's 1 NT opening bid to the six-level.

3. Suit Opening and Responses

a. 2 Notrump Response

A 2 NT response to a minor suit opening bid is game invitational (11 to 12 HCP) in 2/1. It is a game force bid (13 to 15 HCP) in Standard American.

The bid shows a balanced hand without four or more cards in a major suit.

b. 3 Notrump Response

A 3 NT response to a minor suit opening shows a balanced hand with 13 to 15 HCP playing 2/1. If playing Standard American it shows 16 to 18 HCP.

The bid denies the holding of four or more cards in a major suit.

c. 2 Notrump Rebid

After a one-level response to an opening bid, the opener's jump bid to 2 NT (i.e.: 1 ♣ – 1 ♥ – 2 NT) shows a balanced 18 or 19 HCP hand.

If the responder's bid was a major suit, the 2 NT rebid by the opener denies four card support for the responder's suit. With four card support, the opener would raise the responder's suit to the three-level with 18 HCP or to game in the responder's suit with 19 HCP.

This method is used to show the balanced hands that are between the 1 NT and 2 NT opening ranges.

The risk of the 2 NT rebid resulting in a risky contract level is minimized because the responder has already indicated points by bidding.

d. Drury

Drury is a convention used as a response to a major suit opening made in the third seat. A 2 ♣ bid is used to show an invitational hand with three or more cards support for the opened suit.

As an example, following the bidding of pass, pass, 1 ♥, pass, a bid of 2 ♣ is a Drury bid.

The third seat opening may be one or two fewer points than in other seats. As such, this convention avoids the risk of a double raise or a Bergen raise which would place the contract at the three-level.

The advantage of the Drury bid is that it allows the partnership to play at a safer two level if the opener has minimal opening points. For this reason, a 2 ♣ response by the passed hand shows interest in game in their partner's major suit. It shows three or four cards support with 11 or 12 support points. It allows the partnership to sign off at the two-level if game is not feasible.

The opener's rebid of their opening suit at the two-level shows a minimum opening bid. Other bids seek game with more than 13 points.

e. Jacoby 2 Notrump

Using this convention, a 2 NT response to a major suit opening bid shows four cards support for the opener's suit and at least 13 HCP. If using splinter bids, it denies a void or singleton in a side suit.

After the 2 NT response, the opener's rebids are;

- i. a new suit at the three level shows a singleton or void in that suit,
- ii. a raise of the suit to the three level shows a strong (16 or more HCP) hand,
- iii. a 3 NT rebid shows a 14 to 15 HCP balanced hand,
- iv. a new suit at the four-level shows a second five cards suit, and
- v. a raise to game in the opened suit shows a balanced, minimum opening hand.

The advantage of using this convention is that it preserves bidding space. This allows more slam contracts to be investigated and found.

Responding stronger hands inversely to their strength (i.e.: the lower ranking 3 ♠ bid shows more points than the higher ranking 3 NT bid) allows more bidding space to investigate a possible slam contract.

f. Inverted Minors

Inverted Minor responses are used to show five or more card support for the opened minor suit. They deny holding a four cards major suit. If 1 ♦ is the opening bid, four cards support is usually sufficient.

With five or more cards support for the opened minor suit, the Inverted Minor responses to a minor suit opening bid are;

- i. a single raise of a 1 ♣ opening bid to 2 ♣, or a 1 ♦ opening bid to 2 ♦, shows ten or more high card points (HCP),

It denies a four card major suit.

- ii. a double raise as a preemptive bid with zero to five HCP, or
- iii. 1 NT with six to nine HCP.

After a single level raise, the next bidding priority is to find a possible notrump contract which will likely yield a better score than a contract in the minor suit.

After the single level raise, the opener rebids are;

- i. 2 NT with stoppers in both major suits but less than fifteen HCP,

The responder will raise the contract to game level with thirteen or more HCP.

- ii. 3 NT with stoppers in both majors and fifteen or more HCP,

- iii. a major suit, at the two-level, if they have stoppers in that major suit, but not the other major suit, or

The responder will then either bid notrump if they hold stoppers in the other major suit or will reject the notrump invitation and bid three of the opened minor suit.

- iv. a raise of the minor suit to the three-level if they lack stoppers in both of the major suits.

The advantages of using Inverted Minors are;

- i. it allows the partnership to look for a notrump contract while retaining the option to play in the minor suit fit if a notrump contract is not feasible, and
- ii. it incorporates a preemptive double jump when the responder has a weak hand.

The opponents are likely to have an eight or greater card fit in one of the major suits. The jump raise makes it more difficult for their opponents to find their major suit fit.

g. Weak Jump Shifts

Weak jump shifts are a response used to show a six card or longer major suit with zero to four high card points.

They may be either;

- i. a 2 ♥ response to a 1 ♣ or a 1 ♦ opening bid, or
- ii. a 2 ♠ response to a 1 ♣, 1 ♦ or a 1 ♥ opening bid.

They are preemptive in nature.

The advantages of weak jump shifts are:

- i. they alert the opener of the responder's lack of high card points,

This warns the opener not to place the contract to a level that is likely to be set.

- ii. it allows the responder to place the contract,

The responder's major suit is likely a better fit than the suit opened. It is also reasonably likely to make.

iii. without such an agreement, the responder would be unable to bid,

They lack the high card points to respond to an opening bid.

iv. it usually prevents the opponents from finding their suit fit, and

v. If the opponents do find their suit fit, the opener is in a position to further the preempt with at least three cards support.

If used, it may;

a) provide a sacrifice contract that will lose fewer points than allowing the opponents to play the contract in their suit, or

b) push the opponents to bid their contract to a level more likely to be set.

h. Reverse Bids

Commonly called reverses, reverse bids are used to show a strong two suited hand.

A reverse bid is an opening bid followed by a bid which bypasses the opener's first suit (i.e.: 1 ♣ – 1 ♠ – 2 ♥).

This shows a strong hand with a longer holding in the suit opened than in the second suit bid. The shorter suit will be at least four cards in the length.

A reverse bid is forcing for one round.

While many players use sixteen high card points for a reverse, seventeen is suggested because of potential problems. The possible only game contract is in notrump which is often played in a misfit. Transportation problems may limit finesses, ability to set up long suits and ability to get to the weaker hand..

i 2 Notrump Jordan/Truscott

This convention, known as either Jordan or as Truscott, uses the 2 NT bid over an overcall to show a game invitation (11 or 12 point) hand with at least three card support for the major suit opened.

For example, a 1 ♠, 2 ♥, 2 NT sequence would be a Jordan or Truscott bid.

The advantage of this convention is that it provides a distinction between a pre-emptive raise to the three level and a game invitational hand.

j. New Suit Response After a Double

After a double of the opening bid, a new suit bid by the responder is not forcing.

A new suit response shows fewer than ten points. With 10 or more HCP the responder redoubles. The redouble either scores well or places their opponents in a possible doubled contract which will also score well.

After the double, a new suit response should be made by the responder when they have;

- i. less than ten HCP,

- ii. less than two cards support for the opener's suit, and
- iii. a long suit to bid.

This may be a five card suit at the one level. A six cards suit is preferable for a two level response.

After the double of the opening bid, two-level responses may be made with less than 10 HCP. This is because;

- i. it interferes with the opponents bidding,

If the responder holds a long suit, there is a good possibility that the opponents have an eight cards fit. The two-level bid may either prevent the opponents from finding their fit or force them to the three-level which will be easier to set than a twolevel contract.

- ii. it provides an escape suit which may be needed if the responder is short in the minor suit opened, and

- iii. the contract will either make or will be a good sacrifice bid.

n. New Suit Forcing After an Overcall

After an overcall, a bid of a new suit is forcing for one round.

This allows the bidding to continue as it would have had the overcall not occurred.

4. Two Level Opening and Responses

a. 2 Hearts Negative Convention

This is a common convention used after a 2 ♣ opening bid.

Using this convention the responder's bid either;

- i. shows or denies an interest in game, or
- ii. shows an interest in a major suit slam.

The responses to a 2 ♣ opening bid are;

- i. 2 ♦ - at least one ace or king,

After this response, the bidding is forcing to game level.

- ii. 2 ♥ - no ace or king,

This allows the partnership to sign off in 2 NT or pursue a part score in a suit contract.

- iii. 2 ♠ - slam invitational bid for the spade suit, or

It shows a five cards, or longer, spade suit with at least 8 points and two of the top three honors in the spade suit.

- iv. 2 NT - slam invitational bid for the heart suit.

It shows a five card, or longer, heart suit with at least 8 points and two of the top three honours in the heart suit.

The 2 NT bid is used to show hearts because the 2 ♥ bid has already been used to show a poor hand.

b. 2 ♦/♥/♠ Opening Bids

The 2 ♦, 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ opening bids are preemptive. They are used with a six card suit headed by AQ, AK, AKQ, AKJ or KJ10, or a seven card suit with less strength in the suit honors.

