



Larry Teaches Modern Bidding
(Volume 1 of 3)

Opening Bids and Responses



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Introduction

My 25 years of teaching have taught me that most of my students never properly learned bidding basics. There are gaps in their learning.

Knowing what the first few bids of the auction mean is essential to good bidding.

More than likely, you will discover how much you don't know that you thought you knew. If you can master the opening bid and response, your auctions will be off to a great start. Combine this with the information in the next two Volumes of this series and you will know just about everything about bidding basics.

In this Volume, other than Stayman, Jacoby transfers and Jacoby 2NT, don't expect to be reading much about conventions. They are the bane of my existence. Too many of my students have clogged their head and wasted their time learning fancy conventions. A much better use of your bridge studying is to learn what is in this book and know it like the back of your hand.

If you read this book and get every quiz question right (all 240 of them), then I apologize for wasting your time.

Note: This series originated in the ACBL Bulletin running from 2017-2021. The content in this book has been updated and enhanced (with added and modified quiz questions). Volume 2 will deal with Opener's Rebid. Volume 3 covers the 4th bid of the auction and competitive auctions.

PART 1

Opening Bids

1♣ Opening

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

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

Three or more clubs and 12-20 (approximate) points counting *useful* distribution

“Useful” would be a decent five-plus card club suit. One club is a bit of a “catchall” opening bid. It can be opened with a balanced (flat) hand such as ♠K87 ♥Q72 ♦A65 ♣KJ52. It can also be opened with a very shapely hand such as ♠AQ65 ♥-- ♦A3 ♣KJ109872. 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 ♠1072 ♥KJ6 ♦AJ6 ♣AK65, open 1NT, not 1♣. If you do open 1♣ with a balanced hand, you will have either 12-14 or 18-19 HCP (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).

However, because opening 1♠ or 1♥ requires a five-card suit, you will often have no choice but to open in a three-card suit. For example, you hold:

♠AQ2 ♥K974 ♦Q95 ♣Q76. You can't open 1♥ (with only four) 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♦?

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 ♦KJ2 and ♣1087, the correct opening is 1♣. With an extreme disparity (maybe ♦AKQ and ♣432), 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 not in 1NT or 2NT range, open 1♣.”

Each of the hands below should be opened 1♣:

♠K876 ♥AJ7 ♦KJ4 ♣J32
♠K76 ♥A876 ♦A32 ♣Q43
♠AQ5 ♥AQ76 ♦AQ2 ♣J32.

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, with 3-2 in the minors (and 4-4 in the majors), always open the bidding with the three-card minor. With: ♠KJ87 ♥Q876 ♦AJ ♣Q32, open 1♣. With: ♠KJ87 ♥Q876 ♦Q32 ♣AJ, open 1♦. As you will see next section, 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: ♠AQ ♥KJ73 ♦J876 ♣AK9, open 1♦ (too strong for 1NT 15-17). With: ♠KQ2 ♥876 ♦AK2 ♣J765, 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 (like ♣KQJ10) and the diamonds poor (like ♦8762) I would opt for 1♣.

5-4 in the minors

With five diamonds and four clubs, always open 1♦. With five clubs and four diamonds you might have a dilemma. Say you hold: ♠2 ♥KJ3 ♦KQ107 ♣A9765. Mainstream would be to open 1♣. Be aware though, that if partner responds 1♠ (you know how partners are), you will be stuck. You wouldn't want to rebid 1NT with a singleton. You shouldn't repeat the five-card club suit. You are not strong enough to rebid 2♦ (this is a reverse – see appendix). Accordingly, some players might open 1♦ with this sort of distribution (planning to rebid 2♣). There is no right and wrong (there are pros and cons). If you do open 1♣, be aware that there may be a rebid problem.

5-5 (clubs and another suit)

With 5-5, always open the higher-ranking suit first. There are some players who with 5-5 in spades and clubs choose to open 1♣ (planning to later bid spades twice), but I'm all for keeping things simple. Always starting with the higher-ranking suit when 5-5 keeps things that way.

