

Contemporary Bridge Bidding

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1. Counting Points:

"Golden Game": 25 total pts for game in major or NT; 29 pts for game in minor. Strive to find a fit in NT or a major.

"Golden Fit": a total of 8 or more cards in a suit in the combined hands.

Distribution points: Initially count a point for every card in a suit above four (length points), but do not count pts for short suits. If you are going to be dummy in a suit contract, count 5 pts for a void, 3 for a singleton, and 1 for a doubleton, instead of counting length points. [Note: If you bid a takeout double or you are raising responder's suit, you are planning to be dummy, so you may count dummy distribution points].

2. Evaluating the hand:

Opener: 13-15 pts is a minimum hand, 16-18 a medium hand, 19-21 a maximum hand, 22+ is a blockbuster

Responder: 0-5 is a bust, 6-9 is minimum, 10-11 is medium, 12+ is maximum

"Good" suit = at least 5 cards containing 6 high card points (HCP), or 2 of the top 3 or 3 of the top 5 cards.

3. Opening a balanced hand: [no void or singleton, no more than one doubleton]

13-14 HCP – bid a suit, then rebid 1NT

20-21 HCP = 2 NT

15-17 HCP = 1 NT

22-24 HCP = bid 2 ♣, then bid NT

18-19 HCP = bid a suit, then jump in NT

25-27 HCP = 3NT

4. Opening an unbalanced hand:

13-21 total pts: With a 5-card or longer suit: bid your longest suit at the one-level. Bid higher ranking of two 5-card or 6-card suits. With no 5-card or longer suit, bid longest minor. With two 4-card minors, bid 1♦. With two 3-card minors, bid 1♣

22+ pts: Bid 2♣

5. Responses to NT openers:

After 1 NT Opener:

With 0-7 pts and a 5-card or longer suit (not clubs), bid 2 of that suit ("drop-dead" response), otherwise pass

With 8-9 pts and at least one 4-card major, bid 2♣ (*)

With 8-9 pts and a balanced hand or a 5-card minor, bid 2NT

With 8-9 pts and a 5-card or longer major, bid Stayman first, then your suit

With 10-15 pts and at least one 4-card major, bid 2♣ (*)

With 10-15 pts and a 5-card major, jump to 3, asking opener to choose either game in NT or your suit

With 10-15 pts and a 6-card major, jump to game in it

With 10-15 pts and a balanced hand or long minor suit, bid 3NT

With 16-17 pts, Bid 4 NT with balanced hand, inviting small slam, or bid Gerber to check on aces

With 18-19 pts, bid small slam

With 20-21 pts, bid 5 NT, inviting grand slam

With 22+ pts, bid 7 NT

- *Stayman Convention: Opener bids 2♦ without a 4-card major, bids 2♥ or 2♠ to show a 4-card major, or bids 2♥ if he has both 4-card majors. Responder bids 2NT, raises opener's major, or bids the other 5-card major with 8-9 pts, inviting game. With 10-15 pts, responder bids game in either NT or opener's major.*

2 NT Opener:

0-4 pts pass or bid your 5-card major

5-11 pts and at least one 4-card major, bid Stayman or bid 3NT

3 NT Opener: With less than 5 pts and a 6-card major, bid game. With 6 or more pts, explore slam.

6. Responses to a 1-level suit bid opening (Note: Remember to use dummy pts if you have a fit):

0-5 pts: pass

6-9 pts: raise partner's major with 3-card support, bid 1 ♠ or 1NT. If opener bid a minor suit, bid your longest suit, higher-ranking of two 5-card suits, lower-ranking of two 4-card suits at the one-level, 1 NT, or raise with 5-card support.

10-11 pts: Raise a major to the three-level with 4-card support (or 3 good cards); raise a minor to the three-level with 5+ card support ("Limit Raise"). Otherwise, bid a new suit (forcing unless a passed hand) or 2NT with balanced hand (invitational).

12+ pts: With a balanced hand, bid 3NT with 13-15 HCP. Otherwise, bid a new suit (show support on rebid by jumping to game if partner shows a minimum opener)

17+ pts: jump shift

7. Responses to an opening bid of 2♣ (22+ points):

0-7 pts: 2♦ [Note: a rebid by opener in a suit is forcing. Raise with support and an A, K, singleton or void; jump to game with good trump support, but no extra strength. Bid cheaper minor with 0-4 pts. Bid a new suit or NT to show 5-7 pts.

8+ pts and a good 5+card suit, bid it, otherwise bid 2NT (forcing to game) or 2♦ □□□□□□□□□□□□ or with a 4-card major (waiting)

8. Rebids by Opener:

Single raise of responder's suit, rebid of opener's suit, bid of a new suit of a lower rank than the initial bid, or 1 NT all suggest a minimum hand. A jump raise would show a medium hand. A "reverse" bid, which is a bid of a new suit at the next level by opener that is higher in rank than the first suit, indicates 16-21 pts. A jump shift into a suit lower ranking than the original indicates 19-21 pts.

