

The Next Level: Week 5

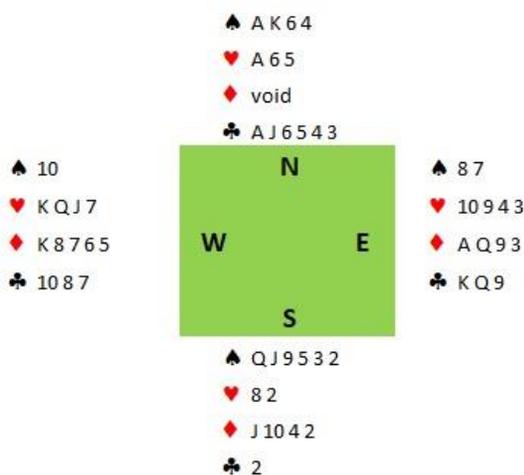
Responding to partner's opening bid of 1-of-a-suit

In our previous two weeks, we discussed the criteria for opening 1NT or 1-of-a-suit, and refreshed the concepts of limit and non-limit bids, forcing and non-forcing bids, and the “barrier”: what it means to “reverse”, and why it’s important. We also looked at some guidelines to help decide which suit to open, when there’s a choice of suits.

Now, we want to move on to discuss how to respond to a 1-of-a-suit opening bid by partner.

Responding with Not a Lot

When your partner opens 1-of-a-suit, and your right hand opponent passes, you should strive to find a response. Don’t be too rigid about needing at least 6 points, especially if your hand is shapely. If you pass, and opponents don’t enter the bidding, partner will be left at the one level. In these days of Weak Two openers, partner may have more than 19 points. Even if partner’s hand is not very strong, there might be a good fit, and a low point count game is possible. Even if partner has a normal 12 or 13-point opener, responding is tactically better than passing and ceding the initiative to the opponents.



North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North opened 1♣. East passed, and South, with a meagre 4 points, also passed. West could say nothing, so North languished in 1♣, and made a comfortable 9 tricks for +110.

What should have happened?

After scraping up a 1♠ response, South would soon be declaring in 6♠. Winning the ♥K lead with ♥A, declarer sets about establishing clubs, by cashing ♣A and ruffing 3♣. Declarer then crosses to ♠K and ruffs 4♣. Good – the clubs split 3-3. Declarer then crosses to ♠A, drawing the outstanding trump, and cashes ♣J65, throwing ♥8 and ♦42. Cross ruffing the rest, declarer chalks up all 13 tricks. Small slam made plus one. (The grand slam was not really biddable

as it needed clubs 3-3 and spades 2-1).

You should respond 1♠ to partner’s opening 1♣ bid with any of these hands:

- | | | | |
|---------------|----------|------------|----|
| ♠K J 9 5 2 | ♥J 9 8 2 | ♦7 4 2 | ♣2 |
| ♠Q J 9 5 3 2 | ♥8 2 | ♦J 10 4 2 | ♣2 |
| ♠J 10 9 5 3 2 | ♥8 2 | ♦Q 9 8 4 2 | ♣- |

The weak jump change of suit response (also known as Weak Jump Shift)

We saw last week that if your partner opens 1-of-a-suit, and you respond in a different suit at the lowest level, opener is forced to rebid. So there is **no need** to use a jump in another suit to show a strong hand – if you are strong, you can respond at the lowest level, and show your strength in a subsequent bid, as you **know** you’re going to get another bid.

This frees up a jump in another suit for a different purpose – a weak single-suited hand. This bid tells partner “I am too weak to respond 1NT, I have one long suit, and I have nothing much to help you in your suit. Unless you have a very good hand, the opposition probably have the majority of the points, and I’m bidding to make it hard for them to find their contract”. The Weak Jump Shift is a bit like an opening pre-empt, except it’s used as a responding bid to partner’s opener.

Here is an example of the Weak Jump Shift in action:

Partner opens 1♥, and your RH opponent passes. You hold

♠8 5 ♥6 ♦7 5 3 ♣K J 10 8 6 4 3

You can’t bid 2♣, as that would show “rule of 14” and you are far too weak for that. Likewise, you can’t bid 1NT as that would show 6-9 points. Without the weak jump shift in your toolkit, you’d have to pass, and risk opponents entering the bidding. But with it, you bid 3♣. Partner knows you are weak with long clubs, and doesn’t get carried away.

Note that if your RH opponent had overcalled partner’s opening 1♥ with 1♠, you’d still have bid 3♣, but not if the opponent had overcalled with 2♦. In that case 3♣ wouldn’t be a jump; you’d have had to bid 4♣ for a weak jump shift. At the 4-level, you’d want an 8-card suit, especially if vulnerable, so with this hand, you’d pass the opponent’s 2♦.

General guidelines for responding to partner’s 1-of-a-suit opening bid

1. Try to respond if you can, to give partner a chance to bid again.
2. If you have no alternative bid, but have 6-9 HCP, bid the “dustbin” 1NT. It is the only NT bid which doesn’t guarantee a balanced hand. It simply shows a point count. It says “I don’t have support or your suit, I don’t have another suit I can bid at the 1 level, and I don’t have a strong enough hand to bid at the 2 level”.

