

Standard American bidding is assumed unless otherwise stated

Question & Answers:

1 Q Which bids need alerting?

A An 'impossible one' to start with - the rules keep on changing. Basically anything that is not 'standard' needs alerting. But what is 'standard'? And 'standard' keeps changing all the time! For example, years ago a weak opening two bid needed alerting, these days most players play weak twos and strong twos need alerting. At our club I simply ask people to use their common sense. If it is possible that the opponents will not know what the bid is - then alert it. I have included guidelines in the club rules and in the 'alert procedures' section I include a recent ACBL document on alerts/announcements etc. and I mention where it differs at our club.

2 Q Which opening range for 1NT is best?

A This topic is discussed in part 3 of the conventions section.

3 Q A three part question:

- (a) Is opening 1NT with a 5 card major recommended?
- (b) Is a weak doubleton acceptable for a 1NT opening?
- (c) Are two very weak suits acceptable for a 1NT opening?

A (a) This is a matter of personal preference. It is fully covered in section 1.1 of the NT bidding book.

(b) A weak doubleton is no problem. Consider this typical hand: ♠54 ♥KJ43 ♦AQ8 ♣AQ76

Playing a strong NT you should open 1NT. The problem with opening 1♣ is that you have no sensible rebid after a 1♠ response from partner. You have exactly the same situation if you play a weak NT with ♠54 ♥Q943 ♦AJ8 ♣AQ76 (a similar hand in the 12-14 point range). The bottom line: With a balanced hand within your 1NT opening range - open 1NT. In fact, some players will open 1NT with two doubletons, this is discussed in detail in section 1.2 of the NT bidding book.

(c) Consider this hand from news-sheet No.79: ♠96 ♥AKQ8 ♦764 ♣AK75. I suggested a strong 1NT opening. Now the general opinion in the club was that they would not open 1NT with two weak suits; however, nobody could come up with a sensible rebid having opened 1♣ and got a 1♠ response. As I said above - with a balanced hand within your 1NT opening range - open 1NT.

- 4 Q How many points do I need to respond with Stayman to my partner's 1NT opening? And how many for a Jacoby transfer to a major?
- A (a) Stayman. There are numerous variations of Stayman and many require invitational values or better to bid it (i.e. 8+ playing a strong NT or 11+ playing a weak NT). Probably the most popular form of Stayman is 'Garbage Stayman'. The points requirement are zero playing Garbage Stayman - provided that you can cope with any response. Typical shapes are (♠♥♦♣ order) : -
54xx, 45xx and 4441 (or similar - with a ♣ singleton or void). It's fully covered in the link.
- (b) Transfers. There is no points requirement at all in order to transfer into a 5 card major. In fact, it is important to do so with a weak hand as otherwise your hand may be useless in 1NT.
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- 5 Q I know about Jacoby transfers and Stayman when I hold a major suit and partner opens 1NT, but what do I do when I hold a minor suit(s)?

- A I'll answer this question in two parts: -
- (a) With a 5 card minor and insufficient strength to investigate slam it's best to ignore the minor suit. So pass with a weak hand, bid 2NT with an invitational hand and bid 3NT with game going values.
- (b) With a 6 card minor you may choose to transfer to the minor. You may do this with any strength hand; the best method is 4-way transfers which is fully described in the NT bidding book
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- 6 Q We play 2♦ and 2♥ as transfers over partner's 1NT opening, so a natural 2♠ is not needed. What is the best use for this bid?

- A There are a number of possibilities and they are listed in the start of chapter 4 of the NT bidding book. If you/your partner are relatively inexperienced then it's probably best to keep it simple with 2♠ showing a weak hand with a (6+ card) minor suit. Partner should bid 3♣ which you then either pass or correct. A popular use in the States is Minor Suit Stayman, but this is nowhere as efficient as SARS for finding minor suit fits. For more experienced partnerships the best scheme for 2♠ is undoubtedly 4-way transfers, but this has repercussions elsewhere (it affects your Stayman sequences). This is all fully covered in the NT bidding book.
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- 7 Q What does the 2NT response to Stayman mean (i.e. 1NT - 2♣ - 2NT)? Does it show both majors or does it show a maximum with no major?

