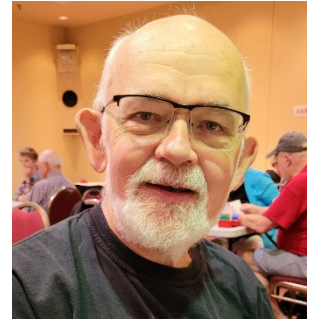


## ALEX'S BRIDGE TIPS

RHO = Right Hand Opponent

LHO = Left Hand Opponent



1. You have this hand:

S Q764  
H Q4  
D AQ65  
C 763

Your partner opens 1S. Your RHO bids 2H. What is your bid?

2. You pick up these cards:

S 432  
H A76  
D Q76  
C J853

Your partner opens 1S. RHO passes. What will you bid?

3. Partner opens 1H. Your RHO overcalls 2D. What will you bid with this hand?

S 7643  
H KJ8  
D K6  
C KJ98

4. Partner opens 1S. Your RHO overcalls 2C. What will you bid with this hand?

S 7632  
H 863  
D K9432  
C 7

5. You have this hand and you open 1D. LHO passes. Partner bids 1S. Your RHO bids 2C. What will you now bid with this hand?

S J87  
H 654  
D AKJ32  
C K6

## ANSWERS

1. Bid 2S only. Your Heart Q is worth precisely nothing in light of your RHO's bid of 2H. You must downgrade your hand and not get excited.

BUT if the opponents compete to the 3H level, now you can bid 3S, based on the Law of Total Tricks.

2. Bid 2S, NOT 1NT, which you may have been tempted to bid. Some of you may play constructive raises, which only allows you to bid 2S with 8-9 points. We do not encourage this method. We strongly recommend that with 6-9 points and three-card support that you raise to 2 of the major, telling partner immediately that you have support for her major.

3. Bid 3D. This is a cue-bid which should show 10 or more points (including distribution) and at least three-card support for partner's suit. Please learn this. It is a most valuable bid. Do not negative double to show four Spades when you now know that your side has an eight-card fit in a major.

4. Bid 3S. In the world of modern day bridge, this shows 2-6 points and four card support for partner's major.

5. Bid Double. This is a Support Double. This is such a valuable convention to know about. It is made by the OPENING BIDDER only, when partner has responded in a major at the one-level and your RHO now has made an overcall that is 2H or lower. Your Double shows three-card support. It does not specify how many points you have. Playing Support Doubles, if you now pass, partner knows that you have two or fewer cards in his major. (If you need a write-up on Support Doubles, email Barbara.)

If you do NOT play support doubles, then be sure to NOT bid 2NT after the 2C overcall by RHO. This would show 18-19 HCP.

Reason: Partner (Responder) gets another turn to bid. So you can pass. If partner has 11 points or more, she will bid again.

So, with a minimum balanced hand, you pass (or you could bid 2D here).

With a balanced 15-17 HCP, you would have opened 1NT.

So, if your rebid is 2NT (when partner COULD have had only 6 points), then your bid shows 18-19 HCP. Read this over and over.

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### TONY'S TIPS

by **TONY JACKSON: A Wonderful teacher in SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA**

We are all somewhere on the road from novice bridge player to expert. If you are reading this then my guess is you want to move further along that road and you are willing to put in a little work (reading, classes, discussion) to improve.

There are certain "markers" along this road. If I am watching someone play and they hesitate before playing every card, then I think "they haven't learned how to make a plan". If they use stolen-bid doubles, raise their own preempts, or underlead Aces on opening lead against suit contracts, well, it gives me an impression of their skill level. (If you are wondering why those three things are so bad, I'll get to that eventually.)

One of the things you should do when you are bidding is to create a picture in your mind of what the players hold and where the auction is going. For example, you pick up a semi-balanced 12 count and your partner opens 1 diamond. You should be thinking "maybe we have 3 notrump?" and wondering "Is my hand worthy of a game force or is it more of an invitational hand?" Your partner's bidding will give you information to help you modify your plan. You start with an idea and you refine it along the way as you learn more about the others' hands.

I'm sure you have heard the adage "You should be thinking about your rebid before you make your first bid." It's the same thing: figuring out where the bidding is likely to go, and making changes to your assumptions and plans as you gather more information.

