

Lesson 1 – Opening 1 Level in a Suit

In most cases, you should have at least 12 High Card Points (HCP) to start the bidding (to “open” the bidding). Please note that experienced players may evaluate their hands quite differently, using complicated methods. For beginners, simplicity makes it easier to learn. Some beginner books recommend 13 HCP to open, but this is considered somewhat outdated, especially in competitive games.

“Bid on length, not strength.”

Two steps:

(1) Count your high card points (HCP). If you have enough points (12+) to open the bidding, then you should bid.

(2) Bid on the length of your suit. That will determine the suit you will bid. You must consider the total point count in your hand, not the points in a particular suit. When you bid a suit, you are showing the length in that suit based on rules. The 12+ points are in your hand, but the suit shown in your opening bid might not contain many of those points.

BRIDGE IS A PARTNERSHIP GAME! You are bidding and communicating with a partner. You may have low cards in a suit, but your partner may have the top cards in that suit. It’s how your hands fit together, in combination with total points that counts. “Fits take tricks!” You will do better at bridge if you can communicate and cooperate with your partner so that, together, you find the best contract.

If you have fewer than 12 HCP, for now, **Pass**. Sometimes you can “open” the bidding with fewer than 12 points, but that will be covered in another lesson.

An opening bid of **1 of a suit** shows 12-21 points. Your partner will not know how many points you have immediately. You will narrow that range as you continue to bid.

Step 1: With 5 cards or more in a major suit, open 1♠ or 1♥ appropriately.

With 5 cards or more in both majors, bid the major with the most cards.

With 5 cards or more in both majors, and exactly the **same number** of cards in both majors, bid the higher-ranking major (1♠) to start.

Hint: When having 5 cards in both major suits, think **“High Five!”** Bid the higher-ranking suit first.

Step 2: Skip this step for now. It’s for opening the bidding with 1NT. This is covered in the next lesson.

Step 3: If you do not have a 5-card major, then open with one of your minor suits (1♦ or 1♣) even though that minor suit might not be long or strong. When you open in a minor suit, you are giving two important messages to your partner: “I have opening points. I do not have a 5-card major.” You are not bragging about your minor suit! You and your partner are putting clues together, slowly.

With more diamonds than clubs, bid 1♦. With more clubs than diamonds, bid 1♣.

If you have 4 cards exactly of both diamonds and clubs, bid 1♦.

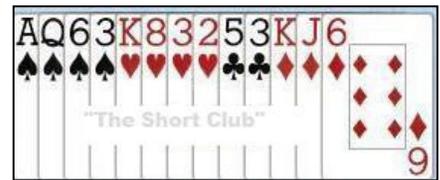
Memory Hint: A diamond has 4 points, so when you have 4-4 in the minors, bid 1♦.

If you have 3 cards exactly of both diamonds and clubs, bid 1♣.

Memory Hint: A club has 3 petals, so when you have 3-3 in the minors, bid 1♣.

When opening the bidding, with 5 cards in both minors (and no 5-card major), think: **“High Five!”** That means bid the higher-ranking minor suit when you have 5 of each.

Here is one hand distribution (4 spades, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs) which some players prefer to open with 1♣. When they do, they must alert it and say, "Could be short." Please open this hand following the simple rules on this sheet and, if necessary, ignore advice from well-meaning players for now. You should open this hand



with 1♦. When you open 1 of a major, you are promising 5+ cards in that major. When you open 1 of a minor, you are denying a 5-card major and you are promising at least 3 cards in the minor. That's all. Most times you will have 4 cards or more in the minor suit anyway. Here's a good phrase to remember to say when another player gives you advice:

"Thank you for your advice. I am a beginner. For now, I prefer to follow the simple rules."

When you open by bidding 1♣ or 1♦, Partner knows you do not have a 5-card major but you have enough points to open (12-21 pts). That's important information to know. Don't ever feel embarrassed when you open the bidding with a 3-card minor suit with only spot cards. You have opening points!

Bridge is a partnership game! Much of your success in bridge will depend on your ability to communicate accurately. You will be a better bridge player if you can convey clear messages to your partner and can understand and apply what your partner is telling you.