- A Now there are numerous variations of Stayman and many do cater for a 2NT response. But the most popular form of Stayman is 'Garbage Stayman' whereby the Stayman bidder does not promise invitational values or better. Using Garbage Stayman it is generally considered unsound to respond 2NT as partner may have no points. However, more advanced players may like to look at 'Stayman super-accepts' in the NT bidding book.
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8 Q Should I transfer or bid Stayman when 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors opposite partner's 1NT opening?

A (a) With a weak hand it's best to use Garbage Stayman.

(b) With invitational and game forcing hand there are various options: -

In America it is common to use Stayman, and if you get a 2♦ response then jump in your 5 card major - this treatment is game forcing in the States. An alternative is to play Smolen but this is rather out-dated and inefficient and has been superceded by Quest transfers. There is no clear way to bid invitational hands unless you play Quest transfers.

In the UK the above scheme of bidding Stayman and then jumping in the 5 card suit is often played as invitational, with game forcing hands using transfers. This scheme obviously works but it is not clear how you show 5-5 major suited hands.

This is all discussed in detail in the NT bidding book. The complete scheme is to use Quest transfers (chapter 2.6.2) for both invitational and game forcing 5-4's and 6-4's and to use the sequence 1NT - 2♦ - 2♥ - 2♠ (chapter 3.1.4) for both invitational and game forcing 5-5's.

9 Q My partner opens 1NT and I am 4333 or 3433. Should I forget about Stayman with these flat hands?

A It is rarely correct to deny a 4 card major, as a possible 4-4 fit nearly always generates an extra trick.

The thing is, although you are completely flat, partner may not be! The only time that ignoring the 4-4 fit is correct is when you have loads of points, especially outside the 4-4 fit, say about 28+ in total so that there are just the same two losers or whatever in NT or in the suit contract.

Now there actually is a scheme to find out if opener is also totally flat (SID) but you can only use it with game going values. But there is an advanced variation of SID (ASID - Advanced Stayman In Doubt) which not only establishes if there is duplication in shape, but also enables responder to establish opener's shape. Check it out, it's chapter 2.4 of the NT bidding book.

10 Q If I have a totally flat hand with a very weak 4 card major and 6-9 points. Am I better off responding 1NT to show my points or should I bid the 4 card major anyway?

A Never deny a 4 card major. You see this theme again and again in the news sheets - even a suit as bad as ♥5432 should be mentioned - a 4-4 major suit fit is virtually always better than NT

11 Q We are playing a strong NT (so a 1NT rebid is 12-14). I hold something like
♠54 ♥K93 ♦AQ84 ♣KJ76 and open 1♣. Partner responds 1♥, should I rebid 1NT or 2♥?

A This is more a matter of style rather what is right or wrong. With the hand given 1NT may work out best opposite ♠
AQJ3 ♥J842 ♦753 ♣82 but 2♥ would be better opposite ♠982 ♥AQ84 ♦J53 ♣982

I personally would usually support with this type of hand because: -

- You will probably get a ♠ lead.

- Partner may have 5 ♥'s

- Even if it's a Moysian fit it should play well as you get a ruff with the short trumps.

If you change the example hand to ♠K93 ♥54 ♦AQ84 ♣KJ76 and open 1♣ and get a 1♠ response then it surely
must be best to bid 2♠ as partner has denied 4 ♥'s and that's what's going to be led against a NT contract.

12 Q Which is best - a 5-3 major suit fit or 3NT?

A This is not as clear-cut as with a 4-4 fit. The 5-3 major suit fit (so 4♥/♠) is often preferable to 3NT but not always.
Generally it depends upon whether the outside suits are well stopped.

13 Q When should I opt for the Moysian (4-3) fit?

A NT usually plays better (or scores more) than a Moysian fit, but there are certainly occasions where a
4-3 fit will play well. This is usually when the trumps (i.e. the 4-3 fit) are decent ones and you can trump a danger suit
in the short trump hand. For example: - you hold ♠5 ♥KJ4 ♦K98654 ♣Q76

Partner opens 1♣, you bid 1♦ and LHO bids 1♠. Partner then bids 2♥ (a reverse, so a good hand with
5+ ♣'s and 4 ♥'s). There are options, but 4♥ is probably the best bet.

