

Oxford Students' Bridge Association

Beginners' Lessons 2009

Lesson 5. 2 and higher level openings

Sarah Cochrane (sarah.cochrane@worc.ox.ac.uk)

Paul Hunter (paul.hunter@comlab.ox.ac.uk)

Introduction

We have now covered most of the sequences that can happen after someone opens at the 1 level and only one side bids. We will now look at 2 level and higher level opening bids, which show strong hands and weak single suited hands respectively.

Opening 2NT and responses

A 2NT opening is made on a 20-22 balanced hand (limit bid). I suggest that you open this, even if you have a good 5 card major suit. Responses are:

- **Pass.** 0-4 HCP, any shape. There are no weak takeouts after a 2NT opening in Acol.
- **3NT.** 5+ HCP, to play.
- **3C/D/H/S** 5+ HCP, **game forcing** with 5 card suit.
- **4H/S and 5C/D** to play. Slam denying.
- **4NT** 11-12, fairly balanced, invite to 6NT (like the 1NT-4NT response)
Other bids natural and slam try. This includes 4C/D – when an auction is **game forced** the **faster** you arrive at game, the **less interest** you have in slam. This is known at the **principle of fast arrival**. 5H and 5S are **voluntary** bids above game, suggesting slam if opener has a maximum or a good fit with responder's suit.

Opening 2D/H/S and responses

A 2D/H/S **but not 2C** (see later) opening in Acol shows 20-22 HCP (or distributional equivalent) or **8+ playing tricks** and a good 5 card suit (preferably 6). Playing tricks are defined as tricks that the hand would be expected to make on its own, assuming the rest of the cards in each suit divide fairly equally. To count your **playing tricks** (PTs):

- Add one PT for any quick trick or trick that can be set up
- Add one PT for any card below the 3rd in a suit with 7 or more cards
- Add one PT for any 5 card suit, or 2 for any 6 card suit (providing that doesn't take the total number of tricks in that suit to more than can obviously be taken in it)
- Add 0.5 PT for any positional trick (e.g., if you can take a finesse)

So, for example: AKxx, AQJT9, Kx, AQ has 2PT in spades, 4.5 in hearts, 0.5 in diamonds and 1.5 in clubs for a total of 8.5. The hand must also hold reasonable **defensive values**. This would qualify for a 2H opening owing to the quality of the Heart suit. These openings are not truly limit bids as they encompass many possible hand shapes, so they are **forcing for one round**. Responses are:

2NT. 0-7 HCP, any shape. This is the **artificial negative** bid and is slam denying (an artificial bid is one that bears no direct resemblance to the hand making the bid). If opener repeats his first suit at the 3 level, responder may pass with 0-4 HCP. Alternatively, if opener bids a lower ranking suit at the 3 level, responder gives **preference** with 0-4HCP. Other bids are game forcing.

Any other bid is natural, game forcing and slam suggesting. When raising opener's suit directly, a raise to the 3 level is strongly slam suggesting, whereas a raise to game is weaker (fast arrival).

With this hand strength and clubs as the longest suit, you must open 1C and make a strong action (e.g., jump shift, reverse) later in the auction.

Opening 2C

A 2C opening in Acol is **artificial** and is the strongest opening bid that can be made. It is made on a hand that either:

- Is balanced with 23 or more points
- Can justify bidding game without any help from partner (so **9+ playing tricks**).

Good defensive values are also necessary. A game forcing bid forces the partnership to play in a game contract **or defend a doubled contract**. Strong distributional hands are better opened 2D/H/S and hands that can provide lots of tricks based on one long running suit are opened **pre-emptively** at the 3 level or higher (see later). Essentially a 2C opening is immediately Game forcing, with one exception:

2D is the artificial negative response showing 0-7 HCP and little or no slam interest. Opener will rebid 2NT with 23-24 balanced (bid 3NT with stronger balanced hands) which responder can pass with 0-1 HCP. Any other sequence is game forcing.

3 level openings – pre-emptive bidding

Before we consider this, we must look at how **vulnerability** (in duplicate bridge you are vulnerable if your position on the board is indicated by a red marker) affects scoring.

