

Responding to the bid of 1♣ - Playing 2/1

By Neil H. Timm

An Overview of the 1♣ Bid

Opening the bidding 1♣ may appear simple to most, but the ACBL has made it complicated since it depends on both ACBL Convention Chart and the strength of your hand as of April 4, 2022.

For the Basic or Basic+ charts the bid may be natural or quasi-natural and show a hand with average strength (a hand with 10HCP or meets the Rule of 19).

For the Open and Open+ Charts the bid is natural or quasi-natural and contains near average strength with as few as 2-cards for a minor suit opening if the hand pattern meets the definition of 1NT opening or a hand with 8HCP or meets the Rule of 17. For a major suit opening the hand must have at least 3-cards with 8HCP or again meets the Rule of 17.

What does this mean for our Club games that are listed <100, <500, <1500, <2500, and Open ranges?

Basic Chart applies to events with <750

Basic+ Chart applies to events with <3000

Open Chart applies to events with no upper limit

However, Villages Duplicate Bridge Club voted to use the Basic + chart for all limited games and the Open Chart for its Open games

The opening bid of 1♣ may be artificial, short, or natural! What does this mean?

The ACBL has NOT defined the term “NATURAL”!

A natural opening minor suit bid shows a suit with a least 3-cards and a major suit opening bid contains at least 4- cards.

Given the complex nature of the 1♣ bid, the ACBL states that the bid requires a **pre-Alert** if you play a system that includes at least one one-level opening bid that is not natural or that is **forcing**. This can be as simple as saying, “We play a strong club” or “We play 1♣ as may be short.”

If the bid of 1♣ is artificial it must be alerted; however, if it is a “short” club it must be announce it may be short and the length of the suit must be stated (e.g., ≤ 2).

What about responses to the 1♣ bid?

A natural response bid of a suit which shows that suit and does not show any other suit; the suit shown will be at least three cards.

If the response to 1♣ is artificial or short it must be alerted, and responder must explain the bid if asked (e.g., length and HCP).

Responding to the 1♣ Bid playing 2/1

When opening 1♣ playing the 2/1 bridge system most require at a least 3-card suit and 10HCP and not playing a short-club with 2-clubs or less (if you play a short club the ACBL now requires a pre-alert as is the case if you play any strong club system with 16+HCP).

Playing 2/1 with 5-card majors, responder knows partner does not have a 5-card major. What is one to do with 6-7HCP or 8-10HCP and no 4-card major?

What is your response? There are clearly only two options: bid 1♦ or 1NT.

With a balanced hand and at least 2-diamond most will bid 1NT with 6-7 or 6-9HCP which denies a 4-card major and most opening bidders will pass. What does this accomplish? Nothing and the weak hand will play the contract. It is much better to bid 1♦* (which is no longer natural so must be alerted). If asked you must say it's at least two.

This allows the opener, the strong hand, to bid 1NT and to play the contract.

What if you have 8-10HCP and a balanced hand with no 4-card major? Now you may bid 1NT since it usually makes little difference who plays the hand: responder or opener!

Audrey Grant and others recommend responding to the bid of 1♣ with 1NT and 6-10HCP, making no distinction between 6-7 or 8-10HCP playing 2/1.

If opener has a 6-card club suit in either situation, opener will re-bid clubs with 11/12-15HCP and an unbalanced hand.

The Montreal Relay – Forcing Club System

The Montreal Club convention was developed by Eric Kokish and published an article in the *The Bridge World*, August 1974, Volume 45, No. 11, called *The Montreal Relay*.

His approach allowed one to find a 5-card major at the 1-level and one to play in a 4-4 fit with the stronger opening bidder the declarer.

Highlights of the Kokish approach:

Responder bids a 5-card major after the bid of 1♣* may be short and forcing, a likely pattern is 4=4=3=2.

A 1♦* response denies a 5-card major and 6-10HCP.

A 1NT* response to 1♣ = 11-15HCP and no 5-card major and balanced hand.

Becky Bray and Margaret Matheson in the July and August issues of the “Bridge Bulletin” modified the system using Richmond Relay bids.

In 2022 they modified their relay system and made the bid of 1♣ semi-forcing with or without a singleton and 11-17HCP.

The responses to their 1♣ bid:

- A major suit response must have at least a 5-card suit
- A 1♦* response is artificial and denies both a 5-card major, and as much as 11HCP
- A 1NT response is 11-15HCP (9-11 passed hand) & may have one/ both 4-card majors
- A 2NT response is 16+ HCP and may have one or both 4-card majors
- A 3NT response is 16-18 points, and denies a 4-card major
- A double jump response in either major show 5-5 in hearts or spades
- A jump raise of clubs has a 6-card club suit with 8-10HCP
- A jump response in a new suit, except diamonds, shows a 6-card suit with 8-10HCP
- A 2♦ jump response shows at least a 5-card suit and an unbalanced hand with 11+HCP

A modification developed by Neil H. Timm, which appeared in Bridge Guys, goes as follows where the bid of 1♣* =11-19HCP and is forcing and may be as short as one. The responses follow and give specific values to responder bids.

High Card Points (HCP)	Responses	Follow-up Bids
5/6-9 Points	1♦ 5+ Diamonds 1♥ 5+ Hearts 1♠ 5+ Spades 1 NT No 5-card Maj	Opener's Rebid 2 Clubs Forcing Re-Bid 6+ Suit or Bid 4-card Suit or Bid 3-card Suit with A or K
10-12 Points	2♣* 5 Hearts 2♦* 5 Spades 2♥ 6+ Hearts 2♠ 6+ Spades 2NT No 5+ Major	3 Clubs Forcing, Next Level Bids 1 st Level Higher 10 Points 2 nd Level Higher 11 Points 3 rd Level Higher 12 Points
13+ Points	3♣* 5 Hearts 3♦* 5 Spades 3♥ 6+ Hearts 3♠ 6+ Spades	4 Clubs Forcing, Next Level Bids 13-14 4 Diamonds 15-16 4 Hearts 17-18 4 Spades

3NT No 5 Card Maj 19+ 5NT

Note: With one or two 4 card majors, may bid 2NT with 13+ Points so that partner may bid their 4 card Major Suit if Available. With no 4 Card Major bid 3NT. With a larger hand bid 4NT Blackwood since no agreed upon suit. *= Alert as Forcing Artificial Bid @=announce bid as non-forcing and maybe short.

Another option is to use the Kennedy club; however, one has minimum knowledge about responders' HCP and distribution.

Kennedy Club

High Card Points	Responses	Opener's Rebids
6-10 Points	1♦* No 5-card Major	Bid 4-card Majors Up-the-line
	1♥ 5+ Hearts	jump with 15+
	1♠ 5+ Spades	Bid 1NT balanced Minimum
	1NT No 4/5-card Major	Invite 2NT or bid best minor

The responder, holding neither a 4-card major suit nor a 5-card major suit, and no 5-card support for opener's minor suit, will bid 1NT with 8-9, 2NT with 10-12, and 3NT with 13-15HCP.

The short club – What some experts say

What does a partnership gain by playing a short club system? The primary benefit is that if you are 4-4 in the majors with three diamond and two clubs you no longer open 1♦. But the benefit is minimal, all you have done with your diamond bid is increased the odds of a four card (or longer) diamond suit from 97% to 100%; in the meantime, your 1♣ opening has become even more ambiguous. You have given up more than you have gained.

Does a short club system make sense? Most experts will tell you that opting to play a short club is an extremely poor choice with limited gain!

However, the Montreal Relay as modified by Timm allows one to gain valuable information regarding both distribution and points.