14 Q We play negative doubles. My partner opens and RHO overcalls in a suit in which I have an excellent holding. I
cannot double for penalties as that would be negative, so what should I do?

A Pass. When you play negative doubles and you hold a penalty hand you have to pass. That is no problem as partner
will usually re-open with a double and you can then pass that.

15 Q Does a negative double promise the two unbid suits?

A Virtually every partnership play negative doubles slightly differently. Some just show 'values', some
promise the two unbid suits. My style is to guarantee 4 cards in an unbid major if there is just one unbid major. If the
two suits bid were minors then I only promise 4 cards in one of the majors.

16 Q How many points does a negative double show? Say partner opens 1♣ and RHO overcalls 1♠ or 2♠, how
strong do I need to be to negative double?

A Generally speaking, only enough to compete to the next level of the major shown. So if partner opens 1♣ and RHO
overcalls 1♠, then a negative double would only promise 6+ points and 4+ ♥'s. But over a 2♠ overcall you would
need about 11+ points although I sometimes shade this.

17 Q What do I do if I have an opening hand (say a balanced 13 count) and RHO opens in front of me?

A The concept of doubling just to show an opening hand went out in the stone age. Once RHO opens then you need a
good hand (15+) or a shapely hand to compete. With about opening values and shortage in the suit opened you can
double - generally around 11+ points. With a 5 card suit you can overcall - generally anything from 8-16 points,

11-16 at the two level. You need around 15-18 points to overcall with 1NT. With a flat 12-14 you pass.

18 Q What do I do if RHO bids my suit?

A It's usually best to pass. On a good day partner may get in a take-out double which you can then pass for penalties

19 Q When do I open a 4-card ♥ or ♠ suit when playing Acol?

A There are a number of points here, and to start with we'll assume that the hand is unsuitable for a 1NT (say too many points). Now Acol is a 4-card major system, and that means that you open a 4-card major in preference to a 4-card minor. So with 4342 it's 1♠ in preference to 1♦. Now many players (including me) are not happy with opening 1♠ with a 4 card suit and prefer to play that 1♠ is always 5 card. That said, I am fairly happy with opening a 4 card major with a strong hand, but I do have my reservations. To start with, I will only open 1♥/♠ with a 4 card major if my rebid is NT (so 15+ points); that is fairly standard. With this philosophy you are not embarrassed by a two level response as you have a NT rebid available.

But I also have other restrictions, let's stick with this 4342 shape. With Hand A I am more than happy to open 1♠ as I have an easy 3NT rebid over a two level response.

And it would appear to be similar with both Hands B & C. With both of these you have no problem over a two level response (bid 2NT - 15-16). But the problem comes if partner responds 1NT.

The point is that when you open 1♠ (and sometimes with 1♥) partner will often have to make a 1NT response with an unsuitable hand (because he does not have the values for a two level response) and this 1NT response has a large range (6 - a poor 10); so I personally only like to open a 4-card ♥/♠ suit if I am very happy about what to do if partner responds with 1NT. If I can raise a 1NT response to 2NT or more (so a very good 16+, usually 17+) or if I am happy to pass 1NT (so a 15 count). If I have a hand of about 16 - poor 17 then it's a gamble to raise a 1NT response to 2NT and so I would prefer to open a minor suit.

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ AKJ4	♠ AQ84	♠ AQ84
♥ K93	♥ K93	♥ K93
♦ A984	♦ K984	♦ A984
♣ K7	♣ K7	♣ K7

So, for me, a 1♠ opening with Hand A is fine.

And I have no problem with opening 1♠ with Hand B if you wish as you will pass a 1NT response.

But I would open 1♦ with Hand C because I would not know what to do over a 1NT response if I opened 1♠.

Pass would probably be best, but you may miss game if partner is maximum for 1NT. So you may choose to minimise the risk and open 1♦?