The range of points for these two level opening points is 6 to 10 HCP, although usually restricted to 8 to 10 HCP when vulnerable.

The main purpose of these bids is to make it more difficult for the opponents to find their suit fit and bidding level. They also provide the responder with sufficient information to either:

- i. search for a game contract if they have an opening hand and support for the long suit,
- ii. pass if game is not likely, or
- iii. further interfering with the opponents' bidding and potential game contract by raising the suit.

c. 2 Notrump Feature Ask

This convention is used by the responder to determine whether to raise a two-level preemptive bid to game.

To determine whether to ask for a feature, if the responder has at least two card support for the opener's preemptive two-level major suit bid, they should;

- i. count their HCP,
- ii. count the number of cards that they hold in the opener's long suit,
- iii. add those two numbers together, and

- iv. if that number equals sixteen or more, they should make the feature ask.

The feature ask uses a 2 NT bid to ask the opener for more information about their hand. This allows the responder to determine whether the pair should be in a game contract.

The opener's responses to the 2 NT ask are;

- i. the opened suit at the three-level – minimal opening points,
- ii. a new suit at the three-level – maximum hand with a high honor in the suit bid. The honor may be as low as a queen., or
- iii. 3 NT – the opened suit is headed by AKQ.

This offers the partnership an option to play in a 3 NT contract which usually results in a higher score and placement in a Matchpoints game.

If the opener;

- i. rebids their suit, showing a minimum hand, the responder usually passes if their count was sixteen, or raises to game with a higher count,
- ii. shows a feature, the responder usually raises the opener's suit to game, or
- iii. bids 3 NT, the responder will choose between playing game in a notrump or suit contract.

If the total number of their cards plus the total number of HCP equals 17, the responder should bid game in the preempted suit

after the feature ask even if the opener shows a minimum hand (*Rule of 17*).

In Matchpoints games, it is best to go through the feature ask first in case a 3 NT contract will improve the pair's placing on the hand.

If the responder holds a strong hand, the feature ask may be used to determine whether a slam contract is feasible.

d. Suit Response to the 2 \diamond / \heartsuit / \spadesuit Opening Bids

This shows a six cards suit held by the responder, searching for a game in a safer contract.

When using this, the responder should have two cards support for the opener's suit plus enough other points for a game contract should the opener show three cards support for the responder's long suit.

It asks the opener to raise the responder's suit with three or more cards support. Without three or more cards support, the opener rebids their own long suit. The responder may then either;

- i. pass, or
- ii. raise the suit to game with sufficient points.

5. Doubles

a. Double of a Suit Contract

A double of a suit contract is a takeout bid up to 2 ♠. This includes both direct seat doubles and those made after two passes. In the latter case, their partner may pass if they have length in the suit and wish to punish the opponents.

It shows either;

- i. a strong hand, or
- ii. a desire to make a sacrifice bid which will either;
 - a) play the contract in, and score better, whether making or set, than allowing the opponents to play in their last bid contract, or
 - b) force the opponents to bid at a higher level.

b. Double of 1 Notrump Opening Bid

A double of a 1 NT opening bid is for penalties unless the partnership uses a convention which uses the double for another meaning.

To double for penalties, the player should have at least one more point than the bottom end of the opponent's notrump range. If the opener's notrump range is 15 to 17 HCP, the double would be made with a balanced 16 to 18 HCP hand.

The penalties doubles are usually made in the direct seat. In the balancing seat, which is the one after two passes, the player will require more points to double for penalty because their hand precedes the opponent's strong hand.

Many players use two conventions for bidding over their opponent's 1 NT opening bid:

- i. one convention is used over a weak notrump opening bid, where the double is used as a penalty double, and
- ii. a different convention is used over a strong (15 to 17 HCP) 1 NT opening bid, where the penalty double is used for a different purpose.

The reason for using two different conventions is that double is needed as a penalty double over the weak notrump openings.

The double is more effectively used for a different purpose over a strong notrump opening bid.

c. Double of a 1 Notrump Overcall

If the direct seat overcalls the opener's bid with a 1 NT overcall, a double, by the responder, is made with ten or more HCP. It is for penalty. It shows that the balance of points (BoP) is held by the opener's side.

Once that double is made, all subsequent doubles of the opponent's bids are for penalty.

d. Double of Weak Two or Three-Level Bids

A double of a weak two or three-level opening bid is for takeout.

It shows an opening hand with shortness in the suit opened.

Doubles of three-level opening bids are risky. They often result in a contract being played at the four-level. Unless the three-

level opening is in a minor suit, it is usually better to pass. Doubling for takeout would require a singleton or void in the opened suit and at least 15 HCP.

e. Double of the Opponents' Overcall

A double of a 1 ♦ overcall of a 1 ♣ opening bid shows four or more cards in both major suits. It is for takeout. With only one major suit with four cards or greater length, that suit is bid with six or more HCP.

A double of a 1 ♥ overcall promises a four card spade suit. With five or more cards, the spade suit is bid. This helps the opener distinguish the length of the responder's spade suit.

A double of a 1 ♠ overcall promises either four or more hearts. It may be five or more with insufficient (less than eleven) points to raise to the two-level. Using this agreement a two-level heart response after the opponents' spade overcall is invitational to game. A delayed heart bid, using the double first, shows a five or greater cards suit with insufficient points to invite game.

f. Support Double and Redoubles

When their RHO bids after the responder bids a suit, a double by the opener shows three card support for the responder's suit (i.e.: 1 ♣, pass, 1 ♥, 1 ♠, double shows three cards support for the responder's heart suit).

If their RHO doubles the responder's bid, a redouble by the opener shows three cards support for the responder's suit.

Since it may result in the responder playing in a Moysian (4 – 3) fit, it is best that the opener use support doubles with a

doubleton holding in a side suit. The doubleton holding usually allows that suit to be trumped by a card which would have fallen during the pulling of the opponents' trump cards.

The advantages of the support double and redouble are they:

- i. enable the opener to show three cards support for the responder's major suit, and
- ii. distinguish between three and four cards support.

The opener would bid the responder's suit to show four cards support.

g. Redouble of the Opening Bid

If the direct seat doubles the opening bid, a redouble by the responder shows ten or more high card points. It does not deny support for the opener's suit.

The main purpose of this double is to show that their partnership has the balance of points. It suggests not letting the opponents play in a contract unless it is doubled for penalty.

After a redouble, any double of the opponents' bid(s) are for penalty. If the opening side has stoppers and/or length in the suit bid by the opponents, the opponents' contract is likely to be set, usually by more than one trick. The set doubled contract is likely to yield a higher score, for the opening side, than that of a part-score and possibly a game contract.

h. Double of a 4 Level Major Suit Bid

This is for penalty.

A 4 NT bid over a four-level major suit bid is a takeout for the minor suits.

6. Overcalls and Responses

a. Direct Seat Overcalls

In the direct seat, overcalls should be either;

- i. a 1 NT overcall showing a balanced hand and 16 to 18 HCP, or
- ii. a good five card or longer suit with 8 to 15 HCP.

These overcalls are not forcing. When holding 15 or more HCP, the overcaller first doubles, the bids their long suit.

b. Weak Jump Overcalls

Overcalling one level higher than required (i.e.: 1 ♣, 2 ♥) is referred to as a jump overcall.

They are used to show a 6 to 10 HCP hand and a six cards suit for a two-level or a seven cards suit for three-level overcall. However, if the long suit is of poor quality, the overcall should be made one level lower.

These are preemptive bids intended to obstruct the opponents bidding.

To further the preemptive bid of a weak jump overcall, their partner should advance the suit by one level holding three cards support or two levels with four cards support and less than opening points.

To invite a game contract in the suit, their partner cue bids the opponents suit (i.e.: 1 ♣, 2 ♥, pass, 3 ♣) asking the overcaller to bid game with a maximum point hand.

c. 1 Notrump Overcalls

1 NT overcalls are 16 to 18 HCP balanced hands in direct seat. After two passes after the opening bid, the 1 NT overcalls are used with balanced hands of 10 to 15 HCP.

d. Unusual 2 Notrump

Using the Unusual 2 Notrump convention, an opening bid overcall with a 2 NT bid shows five or greater card length in each of the two lowest ranking unbid suits. (i.e.: 1 ♦ – 2 NT shows clubs and hearts).

This bid requests that their partner pick a suit contract in one of the overcaller's long suits.

Unusual 2 Notrump is used by hands with either;

- i. less than 11 HCP, or
- ii. more than 15 HCP.

With 11 to 15 HCP, the player starts by overcalling with the higher ranking suit, then rebids the lower ranking suit if the first suit is not supported by their partner.

With more than 15 HCP, the overcaller raises their partner's suit bid.

e. Michaels Cue Bid

Michaels Cue Bid is an overcall of the opening suit used to show length in two suits.