When the opponents get in the bidding, then it's often harder but there can be more information. For example, with both sides vulnerable, you pick up a nice 15 count, planning to open 1NT, but since you are in 4th seat you have to wait. Disappointingly, you hear this auction before you can even pick up a card from the bidding box: Your LHO opens.

(1D) - P - (2NT) - ? Your turn.

What do you know from this auction? Well, it depends on how the opponents play the 2NT response, but if it's like many people, it should be a balanced 11-12 HCP, inviting game and denying a 4-card major.

How does your 15 count look now? Should you try to bid? It sounds like your opponents have 23 or more points and you have 15, leaving your partner with almost nothing. Hmm, your hand isn't looking so good, is it?

Side note: one thing that you need to learn is that it isn't always bad to not be declarer! Too many people would complain "Oh, I wish I was dealer so I could have opened 1NT". But think about that: If your side has 17 HCP total and the opponents have 23 HCP, how well will you do in 1NT? Down 2 for -200 maybe? Isn't that much worse than any part score the opponents will score? Wouldn't you prefer to have -110, -120, or -140?

### **23: the Magic Number**

23 is an important number in bridge. Maybe you are thinking "but it's only 3 points more than the average of 20 points". True enough. Yet 23 seems to be the dividing line: The side with 23 points has a preponderance of points, and the other side bids at their own risk.

Mel Colchamiro, author of "How You Can Play Like An Expert (Without Having to Be One)" likes 23 so much, he has two different rules of 23.

Mel's first rule of 23: In later rounds of bidding, avoid bidding 2NT unless you are sure your side has at least 23 HCP.

Mel's second rule of 23: If you know your side has at least 23 HCP and the opponents "have the bid", you have only two options: Double or bid on. Pass is not an option.

These rules are really saying the same thing: on most deals lacking extreme distribution, the side with 23 points is much better placed.

Generally speaking, with 23 points you can make 2NT or you can make a 3-level suit contract (given an 8-card fit). Not always, of course, but most of the time.

Sometimes people say to me: "but if you need 25 points to make 3 NT, 23 points is almost there. Do you really need almost as many points to make 2NT?" YES, that is EXACTLY what I am saying.

Think of it this way:

How many points to make 1NT? Well, it's highly variable, but since you are contracting for just over half the tricks, you should need just over half the points (on average), so let's say 21 points.

If you need 21 points to make 1NT and 25 points to make 3NT, it kind of makes sense to split the difference and say 23 points for 2NT.

So what does 23 skidoo mean in this context? If the opponents have the 23 points, maybe it's time for you to skidoo.

## **Counting Points**

You should be counting points on every deal, both during the bidding and during the play. Not necessarily the exact number, but you should always have an idea of how many points your side has, and how many the opponents have. Barbara Seagram calls this the "Rule of 40": Since there are 40 high card points in the deck, if you can estimate how many your partner has, you then know how many the opponents have.

Are you counting points? There are many things to count in bridge. If you are thinking "I'm not ready for counting", consider this: You already do count. Say you have a 9-card trump fit and you play the Ace of trump and both opponents follow. Surely you know that at this point there are 2 trump remaining, right? So you are counting trump already, at least some of the time.

Step 1 in counting is to always count the trump suit.

Step 2 in counting is to count any side-suit you are trying to establish (five card suits!)

Step 3 in counting is to estimate the high card points around the table. It might be as simple as "I have 5 points, the opponents have 25 or more points since they bid to 3NT, therefore my partner rates to have 10 or fewer points."

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## **Related Thoughts**

1. Why do you need 17 points to reverse? Because if partner has only 6 points, then you need 17 to get to the magic number of 23 since reverses almost always lead to 3-level (or higher) contracts.

2. Why should you never retreat to 2NT as a backup? Because you need 23 points to make 2NT. You should only bid 2NT if you know you have the values and that's the best spot.

What if you don't have the values? Just stop at the 2-level in your 7-card fit. Don't ratchet the bidding up even higher!

Notrump is NEVER a place to retreat to. Notrump should be a destination, not a backup plan.

