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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

The following notes are designed to help your understanding of the Acol system of bidding and should be used in conjunction with the [Glossary of Terms](#) and [Acol Crib Sheets](#). The crib sheets summarise the bidding in tabular form, whereas these notes provide a fuller explanation of the reasons for making particular bids and bidding strategy.

These notes consist of a number of short chapters that have been structured in a logical order to build on the things learnt in the earlier chapters. However, each chapter can be viewed as a mini-lesson on a specific area which can be read in isolation rather than trying to absorb too much information in one go.

It should be noted that there is not a single set of definitive Acol 'rules'. The modern Acol bidding style has developed over the years and different bridge experts recommend slightly different variations based on their personal preferences and playing experience. These notes are based on the methods described in the book *The Right Way to Play Bridge* by Paul Mendelson, which is available at all good bookshops (and some rubbish ones as well). They feature a 'Weak No Trump' throughout and 'Strong Two' openings.

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CHAPTER 1: BIDDING OBJECTIVES & SCORING

The objectives of bidding are threefold:

- To exchange information with partner about the strength and shape of your hand.
- To outbid the opponents and win the right to play the contract, preferably at “game level”.
- To obstruct the opponents’ bidding and make it difficult for them to reach their best contract.

A bid at the 1 level aims to make 7 tricks, at the 2 level 8 tricks and so on, right up to the 7 level (all 13 tricks). For bidding purposes the suits are ranked in alphabetical order with Clubs the lowest, followed by Diamonds, Hearts and then Spades. A No Trumps bid out-ranks any suit bid at the same level.

- Tricks bid and made in the Minor suits (Clubs & Diamonds) earn 20 points each.
- Tricks bid and made in the Major suits (Hearts & Spades) earn 30 points each.
- In No Trumps contracts the first trick is worth 40 points and subsequent tricks 30 points each.

In the most popular form of the game (Rubber Bridge) the first pair to reach 100 points wins the **Game** and the first pair to win 2 games wins the **Rubber**. Game can be made in one hand, e.g. 3NT = 100 points, or over the course of several hands, e.g. 1 Club (20) + 2 Spades (60) + 1NT (40) = 120 points.

A contract bid and made at the 6 level (12 tricks) is called a Small Slam and earns additional bonus points. A 7 level contract (all 13 tricks) is called a Grand Slam and is worth a larger bonus.

More details about scoring can be found on the Rubber Bridge Scoring page.

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CHAPTER 2: EVALUATING THE STRENGTH OF YOUR HAND

The strength of a hand is initially evaluated by counting the number of High Card Points (HCP) on the following scale: Ace (A) = 4pts, King (K) = 3, Queen (Q) = 2, Jack (J) = 1. Additional points are added for every card over 4 in a long suit.

The number of tricks a partnership should expect to make is based on their combined point holding. There are 40 HCP in the pack and to make a one level contract (7 tricks) generally requires a little more than half the total HCP, i.e. 21 – 22 pts. To make a two level contract (8 tricks) requires a few more points (23 – 24), and so on. The combined partnership targets are summarised in the following table:

Combined points	Target level	No. of tricks	
21 – 22	1	7	
23 – 24	2	8	
25 – 26	3	9	Game in No Trumps
26 – 28	4	10	Game in Major suits (Hearts & Spades)
29 – 32	5	11	Game in Minor suits (Clubs & Diamonds)
33 – 35	6	12	Small Slam
36 +	7	13	Grand Slam

These combined points ranges and target levels are only general guidelines. The way that the missing honour cards are split between the opponents’ hands makes a big difference, as does the way that the trump suit may be split. And had George Orwell played bridge he might have remarked that “All points are equal, but some are more equal than others!” For example, consider two hands, both with 12 points:-

A hand with 3 unsupported Aces would be sure of making only 3 tricks and leading out the Aces could promote the opponents' Kings. This would be considered a 'poor' 12 points. However, a hand with two 4 card suits headed by sequences of K-Q-J would make at least 4 tricks and more if partner holds any of the Aces or 10's in those suits. This would be considered a 'good' 12 points.

A hand with a number of 10's and 9's is good because these cards can often win when a suit is led for the third or fourth time. A singleton King is a poor feature, especially if it ends up in Dummy where the opponents can see it and lead the Ace. The same applies to a doubleton Queen which is worthless if the opponents hold A-K.

If partner bids a suit in which you hold 3 or more cards your hand improves because you have a Fit in that suit and you know that you and partner have more cards in the suit than the opponents. If partner bids a suit in which you have a shortage this makes your hand worse because you have a Mis-fit.

When looking to play in a suit contract with a good trump fit (at least 8 cards between the 2 hands), the strength of the hand should be re-evaluated by adding extra points for Voids, Singletons and Doubletons because these can be used for cross-ruffing (trumping) - more about this in Section 3.

The targets on every hand in order of preference are:

- First: An 8 card fit (or better) in a Major suit.
- Second: A No Trumps contract.
- Third: A Minor Suit contract.

With a mis-fit (no more than a 7 card fit) consider deliberately bidding to 1 level below those shown above.

Note: The strength of a strong 'Distributional Hand' is usually assessed in terms of "Playing Tricks", rather than High Card Points. This is described further in Chapter 61.

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CHAPTER 3: EVALUATING THE SHAPE OF YOUR HAND

The Acol system of bidding makes the shape of the hand a vital consideration, especially for the opening bidder. Having assessed point-strength it is important to establish whether the hand is Balanced or Distributional.

Balanced hands have no exceptionally long (6 card) or short (singleton) suits and are best suited to playing in No Trumps contracts. Typical suit lengths are 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2.

