

Chapter 4

Responding with Weak Hands

RESPONDING TO AN OPENING OF 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠

- **0–5 points:** Pass
- **6–9 points:** Bid only at the 1-level *or* raise opener's suit to the 2-level.

An average hand contains 10 high card points. Hands below 10 points are considered weak, but game is still possible if your partner has a very strong hand. *Therefore, always respond to a suit opening bid with 6 points or more, but normally pass with a hand in the 0–5 point range.*

If responding with a weak hand, keep the bidding at a low level initially, since your partner may have only a minimum opening of 12–13 points. Then the partnership will have only about 20 points, perhaps a little more. With the strength evenly divided between the two sides, it will be tough to make more than 7 or 8 tricks. Consequently, you may raise opener's suit to the 2-level with a weak hand, but otherwise remain at the 1-level.

Do not bid a new suit at the 2-level with 6–9 points, only with 10 high card points or better, or with 11 or more points, including length points.

YOUR CHOICE OF RESPONSE:

RAISE OPENER OR NEW SUIT OR 1NT

Raise opener to the 2-level: 6–9 points + support for opener's suit.

A decent trump holding for your partnership is 8 trumps or more. With fewer than 8 trumps, the opponents will have almost as many, or more, than you, making your task to win very difficult. To ensure the partnership has at least 8 trumps, you should have three trumps (or more) to support a 5-card suit (an opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠ if playing 5-card majors), four trumps (or more) to support a 4-card suit, and five trumps (or more) to support a 1♣ opening if that suit that might be just a 3-carder.

Without support for your partner, count high card points and length points.

With support for your partner, ignore length points and count high card points plus Ruffing Points: 5 for a void, 3 for a singleton, 1 for each doubleton.

With 10 HCP and a 4-3-3-3 pattern with support for opener, a raise to the 2-level is acceptable. With less than 10 HCP but a total of 10 points after adding distribution, a raise to the 2-level is also acceptable.

Bid Your Own Suit (but only at the 1-level): 6 points or more.

The suit you bid must contain at least four cards, but it need not have any high cards in the suit itself. In other words, any 4-card suit is biddable for responder. A significant difference between bidding your own suit at the 1-level and raising opener to the 2-level or responding 1NT is this: While the raise is 6-9 and the 1NT response is 6-9, the new suit response is 6 points *or more*. In other words, a new suit at the 1-level might be based on a strong hand, which you will reveal later in the bidding, but it need not have more than the minimum of 6 points. Because the raise to the 2-level is limited (6-9) and the 1NT response is limited (6-9), opener may pass these responses, but because a new suit response has a very wide range (6 points or more), opener is obliged to rebid after a new suit response.

Where you have a choice of suits as responder, the order of preference is:

- (1) Bid your longest suit first.
- (2) With two 5-card suits or two 6-card suits, bid the higher-ranking.
- (3) With two or three 4-card suits, bid the cheapest suit first.

"Cheapest" means the first available bid over your partner's bid, not necessarily the lowest-ranking suit. If your partner opened 1♥ and you have 4 spades and 4 clubs, 1♠ is a cheaper bid than 2♣. Likewise, if your partner opened 1♦ and you hold 4 spades and 4 hearts, the cheaper suit is hearts and your response should be 1♥. This method of bidding your cheapest 4-card suit is called bidding your suits "up-the-line." Note that the up-the-line rule applies only to 4-card suits, *not to 5-card suits*.

This order of preference in bidding suits is subject to the priority that *you should not bid a new suit at the 2-level unless you have at least 10 high card points (or 11 or more points including length points)*.

Consequently, when you have only 6-9 points, you may occasionally be forced into bidding a suit which is not your normal first preference. Suppose your partner has opened 1♦ and you have 6 points with 4 spades and 5 clubs. You should respond 1♠. Your hand is not strong enough for 2♣.

Respond 1NT: 6–9 points, no support for opener, no suit that you can bid at the 1-level, *any shape*. If unable to raise opener and unable to bid a suit at the 1-level, respond 1NT as your last resort. Because of the importance of the rule requiring 10+ points for a new suit at the 2-level, *the 1NT response need not be balanced*. With 10 HCP and a 4-3-3-3 pattern, prefer a 1NT response to a 2-level change of suit.