Using Michaels Cue Bid, a cue bid of the opener's minor suit (either 1 ♣ – 2 ♣ or 1 ♦ – 2 ♦), shows;

- i. five hearts and five spades, and
- ii. either less than eleven or more than fifteen HCP.

Over a minor suit opening, holding 11 to 15 HCP and two five cards major suits, the overcaller bids spades first. If their partner does not raise that suit, they may bid their hearts the next round.

Using Michaels Cue Bid, a cue bid of the opener's major suit (either 1 ♥ – 2 ♥ or 1 ♠ – 2 ♠), shows;

- i. five cards in the unbid major suit and five cards in a minor suit, and
- ii. either less than eleven or more than fifteen HCP.

Over a major suit opening, holding 11 to 15 HCP, five cards in the other major suit and a five cards minor suit, the player overcalls with the major suit first. If their partner does not raise that suit, they may bid their minor suit the next round.

With sufficient support to invite game, the advancer may make a further cue bid of the opened suit (i.e.: 1 ♣, 2 ♣, pass, 3 ♣) asking the overcaller to bid either:

- i. The next available suit (in this case 3 ♦) with less than eleven points, or
- ii. Any other suit with the stronger, over 15 HCP hand.

7. Defensive Bids

a. DONT

DONT is a defensive bidding convention used over a strong (15 to 17 or 16 to 18 HCP) 1 Notrump opening bid. It is usually used in the direct seat.

The bids in the DONT convention are;

- i. double – a long (six or more card length) club, diamond or the heart suit,

If the responder passes, the advancer (doubler's partner) must bid 2 ♣ to enable the doubler to either pass or correct to their long suit.

If the responder bids, the advancer either:

- a) doubles the responder's artificial bid as a lead directing double,
- b) bids their own six card or longer suit, or
- c) passes.

- ii. 2 ♣ – clubs and a higher ranking suit (with at least 5 - 5 vulnerable, 5 – 4 not vulnerable),

If all of their suits are as long or longer than their club suit, the advancer bids 2 ♦ to enable the overcaller to either pass or to correct to their other long suit.

- iii. 2 ♦ – diamonds and a major suit,

These should be at least 5 – 5 when vulnerable or 5 – 4 when not vulnerable.

If both major suits are as good as or better than their diamond suit, the advancer bids 2 ♥ asking their partner to either pass or correct to spades.

iv. 2 ♥ – hearts and spades, or

These should be at least 5 – 5 when vulnerable or 5 – 4 when not vulnerable.

v. 2 ♠ – six or more spades.

The name DONT is an acronym for Disturbance Over NT.

DONT provides a method to show both one suited and single suited hands.

The advantage of using DONT over strong notrump opening bids is that it allows for possibly playing in a 2 ♣ contract when the overcaller has either a single suited or two suited hand with a long club suit.

If the partnership is already playing a convention that uses a penalty double, such as Cappelletti, they should retain it for use over weak notrump opening bids.

8. Slam Conventions

a. 1430 Blackwood

Playing 1430 Blackwood, the 4 Notrump bid asks for keycards (king of the agreed suit and aces) instead of just aces.

Adding the king of trumps allows for a more accurate determination of the likelihood of a slam contract making.

Responses to the keycard ask are:

- i. 5 ♣ - one or four keycards,
- ii. 5 ♦ - three or zero keycards,
- iii. 5 ♥ - 2 keycards without the queen of the agreed trump suit, or
- iv. 5 ♠ - 2 keycards with the queen of the agreed trump suit.

1430 Blackwood is commonly referred to as 1430 or Fourteen-Thirty.

See further description of using this convention under the Bidding: Other section in this book.

9. Other Conventions

a. Fourth Suit Forcing

Fourth suit forcing is a convention used to keep the bidding progressing. It is a forcing bid. This means that their partner must bid. The recommended use is for it to be forcing to game.

The convention comes into effect after three different suits have been bid. The bid of the fourth suit is the forcing bid. It does not promise any length or stoppers in that suit.

The common use is to find a major suit fit.

If the second suit bid is spades and the fourth hearts, the player likely has five spades and may have four hearts. Because a 4 – 4 heart fit is preferable to a 5 – 3 one, the order of the opener's priorities are;

- i. the first priority is to bid the heart suit if they hold four cards in it,
- ii. if the opener does not have four cards in the heart suit, their next priority is to show three cards support for the spade suit if they have it, or
- iii. without either, the opener bids notrump.

If the second suit bid is hearts and the fourth spades, the player may have five hearts. They may also hold four spades. In that case, the order of priorities for the opener are;

- i. the first priority is to bid hearts with three cards support,

- ii. the next priority is to bid spades if they hold four cards in the suit, or
- iii. without either, the opener bids notrump.

In both of the above cases, after the fourth suit forcing bid is made, notrump is bid when they have;

- i. less than three cards support for the second suit bid, and
- ii. stoppers in the fourth suit, but less than a four cards holding.

b. Cue Bid Invitational Raise

This is often referred to as a cue bid limit raise.

Using this agreement, if the direct seat overcalls the opener's bid, a cue bid of the overcalled suit (i.e.: 1 ♥, 2 ♣, 3 ♣) is an invitation to game (11 to 12 points) in the opener's suit with at least three cards support.

The advantage of this bid is that it provides the responder with three ways to show support for the opener's suit;

- i. a single level raise is a simple raise,

It shows 6 to 10 points and at least three card support for the suit.

- ii. a jump raise shows a 0 to 5 point hand with more than three cards support, and

The jump is used as a preemptive bid to block the opponents' bidding or force them to play at a level which would be easier to set.

iii. a cue bid invitational raise shows 11 or more high card points and length in the opener's suit.

c. Help Suit Game Try

A help suit game try is used to invite game in a major suit after a single level raise.

They are used by the opener when they hold 16 to 18 points with a four cards side suit which is missing key honors. A bid of the side suit asks the responder to raise the contract to game with either:

i. support for the second suit bid (shortness or honors),
or

This reduces the potential number of losers that the opener has in their four cards suit.

ii. the top of their range for a single raise.

d. Western Cuebid

A cue bid of the opponent's suit asks their partner to bid 3 NT with a stopper.

This is usually done at the three-level and asks their partner to bid 3 NT with at least one, preferably more, stoppers in the opponent's suit.

Preferably, the player making the cue bid holds a stopper in the suit. This allows their partner to bid notrump when holding one or more stoppers.

A $Kx(x)(x)$ holding is considered a stopper if it is following the hand with length, and usually honors, in that suit.

Bidding: Other

1. Goals of Bidding

The goals of bidding are to;

- a. acquire a contract that is expected to make and provide the partnership a high score,
- b. prevent the opponents from finding, or playing in a contract that will provide them (the opponents) with a high score,
- c. sacrifice where the expected loss is likely less than the loss that the bidder would have if the opponents were allowed to play their contract,
- d. assist the bidder's partner in making the correct decisions on whether to bid, pass or double, and
- e. whenever practical, provide their partner with lead directing information.

2. Notrump Responses

The following are suggestions for responding to a 1 NT opening bid:

a. With Five Cards in Each Major Suit

With five cards in each major suit, a player should be able to find an eight cards fit. Notrump opening bids are rarely made with hands containing two doubletons.

If the responder has a hand as weak as two kings, as long as neither is a singleton, the partnership likely has enough strength for game. With this, or a stronger hand, the responder should transfer to 2 ♠, then bid 4 ♥.

With a weak hand of less than five HCP, there are a few options for the responder. This depends on whether they are playing the Smolen convention.

- i. With no Smolen agreement, or playing Smolen at the two-level, the responder is better off transferring to the major suit which contains the best holding in the nine to queen range,
- ii. If there is an agreement that Smolen is only played at the three-level and that major suit bids after a 2 ♦ Stayman response are to play, the responder should use Stayman first.

If the opener responds with a major suit, the responder should pass. If the opener responds with a 2 ♦ bid, the responder should bid the major suit with the best holding in the nine to queen range.

With sufficient points for game;

- i. if the partnership does not use the Smolen convention, the responder should transfer to spades followed by a bid of 4 ♥ allowing the opener to choose which major suit to play the game in., or
- ii. if playing Smolen, the responder should go through the Stayman ask first.

This will usually place the stronger hand as the declarer.

If the opener bids 2 ♦, the responder should bid 3 ♥ showing game strength and five spades. If the opener bids 3 NT denying three cards spade support, the opener will have three cards support for the heart suit and the responder should bid 4 ♥.

With any other invitational hand, the responder should transfer to 2 ♠, then bid 3 ♥.

b. Garbage Stayman

After a 1 NT opening bid, the responder may use Garbage Stayman with less than eight HCP. This is done by bidding 2 ♣ and passing any response that the opener makes.