Distributional hands have one or more long suits and are likely to have shortages too (doubletons, singletons or voids). These are best suited to playing in suit contracts. Typical suit lengths are 5-4-x-x, 6-x-x-x, and 7-x-x-x.

More specifically, a Balanced Hand is defined as a hand with **no more than 8 cards between the two longest suits**. There is one exception to this; 4-4-4-1 shape is not considered balanced because of the singleton. Opener should aim to indicate a balanced hand by bidding No Trumps on either the first or second round of bidding. Bidding with Balanced Hands is covered in Section 2 below and 4-4-4-1 hands are covered in Chapter 39.

A Distributional Hand is defined as a hand with **at least 9 cards between the two longest suits**. If opener denies having a balanced hand by bidding 2 different suits, it infers at least 5 cards in the first suit and at least 4 cards in the second suit (the longest suit is always bid first, irrespective of strength). Bidding with Distributional Hands is covered in Section 3 below.

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SECTION 2 - BALANCED HANDS

The chapters in Section 2 relate to Balanced Hands, i.e. hands with no more than 8 cards between the two longest suits. It should be noted that some of the bids described in this section are also applicable to Distributional Hands – usually it is not until the opener’s second bid that it becomes clear whether a hand is Balanced or Distributional.

In the following chapters there are recurring themes in the way that the appropriate No Trumps bid is determined by assessing the partnership’s combined point count based on partner’s known minimum points holding. These are summarised by a few simple guidelines in Chapter 28.

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CHAPTER 21: 1NT OPENING BID & NO TRUMP RESPONSES

An opening bid of 1NT shows a Balanced Hand with 12 – 14 pts. 1NT is a very useful bid because it immediately describes both the shape of the hand (balanced) and the strength within 1 point (13). Plus, it stops the opposition from bidding at the 1 level.

- If responder also has a Balanced Hand, a No Trumps contract is the most likely outcome. The level of the contract is determined by the combined point count of the 2 hands as described in Chapter 2. If responder has 13 points or more, the partnership has at least 25 points even if opener is a minimum (12) and he can safely bid 3NT (game) directly.
- If responder has 11 – 12 pts a game contract will be possible if opener is a maximum (14pts) and responder should bid 2NT. Opener will pass with 12pts or raise to 3NT with 14pts (or occasionally with a good 13pts).
- If responder has 10pts or less, the combined holding cannot be more than 24pts and he should pass.

With a very strong balanced hand responder will make a ‘quantitative raise’, looking for a slam based on the target requirements shown in Chapter 2:

- With 19 – 20 pts, bid 4NT. Opener will pass with a minimum or raise to 6NT with a maximum
- With 21 – 22 pts, bid 6NT. Opener will pass.
- With 23 – 24 pts, bid 5NT. Opener will raise to 6NT with a minimum or 7NT with a maximum
- With 25+ pts, bid 7NT

Note: expert opinion is divided on whether a hand with 12 – 14 pts and a 5 card Major suit (Spades or Hearts) should be opened with one of the suit, rather than 1NT. A good rule of thumb is to open (and re-bid) the 5 card Major suit, unless the quality of the suit is so poor that 1NT looks more attractive.

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CHAPTER 22: 1NT OPENING BID & SUIT RESPONSES

With a weak hand (0 – 10 pts) and a long suit (5+ cards) it is often better to play in 2 of the suit rather than 1NT, so bid 2D, 2H or 2S (but not 2C which is reserved for the Stayman convention; see Chapter 41). Opener will always pass this ‘sign-off’ bid.

On very weak hands (0 – 5 pts) you are not expecting to make the contract, but the damage may be less than playing in 1NT and you can take consolation that the opponents have probably missed a makeable contract.

With a 5 card Major suit and 12+ pts, bid 3H or 3S. Opener will raise to 4 of the suit with 3 card support or bid 3NT with only 2 card support.

With a 6 card major suit and 12+ pts, bid 4H or 4S. Opener will pass.

With a stronger hand and a long Minor suit it is usually better to respond in NT’s unless there are slam ambitions (typically 16+ points in a Distributional Hand). In this case, bid 3C or 3D.

In a strong hand with slam ambitions, a 4C bid can be used to ask opener how many Aces and Kings are held. This is the Gerber convention; see Chapter 43.

CHAPTER 23: OPENING BIDS WITH STRONGER BALANCED HANDS

A balanced hand in the range of 15 to 19 points is too strong for a 1NT opening bid (12 – 14 pts), but not strong enough to open 2NT (20 – 22 pts) or 2 Clubs (23+ pts). These hands should be opened with one of a 4 card suit, planning to re-bid in No Trumps next time to show a Balanced Hand.

With two 4 card suits open 1Heart (or a Minor suit without a 4 card heart suit). With two 4 card Minor suits (Clubs & Diamonds) open the weaker suit to discourage a lead in that suit against a No Trumps contract.

The level of opener's No Trumps re-bid depends on the strength of the hand:

- With 15 - 16 pts: open a suit & rebid No Trumps at the lowest available level, e.g. 1H → 1S → 1NT or 1S → 2C → 2NT
- With 17 - 18 pts: open a suit & rebid No Trumps, jumping a level, e.g. 1H → 1S → 2NT or 1S → 2C → 3NT
- With 19 pts (or a poor 20): open a suit & rebid 3NT, e.g. 1H → 1S → 3NT or 1S → 2C → 3NT

These bidding sequences by opener are very informative because they accurately describe both the shape of the hand (balanced) and the strength within 1 point. However, after some responses, opener has to re-assess his planned re-bid as follows:

- After a response of 1NT (6 – 9 pts) or 2NT (10 – 12 pts), base the No Trumps re-bid on the partner's known minimum points and the target combined points holdings shown in Chapter 2.
- After a single raise (6 – 9 pts) or a double raise (10 – 12 pts) of opener's suit, base the re-bid on partner's known minimum points and the target combined points holdings shown in Chapter 2.
With a Major suit (Hearts or Spades), raise the suit (or pass).
With a Minor suit (Clubs or Diamonds), re-bid in No Trumps (or pass).
- With 4 card support for responder's Major suit (Hearts or Spades), raise that suit rather than re-bidding in No Trumps – see Chapter 24.

