

PATTERN BRIDGE HANDS
Notrump Opening (15-17 HCP)
by Robert Locke

(first two pages repeated for easier reference)

After playing a while, you begin to see patterns in Bridge hands: patterns of distribution of the suits, patterns of honors, and patterns of Play-of-the-Hand. These pages are an adjunct to my larger book *BITE-SIZED BRIDGE FOR MOM AND POP* but the intent here is to point out these patterns — paradigms actually — model hands with model suggestions for bidding and play, so that you can more easily recognize the patterns as they unfold in your hands.

The first pattern to deal with is the Opening Hand, but first you may need a quick familiarization with terms in Bridge, hence this front-pages Glossary:

Beginners' Glossary

Opening Hand	--	The first player to make a bid other than Pass
HCP	--	High Card Points: A=4; K=3; Q=2; J=1
Auction	--	The first period of play during which Opponents bid for the Contract, using a # plus denomination (suit name ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ or NT): e.g., 1 ♥.
Contract	--	The final bid, establishing a Trump suit based on Fit or Notrump: e.g. 4 ♥
Fit	--	A suit in which partners have at least eight between them
Trump	--	"Wildcard" Suit established during auction; beats other three suits
Rotation	--	clockwise, both during the Auction and Play-of-the-Hand
Opener	--	Player who Opens the bidding
Responder	--	Partner of Opener
Overcaller	--	Opponent who bids over Opener
Advancer	--	Partner of Overcaller
Declarer	--	Player who wins the final contract
Dummy	--	Partner of Declarer, exposes hand after Opening Lead
Play-of-the-Hand	--	The second period of play, after the Auction and Opening Lead
Opening Lead	--	By LHO (left-hand opponent) of Declarer
Trick	--	During Play-of-the-Hand each player contributes a card to each trick, following suit; high card or trump wins the trick; 13 tricks possible
Discard (slough)	--	a card chosen from another suit when you have none of the led-suit
Book	--	The first six tricks, which do not count: 7=1; 8=2; 9=3; 10=4; 11=5; 12=6 Slam; 13=7 Grand Slam
Major Suits	--	Hearts ♥ and Spades ♠: each trick 30 points; 4♥ or 4♠=GAME
minor suits	--	Clubs ♣ and Diamonds ♦: each trick 20 points; 5♣ or 5♦= GAME
Notrump	--	No suit is trump; high card wins the trick: 40 points first trick, 30 each trick thereafter; 3NT=GAME
GAME	--	In caps because it is the hoped-for goal of every hand: 100 points earns a Game Bonus of 300 NV or 500 V
Vulnerability	--	V or NV=Vulnerable or Nonvulnerable; adds tension and risk, greater rewards v. greater penalties

Perhaps now you can now more readily understand what is involved with the Opening Bid at the 1-Level: 1-of-a-Major or 1-of-a-minor most commonly, or 1NT (perhaps 1 out of 20 deals).

Your Goal

Every hand you unfold you hope to achieve exactly the same goal: a GAME contract in a Major Suit. Major Suits are more valuable than minor suits (30 v. 20 points per trick) and usually Trump is easier to make more tricks than Notrump. Hence this goal, as simply as I can put it.

Therefore, as you sort your cards look first for a 5-card Major. You will want to tell Partner about that as soon as possible. Next look for honor cards, A,K,Q,J and begin a first evaluation of your hand's strength. You want, also, to tell your Partner how strong or weak you are.

Evaluating Your Hand

Beginners: To help bid more easily, use simple HCP evaluation: A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1. Before you can develop any idea what to bid, let alone how high, you must have an idea of how strong your hand is, relative to the other hands around the table. There are 40 HCP total; if you have 10, you have your fair share; if you have 12 you have an advantage and you are ready to open the bidding. (It used to be common advice to open with 13-14, but inflation hits everywhere.)

One of my best bridge teachers told our class: **“Let us promise each other we will Open every 12+ HCP hand and Respond every 6+ HCP hand.”** I played a whole year on this simplistic agreement and did very well. Try it; you can change your plan any time. Soon you will want to use more sophisticated methods of re-evaluating for bidding purposes: Distribution, adding points first for LENGTH (1 point for each card more than 4) also ..after finding your Fit... for VOIDS (3), SINGLETONS (2), DOUBLETONS (1). But at first, stick to simple HCP.

