



SKELETON System

Eddie Kantar wrote: "One of the main difficulties of playing so many conventions is that it puts an added strain on the partnership. Not only do you have to remember what you are playing, but you also have to remember the ramifications and minor changes you have adopted to fit your own bidding style."

Bob Hamman, concerning his victory in the Platinum Pairs of the Spring 2012 NABC in Memphis, reported in the Daily Bulletin that of the 156 boards played, system was irrelevant on nearly all of them.. Michael Rosenberg asked Hamman if he had really once said, "System is 3% of the game," and he replied, "Why so much?"

Rosenberg goes on to say (In *Bridge, Zia, and Me*): "I would say that the choice of basic system, conventions, and gadgets is relatively unimportant. I do regard *agreements* as being of primary importance. The more different situations in which you and your partner are attuned to the same wavelength, the better equipped you will be to handle different possibilities. To do this requires definition rather than artificiality."

Skeleton gets its name from being "bare bones," with only a very few simple bidding conventions. No Stayman, no transfers, no negative doubles, no Blackwood or Gerber, no conventional raises, etc. For that reason we must be sure of the strength and distribution requirements for all calls, and especially must agree on their forcing or non-forcing nature. Doing that we should hardly ever have a bidding misunderstanding. We must also play our cards well, doing our best to offset the lack of conventions by good declarer play and defense. Bridge is a card game, after all. First, learn how to play cards.

HCP stands for high-card points in the 4-3-2-1 point count system. A better system is described at the end of this article.

System Summary

- Weak notrump opening, a "good" 12 to a "bad" 15 HCP.
- 2NT opening 21-22 HCP
- 3NT opening shows a solid minor and outside stoppers, not "gambling"
- Four-card major openings, Q10xx or better
- Jump raise of a major forcing, limit raise in competition
- Jump raise of a minor opening always a limit raise, invitational

- 2NT response 13-15 HCP, but 11-12 in competition after a minor suit opening
- Strong two bids in all suits, but 2C can be clubs or a 23+ HCP notrump hand
- Unusual notrump by a passed hand only
- Penalty doubles of overcalls (cooperative)
- Direct 1NT overcall 16-18 HCP
- Landy vs 1NT opening (2C shows both majors)
- Strong jump overcalls (about 8 tricks)
- Sound preemptive bids
- Direct cue bid very strong by an unpassed hand, takeout by a passed hand

System Details

CONVENTIONS?

The whole point of Skeleton is to minimize the number of conventions. There are a few valuable old-time conventions that are simple, requiring no discussion, and we should probably play them:

- Landy vs 1NT (2C shows both majors, and a 2D response is natural, not pick-a-major). With equal length, advancer bids 2H (which intervenor will consider when 5=4 or 4=5 in the majors with light values).
- Next-higher denomination response (e.g., 2S-P-2NT, 2C-P-2D) to a strong two bid is negative or waiting. Cheaper of 2NT or 3NT is the second negative.
- Strong 2C opening is either natural with clubs or a 23+ HCP notrump hand. Open 2NT with 21-22 HCP.
- Unusual notrump, usually lower two unbid suits, Only in obvious, balancing situations. *Not* directly over an opening suit bid or a bid by responder. Notrump overcalls by a passed hand are of course Unusual, but not by an unpassed hand (4S-4NT is natural, long solid minor and spades stopped). 1S-P-2S-2NT or 1S-2NT is natural, probably a long solid minor and a spade stopper. However, if the opposing suit has been raised to a higher level, then 4NT is Unusual, even by an unpassed hand.
- Conventional countermeasures vs opposing conventional bids (Multi, Unusual Notrump, etc.) are optional. We are sometimes reluctantly obliged to defend ourselves from the conventions of others by a conventional countermeasure, but that is a partnership decision, not integral with Skeleton.

Opening 1NT = 12+ to 15- HCP That's a good 12 to a bad 15 HCP. A good 12 has honor cards in combination rather than scattered, and at least one ace. A "bad 15" has some isolated honors, and 0-1 aces. Any 12 HCP hand is okay in third seat. In fourth seat the HCP requirement is 11 to 13, which means game is generally out of the question.

When the opening bid is one of a suit and opener rebids 1NT, that shows a strong notrump hand (good

15 to a bad 18) and must be Alerted. By fourth seat it's a good 14 to 16, so jump to 2NT with 17-18. With passing opponents these rebids are pretty safe.

Opening 1NT with 4-4-3-2 and strength concentrated in the four-card suits is undesirable if the hand qualifies as a suit opening. For instance, with two good black suits (hence weak red suits) prefer to open 1C because there is no rebid problem. Open 1C with KJxx xx xxx AKJx. In third seat it may be preferable to open a strong leadable major suit rather than open a marginal 1NT or one of a minor. Open 1S with AKxx xxx Qx Kxxx. You can pass any response so there is no rebid problem. Such bids have two advantages: they suggest a good lead for partner and they rob opponents of some bidding space.

It is seldom right to open 1NT when holding a "rebiddable" (Q10xxx or better) spade suit and suit-opening-bid values. Open 1S with AJ9xxx K10x KQx xx, not 1NT. You can pass a 1NT response, raise a 2H or 2D response (KQx = "extra values") and rebid 2S (not 2NT!) if the response is 2C. In third or fourth seat a light 1S opening is also preferable (no rebid problem because you can pass any response).

The same goes for a five-card heart suit, but only when holding spades good enough to raise. Open 1H with Axx KJxxx Axx xx because you don't have to rebid 1NT after a 1S response. With one more club and one fewer spades you have to open 1NT in first or second seat, but 1H would be right in third or fourth seat because you can pass any response.

