

The Foundation System

Preemptive Bidding

Introduction

Earlier chapters have covered all non-competitive auctions beginning with an opening bid at the one-level, as well as auctions beginning with 2NT. The next chapter (Slam Bidding) will cover auctions beginning with a strong, artificial, and forcing 2C bid. This chapter will treat all auctions beginning with a bid of 2D or higher, with the exception of 2NT. Such opening bids are described as preemptive because their intent is to disrupt the opponents' bidding by consuming as much bidding space as possible without incurring an excessive penalty, while alerting partner that your hand has little or no defensive strength, reasonable offensive strength provided your suit is trump, and little or no chance of game if another suit is trump.

To avoid an excessive penalty, the traditional guide for preemptive bidding was the Rule of Two and Three, which stated that with no help from partner's hand, Opener should expect to go down two tricks if vulnerable or three tricks if not vulnerable. In LTC terms, this translates to an LTC of 7 or 8 for a 2-level opening, 6 or 7 for a 3-level opening, 5 or 6 for a 4-level opening, and 4 or 5 for a 5-level opening. The modern tendency is to relax the traditional guide somewhat, except perhaps when vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, in hopes of pressuring the opponents into the wrong contract.

Weak Two Bids

Opening Bid Requirements

In the Opening Bid chapter, the requirements for an opening bid of 2D, 2H, or 2S were specified as 7 to a bad 11 HCP, an LTC of 7 if vulnerable and 7-8 if not vulnerable, and a 6-card suit, which in first or second seat should be headed by the ace or king. These requirements do not apply to fourth seat weak two bids, which are a different kettle of fish. Since you can pass the hand out if weak, your objective when opening in fourth seat is to get a plus score while making it difficult for the opponents to compete for the partscore. The range is therefore something like 10 to a bad 13 HCP, and the LTC is 6 or 7 instead of 7 or 8.

The primary offensive target after a weak 2H or 2S bid is game in the major, with secondary targets of 3NT, game in the other major, or any slam. Only rarely will a minor suit game or partscore occur. After a weak 2D, however, the primary offensive target is 3NT, with secondary targets of 5D, game in another suit, any slam, or any playable partscore; club contracts will be rare. The suit quality requirements for a weak 2D must be modified somewhat because of the primacy of the 3NT target. The most effective treatment is to require a 6-card suit headed by 2 of the top 3 honors, as well as a possible outside entry in the form of a side ace or king.

Suit Texture

Whether the above requirements conform to the Rule of Two and Three or not depends primarily upon the suit quality. With K75432 you might lose 4 or 5 trump tricks on a bad day, while with K109742 you would usually escape with 2 or 3 losers if partner can produce a small doubleton in support. Suits with lots of intermediate cards (10s, 9s, 8s) are said to have good texture. In deciding whether or not to open a weak two bid, suit texture should be the controlling factor. These days, weak two bids with a 5-card suit are becoming more and more common, especially in third seat. The Foundation System tolerates such openings but does not recommend them. Should you choose to try such a bid, good suit texture is vital; the minimum suit requirement should be something like KQ1097. You should not seriously consider such a bid except in third seat, or when not vulnerable (preferably both).

Other Common HCP Ranges

You will often encounter players using a lower HCP range; 5-10 is a fairly common choice. The problem with making the lower limit that low is that you are unlikely to find a profitable sacrifice against an opposing game when partner has a fit, since you may lose 800 or more; and when the opponents end up playing the hand, your opening makes it easier for them to read both the distribution and the location of the missing high cards. Setting the upper limit at 10 HCP implies that there is an intermediate HCP zone which is too strong for a weak two bid but too weak for a 1-level opening. This is fuzzy thinking. If you have a suit good enough that you want to get in the bidding, then if it's too strong for a weak two bid it ought to be strong enough to open at the 1-level. Conversely, I have been known to open a weak two bid with a bad 12 or 13 HCP when I thought the hand was too weak for a 1-level opening.