The use of Garbage Stayman requires at least three cards in each non-club suit with at least two of the non-club suits being four cards in length. The club suit, therefore, must be either a doubleton, singleton or void.

c. Rule of 16

The *Rule of 16* upgrades a hand which contains a substantial number of higher ranking spot cards, which are often referred to as intermediate cards.

Using the *Rule of 16*, the responder;

- i. adds their number of HCP,
- ii. adds their number of cards greater than the seven,
- iii. adds those two sums together, and
- vi. if the resulting number is 16 or greater, they have sufficient points to make game.

3. Other Responses

a. Rule of 17

This “rule” is used when the opening bid is a preemptive two level bid in a major suit and the responder has at least two card support.

Using the *Rule of 17*, the responder;

- i. counts their HCP,
- ii. counts the number of cards in the opener’s suit,
- iii. adds the two sums together,
- iv. if the total is sixteen, they should try for game by using their 2 NT ask, and
- v. if the total is 17, they should bid game after going through their 2 NT ask.

b. Rule of 4 and 4

The *Rule of 4 and 4* states that responder should delay giving the opener three cards support for their five cards major suit opening bid if it is likely that a 4 - 4 fit in the other major exists. A 4 - 4 fit usually plays better than a 5 - 3 fit.

Usually the *Rule of 4 and 4* means that the responder should bid 1 ♠ with a four cards spade suit and three cards support for the 1 ♥ opening bid.

4. Balancing Seat Overcalls

If possible, it is best that the opponents do not play in a one level contract. Therefore, after two passes, a player should stretch to overcall in the balancing seat.

The general rule for the balancing seat is for the player to “borrow” three points from their partner when making the decision to overcall. The overcaller’s partner then needs to subtract the three points that they “loaned” to the overcaller when determining their reply to their partner’s overcall.

An overcall bid of 1 NT can be made with three fewer points. The 1 NT overcall can be 12 to 15 HCP in the balancing seat.

A takeout double can be made in the balancing seat with up to three points fewer than in the direct seat. The minimum for these takeouts is;

- a. seven HCP with a void in the opening suit,
- b. eight HCP with a singleton in the opening suit, or
- c. nine points with a doubleton in the opening suit.

This takeout double is important. The direct seat may not have been able to bid due to length in the opening suit (referred to as a “trapped pass”) since their double would be for takeout, not penalty. In that case, after the double the advancer may now leave the double in for penalty.

5. Penalty Doubles

Many players are reluctant to make penalty doubles. When appropriate, making more penalty doubles is likely to improve a player's game results.

When successful, a penalty double provides the doubler with a better score.

Another advantage of making successful penalty doubles is that the player develops a reputation. Opponents are more likely to be less aggressive in their overcalls and sacrifices out of fear of being doubled. This results in more of the player's contracts not being overcalled and them being allowed to score better results.

a. General Rule

A general rule is to only double for penalty if the player thinks that they can set the contract by two tricks. In IMPs games, the bonus for the double by setting them by one is not significant, but by two is.

A double may tip off the opponents. The danger is that the declarer may play the hand differently if doubled. This could result in the declarer losing fewer tricks. Sometimes a poor penalty double allows the declarer to make a contract that they would not have made if they were not doubled. Either of these results does not score well for the defenders.

One of the advantages of playing the *Rule of 22* for the opening bids is that they help the responder make successful penalty doubles. The responder is better able to determine whether there are enough tricks, in either quick tricks or HCP, to likely set the contract.

b. Rule of 9

When determining whether to double the final game contract of the opponents, a player should add the number of cards that they hold in the contract suit to the level of the contract.

If that equals, or exceeds nine, they should double. (*Rule of 9*)

If the total is less than nine, a player should either pass or bid. If the player has already doubled for takeout, they should pass and allow their partner to turn the double into a penalty double or make a sacrifice bid.

c. Rule of 23

With 23 or more HCP among them, a pair holds the balance of points (BoP).

When holding the balance of points, a pair should either double the opponents' bid or bid over it. Passing is not an option. (*Rule of 23*)

d. In Matchpoints Games

In Matchpoints games, having pushed the opponents into a game contract that they otherwise would not have bid, the opponents will now get a good score if they make the contract.

A double is usually the best option in these situations. The risk of loss is low and the risk of gain is high. If it is doubled and it makes, it often does not change the opponents' position of having the top score. If the doubled contract goes down, the doubler will obtain a higher score than they would have received had they not doubled.

6. Bidding Against a 1 Notrump Opening Bid

a. The Purpose

The purpose of bidding over the opponents' 1 NT opening bid is to;

- i. interrupt the opponents' bidding,
- ii. steal the contract,

Playing in one of the overcaller's long suits will likely play and score better, for the overcaller or the advancer, than in the opponent's 1 NT contract.

- iii. show the shape of the overcaller's unbalanced hand, or

This often allows their partner to choose from two of the overcaller's long suits.

- iv. convey to the overcaller's partner information about not only the overcaller's shape, but lead preferences.

b. Opponents' 1 Notrump Opening Bid Ranges

The ranges for the opponents' 1 NT opening bids may be either;

- i. strong, usually 15 to 17, but may be 16 to 18,
- ii. weak, often 10 to 12, or
- iii. mid-range – usually 12 to 14 or 13 to 15.

c. Against Strong Notrump Opening Bids

A penalty double is usually not needed over a strong 1 NT opening. For those openings, players usually play a convention, such as DONT, which uses the double for a different purpose.

Over the strong notrump opening, a bid should show either:

- i. a six cards suit with at least two honors and a good 8 or 9 HCP or better, or

A seven cards suit may contain less honors or points.

These are hands that would have opened with a two-level preemptive bid.

- ii. a two suited hand, usually 5 – 5 if vulnerable or 5 – 4 if not vulnerable.

If not vulnerable, a 4 – 4 hand may be suitable if they both contain at least two of the top three honors. These should also be either a good 8 or 9 HCP or better.

d. Against Weak and Mid-Range Notrump Openings

The weak 1 NT opening bids are preemptive. The opener usually has a hand that would not have been opened with a suit bid. The opener's goal with their weak 1 NT bid is to interfere in their opponents' bidding and possibly prevent them from bidding and making a game.

Against 1 NT opening bids that are either weak or mid-range, a convention, such as Cappelletti or Modified Cappelletti, detailed in the next book, is preferred. These conventions incorporate a penalty double showing a balanced hand with at least as many points as the opener.

The double should be at least one point above the range of the opener's 1 NT opening bid (i.e.: if the opener's 1 NT range is 13 to 15 HCP, the double should show at least 14 to 16 HCP).

e. In the Balancing Seat

In the balancing seat, after two passes, the same conventions may be used against weak or mid-range notrump openers.

Against a strong notrump opening, it is usually best to pass.

7. Bidding Against a Short Club Opening Bid

Occasionally an opponent opens 1 ♣ and announces that it “may be as short as two”. The opponents will still open a five card major suit if they have one.

The opponents’ “could be as short as two” bid simply means that they play that their 1 ♦ opening bids promise a four card diamond suit. They usually will only have a two card club suit if they have a 4=4=3=2 pattern hand.

Most of the time, even after announcing that it may be short, the opener has four or more clubs for their 1 ♣ opening bid. They are highly likely to hold at least three cards in the club suit. So, a player should treat the opener’s short 1 ♣ opening bid, excluding the strong 1 ♣ used in systems such as Precision, as the same as other 1 ♣ opening bids.

8. Keycard Blackwood

a. Getting the Right Number of Keycards

When asking for keycards and the response is either 0 or 3, or with 1 or 4, the inquirer should assume the smaller number.

In these cases, if the contract is signed off at the five level, their partner should raise to a small slam when they hold the higher number of keycards, especially if they hold more than the minimum number of points that they have previously shown.

b. Responding With a Void

A 5 NT response to the 4 NT keycard ask shows an even number of keycards (either two or four) with a void in an unspecified suit.

With an odd number of keycards (either one or three) and a void, a player bids the void suit at the six-level if that suit is lower ranking than the agreed upon trump suit.

c. Queen of Trump Ask

Keycard Blackwood, either Fourteen Thirty (1430) or Roman Keycard (RKC or 3014), often allows an ask for the queen of trumps. After a 5 ♣ response, a 5 ♦ bid is an ask about the queen of trump. If spades are trump, a 5 ♥ bid over a 5 ♦ response is also an ask about the queen of trump.

The responses to the queen asks are;

- i. the agreed upon trump suit bid at the five-level denies the queen of trumps,
- ii. the agreed upon trump suit bid at the six-level shows the queen of trumps with no kings in the side suit, or

iii. a bid of a side suit shows the queen of trumps and the king in that suit.

It denies the king in any bypassed suit.

