

Introduction to Constructive Bidding

This is the first tutorial of a 5 lesson series on the Fundamentals of Constructive Bidding. Constructive bidding is defined as auctions with no interference by the opponents.

The purpose of these lessons is for students to learn the concepts behind constructive bidding. I have found that, although many students understand the (often complicated) rules about bidding, they do not understand the reasoning behind these rules. By learning the fundamentals rather than just the rules, a student will be able to more intuitively and comfortably bid, without being confused by the many (sometimes conflicting) rules that may or may not apply. Note that these lessons will not teach any particular system. It will simply teach the fundamentals upon which most bidding systems are built. A student should therefore be able to more comfortably play any of the popular systems.

The series consists of 5 lessons;

- Introduction to Constructive Bidding (this lesson)
- No Trump Auctions
- Major Suit Auctions Part 1
- Major Suit Auctions Part 2
- Minor Suit Auctions

I consider this lesson the single most important of the series. If you learn and apply the principles presented here, your bidding will improve, even if you do not take any of the subsequent lessons.

In this lesson, we will learn the basic principles of bidding, regardless of whatever conventions or treatments you play. If you understand these principles, you will become a very good bidder, even if you play a very simple bidding system. In fact, most very good money bridge players use a very natural style of bidding, following these principles and using very few, if any, conventions. As one rubber bridge player once remarked to me after I watched him demolish a pretty good duplicate bridge partnership using his very simple bidding style, "Match points (tournament bridge) is an interesting game, but it bears little resemblance to bridge".

Bidding Objectives

Non-slam auctions have only 2 simple objectives:

1. Bid game if possible, otherwise stay as low as you can.
2. Find a good strain (trump suit or NT).

You may have learned all these complicated bidding rules, but their only purpose is to help you fulfill these simple objectives.

In this lesson, I will teach you how to meet the first objective, determining if you should bid game. The subsequent lessons are related to meeting the second objective, finding a good strain.

Determining If You Should Bid Game

In all of these lessons, I will assume the reader uses basic hand evaluation techniques. That is, he or she uses the standard 4-3-2-1 method for counting HCP and makes small adjustments for either shortness or length. I now teach, and prefer, the more accurate Bergen methodology, but, because it is not familiar to everyone, I will not use it in these lessons.

As opening bidder, your hand falls in one of three categories:

1. minimum (12-14 points)
2. medium (15-17 points)
3. maximum (18+ points)

Similarly, as responder, your hand falls in one of three categories:

1. minimum (6-8 points)
2. medium (9-11 points)
3. maximum (12+ points)

Remember, game requires that the combined partnership assets be at least 25 points. Therefore, the following table summarizes how the partnership can tell whether or not they have enough points to bid game:

Responder	Opener		
	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
<i>Minimum</i>	No	No	Yes
<i>Medium</i>	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Maximum</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes

During the auction, both partners should always be thinking about whether it is still possible to bid game. For example, if your partner opens and you, as responder, have a maximum (12+) hand, you should bid game. Similarly, if you open with a maximum (18+) and get any response from partner, you should bid game.

The Captain

(Men, in particular, should pay special attention to this section because we will find it emotionally difficult to follow these principles!)

Although the bidding is a co-operative effort, one of the partners is considered the "captain" of the hand. The other partner is considered the subordinate (men, substitute "peon" or even "slave" so you get the point). The captain is in charge of deciding the final contract. This is accomplished by asking the subordinate to further describe their hand and, perhaps, giving a choice of contracts. The subordinate simply answers the captain's questions.

This next sentence is very important. On almost all hands, THE RESPONDER IS THE CAPTAIN OF THE HAND. So (men), once you open the hand, you are relegated to being the subordinate. Similarly (ladies), you as responder are the captain and in charge of the auction.

The Captain's Tools

The main difficulty for the captain is to communicate to the subordinate when to keep bidding and when to stop.

The main tool to accomplish this is the "new suit forcing" principle. If the responder bids a new suit, the opener is obligated to make another bid. Opener, if your partner introduces a new suit, YOU MAY NOT PASS.

Some advanced partnerships even play a convention called "fourth suit forcing". If 3 suits have been bid, and responder bids the fourth suit, which may be artificial, the partnership is committed to bid game.

The other forcing bid is for responder to jump (e.g. 1♥-1♠-2♣-3♠). This should be avoided, if possible, in favor of new suit forcing, which leaves more room for further bidding. In fact, in those partnerships that play the fourth suit forcing convention, a jump rebid by responder is not forcing.

The Subordinate's Tools

The subordinate is responsible for describing both the strength (e.g. minimum, medium, maximum) and suits. In this lesson, we will concentrate on how to describe strength.

Minimum hands are described by making the cheapest bid possible in the strain opener wishes to bid (e.g. 1♥-1♠-2♣). Maximum hands are described by jump shifting, bidding one level higher than necessary in a new suit (e.g. 1♥-1♠-3♣).

Medium hands are a bit harder to describe. Fortunately, many medium hands are opened 1NT. Another method is to jump in the opening suit (e.g. 1♥-1♠-3♥).

Another method to show a medium or maximum opening hand is to use a "reverse". A reverse is defined as bidding past the minimum rebid of your suit (e.g. 1♣-1♠-2♥). A reverse shows a medium or maximum hand and promises that opener will bid at least once more. A reverse also guarantees that the opening suit is longer than the second suit (in the above example, opener shows at least 5 clubs, 4 hearts, and a medium/maximum hand). Playing reverses means that you sometimes have to suppress a four card suit. For example, if you have 5 diamonds, 4 spades, and a minimum opener, if you open 1♦ and partner responds 2♣, you must respond 2♦ (because 2♠ promises a medium or strong hand). Many beginning players find reverses confusing, but I think they are an essential tool if you want to become a good bidder.

