

2 An introduction to bidding

How the bidding works

HOW THE BIDDING WORKS


In MiniBridge:

- the side to declare is the one with the most high card points in the two hands combined
- the declarer is the hand, of the declaring side, that has the most points
- trumps are decided when declarer has looked at both hands
- the declarer decides how many tricks can be made and whether to play in game or not
- the opening lead is chosen with dummy visible on the table.

In bridge, all of these choices are made in a different way. Before play can start there is a 'bidding' phase, where the contract and declarer are determined. This is usually called the **auction**. Just as at an auction sale the lot goes to the highest bidder, so in a bridge auction the highest bidder **buys** the **contract**.

BRIDGE RULES FOR BIDDING

- the dealer makes the **opening bid**
- the player on the dealer's left bids next
- the bidding goes clockwise round the table
- each bid must outrank the last one made
- a player who does not want to bid, says 'pass' or 'no bid' (we will say pass)
- a bid is a number from one to seven, followed by a suit or no trumps
- you say one no trump, but it is usually written 1NT; 1NT is a bid.




REMEMBER
In bridge, it is in the auction that the final contract is decided. You cannot have a look at dummy and then decide what to do!

The number in the bid indicates the number of tricks above SIX that the declarer will have to try to make. The final bid in the auction sets the contract, so a contract of 2NT says that the declarer has to make eight tricks in no trumps. As in MiniBridge, nine tricks in no trumps is game. So a contract of 3NT, a 'game bid', means that the declarer has contracted to make nine tricks playing in no trumps.



REMEMBER
3NT = Game in no trumps, needing nine tricks
4♥ or 4♠ = Game in a major, needing ten tricks
5♣ or 5♦ = Game in a minor, needing eleven tricks

If all four players pass without making a bid on the first round, there is no further play. This is called a 'throw in'. When a player makes a bid on the first round, the auction continues until there is a bid followed by three consecutive passes. The side that bids higher sets the trumps and the number of tricks to be won. The member of the side who first bid the suit that becomes trumps, or who bid no trumps, is the declarer.



REMEMBER
The player who bids the suit, or no trumps, first is declarer, even if partner bids the final contract.

THE RANKING OF THE SUITS

The suits are ranked in order:

NT	no trumps	highest
♠	spades	↑
♥	hearts	
♦	diamonds	
♣	clubs	
		lowest

This means that a bid of 1♦ can be outbid by 1♥ or 1♠ or 1NT or any bid starting with a two, three, four, five, six or seven, whilst a bid of 7♠ can only be outbid by 7NT.

AN EXAMPLE AUCTION

An auction at bridge might go:

West	North	East	South
pass	1♥	2♣	2♦
2♠	pass	pass	4♥
pass	pass	pass	



Note that:

- West was the dealer so made the first **call**
- West did not want to make a positive bid and so she said '**pass**'
- North opened the bidding with 1♥
- East had to bid his clubs at the two level as clubs are the lowest ranking suit
- South could bid 2♦ as diamonds outrank clubs
- because West passed initially, it did not stop her bidding later
- South could have bid 3♥ but jumped to 4♥ because it is a game bid
- North will be declarer because he bid hearts first and will try to make ten tricks with hearts as trumps
- East has to make the opening lead. Dummy goes down after the lead is made
- if ten tricks are made the score is 420 to North/South, if nine tricks are made East/West get 50 points.

THE OPENING LEAD AT BRIDGE

The only other difference between bridge and MiniBridge is that the **opening lead** is made before dummy is put down on the table. Thereafter play proceeds as before, and scoring is very similar to MiniBridge.

THE LANGUAGE OF BIDDING

Bidding is rather like being forced to talk a foreign language which has only a few words in its vocabulary. We have to use the words efficiently to convey messages to partner or to ask questions. These messages cannot usually be conveyed in one go, sometimes it takes several bids. These are some messages:

- I have a good hand
- I have a **balanced hand**
- I have very few points in my hand
- I have a long suit of spades
- should our side be playing in game?
- have you any extra values for your bidding so far?

Opening 1NT and balanced hand responses

THE ONE NO TRUMP OPENING BID

An opening bid of one no trump shows a particular kind of hand. It says you have a balanced hand with no 5-card major and with precisely 12–14 points. It is a **limit bid**.

