A Beginners Guide to Contract Bridge

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1 Introduction

Contract bridge is a four-handed trick-taking card game played with a standard 52-card deck between two cooperative *partnerships*, each consisting of two players who sit opposite one and other. The goal of the game is simple: win as many tricks for your side as possible in each hand. There are various ways of keeping score depending on how many players are competing but techniques and strategies involved in the play of the hand are largely independent of the scoring method.

1.1 Beginning a New Hand

The dealer deals out the entires deck, one card at a time, beginning with his left-hand opponent (LHO), then his partner, then hi right-hand opponent (RHO), and finally himself. Players arrange their cards as they see fit (we recommend the player sort his hand by suits (club, diamonds, hearts, then spades left to right) and then by rank (deuce (low) through ace (high)) and wait for the dealer to make the first *call*. An example deal is show in Figure 1. Note that the four players are labeled according to the cardinal directions of the compass.

S, N–S	♠QJ6 ♡Q52 ♢J10432 ♣J5	Board 1
♠K9853 ♡J8 ♢65 ♣6432	N W E S	♠42 ♡K1094 ♢A98 ♣Q1097
	♠A107 ♡A763 ♢KQ7 ♣AK8	

Figure 1: An Example Deal

1.2 Bidding

After the hand is dealt, the partnerships compete with one and other to *declare* the contract. This is done via an auction (typically referred to as "the bidding") which begins with the dealer and proceeds to his left. In this section we assume south is the dealer. In Figure 1, the dealer is indicted in the top left-hand corner: the "S" in "S, N–S". When the dealer is ready, he may make any *legal* call. A call is any of the following: pass, bid of one club, bid of one diamond, bid of one heart, bid of one spade, bid of one no trump, bid of two clubs, ..., bid of seven no trump, double, redouble. Whether or not the bid is legal is determined by the previous bids that have or have not been made. The bidding ends after three *consecutive* passes, or, one side bids seven no trump. The contact is thus set and is the last non-pass call made.

1.2.1 Legal Calls

Before we discuss what conditions must be satisfied for a call to be legal, we must discuss the ranking of the suits. Each suit is given a rank which is determined by alphabetical order, thus, clubs is the lowest ranking suit, next is diamonds, third is hearts, and the highest ranking suit is spades.

$$\clubsuit < \diamondsuit < \heartsuit < \spadesuit$$

In the prior section, we mentioned that one possible call was "no trump". This call indicates the hand will be played without a trump suit. For the sake of bidding, no trump (NT) is the *highest* ranking suit: even higher than spades.

$$\clubsuit < \diamondsuit < \heartsuit < \spadesuit < \text{NT}$$

If the call belongs to the following subset of calls, we call it a *bid*: bid of one club, bid of one diamond, bid of one heart, bid of one spade, bid of one no trump, bid of two clubs, ..., bid of seven no trump. For a bid to be legal, it must be at a *higher* level than *all* previous bids. Since the declarer is the first to make a call, he may choose from any of the calls that make up the bids. Suppose, for example, South, the dealer, bids 1$\diamondsuit$. It now becomes West's turn to make a call. If West wishes to make a bid in clubs, he must bid 2$\clubsuit$ because the diamond suit outranks the club suit. On the other hand, if West wishes to bid a heart or spade suit, he may do so at the "one-level" via 1$\heartsuit$ or 1$\spadesuit$, respectively. As another example, if South had opened the bidding with

1 NT, then the *lowest legal bid* any player could make after South would be 2♣. This covers all bids: a bid is legal if and only if all bids prior to it are of a lower rank.[1]

After removing the bids from the set of calls, there are only three calls left: pass, double, and redouble. A call of pass is what it sounds like, you pass your opportunity to compete in *that round* of the auction. It *does not imply* you must pass for the rest of the auction: just that one turn. A pass is *always* a legal call.

A call of double is a "defensive" bid. Suppose your LHO has bid 4♡ and you hold the AKQ of hearts. You may not believe your opponents will be able to make their contract. A call of double means that if your opponents do not make their contract, the penalty for failing to make is doubled. Alternatively, if your opponents do make their contract, their score is doubled for doing so. A double (indicated by X, e.g. 1♣– 4♡–X) is legal if and only if the last bid (note we use the term bid and not call) was made by one of your opponents. In other words, you are not permitted to double your own bid or your partner's bid: you must only double your opponents. Suppose, for example, South, your partner, passes and West bids 1♣. Now, as North, you can legally double. Further, if South, your partner, opens with 2 NT and West overcalls with 3♡ you, as North, may legally double. However, if the bidding had gone 1♣ from South (still your partner) and pass from West, you *may not* double, since the last *bid* was made by your partner. Finally, suppose you are South, and as dealer you pass, West bids 3 NT, North passes, and East passes. You would be allowed to double because the last bid was made by an opponent.

A call of redouble is an aggressive bid for sure. Just as it sounds, it redoubles the penalty (or reward) for failing to make (or making) the contract. A redouble is a legal call if and only if there is "a double on the table", that is, one of your opponents has doubled your contract, *and* the only calls made between you and the double are *passes*, *and* it was one of your opponents who made the double. In other words, after your opponent doubles, no bids can be made after the double if you are going to redouble. Consider some examples. South bids 1 NT and West doubles. You may, as North, redouble.

[1]Note that this implies repeating a bid is forbidden.