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## BRIDGE ETIQUETTE and PROTOCOL

by Barbara Seagram

- Count your cards **face-down** before starting to play. If you count while looking at your cards, then suppose you count 14 cards. You call the Director, who now restores the hand. East had 12 cards and now is given your Spade Ace. You now know one of her cards. This is against the rules of the game. Count your cards before putting them back in the board also.
- Make your opening lead before writing down the contract in your convention card. This means the dummy can now be laid down and this gives declarer extra time to make a plan.
- Decide what card to play before touching it. Do not pull up a card, push it back into your hand, and then pull up another card. Make up your mind and then play. Let's say you are on opening lead and pull a card part way up in your hand and then place it back in your hand. You are inadvertently giving a message to partner that you do not have a clear-cut lead.
- Decide what bid you want to make and THEN pull the card from the bidding box. SIT on your hands in the meantime. *Do not let your fingers do the walking!* If you pull one card and then another, it gives partner extra information. It is like saying "3C...Oh! I meant to say 3H!"
- Say "Thank you, partner" when dummy comes down and dummy can say "Good luck, partner." NEVER let on when dummy is a disappointment, or this alerts the opponents to the fact that something has gone awry. Their ears pick up and now they defend better. Do not gloat when you get a good result and do not badger partner when things go poorly. Leave the table for a discussion about misunderstandings. It is acceptable to say "Well done, partner" at the end of the hand but no more than that. It is always acceptable to praise your opponents.
- Avoid any behaviour that would make your partner or opponents feel uncomfortable. Your opponents should leave your table feeling that they are glad they came out to play today, even if they had two bad boards against you.
- Try to minimize chatter at the table during a hand. It is a distraction for all. Focus is a very important part of the game. If you are playing the piano, you would not be chatting at the same time. It is the same principle.
- Greet your opponents on arrival at the table and wish them luck upon leaving. They are people, not chairs. On BBO, greet your opponents by name!

- Call the Director whenever there is an infraction. Even a Director may not make a ruling at their own table. Say "Director, please" so it will not be like calling the police.
- It is YOUR JOB as a player to make sure that you are the best person you can be at the table. You wish to foster the growth of the game we all love. Less experienced players are very sensitive. Any unpleasantness can send them off to play party bridge in their homes. If you did not come to the club to have fun, it would be best if you stayed home.

*"Bridge is for fun. You should play the game for no other reason. You should not play bridge to show how smart you are, to show how stupid your partner is, to prove that you are the greatest teacher since Socrates or to show off the latest fad in bidding."*

Charles Goren

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### AVOID MINOR SUIT GAMES, NOT MINOR SUITS by ANDREW ROBSON

The 4 H and 4 S games require one more trick than 3 NT, but that is normally a price worth paying should there be an eight-card fit. The 5 C and 5 D games require two more tricks – just one fewer than a small slam – and that is normally not a price worth paying. Bid minor-suits at low levels, to describe your shape. However, when you realize you have the values for game, strain to play in 3 NT rather than the dreaded Five-of-a-minor.

**A.** After 1 H - 1 S [you open 1 H ; partner responds 1 S] rebid 2 D with these hands:

S 5  
H AKJ 4 2  
D J 9 7 6  
C AJ 4

(Ed. Note: Bidding 1NT as your rebid by opener guarantees no singleton or void. i.e. a balanced hand.)

Hand (ii)

S K 5  
H J 9 8 5 3 2  
D AK 7 6  
C 3

(Ed. note: If your Hearts are fantastic, e.g. AKXXXX, rebid your suit)

**B.** After 1 H by partner - 1 S by you - 2 D by partner, bid 3 D with these hands:

S KJ 6 2  
H 9 7  
D KQ 4 2  
C Q 6 3

Hand (ii)

S K J 9 3 2  
H J 4  
D Q J 5 3  
C J 3

C. After 1 H by you - 1 S by partner- 2 D by you - 3 D by partner, rebid 3 NT with these hands:

S Q  
H K Q 9 8 7  
D A 9 4 2  
C K J 3

Hand (ii)

S J 2  
H K J 9 8 5  
D K 9 5 3  
C A Q

South Deals None Vul.