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CHAPTER 24: SUPPORTING RESPONDER'S MAJOR SUIT

A balanced hand in the range of 15 to 19/20 points is opened with one of a suit, with the intention of re-bidding in No Trumps next time to show a balanced hand. However if partner responds with a Major suit (Hearts or Spades) and you hold 4 of that suit you should support that suit immediately. This takes preference over re-bidding No Trumps to show point count.

Over a 1 level change of suit (e.g. 1C → 1H), make a *limit raise* based on the knowledge that partner has at least 6 points and a 4 card suit:

- With 12 - 15 pts, raise 1 level (e.g. 1D → 1S → 2S)
- With 16 - 18 pts, raise 2 levels (e.g. 1D → 1S → 3S)
- With 19 - 20 pts, raise to game (e.g. 1D → 1S → 4S)

After the sequence 1S → 2H, make a *limit raise* based on the knowledge that partner has at least 8 points and a 5 card suit (see Chapter 32 for an explanation of this):

- With 12 - 16 pts, raise 1 level (i.e. 1S → 2H → 3H)
- With 17 - 20 pts, raise to game (i.e. 1S → 2H → 4H)

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CHAPTER 25: 2NT OPENING BID & RESPONSES

An opening bid of 2NT shows a Balanced Hand with a 'good' 20 – 22 pts.

The responses are consistent in meaning with those for 1NT, without the 2 level weak take out responses:

- 3H & 3S show 5 card suits and are game forcing.
- 4H & 4S show 6 card suits, or longer and will be passed.
- 3NT is balanced (or a long minor suit) with 5-10 pts and will be passed.
- 3D is a slam try with a strong Diamond Suit.
- 3C is the Stayman convention (looking for a fit in the majors), see Chapter 41.
- 4C is the Gerber convention (asking for Aces), see Chapter 43.

With a strong balanced hand responder will make a 'quantitative raise', looking for a slam based on the target requirements shown in Chapter 2:

- With 11 – 12 pts, bid 4NT. Opener will pass with a minimum or raise to 6NT with a maximum
- With 13 – 14 pts, bid 6NT. Opener will pass.
- With 15 – 16 pts, bid 5NT. Opener will raise to 6NT with a minimum or 7NT with a maximum
- With 17+ pts, bid 7NT

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CHAPTER 26: 2 CLUBS OPENING BID & RESPONSES

A 2 Clubs opening bid does not show a club suit. It is an artificial bid that can be either a Balanced Hand with 23+ pts or a Distributional Hand with 10+ 'Playing Tricks' (see Chapter 61 for a definition of Playing Tricks). The type of hand will be revealed by opener's second bid. With a balanced 23 – 24 pts, opener re-bids 2NT and with a balanced 25 – 26 pts re-bids 3NT. For opener's re-bids with a Distributional Hand, refer to Chapter 37.

A 2C opening is forcing to game, except after the sequence 2C → 2D → 2NT.

There are 2 types of response to a 2C opening:-

- 2H, 2S, 3C, 3D show at least a 5 card suit with 2 of the top 3 honours
- With any other type of hand responder should make an artificial 2 Diamond relay bid and wait for opener to clarify his type of hand.

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CHAPTER 27: NO TRUMP RESPONSES AFTER AN OPENING SUIT BID

As an opening bid of '1 of a suit' shows 12+ pts and at least 4 cards in the suit bid. The bidding level for responses in No Trumps are based on the combined point count of the 2 hands using the target guidelines shown in Chapter 2, initially assuming that opener has 12pts.

Note: bidding a 4 card Major suit (Hearts or Spades) at the 1 level is preferable to a NT response, irrespective of the quality of the suit.

- If responder has a balanced 13 points or more, the partnership has at least 25 points and he can safely bid 3NT (game) directly.
- If responder has a balanced 10 – 12 pts a game contract will be possible if opener has more than a minimum and he should bid 2NT. If opener has a balanced 15+ pts or a good 14pts he will raise to 3NT.

- If responder has a balanced 6 – 9 pts he should bid 1NT. If opener has a balanced 19pts he will raise to 3NT. If opener has 17 – 18 pts or a good 16pts he will raise to 2NT. This invites responder to raise to 3NT if he is maximum for his original bid (8 – 9 pts) or pass if he is a minimum (6 – 7 pts).

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CHAPTER 28: SUMMARY OF BIDDING WITH BALANCED HANDS

You will hopefully have noticed in the previous chapters that there are recurring themes in the way that the appropriate No Trumps bid is determined by assessing the partnership’s combined point count based on partner’s known minimum points holding. Following the guidelines below will enable you to choose the best bid in most circumstances.

As Opener

- With a balanced 12 to 14 points, open 1NT
- With a balanced 15 to 19 points (or a poor 20), open 1 of a suit (which promises 12+ pts), intending to re-bid in No Trumps on the second round of bidding.
- On stronger hands open 2NT (20 – 22 pts) or 2 Clubs (23+ pts)

As Responder

- A bid of 1NT (e.g. 1H → 1NT) or a simple change of suit at the 1 level (e.g. 1H → 1S) or a single raise of opener’s suit (e.g. 1H → 2H) all promise 6+ points.
- A simple change of suit at the 2 level (e.g. 1H → 2C) promises 8+ points.

