

# **Memory Aids and Useful Rules: Part I**

## THE BASICS

### Which suit do I bid first as opener?

With a 5-card or longer suit in your hand, it is normal to bid your longer suit first.

With a 6-5 pattern, bid 6-5-5: the six-card suit first, then the five-card suit, then repeat the five-card suit, if partner has not supported one of the suits earlier.

With a 6-4 pattern, it is normal to bid 6-4-6: the six-card suit, then the four-card suit, then repeat the six-card suit if partner has not shown support earlier. Be aware that you need extra strength (16 or more points normally) if bidding the 4-card suit breaks your barrier: see *Breaking the Barrier*.

With a 5-5 or a 6-6 pattern, bid Hi-Lo-Lo: the higher-ranking suit comes first, then bid the lower-ranking suit, then repeat the lower if partner has not given support earlier.

With two 4-card suits, you can choose which suit to open if outside the no-trump ranges. It is usually best to choose the stronger suit with the plan to rebid no-trumps next.

If 4-4-4-1 use R-S, U-S (red singleton, under the singleton), B-S, M-S (black singleton, middle suit).

### Which suit do I bid first as responder?

With a 5-card or longer suit, the principles are the same as for opener, as long as you have enough points to bid at the two-level if that would be your response: see *Breaking the Barrier*.

With no 5+ suit, bid your cheapest 4-card suit. If that means bidding at the two-level, you need 10 or more points: see *Breaking the Barrier*.

### The Skip-Over Principle:

If opener's rebid bypasses a suit, it denies 4+ cards in the suit bypassed. Thus, 1♣: 1♦: 1♠ denies four hearts and 1♦: 1♥, 2♣ denies four spades.

**Do not bid with values.** Do not make a bid that shows significantly more than you have.

**Do not underbid.** Do not make a weak bid if you have a strong hand.

## THE BARRIER PRINCIPLE

### The Barrier Principle for Opener

Opener's first suit creates a barrier for opener's rebid. The barrier is two-of-the-suit opened. For a 1♣ opening, the barrier is 2♣, for a 1♦ opening, the barrier is 2♦, and so on. If opener's rebid is in a new suit beyond the barrier, that promises extra values, normally 16 points or more. A new suit rebid below the barrier does not promise extra strength, but opener can have extras.

For example, 1♦ : 1♠, 2♥ is beyond opener's 2♦ barrier, so 16+ points (forcing); 1♦ : 1♠, 2♣, below opener's barrier, does not promise extras (not forcing, but it could have up to 18 points).

### The Barrier Principle for Responder

After a suit opening at the one-level, responder's barrier for a two-level response in a new suit is 10 HCP or more. (You may shade this to 9 HCP for a strong 6-card suit or 8 HCP for a good 7-card suit.) With fewer points, responder may support opener's suit, if suitable, or bid at the one-level only. Sometimes responder will have to respond 1NT with an unbalanced hand of about 6-9 points. For example, in response to 1♥, you hold:

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

You are too weak for a 2♦ response. Bid 1NT.

## OPENING POINTS

**Opening in first or second seat:** Most hands of 12 HCP are worth opening but some 12-point hands are borderline. A good guide when to open with 12, 11, 10 or even 9 HCP is **The Rule of 20** (devised by Marty Bergen): Add your HCP to the number of cards in your two longest suits. If the total = 20 or more the hand is worth a one opening.

♠ A 10 2      ♥ K J 7 3      ♦ Q 9 6 4 3      ♣ 6

10 HCP + 9 for two long suits (5 diamonds, 4 hearts) = 19. Not enough for a 1♦ opening.

♠ A J 7 5 2      ♥ K Q 7 3 2      ♦ 8 4      ♣ 2

10 HCP + 10 for two long suits (5 spades, 5 hearts) = 20. That is enough for a 1♠ opening.

Bergen's Rule of 20 works all right most of the time but a more accurate guide is:

### The Rule of 22

Add your HCP to the number of cards in your two longest suits and your quick tricks. If the total is more you have a one-opening in first or second seat. At favourable vulnerability, 21 will do.

**Quick tricks:** A-K = 2, A-Q = 1½, A = 1. K-Q = 1, K = ½ (not singleton king).

♠ Q J 4 3      ♥ Q J      ♦ Q J 8 2      ♣ Q J 5

12 HCP + 8 for length + 0 quick tricks = 20. Pass

♠ A J 4 3 2      ♥ 4      ♦ A 9 8 7 6 2      ♣ 3

9 HCP + 11 for length + 2 quick tricks = 22. Open.

## THE SUIT QUALITY TEST

**The Suit Quality Test** is an excellent guide when the quality of the suit you wish to bid is relevant, such as overcalls and pre-empts.

