

Pre-emptive Bidding

A pre-emptive bid is made on a relatively weak hand at a relatively high level, with the aim of making life difficult for our opponents, trying to shut them out of the auction.

What is a Pre-emptive bid?

A Preempt (also spelled "pre-empt") is a bid in bridge whose primary objectives are

- (1) to thwart opponents' ability to bid to their best contract, with some safety, and
- (2) to fully describe one's hand to one's partner in a single bid.

A pre-emptive bid is usually made by *jumping*, i.e. skipping one or more bidding levels. Since it deprives the opponents of the bidding space, it is expected that they will either find a wrong contract (too high or in a wrong denomination) of their own, or fail to find any.

A pre-emptive bid often has the aim of a sacrifice, where a partnership bids a contract knowing it cannot be made, but assumes that (even when doubled), the penalty will still be smaller than the value of opponents' bid and made contract.

All sorts of bids in bridge are pre-emptive.

The weak No Trump opening (12-14) describes our hand in one bid, and opponents have to bid at the two level if they want to enter the auction.

Weak two openings in the majors are pre-emptive, as they describe our hand in one bid, and mean that the opposition must bid at the three level if they want to come into the auction.

Opening bids at the three level or higher are pre-emptive, as they are made on relatively weak hands (in terms of hcp) and are designed to make life difficult for our opponents as they have to come into the auction at a high level.

Why do we Pre-empt?

Pre-empts force the opposition into guessing what to do. Their decisions have to be made without any clear knowledge of what is held by their partner. When they have to guess at the contract, they will sometimes make the wrong guess. That is your profit.

When do we Pre-empt?

A pre-emptive bid is made on the first round of bidding. There is no such concept as a pre-emptive rebid, since if the opponents have not entered the bidding on the first round, there is no need to shut them out. A pre-empt can be made in any position, by opener, by responder or by either defender. Pre-empts are more effective the sooner they are made as that reduces the amount of information the opponents can exchange. Therefore, pre-empt as high as you dare, as early as possible. Once you have pre-empted, **do not bid again**, unless your partner makes a forcing bid.

ALWAYS PRE-EMPT AS HIGH AS YOU CAN ON THE FIRST ROUND AND THEN LEAVE THINGS TO PARTNER

What sort of hand do I need for a three level pre-empt?

The normal pre-empt contains 6-10 hcp and a relatively strong suit of 7+ cards.

A pre-emptive opening may have fewer than 6 points if it contains the right number of playing tricks, but in practice, this is very rare. It may also be a very powerful 6-card suit, but this is rare, too. Do not pre-empt in a major if you have a decent 4-card or longer suit in the other major.

Hand evaluation of pre-emptive style hands

- (1) Count every card after the third card in a suit as one playing trick.
- (2) Each ace and each king = one trick.
- (3) Count each queen as a trick if there is a second honour card in that suit.
- (4) Count no trick for a singleton king, singleton queen or queen doubleton. Count only one trick for holding K-Q doubleton.

For example:

♠ 6 5

♥ K Q J 9 8 6 4

♦ J 7 3

♣ 7

This hand is worth 6 tricks. 1 for ♥K,
1 for ♥Q and 4 for the long ♥s

♠ 9 8

♥ 7

♦ Q J T 9 6 5 4

♣ A J 3

This hand is worth 6 tricks. 1 for ♦Q,
4 for long ♦s, and 1 for ♣A.

♠ A Q 9 7 6 5 2

♥ K 3

♦ 5

♣ T 8 2

This hand is worth 7 tricks. 2 for ♠A and
♠Q, four for long ♠s and 1 for ♥K

♠ K

♥ 6

♦ Q J 7 2

♣ A J T 5 4 3 2

This hand is worth 7 tricks. 1 for ♠A,
4 for long ♠s, 1 for ♦Q, 1 for long ♦s

Rule of 500

Traditionally a pre-emptive bid will cost us a score of 500 if partner has nothing and we are doubled.

This means going three off not-vulnerable and doubled (for -500) or going two off vulnerable and doubled (also for -500).

So not-vulnerable to open at the three level we need about 6 tricks in our own hand,

And vulnerable to open at the three level we need about 7 tricks in our own hand.

So using the hands above as examples:

♠ 6 5
♥ K Q J 9 8 6 4
♦ J 7 3
♣ 7

Open 3♥ not vulnerable

Pass if vulnerable

♠ A Q 9 7 6 5 2
♥ K 3
♦ 5
♣ T 8 2

Open 3♠ if vulnerable

♠ 9 8
♥ 7
♦ Q J T 9 6 5 4
♣ A J 3

Open 3♦ if not vulnerable

Pass if vulnerable

♠ K
♥ 6
♦ Q J 7 2
♣ A J T 5 4 3 2

Open 3♣ if vulnerable

Responding to an opening bid at the three level

The pre-emptive raise

To support further pre-emptively, you need at least a good three card support for partner and at most about 8 points. You are now bidding as a likely sacrifice and are unlikely to make your contract. However, you are bidding with the intention of preventing your opponents from making their game. Expect to be doubled. However, keep an eye on the vulnerability. If you are vulnerable and they are not, then it is probably not a good idea to sacrifice as it may well cost more than your opponents game.

