

Bid the right game

When your partnership has 25 or more points you look to bid for a game contract. The five game contracts are 3NT, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣ and 5♦.

The main aim of modern bidding systems is to find a trump fit of eight or more cards in a major suit. With game strength and a major-suit trump fit of eight or more cards, you should prefer to play in 4♥ or 4♠.

With no trump fit in hearts or spades, you should usually play in 3NT. The minor-suit game should only be bid with unbalanced hands or if an opponent shows a long, strong suit which will take too many tricks against you in a notrump contract

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">11</div> <div style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">D</div>	N North	W N E S
♠ J1096 ♥ 1092 ♦ 2 ♣ KQ865	♠ 5 ♥ AJ7 ♦ QJ1086 ♣ AJ92	♠ AK73 ♥ K8 ♦ K7543 ♣ 73
W West	S South	E East
♠ 5 ♥ AJ7 ♦ QJ1086 ♣ AJ92	♠ Q842 ♥ Q6543 ♦ A9 ♣ 104	♠ AK73 ♥ K8 ♦ K7543 ♣ 73
♠ J1096 ♥ 1092 ♦ 2 ♣ KQ865		1♦ P 1♠ P 1NT P 3NT P P P
W West		E East
♠ 5 ♥ AJ7 ♦ QJ1086 ♣ AJ92		♠ AK73 ♥ K8 ♦ K7543 ♣ 73
S South		3NT W NS: 0 EW: 0
♠ Q842 ♥ Q6543 ♦ A9 ♣ 104		♠ AK73 ♥ K8 ♦ K7543 ♣ 73

On board 11, partner west opens 1♦, north passes and you are east with ♠AK73 ♥K8 ♦K7543 ♣73. You have 13 high-card points so you know your partnership has the strength for a game contract. Do not raise diamonds!

With the possibility of a spade trump fit, you should respond 1♠. If partner has four cards in spades your best game will be 4♠. After you bid 1♠, south passes and partner rebids 1NT. After north passes, you should bid 3NT. Do not bid diamonds! Your best game contract with a semi-balanced hand is 3NT.

More than half the easts bid diamonds, either 2♦, 3♦, 4♦ or 5♦. Quite a few did not reach a game contract and some in 5♦ went down instead of making an easy ten tricks in 3NT. Even those who made 5♦ only scored 37%

D	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ KJ102		1♣	P	1♦
	♥ KJ53	P	1♥	P	3NT
	♦ 103	P	P	P	
	♣ A54				
W West		E East			
♠ 98654		♠ 73			
♥ Q86		♥ A97			
♦ J4		♦ 652			
♣ 1097		♣ KQJ63			
	S South	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0			
	♠ AQ				
	♥ 1042				
	♦ AKQ987				
	♣ 82				

Partner north opens 1♣, east passes and you are south with ♠AQ ♥1042 ♦AKQ987 ♣82. You know your partnership has game-going strength. Your first response is 1♦. Do not make a jump bid in diamonds as partner might think you have a weak hand.

After you bid 1♦, west passes and partner bids 1♥. The most practical bid is now 3NT. An expert partnership might explore for a slam by using a technique known as fourth-suit forcing but will eventually end up in 3NT when north shows a minimum opening hand.

Quite a few pairs rebid their diamonds and ended up playing in 2♦ or 3♦. The trouble with a lot of players is that they love their diamonds too much!

D	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ J752		P	P	1NT
	♥ 107	2♠	3NT	P	P
	♦ A10765	P			
	♣ A7				
W West		E East			
♠ AK986		♠ 10			
♥ KQ3		♥ J8652			
♦ 32		♦ J98			
♣ 1054		♣ Q862			
	S South	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0			
	♠ Q43				
	♥ A94				
	♦ KQ4				
	♣ KJ93				

In our third example partner south opens 1NT, west passes and you are north with ♠J752 ♥107 ♦A10765 ♣A7. You have 9 high-card points and can add an extra point for your five-card diamond suit to give you 10 points. You have game-going strength!

