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ACBL Alert Procedure

The objective of an Alert is to indicate to the opponents that the meaning of a call is *unexpected*. In an ideal world we would just Alert “what the opponents don’t know.” In the real world, we don’t know what the opponents know, so we must use a set of rules instead.

Alerts are not the only mechanism that provides the opponents access to information. Upon the request of an opponent, a player must fully explain the meaning of any of their partner’s calls including any inferences from related auctions and from partnership experience.

Alerts must be made verbally by saying the word “Alert” and visually by tapping the “Alert” strip or showing the “Alert” card in the bidding box. When a call has been Alerted, an opponent, at their turn to call may ask about its meaning. The preferred form of the question is a simple “Please Explain.”

Penalties for failing to Alert are not automatic. However, a player who is misinformed by an opponent’s failure to Alert will be protected. A player who does not ask about an Alerted call will not be protected, even if the meaning of the call is not what they expect.

If you are not sure whether to Alert a call, err on the side of Alerting it. You should Alert a call that requires (or may require) an Alert even if you do not remember its meaning. However, do not Alert any call that this document says not to Alert.

The default rule for Natural bids and Passes is that they should not be alerted, with exceptions shown in italics. The default rule for Artificial bids, Doubles, and Redoubles is that they should be alerted, with exceptions shown in plain text.

Following the main Alert Procedure is a list of examples intended to help with its application. Capitalized words are defined in this document or in the ACBL Convention Charts (<https://www.acbl.org/convention-charts/>).

The rules for Alerts change when playing behind screens or online. See Appendix G of the ACBL Conditions of Contest (<http://web2.acbl.org/coc/AppendixG.pdf>) for the rules for playing behind screens and Appendix O (<https://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/play/AppendixO.pdf>) for the rules for playing online.

Definitions

All definitions from the ACBL Convention Charts also apply.

1. Takeout Double - A double that generally contains length in the unbid suits and for which the expectation is that partner will bid without an independent desire to defend if the next hand passes. A Takeout Double may also contain strong options without support for all unbid suits.
2. Negative Double - A kind of Takeout Double made by the partner of the Opening Bidder after a Direct Overcall. A Negative Double shows 4 cards in any major that could be bid at the one level, and may have more than 4 cards in a major that could only be bid at a higher level.

A double that by agreement occasionally has only 3 cards in a major is a Negative Double. After 1C (1D), a double that shows length in both majors, possibly with more than 4 cards in one or both majors is a Negative Double. After 1m (1H), a double that shows fewer than 4 spades or a double that is frequently made with 5 or more spades is NOT a Negative Double.

A double that could be a strong hand without length in the unbid major(s) or a strong hand with 5 or more cards in the unbid major(s) (as frequently played in combination with negative free bids) is NOT a Negative Double.

3. Semi-Forcing - A response of 1NT to a Natural Opening Bid of 1H or 1S that can contain Invitational values but may be passed.
4. Opening No Trump Sequence - A Natural Opening Bid of 1NT or 2NT or a sequence of Artificial bids that does not show length in any suit ending with a Natural 1NT or 2NT.

Announcements

An Announcement is a word or a short phrase that describes the meaning of partner's call. Announcements are a form of Alerting, and you must still visually Alert the call. Calls that require Announcements must be immediately announced, even if the call would otherwise not be Alerted or if the Alert would be delayed. Announce the following Agreements:

1. The minimum length of any Non-Forcing minor suit Opening that could be fewer than 3 cards. Use the form, "Could be X" where X is the minimum length of the suit as the announcement.
2. The HCP Range of any Natural 1NT Opening.
3. Any Artificial bid that primarily shows Length in one specific suit and any double or redouble that shows Length in one specific suit. Use the name of the suit being shown as the announcement. This does not apply to suits in which you or your Partner have already shown Length.

4. After a 1-level major suit Opening in first or second seat, a 1NT response that is Forcing or Semi-Forcing. Also announce "could have 4 spades" in the unopposed auction 1H - 1NT if you routinely bypass a 4-card spade suit.

Natural Bids

Alert the Natural bids listed below.