RESOLVING A CHOICE OF RESPONSE

What happens when your hand fits two or more responses? Perhaps you are able to support your partner but you also have a suit of your own? Perhaps you could raise opener, bid your own suit, or respond 1NT? The way to solve such conflicts will depend on whether your partner has opened with a major suit or with a minor suit. If you have only 6–9 points, this is the order of priorities when responding:

If your partner opened with a major suit:

- (1) Raise opener's major.

(2) Bid 1♠ over 1♥ if unable to support hearts.
 (3) Respond 1NT.

If your partner opened with a minor suit:

- (1) Change suit at the 1-level. Prefer a major to raising a minor.
- (2) Raise opener's minor. It is better to raise opener's minor than to show the other minor.
- (3) Respond 1NT.

These priorities apply when responding with a weak hand. There may be different priorities when responding with a strong hand.

When changing suit in response to an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦, follow the normal rules when you have a choice of suits: longest suit first; the higher suit with two 5-card suits or two 6-card suits; bid up-the-line with 4-card suits.

EXERCISE

What is your response on these hands if your partner opened:

- (a) 1 Club? (b) 1 Diamond? (c) 1 Heart? (d) 1 Spade?

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. ♠ J 4 3 2
♥ 8 6
♦ A J 7 4 3
♣ 9 5 | 2. ♠ K J 8 3
♥ Q 5 4 2
♦ 7 6
♣ 8 7 3 | 3. ♠ Q J 6 5 2
♥ K 3
♦ 8 7 3
♣ 9 4 2 | 4. ♠ 9 8 4 2
♥ 7 4
♦ A 8 5
♣ A 8 3 2 |
| 5. ♠ A Q 8 3
♥ 8 7 6 2
♦ 7 5
♣ 4 3 2 | 6. ♠ K 9 7 4 3
♥ 6
♦ A 7 6 5 4 2
♣ 4 | 7. ♠ 4 3
♥ A J 7 6
♦ 6 2
♣ Q J 7 5 4 | 8. ♠ 4 3
♥ Q 9 7 5 4
♦ 9 8 6 4
♣ 3 2 |

EXERCISES ON RESPONDING WITH A WEAK HAND

A. Your partner opens 1♣, next player passes. What is your response?

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. ♠ K J 8
♥ A 7 6
♦ 9 6 4
♣ 8 7 3 2 | 2. ♠ K J 8
♥ A 7 6
♦ 9 6 4 3
♣ 8 7 3 | 3. ♠ K J 8
♥ A 7 6 4
♦ 9 6 4
♣ 8 7 3 | 4. ♠ K J 8 2
♥ A 7 6
♦ 9 6 4
♣ 8 7 3 |
| 5. ♠ A 7 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ K 8 6 4
♣ 9 4 3 | 6. ♠ A 7 4 2
♥ K 8 6 4
♦ 7 6
♣ 9 4 3 | 7. ♠ A 7 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K 8 6 4 | 8. ♠ 7 6
♥ K 8 6 4
♦ A 7 4 2
♣ 9 4 3 |
| 9. ♠ A 8 6 3 2
♥ Q J 7 6 5
♦ 9
♣ 7 2 | 10. ♠ A 8 6 3 2
♥ 9
♦ 7 2
♣ Q J 7 6 5 | 11. ♠ K J 7 5
♥ J 8 4 3
♦ Q 9 8 3
♣ 2 | 12. ♠ K J 7 5
♥ J 8 4 3
♦ 2
♣ Q 9 8 3 |
| 13. ♠ A J 7 2
♥ 7 6
♦ 5 4
♣ Q 9 8 6 3 | 14. ♠ 7 6
♥ 5 4
♦ A J 7 2
♣ Q 9 8 6 3 | 15. ♠ Q 6
♥ 5 4 2
♦ A J 7
♣ 9 8 6 3 2 | 16. ♠ Q J 7 2
♥ 6
♦ A 9 7 6 4 3
♣ 5 2 |

