

## Basic Bidding Rules

These notes are for guidance only and are a simplified version. They are not hard and fast rules that will cover every set of circumstances. Bidding system – basic ACOL, including Stayman.

### Important numbers

To evaluate your hand count 4 points for A, 3 for K, 2 for Q, 1 for J. Add points for length in a suit (1 for 5 cards, 2 for 6 etc). When you and partner have found a fit in a suit do not add any points for length but instead add points for shortages (5 for a void, 3 for a singleton, 1 for doubleton).

### Opening the bidding

12 or more points - an opening hand

12 - 14 points - open 1NT with balanced hand

20 or more points - open at 2 level

20 - 22 points - bid 2NT with balanced hand

23 or more points - bid 2C

### Points for game

combined 25 points - should be game in 3NT (less than 8 hearts and 8 spades)

combined 25 points - 4H or 4S if you have at least 8 cards in the suit

combined 29 points - gets game in a minor suit, 5C or 5D (must have at least 8 cards in suit)

combined 33 or more points - consider a slam

Note that with 8 diamonds (or 8 clubs) it is often easier to make 3NT than 5D (or 5C).

### Opening Bids

This section assumes that the opposition has not bid. If you have a balanced hand and 12 to 14 points bid 1NT. A balanced hand has suit distributions 4333, 4432 or 5332, where the five-card suit is diamonds or hearts. If you have a balanced hand and 20 to 22 points bid 2NT. Here, a balanced hand is 4333, 4432, 5332 (where the five-card suit can be any suit) or 5422.

If bidding a suit bid your longest suit even though it may not be strong. If you are bidding a suit and you have two suits of equal length bid the higher suit e.g. with 5 hearts and 5 diamonds bid 1H. An opening bid of a suit at the one or two level promises a re-bid. Consider what it might be before making your bid.

The table below gives a summary of opening bids:

Level	Suit	Points
1	C, D, H or S	12-19
1	NT	12-14
2	C	23 +
2	D, H or S	16+ points and 8 quick tricks without support from partner
2	NT	20-22
3	C, D, H or S	7 cards in C, D, H or S; 6 to 9 high card points
3	NT	7 clubs or diamonds to the AKQJ (the gambling 3NT). This should probably not be played by a beginner.
4	C, D, H or S	8 cards in C, D, H or S; 6 to 9 high card points. If you play Gerber for aces (see below) an opening bid of 4C is asking for aces.
4	NT	Blackwood (see below) asking for aces

## The dreaded 4441 split

If you have a 4441 split and opening points you should bid the middle suit of your four-card suits if the singleton is a spade or a club. For the other two suits bid the suit below the singleton. So if the singleton is S bid 1D; singleton is H bid 1D; singleton is D bid 1C; singleton is C bid 1H.

## Rule of 20

If the sum of your High Card Points and the number of cards in your two longest suits is 20 or more you should open the bidding. For example, with 11 High Card Points, 5 spades and 4 hearts you should open 1S.

## Responses

If you have 6 or more points you must respond. If you have 4 or more cards in your partner's major suit the search for a fit is over. Raise in that suit, jump bidding to show strength.

Partner opened	You have	Your reply
1 level of a suit	0 – 5 points	Pass
	6 - 9 points	1 of new suit, or 2 of partner's suit, or 1 NT
	10 – 12 points	3 of partner's suit, or 2 of new suit (prefer majors to minors)
	13 or more points	3 NT or jump bid longest suit
1 NT	Less than 11 pts, balanced	Pass
	0 - 10 points, unbalanced	2 of longest 5 or more suit (but not C as 2C after 1NT is Stayman (see below)). Partner <b>must</b> pass.
	11 - 12 points, balanced	2 NT
	11 or more pts, 4 H or S	Stayman, 2C
	13 or more points	With 6 hearts or spades bid 4H or 4S.
	13 or more points	With 5 hearts or spades bid 3H or 3S. This forces partner to bid 4 of the major if he has 3 card support or 3NT if not.
13 or more points	With no more than 4 hearts and 4 spades bid 3NT	
19+ points, balanced	4NT. If opener has 14 points he will bid 6NT and will pass with 12 points	
2 level of a suit	Forcing, so cannot pass	
	0 - 7 points	2 NT (a denial)
	8 – 9 points	Bid longest suit
	10 – 12 points	3 NT
	13 or more points	Jump bid in longest suit, possible slam

2 NT	0 – 4 points	Pass
	5 – 11 points	3NT if balanced or C or D is longest suit
	5 - 11 points	3C (Stayman) if you have 4S or 4H
	5 – 11 points	4S or 4H if you have 6S or 6H
	12, 13 pts balanced	4NT (partner jumps to 6NT with 22 points and passes with 20 points)
	12+ points, unbalanced	3 of longest suit, explore slam

2C	Forcing to game	
	0 - 7 points	2D (a denial)
	8+ points	bid longest suit or bid 2NT with no 5-card suit. Probable slam.