If the partnership has a ten card fit, there is a 78 percent chance that the queen will fall in two rounds. When the responder to the keycard ask holds an extra trump card, bringing the total to ten, they should respond as if they were holding the queen of trump.

d. Specific King Ask

In response to a 5 NT king ask, most experienced players use specific kings rather than the number of kings. This is more helpful when the inquirer has a suit headed by the ace and queen, especially if it is a long suit which can be set up for extra tricks.

Using specific kings, the responses to the king ask are six of the lowest ranking suit containing a king. With no king below the agreed trump suit, the response is a bid of the agreed upon trump suit at the six-level.

If a player shows a specific king it denies a lower ranking king. The inquirer may ask about the king in a specific higher ranking suit by bidding the suit if it ranks lower than the trump suit.

This asks their partner to bid the agreed trump suit at the seven-level if they have the king in the suit or at the six-level without it (i.e.: After a 5 NT king ask and a 6 ♣ response, a 6 ♦ bid asks their partner to bid the agreed upon trump suit at the six-level without the king of diamonds or at the seven-level if they hold the king of diamonds).

e. Signing Off in 5 Notrump

Playing Matchpoints, there are occasions when a player prefers to play in a 5 NT contract rather than the agreed trump suit at the five-level. If both make the same number of tricks, the notrump contract scores higher in a Matchpoints game than a major suit contract.

In those instances, if there is room to bid an unbid major suit at the five-level, it is an artificial bid used to tell their partner to bid 5 NT.

Without this agreement, a player would have difficulty signing off in a 5 NT contract, since a 5 NT bid would be a king ask.

9. Control Bids

Control bids are used to investigate slam possibilities once a suit fit has been established. Suit controls are bid up-the-line. This means that each bid either confirms or denies first or second round control of the next available suit. Repeating the controlled suit shows both first and second round control in that suit.

First or second round control may be either a void, singleton, ace or king.

Controls in the trump suit are not shown in the control bidding process. Trump controls will usually be found later during the keycard ask. Bidding the trump suit is therefore used as a signoff to end the bidding.

In the control bidding process, if a player does not hold either first or second round control of a suit bypassed by their partner, they sign off with a bid of the agreed suit at the available level. A slam contract will not make since the opponents will take two tricks in that suit.

A sample of control bidding is:

<u>Opener</u>	<u>Responder</u>
1 ♥	3 ♥ ¹
3 ♠ ²	4 ♦ ³
4 ♥ ⁴	

¹ Invitational (11 or 12 points) raise in hearts with three or more card heart support

² Control bid showing slam interest and first or second round control of spades

³ First or second round control of diamonds. Denies first or second round control of clubs

⁴ Sign-off. Has at least two clubs without first or second round control of the suit

10. Summary of Jump Responses

Any jump responses must be alerted.

Since there are several jump responses and several meanings to them, a summary is provided.

a. Jump Responses to a 1 ♣ Opening Bid

- 2 ♦ - 2/1 game force, 13+ HCP, 4+ diamonds
 - no four cards major suit
 - forcing to game

- 2 ♥ - Weak Jump Shift - 6+ hearts
 - 0 to 4 HCP
 - preemptive, not forcing

- 2 ♠ - Weak Jump Shift - 6+ spades
 - 0 to 4 HCP
 - preemptive, not forcing

- 2 NT - 11 or 12 HCP, (13 to 15 if playing Standard American), balanced
 - not forcing
 - denies a four cards major suit

- 3 ♣ - Inverted Minors - 5+ clubs, 0 to 5 points
 - preemptive, not forcing

- 3 NT - 13 to 16 points, (16 to 18 if playing Standard American)
 - balanced
 - not forcing
 - denies a four cards major suit
- 4 ♣ - 16+ points, slam try in clubs
 - forcing to 5 Clubs
- 4 ♦ - preemptive, 7+ diamonds 10+ points
 - not forcing
- 4 ♥ - preemptive, 7+ hearts 10+ points
 - not forcing
- 4 ♠ - preemptive, 7+ spades 10+ points
 - not forcing
- 4 NT - Blackwood, ace or keycard ask
- 5 ♣ - to play

b. Jump Responses to a 1 ♦ Opening Bid

- 2 ♣ - 2/1 game force, 4+ clubs, 13+ points
 - denies a four cards major suit
 - forcing

- 2 ♥ - 6+ hearts, 0 to 4 HCP, not forcing
- 2 ♠ - 6+ spades, 0 to 4 HCP, not forcing
- 2 NT - 11 or 12 HCP (13 to 15 if playing Standard American)
 - balanced
 - not forcing
 - denies a four cards major suit
- 3 ♦ - Inverted Minors - 5+ diamonds
 - 0 to 5 points, preemptive, not forcing
- 3 NT - 13 to 16 points, (16 to 18 if playing Standard American)
 - balanced
 - not forcing
 - denies a four cards major suit
- 4 ♦ - 16+ points, 5+ diamonds, strong slam try
 - forcing to 5 Diamonds
- 4 ♥ - 7+ hearts, 10+ points
- 4 ♠ - 7+ spades, 10+ points
- 4 NT - Blackwood, ace or keycard ask
- 5 ♦ - to play

c. Jump Responses to a 1 ♥ Opening Bid

2 ♠ - Weak Jump Shift – 6+ spades, 0 to 4 HCP

2 NT - Jacoby 13+ points, 4+ hearts

- no singleton or void

- forcing to game

3 NT - 13 to 16 points, (16 to 18 if playing
Standard American)

- balanced

- not forcing

- denies a four cards major suit

4 ♥ - 5+ hearts

4 ♠ - 7+ spades, 10+ points

4 NT - Blackwood, ace or keycard ask

d. Jump Responses to a 1 ♠ Opening Bid

2 NT - Jacoby 13+ points, 4+ spades

- no singleton or void

- forcing to game

3 NT - 13 to 16 points, (16 to 18 if playing
Standard American)

- balanced

- not forcing
- denies a four cards major suit

4 ♠ - 5+ spades

4 NT - Blackwood, ace or keycard ask

e. Jump Responses to a 1 NT Opening Bid

3 ♣ - 5+ clubs, 5+ diamonds, weak
- pass or correct

3 ♦ - 5+ clubs, 5+ diamonds, game force

3 NT - 10 to 13 points, no four cards major suit

4 ♣ - Gerber, ace ask

4 NT - 16 points, balanced, no four cards major suit,
invitational to 6 NT

5 NT - 20 HCP, balanced, no four card major
- choose between a 6 NT or 7 NT contract

6 NT - 18 to 19 HCP, balanced, no four cards major
suit

11. Other Bidding Tips

a. In Matchpoints Games With 28 to 30 HCP

In a Matchpoints game, with 28 to 30 HCP between the two hands, a player is usually better off playing in a notrump game than a major suit one. They will likely take the same number of tricks, but the extra 10 points from the notrump contract will rank them higher.

b. Risk in IMPs Games

Playing in an IMP game, the scoring method favors taking higher risks in bidding games, especially when vulnerable. The breakeven point for the gamble in an IMP game is a 39.5 percent success rate when vulnerable or a 45.5 percent when not vulnerable.

c. Playing Misfits

A player should beware of misfits.

When they encounter one in the bidding, it is usually best to bail out as early as possible. If their partner has bid the other two suits, they are likely to have a misfit, even if the player has a 5 - 5 or a 6 - 5 holding.

Notrump contracts usually don't play well in misfits. There are problems transporting between dummy and the declarer. The declarer often must lead away from their tenaces rather than leading into them for a finesse.

In misfits, both notrump and suit contracts run a risk of not being able to get to possible winners in one of the hands.

d. Pushing the Opponents Once

If the opponents have found an eight cards fit, they have eighteen cards in their other three suits. Unless they have six cards fits in all three remaining suits, their opposing side will have at least one eight cards fit.

It is usually best to make a sacrifice bid if it can be done at the two level. The opponents are not likely to double as the game bonus will be added if the contract makes.

Down one, undoubled, will score -50 not vulnerable or -100 vulnerable. Both are better than -110. Not vulnerable, down two undoubled, will score -100 score which is better than the -110.

The opponents, once pushed, often raise their suit to the three-level. The goal of the push has been accomplished. One less trick is now needed to set their contract. Any further pushes are usually too risky.

e. Bidding at the Five-Level

When the bidding has reached the five-level, a pair should defend rather than bid. The five-level usually belongs to the opponents. In wildly distributed hands, however, the opposite is true and the pair should bid on. (*Rule of 5*)

A player should;

- i. double their five-level bid when they hold two cards in the opponent's suit,
- ii. pass when holding one card, or
- iii. bid again if they have no cards and with zero bid again. (*Rule of 210*)

f. With Shortness in the Major Suits

When the responder bids 1 NT or 2 NT to a minor suit opening they deny a four cards major suit. The opener should be cautious of raising their Notrump contract with a doubleton major unless it is AK.

Declarer Play

1. Planning the Play

When dummy comes down, the declarer should take their time and plan their play.