Opening Bids

1. *A Natural 2C Opening.*
2. *A Natural Opening suit bid at the 2 or 3 level that may contain 12 or more HCP. This does not apply to an Opening in fourth seat.*
3. *A Natural Preemptive bid if there is a second way to show the same suit at the same level.*
4. *A Natural Opening suit bid where a second suit bid later in the auction would routinely be longer than the opened suit.*
5. *An Opening No Trump bid that is Natural but always based on a long suit.*

Direct Overcalls

1. *After a Natural or Quasi-Natural 1-level suit bid, a Natural 1NT Direct Overcall that does not show at least 14 HCP.*
2. *After a Natural 1-level suit bid, a Natural 2-level Cuebid.*
3. *After a Natural 1-level suit bid, a Natural jump overcall that shows at least Average strength.*
4. *After a Natural 1-level suit bid, a Natural 2NT that shows a Strong hand.*

Responses to Opening Bids

1. *By an unpassed hand, and after an Opening suit bid and an opponent's pass or overcall, a Non-Forcing new suit bid at the cheapest level (unless that bid is at the level of game or higher).*
2. *By an unpassed hand, and after an Opening Bid and an opponent's double, a Non-Forcing new suit bid at the one level.*
3. *After a Natural 1-level Opening Bid, a single raise that is Forcing.*
4. *After a Natural 1-level Opening suit bid and an opponent's pass, a double raise that does not show Invitational values.*
5. *By an unpassed hand, and after a Preempt, a Natural response in a new suit that is below game and not Forcing or a 2NT response that is not Forcing.*
6. *After a Preempt, a below-game raise that is Invitational or Forcing.*

Rebids By Opener and Overcaller

1. *Unless the Opening bid showed a Strong hand, a 1NT rebid or a raise of a 1-level major suit response to 2 of that major that may contain hands of 16 or more HCP.*
2. *After a Natural Opening Bid, a rebid by Opener that shows a suit that is routinely longer than the suit opened.*
3. *After an Opening No Trump Sequence or a Natural No Trump Direct Overcall and a 2C or 3C bid asking for major suit length, a rebid that shows 5 cards in a major.*

Always

1. *A Natural bid which also shows Length or values in another suit.*

Passes

Alert the passes listed below.

1. *A pass that is Forcing when the hand passing has not previously shown any strength, unless the partner of the passing hand has shown a Very Strong hand.*
2. *A pass that shows the hand is not minimum strength in context of the current auction.*
3. *A pass that shows Length or strength in a suit that was neither the suit most recently shown by partner nor the suit most recently shown by opponents.*

Artificial Bids

Alert all Artificial bids except as listed below. Alert any Quasi-Natural bid that is not Announced.

Do NOT Alert the following bids:

Opening Bids

1. A Very Strong Artificial 2C Opening Bid.

Direct Overcalls

1. After a Natural 1-level minor suit bid, a 2-level Cuebid that shows Length in both majors.
2. After a Natural 1-level major suit bid, a 2-level Cuebid that shows Length in the unbid major and an unspecified minor.
3. After a Quasi-Natural Opening Bid, any Cuebid.
4. After an Artificial Opening Bid, any bid in the same suit or in a suit shown by the Artificial Opening Bid.
5. After a Natural 1-level Opening Bid, a 2NT Overcall showing the lowest two unbid suits.
6. After a Quasi-Natural or Artificial Opening Bid, a 2NT Overcall that shows two suits (known or unknown).

7. Any Cuebid that is a jump.

Responses to Opening Bids and Overcalls

1. After a 2-level Preempt, a Forcing 2NT response regardless of its meaning.
2. After an Opening No Trump Sequence or a Natural No Trump Direct Overcall, a 2C bid over 1NT or a 3C bid over 2NT that asks about the No Trump bidder's major suit holdings. Alert any follow-up bid that reveals that the 2C or 3C bidder may not (or did not) hold a major suit for the bid.
3. A 2D response to a Strong (or Very Strong) Artificial 2C Opening Bid.

