

Lesson 3 –Opening One-of-a-Suit

When to Open One of a Suit

	12-14 HCP	15-19 HCP
Balanced	1NT	1 of a suit
Unbalanced	1 of a suit	

- Hands which cannot be opened 1NT (because they are either unbalanced or they contain more than 14 HCP) are opened with one of a suit.
- The point range for opening one of a suit is 12-19 hcp
- Opening one-of-a-suit covers a multitude of hands with different shapes and strength, the opening bid of one-of-a-suit is a WIDE RANGING bid.
- Unlike opening 1NT, which is a LIMIT bid closely defining the strength and shape of your hand, when you open one-of-a-suit you are not telling your partner the whole story in one bid and neither are you asking partner to take over control of the auction.
- You want to tell your partner more about your strength (High Card Points) and your suit holdings (distribution) with your next bid (re-bid). You want partner to respond so that you can make another bid.
- Opening one of a suit is therefore a FORCING Bid which you would not normally expect partner to pass – unless he has a very weak hand

Which Suit to Open

1. **Without exception, you always open with your longest suit.** It doesn't matter what the quality of the suit is. Aces and Kings will usually always make tricks even if they are not trumps but small cards will usually only make tricks if they are in the trump suit. **Always open length before strength.**
2. **If you have two suits of equal length, open the higher ranking** (with one exception – see 3 below).
3. The exception is **with a balanced hand and more than 14 hcp having a 4-card heart suit and a 4-card spade suit, in which case you open 1♥**. This makes sense because you are always looking to give priority to finding an 8-card major suit fit and by bidding 1♥ you leave room for your partner to bid 1♠. Holding a balanced hand, you will want to use your re-bid to tell your partner you have a balanced hand by bidding no trumps. Since you are only going to have the chance to make one suit bid it makes sense to make this bid 1♥.

If you can remember these few simple rules you will always know which suit it is correct to open.

Note: The only remaining shape to worry about is **4-4-4-1** hands which are always difficult to bid but which fortunately don't crop up very often so we won't concern ourselves with those hands right now.

Responding to a One of Suit Opening Bid

In response to an opening bid of one of a suit, as opener's partner, you could:

- Pass
- Support Partner's Opening Suit
- Respond in No Trumps
- Respond in a New Suit

1. Pass

With less than 6 hcp – Pass.

Partner's opening bid is forcing but only on condition that you have 6 or more points

The reason for this is that when partner opens one of a suit he will have at most 19 points and if you have at most 5 points then your combined total (24 max) can't be enough for game. Further, if partner opened with only 12 points, your side will certainly have well under half the total points – so it is best to pass as soon as possible. Even if you have a void or singleton in partner's suit you should Pass.

Don't try and rescue partner else matters will likely get even worse!

With 6 + points it is possible that your side has the magic 25 points so you must bid.

But with less than 6 points you should Pass.

Supporting Partner's Major Suit Opening

If partner opens one of a **major suit** (1♥ or 1♠) and **you have four cards or more in that suit** then you have immediately found the holy grail of bridge – a major suit fit.

Don't look any further or mention any other suit – the only question is how far to go in supporting partner's suit.

Raise partner's one of a major suit opening as follows:

Supporting partner's one of a major suit opening	
6 – 9 points	Raise to the two – level (2♥ or 2♠)
10 – 12 points	Raise to the three – level (3♥ or 3♠)
13+ points	Raise to game (4♥ or 4♠)

By bidding to the limit of the points in your hand your responding bid is a Limit Bid – closing defining the shape (4 or more cards in partner’s suit) and strength of your hand. You are telling partner that it is for him to now take control of the auction and decide whether to bid on towards game or pass and play in a part-score.

On hearing your response, partner (opener) will add his points to your points and decide whether to Pass or bid on.

The auction 1♠ - (2♠) - 3♠ is just like the auction 1NT – 2NT. It is an INVITATION BID. As responder, you are invited to bid 4♠ if you your points are at the top of your range [8-9 hcp] or to Pass if you are minimum [6-7 hcp].

Suit Opening

When partner opens one of a minor suit (♣’s or ♦’s), then in principle you can support this suit in exactly the same way as if it were a major; i.e. with 4+ card support and 6 – 9 points raise to the two level and with 10 – 12 points raise to three level.

However your goal is to find major suit fits and not minor suit fits. This follows because your game priorities are:

1. 4♥/♠,
2. 3NT,
3. 5♣/♦.

Opener may have opened 1♦ (longest suit) on the following hand:

♠ A K 10 8
♥ K 4
♦ K J 9 7 4
♣ 5 4

Your hand is:

♠ Q 9 7 2
♥ A Q 3
♦ Q 8 6 2
♣ J 10

You have 4-card support for partner’s diamonds and 11 HCP so you could raise partner to 3♦. But whereas 3♦ would leave opener in a quandary as to what to do

next, your alternative bid of 1♠ (showing your 4 card spade suit) would be music to his ears and you would soon find yourself playing and making game in 4♠! Had you bid 3♦ you would either have ended up in 5♦ going down (losing two club tricks and the ace of diamonds) or making a part score in 3♦ but missing a game in 4♠!

If you have a 4 card major suit always bid it first before supporting partner's minor suit. Note that the suit quality is not important - even with 4 small cards in the major you still bid it first.

If you straightaway support opener's minor suit then you deny having a 4 card major suit.