Other Considerations

Notice that the above requirements for a weak two bid do not specifically prohibit holding a second suit. Many players refuse to open a weak two bid when holding a side 4-card major; some even reject a weak two bid if they have Qxx or better in a side major suit. They fear that the weak two bid will make it difficult or impossible to find a major suit game in such a side major suit. For the most part, such fears are groundless. The response structure to be described below will allow reaching a 53 or 54 major suit fit, so the only danger is missing a 44 major suit fit when holding a side 4-card major. If your 6-card suit is KJ10xxx or worse, it will usually not be a useful side suit in a 44 major suit contract, because you are unlikely to have an entry to the suit after trumps are drawn. So my recommendation is to avoid a 4-card major side suit only if your long suit is as good as AKxxxx or KQJxxx. Further, a weak two bid with a weak 5-card minor side suit is not prohibited, although it is rare, since a 65 two-suiter will frequently qualify for a 1-level opening bid unless the side suit is junky (Jxxxx, for instance).

Defensive Requirements

Partner will expect a weak two bid to contain about 1½ defensive tricks, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 2. With less, it is better to pass and hope to overcall later. With more, you should be worth a 1-level opening. A typical minimum from a defensive point of view would be A109xxx with a couple of scattered queens and jacks outside, or KJ9xxx with an outside king. A normal defensive holding would be KJ10xxx with an outside ace, while a maximum would be something like KQJxxx with an outside ace or AQ98xx with an outside king. Adding an outside queen to either of these defensive maximums would usually push them into a 1-level opening.

Responding to a 1st or 2nd Seat Weak 2H or 2S Bid

The standard response structure assumes that Responder has not yet passed; either Opener dealt, or his RHO dealt and passed. Some modifications are required for a weak 2D opening and for a 3rd or 4th seat opening, where Responder has already passed. To consider game, except as a sacrifice against an opposing game, Responder will need an LTC of 6 or 7 or less, or at least 4 cover cards. Responder's options are listed below:

- **Raise to 3-Level:** This is mainly preemptive, usually with 3+card support. Opener **must** pass. Responder could choose this approach with 2-card support and good defense against game in the other major, hoping to entice the opponents into a poor game. This is one of the reasons for the Defensive Requirements paragraph above.
- **Raise to Game:** This is to play, with one of two hand types: (a) a good hand (more than a minimum opening bid; I like to have about 15+HCP) which expects to have a good play for game; or (b) a weak hand with 4+card support, hoping to shut out the opponents or push them into the wrong game.
- **Minimum Bid in a New Suit:** This shows a good hand (stronger than a minimum opening bid) with a 5+card suit and less than 3-card support for Opener's major. It asks Opener to show 3+card support for the new suit, either by raising the new suit or by bidding a side ace or king. If Opener lacks 3-card support, he must rebid his major.
- **Jump in a New Suit:** This is preemptive, with a 7+card suit, and neither shows nor denies support for Opener's suit. Opener **must** pass.
- **3NT:** This is to play, and is usually based on either a 1NT opening bid with a doubleton honor in Opener's suit, or a long solid minor suit with some sort of stoppers in the other two suits. Opener **must** pass.
- **2NT:** This is an artificial forcing bid which asks Opener to describe his hand further. Two different ways for Opener to do so are in common use:
 - ◆ **Feature:** Opener bids a side ace or king if he has one, or rebids his major if he has no side ace or king.

- ◆ **Ogust:** Opener uses step responses to clarify his strength and suit quality: Note: As originally published by Ogust the 3D and 3H replies shown below were reversed. The structure shown below is the one most commonly used these days.
 - **3C** = Bad hand (7 to bad 9 HCP) and bad suit (KQ9xxx or worse)
 - **3D** = Bad hand and good suit (AQ9xxx or KQ10xxx or better)
 - **3H** = Good hand (good 9 to 11 HCP) and bad suit
 - **3S** = Good hand and good suit

Note: Since both ways of responding to 2NT are quite common, the Foundation System makes this choice optional; it should be discussed ahead of time with each partner. I usually prefer to play Ogust with most partners. The definition of good and bad suits depends upon the minimum suit quality requirements for the weak two bid. Since our weak twos must be headed by the ace or king (except in 3rd seat), a suit we describe as bad, such as KQ9xxx, would be considered good by a partnership which routinely opens a weak two with Qxxxxx. Any 5-card weak two bid is by definition a bad suit.

Responding to a Weak 2D Bid

All raises are preemptive. A minimum bid in a new suit still asks for 3-card support. A jump in a new suit is still preemptive, with a 7+card suit, and 3NT is still to play. 2NT still asks for further description, but guarantees a fitting honor (Qx or better), so that the suit should be running if Opener has adhered to the requirement that he hold 2 of the top 3 honors. Opener should rebid a side ace or king if he has one, or rebid 3D otherwise. Opener should also rebid 3D if he has succumbed to temptation and violated the required KQxxxx minimum suit quality.

