

Beginner Bridge Lessons

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Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Declarer Play	4
3	Goals of the Auction	13
4	Opening Bids	15
5	The 1NT Opening Bid	16
6	Major Suit Openings	22
7	Minor Suit Openings	24
8	Preempts	29
9	Overcalls	34

Chapter 1

Introduction

This book is intended for complete beginners to learn bridge. It is assumed that you already know the rules of bridge, but nothing else. This book covers the basics of bidding and declarer play. Defensive cardplay is largely omitted because it is a more complicated topic than declarer play. You can declare by yourself; when you defend, you need to cooperate with your partner.

However, this is not a typical beginner book. Throughout the book, I will include more advanced technical details that would typically be omitted from a beginner text. Don't let that scare you off – the extra details will be marked as such, and you can easily skip them. (For example, feel free to skip this introduction. But note that there's a section on notation below, so you may want to refer back here later.) Some of the extra details suggest things you can learn about on your own. Others try to answer the question "Why does this bid mean what it does?" This way, you can simply accept that the auction 1NT-2♥ should show spades, not hearts,¹ but you can also choose to understand why the bidding system is designed this way. I have always found it easier to remember bids that have a clear motivation; if you understand the reasons why 2♥ promises spades on this auction, you are less likely to forget that 2♥ shows spades when you are playing. Beside any practical benefit, I think that the game is more fun when you understand why your bidding system works the way it does. Every bidding system involves tradeoffs. If we choose a different system, some hands will be easier to bid, and others will be harder. Understanding the philosophy of a bidding system, and how it chooses to make these tradeoffs, is my favorite part of the game. Of course, this is not a text on bidding theory, so I can mostly only hint at those considerations here, but I hope I can suggest some of the beauty of a well-constructed bidding system.

As I have already hinted above, there are many different bidding systems. The meanings of different bids are not written anywhere in the rules of bridge. Rather, each partnership agrees on what their own bids will mean. But obviously every single partnership can't create new bidding agreements from scratch, so there are a few bidding systems that are commonly used. This book teaches a system called

¹This is a bidding convention called a Jacoby transfer. See the chapter on 1NT openings.

Standard American, the system usually taught to beginners in North America.² Once you know Standard American, you will be able to play with virtually any partner in the continent. Just say, “I play Standard American,” and your partnership will instantly have a playable set of bidding agreements.

Terminology and Notation

The first person to bid (that is, not pass) in an auction is called the **opening bidder**, or simply **opener**. Opener’s partner is called the **responder**. If you are the first member of your partnership to bid after the opponents open, you are called the **overcaller**, or **doubler** if you doubled. Your partner is the **advancer**.

If you have no cards in a suit, that is called a **void**. One card is a **singleton**, and two cards is a **doubleton**.

I will try to keep my use of notation to a minimum, since this book is intended for beginners, but some notation is necessary.

LHO stands for left-hand opponent; RHO stands for right-hand opponent.

In general, most auctions in this book are noncompetitive auctions – that is, the opponents pass throughout the entire auction. These auctions will be denoted by something like 1NT-2♥-2♠-3NT. When the opponents bid, their bids will be indicated for parentheses. Passes are indicated by P, doubles by X, and redoubles by XX. For example, the auction 1♥-(X)-P-(1♠) indicates that your side opened 1♥, an opponent doubled, your side passed, and the other opponent bid 1♠.

A capital M refers to a major, and a lowercase m refers to a minor. If M or m appears twice in the same auction, it refers to the same suit. For example, 1m-1NT-2m refers specifically to either 1♣-1NT-2♣ or 1♦-1NT-2♦. If we want to refer to the other major/minor, we can use OM or om. 1NT-2♣-2M-3OM refers to either 1NT-2♣-2♥-3♠ or 1NT-2♣-2♠-3♥.

I will use a change of font to indicate specific hand patterns. Hand patterns are always given in order: Spades, Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs. For example, 5143 shows a hand with five spades, one heart, four diamonds, and three clubs. In addition, I will use parentheses to indicate general patterns and ordered numbers to indicate specific suits. For example, 31(54) means a hand with 3 spades, 1 heart and 5-4 either way in the minors.

²It would be more accurate to say that Standard American is a framework, not a complete system. Standard American specifies the meanings of the most common auctions, but you and your partner can still customize how your system handles less-common auctions. If you want to use a lot of complicated bidding conventions, you can. If you don’t want to, you don’t have to.

Chapter 2

Declarer Play

Planning the Play

Before you start declaring a hand, you should make a plan. For now, you can assume that your only goal when you declare is to make your contract. That is, you don't care about overtricks.¹ Start by figuring out how close you are to making your contract. If you're playing a notrump contract, this means counting how many tricks you can win right away. In theory, you could also count winners when playing a suit contract, but it is usually easier to count your losers instead, since you will be able to trump the opponents' winners in a suit once you run out of that suit. Once you have counted your tricks, you will know how many more winners you need to create (or losers you need to get rid of).

Basic Techniques

Drawing trumps

Usually, if you haven't done too badly in the auction, your side will have more trumps than the opponents, so you will be able to get rid of the opponents' trumps, without running out of trumps yourself. How would you play the following hand in 7♥, when the opponents lead the ♠ A?

¹If you play in a tournament, this may not be true. Depending how the tournament is scored, overtricks can be very important, or not.

♠ 5432
♥ AQ98
♦ A5
♣ K5

♠ -
♥ KJ7654
♦ KQ3
♣ AQJ4

Notice that you have 13 tricks: six hearts, AKQ of diamonds, and AKQJ of clubs. The only risk here is that the opponents might trump one of your winners, so don't give them the chance. Trump the opening lead, and immediately play the AKQ of hearts. Now the opponents have no trump, so you can safely take your thirteen tricks, and make the grand slam.

Setting up a suit

There are two ways to set up a suit. You can either set it up by high cards or by length. For example, suppose you have ♣ KQJT and the dummy has ♣ 32. You don't have any immediate winners in the suit, because the opponents have the ace. But once you drive out the ace, you will be able to take three club tricks.

