



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(2) Which Suit to Open

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Level: 1

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

Basics

Opening the bidding is the start of our conversation with partner (and often the opponents.) It is very important that we start that conversation in the right way – make the right choice in opening the bidding. If we start off with the wrong opening bid, we often have trouble properly describing our hand as the auction progresses. This document contains a basic overview of what to open when your choice of opening bid is not clear.

Majors

When we have a 5-card Major, we usually open it. The first question we'll consider is what to do when we have both Majors.

5♠-5♥ (or longer with equal length: 5-5, 6-6)

We open 1♠ and rebid ♥.

5c♠-6c♥

This is a more complicated hand. If we have only a minimum opening bid, we treat it like we are 5-5 in the Majors. If we have extra values (enough to reverse), then we open and bid more naturally – starting with 1♥ and bidding ♠ twice after that.

Ex. 1♥ 1NT
 2♠ 2NT
 3♠



Minors

When we do not have a 5c Major and do not have a hand that can open some number of NT, we must go to our backup plan – open a minor. If we have both minors, we have a choice of which suit to open. Our planned rebid and the rest of our hand will help us determine which suit to open.

5♦-5♣ (or longer with equal length: 5-5, 6-6)

Open 1♦ and rebid ♣.

4♦-4♣

Open 1♦ and rebid NT if balanced or something else if unbalanced.

3♦-3♣

Open 1♣ and rebid NT with a balanced hand.

5♦-4♣

Open 1♦ and rebid ♣, like we are 5-5 in the minors.

4♦-5♣ (Difficult Hand)

With this hand, we generally open 1♦ and rebid 2♣, showing an unbalanced hand.

Note: We will treat some 2-2-4-5 hands as balanced and open 1♦, planning to rebid 1NT – or we open 1♣ planning to rebid 2♣ or 1NT.

Nothing to Open (4-4-3-2)

We generally promise 5-cards when we open 1M, 4-cards when we open 1♦, and 3-cards when we open 1♣. There is one hand, with distribution 4-4-3-2 that gives us nothing to open. With this hand, we open 1♦ - our longest minor. This is the only hand in which we open 1♦ with only a 3-card ♦ suit.



Problem Hands (*Advanced Topic*)

When we have a 4-5 shape and an unbalanced minimum hand, we can open 1♦ if our suits are ♦ and ♠. But if we have a 4-card ♥ suit and a 5-card minor, we may be faced with a very difficult bidding problem.

Example Shapes

1-4-5-3

1-4-3-5

With a minimum hand, we would open our 5-card minor (let's say ♦ in this case), but if partner responds 1♠ we will not have a good rebid. We can rebid 2♦, 2♣, 1NT, or reverse into 2♥ - but all of them are "bad bids." The question is which one is the least bad bid. Rebidding 1NT or reversing into 2♥ are the worst two bids. 1NT shows a balanced hand (which you don't have) and 2♥ shows lots of extra values (which you don't have.) Rebidding 2♦ shows a 6-card ♦ suit and rebidding 2♣ shows a 4-card ♣ suit. All of these bids are lies.

So what to rebid? As a general rule in bridge, it is better to lie in a minor than a Major or NT, so rebidding 2♦ or 2♣ are the best rebids! Our general rule is not to lie to partner about our hand type. By rebidding 2♦ or 2♣, we might lie a little bit about our length in the suit, but at least we haven't lied about our hand type: partner knows we have an unbalanced hand.

Conclusion

Opening the correct suit allows us to more easily find our Major suit fits, when they exist. But in addition to searching for a Major suit fit, opening the correct suit allows us to have a reasonable rebid available. This is particularly important in modern auctions, where the opponents often compete in the bidding. Plan ahead and think about opening a suit that will allow you to have a reasonable rebid.