For established partnerships, I like to recommend a slight modification in responding to a weak 2D: 2NT is natural and non-forcing; Opener **must** pass. A 3C response replaces the standard forcing 2NT response. Opener is requested to rebid his suit if it is worse than KQxxxx, and otherwise to bid a side major suit ace or king, or to bid 3NT with a side ace or king in clubs.

Adjustments When Responder is a Passed Hand

After a 4th seat weak two bid, game is still barely possible, so all bids retain their standard meaning, except that Responder can be about 3 HCP (or 1 LTC) weaker than if he had not passed originally. After a 3rd seat weak two bid, all raises and jumps are still preemptive, but a minimum bid in a new suit has a new meaning aimed at preparing the defense against the opposing contract which is likely to be bid after 4th hand enters the bidding. Thus we define a new suit by a passed hand as lead-directing, to show a quick entry so that Responder can win the opening lead and shift to Opener's suit, in case Opener has a suit such as AQxxxx which he cannot effectively lead himself. After such a lead-directing response, Opener can if he chooses bid a side ace or king in a lower-ranking suit than his own in order to further assist the defense against a potential contract by the opponents. Note that this lead-directing response applies **only** after a 3rd seat weak two bid.

Opening Three Bids and Higher

Weak Two Bids are a sort of hybrid, combining a limited but definite defensive potential with a reasonable amount of offensive potential if partner has a good hand with a fit for Opener's suit. As we progress to higher level opening bids, Opener's increasing offensive potential is counterbalanced by a corresponding decrease in defensive potential. The opening bid should be sufficiently descriptive that Responder can readily evaluate your combined offensive potential while expecting little or no defensive help from Opener. The primary emphasis is on using up bidding space which would be more useful to the opponents, thus keeping them from bidding, or forcing them to choose a final contract with little room for exchanging information. Since our high-level opening bids are so descriptive, our response structure can be considerably simpler than required by the hybrid nature of the weak two bid.

Opening 3C and 3D Bids

These should show a good 7-card suit KJ10xxxx or better with an LTC of 6-7 if vulnerable or 7-8 if not vulnerable, a maximum of 1 defensive trick outside the long suit, and usually no side 4-card major. A suit of KQxxxxx can achieve an LTC of 7 with no outside strength, so this would be a bare minimum for a vulnerable 3C or 3D bid. Since 3NT is the main offensive target, there is not much point to a 3C or 3D bid on J109xxxx, but QJ10xxxx should not be ruled out. (If partner has Ax or Kx and tries for 3NT, the suit can be set up, and the side ace or king you need to reach an LTC of 7 could provide an entry.)

Since a 2C opening is reserved to show a strong forcing opening of unspecified shape, so that no weak 2C opening is possible, there is a strong modern tendency to open 3C with a good 6-card suit; KQJxxx is about the minimum suit quality for such a bid. Actually, AKQxxx with nothing outside gives an LTC of 7, but opening with such a suit is pointless, since partner will not have a fitting honor in the suit and will thus never consider 3NT as a feasible target. The Foundation System's position on such 3C opening bids is somewhere between mildly tolerant and disapproving, but you need to be aware of the possibility, since you will encounter a few partners and many opponents making such bids.

Our response structure after a 3C or 3D opening is relatively simple. Unlike the weak two structure, the same structure applies whether or not Responder passed originally, since a 10 HCP hand (with Qx support and two side aces) could be enough to make game in NT. All raises are preemptive with the intent of either making the contract or incurring a penalty which is less than the value of an opposing game. Any new suit bid implies a fitting honor in Opener's suit, a stopper in the new suit, and one other stopper. If Opener's suit is headed by 2 of the top 3 honors, he is requested to show a stopper if he can do so below 3NT, and otherwise to bid 3NT if he has a stopper he could not show below 3NT. If Opener rebids 3NT and Responder bids again, Responder's initial new suit bid is revealed as a slam try. A direct 3NT response shows a fitting honor in Opener's suit and implies stoppers in the other three suits. A jump in a new suit by an unpassed hand is a slam try, asking Opener to bid a side suit ace or king if he has Qx or better in the new suit, and to rebid his suit if he lacks either a fitting honor in the new suit or a side ace or king.

