

Bidding Basics by Larry Cohen

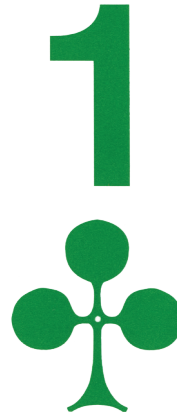
Good bidding habits start with understanding the basics. In this new column, author, teacher and many-time national champion Larry Cohen takes newer players on a tour of the bidding box. All common opening bids will be discussed, followed later in the series by simple bidding sequences.



1♣ is the most common opening bid. Look at a bidding box and you will often see that this card is the most worn out from overuse.

Technically, the definition of a 1♣ opening bid is:

A hand with three or more clubs and about 12–20 points counting useful distribution.



This definition, however, clearly requires some further explanation. 1♣ is a bit of a catchall opening bid. It can be opened with a balanced (flat) hand such as:

♠K 8 7 ♥Q 7 2 ♦A 6 5 ♣K J 5 2.

It can also be opened with a very shapely hand such as:

♠A Q 6 5 ♥— ♦A 3 ♣K J 10 9 8 7 2.

It can be opened with only 12 points, but can also be based on a very strong hand, just short of a strong 2♣ opening bid.

If you have a balanced hand (4-4-3-2, 4-3-3-3 or 5-3-3-2) and are in range for 1NT (or 2NT), don't ever open 1♣ – choose the notrump opening instead. So, with:

♠10 7 2 ♥K J 6 ♦A J 6 ♣A K 6 5,

open 1NT, not 1♣. If you do open 1♣ with a balanced hand, you will have either 12–14 or 18–19 high-card points.

1♣ “shows clubs,” but the bid could be made with only a three-card suit. Why would you open in a suit with only

three cards? It's not like you want clubs as trump when you have only three of them. In fact, the bidding could go 1♣–Pass–Pass–Pass and there you are. (Hopefully dummy has some support, but it might not).

Because a five-card or longer suit is required to open 1♥ or 1♠, you will often have no choice but to open in a three-card minor suit. For example, you hold:

♠A Q 2 ♥K 9 7 4 ♦Q 9 5 ♣Q 7 6.

You can't open 1♥ with only four cards in the suit, and you aren't strong enough to open 1NT (15–17). You have too much to pass, so that leaves an opening in a three-card suit. But why 1♣ and not 1♦? Let's see.

3–3 in the minors

With 3–3 in the minors, the proper opening bid is 1♣. Some players mistakenly think that with 3–3 they should open in the “better minor.” Not so. That is not standard. With a choice between ♦K J 2 and ♣10 8 7, the correct open-

ing is 1♣. With an extreme disparity (maybe ♦A K Q and ♣4 3 2), if you wish to “violate” the system and open 1♦, so be it. But the general rule is: “With opening-bid strength, 3–3 in the minors, no five-card major and a hand not in the 1NT or 2NT range, open 1♣.” Each of the hands below should be opened 1♣:

♠K 8 7 6 ♥A J 7 ♦K J 4 ♣J 3 2

♠K 7 6 ♥A 8 7 6 ♦A 3 2 ♣Q 4 3

♠A Q 5 ♥A Q 7 6 ♦A Q 2 ♣J 3 2

3–2 in the minors

Never open the bidding in a two-card suit. If you do, you are not playing “standard.” If you are not in range for a 1NT or 2NT opening, and you hold a 4–4–3–2 or 4–4–2–3 pattern, always open the bidding with the three-card minor. With:

♠K J 8 7 ♥Q 8 7 6 ♦A J ♣Q 3 2,
open 1♣. With:

♠K J 8 7 ♥Q 8 7 6 ♦Q 3 2 ♣A J,

open 1♦. As you will see in the next issue, this is the only time you would open 1♦ with only a three-card suit.

4-3 in the minors

Nothing unusual here, and no exceptions: Always open the four-card suit. So with:

♠A Q ♥K J 7 3 ♦J 8 7 6 ♣A K 9,

open 1♦ (too strong for a 15-17 1NT).

With:

♠K Q 2 ♥8 7 6 ♦A K 2 ♣J 7 6 5,

open 1♣.

4-4 in the minors

There is no clear “standard” answer here. I recommend opening 1♦ when you are 4-4 in the minors. If the clubs are very good (such as ♣K Q J 10) and the diamonds poor (such as ♦8 7 6 2), I would opt for 1♣.

Are you concerned about having only three clubs when you open 1♣? Don't be. Typically, partner won't raise, and if he does, he usually will have five or more cards in support. Believe it or not, a three-card suit isn't too likely. The odds when starting with 1♣ are about one in six that you have only three clubs. A holding of three cards is about as likely as six cards! More probable than either is four cards (about one quarter of the time) and most likely

of all is five cards (nearly 40% of the time).

There are other distributions which can be tricky to handle. For now, here is a simple rule to cover one of the easier ones: With five clubs and another five-card suit, open in the higher-ranking suit. We will touch on some of the issues regarding 6-5 (as well as 5-4) hands down the road in this series.

QUIZ

Should the hands below be opened 1♣?

1. ♠K J 8 7 ♥A 9 8 7 ♦A J ♣4 3 2

2. ♠A Q 2 ♥K J 5 ♦J 3 ♣A 10 9 8 2

3. ♠A Q 3 ♥K Q 4 2 ♦A Q 2 ♣Q 3 2

4. ♠6 5 ♥8 2 ♦Q 3 ♣A Q 10 8 7 6 5

5. ♠5 4 ♥2 ♦K J 7 6 5 ♣A K Q 3 2

1. Yes. Not enough points for 1NT and not enough hearts/spades for 1♥/1♠.
2. No. This is a balanced (5-3-3-2 pattern) 15-17, so open 1NT.
3. Yes. Wrong range for 1NT or 2NT.
4. No. Too weak for a one-level opening. Open 3♣.
5. No. With 5-5, open the higher-ranking suit first, so 1♦.