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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Standard American edition



CHAPTER 1

Opening One of a Suit

When to open, five-card majors, the better minor, 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 your hand. Bridge players use **high-card points**:

Card	Ace	King	Queen	Jack
Points	4	3	2	1

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

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

2. The Rule of 20

A hand with two long suits can take plenty of tricks with only 10 or 11 points. 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.

♠ K Q J 6 5
♥ A J 10 7 4
♦ 8
♣ 9 2

Only **11 points**, but 5 + 5 = 10 cards in the two long suits. 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**; 9 + 4 + 4 = 17. Short of 20: **pass**.

3. Balanced hands

A **balanced** hand has no singleton or void and at most one doubleton: 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2. In Standard American they are opened by strength:

Points	With a balanced hand, open…
12–14	**One of a suit**, then rebid 1NT
15–17	**1NT** (Chapter 2)
18–19	**One of a suit**, then jump to 2NT
20–21	**2NT**
22 or more	**2♣** (strong and artificial; a later chapter)

♠ K 8 4 ♥ A J 6 ♦ K Q 7 3 ♣ K 9 2	**16 points**, 3-3-4-3: open **1NT**.

4. Five-card majors

The biggest difference from many other systems: in Standard American you open **1♥ or 1♠ only with five or more cards** in that suit. Partner can then support you with just three cards.

Rule 2. Open 1♥ or 1♠ only with a **five-card or longer** suit. With two five-card suits, open the **higher-ranking**.

♠ A K 8 5 4 ♥ K 7 2 ♦ Q 6 3 2 ♣ 5	**12 points** and five spades: open **1♠**.

5. Opening a minor

Without a five-card major, open your **longer minor**. Because 1♣ and 1♦ do not promise long suits, they are sometimes opened with only three cards.

Rule 3. No five-card major: open your **longer minor**. With **3-3** in the minors, open **1♣**. With **4-4**, open **1♦**.

♠ K J 7 3 ♥ A Q 8 4 ♦ K 6 2 ♣ 9 5	**13 points** and two four-card majors, but no five-card major. Open your longer minor: **1♦**, with only three cards.

♠ A Q 7 2 ♥ K 6 4 ♦ J 5 3 ♣ Q 8 2	**12 points**, 4-3-3-3. Only four spades, so no 1♠. With 3-3 in the minors, open **1♣**, planning to rebid 1NT.

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

With no five-card suit, Rule 3 decides these too: you open a minor. In practice that means:

Rule 4. With 4-4-4-1, open **1♦**, unless your singleton is a **diamond**: then open **1♣**.

♠ A Q 6 3 ♥ K 8 5 2 ♦ 7 ♣ A J 9 4	**14 points**, singleton diamond, so your only four-card minor is clubs: open **1♣**.

♠ 5 ♥ A K 7 4 ♦ K J 8 3 ♣ Q 10 6 3	**13 points**, four cards in both minors: open **1♦**.

7. Summary

Your hand	Open
Fewer than 12 points, Rule of 20 under 20	Pass
Balanced 15–17	1NT
Balanced 20–21	2NT
Five or more hearts or spades	1♥ / 1♠ (higher of two fives)
No five-card major	Your longer minor
3-3 in the minors	1♣
4-4 in the minors (including most 4-4-4-1 hands)	1♦

8. Test yourself

What would you open with each hand?

1. ♠ K J 10 7 3
♥ A Q 5
♦ 9
♣ K 8 4 2

2. ♠ A J 8 4
♥ K Q 7 3
♦ Q 5
♣ J 6 2

3. ♠ A 9 7 5 2
♥ K 10 8 6 4
♦ Q 3
♣ 5

4. ♠ K 7
♥ A Q 4
♦ K J 8 5
♣ A J 6 2

5. ♠ A Q 3
♥ K J 8
♦ K 10 6
♣ Q J 6 5

6. ♠ Q 4
♥ A J 9 2
♦ 8
♣ A K J 7 5 3

Answers

1. 1♠. 13 points with five spades.

2. 1♣. 13 points, 4-4-2-3. No five-card major, so open the longer minor: three clubs against two diamonds.

3. Pass. 9 + 10 = 19, one short of the Rule of 20.

4. 1♦. 18 points, balanced. Too strong for 1NT: open 1♦ (4-4 in the minors) and jump to 2NT next time to show 18–19.

5. 1NT. 16 points, balanced.

6. 1♣. 15 points with six clubs. You can show the hearts later.

Next: Chapter 2, Opening 1NT. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

About this guide. There are many versions of Standard American, 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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