Here are the basic HCP ranges for GAME. (Remember GAME is always your first goal. Clearly you can't always reach it; in fact, fewer than half of deals will yield GAME.

25-26 — GAME in a major suit or Notrump

28-29 — GAME in a minor suit (rare, you should really try 3NT rather than 5-of-a-minor)

33 — SLAM (6 tricks; 1 in 144 deals) huge bonus

37+ — GRAND SLAM—(all 7 tricks; 1 in 5848 deals) hugest bonus

12-21 HCP: You Open 1of-a-Major or 1-of-a-minor. 15-17 HCP: You open 1NT.

There are other Opening bids: 20-21 HCP=open 2NT; 22+ HCP=open 2C; also pre-emptive openings based upon a long suit in a weak hand: 6 cards, you open 2-of-a-suit; 7 cards, you open 3-of--a-suit, 8 cards—sheesh. Let's go back to the hands you usually get.

Look at these five most common distributions, 73% of all deals:

4-4-3-2—22%; 5-3-3-2—16%; 5-4-3-1—13%; 5-4-2-2—11%; 4-3-3-3—11%

Not a 6-card suit nor a void among them, but three of these deals contain a 5-card suit; so hope is high every time you unfold your cards that the pearl of a 5-card major will be among them and you will Open that blessed of all bids, 1-of-a-Major.

As Opener or as Responder, you want always to describe your hand as truthfully as you can.

Yes, sometimes you must lie, but try to make it a little lie, and about a minor, not a Major.

NT Opening Bids
Pattern Deal #1 — MAJOR Partscore using Jacoby Transfer

Dealer-S; Ignore vulnerability.

	NORTH		
	976		
	JT732		
	A9		SUGGESTED AUCTION:
	J63		2D, P
WEST		EAST	P, P P, P
K43		J85	1NT, 2H
A86		95	
J84		KT752	
9754		AQ8	
	SOUTH		
	AQT2		FINAL CONTRACT: 2H
	KQ4		S as DECLARER must win 8 of 13 tricks.
	Q63		N=DUMMY, E/W=DEFENDERS
	KT2		

The bidding makes clear to N that Game (25-26 HCP) is not likely, and so N stops bidding at first opportunity after establishing best probable trump suit, at least 7 hearts between them.

Bidding Dialogue:

- S: **1NT** — “I have 15-17 HCP with balanced distribution—4432 (22%) **or** 5332 (16%) **or** 5431 (13%) **or** 4-3-3-3 (11%) **or** semi-balanced distribution—5422 (11%).”
- W: **P** — “I do not have the right kind of hand for an Overcall.”
- N: **2D**—”I have 5+ h. My HCP is concealed for the moment. I want you, Partner, to play this hand with hearts as trump; I am making a conventional bid: Jacoby Transfer.”
- S: Announce “Transfer” to clarify to opponents that your partnership uses this convention.
- N: **P** — “I, too, do not have the right kind of hand for an Overcall.”
- E: **2H** — “I complete your Transfer at the lowest level. You know I might have only 2.”
- S: **P** — “Same as before.”
- W: **P** — “We do not have enough HCP for Game, and as I have only the 5 hearts I have already promised you, a Partscore at 2H is the best we can hope for.”
- E: **P**— “Same as before.”

Note: The Jacoby Transfer is not new (1956) but there are still some beginning players who prefer to simply respond to 1NT with their best suit. The advantage of the Transfer, however, is significant, usually resulting in an extra trick or sometimes even two since the opening lead comes **into** the strong hand, rather than **through** it. It is not completely incumbent upon Opener to complete the Transfer, but it is almost always the wisest course.

A huge advantage of the Transfer is that a very weak Responder can get Opener out of a doomed 1NT contract (when Opponents have more HCP on their side) and into a suit where Responder is long and can therefore take tricks with little trumps.

Opening Lead (by W)— d-4 (Don't lead away from an A or K. A little card shows an honor.)

