

The Foundation System

Minor Suit Bidding

PRIORITIES

The priorities in the minor suit bidding structure are governed by the scoring rules which assign a lesser value to tricks won with a minor suit as trump. Thus, the priorities are:

- (1) Find a 44 or 53 or better fit in a major suit and play game or partscore in the major.
- (2) In the absence of a major suit fit, play game or partscore in notrump.
- (3) If unable to play in a major suit fit or notrump, play game or partscore in a minor.
- (4) If slam in a minor suit appears possible, forget the first three priorities until certain there is no slam; then fall back on the first three priorities.
- (5) With hands so weak that you do not expect to make whatever contract you play in, forget the first four priorities and play in the safest contract; undertricks count the same in a minor as in a major or notrump.

THE 1C & 1D OPENING BID

Detailed requirements for a minor suit opening bid were spelled out in the Opening Bid chapter. You will recall that the requirements are a balanced hand with 12-14 HCP or 18-19 HCP, or an unbalanced hand with 11-21 HCP and a LTC less than 8 and greater than 3. In choosing between 1C and 1D, with two 3-card suits you always open 1C. This ensures that a 1D opening bid will always show a 4+card suit unless holding both 4-card majors. With two 4-card suits, the primary rule is to **plan your rebid**. If you plan to rebid 1NT over any 1-level response by partner, open whichever suit is stronger, but choose 1C if both suits are more-or-less equal in strength. With a singleton or weak doubleton in one of the majors, so that you are reluctant to rebid 1NT over a response in the other major, open 1D so that you may rebid 2C rather than 1NT over the response in the other major. With 54 in the minors, you will always open the longer suit with one exception: a minimum hand with a good 4-card diamond suit may be opened 1D if the club suit is too weak (K10xxx or worse) to rebid.

THE NT RESPONSES

These all show balanced hands (in principle) with no 4+card major suit. Over a 1C opening, 1NT shows 8-10 HCP, 2NT shows 11-12 HCP, and 3NT shows 13-15 HCP; with 6-7 HCP you should respond 1D rather than 1NT. Over a 1D opening, the 1NT response must cover the full range of 6-10 HCP. This is why we prefer opening 1C rather than 1D whenever possible. **Note:** A minimum **unbalanced** hand with length in clubs and no 4+card major may have to respond 1NT over a 1D opening when not strong enough to bid 2C. Do so if holding a singleton diamond, but with a singleton or void in a major, it is better to bid the other major if it is Axx or K10x or better. If playing 2/1 Game Forcing, the same problem arises when holding invitational strength with length in clubs; you must decide whether to bid 1NT, 2NT, or a 3-card major.

OPENER'S REBIDS AFTER THE NT RESPONSES

Since Responder has shown a balanced hand with no 4-card major, our priorities are now (in order): a NT slam, a minor suit slam, 3NT, or a minor suit (or 2NT) partscore, although a major suit contract may still be reached occasionally on a 53 or 43 fit when Opener has a singleton or void.

When Opener is balanced, we have a pure HCP auction; Opener adds his HCP to those shown by Responder and bids the appropriate number of NT; a jump to 4NT here is invitational, asking Responder to bid 6NT if at the top of his announced HCP range. For 4NT to be treated as some form of Blackwood, Opener must make a forcing bid in a new suit and then bid 4NT. Any new suit rebid by Opener (except the sequence 1D/1NT/2C) is forcing one round and presumed to be a 4-card suit, but a major suit bid could be a well-stopped 3-card suit, with a weak doubleton in one or both unbid suits which Responder must be able to control if NT is to be a viable contract. With a relatively balanced 5332 or 6322 shape, Opener will usually just rebid some number of NT; a simple rebid of his minor shows such a shape (or an unbalanced 6331, 6421 or 6430 where the 4-card suit is a major), and implies a serious weakness for NT, such as two weak doubletons, a singleton or void, or a suit such as Jxxxx that is unlikely to be usable in NT.

