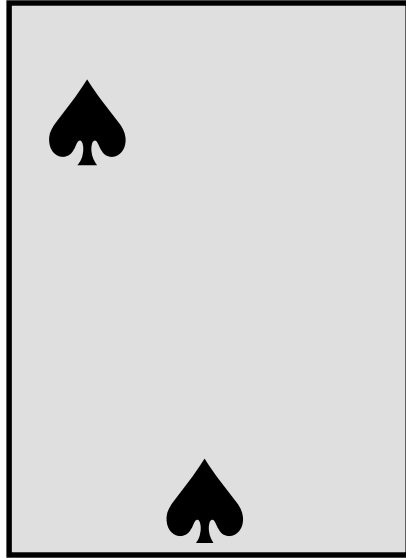


“There are three kinds of Bridge players.
Those who can count, and those who can't”.

- *Alfred Sheinwold*



two

Hand evaluation
High card points and length points
Opening bids at the one-level
opening 1NT
Rule of 15 and 20

Opening one bids

Palm reading

The most common method of reading your hand strength is counting high card points.

High card points (HCP)

Card	Value
Ace	4 Points
King	3 Points
Queen	2 Points
Jack	1 Point

There are 10 HCP in each suit. Since there are four suits, the maximum number of HCP in a single deck of cards is 40. The **A**, **K**, **Q**, **J** and **10** are honor cards.

chart 2:1

Length points (LP)

In a no-trump contract, how many tricks would you expect to take with this club suit?

♣AKQJ874

According to the HCP method this suit has 10 HCP. From a trick stand point, the ♣AKQJ should extract the outstanding clubs making the ♣874 winners. So even though you have only 10 HCP, by way of attrition you can take seven tricks. The strength of this hand is not just in the HCP, but also in the length of the suit. Hence, let us give value for length. **Length points (LP)** are added as follows:

Suit length	Length points
Eight Card Suit	4
Seven Card Suit	3
Six Card Suit	2
Five Card Suit	1

chart 2:2

If a suit is longer than four cards in length, add one point for each card in excess of four cards. The above suit ♣AKQJ874 is worth 13 points: 10HCP plus three length points.

Opening bids at the one-level

Before a Bridge hand can be played we must first have an auction to determine who wins the contract and who defends. The dealer is the first to bid and thus the auction is off and running. You can open the bidding at any level you want, but in this chapter, we will start with an opening bid at the one-level. $1\clubsuit$, $1\diamond$, $1\heartsuit$, $1\spadesuit$ and 1NT.

Opening bid of 1NT

An opening bid of 1NT shows 15-17 HCP (not length points) and a balanced hand. A balanced hand can be one of the following three distributions.

4-3-3-3 or 4-4-3-2 or 3-3-5-2

1)	2)	3)
\spadesuit KQ84	\spadesuit KJ95	\spadesuit KJ10
\heartsuit Q87	\heartsuit K4	\heartsuit K4
\diamondsuit KQ4	\diamondsuit KJ2	\diamondsuit AK3
\clubsuit A94	\clubsuit A983	\clubsuit QJ542

Hand 1 **Open 1NT.** With a 4-3-3-3 distribution, the four-card suit can be in any suit. 1NT aptly describes your shape and strength.

Hand 2 **Open 1NT.** With a 4-2-3-4 distribution, the two four-card suits can be in any suit.

Hand 3 **Open 1NT.** With a 3-2-3-5 distribution the five-card suit should be in a minor, not a major.

Clear and concise

As you can see, an opening bid of 1NT is a very descriptive bid. It shows your strength (15-17 HCP) and shape (a balanced hand) all in one go. Open 1NT whenever you have the appropriate hand to do so.

Opening bids of one-of-a-suit

When opening the bidding with one-of-a-suit (1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠) you can use both HCP and LP to assess the value of your hand. An opening bid of 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ shows 13-21 **total points** (TP). 13-21 is quite a big range and you will usually need two or more bids to clarify your exact strength and distribution.

suit opened	minimum length	strength
1♠	5+ cards	13-21 TP
1♥	5+ cards	13-21 TP
1♦	4+ cards*	13-21 TP
1♣	3+ cards	13-21 TP

Chart 2:3

*If your distribution is four spades, four hearts, three diamonds and two clubs and you have 13-21TP (not 15-17 HCP balanced), you should open the bidding with 1♦. This is the only time you will open the bidding 1♦ with a three-card suit. This happens less than 5% of the time. Hence, 95% of the time when you open 1♦ you will have four or more diamonds.

♠ AJ43 ♦ J983 ♥ AQ6 ♣ J3

This is an example of a hand you would open 1♦ with a three-card suit. You do not want to pass with 13 points!

