

Reverse Bids:

A 2-level reverse bid by Opener requires:

1. Minimum 16 HCPs.
2. At least 5-4 distribution in Opener's two suits.
3. The first suit bid must be longer than the second suit bid.
4. The second suit bid must be higher in rank than the first suit.
5. Partner must have bypassed Opener's second suit with his response.

Note: A reverse bid by Opener is forcing for one round. Partner must bid again. When responding to a reverse, Partner may be forced to agree with or support the first suit at the 3 level. Opener needs 16+ points to force Partner to bid that high, considering that Partner has promised only 6 points.

Players must be careful not to make a reverse bid without 16+ HCPs. When used appropriately, reverse bids can be extremely valuable to show additional points.

Let's first look at two hands that are not reverse bids. This will help reinforce the basic bidding rules. These are all opening hands, with no bids yet made in the game.

Hand #1 has 13 HCPs plus 1 for length.

(Minimum opening hand)

Notice the 5 spades and 4 hearts. Opener is bidding spades, the higher-ranking suit.

Opening bid: 1♠ (bidding the 5-card major).



Here are some possible bids by Partner (Responder) and how Opener should rebid:

1NT – Responder is showing less than 3-card support for spades, has 6-9 pts, may have 4 hearts but cannot bid at the 2 level without 10+ pts. Opener passes.
(Some partnerships may consider a 1NT response to a major opening bid to be forcing, in which case, Opener bids 2♥ - non-forcing).

2♣ or 2♦ – (2 of a minor) Responder has 10+ pts and 5+ clubs or diamonds, no support for spades. Opener bids 2♥ to show the 4-card heart suit. This is not a reverse, because Opener bid the 5-card higher-ranking spade suit first. A change of suit by Opener, without a jump, is not forcing. Responder can pass the 2♥ bid, but may choose to bid 2NT with stoppers in the unbid suits or make another bid at the 3 level.

2♥ – Responder has 10+ pts and 4+ hearts. A change of suit in first round is forcing, so Opener must bid again. Opener should bid 3♥ to show support for Partner's 4-card (or more) heart suit. Opener can now count 2 Dummy pts for the two doubletons (15 total pts).

2♠ – Responder has 3+ spade support and 6-9 pts. Opener should pass.

Hand #2 has 13 HCPs plus 1 for length. (Minimum opening hand)
Notice the 5 hearts and 4 spades (compare how similar this is to Hand #1).
Pay close attention to the fact that the shorter spade suit is higher-ranking than hearts and Opener will bid the 5-card lower-ranking heart suit first.

Opening bid: 1♥ (showing a 5-card major)



(Attention! This hand does have enough pts to qualify for a reverse bid. Opener starts bidding with the lower-ranking 5-4 suit, but must be careful not to bid a reverse.)

Here are some possible bids by Partner (Responder) and how Opener should rebid:

1♠ — Responder is not showing support for hearts, but has 4+ spades and is promising 6+ pts. A change of suit by Responder is forcing for one round and Opener has 4 spades to support, so Opener's rebid will be 2♠. Opener can now count Dummy pts (15 pts), almost enough to bid 3♠, inviting to game. If Responder has 10+ pts, he should invite Opener to game by raising the bid to 3♠. With this hand, Opener would accept his invitation and bid 4♠.

1NT — Responder does not have 3-card support for hearts, does not have a 4-card spade suit (has skipped spades to bid 1NT), has 6-9 pts. Opener should pass.

2♣ or 2♦ — (2 of a minor) Responder has 10+ pts and 5+ clubs or 5+ diamonds, is not showing support for hearts, does not have a 4-card spade suit. Opener now bids 2♠ to show the 4-card spade suit. A change of suit by Responder is forcing for one round. In this case, Opener is forced to bid at the 2 level above the minor, so this is not considered to be a reverse bid. Partner can pass Opener's rebid.

2♥ — Responder has 6-9 pts and support for hearts. Opener has a minimum hand so will pass.

Now that you have reviewed the basic bidding with a minimum opening hand (12-15 pts), we will now look at the situation where Opener has 16+ HCPs. Opener can use a reverse bid with 16+ HCPs, but cannot use a reverse bid with a minimum hand. Opener must be very careful how he bids when he opens the bidding with a lower-ranking 5-card suit, and also has a 4-card suit in a higher rank.

Hand #3 has 17 HCPs and 1 for length. (Medium opening hand)
 Notice the 5 hearts and 4 spades. Hearts is a lower-ranking suit than spades. This is when a reverse could be used so Opener should be alert to this.

Opening bid: 1♥ (showing the 5-card major suit)



(This hand qualifies for a reverse bid. Opener has 16+ pts and is opening with the lower-ranking 5-4 suit. Responder/Partner must skip bidding the Opener's 4-card suit in order for the reverse to apply.)

Here are some possible responses by Responder and how Opener should rebid:

1♠ — Responder is not showing support for hearts, but has 4+ spades and is promising 6+ pts. Opener has 4 spades to support and now must jump to show extra points, so Opener's rebid will be 3♠, inviting to game. This is not a reverse bid. It just shows support for spades and extra points. If Opener bids only 2♠, without jumping, he is limiting the hand to a minimum opening hand (12-15 pts).

1NT — Responder does not have 3-card support for hearts, does not have a 4-card spade suit, and has 6-9 pts. Opener can now use a reverse bid of 2♠. This is forcing for one round.