B. Your partner opens 1♥, next player passes. What is your response?

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| 1. ♠ K 7 6 4
♥ 8
♦ Q 9 7 2
♣ Q 8 4 3 | 2. ♠ 8 7 5 3
♥ 9 2
♦ J 8 4 3
♣ A K 2 | 3. ♠ K 7 4
♥ 8 6
♦ A J 7 4
♣ 9 5 3 2 | 4. ♠ Q J 9 4
♥ 8
♦ A J 8 6 3
♣ 7 6 2 |
| 5. ♠ A 7
♥ J 7 6 3
♦ 9 8 7 4
♣ 4 3 2 | 6. ♠ A J 7 2
♥ Q 9 8 3
♦ 7 6 4
♣ 4 2 | 7. ♠ A J 7 3 2
♥ Q 8 7 5
♦ 7 5
♣ 4 2 | 8. ♠ Q J 9
♥ 6
♦ Q 9 7 4
♣ K 7 5 3 2 |
| 9. ♠ 9 4 3 2
♥ 8
♦ A K J 3
♣ 9 5 3 2 | 10. ♠ 8 3
♥ 6 2
♦ K 8 4 3 2
♣ Q J 6 4 | 11. ♠ J 2
♥ 8 6
♦ A J 8 6 4 3
♣ Q 9 5 | 12. ♠ 7
♥ K 9 8 2
♦ 7 5 4 3
♣ J 8 5 2 |

SHUT-OUT JUMP-RAISES

The jump-raises to game in the major suits (1♥: 4♥ and 1♠: 4♠) are used on weakish responding hands. They show about 6-9 high card points (could even be less), excellent trump support (more than the minimum needed for a raise), and unbalanced shape (must have a singleton or a void). The message is: "I have excellent support, but am weak in high cards." They are called "shut-out" because their function is to shut the next player out of the bidding. At the same time they serve as a warning to your partner not to expect too much in high cards if your partner has notions about a slam. They are also known as "weak freaks" or "gambling raises," but with the excellent support and unbalanced shape, it is not much of a gamble.

Shut-out raises in minor suits are also available (1♣: 4♣ or 1♣: 5♣ or 1♦: 4♦ or 1♦: 5♦), but these are very rare since they bypass a potential 3NT contract. When used, however, they do show the same sort of hand as the shut-out raise in the major suits, namely, weak in high cards (often 6-9 high card points, but they can be much weaker), 5-card or longer trump support, and an unbalanced hand (it has to contain a void or a singleton).

RESPONDING TO AN OPENING BID OF 1NT

Responding to 1NT with a balanced hand was covered in Chapter 3. Responding to 1NT with a weak, unbalanced hand is different to responding to a suit opening, because the 1NT opening is closely defined, a balanced 15-17, while the suit opening has a wide range, 12–21 points with balanced, semi-balanced, or unbalanced shape. You would pass a suit opening with 0–5 points, but you are allowed, even encouraged, to respond to 1NT with a hopelessly weak hand, provided that you have a long suit:

1NT: 2-in-a-suit = 0–7 points and a 5-card or longer suit. Opener should pass this 2-level response, but with 17 points and 4-card support, opener is permitted to raise responder's suit to the 3-level.

1NT: 2♣ is commonly used as the Stayman Convention which you should certainly adopt after playing for some time (see page 127).

With 8 points or more, responder has a chance for game opposite 1NT and therefore must not make a weak suit response at the 2-level. 2NT is used as a response with exactly 8–9 points (see Chapter 3) and the Stayman Convention (see page 127) can also be used when exploring for game in a major suit with 8 points or more. Other strong responses to 1NT are covered in Chapter 5.

OPENER'S REBIDS AFTER A WEAK RESPONSE

Opener's hand is generally divided into three ranges:

12–15 points:	Minimum opening
16–18 points:	Strong opening
19 points up:	Maximum opening

Strategy: If the partnership may hold 26 points, keep on bidding since game is feasible. If the combined total is 25 points at least and there might be more, bid for a game. If the combined total is 25 points at most and there might be less, do not bid for a game. With 26 points together, game is a good bet; with 25 points together, game is a reasonable bet, and with 24 points or less together, game is a poor bet. This bidding strategy is revealed in the approach taken by opener after a weak response from partner.

