

## Five card majors

1. The Five card majors system is widely played (a variation of the system that the majority of players use in the UK). It is the standard system used in many European countries. The basic premise is that an opening bid in a major suit shows at least 5 cards in that suit.

The basic guidelines to opening at the 1-level are:

1. You should open 1NT if the hand meets the requirements in suit distribution and points range. You can play any hcp range you like but the most popular are 12-14 or 15-17. Note that in France & Spain strong NT openings are the norm. A 1NT opening hand has no void/singleton or 6 card suit/five card major. It should not contain 2 doubletons.
2. If you do not open 1NT then open the longest suit with the proviso that if you open in hearts or spades the suit will have at least 5 cards.
3. If the major suit is only 4 cards in length you open your better minor suit.
4. Special guidelines apply to opening in a minor when you hold a 4-card major, With two minor suits of 4 cards open 1 diamond. With two minor suits of 3 cards open 1 club.
5. A 1 diamond opening bid always shows at least 4 cards in diamonds except when you hold two 4 card majors and a doubleton club holding.
6. The opening bids of 1 club or 1 diamond must be alerted because the suit may contain only 3 cards. Major suit openings are not alertable.

What about opening bids at higher levels and conventions such as Stayman and Blackwood etc.? These are not affected in any way by the requirements of the 1-level opening bids so you can play any conventions you wish.

### 2. What are the advantages of 5 card majors?

The main advantage is that you can support an opening major suit with only 3 cards. A second plus point is that a fit with only 2 cards in support is usually very playable. The suit does not have to be rebid to show 5 cards. Hands containing another 4 card suit are much easier to bid because the minimum length of the first suit is known so it does not have to be rebid.

### 3. What are the problems in opening a minor suit?

Because you may have to open with a 3 card suit then you may play a minor

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suit contract with 7 or less trumps. If opponents overcall your minor suit bid then it may be difficult to show your 4 card major suit.

### 4. Opening a major suit

With 1 major suit of at least 5 cards bid it. With two 5-card majors open spades. With 6-5 in the majors open the 6 card suit, and bid and rebid the second suit to show 5 cards. Or open as strong 2 bid. Hands with a 6-card minor + a 5-card major can be opened with the major (treating the hand as 5-5 in these suits)

### Responding at the 1 or 2 levels

Responses even at the 1 or 2 level are similar to standard bidding. A response at the one level shows 6 plus hcp and 1NT shows 6-9 hcp with no suit biddable at the one level. Responses at the two level show at least 8 hcp but to raise in the major suit opened needs only 3 cards in that suit. Show a new 4 card suit in preference to raising the major with 3 cards. Do not raise direct to the three level or higher with only 3 cards in the major suit.

### Opener's first rebid

A second suit should always be shown if space allows. The opener may have to rebid the 5-card suit sometimes with a weak hand so should have 2 honours in the suit. Rebids in no-trumps show the same values as in standard systems. A 5 card suit is usually useful in a no-trump contract as well as as a trump suit. You may raise responder's bid with 3 cards rather than rebid the 5 card major

### Responder's second bid.

With a weak hand prefer a 5-2 fit in a major to a possible 4-3 in a second suit especially if by doing so you keep the contract at a lower level

### 5. Responding to a minor suit opening

Bid suits upwards but with a good responding hand bid a major suit before a minor. With 6-9 hcp, and no available suit at the 1 level, bid 1NT

#### Useful Conventions when playing 5 card majors

After partner's opening bid has been overcalled, any bid you would have made if the overcall had not been made, is forcing. If you are prevented from making the bid because of the overcall, then the negative double can be used to indicate possible interest in both unbid suits.

## 1. The negative double

This convention is especially useful over a minor suit opening bid by partner which is overcalled by opponent's major suit, but may be used over any opening bid/overcall sequence. A double by you shows

- (i) 9 plus hcp, with likely interest in two suits other than the opening bid suit
- (ii) It is forcing for 1 round and *alertable*
- (iii) It is for take-out but may be left in for penalties
- (iv) It denies 4 card support for an opening major suit bid.
- (v) It applies even up to an overcall of 2 spades by opponents.

### Responses by partner

- (i) Bid a new suit, or no-trumps with 2 guards in the opponent's suit
- (ii) A new suit may occasionally be 3 cards
- (iii) Rebid the opening suit (shows 6 if a major or a very good 5 card suit headed by 2 honours; 5 or more if a minor)

## 2. The flexible 1 no-trump rebid & the Crowhurst convention

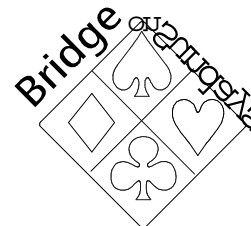
Normally a 1NT rebid shows 15-17 hcp. However you can set the range from 12-16 hcp thereby allowing flat hands with 12 hcp to be opened with a minor suit instead of 1 NT. This is useful when you are vulnerable to avoid being doubled. If partner responds at 1 level then rebid 1 NT. If partner wants to go on (needs 9 plus hcp) then he can bid 2 clubs (Crowhurst enquiry).

After Crowhurst (2 clubs) bid:

- (i) 2 diamonds = minimum hcp, no 3 card support, no unbid major
- (ii) 2 of partner's suit = 3 card support & 12-14 hcp. Bid at 3 level with 15-16
- (iii) 2 of unbid major = 4 card unbid major & 12-14 hcp. Bid 3 with 15-16
- (iv) 2NT = 15-16 hcp, no 3 card support, no 4 card unbid major

*The Crowhurst 2C bid and any of the responses are alertable. The two level responses to Crowhurst are non-forcing, but responses at the three level are forcing.*

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