Other Artificial Bids

1. A 4C bid asking for aces or keycards directly over a No Trump bid or in an auction that started with an Opening No Trump Sequence.
2. A 4NT bid asking for aces or keycards.
3. After an Opening Suit Bid and an Overcall, a Cuebid by either side that shows a raise, or an Average Strength or stronger hand, or either possibility.
4. After an Opening No Trump Bid and an Overcall, any bid in the same suit or in a suit shown by the Overcall.
5. After an Opening Bid and a Response, a Cuebid with any meaning.
6. After an Opening Bid and a Response, any suit bid that shows strength in the suit or at least three cards in the suit.
7. Any No Trump Overcall at the 4-level or higher.
8. After a 2C major asking bid, a 2D response that denies a four card major, and after a 3C major asking bid, a 3D response that denies a four card major.

Doubles

Alert a double of an Artificial Bid that asks for the doubled suit to not be led, or that asks for a specific suit to be led that is not the doubled strain. Otherwise do not alert a double of 3NT or higher. Alert a double below 3NT except as listed below.

Do NOT Alert the following doubles:

After an Opening Bid

1. After a Natural or Quasi-Natural suit Opening at any level, a Takeout Double.
2. After a No Trump Opening Bid, a penalty or card-showing double.
3. After an Artificial Opening Bid, any double.

After an Opening Bid and an Overcall

1. After a 1-level suit Opening Bid and a Natural suit overcall, a Negative Double by Responder.

2. After a 1-level suit Opening and an Artificial overcall, any double by Responder.
3. After a 2-level or higher suit Opening Bid and a Natural suit overcall, a penalty double by Responder.
4. After a Natural 1NT or 2NT Overcall, a penalty double by Responder. After an Artificial 1NT or 2NT Overcall, any double.
5. After a 1NT or 2NT Opening and an overcall at the two or three level, Negative Doubles, penalty doubles and card-showing doubles by Responder.

After an Opening Bid and a Response (whether or not there was interference)

1. After a Natural or Quasi-Natural Opening suit Bid and a Natural or Quasi-Natural Response, a Takeout Double.
2. After an Opening Bid and a Response if either the Opening Bid or the Response is Artificial, any double.
3. After a Natural Opening, Natural overcall, and Natural 1NT Response, any double.

At Opener's Rebid and Later

1. All doubles by both sides.

Redoubles

Alert redoubles except as listed below.

Do NOT Alert the following redoubles:

1. A redouble that shows general strength, and suggests playing the current contract or penalizing other contracts.
2. A redouble that shows a specific number of cards or strength in partner's suit.
3. A redouble in balancing seat or after a balancing double that suggests doubt about the current contract or is a suggestion to play a different contract.
4. A redouble that shows a control in the suit that was doubled.

Delayed Alerts

In any case where a bid is Alertable, but the bid is 3NT or higher, and the auction is at or beyond opener's rebid, delay the Alert until the end of the auction. Additionally, Control Bids should be Alerted at the end of the auction even if they are below 3NT. Alerts of passes, doubles, and redoubles are not delayed regardless of the level of the auction. When behind screens or online, do not delay any Alerts.

At the end of the auction both defenders should Alert any Alertable bids by their partners with a Delayed Alert. The declaring side should explain any Alertable bids where Alerts were delayed.

Pre-Alerts

Before the auction begins on the first board of a match or round, you must inform the opponents if you have any of these agreements:

1. A 1-level Opening Bid that is not Natural or that is Forcing.
2. A canape system.
3. Playing different systems depending on seat or vulnerability. It is not considered a different system if the only change is No Trump Range (and responses) or Opening Bid strength.

Additionally, you must inform the opponents about any Artificial Opening Preempts below 3NT.

Examples

All examples follow the numbering from earlier in the document. For some simple cases a number has no examples.