3S or 3H Three level suit openers are based on length not strength and are pre-emptive.

If you can guarantee three tricks in your own hand bid 4S or 4H

3D or 3C If you can guarantee four tricks in your own hand bid 5D or 5C

There is not enough space here to discuss all aspects of pre-empt bids here and so it is suggested that you find out more by consulting your favourite bridge book.

### Opener's Rebids

As there are so many combinations of opening bids followed by responding bids followed by opener's rebids this section deals with only some of these.

#### Stayman

A response of 2C after a 1NT opener is Stayman. This asks opener to bid 2S or 2H if he has four spades or hearts and 2D if he does not have a four-card major. If opener has four hearts and four spades he responds 2H.

Similarly 3C after a 2NT opener is also asking about the majors. Opener bids 3S or 3H if he has four spades or hearts and 3D if he does not have a four-card major. If opener has 4 hearts and 4 spades he responds 3H. More information is given about Stayman elsewhere on this website.

#### Reverse Bid

An opener's rebid of a higher suit at the 2-level means 16+ points. For example, a bidding sequence of 1D, 1S, 2H means that the opener has 16+ points (H is a higher suit than D). If opener has five diamonds and four hearts in his hand but fewer than 16 points he cannot bid 2H after partner responds 1S. The choices are to open the bidding with 1D knowing that a rebid over 1S will need to be 2D (however, if the response is 1H the rebid will be 2H); or open with 1H and then rebid 2D after a response of 1S. Unfortunately, partner will take you for having five hearts (the latter option is more attractive if the hearts are strong and the diamonds are weak).

#### NT Hands

The following bidding sequences relate to balanced hands. The point counts are quite narrowly-defined to make it easier to work out whether the partnership has the 25 points required to make 3NT.

Bidding sequence	Meaning of the last bid
1C, 1D, 1NT	15, 16 points, balanced. Responder bids 3NT with 10+ points.

1C, 1D, 2NT	17, 18 points balanced. Responder bids 3NT with 8+ points
1C, 1D, 3NT	19 points balanced
1D, 2C, 2NT	15 to 18 points. Responder bids 3NT with 10+ points
1D, 2C, 3NT	19 points
1H, 1NT, Pass	Less than 17 points
1H, 1NT, 2NT	17, 18 points. Responder bids 3NT with 8+ points
1H, 1NT, 3NT	19 points

### Asking For Aces and Kings

If it becomes clear in the bidding sequence that a slam may be possible, partnerships use a bid of either 4C (Gerber) or 4NT (Blackwood) to ask about aces and 5C or 5NT to ask about kings.

If you are playing Gerber the responses to 4C are 4D (no ace or four aces), 4H (one ace), 4S (two aces) and 4NT (three aces). The responses to 5C are 5D (no king or four kings), 4H (one king), 4S (two kings) and 4NT (three kings).

If you are playing Blackwood the responses to 4NT are 5C (no ace or four aces), 5D (one ace), 5H (two aces) and 5S (three aces). The responses to 5NT are 6C (no king or four kings), 6D (one king), 6H (two kings) and 6S (three kings).

### Interference and other Competitive Bidding

So far we have only considered bidding by one partnership. This section looks at overcalls i.e bidding over the opposition's bid.

Their bid	Your bid	Meaning
1 of a suit	1NT	15 to 19 points, balanced, stopper in their suit
1 of a suit	2NT	20+ points, balanced, stopper in their suit
1 of a suit	Double	Demand to partner to bid his best suit even if very weak
1 of a suit	1 of higher suit	5+ cards in reasonably good suit, 8+ points
1 of a suit	2 of lower suit	5+ cards in reasonably good suit, 10+ points
1NT	Double	15+ points
3 of a suit (pre-empt opening bid)	Double	Demand to partner to bid his best suit even if very weak

### Doubles

Most doubles of suit contracts up to the 2-level are for take-out i.e. your partner has a good hand, is short in their suit and is asking for your best suit. You must respond even with no points. However, if the opposition bid after your partner's double you need not bid unless you have about 8+ points.

Doubles of NT contracts and suit contracts above the 2-level are for penalties. The exception to this is a double of a pre-empt opening bid of 3 of a suit, which is for take-out.

### Other Conventions

There are a few other conventions and bidding tools that many players add to the basic ACOL system. **Transfers.** After partner has opened 1NT a bid of 2D asks opener to bid 2H and a bid of 2H asks partner to bid 2S. See elsewhere on the tuition part of this website for a full explanation.

**Losing Trick Count.** This is a method of evaluating the combined strength of your hand and your partner's hand. See Mr Bridge's website under Library.

**Weak two opening.** Some players use an opening bid of 2H or 2S to mean 6 cards in the bid suit and six to ten points. See Mr Bridge's website under Library.

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