

PATTERN BRIDGE HANDS

Pre-Emptive Openings

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 give 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 suit name or NT, rank= C-D-H-S ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT, e.g., 1 ♠.
Contract	--	The end of the auction, establishing a Trump suit based on Fit or Notrump
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 13 to Open, 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 Fit with partner, 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

27-28 — GAME in a minor suit (rare, you should really try 3NT rather than 5-of-a-minor)

33-35 — 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; you might open 2NT; 22+ HCP—you 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 lie a little, not a lot. And lie about a minor, not a Major.

PRE-EMPTIVE OPENING BIDS

WEAK-2 Opening Bids

In the Pattern Hands dealt with so far in these pages, we have stuck with 1-Level Opening Bids in the Standard American System: 1-of-a-Major and 1-of-a-minor showing 12-21 HCP, also 1NT showing 15-17 HCP and a balanced or semi-balanced hand.

2H or **2S**: With a 6-card Major and many fewer HCP, you might want to try a Weak-2 Opening Bid. After all, your Partner need have only 2 in your suit for you to have your 8-card FIT, and your extra trump in your hand might more than make up for your deficit in HCP.

2D: Many partnerships will also open a Weak-2 with six diamonds, but the pre-empt value is limited, allowing opponents to enter the bidding at either 2H or 2S, and there are other perhaps more useful meanings for an opening bid of 2D.

2C is never a Weak-2, being reserved for a very strong Opening Hand of 22+ HCP or other values.

Standard Guidelines for a Weak-2 Opening Bid are:

6 of your suggested trump

6-10 HCP (or perhaps 7-9 by partnership agreement; use trial-&-error)

two of the top three, or three of the top five honors

lack of a 4-card outside Major since you and Partner might have 4-4 FIT in the Majors

lack of a void, which makes your hand too strong

The advantages of the Weak-2 are:

- 1) It describes and limits your hand more perfectly, which is good for Partner.
- 2) It gives Partner a clue for good Opening Lead.
- 3) It is pre-emptive, especially in 3rd Seat, making it harder for Opponents to find their way to Game or Slam.

RESPONDING TO A WEAK-2 OPENING BID

- 1) You, too, are weakish but you do have 3 trump: raise the Weak-2 to 3, "advancing the pre-empt."
- 2) You have 4 trump, so the two of you together have 10: jump raise to 4 "Law of Total Tricks."
- 3) You have an Opening Hand. Apply the "Rule of 17". Add your HCP to the number of trump in your hand, if the total is 17 or above, jump raise to 4.
- 4) You have an Opening Hand but few or perhaps none of Partner's suit: bid 2NT to find out more about Partner's hand which is forcing. If Partner has an outside entry (A or protected K) partner should bid that suit at the 3-Level. If Partner has no outside entry, Partner should rebid his suit at the 3-Level.
- 5) You have an Opening Hand with a quality 5+ card suit of your own. Bid your suit. Forcing one round.
- 6) None of the above, Pass. Yes, even with a void in Partner's suit. Hope that the pre-empt has done its work against Opponents.

OTHER PRE-EMPTIVE BIDS

3-LEVEL Opening Bids usually show 7 cards in the suit. Since a 6-card club suit cannot be shown with a Weak-2, a 3-C Opener is an except to the "rule".

4-LEVEL Opening Bids usually show 8+.

The more cards you hold in the suit, of course, the fewer HCP you need to make Game. But again, the main goal of the pre-empt is to shut out or disturb your Opponents' bidding schemes.

WEAK 2 OPENING BIDS AND RESPONSES

Your Partner opens in 1st or 2nd Seat with a bid of 2S. What is your response?

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. QJ
KQ
AKQ85
KJ85 | 2. 4
KQ64
KJ853
AJ7 | 3. K743
86
Q963
J43 | 4. J8743
K6
QT5
852 |
| 5. 873
KQ75
AKQ97
5 | 6. 63
AKQT7
AQ5
KT8 | 7. K74
643
KT43
J4 | 8. 32
985
QT75
QT98 |

3-LEVEL PRE-EMPT
Pattern Hand #1 — minor suit GAME pre-empting stronger Opponents

Dealer-S; N/S are NV (non-vulnerable), E/W are V

	NORTH		
	652		
	5		
	AKJ8532		SUGGESTED AUCTION:
	Q2		3D, P
WEST	EAST		P, P Double (*), P
98743	AKQJT		
Q32	KJT4		P, 5D
74	Q		
964	KJT		
	SOUTH		
void			FINAL CONTRACT: 5D
A9876			N as DECLARER must win 11 of 13 tricks.
T96			FINAL CONTRACT: 5D
A8753			

Bidding Dialogue:

- S: **P** — “I do not have an Opening Hand or Rule of 22.”
- W: **P** — “I do not have an Opening Hand.”
- N: **3D** — “I am weak, only 10 HCP, and with two passes ahead of me, chances are good that E has a huge hand full of HCP. I will PRE-EMPT with my 7-card diamonds.”
- E: **Double (*)** — “My TAKEOUT DOUBLE forces my Partner to bid best suit. My hand is huge, with two very strong Majors. I am short in diamonds, and I can support all other suits. I plan to bid my fab spades next, depending upon Partner’s takeout bid.
- S: **5D** — “My Partner is weak, and I am not very strong, but we have ten trumps between us, and I have this beautiful void in spades, no doubt where the Opponents are strong. I will advance my Partner’s pre-empt, but go even further and jump to 5D, beyond the 4S contract they would probably be able to make. With my two aces, transportation for cross-trumping should be a good strategy, and perhaps even my 5th heart can be made good. Even with two such weak hands we might be able to make it.
- W: **P** — “Partner, I am so sorry, but we are vulnerable which means that penalties are much higher. If S had not bid, I would have bid **3S** even though my 5 spades are so dinky, but I can’t go to the 5 level with this awful hand.”
- N: **P** — “Gulp.”
- E: **P** — “Reluctantly, but trusting my partner, and not seeing a successful penalty double, because I sense this is a very distributional hand which might in fact make Slam, and I’d better not drive them all the way there.”

Note: E/W can indeed make 4S (with a finesse of N’s c-Q) but they do go down-1 5S.

Opening Lead (by E)— s-A)

Play-of-the-Hand Likely Sequence

- Trick 1: Dummy wins with d-6 (trump)
- Trick 2: Dummy leads and wins h-A
- Trick 3: Dummy leads h-6, N wins d-2
- Trick 4: N leads s-5, Dummy wins d-9
- Trick 5: Dummy leads h-7, N wins d-3
- Trick 6: N leads s-6, Dummy wins d-T
- Trick 7: Dummy leads h-8, N wins d-8 (whether or not W trumps)
- Trick 8: N leads and wins d-A
- Trick 9: N leads and wins d-K, trump are now pulled
- Trick 10: N leads c-2, E plays T, Dummy wins c-A
- Trick 11: Dummy leads h-9, wins with N sluffing c-Q
- Trick 12: N wins a trump
- Trick 13: N wins a trump

No losers since Dummy's last heart sets up: Final Score 5D making 7 = 140 + 300 NV Game Bonus = 440 N/S.

More pre-emptive patterns to come.