Announcements

1.
 - a. A Quasi-Natural 1C Opening Bid that includes all balanced hands outside the 1NT Opening range: Announce "*Could be two.*"
 - b. A Non-Forcing 1D Opening that might not contain any diamonds: Announce "*Could be zero.*"
 - c. A Forcing 1C Opening showing 16+ HCP that might not contain any clubs: "*Alert.*"
2.
 - a. A 1NT Opening Bid that shows 15-17 HCP: Announce "*Fifteen to Seventeen.*"
 - b. A 1NT Opening Bid that generally shows 12-14 HCP, but is frequently opened with 11 HCP: Announce "*Good Eleven to Fourteen.*"
3.
 - a. After a 1NT opening, a 2D bid showing hearts: Announce "*Hearts.*"
 - b. After a 1C opening and a Takeout Double, a 1H bid showing spades: Announce "*Spades.*"
 - c. After a 1D opening and a Takeout Double, a redouble showing hearts: Announce "*Hearts.*"
 - d. After a 1D opening and a Takeout Double, a redouble showing spades: "*Alert.*"
 - e. As Advancer in the auction (1C) 1S (P), a 2D bid showing hearts: Announce "*Hearts.*"
 - f. After a Very Strong 2C Opening, a 2D bid showing hearts: Announce "*Hearts.*"

- g. A 4D Opening Bid showing spades: Announce "*Spades.*"
 - h. After a Preemptive 2D Opening, a 2NT response showing spades: Announce "*Spades.*"
 - i. After a 1NT opening, a 2S bid showing either clubs or diamonds: "*Alert.*"
 - j. As Responder in the auction 2S (X), a 3D bid showing either hearts or a raise to 3S that wants a heart lead: "*Alert.*"
 - k. After a 1D Opening and a Takeout Double, a 1S bid showing a balanced hand: "*Alert.*"
 - l. After a Natural 1H Opening, a 2H Direct Overcall showing Length in spades and an unspecified minor suit: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - m. After the unopposed auction 1NT - 2H - 2S, where 2H was a transfer to spades, a 3H bid showing a game forcing hand with 6 or more spades: "*Alert.*"
- 4.
- a. After a first seat 1H opening, a 1NT Response that is Semi-Forcing: Announce "*Semi-Forcing.*"
 - b. After a third seat 1H opening, a 1NT Response that is Semi-Forcing: No Alert or Announcement required.
 - c. After a first seat 1H Opening, a 1NT Response that is Forcing and also routinely has 4 spades because the pair plays Flannery: Announce "*Forcing, could have 4 spades.*"

Natural Bids

Opening Bids

- 1.
 - a. A 2C Opening showing a Weak hand with clubs: "*Alert.*"
 - b. A 2C Opening showing 10-15 HCP and 6 or more clubs: "*Alert.*"
 - c. A 2C Opening showing a Strong hand with clubs: "*Alert.*"
- 2. No examples
- 3.
 - a. A 4H bid showing a Natural Preempt in hearts when the partnership also uses 4D as a stronger Preempt in hearts: "*Alert.*"
 - b. A 3D bid showing a Natural Preempt in diamonds when the partnership also uses 2S as a weaker Preempt in either minor: "*Alert.*"
- 4. No examples
- 5. A 3NT Opening Bid based on a running minor suit and stoppers outside: "*Alert.*"

Direct Overcalls

- 1. No examples
- 2.
 - a. After a Natural 1C Opening, A Natural 2C Direct Overcall: "*Alert.*"

- b. After a Precision-style 1D Opening showing 2 or more diamonds, a Natural 2D Direct Overcall: No Alert or Announcement required.
 - c. After a Natural 1C Opening, A Natural 3C Direct Overcall: No Alert or Announcement required.
- 3.
- a. After a Natural 1S Opening, a 3H Direct Overcall that shows 11-15 HCP and a 6-card heart suit: *"Alert."*
4. No examples