Opening 3H and 3S Bids

Like the 3C and 3D bids, these show a 7-card suit with an LTC of 6-7 or 7-8 depending on vulnerability. Since 3NT is no longer a primary offensive target, the motive for such openings is mainly preemptive, so more liberties can be taken with suit quality. Q98xxxx is about the minimum recommended suit quality, but even J109xxxx is fair game if the LTC requirement is met and you are willing to risk the danger that on defense partner may make a disastrous opening lead when he holds Kx or Kxx in your suit. With such weak suits, holding a side 4-card major is no deterrent, since such weak suits will usually be useless if played in a 44 fit. With a good 7-card suit, especially one including the ace, it is usually wise to avoid the preemptive opening when holding 4 cards in the other major. A side 4-card minor, and even a weak side 5-card minor is no deterrent; their presence reduces the LTC and permits effective preemption with a remarkably low HCP holding.

With 3NT no longer a primary offensive target, our response structure can be a little simpler than for 3C and 3D. Responder can still bid 3NT with stoppers in the other three suits and sufficient support in Opener's suit. Axx support will usually suffice, even opposite J109xxxx, since only a 3-0 split will prevent running the suit with one loser, but double side stoppers will be needed if a trick must be lost in Opener's suit. A raise to game can be either a good hand expecting to make game, or a purely preemptive action to force the opponents to make their offense vs defense decision one level higher. A new suit by an unpassed hand is a forcing cue-bid slam try, but by a passed hand it is lead-directing, to prepare the defense against an opposing contract. A raise to the 5-level asks Opener to bid a slam in his suit if he has 2 of the top 3 honors. A jump in a new suit is a natural forcing slam try, asking Opener to show a side ace or king if he has Qx or better in the new suit, and to rebid his suit if lacking both Qx support and a side ace or king.

Opening 3NT Bids

The classical meaning for an opening 3NT bid has always been to show a very strong balanced hand, typically with about 25-27 HCP. Since the Foundation System's response structure for a strong forcing 2C opening, to be described in the next chapter, can easily handle all strong balanced hands with 22 HCP or more, an opening 3NT bid is not formally defined in the System. Though not an official part of the System, for the benefit of those brave souls who wish to experiment with it, we describe here a frequent alternative to the classical meaning: the so-called Gambling 3NT, which shows a solid 7-card minor (AKQxxxx). In some versions, the Gambling 3NT will have no outside stoppers; other versions require one or more outside stoppers. Our 3NT opening will always show AKQxxxx in clubs or diamonds. Whether an outside stopper is required depends upon whether the opening bid is made in 1st or 2nd seat, or in 3rd or 4th seat.

In 1st or 2nd seat, the opening denies a side ace or king, but may, or may not, have a scattered queen or jack floating around. Responder, who is an unpassed hand, will pass 3NT when holding stoppers in all three side suits, and **may** pass when holding two aces, or an AK in one suit and a stopper in another suit, gambling that the opponents will not find the killing opening lead if one suit is unstopped. Naturally, to pass 3NT, he will also

need at least one card in each minor suit in order to make sure that he has an entry to Opener's solid minor suit. When Responder lacks either sufficient stoppers or an entry to Opener's suit, he will almost always want to play in Opener's suit at some level. Any bid of either minor suit by Responder is "pass or correct". Opener is requested to pass if Responder has bid his suit, or to rebid his suit at the cheapest level if Responder has not bid his suit. Thus a response of 4D says that Responder wants to play in 5C if clubs is Opener's suit, but in a 4D partscore if diamonds is Opener's suit. Over such a 4D bid, Opener can bid 5C if he wants to be declarer, but will usually choose to bid a meaningless 4H, 4S, or 4NT to permit Responder to become declarer in 5C, thus protecting any Kx holding Responder may hold in one of the side suits. If Responder wants to play in some suit other than Opener's, he must first respond 4NT over the 3NT opening. This requests Opener to bid his suit at the 5-level. Responder can then pass, of course, but any other bid by Responder is an absolute signoff.