Both Players

Add your points to partner’s known minimum points:

- With a combined 23 – 24 pts, bid 2NT
- With a combined 25 – 26 pts (or more), bid 3NT

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SECTION 3 - DISTRIBUTIONAL HANDS

The chapters in Section 3 relate to opener’s Distributional Hands, i.e. hands with at least 9 cards between the two longest suits. It should be noted that some of the bids described in this section are also applicable to Balanced hands – quite often it is not until the opener’s or responder’s second bid that it becomes clear whether a hand is Balanced or Distributional.

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CHAPTER 31: OPENING BIDS OF 1 OF A SUIT

The minimum requirement to open one of a suit is 12HCP (or 10 – 11 HCP with a 6 card suit). There is no set upper limit, although a hand with a self-supporting suit and at least 8 ‘Playing Tricks’ would be opened with a 2 level bid (see Chapter 61 for a definition of Playing Tricks).

- With two long suits of unequal length (e.g. 5-4, 6-4, 6-5) always bid the long suit first, irrespective of the strength of the two suits.
- With two long suits of equal length (5-5, 6-6) open the higher ranked suit first (unless Clubs and Spades).
- Opening one suit & re-bidding another shows at least 5 cards in the first suit and at least 4 of the second (due to not having re-bid No Trumps within the first 2 rounds to show a Balanced Hand).
- Opening a suit and re-bidding it shows at least a 5 card suit. Opening a suit and re-bidding it twice shows at least a 6 card suit.

- Always consider the need to make a sensible re-bid over any change of suit by partner (which is a one round force).

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CHAPTER 32: CHANGE OF SUIT RESPONSES

After an opening bid of 1 of a suit, a simple change of suit at the 1 level promises at least 6 points and a 4 card suit. There is no upper limit to the number of points held, so opener must bid again (i.e. it is a one round force). The only exceptions to this rule are if the responder had previously made a No Bid or if the opposition makes an intervening bid.

A simple change of suit at the 2 level promises at least 8 points and a 4 card suit, except for 1S → 2H which promises at least a 5 card suit. The reason for the exception is that the bidding has been catapulted up to high level after only two bids and so it needs to contain extra information (i.e. the 5 card suit) to make it worthwhile. Again there is no upper limit to the number of points held, so opener must bid again unless responder had previously made a No Bid or the opposition makes an intervening bid.

A jump shift (i.e. bidding a new suit at 1 level higher than necessary) shows at least 15 HCP points with a 5 card suit (or 13 -14 pts with a 6 carder). It is a slam-going procedure which is unconditionally game forcing and should only be used when you are certain which suit is going to be trumps.

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CHAPTER 33: SUPPORTING OPENER'S SUIT

Raising opener's suit (first time round) promises 4 card support. Such bids are known as *limit raises* because they are bid to the limit of the combined hands assuming that opener is a minimum. If he is a minimum he will pass, otherwise he will continue the bidding.

When raising partner's suit with a good trump fit (at least 8 cards between the 2 hands), the strength of your hand should be re-evaluated by adding extra points for Voids, Singletons and Doubletons because these shortages can be used by partner to trump losing cards in these suits:

- With a doubleton, add 1 point
- With a singleton, add 3 points
- With a void, add 5 points

The ranges for responder's limit raises are:

- Single raise (e.g. 1S → 2S) with 6 to 9 points
- Double raise (e.g. 1S → 3S) with 10 to 12 points
- A triple raise in a Major suit (e.g. 1S → 4S) shows a weak hand - less than 10HCP, but with excellent support for partner's suit and useful 'distribution'.

Having been supported, opener will re-evaluate his hand by adding extra points for Voids, Singletons and Doubletons on the following scale:

- With a doubleton, add 1 point
- With a singleton, add 2 points
- With a void, add 3 points

The reason that these value are lower than those for the hand that initially supports a suit are that you often only want to trump cards in one hand, leaving length in the other to draw the opponents' trumps. Therefore shortages in the hand that bids trumps first are not quite worth so much.

After a raise in a Major suit, opener can investigate the possibility of a Game contract by making a *Trial Bid* in a suit that in which he requires help from partner (by way of high cards or a shortage) . See Chapter 63 for further information about Major Suit Trial Bids.

After a raise in a Minor suit, opener can investigate the possibility of a Game contract in No Trumps by make a *Trial Bid* in a suit that he holds stoppers. See Chapter 63 for further information about Minor Suit Trial Bids.

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CHAPTER 34: OPENER'S SECOND BID

Always support partner's 4 card Major – see Chapter 24.

With a weak hand (12 – 15 pts):

- Re-bid a 5 card suit at the lowest level
- Bid a new 'lower ranking' suit at the lowest level. This guarantees 5+ cards in first suit & 4+ in second.

With a stronger hand:

- Jump re-bid with a good suit
- Jump in a new suit with 17+ pts and two 5 card suits (game forcing)
- "Reverse" in a new suit with 16+ pts (A reverse is a bid at the 2 level in a suit which is higher ranking than the first suit bid. It forces partner to go to the 3 level if he wants to show preference for the first suit (e.g. 1H → 2C → 2S or 1D → 1S → 2H). It shows more cards in the first suit bid than the second and is forcing for 1 round.

