

BEGINNER'S BRIDGE – LESSON 2– OPENING BIDS – September 23, 2020

After the cards are dealt, the dealer will have the first opportunity to bid. He can do so, or he may pass. The bidding continues until a bid is followed by three passes. That bid then becomes the contract. It is also possible that all four players may pass (no one has chosen to bid). That is called a passed hand, and the same dealer deals out a new hand.

Whoever makes the first bid is making an **opening bid**. This bid generally requires 13 points. These points are determined by adding your high card points (HCP) plus your distribution points. If the total is 13 or more, the player can make an opening bid. **HCP** are determined by giving 4 points for each Ace, 3 points for each King, 2 points for each Queen and 1 point for each Jack. **Distribution points** are awarded for suits in which a player has more than 4 cards. Each card over 4 gets an extra point. If a player has 2 suits with more than 4 cards, each suit will get distribution points (a 5 card suit gets 1 point, 6 card suit 2 points, etc). Again, HCP + distribution points should equal 13 or more to make an opening bid.

Major and minor suits- Bridge categorizes the four suits into the major and minor suits. If you look at the bidding scale, you will see that in each level, the clubs and diamonds are at the bottom, and the hearts and spades are at the top. Hearts and spades are called the **major suits** and clubs and diamonds are called the **minor suits**.

Standard American bridge uses a **convention** (a mutually agreed upon method of bidding) called **five card major**. That means that if you want to make an opening bid in a major suit (hearts or spades), you would need to have 5 cards in that suit to do so. If not, you would bid something else. You would not pass with 13 points, simply because you don't have a 5 card major to bid.

On what level do I make an opening bid? The vast majority of opening bids are made at Level 1 (1 club, 1 diamond, 1 heart or 1 spade). When you make one of these bids, you are stating that you have 13 – 21 points (again, HCP + distribution). If you have more than 21 points (congratulations, you have a phenomenal hand!!) there is a different bid that we will learn later. If you have fewer than 13 points, you will generally not open, but, again, there are exceptions. For our purposes, pass with fewer than 13 points, and open at the one level with 13-21 points.

Now that you have determined that you have the points to make an opening bid, in what suit will you open? Write this down in big, bold letters – **Major suits are preferable to minor suits!!** So, if you have a 5 card major and a 5 card minor in your hand, bid the major suit first. (Ex: 1 heart instead of 1 diamond). If you have 2 major suits of equal length (and they're both at least 5 cards in length), bid the spades first. You can always bid the hearts on your next bid. If you have two major suits, and they're both at least 5 cards in length, but one is longer than the other, always bid the longer one first.

We have not discussed when you would open 1 no trump, or what to do if you have 13 points but no 5 card major. More to follow....

Practice – Look at each of the following hands. Next to each write down what the opening bid should be, or if the player should pass.

Spades – A,K,10, 9, 7,

Spades - 3

Hearts – 9, 6,4,3,2

Hearts – Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7

Diamonds-Q,3

Diamonds- A, 10

Clubs-4,3 _____

Clubs- A, 5,4,3 _____

Spades- A,J, 6,3,2

Spades – A,K, 4,3

Hearts – A, K, 6,4,3

Hearts – Q, 7,5

Diamonds – X (void)

Diamonds – A, K, Q, 5,4

Clubs- 9,7,5 _____

Clubs – J,2 _____

In the last hand, I'm sure you could guess what to bid, even if there wasn't a five card major. That brings us to our next topic, opening with a **minor** suit.

As we learned, the minor suits are clubs and diamonds. If we have 13 points, and we don't have a five card major, we will open with a minor suit. But which one? In the above example, it was easy to see that diamonds were better than clubs, so

we would open 1 diamond (Notice, too, that this hand was much stronger than the hand above it, but they were both opened at the one level, since this level shows 13-21 points).

