

USING YOUR JUDGMENT WHEN OPENING 1NT

Should you ever open 1NT with a 5 card major? What about 5-4-2-2 patterns with 15-17 points? Some people open 1NT with 6 card minors, too. What about a singleton?

Opening 1NT with a 5 Card Major or How to Start an Argument with a Bridge Player

When you first learned to play bridge, you probably learned never to open 1NT with a 5 card major or always to open 1NT with a 5-3-3-2 pattern and 15-17 HCP since most authors of beginning bridge series believe that beginners should be taught few exceptions to the rules. Neither approach is right all of the time; both are correct some of the time. Beginners don't need many exceptions to the rules. They have their hands full remembering the structure of the bidding system. But, as you gain some experience with this game, you should begin to develop some judgment and learn when to break the rules.

If you open this hand with 1H, what will you rebid over partner's 1S response?

♠Qx ♥AJTxx ♦KQx ♣Axx

Approach 1

Some people open 1NT with 16 points and a 5-3-3-2 pattern and with 15 or 17 points they open the major suit. If you open 1 Major with a 15 point hand, you plan to rebid in such a way that shows a minimum balanced hand, a slight underbid. With 17 points, and the same pattern, if you open 1 Major, you plan to jump rebid in NT, a slight overbid that usually shows 18 or 19 points.

Approach 2

Others will open 1NT with a 5 card major only with 16 or 17 and never with 15. The reason for this is that with extra values in the hand, a NT contract may score as many tricks in NT as in the major. Usually, 2 hands that have an 8 card major suit fit will score an extra trick playing in the major. The exception to this is when there are extra values in the combined hands. Then, you have a good chance to win the same number of tricks in NT as in the major.

Approach 3

Another school of thought is to open 1NT with a 5 card major only when you also have 3 cards in the other major. This will prevent you from playing in an inferior 7 card major suit fit if partner transfers into your 2 card major while holding 3 cards in your 5 card major. So some players never open 1NT with a 5 card major and 2 small in the other major - not a bad plan since that is the most likely lead against your NT contract also.

If you and your partner are playing 2/1 Game Force, or any system that uses a Forcing NT response to 1 of a major opening bids, you will not have a rebid problem on very many hands. The only hands that present a problem are hands with 5 card heart suits. Since partner may respond 1S to a 1H opening, you will have a problem with a rebid. If you adopt Approach 1, you rebid a minimum number of NT with 15 points and jump rebid NT with 17 points. Then the only hand that is a problem for you is the 16 point hand with 5 hearts. On those hands, you may have to open 1NT to avoid a rebid problem. Some partnerships have worked out a system where 1H:1NT!:2C:2X:2NT shows the NT opener and 1H:1NT!:2NT shows the 18-19 point hand. Having such an agreement will help solve most of your rebid problems in the 2/1 bidding system; however, it won't take care of the 16 point hand with 5 hearts if partner responds 1S.

Opening 1NT with 2 Doubletons

I am sure you all learned not to do this very early in your bridge career. After you have played for awhile, you see more experienced players doing it and you wonder why. This particular type of 1NT opening is abused quite frequently. However, there are some very legitimate reasons for opening 1NT with some 5-4-2-2 hand patterns.

Suppose you pick up this hand:

♠Kx ♥KJTxx ♦KJTxx ♣AJ

If you open the bidding with 1D and partner responds with 1S, what is your rebid? You have just endplayed yourself in the bidding! The hand is not good enough for a reverse rebid of 2H; the diamond suit is not long enough for a jump to 3D; and; the diamond suit is also not long enough for a 2D underbid;

and 1NT is also an underbid. Anytime you hold 5 diamonds and 4 hearts, you are unlikely to be able to describe such a hand accurately with a rebid unless you are strong enough to reverse the bidding with 17+ HCP. A 1NT opening takes care of the rebid problem. Notice that this hand does not have a good rebiddable suit and also has honors in the two doubletons.

Suppose instead you pick up:

♠xx ♥AKJx ♦AKJTx ♣xx

With this hand you might choose to open the bidding with 1D and rebid 2H. With all of your values concentrated in your long suits and the good prime cards, the hand is worth a slight overbid of 2H. Since no rebid is quite right with this hand, try to choose the most descriptive one.

How about this one:

♠QJ ♥AQ ♦QTxx ♣AJxxx

You can open in your longest suit, 1C, but if partner bids a major you will have a problem. With the scattered values and the semi-balanced pattern, this hand is not good enough for a reverse to 2D. Some players might open 1D, planning to rebid 2C over partner's major suit response. This is probably a better plan than opening 1C. But, because of the holdings in the majors, you might choose to open this one with 1NT.