9. Forcing Bids:

New suit by responder that has not previously passed, except after opener rebids 1NT; jump to 2NT by responder or opener; jump shift; takeout double (unless there is an intervening bid)

[Note: not forcing are a single or double raise of opener's suit by responder, a NT bid at the lowest level by either partner, a rebid by opener of a suit lower in rank than first suit and at the lowest possible level, and a jump to game].

10. Finding the right level:

Both opener and responder should revalue their hands after hearing partner's bid each time with the goal of determining whether there are enough points between the two for game or slam and if there is a golden fit. Do the math. If it is evident that neither is the case, the partnership should end the bidding at the cheapest level possible. If you have a golden fit in a minor suit, but only 25-28 pts you should usually play in 3NT.

11. Slam Bidding:

Blackwood: 4NT bid used to ask for aces after you have decided on a trump suit.

Gerber: 4♣ bid used when no trump suit has been chosen and partner has bid NT.

Bidding one level above game: A bidding sequence in which opener has shown a minimum hand and responder bids 4NT, 5♥ or 5♠ is invitational to slam. If opener has shown a medium hand, responder invites slam with 15-16 pts and opposite a maximum hand responder invites slam with 13 pts.

Cue bids: Once you have agreed on a trump suit, any bid of another suit indicates first-round control and an interest in slam. Use a cue bid when it is more important to know which ace partner has than how many, e.g., you have a void.

12. Competitive Bidding:

a. Preempts: With less than 13 pts and a good long suit, open at the two-level with a 6-card suit (except clubs), 3 with a 7-card suit, 4 with an 8-card suit. You expect to be defeated by 3 tricks if not vulnerable, 2 tricks if vulnerable. If your hand is weaker than that, pass.

Responding to preempts: Quick tricks (QT) are more important than total points. Queens and jacks are usually worthless unless in partner's suit. You should have enough QT to compensate for partner's expected losers, e.g., 3 aces if you are not vulnerable.

With enough QTs and trump support in a major (e.g. 2 cards opposite a weak two), bid game

With enough QTs, 2-card support for partner's minor suit, stoppers in the other 3 suits, bid 3NT

With a strong, long suit of your own, use caution: partner's hand may be worthless and your bid is forcing

With 3 or more trumps and a weak hand, raise partner to increase the preempt level.

Otherwise pass.

b. Overcalls: 10-17 pts and a good 5-card suit or any 6-card suit at the one-level. At the two-level or when vulnerable, you should have at least 13 pts and a 6-card suit. A 1NT overcall promises 15-17 HCP, a balanced hand, and a stopper in the opener's suit. A jump shift overcall is preemptive, indicating less than 13 pts and a good 6-card suit; a double-jump indicates a 7-card suit. *[Note: If your hand doesn't fit an overcall, pass unless you have 18+ pts].*

c. Responding when opponent has overcalled: bid normally except that a 1NT bid indicates a stopper in the overcaller's suit and a double is for penalties.

d. Advancing partner's overcall:

8-9 pts: raise to 2-level with 3-card support, bid 1NT with a stopper in opener's suit, or bid new suit at one-level. If partner's overcall was at the two-level, you may bid with only 6-7 pts, otherwise pass.

10-11 pts: bid your own good 5-card suit or cue bid opponent's suit with trump support

12+ pts: if overcall was at the one-level, jump raise or jump shift; if at two-level, bid game or jump shift.

[Note: With stoppers in opponent's suit, no fit for partner or a suit of your own, bid 1NT with 8-11 HCP, 2NT with 12-15 HCP, and 3NT with 16+ HCP. You may also respond preemptively: With 4-card trump support and 0-9 pts, jump raise; with 5-card trump support, jump to game].

e. Takeout Double: 13-17 pts, shortness in opener's suit, and 3+card support for all unbid suits, or 18+ pts (too strong to overcall). Opener's partner (responder) bids a new suit at the one-level, raises opener, or bids 1NT with 6-9 pts. With 10+ pts, responder redoubles. The doubler's partner (advancer) passes with less than 6 pts if responder has bid, but if responder passes, advancer makes a minimum bid with 0-8 pts, jumps with 9-11 pts, and bids game with 12+ pts. With stoppers in opener's suit and no suit of your own, bid 1NT with 8-10 HCP, 2NT with 11-12, 3NT with 13+. *[Note: if either partner has bid or the contract is game, the double is for penalties. If it is the doubler's third or more turn to bid and the contract is a part score, the double is also for penalties.]*

f. "Balancing" Bid: If the bidding has been 1 in a suit, pass, pass, you should compete if at all possible and you don't need as many points to do it. Partner may have up to 12 pts, but didn't have a good suit for an overcall. There is no point in pre-empting. It's too late, so forget weak two or preempt bids. If you have the kind of hand useful for a takeout double, you can do it with as little as 10 HCP. If you have an overcall-type hand and can do it at the one level, you can do it with as little as 7 HCP and a good 5-card suit or strong 4-card suit. To overcall at the 2 level, you should have a good 5-card suit and at least 9 HCP. With an opening hand, jump overcall. With a balanced hand and a stopper, bid 1 NT with as little as 9-12 HCP; double with 13+ HCP and then bid 2NT over partner's response.