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CHAPTER 35: RESPONDER'S SECOND BID

- Re-bid your own suit to show a 6 carder (jump a level with 11+ pts)
- With a minimum for your initial response you can show preference for one of opener's suits by passing or re-bidding the first suit. Always return to the first suit, unless you have 2 more cards in the second suit than in the first. This is because partner will have at least 5 cards in the first, but may only have 4 in the second – length in a trump suit is more important than strength and it is better to play in a 5-2 fit rather than a 4-3 fit.
- When you know you have an 8 card fit you can support one of partner's suits:
Raise to the 2 level with 6 - 9 pts
Raise to the 3 level with 10 - 12 pts
Raise to game with 13+ pts
After a reverse show preference with 6 - 8 pts & raise to game with a good 9+ pts
- Bids in No Trumps are based on the same point ranges as for a direct No Trumps response on the first round of bidding:
1NT with 6 - 9 pts
2NT with 10 - 12 pts
3NT with 13 - 15 pts
After a reverse, bid 3NT on 10+ pts

Note: if the partnership has already bid 3 suits, a bid in NT's promises at least 2 stoppers in the 4th suit. Without them, you should consider giving preference for one of partner's suits or using the "4th suit forcing" convention (see below).

- A bid of the 4th suit does not promise length in that suit. It denies having 2 stoppers in the suit and asks partner to further clarify his hand. It is forcing for one round and is usually regarded as forcing to game. For that reason you must have enough points to cope with whatever response partner may make. 11 pts is generally considered a minimum at the 1 or 2 level and enough points for game at the 3 level. To use at the 3 level you should hold one stopper in the suit to enable partner to happily bid 3NT if he holds just one stopper in the suit opposite you.

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CHAPTER 36: STRONG 2 OPENING BIDS & RESPONSES

A 'Strong Two' opening bid of 2 Diamonds, 2 Hearts or 2 Spades shows a quality 6 card (or longer) suit with between 8 and 9 ½ 'Playing Tricks' (see Chapter 61 for a definition of Playing Tricks). The number of points held is irrelevant. Hands with 10+ Playing Tricks are opened with 2 Clubs – see Chapter 37.

Note: reserve 'Strong Two' opening bids for one suited hands. With a strong 2 suited hand it is better to open with one of the first suit, followed by a jump in the second suit on the second round.

Responses:

- Pass with less than 1 'Quick Trick' in your hand (see Chapter 61 for a definition of Quick Tricks).
- 2NT with 1 to 2 Quick Tricks in your hand (if partner is minimum he will re-bid 3 of his suit). This is the only response that is not forcing to game.
- Single raise (e.g. 2H → 3H): 3 card support or a doubleton honour and at least one Ace or Void
- Double raise (e.g. 2H → 4H): 3 card support or a doubleton honour and no Ace or Void
- With no support for partner's suit, you can bid your own good quality 5 card (or longer) suit with at least 2 Quick Tricks in your hand.
- Opposite a 2D opener, bid 3NT with 2 card support for diamonds and a scattering of values in other suits.

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CHAPTER 37: 2 CLUBS OPENING BID & RESPONSES

A 2 Clubs opening bid does not show a club suit. It is an artificial bid that can be either a Balanced Hand with 23+ pts or a Distributional Hand with 10+ 'Playing Tricks' (see Chapter 61 for a definition of Playing Tricks). A Distributional Hand is revealed by opener's second bid of a suit (rather than No Trumps). The suit bid shows that you believe you hold 'game' in your own hand and have at least a 6 card suit or two 5 card suits. For opener's re-bids with a Balanced Hand, refer to Chapter 26.

There are 2 types of response to a 2C opening:-

- 2H, 2S, 3C, 3D show at least a 5 card suit with 2 of the top 3 honours
- With any other type of hand responder should make an artificial 2 Diamond relay bid and wait for opener to clarify his type of hand.

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CHAPTER 38: PRE-EMPTIVE OPENING BIDS & RESPONSES

An opening bid of 3C, 3D, 3H or 3S is designed to disrupt the opponents' bidding space. It will typically consist of a quality 7 card suit with less than 10HCP. Longer suits can be opened at the 4 or 5 level, but these hands are very rare.

In response to a 3 level pre-empt:

- Raise to game with one card support and 4 'Quick Tricks' (see Chapter 61 for a definition of Quick Tricks).
- Bid 3NT with a strong hand AND A GOOD FIT with partner's suit

- Bid a new suit with a good suit that is a genuine alternative to partner's suit (game forcing)
- Otherwise pass

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CHAPTER 39: 4-4-4-1 HANDS

This shape of hand can be difficult to bid as opener, especially when partner responds with your short suit. Whatever you re-bid will be a lie because:

- You cannot re-bid your own suit because it would promise a 5 card suit.
- You cannot bid a new suit without promising 5-4 distribution.
- You cannot bid NT's because you don't have a balanced hand and you may not have the required 15 points.

To avoid the worst repercussions of providing misleading information, the following is recommended:

- With 4-4-4-1 hands of 12 or 13 points, pass initially and hope to be able to enter the auction at a later stage.
- With 14 points or more, open Hearts if you have them, or open a Minor suit. Never open 1 Spade.
- If partner responds with your singleton suit, re-bid NT's at the appropriate level (see Chapter 23).
- If partner responds with one of your 4 card suits, you can breathe a sigh of relief and support that suit.

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SECTION 4 - BIDDING CONVENTIONS

A convention is an artificial bid or series of bids carrying a meaning other than the apparent natural one. Some of the most frequently used conventions are Stayman which attempts to find a major suit fit after a NT opening bid, along with Blackwood and Gerber which ask partner to supply information about the number of Aces and Kings held when investigating the possibility of a slam.

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CHAPTER 41: THE STAYMAN CONVENTION

After an opening bid of 1NT a bid of 2C is asking opener to show any 4 card Major suits with a view to finding a fit in one of the Majors.