Your opening bid:	This is the message you are sending to your partner. In all 1-level opening suit bids, you are promising 12-21 points and this:
1♠	I have at least 5 spades, maybe more. I may have equal number of hearts. I am promising 5 spades minimum.
1♥	I have at least 5 hearts, maybe more. I have more hearts than spades. I am promising 5 hearts minimum.
1♦	I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 diamonds.
1♣	I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 clubs.

You cannot tell your partner everything with your first bid. As the bidding continues, both partners should be analyzing the messages and trying to find the best suit and the best level.

Examples - Opening 1 of a Major Suit (12-21 points):

When you have opening points and a 5-card major, you can stop at Step 1.

You have found your opening bid!



14 HCP + 1 for length. Open 1♥. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts and at least 5 hearts."



15 HCP + 1 for length. Open 1♠. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts and at least 5 spades."



15 HCP + 2 for length. Open 1♠. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts and at least 5 spades."



19 HCP + 2 for length. Open 1♠. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts and at least 5 spades."

With exactly 5 cards in both majors, bid the higher-ranking major first. "High Five!"



12 HCP + 1 for length. Open 1♠. **Bid on length, not strength.**

You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts and at least 5 spades."

Focus on this: Your first goal is to find an 8-card fit in a major suit. If you think you should open 1♣ with the hand above, read this. If you open 1♣, you are telling your partner you do not have a 5-card major. It is possible that your partner has the Ace/King/Queen of spades! If you deny having a 5-card major and your partner has 3 spades, you will not find your 8-card fit in a major which is your first goal. Bidding is just the first step in the game of bridge. The next step is playing the hand and requires another set of skills. Should you happen to end up playing this hand with spades as trump, you may need to use a different strategy for playing the hand. And your lowly ♠3 and ♠2 will probably take some tricks!

Examples - Opening 1 of a Minor Suit (12-21 points):

When you open 1♠ or 1♥, you are showing at least 5 cards in that major suit.

When you open 1♦ or 1♣, you are saying this and nothing more: "I do not have a 5-card major. I have opening pts. I have at least 3 cards in the minor suit which I bid."



14 HCP + 1 for length. No 5-card major. Open 1♦ because you have more diamonds than clubs. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 diamonds."



12 HCP. No 5-card major. Open 1♣ because you have more clubs than diamonds. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 clubs."



13 HCP. No 5-card major. Open 1♦ because you have more diamonds than clubs. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 diamonds."



13 HCP + 1 for length. No 5-card major. Open 1♣ because you have more clubs than diamonds. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 clubs."



13 HCP. No 5-card major. Open 1♦ because you have more diamonds than clubs. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 diamonds."



12 HCP. No 5-card major. Open 1♦. With exactly 4 of each minor, open 1♦. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 diamonds."



14 HCP. No 5-card major. Open 1♣ because you have exactly 3-3 in clubs and diamonds. You are saying: "I have 12-21 pts. I do not have a 5-card major. I have at least 3 clubs."

Before you continue, you may wish to try Quiz #1 and check your answers to see if you have understood this lesson so far.

Responding to Partner's opening bid of 1 of a suit — 1♠, 1♥, 1♦ or 1♣:

If you have fewer than 6 points, **Pass**, for now.

Please note: The following responses have been simplified to enable a beginner to continue with the bidding with minimum complexity. The next bids apply when the responder has 6-9 points. If the responder has more points, the bids may be different. These guidelines are for beginners and may change somewhat as you learn more and gain more experience.

The Pocket Guide for Beginner Bridge has a brief summary of opening bids that can be used as a quick reference, but these more detailed lessons help you understand the reasons for choosing a particular suit. If you follow the rules consistently, you and your partner can rely on each other and, eventually, you will see how it all fits together.

