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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Acol edition



CHAPTER 1

Opening One of a Suit

When to open, which suit to choose, the Rule of 20 and 4-4-4-1 hands

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1. Counting your points

Before you can decide whether to open the bidding, you need a quick way to judge the strength of your hand. Bridge players use **high-card points**:

Card	Ace	King	Queen	Jack
Points	4	3	2	1

There are 40 points in the pack, so an average hand holds 10. If you have **12 or more**, you have more than your fair share, and you open the bidding.

Rule 1. With 12 or more high-card points, open the bidding.

2. The Rule of 20

Points are not the whole story. A hand with two long suits can take many tricks even with only 10 or 11 points, because the small cards in a long suit become winners once the high cards have gone. The **Rule of 20** lets you open these shapely hands.

Rule of 20. Add your high-card points to the number of cards in your two longest suits. If the total is **20 or more**, open the bidding.

♠ K Q J 6 5 ♥ A J 10 7 4 ♦ 8 ♣ 9 2	Only **11 points**, but your two longest suits hold 5 + 5 = 10 cards. 11 + 10 = **21**: open. With two five-card suits, open the higher-ranking: **1♠**.

♠ K 8 ♥ Q 9 6 3 ♦ K 7 4 ♣ J 10 5 2	**9 points**, and the two longest suits hold 4 + 4 = 8 cards. 9 + 8 = 17, well short of 20: **pass**.

> The Rule of 20 is mostly used with 10 or 11 points: with 12 or more you open anyway. It can let you open a very shapely hand with even fewer points (9 points with a 6-5 shape adds up to 20), but many teachers prefer to keep such hands for a later bid.

3. Balanced hands come first

A **balanced** hand has no singleton or void and at most one doubleton: the shapes 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2. In Acol these are opened according to their strength:

Points	With a balanced hand, open…
12–14	**1NT** (Chapter 2)
15–19	**One of a suit**, then rebid in no-trumps to show your strength: 1NT with 15–16, 2NT with 17–18, 3NT with 19 (Chapter 2)
20–22	**2NT**

So the rest of this chapter is about **unbalanced hands** with 12 or more points (or fewer, by the Rule of 20), and **balanced hands of 15–19**.

4. Which suit to open

Open your longest suit

Rule 2. With an unbalanced hand, open your longest suit. With a five-card suit and a four-card suit, open the five.

♠ A K 8 5 4
♥ K 7 2
♦ Q 6 3 2
♣ 5

12 points and a singleton, so not balanced. Your longest suit is spades: open **1♠**.

♠ Q 8
♥ K 7
♦ A J 9 6 2
♣ K 8 4 3

13 points, five diamonds and four clubs. Open the longer suit, **1♦**. You can show the clubs later.

Two suits of the same length

Rule 3. With two five-card suits (or two sixes), open the **higher-ranking**.
Rule 4. With two four-card suits, open the **lower-ranking**.

Opening the higher of two long suits makes it easy to show the second one next time at a low level. With two four-card suits,

opening the lower one keeps the bidding low and gives partner room to show a major.

♠ A Q 7 2 ♥ K 6 4 ♦ A J 5 3 ♣ Q 8	**16 points**, balanced (4-3-4-2), so too strong for 1NT. Open the lower of your two four-card suits, **1♦**, planning to rebid in no-trumps to show 15–16 or 17–18.

Six-card suits

A six-card suit is nearly always the suit to open, even if you also hold a strong four-card suit. You may well bid it again later to show its length.

5. Hands with three four-card suits (4-4-4-1)

Hands with three four-card suits and a singleton are awkward: whichever suit you open, you may have to show another one later. A simple rule that many teachers use is:

Rule 5. With a **red** singleton, open the suit **below** the singleton. With a **black** singleton, open the **middle** of your three suits.

Singleton	Open
♠ (black)	1♦, the middle of ♥ ♦ ♣
♥ (red)	1♦, the suit below hearts
♦ (red)	1♣, the suit below diamonds
♣ (black)	1♥, the middle of ♠ ♥ ♦

♠ A Q 6 3
♥ K 8 5 2
♦ 7
♣ A J 9 4

14 points, singleton diamond, which is red. Open the suit below it: **1♣**.

♠ 5
♥ A K 7 4
♦ K J 8 3
♣ Q 10 6 3

13 points, singleton spade, which is black. Open the middle of your three suits: **1♦**.

Some teachers and partnerships use slightly different rules for 4-4-4-1 hands. Whatever you choose, agree it with your partner.

6. Summary

Your hand	Open
Fewer than 12 points, Rule of 20 total under 20	Pass
Balanced, 12–14	1NT
Balanced, 15–19	One of a suit, then rebid no-trumps
Balanced, 20–22	2NT
Unbalanced, 12+ (or Rule of 20)	Your longest suit
Two five- or six-card suits	The higher-ranking
Two four-card suits	The lower-ranking
4-4-4-1	Red singleton: the suit below. Black singleton: the middle suit

7. Test yourself

What would you open with each of these hands? The answers follow.

1. ♠ K J 10 7 3
♥ A Q 5
♦ 9
♣ K 8 4 2

2. ♠ 6 4
♥ A K J 8 4
♦ K Q 10 5 3
♣ 7

3. ♠ A 9 7 5 2
♥ K 10 8 6 4
♦ Q 3
♣ 5

4. ♠ K Q 6 4
♥ 9
♦ A J 8 5
♣ K J 7 2

5. ♠ A Q 3
♥ J 8
♦ K J 6
♣ A Q 10 6 5

6. ♠ Q 4
♥ A J 9 2
♦ 8
♣ A K J 7 5 3

Answers

1. 1♠. 13 points and a singleton. Open your longest suit.

2. 1♥. 13 points with two five-card suits: open the higher-ranking.

3. Pass. 9 points + 10 cards in the two long suits = 19, one short of the Rule of 20.

4. 1♦. 14 points, 4-4-4-1 with a red singleton (hearts): open the suit below it.

5. 1♣. 17 points and balanced (5-3-3-2), too strong for 1NT. Open your five-card suit and rebid 2NT to show 17–18.

6. 1♣. 15 points. Open your six-card suit; you can show the hearts later.

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About this guide. There are many versions of Acol, and clubs, teachers and books do not all agree on every detail. This chapter describes one common, straightforward version for learners. We do not claim it is the only or the best way: if your teacher or club plays something different, follow them. What matters most is that you and your partner agree.

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