When Opener is unbalanced, he will bid a new suit (forcing except for a 2C rebid after a 1D opening), or rebid his minor (not forcing, but a 3-level jump rebid asks Responder to bid 3NT with a fitting honor in Opener's suit). We're now back in LTC territory. A forcing new suit bid by Opener shows LTC = 4-5; a simple rebid of his minor shows LTC = 6-7; and a jump rebid of his minor shows LTC = 5-6. The focus is still on finding a playable 3NT contract, but the caution flag is out because of Opener's probable singleton or void. When Opener holds a solid suit (AKQxx or better, balanced or unbalanced), he must be aggressive about pursuing a NT contract, since Responder will be conservative because of the lack of a fitting honor, yet that lack increases the likelihood than Responder will be able to cover any suit in which Opener lacks a stopper.

THE 1H AND 1S RESPONSES

These show 5+HCP and a 4+card suit. With 54 in the majors, you will always bid the 5-card suit. With 44 in the majors you will always bid 1H unless you have a double stopper in spades (KJ9x or better) and no stopper in hearts (10xxx or worse). You will often respond 1H or 1S when holding 4+card support for Opener's minor or a 5+card suit in the other minor. Over a 1C opening, you will bid 1D first with a 5+card suit and invitational strength or better (11+HCP), planning to bid the major on the next round. Over a 1D opening, the situation is more complex, since it depends on whether you are playing Standard American or 2/1 Game Forcing. In Standard American, you can bid 2C with invitational strength or better, but in 2/1, the 2C bid requires game-forcing strength (12-13 HCP or more).

OPENER'S REBIDS OVER THE 1H AND 1S RESPONSES

This section covers those auctions in which Responder bids a major suit in response to an opening bid in a minor suit; e.g., 1C/1H, 1C/1S, 1D/1H, or 1D/1S (all with opponents silent). Opener's range is 11-21 HCP, while Responder's range is 5-15 (if playing old fashioned strong jump shifts) or 5-29 (if playing modern preemptive jump shifts). Opener's raise will normally show 4-card support, but can be based on 3-card support (with a doubleton, singleton or void in a side suit) if no reasonable alternative bid is available.

The 1S Rebid (LTC = 4-8): Over a 1H response, a 1S rebid covers a wide range and is absolutely forcing with one exception; if Responder has a singleton or void in Opener's minor and elected to bid with a sub-minimum hand (less than 4 HCP), he may pass since game is extremely unlikely if Opener was unable to open 2C. With a minimum-range hand (5-10 HCP), Responder will raise one of Opener's suits if possible (showing 0-2 cover cards), rebid 2H with a 5+card suit, or rebid 1NT. Responder has one other option here: a jump to 3 of the other minor. Despite the jump, this shows a minimum-range hand with only 4 hearts, but with a 6+card minor, having bid the major first to explore for a major suit fit (Recall that with invitational strength or better, Responder would have bid his minor first). With invitational strength (11-12 HCP), Responder can raise either of Opener's suits to the 3-level (showing 3 cover cards), rebid 2NT, jump rebid to 3H with a 6+card suit, or bid the fourth suit (the other minor). The fourth suit bid (4th Suit Forcing) is artificial and forcing one round, shows nothing about his holding in that suit, but implies a 5-card heart suit and asks Opener to show 3-card support if possible, or make some other descriptive bid. With game-forcing strength (13+ HCP), Responder can bid game in spades (4 cover cards), in NT, or in Opener's minor (5 cover cards), or bid the fourth suit to elicit 3-card heart support or explore the possibility of slam in Opener's minor.

The NT Rebids: These all deny 4-card support for Responder's major; the 2NT and 3NT rebids also deny a 4-card holding in the other major. The 1NT rebid shows a minimum balanced hand (11-14 HCP). With a minimum hand (5-10 HCP), Responder will pass with a balanced hand, rebid a decent 5-card major or any 6+card major, or support Opener's minor at the 2-level. With invitational strength (11-12 HCP), Responder can raise to 2NT, jump to 3 of his major with a 6+card suit, raise either of Opener's suits to the 3-level, or bid the other minor. Like 4th Suit Forcing, this bid is artificial and forcing (New Minor Forcing), and shows nothing about Responder's holding in that suit, but implies a 5-card major and asks Opener to show 3-card support if possible, or make some other descriptive bid. With game-forcing strength, Responder can raise to 3NT or 4 of either major, or use New Minor Forcing to ask for 3-card support for his major or explore for a possible slam in Opener's minor. After using New Minor Forcing, if Responder then rebids his major after Opener has denied 3-card support, Responder shows a 6+card suit and slam possibilities (if Opener has a doubleton honor in support, for instance). **Opener's 2NT rebid** shows a balanced 18-19 HCP (Remember that with a balanced 15-17 he would have opened 1NT). Responder's options here follow a similar pattern; New Minor Forcing is still available to ask about 3-card support. **Opener's 3NT rebid** shows a solid 6+card minor AKQxxxx or better with a stopper in each unbid suit.

