

All about Alerts

ACBL's Alert System is meant for the benefit of the opponents, not the Alerting side. An Alert informs the opponents a bid's meaning is not what would customarily be assumed and is consistent with ACBL's policy of no secret agreements between partners.

Alerts are not meant to ensure the bidding side is on the same wavelength. Thus, when partner fails to Alert or mistakenly Alerts, you must resist the involuntary urge to react or speak up. Nor are Alerts meant to inform partner of the details of your agreements. So, when you provide full disclosure of your agreement after Alerting partner's call, partner has two (2) conflicting duties:

1. To ignore your explanation, and
2. To pay close attention to it.

Partner ignores the explanation, in essence, because the information given is unauthorized for him to use in the subsequent bidding and play. Partner pays attention because it his duty to inform the opponents of possible misinformation at the appropriate time. The proper time to correct misinformation is:

- if your side is declaring the contract—after the auction has ended but before the opening lead is made.
- if your side is defending the contract—immediately after play has ceased and the result agreed to.

The requirements of the last paragraph also pertain to information gained from Alerts or lack of Alerts. If you've forgotten your agreement on a bid and partner correctly Alerts, you cannot let the Alert serve as a wake-up call to guide your subsequent bidding. You ignore the Alert and continue bidding in a manner consistent with your prior thinking. However, if other clues give you reason to alter your bidding path, you don't have to continue to distort your subsequent bids in an attempt to ignore the "wake-up" nature of the Alert.

If partner fails to Alert an Alertable bid or provides misinformation in explaining an Alertable bid, you may not make any indication during the auction. In addition, you must assume partner knows the true meaning of your bid. The laws require you to assume your partner knows your bidding system and made his/her subsequent calls accordingly.

Generally speaking, the Alert System imposes these requirements:

- 1) to Alert when appropriate,
- 2) to not react or blurt out surprise when an Alert (or non Alert) has gone astray,
- 3) to be uninfluenced by unauthorized information, and
- 4) to correct misinformation—if any—given by partner and to do so at the proper time.

Pre-Alerts

For some pairs the Alert System actually starts with pre-Alerts. Pre-Alerts are given verbally before the start of play for each round or each match, and are often accompanied by card or sheet with the pre-Alert information. Pre-Alerts are designed to act as an early warning of any unusual methods for which the opponents may need to prepare. For instance, if your partnership plays very light openings (fewer than 10 HCP) and/or very light overcalls (fewer than 6 HCP), you are required to pre-Alert these agreements. These pre-Alerts do not relieve you of the requirement to alert at the proper time in the auction.

Immediate Alerts

Immediate Alerts—the most common Alerts—are given at the time partner makes a call which requires an Alert and are the means by which opponents are notified of your pair's special agreements. Your duty is to alert the opponents before your right hand opponent makes a call. Your side is also responsible for ensuring the opponents noticed/heard the alert, and that every review of the auction includes all alerts made.

Alerts in the Pass Out Seat

Calls in the balancing seat are often ascribed a different meaning than in a more direct seat. For instance, pass out seat jumps to the 2-level are normally played as constructive rather than preemptive. Thus, in the balancing seat, it is the preemptive call that is Alerted, not the constructive call. Another example is: 1♣-PASS-PASS-1NT; if the 1NT bid is a balanced 10-14 HCP, it is not Alerted, but a balanced 15-17 HCP range is Alerted because it is unexpected in that seat.

Delayed Alerts

Delayed Alerts are not given until the auction has ended. They are for Alertable calls above the level of 3NT starting with the opening bidder's second turn to call.

- The dummy or declarer Alerts the defenders before the opening lead.
- The defenders Alert after the opening lead has been made but before it is faced.

Announcements

An announcement is an Alert that may be accomplished in a word or short phrase. Five frequently heard announcements are:

“May be short”

The range of a natural 1NT opening bid, e.g. “15 to 17”

“Transfer”

“Forcing”

“Semi-forcing”

Expected Length for Natural Bids for the Alert Procedure

- Suit bids:
 - 3+ in a minor and 4+ in a major for opening bids, rebids and responses.
 - 4+ for an overcall at the one level, 5+ for higher levels.
 - 5+ for a weak two-bid.
 - 6+ for a weak three-bid.
- Notrump openings and overcalls:
 - A notrump opening or overcall if not unbalanced (generally, no singleton or void and only one or two doubletons) is considered natural.

Conventions Generally Not Alerted

Some common conventions do not require an Alert during the auction: Stayman, ace-asking bids (unless made as the opening bid), most meanings of cue-bids, strong artificial and forcing 2♣ openings, any 2♦ response to the aforementioned 2♣ opening, and most doubles & redoubles (unless highly unusual or a support double/redouble) and passes (unless highly unusual). Some Alerts are delayed until the auction is completed.