Before using Stayman always consider the need to make a sensible re-bid (or a pass) if opener has no 4 card Major. With a balanced hand you need to have at least 11pts because you may have to revert to 2NT if no fit is found. With longer Major suits, Stayman can be used with a very weak point count with a view to signing off in 2 of a Major.

Opener's responses to 2C are:

- 2D with no 4 card Major
- 2H with 4 hearts (& possibly 4 spades as well)
- 2S with 4 spades (but not 4 hearts)

With a weak hand responder's re-bid options are:

- Pass if a fit has been found
- Sign off in 2 of his best Major suit
- Sign off in 3C if he has a genuine club suit

With a stronger hand responder's re-bid options are:

- If a fit has been found, raise invitationally to the 3 level or bid game
- If a fit has not been found, bid a Major invitationally at the 3 level or bid game
- Bid NT's using the same point ranges as for a direct raise after a 1NT opening bid (2NT with 11 -12 pts, 3NT with 13 – 15 pts).

Note: after an opening bid of 2NT, a bid of 3 Clubs is Stayman with similar responses at the 3 level.

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CHAPTER 42: THE BLACKWOOD CONVENTION

Except after a direct raise from 1NT or 2NT, a bid of 4NT is asking partner how many Aces he holds with a view to playing in a slam. Responses are:

- 5C with 0 or 4 Aces
- 5D with 1 Ace
- 5H with 2 Aces
- 5S with 3 Aces

A subsequent bid of 5NT is asking partner how many Kings are held. Responses are:

- 6C with 0 or 4 Kings
- 6D with 1 King
- 6H with 2 Kings
- 6S with 3 Kings

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CHAPTER 43: THE GERBER CONVENTION

After an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT, a bid of 4NT is quantitative and cannot be used as the Blackwood convention (asking for Aces - see Chapter 42). After a 1NT or 2NT opening bid, a bid of 4C asks partner how many Aces he holds with a view to playing in a slam. Responses are:

- 4D with 0 or 4 Aces
- 4H with 1 Ace
- 4S with 2 Aces
- 4NT with 3 Aces

A subsequent bid of 5C is asking partner how many Kings are held. Responses are:

- 5D with 0 or 4 Kings
- 5H with 1 King
- 5S with 2 Kings
- 5NT with 3 Kings

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SECTION 5 - COMPETITIVE BIDDING

When the opponents have already opened the bidding, your bidding strategy is different to that in an uncontested auction. You are not necessarily expecting to win the contract, but by entering a competitive auction you may disrupt the opponents' bidding space and force them up to a higher level than they would wish. It can also provide your partner with useful information about which suits to lead in defence.

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CHAPTER 51: SUIT OVERCALLS

A simple overcall at the 1 level

Example: 1H – 1S. Requires a good 5 card suit with 8 to ~15 pts.

Partner's responses are:

- With a weak hand & support for partner's suit: Single raise with 3 to an honour. Double raise with 4 card support. Triple raise with 5 card support.
- Bid a new suit at the same level with a good 5/6 carder
- Bid 1NT (10 - 12 pts), 2NT (13 - 15) or 3NT (16 - 18), i.e. 3 or 4 pts stronger than normal

A simple overcall at the 2 level

Example: 1H → 2C. Requires a good 5 card suit with 12 to ~16 pts (or 10/11 pts with 6 card suit)

Partner's responses are:

- With a weak hand & support for partner's suit: Pass with 3 to an honour. Single raise with 4 card support. Double raise with 5 card support..
- Bid a new suit at the same level with a good 5/6 carder
- Bid 2NT (10 - 12 pts) or 3NT (13 - 15)

A Jump overcall of a suit at 1 level higher than necessary

- At the 2 level (e.g. 1D → 2S). Requires a good 6 card suit with 11 - 15 pts
- At the 3 level (e.g. 1S → 3H). Requires a good 6 card suit with 12 - 16 pts

Partner can raise with 2 card support, otherwise a pass is the most likely bid.

Pre-emptive overcall of a suit at 2 levels higher than necessary

- Examples: 1H → 3S or 1S → 4H. Requires a 7+ card suit with less than 10 pts.

Responses are similar to those after a pre-emptive opening bid (Chapter 38).

1NT overcall

- 16 – 18 pts, balanced with 2 stoppers in opponent's suit

Responses are similar to a 1NT opening, but require 4 points fewer.

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CHAPTER 52: TAKE-OUT DOUBLE

Double of opponents' suit bid

A *take-out double* (as opposed to a *penalty double*) after the opponents have bid one or more suits typically has:

- 12+ pts (or 9 - 11 with 'distribution' if previously passed) and a shortage in one of opponents' suits.
- If opponents have bid 1 suit: at least 3 cards in all unbid suits.
- If opponents have bid 2 suits: at least 4 cards in all unbid suits.

Partner must respond unless:

- He has a strong hand with length & strength in opponent's suit and wants to convert it to a penalty double, or
- The opponents make an intervening bid

Base responses on the assumption that partner has 13 pts with 4-4-4-1 distribution (10 pts if previously passed). Bid as many of your best suit as you think you can jointly make. Alternatively, with 2 stops in opponents' suit bid 1NT (6 - 9 pts), 2NT (10 - 12) or 3NT (13 - 15).

Responses after opponents' Take-Out Double

- Pass with 0 – 5 pts.
- Re-double with 10+ points and a shortage in partner's suit. Suggests anything opponents bid should be doubled.
- With 4 card support for partner's suit, raise pre-emptively (1 level higher than normal), i.e.
0 – 5 pts, raise 1 level
6 – 9 pts, raise 2 levels
10 + pts, bid 2NT. If left hand opponent passes, partner will raise the suit to the 3 or 4 level.
- Bid 1NT with 6 - 9 pts and 2 or 3 card support for partner's suit.
- Change suit with 6 - 10 pts (a 1 round force). It is important to show a 4 card Major at the 1 level.
- Jump in a new suit with 12+ pts and a good 6 card suit. Game forcing.