20 Q How many points do I need for a response in a new suit at the two level over partner's opening bid? For example, if partner opens 1♠ how many points would a 2♦ response promise? And how many ♦'s do I need? And how many ♥'s would I need for a 2♥ response?

- A (a) How many points? Actually, this depends upon your system. If you play a weak NT then you can respond in a new suit at the two level with as little as 8 points. Playing a strong NT you need a very good 10+. A response of 2♣/♦ may well be only 4 card, occasionally just 3 card.
- (b) How many ♥'s ? Five. This is true for all systems. A 2♥ response takes up a lot of bidding space and partner needs to know that he can support with just three cards. If partner opens 1♠ and you have just a 4 card ♥ suit and enough points for the two level then bid 2♣/♦. This is no problem because if partner also has 4 ♥'s then he will bid them.
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21 Q My partner opens 1♣ and I have 4 ♦'s and 4 ♥'s. Should I respond 1♦ or 1♥?

- A This is a matter of style/partnership agreement. Most players bid up the line - so 1♦. But many good players play Walsh, where a responder will by-pass a 4 (or even 5) card ♦ suit in order to bid his major suit if he has a weak hand.
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22 Q How many points do I need to overcall, and how many points for a take-out double?

- A This depends upon the shape of the hand and suit quality. Generally speaking, a good 7+ is enough for a one level overcall and you really need about 10+ for a two level overcall. A double is generally about 11+.
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23 Q What is the best use for the 2♦ opening 2 bid?

- A There is a fairly comprehensive answer to this question in Section 3 of the conventions page - 'The 2♦ opening', where ½ a dozen options are discussed.
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24 Q What are the responses to a strong 2♣ opener?

- A My personal preference is to play Benjamin twos with an automatic relay to the 2♣ and 2♦ opener. However, the majority of the bridge playing world prefer to have just the one strong bid. The 'best' set of responses are given in the 'responding to 2♣' section in the conventions page.
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25 Q Is psyching allowed, or is it cheating?

- A Psyching is not cheating unless there is a partnership understanding or if partner of the psycher is aware that his partner may well psyche in this situation. As to whether it's allowed - that depends upon the competition/club. At our club, which has a number of beginners/improvers, psyching is simply not allowed. It is considered unsportsmanlike to psyche against inferior opponents.
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26 Q What should I do if partner fails to alert my conventional bid, or if he gives an incorrect explanation when asked?

A You should say nothing while the auction is in progress. After the auction is complete then you should inform the opponents before the opening lead if you are dummy or declarer. If you are defending then you can say nothing until the end of play as that would give unauthorised information to partner.

27 Q How do I know if a double is for penalties or take-out?

A A simple question with no complete answer. I have written a couple of pages in section 3 of the Conventions section. 'Double!' gives general guidelines as to when a double is penalties or take-out or conventional. 'Conventional Doubles' gives a brief description of the most common conventional doubles.

28 Q In the sequence 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ is 1♠ natural or 4th suit forcing?

A This is fully covered in the section on 4th Suit Forcing in Conventions.

29 Q Here are a number of common questions about Blackwood: -

- (a) Is Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) that much better than normal Blackwood?
- (b) What are Roman responses?
- (c) What is Roman Blackwood?
- (d) What is 1430?
- (e) When a minor suit is trumps using 4NT as Blackwood (or RKCB) may get us too high, what's the solution?

A (a) Virtually all experienced players accept that RKCB is far better than normal Blackwood in most situations. But you have to know when 4NT is RKCB, natural or (rarely) normal Blackwood and it's fully covered in the 'Quantitative, Normal Blackwood, RKCB, Gerber, Splinter or what?' document.

(b) Roman responses are 1st step = 0 or 3; 2nd step = 1 or 4; 3rd step = 2?; 4th step = 2?; where the ? is defined.

(c) In Roman Blackwood the ? tries to define the two aces (by rank and colour). It is not really very satisfactory and RKCB is a far better system.

