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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Standard American edition



CHAPTER 2

Opening 1NT

The strong notrump: which hands qualify, and what to do with other balanced hands

Mike Smith

bridgescorer.com

1. What 1NT means in Standard American

An opening bid of **1NT** shows a **balanced** hand with **15, 16 or 17** high-card points. It is one of the most descriptive bids in bridge: partner knows your strength within three points and your shape almost exactly.

Rule 1. With a balanced hand of **15–17 points**, open **1NT**.

2. Which hands are balanced?

A balanced hand has no void, no singleton and **at most one doubleton**:

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

♠ A Q 5
♥ K 7 3
♦ K J 8 4
♣ Q 10 6

15 points, 3-3-4-3. Open **1NT**.

♠ K Q
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ K 8 5 2
♣ Q J 3

15 points, 2-4-4-3. A doubleton king-queen is fine: open **1NT**.

♠ K Q ♥ A 7 ♦ Q J 10 6 3 ♣ K 10 4 2	**15 points**, but two doubletons: **not** balanced. Open your longer minor, **1♦**.

A five-card major?

♠ A K J 7 4 ♥ Q 6 ♦ K 8 3 ♣ A 10 5	**17 points**, 5-2-3-3 with five spades. Standard American allows **1NT** here, and many players prefer it because it shows the strength at once. Others open 1♠. Agree with your partner.

3. Other balanced hands

Balanced hands outside 15–17 are opened by strength, as in Chapter 1:

Points	Open	Then
12–14	your longer minor (or a five-card major)	rebid 1NT
15–17	**1NT**	—
18–19	one of a suit	jump to 2NT
20–21	**2NT**	—
22 or more	**2♣**	rebid in notrump

♠ A 9 6 ♥ K J 5 ♦ Q 10 7 3 ♣ K 8 4	**13 points**, balanced: too weak for 1NT. Open **1♦** (your longer minor) and rebid 1NT.

♠ A K Q ♥ K J 4 ♦ A 10 8 3 ♣ K 9 6	**20 points**, balanced: open **2NT**.

4. Why a strong notrump?

- **Accuracy.** Partner can add points and often place the contract at once.
- **Safety.** With 15–17 you are rarely in trouble if the opponents double.
- **Declarer.** The strong hand usually plays the contract, with the opening lead coming up to it.

> Partnerships in Britain often play a **weak notrump** (12–14). If you play with someone from there, check your range before you start!

5. Summary

Balanced hand	Open
12–14	One of a suit, rebid 1NT
15–17	**1NT**
18–19	One of a suit, jump to 2NT
20–21	**2NT**
22 or more	**2♣**

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

6. Test yourself

What would you open with each hand?

1. ♠ K J 3
♥ A Q 6
♦ K 10 5 2
♣ J 8 4

2. ♠ A 10
♥ K Q 9 4
♦ A J 5
♣ Q 8 7 3

3. ♠ Q 2
♥ K 5
♦ A J 10 6 3
♣ K Q 8 4

4. ♠ A Q 10 8 3
♥ K 7
♦ K J 5
♣ Q 9 6

5. ♠ A K 5
♥ A Q 4
♦ K J 7 3
♣ Q 9 2

6. ♠ K Q J
♥ A K 6
♦ A Q 8 5
♣ K 7 3

Answers

1. 1♦. 14 points, balanced: one short of 1NT. Open your longer minor and rebid 1NT.

2. 1NT. 16 points, 2-4-3-4.

3. 1♦. 15 points, but two doubletons: not balanced.

4. 1NT. 15 points, 5-3-3-2 (or 1♠ if that is your agreement).

5. 1♦. 19 points, balanced: too strong for 1NT. Open 1♦ and jump to 2NT.

6. 2♣. 22 points, balanced. Open 2♣ and rebid notrump.

Next: Chapter 3, Responding to 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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