Double of opponents' 1 No Trumps opening bid

A double after the opponents have opened 1 No Trumps is for penalties, not take-out. With Balanced Hands you should hold at least a good 16 points (plenty of intermediates or a 5 card suit) over a 'Weak No Trump' (12 – 14pts) and at least 18 points over a 'Strong No Trump' (15 – 17pts).

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CHAPTER 53: BALANCING (PROTECTIVE BIDDING)

Balancing is a technique that should only be used by more experienced players and with prior agreement with partner.

You are in the 'Balancing Position' when your left hand opponent opens the bidding and that is followed by 2 passes. In these circumstances the opener should have no more than 19 pts (or he would have made a 2 level bid) and his partner no more than 5 pts (otherwise he would have responded with a 1 level bid), making a combined 24 pts maximum. Statistically it is more likely that both pairs have around 20 pts each, i.e. the points for both sides are more or less balanced. If you have less than a normal opening bid it is likely that your partner has enough points for an opening bid but was not able to find a suitable bid over the opponent's opening bid.

Passing in the Balancing Position is giving the opponents an easy time. By bidding you hope to steal a contract that would otherwise have been missed, or push the opponents end up at a level where they are likely to go down, or just stop them from reaching Game with a part score in Rubber Bridge.

When decided whether to bid in the Balancing Position, you should use the 'Theory of the Deferred King'. Imagine that your hand contains an extra 3 points (a King borrowed from partner) and bid accordingly. When partner chooses a response he will deduct the 3 points from his hand before bidding.

If a partnership uses Balancing, the bidding guidelines are modified as follows:

- A simple suit overcall at the 1 level with 6+ pts and a reasonable quality 5 card suit
- A simple suit overcall at the 2 level with 8+ pts and a good quality 5 card suit
- A jump suit overcall with a 6 card suit and 7+ playing tricks (probably ~ 15 pts)
- Double with the usual shape (see Chapter 52) and 9+ pts
- 1 No Trumps with 11 – 14 pts and at least 1 stopper in opponents' suit
- 2 No Trumps with 19 – 22 pts and 2 stoppers in opponents' suit
- With a balanced 15 – 18 pts, Double and bid No Trumps at the lowest level next time round

Note: in rubber bridge beware of what appears to be a balancing situation which is actually opponents stopping at the 1 level because that is all they need for Game.

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SECTION 6 - MISCELLANEOUS

CHAPTER 61: PLAYING TRICKS & QUICK TRICKS

Playing Tricks

The strength of a strong Distributional Hand is usually assessed in terms of "Playing Tricks", rather than High Card Points. The number of Playing Tricks in a suit is determined by assuming that all the cards in the suit are distributed evenly between the other 3 hands:

AKQJ	Will produce 4 tricks
AKQJ32	Should produce 6 tricks. After playing the top 4 honours the other tricks should be good.
AK65432	Should produce at least 5 tricks (and maybe more).
AQ	Will make 2 tricks if the finesse works or 1 if it loses, so call it 1½ tricks.
AQJ	Will make 2 or 3 tricks depending on the finesse(s), so call it 2½ tricks.
K53	Is taken to be half a trick. K usually makes half the time.
KQ3	1 or 1½ tricks.
KQJ765	Should make 4½ or 5 tricks.
AJ8532	Probably 3½ or 4 tricks.

Assessing Playing Tricks is not an exact science. It is better to be a little over-optimistic than the other way round.

Quick Tricks

When partner has a long strong trump suit, he will be interested to know how many 'Quick Tricks' (QT) your hand can supply in the other suits. For example, when partner opens with a 'Strong Two' (e.g. 2 Hearts or 2 Spades) showing 8 Playing Tricks, if your hand can supply 2 Quick Tricks then game should be on.

- Ace = 1 QT
- KQ = 1 QT
- AK = 2 QT
- KQJ = 2 QT, etc.
- A, K or Q in partner's suit is usually worth a QT too.
- Queens, Jacks & 10's count as 'plus values' with 2 plus values making up ½ QT.
- No suit can contain more than 2 QT.

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CHAPTER 62: OPENING LEADS

Choosing a good opening lead is very important and can often make or break a contract.

Against a suit contract it is usually the first two rounds of a suit that are important, and consequently it's often correct to concentrate on the quick trick taking potential of a suit – i.e. honours. Subsequent rounds are less important, since there is a high probability that they are going to be ruffed.

However against no-trumps you are trying to establish a suit; and part of this process is maintaining communications with partner, so it's much more of a patient waiting game – less emphasis on the actual lead of an honour, more about trying to eventually benefit from the length of the suit.

Here are some general guidelines:-

CHOOSING WHICH SUIT TO LEAD

Leading a suit bid (or suggested) by partner is usually a good move, especially if it was bid as an over-call which suggests a fairly solid suit. Reasons for not leading your partner's suit could be:

- A dangerous holding in the suit such as A-x-x (see below).
- An especially inviting alternative lead, like a singleton or solid suit.
- When a trump lead seems correct.

Choosing which suit to lead against a Suit Contract

If partner has not bid, there are 3 basic leads:

- A short suit (especially a singleton) in the hope of a ruff.
- Your longest and strongest suit.
- Trumps (but not a singleton).

