

Forcing and Non-Forcing Bids

Here are some basic rules for standard bidding:

1. A change of suit in the first round is forcing.
2. A change of suit by Responder is forcing, unless Responder passed to begin with.
3. A change of suit by Opener (no jump in level) is not forcing.
4. A change of suit by Opener (with a jump) is forcing.
5. A repeat of the same suit bid by either partner is not forcing (i.e., an agreement in suit, showing support, is not forcing).
6. A response of 1NT is non-forcing and a cut-off bid. (Whoever bids 1NT may pass the next bid, unless there is a jump.)
7. These bids are forcing: 2♣ (opening) and 2♦ (response to 2♣), 4NT (Blackwood), 4♣ (Gerber), Stayman and Jacoby transfer bids, take-out doubles (usually), and cue bids.
8. If there is an intervening bid by opponent, then a forcing bid is no longer forcing.
9. Game level bids are non-forcing.

Here are some sample bidding sequences showing forcing and non-forcing bids with explanations:

Abbreviations used:

P=Partner

O=Opener

R=Responder

F=Forcing

NF=Non-forcing

LHO=Left-hand opponent

RHO=Right-hand opponent

Sample Game 1:

Who?	Bid?	F/NF?	Explanation and More Information
Opener (O)	1♥	NF	If R has 6+ pts, R is expected to bid. Otherwise, O's bid is NF.
Responder (R)	1♠	F	O must bid again. A change of suit in the first round is F. Even if R has 3-card heart support, R can bid his 4-card spade suit first and expect that O will bid again, so support for hearts can be shown in the next bid.
Opener	2♣	NF	Without a jump in level, R is not forced to bid again. O likely has 5 hearts and 4 clubs, and is denying having 4 spades to support R.
Responder	3♥	NF	R jumped, showing additional points (10-12) and 3-card heart support. R agreed with O's original suit, so O is not forced to bid again. R is "inviting" O to game, giving O a chance to bid higher, if O has more points.
Opener	4♥	NF	O has additional pts (15+) so he can bring it to Game. If O had just 12-14 opening pts, he could pass R's 3♥ bid.

Sample Game 2:

Who?	Bid?	F/NF?	Explanation and More Information
Opener	1♣	F (or NF?)	Most partners agree that a 1♣ opening bid is forcing for one round. The only time you should pass this is when you have very few points and 4-5 clubs so you know your partner is relatively safe in clubs, should that end up being the final contract. Normally, this opening bid is asking, "Partner, do you have a 4-card major?" If R has a 4-card major, he should bid it. Opener must be aware that you may respond to a 1♣ opening bid with fewer than 6 pts. (Partnership agreement.)
Responder	1♥	F	A change of suit in the first round is forcing.
Opener	2♣	NF	Partner has repeated his suit without jumping, so with just 6-9 pts, R can pass.

Sample Game 3:

Who?	Bid?	F/NF?	Explanation and More Information
Opener	1♦	NF	If R has 6+ pts, R should bid. Otherwise, NF.
Responder	1♠	F	A change of suit in the first round is forcing.
Opener	2♦	NF	Opener has repeated his suit without jumping, so R can pass.
Responder	2♥	F	Responder's change in suit is forcing. R must have 10+ pts as this bid could force O to bid at the 3 level. R is also showing 5 spades and 4 hearts (maybe 5 hearts), otherwise R would have bid hearts first having 4-4 in the majors.
Opener	2NT	NF	R forced O to bid, so now R is saying that he has no additional points, and he cannot support O's spades (does not have 3 spades) or hearts (does not have 4 hearts). He must have decent diamonds and clubs since he cannot support the majors, so this is likely a safe bid.

Sample Game 4:

Who?	Bid?	F/NF?	Explanation and More Information
LHO/Opener	1♠		
Overcaller (Partner)	"Double"	F	This is a take-out double. If RHO bids, it becomes NF.
RHO/Responder	Pass		
Advancer (Partner of Overcaller)	2NT	NF	Now partner's double is definitely forcing since there was no intervening bid by RHO. Spades is your best suit — you have stoppers in spades, so you could decide to leave your partner's "double" in as penalty. But you have 11 pts, you know your partner has opening points or more, is short in spades and has the other three suits covered, so you bid 2NT. If you bid just 1NT, partner could pass because he would not know how many pts you had (maybe 0), since he forced you to bid.
Overcaller/P	3NT	NF	Partner must have more than just opening pts. Game level bids are non-forcing.

Sample Game 5:

Who?	Bid?	F/NF?	Explanation and More Information
Opener/ Partner	1♠	NF	If R has 6+ pts, he is expected to bid. Otherwise, NF.
RHO/ Overcaller	2♥		Overcaller has 5 hearts and usually 10+ pts.
Responder	Pass	NF	Because of RHO's intervening bid, R can now pass, even with 6+ pts. Judgment is required. If R has support for O's spades and 6+ pts, R should bid 2♠ or higher, depending on how many pts he has. If R has 10+ pts, R could bid a different suit at the 3 level, but it gets tricky. R can bid 2NT with stoppers in hearts, but R should have 10+ pts to do so.
LHO/ Advancer	Pass		
Opener	3♦	NF	O cannot expect R to bid since R has already passed. However, R should recognize the significance of this bid. O is bidding without any support from R so therefore is showing a very strong hand and shortness in opponent's suit (hearts). He likely has 5 spades, 4 diamonds (or more) and 17+ pts. Counting Dummy pts, can R support O in spades or diamonds even with few HCPs? In a sense, O is asking R to choose one of the 2 suits. If R is short in opponent's suit, he may be able to bid now. Judgment is required. Otherwise, pass.

Sample Game 6:

Who?	Bid?	F/NF?	Explanation and More Information
Opener	1♦	NF	If R has 6+ pts, R is expected to bid. Otherwise, NF.
Responder	1♥	F	A change of suit in the first round is forcing.
Opener	2♠	F	This is a jump shift by O so it is forcing. It is also a reverse bid. O must have 16+ pts to do a "reverse." O is forcing P to bid at the 3 level so he must have extra pts to do that.
Responder	2NT	NF	R is showing length or stoppers in clubs and cannot support partner's diamonds or spades; otherwise R would rebid one of those suits. R is limiting his hand to under 10 pts.
Opener	3♦	NF	P/O repeated his first suit. Perhaps he sees a danger in NT. He could have a long diamond suit and be void in clubs, for example.