Play-of-the-Hand Likely Sequence

Trick 1: W leads d-4, E wins d-K

Trick 2: E returns partner's lead, leads d-5, Dummy wins d-A

Trick 3: Dummy leads h-2, S=h-Q, W wins h-A

Trick 4: W leads c-4, E wins c-A

Trick 5: E leads another c-8, S wins c-K

Trick 6: S leads and wins h-K

Trick 7: S leads d-Q and discards loser c-J in Dummy

Trick 8: S leads h-4, Dummy wins h-J (trump now pulled)

Trick 9: Dummy leads s-6 to finesse s-Q, W wins s-K

Trick 10: W leads c-7, Dummy trumps

Trick 11: Dummy leads s-7 to finesse S s-T which wins

Trick 12: S cashes s-A

Trick 13: Dummy wins last trump

4 Losers: d-K, h-A, c-A, s-K: Final Score 2H making 3, $3 \times 30 = 90$
+ Part-score Bonus 50 = 140 N/S

NT Opening Bids
Pattern Deal #2 — MAJOR GAME: Jacoby Transfer with G.G. Responder

Dealer-W; Ignore vulnerability.

NORTH			
KQ7			
854			
A986		SUGGESTED AUCTION:	
984		P, P, P,	
WEST	EAST	1NT , 2H, 4H	2D, 3N, P
A43	T65	P, P, P	
A76	KQT32		
JT2	K3		
AKJ3	Q65		
SOUTH			
J982		FINAL CONTRACT: 4H	
J9		W as DECLARER must win 10 of 13 tricks.	
Q754		E=DUMMY, N-S=DEFENDERS	
T72			

Bidding Dialogue:

W: **1N** — “I have top of range 1NT 15-17 HCP.”

N: **P** — “I do not have enough HCP or a good enough suit for an Overcall.”

E: **2D** — “I have 5+ hearts. My strong HCP is as yet unknown.”

S: **P** — “I, too, do not have enough HCP or a good enough suit for an Overcall.”

W: **2H** — “Aye aye, Cap’n. Where to?”

N: **P** — “Same as before.”

E: **3N** — “I have Game-Going Values (10 HCP) but only the 5 hearts already promised.”

S: **P** — “Same as before.”

W: **4H** — “We have our FIT in hearts. We might make a NT Game, also, with my flat distribution, but I am not sure of your distribution beyond 5 hearts, and it is usually safer to play in a Trump contract than a NT contract.”

Opening Lead (by N): s-K (top of two touching honors, hoping to make the Q good later)

Play-of-the-Hand

After Declarer takes the first trick with s-A (sometimes it’s good to wait, but not here because Declarer wants to immediately establish clubs for a spade sluff) Declarer pulls trump in three leads then turns to clubs for the four immediate tricks there, discarding one of Dummy’s three spades on the fourth club.

Then, while still in Declarer’s hand, Declarer leads a low diamond, hoping for d-A to be *onside*, which it is. This is the proper way to make a finesse, leading low from one hand to the high card in the other hand. N can take d-A now, or later, but because N must play in front of Dummy’s d-K, the d-K will always take a trick. In a finesse situation such as this, it is important for Declarer to ensure *Transportation* at the very first so as to be in the correct hand at the correct time.

Note that if Declarer does not first establish clubs to discard one of Dummy’s losing spades, when Declarer does necessarily lose to N’s d-A, N-S will take two spade tricks instead of, now, only one.

2 Losers: d-A, s-Q: Final Score 4S making 5: 5 X 30 = 150 + Game Bonus, 450 NV or 650 V.

NT Opening Bids
Pattern Deal #4 — MAJOR GAME: 6-card Jacoby Transfer

Dealer-E; Ignore vulnerability.

<p>NORTH J7 K94 K9843 K76</p> <p>WEST KQT632 Q872 Q93</p> <p>SOUTH 985 JT3 A765 852</p>	<p>EAST A4 A65 QJT2 AJT4</p>
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SUGGESTED AUCTION:

P, P, P,	
2H, 3S, P	1NT, 2S, 4S
P, P, P	

FINAL CONTRACT: **4S**

E as DECLARER must take 10 of 13 tricks.

W=DUMMY, N-S=DEFENDERS

Bidding Dialogue

Responder's interior dialogue here (compare to Pattern Deal #1 and 2) is: *"I have a 6-card major; so first I bid 2H to transfer Opener. My next bid—3S—tells Partner I have invitational values (8-9 HCP) but 6+ trump, not merely the 5 I promised in my first bid. I invite you to Game if you are Max or Pass if you are Min. But with my 6 and your 2, we have our 8-card FIT in spades."* (A more aggressive Responder would include void in HCP and jump to Game.)

