

Reverse Bidding (or Going Above the Barrier)

When you open the bidding, with a one-level suit bid, you immediately set yourself a "barrier" which is defined as two of that suit you bid.

Eg suppose you hold this hand:

♠ A 6 3
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ K Q 9 5 2
♣ 4

Clearly you will open the hand 1♦.

The "Barrier"

By opening 1♦, you immediately set a "barrier" of 2♦.

How does this affect things? What it means is that if partner bids something between your bid and the barrier, you cannot bid a *new* suit at a level above the barrier, unless you hold a strong hand.

So if partner responds 1♥, 1♠, 1NT or 2♣, then you can only introduce a new suit at a level above the barrier if you hold a strong hand.

How strong do you need to be to go above the barrier?

A hand which makes a reverse bid (ie goes above the barrier) should hold at least a good 16hcp and ideally 17+hcp to go above the barrier.

So going back to our original hand:

♠ A 6 3
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ K Q 9 5 2
♣ 4

This hand has 14hcp and so is NOT strong enough to reverse with.

We have already seen that we open 1♦.

If partner bids 1♥ we can then raise him to 2♥. NB This is NOT going above the barrier as we have not bid a NEW suit.

If partner bids 1NT in response to our opening, we could pass it, although, with our singleton in clubs it might be safer to take it out into 2♦. Notice that partner, by bidding 1NT, denies holding four hearts or four spades (or he would have bid them at

the one level), and also denies holding four diamonds (or he would have supported us to 2♦). And so, it is almost certain that partner holds at least four clubs, and so passing 1NT is certainly a possibility.

The one that many people get wrong is if partner bids 1♠ or 2♣. In this case we MUST NOT bid 2♥, because we are reversing, and partner will think that we have 17+ hcp. In both those two situations, all we can bid (we are, of course, obliged to find a rebid after opening) is 2♦. In this situation, people are worried about missing a heart fit. Generally, we know that partner does not hold four hearts (because he would have bid them over 1♦) and so the danger of missing a heart fit is minimal. There will be hands when partner has not bid 1♥ over 1♦ (even though he holds a four card heart suit). The reason will be that he holds a five or six card spade or club suit, and so bids 1♠ or 2♣. In this case, he still has the chance to bid again, so may come back with 2♥ over your 2♦ bid, ensuring that you do not miss the heart fit.

A stronger hand

A hand which goes above the barrier will always be at least a good 16 count, and ideally 17+ hcp. It usually shows two suits, the first of which is at least 5-cards and the second of which is at least 4-cards.

An ideal hand would be:

♠ A K 3
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ K Q 9 5 2
♣ 4

This is the same hand as before, but now we also hold the ♠K. We have 17 hcp and are strong enough to reverse. We should open 1♦, and if partner bids something in between our bid and 2♦, (ie 1♠, 1NT or 2♣), we can bid 2♥. This shows that we have got at least five diamonds, at least four hearts, and at least a good 16 hcp, usually at least 17.

Forcing or not Forcing?

A reverse is always forcing for at least one round. If responder has initially bid at the two level (implying at least 8/9 points), then it is forcing to at least game.

Responses by responder to a Reverse

With a minimum hand and support

Here you just bid which ever of opener's two suits you prefer at the minimum level.

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ K 9 8 5 3
♥ 2
♦ T 8 3
♣ Q J 4

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - ?, then just bid 3♦. You now know partner has at least five diamonds and 17+ (possibly 16) points, so you will be safe at the three level. Your response is not forcing, but opener can go on if he wishes to.

With a minimum hand, no support, and a stop in the unbid suit

Here you can just bid NT at the lowest level

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ K 9 8 5
♥ 7 6 2
♦ T 8
♣ Q J 4 3

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - ?, then just bid 2NT. Partner will have a good idea what you have and can bid on accordingly.

With a minimum hand, no support, and no stop in the unbid suit

Since you have no support for either suit partner holds, and lack any stop in the unbid suit, it is likely that you own suit is long and so you can rebid it.

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ K Q 9 8 5 3
♥ 6 2
♦ T 8
♣ J 4 3

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - ?, then you cannot support either of opener's suits, you cannot bid NT, but you can rebid your spades, so bid 2♠. Again partner will have a good idea what you have and can bid on accordingly.

With a fair (or better) hand.

Now it depends on what you bid on the first round. If you have already bid at the two level, then the auction is forcing to game. However, if you only bid at the one level, you may need to jump the auction to force partner to game (or bid it yourself!).

