

A circular arrangement of playing cards, viewed from above, with a red background at the center. The cards are arranged in a ring, showing various suits and ranks. Overlaid on the cards are four text boxes, each containing a word in a stylized, bold, yellow font. The words are 'modern', 'constructive', 'bidding', and 'marshall miles'.

***modern***

***constructive***

***bidding***

***marshall miles***

*modern*

*constructive*

*bidding*

***marshall miles***

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# INTRODUCTION

Constructive, uncontested auctions, on the rare occasions in the modern bridge world that your opponents allow you the luxury, are the cornerstone of your bidding system. You and your partner want to bid accurately, giving yourselves the maximum chance of making a good decision as to the final contract. This is harder than it sounds, but what it comes down to is this: the secret of accurate bidding is always to bid all hands of a certain type in the same way.

Some bidding sequences will have specific meanings like, 'My high cards are concentrated in two suits with very little in the others,' or 'I have (or do not have) a singleton in the unbid suit,' or, 'I have exceptionally good trump support, but not much else.' Such bids are usually made when you know that partner will be the declarer and your hand will be exposed. Occasionally this will help an opponent on opening lead; more frequently it will help partner choose the best contract. When you don't have a hand justifying a special message, or when your previous bids have fully described your hand, there should be certain bids that say, in effect, 'I have nothing more to say. I am only bidding because you forced me to, perhaps because you have something more to say.'

Consistency of style is also critical. Each member of a regular partnership should know what the other is likely to do in various situations. Then it is possible to draw inferences, not only from what partner does, but also from what he doesn't do. If someone asked you what your regular partner would do with a certain hand, could you answer with confidence, or does his bidding vary with his mood?

Of course, I realize that most bridge players have several partners. If you play with only one person, you can discuss and agree upon the meanings of many sequences, but it is difficult to persuade several partners to play exactly the same conventions and treatments. Nevertheless, I think you should have agreements with all of your partners on such basic issues as whether to play 'Fast Arrival' or 'Picture Bidding.'

In this book I'm going to discuss some of the auctions in which serious partners ought to have agreements and frequently don't. I'm also going to suggest a number of modern expert treatments and conventions that I think are useful in addressing certain problem areas in constructive bidding. Let me start by posing a series of 'skill-testing questions' to see just how good your current agreements are.

In the sequence

<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>
1♠	2♣
2♠	4♠

is 4♠ a signoff, or does it show where your values are?

How do you play this auction:

<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>
1♣	1♥
2NT	4♥

How does it differ from

<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>
1♣	1♥
2NT	3♥

Is a two-over-one response by a non-passed hand unconditionally forcing to game in your methods? If not, what are the exceptions? Does a two-over-one response by a passed hand guarantee a rebid?

When you have the equivalent of an opening bid and a fit opposite partner's opening bid, you will not let the bidding die short of game. Most of the time it doesn't matter how you get to game, but occasionally it does. It is a nice bonus when you get a good result merely because you have a convention or treatment that routinely permits you to bid a slam that other players miss — or to stop at a safe level on a badly breaking hand. This is where you need some understandings about suit quality as well as high-card strength for your two-over-one auctions. Suppose partner opens the bidding with one of a major and you have 13 to 15 points. Do you usually make a two-over-one response just to let him know about your strength? If partner opens with 1♠, do either of these hands qualify for a 2♣ response in your methods:

♠ A J x   ♥ K J x x   ♦ K J x   ♣ J x x

♠ A J   ♥ K x x x   ♦ A Q x   ♣ 10 x x x

At the other end of the scale, would you and your regular partner get to an excellent slam on these cards:

♠ A Q 10 x x x  
♥ x  
♦ A x x  
♣ Q x x

♠ K x x  
♥ J x  
♦ J x  
♣ A K 10 9 x x

You should (at least, when the hand with a six-card spade suit is the opener)!

Can you quickly diagnose a potentially fatal weakness and get out while it is still safe? For example, would you get higher than 4♥ with these hands:

♠ A K J x x	♠ Q
♥ K x x	♥ A J 10 x x x
♦ J x	♦ A K Q x
♣ Q x x	♣ x x

You won't if you follow my suggestions!

Even simple Stayman auctions contain undiscussed minefields. What do the following sequences mean to you?

<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>
1NT	2♣
2♥	4♦

<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>
1NT	2♣
2♥	3♠

The earlier the partners discover their approximate combined strength, the easier it is to bid accurately. If they know they are in the possible slam zone, they will try to describe their hands in detail to show whether they have extra values and, if so, where they are located. If slam is unlikely, they will look for the safest game (at IMPs) or the best-scoring game (at match-points) while trying to provide no more information to the opponents than necessary. If the strength is almost evenly divided, there are two concerns — find the best contract and make it difficult for the opponents to find theirs. When it is obvious that the opponents have the balance of power, the question is whether it is better to keep quiet, so as not to risk a large penalty or help declarer when he plays the hand, or to try, at some risk, to interfere with the opponents' bidding.