Game bonus: 300 when non-vuln, 500 when vuln (so 4H making 10 tricks scores 420 non-vuln, but 620 vuln)

Undertricks: 50 per undertrick non-vuln, 100 vuln

However, if you bid to a contract that your opponents think will not make, they can **double** you. This increases the penalty for going off in a contract (but also increases the

rewards for making it). You may also **redouble** your own (or partner's) contract after the opponents double you if you think it will make. If you go off in a doubled contract:

<u>No. undertricks</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
Non-vulnerable	100	300	500	800	1100	1400
Vulnerable	200	500	800	1100	1400	1700

Note that if you are non-vul and opponents are vulnerable, you will get a better score (-500) for going 3 off doubled than for allowing opponents to make a Game contract (-600 at best). Bidding a contract after opponents have reached Game for this purpose is known as **sacrifice** bidding. Pre-emptive bids are made for the same reasons **before** opponents have had the chance to explore their hands.

Opening 3 of a suit (or higher)

This is made with **fewer than 10 HCP** and a **7 card suit** (or sometimes a good 6 card suit). The HCP should be mostly in the long suit. Such hands are valuable when playing the contract, but pretty useless when defending against a suit contract. The aim of making a **pre-emptive** bid is to (a) remove opponents' bidding space as they are likely to have to stronger hands and (b) suggest to partner that a sacrifice might exist if opponents bid Game.

How high to open?

A rough guide is the **Rule of 3 and 2**. Count your playing tricks (1 for any A, K or Q in your long suit, 1 for any card below the 3rd in the long suit and however many you may hold outside the trump suit). Add 3 to this number if non-vuln (2 if vuln) and open the auction with a bid for that many tricks. Most modern duplicate bridge players pre-empt much more aggressively than this...

Position around the table is also important. You should be most aggressive when you are in the 3rd seat since your partner has passed and the remaining opponent is likely to have a very strong hand. In 1st seat, you have 2 opponents bidding after you and only one partner, so you can still afford to be aggressive. You should be more careful in 2nd seat since you have an equal chance of pre-empting your partner as the opponents.

Responding to your partner's pre-empts

Raising your partner's pre-empts may be done for 2 reasons. (a) with expectation to make Game if you have a strong hand or (b) to raise the pre-empt and remove more bidding space with a weak, distributional hand with a fit for partner. Note that once you have made a pre-emptive bid **you should not raise your own pre-empt, even as a sacrifice over opponents game**. You know nothing about your partner's hand, and you are likely to get doubled go for a large penalty!!

Bidding over an opponent's pre-empt

Your side may well have the balance of points, even values for Game. However, as you have to enter the auction at a high level, you must be careful. The higher the level of the

pre-empt, the stronger the hand that overcalls it is. If North makes a 3 level pre-empt, East (in the **direct** seat – the one immediately after opener) can bid:

3NT on 19+ (you expect partner to hold some values) balanced with a **double stop** in opener's suit. Partner (West) will usually pass, but may prefer to play in 4H/S.

Bid a suit at the lowest level to show 16+ HCP with a good 6 card suit (the HCP can be reduced as the suit quality and length increases). Partner (W) should pass if weak or raise (2 card support is OK) or bid his/her own suit if stronger. With a very strong hand, West can make a **cue-bid in opener's suit**. This is artificial and shows **support for East's suit with Slam ambition**.

Jump bid a suit. Generally done when you know where you want to play (e.g., a strong, single suited hand (7+ cards)).

Make a takeout double. Double is not always used to penalise opponents. It is often more useful to have this as a constructive bid. Typically, if North opens 3H, East will make a takeout double with **shortage in hearts, length in the other 3 suits and 16+ HCP**. It asks West to bid his/her longest suit. Typically East will hold: AKxx, x, KQxx, AJxx.

After East's takeout double (assuming South passes), West will:

Pass for penalties with a **good** hand with heart length.

Bid a suit at the lowest level with 0-8 HCP, opener may pass if minimum.

Jump bid with a long suit and strong hand (9+ HCP)

Cue bid 4 of opener's suit with a very strong hand, length in the 3 other suits and slam interest.

DO NOT PASS YOUR PARTNER'S TAKEOUT DOUBLE WITH A WEAK HAND. The scores for tricks bid and made double if you allow the opponents to make a doubled contract. Therefore, 3S doubled making will score 180 for the tricks bid and made, 300 for the Game bonus (if not vulnerable) and 50 "for the insult" of doubling a making contract...

If any player makes a takeout double then bids a new suit, this shows a hand that was too strong to bid that suit directly.

Bidding in the pass-out seat

If North's pre-emptive opening is followed by 2 passes, it is likely East held some values (possible a balanced 15HCP!), so West should be more aggressive. Generally, follow the same principles as in the direct seat, but you should "add a king" to your hand before making the decision to act.

