

How the bidding works

HOW THE BIDDING WORKS

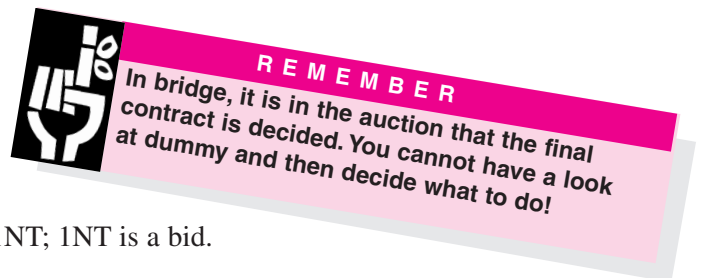
In MiniBridge:

- the side to declare is the one with the most high card points in the two hands combined
- the declarer is the hand, of the declaring side, that has the most points
- trumps are decided when declarer has looked at both hands
- the declarer decides how many tricks can be made and whether to play in game or not
- the opening lead is chosen with dummy visible on the table.

In bridge, all of these choices are made in a different way. Before play can start there is a ‘bidding’ phase, where the contract and declarer are determined. This is often called the ‘auction’. Just as at an auction sale the lot goes to the highest bidder, so in a bridge auction the highest bidder buys the ‘contract’.

BRIDGE RULES FOR BIDDING

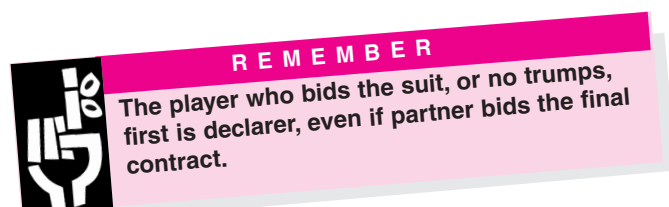
- the dealer makes the first bid
- the player on the dealer’s left bids next
- the bidding goes clockwise round the table
- each bid must outrank the last one made
- a player who does not want to bid, says ‘pass’ or ‘no bid’ (we will say pass)
- a bid is a number from one to seven, followed by a suit or no trumps
- you say one no trump, but it is usually written 1NT; 1NT is a bid.



The number in the bid indicates the number of tricks above SIX that the declarer will have to try and make. The final bid in the auction sets the contract, so a contract of 2NT says that the declarer has to make eight tricks in no trumps. As in MiniBridge, nine tricks in no trumps is game. So a contract of 3NT, a ‘game bid’, means that the pair have contracted to make nine tricks playing in no trumps.



If all four players pass without making a bid on the first round, there is no further play. This is called a ‘throw in’. When a player makes a bid on the first round, the auction continues until there is a bid followed by three consecutive passes. The side that bids higher sets the trumps and the number of tricks to be won. The member of the side who first bid the suit that becomes trumps, or who bid no trumps, is the declarer.



THE RANKING OF THE SUITS

The suits are ranked in order:

| | | |
|----|-----------|---------|
| NT | no trumps | highest |
| ♠ | spades | ↑ |
| ♥ | hearts | |
| ♦ | diamonds | |
| ♣ | clubs | |

This means that a bid of 1♦ can be outbid by 1♥ or 1♠ or 1NT or any bid starting with a two, three, four, five, six or seven, whilst a bid of 7♠ can only be outbid by 7NT.

AN EXAMPLE AUCTION

An auction at bridge might go:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| pass | 1♥ | 2♣ | 2♦ |
| 2♠ | pass | pass | 4♥ |
| pass | pass | pass | |

Note that:

- West was the dealer so made the first call
- West did not want to make a positive bid and so she said 'pass'
- North opened the bidding with 1♥
- East had to bid his clubs at the two level as clubs are the lowest ranking suit
- South could bid 2♦ as diamonds outrank clubs
- because West passed initially, it did not stop her bidding later
- South could have bid 3♥ but jumped to 4♥ because it is a game bid
- North will be declarer because he bid hearts first and will try to make ten tricks with hearts as trumps
- East has to make the opening lead. Dummy goes down after the lead is made
- if ten tricks are made the score is 420 to North/South
- if nine tricks are made East/West get 50 points.



The only other difference between bridge and MiniBridge is that the opening lead is made before dummy is put down on the table.

Thereafter play proceeds as before, and at the end of the hand scoring is very similar to MiniBridge.

Bidding is rather like being forced to talk a foreign language which has only a few words in its vocabulary.

We have to use the words efficiently to convey messages to partner or to ask questions. Messages like:

- I have a good hand
- my hand is balanced
- I have very few points in my hand
- I have a long suit of spades
- should our side be playing in game?
- have you any extra values for your bidding so far?

