Many bridge teachers would be aghast at my suggestion (over) that a beginner respond to Major Suit Opener with Reverse Bergen raises—jumps to 3D or 3C— to show 4+ trump support. "Too advanced!" They would teach instead a double raise to 3 of the Major as a Limit Raise, 10-12 HCP. I reply, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree. Why teach a less exact and less economical system?" Think about the advantages of making exactly the same communication at the 3C instead of the 3S Level.

RESPONDER TO A MINOR SUIT OPENER

For Opener with 13+ or Rule of 22 but lacking either a 5+ Major or the HCP range and B or SB requirements for NT, open your best Minor. As always, your goal is to find a Major suit Fit with Partner.

Opener w/out 5+ Major	Responder
1 ♦ = 4+ 1 ♣ = 3+	1 ♥ or ♠ = 6+ HCP with 4+ Major
	1NT = 6-10 HCP w/out 4+ Major 2NT = 10-12 w/out 4+ Major 3NT = 12-15 w/out 4+ Major

These NT responses are not the HCP ranges recommended by many players/teachers, but they are perhaps easier to remember since they comport with the 6-10, 10-12, 12-15 ranges already established here for Min. Max. Inv.

Responder who jumps over the Majors to bid NT indicates to Opener they do not have a Major Fit.

Responder with a 4+ card Major, bid that Major. If Opener also has 4 cards in that Major, you have found your 8+ Fit. With a Min. (12-15 HCP) Opener will rebid that Major at the lowest level or with Inv. (15+) will jump a level.

Responder with 4-4 in both Majors, bid 1H. Opener w/out 4 hearts but with 4 spades will bid 1S. W/out 4 of either Major, Opener will rebid 1NT or rebid own or other Minor.

Responder with 5-5 in both Majors, bid 1S. Opener w/out 4 spades will rebid 1NT or Minor. Then Responder can rebid hearts.

Responder with 5-4 in Majors, bid the longer Major first.

BRIDGE MAXIMS

Game, with the Game Bonus, is the goal when it appears Partnership has 25-26 HCP. But there is also Slam, which is taking 12 of the 13 tricks, or Grand Slam, all 13. Slam generally requires 33 HCP between the Partnership, or less with favorable suit distributions. Grand Slam generally requires 37 HCP, or ditto. Slam and Grand Slam bonuses, when bid, are huge.

There are many guidelines and caveats to help you reach Game or Slam or to know when they are impossible. Here are some:

SLOW SHOWS — Strong ("Let's think about Slam, go slowly, make every bid count to show our controls.")

FAST ARRIVAL — Weak ("Slam unlikely, let's get right to Game and stop there.")

LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS (LOTT)—With equal HCP to your opponents, you should be able to take as many tricks as you have trumps. That is why it is so important to let Major Suit Opener know immediately, "I have 4+ trump support, Partner! LOTT says we have at least 9 tricks."

Note: These guidelines are simplistic in the extreme and do not even touch upon bid choices when the opponents enter the auction, where often you can use their bids to communicate to Partner. A different lesson entirely.

However, you must leap in and learn from experience. More especially you learn from mistakes; so don't be afraid to make them. Just be sure to make them quickly without belaboring them or berating yourself or Partner.

♠♥   Standard American Bidding   ♦♣
A Guide for Beginners
© Robert Locke 2011

This guide is at once simple and simplistic. Bridge bidding can be an intricate dialogue between partners, trying to find ways to show Minimum, Maximum and Invitational values, yet Keep It Simple, Sweetheart: KISS.

Your vocabulary is 15 words: *1-7, clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, notrump, pass, double, redouble* to communicate your hand's strengths both in high cards and shape (suit lengths).

Your goal when you pick up each new hand is almost always the same: **BID and MAKE GAME IN A MAJOR SUIT** when likely or feasible. Why? You get a bonus when you make Game, but only if you bid it. With 30 Score Points (SP) per trick for a Major suit (Spades/Hearts) instead of 20 SP for a Minor (Diamonds, Clubs), a Major suit Trump offers the best route. True, 3NT also makes Game but is usually more difficult since a trump suit offers 13 wildcards to beat high cards.

Game = 4 ♠/♥ (10 tricks) or 5 ♦/♣ (11) or 3NT (9).

EVALUATING YOUR HAND
Making Game usually requires 25-26 HCP (High-Card Points) between the Partnership. So first, evaluate your hand counting only HCP: A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1.

Soon you will be confident enough to start fudging numbers: "This is a **Weak** 10, so I will respond this way.," or "This is a **Strong** 12, so I will be bold and open the bidding."

What makes a given HCP weak? Q and J (quacks); they count 2 or 1 but their strength often vanishes.