With 6-9 points, you should respond, as follows:

- Partner opens **1♠**:
With 3 or more spades to support, you have found an 8-card fit for trump (5+3=8).
-- Bid **2♠** to show Partner that you have support for spades.
With fewer than 3 spades, bid **1NT**.
- Partner opens **1♥**:
With 3 or more hearts to support, you have found an 8-card fit for trump.
-- Bid **2♥** to show Partner that you have support.
With fewer than 3 hearts, but having 4 spades or more, bid **1♠** to tell Partner you have 6+ points and 4+ spades. Otherwise, bid **1NT**.
- Partner opens **1♦ or 1♣**:
Important: First priority is to investigate whether you have an 8-card fit in a major. Be aware that your partner could have 4 of a major when opening with 1 of a minor.
With 4 spades or 4 hearts (or more), respond by bidding your major suit at the 1 Level. A bid by you (Responder) of **1♠** or **1♥** promises 4 cards minimum (could be more than 4) in that suit and 6+ points.
If you do not have a 4-card major, but you have 5 cards in the same minor suit your partner bid, respond **2♦ or 2♣** to support.
Otherwise, bid **1NT**.
- Partner opens **1♣** and you do not have 4 cards in either spades or hearts, nor do you have 5 cards in clubs to support, but you have 4+ cards in diamonds, bid **1♦**. Otherwise, bid **1NT**.

Summary:

With 6-9 points, as responder, your first goal is to support your partner's major suit if you have 3+ cards in that suit.

Your next goal is to bid your 4-card major suit, whenever you can do so at the 1 level.

If partner opened in a minor suit and you do not have a 4-card major, but you have 5 cards to support the minor, bid the minor suit at the 2 level.

With no other options, bid 1NT. This is a fall-back bid, showing 6-9 pts and limiting the points in your hand.

Warning: If you bid a new suit at the 2 level, you are promising 10+ pts.

Here are some important points to remember:

Please be careful to understand this terminology: One player opens the bidding. This player is referred to as the Opener. The partner of the Opener is the Responder.

#1: A change in suit by Responder in the first round of bidding is considered forcing! Opener must bid again. That means Responder also gets a chance to bid again.

#2: When you have support for your partner's opening bid in a major, you can re-evaluate your hand and count Dummy Points. (More info on this in another lesson.) If you take more tricks than expected, this could be why.

#3: If you have fewer than 10 points, you should not raise the bidding above the 1 Level unless you have support for Partner's suit. Support means 3 cards in partner's major or 5-card support for a minor. Your fall-back bid is 1NT.

#4: The main goal for now is to find the best suit or NT contract. You may not find the best level (how high to bid) just yet. It's difficult to learn everything at once! It takes time.

#5: When you have opening points with two suits, exactly 5 cards in each, bid the higher-ranking suit. Remember: "High Five!" (This also applies with 6-6 in two suits.)

#6: When responding with exactly 4 cards in two suits, bid the lower-ranking suit.

Example: Your partner opens 1♦ or 1♣. You have 6+ points and exactly 4 cards in each major. Bid the lower-ranking one first, 1♥. When you respond with 1♥, you are telling your partner that you may also have 4 spades. If you respond with 1♠, you are denying having 4 hearts because you skipped hearts.

For now, you may not find the best level of your final contract. If you can identify an 8-card fit in a major suit and end up in that major suit contract, that's a good start!

In a future lesson, you will learn more about how high to bid. If you have found your 8-card fit in a major suit, you can use the following guidelines to bid higher for now.

You should have 25+ points together to bid to Game level (4♥ or 4♠) in a major suit. When you or your partner play the hand (become the declarer), you will need to take 10 tricks. This is a reasonable guideline and will help you assess how high to bid so you can make your contract.

Here is a simple way to bid when Opener bids a major suit (showing 5 or more in that suit) and Responder has 3 or more cards in that suit to support their partner. You have found your 8-card fit in a major suit which is your first goal. Congratulations! Bidding is not always so easy as that. 😊

With 6-9 points, support your partner's suit by bidding 2♥ or 2♠.

With 10-12 points, support your partner's suit by bidding 3♥ or 3♠.

With 13+ points, you know you have game level (25+ pts) together. However, bid another 4+-card suit first, even at the 2-level if necessary. This is called a "temporizing" bid. A change of suit by partner in the first round is forcing so you are assured that your partner will not pass yet. Then jump to game level, 4♥ or 4♠, in the next round. This shows that you have 13+ pts. (You will learn more about this later.)

If you have not yet done so, try Quiz #1 and check your answers. Next, you should try the Practice Games for Lesson 1 which explain in more detail the strategies for bidding and playing the hand.