

Handling Small Hands

The key to a successful bridge player is having a good understanding of the bidding process. Many students have a good idea when to open the bidding and when they are supposed to respond to the opening bid of their partner. As a starting point we are going to look at the bidding of small hands. What is a small hand?

1. When you open the bidding a small hand is a hand where you have a maximum of 14 playing points.
2. As a responder a small hand is a hand where you have between six and nine points.

Small Opening Hands

When you have a small opening hand you look for reasons to pass instead of reasons to bid. Since you have a small opening hand you will not be opening the bidding one no trump since you do not have enough points. With a five card major you will open that suit. Otherwise you must open a minor suit.

The question becomes which minor do you open. There are specific rules we will adopt.

1. When one minor has more cards than the other open the suit with the longer minor.
2. With four diamonds and four clubs open one diamond. A nice benefit of this treatment is that your partner will know you almost always have four diamonds except in the situation where you have two four card majors.
3. With three clubs and three diamonds bid one club. The advantage of this treatment is that partner will have three different bids available before one no trump.

Remember you are looking for reasons to pass from here on in.

Small Responding Hands

Small responding hands are hands that are generally worth only one bid or six to nine playing points. Again you are looking for reasons to pass and stop the bidding. A good way to look at bridge bidding is through combinations of different types of hands. For example small opening hands combined with small responding hands should lead to part score contracts. In other words there is no chance for game. Now it is time to start talking about some specifics.

Suppose your partner opens one spade. You have six to nine points and three spades. Your bid is easy - two spades. With a fit you can raise your partner's bid to the two level.

Suppose however that you have the same hand but only two spades. Now you have one bid - one no trump. Notice that your one no trump bid does not promise a

balanced hand. Also note that **small responding hands can not change suits and bid to the two level unless there is a fit.**

Another example is when your partner opens one heart. With a fit we can bid two hearts (three cards). Without a heart fit we have two choices - one spade or one no trump. We can bid one spade if we have four spades otherwise we must bid one no trump. Again note that we might have an unbalanced hand when we bid one no trump.

If our partner has opened a minor suit our first obligation is to bid a four card major if we have one. If we do not have a four card major and we have an unbalanced hand (singleton or void somewhere) we should look to see if we have a minor suit fit. The minor suit fit generally will show five cards since partner may have opened with a minor suit with only three cards. (called convenient minor). Otherwise our most common response to partner's opening bid will be one no trump.

That is generally all there is to it (unless of course the opponents interfere). Let's practice a few hands.

Partner opens one heart.

1. xxxx, Kx, Axxxx, xx Bid one spade. We hate our spades but we do have four and a small hand so we must bid them.
2. xxxx, Qxx, KQxxx, x We are happy to bid two hearts. We have defined our hand nicely.
3. xx, x, KQJxxx, Qxxx We do not like it much but we must bid 1NT. We do not have ten points so we **can not** change suits at the two level.

Partner Opens One Diamond.

1. Kxxx, Qxxx, xx, Qxx We are happy to bid one heart which is our first four card major.
2. Kxx, x, Axx, Qxxxxx We must bid one no trump. We do not have enough values for a two club bid.
3. xx, xxx, AKxxx, Jxx We can now bid two diamonds. We have minimum values and five diamonds with no major.