

## Lesson 2 (Part 1)– Opening 1 No Trump (1NT)

**With 12-21 points**, follow these steps. Repeat them to yourself as you decide on what to bid. It's a process of elimination. If Step 1 does not apply, go to Step 2. If Step 2 does not apply, go to Step 3.

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

**Step 2:** If you do not have a 5-card major, check to see if you have a balanced hand and 15-17 HCP (open **1NT**) or 20-21 HCP\* (open **2NT**).

**Step 3:** If you do not have a 5-card major, then your last option is to open with one of your minor suits (1♦ or 1♣).

The 1NT opening bid should be considered before opening in a minor suit and this lesson concentrates on the 1NT opening bid.

\*With 20-21 HCP and a balanced hand, you should open 2NT, but that will be covered in the next lesson. A 2NT opening bid is not as common as opening 1NT.

With **15-17 points and a balanced hand**, open with **1NT**.

Add a point for the 5<sup>th</sup> card in a suit. If it brings the count to 18, follow Lesson 1. Here is some terminology you should now be familiar with:

**Doubleton** = 2 cards in a suit

**Singleton** = 1 card in a suit

**Void** = no cards in a suit

**HCP** = High Card Points

**Balanced Hand** = all 4 suits, no voids, no singletons, no more than one doubleton.

**Honor Cards** = Ace, King, Queen or Jack (some consider the 10 to be an honor)

**Spot Cards** = any card, 10 or lower

Consider this: In a 1NT contract, you can lose 6 tricks. You need to take only 7 tricks to make the contract and you will not always be able to make it.

When you start to bid higher, searching for game level in NT, you should become concerned about high cards which will stop the opponents from running one of their long suits. (See more information about stopper cards at the end of this lesson.)

Sometimes it is best to leave the bidding in a minor contract at the 3 level; sometimes it is best to bid NT anyway (you will get a better score); and sometimes you may end up in a major suit contract with only 7 cards in the major as the better option. This takes experience and judgment. Do the best you can for now.

Experienced players may tell you that a 1NT contract is one of the hardest to make. This is somewhat true. Not only that, but beginners generally do not play a NT hand very well. You will find a specific lesson on that topic on this website to help you learn some techniques that will help you play a NT hand better. I also remind my beginner students when they are faced with a 1NT contract and are nervous: "You can lose 6 tricks and still make the contract!"

Balanced hands come in only three shapes, with 13 cards distributed as follows, including all 4 suits (no voids): 4-4-3-2      4-3-3-3      5-3-3-2  
You do not need to memorize these shapes; this is given as information only.

Please note that some players will open 1NT without having a balanced hand as described above. They may follow some other rules. They may open 1NT with 12-14 points or 16-18. When you have more experience, you may decide on different bidding rules, but simple rules are the best for beginners. Many experienced players keep to these simple rules and play quite well.

For beginners, I suggest that you should always open 1♥ or 1♠ with 5 cards in a major and 12-21 pts. I like this rule because it helps me and my partner find an 8-card fit in a major much easier, which is the first goal! Some experienced players will sometimes open 1NT with a 5-card major. You can have 5 cards in one suit and still be balanced (5-3-3-2). I don't use that method and I don't recommend it. Bridge players can be very opinionated, but you should consistently follow one set of rules for now if you want to be less confused!

Below are some examples of hands which fall into the 1NT range (15-17 points) for opening bids. The comments below each hand show how to analyze and reason out the hand to decide on the opening bid, whether you should open 1NT or not:



Opening bid: 1NT - 16 HCP, balanced hand, no 5-card major



Opening bid: 1♦ - 16 HCP, singleton makes it unbalanced, so should not open 1NT; no 5-card major, must open in a minor; diamond suit is longer than clubs.



Opening bid: 1♣ - 16 HCP plus 1 pt for length, 2 doubletons make it unbalanced, so should not open 1NT; no 5-card major, must open in a minor; clubs are longer than diamonds.

Note: Some players might open 1NT with this hand.



Opening bid: 1♦ - 18 HCP, balanced hand but too many pts to open 1NT; no 5-card major, must open in a minor, diamonds are longer than clubs



Opening bid: 1NT - 15 HCP, balanced hand, no 5-card major



Opening bid: 1♥ - 16 HCP plus 1 pt for length; balanced hand; open with a 5-card major suit when you have one

Note: Some players might open 1NT with this hand.

### What does Responder know about their partner's 1NT opening bid?

- 1) Opener has 15-17 points
- 2) Opener has all 4 suits
- 3) Opener does not have a 5-card major, but could have one or two 4-card majors
- 4) Opener has only one suit that could be a doubleton
- 5) Opener does not have a singleton or a void

As soon as your partner opens 1NT, you should put your hand into one of these three categories based on points, and consider whether or not you have game level\*:

Points	Analysis:
0-7	You and partner do not have game level.
8-9	You and partner could have game level. It is possible. It depends on whether opener has 15, 16, or 17 pts and you do not know which, so you can invite, but opener makes the final decision.
10+	You and partner have game level points (in 3NT or 4♥ or 4♠) because opener has shown a minimum of 15 pts.

Note: Besides HCP, distribution of the suits is also an important factor and you will learn more about that as you gain more experience. For now, this is enough information.

**Stoppers** = A stopper in a suit is a high card that will stop the opponents from running the suit in a NT contract. We don't worry too much about stoppers when in a Trump contract because we can "ruff" (use a trump card) to stop the opponents from running their suit. But when in a NT contract, stoppers are important.

The Ace is always a stopper. The King/Queen combination is at least one stopper. The King with one other card in that suit is considered a stopper. The Queen with two other cards in the suit is considered a stopper. The Jack with three other cards in a suit is considered a stopper. Generally, if you or your partner bid a suit with 4+ cards, you consider that suit stopped. To take the bidding to game level in NT (3NT), you should have established that you have 25+ pts together and, between you and your partner, you have all suits stopped. If you stop bidding at 1NT or 2NT (before reaching game), you may not have established stoppers in all suits and that's okay. That's why you stop bidding before you reach game level!

Here are three bidding examples when you do not concern yourself about stoppers in all suits, but may still end up in 1NT:

- (1) To open with 1NT, you are not concerned about stoppers, not yet. In fact, players often open 1NT with a "worthless doubleton" (two spot cards).
- (2) When you respond to your partner's opening bid (1 of a suit) with 6-9 points, you can bid 1NT without stoppers. It's a fall-back bid.
- (3) When you open 1 of a suit, your partner responds with 1 of another suit, and you rebid 1NT, you do not consider stoppers. It's a fall-back bid.

**\*As you bid and play more, remind yourself of these point levels:**

Game Level in a major suit is 4♥ or 4♠ and requires approximately 25 points. Declarer will need to take 10 or more tricks to make the contract.

Game Level in 3NT requires approximately 25 points. Declarer will need to take 9 or more tricks to make the contract.

Game Level in a minor suit is 5♦ or 5♣ and requires approximately 29 points. Declarer will need to take 11 or more tricks to make the contract.