



St Annes Bridge Club

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WEAK OPENING BIDS

You and your partner may achieve success in the auction by bidding to your best contract and making it. However, there is another route to success: you can prevent the opponents from reaching their best contract.

All hands with sufficient strength to open the bidding (i.e. from about 11 or 12 points up) including very strong hands may be described by starting with an opening bid at the 1-level or, for those stronger hands, at the 2-level.

This means that opening bids at the 3-level or higher are not needed to show strong hands, and can be put to use as obstructive bids, to make life harder for the enemy.

PRE-EMPTIVE BIDS AT THE 3-LEVEL

An opening bid of 3 of a suit is not a strong bid. It is a weak bid. It is made on a hand with a reasonably strong, long suit (usually seven cards) and therefore some playing strength if that suit becomes trumps, but less than the values needed for a normal opening bid at the 1-level. It is a nuisance bid.

Note: if you have enough strength to open the bidding with a normal opening bid, you are probably too strong to open with a pre-emptive bid

The idea behind the bid is that, since we hold a weak hand, the opponents quite possibly hold the balance of power. Given the chance to conduct an uncontested auction, they should reach a contract that will score well for them, perhaps a game or even a slam.

So what is the point of opening at the 3-level with a weak hand?

By starting with a bid at a high level, we deprive the opponents of the bidding space they may need to explore their potential before reaching the right contract. We force them to guess - we make life hard for them.

Remember that an opening 3-bid is not a hand on which you expect to make 9 tricks. It is a hand where, with your long suit as trumps, you will make perhaps 6 or 7 tricks given some minimal help from partner's hand. You hope that, if you fail in your contract, the penalty that the opponents collect will insufficiently compensate them for the game or slam they could have made.

EXAMPLES OF OPENING 3-BIDS

♠	K Q J 9 6 4 3
♥	9
♦	10 5
♣	J 9 6

You can almost guarantee 6 tricks in your own hand, and if partner can contribute nothing then probably the enemy can make a slam. If they want to try and bid the slam now, though, they must start their bidding at the 3NT level or with 4 of a suit - their task will not be easy.

Verdict: open 3♠

♠ 6 4
♥ K J 10 8 7 5 3
♦ K 4 2
♣ 6

Non-vulnerable, this is a reasonable 3♥ opening bid. Your middle cards in the suit are very important. Again, you are making life difficult for the opponents.

However, if you are vulnerable, it is probably best to resist the temptation to open 3♥ on the hand. The penalties for going down doubled when vulnerable can be more than the value of an enemy game. The danger is too great.

♠ 4
♥ A Q 10 8 6 5 4
♦ Q 10 9 7
♣ 2

This hand is a sound opening 3♥ bid, vulnerable. In addition to about 6 tricks in the heart suit, you may reasonably expect the diamond holding to produce an additional trick.

♠ Q 10 9
♥ J 8 6 5 4 3 2
♦ A 7
♣ 2

Although you have a 7-card suit, this hand is unsuitable for a 3♥ opening. The Heart suit is poor in quality, so your playing strength is limited.

♠ Q 10 9 4
♥ A Q 10 8 7 6 5
♦ 2
♣ 6

One of the things that you make clear to partner when you open a hand with a pre-emptive bid is that your hand is not much use in any other suit.

Here that is not the case. If partner can bid spades, your hand offers powerful distributional support and a potential source of tricks in your long heart suit. Partner, with a decent hand with spades but no liking for hearts would pass an opening 3♥ bid, and a spade contract would be lost.

Verdict: do not open this hand with a pre-emptive bid in hearts

♠	10 9
♥	A Q 10 8 7 6 5 2
♦	K 2
♣	6

With an 8 card suit you can pre-empt at the 4 level! Here you would open 4 ♥ making it very difficult for the opposition to find a spade contract.

Note that the dividing line between opening 4 and 1 is very fine.

RESPONDING TO AN OPENING 3-BID

An opening 3-bid by partner warns you that his hand is probably suitable only to play with his long suit as trumps. Indeed, if his hand could be useful to you in another denomination, then that would probably be enough to put him off the pre-empt in the first place.

When he has opened with a bid of 3♥ or 3♠, the only relevant question for a responder who holds a decent hand is usually “Do I have enough values for us to make game in partner’s suit?”

♠	K 4
♥	A K 6
♦	Q 10 9 4 2
♣	A 9 6

If partner has opened 3♠, then you might imagine him with something like ♠ A Q x x x x x and some bits and pieces elsewhere, and raise to 4♠. Whilst this is not certain to make, it should have fair chances.

A response of 3NT to an opening pre-emptive bid is rare. It conveys the message that this is almost certainly the right contract despite opener's weak hand. This decision should be respected by opener.