Suppose South passes and West passes as well. As North, you open 1 NT which East doubles. South passes and West passes too. As North, you may redouble. On the otherhand, if South passes and West passes as well. As North, you open 1 NT which East doubles. South bid 2♣ and West passes again. As North, you may not redouble because partner has "removed" the double with his 2♣ bid. A redouble is indicated by "XX" as in "1♣– 4♡–X–XX".

1.2.2 Meaning of Bids

We have discussed the order in which the auction proceeds and we have discussed how to make a legal call, but we not made mention of what any of these bids actually mean. First note that since the entire deck is split evenly between four players, there are thirteen total tricks. If the bidding were to start with "I can win one trick with spades as trumps" the bidding would take so long that the partnerships would essentially be able to reveal the contents of their entire hand to one and other and thus always arrive at the perfect contract with little skill involved. Thus, the bidding begins at one trick above *book*. Book refers to the first six tricks. Thus, a bid of one clubs means "I can make one trick *above book* with clubs as trumps". In other words: "I can win seven tricks total with clubs as trumps." A bid of one no trump means "I can win seven tricks total (one above book) with no trump suit." A bid at the two level means two tricks above book or eight total tricks and so on and so forth all the way up to seven which means seven tricks above books, or thirteen total tricks, or *all* of the tricks!

1.2.3 An Example Auction

We return to the hand shown earlier and lay down a logical line of bidding which is shown in Figure 2. South opens with two no trump, West passes, and North offers a 3 NT bid, but East takes exception and doubles for penalty. South passes as does West. Confident, North redoubles and the the contract passes out. Thus, the contract is 3 NT XX (said three no trump redoubled) which the North–South partnership will try to make. The East–West duo will defend 3 NT XX. To make their contract, North–South must make nine tricks. To *set* the contract, East–West will have to win five tricks (limiting their opponents to eight).

S, N–S	♠QJ6 ♡Q52 ♢J10432 ♣J5	Board 1
♠K9853 ♡J8 ♢65 ♣6432	N W E S	♠42 ♡K1094 ♢A98 ♣Q1097
	♠A107 ♡A763 ♢KQ7 ♣AK8	

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			2 NT
Pass	3 NT	X	Pass
Pass	XX	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Figure 2: An Example of an Auction

1.3 Play of the Hand

Unlike other trick taking partnership games, only one partner plays for the side that won the auction. This player is called *declarer*. However, both of his opponents defend. Appropriately, they are known as the *defenders*. Who will play for the side that won the auction is not a matter of choice, but rather, is dictated by the bidding. Whichever partner bid the trump suit (or no trump) *first* in the auction is the declarer. Thus, in the example of 2, even though North made it 3 NT, it was South who first bid no trumps, and thus, it is he who will play the contract. Once everyone is clear on whom the declarer is, the declarer's LHO makes the opening lead *face down*, that is, he selects the card from his hand he wishes to play and puts it face down on the table. He asks aloud, "questions?" at which time anyone may ask what one of his opponents bid meant. For example, going back to 2, when West asks "any questions?", east may ask, "What did North's 3 NT bid mean?" Now,

North's *partner* must answer the inquiry. Similarly, South may ask, "How strong was East's double?" A question West must answer. Once all questions are sorted and all sides are satisfied, LHO reveals his opening lead by turning it right side up. At his time, North turns his entire hand face-up on the table so that it is visible to all players. He arranges his cards in four columns, sorted by suit, with the trump suit (if there is one) on the his partner's left (his right).

Play proceeds clockwise around the table with *South* selecting the card to play from the exposed hand of North. As South is not involved in the hand, his hand is referred to as the "dummy hand" or "dummy" for short. Note that each player *must* follow suit if he can. Thus, if a spade is led, each player must play a spade unless he has no more spades. If a player is out of the lead suit, he may play any card from his hand. Once all four players have played a card, the highest card *of the suit led* wins the trick *unless* a trump was played because one player (or more) was out of the led suit. In this case, the highest trump card wins the trick. As a note, bear in mind that while diamond out rank clubs in the bidding, this is not true for the play of the hand. Suppose, with spades as trumps, West leads the nine of clubs, South plays the queen of clubs, out of clubs, east plays the deuce of diamonds, and North completes with the four of clubs. It is South who wins the trick, not East. If instead of the deuce of diamonds, East produced the deuce of the trump suit, spades, then East would have won the trick. The next lead is made from the hand that one the previous trick. So, if South won the trick, he must lead. If South is declarer and the winner of the previous trick, he must not lead from dummy (North) even though he playing North's cards. Declarer must play from the hand that one the trick: be it dummy's or his own.

1.4 Scoring

As we said earlier, the method of scoring varies depending on what style of game is being played. The two most popular methods for scoring are Rubber Bridge and Duplicate Bridge. In Rubber Bridge, one partnership keeps directly against another. In Duplicate Bridge, there are multiple sets of partnerships competing. Everyone plays the same hand and the scores are determined by how well one partnership did relative to other partnerships *playing the same cards*. The subtleties of scoring are not worth getting into

at this stage. Suffice it to say, the goal is to make your contract and, if you can, make extra tricks. That said, there is a difference in scoring between making 2 NT with one extra trick (written 2 NT + 1 and said "two no trump up one" or "two no trump with an overtrick") and three no trump making with no over tricks (written 3 NT ✓ and said "three no trump making"). However, there is a much larger difference between 2 NT making and 3 NT being set by one trick (written 3 NT – 1 said "three no trump off one[2]. " or "three no trump set by one"), but this should come as no real surprise. As with most things, there must be a balance between "going for it" and "playing it safe". One determining factor when deciding whether or not to go for it is the score which dictates *vulnerability*. We discuss this later.