(d) 1430 is a variation on RKCB whereby the first two steps are inverted. Using RKCB it probably is a slight improvement as it is more likely to make asking for the trump queen easier. If you play Kickback you don't need to bother with 1430 and standard responses always work fine.

(e) There are various solutions. Some play 4 of an agreed minor, I prefer Kickback (4 of the suit above trumps).

30 Q Is the 3♥ (or 3♠) bid in the sequence 1♥ - 2♥ - 3♥ (or 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♠) invitational or pre-emptive?

A Up to you. Some players do indeed play it (especially the ♥ sequence) as pre-emptive but the majority will play these sequences as a game try. If you play help suit game tries then this try is a general game try with no specific suit needing help.

31 Q We play Stayman and transfers over partner's 1NT opening, but are these also applicable when partner has overcalled with 1NT. And what should we do if our 1NT opening (or overcall) is interfered with?

- A (a) When partner overcalls 1NT. Most players play that Stayman and transfers still apply over partner's 1NT overcall.
(b) If your partner's 1NT opening is doubled then a popular treatment is that everything (Stayman and transfers) still apply. Others simply redouble with a good hand and play any bid as a weak take-out. If partner's 1NT opening/overcall is overcalled then a popular convention is Lebensohl, which I highly recommend.
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32 Q I am often confused as to whether a bid is a Game Try, cue bid, splinter, 4th suit forcing, natural or whatever. Can you help?

A Game Tries, cue bids, splinters and 4th suit forcing are often confused with each other. For a fairly comprehensive explanation of what is what, refer to the Game Tries, Cue bids, Splinters, 4th suit forcing and all that Jazz document.

33 Q I am often confused as to whether a bid is weak, invitational or forcing. For instance the uninterrupted sequences (a) 1♣ - 1♥ - 2NT - 3♥ or (b) 1♣ - 1♠ - 1NT - 3♠? Can you help?

A To some extent this depends upon the system you play, but many sequences are the same in Standard American or Acol and some sequences are up to partnership agreement. For example sequence (a) is played as weak by many players but I prefer to play it as forcing. And sequence (b) probably depends upon your system; in Standard American the 1NT rebid is 12-14 and 3♠ is invitational but playing Acol the 1NT rebid is 15-16 and so I would play the sequence as forcing.

I have given a number of general guidelines (playing Standard American) in the 'Is It Forcing' document.

34 Q I know of some players who always use 4♣ as ace-ask, but others have told me that 4♣ is only Gerber after partner has opens 1NT or 2NT. What is the best philosophy here?

A Generally speaking, most players use 4♣ as Gerber only after partner's last bid was a natural 1NT or 2NT and they use 4NT as Blackwood (or Roman Key Card Blackwood) in other situations. The 'best' solution is slightly more complex – see the 'Blackwood or Gerber' document. And, as an aside, you may like to have a look at Kickback which is perhaps a fairly advanced concept but takes care of some the problems of using 4NT as Blackwood with a lower ranking suit as trumps.

35 Q (a) Can I rebid a 5 card major playing Standard American or does that show 6 cards?
(b) And how about rebidding a minor; does that promise 4,5 or 6 cards?

A (a) Hand A To rebid a major usually shows a 6 card suit, but not always – it depends upon the sequence. Consider this Hand A. You open 1♥ and partner responds 2♦, what do you bid?

♠ 9 2NT now shows 12-14 points but would be a distortion with a singleton ♠
♥ AKJ92 and so a 2♥ rebid is the only sensible option. If you play 2/1 and agree that a high
♦ 843 reverse does not show extras then you can bid 3♣ with this hand.
♣ KQ82

(b) Hand B And rebidding a minor most certainly does not promise 6 cards.
I would open this hand with 1♣ (if you disagree and would open 1♦ then have a look at my sheet on opening 4441 type hands).
♠ 9 Anyway, you open 1♣ and partner responds 1NT, what do you do?
♥ AKJ2 I would bid 2♣, especially if partner would respond 1♦ with a 4 card ♦ suit.
♦ 8743 Partner has denied a 4 card major and probably has 4 or 5 ♣'s; there is obviously an enormous
♣ KQ82 gap in ♠'s if you play in 1NT.