Eg

If partner opens 3♥ and you hold

♠ 5 2
♥ A J 4
♦ 9 8 3
♣ Q 8 7 5 2

then you should raise partner to 4♥. In all probability your left-hand opponent has a good hand with spades (somebody at the table must have this sort of hand and there is only one person left). Put him on a guess as to whether he should bid 4♠. 4♥ will fail by probably only two or three tricks, making it a good sacrifice.

The raise to game (or slam) in partner's suit

You do not particularly need much trump support to raise partner. A small doubleton or a singleton honour is often enough, and occasionally, if the rest of your hand is good enough, you can raise to a major suit game on a small singleton.

You need to check how many tricks your hand is worth, opposite your partner's pre-empt.

- (1) Assess how many tricks your partner has shown by deducting three if your side is not vulnerable or two if your side is vulnerable.
- (2) Add to this your own 'quick tricks': Count the A, K or Q of partner's suit as one trick each. In other suits, count A-K as 2, A-Q as $1\frac{1}{2}$, A as 1, K-Q as 1, and K as $\frac{1}{2}$. If you have support for opener's suit, count an outside singleton as one and an outside void as two.
- (3) If the total is less than partner's bid or just enough for the contract, pass.
- (4) If the total is more than partner's bid, you should bid on to game (but if partner's bid is already a game, you would pass). If the total is 12 or more, bid on to a slam provided that you are not missing two aces. (You may need to use Blackwood to check)

If partner opens 3♥ and you hold

♠ A K 6 5
♥ K 6 4
♦ 3
♣ K 9 8 7 2

♠ A Q 9 8
♥ 7 3
♦ K J T 9
♣ A K 3

$4\frac{1}{2}$ quick tricks - raise to game

4 quick tricks - raise to game

If partner opens 3♣ and you hold

♠ 5	♠ 9 8 3
♥ A 9 4	♥ 7 2
♦ A K J T 5	♦ A K 9 5
♣ A J 7 3	♣ A J T 3

4 quick tricks - raise to game

3 quick tricks. If partner is vulnerable
then raise to game. Not vulnerable - pass

If partner opens 3♦ and you hold

♠ A Q 5	♠ K Q 8 6
♥ 9 8 4	♥ A
♦ J 7 3	♦ K 5 4
♣ A Q 6 3	♣ A K J 3

3 quick tricks - pass

Bid 4NT. Surely 6♦ is on if
partner has an Ace

Bidding 3NT over a pre-emptive 3 bid

Remember that if you bid 3NT it is "to play" and partner will pass. You cannot rely on partner to stop any suit (other than the one he has bid), and, unless you have a few cards in his suit, then his hand is likely to be useless to you.

The type of hand you will have will either be one that can utilise partner's suit, or alternatively a hand that can make 3NT on its own.

If partner opens 3♣ and you hold

♠ A Q 2	♠ A 8
♥ K 9 4	♥ A 7 6 2
♦ K Q 5	♦ A K Q J 9 8 5
♣ A Q 3	♣

Bid 3NT. You hope to make 7 club tricks
and you can make two more in your hand

Bid 3NT. You have 9 tricks in your own
hand, and partner can stop the clubs

Other bids over a pre-emptive 3 opening

Very occasionally you will have a long major of your own and a good hand, so that you can bid the major suit game.

A change of suit is forcing. Only do this with a very powerful hand indeed.

Never try and rescue partner from a pre-empt. With a weak hand, pass.

Opening at the four level

The rule of 500 still applies, so you need to have 7 tricks not vulnerable and 8 tricks vulnerable. Often it will mean you hold an eight-card suit.

♠ A Q 9 7 6 5 3 2	♠ 3
♥ K 3	♥ 6
♦ 5	♦ A J 7 2
♣ 7 2	♣ A Q T 5 4 3 2

8 tricks

8 tricks

Open 4♣

Open 4♠

Overcalling with a pre-empt

Again, this is very similar - the rule of 500 still applies. Now you know that the opponents have points though, so be inclined to push as much as you can.

Right-hand opponent opens 1♦

Right-hand opponent opens 1♥

♠ 6 5	♠ A Q J 9 8 5 3 2
♥ K Q J 9 8 6 4	♥ 7
♦ J 7 3	♦ K 3
♣ 7	♣ 8 3

If you are not vulnerable, bid 3♥

With 8 tricks in your own hand,

You have 6 tricks

bid 4♣, to make life difficult for them