6-5 (clubs and another suit)

This can get tricky. With only five clubs and a six-card suit, you would always start with the six-card suit. For example, open 1♥ with:

♠7 ♥AQJ765 ♦2 ♣KJ876. But, the other way around, it isn't as clear. If you have six clubs and five spades, life is good. You can open 1♣ and hope to bid spades twice. For example: Open 1♣ with: ♠KQ987 ♥2 ♦3 ♣AKJ765 and plan to bid spades on your next two turns. Partner will expect five spades and therefore longer clubs (the suit you started with). You will have a slight problem on the occasional time your partner responds 1NT to 1♣ (1♣--1NT--2♠ is a reverse – see appendix). The real problem comes when your side five-card suit isn't spades, because of that nasty “r” (“reverse”) word again. Say you hold:

♠2 ♥AKQ87 ♦3 ♣QJ8765. If you open 1♣ and partner responds 1♠ you are stuck. A rebid of 2♥ is a reverse (see appendix). You aren't worth it. So, you've lost the heart suit. Starting with 1♥ is probably best. I'd say that unless you have a hand strong enough for a reverse, you should open with the five-card suit when you have five hearts or diamonds and six clubs.

Are you concerned that partner fears you have only three clubs when you open 1♣? Typically, partner won't raise, and if they do, they 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. 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).

Advanced Study

What is described in this section is “Standard.” Many experienced players use 1♣ as their strong forcing opening (similar to a standard 2♣ opening bid). Their 1♣ opening says nothing at all about clubs (they could be void!). Others play something called “short club.” What/why? When they are exactly 4=4=3=2 (with 4-4 in the majors, three diamonds and two clubs) they open 1♣. They don't want to open 1♦ with only three cards. So, instead they make the 1♣ bid take on extra burden. Because they would open 1♣ with that 4=4=3=2 hand, their 1♣ opening promises only two clubs. Their partner has to announce “could be short.” To me, this just substitutes one problem for another, so I'm happy to stick to plain old Standard as described in this section.

QUIZ

Should each of the hands below should be opened 1♣?

- 1) ♠KJ87 ♥A987♦AJ ♣432
- 2) ♠AQ2 ♥KJ5 ♦J3 ♣A10982
- 3) ♠AQ3 ♥KQ42 ♦AQ2 ♣Q32
- 4) ♠65 ♥82 ♦Q3 ♣AQ108765
- 5) ♠54 ♥2 ♦KJ765 ♣AKQ32
- 6) ♠K2 ♥AQJ76 ♦-- ♣Q97654
- 7) ♠AQ654 ♥2 ♦4 ♣KQJ765
- 8) ♠Q765 ♥AK3 ♦A42 ♣876
- 9) ♠K5 ♥762 ♦98 ♣AKJ1093
- 10) ♠109832 ♥92 ♦K75 ♣AKQ
- 11) ♠7 ♥AJ5 ♦KQJ4 ♣AQJ108
- 12) ♠762 ♥AK5 ♦KQJ ♣AQJ10

ANSWERS

- 1) Yes. Not enough points for 1NT and not enough spades/hearts for 1♠/1♥.
- 2) No. This is a balanced (5-3-3-2 is balanced) 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♦.
- 6) No. You can't risk 1♣ followed by a 1♠ or 1NT response by partner (you are too weak to reverse into hearts). So, open 1♥ and bid clubs later.
- 7) Yes. Here, you likely don't have to worry about a reverse. Open 1♣ and bid spades on your next two turns (if you get them).
- 8) Yes. "Never" open 1♦ on a three-card suit (the exception being exactly 4=4=3=2 shape).
- 9) Yes. High card points are overrated. Here you have only 11 counting for face cards, but your extra length in clubs makes this an opening bid.
- 10) No. You open your five-card major even if you have all of your high card points in clubs.
- 11) Yes. Are you worried that opening 1♣ with this shape would force you to bid 2♦ later which shows a good hand? Guess what. You've got a good hand. With good hands, try to show your shape naturally.
- 12) No. With a balanced 20-21, open 2NT (you don't need all four suits stopped).

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