

Major Suit Openings

Major Suit Opening Bids

Our goal in the bidding is usually to find an 8-card or longer major suit fit. Playing in a major suit is worth more points, and it is easier to make game in a major suit (on the 4 level) than in a minor suit (on the 5 level). Therefore, our bidding system is oriented towards finding a major suit fit. If you have a 5-card or longer major suit, and enough points to open the bidding, then you should open 1 of the major. If you only have four cards in a major, even if it is your longest suit, you should not open in the major.

If you have a 5-card major, but you also have 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand, should you open 1 of your major or 1NT? There is no expert consensus, so you're free to do whatever you are most comfortable with. I prefer to open in my major suit, but the subsequent auction will be simpler if you open 1NT.

Hand Evaluation

To begin with, we learned how to count high card points to evaluate a hand. But what if your hand has interesting distribution? A hand with a 7-card suit or a void somewhere will certainly be more useful than a balanced hand with the same high cards. To more accurately judge the usefulness of your hand, you can add distribution points to your HCP. Length points are the simplest: you get one point for a 5-card suit, two points for a 6-card suit, etc.

Short-suit points are more complicated, and there are actually several popular methods for counting them. The one I discuss here is based on the principle that a short suit is more useful in the dummy (the hand with short trumps) than in the declarer's hand (the hand with long trumps), because trumping with the long trump holding does not produce extra tricks. (If declarer has 5 trumps and dummy has 3, we can take 5 trump tricks if declarer runs his trumps. If we ruff in the short hand, then we can take a ruff in the dummy and still take all 5 of declarer's trumps, for 6 tricks. If we ruff in the long hand, then declarer gets a ruff, but then only has 4 trumps left, so he still gets 5 tricks total.) Therefore, if you are going to be declarer, you get:

- 1 point for a doubleton,
- 2 points for a singleton,
- 3 points for a void.

If you are going to be dummy, you get:

- 1 point for a doubleton,
- 3 points for a singleton,
- 5 points for a void.

If you do not have a trump fit yet, then you cannot count short-suit points. Your short suits will be useless if you play in NT.

Raising Partner's Major

After partner opens 1 of a major, your first priority is to raise partner's suit if you can. The point of the bidding is to find an 8-card major suit fit, so once you know that you have one, you should tell partner as soon as possible. If partner opens the bidding with a major, and you have 3-card or longer support:

- If you have 0-5 points, pass.
- If you have 6-9 points, raise partner's major to the 2-level.
- If you have 10-12 points and 4-card or longer support for partner's suit, then raise partner's major to the 3 level. If you only have 3-card support, start by bidding a new suit on the 2-level, then raise partner's suit to 3 on your next turn. We require that you have 4-card support to jump to the 3-level because it is frequently useful for partner to know whether you have 3 or 4 cards in the suit.
- If you have 13+ points, do not jump to 4 of partner's major. This is reserved for a different meaning. Instead, start by bidding a new suit on the 2 level, and then jump to 4 of partner's major on the next turn.

Preemption

One of the biggest challenges in bidding is that you have a limited amount of bidding space to describe your hand. When you have a good hand, you want as much space as possible so that you can describe your hand well. When you have a bad hand, you want to take up space so that your opponents cannot describe their hands. In modern bidding, there are many situations in which you will make a jump bid with a weak hand for precisely this reason.

One example is the auction where you raise partner's major directly to the 4-level. Rather than use this for a strong hand, we use this for a weak hand with 5 (or more) cards in partner's suit. Frequently, you will be able to make the contract, simply because you have so many trumps between you and your partner. Even if you don't make it, the opponents probably could have gotten a better score if they had been allowed to bid freely.

What if I Can't Raise My Partner?

If you do not have 3-card or longer support for your partner, you will have to find another bid.

If you have 0-5 points, you still pass. Even if you don't have many trumps, the contract is low enough that your partner should be safe.

If you have 6-9 points, you do not have enough points to bid above the 1 level, so you will usually bid 1NT, which describes most hands with 6-9 points. However, if partner opened 1♥ and you have 4 spades, you should bid 1♠.

If you have 10+ points, you have enough points to bid on the 2 level. (That does not mean you have to; if you have 4 spades and no longer suit to bid, you should still bid 1♠.) You may also bid 2NT with 10-12 points, or 3NT with 13-15.