We call it the “dustbin” 1NT bid as it catches all those rubbish hands with 6-9 points where there is nothing else you can bid. It is your last resort if you can’t bid anything else. Note that if your RH opponent bids, opener will have a chance to bid again, so you are absolved from the responsibility to stretch to make a response. **If you bid 1NT after an intervening bid, this is NOT the “dustbin” 1NT**, but a constructive bid (see point 10), and shows a stop in opponent’s suit and 8-9HCP.

3. The strength required to bid a new suit is 6+ HCP if it’s at the 1-level (but see Responding with Not a Lot, above, where you can dredge up a 1-level response with fewer than 6 points). If you need to go to the 2-level to respond (eg your suit is ♣ or ♦ and partner has opened 1♥ or 1♠, use “Rule of 14”).
 - **RULE OF 14** for 2-level response: add the number of HCP in your hand to the number of cards you have in the suit you want to bid. If it comes to 14 or more, you can bid at the 2 level. If it doesn’t, don’t. So a 4 card suit and 10HCP qualifies, or a 5-card suit and 9HCP, etc. This is one of the rare rules in bridge which is sacrosanct - **DON’T BE TEMPTED TO BREAK IT!**
4. **Don’t jump in a new suit to show strength.** A simple change of suit response is **forcing** for one round, so you’ll get a chance to bid again and show your strength then. Keep the jump in a new suit for WEAK hands with a long suit (the Weak Jump Shift).

5. If partner opens a major suit, and you have 4 or more cards in that suit, you have found the holy grail, a fit of at least 8 cards in a major. **Support partner's suit by responding in that suit.** Even if you have a longer minor suit, don't bid it. But how high do you bid in support of partner's suit? If you're unbalanced, you should be using Losing Trick Count (LTC)— don't worry if you don't know about that yet. It's a very useful tool, and we'll come to it in another lesson. If partner opens 1♥ or 1♠, and you have 4+ card support and
 - 6-9 HCP [or if unbalanced, 9 losing tricks by LTC] - bid 2♥/ 2♠
 - 10-12HCP [or if unbalanced, 8 losing tricks by LTC] - bid 3♥/ 3♠
 - 13+ HCP [or if unbalanced, 7 losing tricks by LTC] - bid 4♥/ 4♠

Any supporting bid in partner's suit is a limit bid, and is **non-forcing**.

6. If partner opens a major suit, and you don't have 4 or more cards in that suit, bid your longest suit if you can (don't bid at the 2-level, if you don't satisfy the Rule of 14). For example, if partner opens 1♥, and you have 6+ points, 4 spades, and 5 clubs, but not enough HCP to bid 2♣: you can't bid 1NT as that would deny a 4-card spade suit, nor 2♣ as you're not strong enough. Bid 1♠, even though it's not your longest suit.

A tricky situation arises where you **do** satisfy rule of 14 for a two level response in a minor, but bidding it would bypass a 4-card major. eg 1♥ - 2♣ with this 10HCP hand: ♠K 8 7 3 ♥ Q 3 ♦ 7 4 ♣ K Q 9 8 3. Partner might be 5-4 in hearts and spades. With a minimum-ish opener, she won't be strong enough to bid her second suit, spades, as that would go through the barrier, so she'd have to rebid 2♥ over your 2♣. You couldn't introduce your spades now, as you aren't strong enough, so the spade fit would go undiscovered. When bidding a new suit in response to partner's 1-of-a-suit opening bid, only bypass a 4-card major, to bid a longer minor, if you have 12+HCP. Then you won't risk missing a major suit fit, because with 12+ HCP you will be able to bid your major on your next bid.

7. If partner opens a major suit, and you don't have 4 or more cards in that suit, but you do have 6-9 HCP and **3-card support including an honour**, support partner's major at the 2 level in preference to responding 1NT. Corollary: be aware, as opener, that if partner responds by bidding 2 of your opening 1-of-a-major, they might only have 3 cards in the suit.
8. When you respond to partner's opening 1-of-a-suit by bidding a new suit, and you have 4-card suits of equal length, always bid the cheapest first. (called "bidding up the line"). This way you won't risk missing a fit. For example
 - If partner opens 1♥, and you have 10HCP and 4 cards in clubs and spades, respond 1♠. That's your cheapest bid, even though clubs is a lower ranking suit and you satisfy the rule of 14.
 - If partner opens 1♣, and you have 10HCP, and two 4-card suits in ♦ and ♠. Your cheapest response is 1♦, so bid it. Don't be tempted to bypass the diamonds and bid 1♠ ("because it's a major"), or to bid 2♦ ("because you satisfy rule of 14"): 2♦ is a Weak Jump Shift, and means something else, as we've seen.

See example hand below.