Sacrifice bidding

If North opens 3S, East bids 4H and South holds: Qxxx, xx, Axxxxx, x; 4H will probably make, so South may bid 4S as a **sacrifice** against this. He should do this if he is certain

that 4H will make and expects that 4S going off doubled will score better. From looking at the scores above, this means that:

- At equal vulnerability, 4S can go no more than 2 off
- When non-vuln vs. vuln, 4S can go no more than 3 off
- When vuln vs. non-vuln, 4S can go no more than 1 off

If South chooses to sacrifice in 4S, E/W must decide whether to double 4S for penalties or bid 5H hoping to make.

If you have a choice, it is always better to bid pre-emptively by raising partner's pre-empt **before** the opponent's have acted. The less information they have about their hands, the less likely they are to make the correct choice of bidding Game or doubling you.

Card play following pre-empts

After a high level pre-empting side buys the contract, little is know about either hand. It is often a good idea to cash an ace on the opening lead to see Dummy. This is especially true in the contract is to be played in NT.

When you declare a contract after opponents have pre-empted, remember that opener is less likely to hold length or high cards outside his long suit. So if, for example, you have to take a **two-way finesse**, this extra information might help you.

Key Points from Lesson 5

- Opening strong hands at the 2 level and the artificial 2NT response.
- Artificial 2C opening.
- Pre-empting on weak hands with long suits.
- The effect of vulnerability on scoring.
- The effect of position around the table in pre-emptive auctions.
- Bidding over opponent's pre-empt.
- Take-out and penalty doubles.
- Cue-bids of opponents suits.
- Voluntary bids above game as slam tries.
- Sacrifice bidding.

—*written by Rob Richardson, 2004*

Bidding Summary

Point values should be adjusted for distribution when a fit is found. Abbreviations: cs = card suit, F = forcing, G = Game, bal = balanced, M = major, m = minor, sup = card support, Sl = slam, inv = invitational to, dep = depending on, F1 = forcing for one round, gd = good

Opener	Responder	Opener rebid	Responder rebid
2NT 20-22, bal	Pass 0-4, any shape	-	-
	3C/D/H/S 5+, 5cs, FG	3NT or suit game with 3cs	-
	3NT 5+, to play	-	-
	4H/S 5+, 6+cs, to play	-	-
	5C/D 5+, 6+cs, to play	-	-
	4NT, 11-12, inv Sl	Pass (min) / 6NT (max)	
	4C/D, 6+cs, inv Sl. FG	5C/D min, no fit	
		6C/D/NT max, or gd fit	
		Pass or 6H/S/(NT)	
		5H/S, 6+cs, inv Sl	3 same suit, 8 PT
2D/H/S 20-22 gd 5+cs, F or distributional equiv 8+ playing tricks (PT)	2NT 0-7, negative, F1	3 lower ranking suit 8PT	Others, nat, FG
	Slam denying		3 level pref 0-4
		Others nat, FG	Others, nat, FG
	Others 9+, nat, FG, slam encouraging fast arrival applies (2S-3S is stronger than 2S-4S)		
2C Game force 9+PT or 23-24 bal	2D 0-7, slam denying	2NT 23-24 balanced	Pass 0-1
		3NT 25-26 bal	Others as over 2NT open
		Others, nat, FG	
3C/H/D/S, 7+cs, <10 HCP pre-emptive	Others, nat, FG, fast arrival		
	Raise further pre-empt or expecting to make if 4H/S or 5C/D		
4C/H/D/S or 5C/D The strength of pre-emptive bids varies around the table: 4 th > 2 nd > 1 st > 3 rd	3NT to play with stops		
	Suit change, nat, FG		
	As 3 level, but longer suits		
Directly after opponents 3 level pre-empt (these are generally 3 HCP lighter in the pass-out position):			
Overcaller	Overcaller's partner	Overcaller	
3NT, 19+ bal, double stop in opener's suit, to play	Pass		
Non-jump suit 16+, 6cs	Raise to game		
	Others, nat, FG		
	Cue-bid opener's suit shows slam interest		
Jump suit bid, 6+cs, to play if not above Game, if above Game, slam invite in that suit	Pass – long in opener's suit, penalties		
Double, 16+, takeout	Suit at lowest level 0-10	Pass minimim	
		Raise to play (or invG)	
		Change suit 19+ or dist, slam try	
	Jump bid 11+ slam interest		
	Cue bid opener's suit 3 suited hand, slam interest		

Generally, the higher the level of the overcall, a stronger hand is required to overcall it. 3S is harder to overcall than 3C