Responding to Suit Bids

You will find it easier to grasp the structure of responses to a suit opening bid if you understand the order of doing things. Firstly, you must settle the denomination (suit or no trumps). Then you determine the level. There is not enough bidding space available to jump about to show a strong hand when you have no idea of the denomination.

Responder Supports Opener's Suit
Opener has shown at least a 4-card suit, so if responder has 4-card support the search for the right denomination is over before it has begun. The only problem concerns the level at which you should play. Responder can make a limit bid to suggest the level, jumping if necessary.

After a 1♥ [WR] opening bid responder supports his partner's suit according to the table below.

2♥ [L] shows 6-9 points and 4+ hearts, hand (a).
3♥ [L] shows 10-12 point a and 4+ hearts, hand (b).
4♥ [L] shows 13-15 points and 4+ heart, hand (c).

(a) ♠ K J 7	(b) ♠ K J 7	(c) ♠ K J 7
♥ Q 10 6 5	♥ Q 10 6 5	♥ Q 10 6 4
♦ 9 5 3 2	♦ A 5 3 2	♦ A K 3 2
♣ 10 6	♣ 10 6	♣ 10 6

Note the values 6-9 and 10-12. They constantly recur.

You should be prepared to bid even more aggressively if you have a good fit with partner and great shape.

(d) ♠ 9 7 3 2	(e) ♠ 9
♥ Q 10 6 5	♥ K 10 6 5 3
♦ -	♦ 10
♣ 9 6 5 3 2	♣ A 8 6 5 3 2

With hand (d) raise 1♥ to 2♥ [L], expecting to make tricks by ruffing diamonds. With (e) jump to 4♥ [L]. 4♥ will probably make, and just as important, 4♠ may wall make for your opponents so it won't do you any harm to make it hard for them to get in a safe bid. Such an attempt to bully opponents out of their dues is called pre-emptive bidding and you will meet it again later.

Note how different hand (e) is compared to hand (c). With (c) you bid game because of points. With (e) you bid game because of shape. Because of this experienced players try to find different ways of coping with (c), which usually involve making a forcing or conventional bid on the first round and jumping to game in partner's major suit on the second round.

If you want a more methodical way of valuing your hand when supporting partner you might value a side-suit void as the worth as much as an ace, a

side-suit singleton as worth as much as a king, and a side suit doubleton as an extra value. *Appreciate shortage only when you have found a fit with partner.*

Since these raises are limit bids opener's common sense will probably tell him what to do next. Suppose opener's 1♥ is raised to 2♥ [L] and he holds these hands.

(f) ♠ K J 7   (g) ♠ K Q 7   (h) ♠ K Q 7
     ♥ A Q 8 3   ♥ A Q J 7 3   ♥ A Q J 7 3
     ♦ A 9 2   ♦ A Q J 8   ♦ A 10 8 4
     ♣ J 10 6   ♣ 4   ♣ 2

With (f) he intended a no-trump rebid but new information has come to light, namely that responder has 6-9 points. No game is likely, so there is no point in bidding on.

With (g) he knows the correct contract is 4♥. There appears to be a 9-card heart fit and the combined point count is at least 26. He closes the auction with 4♥ [S].

With (h) he is still unsure as to whether game or part-score is correct. He could pass this message with 3♥ [I]. The logic is inescapable. With no interest in gone he would have passed, while if he knew game was desirable he would have bid it. Therefore he wants responder to proceed with 8-9 points, but not 6-7. A better bid still is the *trial bid* of 3♦ [F], showing a second suit and helping responder judge how good is the fit between the two hands. He will place greater value on the ♦K or ♦Q then on the ♣K or ♣Q.

Responder bids No~trumps

If you raise opener's suit the trump suit is clearly settled. If instead you respond in no-trumps the denomination is not so clear, but because you are suggesting a balanced hand opener is usually in a good position to pick the contract. Therefore it makes sense for no-trump responses to be limit bids.

If opener starts with 1♥ [WR]:
 1NT [L]   shows 6-9 points, hand (a).
 2NT [L]   shows 10-12 points, balanced, hand (b).
 3NT [L]   shows 13-15 points, balanced, hand [c].
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(a)   ♠ K 6 3   (b) ♠ K 8 3   (c) ♠ K Q 3
      ♥ 7 2   ♥ 7 2   ♥ 9 7 2   -
      ♦ Q 10 7 2   ♦ Q 10 7 2   ♦ Q 10 7 2
      ♣ K 6 4 3   ♣ A Q 9 2   ♣ A Q 9

Each of these bids denies four hearts, (otherwise it would be appropriate for responder to support opener's suit), or four spades (a 4-card major that could be shown at the one level). Once again there is a great premium on finding a 4-4 major suit fit if one exists.

You might wonder why the word 'balanced' is missing from the 1NT response. Consider hands (d) and (e). Both are rotten, misfitting hands, hardly suitable

for a forcing and space-consuming change of suit at the two level. Improvising a 1NT [L] response is the least ugly bid. You will learn that a perfect bid is not always available, making compromise necessary.

(d)   ♠ K 9 3   (e)   ♠ A 2
        ♥ 6   ♥ 2
        ♦ K 9 6 4 3   ♦ K 9 6 4 3
        ♣ 10 7 4 2   ♣ 10 9 7 4 2

After a 1NT [L] response to 1♥ [WR] opener can bid game directly, or alternatively he can:
(i)   rebid his suit at the two level, 2♥ [S], but he needs at least a 6-card suit to do so, hand (f).
(ii)   jump rebid his suit, 3♥ [I], hand (g).
(iii)   bid a new suit at the two level, 2♣ [WR], hand (h).
(iv)   raise to 2NT [I], hand (i).
(v)   jump in a new suit, 3♣ [GF], hand (j).

