

# Standard American Bidding (5-Card Major System)

---

**Point Count:** Ace = 4 pts. King = 3 pts. Queen = 2 pts. Jack = 1 pt. There are 40 total points in the deck.

**Suit Rank** (lowest to highest): *Minors:* ♣Clubs ♦Diamonds *Majors:* ♥Hearts ♠Spades *Notrump*

**A good trump suit:** A "fit" of 8 or more cards in one suit, combined in your two hands in any way (4-4, 5-3, 6-2, etc.).

**First choice:** A major (hearts or spades) if you have at least an 8-card fit.

**Second choice:** Notrump if you have balanced strength and *no* major-suit fit.

**Third choice:** A minor (clubs or diamonds) if you have at least an 8-card fit and unbalanced strength.

**Contract requirements** -- What you and your partner need in your two hands to make these contracts:

**Suit partscore** (bid of 1, 2 or 3 in any suit) -- 18-24 pts. *and* at least an 8-card trump fit.

**Notrump partscore** (bid of 1NT or 2NT) -- 20-24 pts. *and* preferably *no* 8-card major-suit fit.

**Major-suit game** (4H, 4S) -- 25-26+ pts. *and* at least an 8-card fit. (Game and slam contracts pay a scoring bonus.)

**Minor-suit game** (5C,5D) -- 28-29+ pts. *and* at least an 8-card fit.

**Notrump game** (3NT) -- 25-26+ pts. *and* preferably *no* 8-card major-suit fit.

**Small slam** (any bid of 6) -- 33+ pts.

**Grand slam** (any bid of 7) -- 36+ pts. *and* all four aces.

These contract guidelines apply when you have relatively balanced hands. If you have a strong trump fit, long side suits and/or unusual distribution, you'll need fewer points to make these contracts.

---

**Rules for Opener** (the first player to make a bid other than Pass)

**Your first bid:** Always open the bidding at the 1-level if you have 13-20 pts. You can open a hand of 11-12 pts. if you have a long suit, distributional strength and/or good quick tricks. *The meanings of your opening bids are:*

**1NT** = Exactly 15-17 pts. and balanced distribution (at least 2-3 cards in every suit). The old-style Goren system specifies 16-18 pts. for a 1NT opener, but 15-17 is so widely used now that most learners adopt this range.

**1H or 1S** = 13-21 pts. and at least 5 cards in your suit.

**1C or 1D** = 13-21 pts. and at least 3 cards in your suit. A 1C or 1D opening is often called a "convenient minor" -- it tells partner you have opening count, but your hand doesn't meet the requirements for 1H, 1S or 1NT. Choose your *longer* minor. If you have two 3-card minors, open 1C to keep the bidding low.

**2NT** = Exactly 20-22 pts. and balanced distribution. (If your 1NT is 16-18 pts., your 2NT range should be 21-23 pts.).

**2 of a suit** = A very strong hand (21+ pts.) and a long suit (5+ cards). A modern, more popular alternative is to agree to play [weak two-bids](#) .

**3 of a suit** = A weak hand (5-9 pts.) with a long, strong suit (6+ cards).

If you have two 5-card suits, open the *higher-ranking* suit, then rebid the lower-ranking suit (if you have 5 clubs and 5 diamonds, open 1D and bid clubs at your next turn). This allows partner to choose between your two suits without raising the level of the bidding.

**Your second bid** (after partner responds to your opening bid):

**A new suit (1C-1H-1S)** -- At least 4 cards in the suit, 13+ pts.

**Simple rebid of your first suit (1C-1H-2C)** -- Extra length (usually a 6+ cards) and a minimum opener (13-15 pts.). To show a stronger hand with a long suit, you can jump-rebid your suit -- 1C-1H-3C.

**Single raise of partner's suit (1C-1H-2H)** -- 4 cards in the suit partner responded and a minimum opener (13-15 pts.). To show a stronger hand with a fit for partner, you can jump-raise his suit -- 1C-1H-3H or 4H.

**Notrump (1C-1H-1NT)** -- A balanced minimum opener (13-15 pts.) WITHOUT 4 cards in partner's suit and without a new 4-card suit you could bid at the 1-level. To show a stronger balanced hand, you can open 1NT (with 16-18 or 15-17 pts.). To show a *very strong* balanced hand (19 pts.), open a suit bid and then jump in notrump -- 1C-1H-2NT.

**As Opener, if you have fewer than 16 pts., DON'T go to the 2-level unless you're:**

- 1 - Raising partner's suit (to confirm a trump fit); **or**
- 2 - Rebidding your own extra-long suit; **or**
- 3 - Showing a 2nd suit of *lower* rank than your first suit (1D-1S-2C).

---

**Rules for Responder** (after your partner opens the bidding):

Respond to partner's opening bid if you have **6 pts.** or more.

**If partner opens 1H or 1S** and you have 3-card support, always raise to confirm the 8-card trump fit.

**If partner opens 1C or 1D** and you have a 4+-card major, always respond 1 of your major. If you have two 4-card majors, respond the *cheaper* major to keep the bidding low.

**If you have fewer than 10 pts., DON'T** go to the 2-level unless you're raising partner's suit (to confirm a trump fit) **or** rebidding your own extra-long suit. With some unbalanced hands, you'll have to respond 1NT to keep the bidding low.

### Your first response:

**1 of a new suit (1C-1H)** = At least 4 cards in your suit and at least 6 pts.

**2 of a new minor (non-jump) (1H-2D)** = A 4+-card suit and at least 10-11 pts.

**2 of a new major (non-jump: the auction 1S-2H)** = A **5+-card suit** and at least 10-11 pts.

**Single raise of partner's major (1S-2S)** = At least 3 cards in partner's suit and 6-10 playing pts. To show a stronger hand with support, make a jump-raise -- 1S-3S or 1S-4S.