What do we do when it isn't clear which minor suit to open? We are learning a convention called **the better of two minor suits**. That means if you don't have a five card major suit to open, bid the better of the minor suits. Better always means longer. The expression to memorize is **length over strength**. Say you have 5 diamonds— J ,10, 5, 3, 2 and 4 clubs- A, K, Q, 7. While the clubs are stronger than the diamonds, the diamonds are longer, and therefore, that is the suit in which you make the opening bid. If you have 3 cards in both minor suits, bid the clubs first. If you have 4 cards in both minor suits, bid the diamonds first. In most cases, opening with a diamond would show 4 cards in that suit. Here's an example of when you would open with a diamond when you don't have 4:

Spades – A, K, J, 3 Hearts – A, 10, 3, 2 Diamonds – Q, 6,5 Clubs- 9,6

Practice – Write the opening bid (or pass) for each hand below.

Spades – A,K,J,10

Spades – 10,8,7,6,5

Hearts – Q, 9, 8,6

Hearts – A

Diamonds- 9,5,3

Diamonds – A, K, J, 10, 7

Clubs- 7,2 _____

Clubs – 9, 6 _____

Spades – 10,9,7,4

Spades – J, 10, 9, 3

Hearts – A, J, 2

Hearts – J

Diamonds – A, K, 3

Diamonds – A, J, 7,3

Clubs- A, K, 3 _____

Clubs – K, Q,J, 2 _____

Opening the bidding with 1 No Trump- Sometimes, you would not prefer to open the bidding with a particular suit. You may have a very **balanced** hand. What is a

balanced hand? This is a hand that has no voids (empty suits), no singletons (suits in which you only have one card), and at most one doubleton (suits in which you have 2 cards only). A hand which is not like this is called unbalanced. Please go back over all the hands you have looked at thus far in the packet and circle the ones that are balanced.

To open 1 No Trump (1 NT), you need to have a balanced hand. So, since there were so many balanced hands that you circled, why didn't we open these hands 1 NT? The answer is, you also need a very specific number of points. Count up your HCP. If you have between 15 to 17 HCP, and a balanced hand, you can open 1 NT. Some people play where you need 16 to 18 HCP, but this is not generally favored in modern games. Your choice, entirely. NOTE: Notice when discussing opening in 1 NT, there has been no discussion of distribution points. That's because HCP alone are the only points considered.

The one exception to the above is if you have 15 to 17 points, and a balanced hand, but your hand also contains 5 cards in a major suit. While technically this hand can be opened 1 NT, it is usually considered better to open in a major suit. For now and always, remember that the first priority is to play in a major suit contract. If that's not possible, play in a no trump contract. At the bottom of the priority list is to play in a minor suit contract. Here's why.... Remember, we learned that with sufficient combined points, players would like to play in a game contract, not a partial one. A game contract in no trump is 3 NT. That means 9 required tricks. A game contract in a major suit is 4 H or 4 S. That means 10 required tricks. A game contract in a minor suit is 5 C or 5 D. That means 11 required tricks. It's harder to make 11 tricks than 10 tricks, so major suits are better. Why not play in no trump, though, if you only need to make 9 tricks? ***It is always easier to play in a suit contract, since you have the advantage of trump cards to take tricks.***

NOTES TO REMEMBER: 1. In order to consider a particular suit as a potential trump suit, you and partner need a good fit (sometimes called the **golden fit**). That means at least 8 cards between you and your partner in that suit. How do you know if you have 8 cards? The bidding will tell you. For example, if your partner opens 1 heart, you know he has 5 hearts. If you have 3 hearts, there's a

fit. 2. There is a minimum number of combined points (you and your partner) that are usually necessary to make a game contract. They are:

3 NT – at least 25 combined points

4 Hearts or 4 Spades – at least 26 combined points.

5 Clubs or 5 Diamonds – 28 combined points.

Why do you think you need more points for certain contracts?

Practice: Write the opening bid or pass for each hand.