9. When you respond to partner's opening 1-of-a-suit by bidding a new suit, and you have two **5-card suits** of equal length, bid the higher ranking first ("high fives"). Whether opener, responder (or overcaller), it is normally better to bid the higher-ranking of two 5-card suits, enabling you to bid the lower-ranking suit next time and so finish the two-stage process more economically. See example hand below.
10. When partner opens 1-of-a-minor, supporting responses in the same suit work the same as for the major suits. eg Responding 2♦, to partner's opening bid of 1♦, means 6-9 HCP, or if unbalanced, 9 losing tricks (LTC). **However**, if partner opens 1-of-a-minor suit (1♣ or 1♦) and you have 4 in their suit and 4 in a major, bid your major in preference to supporting their minor. (*Note that this only applies when responding. When opening, always start with your longest suit, whether major or minor.*) Why show a major rather than support partner's minor? The reasoning is that it's hard to make a game in a minor suit, as you need 11 tricks, so in your bidding you'll be trying to find a major suit or NT contract if you can.
- Note that in the case where partner opens 1♦ and you have 5+ clubs, and satisfy Rule of 14, do not bypass a 4-card major to bid your clubs unless you have 12+ HCP. Then you won't risk missing a major suit fit, because with 12+ HCP you will be able to bid your major on your next bid. Say partner opens 1♦, and you hold ♠K 8 7 3 ♥Q 3 ♦7 4 ♣K Q 9 8 3
- You have 10HCP and 5 clubs, and could bid 2♣. But if you do, and partner was 5-4 in diamonds and spades, and she is not strong enough to bid through the barrier, she will not be able to bid 2♠. She will have to rebid 2♦. You could not now bid 2♠ yourself, as you don't know about partner's spade suit. To put you back into your first bid (and presumed longer) suit, say with two little clubs and two little spades – she'd need to bid clubs at the 3 level, and you've got too high. But if you had 12+ HCP, you could bid 2♠, and if partner does rebid 3♣ it's not a disaster.
11. Responses in NT to partner's 1-of-a-suit opening bid are limit bids, and non-forcing. The general "dustbin" response of 1NT (6-9HCP) should only be used when you have no reasonable alternative bid. A response of 1NT, when opponents have overcalled, is not the "dustbin" bid: it is a constructive bid, showing 8-9 HCP and a stop in opponents' suit; it implies a genuine interest in playing in a NT contract. For example partner opens 1♥, opponent overcalls 1♠, and you bid 1NT. You are saying "I have 8 or 9HCP, I can't support your hearts; I have a balanced(ish) hand, and a stop in spades". The same applies for responses in NT at a higher level: they indicate a balanced hand (and of course, if opponents have overcalled in a suit, a stop in that suit).
- 2NT response= 10-12HCP balanced (and a stop in opponents' suit if they've bid one).
 - 3NT response= 13-15HCP balanced (and a stop in opponents' suit if they've bid one).
- But note:** as we develop our bidding system, we will want to add in a very useful gadget called the Jacoby 2NT in response to one of a major. When we get there, a 2NT response will mean something very different from 10-12HCP balanced. But that isn't for now – it will come later in the course.

Example: not following guideline 8 (bidding up the line)

	♠ 2		
	♥ A Q 6 3		
	♦ 8 5		
	♣ A K 6 5 3 2		
♠ J 8 7 6 4 ♥ 10 8 7 ♦ A K 10 7 ♣ J	<div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ K Q 10 ♥ J 9 ♦ Q J 9 3 ♣ Q 10 9 8	
	♠ A 9 5 3		
	♥ K 5 4 2		
	♦ 6 4 2		
	♣ 7 4		

Dealer: N Vulnerability: neither

The bidding proceeded

N	E	S	W
1♣	pass	1♠(oops)	pass
2♣	pass	pass	pass

North was unable to show her hearts on her rebid, as that would have been a reverse, showing a much stronger hand (see lesson 2b). NS missed their heart fit, languishing in 2♣ and making 9 tricks for +110. What should have happened: South should have bid up the line, responding the cheaper of 4's, 1♥. The 4♥ contract is reached. Careful declarer play succeeds, despite the 4-1 club split. +420.

Example: not following guideline 9 (failing to bid the higher ranking of 5's)

	♠ K 3		
	♥ K 3		
	♦ 5 3 2		
	♣ A J 5 4 3 2		
♠ J 5 2 ♥ J 10 6 2 ♦ A K J 9 ♣ K 9	<div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ Q 10 6 ♥ Q 5 ♦ 10 7 6 4 ♣ Q 10 8 6	
	♠ A 9 8 7 4		
	♥ A 9 8 7 4		
	♦ Q 8		
	♣ 7		

Dealer: N Vulnerability: neither

The bidding proceeded

N	E	S	W
1♣(rule of 20)	pass	1♥(oops)	pass
2♣	pass	2♠	pass

3♥(justifiably expecting partner to have longer hearts than spades)

What should have happened:

N	E	S	W
1♣(rule of 20)	pass	1♠	pass
2♣	pass	2♥	pass

2♠ (able to return partner to her first bid suit at the 2 level).

The 3♥ contract is unmakeable, while 2♠ can be made with careful declarer play.

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