

Simply English

Why do we have a system?

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The August issue of *English Bridge* saw the first publicity for Standard English, the system designed for students learning bridge in the *Bridge for All* scheme. The article has generated many comments, like 'Why do you open 1♥ with four clubs, four hearts and 15 points. I think 1♣ is best'. To answer this, I am going right back to basics. Lets start by looking at what goes on during the auction.

Why do we need a system?

Bidding is a conversation in a very limited language, just fifteen words. To make the language work better, we have rules – called the 'system'. We combine the knowledge inherent in the system with the knowledge gained from the bidding when deciding the contract.

The opening bid starts to describe the hand held. Responder is given information about the hand type and strength and from that information makes decisions on whether to play a suit or no trump contract and whether to play in a part score, game or slam. It is often responder who is in charge, the captain of the hand, because opener starts the description and responder gathers the information. Think about this auction where responder is asking questions with each bid in order to gain more information:

1NT	2♣	I know you have 12-14 balanced but do you have a four card major?
2♥	3♥	Are you a maximum for your opening?

Once the opening bid of 1NT is made, much information has already been conveyed. Opener is 12-14 and balanced. So it is only right that responder asks questions and places the final contract. Responder has no need to tell opener anything, in fact, say as little as possible. Careless talk costs tricks!

Rather more subtle conversations take place after a suit opening. One heart has a much wider range, say ten to twenty points. It may be a balanced hand or it may be a monster distribution. Responder has to find out.

1♥	1♠	I have four spades. Can you support them? Tell me more.
3♠	4♣	OK, you've four spades, four or five hearts, about 16 points. Can you cue-bid?
4♦	4NT	How many aces do you have?
5♥	6♠	Good, we will play in a slam.

Note how little opener knows about responders hand, so cannot influence the choice of final contract. The last example was easy, it included a limit bid. The next one uses fourth suit forcing to ask a question.

1♥	1♠	I have four spades. Can you support them? Tell me more.
2♣	2♦	You have five hearts and four clubs but what else? Tell me more.
2NT	3♠	My spades are good, can you support now?
4♠	pass	Expecting a doubleton in spades.

Note that responder is not always the captain. Opening bids like 2♣ and 4NT are asking questions with the first bid and opener is then the captain. And sometimes responder can hand the captaincy back to partner, for example with a raise of 1♠ to 2♠ or by making a splinter response to the 1♠ opening.

What influenced the choice of system?

In Standard English Foundation we took into account that the system should be:-

- simple, so that beginners can use it correctly and remember it
- what is currently taught by the majority of teachers
- widely played across the country
- capable of development to a full system

The bridge objectives are equally straightforward:

- priority is given to finding an eight-card major suit fit if it exists
- if there is no major suit fit and we have the points for game, we mostly play in no trumps
- we only play game in a minor as a last resort
- given a choice of bids we will make the one that limits the hand.

What are the features that help to meet the objectives?

From the objectives, the weak no trump showing a balanced, minimum opening, limiting the hand and removing the need to find a rebid on poor values, is a clear winner.

To keep things simple all balanced hands are shown by bidding no trumps, either as an opening or as the first rebid, depending on the point count. So an opening 1NT is 12-14 and 2NT is 20-22. Other balanced hands rebid 1NT on 15-16, 2NT on 17-18, or 3NT on 19 (or a level higher after a two-level response). The lack of stoppers in an unbid suit should not deflect you from making the descriptive limit bid.

One useful result of this no trump bidding is that to open one of a suit and rebid in another shows five cards in the first bid suit (with the awkward exception of some 4-4-4-1 hands).

Why with 15+ points, four hearts and four clubs, do I say you must open 1♥? If you open 1♣ and partner responds 1♦ you have a choice of bidding 1♥ or 1NT. Either you describe an unbalanced hand by bidding 1♥ on a 4-4 distribution or you risk losing the heart fit by bidding 1NT to show your balanced 15-16 count. You can't do both. But if you open 1♥ and partner does not raise, then you know there is no eight-card major fit and you rebid no trumps. Simple reasons, easy to use. Of course, you may miss the best contract of two clubs but 1NT should score better.

Is Standard English standardised?

Yes – if you are a *Bridge for All* teacher, you agree to teach the system to your students because it co-ordinates with the teaching materials.

Players ask if they can play modified Standard English. NO! If you modify it, it is not Standard English but another dialect of Acol. You don't have to play this system but if you do, you have to play it as it stands – warts and all.