Independent of the scoring system, there are bonuses associated with making a certain amount of tricks. There are three levels of bonus: game bonus, small slam bonus, and grand slam bonus. The actual value of the bonus depends on the vulnerability, whether or not the contract was doubled or redoubled, and the scoring system. The contracts for which bonuses apply, however, are independent of the scoring system and are summarized in Table **??**. Since a bonus is given to hearts and spaces at the four-level but not until clubs and diamonds at the five level, we call hearts and spades *major suits* and we call clubs and diamonds *minor suits*. Note that making any doubled or redoubled contract results in a bonus, independent of what level the contract is at and in addition to any of the bonuses listed in Table **??**.

If a contract is bid that does not qualify any of the bonues in Figure 3 we call that contract a *part-score*. For sake of showing the relative risk/reward for the various bonuses versus getting set, we show the bonus values and undertrick penalties for Duplicate Bridge in Table 1 and 2, respectively. It is worth noting that doubling a contract that makes is far from a grievous error, but if the opponents pile up overtricks, the mistake can be enormous.

Determining vulnerability depends on the method of scoring. In Rubber Bridge, once one partnership has won a game, that is, scored one-hundred points, that side is considered vulnerable. In duplicate bridge, the vulnerability is printed on a card which is put face up on the table before the hand is dealt. It rotates such that for board one, no one is vulnerable, for board two, North–South are vulnerable, for board three, East–West are vulnerable,

[2]The tricks by which the contract is set are called undertricks

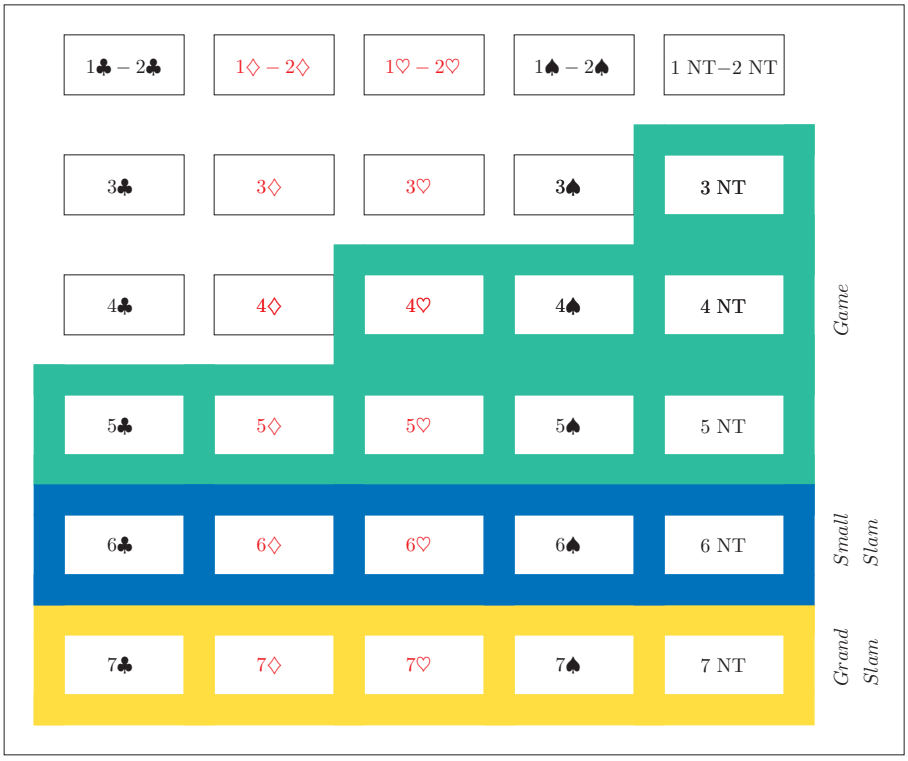

Figure 3: Contracts and their Bonuses

Bonus	Vulnerable	Not Vulnerable
Game	500	300
Small Slam	750	500
Grand Slam	1500	1000
Making a Doubled Contract	50 + 200 / OT	50 + 100 / OT
Making a Redoubled Contract	100 + 400 / OT	100 + 400 / OT

Table 1: Scoring Bonuses for Duplicate Bridge (OT stands for overtrick)

Undertrick	Undoubled		Doubled		Redoubled	
First UT	100	50	200	100	400	200
Second and Third UT	100	50	300	200	600	400
Forth and All Additional UT	0	0	0	100	0	200

Table 2: Undertrick Penalties in Duplicate Bridge (UT stands for undertrick)

and on board four, all are vulnerable. In Figure 1 and 2 the vulnerability shown in the top right-hand corner. In both cases, N–S is vulnerability as indicated by the "N–S" in "S, N–S". When not vulnerable / vulnerable, you say "With favorable vulnerability / disfavored vulnerability...". Often we say, "At game all..." which indicates both sides are vulnerable. For example "With favorable vulnerability North opens 1♣ on an eleven count." or "At game all South has doubled E–W into game! " or "At love all, North is feeling feisty and finds an ill-advised cue bid." which means neither side is vulnerable (never mind about the cue bid for now!).

