

LESSON 3

Responses to 1NT Opening Bids



General Concepts

General Introduction

Group Activities

Sample Deals



GENERAL CONCEPTS

Bidding

The role of each player

The opener is the describer; the responder is the captain. When opener bids 1NT, opener paints a clear picture for responder because that bid shows a balanced hand with 15, 16 or 17 HCP.

The role of the captain

The responder places the value of the hand in one of three ranges:

0 to 7
8 or 9
10 or more

Then the responder answers two questions:

1. What level?

Do we have 25 or more combined points? If the answer is yes, then the contract should be a Golden Game: 4♠, 4♥ or 3NT. If the answer is no, the contract should be a partscore: 1NT, 2♠, 2♥ or 2♦ (2♣ is reserved for the Stayman convention).

2. What strain?

Do we have a Golden Fit — eight or more cards in a suit? If the answer is yes, consider the level. At the game level, minor-suit fits are played in 3NT. At the partscore level, a diamond fit is played in 2♦. At the part-score level, a club fit is played in 1NT because 2♣ is reserved for the Stayman convention.

The Play

Considering goals and assets

Students are encouraged to remind themselves of their goal — taking the required number of tricks. Then they count sure tricks or winners. In every deal so far, they have had enough winners to make the contract. In the deals in Lesson 3, they are short of their target and must start looking at ways to develop additional tricks.

Promotion

All four deals focus on getting the extra tricks needed to make the contract through promotion. Students are shown that sometimes this is a speedy process, for example, when you have the king, queen and jack of a suit. Sometimes it requires patience to promote cards, such as when you have the J-10-9-8.

Take your losses early

When developing tricks through promotion, you must lose in order to gain. These losses should be taken early. Students have a tendency to take all of their winners first.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“As we saw in the last lesson, responder is the captain and is responsible for steering the partnership into the appropriate contract. Responder does this by asking two questions: *What level?* and *What strain?*”

“To decide on the level, responder adds up the combined strength of the hands. If the partnership has 25 or more total points, the deal should be played in one of the Golden Games. If the partnership has fewer than 25 total points, the deal should be played in a partscore.

“To decide on the strain, responder tries to find a Golden Fit. If the partnership is going to play in a partscore, responder looks for any Golden Fit. If one can't be found, the partnership plays in notrump. If the partnership is headed for game, responder is interested only in a Golden Fit in a major suit. If one is found, the partnership plays in 4♥ or 4♠. Otherwise, the partnership plays in 3NT, even if there is a Golden Fit in a minor suit.

“If opener bids 1NT, responder usually can decide on the level and strain right away. Opener has described the hand very accurately: balanced with 15 to 17 HCP. To decide what to do, responder starts by looking at the strength of the hand and puts it into one of three categories:

0 to 7 points

8 to 9 points

10 or more points

“Let's see why.”

GROUP ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE ONE: Responding with 0 to 7 Total Points

Introduction

“Let’s practice with some hands and see how you work as the captain to decide the level and the strain of the contract.”

Instructions

“Your partner opens 1NT. You are the responder. Value your hand and decide the level, the strain and the response for each of the following hands. What do all of the hands have in common? (0–7 range and partscore).”

1) ♠ 10 8 6 5 4 2
♥ J 7 5
♦ 8
♣ J 6 2

2) ♠ J 9 8
♥ A 9 6 2
♦ J 7 6
♣ 10 9 4

3) ♠ Q J
♥ 9 8
♦ Q 9 8
♣ 10 9 7 6 3 2

Points 4

Points 6

Points 7

Level Partscore

Level Partscore

Level Partscore

Strain Spades

Strain Notrump

Strain Notrump

Response 2♠

Response Pass

Response Pass

Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. On all of the hands responder wants to stop in a partscore. Explain why this will always be the case when responder has 0 to 7 total points.