Choosing which suit to lead against a No Trumps Contract

If partner has not bid, generally lead your longest and strongest suit unless:

- You are very weak and unlikely to get in to cash your winners.
- Your longest suit is only 4 cards headed by a solitary King or Queen.

In these cases it is better to lead a suit that the opponents have not bid, hoping that partner may be strong in that suit.

CHOOSING WHICH CARD TO LEAD

General Guidelines

- Lead the top of a sequence (see below)
- Lead a low card to show interest in a suit (you have an honour in the suit), or a higher card to deny interest (no honour). For example:-
 - ... lead the 4th highest from a long suit with an honour
 - ... lead the 3rd highest from 3 to an honour
 - ... lead the 2nd highest from nothing
 - ... lead "Middle-Up-Down" (MUD) from 3 small cards
 - ... lead the top of a doubleton (although this can be a risky lead, especially if it is an honour)

Leads against a Suit Contract

- Lead the top of 2 or more touching high cards (if 10 or above), e.g. Q from **Q**-J-x
Exception: don't lead away from an Ace against a suit contract, e.g. with A-J-10-x find another suit to lead.
- Lead a low card to show interest in a suit (if you have an honour), e.g. 2 from Q-8-5-**2**
- Lead a higher card to show no interest in a suit (if you have no honour), e.g. 7 from 9-**7**-3-2
- Lead trumps if all other leads look unattractive (but don't lead a singleton if the bidding indicates that partner may hold 4 trumps).
- In general, do not lead an Ace without holding the King (one exception to this is against a slam where quick tricks may be required).
- Do not under-lead an Ace
- Try to avoid under-leading a King

So when partner leads an honour against a suit contract, he also promises the card below (or a singleton, or possibly a doubleton) and unless he leads the Ace he denies having the Ace in that suit.

Leads against a No Trumps Contract

- Lead the 4th highest card of the longest suit, unless it is a weak suit with no honour or a weak hand with no entries, e.g. lead 5 from Q-9-8-**5**-3
- Lead a high card from a poor holding, usually the 2nd highest, e.g. 8 from 9-**8**-7-5
- With a sequence of 3 or more significant high cards lead the highest of the touching cards (as long as it is 10 or higher). There are 3 types of sequence:

Sequence type	Definition	Example	Lead	
Complete Sequence	3 or more consecutive high cards		Q -J-10-x	Queen
Broken Sequence	2 touching high cards with the next but one below		J -10-8-x	Jack
Interior Sequence	2 touching high cards with one more above		A- J -10-x	Jack

The lead from a sequence against a No Trumps contract gives partner a lot of information and will help

him to choose the best card to play on the first trick. Except in the rare case where the lead may be a doubleton, leading an honour promises:

- Holding the card below
- Holding either the card 2 below, the card 3 below or a higher honour
- Denies having the card above

For example:

Lead	Sequence	Broken Sequence	Interior Sequence
Ace	<u>A</u> -K-Q-x	<u>A</u> -K-J-x	
King	<u>K</u> -Q-J-x	<u>K</u> -Q-10-x	
Queen	<u>Q</u> -J-10-x	<u>Q</u> -J-9-x	
Jack	<u>J</u> -10-9-x	<u>J</u> -10-8-x	A- <u>J</u> -10-x or K- <u>J</u> -10-x
Ten	<u>10</u> -9-8-x	<u>10</u> -9-7-x	A- <u>10</u> -9-x or K- <u>10</u> -9-x or Q- <u>10</u> -9-x

In summary, when leading an un-bid suit against a No Trumps contract:

- Leading an honour indicates a sequence (or rarely a doubleton)
- Leading a small card indicates the 4th highest from a suit headed by an honour
- Leading a higher intermediate card indicates a suit with no honour card

When leading partner's suit against a No Trumps contract, choose the top of a doubleton or the top of touching honours. Otherwise lead low from three or more cards.

Further Reading

The guidelines above show how to pick the right card to lead from any given suit. Most of them hold true throughout the game, especially leading low from honours. They also hold true when leading partner's suit: you should not always lead the highest of your partner's suit, but follow the rules given above.

Click on the following links for more examples and explanations of standard opening leads:

[Opening Leads, part 1](#)

[Opening Leads, part 2](#)

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CHAPTER 63: TRIAL BIDS

After the trump suit has been agreed, a bid in another suit asks partner to clarify his hand to see if a Game contract is on. The meaning of trial bids differs depending on whether the trump suit is a Major or Minor suit.

Major Suit Trial Bids

After the sequence 1H → 2H or 1S → 2S, opener bids a suit in which he requires help – typically a suit with 3 'quick losers'. If responder is able to reduce the number of losers because of a high card holding or a shortage he raises to Game, otherwise he signs off in 3 of the agreed trump suit and opener passes.

- With 3 losers: bid 3 of the trump suit
- With 2 losers, having raised on a minimum (6 – 7 pts): bid 3 of the trump suit
- With 2 losers, having raised on a maximum (8 – 9 pts): bid 4 of the trump suit
- With 1 or no losers: bid 4 of the trump suit

Minor Suit Trial Bids

After the sequences 1C → 2C, 1D → 2D, 1C → 3C or 1D → 3D, opener investigates the possibility of a No Trumps contract by bidding the lowest suit in which he holds stoppers (e.g. a minimum holding of A-x, K-x, Q-10-x or J-x-x-x). Such a bid is made in the belief that Game is a possibility, so after a 2 level raise it requires 17+ pts and after a 3 level raise it requires 14+ pts.

If responder holds any stoppers he bids the lowest ranking suit with a stopper, or No Trumps at the appropriate level with stoppers in all the un-bid suits. Without any stoppers he signs off in the agreed trump suit and opener passes.