2 Hand Valuation

In the previous section we learned when we can, legally, make which calls. Now we must tackle a more difficult subject: which call best suits your hand? Some hands play them selves, such as a hand with four aces, four kings, four queens, and a jack: big seven no trump. On the other end of the spectrum are hands such as four deuces, four threes, four fours, and a five: do not enter the auction unless partner forces you to do so (how he might do this we will get to later). But what is one to do with a hand with two kings, two queens, a jack, two tens, and and five small cards distributed more or less evenly between the suits?

In 1915 Milton Work asked himself a similar question and he devised a method of hand valuation that is still used today. While it is true some changes have been made (e.g. by Root in 1998), the basic ideas are unchanged and we recommend his high card point system along with Root's distribution point system as a primary method of hand valuation. Note that other methods exist and that this system is by no means cast in stone. That is, all hands of the same point ranking are not equally strong. Finally, which

the system is called a "point" system, these points have no bearing on the score whatsoever. They are simply an evaluation tool.

2.1 High Card Points

The High Card Point system (HCP) assigns a point value to each of the *honor* cards. The rank of the hand is simply the sum of these points. The values are thus:

$$\text{A} = 4 \text{ HCPs} \qquad \text{K} = 3 \text{ HCPs} \qquad \text{Q} = 2 \text{ HCPs} \qquad \text{J} = 1 \text{ HCP}$$

All other cards are worth zero HCPs. Consider the four hands shown in Figure 4. South has twenty (20) HCPs (three aces plus two kings plus one queen $= 4 \times 3 + 3 \times 2 + 2 \times 1 = 20$), West has four (4) HCPs, North has seven (7) HCPs, and East has nine (9) HCPs. Since most of your bids will

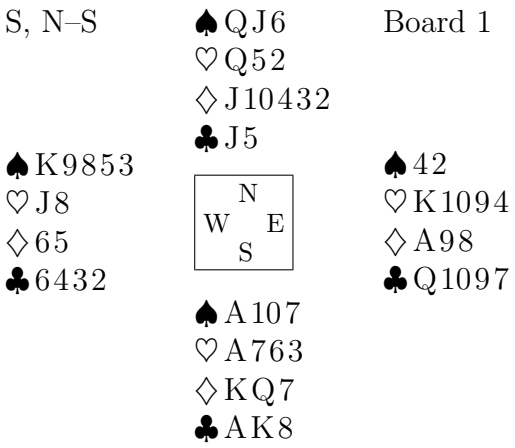

Figure 4: Counting High Card Points

be based on how many points your hand is worth, it is certainly worth your while to double count the HCPs in your hand.

2.2 Distribution Points

Root's addition to Work's high card point system was distribution points. Distribution points (DPs) depend on whether or not you are the first person

to bid in your partnership. Suppose you are opening the bidding, and thus, are first to bid for your side, distribution points are awarded according to:

Void = 3 DPs Singleton = 2 DPs Doubleton = 1 DP

A hand is said to have a void if it has zero cards in a suit (North's club suit in Figure 5). A hand is said to have a singleton if it contains only one card in a suit (West's diamond suit in Figure 5). A hand is said to have a doubleton is it contains two exactly two cards in a suit (East's diamond suit in Figure 5). Consider the example if Figure 5. South has two (2) DPs (no voids

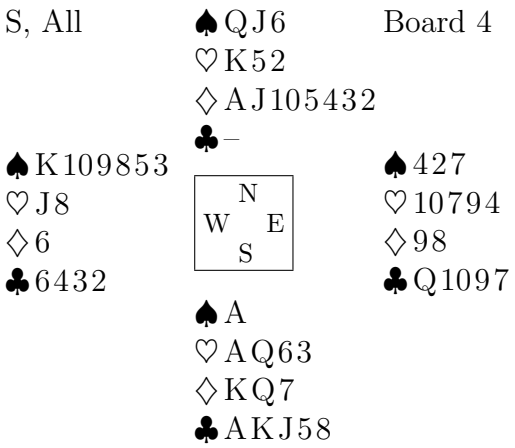

Figure 5: Counting Distribution Points

plus one singleton plus no doubletons = $3 \times 0 + 2 \times 1 + 1 \times 0 = 2$), West has three (3) DPs, North has three (3) DPs, and Eas has one (1) DP. Notice that if you chage a small heart to a small diamond in East's hand, then East has zero (0) DPs.

As we said, DPs depend on whether or not partner has bid. Suppose West opens the bidding with 1♠ with the hand in Figure 6 and North passes. When it comes to East, he likes the spade bid and wants to *support* partner. When a partnership has found a common suit, the second partner to bid, or the suporting partner, in this case, East, changes the value of the distribution points according to:

Void = 5 DPs Singleton = 3 DPs Doubleton = 1 DP

Thus, East has seven (7) DPs in Figure 6. Suppose, South had opened the bidding with 1♢ and West had passed. Then North, with support for his partner's diamond suit, would have four (4) DPs (a doubleton plus a singleton).