**Add the number of cards in the suit you wish to bid to the number of honours in that suit.**

If the total equals (or exceeds) the number of tricks which you want to bid, the suit quality is OK.

The honour cards are the A, K, Q, J, and 10. In applying the SQ Test, count the jack or ten only if supported by at least one of the top three honours.

Suppose right-hand opponent (RHO) opens 1♥. Would you overcall with these hands:

A: ♠ A Q 2      ♥ 8 6      ♦ K 8 7      ♣ Q 9 8 4 2  
B: ♠ Q J 5      ♥ 8 6      ♦ 7 6 3      ♣ A K J 5 2

Both have 11 HCP, but pass with A (suit quality of the clubs only 6), overcall 2♣ with B (suit quality = 8).

For a vulnerable 3-level pre-empt (nine tricks) your suit quality (SQ) should be 9. For a vulnerable 4-level pre-empt, the SQ should be 10. When not vulnerable, the suit quality for a pre-empt can be one less.

For a weak-two opening (eight tricks) the SQ should be 8 or more, i.e., Q-10-x-x-x or better.

**The Self Sufficient Suit** is one that needs no support, one that you can insist on as trumps. Consider a suit self-sufficient if it has a suit quality of 10 or more. Suppose the bidding has started 1♣ : 1♥, 2♣. What should responder rebid with:

A. ♠ A Q 2      ♥ K Q 8 7 5 3      ♦ 8 7      ♣ 4 2  
B. ♠ A J 5      ♥ K Q J 10 5 3      ♦ 8 7      ♣ 4 2

Both hands have 11 HCP, but with A 3♥ will do. You need some support from partner. With B, rebid 4♥, as your suit quality is 10.

## THE LOSING TRICK COUNT

**The Losing Trick Count** is an excellent way to measure your side's trick potential when a good trump fit exists.

**Count Your Losers**

**Add Partner's Losers**

**Deduct the total from 24**

The answer is the number of tricks your side will probably take with your good suit as trumps.

*When counting your losers:*

A void = no losers.

A singleton = 1 loser except for ace-singleton (0).

A doubleton = 2 losers except for A-x (1), K-x (1), AQ (½) or A-K (0).

3-card or longer suits have a maximum of 3 losers. Deduct a loser for each of the ace, king or queen in the top three cards in the suit.

For example, A-K-x-x-x = 1 loser    Q-J-8 = 2 losers    J-7-5-4 = 3

♠ A Q 2    ♥ K Q 8 7 5    ♦ J 7 2    ♣ 4 2 = 7 losers

♠ K 8 7 5 3    ♥ A K Q 8 2    ♦ 5    ♣ 4 2 = 5 losers

### Estimating partner's losers

A routine opening hand of 13-15 points = 7 losers. Every three points one way or the other = one trick, so 16-18 points = 6 losers, 19-21 = 5-losers, 10-12 = 8 losers, 7-9 = 9 losers. Suppose you have:

♠ K 9 8 5 2    ♥ 5    ♦ Q J 6 3 2    ♣ 3 2

Partner opens 1♠ (7 losers or fewer). Your bid? You have 7 losers. Your 7 + partner's 7 = 14. 24 – 14 = 10 tricks expected. Bid 4♠.

♠ A 5 2    ♥ K Q 10 7 3 2    ♦ 9 8 4    ♣ 6

1♣ on you left, double from partner. Your bid? You have 7 losers. Partner's takeout double = 7. 7 + 7 = 14. 24 – 14 = 10 tricks expected. Bid 4♥.

♠ K Q 5 2    ♥ 3 2    ♦ A 8 7 6 4 3    ♣ 6

1♣ by LHO, partner 1♠, 2♣ by RHO. Your bid? You have 6 losers. Partner's overcall = 8 or fewer. 8 + 6 = 14. 24 – 14 = 10 tricks expected. Bid 4♠.

### CONSTRUCTIVE BIDDING TIPS

**With 6-4, bid more:** If you have a 6-4 pattern and find a trump fit, your hand has great potential.

**With 6-5, come alive:** Even more so if 6-5 (or 6-6).

### Opening in third seat

Open with 13 HCP or more. If below 13 points, open if your hand qualifies for a sound one-level overcall: 8+ HCP and a good suit (*see The Suit Quality Test, page 6*). A 4-card suit K-Q-J-x or better will do. The aim is to indicate a good lead, as the opponents are likely to win the auction. With three honours in a 5-suit, open with a weak two.

