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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Acol edition



CHAPTER 9

Pre-emptive Openings

Weak twos, three- and four-level pre-empts, and what to do when partner pre-empts

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1. Why pre-empt?

Most opening bids show strength. A **pre-emptive** opening shows the opposite: a **long suit** and a **weak hand**. Its purpose is to take bidding space away from the opponents, who probably hold most of the points. Starting their auction at the three level is much harder than starting at the one level.

A pre-empt says: "I have a long, decent suit and not much else. Trumps in my suit are worth something; elsewhere, don't count on me."

2. Weak twos

Many Acol players use 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ as **weak twos**, and this book does too. (Traditional Acol uses them as strong "Acol twos": see Chapter 8. Agree with your partner which you play.)

Weak two: open 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ with a **six-card suit** and **6–10 points**, with most of your points in that suit.

♠ K Q J 9 6 5 ♥ 7 3 ♦ J 8 4 ♣ 6 2	**7 points** and six good spades: open **2♠**.

♠ 8 ♥ A Q 10 7 5 3 ♦ 9 4 2 ♣ J 6 3	**7 points** and six hearts: open **2♥**.

♠ A K J 10 6 4 ♥ K 5 ♦ Q 8 3 ♣ 7 2	**13 points**: too strong for a weak two. Open **1♠** and rebid your spades.

Good habits for weak twos: a suit with **two of the top three honours** or similar, and **no four-card major** on the side (partner may have a better place to play).

3. Three- and four-level pre-empts

Opening	Usually shows
3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠	a **seven-card** suit, fewer than 10 points
4♥, 4♠	an **eight-card** suit, fewer than 10 points

How high you can go depends on how much you can afford to lose if you are doubled. A common guide is the **rule of 2 and 3**: expect to be no more than **two tricks short** when vulnerable and **three short** when not.

♠ 5 ♥ K Q J 9 8 6 4 ♦ J 7 2 ♣ 8 3	**7 points** and seven good hearts: open **3♥**.

♠ K Q J 9 8 7 5 4 ♥ 6 ♦ Q 7 2 ♣ 5	Eight spades and not vulnerable: open **4♠**. You expect seven or eight tricks, so you may well go two or three down, but the opponents, who probably have a game of their own, must now start bidding at the five level.

4. When partner pre-empts

Remember what partner has: a long suit and little outside. So:

- **Count tricks, not points.** Your aces and kings, plus partner's long suit, decide whether game is on.

- With **support**, raise to game with a good hand. With four or more trumps and a short suit, raising can also be right with a **weak** hand, especially when not vulnerable: the opponents probably have a game, and the higher you go, the harder it is for them to find it.
- Without a fit, **pass** unless you have a very strong hand. Partner's suit is the trump suit they want.

♠ A 5 2 ♥ K 8 4 ♦ A K J 3 ♣ Q 7 2	Partner opens **2♥**. You have three trumps, two aces and a king: raise to **4♥**.

5. Summary

Opening	Suit length	Points
Weak two (2♦, 2♥, 2♠)	six cards	6–10
Three level	seven cards	fewer than 10
Four level (4♥, 4♠)	eight cards	fewer than 10

6. Test yourself

1. ♠ A J 10 9 6 4
♥ 8 2
♦ Q 7 3
♣ 9 5

2. ♠ 7
♥ J 7
♦ K Q J 10 8 6 5
♣ Q 4 2

3. ♠ K Q 10 8 7 5
♥ A 6
♦ K 4
♣ J 8 3

4. ♠ 4
♥ Q J 10 9 6 4 3
♦ K 10
♣ J 5 2

5. ♠ K 8 3
♥ A 10 5
♦ K Q 6 4
♣ A J 2

6. ♠ A Q 5
♥ 2
♦ K J 8 4
♣ Q 10 7 6 3

1–4: What do you open (not vulnerable)? 5: Partner opens 2♠. 6: Partner opens 3♥.

Answers

1. 2♠. 7 points and a good six-card suit.

2. 3♦. Seven diamonds and 9 points.

3. 1♠. 13 points: an ordinary opening, not a pre-empt.

4. 3♥. Seven hearts and 7 points.

5. 4♠. Three trumps and plenty of high cards.

6. Pass. A singleton heart: the hands do not fit. 3♥ is high enough.

Next: Chapter 10, Overcalls and Takeout Doubles. 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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