Bidding the game

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ K Q 9 8 5
♥ Q 9 6 2
♦ 8
♣ K 4 3

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - ?, now you must bid 4♥, because if you only bid 3♥, partner may take you for a weaker hand, and pass.

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ A 5
♥ T 9 6 2
♦ 8
♣ K Q J 6 4 3

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 2♣, 2♥ - ?, now you only need to bid 3♥, because the auction is already forcing to game.

With a fair hand and stop(s) in the unbid suit

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ K 9 8 5
♥ Q 9 6
♦ 8 6
♣ K Q 4 3

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - ?, now you must bid 3NT. You must not bid just 2NT, as opener may take you for a much weaker hand and pass. Given that partner has at least 16 hcp, you know that the game is on, so bid it.

Eg suppose you hold:

♠ A Q 6
 ♥ 9 6 2
 ♦ 8 6
 ♣ K J 6 4 3

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 2♠, 2♥ - ?, now you only need to bid 2NT, to show your spade stops. The fact that you have already bid to the two level means you are already committed to game, so opener will not pass.

What if there is an intervention by opponents

Is a bid above the barrier still a reverse?

You have to be very careful here. Opener is generally obliged to give a rebid, and sometimes, because of an intervention by opponents, opener is forced over his barrier.

Why is opener obliged to give a rebid?

To give responder a chance to bid again. Often responder will just bid at a low level with quite a powerful hand, and so opener needs to keep the bidding open for responder to bid again. If an intervention by opponents forces opener above the barrier for this to happen, then it is NOT a reverse, and does not guarantee 17+ hcp. If, however, opener chooses to go above the barrier of his own accord, then it still IS a reverse, and should show 17+ hcp.

Consider these auctions:

Opener		Responder
1♦	(1♠)	2♣
?		

Here, if opener bids 2♥, then he has chosen to do so, of his own accord, and it is a reverse, and show 17+ points.

Opener		Responder
1♣	(1♠)	2♦
?		

Now, the intervention by opponents has forced the partnership over the barrier, and a bid of 2♥ is not a reverse, because opener is obliged to bid at that level to show his hand (because of the intervention).

Opener		Responder
1♣		1♠ (2♦)
?		

This is very similar to before, but now opener is not obliged to bid, because partner still has a bid whatever happens. So a bid of 2♥ here is a reverse and shows 17+ points, because opener has chosen to bid it.

So, be careful if there is an intervention, If opener chooses to reverse of his own violation, then it really is a reverse. But if he is forced over the barrier because of an opponent's intervention, then it is just an ordinary bid and should not be regarded as 17+ hcp.

What about if you want to investigate further over a reverse?

Obviously, if opener makes a reverse bid, then three suits have already been bid (unless, of course, responder bid 1NT). If responder wants to make further enquiry, he can bid the only unbid suit (the fourth suit).

Fourth Suit Forcing

If responder bids the fourth suit after a reverse, it is forcing, now to at least game level, and enquiring further about responder's hand.

Eg

If the auction goes: 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - ?, then a bid of 3♣, the fourth suit, is "fourth suit forcing", enquiring more about openers hand, and should be alerted by opener.

Opener's response to Fourth Suit Forcing

With a stop or stops in the fourth suit, opener can bid NT

Eg

♠ 3
 ♥ K Q 6 2
 ♦ K Q 9 5 2
 ♣ A K 4

If the bidding starts 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - 3♣, then opener can bid 3NT.

With an extra card or cards in one of his suits above 5-4, then opener can repeat that suit, showing his length.

Eg

♠ K 3
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ A K Q 9 5 2
♣ 4

If the bidding starts 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - 3♣, then opener can bid 3♦, showing at least 6-4 distribution.

With secondary (3 card) support for responder's suit, then opener can bid it.

Eg

♠ A K 3
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ K Q 9 5 2
♣ 4

If the bidding starts 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - 3♣, then opener can bid 3♣, showing three card support for that suit.

This is perhaps the strongest bid the opener can make, as it also implies at most a singleton in the fourth suit (5-4-3-1 shape). From here the partnership could easily go slamming, possibly via cue bidding, or possibly via Blackwood, or both

Eg

♠ A K 3	♠ Q J T 7 5
♥ K Q 6 2	♥ A J 4
♦ K Q 9 5 2	♦ A
♣ 4	♣ Q 9 7 5

After the auction starts 1♦ - 1♠, 2♥ - 3♣, 3♠ - ?, responder can virtually bid the slam himself. A RKCB bid will discover only two Key Cards in the West hand, so that East knows either the ♠A or a big spade is missing. He can then bid 6♣, which has 12 tricks on top.