

Responding in no trumps

1. Responding in no trumps

The Acol system of bidding, from its concept, laid down points ranges for opening and responding in no trumps. Responding in no trumps is a key part of the system. Many inexperienced players however, are less familiar with the basic requirements of responding no trumps, and so fail to make the most of these responses.

Combined hand requirements

It is generally reckoned that with no long suit, and having no suit unguarded to make:-

1NT- requires a total points holding of 21-22 pts between the two hands.

2NT- requires a total points holding of 23-24 pts between the two hands.

3NT- requires a total points holding of 25-26 pts between the two hands.

A 'guard' in a suit is such that you can expect to win a trick in the suit if it is led round to you. A, Kx, Qxx, Jxxx represent minimum guards. 1NT is often opened with guards in only 3 suits and sometimes with only 2.

2. The basic requirements

To respond 1NT when partner has opened in a suit.

A bid of 1 NT shows 6-9 pts and *no biddable* suit available at the 1 level. Both these conditions are important, though the points range can be varied to suit partnership agreement. Some players have a higher range say 8-10 iwhen the opening bid is 1 | . As responder you should always bid a 4-card suit if you can in preference to bidding 1NT (with a flat hand whose only suit is clubs, you may opt to bid 1NT instead of 2 |). Responding 1NT often means that the weaker hand plays the contract, which can be a big disadvantage because the HCP cards are visible on the table to be attacked easier than if they are hidden in declarer's hand. If partner opens 1` or 1@, and you have fewer than 8 pts, you may have to respond 1NT even though you have a 5-card | or ~ suit. So a 1NT response sometimes hides a hand with a longish suit but few points. Partner might only hold singleton in opener's suit. Bidding no trumps with a singleton in partner's suit whilst not desirable, can be tolerated.

Bridge on Sundays

Examples: Partner opens 1~ and you hold:

1. | A763 ~862 ` K94 @753-bid 1NT: you need 8pts to go to 2 level

2. | AQ763 ~87 ` 864 @976- bid 1NT not 2 |

3. | A85 ~K542 ` 986 @1042- bid 1NT not 2~ (no ruffing value)

4. | AJ87 ~Q73 ` 5432 @ 109- bid 1` not 1NT

The requirements to respond 2NT when partner has opened in a suit.

A bid of 2NT shows 10-12 pts (11-12 pts is better unless the middle cards are good or there is a long minor to run) and should show no biddable suit at the 1 or 2 levels. Far too many partnerships use a direct response of 2NT to show merely a points range, instead of first bidding a 4-card suit. Do not respond 2NT whenever you hold a 4-card major suit. The direct response of 2NT, showing 10-12 pts, should be avoided, wherever possible, because it means that opener with a weakish distributional hand may have to bid a second suit at the 3 level. Having first bid a suit, and opener has replied in a new suit, you can *then* bid 2NT to show 10-12 pts.

Example: Partner opens 1~ and you hold | AJ93 ~654 ` A109 @Q84 you could respond 2NT but 2 | would be better

Many experienced partnerships use a direct 2NT response to show 16+ pts and a balanced 4-3-3-3 hand (Baron 2NT response). Such players would first bid a major suit if the distribution is different from 4-3-3-3. If you have already *passed* then a direct bid of 2NT shows 10-12pts, since you cannot have 16+pts by your initial pass.

Example: Partner bids 1~ and you hold: | AQ7 ~KQ87 ` A73 @J85 bid 2NT

The requirements to respond 3NT when partner has opened in a suit.

A bid of 3NT indicates no biddable major suit, a flat hand, and 13-15 pts. If your basic system shows a 5 card major, then the 3NT response indicates usually 1 or 2 cards in the bid major suit, and no more than 3 in the other major (an exception is a 4-3-3-3 hand). The direct bid of 3NT should be used with caution in case partner opened with highly distributional hand and fewer than expected points. If your first response is in a suit, then later jump to 3NT, that is to play.

Example: Over a bid of 1~ bid 3NT with | A87 ~KQJ4 ` Q108 @ Q96

What about guards in the other suits?

In responding 1NT, you should have guards in 2 other suits, plus 3 cards in an 'unguarded' suit. Responding 2NT (10-12) you should have guards in the other 3 suits. The Baron 2NT response is strong enough not to worry about 3 guards. A response of 3NT automatically shows guards in the other 3 suits.

3. What to do when partner first responds 1NT

Opener's re-bid depends upon the shape and strength of the hand. With 5-4 type hands you should bid the second suit, unless you hold 16+ pts, or the suit is higher ranked than your first suit. Also with 4-4-4-1 hands you should show a second suit, except when you opened 1 | . A 6 card suit should always be re-bid. Holding hands of 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2 shape, you should think in terms of NTs as the final contract. Do not rebid a 5 card suit with a 5-3-3-2 distribution as partner may hold only 1 card in your suit, especially with only 6 pts. So, if partner replies 1NT to your opening bid, and you are thinking of playing in no-trumps, pass unless you hold at least 16 pts. If you have a stronger hand, of 17+pts, you must use your judgement of your hand strength whether to go to 2NT or 3NT. Always remember that, particularly in NT contracts, 9s and 10s are very important cards for forcing out opponents' court cards. Many players count 10s as ½points when considering NT contracts.

What to do if partner first responds 2NT.

Show a second 5 card suit or re-bid a 6 card suit. Holding a singleton/void bid a second 4 card suit Otherwise raise to 3NT or leave 2NT

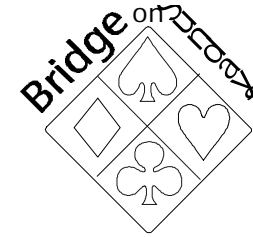
What to do if partner first responds 3NT.

You can re-bid a 6 card major, or show a second suit with 5-5 or 6-5 major suit hands. Otherwise pass unless thinking of a slam. Partner may hold only 1-2 cards in your suit, preferring to bid 3NT instead of showing minor suits.

4. You respond 1NT/2NT and partner shows a new suit.

Your duty is to show preference between the suits bid by opener. Preference is given either by passing the second suit, or by bidding the opener's first suit. If partner 'reverses' then the onus is on him to have the required strength. It is unlikely you would pass a new suit bid at the 3 level.

Bridge on Sundays



Responding in no trumps

Guides to Better Bridge No.17