Opening Lead (by S)— h-J (best choice, bad to lead away from K or A.) Declarer covers with h-Q, N with h-K, and Declarer wins with h-A.

Play-of-the-Hand

Declarer takes first trick with s-A and pulls trump in three leads.

Declarer now goes for the *Trap Finesse* in clubs, by leading c-Q first from Dummy, then c-9 (50-50 odds c-K is *onside*). This *Trap Finesse* works, but in the end there are two heart losers.

Score for winning 5 tricks: 5X30=150 plus GAME Bonus 300NV or 500V.

NT Opening Bids
Pattern Deal #6 — Major Suit GAME using Stayman

Dealer-W; Ignore vulnerability.

NORTH	
K86	
T84	
T85	
K743	
WEST	EAST
AQT4	J975
QJ73	K2
J2	AQ3
AJT	9865
SOUTH	
32	
A965	
K9764	
Q2	

SUGGESTED AUCTION:

P, P, P

1N, 2H, 4S 2C, 3N, P

P, P, P

FINAL CONTRACT: **4S**

W as DECLARER must win 10 of 13 tricks.

E=DUMMY, N/S=DEFENDERS

Bidding Dialogue:

W: **1NT** — “I have 15-17 HCP with balanced distribution—4432 (22%) **or** 5332 (16%) **or** 5431 (13%) **or** 4-3-3-3 (11%) **or** semi-balanced distribution—5422 (11%).”

N: **P** — “I do not have the right kind of hand for an Overcall.”

E: **2C** — “I have 10 HCP with a 4-card major, perfect for the Stayman Convention, asking my partner for a 4-card major in his 1NT opening hand.”

S: **P** — “I, too, do not have the right kind of hand for an Overcall.”

W: **2H** — “In fact I have four cards in **both** majors. As usual to show 4-4, I bid **Up-the-Line**, the lower ranking suit first, leaving room for one of us to bring in the higher ranking suit.”

N: **P** — “Same as before.”

E: **3NT** — “The four-card Major you have named is not **my** 4-card major. By bidding NT at this point, I confirm my major is the other one. Also, by jumping to Game in NT, I am telling you that I have at least 10 HCP, therefore making GAME VALUES between us, 25-27 HCP.”

S: **P** — Same as before.

W: **4S** — “Aha, this time we have captained each other, you to Game and me to our Golden Fit of 8 spades.”

N.B: A deal with this kind of bidding might play as well or better in NT than in a trump contract. However, usually with an 8-card fit, it's better to play in a trump contract because after you have pulled trump, you usually have two trump left in each hand, which is like having two additional aces. Exceptions to this rule are many!

Opening Lead (by N)— d-5. Knowing W to have 4-4 in the Majors—because W bid hearts first, then apades—and not wanting to lead away from the c-K so as to keep it behind Declarer's strong cards, diamonds make sense.

Play-of-the-Hand Likely Sequence

Trick 1: N leads d-5, S wins d-K
Trick 2: S leads c-Q, W wins c-A
Trick 3: W leads d-J, E wins d-Q
Trick 4: E leads s-5, W tries to finesse s-Q, but loses to N's s-K
Trick 5: N cashes c-K
Trick 6: N leads c-4 and S trumps s-3
Trick 7: S leads d-4, W discards h, E wins d-A
Trick 8: E leads s-7, W wins s-T
Trick 9: W leads and wins s-A (pulls last trump from N)
Trick 10: W leads h-3, Dummy plays h-K, S wins h-A
Trick 11: S leads d-9, Dummy wins s-J
Trick 12: Dummy leads h-2, W wins h-Q
Trick 13: W wins last trump

5 Losers: d-K, s-K, c-K, c-trumped in S, h-A: Final Score 4S down 2 @ 50 per trick NV = 200 N/S.

What a disappointment for E/W. But this is good to know about the game of Bridge. Things are never predictable even when you play the odds.

E/W found their 8-card Major Suit Fit and Game-Going Values (10 HCP in East opposite W's NT Opening bid). So what went wrong?