Alternatively, you can set up a suit by length. Suppose you have ♣ AK432 and the dummy has ♣ 765. Initially, you can count two tricks. But even though you have only two high cards in the suit, you will probably be able to win 4 tricks in the suit. If both opponents follow when you play the ace and king, then you can lose the third round of the suit. This drives out the opponents' last club, after which your 4 and 3 will be winners, so you can take four tricks in the suit. (This assumes that the opponents' clubs split 3-2; that is, one opponent has 3 and the other has 2. If the clubs split 4-1, then you will have to lose two tricks in order to set up your 4, so you can only take three club tricks.)

Taking a finesse

A **finesse** is a way of winning a trick with a card, even though the opponents still have a higher card. The classic situation for a finesse is when the dummy has the AQ of a suit, and you have small cards. Lead a small card from your hand, and play the queen. If your left-hand opponent has the king, then the queen will win. Of course, if your right-hand opponent has the king, then your finesse will lose. Here are some more examples of finesses:

♠ K32

♠ 654

Lead low to the king. If LHO has the ace, your king will win.

♠ AJT

♠ 432

Lead low to the ten. This will probably lose. When you regain the lead, play a low card to the jack. As long as LHO has at least one of the king and queen, you will win two tricks in the suit.

♠ A32

♠ QJT

Lead the queen, and play low when LHO (left-hand opponent) plays low. If LHO has the king, you will take three tricks. If RHO has the king, you will take only two.

♠ A32

♠ Q54

Play the ace, then lead toward the queen. If RHO has the king, the queen will win. Don't confuse this situation with the previous one. It's tempting to lead the queen here, but that doesn't work. If you lead the queen, your LHO can simply cover the queen with the king; since you don't have any other honors to set up, letting your queen fall under the king doesn't help you. Leading the queen here is derogatorily called a "Chinese finesse."² Notice that the Chinese finesse could work if your LHO forgets to cover your queen with his king. This brings us to an important principle of defensive play. When declarer leads an honor, you often want to cover with a higher honor if you can. If you have KJT, then it's obvious to cover the queen, because then your jack and ten will be set up. Even if you don't have the jack, your partner may have it, so the same reasoning applies. This principle is generally referred to as "**cover an honor with an honor.**"

♠ KT2

♠ J93

Lead the jack, planning to play low if LHO plays low. If LHO has the queen, he will be unable to win it, so you will take two tricks in the suit (after driving out the ace).

♠ KT2

♠ J43

In this case, leading the jack is another form of Chinese finesse. If LHO has the queen, LHO can simply cover the jack; you haven't gained anything because this time you don't have the 9. (Make sure you can see why this makes a difference.) Against good defenders, you should try leading a low card to the ten. If LHO has the ace and queen, then the ten will win, and you can later finesse the king to

²Don't blame me. I didn't name it.

win a second trick. If LHO has the queen but not the ace, then RHO will win the ace. Later, you can play the king. If LHO started with only two cards in the suit, then the queen will fall, making your jack good for a second trick. But on most layouts you will only take one trick in the suit. Against bad defenders, it might be worthwhile to try the Chinese finesse. If LHO has the queen and forgets to cover the jack, then your jack will drive out the ace, and you can later finesse the ten to win two tricks.

♠ KT2

♠ AJ9

This is known as a **two-way finesse**, because you can play either opponent for the queen. If you think LHO has it, you can lead a low card to the ten. If you think RHO has it, you can lead a low card to the jack. If you are faced with a situation like this, you want to try to figure out who has the queen. For example, whoever has more cards in the suit is (in the absence of other information) more likely to have the queen. Alternatively, whoever has promised more HCP during the auction may be more likely to have it. But, if you can't find a clue either way, you can try to trick the opponents. Lead the jack from your hand. As far as LHO is concerned, this situation looks exactly the same as the previous one. In the previous example, LHO needed to cover the jack with the queen. If LHO does this, then you win the king, and your ace and ten are winners. If LHO does not cover, there's a good chance that he does not have the queen, assuming that he probably would cover if he had it. You should win the king and finesse the 9, playing RHO to have the queen.

♠ KT2

♠ AJ3

In this situation, there's no trick play available. If you lead the jack and then win the king, you'll be left with T2 opposite A3, missing the queen. This is another Chinese finesse position, so you've given up your real finesse for a fake one. In this case, you just have to guess which opponent has the queen and hope that you're right.

Trumping losers

In a suit contract, you can get rid of your losers by trumping them. But remember that you only want to trump losers with trumps from the dummy; don't trump the dummy's losers with your trumps. (In this section, we assume that the dummy has fewer trumps than the declarer. If dummy has more trumps, then reverse all the references. This is also an important distinction when counting losers. You should generally count losers in the hand that has more trumps.) For example, consider the hand below, with spades as trump:

♠ 9876
♥ 54
♦ AK2
♣ AK54

♠ AKQJT
♥ AK32
♦ 64
♣ 32

Immediately, you have five trump tricks available (AKQJT). If you try to ruff a diamond with your ten of spades, you still have only five trump tricks (AKQJ, and the ruff). But if you ruff a heart with the 6 of spades, you get six spade tricks (AKQJT, and the ruff). If you ruff both your hearts, you will take all thirteen tricks.

Discarding losers

Sometimes the problem in a suit contract is not that you don't have enough winners, but that the opponents might take their winners first. How would you declare 6♠ after the opponents lead the ♥K?

♠ 9876
♥ 654
♦ AKQ
♣ AKQ

♠ KQJT5
♥ A32
♦ 6
♣ J732

You can see that you have 12 tricks: you will take four spades (after losing the ace), the ace of hearts, the AKQ of diamonds, and the AKQJ of clubs. But if you count your losers, you see that you're at risk of losing two heart tricks. If you try to draw trumps immediately, the opponents will win the ace of spades and cash the queen and jack of hearts, and you will go down two. Instead, start by playing the diamonds and discarding your heart losers. Now, when the opponents try to take their hearts, you will be able to trump the hearts, and you will make your contract.

