

MAJOR Suit Opening & Responses

GOAL every time you unfold a new hand: to bid and make GAME in a MAJOR suit.

No, you cannot always accomplish that goal; you find out early in the bidding if you must settle elsewhere. But your GOAL is ALWAYS the same as you begin picking up and sorting every hand, communicating hcp with Partner and aiming toward an achievable final contract.

Why GAME? Because GAME earns a big bonus and is pretty easily achievable in a single hand: 4♠ or 4♥ = 120 points, **plus** 300-V or 500-NV BONUS,; 25+ hcp, 8+ FIT.

OPENER: 13-21 hcp; 5+ cards in the Major. Open 1♠ or 1♥—Opening Hand=O.H. in “Standard American” Other bidding systems exist, but I am teaching S.A.

Weak Responder: 0-5 hcp ... Pass.

Minimum Responder: 6-9 hcp and 3-card support ... bid 2 of the Major.

Minimum Responder: 6-9 hcp but less than 3-card support ... bid 1NT.

Invitational Responder: 10-12 hcp and 4-card support ... double raise*.

Invitational Responder: 10+ hcp and 3-card support ... 2 of anything: Temporizing Bid.

On your next bid, you will show your support. **New Suit by**

Responder is forcing. Opener MUST rebid.

Game-Going Responder with O.H. ??? More in a later lesson.

*In S.A. the double raise has three possible interpretations, and you check the box that applies to your agreement with Partner:

Force Inv. Weak

Once, most people played the double raise as Force=13+ — O.H. opposite O.H. Now most people play it Inv.=10-12 hcp, called a “Limit Raise”. My partners and I play it **Weak**. **Red** on Convention Card requires Alert. I shall teach you what most people play: the “Limit Raise”.

To **rebid** the MAJOR (after Responder bids 1 NT) Opener shows 6+ instead of 5.

To rebid the MAJOR (after Responder shows support) Opener should consider:

Min. O.H. = 13-14 hcp - Add joint hcp. Invite to Game by rebidding 3, or pass?

Inv. O.H. = 15-17 hcp - Definitely invite to GAME by rebidding 3.

Max. O.H. = 18-21 - Jump to GAME.

hcp odds: 10 & 9=10%; 11 & 8=9%; 12 & 7+8%; 13 & 6=7%; 14 & 5=6%;

15=4.4%; 16=3.3%; 17=2.2% 18=1.5% 19=1% 20=.6% 21=.4%

Ponder the Wisdom
(but remember, Bridge is full of contradictions)

“Just Do It!” “Bridge is a game of mistakes.” “The partnership that makes the fewest mistakes wins.” “You learn best, fastest and longest from your mistakes.”

“Forgive your Partner. Also remember to forgive yourself.”

“Trust your Partner.”

“Bridge is a thinking game,” ... “but Duplicate Bridge is also a timed game:
7 1/2 minutes per hand. Just do it!”

“Second Hand Low, Third Hand High” but... “Cover an Honor with an Honor.”
(Undoubtedly a finesse; collect two of their honors for one of yours;
and you might make Partner’s 10 good.)

“Eight Ever, Nine Never.” (Said of finessing the queen; google bob locke bridge
and look for the brochure titled “Finesses, a 50-50 strategy”.)

ADVICE to DECLARER

Upon seeing Dummy, **first** count your trumps. How many leads to pull trump from Opponents’ hands? 5678! If 5, odds are 67.8% they are divided 3-2.

Next locate losers? How can you minimize them? Trump them? Finesse them?

ADVICE to DEFENDERS

“The First Lead is the most important card in the deck.”

“Aces are meant to capture Kings; Kings are meant to capture Queens or remove Aces.
Queens and Jacks (Quacks) are over-valued at 2 and 1 hcp.”

Good leads: Partner’s bid suit.

Top of Honor Sequence, especially **AK, KQ, QJT, JT9**.

Okay leads: Bottom of Internal Sequence of Honors, **KJT, QT9, KT9**.

B.O.S.T.O.N. (Bottom of Something, Top of Nothing).

Singleton (when you have good trump).

4th from High (especially against NT).

Bad leads: **Axx, Kxx, Qxx, Jxx**, also **Axx, Kxx**.

Doubleton (high-low is S.A.).