The 2C and 2D Rebids: If Opener rebids his minor at the 2-level, or rebids 2C after opening 1D, he shows a minimum-range opening and denies the ability to make any of the major suit raises described below. With a minimum-range hand, Responder will pass or rebid a 5+card major. If Opener has bid both minors, Responder will bid 2D unless he has more clubs than diamonds; this bid can be made with doubleton support if no better bid is available. If Opener has rebid his minor, Responder can bid the other minor with a 6+card minor and 4-card major. This is weak, even if rebidding 3C over 2D, since with invitational strength Responder would have bid the minor first, but the 3C rebid would only be chosen as a desperation measure with a singleton or void in Opener's minor, and even then only if at the top of the minimum HCP range. Responder can also bid 2H after first responding 1S; this shows 5+ spades and 4+ hearts. With invitational strength or better, Responder can raise Opener's minor (either if Opener has bid both), bid 2NT or 3NT, or jump rebid his major with a 6+card suit. New Minor Forcing is also available if Opener has bid only one minor, and a jump in a new suit is always available as an absolute force. If Responder's first response was 1H, a 2S rebid is forcing, and presumed to be a 4-card suit, even though Opener has not rebid 1S and therefore does not have a 4-card suit, but the 2S rebid could be merely showing a stopper en route to 3NT or a possible slam.

The Reverse (LTC = 4-5): Any 2-level rebid by Opener in a suit that is higher-ranking than the minor he opened originally (thus any new suit rebid of 2H or 2S after a 1C or 1D opening, or a 2D rebid after a 1C opening) is called a reverse and is absolutely forcing (with the usual exception of a weak 0-3 HCP response with a singleton or void in Opener's minor). This is a strong bid, since it forces Responder to go to the 3-level, even with a weak hand, if he prefers Opener's first suit. The reverse is presumed to show at least 54 in Opener's two suits, but will sometimes be made with 44 or 53 or 63 shape in order to learn more about Responder's hand. Responder is expected to rebid naturally, raising either of Opener's suits, rebidding his own suit, or bidding NT or the fourth suit.

The Single Raise (LTC = 6-8): Responder will pass with less than 3 cover cards, make a game try with 3 cover cards, bid game with 4 cover cards, or make a slam try with 5+ cover cards. To make the game or slam try, Responder should bid a new suit or 2NT. This is **absolutely forcing** for one round, and allows Opener to reject (by returning to Responder's suit at the 3-level) with LTC = 8 (or a bad 7), to accept by jumping to game with LTC = 6, or to pass the buck (with a good LTC = 7) by rebidding his own suit or by bidding a new suit below 3 of Responder's major (allowing Responder to reevaluate his cover cards based on the additional information about Opener's distribution).

The Double Raise (LTC = 5): Responder will pass with 0-1 cover card, bid game with 2 cover cards, or bid a new suit as a slam try with 3+ cover cards.

The Triple Raise (LTC = 4): Responder will pass with 0-2 cover cards, or bid a new suit as a slam try with LTC = 3.

The Splinter Raise (LTC = 4-5): A double jump in a new suit by Opener (e.g., 1C/1S/4D) shows a singleton or void in the new suit with 4-card support. Responder now does not count the king and queen of the splinter suit as cover cards, but kings in all other suits are

sure cover cards, and queens in other suits are probable cover cards. Thus 3 cover cards are worth a slam try, which usually takes the form of a cue bid in Opener's first suit or a side suit, or perhaps a direct 4NT Blackwood or Roman Keycard Blackwood bid.