Well, first I remember reading somewhere that 25 HCP will yield GAME in NT only 60% of the time. (That losing 40% looms very large.) Also that 26 HCP will yield GAME in NT 70% of the time: 1 HCP makes a 10% difference. Gee.

Second, about those finesses which, we know mathematically, win only 50% of the time. The way the cards are laid out in N/S in this deal, both the finesses lose—the s-K and the d-K. If those two Ks were reversed, both finesses would win, and the contract would have been made.

That is merely bad luck, just the deal of the hand, those badly placed Ks. There was no bidding to indicate where those Ks were held.

This again shows how Duplicate is so much preferable to Party Bridge. Every E/W partnership faces the same bad finesse situation and will get much the same score at every table in Duplicate. The Party Bridge players, however, will be scratching their heads in the dark, saying to each other pretty morosely, "Well, we SHOULD have made Game, according to the odds."

NT Opening Bids
Pattern Deal #7 — Major Suit Partscore using Stayman

Dealer-N; Ignore vulnerability.

	NORTH		
	QJ32		
	A64		
	KQ82		SUGGESTED AUCTION:
	K4		1N , 2S, P
WEST	EAST	P, P, P	P, P, P
54	A76		2C, 3S
K73	T9852		
AJT3	96		
8765	A93		
	SOUTH		
	KT98		FINAL CONTRACT: 3S
	QJ		S as DECLARER must win 9 of 13 tricks, Partscore.
	754		N=DUMMY, E/W=DEFENDERS
	QJT2		

Bidding Dialogue:

- N: **1NT** — “I have 15-17 HCP with balanced distribution—4432 (22%) **or** 5332 (16%) **or** 5431 (13%) **or** 4-3-3-3 (11%) **or** semi-balanced distribution—5422 (11%).”
- S: **2C** — “I have 8+ HCP and at least one 4-card major. If you have a 4-card major, Partner, please name it.”
- N: **2S** — “I have four spades. You can be certain that I do not have four hearts, also, because if I did have both 4-card majors, I would name the lower-ranking one first.”
- S: **3S** — “Okay, I also have four spades; so we have our Major-Suit Fit. However, I do not have enough HCP (10+) to go to Game. If you are max, you can go.”
- N: **Pass** — “Nope, I am not max. In fact, I am min, just 15 HCP, and only one ace.”

Although N/S may well make 4S because they have two solid suits with KQJT (spades and clubs), plus doubletons well-positioned and a trapped h-K, there is a lot of luck on their side. The many quacks in N’s hand, plus the Dubious Doubleton QJ in hearts (3 HCP that could easily be worth zero), happen to be exactly the right cards in exactly the right place which is why this deal goes so well for N/S. N made the probably wise call of **3S**, leaving the final decision to go to GAME up to Opener. Aggressive partnerships might try for GAME, but 4S could very easily go down without good Declarer play, and without this lucky distribution.

BEWARE: Some deals play just as well in NT as in a trump suit, but not so this deal. In a NT contract, W would undoubtedly lead h-5, and Declarer would run out of heart stoppers in two leads. With so many aces between E-W they would surely get the lead back into W’s hand in order to take three heart tricks, plus their three aces.

This is one of the reasons that most experts will advise playing in a Major trump suit with an 8-card Fit, so as to be able to wrest back the lead when Defenders have established a long suit in a NT contract.

Opening Lead (by W)— d-9 (high-low to show a doubleton in Standard Carding)

N.B. My partners and I have now agreed to play Upside-Down-Count-and-Attitude, which we prefer to Standard Carding (where high encourages and low discourages). We deem low cards easier to determine, usually, and we object to wasting high cards as signals. See GLOSSARY.

Play-of-the-Hand here is anybody's guess, given the opening lead of d-9. Does E play d-3, saving d-A for later, or does E play d-A now, returning a diamond in hopes W led a singleton? Personally I rarely lead from a doubleton because it often sets up tricks for Declarer, as it would here. Seeing the d-9 lead and assuming that it is indeed high-low from a doubleton, Declarer can easily place JT in E and therefore win the KQ and even successfully finesse the 8, depending upon what E does with the initial lead.

After drawing trump (3 leads) Declarer's best play is to attack clubs, needing only to get out the ace to promote three club tricks.

3S is make-able, perhaps even 4S with good Declarer play despite E/W's three aces.

