

Numeric guidelines

Are you good at remembering numbers? There are a few useful rules available to use as guides for decision making, both during bidding and play. These are set out below, not necessarily in order of importance, but in “numeric order”.

- **The rule of 3 and 2 (for pre-emptive opening bids)**

When considering whether to make a pre-emptive bid, especially after partner has passed, it is useful to estimate how many tricks might be made by the hand due to its shape, (assuming other hands have reasonable distribution). Make the bid if you are non-vulnerable, opponents are vulnerable, and you are likely to go only 3 tricks off; or if both sides are vulnerable and you expect to go only 2 tricks off. This is determined by the size of the penalty if doubled, compared to the probable game score capability of the opposition. If you are vulnerable and the opposition not, or if both not vulnerable, beware!

Example 1 (opponents vul, you non-vul)

@104 ` K1098754 ~QJ10 | 8. With only a little help from partner you have a good chance of making six tricks, which if doubled costs you 500.

Example 2 (both vul)

@104 ` K1098754 ~KQJ | 8. With only a little help from partner you should make seven tricks, which if doubled costs you 500. (game worth 600+)

- **The rule of 5 (bidding that heart suit over 1@ opening)**

This is *very simple* – when partner opens 1@, *you should only respond 2`* if you have at least 5 of them, because the 2` response uses up valuable bidding space. So bid a 4-card minor suit instead of a 4 card ` suit. Later if opener rebids 2` you can raise the suit in the usual way. N.B. You may *even occasionally have to bid a 3 card minor suit* when you do not hold 5 cards in hearts and no four card minor suit. *Examples:*

1. @43 ` Q842 ~AQ87 | QJ4. When partner opens 1@, reply either 2~ or 2NT, depending on your values for a 2NT response. If after 2~ partner rebids the spades at the 2 level, then pass or bid 2NT.
2. @43 ` K10842 ~AQ87 | Q4. When partner opens 1@, reply 2`. Partner can now agree hearts with a three card fit, knowing you have five.

- **The rule of 7 (how long should I hold up?)**

Playing in no-trumps, it is very often the case that the opposition first attack your shortest combined suit holding, of which you have an ace as the only stop, and you have to try to judge when to use that ace! As a general rule of thumb, you should hold it up, if possible, for a number of rounds equal to **‘7 minus the number of cards you hold in the suit between you and dummy’**. Should the suit break badly, the

Bridge on Sundays

hold-up play is designed to prevent the leader’s partner from being able to return the suit. This often creates a ‘safety play’ in that a finesse can be taken against the danger hand in the knowledge that if the finesse fails the danger hand cannot be put in. *Example:* 5~ is led and on dummy you see ~J 8 and you as declarer hold ~A32.

Apply the rule of 7. You hold 5 cards between hand and dummy, so hold up 7-5 =2 times. Play the ace on the 3rd round.

The full layout of the ~ suit was: K10975 J8 Q84

By delaying the play of the ace, the leader’s partner will have no ~s to lead back at a later stage of the play. Try it for your self.

Hold-up plays are not confined to aces (or to the first suit led), but include holdings such as Kxx where the ace is played by the opposition on the first round. With 2 stops you may even decide to hold up for 1 round to get a better count on the hand.

- **The rule of 11 (when the 4th highest is led)**

Many, though not all, players use the lead in no-trumps of the 4th highest of their best suit. If it is known that that is the case, (and it is quite proper for you as declarer to enquire of the leader’s partner what lead style is agreed in their partnership), then there is a definite mathematical rule which says that **“If you subtract the value of the led card from 11, then the result is equal to the number of cards above the card led which are held between the other three hands”**. For example, if the 5 is led by your partner, then declarer, dummy and you hold between you six cards above the 5. You can see what you and dummy hold, so this gives an important idea of what the declarer holds. You can use this idea to assist your judgement in which card to play. Declarer can also make judgements about the holdings held by both opponents, as the same rule applies both ways!

Examples:

1. Partner leads ` 7, and you see in dummy 1032, while you hold Q94. Now you know that declarer has only one card above the 7 (11 minus 7 less the three higher cards you can see). You also know declarer has no more than three of the suit. You must play the Q, and if it holds, lead back the 9.
2. Partner leads the ~7, and you see in dummy J95, while you hold A104. Now you know that declarer holds no cards above the 7. If dummy puts up J play the A, then lead back 10. If dummy plays low, play the 10 which will win, then lead back A and then the 4. At all costs, avoid sticking to the ace, which would block your partner’s suit,

- **The Rule of 15 (everyone else has passed)**

This guidance assists you when, after the auction starts with three passes, you have to decide whether to open in a suit at the 1 level, or to pass. For those hands where you clearly have an opening bid, you do not need the rule. As your opponents have not opened, partner must hold at least a scattering of points. For

those hands where you are not certain whether to bid, (usually in the 10-12 hcp range), the rule of 15 is useful. Simply put, you add the number of **hcps** to the number of **spades** held and bid *only* if the combined total reaches 15. The reasoning is that if you bid on a minimal hand, others may also bid on the second round, and if you hold few spades you can be outbid, and would have done better by passing. Opening 1NT on 12-14 hcps is not influenced by the rule, because your opponents need to overcall at the 2 level to win the contract, and having already passed are unlikely to do so.

Examples:

1. @ 76 ` AK987 ~A98 | J73 hcps = 12, @s = 2, total 14: you should pass
2. @ 764 ` AK987 ~A9 | J73 hcps = 12, @s = 3, total 15: you should bid 1`

- **The rule of 19 (can I open on this?)**

This rule of 19 is published by the EBU for agreements by partnerships in EBU regulated tournaments, which usually includes duplicate bridge at affiliated clubs.

The rule states that *an agreement may not be made* to open one of a suit on a hand where: the number of hcps plus the number of cards held in the longest two suits totals less than 19. So, for example:

Hand 1	Hand 2
@ Q8432	@ 6
` 3	` AJ872
~ A43	~ KJ932
K654	86

Hand 1. High card points 9, cards in longest suit =5, cards in next long suit =4
Total 'Rule of 19' value 9+5+4 = 18

Hand 2. High card points 9, cards in longest suit = 5, cards in next long suit = 5
Total 'Rule of 19' value 9+5+5 = 19

So you may have an agreement to open 1` or 1~ on hand 2, but not 1@ or 1| on hand 1. You may very occasionally make a 'psyche' bid on hand 1, but it must be just as unexpected to partner as it is by the opponents!

Others have suggested a **rule of 20** as a better starting point for suit bids at the 1 level. Again this is based on hcps + number of cards in the two longest suits. Bridge on Sundays does not ask that opening bids meet the EBU requirements, but suggest that they at least conform to the rule of 20 as a matter of prudence.

Examples:

1. @AQ43 ` 1074 ~KQ987 | 6. This hand conforms to the rule of 20. Open 1~ and rebid 1@ if partner bids 1`, but 2~ if partner bids 1NT.
2. @AQ43 ` J7 ~KJ9 | 7642 doesn't conform to the rule of 20. Although it does conform to the rule of 19, it is not safe to open as there is no valid rebid and it is too weak for 1NT. So pass unless 4th in hand (rule of 15).

Bridge on Sundays



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