They should count their winners to determine whether they have enough tricks to make the contract or need to develop some. Then, they should count their losers.

a. Determining the Objective

In an IMPs game, making the contract is the main objective. The plan should be the safest way to make the contract.

In a Matchpoints game, the declarer should plan the safest way to play the contract when they are in a better contract than most of the other competitors will be in. In these circumstances, simply making their contract will yield a good score.

Examples of these better contracts are;

- i. playing in a game contract when most of the field will be playing in a part-score contract,
- ii. playing in a slam contract when most of the field will be in a game contract, and
- iii. playing in a notrump slam when the rest of the field will be in a suit slam.

In a Matchpoints game, if most of the competitors will be in the same contract, the declarer's plan should change. An overtrick

in these contracts will score them above their competitors. The declarer's objective in those games should be to play the way likely to both make the contract and take the most tricks.

b. Gaining Tricks

If, after planning the play, more tricks are needed to make the contract, there are several methods that they may be obtained.

The ways to gain tricks are one or more of the following;

- i. trumping losers,
- ii. finesses,
- iii. developing a winner,
- iv. tossing losers on a long suit,
- v. having the opponent's winner drop under the declarer's higher card,
- vi. forcing the opponent to discard a winner, or
- vii. opponent error.

These methods may also be used to gain overtricks.

2. Ruffing in the Short Trump Hand

A common way for the declarer to gain a trick is to trump a loser in the hand with the shorter trump holding. That method gains a trick from a trump card that often would have fallen while pulling the opponents' trump cards.

This method usually requires a short side suit in the hand that has the shorter trump holding. A void or singleton side suit are the easiest to gain a trick by trumping.

With a doubleton side suit, the chance of a successful ruff is high. If the longer trump side has three cards facing a doubleton in a side suit, the opponents hold eight cards in the suit and the chance of a 6 - 2, or worse, split is low.

If the hand with the long trump holds four cards opposite a doubleton, the odds of a 4 - 3 split among the opponents are also high, stated as 62.2 percent, but actually higher if they had a chance to bid a suit holding 5, 6 or 7 cards in it.

In a 5 - 2 side suit split among the opponents, it can gain when the shorter opponent holding precedes the declarer's short trump suit holding. In these cases, the declarer may be able to overtrump.

If the short trump and side suits are in dummy's hand, the opponents will see them. Once on lead, the opponents will return a trump to reduce the number of tricks that the declarer can trump in dummy's short suit. The declarer should make sure that they can develop the ruff before embarking on this technique. This is usually done by stripping dummy's short suit before the opponents can eliminate trumps from the shorter holding.

3. Cross-Ruffing

Cross-ruffing is a technique of trumping side suits in both dummy and the declarer's hand. It requires shortness in different side suits in the hands of the declarer and dummy.

Before embarking on a cross-ruff, the declarer should count their tricks and take any side suit winners needed to make the contract. If they fail to do so, the opponents may render the side suit winners useless. They may do so by tossing their losers in that suit during the cross-ruff process. The opponents will then trump the side suit winners when the declarer tries to take them later in the play.

Here is an example of the cross-ruffing technique:

Dummy	♠ AK104
	♥ A732
	♦ A752
	♣ A
Declarer	♠ QJ53
	♥ Q
	♦ Q63
	♣ J6432

Dummy opened 1 ♦. The declarer responded 1 ♠ and their partner placed them in 4 ♠. A low club was led.

Counting winners, there were seven: the aces of hearts, spades and diamonds and four spades. The declarer needed three more tricks to make their game.

Instead of pulling trump, the declarer spotted a cross trump opportunity. They played the hand in the following sequence:

- a. The lead was won with the ace of clubs,

- b. The ace of hearts was played next followed by a trump of a heart with the three of spades,
- c. A low club was led and trumped by the four of spades, and
- d. The ace of diamonds was cashed and it held.

The contract was now guaranteed. Five tricks had been taken: the aces of clubs, hearts and diamonds plus two ruffs with low trump cards. The declarer still held the top five trump cards. They could ruff two rounds of hearts with high cards and ruff two round of clubs and still remain with a winning trump card.

4. Finesses

Finesses are a basic part of declarer play. They usually have only a 50 percent chance of making. That is usually a higher winning percentage than playing the cards from the top hoping for an honor to drop. Some finesses may increase the chance of success beyond 50 percent.

a. Simple Finesse

A simple finesse is leading towards a hand where the honors are such that it may capture an outstanding honor.

A few examples are:

Dummy	AQJ
Declarer	xxx

The declarer led a small card from their hand. If their LHO did not play the king, the declarer will play the queen or jack. If the honor holds, they will return to their hand and finesse again.

Dummy	Axx
Declarer	QJ10

The declarer led the queen. Unless it is covered, they will play low. If it holds the trick, the declarer will lead a second card towards dummy and repeat the finesse.

b. Indirect Finesse

An indirect finesse occurs when leading towards an honor, when the top honor or top two honors are missing.

Dummy	Kx
Declarer	xx

The declarer led towards dummy. If their LHO held the ace, the king will win a trick.

Dummy	QJx
Declarer	xxx

The declarer led towards dummy. If their LHO played low, the declarer will play the queen or jack. Later the declarer will return to their hand and lead towards the remaining honor. The *a priori* chance of both honors being in the RHO's hand is 25 percent, so there is a 75 percent *a priori* chance of the declarer scoring a trick in the suit in a notrump contract.

c. Double Finesse

This is a play where the declarer takes a finesse twice, missing two touching honors.

An example is:

Dummy	753
Declarer	AJ10

In this setup, the declarer led towards their hand. They would cover an honor played by their RHO. They then would repeat the finesse.

Usually the two missing honors are evenly split, giving this technique a 50 percent chance of taking two tricks. However, in a suit contract, if this is a side suit that was not led, the chance of success was much higher. The LHO would likely have led the king from their KQ(x)(x) combination or a low card from either a Kxx(x) or Qxx(x) holding.

d. Deep Finesse

A deep finesse will gain an extra trick if the cards are well placed.

An example of such is:

Dummy	AJ9
Declarer	872

Trying to gain an extra trick, the declarer started by finessing the nine. If the ten was in the LHO's hand, the nine will lose to a high honor in their RHO's hand. The declarer would finesse the jack the next time.

e. Triple Finesse

Similar to the deep finesse, a triple finesse gains a trick when two of the missing honors lie in front of honors.

Here is an example:

Dummy	♣ AJ53
Declarer	♣ 987

Trying to take two tricks in this holding, the declarer;

- i. led the nine, and

If it was covered by the declarer's LHO, the declarer would cover that card.

If not, they would let the nine ride, playing their LHO for the ten.

- ii. returned to their hand and repeated the finesse.

This technique would take two tricks when the top honors were split and the ten was held by the declarer's LHO.

Another example is:

Dummy	AQ92
Declarer	643

With this holding, the declarer led low towards the nine, returned to their hand and led low towards the queen.

This technique will take two tricks when the declarer's LHO held either;

- i. the king and either the ten or jack, or
- ii. the ten and jack with or without the king.

f. Ruffing Finesse

The ruffing finesse is a combination play.

It is used in a suit contract where there is a short side suit facing an almost solid holding in the opposite hand. Common uses of this technique are:

- i. AQJ(x) facing x

The declarer started by playing the ace, then the queen. If the queen was covered, the declarer would ruff. They can then return to the other side to toss a loser on the jack.

If the queen is not covered, the declarer would toss a loser. The queen will either hold for a trick or they can later toss another loser on the jack.

ii. KQJ(x) facing a void

The declarer started by playing the king. If it was covered, the declarer would ruff. The declarer can then return to the other side to toss losers on the queen and jack, when appropriate.

If the king was not covered, the declarer would toss a loser. If the king is not covered by the declarer's LHO, the declarer can repeat the ruffing finesse and toss another loser.

If the king was covered by the declarer's LHO, the declarer can toss other losers on the queen and jack, when appropriate.

g. Finesse That Can't Lose

If a suit is stripped, the declarer may be able to endplay one opponent if the finesse loses.

An example is as follows:

Dummy	♠ KQ752
	♥ AK5
	♦ A32
	♣ 42
Declarer	♠ AJ64
	♥ Q64
	♦ KJ106
	♣ AQ

The declarer opened 1 NT. Their partner transferred to spades, which the declarer made a superaccept 3 ♠ bid. That showed four card support, a maximum (17 points) hand and a doubleton in a side suit. After cue bidding control cards and kings, the declarer ended in a 6 ♠ contract. A heart was led.

