

MINI TIPS by BARBARA & ALEX

We have noticed that many of you, in the No Trump section of your convention card, leave one section blank: The section deals with (opponents are silent):

1NT - 3C

1NT - 3D

1NT - 3H

1NT - 3S

So many of you do not use any of these bids and that is a waste. Would you have a Rolls Royce in your driveway and never use it? You must not have bids lying around in your toolbox, unused.

Here is what we recommend but you and partner must decide. These bids are all alertable.

1NT - 3C. We like this to be Puppet Stayman. If you want info on Puppet Stayman, email Barbara and I will send you a write-up.

1NT - 3D. We like this to show a weak hand with long, good Diamonds, asking partner to bid 3NT with a fit.

e.g.

S xx

H xx

D KQJxxx

C xxx

Partner can pass 3D with D xx. With three cards in Diamonds, or Ax or Kx, Opening NT bidder should bid 3NT.

1NT - 3H. We like this to show 5-5 (or better) in the majors and an invitational hand

e.g.

S Qxxxx

H KQxxx

D ---

C Jxx

Opener decides in which major to play the hand (because he will not have two doubletons in the majors) and at what level to play (game or at the 3 level).

1NT - 3S We like this to show 5-5 (or better) in the majors and a slam-going hand.

e.g.

S KJxxx

H AKxxx

D Ax

C x

This last one is open to negotiation with partner as many play this bid as a game-going (only) 5-5 hand.

We like that with a game-going 5-5 hand, that you transfer to the higher- ranking major first and then bid game in the lower-ranking major.

1NT - 2H

2S - 4H

Partner chooses which major to play in.

Moral of the story: Do not run into the bridge club at the last minute to play with a new partner. Take the time to go over a convention card with him/her before the game.

Ditto for playing online with a new partner.

Play of the Hand – Using the dummy

This deal from Bridge Master, a free, interactive declarer-play program on Bridge Base Online, illustrates the importance of a long suit and managing entries.

On the lead of the ♥9, South must consider what to do with the diamond losers in hand. After at trump lead, the timing isn't there to ruff diamonds in the dummy – the defenders will keep leading trump.

If North's club suit can be set up, the contract can be made easily. With careful play, South can even handle a 4–1 break in the club suit.

After drawing trump, South should duck a club, i.e., play a low club from both hands. Suppose a spade comes back; South should win in hand with the ♠A and play another club to the ace.

If a defender shows out on the ♣K, declarer can ruff a club and reenter dummy with the ♠K to run the clubs, pitching the three losing diamonds.

The full deal is below:

	♠ K Q		
	♥ 4 3 2		
	♦ 6 5		
	♣ A K 5 4 3 2		
♠ J 10 9 8	N	♠ 7 6 5 4 3	
♥ 9 8	W - I - E	♥ 7 6 5	
♦ 9 8 7	S	♦ K Q J 10	
♣ Q J 10 9		♣ 8	
	♠ A 2		
	♥ A K Q J 10		
	♦ A 4 3 2		
	♣ 7 6		

Dlr: North	♠ K Q
Vul: None	♥ 4 3 2
	♦ 6 5
	♣ A K 5 4 3 2
	♠ A 2
	♥ A K Q J 10
	♦ A 4 3 2
	♣ 7 6

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥	Pass	6♥
All Pass			

Best Bidding – Advancing an overcall

Advancing an overcall

Last month we talked about overcalls. What do you (the “advancer”) do after partner makes a simple overcall? (“Simple” means not a preemptive jump overcall.) Here’s some good advice from expert Larry Cohen:

Advancer has support

A raise by advancer is normal – much like raising an opening bid – about 6–10 HCP.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Overcaller</i>	<i>Responder</i>	<i>Advancer</i>
1♣	1♥	Pass	2♥

You could raise with something like:

♠A J 4 ♥K 5 3 ♦9 8 5 4 3 ♣7 3.

With a stronger raise, the advancer should cuebid the opponent’s suit (i.e., bid the opponent’s suit):

♠A J 10 4 ♥K 5 3 ♦A 8 5 4 3 ♣3.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Overcaller</i>	<i>Responder</i>	<i>Advancer</i>
1♣	1♥	Pass	2♣

It doesn’t matter the level of the overcall. No matter what the overcall, if the advancer bids the opponent’s suit, he is promising a limit raise or better (10 HCP in support and three or more trumps). Not everyone plays the cuebid this way (as guaranteeing support), but I highly recommend it.

This method makes things simple. The overcaller can jump to game without worrying that advancer might not have support. Note: In all the examples above, the responder is shown as passing. Even if the responder acts (a bid or a negative double), the meanings of the calls for the advancer are still the same.