These messages cannot usually be conveyed in one go, sometimes it takes several bids.

Opening 1NT and balanced hand responses



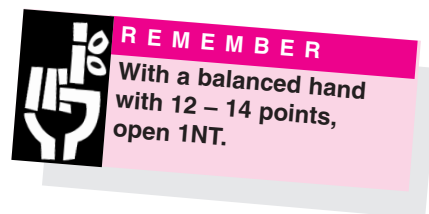
THE ONE NO TRUMP OPENING BID

An opening bid of one no trump shows a particular kind of hand. It says you have a balanced hand with no 5-card major and with precisely 12 – 14 points.

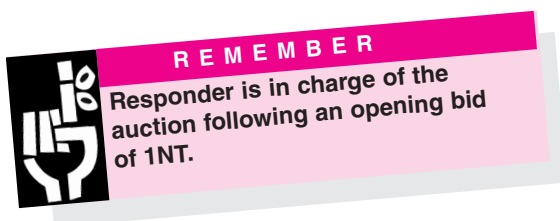
Balanced has a special meaning in bridge, which is

- no void
- no singleton
- not more than one doubleton
- no 6-card or longer suits

The reason no 5-card major is allowed, although you are allowed a 5-card minor, is that it is better to play in a major than in no trumps and so if you have a good holding in a major, you want to tell partner about it.



When partner bids 1NT you know a lot about the hand that partner holds so it is up to you to decide what to do on the hand. If you have enough points, you may be able to decide straight away which contract to play. With thirteen or more points and a fairly balanced hand, you can bid 3NT. Or if you really do have lots of points, say, more than twenty, you might even bid a slam.



With 25 or more points - bid game



RESPONSES TO 1NT WITH BALANCED HANDS

When partner has opened 1NT and you, too, have a balanced hand, playing in no trumps will be the best choice. Just add your points to partner's to see whether to bid game or even a slam.

| | | |
|------------|------|--|
| 0 – 10 | Pass | There probably isn't a better contract. Hope for the best. |
| 11 – 12 | 2NT | Asks a question – see below. |
| 13 – 18 | 3NT | We must have enough points to bid game. We won't bid slams for quite a while but, so you can sometime in the future, here are some bids that you will need to know. |
| 19 – 20 | 4NT | A try for slam, asks partner to bid 6NT with a maximum. |
| 21 – 24 | 6NT | Try for a small slam; with at least 33 points it should make. |
| 25 or more | 7NT | Only once in a lifetime, but you know your side has 37+ points. |

ASKING QUESTIONS

Suppose you have eleven or twelve points. Partner has promised twelve, thirteen or fourteen. If partner has twelve then game – 3NT – is optimistic but if partner has fourteen then our side should be playing in 3NT. You can ask partner how many points he has by bidding 2NT. Partner bids 3NT with fourteen or a nice-looking thirteen points – say, a hand with a 5-card minor or lots of tens and nines. Partner passes with a minimum, that is twelve or a poor thirteen.

Notice you don't bid 2NT just because you think your side can make it! The score for 1NT bid and made with an overtrick is identical to the score for 2NT bid and making eight tricks, that is 120 (40 + 30 for tricks and 50 for the part score bonus).

We reserve a bid of 2NT as a question, 'Exactly how many points have you got, partner?'. If you have ten points and a balanced hand when partner opens 1NT, partner may well be able to make eight tricks but you pass because there is little chance of a game



REMEMBER

A bid of 2NT over partner's opening 1NT asks partner to bid 3NT with a maximum.

2NT ?
Have you got 14
points ?

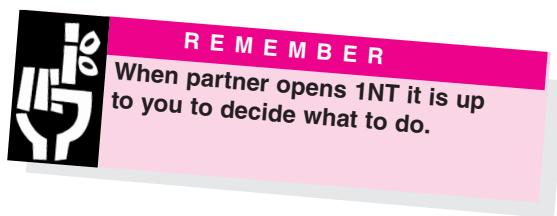


Game going responses on unbalanced hands

SUMMARY OF GAME FORCING BIDS ON UNBALANCED HANDS

| | | |
|----------------|-------------|---|
| 12 – 15 points | | With a long minor, usually just try 3NT. Don't bid the suit. |
| 12 – 20 points | 3♥ 3♠ | But with a 5-card major offer partner a choice of 3NT or game in the major. It is forcing, partner must choose. |
| 16 – 20 points | 3♣ 3♦ | A jump to 3♣ or 3♦ shows real interest in playing in a minor. Normally it is a 6-card suit and an unbalanced or very strong hand. |
| 21 or more | 3♣ 3♦ 3♥ 3♠ | With very strong hands, show your suit then bid on to a slam. |
| 12 – 20 | 4♥ 4♠ | Shows a 6-card or longer major suit. Tells partner to pass. |

When opener bids 1NT you know he has 12 – 14 points and at least two cards in every suit. This is because he is promising his hand has no voids or singletons and no more than one doubleton. You also know he has at least twelve points – and no more than fourteen. You know a lot about partner's hand and so it is up to you to decide what to do; you are the captain of the bidding.

