

Choosing your opening bid

The first bid all *Bridge for All* students learn is the opening of 1NT. It's a well-defined bid, 12, 13 or 14 points, a balanced hand with no voids or singletons, at most one doubleton. In addition it has no 5-card major. Easy to recognise the bid, easy for partner to understand, though I do wonder why even my third year students sometimes slip up and open something else.

The trouble is when we want to open but the hand isn't suitable for 1NT. Then we must start with a bid of one of a suit. When we open with a suit we have to be prepared with a rebid if partner responds with a new suit. So which suit do we open and what do we plan to rebid?

- ❖ With one suit longer than all the others, we open that suit. Plan to rebid this or another suit or no trumps depending on the shape.
- ❖ With two 5-card suits, open the higher ranking. Plan to rebid in the other suit.
- ❖ With two 4-card suits open 1♥ if you have four hearts – without hearts, open the higher ranking suit. Plan to rebid no trumps, showing your point count.
- ❖ With three 4-card suits, if the singleton is red, open the suit below the singleton. If the singleton is black, open the middle of three touching suits, that is 1♦ with a singleton spade and 1♥ with a singleton club. Rebid by raising partner if you have four or bidding your cheapest new suit if partner bids your singleton.

Try putting these rules into practice. Cover up the answers. What do you open and what do you plan to rebid with the following hands?

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| ♠ A 9
♥ Q 8 7 3
♦ Q 10 9
♣ A K J 2 | Open 1♥, looking for the major suit fit. Unless partner responds 1NT, you will rebid 1NT over partner's 1♠ and 2NT over a 2♣ or 2♦ response. If you were to open 1♣ and partner were to respond 1♦, you would not know whether to rebid 1♥ to make sure the major is not lost or 1NT to show your points. |
| ♠ A 9
♥ 9 8 7 3 2
♦ 6 2
♣ A K Q 9 | 13 points but the wrong shape for 1NT. Open 1♥, your longest suit even though the clubs are so much stronger. You can rebid 2♣ over a 1♠ response, but it will have to be 2♥ over a 2♦ response. |
| ♠ A 9
♥ Q 8 7 3
♦ 10 9 6
♣ A K J 2 | Open 1NT. Did this catch you out? It is a balanced 12-14, so we must open 1NT or we will be stuck for a rebid. Contrast this with the first hand which had 16 points. If this hand had the ♦A in place of the ♦6 making 18 points, you would open 1♥ and jump rebid in no trumps. |
| ♠ 9
♥ Q 8 7 3
♦ A 10 9 6
♣ A K J 2 | Open 1♦, the middle from three touching suits. The likely response is 1♠ and you will rebid 2♣. If partner makes a favourable response, you can raise 1♥ to 2♥ or 2♣ to 3♣. This hand is a rare occasion when your suit opening followed by a rebid in a new suit does not show five cards in the first suit. Follow the rules for which suit to open and you will never be stuck for a rebid. |
| ♠ A 9
♥ 10 8 7
♦ 10 9 6
♣ A K J 3 2 | Open 1NT. You have 12 balanced points. The clubs will win tricks in no trumps and making no trumps will score better than making clubs. We only bother with the minor suit games when we have very unbalanced hands. You may worry about opening 1NT with a concentration of points in one suit, but trust me, it's best. |
| ♠ 9 8 7 6 5
♥ A 3 2
♦ A K J 3 2
♣ – | Open 1♠. Always open the higher ranking with two 5-card suits. Rebid 2♦ over 1NT or 2♣. Raise 2♥ to 3♥ (or even 4♥). Pass 2♠ but bid 4♠ if partner raises you to 3♠. This is a much better hand than the 12 points would suggest, provided we can find some sort of fit with partner. |