What makes a given HCP strong? Aces and tens. Aces count 4 but are really stronger; 10,9,8 don't count at all, but they often force a king or queen into the guillotine.

Balanced, Semi-Balanced, Unbalanced

Also evaluate your hand in terms of suit length. A long suit (5+) is almost always valuable even with only low cards in it since after 1-3 leads you drive out the high cards in the suit so that low cards take tricks. Add a point for each card 5 or above in a suit.

There are three "balanced" distributions, given here with the percentage of deals in which you can expect to find them: 4432 (22%); 5332 (16%); 4333 (11%). The last of these three is a *flat hand,* usually undesirable; so deduct a point for it.

A semi-balanced hand is 5422 (11%). All other distributions are called UNbalanced.

Shortness can be extremely valuable, too, but not if in Trump. So before counting shortness, your partnership must find your Trump Fit, looking for at least 8 in a suit between you, again preferably in a Major. **After** you know what Trump will be, **then** you can add points for shortness outside Trump:

Void (1.3%) = Number of Trump
Singleton (8%) = 2
Doubleton (20%) = 1

Caution: The suggestions for point ranges that I offer are my own personal counts, gleaned from a huge variety of "experts" who may or may not use the same, or even consistent point ranges. I keep my ranges simple, consistent and mnemonic because beginners have so much to remember. When ranges overlap, e.g., 6-10 vs. 10-12, does a 10-count fall into the 6-10 range or the 10-12 range? That is where the **Weak** or **Strong** re-evaluation comes in.

You may want to use Rule of 20 to determine whether to open: 12 HCP added to the two longest suits (always at least 8 except in the case of 4333). Too facile, I think; so I use Rule of 22, additionally requiring 2 Quick Tricks to open. One Quick Trick=A or KQ; AK=2.; AQ=1.5;   Kx=.5

OPENER

Remember, Opener's goal is always the same: to seek a Major Suit Contract for best score results (usually).

HCP	OPEN
12-21, Unb.	1 of longer Major 1♠♥ = 5+ or 1♦ = 4+ 1♣ = 3+ (most frequent)
15-17, B or S-B	1 NT
20-21, B or S-B	2NT
22+	2C
5-11, 6-card suit	Weak 2 (pre-empt)
5-11, 7-card suit	3 of suit (pre-empt)

NT Openers most often want responses in Stayman or Transfer to reach a Major suit contract; for a quick guide write to boblocke@csus.edu.

Already so many complications. Many Openers do not differentiate between Minors but open *Convenient Minor*. Only 1 in 300 hands presents a problem for my suggestion above: 4432, with 4-4 in Majors, 3♦ and 2♣.

The idea behind pre-empts is to shut up opponents. Open a Weak 2 with 2-of-the-top-3 honors or 3-of-the-top-5. Favorable vulnerability is also advised: you NV, opponents V.

VULNERABILITY — RED ALERT
One of the innovations to the old game of Auction Bridge to revolutionize it into the new game of Contract Bridge (during a 1925 cruise through the Panama Canal) was that of Vulnerability. If you are Vul (V) your SP rewards/penalties are increased, riskier than when you are Non-Vul (NV). In Duplicate, vulnerability is shown by red slots or the notation Vul or V.

RESPONDER TO A MAJOR SUIT OPENER

Responder often finds communication more complicated than Opener because specificity is so important.

First there is the matter of Trump Support (TS) which is 3+. Above all, Responder wants to tell Opener, "**We have or 8+ Fit!**" But Responder also wants to indicate HCP range, whether **Min., Max. or Inv.**

Opener with 5+ Major	Responder
1♥ = 5+ (also see below)	1♠ = 6-21 HCP, 4+♠ 1NT = 6-10 HCP, w/out 3 TS (Max.)
1♠ or ♥ = 5+ With 6+ Opener can rebid major.	1NT = 6-10 HCP, w/out 3 TS (Max.) 2♠ or ♥ = 6-10 HCP, 3 TS (Max.) 2♣/♦ = 10+ HCP. temporizing until... ... with 3+ TS, support Opener's major ... w/out 3 TS, pass?
	With 4+ Trump Support, Jump
	3♠ = 0-7 HCP (pre-empt, Max.) 3♦ = 7-10 HCP (Reverse Bergen, Max.) 3♣ = 10-12 HCP (RB, Limit Raise, Inv.) 2NT = 12+ (Jacoby 2NT, Unlimited)

Important: New suit by Responder is FORCING, 1 Round.

A temporizing bid by Responder does not deny support.

Opener's rebid w/out jump shows Min. 12-15 HCP; jump shows Inv. values, 15+.

If Responder shows Max. (limits hand), Opener should expect Responder to pass next time. It is up to Opener, then, to set the final contract.