**Single raise of partner's minor (1D-2D)** = At least 4-5 cards in partner's suit, 6-10 pts. **and** no 4+-card major suit. To show a stronger hand with support, make a jump-raise -- 1D-3D.

**Notrump (1S-1NT)** = A weak hand (6-10 pts.) with no support for partner **and** no suit you can bid at the 1-level. To show a stronger balanced hand, jump in notrump -- 1S-2NT or 1S-3NT.

**Jump in a new suit (1S-3C)** = A very strong hand (18-19+ pts.) and a long, strong suit. This is called a **jump-shift**.

### **As Opener OR Responder, you show your point-count any time you:**

1 - Open or rebid notrump -- 1C-1NT 1C-1S-1NT 1S-2H-2NT

2 - Raise partner's suit (to confirm that you have an 8-card fit) -- 1H-2H 1C-1H-2H 1C-1H-1S-2S

3 - Rebid your own long suit -- 1H-1S-2H 1H-1S-1NT-3S

The **level** you choose for these bids shows whether you have a minimum, invitational or forcing point-count range.

---

### **Rules for Overcaller** (after an opponent opens the bidding)

**1-level suit overcall (1H-1S)** = 10+ pts. with a good 5+-card suit.

**2-level, non-jump suit overcall (1H-2D)** = 12+ pts. with a strong suit

**Jump overcall (1H-3C)** = Weak hand (5-9 pts.) with a long, strong suit (6+ cards).

**1NT (1H-1NT)** = 15-17 pts. (some play 15-18) with balanced distribution and stoppers in the opponent's suit.

**Double (1H-DBL)** = 12+ pts., shortness in the opponent's suit and at least 3-card support for all unbid suits. This is called a **takeout double** because it asks partner to take it out of the auction by bidding his longest suit.

---

*Copyright © 2007 -- Karen Walker*

## **Weak Two-Bids**

---

Weak Two-Bids are popular because they allow you to preempt more often (making it difficult for the opponents to bid when it's their hand) **AND** because they provide a good description of your hand (making it easier for your partner to bid when he has strength). To play Weak Two-

Bids, you and your partner must agree to change the meaning of **all four** opening Two-Bids. The new meanings are:

- **2C** = Artificial and forcing, showing a Strong Two in a suit (or notrump) to be named at your next bid. 2C forces the partnership to at least 3 of a major. To decide whether or not you should open a Strong 2C, you can use the same general guidelines you would follow for old-fashioned [Strong Two-Bids](#).
- **2D, 2H, 2S** = Good 6-card suit, 5-11 pts., *no more than one Ace or King outside your suit*. A Weak Two is a preempt, but tends to be more constructive than a 3-bid.

### Watch the vulnerability!

If you're not vulnerable, you can open a Weak Two with very light hands:

♠K109654 ♥43 ♦753 ♣K5 or ♠432 ♥AQ9875 ♦753 ♣5

A vulnerable Weak Two should promise a stronger suit and more playing strength:

♠KQJ987 ♥4 ♦764 ♣K54 or ♠73 ♥4 ♦AQJ1084 ♣J1085 .

---

### Responses to a Strong 2C Opening

- **2D** = A "waiting" bid that lets the 2C opener describe his hand. You can bid 2D with a negative hand (0-7 pts.) or a better hand that has no clearcut action.
- **2H, 2S, 3C, 3D** = Positive response (7+ pts.) & good 5+-card suit (AK, AQ or KQ).
- **2NT** = 8-10 pts., balanced distribution.

After 2D (the most common response), opener will bid his long suit. You can then bid naturally (raise his suit with support or bid a 5+-card suit of your own).

If you have a "double negative" (0-3 pts. with no fit for partner), respond 2D, then bid the cheapest number of notrump over partner's rebid. You can then stop below game (3H, 3S, 4C or 4D) if partner doesn't have a super-strong hand.

---

### Responses to a Weak-Two Opening (2D, 2H or 2S)

Partner's Weak Two is a preempt -- you're not obligated to respond unless you want to preempt higher in his suit or try for game. The meanings of responses are:

- **New suit** = Strong hand, good 5+-card suit. The Weak Two opener must bid again.
- **2NT** = Good hand (usually with a fit for partner's suit), at least invitational to game. 2NT asks opener to show an outside Ace or King by bidding that suit at the 3-level. If he doesn't have one, he "retreats" to 3 of his suit.
- **Simple raise of opener's suit** = A weak, competitive raise. It shows a fit for partner's suit and a few tricks, but is not invitational to game-partner should always pass.
- **3NT or 4 of a major** = To play. Partner should not bid again.

To assess your chances for game, don't count points. Since you have a picture of partner's hand, you should instead count winners and losers. **For example:**

♠QJ52 ♥J ♦KQ732 ♣AQJ

If partner opens 2H, pass. Even though you have 16 pts., your poor fit gives you little hope of game. You have 4 possible losers in the outside suits and partner could have 2 heart losers. Even if partner has an outside Ace or King, you can't count 10 tricks.

However, if partner had opened 2S, your trump fit makes this hand much more powerful, and you would bid 4S.

♠J854 ♥6 ♦KQ65 ♣KQ73

If partner opens 2S, bid 2NT to ask for an outside Ace or King. If he answers 3C or 3D, bid 4S. Count your tricks: 3 in the minor where partner has the Ace, 1 in the other minor, 5-6 spades (your length fills in his suit) and 1 or more heart ruffs in dummy. If partner instead answers **3H**, you aren't sure of game, so bid only 3S and let partner decide.

---

*Copyright © 1997 -- Karen Walker*