Balanced has a special meaning in bridge, which is

- no **void**
- no **singleton**
- not more than one **doubleton**
- no 6-card or longer suit

If you have five hearts or five spades you usually want to bid the suit whereas if you have five clubs or five diamonds you prefer to open 1NT.



Here are three examples of sound 1NT openings:

A

♠	A 10 9 7
♥	A Q 6
♦	K 8 4
♣	J 7 5

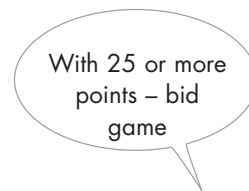
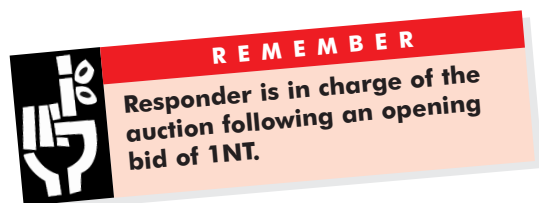
B

♠	7 6 5 4
♥	Q 10
♦	A K J 8
♣	Q J 7

C

♠	7 5
♥	A 6 3
♦	K Q 8
♣	A 10 7 5 4

When partner bids 1NT you know a lot about the hand that partner holds so it is up to you to decide what to do on the hand. If you have enough points, you may be able to decide straight away which contract to play. With thirteen or more points and a fairly balanced hand, you can bid 3NT. Or if you really do have lots of points, say, more than twenty, you might even bid a **slam**. To make a slam you must promise to make 12 tricks. We will look at slams later.



RESPONSES TO 1NT WITH BALANCED HANDS

When partner has opened 1NT and you, too, have a balanced hand, playing in no trumps will be the best choice. Just add your points to partner's to see whether to bid game or even a slam.

0–10	Pass	There is no prospect of making game.
13–19	3NT	We must have enough combined points for game.
11–12	2NT	Have we got enough combined points for game, partner? Partner will bid 3NT with 14 points or pass with 12 points.

RAISING PARTNER'S 1NT TO 2NT

Suppose you have eleven or twelve points. Partner has promised twelve, thirteen or fourteen. If partner has twelve then game – 3NT – is optimistic but if partner has fourteen then our side should be playing in 3NT. You can ask partner how many points he has by bidding 2NT. Partner bids 3NT with fourteen or a nice-looking thirteen points – say, a hand with a 5-card minor or lots of tens and nines. Partner passes with a minimum, that is twelve or a poor thirteen.

Notice you don't bid 2NT just because you think your side can make it! The score for 1NT bid and made with an **overtrick** is identical to the score for 2NT bid and making eight tricks, that is 120 (40 + 30 for tricks and 50 for the part score bonus).

We reserve a bid of 2NT as a question, 'Exactly how many points have you got, partner?'. If you have ten points and a balanced hand when partner opens 1NT, partner may well be able to make eight tricks but you pass because there is little chance of a game.

REMEMBER

A bid of 2NT over partner's opening 1NT asks partner to bid 3NT with a maximum.

2NT?
Have you got 14
points?



Responses to 1NT on unbalanced hands

RESPONDING TO 1NT WITH A STRONG HAND WITH HEARTS OR SPADES

When partner opens 1NT, you know he has 12–14 points and at least two cards in every suit. This is because 1NT is promising a hand with no voids or singletons and not more than one doubleton. You also know that opening 1NT shows at least twelve and no more than fourteen points.

Since you know a lot about partner's hand it's up to you to decide what to do; you are the captain of the bidding. When 1NT is opened, the hand must contain at least two cards in each suit. So if you have a long major suit of 6+ cards, the partnership must have an 8+ card fit in that major.

With enough points to go to game, say 12 points or more, you just respond by bidding game in your major. You know you have the values and an 8-card fit.

Over 1NT, bid 4♥ with

♠	A 2
♥	K J 10 9 6 3
♦	K J 7
♣	A 5

Over 1NT, bid 4♠ with

♠	A Q 9 7 6 2
♥	K 8 3
♦	Q J 7
♣	9

When your major suit is only five cards long, you can't tell whether it is better to play in 3NT or four of your major. The solution is to ask partner, the 1NT opener.

A bid of 3♥ says 'I have five cards in hearts. If you have three or more hearts, please raise me to 4♥. With only two hearts, please bid 3NT.' And similarly 3♠ asks about the spade suit.

