

When you need 5 or 6 cards in a suit

Bridge on Sundays

1. System requirements for an opening bid at the 1 level

Acol or Standard English

There is no requirement for a suit opened at the one level to contain more than 4 cards. It is however desirable that an opening bid of 1@ should show at least 5 cards in @s, because of the restrictions it places on the responding hand. As responder you cannot make legal suit bid at the one level. You may have to bid 1NT with 6-7 pts even though the shape is unsuitable for the bid. Holding 5 cards in @s enables you to pass with a singleton @ and 6pts and to raise to 2@ with only 3 cards in @s.

5-card majors and most European systems.

A major suit requires 5 cards, though a minor suit may be bid on 4 or even 3 cards when no 5 card major is held.

Strong | systems

Most systems using a | suit to show 16 pts or more (and especially Precision Club), require that a 1` /@ opening bid shows 5 cards or more in the suit.

2. System requirements for a 2 level opening in a suit

Any system using a natural strong 2 opening bid in a suit, requires 5 cards in the suit as a minimum holding. For example a 2~ opening in Acol needs at least a good 5 card ~ suit (usually two suits of 5 cards) and preferably a 6 card or longer suit. The game force opening of 2| (usually 23pts or more) can be based on a flat hand with no suit longer than 4 cards.

Systems employing weak twos in the majors specify that these bids show at least a 6 card suit and 6-10 pts.

3. Responses to an opening bid in a suit at the 1 level.

If your system requires you to hold 5 cards in a suit to make a change of suit response to partners' opening bid, then you place considerable restrictions

on the response and on the auction, and so frequently have to respond in no-trumps when a suit response would have been available if the response had only required 4 cards. Systems in popular use place no such restrictions in general. *A change of suit only requires 4 cards in the suit*

Responding 2` over partner's opening of 1@

This is a special case and should show 5 cards in ` s because you have used bidding space and denied the opener of the opportunity to show a second suit at the 2 level. If you hold a 4 card ` suit and no other 4 card suit, then bid a 3 card minor and await openers rebid.

A Jump response in a new suit

When you jump immediately over partners opening bid, this should show 16+ pts and a very good 6 card suit, because you have used up a lot of bidding space (e.g. partner opens 1~, and you bid 2@). Preferably the suit should be headed by AK, or KQ.

4. Responses over a 1NT opening bid by partner

A weakness take-out (e.g. 1NT by opener, you bid 2~) must be at least a 5 card suit. Also when you play transfers (e.g. 1NT, you bid 2~ asking opener to transfer to 2`) the transferred suit (`) should be 5 cards or more.

A jump bid at the 3 level (e.g. 1NT, you bid 3`) shows a 5 card suit. Note a jump in the major suits shows exactly 5 cards in the suit, but a bid in the minor suits may show 5 or more, and opening pts.

A jump bid at the 4 level shows 6 cards or more in the suit (e.g. 1NT, you bid 4@) and around 'opening' pts.

5 Over opponent's opening bid at the 1 level.

An overcall should show 5 cards in the overcalling suit, but frequently at the one level you have to overcall with a good 4 card suit, because other bids are not available (unsuitable hand distribution etc) An overcall at the 2 level must show 5 cards or more in the suit.

E.g. your opponent opens 1| , and you overcall 1@, this can be a 4 card suit, however if your opponent opens 1` , and you overcall 2~, this should be a 5 card suit or longer

A jump overcall

Opponents open 1~, you bid 2` for example. Should show 6 cards or more and 10+ pts.

The 'unusual' 2NT overcall

This has been popular with players for a long time. It show 2 suits of 5 cards and shortage in the suit bid, with about 10+ pts. Nowadays it must show the lowest 2 suits available. There are other conventions showing 2 suits of 5 cards.

6. Re-bidding a suit

When you rebid a suit without support from partner, this suit should always have at least 5 cards (e.g 1@, partner bids 2| and you rebid 2@). A jump rebid (e.g 1@, partner bids 2| and you rebid 3@) should be based on a 6 card suit, but occasionally it will be a very strong 5 card suit. If you raise a suit supported by partner (e.g. 1` , partner bids 2`) then you need only hold 4 cards in that suit.to raise the suit.

7. General points on choice of suit opening

- When you hold 4 card suits try to open 1NT whenever you have the designated points range
- Holding two 4-card suits consider your rebid before choosing. Usually the lower of 'non-touching' and the higher of 'touching' works best
- Holding three 4-card suits the general rule is: if two of the suits are | +@ then open 1| ; otherwise open the 'middle' suit. For example if the three suits are | +` +@, then open 1| . If the three suits are ~+` +@ open 1` .
- Holding two 5-card suits, open the higher ranked suit, and re-bid if possible the lower ranked suit to show the distribution.

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