Because a raise shows 6–10 HCP and a cuebid shows a limit raise, a jump raise should be weak, 0–6 HCP and four trumps.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Overcaller</i>	<i>Responder</i>	<i>Advancer</i>
1♣	1♥	Pass	3♥

Advancer does not have support

What if the advancer does not have support? With a notrump hand (stopper in the opponent's suit), he can bid 1NT, 2NT or 3NT – depending on how many points he has. A 1NT advance is approximately 8–11 HCP, 2NT is approximately 12–14. 3NT is more. The exact range depends on overcall style and vulnerability.

What if the advancer bids a new suit? Typically, this shows a five-card or longer suit. The big issue: Is a new suit forcing? It is best to adopt a simple rule for new suits. Here are two possible ways to play it – choose one:

1) New suits by advancer are never forcing. In this case, I suggest that a jump by advancer is natural and forcing (he needs some way to show a good hand).

OR

2) New suits by advancer are forcing (unless advancer is already a passed hand).

THE “SHORT” CLUB & THE “SHORT” DIAMOND

Stop calling it that!!

by Barbara & Alex

There are innumerable partnership misunderstandings over this subject! Some of you even think that when partner opens 1C that it is "ASKING FOR A MAJOR!" This is not an interrogation. It is the beginning of a conversation.

THE SHORT DIAMOND: The only time you would ever open 1D, with just three cards in the suit, is when you are 4-4 in the majors and have a doubleton club.

e.g.

S KQxx
H KQxx
D 543
C K3

You open 1 D with this hand because when you do not have a 5 card suit, you always open with your longest minor.

BUT with this hand:

S AKQ4

H 432

D KJ3

C J32

You must open with 1 C. When you have two 3 card minors, you open with 1C. Always. This allows you the best and most economical choice of rebid. Do not choose to open with 1 D on this hand above because you have heard that you should open with your "better minor."

So, you must understand and fully accept that when your partner opens with 1 D and only has three of them, she will also have 4-4 in the majors. **BY THE WAY, IT WILL SURPRISE YOU TO LEARN THAT YOU OPEN WITH A 3 CARD DIAMOND SUIT APPROXIMATELY 4% OF THE TIME ONLY.**

Let us look at some subsequent deductions that must now be made:

1D	1H
1NT	?

You, the responder, now knows that opener has four diamonds now, NOT three. If he had three diamonds only, he would have had 4-4 in the majors and thus would have raised your hearts.

N.B. Anytime that partner opens 1D and does not support your major suit response directly, he cannot have a short (3 only) diamond suit.

One more:

N	E	S	W
1D	3S	?	

South has

876

A2

KJ95

K876

What should he now do?

E is marked with 7 spades and South has three spades. Therefore N cannot have four spades. If he opened 1 D with only three diamonds on this hand, he would have to have four spades. He cannot have four spades, thus he must have four diamonds, at least. Therefore, South should now bid 4D.

Once you find out from the bidding that opener cannot have 4 hearts or 4 spades, then she must have at least 4 diamonds!

THE SHORT CLUB

YOU WILL OPEN WITH A 3 CARD CLUB SUIT ONLY 15% OF THE TIME.

You will do this when you are 4-3-3-3, 3-4-3-3 and 4-4-2-3.

S AJxx
H Qxx
D 765
C AQx

S Qxx
H AJxx
D AQ5
C 654

S AJxx
H A987
D AJ
C 543

In all above cases, you should open with 1 C.

With 4-4- in the minors, you open 1D, with 3-3 in the minors, you open 1C.

People have a burning urge to rebid their Club suit (or diamond) to show partner that they really have that suit and that it was not short. Suppress that urge, please!
It is almost always wrong to rebid a 5 card minor. There is usually something better to do.

S AJx
H Q87
D 54
C AQ532

You open with 1C and partner responds 1D, you should now bid 1NT... NOT 2C.
You open this above hand 1C and partner responds either 1 H or 1S, you should now bid 2 of that major. This does NOT promise 4 card support. If you only have three-card support, then you were unable to bid NT because of a useless doubleton.

One more: You open 1C with this hand (below) and partner responds 1D. What will you bid next? You are North.

North

S J876
H AQ6
D Qx
C KJxx

Some of you now bid 1NT because you mistakenly believe that 1D is denying ownership of a major. Thus, you believe you have no reason to show your Spades.

This was partner's hand:

South

S AKxx

H Jxx

D Kxxxx

C x

IF North bid 1NT as her rebid, South would now bid 2NT showing 11-12 HCP. You have successfully missed your 8-card fit in Spades which would have been a much safer spot.

1C - 1D

1S - 2S

is a much safer spot.

Fourth Highest? By Andrew Robson

If "fourth from the top of the longest and strongest suit" is the normal opening lead against a notrump contract - length being of paramount importance - the question is:

When should you NOT lead "fourth highest of the longest"?

There are two issues here.

- (a) When it is best to lead a different card in your longest suit.
- (b) When it is best to lead a different suit altogether.

This deal we begin looking at (a). Say you hold KQJ75. Clearly you would like to force out the ace with your lead, so as to promote your other honours with the hoped-for length to come. Leading the seven runs the all-too-likely scenario that, unless partner holds the ten, declarer will win a cheap trick with the ten, with the ace yet to be dislodged.