Partner bids 1NT
Partner **rebids** 3NT

♠	A 4	♠	K Q 9 7 2
♥	K J 10 9	♥	Q 3 2
♦	Q 9 6	♦	K J 7
♣	A 10 9 8	♣	K 4

You respond 3♠
You pass 3NT

But with a different hand

Partner bids 1NT
Partner **rebids** 4♠

♠	A 10 4	♠	K Q 9 7 2
♥	K 9	♥	Q 3 2
♦	Q 9 6 4	♦	K J 7
♣	A 10 9 8	♣	K 4

You respond 3♠
You pass 4♠

RESPONDING TO 1NT WITH A STRONG HAND WITH DIAMONDS OR CLUBS

With a 5- or 6-card minor and the values for game, just bid 3NT. Don't bid your minor, as you need to make eleven tricks for game in a minor. Nine tricks in no trumps will be easier and score better.

With twelve or more points and a long minor, just say 3NT. You may have only a combined 24 points, but this should be enough, because **unbalanced** hands usually generate more tricks in the play.

To jump to 3♣ or 3♦ shows real interest in playing in that minor – perhaps because the hand is very distributional, or maybe because the hand is so strong that a slam is possible.

Partner bids 1NT
Partner passes

♠ Q 4 3 2	♠ J 5
♥ K 10 6	♥ 5 2
♦ K 4 3	♦ A Q 7 6 5 2
♣ A J 7	♣ K Q 4

You respond 3NT

Partner bids 1NT
Partner **rebids** 4♦

♠ K 2	♠ A 7 5
♥ A J 10 3	♥ K 2
♦ K 8 5	♦ A Q 10 7 6 2
♣ K 7 6 5	♣ A 9

You respond 3♦
You bid 6♦

You have shown a strong hand with good diamonds. Partner is pleased to support your diamonds and if you feel brave you might try to see if you can make a slam.

Partner bids 1NT
Partner **rebids** 3NT

♠ K Q 8 2	♠ A 7 5
♥ Q J 4 3	♥ K 2
♦ 8 5	♦ A Q 10 7 6 2
♣ K J 6	♣ A 9

You respond 3♦
You pass 3NT

You have shown a strong hand with good diamonds. Partner rebids 3NT to show no interest in diamonds. You should respect partner's decision and pass.

Partner bids 1NT
Partner rebids 3NT
Partner signs off in 5♣

♠ A K 3	♠ 2
♥ J 8 6 4	♥ -
♦ 8 6	♦ K Q J 10 9 7
♣ A 10 8 2	♣ K Q J 9 4 3

You respond 3♦
You respond 4♣

The hand with six diamonds and six clubs is very strong in trick taking possibilities, but 3NT will **go down** on a heart lead. You bid 3♦, but partner doesn't like diamonds, so says 3NT. When you bid 4♣, your partner is happy to raise clubs. In fact twelve tricks can be made with clubs as trumps.

RESPONDING TO 1NT WITH A WEAK HAND

With a balanced hand and fewer than 11 HCP, all you can do is pass when partner opens 1NT. But when holding a long suit of five or more cards, it is usually better to play in your long suit, rather than 1NT. The long suit will provide some tricks by ruffing the opponents' high cards.

A pass of 1NT might be

As bad as

♠ 8 6 4
♥ 9 3 2
♦ 10 7 3 2
♣ 8 3 2

Or as good as

♠ K 7 6
♥ A J 7
♦ Q 4 3
♣ 9 8 5 3

If partner has the first (weak) hand 1NT will certainly fail, but since your opponents have enough points to make game themselves you can feel happy.

If partner has the second (stronger) hand your side should have the majority of the points and should make 1NT. You might even make 2NT, but that doesn't matter. You don't bid 2NT just because you

might make it. You pass 1NT because you can see little prospect of making 3NT, which would attract the big bonus for a game contract.

To tell partner that your hand is weak and has somewhere between 0 to 10 HCP, you bid your long suit at the two level. A two-level response tells partner to pass and you will try to make eight tricks. If you have very few high cards you will probably go down, but not as much as you would do in 1NT.

This bid at the two level is called a **weakness takeout**.

WHAT SHOULD THE 1NT BIDDER DO AFTER A WEAKNESS TAKEOUT?

A weakness takeout might be


As bad as

♠	9 8 6 3 2
♥	8 7
♦	J 5 2
♣	10 6 2

Or as good as

♠	K Q 6 4 3 2
♥	K 7
♦	J 5
♣	10 6 2

The 1NT bidder cannot tell what cards partner holds, but neither can the opponents. The 1NT opener must pass whatever cards are held when partner bids 2♠ over 1NT.