### Opening in fourth seat

There is no urgency to open in fourth seat with a modest hand. With 14 HCP or more, definitely open. With fewer points use the **Rule of 15**:

*Add your HCP to the number of spades you have. If the answer is 15 or more, open. If not, pass.*

As partner is a passed hand and you have below 14 points, it figures to be a part-score hand and the side that owns the spade suit is better placed competitively.

## The Rule of 2, 3 and 4 for pre-empts

When pre-empting, calculate your playing tricks. The Losing Trick Count is a good yardstick: count your losers and subtract from 13 to determine your playing tricks. Then add two if vulnerable. Open for the number of tricks indicated, but not beyond game.

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

You have six losers and so seven playing tricks. If not vulnerable, open 4♠, not 3♠.

## The Rule of 6

The bidding has started, say, 1♠ : 1NT, 2♠. When should you pass and when should you run to the three-level in your own long suit? The Rule of 6 can aid your decision: Subtract the number of cards you have in opener's suit from the number of cards in your own long suit. If the answer is below six, pass. If six or more, bid your suit.

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

After 1♥, 1NT : 2♥, bid 3♣, 6 clubs – 0 hearts = 6

## COMPETITIVE BIDDING TIPS I

**The 3-over-2 rule:** If the opponents have bid and raised a suit at once to the two-level, *followed by two passes*, it is almost always right to compete even if it requires that your side go to the three-level. Use a delayed takeout double, suit overcall or 2NT for the minors. When not to compete here: if your side is vulnerable and you are 4-3-3-3.

**The 3-over-3 rule:** If a competitive auction has reached the three-level and your suit is higher-ranking than theirs, bid 3-over-their-3 if your side has nine trumps, pass and defend with eight trumps.

**The 4-over-3 rule:** If a competitive auction is at the three-level and your suit is lower ranking, do not bid 4-over-their-3 if your side has only the values for a part-score.

## Defend on odd occasions

It is usually better to defend at the three-level and the five-level than to bid higher. See the above 3-over-3 for the three-level guide.

If they are at the five-level, pass if you are the weaker side and hope they are too high. If you are the stronger side, bid higher only if confident of making your contract, otherwise double.

## Takeout double, Type A, B and C

Requirements for making a takeout double vary according to the strength held:

**Type A, minimum strength** (about 11-15 HCP)

The double should have 3+ support for every unbid suit and the shortest suit should be the opponents'.

**Type B, strong hand** (about 16-18 HCP / 5 losers)

Any hand that does not fit a 1NT overcall (which is 15-18 HCP, balanced, stopper in their suit). This type is shown by doubling and raising partner or bidding a new suit after partner's reply.

### **Type C, powerful hand (19+ HCP / 4 losers)**

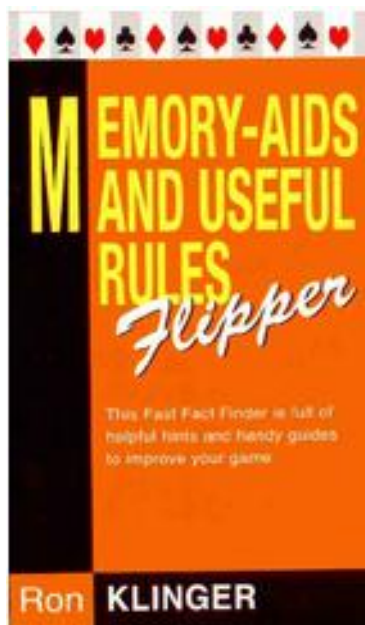
Any hand with 19 HCP or more qualifies. This type is shown by doubling and rebidding in no-trumps or with a jump-raise or jump in a new suit.

The Rule of 15 (devised by Seamus Browne) will indicate whether your hand is strong enough for a Type A double. Add your HCP to your shortage points in their suit. For doubleton in their suit, 2 points, a singleton = 4 points, a void = 6 points. If the total is 15+, you have enough to double.

If RHO opens 1♥, this is enough to double:

♠ Q J 7 3      ♥ ---      ♦ A 7 6 4      ♣ Q 10 9 5 2

**- end of Part I -**



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- The Losing Trick Count
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