Conclusion

“When you have 0 to 7 total points, you want to make sure that you play in a partscore. You have two choices. You can pass and play in 1NT or bid a suit at the two level if there is a Golden Fit. For reasons we won’t go into here, a 2♣ response is reserved for a special purpose, so actually your only choices are 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠.

“With a six-card or longer suit, you know there is a Golden Fit. With a five-card suit, there will be a Golden Fit if opener has three or more cards in the suit. Since opener usually will have three or more cards in your suit, and you don’t have any room on the Bidding Scale to explore, you can assume that you have a Golden Fit. With four cards or fewer in your suit, you should assume that no Golden Fit exists. It’s much less likely that opener has four cards in your suit, and you have no room on the Bidding Scale to find out.

“So, with 0 to 7 total points, bid 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ with a five-card or longer suit. Otherwise, pass.”

Don’t get into a discussion of Stayman at this point. Interested students can read about it in the text. It’s unnecessary also to look at signing off in clubs (by bidding 2♣ followed by 3♣). The rules given will suffice for now. To explain why a Golden Fit is likely when responder has five cards but not when responder has four cards, you could go over opener’s possible shapes and show that responder rarely has a doubleton in a suit and has only four cards in a suit about 1/4 of the time. Do this only if you think you have plenty of time.

EXERCISE TWO: Responding with 10 to 15 Total Points

Introduction

“Your partner opens 1NT showing at least 15 HCP. When you have 10 or more total points, you want to make sure that you, as the captain, place the contract in game. You want to play in one of the Golden Games. So you have three choices — 4♥, 4♠ or 3NT. Let’s see how this works.”

Instructions

“Value your hand and decide the level, the strain and the response for each of the following hands.

1) ♠ Q J 9 7 6 4
♥ K 8 6
♦ K 4 3
♣ 5

2) ♠ A 8 2
♥ A Q 9 8 3
♦ 9 4 2
♣ 10 9

3) ♠ Q J
♥ K Q
♦ Q 9 8
♣ J 9 7 6 3 2

Points 11

Points 11

Points 13

Level Game

Level Game

Level Game

Strain Spades

Strain Maybe hearts

Strain Notrump

Response 4♠

Response 3♥

Response 3NT

“What do all of the hands have in common? (10+ total points and game).”

Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. The second hand will be the focal point since responder knows the final level but not the strain. Show how responder can make use of the room on the Bidding Scale to respond 3♥, asking opener to choose between 3NT and 4♥.

Conclusion

“When you have 10 or more total points and your partner opens 1NT, you, as captain, must make sure the partnership reaches a game contract. If you have a six-card or longer major suit, jump to game in your known Golden Fit. With a five-card major suit, jump to the three level in your suit. This asks opener to raise to four of the major suit holding three or more of this suit or to bid 3NT with a doubleton. Otherwise, bid 3NT.”

Again, do not get into Stayman at this point. You can mention it to the more curious students and have them read about it in the Bonus Chapter in the text.

EXERCISE THREE: Responding with 8 or 9 Total Points

Introduction

“With 8 or 9 total points, you’re not sure whether the contract should be at the game or partscore level. Bid 2NT. You don’t bid game but you move toward the game-bonus level.”

We are ducking the issue of invitational hands with a major suit, since this involves Stayman. None of the exercises or pre-dealt deals raises this issue, and it’s best left alone for now. You have the choice as to whether to teach the bonus chapter on Stayman or let your students read it on their own.

Instructions

“You are the responder after your partner has opened the bidding 1NT. Construct a hand with which you would respond 2NT.”

Follow-up

Ask the students to describe the hand that they have constructed. At this point, you may run into a question about major suits. Refer the students to the bonus chapter. Keep it simple.

Conclusion

“With 8 or 9 total points, bid 2NT. It will be up to the opener to make a final decision. Opener will carry on to game with the maximum of 17 HCP.”

Introduce the idea of judgment by adding:

“With 16 HCP, opener should use judgment to decide whether to bid 3NT or to pass responder's invitational bid.”