Partner opens 3♠ and you hold:

♠	void
♥	A J 9
♦	A K Q 10 9 4 2
♣	Q J 6

Partner has chosen a time when you hold a fine hand to open with 3♠. Respond 3NT. This does not invite partner to bid again. If he now bids 4♠, kick him under the table.

A response of 3NT to an opening pre-emptive bid is rare. It conveys the message that this is almost certainly the right contract despite opener's weak hand. This decision should be respected by opener.

Partner opens 3 ♣ and you hold:

♠	K Q 5 4
♥	A J 9
♦	A Q 5
♣	9 8 7

You can stop all the other suits (hopefully twice) and (most important) have 3 of your partner's pre-empt suit for entries to his hand.

HAND 1

North

♠ 6 5 2
♥ 9 7 6 5 4
♦ K 10 8
♣ A J

pass

West

♠ Q 3
♥ 10 8
♦ A 7 6 5
♣ K Q 9 3 2

pass

East

♠ A K J 10 9 8 7 4
♥ Q
♦ 4 3 2
♣ 8

4 S

South

♠
♥ A K J 3 2
♦ Q J 9
♣ 10 7 6 5 4

pass

HAND 2

West

♠ A 5 4 3
♥ 10 9 8 7
♦ J 9 6
♣ 5 4

pass

pass

North

♠ K Q 10
♥ K 6 5
♦ A Q 5 4
♣ K 3 2

3 NT

East

♠ J 9 8 2
♥ A Q J
♦ K 10 8 3 2
♣ 8

South

♠ 7 6
♥ 4 3 2
♦ 7
♣ A Q J 10 9 7 6

3 C

pass

pass

PRE-EMPTIVE BIDS - SUMMARY

- A pre-empt skips 2 or more levels of bidding and is based on a weak hand with 7+ in the suit.
- The bid is designed to take away bidding space from the enemy. It is a nuisance bid!
- There should not be a 4 card major side suit (unless partner has passed) or good defensive values.
- Only bid 3NT if you have 3 cards in partners suit and stops in the others OR you can make the 9 tricks in your hand.
- Raise your partners pre-empt if you can.
- Do not overdo the pre-empting – it may backfire!

defending against pre-emptive opening bids

As we have seen, the purpose of a pre-emptive opening bid is to make life difficult for the opponents. The bid takes away much of the bidding space that they would have liked to use to explore possibilities of a contract.

In order to minimise the disruption caused by these bids, it is necessary to have a defence prepared to counter them. Regular partnerships often have a fairly sophisticated method of dealing with different high-level opening bids – although even so, it is often a matter of guesswork.

For players who are not able to develop such a method, a few simple understandings as to what bids mean after a preempt will help.

Defence to opening 3-bids:

Double	Takeout, interest in the other suits, but with the emphasis on the unbid major(s)
3 of a suit	Natural, strong 5-card or (preferably) longer suit, non-forcing
3NT	Natural, 16+ points, stopper in their suit

Examples:

West	North	East	South
3♣	?		

♠	A Q 9 4
♥	J 8 7 6 2
♦	A J 5
♣	4

Double for takeout. With a singleton in opener's suit and support for the other suits you should double on any hand of opening strength. With a doubleton club you would need a little more – about 14+ points.

♠	6
♥	A Q 9 7 5
♦	A J 5 4
♣	A 6 3

Although you have the strength to make an opening bid, this hand is unsuitable for a takeout double, as a response in spades would be unwelcome.

Best is to overcall 3♥

Examples:

West	North	East	South
3 ♥	?		

♠ K Q J 10 9 6 2
♥
♦ A K 4 3
♣ J 7

You can see only 8 tricks but its right to bid 4♠ you need very little from partner to make 4.

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ A J 10
♦ A K 4
♣ K J 7

This is the hand where you wish you were playing penalty doubles but you aren't. So bid 3NT and hope for some help from your partner

HAND 3

North



7



J 8



A 9 4



K J 10 9 7 5 4

3 C

pass

West



9 5



A 9 7 3 2



Q 6 3 2



8 3

pass

East



A K J 10 8 4 3



6



K 7



A 6 2

South



Q 6 2



K Q 10 5 4



J 10 8 5



Q

pass

4 S

HAND 4

North

♠ K J 10 9 2

♥ 8 7 6

♦ 8 5

♣ A 9 5

4 S

West

♠ Q 5 4

♥ A 5

♦ K 7 4 3 2

♣ Q 7 6

pass

pass

East

♠ 8

♥ K Q J 10 4 3 2

♦ J 9 6

♣ 3 2

3 H

South

♠ A 7 6 3

♥ 9

♦ A Q 10

♣ K J 10 8 4

double

Homework

- Review pgs 93-104 Competitive bidding