Alert Chart

This Alert Chart may not pertain to bids made in the pass out seat. Calls in the balancing seat are often ascribed a different meaning than in a more direct seat. For instance, in the auction 1♣-PASS-PASS, the standard meaning for a 4th seat 1NT bid is a balanced 10-14 HCP, which is not Alerted. But, if you play a completely different range, which is not the norm in balancing seat, that should be Alerted.¹

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Natural Calls Not Specifically Noted	About expected strength and shape	Unusual strength, shape, etc.	"Fuzzy" phrasing under Alert is deliberate
Conventional / Artificial	Stayman (next higher level of clubs)	All other conventional and/or artificial bids. * See Delayed Alerts (in Alert column on the last page of this chart) for when to Alert*	Limited number of conventions considered the norm
	Blackwood (4NT) and expected responses		
	Gerber (4C)/NT	Blackwood & Gerber are Alertable as opening bids	
	Conventional 2NT response to an opening two-level suit bid Generally refers to weak 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ openings.	Alert 2NT response after Flannery 2♦, Flannery 2♥, Mini Roman, Multi 2♦, etc.	
	Two diamond response to strong artificial two club opening	Step responses (except 2♦) showing specific point ranges. Step responses (except 2♦) showing # of controls.	
No Trump Openings		Conventional	State agreed range, for all natural 1NT openings
No Trump Overcalls	Conventional NT overcalls by a passed hand	Conventional notrump overcalls except those specifically not requiring an Alert	Some sort of unusual NT is the norm for jumping in NT (except for a jump to 3NT or to 2NT in balancing seat)
	Jumps to 2NT (for example, Unusual NT) or any four-level or higher NT bid that shows minors or the two lower unbid suits	Natural jumps to 2NT, except in balancing seat Jump to 3NT that is unusual Natural NT overcalls with an expected lower limit of less than 14 HCP and/or an upper limit of more than 19 HCP	

¹ Similarly, in an auction of 1♣-PASS-PASS-2♦ / 2♥ / 2♠, the jump to the 2-level is no longer (normally) played as preemptive, but as constructive. Since you might bid 1 of a suit on a weak hand, you need to distinguish a full opener. Also, the need/desire to preempt the opponents no longer exists since the responder has already passed. Thus, the jump shift with a 6-card suit and 12-15 HCP is the norm and is not Alerted, but if you play it as preemptive, that should be Alerted. You may, nonetheless, Alert the constructive jump for 2 reasons: a) it is better to Alert unnecessarily than miss a legitimate Alert, and b) many players, especially the relatively inexperienced, are unaware that intermediate is the standard meaning of a balancing jump to the 2-level.

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Responses to NT Opening Bids and NT Overcalls	<p>Stayman (<i>next higher level of clubs</i>) asking for a four-card or longer major. (Also, Stayman after the NT opening has been doubled.)</p> <hr/> <p>Natural signoffs at the next higher level in diamonds, hearts and spades</p> <hr/> <p>Three-level natural responses whether or not it is a jump response</p> <hr/> <p>4♣ asking for Aces and responses thereto</p>	<p>Continuations by responder (e.g. 2NT) after the use of Stayman which do not promise a major</p> <hr/> <p>Continuations by responder after the use of Stayman which guarantee a longer suit than that named</p> <hr/> <p>After the use of Stayman, continuations by opener where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the lowest level of ♦s does not deny a 4-card major the lowest level of either major guarantees something other than 4 cards in the major suit named <hr/> <p>Other conventional responses</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 5px auto;">Transfers to minors are Alerted</div>	<p>State "Transfer" any time a diamond response to a natural notrump bid at any level is a transfer to hearts. *</p> <hr/> <p>State "Transfer" any time a heart response to a natural notrump bid at any level is a transfer to spades. *</p> <hr/> <p>* If the transferer may occasionally hold a Game Forcing hand without the next higher suit, state "Transfer" and Alert the subsequent bid which cancels the transfer meaning</p> <hr/> <p>NOTE: Announcements of transfers as above apply after a natural NT rebid by opener</p>
Opening Suit Bids at the One Level	<p>Natural non-forcing openings with an agreed range of somewhere between 10-21+ HCP</p>	<p>Other conventional openings which do not require an Announcement such as a strong/artificial forcing club</p> <hr/> <p>Frequent very light openings (fewer than 10 HCP by agreement). Also, pre-Alert</p>	<p>State "may be short" for non-forcing 1♣ and 1♦ calls which may be shorter than three (3) cards</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 5px auto;">e.g. = <i>exempli gratia</i> = for example</div>
Responses to One-Level Opening Suit Bids	<p>Non-forcing 1NT responses that may or may not bypass four-card majors</p> <hr/> <p>Natural 2NT responses that may or may not bypass four-card majors which promise invitational or better values</p> <hr/> <p>One-level major-suit responses to 1♣ that may bypass longer diamonds</p> <hr/> <p>2/1 responses that promise invitational or better values</p>	<p>Non-forcing suit bids by an unpassed hand (UPH)</p> <hr/> <p>Three-level jump raises not in competition which promise less than invitational values</p> <hr/> <p>Non-forcing jump shifts not in competition (<i>Weak jump shifts not in competition</i>)</p> <hr/> <p>Other conventional responses</p>	<p>State "Forcing" if a 1NT response to a major is simply forcing</p> <hr/> <p>State "Semi-forcing" if a 1NT response to a major is simply forcing except when opener has a balanced minimum</p>