More advanced concepts

The division into "basic techniques" and "advanced concepts" here is somewhat artificial, but I'm trying to give the chapter a natural breakpoint. Basically, after completing the "basic techniques," you've covered everything that I would try to cover in a first lesson on declarer play. I will try to organize the rest of this chapter

from least advanced to most advanced; feel free to stop reading wherever you want, and move on to the next chapter.

Stoppers

Suppose you're declaring 3NT. You might be able to set up nine tricks, but that doesn't help you if the opponents can take five tricks first. How would you play the following hand in 3NT, after the opponents lead the queen of spades?

♠ 32
♥ AK5
♦ KQJT9
♣ A43

♠ AK5
♥ 432
♦ 876
♣ K765

It should be easy to take ten tricks: AK of spades, AK of hearts, KQJT of diamonds (after losing the ace), and AK of clubs. But you should remember to lose the ace of diamonds early. If you play both the AK of spades before you attack diamonds, then LHO could cash three spades after he wins the ace of diamonds, if the deal is something like this:

	♠ 32	
	♥ AK5	
	♦ KQJT9	
	♣ A43	
♠ QJT98		♠ 764
♥ 876		♥ QJT9
♦ A54		♦ 32
♣ JT		♣ Q982
	♠ AK5	
	♥ 432	
	♦ 876	
	♣ K765	

As long as you hold on to one of the high spades, the opponents will not be able to take their spades before you take your diamonds. A winner which stops the opponents from running a suit is known as a **stopper**. Stoppers are especially important at notrump, since you don't have a trump suit to stop the opponents from taking their winners. Essentially, a notrump contract is a race: you try to knock out the opponents' stoppers and run your suits before they can knock out your stoppers and run their suits. Don't help out the opponents by playing your own stoppers before your winners are set up! In other words, when you're playing a notrump contract, **lose your losers early**.

Entries

Even if you set up your winners, they won't help you unless you have some way to play them. If all the hearts in the dummy are winners, but your hand is on lead and you have no hearts, then those winners could be useless. An **entry** is a winner that allows you to get from one hand to the other. Consider the following deal, played in 7NT after the ♠Q lead:

♠ 43
♥ 3
♦ 32
♣ KQJ65432

♠ AK76
♥ AK54
♦ A54
♣ A7

This is another hand that should be easy: you have eight club tricks and five tricks on the side. But watch what happens if you play the king of clubs before the ace. After you win the ace, the lead is in your hand, and you have no way to get to the dummy to use the clubs. You will only take seven tricks, instead of 13. If you start with the ace of clubs, then the king, you will end up in the correct hand. The general rule here is to start with the **high card from the short side**.

The hold-up play

Do you think you can make 3NT on this deal?

	♠ 32	
	♥ AK5	
	♦ KQJT9	
	♣ A43	
♠ KQJT9		♠ 764
♥ 876		♥ QJT9
♦ 543		♦ A2
♣ JT		♣ Q982
	♠ A85	
	♥ 432	
	♦ 876	
	♣ K765	

This should look suspiciously like the hand from the "Stoppers" section. But this time you only have one spade stopper. The opponents will lead spades to knock it out, so when you give up the ace of diamonds they will run spades, right? Actually, watch what happens if you refuse to win the first or second round of spades. This will cause RHO to run out of spades. RHO can win the ace of diamonds, but LHO has no entries, so the opponents can't take his spade winners. By refusing

to win the first spade, you made sure that RHO would run out of spades, taking away LHO's entry. This is called a **hold-up play**.

The defenders can also perform a hold-up play. Suppose you're declaring 3NT with

♠ 432
♥ 543
♦ KQJT9
♣ 43

♠ AK5
♥ AK2
♦ 876
♣ AK76

If the opponents win the first or second round of diamonds, you'll have no problem taking two spades, two hearts, four diamonds, and two clubs for ten tricks. But if the opponents refuse to win the first or second round, then you can still set up the diamonds if you like, but you'll never get to use them, so you take only eight tricks. One last example: suppose the opponents lead the ♥J against 3NT:

♠ 432
♥ A3
♦ KQJT95
♣ 43

♠ A65
♥ KQ2
♦ 876
♣ AK76

Be careful to win the first trick in your hand, so you save the ace of hearts as an entry. If either opponent can hold up until the third round of diamonds, you'll need that side entry! Notice that this is an exception to "high card from the short side."

The Bath Coup

The **Bath Coup** is actually just a fancy name for a specific kind of hold-up play. Suppose LHO leads the ♠K and the layout of the spade suit is

♠ 432
♠ KQT98 ♠ 76
♠ AJ5

on a deal where you need to drive out the ♦ A. If you win the first round of spades, then when RHO gets on lead later he will lead a spade. The opponents will finesse you out of your jack and take four spade tricks. But if you duck the first round of

spades, RHO can't continue playing the suit without allowing your jack to win, so no matter what he does you'll still have a stopper later. Unlike the previous hold-up plays we've seen, this one works regardless of which opponent has the
♦ A.

Chapter 3

Goals of the Auction

During the auction, a partnership has two main goals. First, you have to figure out what **strain** (trump suit or notrump) you want to play in. Second, you have to figure out the appropriate level for the contract (how many tricks you think you can take). There is a significant bonus for bidding and making a **game** contract, which is a contract of 3NT, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, 5♦, or above. There are also extra bonuses for bidding and making a **small slam** (a 6-level contract) or a **grand slam** (a 7-level contract), but those are rare enough that we won't worry about them much in this book. A contract below game is called a **partscore**.

Choosing the right strain

You generally only want to play in a trump suit if you and your partner combined have eight or more cards in the suit. (You need at least seven to have a majority of the trump, and experience shows that an eighth trump is very valuable.) Also, you generally try to avoid playing in minor suits (clubs and diamonds) for two reasons. First, it's difficult to make a game contract in a minor, which requires eleven tricks, so we usually prefer to bid 3NT, which only requires nine tricks. Second, tricks in a minor-suit contract are worth fewer points than tricks in a major-suit contract or notrump, which also tends to make minor suits less valuable. Therefore, the goal of the auction is generally to find an 8-card major suit fit, or else to play in notrump. (Of course, it's sometimes right to play in a minor-suit contract, but we're going to ignore that possibility for this class.)

