

How do you respond to a pre-empt bid?

An opening bid at the three level shows a weak hand with a good 7-card suit that has at least two honours.

The hand should be too weak to open at the one level – including hands you would open using the rule of twenty.

You should not have a side 4-card major suit because of the risk of missing a better contract.

You should have few defensive tricks.

You need 6 playing tricks if you are non-vulnerable and 7 playing tricks if you are vulnerable.

To assess your playing tricks, allocate partner one card in the trump suit and imagine the opposition's trump cards divide as expected: five missing cards will usually divide 3-2, four missing cards 3-1.

An opening bid at the 4 level shows a weak hand with a good 8-card suit: you have one more trick so you can pre-empt at one higher level.

An opening bid of 3NT shows a long solid minor suit with no more than a queen in the side suits.

To show a pre-empt overcall you need to bid a double jump over opener's bid. For example: 1♠ - 4♣ or 1♦ - 3♥

Responder is in charge following a pre-empt opening or overcall. This is because the pre-empter has clearly defined his or her hand (see sidebar). Responding is therefore fairly straightforward.

If partner pre-empts: 3 of a suit....

Don't worry about your trump suit cards even if you have a void, because partner has a long holding in the suit. **Simply count the playing tricks in your hand and add them to the number you know partner has. Partner has 6 if not vulnerable and 7 if vulnerable. If your tricks plus partner's tricks equals enough for game, then bid game. If not, pass.**

There are a couple of things to note about your strategy regarding a minor suit contract versus a no trumps contract. Normally we would prefer to be in NTs rather than a minor suit because NTs scores more. However:

- (i) After a minor suit pre-empt, if you want to respond "3NT" you must have either 9 tricks in your own hand without using partner's hand, or cards in partner's suit and stoppers in the other suits.
- (ii) A raise of a minor suit pre-empt (e.g. 3♣ - 4♣) is not invitational. It is just raising the level of the pre-empt to stop the opposition bidding.

If partner pre-empts: 3NT (see sidebar This really is an 'improvers' topic so don't use it just yet.)

To leave partner in the 3NT contract by passing you need to have stoppers in the other suits AND cards in partner's suit. (Or 9 tricks in your own hand without using partner's suit including stoppers for whatever the opposition might lead.)

If you haven't, bid 4♣ and partner will either pass or correct to 4♦

Finally....competing over a pre-empt opening is just like competing over a 1-level suit opening. We'll look at competing over a pre-empt opening next.