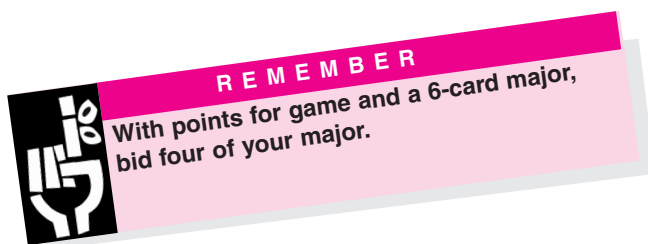


With twelve or more points and an unbalanced hand, you want to bid game. You might argue that if opener has just twelve points, your side will have only 24 points if you, too, just have twelve. If you have an unbalanced hand it should be enough because unbalanced hands are always stronger in play.

If you have a 6-card or longer major suit and twelve or more points, bid four of your major. You know you will find at least two hearts in opener's hand so that gives you the magic 8-card fit.

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

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



WITH A 5-CARD MAJOR

If you have a 5-card major and points for game, bid three of your major. This is a game forcing bid which means that partner must not pass; he must keep bidding until game is reached. With just two cards in your suit, he will bid 3NT, knowing this is the best game whereas with three or four cards in your suit he will raise it to game.

♠ A 7 2
♥ K J 10
♦ Q J 7 6
♣ J 5 3

Partner
1NT
4♥

You
3♥

♠ 10 4
♥ A Q 8 7 5
♦ A K
♣ K 10 9 8

♠ A 9 3 2
♥ K J
♦ Q J 7
♣ J 5 3 2

Partner
1NT
3NT

You
3♥

♠ 10 4
♥ A Q 8 7 5
♦ A K 2
♣ K 9 8

Notice that a response of 3♥ is not weaker in points than a response of 4♥. It is just saying you have fewer hearts and are asking partner, in the light of this knowledge, to decide on the best game.

REMEMBER
With points for game and a 5-card major, bid three of your major telling partner to choose between game in your suit or no trumps.



Since it needs eleven tricks to make game in a minor, and since minor suits do not score so well, you can jump to 3NT with a long minor and at least twelve points, fewer if it is a very good suit. So bidding 3NT in response to partner's opening 1NT does not always show a balanced hand.

Jump bids to 3♣ or 3♦ show really unbalanced hands that are worried that 3NT may not be the best place to play. Opener bids a new suit at the three-level to help you decide or 3NT with stoppers in the other suits. With a suitable hand to play in your suit opener will raise it to the four-level.

REMEMBER
Three-level bids in a minor say my hand is strong but not very suitable for no trumps.

Weak responses on unbalanced hands

WITH A DREADFUL HAND

When you have very few points and partner bids 1NT, you know the contract is doomed. If you have a balanced hand you can do nothing but pass, trying to look the same as you do when you have quite a good hand for partner.

If you have a long suit, bid your suit at the two-level. Partner must pass and you will have to do your best to make eight tricks. If you have very few points you will probably go down in your contract. Just do the best you can.

The logic behind this is as follows. When partner bids 1NT he is saying he is going to make half the tricks in the pack plus one. Being able to see dummy gives him some advantage in the race for tricks but none the less, to have any chance of succeeding, he is going to need somewhere near half the points. That is, between his hand and yours he needs to have something approaching twenty points. When he has 12 – 14 points in his own hand he is making the presumption that the remaining 26 – 28 points are evenly distributed between the other three people at the table. In other words, he is assuming that you have around nine points. Put together with his, that will give your side just over half the points available – enough to make the seven tricks needed in a no trump part score.

If you know his assumption is incorrect, you must rescue him if you possibly can. If you have a long suit – five cards or more – your little cards will almost certainly be worthless in no trumps. For one thing, how will partner ever get into your hand? Played with that suit as trumps, you might be able to make the odd trick with them. It is a damage limitation exercise – you are going down but perhaps not as badly as 1NT.