With a possibility of a spade trump fit, you should use the Stayman Convention. After you respond 2♣, east passes and partner south bids 2♦, showing no four-card major. You now bid 3NT. With a semi-balanced hand, don't even think of introducing your diamonds.

At some tables south opened 1NT and west overcalled 2♠. Once west shows length in spades, north knows that a spade game is out of the question, so north should bid a direct 3NT. Only eleven of twenty-eight tables managed to bid this easy game. They scored 70% for making ten tricks or 87% for making eleven tricks. Most tables played in 2NT, three tables played in diamonds and three tables let their opponents win the auction in 2S

When to bid a minor-suit game

Minor-suit game contracts are rare in duplicate bridge.

When you have established a minor-suit fit and the strength for a game contract you should bid 3NT when you have no singleton or void. Balanced and semi-balanced hands with a minor-suit trump fit have better chances of producing nine tricks in notrumps rather than eleven tricks in a five-level minor-suit trump contract. If you have three unavoidable losers you will be defeated in a five-level minor-suit game, but you may well make 3NT.

You should also choose 3NT as your game contract when you have game strength and a minor-suit trump fit with a singleton or void in a suit bid by your partner.

Of course, there are hands where you bid for a minor-suit game.

When an opponent has shown length and strength by opening or overcalling you may look to play in a minor-suit game rather than in a notrump game. Your opponent's bid has shown the potential length to defeat a notrump game so with no stopper in their suit but sufficient strength for a game contract, you should bid to the five level in your minor suit

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 40px; text-align: center; margin: 0 auto;">11</div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 5px;">D</div>	N North ♠ K32 ♥ AQ10984 ♦ 87 ♣ 72	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th>W</th> <th>N</th> <th>E</th> <th>S</th> </tr> <tr> <td>1♣</td> <td>2♥</td> <td>3♦</td> <td>3♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♠</td> <td>P</td> <td>5♦</td> <td>P</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	W	N	E	S	1♣	2♥	3♦	3♥	3♠	P	5♦	P	P	P		
	W	N	E	S														
1♣	2♥	3♦	3♥															
3♠	P	5♦	P															
P	P																	
W West ♠ J975 ♥ 5 ♦ KQ ♣ KQJ653	E East ♠ A ♥ 32 ♦ AJ109632 ♣ A84																	
	S South ♠ Q10864 ♥ KJ76 ♦ 54 ♣ 109	5♦ E NS: 0 EW: 0																

Partner west opens 1♣, north overcalls 2♥ and you are east with ♠A ♥32 ♦AJ109632 ♣A84. After you respond 3♦, south bids 3♥, west bids 3♠ and north passes. Don't bid 3NT without a stopper in hearts. You should bid 4♦ (or 5♦ if you think partner may pass 4♦).

You should choose one of the minor-suit games of 5♣ or 5♦ with game strength, a trump fit and a singleton or void in a suit partner has not bid. When partner has failed to bid a suit in which you have a singleton it looks likely that your opponents will have at least a nine-card fit in that suit. If you play in notrumps, they will lead this suit. If they can establish their length tricks, they may well defeat you.

Here is an example: With ♠9 ♥82 ♦AKJ43 ♣AQJ62 you open 1♦. When partner responds 3♦ you know your partnership has game strength. Partner has denied four cards in a major (by not responding in a major at the one level). With spade length in your opponents' hands, you should choose 5♦ as your game bid.

Some unusual hands with an eight-card or longer suit or eleven or more cards in two suits should also be played in a trump contract, even if your trump suit is a minor suit. Hands with two singletons, or a void and a singleton, can play very poorly in notrumps as it can be difficult to lead to partner's hand.

Summary – there is a lot to think about ! Good judgment is developed slowly and having information about how your hands fit rather than simply assessing high card points will produce more successful game contracts.