In any system, notrump openings have a fairly narrow range of high card points, and responder can often tell immediately who can make what. Similarly, in strong club systems, like Precision, when opener starts with one of a suit other than clubs, showing roughly 11 to 15 points, his partner again knows approximately how high the partnership should be. If the opening bid was a major suit, showing five or more, and responder has adequate support and enough strength to bid game, but not enough for a slam, he can jump immediately to game in the major. This bid provides no information to the opponents except that responder is willing to play that contract. The opponents don't know whether his bid was a preempt or whether he expects his partner to make it. If the latter, they don't know whether his bidding was based on high card strength or distribution. That makes the opponents' decision whether or not to compete very difficult.

However, after a ‘standard’ opening suit bid, which may show almost any distribution and roughly 10 to 21 points, it is usually impossible to tell immediately which side the hand belongs to. Consequently, it is dangerous for responder to overbid, unless he is making an unambiguous preempt, for fear that opener, with a strong hand, will drive to a losing slam. You don’t have that particular concern when playing Precision.

As an aside, suppose you are playing Precision and partner opens 1 ♥. Next hand passes and you hold

♠ x x   ♥ K 10 x x x   ♦ J x x x   ♣ x x

What do you think of your prospects? My estimate is that partner can take eight tricks in hearts, and the opponents can take ten or eleven tricks in spades. What can you do about it? (See Chapter 5 for my answer.)

While it usually takes a little longer for Standard bidders to discover their combined strength, they do have ways to limit their hands. I recommend an expanded use of a forcing notrump response to one of a major, both as a means for responder to limit his hand and as a way to give a more precise meaning to two-over-one responses. No more two-over-one responses with ‘suits’ like ♣10xxx or ♣Jxx, just to show game-forcing values. (See Chapter 2 for this discussion.)

Do you ever play step responses to show how much you like your hand? If so, when? Do you always look for an eight-card major fit when it is possible that you might have one? Unless you have played bridge for a long time with the right people, you may not be familiar with some of the conventions and treatments mentioned in Chapter 4.

When your agreed suit is a minor, do you have a way to ask for aces or keycards other than using 4NT? What is your priority in cuebidding: First-round controls up the line? First- *or second*-round controls up the line? Length first? What do you bid when you have two crucial controls but only room to show one of them without forcing the bidding to slam? I am pretty sure that you will find new ideas to consider in Chapter 6.

Playing so-called Standard bidding means different things to different people. I am going to suggest solutions to all of the problems I have just raised. Probably 75% of these answers are ‘standard’ in that they are accepted by a majority of top players, and most of my non-standard recommendations are identified as such: feel free to adopt them if they appeal to you and ignore them if they don’t. Many of these ideas were suggested by others and adopted by me because I thought they were both logical and useful; some of them are my own ideas. However, frequently when I came up with a great new way to handle a problem, I later discovered that someone else had thought of it many years ago.

Finally, a word about my style of writing: I don’t see any point in being wishy-washy. If I believe something, I say what I believe, without qualifications.

But when I say you *should* make a certain bid, it doesn't mean that no good player could possibly disagree (take a look at the Bidding Panel in any bridge magazine — experts frequently disagree!). However, I never tell you that you should bid a certain way just because I say so; I always give my reasons. You may not be convinced, because you may think the advantages I mention are illusory or are outweighed by other factors. But even if you disagree with me, you should find it useful to consider the pros and cons so that you can either develop your own treatment or continue to play the way you have been playing with even greater confidence.



## CHAPTER 1

# OPENING THE BIDDING

### WHAT CONSTITUTES AN OPENING BID?

What do you need for an opening bid? The current vogue is to open all 12-point hands, but my tendency is *not* to open balanced 12-point hands unless they include some favorable feature. This could be good spot cards, or having the points mostly concentrated in aces and kings. I also like having 4432 distribution including four spades and a four-card minor: there can't be a serious rebid problem when, over partner's one of a suit response, you can rebid 1♠. With 5332 distribution, 12 points are usually enough unless the five-card suit is very weak or you have queens and jacks unsupported by higher honors.

Most people would open a 5431 12-count automatically, but it should not be so automatic in my view. Not everyone would agree, but I think it is a mistake to open the bidding with

♠ K   ♥ A J 8 x x   ♦ J x x x   ♣ K x x

Your suit is weak, and you have to count both the singleton king and the unsupported ♦J, both of which are of very dubious value, to get your 12 points. In a recent bidding panel, four out of five experts favored a pass with this hand. However, AKxxx of a suit with a side ace is a clear-cut opening bid: this is because your points are concentrated in your long suit. Something like Axxxx with an ace-king on the side is not quite as good. You probably need a suit like A109xx to go with your ace-king to justify opening with 5332 distribution, although with 5431 distribution I can't imagine passing with three quick tricks (referred to as honor tricks in the old days).