Opener should avoid being redundant. Every new bid should provide partner with new information. For example, once you open 1 of a major partner knows you have at least a minimum opening hand with at least a 5 card suit. Some players will rebid their suit if they can't think of anything better. Rebidding your suit should promise a six card suit. If you only have a five card suit, bid another suit if possible or bid NT.

Quiz

Below are several hands you might hold as responder. For each hand:

- a) Determine the hand type (minimum, medium, maximum)
- b) Determine the minimum hand type opener must have to bid game

1. ♠ Axxx
♥ KQxx
♦ Kxx
♣ xx

Answer:

- a) You (responder) have maximum hand
- b) You should unconditionally bid game, even if opener has a minimum

2. ♠ Axxx
 ♥ KQxx
 ♦ xxx
 ♣ xx

Answer:

- a) You (responder) have medium hand
 b) You should bid game if opener has a medium or maximum hand

3. ♠ Axxx
 ♥ Kxxx
 ♦ xxx
 ♣ xx

Answer:

- a) You (responder) have a minimum hand
 b) You should only bid game if opener has a maximum hand

Below are several partial auctions. You are responder.
 For each auction:

- a) Describe everything you know about opener's hand.
 b) Determine the minimum hand type you must have to bid game.

1. 1♦-1♥-1NT

- a) Opener has a minimum hand
 Opener has 2 or 3 hearts (would bid 2♥ with 4 hearts)
 Opener has 2 or 3 spades (would bid 1♠ with 4 spades)
 Opener has 4 or 5 diamonds
 Opener usually has 3 or 4 clubs (the only time opener has 2 clubs is with 3 spades, 3 hearts, 5 diamonds, and 2 clubs)
- b) You (responder) should only bid game with a maximum hand

2. 1♦-1♥-2♦

- a) Opener has a minimum hand
 Opener does not have 4 hearts (would bid 2♥), 4 spades (would bid 1♠), or 4 clubs (would bid 2♣)
 Opener almost always has 6 diamonds -- Opener should bid 1NT with most 5-3-3-2 patterns, unless the diamonds are really solid (e.g. AKQxx or AKJ10x, which is almost as good as a 6 card suit)
- b) You (responder) should only bid game with a maximum hand

3. 1♦-1♠-3♦

- a) Opener has a medium hand (and not a maximum hand)
Opener does not have 4 hearts (would bid 2♥, a reverse)
Opener does not have 4 spades (would bid 3♠)
Opener usually has six diamonds (the only time opener has 5 diamonds is with 2 spades, 2 hearts, 5 diamonds, and 4 clubs; with any 5-3-3-2 distribution, opener would have opened 1NT)
- b) You (responder) should bid game with a medium or maximum hand

4. 1♦-1♠-2♥

- a) Opener has a medium or maximum hand
Opener has 4 hearts
Opener does not have 4 spades (would bid 3♠ or 4♠)
Opener has at least 5 diamonds; with 4-4 in the red suits, opener would have opened 1NT or rebid 2NT (ok, opener rarely will have 1 spade, 4 hearts, 4 diamonds, and 4 clubs with a medium hand, but you should assume opener has 5 diamonds)
- b) You (responder) should bid game with a medium hand.
Since opener could have a maximum hand, you may not pass; if you do not make a forcing bid (e.g. 3♣ or 3♠), opener is responsible for bidding game with a maximum hand.

5. 1♦-1♠-3♣

- a) Opener has a maximum hand
Opener does not have 4 hearts (would bid 2♥)
Opener does not have 4 spades (would bid 4♠)
Opener has at least 4 clubs
Opener almost always has at least 5 diamonds (with 4 diamonds, 4 clubs, and 3-2 in the majors, opener would rebid 2NT; the only distribution without 5 diamonds is 1 spade 4 hearts, 4 diamonds, and 4 clubs).
You should assume opener has 5 or more diamonds.

Many people (including experienced bridge players) only think about their hands during the bidding. The point of the above exercises is to get you in the habit of thinking about partner's hand as well. As you can see, you know a lot about partner's hand even after only 2 bids.

Below are several hands you might have as opener, with several partial auctions. What is your next bid?

1. ♠ xx

- ♥ AKxx
- ♦ KQxxx
- ♣ xx

1♦-1♠-?

2♦ is my first choice; 1NT is possible and would be chosen by some experts.
You should not bid 2♥, as that is a reverse (showing at least a medium opener)

2. ♠ xx

♥ AKxx

♦ AKJxx

♣ xx

1♦-1♠-?

2♥ is the perfect bid; a medium hand with at least 5 diamonds and 4 hearts.

3. ♠ xx

♥ xx

♦ AKxxx

♣ AQxx

1♦-1♠-?

2♣ is the correct bid, providing the most information to your partner.

If you bid 2♦ you are denying a 4 card club suit.

If you bid 1NT (the choice of hand hogs!), you are denying 2-2 in the majors.

4. ♠ xx

♥ xx

♦ AKQxx

♣ AQxx

1♦-1♠-?

3♦ is the best bid. Shows a medium hand with at least 5 diamonds.

If you bid 2♣, you are making an underbid (shows a minimum opener).

If you bid 3♣, you are making an overbid (shows a maximum opener).

5. ♠ xx

♥ xx

♦ AKQxx

♣ AKJx

1♦-1♠-?

3♣ is the best bid. Shows a maximum hand with at least 5 diamonds and at least 4 clubs.

6. ♠ xx

♥ AKxx

♦ AQxx

♣ xxx

1♦-1♠-1NT-2♠-?

Pass. Partner has not made a forcing bid (in fact, it is a "close out" bid; you must pass).

Remember, partner is the captain and is responsible for choosing the final contract.

You have already described your hand and have nothing further to add.