Instead of leading the seven, you must lead an honour, making sure you force out the ace. Although it doesn't matter to you which of your picture cards you lead, the conventional card to lead, giving the proper information to partner, is the top of the sequence, here the king.

Following similar top-of-a-sequence principles, lead the red card from the following holdings:

QJ1063 J10973 109832

Take West's cards and defend 3NT

South Deals	♠ Q 8 7	
None Vul	♥ Q J 8	
	♦ Q 10 8 7	
	♣ K Q 8	
♠ J 10 9 6 5	N	♠ 4
♥ A 10 2	W	♥ 9 7 6 4 3
♦ A K	E	♦ 6 5 4
♣ 6 5 3	S	♣ J 10 9 4
		♠ A K 3 2
		♥ K 5
		♦ J 9 3 2
		♣ A 7 2

S	N
1NT	3NT
West is a bit too flat with a crummy suit to overcall at the 2-level.	

On our featured deal, West carefully led the jack of spades. Had he led the six, dummy's seven would have taken the first trick, and West would only score his three top tricks (game made plus one). It was a different story on the jack of spades lead.

Declarer won dummy's ace, and led the queen of diamonds (needing to force out the ace-king). West won and persevered with the ten of spades. Declarer won his queen (East discarding), and led a second diamond. West won the ace and continued with the nine of spades, pinning dummy's eight and promoting his six-five.

Declarer won his last spade stopper, the king, cashed his two promoted diamonds, but still needed a heart trick to bring his total to nine. When he led the king of hearts (he hoped East had it and had no more spades), he saw West win, and cash the six and five of spades. Down one.

As we shall see over the next deals, a two card sequence can suffice if no more than a one card gap exists between the second and third cards.

TIDY UP YOUR BIDDING by BARBARA

When you respond in a new suit to partner's OVERCALL, you promise 10+ pts and a good 5 card suit of your own. You must agree with partner on whether this is forcing or not. I would suggest that you play this as forcing for one round. Unless you had passed the first time around. Overcaller will now either bid her suit again or raise yours or bid NT.

S AQJ1098

H x

D AJx

C Qxx

You have this hand.

Partner opens 1H and you bid 1S. If he now bids 2H, **IF** you now bid only 3S, he can pass. This is merely invitational.

You must bid 4S now, not 3S.

Responder to the Opening Bid with 13-15 best copes by first bidding a new suit and then JUMPING TO GAME on his next bid. Either in partner's suit or his own suit or 3 NT. Of course, if you have 4 card support for partner's major, you would have started with Jacoby 2NT or a Splinter bid. AND if the opportunity to use Fourth Suit Forcing arises, this is always best.

Take above hand and change it a bit.

S AQxxxx

H x

D Axx

C Jxx

Partner opens 1H, you bid 1S. He bids 2H next. You now bid 3S only. INVITATIONAL.

Any time you bid 3 of a suit, it is inviting partner to bid again. ONLY inviting. Same with 2NT. Invitational. That's the "singles bar" bid. It is an invitation to go further! That's how you can remember it!

New suits are forcing. Old suits are not forcing. Please do not think that just because you jump that partner will always bid again.

Too much reverence for slams: just bid the darn thing already! **by Tony Jackson, a much-loved teacher in California**

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. If you knew the risk of the slam not making was 1%, and the risk of getting a bad board because you didn't bid the slam was 99%, would you still hesitate? It seems like many people look for any excuse to avoid bidding a slam.

As for how to bid it, many people worry too much about HOW to bid the slam. You don't need any fancy bidding tools, just jump to 6. Here's an example sent in to me.

S: AKJT53

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. What are the odds that an opening 1NT bidder will not have at least one ace given you hold this hand? Almost none.

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?" You should even have a thought about slam as a possibility before you even hear a word from your partner. 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 30 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 15 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.

One more thing: If you bid 4C (Gerber) the opponents may make a lead directing double. If you just blast to slam with 6 spades, your opponents are in the dark. Here's a bridge maxim for you:

Bid slowly to game, blast to slam.

Bidding Options: Gerber? Stayman? Transfer? Blast!

OK, so if you have decided to explore for slam scientifically, 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 not use that unless I had already discussed it with my partner. 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 should just jump to 6 spades.

Another option is to first bid 4H, a Texas Transfer and then rebid 4NT, which is ace asking after a Texas transfer. (Are you playing Texas transfers? This is one good reason to play them.)

On this hand, my recommendation is to just blast to 6 spades immediately.

NOTE FROM BARB & ALEX: Another possibility is to bid 2C Stayman and after a 2D response from partner, now bid 4H, showing four hearts and six spades (a delayed Texas transfer). But the remainder of the auction requires partnership agreement.

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: For this example, 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.

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 addition, you usually need to use control bidding to make sure you have controls in all suits before bidding Blackwood. 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 gadgets to bid slams. You just need to recognize strength!