



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(338) Balanced Opening Hands**

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Level: 1

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#### **General**

When we open the bidding, we have much to communicate about our hand. We generally focus on our longest suit (called our primary suit), but that is not the most important information that we need to communicate to partner. The most important information is our strength (the “bucket”) and our hand type (balanced, unbalanced, or semi-balanced). Here we look at how to describe a variety of different balanced hands.

#### **Balanced Hands by Strength**

When evaluating our hand and determining how to describe it to partner, we use our Total Points = High Card Points (HCP) + Length Points.

- 12-14 points    Open longest suit, rebid 1NT (if no fit found)
- 15-17 points    Open 1NT
- 18-19 points    Open longest suit, rebid 2NT (if no fit found)
- 20-21 points    Open 2NT
- 22+ points    Open 2♣ and rebid Notrump

#### *Example 1*

♠ KJ5

♥ A983

♦ A873

♣ Q5

1♦    1♠

1NT

Here we open the bidding 1♦ and when partner responds 1♠, we rebid 1NT, showing a balanced hand with 12-14 total points with 2-3 cards in the ♠ suit.



*Example 2*

♠ KJ5  
♥ A983  
♦ A873  
♣ AQ  
1♦    1♠  
2NT

Here we open the bidding 1♦ and when partner responds 1♠, we rebid 2NT, showing a balanced hand with 18-19 total points with 2-3 cards in the ♠ suit.

When we open a balanced hand with a suit (either starting with 12-14 points or 18-19 points), we plan to rebid notrump. But if we have a fit for Responder's suit, we raise them instead of rebidding notrump.

- Raise to 2-Major            12-14 points
- Raise to 3-Major            15-17 points (Semi-Balanced or Unbalanced)
- Raise to 4-Major            18-19 points

*Example 3*

♠ A983  
♥ KJ5  
♦ A873  
♣ Q5  
1♦    1♠  
2♠

Here we open 1♦ and when partner responds 1♠, we raise to 2♠, instead of rebidding 1NT.

*Example 4*

♠ AJ83  
♥ KJ5  
♦ A873  
♣ AQ  
1♦    1♠  
4♠

Here we open 1♦ and when partner responds 1♠, we raise to 4♠ instead of rebidding 2NT.

*Example 5*

2♣    2♦  
2NT

Here we show a balanced hand with 22 to a bad 24 points. Notrump systems are on by Responder.



### Example 6

2♣    2♦

3NT

Here we show a balanced hand with a good 24 to 26 points. Notrump systems are on by Responder.

The possible distributions for a balanced hand are 4333, 4432, or 5332. We sometimes treat semi-balanced hands of 5422 or 6322 as balanced, but these are not what partner generally expects us to hold when we show a balanced hand.

### Walsh Style Rebids by Opener (Modern Standard Bidding)

When we open the bidding with 1♣ and partner responds 1♦, then as the Opener when we tend to rebid notrump.

1♣    1♦

—

- 1NT    12-14 points
- 2NT    18-19 points

We make these notrump rebids even if we have a 4-card Major suit (bypassing this suit to rebid NT and show our hand type and values).

### Example 7

We might use our judgement if our balanced hand looks like a 2-suiter.

♠ KQJ4

♥ 43

♦ 873

♣ KQJ8

1♣    1♦

—?

With this hand (all the honors located in our two 4-card suits) it is reasonable to rebid 1♠, treating this hand as unbalanced instead of balanced.

### Extended Walsh Style Rebids by Opener

*Note: This is a partnership agreement for you to discuss with partner.*

When we open the bidding with a minor suit and partner responds 1♥, if we have a 4-card ♠ suit we must decide what to rebid. With a balanced 18-19 point hand, it is standard to rebid 2NT, not 1♠.



*Example 8*

♠ KQ65

♥ K8

♦ AJ2

♣ AJT4

1♣      1♥

\_\_\_?

With this hand we rebid 2NT to show both our balanced hand and our values, 18-19 points. If we have a ♠ fit, partner can search for that later in the auction.

The Extended Walsh concept is that with a similarly shaped hand but a balanced 12-14 points (instead of a 18-19 points), we rebid 1NT. We generally only rebid 1♠ with an unbalanced hand.

*Example 9*

♠ KT65

♥ K8

♦ AJ2

♣ QT94

1♣      1♥

\_\_\_?

Here we rebid 1NT, instead of 1♠. *Discuss this with your partners.*

**Balanced Hands with a 5-card Major**

When we have a balanced hand with a 5-card Major (5332 distribution) then with the proper amount of points then we open notrump.

1NT Opening    15-17 points

2NT Opening    20-21 points

With 12-14 points or 18-19 points and a balanced hand with a 5-card Major, we may face a rebid challenge.

*Example 10*

1♥      1♠

1NT

This 1NT rebid shows a balanced hand with 12-14 points and a 5-card ♥ suit.



*Example 11*

1♥    1♠

2NT

This 2NT rebid shows a balanced hand with 18-19 points and a 5-card ♥ suit.

*Example 12*

1♠    1NT

Pass

With a balanced hand, 12-14 points, and a 5-card ♠ suit, we open 1♠. If we play a *Semi-Forcing 1NT* response, then we can pass 1NT with 12-13 points and rebid our best minor (3-cards) with 14 points. If we play a *Forcing 1NT* response, then we must rebid our best minor (3-cards) with all 12-14 points.

*Example 13*

1♠    1NT

2NT

With a balanced hand, 18-19 points, and a 5-card ♠ suit, we open 1♠ and rebid 2NT.

**Conclusion**

As the opening bidder when we have a balanced hand, we should be bidding notrump at some point in the auction (unless we discover a Major suit fit immediately). This notrump rebid lets partner know you have a balanced hand with 2-3 card support for their suit and communicates your “bucket” (strength) to partner. Make sure you and partner feel comfortable about how to handle these common auctions and hands.