Opener's Action after a Raise to the 2-level (e.g., 1♥: 2♥, . . . ?)

Count HCP Plus 5-3-1 Shortages (void 5, singleton 3, doubleton 1).

12–15 points:	Pass. Responder has 6-9, so no 26 points together.
16–18 points:	Bid again. Raise a major to the 3-level; if your suit is a minor, raise to the 3-level or try 2NT.
19 points up:	Bid game. If your suit is a major, raise to the 4-level; if it is a minor, consider 3NT if your hand is balanced or semi-balanced.

After a 1NT Response (e.g., 1♦: 1NT, . . . ?)

(a) If satisfied with no-trumps:

12–15 points:	Pass. Responder has 6-9, so no 26 points together.
16–18 points:	2NT. Opener figures to be semi-balanced.
19 points up:	3NT. The partnership has 25 points at worst.

(b) If not happy with no-trumps:

12–15 points:	Bid a new suit lower than your first bid suit <i>or</i> repeat your first suit with extra length in the suit.
16–18 points:	Bid any new suit <i>or</i> with no second suit, jump to three in the first suit with six or more cards in it.
19 points up:	Jump to the 3-level in a new suit (jump-shift) <i>or</i> jump to game in your suit.

♠ A 9 8 4 3	You opened 1♠. Your rebid after 2♠ or 1NT? Over 2♠ you should pass—the partnership does not have 26 points. Pass also over 1NT. With a 5-3-3-2, the shape is balanced, so no-trumps is attractive.
♥ A 9 7	
♦ K Q	
♣ J 3 2	

♠ 7
♥ A 9 7 3 2
♦ K Q 8 6
♣ Q J 4

You opened 1♥. Your rebid after 2♥ or 1NT? Over 2♥, you should pass—no 26 points—but over 1NT, prefer a 2♦ rebid. Your hand is unbalanced and so a trump contract figures to be a better chance.

♠ A Q 8 6 4
♥ A K 9 3,
♦ A Q
♣ J 7

You opened 1♠. Your rebid after 2♠ or 1NT? You have more than 20 points and therefore enough for game opposite your partner's 6–9 points. Over 2♠, bid 4♠. Over 1NT, force to game with a jump-shift to 3♥.

♠ 9
♥ K Q 8
♦ A K 8 7 4 3
♣ A 9 3

You opened 1♦. Your rebid after 2♦ or 1NT? Game is possible but not certain. In both cases, rebid 3♦ to invite game. Responder will pass if minimum, but will bid again with a maximum (8–9 points).

AFTER A SUIT RESPONSE AT THE 1-LEVEL (E.G., 1♣ : 1♥, ... ?)

(a) **Opener has 12–15 points.** With a minimum opening, opener makes a minimum rebid. You must not make a jump-rebid as opener unless you have a strong hand. In order of preference, opener's possible rebids are:

- **Raise responder's suit.** This requires 4-card support since the suit bid by responder need not have more than four cards in it. The only time opener would not raise responder's suit at once is if the bidding has started 1♣ : 1♦ and opener has a 4-card major as well as support for diamonds. Show your major first rather than support your partner's minor.
- **Bid a new suit at the 1-level.** The new suit must have four cards in it, but any suit quality will do. Prefer to bid a new suit at the 1-level to rebidding 1NT or repeating your first suit.
- **Rebid 1NT if your hand is balanced.**
- **Bid a new suit at the 2-level lower than your first suit.** With a minimum opening, you should not rebid higher than two of your first suit unless you are supporting responder's suit.
- **Rebid your first suit as a last resort.** To rebid your suit after a 1-level response, the suit must have extra length (more than the opening promised).

