



## GBC Online Lessons

### Distributional Hands – 2-3-4 Level Preempts<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Preempting the bidding is a matter of partnership style and partnership agreement. There is no right or wrong answer to your preempting style (within reason, of course.) The most important thing is for you and your partner to be on the same page about what you expect from a preemptive opening bid.

#### Philosophy

Taking away the opponents' bidding space makes it more difficult for them to communicate and thus more difficult for them to reach the correct contract. Forcing the opponents to consistently guess what to do is "winning bridge!" Therefore, since preempts are such an effective destructive bidding tool, we should strive to make them as often as possible. That means that we should loosen our requirements for them so that we can make this effective bid as often as possible...

#### Considerations

If your goal is to preempt the bidding by opening a weak-two as often as possible then you need to figure out what you need to take into account in order to help your partnership make good decisions about when to do this.

*Note: Not getting into trouble when preempting the bidding is an art form. It takes practice and judgment in order to be aggressive enough to cause difficulty for the opponents yet not get into too much trouble for your side.*

- **Vulnerability** - Vulnerability is an important part of preempts because it helps you determine how many tricks you can go down and still get a good board.
  - If it is a partscore deal for all, then neither side will be able to make a big score on the board.
  - *Opponents' Part Score Deal*- You need to be -50, -100, or maybe -150 in order to get a decent result. If you are -200 or more it will be a horrible score (-200 is called the "Death Score"). You need to try to avoid that result and not go down many tricks especially if you are vulnerable.
  - *Opponents' Game Deal* if the opponents will be able to make a game if they declare the hand, you want to interfere, if possible. For example, if the opponents can make +620 declaring in 4♥ then you will be ok with -100, -300, or -500. But -800 will be too much and get you a bad result.
  - *White v Red* - preempt as often as you can when you are blessed with this vulnerability.
  - *All White* – also a time to be aggressive with preempts.
  - *All Red* – be more conservative.
  - *Red v White* – be most conservative here. Use only with hands that have a good playing shape.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Todd, Audrey Grant, Larry Cohen, Bridgebum, Jim Ricker, Barbara Seagram



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- **The Rule of 2, 3, 4 –**
  - *Bid 2* when you are Vulnerable against not, you need to be within 2 tricks of your preempt.
  - *Bid 3* At equal vulnerability you need to be within 3 tricks of your bid. For example, you can open 3♥ with ♥KQJ10987 and maybe a side king.
  - *Bid 4* at favorable vulnerability, within four tricks of your bid.
- **Style** – We recommend using a moderate to sound style. Use a sound style when vulnerable. That is, have two of the top five honors for moderate style and two of the top three for sound.
- **Rule of 17** – This is one rule that will help you as a partner of the preemptor. When partner opens 2 of a major, if you have the number 17 or more when you add your HCP and number of trump, bid game!

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### Distributional Hands – 2-3-4 Level Preempts<sup>3</sup>

#### Considerations Continued

- **Seat** - The position (or seat) that we are in is another important factor to consider when deciding whether to preempt or not.
  - First Seat (Dealer) – This is the seat that you preempt in most aggressively. If your goal is to make life difficult on a player with a very good hand, then the odds are 2 to 1 in favor of one of the opponents being the person with the good hand instead of your partner.
  - Second Seat – This is your most conservative seat. One of your opponents has already passed (the dealer) and thus the player with a good hand is either your LHO or your partner.
  - Third Seat – This is the most varied seat. When your partner is a passed hand, you are free to make more tactical bids. In this case, you can open at the 2-level with a slightly weaker or a slightly stronger hand than you would in the first or second seat.
  - Fourth Seat - In the 4th seat you do NOT preempt. If you have a weak hand, just pass the hand out. A 2-level opening in the 4th seat is “To Play.” It is usually a 6-card suit with 11-14 HCP and no game interest opposite a passed hand partner.
- **Opponents** – Once again, consider your opposition. Good players can turn the tables on you. Use caution and make sound preempts against top players.

- **Suit Quality**

A good preempt suit is one that has minimal danger of getting you into trouble when partner does not have a fit. One of the best tests for determining if this is a good suit to preempt is to ask ourselves how well the suit will play if partner has a singleton in your suit. The traditionally accepted idea of 2 of the top 3 honors is NOT the best kind of suit to have in order to survive these kinds of misfit auctions. The most important cards to have are the interior spot cards: J, 10, 9... These intermediate cards give your suit strength and solidity even when partner doesn't have help for you.

- AKxxxx opposite x. This will usually result in 2 losers when the suit breaks the expected 4-2.
- QJ109xx opposite x This will result in the same 2 losers when the suit breaks the expected 4-2

Notice that in the first example 7 HCP are used to accomplish 4 tricks and in the second example only used 3 HCP. We would much rather have the second holding.

- **Hand**

When you are deciding what to preempt you want to consider the quality of your suit but also want to consider the overall quality of your hand. Some factors to consider:

- HCP
- Location of your honors,
- Suit Quality and spot cards
- Shape of your hand

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- **Hand - Continued**

The overall shape of your hand is one of the things that is not considered enough by many bridge players. We all know that 4333 hands are a horrible shape for declaring. But most of us don't consider that 5332, 6322, and 7222 hands are also "horribly balanced hands". These hands do not take as many tricks as their cousins. Compare the following:

- 5332 vs. 5431
- 6322 vs. 6421
- 7222 vs. 7321 vs. 7420

Note: These distributions are not suit specific (5431 does not have to be 4-card hearts.)

The shapelier hands in this list will often take at least one trick more than the more balanced ones. When you are dealt a good suit with one of these shapelier distributions, you should consider "preempting one level more." That is,

- Open a weak-two with a 5431 shape
- Open a 3-level preempt with 64 hands
- Open a 4-level preempt with 74 hands

In addition to this, when you have 7222 shape you should often "preempt one less." 7222 is one of the worst shapes in all of bridge (almost everyone overbids with these hands.) It is often right to open at the 2-level, not at the 3-level, with this distribution

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