Choosing the right level

To help evaluate how good a bridge hand is, bridge players use a tool called **high card points**, often abbreviated as **HCP**. Using this evaluation method, an ace is worth 4 points, a king 3, a queen 2, and a jack 1. (This is purely an evaluation method – the “points” do not mean anything in the scoring.) Experience has

shown that a game contract generally requires 25 HCP (but 29 for a minor-suit game, which is why we rarely bid them), a small slam requires 33 HCP, and a grand slam requires 37 HCP. These are very general guidelines, but they are surprisingly effective.

But what if your hand has interesting distribution? A hand with a 7-card suit or a void 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 traditionally get one point for a 5-card suit, two points for a 6-card suit, etc. (I find this a bit aggressive. It might be better to count one point for a 6-card suit, two for a 7-card suit, and so on.)

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 have to play in NT.

Chapter 4

Opening Bids

Should I open the bidding?

Suppose it's your turn to bid, and nobody has bid yet. (In other words, everybody has passed so far.) The first question you should ask yourself is whether you want to open the bidding at all. Naturally, you want to bid when you have a good hand, and you don't want to bid when you have a bad hand. So what's a "good hand" in this context? You can count that there are 40 HCP in the entire deck, so the average bridge hand will have 10 HCP. Since you want a better-than-average hand in order to open the bidding, you should open when you have at least 12 HCP.

What do I open?

Suppose you have more than 12 HCP. What will you bid? These are your main options, in order of priority:

1. If you have 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand (a hand with about the same number of cards in each suit – specifically, a hand with no voids or singletons, and at most one doubleton), then you open 1NT.
2. If you have a 5-card major suit, open 1 of that suit.
3. Otherwise, open your longer minor. If your minors are the same length, you usually open 1♦. If you have 3 cards in each minor, open 1♣.

There is one possible exception to this list. If you have a 5-card major and a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP, it's your choice whether you want to open your major or open 1NT. Experts disagree on which one is correct, so you can choose whatever you're comfortable with. I open my major, but 1NT makes for an easier auction, so you might want to open 1NT at least until you have more experience.

It is possible to make opening bids that aren't on the one level, but those are less common. For now, you don't need to worry about other opening bids.

Chapter 5

The 1NT Opening Bid

Note: the sections “Old-Fashioned Style” and “What if the opponents interfere?” are not critical. They are included in case you are interested, but they can easily be omitted.

What do I do as opener with a balanced hand?

When you have a balanced hand, your goal is to tell partner as quickly as possible that you have a balanced hand. You also want to describe your high card point (HCP) count within a small range. However, there are more possible point ranges than there are low-level NT bids, so you can't always solve this problem on the opening bid. Instead, you may have to start with something else, and then show your hand more precisely later.

What to do with a balanced hand and ___ HCP:

- 12-14: Open 1 of a suit, then rebid NT.
- 15-17: Open 1NT.
- 18-19: Open 1 of a suit, then jump in NT.
- 20-21: Open 2NT.
- 22-24: Open 2♣,¹ then rebid 2NT.
- 25-26: Open 3NT.
- 27-28: Open 2♣, then rebid 3NT.

¹This does not say anything about clubs. It is a special bid which you use for all extremely strong hands.

How do I respond when partner opens 1NT?

First of all, note that this only applies after partner opens 1NT. If partner opens 1 of a suit and rebids 1NT, there are different methods. However, an essentially identical structure applies after partner opens 2NT (or opens 2♣ and rebids 2NT, which is basically the same).

When responding to 1NT, the goal is to determine the level and strain (trump suit or NT) of the contract. To determine the proper level, add your HCP to partner's. Remember that you need 25 HCP to bid a game. Based on the 25 HCP rule, we divide responder's hands into three main categories after partner opens 1NT:

0-7 HCP: A "sign-off" hand which wants to play in a partscore. Even if partner has 17 HCP, we do not have 25.

8-9 HCP: An "invitational" hand which may play partscore or game. If partner has 17 HCP, we have 25. If partner has 15 HCP, we do not.

10-15 HCP: A "game-forcing" hand which wants to play in a game, even if partner has only 15 HCP.

To determine the proper strain, you will try to find an 8-card major suit fit. If you have one, play in it. If you don't have one, play in NT. It is very rare that you will want to play in a minor suit. For example, if you have a 4-card major, you want to know whether partner has 4 cards in that suit as well. The Stayman convention² allows you to ask.

Stayman

If you have an invitational or better hand (8+ HCP) and a 4-card major, you can bid 2♣ to ask opener for a 4-card major. This bid says nothing about your clubs. Partner's responses:

2♦: I do not have a 4-card major.

2♥: I have 4 hearts.

2♠: I have 4 spades.

After opener gives the answer, you can now describe your point count. If partner did not bid your 4-card major, you can rebid 2NT (invitational) or 3NT (game-forcing). If partner bid your 4-card major, you can raise to the 3 level (invitational) or the 4 level (to play). After this, partner will have enough information to decide the final contract. If you bid a game, partner will usually pass (with one exception, mentioned in the next paragraph). If you made an invitational bid, partner will decide whether to play in partscore or in game based on his HCP count.

²Named after Sam Stayman, who did not invent it

What if you open 1NT with both majors, and the auction is 1NT-2♣-2♥-2/3NT? Your partner would not bid 2♣ without a 4-card major, so you know that partner has spades, and therefore you can bid spades (at whatever level is appropriate).

Next we will see what else you can do as responder.

