

Lesson 2 – “The Easy Way” Responding to 1NT Opening Bid

Important: These rules apply when your partner **opened** the bidding with 1NT. This lesson explains how the **responder** should bid.

Responder should count points as HCP (High Card Points), for now. Put your hand into one of these three categories:

Points	Game level?
0-7	Partscore only, game level is very unlikely
8-9	Invitational hand, game level is possible if partner has 16-17 HCP
10+	Game level in a major or NT is reachable; Responder is responsible for communicating the point count; game level in a minor requires 29+ points

The responder to a 1NT opening bid is designated the “*Captain.*” The responder is steering this ship, so to speak. The responder is the one with the most responsibility to ensure the partnership gets to the best level that is attainable.

Category 1 (0-7 HCP) – keep the bidding low:

With this point range, check to see if you have a 5-card major. If not, you will almost always **pass**. As you gain more experience, you will be pleased to know, this rule will not change.

With a 5-card major, bid the major, **2♠** or **2♥**. That is usually the end of the bidding and the final contract. (See note* below for one exception.)

Please note that the Opener may have a doubleton in your 5-card major suit, which gives your partnership only 7 trump. It is preferable to have 8 trump, but sometimes you are not able to find that fit easily. This is one of those times. You take what you get! The reasoning behind this is: With fewer than 8 points, it is advisable to be in a trump contract with only 7 trump, rather than a 1NT contract with such few points. Little trump cards are stoppers and can take tricks! Therefore, your weak hand may be more useful for taking tricks in a trump suit even though you have only 7 trump. Your hope is that your partner has 3 or 4 in that suit, but there is no guarantee of that. Your partner can open 1NT with a useless doubleton.

Opener’s Rebid: **Pass**, except for this one situation, which is rare*.

Super-Accepting! *If Opener has the maximum number of points (17) and the maximum number of cards (4) in the same major suit bid by the Responder, s/he should bid **3♠** or **3♥** to show this maximum and the 9-card fit in trump. Then Responder can decide whether to bid to game level (**4♠** or **4♥**) or pass. With 9 trump together, your hands have more strength than just points can show you. However, with very few points, it could still be difficult to take 10 tricks. Opener is inviting you to consider game level. Opener is communicating his maximum strength hand and the 9-card fit in trump. If Responder has a singleton or a void

and has points in the higher part of that category range (say, 5-7 pts), game level could be there. Judgment is needed by responder to pass or raise to game level.

Category 2 (8-9 HCP) - invite to game:

With 8-9 points and a balanced hand (no 5-card major), bid **2NT**. If Opener has 17 pts, s/he should raise it to 3NT. Otherwise, Opener should pass. (If Opener has 16 pts, it might be best to pass and leave it at 2NT. With more experience, Opener may choose to bid 3NT with 16 or 17 HCP.)

With a 5-card major, bid the major at the 2 level (**2♠** or **2♥**). Opener should pass unless s/he can Super-Accept. See Page 1. You may take 10 tricks and make game, but it's better to be cautious for now. You can bid more precisely once you learn Stayman and Jacoby transfers, but this will get you bidding without having to learn those two conventions immediately.

Category 3 (10+ HCPs) - take it to game:

With 10+ pts and a balanced hand, raise the bid to game level, 3NT.

With a 5-card major, bid the major at the 3 level (**3♠** or **3♥**). Opener should consider this "forcing." Opener has a choice whether to bid 3NT or **4♠** or **4♥**. Knowing that Responder has 5 of the major, Opener should choose the trump suit with 3 or 4 in Responder's major, or 3NT with only 2 in Responder's major (no 8-card fit).

With 10+ pts and a 6-card major, Responder should bid to game immediately (**4♠** or **4♥**). Responder knows that Opener has at least 2 of every suit to open 1NT, so they have a minimum 8-card fit in a major guaranteed. Responder should not give Opener a choice for 3NT.

A few notes:

With this "Easy Way" of bidding, often the stronger 1NT hand will become the Dummy hand and exposed to the opponents. This usually gives the opponents an advantage. It is generally a better strategy to keep the 1NT hand hidden and have the Responder's hand (the weaker hand) become the Dummy. This is one reason why we use the Stayman convention and Jacoby transfers.

Also, it is difficult to find an 8-card fit in a major when both Opener and Responder have 4 cards in a major. The Stayman convention is used to find this fit. This is another reason to learn "StayJac" as soon as possible.

As soon as you feel comfortable enough with bidding and playing and have some experience and confidence, your next goal should be to incorporate Stayman and Jacoby into your bridge "toolkit." Using Stayman & Jacoby is a more accurate way of bidding and this "Easy Way" should be used only temporarily.

Minor suits: As responder, with 6 cards or more in a minor suit and 10+ pts, jump to 3 of the minor. Opener can then decide to bid 3NT with stoppers in the other three suits or pass. There are some hands that are very difficult to bid and it is impossible to show a sample of every hand you will ever get. Sometimes you must rely on your own judgment and take a chance. Experience in bidding and playing will give you more skill in making those difficult judgments.