



Bidding Basics

BY LARRY COHEN larryco.com

Responding to 1♥

<i>Partner</i>	<i>Opponent</i>	<i>You</i>
1♥	Pass	?

1♠ response

A 1♠ response shows four or more cards in that suit and at least 6 points. Responder is unlimited in high-card points, so opener must bid again – even if he has a minimum!

The only time responder wouldn't show at least four spades is if he has three-card or longer heart support and 6–10 points counting useful distribution. With that hand, he should prefer to raise to 2♥ and ignore the spades.

With:

♠A 10 7 6 ♥6 5 ♦K 8 7 6 ♣8 3 2

respond 1♠. With:

♠A 8 7 6 ♥K 9 8 ♦3 2 ♣9 7 6 5

respond 2♥. With:

♠Q 8 7 6 5 3 ♥A 2 ♦A 2 ♣K Q 2

respond 1♠. (Yes, I advocate playing 2/1 game forcing, but here, 2♠ would be a jump, so the first bid has to be only 1♠.) With:

♠A Q 8 7 6 ♥A Q 2 ♦3 ♣A 8 3 2

respond 1♠.

1NT response

This shows 6 to ?? HCP, and it usually denies three-card heart support or a four-card spade suit. Why the question marks? The upper limit of the range depends on system. I recommend 6–12 HCP, part of the two-over-one (2/1) game-forcing system. If you want to play the old way (“standard”),

then 1NT is limited to 6–10.

Does 1NT promise a balanced hand? Stoppers? No and no. Think of 1NT as a catchall response. You have enough to respond, but you don't have four spades, you usually don't have three hearts (more on this below), and you don't have enough strength to go to the two level in a new suit. With each hand below, you would respond 1NT:

♠Q 4 ♥K 2 ♦K 8 7 6 5 3 ♣6 5 4

♠J 3 2 ♥— ♦Q 7 6 5 4 ♣A 8 6 4 2

♠K J 3 ♥Q 5 ♦5 4 3 ♣J 5 4 3 2

2♣/2♦ response

This shows at least four cards in the suit bid and ?? HCP. Again, the ?? depends on whether you wish to play old-fashioned standard, where only 10 or 11 HCP are required. I strongly recommend the modern way where opening-bid strength is promised and the partnership is forced to game. If playing the latter way, you certainly *can* have a side four-card spade suit. This modern way is called 2/1 game forcing. If you choose this option, then the 1NT response can contain up to 12 HCP. If you choose standard, then the 1NT response is a maximum of 10 HCP. Assuming you opt to play 2/1, respond with two of your longer minor with these hands. With 4–4 in the minors, tend to respond 2♣:

♠K Q 6 2 ♥A 2 ♦6 5 ♣A K 6 4 3

♠6 5 2 ♥4 ♦A Q 4 3 2 ♣A K Q J

♠K 4 ♥K J 3 ♦K 3 2 ♣K 10 6 5 4

However, don't distort your hand just

to use a 2/1 game-forcing response. Respond 1♠ with either of these hands:

♠K 10 8 7 6 ♥A 2 ♦K Q 2 ♣J 3 2

♠A K Q 10 ♥A ♦8 7 6 5 ♣9 4 3 2

2♥ response

This shows three or more hearts and 6–10 points in support (counting useful distribution). Raise to 2♥ with:

♠K 4 3 2 ♥K Q 2 ♦5 4 ♣8 7 6 5

♠3 ♥A J 4 ♦7 6 5 4 ♣10 6 5 4 3

♠5 4 ♥Q 7 6 5 ♦K 10 7 6 5 ♣3 2

2♠ response

Most players today use this jump-shift as weak (old-fashioned would be very strong). Don't make such a bid if you aren't 100% sure your partner knows what it means. Assuming it is weak, it is very weak (approximately 2–6 HCP).