2♣ or 2♦ — (2 of a minor) Responder has 10+ pts and 5+ clubs or 5+ diamonds, is showing no support for hearts, and does not have a 4-card spade suit. Opener must be careful now. This is where it can get tricky. If Opener bids 2♠ to show the 4-card spade suit, Responder can pass. This is not a jump, so Opener is showing only a minimum hand. Opener must bid 3♠ to show extra points and to force another bid. A jump-shift by Opener is forcing. With stoppers in the 4th unbid suit and no fit in either of Opener's two suits, Responder should bid 3NT knowing that there is the combined 25 pts required for game. Without stoppers in the 4th suit, Responder may have to repeat his minor which takes the contract to the 4 level and makes a 3NT bid impossible. So, Opener must be careful of that, too. If Opener has stoppers in the 4th unbid suit, he is the one who should bid 3NT, since he knows that Responder skipped a spade bid and, therefore, does not have a 4-card suit in spades. "The one who knows, goes."

2♥ — Responder has 6-9 pts and support for hearts. Opener has a medium hand so will invite to game by bidding 3♥. With 6-7 pts, Responder should pass and leave it at 3♥. With 8-9 pts, Responder should raise to game at 4♥.

So far, these opening hands have had the distribution of 5-4 in the majors. Reverses also apply in the minors and, again, the Opener has to be careful to bid a reverse only when he has enough points to do so.

Hand #4 has 16 HCPs plus 1 for length (medium opening hand). Notice the 4 hearts and 5 diamonds. Hearts is higher-ranking than diamonds.

Opening bid: 1♦ (denying a 5-card major, showing longer diamonds than clubs, or 4-4, minimum of 3 diamonds, Partner can usually expect 4 diamonds)



(This hand qualifies for a reverse bid with 16+ pts but Responder must skip the 2nd suit for a reverse to apply. Opener bids the lower-ranking 5-4 suit first.)

Here are some responses by Partner (Responder) and how Opener should rebid:

1♥ — Responder has 6+ pts and 4+ hearts. Since Opener has 16+ pts and 4 hearts to support, he will jump to 3♥, inviting to game. It is not necessary to use a reverse bid.

1♠ — Responder has 4+ spades and is promising 6+ pts. Opener does not have a fit for spades. Responder has denied having 4 hearts, though he could have 5 spades and 4 hearts, for example. Opener will bid 2♥ (forcing for one round). This is a reverse bid showing 16+ points. Responder is expected to bid again, now aware that Opener has 5 diamonds and 4 hearts and 16+ pts.

1NT — Responder does not have a 4-card major and has 6-9 pts. He may have support for diamonds but cannot bid them unless he has 5. Opener's bid is 2♥, a reverse bid, forcing for one round, to show the 16+ pts and 4 hearts.

2♣ — Responder does not have a 4-card major, but has 5+ clubs and 10+ pts. With Opener's 16+ points, there may be enough pts for game in NT. A trump suit in a major is not likely in this situation. Opener should use a jump bid of 3♥ to show extra pts and stoppers in hearts. Responder must bid again, if necessary at the 4 level in diamonds. A bid of 3NT by Opener may be a bit risky with just one stopper in spades. Opener is hoping that Responder will bid 3NT if he has stoppers in spades, since that is the only unbid suit.

2♦ — Responder has 6-9 pts and 5 diamonds to support. He is denying a 4-card major. Opener can now bid 2♥ to show 16+ pts and a 4-card heart suit. Partner should not pass. Unfortunately, it may be difficult to find the best contract. A NT contract, though more desirable than a minor contract, could be risky with just one spade, even though it is the Ace and it is a stopper. Game in 5♦ may be there, but difficult to assess.

See next page re: Flannery — a special bid that can be useful once you understand reverses.

Flannery

A man named Flannery invented a special bid to show a hand with 5 hearts and 4 spades, and 11-15 HCPs. The opening bid to show this type of hand is 2♦. If you and your partner agree to use this bid, then you cannot use the 2♦ opening bid to describe a weak hand with 6 diamonds. Also, as soon as Opener uses this bid to open the bidding, it must be alerted by his partner. The opponents may then ask the Opener to explain what the "Alert" means. So you and your partner must have an understanding that you are using Flannery and are not using the 2♦ weak opening bid.

Since a 2♦ weak opening bid is often doubled by opponents, or overcalled with a 5-card major, it does not have the pre-empting power that a 2♠ or 2♥ weak opening bid has. In fact, sometimes a 2♦ weak opening bid can benefit the opponents as it gives them some useful information about your hand. So Flannery decided that he would rather use the 2♦ opening bid to describe a hand with 11-15 HCPs, 5 hearts and 4 spades.

Have a look at these three hands below:



The first hand is perfect for a Flannery opening bid of 2♦. It shows 5 hearts, 4 spades, and 11-15 pts. It describes this hand very well. Remember, if you decide to use this bid, you must make sure it is understood by you and your partner (partnership agreement) and is alerted properly (Partner immediately says "Alert" and/or shows the Alert card from the bidding box).

The second hand is a reverse. It shows 17 HCPs plus 1 for length. It would be opened 1♥ and, if Partner (Responder) bids 1NT, Opener would bid 2♠ to show 16+ pts, 5 hearts and 4 spades. If Partner passes the opening bid and the opponents get into the bidding, Opener may also have a chance to bid 2♠ to show the extra points. Partner may have 4 spades, but fewer than 6 pts, so would have passed the Opener's first bid. Now that Partner knows that Opener has 16+ pts, he may be able to re-evaluate his hand and bid something.

The third hand should not present any problems. It shows 13 HCPs plus 1 for length (opening pts) and a 5-card major to bid. The higher-ranking major is longer than the lower-ranking major, so it's a simple bid to figure out. The opening bid is 1♠. If Partner responds 1NT, Opener would pass. If Partner responds at the 2 level, Opener will get a chance to bid the 4-card heart suit.

If the partnership decides to use Flannery 2♦ as an opening bid, then responding bids should be discussed. Bidding can then become more complicated.