Worst leads: **AQx, KJx**, any card of the three. Lead a different suit, and wait.
Opponent’s bid suit.

Sample Hands for Major Suit Openings & Responses

Sample Deal #1: Single Raise Minimal Responder — 6-9 hcp plus 3-card trump support

Dealer-W: Ignore vulnerability

NORTH

T7

J42

T873

AKQ6

SUGGESTED AUCTION:

P, P

1S, P

2S, P

P

WEST

EAST

AKJ86

953

KT9

AQ63

Q4

J965

T82

73

SOUTH

Q42

875

AK2

J954

FINAL CONTRACT=**2S**

(W as DECLARER must win 10 of 13 tricks.)

E=DUMMY; N/S=DEFENDERS

Bidding Analysis

West has a Minimal O.H. of 13 hcp plus the requisite 5 spades for a 1S Opening Bid. Adding 6-9 minimal Responder hcp to West's minimal Opener hcp, and understanding that together they have only 8 spades, W decides to pass and keep the contract at **2S**.

OPENING LEAD (by N)— Perfectly desirable opening lead of c-A, with c-K second lead. Third lead, most promising is a low diamond.

Play-of-the-Hand — After Defenders have taken their AK combinations in clubs and diamonds, the rest of the tricks should belong to W if W takes the spade finesse of the Q ("Eight Ever, Nine Never").

Score: Taking nine tricks, W will score $30 \times 3 = 120$ plus 50 Partscore Bonus.

Sample Deal #2: Double Raise as a “Limit Raise”
Inv. Responder — 10-12 hcp with 4-card trump support

Dealer-N: Ignore vulnerability.

	NORTH		
	QJ843		
	AK7		
	2		SUGGESTED AUCTION:
	KQ92		1S , 4S, P
WEST		EAST	P, P
65		K2	3S, P
8432		QJT	P, P
QJ7		6543	
AT74		J653	
	SOUTH		
	AT97		FINAL CONTRACT: 4S
	965		(N as DECLARER must win 10 of 13 tricks.)
	AKT98		S=DUMMY; E/W=DEFENDERS
	8		

Bidding Analysis

North has more than a Minimal Opening Hand with 15 hcp and the requisite 5 cards in spades to open 1S. East and West pass throughout. South has what is known nowadays as a “Limit Raise”, which is to say 10-12 hcp and four card trump support. The Convention Card has three choices for the Double Raise: Force Inv. or **Weak** . N/S have chosen to play the Double Raise as invitational, 10-12 hcp.

Knowing this, and with 15 hcp N decides to bid **4S**, knowing the partnership has at least 25 hcp and 9 trumps. SLAM might be possible if the missing hcp are lying in the right place, which they are. The singletons in both hands give the hands extra distributional value in addition to the hcp. Since s-K will captured in a “Trap Finesse” Declarer does make Slam.

Opening Lead (by E)— Best lead is Top of Sequence, h-Q hoping to make the J or T good at a later time.

Play-of-the-Hand — If North plays the hand properly, using the singletons advantageously and performing the “Trap Finesse” North will indeed make 6S, losing only one trick to the c-A.

Score: Taking twelve tricks, N will score 30X6 = 180 plus a GAME Bonus 300 NV or 500V.

Sample Deal #3 — Temporizing Bid
Inv. Responder — 10+ hcp, with 3-card trump support

Dealer-E: Ignore vulnerability

	NORTH		
	J9875		
	J74		
	72		SUGGESTED AUCTION:
	A74		P, P, P
WEST		EAST	2D, 3H, P
QT		AK	P, P, P
Q53		AKT62	1H, 3D, 4H
AK863		J954	
T92		86	
	SOUTH		
	6432		FINAL CONTRACT: 4H
	98		(E as DECLARER must win 10 of 13 tricks.)
	QT		W=DUMMY; N/S=DEFENDERS
	KQJ53		

SHAPES & PATTERNS

This is advanced learning for Beginners, but I'm going to put this info here nevertheless because Deal #3 is ideal for studying common shapes and patterns in bridge deals.