REMEMBER
When you open 1NT, your partner is in charge and decides the final contract. If your partner tells you to pass, you must pass!

CONVEYING INFORMATION

You should convey information to partner only by the bids you make. You are not supposed to pull faces, scratch your head or put a question mark in your voice.

When you are learning to play bridge, it is often hard to know what to bid. Sometimes you won't be able to remember what you have been taught; at other times you will have a choice of actions and be unclear about which one to take. Whatever the problem, you should strive to bid in the same tone of voice and at the same speed. Problems don't get easier because you spend ages thinking.

And remember the answers are rarely written on the ceiling! So do your best and don't mind admitting that you will be wrong sometimes.

What have I learned about bidding?

MINIBRIDGE TO BRIDGE CHANGES

- In bridge, it is in the auction that the final contract is decided
- The opening lead is made before dummy is put down.

WHAT IS BIDDING?

- A 'bid' is a number from 1 to 7 followed by a 'denomination'
- A 'call' is any bid or a 'pass'
- To be legal the bid must outrank all previous bids
- The denominations go in the order clubs (lowest), diamonds, hearts, spades, no trumps (highest)
- Bidding starts with the dealer
- The auction finishes when any bid has been followed by three consecutive passes OR if all four players pass at their first turn to bid
- The vocabulary of bridge is limited to 14 words: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, no trumps and pass (or no bid)
- The player who bids the suit, or no trumps, first is declarer, even if partner bids the final contract.

WHAT IS A BALANCED HAND?

Balanced means:

- no void or singleton
- not more than one doubleton
- no 6-card or longer suits
- no 5-card major if opening 1NT.

WITH A BALANCED HAND AND 12-14 POINTS, OPEN 1NT

- Always open 1NT with 12-14 points and a balanced hand without a 5-card major.

RESPONDING TO 1NT WITH A BALANCED HAND

Responder is in charge of the auction following an opening bid of 1NT

- Add your points to partner's to see what to bid

0-10 HCP	pass
13-19 HCP	3NT

You will learn later what to do if you have more than 19 HCP.

- A bid of 2NT over partner's opening 1NT shows 11-12 points. It asks partner to bid 3NT with a maximum.

RESPONSES TO 1NT - UNBALANCED HANDS WITH GAME GOING POINTS

- With points for game and a 6-card major, bid four of your major
- With points for game and a 5-card major, bid three of your major telling partner to choose between game in your suit or no trumps
- With a 6-card minor and a strong unbalanced hand, bid three of your minor.

RESPONSES TO 1NT - WEAK POINTS AND AN UNBALANCED HAND

- With zero to ten points and a 5-card or longer suit, bid your suit at the two level
- A bid at the two level over 1NT tells partner to pass.

BEHAVE YOURSELF!

- Remember to bid in the same tone of voice and at the same tempo, whether your hand is good or bad
- Don't pull faces!

Exercises on beginning bidding

RESPONSES TO 1NT

1. Partner opens 1NT. Write down everything you know about partner's hand.

2. Partner opens 1NT, what do you respond with each of the hands shown below?
Why do you make this response?

a)

♠	Q 7 3
♥	K J 6
♦	K 9 8 7
♣	J 10 4

I respond _____
because _____

b)

♠	Q 7 3
♥	K J 6
♦	K 9 8 7
♣	K 10 9

I respond _____
because _____

c)

♠	K 7 3
♥	K J 6
♦	K 9 8 7
♣	K 10 9

I respond _____
because _____

d)

♠	3 2
♥	7 6 5 4 3 2
♦	3 2
♣	4 3 2

I respond _____
because _____

1. Partner opens 1NT. Describe what you know about partner's hand.

Partner has 12–14 points and a balanced hand. That means he has no voids, no singletons, no more than one doubleton, no six card suit and no five card major.

2. Partner opens 1NT, what do you respond with each of the hands shown below?

Why do you make this response?