Spades – A, K, 10, 9, 8, 4

Spades – A, K, 10, 9, 8

Hearts – 10, 9, 7, 4

Hearts – A, K, 3

Diamonds – A, Q, 5

Diamonds – J, 10, 9

Clubs – X _____

Clubs – J, 10 _____

Spades – A, 9, 8

Spades – A, K, 10, 9, 8

Hearts – A, 10, 9, 8

Hearts – Q, J, 6, 5

Diamonds – K, Q, 3, 2

Diamonds – 8, 5

Clubs – A, 9 _____

Clubs – 4, 3 _____

Spades – K, J, 5, 4

Spades – 9, 6, 4, 2

Hearts – K, J, 5, 4

Hearts – A, 10, 8

Diamonds – K, J, 5, 4

Diamonds – A, K, 8

Clubs – A _____

Clubs – K, 9, 2 _____

REVIEW: What are the answers to the following questions:

1. What are the major suits?

2. What are the minor suits?
3. How many points do you need to make an opening bid?
4. How are these points determined?
5. Who gets to bid first? When does bidding start?
6. How is the contract determined? What information does the contract tell us?
7. Who is declarer? Who is dummy?
8. When does the dummy hand go down on the table? What is the job of the dummy?
9. What is a balanced hand?
10. What does it mean if a partnership has a fit in a particular suit?
11. When are you allowed to use trump cards?
12. What does it mean to follow suit?

REVIEW SHEET ON OPENING BIDS

1.Spades- A,K,Q,5

Hearts- A,J,5,4

Diamonds-K,Q,3,2

Clubs- Q,9

Points _____ Bid _____

2.Spades- A,K,Q,5,4,3

Hearts-A,K,Q,5,4

Diamonds-3

Clubs-A

Points _____ Bid _____

3.Spades-A,10,5,4

Hearts-A,8,6,5,4

Diamonds-J,10,7,6

Clubs-X

Points _____ Bid _____

4.Spades-A,K,Q,J,10,6

Hearts-K,10,8,7

Diamonds-J

Clubs-7,6

Points _____ Bid _____

5.Spades-K,Q,7

Hearts-A,J,4,3

Diamonds-K,9,8

Clubs-10,8,6

Points _____ Bid _____

6. Spades-K, Q, 7

Hearts-A, K, Q, J, 9

Diamonds-A, 8, 6

Clubs-J, 10 Points _____ Bid _____

7. Spades-K, J, 5

Hearts-A, 10, 7

Diamonds-A, J, 5, 4

Clubs-A, 9, 2 Points _____ Bid _____

8. Spades-10, 5

Hearts-A, 3

Diamonds-K, 9, 8, 7, 6

Clubs-9, 8 Points _____ Bid _____

9. Spades-Q, 5, 3, 2

Hearts-A, K, Q

Diamonds-A, Q, 2

Clubs-A, 3, 2 Points _____ Bid _____

10. Spades-K, 8, 6

Hearts-5, 4

Diamonds-A, K, J, 10, 9, 8

Clubs-3, 2 Points _____ Bid _____

Describe what is meant by a balanced hand _____

_____.

Create a hand that should be opened with a bid of 1 NT. Spades? _____

Hearts? _____ Diamonds? _____

Clubs? _____

SAMPLE HAND #2 – LESSON TWO- CONTRACT 2 Hearts- DEALER : WEST

NORTH

Spades- Q J 9 7

Hearts- 5 4

Diamonds- 10 9

Clubs- Q J 10 9 7

WEST

Spades- A K 3

Hearts- A Q 10 7 6 2

Diamonds- 3 2

Clubs- 8 3

EAST

Spades- 10 8 6 4

Hearts- K J 3

Diamonds- K Q 7 5

Clubs- 5 2

SOUTH

Spades- 5 2

Hearts- 9 8

Diamonds- A J 8 6 4

Clubs- A K 6 4

1. Which partnership do you think will play this hand?
2. How many tricks do they have to win the contract?
3. How many tricks do their opponents have to make to defeat the contract?
4. What is the trump suit? How many trumps does the partnership have? Is it a golden fit? How many times will they have to play trump?