In 3rd or 4th seat, Opener knows that Responder, having passed originally, is unlikely to hold stoppers in all three side suits. So the System requires Opener to hold at least one side suit stopper in addition to his long solid minor. Responder will of course have no slam aspirations after passing originally, so he will pass 3NT whenever he holds two side suit stoppers, and will choose a minor suit "pass or correct" bid otherwise (usually 4C, since game will be fairly remote. When Responder passes 3NT with two side suit stoppers, occasionally one of his stoppers will correspond with the lone stopper in Opener's hand, leaving a third suit unstopped. This is why this opening is called "gambling"; you are gambling that the opponents will not find the killing opening lead, or that their suit will become blocked so that they cannot take the first 5 tricks.

Opening 4C and 4D Bids

The basic requirement of a 4C or 4D opening bid is a long minor suit with an LTC lower by 1 than required for a 3C or 3D bid. Usually the lower LTC is achieved via an 8-card suit instead of a 7-card suit, but a 7411 or 7420 shape instead of a less extreme 7321 or 7222 shape can have the same effect. Aside from this difference in the LTC requirement, a 4C or 4D opening must have one other characteristic: the chance of missing a viable 3NT contract must be reasonably low. In practice, this usually means an aceless suit with fewer outside entries than losers within the suit. A typical suit would be KQJxxxxx with no outside entry, or K10xxxxxx with one outside entry. Queen-high suits are not excluded. Notice that Q109xxxxx with a Qxxx side suit has an LTC of 5. Ace-high suits are inadvisable, since even A8765432 with no outside entry can produce 7 tricks opposite any doubleton by ducking the first round.

As our preemptive openings get higher, our response structure gets correspondingly simpler. Responder will usually pass, but on occasion will raise to 5 or 6, sometimes hoping to make game or slam, but more often hoping to keep the opponents out of slam or to push them into an unmakeable contract. Responder's only other option is 4NT as Blackwood or RKC Blackwood to investigate slam. If you choose this option, hope that you are playing RKC, so that you can locate the king of trumps, since Opener will rarely, if ever, have the ace but will usually have the king.

Opening 4H and 4S Bids

The usual requirements for a 4H or 4S opening are a 7- or 8-card suit with an LTC of 5-6 if vulnerable or 6-7 if not. The motive for choosing a 4H or 4S bid can be purely preemptive, like the 4C and 4D bids. If so, the maximum high-card strength will be about 11 HCP. Another motive is possible in the present case, since 4H and 4S are game bids. Bidding game immediately can be a two-way shot; if partner has a good hand, game is quite possible, and if partner is weak, the opponents may have a game which your bid either prevents them from finding, or pushes them into a game contract which can be defeated. This two-way shot is most effective when opening in 1st or 2nd seat, when partner has not yet passed, so that your chances for game are better.

In 3rd seat, chances for game have been reduced by partner's failure to open the bidding, so preemption becomes the main motive, but another tactic can sometimes be quite effective. Since partner's failure to open the bidding makes slam unlikely, opening 4H or 4S with a good defensive hand (perhaps as good as 17 HCP) will sometimes induce the opponents to suspect that you're trying to steal the contract, and stretch to bid a game which can be defeated easily, sometimes quite badly. On occasion, I have used this tactic successfully when holding a very strong 6-card suit such as KQJ10xx.

In 4th seat, the preemptive motive vanishes, since you can always pass the hand out, so your motive is to achieve a plus score while still retaining a chance for game if partner's holding proves useful. A 4H or 4S bid in 4th seat therefore means that you are reasonably sure of making game, but want to make it difficult for the opponents to find a profitable sacrifice, so the LTC requirement is reduced to 4-5. After three passes, the missing high-card strength is probably evenly divided among the other three players, so partner will usually be able to produce one or two cover cards. If you are not that strong, it is better to start the bidding at the 1-level, or perhaps at the 2- or 3-level, to find out whether partner holds sufficient strength to make game probable.

The response structure after a 4H or 4S opening is fairly trivial. Responder will usually pass. A raise to the 5-level asks Opener to bid slam if he holds 2 of the top 3 honors, while a raise to slam is to play. 4NT is Blackwood or RKC Blackwood, and any new suit is a cue-bid showing the ace and inviting Opener to continue cue-bidding if interested in slam, or to sign off in his suit at the 5-level with no slam interest.

Opening 5C and 5D Bids

These are fairly rare, and are not officially included in the Foundation System. Should you choose such a bid, partner will probably expect a 9-card suit, but that won't matter because he is going to pass anyway, knowing that if you wanted any input from him you would have started the bidding at some lower level.