Finally, long suits can often be advantageous. For long suits[3], DPs go as:

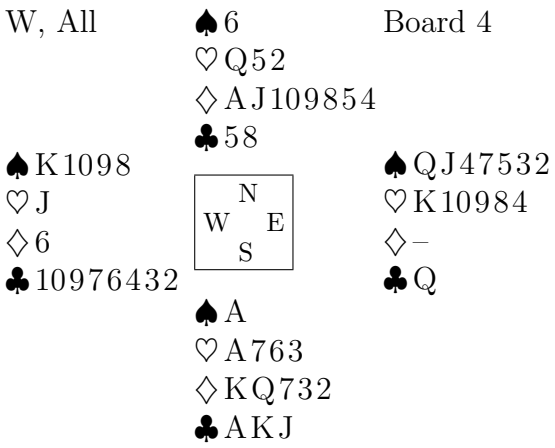

Figure 6: Counting Distribution Points with a Fit

6 Card Suit = 2 DPs 7 Card Suit = 3 DPs 8 Card Suit = ...

Now a word of caution. It is, generally speaking, a bad idea to use both "short-handed" and "long-handed" distribution points since it often leads to over-counting. That is, a hand with a void is, statistically speaking, likely to find itself with a 6+ card suit. When to use which system will be come clear later when we discuss opening bids and responses. For now, we are just concentrating on the method counting points.

Yet another word of caution on double-counting before we continue. The reason we assign points for voids, singletons, and doubletons is because during the play of the hand, these cards are used quickly and when the suit is played again, the hand has an opportunity to play a trump card. That is, the short

[3]Some systems award one DP for a five-card suit. While this may work well for some systems, we do not recommend award DPs for five-card suits. This is a good example of the flexibility of the methodology of hand valuation.

Kx Qxx K Qx Jx Jxx

Figure 7: Holdings that Should not be Double-Counted

suit gives the hand the ability to win tricks. Similarly, HCPs are assigned because aces almost always win tricks, Kings as well, etc. So, the point system assigns points to cards based on their liklihood to win tricks. Consider West's heat suit in Figure 6. If West were to give himself one DP for the doubleton and one HCP for the jack he would be double counting. In all liklihood, the Jack will have to be played on the King (second round of hearts) and is thus, not a winner. To see this more clearly, suppose, with diamonds as trumps, South leads the ♡A. Next, South plays a small heart. West has to follow suit and plays the ♡J and it is covered by dummy's ♡K. Thus, the ♡J was not a winner. However, if South play a small heart from dummy to his ♡Q, then west will be able to play his trump card, the ♢6, and win the trick. Hense, we see the doubleton aloud West to win a trick. Thus, when West counts his points, he should give himself one DP for his doubleton heart suit, but should not count the ♡J toward his HCPs.

Now consider South's ♠A in Figure 6. This card is supper strong because not only will it win the first spade trick, it will allow South to play trump on all subsequent spade tricks! As such, South should count both 4 HCPs and 2 DPs for the ♠A. Figure 7 shows some example holdings where double-counting will result in over-rating the hand. The first two holding in Figure 7 are touch and go. Kx and Qxx may or may not be protected from the ace and and ace and king respectively. It largely depends on the distribution of the over-cards. On the other hand, a bare king is always venerable to being covered by the ace (unless, of course, you learn during the auction that partner holds it).

2.2.1 Long Suits and Short Suits

Earlier we said it is not wise to count DPs for *both* short and long suits. But, when is one method preferred to the other? The answer depends on the final contract. When your partnership is aimed at a no trump contract, count

long-suits. As a matter of fact, when bidding no trumps, *never* count DP derived from short suits. Short suits in no trump contracts are a hinderance; not an advantage. When the partnership is en-route to a suit contract, use short-suits. We have already seen how singletons and whatnot can help in suited contracts, but how do long suits help at no trumps? Consider the deal in Figure 8. Suppose N–S are playing a no trump contract with South as declarer. With West on lead, the ♣6 is produced, followed by the ♣8, East's ♣Q singleton, and won, by South, with the ♣A. South then plays the ♢K followed by ♢6, ♢5, and ♢4. South then leads the ♢2. West shows out and plays and ♣2, North rises with the ♢A. Now, East is forced to play the ♢Q *under* North's ♢A. Thus, the ♢109 8 5 are all winners. That is, the lowly ♢5 is a winner! Thus, the reason long suits are awarded DPs in no trumps, is because it can turn unlikely winners (e.g. deuces, threes, fours, etc.) in definite winners. If this were a suited contract, then West would have played trump at the second round of diamonds which is why short-suits are counted for suited contracts.

Notice, however, that West's long club suit is not all that valuable. By the time his ♣6 4 3 2 becomes winners, he will have already lost the ♣A, K, and J. Thus, long suits are good in no trumps, but they need to have some support at the top.

Also, notice who East's long heart suit will prevent N–S from winning too

N, None	♠76 ♡Q52 ♢AJ10985 ♣58	Board 1
♠K1098 ♡J ♢6 ♣10976432	N W E S	♠J4532 ♡K10984 ♢Q4 ♣Q
	♠AQ ♡A763 ♢K732 ♣AKJ	

Figure 8: Long Suits Produce Tricks in No Trumps

many heart tricks. If the suit were split more evenly between East and West, N–S would have more tricks. Thus, long suits are also useful for defending no trumps. This is an example of a five-card suit that, after the fact, would likely have been worth a DP, but *a priori*, whose to know?

When your side is bidding and it is not clear whether or not you will end up in a suited contract or in no trumps, count your DPs but do not let them sway your bidding too much. Only adjust your point count after you know where your side is headed.