Responses to Opening Bids

- 1.
- a. After a 1C Opening, a Non-Forcing 1H Response: *"Alert."*
 - b. After a 1C Opening and a 1S Direct Overcall, a Non-Forcing 2H response: *"Alert."*
- 2.
- a. After a 1H Opening and a Takeout Double, a Non-Forcing 1S response: *"Alert."*
 - b. After a 1H Opening and a Takeout Double, a Non-Forcing 2C response: No Alert or Announcement required.
 - c. After a 1H Opening and a Takeout Double, a Forcing 2C response: No Alert or Announcement required.
3. No examples
- 4.
- a. After a Natural 1S Opening and a Pass, a Preemptive 3S Response: *"Alert."*
 - b. After a Natural 1S Opening and a Pass, a Forcing 3S Response: *"Alert."*
 - c. After a Natural 1S Opening and a Takeout Double, a Preemptive 3S Response: No Alert or Announcement required.
 - d. After a Natural 1S Opening and a Takeout Double, a Forcing 3S Response: No Alert or Announcement required.
5. After a Natural 2D Preempt, a Non-Forcing 2NT Response that invites game in NT: *"Alert."*
6. No examples

Always

1. A 2H Opening Bid that shows hearts and a minor: *"Alert."*
2. In the auction 1NT (P) 2C (X) where 2C asked about major suit holdings, Opener's 2S Rebid that shows four spades and also shows a stopper in clubs: *"Alert."*
3. After a 1S Opening and a 2C Direct Overcall, a 3H Response that shows both hearts and spades: *"Alert."*

Passes

In an auction that begins 1H (X) XX, neither a Pass as a suggestion to play nor a Pass as a suggestion to run would be Alerted since neither meaning is one of the exceptions.

1.
 - a. After a Very Strong 2C Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a Pass that is Forcing: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a 1NT Opening, a penalty double, and a 2H Response, a Pass that is Forcing: "*Alert.*"
2.
 - a. After a Very Strong 2C Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a Pass showing 0-4 HCP: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a Very Strong 2C Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a Pass showing 4+ HCP: "*Alert.*"
 - c. After a Strong 1C Opening and a 1S Direct Overcall, a Pass showing 0-5 HCP or a trap: Do not Alert or Announce.
3.
 - a. After 1H (2H) X, where 2H showed spades and a minor, a Pass asking the overcaller to bid 2S with diamonds and 3C with clubs: "*Alert.*"

Artificial Bids

Direct Overcalls

1.
 - a. After a Natural 1D Opening, a 2D Direct Overcall showing both majors: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a Natural 1D Opening, a 2D Direct Overcall showing spades and clubs: "*Alert.*"
2.
 - a. After a Natural 1H Opening, a 2H Direct Overcall showing spades and an unspecified minor: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a Natural 1H Opening, A 2H Direct Overcall showing spades and clubs: "*Alert.*"
3.
 - a. After a Precision-style 1D Opening showing 2 or more diamonds, a 2D Direct Overcall showing both majors: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a Precision-style 1D Opening showing 2 or more diamonds, a 2D Direct Overcall showing spades and clubs: Do not Alert or Announce.
4. No examples
5. No examples

6. No examples
7. No examples

Responses to Opening Bids

1.
 - a. After a Preemptive 2D Opening, a 2NT Response asking for an outside ace or king: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a Preemptive 2D Opening, a 2NT Response asking about the strength of the Preempt: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - c. After a 2D Opening showing a Three-Suited hand with 11-15 HCP and diamond shortness, a 2NT Response asking about the shape of the hand: "*Alert.*"
2.
 - a. After the unopposed auction 1C - 1D - 1NT where 1C showed a Strong hand, 1D showed 0-7 HCP, and 1NT showed a balanced 17-19 HCP, a 2C bid asking for major suit length: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After the unopposed auction 2C - 2D - 2H - 2S - 2NT where 2C showed a Very Strong hand, 2D was a waiting bid, 2H showed either hearts or a balanced hand, 2S was automatic, and 2NT showed a balanced hand with 24+ HCP, a 3C bid asking for major length: Do not Alert or Announce.
3.
 - a. After a Strong 2C Opening, a 2D response showing a game forcing hand: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a Strong 2C Opening, a 2D Response showing a Control Count of 0-1: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - c. After a strong 2C Opening, a 2D waiting Response: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - d. After a strong 2C Opening, a 2H Response showing 0-3 HCP: "*Alert.*"
 - e. After a strong 2C Opening, a 2H Response showing a game Forcing hand with hearts: Do not Alert or Announce.