Old-Fashioned Style

There are no serious players who play this way anymore. It is included here as motivation for the new style, and because it is still useful in competitive auctions (see last section). In this style, after partner opens 1NT, responder's bids are:

- Pass:** Not enough HCP to invite game, and no desire to play ♦, ♥, or ♠.
- 2♣:** Stayman. See below.
- 2♦/♥/♠:** To play: 0-7 HCP, at least 5 cards in the suit. Opener should pass.
- 2NT:** Invitational, 8-9 HCP with no 4-card major.³ Opener passes with a bad 1NT opener (15 HCP) and bids 3NT with a good 1NT opener (17 HCP).
- 3♣/♦:** Like 3♥/♠, except must have a very good reason to suggest a minor.
- 3♥/♠:** Game-forcing with 5 cards in the suit. Opener bids 3NT with only 2 cards in the suit, and raises to 4 with 3 or more cards.
- 3NT:** To play, typically 10-15 HCP. Opener must pass.
- 4♣:** Gerber.⁴
- 4♦:** This space intentionally left blank.
- 4♥/♠:** To play. Shows a good hand with at least 6 cards in the suit. Opener must pass.
- 4NT:** Invitational to slam, typically 16-17 HCP. Opener passes with a bad 1NT opener (15 HCP) and bids 6NT with a good 1NT opener (17 HCP).
- 5♣/♦:** To play. Rare.
- 5NT:** Forcing to slam, invitational to grand slam. Typically 20-21 HCP. Opener bids 6NT with a bad hand and 7NT with a good hand.
- 6NT:** To play, 18-19 HCP. Opener must pass.
- 7NT:** To play, 22+ HCP. Opener must pass, as per the laws of bridge.

³However, this bid may include a 5-card major. Yes, that's stupid. It's one of the reasons why nobody plays this way anymore.

⁴Beyond the scope of this class, but mentioned for completeness.

There are a few flaws with this style. The most obvious one arises when you have 9 points and a 5-card major. When you have 9 points, you are not sure whether you have enough points to bid game, so you should make an invitational bid, like 2NT, to ask whether partner has a good hand. However, there is no invitational bid available with a 5-card major. You can decide whether you want to show your major and guess how good partner's hand is, or make an invitational 2NT bid and hide your 5-card major.

Transfers

A Jacoby transfer⁵ is a convention to describe your hand after partner opens 1NT and you have a 5-card major. Instead of bidding your suit, make the bid directly under your suit at the two level.⁶ (If you have hearts, bid 2♦. If you have spades, bid 2♥.) This commands partner to bid your major, which gives you more space to describe your hand. For example, after 1NT-2♥-2♠:

- Pass:** Desire to play 2♠. Same as old-fashioned auction 1NT-2♠.
- 2NT:** Invitational (8-9 HCP) with exactly 5 spades.
- 3♠:** Invitational with 6 or more spades.
- 3NT:** Game-forcing with exactly 5 spades. Same as old-fashioned 1NT-3♠.

After this, partner has the information needed to decide the final contract. You will play spades or NT, depending whether you have an 8 card fit, and you will either play a partscore or a game, depending on your range and partner's.

As you can see, the transfer allows you to describe an invitational hand with a 5-card or longer major. Another, more subtle advantage is "siding" the contract. The transfer guarantees that the 1NT opener will become declarer. With the stronger hand declaring, the defenders can see fewer points in the dummy, so it is harder for them to defend.

The siding advantage is an important motivation behind another convention, the Texas transfer. What if you have a game-forcing hand with a 6-card major? In the old-fashioned style, you bid 4 of your major. Playing Texas transfers, you bid one below 4 of your major,⁶ which tells partner to bid the contract for you. (If you agree to play Texas transfers, then you no longer need the auction 1NT-2♥-2♠-4♠ to show a game-forcing hand with 6 spades, because you have the auction 1NT-4♥-4♠ instead. We instead use the slower auction to show a hand with long spades and slam interest. The same applies if your suit is hearts. Don't worry too much about remembering this. It's a more advanced topic than the rest of this class.)

Let's see how all this fits together in the modern bidding style:

⁵Named after Oswald Jacoby, who did invent it

⁶If you are playing in a club or tournament, your partner must say "Transfer" when you do this, because your opponents have a right to know what your bids mean.

Modern Style

- Pass:** Not strong enough to invite game, and no desire to play ♥ or ♠.
- 2♣:** Stayman.
- 2♦:** Jacoby transfer, showing 5 or more hearts, any strength.
- 2♥:** Jacoby transfer, showing 5 or more spades, any strength.
- 2♠:** This space intentionally left blank.
- 2NT:** Invitational, typically 8-9 HCP.
- 3♣/♦:** Game-forcing hand with a long suit.
- 3♥/♠:** This space intentionally left blank
- 3NT:** To play, typically 10-15 HCP. Opener must pass.
- 4♣:** Gerber.
- 4♦:** Texas transfer, showing a good hand with at least 6 hearts.
- 4♥:** Texas transfer, showing a good hand with at least 6 spades.
- 4♠:** This space intentionally left blank.

Higher bids are the same as in the old-fashioned style.

What if the opponents interfere?

This section is more advanced than the rest of the lesson. It is included partly for completeness, and partly to justify why it is still good to know the old-fashioned style.

Playing Jacoby transfers, your auctions are especially susceptible to opponents' interference. If partner opens 1NT and your right hand opponent (RHO) overcalls 2♦, how do you show a 5-card heart suit? Some people use a convention called "mirror doubles" or "stolen-bid" doubles, in which a double of the opponent's bid means whatever it would mean if you had bid it yourself. In this situation, a double of 2♦ would be a transfer to hearts. This is a popular convention among bad players.

A better idea is to revert to the old-fashioned style. The one exception is that you can still use Texas transfers, because the opponent's overcall probably didn't interfere with the 4-level. In our example auction, you can bid 2♥ if your hand is weak, and 3♥ if your hand is game-forcing. Once again, if your hand is invitational, you'll just have to guess. (Interference works.) If you want to bid Stayman, you can bid the opponent's suit: for example, 1NT-(2♦)-3♦ asks partner to show a 4-card major. This is our first example of a very useful concept: the cuebid. A cuebid is a bid of a suit that you can't possibly want to play in. In this situation,

you don't want to play in RHO's suit, so we give that bid a useful meaning instead. If you actually have good cards in the opponent's suit, you can double for penalty. This says that you don't think the opponents can make their contract; it doubles the score for them if they make it, but doubles the score for you if they don't. When partner opens 1NT, you have a very good idea of what opener's hand looks like, so it is a good opportunity to make a penalty double when you are strong in the opponent's suit. This is one of the reasons why mirror doubles are a bad convention.