3 Opening the Bidding

In this section, we combine what we have learned from the previous sections and begin our discussion of bidding. There are many different bidding conventions and bidding systems used among the bridge community. We introduce a system based on Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC), a bidding system introduced by Charles Goren sometime in the 1940's. We choose the system for its simplicity and (we hope) straight forward manner of bidding. Other systems, arguably more sophisticated systems, are discussed in later sections.

For the rest of this section, unless otherwsie stated, it is assumed that you are either the dealer (and hence first to act) or that all players in-front of you have passed, that is, you are *opening the bidding*.

3.1 Opening Requirements

To open the bidding, you must hold a better than average hand. Given that there are forty (4) HCPs in the deck, an average hand contains ten (10) HCPs. Just how much better than average should your hand be? The answer is a King better than average. Thus, with thirteen (13) HCP you may open the bidding. If, however the hand does not look promising, you may also pass with 13 HCP. On the other hand, with 14 HCP, you are obligated (to your partner) to make an opening bid.

Note that while we used high card points in our above discussion, you should certainly include any distribution points to you total point count. Thus, we

should properly have said, with 14 points, you are obligated to open the bidding.

3.2 Order of Preference

Consider South's hand shown in Figure 9. He has a balanced hand with a strong club suit. Suppose East passes and it it now South's bid: what does he bid?First, South should determine whether or not he can bid. With seventeen HCP South is obligated to open the bidding and therefore will not pass. With such a strong club suit, he may be inclined to bid 1♣. On the other hand, with a fairly balanced hand, South may also consider opening one no trump. So which bid is best? A look back at Table **??** will guide us to the answer. Suppose the bidding were to wind up at the three-level. The most profitable contract at this level in 3 NT since it is the only one with a bonus. At the four-level, a bonus is given to heart and space contracts (as well as no trump). Not until the five-level are club and diamond contracts awarded bonuses. Therefor, ideally, we would like to open no trump if we can. If our hand is not fit for such an opening, we should try to open with a major suit (hearts or spades). Only as a last option should we open a minor suit. Thus we have our answer, South should open the bidding with one no trump.

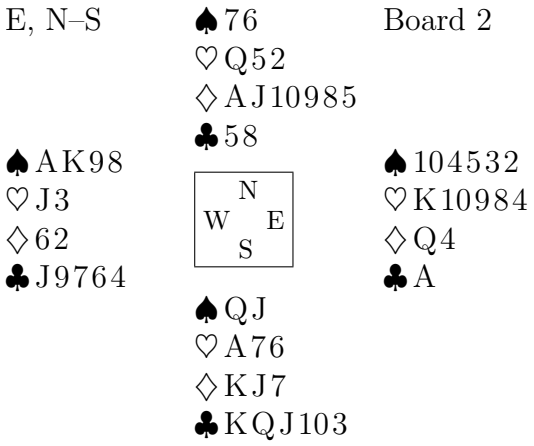

Figure 9: A Balanced Hand with a Strong Club Suit

Figure 10 is a flow chart of how to open the bidding. It starts with counting

your points and works its way through all other openings until it finds its way to 1♣, the opening bid that must be made after all other bids can be ruled out. We now discuss each bid in the flow chart, in decreasing order of preference but leaving the 2♣ bid until last, and the criteria for making such an opening. First, however, remember that bidding is a way of communicating with partner and so by putting various constraints on bids, you and your partner can learn more and more about one and others hands. While this may lead you to open the bidding with your second favorite suit, it will, in the end, guide you and partner to the correct contract.

