

Bidding Basics by Larry Cohen



Author, teacher and many-time national champion Larry Cohen takes newer players on a tour of the bidding box.



1♦ is the second-most frequent opening bid (slightly behind 1♣). A study of 1,000,000 deals showed that the opening bid was 1♣ or 1♦ on roughly 40% of all deals.

Technically, the definition of a standard 1♦ opening bid is:

Usually four or more diamonds (rarely three) and 12–20 points counting useful distribution.



Why the “usually?” With 3–3 in the minors (see last month’s article), you would open 1♣. But there is one specific distribution where you are forced into a three-card 1♦ opening. If you are exactly 4–4 in the majors and 3–2 in the minors, you might have to open in the three-card diamond suit. If you are in range for 1NT (15–17) or 2NT (20–21), there is no problem. But what if you have 12–14 or 18–19 HCP? You can’t open 1NT or 2NT, and you don’t have a five-card major, so you will have to open the bidding in your three-card suit. If it happens to be diamonds, the opening will be 1♦. These hands would be opened 1♦:

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

Other than that exact 4=4=3=2 distribution, any time you open 1♦ you will have at least four cards. (Depending on how you do the math and who you ask, a 1♦ opening will contain a three-card suit only about 3% of the time.) So when your partner opens 1♦, you should expect at least four cards. It is for this reason that most teachers recommend you open 1♦ when 4–4 in the minors. That way, your partner will play you for four diamonds, whereas when you open 1♣, he doesn’t know as

much. With four really bad diamonds and four really good clubs, such as ♦7 6 5 4 and ♣A K J 10, I would choose to open 1♣ instead, but there is no “right or wrong.”

Note: Some players use a system called “short club.” With that dreaded 4=4=3=2 shape, they open 1♣ with the doubleton. They want their 1♦ opening to guarantee four or more diamonds (100%). That system is not standard and must be Announced.

Can 1♦ be opened with a balanced hand?

Often. “Balanced” means hands with 4–4–3–2, 4–3–3–3 or 5–3–3–2 patterns. We’ve already seen that we would open 1♦ with a 4=4=3=2 shape. If you have any of the other shapes for balanced hands and diamonds is your longest suit, you’d open 1♦ (unless, of course, you fall into range for a 1NT or 2NT opening bid). So each balanced hand below would be a 1♦ opening bid:

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

In the first example, you would rebid 1NT (after a 1♠ response) to show a balanced 12–14 (but opener’s rebid will

be covered in a future article).

In the second example, you will rebid 1NT after any major-suit response.

In the third example, you have a balanced 18–19 (with the intention of rebidding 2NT).

Unbalanced hands

If you are not balanced, your 1♦ opening bid has quite a wide high-card-point range. Anything from a dead minimum up to just short of a 2♣ opening is possible. Each unbalanced hand below is a 1♦ opening:

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

The “death” hand: 1=3=4=5

Suppose you open 1♣ with:

♠2 ♥A J 4 ♦K Q 10 2 ♣K 6 5 4 3.

Your partner responds 1♠. Now what? You shouldn’t rebid 1NT with a singleton, nor should you repeat the poor five-card club suit. You are not strong enough to bid 2♦ (a “reverse,” a term we will discuss in a future article). For those reasons, many players choose to open 1♦ with this shape. Even though the clubs are longer, the

1♦ opening makes the rebid easier. If partner makes that likely 1♠ response, you can comfortably bid clubs next. The downside is that partner won't realize your clubs are longer than your diamonds. If the five-card club suit were strong (maybe ♣K Q J 9 8), the lesser of evils would probably be to open 1♣ with that 1-3=4=5 shape and rebid 2♣.

5-5 (diamonds and another suit)

With 5-5 shape, always open the higher-ranking suit first. So with five diamonds and five clubs, open 1♦. With a very strong hand that is 5-5 in the minors, open 1♦ planning to jump-shift with 3♣ next. With a five-card major and five diamonds, always start with one of the major.

QUIZ

What is your opening bid on each hand below?

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

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1. 1♦. With exactly 4=4=3=2 shape, diamonds is the only suit you can open.
 2. 1♦. You have no five-card major. Not the right shape for 1NT.
 3. 2NT. 20-21 balanced.
 4. 1♦. Too strong for a weak two-bid.
 5. 1♦. To avoid a rebid problem after 1♣-1♠.
 6. 1NT. 15-17 balanced.
 7. 1♦. The preferred choice with 4-4 in the minors (unless the clubs are really strong).
 8. 1♥. With 5-5, open the higher-ranking (not the better) suit.