There are other, more complicated methods you can learn for dealing with an opponent's overcall, which allow you to describe more hand types. For example, you can get back your invitational major suit bids, and tell partner whether you have a stopper in the opponent's suit. However, those conventions are far beyond the scope of a beginner book.

Chapter 6

Major Suit Openings

When do you open 1 of a major?

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. Remember that 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. Thus, we make our major suit bids promise 5 cards, despite the fact that this makes our minor-suit openings less reliable, because it is more important to be able to describe our majors accurately.

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, many situations in which you will make a jump bid with a weak hand for precisely this reason. See chapter 8 for more about preempts.

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 shows virtually any hand 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 better suit to bid, you should still bid 1♠.) You may also bid 2NT with 10-12 points, or 3NT with 13-15.

Chapter 7

Minor Suit Openings

Opening the Bidding

Suppose you have a good enough hand to open the bidding. Opening bids of 1NT and 1 of a major are very descriptive and give us a very good start in the auction, so if you can open 1NT or 1 of a major, you should certainly do that. If you do not have a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP, and you do not have a 5-card major, then you will have to open 1 of a minor. (Sometimes it is correct to open above the 1 level, but these bids have not been covered in class yet, so I will ignore them for now. Also, there is one situation in which you can open 1 of a minor despite having a 5 card major; if you have a longer minor – i.e. 5 spades and 6 diamonds – then you should start with the minor.) Exceptions aside, it is completely adequate to say for now that, with an opening hand, you should open 1 of a minor if and only if 1NT and 1 of a major are not options.

How do you know whether to open 1♣ or 1♦? When we were discussing major suit openings, this was an easy decision: opening 1 of a major promises 5 cards in that major, and you probably don't have two 5 card majors. (If you do have two 5 card majors, you should open 1♠. As a general rule, whenever you have two 5 card suits, you bid the higher ranking one first. This will allow you to safely bid the lower-ranking suit twice. If you start with the lower-ranking suit and then bid the higher-ranking suit later, your partner will have to bid a level higher if he chooses to return to your original suit, which may get your side too high. This principle will come up again later.) When you're opening 1 of a minor, the decision may not be so obvious. The bidding system has a set of rules to make the choice automatic:

1. If one of your minors is longer than the other, open in the longer minor.
2. If both of your minors have 3 cards, open 1♣.
3. If both minors have the same length with 4 (or more) cards, open 1♦.

These rules ensure that a 1 of a minor opening promises at least 3 cards in the suit. The 1♦ opening is almost always a “real” suit (at least 4 cards), but a 1♣ opening

is more likely to be based on a 3 card club suit. Specifically, you will only open 1♦ on a 3 card diamond suit if your shape is exactly 4432.

Responder's first bid

As we saw in the previous chapter, responder's hands are divided into three (really four) categories:

0. 0-5 points: Pass. Don't bid at all.
1. 6-10 points: Minimum responding bid
2. 11-12 points: Invitational.
3. 13+ points: Game forcing. Once partner opens, your side must bid a game.

With a minimum hand

With a minimum hand, responder may not (with one exception) bid above the 1 level. If you have a 4 card or longer suit, you may bid it on the 1 level. If you have more than one suit that you can bid on the 1 level, you should:

- Bid your longest suit.
- With two 5 card suits, bid the higher-ranking.
- With two 4 card suits, bid the lower-ranking.

Some experts recommend that, if partner opens 1♣ and you hold 4 diamonds and 4 cards in a major, you should bypass diamonds and bid the major immediately, since we are trying to find a major-suit fit. You may follow this advice if you want, but it is a good idea to make sure you and your partner are bidding the same way.

The one case in which a minimum responder may bid above the 1 level is to raise partner. If you hold 5 card support for partner's suit, then you may bid 2 of partner's minor. You should usually have 5 card support to raise, because partner has only promised 3; you may occasionally raise with only 4, especially if partner's suit is diamonds, because the 1♦ opening is unlikely to be based on a 3 card suit. However, given the choice between raising partner's minor and showing your own 4 card major, you should always show the major (no matter how bad it is). Remember that a primary goal of the auction is to find a playable major-suit fit.

If you cannot bid a new suit on the 1 level and you cannot raise partner's suit, then you must bid 1NT.

With an invitational hand

When you have an invitational hand, you have a new option available to you: if partner opened 1♦, you may bid 2♣ if you have a 5 card suit. Nonetheless, you will frequently start by bidding a new suit on the 1 level, following the same guidelines as for a minimum hand. A new suit bid by responder is **forcing**, meaning that opener is not allowed to pass. Thus you can bid 1 of a suit with a wide range of hands, knowing that you will get a chance to clarify your strength later.

A 1NT bid or a raise is not forcing, so you must clarify your strength immediately. Instead of bidding 1NT, bid 2NT when you have an invitational, balanced hand with no 4 card majors. (Some teachers recommend using the 2NT bid to show a game-forcing hand with 13-15 HCP. Make sure you discuss with your partner which style you are using. It's bad if your partner thinks 2NT is game-forcing, and you pass because you think 2NT is invitational.) If you want to raise your partner, you must bid 3 of the minor rather than 2 of the minor.

With a game-forcing hand

Bidding with a game-forcing hand is almost exactly like bidding with an invitational hand. Usually you will start by bidding a suit, which does not put any limit on the number of points you have. When you have a balanced hand with no 4 card majors, you bid 3NT instead of 2NT to show 13-15 HCP. (If you have more than 15 HCP, then you must bid a suit to stall, and attempt to let partner know how good your hand is later.) If you want to raise partner, you're out of luck. (Modern bidding systems have ways to raise a minor with a game-forcing hand, but they are beyond the scope of this class.)

With an extremely strong hand

If you have 19 or more points and a 5 card or longer suit of your own, you may show it by **jump shifting**, which means making a jump bid in a new suit. For example, the auction 1♣-2♠ is a jump shift. A jump shift is obviously game forcing, and shows serious slam interest.