Other Artificial Bids

1. No examples
2. No examples
3. No examples
4. No examples
5.
 - a. After a 1H Opening and a 2H Response, a 3C game try asking for help in the club suit that might be bid on a small doubleton: "*Alert.*"
 - b. After a 1S Opening and a 2S Response, a 3H game try showing at least a three card heart suit: Do not alert or announce.
 - c. After a 1D Opening and a 2D Response, a 2S bid that shows a spade stopper: Do not alert or announce.
6. No examples

7.
 - a. After a 2NT Opening, and a 3C Response asking about majors, a 3D rebid showing no 4 card major: Do not alert or announce.
 - b. After a 2NT Opening and a 3C Response asking about majors, a 3D rebid that shows no 5-card major, but shows a 4-card major: "*Alert.*"

Doubles

After an Opening Bid and an Overcall

1.
 - a. After a 1D Opening and a 1H Direct Overcall, a Double showing 4 or more spades: Announce "*Spades.*"
 - b. After a 1D Opening and a 1H Direct Overcall, a Double showing fewer than 4 spades: "*Alert.*"
 - c. After a 1D Opening and a 1H Direct Overcall, a Double showing 4 spades: Do not Alert or Announce.
2. No examples
3.
 - a. After a Preemptive 2D Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a Takeout Double: "*Alert.*"
 - b. After a Preemptive 2D Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a penalty double: Do not Alert or Announce.
4.
 - a. After a 1H Opening and a 1NT Direct Overcall, a Takeout Double: "*Alert.*"
 - b. After a 1H Opening and a 1NT Direct Overcall, a penalty double: Do not Alert or Announce.
5.
 - a. After a 1NT Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a Takeout Double: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. After a 1NT Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a penalty double: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - c. After a 1NT Opening and a 2H Direct Overcall, a Double showing 5 or more spades: Announce "*Spades.*"

At Opener's Rebid and Later

1.
 - a. In the auction 1C (P) 1H (1S) a Double by Opener showing 3 hearts: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. In the auction 1C (P) 1H (1S) a penalty double by Opener: Do not Alert or Announce.

Redoubles

1.
 - a. In the auction (2H) X (P) 3NT; (P) P (X), a Redouble suggesting playing 3NT: Do not Alert or Announce.
2.
 - a. In the auction 1D (P) 1H (X), a Redouble showing 3 hearts: Do not Alert or Announce.
 - b. In the auction (1D) 1S (X), a Redouble showing the Ace or King of spades: Do not Alert or Announce.
3.
 - a. In the auction (2H) X (P) 3NT; (P) P (X), a Redouble suggesting playing a different contract: Do not Alert or Announce.

Delayed Alerts

1. In the unopposed auction 1H - 2NT - 3D - 4S - 5C - 6H where 2NT was an Artificial raise of hearts, 3D showed diamond shortness, 4S asked for keycards in hearts, and 5C showed 1 or 4 keycards: Alert 2NT and 3D at the time they are bid. Explain 4S and 5C at the end of the auction.
2. In the unopposed auction 1S - 2C - 2H - 3H - 3S - 4C - 4H where 3S and 4C were control bids: Explain 3S and 4C at the end of the auction.
3. In the unopposed auction 1NT - 2D - 2H - 4C - 4D - 6H where 2D was a transfer, 4C asked for keycards in hearts, and 4D showed 0 or 3 keycards: Announce "Hearts" when 2D is bid. Explain 4D at the end of the auction.

Pre-Alerts

1.
 - a. If you play a standard Precision system, pre-alert that 1C is strong, artificial, and forcing, and that 1D could be as short as 2.
 - b. If you play a mostly natural system, but promise 5 cards when you open 1D, 1H, or 1S and open 1C with other hands, pre-alert that 1C is artificial and could be as short as 1.
2.
 - a. If you play that you routinely open hands with a 4-card major and a longer minor with 1 of the major, pre-alert that your 1H and 1S openings are natural, but can have a longer minor.
3.
 - a. If you play Precision when not-vulnerable and 2/1 when vulnerable, pre-alert how your system changes by vulnerability, and also pre-alert the Precision 1C and 1D bids.