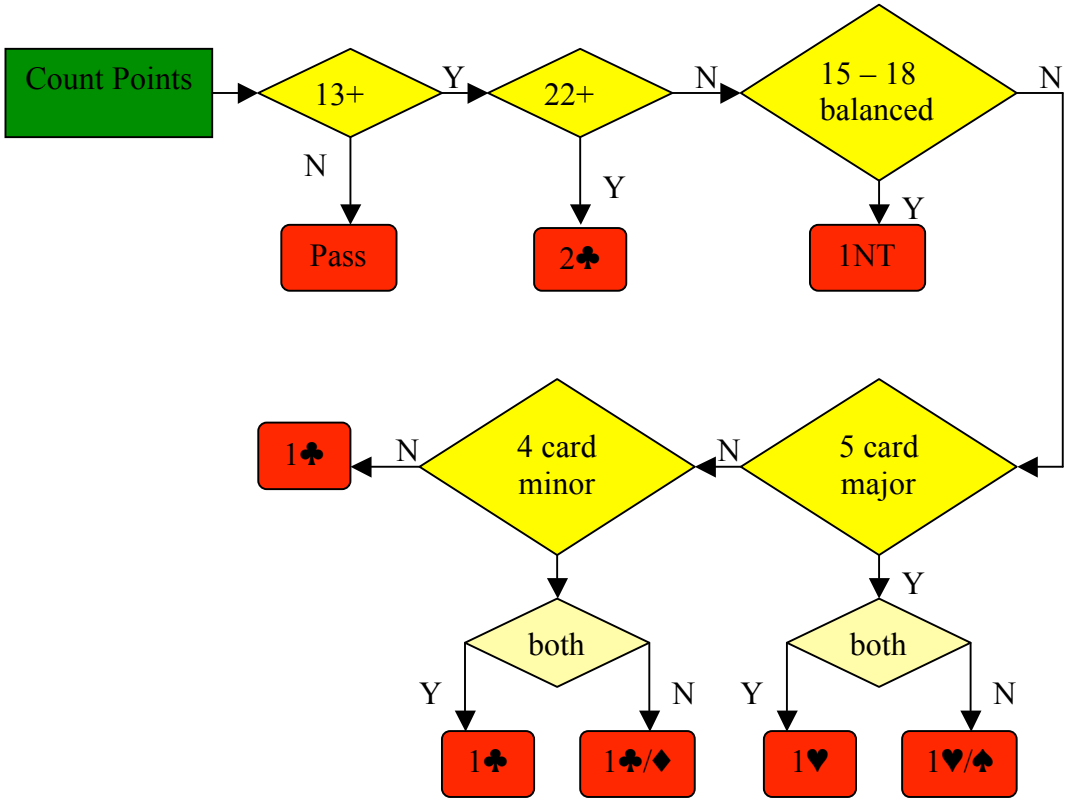

Figure 10: Opening Bids: Order of Preference

3.2.1 Opening 1 NT

The one no trump opening is the most specific opening in contract bridge nearly independent of the bidding system. Certainly this is true in SAYC. Playing in no trumps tends to be a little more difficult than in suited contracts, so to open 1 NT the hand must contain no fewer than 15 HCPs. Notice ewe use high card points. Distribution points should not be counted when making a no trump opening. Further, to open 1 NT the hand must contain no more than 18 points. Finally, the hand must be balanced. In this case, balanced has a very precise definition, it means 3-3-3-4, 2-3-4-4, or 2-3-3-5 shape (N.B. 3-3-3-4 means three cards in each of three of the four suits and four cards in the remaining suit). In practice, it is easiest to remember that the hand must have no voids, no singletons, and *at most* one doubleton. If the suit meets those three requirements, then it is of the proper "shape".

- 15 – 18 HCP
- No voids
- No singletons
- One doubleton at most

3.2.2 Suited Openings

With suited openings, always open your longest and strongest suit. Thus, always bid a seven card suit before a six card suit, and always bid a six card suit before a five card suit, etc.

3.2.3 Opening 1 ♡/♠

In SAYC, to open a major suit you must hold no fewer than five cards in that suit. As such, we say SAYC is a system that uses *five card majors*. Thus, the requirements for opening a major suit are at least 13 total points with at least 4 of those points (even better if 5) in the suit you intend to bid. With a 6-card suit, the suit only needs 3–4 HCPs, with a 7-card suit, only 2–3 points, and any 8+ card suit may be opened independent of the number

of points it contains (though we would caution against opening a suit with deuce through nine). If your hand hold an equal amount of hearts and spades (e.g. 5–5) and they are both biddable (i.e. have at least 4-5 HCP), you open the lower suit, that is, hearts.

3.2.4 Opening 1 ♢

To open 1♢, your hand must contain at least thirteen points, four diamonds, and five points (maybe four) in the diamond suit. If you have an equal amount of diamonds and clubs and they are both biddable, open diamonds.

3.2.5 Opening 1♣

If your hand has thirteen or more points and does not meet any of the criteria above, then open 1♣. FINISH THIS SECTION