S 8 7  
H K 5  
D A 10 8 3  
C J 8 7 4 2

S Q 9 6 5 2  
H 9 7  
D Q 9 7 6  
C A 10

S A J 4 3  
H 10 8 6 4 3 2  
D —  
C K 9 5

S K 10  
H A Q J  
D K J 5 4 2  
C Q 6 3

west	North	East	South
			1D
Pass	3D (1)	Pass	3NT (2)
Pass	Pass	Pass	

**(\*) in England, they open 1NT with 12-14 HCP, hence 1D here and not 1NT.**

(1) Add a point for each of the doubletons (when supporting); thus North has a 3 D bid, the equivalent of 10-12 pts.

(2) Don't even think of bidding 5 D – as expected this would have no hope of making [the only game contract higher than 3 NT with a chance is 4 S by E-W!].

## Contract: 3 NT by South. Lead: S 5

On our deal West led S 5 to East's S Ace and you as declarer win S 3 return with S King. Needing to pick up (finesse) diamonds without loss, the odds slightly favour the drop (playing D AK) but you should cash D K first (key play). Why? Because you can successfully keep finessing West if he has all four diamonds (should East show out) but not the reverse if West showed out (this is because dummy is holding the crucial D 10 8).

If both follow on D King, you plan to lead to D Ace. However East does show out on D K, so you now lead D 2 to D 7 and D 8, H 5 to H J, D 4 to D 9 and D 10, cash D A felling D Q, overtake H K with H A and cash D J and H Q. Nine tricks and game made.

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## Slam Bidding by Tony Jackson

It's either the most common or second most common question I get: "How could I have bid this slam?" Eddie Kantar says to practice slam bidding you should stand in front of a mirror and say "6 spades" over and over again, you'll find it isn't that hard!

Seriously, here is the problem in a nutshell: people think bidding a slam is risky. What you need to realize is that **it is often more risky to NOT bid a slam.**

What if I told you "if you bid the slam, there is a 1/1000 chance it will fail". Ok, there's a risk. But what if I told you "if you DON'T bid the slam, there is a 999/1000 chance you will get a bad board". Doesn't that make it clear that you would need to bid the slam?

People worry too much about HOW to bid the slam. You don't need any fancy instructions, just jump to 6. Here's an example sent in to me.

S: AKT532

H: AK42

D: 7

C: T3

Your partner opens 1NT (15-17 HCP).

What do you think? Here is what I think.

1. My first thought is: if partner has an ace, we want to be in slam. Probably in spades, possibly in hearts. But we want to be in slam unless partner is Aceless.

Note: When you look at your hand, you should be thinking ahead. When you are preparing to open the bidding, you need to be thinking about your rebid. As you get more information from your partner and the opponents, you should be thinking. "where is this auction going? Are we headed for game? Are we looking for notrump? Do I need to be worried about stoppers? Is there a chance of slam?"



On this hand, when you pick it up, before your partner even bids, you are thinking "nice hand. Obviously I will open it 1 spade, but should I rebid my spades or rebid hearts?" Then when your partner opens the bidding with 1NT, you should feel a little jolt of electricity. Think back to a time when you opened 1NT and your partner bids 6NT, didn't you feel a little bit of adrenaline? When your partner opens 1NT on this hand, you should have that same feeling. "Wow, ok, slam here."

2. So if you can't think of any other way to bid slam, you could just ask for Aces (4C would be Gerber) and if partner has 1 or 2 aces, you could just bid 6 spades since you know you have an 8-card spade fit.

If you are thinking about the risk of bidding slam at this point, you are mixed up! The risk is NOT bidding slam.

Some of you are thinking "but you have only 29 points. That's not enough for slam." Do I have to say it? "Points, schmoints!" Doesn't distribution count for anything? Yes, you have only 14 points, but those points couldn't be any better: Aces and kings, those are quality points. And a singleton AND a doubleton? This is a great hand. Once you have a fit, the value of this hand has increased dramatically.

"But Tony, I could be off the AK of clubs." Yes, that's a slight possibility. There is such a slight chance that partner doesn't have the Ace or King of clubs that it's just not worth worrying about. If I had a way to confirm the trump suit, ask for aces, and also start control bidding, I would do it. But since I don't have a way to do all that, then I'll just go with the odds.