(f)   ♠ K 7 2   (g)   ♠ K 7
          ♥ A Q 9 6 4 3   ♥ A Q 9 6 4 3
          ♦ Q 4 2   ♦ A Q 2
          ♣ J   ♣ J 7

(h) ♠ Q 7 2   (i) ♠ K 7 2   (j) ♠ A J 2
    ♥ A Q 9 6 3   ♥ A Q 9 6   ♥ A Q 9 6 3
    ♦ 7   ♦ A J 4   ♦ 7
    ♣ A J 4 2   ♣ K J 10   ♣ A K J 4

After a 2NT [L] response to 1♥ [WR] opener can:
(i)   bid game directly, for example 3NT with hand (k).
(ii)   rebid his suit at the three level, 3♥ [S], hand (l).
(iii)   introduce a new suit, 3♣ [F] hand (m).

(k) ♠ Q 7 2   (l) ♠ Q 7 2   (m) ♠ Q 7 2
    ♥ Q J 8 3 2   ♥ A Q J 9 3 2   ♥ A Q 9 6 3
    ♦ A Q 8   ♦ Q 8 5   ♦ 9
    ♣ A Q   ♣ 9   ♣ A K 9 2

Responder Changes Suit
If opener bids 1♥ [WR]:
(1) A new suit by responder at the one level. ie. I♠ [FIR] [WR) shows 6+ points and 4+ spades.
Respond I♠ with (n), (p) or (q).

(n) ♠ K 9 6 2   (p) ♠ A Q 7 2   (q) ♠ A Q 8 4 3 2
    ♥ 9 8   ♥ K 6 5   ♥ K 6
    ♦ Q J 4 3   ♦ K 9   ♦ K 9
    ♣ 10 7 2   ♣ K 8 4 2   ♣ J 7 3

(ii) A new suit by responder at the two level ie. 2♣/♦ [FIR] [WR] shows 9+ points and 4+ clubs/diamonds.

The extra strength required is logical because it doesn't make sense to push the bidding high with a weak hand. Even 9 point hands are only worth changing suit at the two level if responder has a little something in opener's suit. If in doubt, respond 1NT [L] [NF], as with (d) and (e).

After 1♥ from opener, respond 2♣ with (r) or (s).

(r)	♠ A 8	(s)	♠ A K J
	♥ 8 5 2		♥ 10
	♦ 10 6 3		♦ K 7 5 2
	♣ A J 10 6 4		♣ Q 9 6 4 3

Note that while it is sometimes necessary to respond to 1♠ with 2♣ [F] or 2♦ [F] on a 4-card suit, a 2♥ [F] response in reply to 1♠ promises at least 5 hearts.

(iii) A jump in a new suit by responder ie. 2♠/3♣/3♦ [GF] shows 16+ points. It promises at least a 5-card suit.

After 1♥ from opener, jump to 3♣ with (t), (u) or (v).

Holding (t) you intend to support hearts on the next round, showing heart support and a club suit.

With (u) you will repeat your clubs to show a truly excellent suit.

If you have (v) you can follow up with 3NT to show 16 or 17 points and a club suit.

(t)	♠ 8 4	(u)	♠ 6	(v)	♠ K 8 5
	♥ K J 7 3		♥ K 7		♥ K 7
	♦ A 5		♦ A 5 2		♦ A 5 2
	♣ A K J 7 2		♣ A K J 10 8 3 2		♣ A Q 7 5 2

The advantage of making an immediate jump in a new suit (known as a jump shift) is that having described your strength and forced to game you can subsequently bid cheaply and naturally without having to worry whether your partner will regard your bidding as forcing.

Choice of Suit

For the responder, the choice of suit can be boiled down to three simple guidelines.

(1) With suits of unequal length, bid the longest.

(2) With two 5-card or longer suits, bid the higher ranking. That keeps the bidding cheaper when you rebid the other suit, the logic being the same as that governing opening the higher of two 5-card suits.

(3) With nothing but 4-card suits, bid your cheapest suit.

Consider your response on these hands opposite opener's 1♦.

(w) ♠ Q 9 5 3 2   (x) ♠ K J 4 2
     ♥ K J 4 2   ♥ J 7
     ♦ J 7   ♦ J 6
     ♣ J 6   ♣ Q 9 5 3 2

(y) ♠ K 6 3 2   (z) ♠ K J 4 2
     ♥ Q 9 4 3   ♥ Q 9
     ♦ J 5   ♦ A J 6 3
     ♣ K 8 4   ♣ 6 3 2

With (w) bid 1♠ [F] , but (x) is an exception to guideline (1). This hand is not strong enough for 2♣ [F], and since your priority is to find a major suit fit respond 1♠, You don't like starting with your shorter suit, but the principle of bidding cheaply with a weak hand makes compromise necessary. Make the hand a little stronger, for example replacing the ♥J by the ♥A, and you should start with your longer suit, 2♣ [WR] [F1R].

Hands (y) and (z) also demonstrate the special status of the major suit.

With (y) respond 1♥ [F] (the lower of your two 4-card major suits), even though you seem to have an ideal no-trump hand. That way you won't miss a 4-4 heart or spade fit. A 1NT response would deny a 4-card major suit that could have been shown at the one level.

With (z) respond 1♠ [F] rather than jump to 3♦ [L]. Prefer to explore a major fit before agreeing a minor.