(b) **Opener has 16–18 points.** In order of preference, opener should:

- **Jump-raise responder's suit to the 3-level.** Opener must have 4-card support for this. The only time opener would not raise responder at once is if the bidding has begun 1♣ : 1♦, and opener has a 4-card major as well as support for diamonds. In that case, show the major first.
- **Bid a new suit at the 1-level or 2-level.**
- **As a last resort, jump to the 3-level in the suit opened, provided that you have at least six cards in that suit.**

(c) **Opener has 19 points or more.** In order of preference, opener should:

- **Jump to game in responder's suit.** This requires 4-card support. The only time opener would not support responder at once is if the bidding has begun 1♣ : 1♦, and opener has a 4-card major as well as support for diamonds. In that case, opener would jump-shift to two of the major rather than support the diamonds yet. Majors come first.
- **Jump to 2NT, provided that your hand is balanced.** Opener's jump to 2NT (e.g., 1♣ : 1♥, 2NT) is forcing to game.
- **Jump-shift (i.e., make a jump-bid in a new suit).** The jump-shift denies a balanced hand, but is forcing to game as it promises 19 points up.
- **As a last resort, if none of the above is available, jump to game in your first suit, provided you have a very powerful 6-card suit (it should contain at least four honors) or a strong 7-card suit.**

♠ Q 8
♥ 4 2
♦ A J 8 7 3
♣ A Q J 6

You opened 1♦. Your rebid after 1♥ or 1♠? In either case you should rebid 2♣, showing your second suit and denying a balanced hand (no NT rebid). Further action will depend on responder's rebid.

♠ A K 3
♥ A Q 4
♦ A 9 8
♣ Q 10 3 2

You opened 1♣. Your rebid after 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠? In each case, rebid with a jump to 2NT showing a balanced 18–20 points and forcing to game. Responder may bid 3NT, suggest a suit contract or aim for slam.

♠ A 7 3 2
♥ 6
♦ A Q J 9 5
♣ K 8 3

You opened 1♦. Your rebid after 1♥ or 1♠? Over 1♥, rebid 1♠ and not 2♦. Show a major rather than rebid a longer minor. Over 1♠, you are worth 17 points (via the singleton) and so you should jump-raise to 3♠.

RESPONDER'S REBID WITH A WEAK RESPONDING HAND

If the opener has made a minimum rebid, confirming a hand in the 12–15 point range, responder is allowed to pass. However, responder is not obliged to pass if opener's rebid is unsuitable, but responder with a weak hand must not make a strong rebid. Responder is entitled to bid again with a weak hand, provided that responder's rebid is:

- **A raise of opener's second suit** (e.g., 1♣ : 1♥, 1♠ : 2♠). This still shows just 6–9 points in the same way that an immediate raise (1♠ : 2♠) shows 6–9 points. Four trumps are needed to raise opener's

second suit.

- **A preference to opener's first suit** (e.g., 1♦:1♥, 1♠:2♦). This also shows just 6–9 points in the same way that an immediate raise of opener's first suit (1♦:2♦) shows 6–9 points.
- **A rebid of 1NT shows 6–9 points in the same way that an initial response of 1NT shows 6–9 points.**
- **As a last resort, you may rebid your own suit, provided that it contains at least six cards or is a very strong 5-card suit.**

If opener's rebid is a jump showing 16–18 points, the responder is permitted to pass with just 6–7 points, but is expected to bid on to game with 8+ points, since the partnership could then have 26 points or better.

If opener's rebid is a change of suit, opener may have up to 18 points (opener's range for a change of suit is 12–18 since 19 points or more are needed for a jump-shift rebid). Accordingly, responder strives to find a rebid with 8 points or better, since the partnership could have 26 points.

If opener's rebid is a jump, showing 18/19 points or more (a jump-shift or a jump to 2NT or a jump to game), responder is forced to bid again if game has not yet been reached, but is permitted to pass, of course, if opener's rebid is already a game (e.g., 1♥:1♠, 4♥).

♠ A J 8 7 6
♥ 7 3 2
♦ K 5 4
♣ 8 6

Your partner opened 1♦, you responded 1♠. Now if your partner rebids 1NT, 2♦ or 2♠, you should pass but if your partner bids 2♣, you should rebid 2♦. Show a preference for one of your partner's suits rather than rebid an ordinary 5-card suit.

♠ A 10 9 7 3 2
♥ Q 4
♦ 2
♣ 8 7 5 3

If your partner opened 1♦ and you responded 1♠, then if your partner rebids 1NT, 2♦ or 2♥, you should rebid 2♠, showing long spades but a minimum response (6–9 points), but if your partner rebids 2NT or 3♠, you should rebid 4♠.