The five most common distributions which are dealt over and over again are:

4432-22%, 5332-16%, 5431-13%, 5422-11%, 4333-10% = 72% of deals

Notice these patterns in Sample Deal #3 above:

N —5=3=2=3—	W —2=5=4=2	S—4=2=2=5	W —2=3=5=3
5-3-3-2	5-4-2-2	5-4-2-2	5-3-3-2

Notice also the similarity of suit patterns around the Table:

Spades 5-2-4-2	Hearts 3-5-2-3	Diamonds 2-4-2-5	Clubs 3-2-5-3
5-4-2-2	5-3-3-2	5-4-2-2	5-3-3-2

When you come to realize how often these patterns are repeated, you can begin to make some predictions that will aid your Play-of-the-Hand.

Bidding Analysis

Some advanced players would insist that the best opening bid for E would be 1NT to show the requisite 15-17 hcp for a 1NT Opener. I advise my Beginning Students to ignore that contention and to open instead with the 5-card Major. After all, you cannot do both. Yes, both pieces of information in a single bid are important to deliver to Partner: 1NT=15-17 hcp with balanced or semi-balanced distribution v. 5-CARD MAJOR. I put 5-CARD MAJOR first; some do not. Also notice the two doubletons: one huge with AK, the other tiny with 86. All of that mitigates in favor of opening 1H.

If, however, E were to open 1NT, it is completely plausible that W (having 11 hcp but no long Major) might jump to 3NT. “The One Who Knows Goes.” If this deal ends up in 3NT, it will go down because NS will surely take five tricks in clubs off the bat.

With a weaker hand, W would want to show the 8-card Major Fit immediately, but it is more important to first show those 10+ hcp knowing Opener will remember the dictum: “**New suit by Responder is forcing for one round,**” and that W therefore can show the FIT on W’s second bid. To bid a new suit at the 2-Level shows 10+ HCP and usually 5+ of that suit, **5&Dime**.

Opener, not having 6 hearts, cannot rebid them, but is forced to bid. Therefore Opener should bid 3D to show 4-card support for W’s suit. But W knew all along that the 2D diamond bid was only temporizing, and that W certainly wants 30 points per trick, not a mere 20. W has an Inv. hand, not game-going hcp (G.G.), so W should NOT jump but merely bid 3H. But E with 15 hcp can do the math: 15 hcp + 10+ hcp, plus 8-card FIT: East bids GAME, 4H.

Note: Beginning Bidders often labor for a while in the mistaken belief that the Auction is a contest between Partners, and being polite, they allow their Partner to “win” the contest. No, the Auction is a time for communication showing truthful hcp and seeking a Major Suit FIT. Diamonds in this deal, yes, are great. But with hearts as trump, those same 9 diamonds will score at 30 points per trick instead of only 20.

Opening Lead (by S, LHO)— c-K. Some might choose d-Q, hoping because of the doubleton for the possibility of trumping the third round. **But it is bad to lead Opponents’ second best suit.**

Attitude Signal: To show a positive ATTITUDE toward clubs, RHO can use STANDARD SIGNAL-High Card Encourages, playing the nebulous 7; or UPSIDE-DOWN-Low Card Encourages, playing the 4. Upside-Down is the better partnership choice (imho) than Standard. Why waste a high card when a low card will do the trick, and is so much clearer for partner to read? S sees N’s 4, can also see 2 in Dummy and 3 in S’s own hand. What could be a clearer ATTITUDE SIGNAL.

Therefore S, having already shown by the lead of c-K at least the c-Q and perhaps the c-Q and J will be encouraged next to lead a small club to N’s c-A. Two tricks off the top. If S had chosen any other lead, Declarer would snatch the opportunity to pull trumps, run diamonds and drop one of the two losing clubs on Dummy’s fifth diamond.

Again notice that if EW were to end up in 3NT, they would lose five club tricks off the bat.

Play-of-the-Hand — When the c-K wins the trick, S knows that N has the c-A and best second lead, therefore, is a little club. N/S win two tricks, but that is all.

Score: 5X30 = 150 plus GAME Bonus of 300NV or 500V.

Sample Deal #4 — 1NT Responder
Minimal Responder — 6-9 hcp, lacking 3-card support

Dealer-S: Ignore vulnerability

NORTH			
J86			
AKT86			
AQ7			
87		SUGGESTED AUCTION:	
WEST	EAST	1H, P	
AT7	K532	P, P	P
J95	Q74	P, 1NT	
J54	832		
J532	KQ4		
SOUTH		FINAL CONTRACT: 1NT	
Q94		(S as DECLARER must win 7 of 13 tricks.)	
32		N=DUMMY; E/W=DEFENDERS	
KT96			
AT96			

Bidding Dialogue

South and West pass, neither having an Opening Hand.