The declarer pulled the opponents trump cards and stripped the hearts. Then they played the ace of diamonds and finessed the diamonds. If it lost, their LHO would either;

- i. give the declarer a ruff and sluff,
- ii. lead a club into the declarer's tenace, or
- iii. return a diamond enabling a club to be tossed in dummy.

h. Choice of Finesses

When the contract depends on one of two finesses to make, the declarer should consider three possible choices in the following order:

- i. An endplay and finesse that can't lose.
- ii. Making the opponents discard before the key finesse, and

This relies on an opponent either;

a) being squeezed into a position where they lose their protection in one of the declarer's two finesse suits, or

b) give the declarer information that will tell them which finesse to, or not to, take.

iii. Playing the top cards in the suit which they have the most cards first hoping that the key missing honor will drop.

If it doesn't drop, they then take the finesse in the shorter suit.

5. Avoiding a Finesse

A finesse is usually only a 50 percent chance and is usually the last resort. If a finesse is the only way to win the contract, the declarer will need to take it and hope it wins.

A few ways that the declarer can avoid taking a finesse are as follows:

a. Through Elimination and Endplay

Sometimes an elimination and endplay can turn a choice of finesses into a sure finesse.

Here in an example:

Dummy	♠ AJ853
	♥ K108
	♦ 74
	♣ AK6
Declarer	♠ KQ642
	♥ AJ7
	♦ AQ
	♣ Q52

In an IMPs game, the declarer opened 1 ♠. Their partner responded with a Jacoby 2 Notrump bid showing game points and four card support. With their eighteen HCP, the declarer bid 3 ♠ to show their strong hand. After cue bidding and keycard asks, the declarer discovered that they were missing the king of hearts and settled for a 6 ♠ contract.

A trump card was led. After pulling trumps and running the clubs, the declarer needed to decide how to handle the two finesses. They only needed one finesse to succeed, so there was a 75 percent chance of making the contract.

The declarer chose a better way, yielding a 100 percent chance of success. After pulling trumps and eliminating the club suit they played the ace, then queen of diamonds. The opponents won, but must give the declarer either a free finesse in the heart suit or a ruff in one hand and a heart discard on the other.

b. Playing to Drop a Queen

With a choice of two finesses the declarer may be able to increase their odds by playing for a drop of the queen. They should start in the suit which dummy and the declarer have the longest holding. The opponents are more likely to have a shorter holding in that suit. There is a greater chance of an honor being unprotected in that suit than in a different one.

If the declarer has an eight card holding in a suit, the opponents hold five cards and the queen will drop 31 percent of the time. As previously stated, the odds of making the contract through playing for the drop first has increased the chance of making from 50 percent to 64.5 percent.

If the declarer decides to drop a queen, rather than finesse for it, the odds are:

- i. With four cards outstanding – 52 %
- ii. With five cards outstanding – 31 %
- iii. With six cards outstanding – 19 %
- iv. With seven cards outstanding – 9 %

6. Avoidance Play

The avoidance play technique involves keeping the danger hand off the lead. This is often done through;

- a. holding up winning a trick to keep the safe side on the lead,
or
- b. finessing into the safe hand rather than the danger one.

By being aware of which side is dangerous to have the lead come from, the declarer can often make avoidance plays to keep that side off of the lead.

With a choice of ways to finesse, the declarer should try to ensure that if it loses, the non-threat hand is on lead.

An example of such is:

Dummy	♠ KQ7
	♥ A87
	♦ A10532
	♣ 64
Declarer	♠ A64
	♥ K6
	♦ KJ94
	♣ K532

The declarer opened 1 ♦ to which their partner responded 2 ♦ (inverted minor showing diamond support and at least ten HCP). When the declarer bid 2 NT, showing control of both major suits, their partner raised to 3 NT. A low heart was led.

Counting tricks, there were three in spades, two in hearts and four in diamonds. However, if the declarer finessed towards dummy and their

RHO won, the opponents may be able to lead a high club through the declarer's king.

The safe way was to take the first trick in dummy and play the ace, then finesse the ten of diamonds. If it lost to their LHO, that player would be unable to lead through the declarer's king of clubs.

Another example is:

Dummy	♠ AJ64
	♥ 1064
	♦ AKJ10
	♣ 105
Declarer	♠ KQ5
	♥ AQJ7
	♦ 532
	♣ K642

Dummy opened 1 ♦. The declarer responded 1 ♥. Dummy then bid 1 ♠ and the declarer jumped to 3 NT. The eight of spades was led.

Counting their tricks, the declarer had four spades, the ace and king of diamonds and the ace of hearts.

The declarer needed to avoid giving the opponents the lead and having them run four or more club tricks. They took the heart finesse. If it lost, the declarer would still make the contract. If the declarer took the diamond finesse and it lost, a jack or queen of clubs lead from their RHO would kill the contract.

7. Card Distribution Among Opponents

A player should familiarize themselves with the *a priori* (without further information) odds of different card splits. They need not memorize them, but they should be aware that;

- a. with two outstanding cards, the split narrowly favors an even split,
- b. with other even numbered splits, they are more likely not to split evenly, and

The most likely split is “close to evenly” such as 3 - 1, 4 - 2 or 5 - 3, which are slightly below 50 %.

- c. with an odd number of cards outstanding, they are more than twice as likely to split “as evenly as possible” such as 2 - 1, 3 - 2 or 4 - 3.

The card distribution odds are:

- a. With two cards outstanding:
 - i. 1 - 1, 52 %
 - ii. 2 - 0 or 0 - 2, 48 %
- b. With three cards outstanding:
 - i. 2 - 1 or 1 - 2, 78 %
 - ii. 3 - 0 or 0 - 3, 22 %
- c. With four cards outstanding:
 - i. 3 - 1 or 1 - 3, 49.7 %
 - ii. 2 - 2, 40.7 %

iii. $4 - 0$ or $0 - 4$, 9.6 %

d. With five cards outstanding:

i. $3 - 2$ or $2 - 3$, 67.8 %

ii. $4 - 1$ or $1 - 4$, 28.3 %

iii. $5 - 0$ or $0 - 5$, 3.9 %

e. With six cards outstanding:

i. $4 - 2$ or $2 - 4$, 48.5 %

ii. $3 - 3$, 35.5 %

iii. $5 - 1$ or $1 - 5$, 14.5 %

iv. $6 - 0$ or $0 - 6$, 1.5 %

f. With seven cards outstanding:

i. $4 - 3$ or $3 - 4$, 62.2 %

ii. $5 - 2$ or $2 - 5$, 30.5 %

iii. $6 - 1$ or $1 - 6$, 6.8 %

iv. $7 - 0$ or $0 - 7$, 0.5 %

8. Playing in a 6 - 1 Trump Split

Not infrequently a player ends up playing in a 6 – 1 trump fit, as in the following bidding:

<u>Declarer</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>Responder</u>	<u>LHO</u>
1 ♠	p	1 NT ¹	p
2 ♠ ²	p	p	p

¹ forcing

² six card suit

Their partner, with only one card in the spade suit, recognized a misfit and wisely bailed out. If they had looked for a better fit they would likely not find more than a seven cards fit. It would also be played at a higher level and would likely go down more tricks.

In 6 – 1 trump split situations, many newer players, often caught off guard by the bad fit, lose their focus. They forget to pull trumps and end up losing tricks to;

- i. their LHO overtrumping, or
- ii. both opponents winning tricks through trumping.

A 6 - 1 fit is not as bad as it may seem. If the best fit the declarer has is a seven cards fit, the 6 – 1 fit is a lot better than either a 5 - 2 or 4 - 3 fit.

The declarer should pull trumps as quickly as possible. On the second, and hopefully the third, round they are taking out two of the opponents trump cards for one of their own.

Once trumps are removed from the opponents' hands, the declarer will likely still have trump cards to take tricks. Now, the declarer is in a safe position to try to set up tricks in the side suits.

9. Other Declarer Play Tips

a. Leaving a Trump Outstanding

If the highest trump is the only trump card still outstanding after two rounds have been played, it is usually better to leave it outstanding.

Removing it will usually require losing a trump in both the dummy's and the declarer's hands.

b. Leading Towards Honors

Leading towards an honor will never cost the declarer a trick.

If the ace precedes the honor, the declarer may gain a trick. (*A good example of this is the Morton's Fork Coup shown in the How to play Winning Advanced Bridge.*)

The same principle applies when leading towards a QJx(x) holding. Either the ace or the king will precede the honors 50 % of the time. Both will precede the honors 25 percent of the time. Therefore, by leading twice towards the honors, either the queen or jack will win a trick 75 percent of the time.

c. Using Dummy's Long Suits

Five or greater card suits in dummy can often provide opportunities to toss losers in other suits once the long suit is set up.

When there is a long suit in dummy, the declarer should determine if there are enough entries to dummy's hand to toss losers once trumps have been drawn and dummy's long suit established.

To determine whether dummy's long suit can be set up, the declarer should use "*Culbertson's Rule of X Plus 1*" which states to;

- i. estimate the number of tricks that must be lost before the long suit is established, and
- ii. add one to this number to determine the number of entries needed in dummy to accomplish this.