REMEMBER

With very few points and a 5-card or longer suit, bid your suit at the two-level.

With a better hand, say up to eleven points, still not enough for game but with a good suit – bid your suit. It will probably play better with your suit as trumps than in no trumps.



WHAT SHOULD THE 1NT OPENER DO NEXT?

When you have opened 1NT and your partner bids two of a suit, you don't know whether your partner is making a desperate attempt to rescue you from a hopeless position or has quite a decent hand and every hope of making the contract. Neither does the opposition! With both hands below, partner would bid 2♠ over your 1NT. With the first he is just hoping it won't be as dreadful as leaving you in 1NT, but with the second he has every hope of making it. Partner expects you to pass and let him get on with it.

Your hand
might be
horrible

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ♠ | 9 8 6 3 2 |
| ♥ | 8 7 |
| ♦ | J 5 2 |
| ♣ | 10 6 2 |

Or it might
be this
good

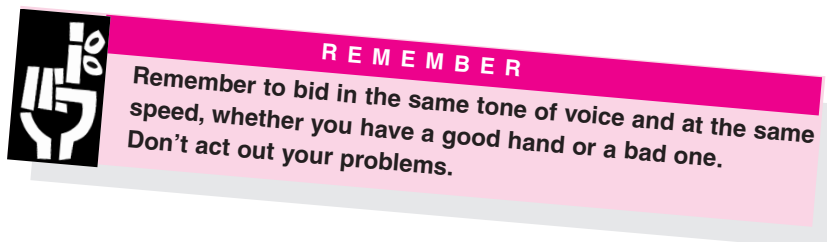
| | |
|---|-------------|
| ♠ | K Q 6 4 3 2 |
| ♥ | K 7 |
| ♦ | J 5 |
| ♣ | 10 6 2 |



CONVEYING INFORMATION

You should only convey information to partner by the bids you make. You are not supposed to pull faces, scratch your head or put a question mark in your voice.

When you are learning to play bridge, it is often hard to know what to bid. Sometimes you won't be able to remember what you have been taught; at other times you will have a choice of actions and be unclear about which one to take. Whatever the problem, you should strive to bid in the same tone of voice and at the same speed. Problems don't get easier because you spend ages thinking. So do your best and don't mind being wrong.



What have I learned?

MINIBRIDGE TO BRIDGE CHANGES

- In bridge, it is in the auction that the final contract is decided
- The opening lead is made before dummy is put down.

WHAT IS BIDDING?

- A 'bid' is a number from 1 to 7 followed by a 'denomination'
- A 'call' is any bid or a 'pass'
- To be legal the bid must outrank all previous bids
- The denominations go in the order clubs (lowest), diamonds, hearts, spades, no trumps (highest)
- Bidding starts with the dealer
- The auction finishes when any bid has been followed by three consecutive passes OR if all four players pass at their first turn to bid
- The vocabulary of bridge is limited to 14 words. These are: One Two Three Four Five Six Seven No Trumps Spades Hearts Diamonds Clubs Pass (or No Bid)
- The player who bids the suit, or no trumps, first is declarer, even if partner bid the final contract.

WHAT IS A BALANCED HAND?

Balanced means:

- no void
- no singleton
- not more than one doubleton
- no 6-card or longer suits.

WITH A BALANCED HAND AND 12 – 14 POINTS, OPEN 1NT

Always open 1NT with 12 – 14 points, a balanced hand without a 5-card major.

RESPONDING TO 1NT WITH A BALANCED HAND

Responder is in charge of the auction following an opening bid of 1NT

- Add your points to partner's to see what to bid
- | | |
|------------|------|
| 0 – 10 | pass |
| 13 – 18 | 3NT |
| 19 – 20 | 4NT |
| 21 – 24 | 6NT |
| 25 or more | 7NT |
- A bid of 2NT over partner's opening 1NT shows 11 or 12 points. It asks partner to bid 3NT with a maximum.

RESPONSES TO 1NT – UNBALANCED HAND WITH GAME GOING POINTS

- With points for game and a 6-card major, bid four of your major
- With points for game and a 5-card major, bid three of your major telling partner to choose between game in your suit or no trumps
- With a 6-card minor and a strong unbalanced hand, bid three of your minor.

RESPONSES TO 1NT – WEAK POINTS AND AN UNBALANCED HAND

- With zero to ten points and a 5-card or longer suit, bid your suit at the two-level
- A bid at the two-level over 1NT tells partner to pass.

BEHAVE YOURSELF!

- Remember to bid in the same tone of voice and at the same tempo, whether you have a good hand or a bad one
- Don't pull faces!