Strictly speaking, strong jump shifts are not necessary. A new suit by responder is forcing, so you do not need to jump to show a strong hand. Thus, many people prefer to use a jump shift to show a weak, preemptive hand. Strong jump shifts are often out of favor in modern bidding systems because modern bidding systems are designed to include many ways to game force. In a beginner bidding system, these options are not available, so it can be hard to describe strong hands. For example, suppose you have an extremely strong hand with long hearts, and you are playing weak jump shifts. When partner opens a minor, the 1♥ bid is easy, but the next bid is not so easy. Although a new suit by responder is forcing, rebidding an old suit is not forcing, so you cannot rebid hearts without risking that partner

will pass. For reasons such as this, when you are playing a simple system that does not have a lot of ways to establish a game force, it is easier to play strong jump shifts. As always, you should discuss with your partner before playing to make sure you both know what your bids mean.

Rebids

Rebids by opener and responder are fairly logical, remembering a few guiding principles:

- You need 25 points to bid a game. Once you know that your side has at least 25 points, you are responsible to make sure you bid a game; you cannot pass, and you cannot make a non-forcing bid. Once you know that your side does not have 25 points, you should pass once you find a playable strain. If you're not sure whether your side has enough points, keep the bidding alive until you know.
- You are looking for an 8 card fit, especially in a major. When you know that you have an 8 card fit, you should almost always raise the suit immediately.
- Bidding a suit twice usually promises 6 cards in the suit.

Opener's rebids

If opener has support for responder's major suit, opener should raise. With a minimum hand (12-14 points) raise to the 2 level; with an invitational hand (15-17 points), raise to the 3 level; with a game-forcing hand (18-20 points) raise to the 4 level.

With a balanced hand, opener will usually rebid NT at an appropriate level (as discussed in the lesson on 1NT opening bids). With an unbalanced hand, opener will usually rebid his second suit at the cheapest available level. There are two exceptions to this rule:

1. If opener rebids a new suit on the 2 level above his original suit (for instance, 1♦-1♠-2♥), that is called a **reverse**. A reverse promises at least 17 points, and more cards in the first suit than the second. A reverse is forcing for one round. If your second suit outranks your first, but you don't have enough points to reverse, you'll have to improvise.
2. With the exception of a reverse, a new suit by opener is not forcing. If you have a game-forcing hand (18+ points), you need to jump shift (for instance, 1♦-1♠-3♣) to show your strength.

If opener does not have a second suit because the opened suit is 6 cards (or longer), then he should rebid the opened suit. With 12-15 points, rebid on the 2 level; with 16-17 points, jump to the 3 level.

Responder's rebids

At this point in the auction, you will frequently have a good idea of what the final contract should be. If not, continue bidding to describe your shape (bid whatever suit is appropriate) and your strength. (You may need to jump to show your strength. For example, after $1\clubsuit-1\heartsuit-1\spadesuit$, $2\heartsuit$ shows a minimum hand with 6+ hearts, $3\heartsuit$ shows an invitational hand with 6+ hearts, and $4\heartsuit$ shows a game-forcing hand with 6+ hearts.)

Chapter 8

Preempts

Goals of the auction

So far, we've been focusing on auctions in which your opponents do not bid. These are known as **non-competitive auctions**, or **uncontested auctions**. In an uncontested auction, your goal is to bid the best possible contract. Therefore, you and your partner will try to exchange as much information as possible, to be sure that you end up in the right place. In a competitive auction, you have a new problem – you and your partner might figure out what the perfect contract for your side is, but it won't help if the opponents can outbid you. Therefore, the goal of a competitive auction is not to exchange as much information as possible; rather, you want to get a pretty good idea of what the right contract for your side is, and then bid it as quickly as possible. Hopefully, the opponents will not have time to exchange all the information they need, and they will not know whether they can outbid you.

Another option available to you in a competitive auction is sacrificing. A **sacrifice** is a contract that you bid even though you know that you cannot make it, in the hope that the penalty for going down will be less than the score if the opponents make their contract. For example, suppose that your side can take nine tricks in spades, and the opponents can take ten in hearts. If the opponents bid 4♥, then you should bid 4♠ – even if the opponents double you, you're better off going down in 4♠ than letting them make 4♥.

Theory of Preemption

Put simply, preempting is bidding a lot (making a jump bid) with a weak shapely hand. (We've already seen one kind of preempt – the auction 1M-4M in chapter 6.) Typically, you have a hand that will only be useful if one particular suit is trumps. Consider the hand ♠5 ♥KQJ984 ♦532 ♣854. You already have a good idea what strain you want to play in (hearts), and you already know what level

you want to play at (partscore, unless partner has a very good hand), so you don't need to have a careful, scientific auction. Your opponents, however, might want to have a careful, scientific auction, so you want to use up as much bidding space as you can, as fast as you can. At your first opportunity, you should immediately jump to the highest level you can (probably 2♥ in this example, though 3♥ might be possible under certain circumstances, especially if you're feeling brave). Once you have preempted, you should not bid again unless your partner tells you to – if you want to bid more, then you should have bid more the first time.

There are pros and cons to preempting:

Pros:

- You take up bidding space, forcing the opponents to guess what to do.
- If the opponents have good hands, your preempt might be a good sacrifice. If the opponents' hands aren't quite that good, you might even make your contract.

Cons

- It's possible that your partner has the good hand; in that case, you'll be making him guess.
- If you catch some unlucky splits, you might go down a lot. If the penalty for going down is more than the score for the opponents' contract, the preempt could turn out to be a bad sacrifice.

Ultimately, how you want to preempt is a matter of personal style. In an **undisciplined** style, you preempt with any excuse – often your partner has to guess what you have, and sometimes you suffer some big penalties, but you hope that you are compensated by the fact that you force the opponents to guess more often. In a **disciplined** style, preempts are much more strictly defined. You don't get to preempt as often, and in return you experience less risk.