S: P

W: P

N: **1H** — "I have an Opening Hand (13-21 hcp) and 5+ hearts."

E: **P** — "I do not have an Overcall, no 5&Dime."

S: **1NT** — "Sorry, Partner, I am weak over here, 6-9 hcp, and do not have 3+ heart support."

W: **P** — "W dittos E."

N: **P** — "I hate to leave you in 1NT, but I have no place else to go. We do not play 1NT as a forcing bid in our Standard American bidding system. This is probably our best contract."

E: **P** — "Gee, I hate to let them have it at the 1-Level, but I have nothing over here to say."

Opening Lead (by W): c-2 perhaps, "4th from High in Longest Suit" or s-7 perhaps, "Unbid Major". The s-7 would be my preferred lead and would probably yield one extra EW trick in spades.

Play-of-the-Hand — A good strategy almost always for the NT DECLARER is to launch into the longest suit as soon as capturing the lead. NS have three suits with 7 cards; of those, the most promising is diamonds, holding AKQ between them. However, the hearts are tempting with five in Dummy with AK. My choice would be to play AK and a third heart to see if the hearts are divided 3-3, which turns out to be the case. N still has the d-A as entry to play the now-good last two hearts. Depending on the First Lead and subsequent DEFENSE, S should make four hearts and four diamonds, a spade and a club.

Score: Depending upon DEFENSE, South should make at least 3NT (3X30 plus 10 for the first trick, plus 50 Partscore Bonus = 150) or perhaps 4NT for a score of 180. Note that if the contract had been 3NT instead of 1NT, NS would have made a GAME Bonus of 300NV or 400V. This good result is because S was at the top of the range, 9 hcp instead of merely 6 hcp. But N had no way of knowing that. Having only 14 hcp N would have been very daring to invite by rebidding 2NT.

Sample Deal #5 — Minimal Opener Rebid (6)
Minimal Responder — 6-9 hcp, lacking 3-card support

Dealer-W: Ignore vulnerability

NORTH

943
 K742
 J5
 AJ65

SUGGESTED AUCTION:

P, P, P

WEST
 AKJ762
 A98
 K3
 T3

EAST
 T8
 QT65
 QT97
 KQ9

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

SOUTH

Q5
 J3
 A8642
 8742

FINAL CONTRACT=**4S**

(W as DECLARER must win 10 of 13 tricks.)

E=DUMMY; N/S=DEFENDERS

Bidding Analysis

West has 15 hcp plus 6 spades, a moderately strong **1S** Opening Bid. East does not have 3-card support but a nice 6-9 hcp with some good, high spot cards, tens and nines: E bids 1NT. West wants Partner to know about the six spades, not merely five. IMHO not quite strong enough to jump, but a good **2S** Rebid. East invites, being at the top of the 1NT-Responder range. West happily accepts the invitation and goes to GAME, **4S**.

OPENING LEAD (by N)— N, knowing that W has most of the hcp at the table does not wish to lead away from his A or his K, but wishes to keep them positioned BEHIND Declarer. Doubting that the doubleton will ultimately yield a trump trick, still perhaps the d-J is the best lead.

Play-of-the-Hand — The d-J turns out to be a great lead for Declarer who, having the d-K can afford to play low from Dummy. Whether S goes up with the d-A now or later, makes no difference since the KQ and high spot cards ensure three diamond tricks after trump are pulled. In fact, W would be wise to drop the d-K on the d-A in South, if South does go up with it on the first trick. That allows both a sure club and a sure diamond entry into Dummy for maximum transportation to the good diamonds in Dummy after trump are pulled from NS. W will probably also try to finesse the s-Q (following the dictum of “Eight Ever, Nine Never”) and that finesse does work. Depending upon DEFENSE, and with the s-Q finesse onSide, W should pull 11 tricks, losing only to the d-A and the c-A, or 10 tricks if South wisely returns a heart lead and N manages to win his h-K before W can slough the two little hearts on the now-good diamonds.

Score: Taking ten tricks, W will score 30X4 = 120 plus GAME Bonus of 300V or 500NV. Taking eleven tricks, W scores 150 plus the bonus.