- a)

♠	Q 7 3
♥	K J 6
♦	K 9 8 7
♣	J 10 4

I respond *Pass*
because *we cannot have 25 points between us as the most partner has is 14. I have a balanced hand so 1NT looks the best contract.*
- b)

♠	Q 7 3
♥	K J 6
♦	K 9 8 7
♣	K 10 9

I respond *2NT*
because *if partner has 14 points or a good 13 we should be in game but if partner has a minimum we should not. I am asking partner which he holds.*
- c)

♠	K 7 3
♥	K J 6
♦	K 9 8 7
♣	K 10 9

I respond *3NT*
because *we have enough points for game even if partner is minimum.*
- d)

♠	3 2
♥	7 6 5 4 3 2
♦	3 2
♣	4 3 2

I respond *2♥*
because *partner cannot make 1NT and my hand should take some tricks if we play in hearts. So 2♥ might go fewer tricks down.*



1NT opening practice hands

1 NORTH DEALER

<p>♠ Q 10 6 ♥ A 10 6 5 ♦ J 3 ♣ J 10 3 2</p>	<p>♠ A 8 7 ♥ Q 4 2 ♦ K 9 8 7 6 ♣ A 9</p>	<p>♠ J 9 5 ♥ K 9 7 ♦ 10 4 2 ♣ Q 7 5 4</p>
	<p>♠ K 4 3 2 ♥ J 8 3 ♦ A Q 5 ♣ K 8 6</p>	

North is the dealer and has to bid first. With a balanced hand and 13 points he opens 1NT. East has nothing to bid with just 6 points, so passes. South has 13 points. 1NT shows at least 12 points. So North/South must have at least 25 points between them and this should be enough for game. South bids 3NT and West, North and East all pass; this ends the auction. East makes an opening lead, say, ♣4 and the South hand is put down as dummy after the lead is made. North has to make nine tricks and should make at least two spades, five diamonds and two clubs.

2 EAST DEALER

<p>♠ 4 ♥ K Q 9 8 6 4 ♦ A 4 2 ♣ A 5 3</p>	<p>♠ Q J 10 2 ♥ A 10 2 ♦ J 9 5 3 ♣ 10 6</p>	<p>♠ K 8 7 3 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ K 8 ♣ K Q 4 2</p>
	<p>♠ A 9 6 5 ♥ 3 ♦ Q 10 7 6 ♣ J 9 8 7</p>	

East, with 12 points and a balanced hand, bids 1NT. South who does not have enough points to bid, says pass. West has 13 points and six hearts, worth a game bid. East must have at least two hearts for a 1NT bid, so West knows it should be best to play in hearts and West bids 4♥, a game contract needing ten tricks. As West is declarer, it is North to lead. North leads ♠Q which holds the trick, North continues ♠J, but West can trump. West should manage ten tricks, but with skill can make eleven by ruffing the losing diamond in dummy and losing just one spade and one heart.

3 SOUTH DEALER

<p>♠ J 10 9 8 ♥ 10 5 4 ♦ 6 4 ♣ A K Q 3</p>	<p>♠ K 3 2 ♥ K J 6 ♦ K Q 5 3 ♣ 9 7 5</p>	<p>♠ 7 5 4 ♥ 9 7 3 2 ♦ A 9 8 7 ♣ 4 2</p>
	<p>♠ A Q 6 ♥ A Q 8 ♦ J 10 2 ♣ J 10 8 6</p>	

South is the dealer, with a balanced 14 points. South opens 1NT and West, with 10 points, passes. North has 12 points. If South has 12 this is not really enough for game, but South may have 13 or 14 points. North bids 2NT, asking if South is maximum. South has 14 points, so bids 3NT, trying for game. West, North and East all pass. West leads ♣A, ♣K, ♣Q, but whatever West plays now, South loses only one further trick, to ♦A.

4 WEST DEALER

<p>♠ Q 3 ♥ K Q 2 ♦ A 10 8 3 ♣ K 5 4 2</p>	<p>♠ A 8 7 ♥ 9 4 3 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ J 9 7 6</p>	<p>♠ J 10 9 6 4 2 ♥ J 8 6 ♦ J 6 ♣ Q 8</p>
	<p>♠ K 5 ♥ A 10 7 5 ♦ 9 7 5 2 ♣ A 10 3</p>	

West has 14 balanced points and opens 1NT. North has 10 points and cannot find a bid. East knows that East/West have at most 18 points. East's only asset is the 6-card spade suit. With spades as trumps the hand is more useful, so East bids 2♠ as a 'weakness takeout' of 1NT. With skill, East can just manage to take eight tricks in 2♠. We normally would write this auction down as:

West	North	East	South
1NT	pass	2♠	all pass