A golden fit

As you can see, the length required to open a minor suit is less than that of a major suit. If you do not have a five-card major, opening a minor suit gets the auction open, with a major suit contract still possible. The term 'fit' refers to the number of cards you and partner hold in a particular suit. If you hold four spades and partner has three spades you have a seven-card spade fit. A **'golden fit'** is when you and partner have an eight-card fit. An eight-card spade fit gives you a clear majority of the 13 available spades. When determining whether to play in a suit contract or a NT contract, a golden fit usually steers you to the suit contract, especially if it is a major suit.

At the table

When deciding which suit to open, the longest suit gets preference provided you have the minimum number of cards required to open that suit (Chart 2:3). If you have a 5+ card major, that is the suit to open.

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ KQJ84	♠ K975	♠ 2	♠ 108762
♥ 87	♥ K84	♥ K4	♥ K4
♦ K1094	♦ KJ2	♦ AK1083	♦ AKQ3
♣ A4	♣ A93	♣ QJ1054	♣ K4

Hand 1 **Open 1♠.** Technically speaking you have the requirements to open 1♦ also as you have 13-21 TP and a four-card suit. However, the spades are longer and preferred.

Hand 2 **Open 1♣.** You want to open with 13+ points and clubs is the only suit where you have the required length.

Hand 3 **Open 1♦.** This is a new one as you have two suits of equal length. With two five-card suits open the higher-ranking suit first, regardless of the strength. (Read this again).

Hand 4 **Open 1♠.** When you open the bidding with a suit bid, you are showing 13-21 TP in your hand. But you are not promising any points in the suit you bid. You are promising length, but not strength (This is important to remember).

FYI

1. Open the bidding 1♥ or 1♠ when holding 5+ cards in either suit.
2. With two three-card minors, open the bidding with 1♣.
3. With two five-card suits, open with the higher-ranking suit.
4. With 4-4 in the minors, it is best to open 1♦ until further notice.
5. When you open 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠, you are promising length in the suit you bid, not strength in the suit.

Addendum to opening bids of 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ and 1♠

Spades are an important suit

You are in fourth seat and the auction has gone three passes to you. If you now pass, the hand is not played. In 4th seat, if your hand is a marginal opener, let the 'Rule of 15' guide you. Add your HCP to the number of spades you hold. If it adds up to 15 or more, you can open. The logic is in spades being the 'boss' suit. Spades control the two-level in a competitive auction.

Rule of 15

♠ AQ983 ♥ 873 ♦ KJ72 ♣ 43

Open 1♠ (10HCP + 5S = 15)

♠ 10743 ♥ 3 ♦ AJ10 ♣ AQ543

Open 1♣ (11HCP + 4S = 15)

♠ 42 ♥ KJ43 ♦ Q982 ♣ AJ4

Pass (11HCP + 2S = 13)

♠ 1098763 ♥ A87 ♦ KQ8 ♣ 5

Open 1♠ (9HCP + 6S = 15)

Figure 2:1

Shape rules

HCP are important, but so is the shape of a hand. Distribution can overwhelm HCP. The 'Rule of 20' accounts for distribution and HCP working together in the same hand. In first and second seat, add your HCP to the length of your two longest suits. If it adds up to 20 or higher, open the bidding.

♠ KJ983 ♥ AQ432 ♦ 7 ♣ 73

10 HCP + 5 (spades) + 5 (hearts) = 20

Does this hand feel good? That good feeling comes from the distribution.

Rule of 20

♠ AJ974 ♥ 6 ♦ AJ743 ♣ 74

Open 1♠ (10 HCP + 5S + 5D = 20)

♠ 742 ♥ KQJ83 ♦ 6 ♣ KQ74

Open 1♥ (11 HCP + 5H + 4C = 20)

♠ A97643 ♥ 2 ♦ 3 ♣ KQ987

Open 1♠ (9 HCP + 6S + 5C = 20)

♠ J1054 ♥ KJ4 ♦ AQ84 ♣ J3

Open 1♦ (12 HCP + 4S + 4D = 20)

♠ QJ ♥ K ♦ Q7532 ♣ Q7654

Pass (10 HCP + 5D + 5C = 20)

This passes the test, but it doesn't feel good.

Figure 2:2

Marty Bergen (1948 -) is a New Yorker, Bridge teacher, writer and Bridge professional since 1976. Marty is well-known for his development of new conventions and treatments. He is the leading innovator in bidding theory today. The Rules of 15 and 20 are just a couple of his sweethearts.

Card play technique

High card from the short side first

♠ 543
 ♥ 7652
 ♦ AKQ7
 ♣ 94



♠ A76
 ♥ AK3
 ♦ J5
 ♣ KQ652

Figure 2:3

In Figure 2:3, let us assume that you need four diamond tricks to make your contract. The N hand has ♦AKQ7 and no entries, other than in the diamond suit. If you carelessly play a high diamond from dummy first (the long side), you will no longer be able to get the four diamond tricks you have coming to you. If however, you play the ♦J first (high card from the short side first) you can then continue with the ♦5 over to the ♦Q and take the four tricks which are rightfully yours. High card from the short side first is a card play technique that allows you to unravel suits to your advantage.

