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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Acol edition



CHAPTER 2

Opening 1NT

The weak no-trump: which hands qualify, and what to do with stronger balanced hands

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1. What 1NT means in Acol

An opening bid of **1NT** tells partner two things at once: your hand is **balanced**, and it holds **12, 13 or 14** high-card points. This is the "weak no-trump", the heart of the Acol system.

Rule 1. With a balanced hand of **12–14 points**, open **1NT**.

Few bids describe a hand so exactly. Partner can add your points to theirs and often decide the final contract straight away. That is why, with a hand that fits, 1NT is the first opening to think of.

2. Which hands are balanced?

A balanced hand has no void, no singleton and **at most one doubleton**. That leaves three shapes:

Shape	Example
4-3-3-3	four cards in one suit, three in each of the others
4-4-3-2	two four-card suits and one doubleton
5-3-3-2	a five-card suit and one doubleton

♠ K 8 4
♥ A J 6
♦ Q 10 7 3
♣ K 9 2

13 points, shape 4-3-3-3. Open **1NT**.

♠ A Q ♥ K 9 7 3 ♦ J 5 2 ♣ Q J 8 4	**13 points**, shape 4-4-3-2. A doubleton ace-queen is no problem: open **1NT**.

♠ Q 2 ♥ J 7 ♦ K Q 8 6 3 ♣ A 10 5 4	**12 points**, but two doubletons, so this hand is **not** balanced. Open your longest suit, **1♦**.

A five-card major?

♠ K J 8 6 3 ♥ Q 4 ♦ A 8 2 ♣ K 9 5	**13 points**, 5-3-3-2 with five spades. Most Acol players open **1NT**: it describes the strength and shape in one bid, and partner can still find a spade fit. Some prefer 1♠. Agree with your partner which you play.

3. Too strong for 1NT

With a balanced hand of 15 or more, open one of a suit (Chapter 1) and show your strength with your **rebid** in no-trumps:

Points	Open	After a one-level response, rebid
15–16	one of a suit	1NT
17–18	one of a suit	2NT
19	one of a suit	3NT
20–22	**2NT**	—

♠ A K 7 4 ♥ K Q 5 ♦ A 6 3 ♣ J 8 2	**17 points**, 4-3-3-3. Too strong for 1NT and not strong enough for 2NT. Open **1♠** (Acol allows four-card majors) and plan to rebid 2NT.

♠ K Q 5 ♥ A Q J ♦ K J 7 3 ♣ A Q 4	**22 points**, 3-3-4-3. Open **2NT**.

4. Why a weak no-trump?

Hands of 12–14 points are the commonest opening hands of all. Opening them 1NT has two advantages:

- **Accuracy.** Partner knows your strength within three points from your first bid.
- **Pressure.** Your opponents have to start their bidding at the two level, which is awkward and risky for them.

> Some partnerships play a **variable no-trump**: 12–14 when not vulnerable and 15–17 when vulnerable. If you do, make sure you both know which range applies on every board.

5. Summary

Balanced hand	Open
Fewer than 12 points	Pass
12–14	**1NT**
15–19	One of a suit, rebid no-trumps (1NT, 2NT or 3NT)
20–22	**2NT**

Remember: **two doubletons, a singleton or a void** means the hand is not balanced. Open a suit.

6. Test yourself

What would you open with each hand?

1. ♠ J 10 7 4
♥ A K 3
♦ Q 8 5
♣ K 6 2

2. ♠ A 5
♥ Q 8
♦ K J 9 7 4
♣ K 10 8 3

3. ♠ A Q 6
♥ K 10 4
♦ A 9 5
♣ Q 8 7 3

4. ♠ K 7
♥ J 9 8 5 2
♦ A Q 4
♣ K 10 6

5. ♠ A J 3
♥ K Q 7
♦ A K 6 4
♣ K J 5

6. ♠ Q 6 3
♥ K 8 2
♦ J 7 4
♣ A J 5 2

Answers

1. 1NT. 13 points, 4-3-3-3.

2. 1♦. 13 points, but two doubletons: not balanced. Open your five-card suit.

3. 1♣. 15 points, balanced, too strong for 1NT. Open your four-card suit and rebid 1NT to show 15–16.

4. 1NT. 13 points, 5-3-3-2. Most Acol players open 1NT; 1♥ if that is your partnership agreement.

5. 2NT. 21 points, balanced.

6. Pass. 11 points, and the Rule of 20 gives 11 + 4 + 3 = 18.

Next: Chapter 3, Responding to 1NT. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

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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