EXERCISE FOUR: The Bidding Messages

Introduction

“The responder must rely on the opener to understand the bids responder makes. A response to a 1NT opening bid that asks the opener to pass is called a signoff bid. A response that gives opener the opportunity to pass or bid again is called an invitational bid. Some bids demand opener bid again. These are called forcing bids.

“One analogy that helps you remember the message given by a particular bid is the traffic light. A signoff bid is like a red light — stop. An invitational bid is like a yellow light — slow down or proceed with caution. A forcing bid is like a green light — go!”

Instructions

“Each bid has a message. Your partner opens the bidding 1NT.

“What are seven signoff responses you can make? (Pass, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, 3NT, 4♥, 4♠.)

“What invitational response can you make? (2NT.)

“What are two forcing responses you can make? (3♥, 3♠ — refer to the middle example of Exercise Two.)”

Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. Emphasize how the traffic-light approach helps recall the message of each bid. Once opener knows the color of responder’s bid, opener knows whether to bid again.

Conclusion

“Each bid that the captain makes has a message. Suit bids at the two level (with the exception of 2♣) and game bids are signoff bids. Opener is expected to pass. 2NT is an invitational bid. Opener can bid on with a maximum hand or pass. 3♠ and 3♥ are forcing bids. Opener must bid again.”

EXERCISE FIVE: Playing in the Golden Fit

Introduction

“You might feel uneasy about bidding to the two level when you have no points. Let’s look at an experiment which might make this decision easier for you in the future.”

Instructions

“Each player take a suit. I’ll tell you what cards to give to North and South.”

Construct the following hands for North and South:

NORTH
 ♠ J 10 9 8 7 6
 ♥ 7 3 2
 ♦ 8 7
 ♣ 4 3
 ■
 SOUTH
 ♠ Q 5
 ♥ A K 4
 ♦ A 6 5 3
 ♣ A 8 6 2

“Randomly deal the remaining cards to East and West. Have South play the hand as declarer in a contract of 1NT. When you’re finished, record the number of tricks won by South. Then play the hand again, this time with North as the declarer in a contract of 2♠. Record the number of tricks won by North.”

Follow-up

“What were the results of the experiment? When the opening bid is 1NT, why is it important that the responder, with 0 to 7 total points, steer the partnership to a Golden Fit whenever possible?”

Conclusion

“It’s easier to take an extra trick in a suit contract if you have a Golden Fit than it is in a notrump contract. When you’re the responder, remember that you are responsible for steering the partnership to the appropriate contract. Don’t pass just because you have few or no points. You have an important role to play.”

EXERCISE SIX: Promoting Tricks

Introduction

“When you’re the declarer, you add up your sure tricks and compare the number to your objective. Sometimes you find that you don’t have enough sure tricks to make your contract. One way to develop the additional tricks you need is through promotion. A card is turned into a sure trick when all of the higher cards have been played.”

Instructions

“Take a suit and put the following combinations on the table. How many tricks can be developed with each of the following suit combinations?”

DUMMY:	1) K Q J	2) K 5	3) J 8 4	4) 10 8 6 3
DECLARER:	7 4 2	Q 4	Q 10 3	J 9 5 2
	Two.	One.	One.	One.

Follow-up

Discuss the exercise, one example at a time.

Conclusion

“You can sometimes promote cards in a suit into sure tricks by playing the suit and driving out the higher cards in the opponents’ hands. Sometimes you have to give up the lead several times. Don’t be afraid to lose a trick to the opponents if you can gain something in return. Losing tricks to the opponents is a normal part of the play — you just don’t want to lose too many!”

All four pre-dealt deals involve getting the extra tricks needed through promotion. The focus is on the play, so the bidding can be reviewed fairly quickly. The only auction that might require some discussion is on the third pre-dealt deal, where opener accepts responder’s invitation.