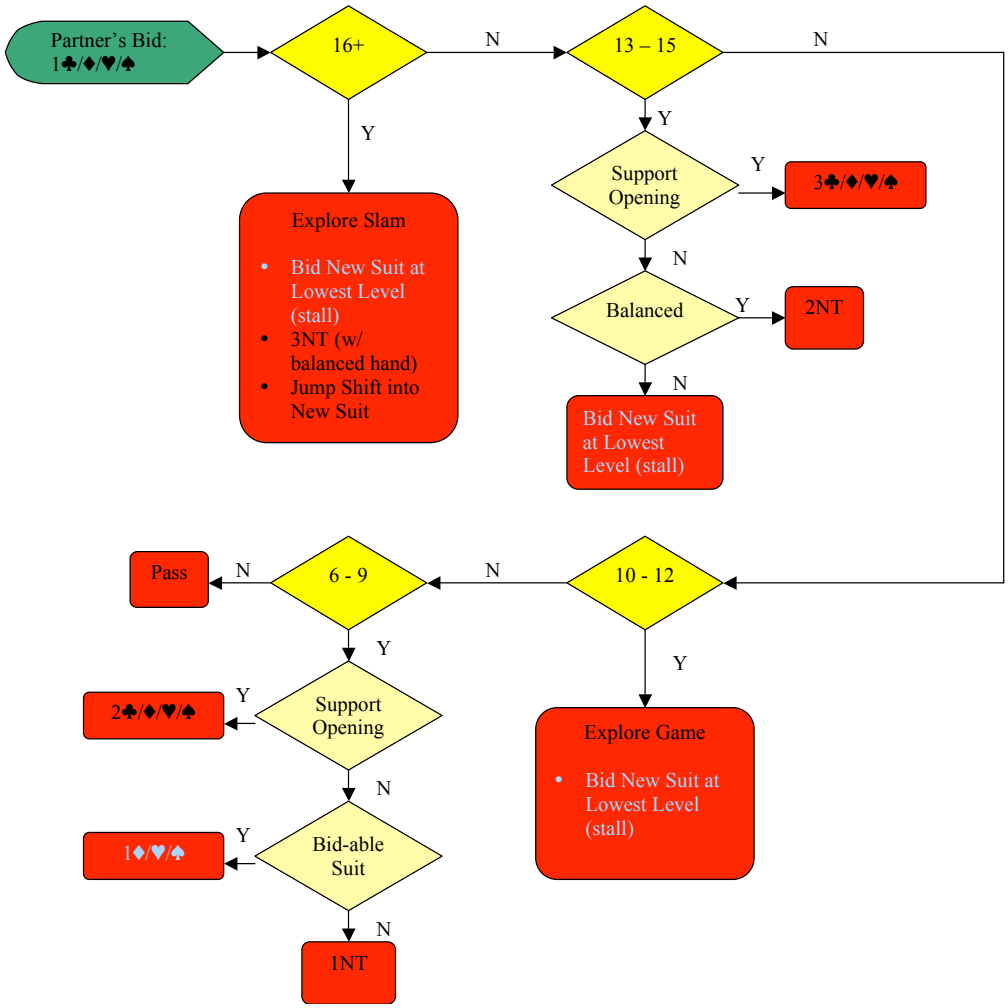

Figure 11: Responding to Partners Suited Opening

3.2.6 Opening 2♣

3.3 Final Thoughts

4 Responding to the Opening Bid

5 Overcalls and Doubles

6 Conventions I: The Bare Essentials

6.1 Stayman

7 Conventions II: Clever Additions

8 Conventions III: Heavy Artillery

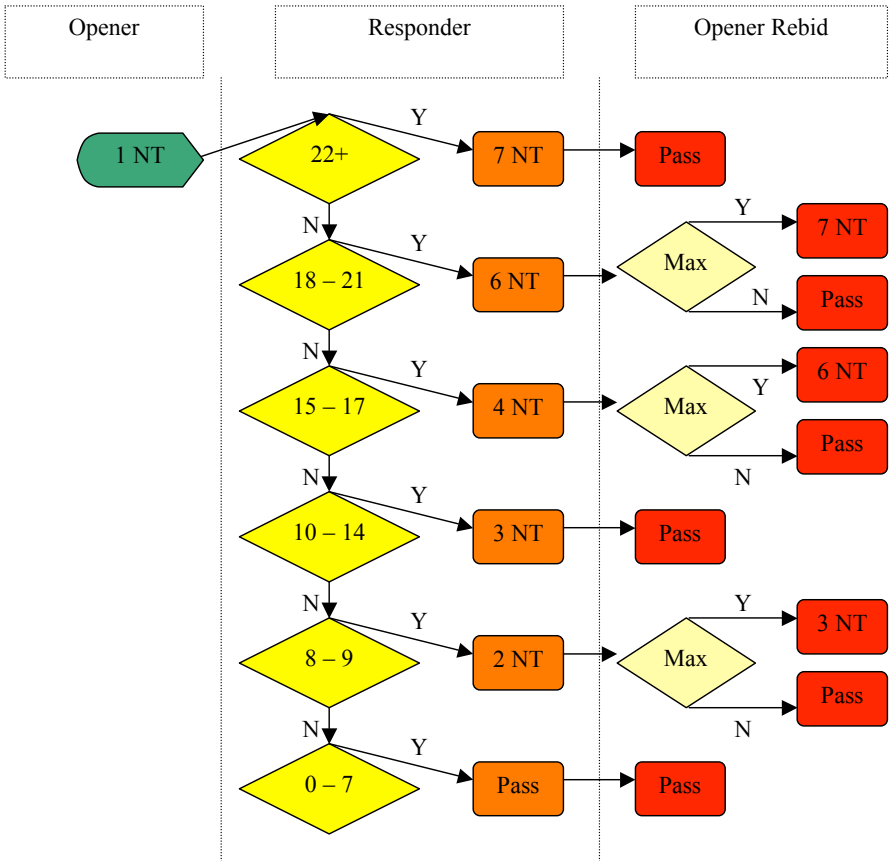

Figure 12: Responding to Partners 1 NT Opening

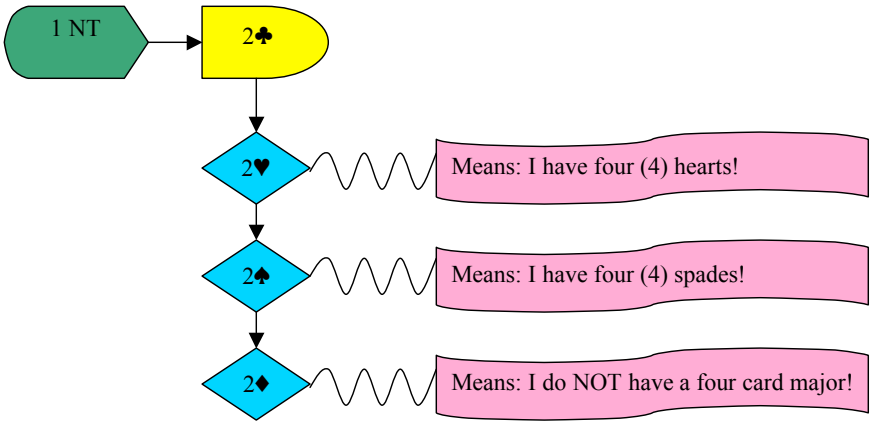

Figure 13: Responding to Stayman