Weak 2 Bids

A weak 2 bid is a preemptive bid of 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ by the opening bidder. (Remember that the 2♣ opening is different.) This typically shows a good 6-card suit, and about 5-10 HCP. Of course, the exact criteria depend on how disciplined you want your weak twos to be. If you want to play an undisciplined style, then a weak two shows:

- A decent 6-card suit
- 5-10 HCP
- Generally no voids, especially if you have a good hand (by weak 2 standards)

If you want to play a disciplined style, then a weak 2 shows

- A good 6-card suit. Typically, this means that you have at least two of the top three honors, or three of the top five. Certainly, the majority of your points should be in your long suit.
- 5-10 HCP.
- No voids
- No side 4-card major. (You don't want to risk missing a 4-4 trump fit, if partner doesn't have support for your suit.)

We try not to bid a weak 2 when we have a void because hands with voids frequently play better than you might expect. If you tell your partner that you have a weak hand, you might miss a game.

Examples

♠ AKJ843 ♥ 952 ♦ 82 ♣ 74 A textbook 2♠ bid, in either style.

♠ AQJ732 ♥ Q952 ♦ 8 ♣ 74 The hyper-disciplined bidders might not like it, but most would consider this another easy 2♠ bid. In my experience, you lose more than you gain by refusing to preempt with a side 4-card major.

♠ K42 ♥ Q98532 ♦ Q2 ♣ 52 An easy pass, for all but the most undisciplined preempters. Remember that you want to have good suit quality to preempt.

♠ K5 ♥ KJ9643 ♦ QJ3 ♣ 54 This one is more of a judgment call. The disciplined players will argue that it doesn't make sense to preempt this hand – your hand probably contains at least two defensive tricks, and possibly three, so it's unlikely the opponents can make a game. Why make a risky bid if you're not even keeping them out of a good contract? Undisciplined players like to keep the opponents guessing, and may decide to try 2♥ despite the arguments against it. (Undisciplined players of a different stripe might try 1♥.) With a hand like this, I generally try to do whatever I think will keep my partner happy. With some of my partners, that means I bid; with other partners, I pass.

What will partner do?

Partner will generally pass your preempt. This does not promise that he has support for your suit – you bid up to this level by yourself, so you're prepared to play without any support from partner. For example, if you open 2♠, partner will pass with ♠ 2 ♥ AQ542 ♦ Q432 ♣ K64.

Partner can also raise you with support. Naturally, partner will bid game if he thinks that you can make game. Otherwise, he can increase the preempt based on how many trumps he has. In other words, you were willing to preempt to the 2 level by yourself – now that partner knows you have a fit, you should be willing to preempt even higher. If he has 3-card support, he can (if he wants) raise to the 3 level. With 4-card support, he can raise to the 4 level. In other words, he bids

a 9-trick contract with a 9-card trump fit and a 10-trick contract with a 10-card trump fit. This is a special case of a more advanced principle known as the **Law of Total Tricks**. Remember that the auction 2M-3M is *not* invitational. Partner is increasing the preempt because he has a weak hand – you cannot bid again.

With a strong hand (i.e. a hand with game interest), partner can bid a new suit with at least 5 cards in the suit, bid 3NT to play there. (He cannot bid 2NT to offer NT, because 2NT is a conventional bid.)

Other opening preempts

Just as opening on the 2 level shows a weak hand with a 6-card suit, opening on the 3 level shows a weak hand with a 7-card suit, and opening on the 4 level shows an 8-card suit. Subsequent bidding is similar to the situation over a weak 2.

Preempts after the opponents open

Of course, you don't have to be the opening bidder to preempt. You can still preempt after the opponents open. (In fact, it's even more attractive to preempt then. It's less likely that partner has a good hand, so you don't need to worry about preempting him.) However, you have to remember to jump. For example, if the opponents open 1♠, 2♥ shows a good hand, not a weak hand. To show a weak hand, you must bid at least 3♥.

Preempts after partner opens

Some people like to play that auctions such as 1♣-2♥ show weak hands (**weak jump shifts**). Since your partner is known to have a good hand, the only reason to preempt is if you're extremely weak, so this would show about 3-6 HCP. Other people like to play that these auctions show extremely strong hands, typically 17+ HCP (**strong jump shifts**). Whatever you choose, make sure that you and your partner are on the same wavelength. It's never fun when you think you made a very strong bid, and partner thinks you made a very weak bid.

Weak Jump Raises

In competitive auctions, you and your partner can decide that jump raises are weak. (Once again, make sure that you and your partner discuss this.) For example, after (1♥)-1♠-(2♥), a 2♠ bid won't take up much bidding space, so you might want to bid 3♠ with a weak hand. But then we have another problem: what if you

had a better hand, and you planned to use 3♠ as an invitational bid? The answer is the **cuebid raise**. You can bid 3♥: you obviously don't want to play in hearts, the opponents' suit, so 3♥ can show a strong spade raise now.

You can also choose to play weak jump raises even when the opponents haven't bid a suit, but that's more advanced. You still need to find some way to show a strong raise, but you can't cuebid because the opponents haven't bid any suits. Those situations are beyond the scope of this class.

Chapter 9

Overcalls

When you enter the auction with a bid after the opponents have opened, that is an **overcall**. The requirements to overcall 1NT are:

- A balanced hand
- 15-18 HCP
- A stopper in the opponent's suit

The requirements to make a non-jump overcall in a suit are below. Remember that jump overcalls were discussed in the previous chapter.

- A five card suit
- 8+ HCP to bid on the 1 level, 10+ to bid on the two level
- A reason to bid

The last requirement is the tricky one. You don't want to overcall any time you have 8 HCP and a 5 card suit. If you're going to overcall an 8 HCP hand, it should be because you have an excellent suit. If you don't have good suit quality, then you should just pass unless you have an especially strong hand. Unlike opening bids, when you have to open whenever you have enough points, you don't need to overcall just because you have a certain number of points. For example, with ♠ KJ8 ♥ A5 ♦ 5432 ♣ AQ94, you would be expected to pass after the opponents open 1♦, because you really don't have any good alternatives.