Opening 1NT with a 6 Card Minor

Many players are now opening 1NT frequently with 6 card minors.

Here is a hand:

♠KJ ♥AQx ♦KJ ♣Qxxxxx

Some will open with 1NT. Your alternative is to open with 1C and rebid 3C with a really bad 6 card suit. And, if partner responds with 1H, you will squirm even more. A jump raise with a 3 card holding is very risky. With most of the values outside of the club suit, you don't want to jump in clubs and have partner trying for a minor suit game or slam with Kxx or Axx in my suit. You also don't want to end up in a 4-3 heart fit when 3NT is the best contract. Also, with all the tenaces, you want the lead coming into this hand.

Another hand:

♠Ax ♥Ax ♦KQTxxx ♣KTx

Most would open with 1D. The hand is not a minimum opener and the diamond suit is good. You can jump rebid this suit and if partner can bid 3NT, it will be played from the correct side of the table. You have no reason to want to play the contract from your side of the table. If partner has queens, your partner should play the hand. Opening 1NT with good hands and good minor suits is a sure way to miss a lot of minor suit slams.

♠Qxx ♥KJx ♦QJTxxx ♣AK

Many players would open this hand with 1NT. The suit is almost good enough to jump rebid after a 1D opening, but with so many slow cards outside of the D suit, partner may not be able to bid 3NT after the jump without further exploration. The more bidding you have to do to get to the correct contract, the more information you are giving the opponents.

You and your regular partners should discuss when you will open with 1NT and stick to the plan. Reevaluate your results after a few months and make whatever changes you think are necessary, but **have a plan.**

The above was taken from http://www.geocities.com/sue_himel/SueA1.html.

Opening NT with a Singleton

On many of the occasions that someone opens 1NT (or 2NT) with a singleton, someone else at the table becomes upset with the opener. Half of the time it's an opponent (who has ducked an ace and lost to a singleton king), and the other half it's opener's partner who has transferred into the suit in which opener has the singleton, causing the partnership to play in a 5-1 or 6-1 fit (going down) when the contract should have been some number of notrump.

Bridge players have different understandings of what the rules are concerning opening notrump with a singleton. It is described, depending on who you ask, as illegal, immoral, unethical or fattening. The answer is almost always—none of the above.

The ACBL General Convention Chart states, "A notrump opening or overcall is natural if not unbalanced (generally, no singleton or void and only one or two doubletons)." Also from the General Chart is this definition of natural opening suit bids and responses: "An opening suit bid or response is considered natural if for minors it shows three or more cards in that suit and for majors it shows four or more cards in that suit."

Players who, by agreement, use opening bids that are not natural may use only the conventional methods permitted by the General Chart. If your notrump opening shows a balanced hand, you may occasionally pick up a hand with a singleton which you may want to treat as balanced. You may use your **bridge judgment** to open or overcall a notrump with a singleton, provided that:

- It is a rare occurrence (no more than 1% of the time)
- Your partner expects you to have at least two cards in each suit, and
- You and your partner have no agreements which enable you to discover that partner has a singleton.

For example, using strong notrumps, a player may elect to open 1NT with ♠K83 ♥AQ72 ♦A9653 ♣K.

He might judge that he did not want to open 1♦ and rebid such a weak suit, or raise spades on only three cards after partner's 1♠ response, or rebid 1NT. You may feel such judgment is incorrect but that was his decision.

Similarly, a player playing five-card majors may opt to open ♠AKQJ ♥87642 ♦K8 ♣Q9 with 1♠ rather than 1♥.

If, however, your opponent has opened 1NT with an outlandish distribution—6-5-1-1, 6-4-3-0 or some such—or has agreements about one-of-a-suit opening bids or other openings which mean that they have to open all 4-4-4-1 hands with 1NT, you should report such to the director. The director should determine whether the pair's notrump opening is natural or conventional.

There is one conventional 1NT opening permitted on the General Chart. It's a forcing 1NT opening indicating a hand of 16 or more high-card points which may be balanced or unbalanced. An example is the Dynamic 1NT opening, which is a cornerstone of the Romex system.

Also, there are two types of conventional notrump overcalls permitted. The first is a two-suited takeout, i.e., the unusual notrump. If used by an unpassed hand at the one level or as non-jump overcall, it requires an Alert. The second is a three-suit takeout similar to a takeout double. This always requires an Alert.

From <http://www.acbl.org/learn/noTrumpwithaSingleton.html>.