Jacoby & Texas
Transfers are announced

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Responses to One-Level Opening Suit Bids (continued)	<p>Three-level natural jump raises that promise invitational or better values</p> <hr/> <p>Natural jump raises in competition regardless of strength</p> <hr/> <p>Natural and forcing jump shifts</p> <hr/> <p>Natural jump shifts in competition regardless of strength</p>		
Opener's and Responder's Rebids	<p>Natural 2-level suit bids after a forcing or semi-forcing 1NT response</p> <hr/> <p>Natural 1NT or 2NT rebids that may or may not bypass 4-card major(s)</p> <hr/> <p>Responder's Stayman bid, asking for a 4-card or longer major, in auctions that begin with strong, artificial openings</p> <hr/> <p>4 asking for Aces or Keycards and responses thereto</p>	<p>Opener's 1NT rebid, if strong</p> <hr/> <p>Responder's conventional third- or fourth-suit bids</p> <hr/> <p>Responder's "checkback" bids of 2♣, 2♦, 3♣, 3♦</p> <hr/> <p>Game tries that, by agreement, may have fewer than three cards in the suit</p> <hr/> <p>Delayed Alerts: Conventional bids above the level of 3NT beginning with opener's rebid</p>	
Opening Two-Level Suit Bids and Responses	<p>2♣ strong, artificial, and forcing</p> <hr/> <p>Natural opening preempts of 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠</p> <hr/> <p>Natural and strong 2NT openings</p> <hr/> <p>Natural and forcing suit responses</p> <hr/> <p>Conventional 2NT responses to natural 2-level opening bids</p> <hr/> <p>Any 2♦ response to a strong artificial 2♣ opening</p>	<p>Natural 2♣ openings</p> <hr/> <p>Natural 2-level suit openings that promise intermediate or better or better values</p> <hr/> <p>Natural and non-forcing 2NT responses</p> <hr/> <p>Natural, non-forcing suit responses</p> <hr/> <p>Other conventional and/or artificial bids, e.g. Flannery, Mini Roman</p>	

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Doubles, Redoubles and Passes	Most Doubles and Redoubles. *See Alertable Doubles in next column (See Alert Pamphlet)* \Rightarrow	Doubles, redoubles and passes with highly unusual or unexpected meanings, including support DBLs/ReDBLs	
Cue-bids	Most Cue-bids. *See <i>Alertable Cue-bids</i> in next column (See Alert Pamphlet)*	If played as natural, a direct cue-bid of a natural opening bid	
Other Constructive Calls	4NT asking for Aces or Keycards and responses thereto <hr/> Over notrump, 4C ace-asking and responses	Ace-asking calls and responses below the level of 3NT or any opening ace-asking call and responses thereto <hr/> Delayed Alerts: Keycard- or Ace-asking calls and responses above the level of 3NT	
Defensive Bids	Natural weak jump overcalls <hr/> Natural non-weak jump-shifts by advancer <hr/> Natural jump raises of overcalls <hr/> Natural weak jump shifts by advancer	Very light overcalls (fewer than 6 HCP by agreement) Also pre-Alert <hr/> Intermediate or better jump overcalls (two or three level)	



Partial List of Alertable Conventions/Bids

Most Conventions Must Be Alerted

1♣ Forcing Opening		
1NT Forcing response		Sandwich NT
3NT Major suit raise	Lebensohl	Short 1♣ NF² opening
4-Suit Transfers	Leaping Michaels	Short 1♦ NF opening
Bergen 3♣ & 3♦ Major raises		Smolen
Blackwood (unless opening bid)		Splinters {delayed if by opnr}
Brozel		
Checkback bids, e.g. Chkbk Stayman		Stayman
Constructive Major raises		Step Responses to 2♣ Opener, but not 2♦
Control Responses to 2♣ Opener, but not 2♦		
Cue Bid (unless of a natural opening bid meant as natural)		
	Mathe over Big ♣	Stolen Bid Doubles
	Maximal Doubles	Support Doubles / Redoubles
DONT	Michaels	
Drury & Reverse Drury	Mini Roman	
	Minor Suit Stayman	
Exclusion Blackwood		
Flannery		
Forth Suit Forcing		Texas Transfer
Forcing Stayman	Namyats	
	Negative Doubles	
Gambling 3NT	New Minor Forcing	
Garbage Stayman		
Gerber (unless opening bid)	Ogust	
		Unusual NT
Hamilton (aka Cappelletti)	Puppet Stayman	Unusual vs. Unusual
	Puppet Stayman Responses	
Intermediate 2♣ Opener		
Inverted Minor Raises	Responsive Doubles	
	Revised Ogust	
	Roman Key Card	Weak Jump Shift not in comp.
Jacoby 2NT		Wolfe Sign Off
Jacoby Transfer		
Jordan 2NT		

² LEGEND: ~~Strikeout~~ in black = not alerted, ~~Strikeout~~ in blue = announced (possibly at end of auction),
NF = non-forcing