

LESSON 6

Today we will be looking at opening with a suit and responding to an opening major with trump support.

SUIT OPENINGS.

First some basic points.

Whilst bidding we are always looking for a Major suit fit first, then a No Trump contract and lastly a Minor suit fit. This is for 2 reasons firstly you need more tricks to get game in a Minor contract and secondly you will score better in other contracts.

When you open the bidding with a suit you always promise a second bid (unless partner has previously passed). So before opening a suit you should always look at your hand and decide on your next bid whatever partner says.

If you cannot see a re-bid maybe you should be opening NT.

In Acol all 4 card suits are biddable as opener or responder except in one situation. If partner opens 1S you can not respond 2H unless you have 5 of them. When opener opens 1S the high probability is that he will have at least 5 in suit & your bid of 2H should promise an equal number.

When I refer to opener, I mean the first person to open the bidding. If the other partnership then bids they are overcalling when the rules for bidding are very different.

When opening and responding with suits, in Acol we always count HCPs plus length points. Length points are 1 for each card over 4 in any suit.

You need 12 - 19 points to open, 6 points to respond at 1 level & 10 points to respond at the 2 level. Each of these values can contain length points.

So if as opener you have 10 HCPs + 2 five card suits or 1 six card suit you can open as you have 12 points. Long suits are very valuable.

As responder if you NEED to bid at the two level, your minimum requirement is 8HCPs + 2 length points (=10).

From now on if I refer to points, I will mean HCPs + length points.

The shape of your hand is equally important as the number of points you hold.

Showing if you hold 5-5, 6-5, 5-4 distributions is very important.

As opener, ALWAYS bid your longest suit first. If you have A K Q J in one suit & 5 cards to 10 in another suit you must bid the 5 card suit first.

With 2 five card suits bid your highest first then if you can (according to your point count & the intervening bidding) bid your second suit twice.

With 2 six card suits bid the highest first then the lower twice if you have not found a fit.

With one 6 & one 5 card suit open the 6 card suit first then bid the second suit twice if you can.

With a 5-4 distribution bid the longest first then the 4 at the appropriate level according to your points. You have then told partner all you need to & should not bid again unless forced to do so.

For example 1H - 1S - 3D shows 5 hearts & 4 Diamonds with 19 points.

Of course re-bidding to show shape is not necessary if you find a Major suit fit straight away.

We have already dealt with 4-4 holdings when we talked about bidding a suit followed by NT bid.

With a 4-4 holding the hand is always balanced. You should bid the lower ranking of the 2 suits unless one is major & the other minor in which case bid the major. The theory being that you will not miss a Major fit. That is fine if you are not pushed into bidding your minor suit as a rebid and partner thinks you have 5 in the Major & will support with 3. Therefore your re-bid should always be in No Trumps at level according to your points.

Many beginners get confused by 4-4-4-1 openings. It is most unlikely that you will get the chance or need to bid all three. There is a formula that gives the greatest odds of finding a Major suit fit in this situation. I always tell students to learn & use then stop worrying.

Formula - If singleton is red open with the suit below it, if the singleton is black open with the middle of the other 3 suits.

RESPONDING TO OPENER'S MAJOR WITH TRUMP SUPPORT.

We are always looking to have a minimum of 8 cards between 2 hands to designate a trump suit.

If partner opens 1H or 1S we know that he has at least 4 cards in the declared suit. If responder has 4 cards in same suit then he knows that that is going to be the trump suit. Remember we are always looking for a Major suit fit and now we know straight away that we have one.

With a suit fit responder should value hand with HCPs + Shortage points. For Doubleton add 1 point, For Singleton add 3 points and for void add 5 points.

With 4 card support and 6-9 points (worked out as above) then responder bids 2 of the suit e.g. 1S - 2S.

With 4 card support and 10-12 points (worked out as above) then responder bids 3 of the suit e.g. 1S - 3S.

These are limit bids and you must be precise to help partner know if there is enough for game.

If partner opens a Major & by subsequent bidding shows he holds 5 then you can support with 3 in your hand using same values as above.

If you have 13+ points you can either bid another suit at lowest level and wait for partner to show their strength, or with the right holding make a splinter bid.

We will talk in more depth about these two options in a later lesson.