Defense

1. Opening Leads Against Notrump Contracts

For all leads, a player should determine which suit to lead prior to deciding which card to lead.

a. Which Suit to Lead

- i. Unless they have a strong suit on their own, a defender should lead their partner's suit if their partner has indicated one,
- ii. If their partner has not indicated a long suit, a defender should lead their longest suit. With two suits of equal length, they should lead the stronger of the two.,
- iii. A defender is usually better off not leading their long suit when it is a four cards suit and;
 - a) the defender does not hold a solid honor sequence, or
 - b) the suit is headed by less than two honors,
- iv. If their four cards suit has been bid by the opponents, a defender should not lead it unless it is headed by a solid sequence,
- v. An unbid suit is usually the preferred lead, especially if suit bidding has happened prior to the opponents settling in a 3 NT game in preference to playing in a minor suit,

- vi. After a 1 NT – 3 NT bidding sequence, a major suit is usually a defender's best suit to lead, or
- vii. With no better lead, high from either;
 - a) a worthless three card suit, or
 - b) J10x or 109x.

b. Which Card to Lead

The suggested lead is either the:

- i. Top of a three card honor sequence,
- ii. Top of a 'broken sequence' such as AKJ or KQ10,
- iii. Middle honor from an 'interior sequence' such as AQJ or KJ10,
- iv. Fourth best from any suit containing an honor,
- v. Second highest from a four card suit which does not contain an honor, or
- vi. Top from two or three small cards.

2. Opening Leads Against Suit Contracts

For all leads, the defender should determine which suit to lead prior to deciding which card to lead.

a. Which Suit to Lead

i. If their partner has bid, the defender should lead that suit unless there is a good reason not to,

Some of those reasons are;

- a) a different suit headed by AKQ or KQJ,
- b) a singleton or doubleton in another suit in which the player on lead is likely to ruff, or
- c) holding the ace of the suit bid by their partner when the declarer is suspected of holding the king,

ii. With four trump cards held by one of the defenders, they should lead the longest suit which their partnership holds.

They should try to set up that long suit while forcing the declarer to shorten their trump holding. This creates the possibility of running the long suit once trumps are gone and the declarer has lost control of the trump suit.,

iii. A defender should tend to lead a suit not bid by the declarer's side,

iv. If the declarer has chosen to not to play in a notrump contract, there is usually a suit that they lack stoppers in.

Usually that suit is known to the defenders. It should be led so that the defenders can take as many tricks as possible in that suit before the declarer has a chance to toss their losers in that suit on one of their winner in a longer suit.,

v. If their partner has made a penalty double, they are likely short in the long suit of the person on lead. That suit should be led.,

vi. If their partner has doubled a slam contract, it is likely because of a void. A defender should lead a suit that their partner is the most likely to be short in. This is usually the longest suit of the person on lead.,

vii. If dummy has answered to a keycard ask, a defender should lead their artificial suit response if their partner has doubled for lead. Otherwise, they should lead a different suit., or

viii. If the declarer has made a help suit game try, they are likely weak in that suit, so that suit should be led.

b. Which Card to Lead

i. Top from two touching honors such as AK or KQ,

ii. Top of a 'broken sequence' such as AKJ or KQ10,

iii. Fourth best from any suit containing an honor,

iv. Second highest from a four card suit which does not contain an honor,

v. The middle card from three small cards. The next time, play the highest card. This is known as MUD (middle, up, down)., or

vi. A defender should not lead from AQx or KJx. It is better to wait for their partner to lead the suit through the declarer.

3. Reading the Lead

A player should try to figure out why their partner led the card and suit that they chose. It will reveal whether the suit led should be returned. The card may also reveal information about their partner's hand, such as distribution or where their points are.

If the player on lead has made a pre-emptive bid, or has rebid their suit, and leads a different suit, the lead is usually a singleton. Their partner should take the trick and lead the suit back so their partner can ruff. Once back on lead, if their partner still holds a trump card, that player should return their partner's short suit for a second ruff.

A low honor or high spot card, in a suit contract, is usually from a singleton or doubleton. It is more likely to be from a doubleton.

If a low card is led in a notrump contract, it is usually fourth best.

A low card lead indicates an honor in that suit.

4. Overtaking Partner's Opening Lead

Usually a player should not overtake their partner's opening lead, but there are a few circumstances when they should.

a. Unblocking in a Notrump Contract

When a queen or king is led from a top of a sequence and their partner has a doubleton including a high honor, they should play it. This unblocks the suit.

Now when that partner regains the lead they can run their suit or as many tricks as they can in the suit.

b. Unblocking and Ruffing in a Suit Contract

Similar to above, in a suit contract, when a king is led from KQx(x), if their partner holds a doubleton ace (Ax), they should overtake to unblock and return the suit. Their partner will win with the queen and then return the suit for a ruff.

If the opening lead is the queen from QJx(x), holding a doubleton ace (Ax) or king (Kx), their partner should overtake to unblock. If it holds, they should return the suit. When the player with the longer holding in that suit regains the lead their partner may be able to ruff the third round of the suit.

c. An Obvious Lead of a Singleton

When a singleton lead is obvious, their partner should take the first trick and return the suit for a ruff.

The most obvious lead of a singleton is when the player on lead has indicated a six cards suit and leads a different suit. The six cards suit may be indicated by a preemptive bid, rebidding the suit, or an overcall or double indicating a long suit.

Here is an example of this:

Dummy ♠ KJ1085
 ♥ K7
 ♦ J105
 ♣ KQJ

 ♠ A3
 ♥ 65
 ♦ A7432
 ♣ A954

Vulnerable, the declarer's LHO opened with a 2 ♥ bid, which was doubled. The advancer bid 2 ♠, which was passed by all. The queen of diamonds was led.

Their partner overtook with the ace and returned the suit. They led a low card to indicate a desire for a club return.

The declarer's LHO ruffed the diamond and returned a club as requested. Their partner won with the ace. Diamonds were returned for a second ruff.

The defense had taken four tricks; the ace of diamonds, two diamond ruffs, and the ace of clubs. They still held the ace of trumps and likely the ace of hearts to set the contract.

5. Defensive Signals

Standard signals are used by most players.

Using standard signals, a high card encourages the continuation of the suit and a low one discourages.

Some players prefer upside-down signals which reverse the meanings.

A player is better off sticking with either standard or upside down signals. This reduces the chance of signalling errors. Since standard signals are more popular, they are usually the best choice to start with.

Signals are meant to inform their partner about what the person signalling holds, and not necessarily what to do. The partner should consider the signal when deciding their best line of defense.

A good example of correct signalling comes from Frank Stewart's 2015 book (reprinted 2018) "*Play Bridge with Me*". He describes a hand that he played in a 2 ♠. His partner led the king of diamonds from AKx(x).

♠ 10973
♥ K6
♦ 1053
♣ AQ43

♠ Q2
♥ AQ107542
♦ 92
♣ 96

If he had encouraged with the nine, his partner would have played his ace then giving Stewart a ruff. The defense would have been held to two diamonds, a diamond ruff and only one heart trick.

Instead, Frank discouraged with the two. His partner then played the jack of hearts. After two heart tricks, Stewart returned the nine of

diamonds, which his partner won. Stewart then ruffed a diamond and returned a heart promoting his partner's Jx of trump.

6. Other Defense Tips

a. Shifting Suits

When the declarer has enough tricks in three suits to make their contract, a defender should shift to the fourth suit. This situation is often apparent when the declarer's RHO can see a long suit in dummy headed by the ace and queen and they do not hold the king in that suit.

b. Splitting Honors

When holding two touching honors, the lower of the two should be played. This informs their partner that they do not hold the honor directly below the one played, but may hold the one directly above.

c. Other Signalling

- i. Some of lead signalling may be done during the bidding phase. Opportunities may exist to double artificial bids. These doubles ask for a lead of that suit.
- ii. When returning a suit for a ruff, a low card returned is a signal that the player wants the lowest ranking other suit returned and a high card returned indicates the higher ranking suit.
- iii. When an ace is led against a suit contract, their partner should not play the queen from Qx. The queen should indicate either a singleton or from QJ(x)(x).
- iv. Most players use their discards to signal for a lead. Playing standard signals, the discard of a high spot card

indicates wanting that suit lead. A low discard discourages the lead of that suit.

Those playing upside down carding reverse the meanings of their discards.

d. Covering Honors

If dummy has two touching honors, the defender to dummy's left hand side should not cover the first honor led.

If the trick holds and the second honor is led, it should be covered. This may promote the card immediately below dummy's touching honors.

If the first lead holds and a lower card is played the next round, the declarer likely holds the Ax doubleton. The defender should play low to avoid promoting dummy's other honor.

If this book improved your bridge game knowledge or results, please show your appreciation by recommending this book and forwarding the PDF to others.

*To continue improving your game, proceed to **How to play Winning Advanced Bridge.***

Enjoy the game!