Whenever you have a close decision, you should tend to open when your long suit is a major and pass if it is a minor. You can even open with as few as 11 points and 5422 distribution if the five-card suit is a major *and* the honors are in the long suits. So you should pass with

♠ Q x   ♥ K x x x x   ♦ J x   ♣ A J x x

but should open the bidding with

♠ x x   ♥ K Q 9 8 x   ♦ x x   ♣ A Q 10 x

Don't get hung up on counting points, though: even 9 points may be enough with long suits and at least two quick tricks:

- a) ♠ A J x x x x x   ♥ x x   ♦ x   ♣ A x x  
 b) ♠ A x x x x x   ♥ K Q x x x   ♦ x   ♣ x  
 c) ♠ x x   ♥ x x x   ♦ A K Q x x x x   ♣ x

Both hands (a) and (b) qualify as 1♠ openers for me. If you hold the same high cards as in hand (b), but five spades and six hearts, it is better to pass originally and plan to come in with a Michaels Cuebid (or use Unusual 2NT if the opponents bid both minors). The hand is not strong enough to reverse, and if you open 1♥ you may never be able to show your spades at a reasonable level.

Hand (c) may make 3NT opposite as little as two aces, and one way to handle it is to open 3NT to show a solid (you hope) seven- or eight-card minor and no side ace or king. But if you are not playing Gambling 3NT (probably because you are playing Namyats and need 3NT to show a minor-suit preempt at the four-level), the best way to describe it is to open 1♦ and rebid a minimum number of diamonds at each opportunity until (you hope) partner bids notrump. (Opening three of a minor should deny a solid suit.)

While these are my recommendations, you will probably continue to open the hands you have been opening in the past, and who can say that you are wrong? Here, as ever, experts disagree. The Granovetters prefer stronger ‘Roth-Stone’-type opening bids. Marty Bergen advocates opening at least one point lighter than I do on balanced hands, and he likes opening 1♥ on

♠ J x x   ♥ K Q 10 x x x   ♦ K x x x   ♣ —

(9 points without two quick tricks). Meckstroth and Rodwell, hereafter referred to as Meckwell, open almost all 11-point hands and sometimes balanced 10-counts (although they do play a strong club system). What’s right depends upon your bidding style (on later rounds) and what your partner has been led to expect.

It is possible to take this kind of aggressive bidding to extremes, as in the system California expert Tom Wood has developed, called Blue Jay. Playing Blue Jay, an opening one-bid in a major has a range of 8 to 21 points with at least a five-card suit, and the forcing club and 1NT bids start at 10 points. The responses and rebids are designed primarily to show distribution, and only secondarily to discover the combined strength of the hands. Wood’s theory is that if the opponents can set you several tricks at a low level after you have found an eight- or nine-card fit, they could probably do just as well or better in a contract of their own. Over a 1♣ opening, which can be made on as few as 10 points, responder responds in the suit below his four-card suit, no matter how weak his hand is. With a minimum club bid and four of responder’s suit, opener jumps to the two-level:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♦ <sup>1</sup>
2♥	

### 1. Showing hearts

— an auction where the hands could be 10 points opposite zero! With a good hand and four or more hearts opener rebids only one heart, which allows more room for each partner to describe his hand.

The downside, of course, is that no matter what you do, when you have such extremely wide ranges for your bids you lose accuracy in your constructive bidding. On the other hand, it is very hard to compete against such wide-range bids, and the opponents may let you bid unopposed to the two-level and play there, down one or two tricks undoubled, when they are cold for a vulnerable game. I won't try to explain the system in detail, but the success of systems like this one and the bidding style used by Bergen and Meckwell makes me wonder whether old-time, accurate constructive bidding is really the best way to go. But that is the way I still (attempt to) play and it is what I describe in this book.

## SELECTING THE SUIT

Now we turn from the strength of the opening hand to the issue of selecting the actual opening bid. First let's dispose of notrump openings: everyone opens 1NT when the hand is within the agreed range and completely balanced. Whether you should open 1NT with five-card majors, weak doubletons (especially with 5422 distribution) or singleton kings are issues that will be discussed in the chapter on notrump bidding.

A long-time subject of debate amongst Standard bidders has been whether to open 1♣ or 1♠ with a 5-5 hand in the black suits. Most modern experts open 1♠ except with weak spades or very strong hands. The reason for choosing spades with most hands is that you may not be able to bid clubs then spades and then spades again without getting too high, and if you can't anticipate making three bids, it is more important to show your five-card major. If you do open 1♣ and fail to bid spades twice, partner will assume that you have only a four-card spade suit. However, with a hand as good as

♠ A Q 10 9 x   ♥ A x   ♦ x   ♣ A K J x x

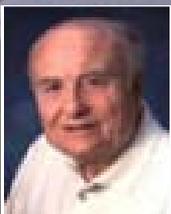
it is better to open 1♣ since someone (perhaps even an opponent) is more likely to keep the bidding open than if you had opened 1♠. Not only could you miss a game by being passed out in 1♠ when partner holds

♠ x   ♥ K x x x x   ♦ x x x   ♣ Q x x x

ADVANCED

## IS YOUR BIDDING up to date?

The logical follow-up to the author's best-selling *Competitive Bidding in the 21st Century*, this book deals with the latest expert thinking on constructive bidding at bridge. Every part of the auction comes under the microscope, from opening bids to slam-going sequences. As usual, Miles' ideas are cutting edge, and not everything he recommends will appeal to everyone. However, in discussing them, he will challenge his readers to think about and question what they are currently doing, and ultimately reinforce their own confidence in the style they choose to play.



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