3 Sure Losers: c-A, d-A, s-A.

Final Score 3S making 3, $30 \times 3 = 90 + 50$ Part-Score Bonus = 140.

3S making 4, $30 \times 4 = 120 + 50$ Part-Score Bonus = the dread 170.

Compare 4S making 4, $30 \times 4 = 120$ plus Game Bonus = 420 (NV) or 620 (V).

NT Opening Bids
Pattern Deal #8 — GAME CONTRACT JUMP IN NT

Dealer-E; Ignore vulnerability.

	NORTH	
	654	
	7432	
	A98	
	J76	
WEST		EAST
A7		KJ2
AK		QJ5
JT543		KQ76
T983		A54
	SOUTH	
	QT983	
	T986	
	2	
	KQ2	

SUGGESTED AUCTION:
P
3N 1N, P
P, P

FINAL CONTRACT: **3N**
E as DECLARER must win 9 of 13 tricks.
FINAL CONTRACT: 3N

Bidding Dialogue:

- E: **1NT** — “I have 15-17 HCP with balanced distribution—4432 (22%) **or** 5332 (16%) **or** 5431 (13%) **or** 4-3-3-3 (11%) **or** semi-balanced distribution—5422 (11%).”
- W: **3N** — “I do not have a 4-card major, so seeking a major fit is probably useless opposite a 1NT opening bid. I do have stoppers in both majors and length in both minors, also 12 HCP which is 27-29 HCP between us, plenty for Game but not enough for the 33 HCP needed for slam. ‘The one who knows goes,’ so I’m just going.”
- E: **P** — “Aye aye, cap’n.”

Opening Lead (by S)— s-8, Fourth-from-High

Play-of-the-Hand Likely Sequence:

- Trick 1: E wins s-J
- Trick 2: E leads d-K, N ducks with d-8
- Trick 3: E leads d-Q, N wins A
- Trick 4: N leads c-6, E ducks with c-5, S wins c-K
- Trick 5: S leads h-6, Dummy wins h-K
- Trick 6: Dummy wins d-J
- Trick 7: Dummy wins d-T
- Trick 8: Dummy wins d-5, E discards c-x
- Trick 9: Dummy wins h-A
- Trick 10: Dummy wins s-A
- Trick 11: Dummy leads c-4, E wins c-A
- Trick 12: E wins s-K
- Trick 13: E wins h-Q

2 Losers: c-K, d-A: Final Score 3NT making 5, 40+30+30+30+30 =160 + 300 NV Game Bonus = 460
or 500 V Game Bonus E/W = 660.

Rule of 16: To best picture “Rule of 16”, in this deal exchange W’s h-K with South’s h-T which is a loss of 3 HCP in Dummy, which should have a radically different trick result; but it does not.

Rebid the hand. In Standard bidding, where 8-9 HCP is Invitational, not Game-Going, the bidding would now go:

1N-P-2N-P-?

Would E dare accept W’s invitation with 16 HCP instead of 17, having only 1 ace?

Knowing “Rule of 16”, however, E would **not** invite with 2N but would instead still jump to 3N, having 9 HCP and 8 cards 8 or above (therefore comfortably 17). See “Rule of 16” in GLOSSARY.

2NT is perhaps the most undesirable contract in Bridge, achieving no Game bonus but only the same exact score of a 1NT contract making 2 and at much greater risk. “Rule of 16” allows prospective NT dummies to give due weight to “pushers”, valuable spot-cards 10 9 8, which otherwise do not figure in HCP.

Since the reason many Responders invite with 8-9 HCP is that Opener might be max with 17 HCP— not 15 or 16—consider these odds:

15 HCP — 4.5 % 16 HCP — 3.3 % 17 HCP — 2.4 %

The 1NT Opener is almost 4 times more likely to have only 15 or 16 than to have 17 HCP — 7.8 % to 2.4 %. This is where re-evaluating high spot cards 10 9 8, especially in sequence with low honors— JT98, for example—can be extremely telling.

N.B.: Since using “Rule of 16” means Responder never bids 2NT but either Passes or jumps to 3NT, the 2NT bid is now available for a 4-Way Transfer to diamonds. This is desirable when Responder is weakish with a 6+ card diamond suit like the club suit in NT Pattern Deal #5.