2NT response

This used to be a natural bid, and if you are allergic to conventions, you can use it as such. However, almost all duplicate players use this as a conventional response called Jacoby 2NT. It promises four or more trumps and enough values for at least game. The follow-ups will be covered in a future article. Here are some examples of a Jacoby 2NT response to 1♥ (which must be Alerted by the opening bidder):

♠A ♥A 7 6 5 ♦A 7 6 5 ♣A 7 6 5

♠5 4 ♥K Q J 7 2 ♦K Q 4 ♣Q 3 2

♠K 7 6 ♥K J 7 6 ♦A K Q ♣4 3 2

3♣/3♦ response

These responses can be played in many ways. They could be natural (very strong or very weak). They can be conventional (“Bergen raises” are popular). I recommend intermediate/invitational with a good six-card or longer suit. This is a matter of partnership agreement. If you aren’t 100% sure that you and your partner know what the bid means, don’t make it. If playing it as invitational, here are some examples:

Respond 3♣ with:

♠7 6 ♥4 3 ♦K 6 5 ♣A Q J 10 8 7.

Respond 3♦ with:

♠4 ♥A 3 ♦K J 10 8 7 6 5 ♣Q 7 6.

3♥ response

This is a limit (invitational) raise with 10–12 points counting useful distribution and four-card or longer support. Opener can pass with a minimum. Here are some examples:

♠7 2 ♥A 8 7 6 ♦K J 4 ♣Q 10 3 2

♠4 3 2 ♥8 7 3 2 ♦A 10 5 4 2 ♣A

What if you have 10–12 points in support but only *three*-card heart support? You’re too strong for a raise to only 2♥, and you don’t have the required four trumps for 3♥. If you have four or more spades, it’s no problem because you can start with 1♠ and jump to 3♥ next. If you don’t have at least four spades, however, it can be a problem. Especially if you are playing 2/1, you might need to respond 1NT (even with three-card heart support), planning to jump to 3♥ at your next turn. This is confusing for now, but will be further explained in a future installment when we deal with responder’s

second bid.

3♠ response

This is the same as 2♠, but with a seventh card in the suit. This is another bid you shouldn’t make unless you are 100% sure your partner will know what it means. Some might use it as a “splinter” bid (see below).

3NT response

This can be played in many ways, but to keep things simple, I recommend 13–15 balanced (no four-card major) with all unbid suits stopped. Typically, the 3NT bidder would have 4–3–3–3 distribution.

4♣/4♦ response

Experienced players use these (and 3♠) as splinter bids. Don’t try this until you and your partner have studied the topic. The response shows at least four trumps and a game force (the same as Jacoby 2NT), but also indicates a singleton or void in the suit bid. The range is approximately 13–16 in support.

Respond 4♣ with:

♠K 6 5 ♥K Q 7 6 ♦A 8 7 6 5 ♣2.

Respond 4♦ with:

♠Q 7 6 2 ♥A Q 6 5 4 ♦2 ♣K J 4.

4♥ response

This does not show a strong hand (responder would have used Jacoby 2NT). It is a semi-preemptive bid showing five or more trumps and at most 10 or 11 points in support. Either of these hands would qualify:

♠3 ♥K Q 7 6 5 ♦Q 6 5 4 ♣4 3 2

♠3 2 ♥Q J 10 9 8 ♦K Q 3 2 ♣3 2

BIDDING BASICS QUIZ

What is your response to partner’s 1♥ opening with each hand below?

1. ♠J 7 6 5 ♥K 7 6 ♦3 2 ♣K J 10 8

2. ♠A J 8 7 6 4 ♥A Q 2 ♦A 3 2 ♣2

3. ♠8 ♥5 ♦K J 7 6 5 4 ♣A 10 8 6 5

4. ♠A K ♥A K Q J ♦Q 5 4 3 ♣5 4 3

5. ♠A 2 ♥K Q 10 7 6 ♦J 7 6 5 ♣A Q

6. ♠K J 5 ♥K J 5 4 ♦2 ♣A 8 7 6 5

7. ♠4 ♥Q 10 9 8 7 ♦K 6 5 4 3 ♣3 2

8. ♠J 5 4 ♥A Q 7 6 ♦K J 5 4 ♣3 2

-
- 2♥. With your “one-bid” hand, supporting is more important than showing the spades.
 - 1♠. This time, you can go exploring.
 - 1NT. Not enough for a two-level response. 1NT says nothing about shape or stoppers.
 - 2NT. Jacoby, a game-forcing four-card raise.
 - 2NT. Yes, the same answer twice in a row just to keep you honest.
 - 4♦. You could have gone for three in a row, but if you play splinter bids, this is more descriptive than Jacoby 2NT.
 - 4♥. Five-card support and a weak hand.
 - 3♥. Four-card limit raise.