The Fit Raise: A double jump in Opener's suit (e.g., 1C/1S/4C) shows good 4-card support (KQxx or better) with a strong 6-card minor (AKxxxx or better) with little or no strength in the unbid suits. This useful bid has become nearly standard in expert circles, but is not part of the Foundation System.

THE 2H AND 2S RESPONSES (also 2D over 1C and 3C over 1D)

These show a minimum range hand with a 6+card suit and 5-9 HCP. Opener will usually pass or raise your suit. If Opener makes any other rebid, he should expect nothing more from you than a double stopper in your suit. You should have no more than one ace or king outside your suit, and may have **nothing** useful outside your suit. You choose this response only with a hand whose prospects for game are slim or none unless Opener can support your suit.

A generation ago, these responses were strong, forcing to game with 16+HCP and a 5+card suit, suggesting a possible slam. This treatment is relatively rare with modern players, but some, including the author, frequently play this response as forcing to game with 13+HCP and a 5-card suit, with slam prospects only if Opener is stronger than minimum or Responder is in the 16+HCP range.

THE 1D RESPONSE TO 1C

One example of this has already been described (a balanced 6-7 HCP). That example is the only case where the 1D response might be based on a 3-card suit; in all other situations the bid implies a 4+card suit. With a minimum hand (5-10 HCP), you will not choose this bid if you hold a 4+card major. With invitational strength or better (11+HCP) and a 4-card major, you should bid 1D with a 5+card (or a good 4-card) diamond suit, planning to bid the major on the next round, or raise the major if Opener bids it first. Delaying the major suit bid until the next round guarantees invitational or better strength.

OPENER'S REBIDS OVER THE 1D RESPONSE

Opener's 1H or 1S Rebid (LTC = 4-8): Opener will always bid a 4+card major if he holds one. With both majors (i.e., 4414 or 4405 shape), Opener will bid 1H unless he holds a double stopper in spades (KJ9x or better) and no stopper in hearts (10xxx or worse). This bid is absolutely forcing (unless Responder has bid 1D with 0-3 HCP and a singleton or void in clubs). Depending on his strength, Responder may raise either of Opener's suits to an appropriate level, rebid NT at an appropriate level, or rebid diamonds at an appropriate level. None of these rebids by Responder is forcing, but the jumps are all invitational; Responder's only forcing action is an artificial bid of the fourth suit (4th Suit Forcing). Responder would usually choose a NT bid instead of the fourth suit if he has a stopper in the fourth suit, so the fourth suit bid is initially presumed to deny a fourth suit stopper. To negate that presumption, Responder must rebid the fourth suit later, or make his initial fourth suit bid a jump (1C/1D/1H/2S or 1C/1D/1S/3H). Responder thus has two

ways to show a legitimate 4-card holding in the fourth suit: jumping in the fourth suit, or bidding and rebidding the fourth suit. Choosing the jump shows more extreme distribution (64 or 74), while the slower route shows less extreme distribution (54 or 44).

Note: Some players reverse the meaning of the fourth suit bids of 1S and 2S. Those players use 1S as a natural bid showing a 4-card spade suit, while the jump to 2S is artificial. This is playable, though not as efficient as the method described above, since it requires reaching the 3-level to show a legitimate spade suit. To avoid confusion, be sure to discuss the meaning of fourth suit spade bids with your partners.

Opener's NT Rebids: These all deny a 4-card major. A 1NT rebid shows a balanced 11-14 HCP, while 2NT shows a balanced 18-19 HCP. A 3NT rebid is a different animal, showing a solid 6+card club suit (AKQxxx or better) with stoppers in the two unbid suits.

Opener's Minor Suit Rebids: These follow the pattern described previously for rebids after Responder's 1H and 1S response. A minimum rebid of 2C is weak, while a jump to 3C is invitational. A raise to 2D is weak, while a jump to 3D is invitational. With better than invitational strength, Opener must start with a 1H or 1S rebid (perhaps based on only a 3-card suit), or with a 2H or 2S rebid. The 2H or 2S rebids are more descriptive, guaranteeing a 4-card suit with a 5+ clubs and denying 3+card diamond support; the 1H or 1S rebids are ambiguous about strength, but will frequently be based on a balanced hand with diamond support, to be shown at an appropriate level on the next round unless Responder steers the partnership toward a NT contract.