♠ A7
 ♥ KJ102
 ♦ 7643
 ♣ 543



♠ K943
 ♥ Q5
 ♦ AQ5
 ♣ 8652

Figure 2:4

In Figure 2:4, you can establish the heart suit for three tricks. You knock out the ♥A and three tricks will come to you. Good card play technique suggests that when tackling this suit, you should play the high card from the short side first. S has the short hearts, so you should play the ♥Q first. If the opponents do not take the ♥Q you can continue with the ♥5 to the N hand and persist with knocking out the ♥A. You will use the ♠A as an entry to the established hearts in the N hand.

Department of defence

Not quite a sequence

It is generally a good idea against a no-trump contract to lead your longest and strongest suit. The reason being that if you can establish your suit (make it all winners), you can continue to win tricks as the opponents cannot trump. The best card to lead from your longest and strongest suit is the top of a sequence. If you do not have a sequence, perhaps you have a 'broken sequence'.

Top of a broken sequence

A '**broken sequence**' is when you have the first two cards in the sequence, you are missing the third card, but have the fourth.

You hold: ♦ KQ102

You have the ♦ K (the first card), the ♦ Q (the second card), you are missing the ♦ J (the third card), but have the ♦ 10 (the fourth card). When you have a broken sequence with an honor in the sequence, lead the top card. Lead the ♦ K.

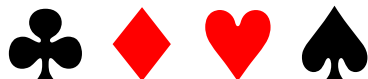
In the following four combinations lead top of a broken sequence.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. ♠ 109762 | Lead: ♠ 10. | 2. ♥ QJ984 | Lead: ♥ Q |
| 3. ♦ J10872 | Lead: ♦ J | 4. ♣ AKJ103 | Lead: ♣ A |

You have the first two cards in each sequence; you are missing the third, but have the fourth. From each holding lead the high card of a broken sequence). Like a sequence, a broken sequence must contain at least one honor card, to enjoy the honor of being called a sequence.

Led astray

The guides you are learning, concerning which card to lead from certain combinations, are actually 'carding agreements' between you and your partner. In the second example above, if you lead the ♥ J (rather than the correct ♥ Q) you deny possession of the ♥ Q. Such is your agreement with partner. Whether you are having a 'senior's moment' or perhaps a 'creative deviation', the ♥ J will lead your partner astray.



Summary

- **High card points (HCP)** is one method of evaluating the strength of a hand.
- **Length points (LP)** is another method to evaluate the strength of a hand.
- An opening bid of 1NT shows **15-17 HCP** and a balanced hand.
- An opening bid of one-of-a-suit promises **13-21** total points (TP).
- **Opening bids of one-of-a-suit**, promise a minimum number of cards in the suit. An opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠ promises 5+ cards. An opening bid of 1♦ promises 4+ cards. An opening bid of 1♣ promises 3+ cards.
- Leading the **high card from the short side first** is good card play technique.
- Leading the top card from a **broken sequence** is a popular opening lead.

Nearly Normal Norman says: When practicing your card play technique, it is a good idea to deal the cards face up on the table and play the cards as is if in a real game. It makes a difference.



Nearly Normal Norman

She who gets to play the last card has an advantage...

“Although last, not least”.

- Shakespeare

Exercises - chapter two

State the strength of each hand and your opening bid.

1)
 ♠ KJ87
 ♥ AQ6
 ♦ KQ73
 ♣ 54

2)
 ♠ 4
 ♥ A4
 ♦ K9873
 ♣ AKQ73

3)
 ♠ AK84
 ♥ A1084
 ♦ K3
 ♣ 986

4)
 ♠ AJ7
 ♥ K984
 ♦ KQ2
 ♣ J43

5)
 ♠ AK764
 ♥ AQ643
 ♦ 5
 ♣ A3

6)
 ♠ K7
 ♥ 98764
 ♦ AKQ4
 ♣ J4

7)
 ♠ KJ4
 ♥ KJ3
 ♦ QJ84
 ♣ AJ8

8)
 ♠ A98765
 ♥ 7
 ♦ K8642
 ♣ A

9)
 ♠ KJ4
 ♥ AJ10
 ♦ QJ73
 ♣ A92

10)
 ♠ A83
 ♥ 97
 ♦ KQ43
 ♣ KJ84

11)
 ♠ AJ104
 ♥ A10842
 ♦ K3
 ♣ 96

12)
 ♠ KQ97
 ♥ KJ54
 ♦ K43
 ♣ J4