

What do you mean by one no trump?

There can be a world of difference in the meaning of a word used in one context or another. Standing in a hotel lobby the shout of 'Fire' induces a very different reaction to when you hear the firing squad leader shout 'Fire'.

So it is in bridge. The words 'one no trump' may mean 'our side are going to make seven tricks with no trumps' but you react very differently to hearing them in the auction where opponents open 1♥ and partner overcalls 1NT to the one where you open 1♥ and partner responds 1NT. Context is everything.

It is interesting to ask how many different auctions you can think of that feature a 1NT bid. Without using double I could find 26 auctions that featured a 1NT bid. Each type of no trump bid showed a different number of points.

1NT opening	12-14 balanced
1NT rebid	15-16 fairly balanced
1NT overcall	16-18 with a stopper in suit opened
1NT response to 1♣ opening	8-10 balanced with no major
1NT response to opening bid of 1♦♥♠	6-9 with no suit that can be bid at one-level
1NT response to an overcall	9-12 with a stopper in suit opened

When people start bidding, they take quite readily to the 1NT opening. The meaning of balanced is learned by heart – NO void, NO singleton and at most ONE doubleton. For a 1NT opening add the words NO 5-card major. So it always comes as a shock to discover that the response of 1NT to partner's suit opening is neither 12-14 nor is it necessarily balanced. Lets look at some examples:

Partner opens 1♥ and the next hand passes. Is there any reason for you to respond when partner might just have a miserable 13 count? YES, of course there is. Partner may hold just 13 points but equally partner might have as many as 19. Lets look at some examples.

♠	Q 7 4
♥	5 3
♦	J 10 7 3
♣	K J 9 2

You hold seven points, so your side could have a combined 26 points. If you don't respond, you could miss a game. On the other hand, you don't want partner to get too excited; you've only got seven points – not enough to make a stronger response by bidding at the two-level. You can't support hearts with two; you can't bid spades with only three. Bid 1NT, it's a limit bid showing 6-9 points.

♠	7 4
♥	5 3
♦	J 10 7 3 2
♣	K Q 9 2

Now you have only six points but it is still right to respond. Despite just two little spades, which certainly won't stop the suit, you should bid 1NT. Partner will know you have a weak hand without spades or hearts. So partner, holding a 4-card minor, will bid it and your side should reach a making contract.

♠	K Q J
♥	5 3
♦	Q 4 3 2
♣	J 9 3 2

With nine points, you are right at the top end of the range for 1NT. You hold enough points for a two-level response, but with poor suits and no fit for partner, it is better to limit your hand straightaway. Of course if partner rebids 2NT or two of a minor, you will be happy to raise.

♠	J 9 4
♥	5
♦	J 10 7
♣	K Q 9 8 7 2

Whereas most no trump bids show balanced hands, a 1NT response does not. Just look at this hand. Seven points, enough to bid but not strong enough to bid 2♣. The only bid left is 1NT

So responding 1NT is pretty straightforward. Let's just test you have got all the points clear. Partner opens 1♦ and the next hand passes. What do you respond on the following hands?

♠ 5 4 3	♥ A 10 3	♦ J 10 9	♣ Q J 9 2	1NT, exactly what partner expects
♠ 5 4 3	♥ A 10 3	♦ J 10 9 8	♣ Q J 10	2♦, you could bid 1NT but it is better to support partner with four diamonds
♠ 5 4 3 2	♥ K J 10	♦ J 10 9	♣ Q 3 2	1♠, even with a major as pathetic as this you should bid it – not 1NT. Your partner could have five diamonds and four spades.
♠ 5 4 3 2	♥ K 3 2	♦ 10 9 2	♣ J 3 2	Pass, too weak to be worth a response.
♠ Q 5 4	♥ 5 4 2	♦ 2	♣ KJ5432	1NT, we should bid with six points and we are not strong enough for 2♣, so 1NT is all that is left.
♠ A K 4	♥ Q 4 2	♦ Q 8 7	♣ 9 8 7 6	2♣, with eleven points we are too strong for 1NT. A two-level response shows our values.