THE 2C RESPONSE TO 1D

This bid does not deny a 4-card major. It shows invitational or better strength (and guarantees that Responder will bid again) when playing Standard American, or game-forcing strength when playing 2/1 Game Forcing. It shows a good 4+card suit, and will usually be based on a 5+card suit; Opener will assume a 5+card suit initially, and will often raise with Qxx or better support, hoping to end in 3NT, or perhaps a minor suit slam.

OPENER'S REBIDS AFTER THE 2C RESPONSE TO 1D

Opener is expected to rebid naturally. A major suit rebid is technically a reverse, but in this case does not show (or deny) the extra strength which is required to reverse after a 1-level response, since the invitational strength shown by Responder's 2C bid provides the safety for a 3-level contract. If playing 2/1 Game Forcing, the auction is of course forcing to game. If playing Standard American, the auction can stop at 2NT or three of either minor; if Responder raises Opener's major-suit rebid to the 3-level, this is not absolutely forcing, but Opener will pass only with a bare minimum and no club fit.

MINOR SUIT RAISES

After a 1C or 1D opening, all minor suit raises deny a 4+card major suit and show 4+card support. A single raise (to the 2-level) shows a minimum-range hand (5-10 HCP). A double raise (to the 3-level) shows invitational strength (11-12 HCP). Since a 1C opening is frequently based on a 3-card suit, you should be wary of raising to 3C without 5+card support. Over the double raise, Opener will frequently rebid 3NT with any non-minimum, so your fifth card may well be needed to provide his ninth trick. Preemptive raises to the 4-level and higher are extremely rare; they require not only extreme shape (6+card support or 55 or better in the minors) but also a total lack of interest in a 3NT game.

OPENER'S REBIDS AFTER A MINOR SUIT RAISE

Since Responder has denied a 4+card major, Opener's rebids are aimed primarily at evaluating prospects for a NT game. A 2NT rebid shows a minimum balanced hand with stoppers in both majors. A jump to 3NT shows a balanced hand too strong to open 1NT (18-19 HCP), or perhaps a gambling hand with a running 6+card suit and stoppers in both majors. If Opener rebids the other minor, he shows an unbalanced hand 54 or better in the minors; this could be the start of a slam try, or merely announcing that Responder will need to provide some major suit help in any potential NT contract. Opener's major-suit rebids are usually aiming toward 3NT. The exception is a 55 or 65 hand containing a 5-card major, with which he will bid and rebid the major (or jump shift to three of his major over a single raise). With that exception, the main purpose of a simple major-suit rebid is to show a stopper in that major and deny a stopper in the other major; Responder will need to control the other major if 3NT is to be a viable contract. The other use for a major suit rebid by Opener is to explore the possibility of a minor-suit slam; this usage will be confirmed if Opener moves past 3NT after Responder has cooperated in what he presumed was an invitation to a notrump game.

Inverted Minor Raises

An alternative structure for minor suit raises has grown increasingly popular in recent years, but is not yet part of the Foundation System. This scheme reverses the meaning of the single and double raise. A single raise is forcing one round and shows invitational strength or better with 4+card support. A double raise shows less than invitational strength, usually with 5+card support (although 4-cards support is permissible for the 3D raise, since the 1D bidder will usually have a 4+card suit). Both raises deny a 4+card major. Many rebid structures have been proposed after the inverted single raise. The simplest, which your author endorses, is for opener to rebid 2NT with a balanced 11-14 HCP or 3NT with a balanced 18-19 HCP. Opener needs stoppers in both majors to choose those rebids; a stopper in the other minor, while desirable, is not necessary, since Responder has denied length in either major and therefore is quite likely to have a stopper in the other minor. If Opener stops one major but not the other, he rebids the major he stops. With no major suit stopper, Opener rebids his minor or bids the other minor. Any new suit rebid by either partner is forcing one round.