### Bidding Options

OK, so if I have convinced you that you need to explore for slam, how could you do it? I already mentioned you could just bid Gerber (4C) to see if your partner has an ace. Should you try to look for a heart fit? You could bid Stayman (2C) but what if partner denies a 4-card major suit? What would you do at that point? You would still want to ask for Aces. Do you have a way to ask for Aces after your partner responds 2 diamonds (they don't have a major)? If you are certain that 4 clubs would still be Gerber at that point, then you could plan to jump to 4C if your partner denies having a 4-card major.

Ok, but what if your partner DOES have a 4-card major suit? How do you ask for keycards? **Many people use a jump to 4 clubs at that point to ask for Aces/Keycards, confirming the trump suit. I think this is "expert standard", but I would be hesitant to use that unless I had already discussed it. A jump to 4NT would certainly be quantitative and that's NOT what you want. So if you aren't sure at any time what to bid, you can just jump to 6 spades.**

My recommendation: if you are 100% sure that your partner plays Gerber, then just bid 4 clubs after partner opens 1 NT. Then if partner shows an Ace or two aces, bid 6 spades. If partner shows 0 aces, bid 4 spades.

If you don't play Gerber? Then bid 4H (Texas transfer) and rebid 4NT, which is ace asking after a Texas transfer.

(Are you playing Texas transfers? This is one good reason to play them!)

So do you get what I am saying: There are various options you have, but nothing looks better than just an immediate Gerber bid and basing your contract on partner's response.

### Grand Slam?

What about a possible grand slam? What if partner has both missing aces? As much as I push people to bid more slams, I am the opposite about grand slams. As a matter of fact, I think you could just say "I'll never bid a grand slam" and it wouldn't hurt you too often. Grand slams are so much harder to make than small slams, they are almost not worth bidding. Yes, you might make 7, but bidding 6 and making 7 will still be a reasonable result most of the time.

So bid lots more slams, but don't worry about grand slams, that's my advice.

### More about Grand Slams

When would I bid a grand slam? Only when I can count that my side has 13 tricks. When can I count 13 tricks though? Not too often.

Partner opens 1 spade and you have this hand:

S: K Q 6 5  
H: 3  
D: A K Q J 7 6 3  
C: A

If your partner has the Ace of spades and Ace of hearts, you almost certainly have a grand slam. You can count 13 tricks. OK, now you can bid the grand slam.  
BUT

One more thing: If your partner opens 1 spade and has 2 aces/keycards, you should bid 7NT, not 7 spades. Not just for the 10 extra points, but because in a notrump contract the opening lead cannot be ruffed!

Tip: if you can count 13 tricks and have all the aces, a grand slam in notrump is safer than a grand slam in a suit: the opponents cannot ruff the opening lead. Thanks to Bob Klein for that tip!

### The Truth About Blackwood

Blackwood is misused. When you are learning bridge, you are too intimidated to bid slams, so you need extra reassurance to do it. You look to Blackwood as a tool to help you determine if you should bid a slam, but that's not what it is for. **Blackwood is used when you have already decided to bid a slam - BUT - you just want to check to be sure that you aren't off two aces. In other words, Blackwood isn't used to help bid a slam, it is used to stay out of bad slams.**

You don't need more tools to bid slams. You just need to recognize strength!

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### THE RULE OF ONE by ANDREW ROBSON

**The Rule of One:** *If there is just one trump out that is higher than yours, leave it out. Why waste two of your trumps to get rid of a trump that will win anyway?*

**Take these two trump suits:**

**(a)**

Dummy

S A42

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Declarer

S K8753

Cash the S AK, then, assuming a 3-2 split, the opponents have one master trump. Leave it out and go about your business in the other suits. Try to stop that trump from drawing two of your small trumps; aim to score dummy's remaining trump by ruffing in dummy.

**(b)**

Dummy

H 8642

Declarer

H A975

A dicey trump suit – yes. However the likely 3-2 split will see you able to maneuver to reach a Rule of One position. The right approach will almost certainly be to duck the first round and take the second round with the ace. Then, assuming both opponents follow twice, leave the last trump outstanding. As in (a), you must aim to prevent the opponent with the master trump from winning the lead and playing it. [Note to defenders: if you do find yourself on play with the master trump, cash it when it draws two of the opposing small trumps].

**(Ed. note: You do have to remove the boss trump or master trump from the opponents when there is a long suit in Dummy with no other entry. That is the only time.)**