In first or second seat you must reluctantly open 1NT with xx AJxxx AKx xxx because a 1S response leaves you without a rebid as 2H would show six. If that seems unacceptable, open 1H and rebid in your better minor (2D in this case) when the response is 1S. If the five hearts are very strong you can rebid 2H, pretending they are six long.

Opening 1NT with 5-4-2-2 distribution is rarely correct because 5-4 hands are suit-oriented. Only when the doubletons are strong and in the major suits should 1NT be contemplated. Open 1NT with AQ AQ 10xxx Jxxxx because a 1D or 1C opening is out of the question, as is a pass. However, with Kx Qx AJxxx KJxx open 1D like everyone else, planning to bid 2C if the response is 1H or 1S.

Direct 1NT overcall 16-18, Balancing 11-14. With more, double or bid a suit.

RESPONSES TO 1NT (Opening, direct overcall, or balancing overcall):

- 2H/2S not invitational, usually passed, but a "super-accept" raise is permissible. With four-card support, opener should raise even with a minimum. With 9+ cards in the trump suit, if the contract doesn't make the opponents probably have something their way. Opener may also raise with a maximum rich in high honors, three very good trumps, and a ruffing value.
- 2C/2D weak, usually passed, but opener should raise with four-card support as a preemptive measure.
- 2NT invitational (opener can show a major if he doesn't pass). This requires a "good 12" HCP. If in doubt, don't raise. The raise should not be made opposite a fourth-seat 1NT opening, when game is presumably out of the question.
- 3C/3D forcing to game, opener must show a major (3H with both), otherwise must bid 3NT (or 3D over 3C, showing good club support and strength in diamonds). We used to say, "Bid your better minor if interested in a major," so the suit might be just three cards or even a strong

doubleton unless a subsequent bid says otherwise. This is not a convention because bidding a three-card suit or a suit with strength is a natural bid according to the ACBL. However, if winning the contract the 3C/3D bid should be explained as not necessarily a "real suit." With both majors opener bids 3H, allowing responder to show four spades.

- A 3H/3S response is also forcing to game. Opener raises with three-card support or (over 3H) shows a four-card spade suit. With 5=4 in spades-hearts a jump to 3C allows opener to bid 3D with no major, whereupon responder's 3S rebid shows five or more. This may not be a "natural" 3C bid, just tactical, and that fact should be disclosed by opener before the opposing opening lead is made. With 4=5 in spades-hearts responder jumps to 3H, giving opener a chance to raise or show four spades. Opener's minor suit rebid after a major suit jump is a cue bid in support of the major, implying a maximum 1NT opening.

Just raise notrump with a 5-3-3-2 hand of invitational strength, even when the five-carder is a major. Simulations have shown this is superior at any method of scoring. Also with a 4-3-3-3 hand, of course. Along that line, pass 1NT with a weak 5-3-3-2 hand and a five-card major. Remember that a 2H or 2S response is not an absolute signoff, because opener can "super accept." Therefore pass 1NT with a really bad hand and no six-card major. Maybe fourth seat will balance.

If 1NT is doubled, we have no conventional runout. An SOS redouble by opener is unwise, as going down doubled may be an acceptable result.

In competition a suit response is just competitive. 1NT-2C-2S with AJxxx Qxxx Jxx x, not macho but not expecting a raise either.

2NT - 21-22. After a 3C/3D response opener should show a major, and if responder goes past 3NT, then he had slam in mind (and a real suit, probably). With 23+ HCP start with a 2C opening, rebid 2NT (or more--see below).

2NT and higher NT overcalls are natural by an unpassed hand, showing a long solid minor and opposing suit(s) stopped, not forcing. Unusual notrump, of course, by a passed hand. "A passed hand" is a hand that did not open the bidding when having that opportunity on the first round of bidding. Passing over an opposing suit opening does not count as a "passed hand," as one could be quite strong in that case.

3NT shows at least 8-1/2 tricks, a solid long minor, at least two side suits stopped and Qx or Jxx minimum in a third side suit.

SUIT OPENINGS AT THE ONE LEVEL

Four-card majors, Q10xx or better, but must have a suitable rebid. Light openings on distributional hands with a good five-card or longer suit, but must have 2+ defensive tricks, usually 2-1/2. Treat five small as a four-card suit!

With 4-4 minors open the stronger. With 4-4 majors, open the stronger if one is weak (worse than Q10xx); if both are weak open a three-card minor.

With 4-4-4-1 open the suit below the singleton. When that suit is clubs (e.g., a 4=4=1=4 hand), bid 1C even with a weak suit. Otherwise if the suit below the singleton is very weak, open the suit below that. If that's weak too, open the third suit. Do not open a light 4-4-4-1 hand. Such hands are hard to describe

after opening, but after passing can be described with one call--a takeout double of the short suit. If they are bidding other suits, let them play their misfit.

Given a choice, it is better to open a strong four-card major than a minor. E.g., with AKxx Jx KJx QJxx, open 1S and rebid 2NT if partner bids 2H, or raise a minor suit response (both implying extra values). Don't do this without a good rebid and a good leadable suit, however. With AKJx xx xxx AQJx open 1C because there is no good rebid if partner bids 2H or 2D over 1S (3C promises five spades and a powerful hand).

With five clubs and five spades, bid 1C if the spades are weak, otherwise 1S (but just bid 2S after a 2/1 red-suit response unless the hand is quite strong).

No lousy third-seat openings in a suit because we don't play Drury. A very leadable suit (AKxx, KQJx) is an excuse to open light, but not a Jxxxx suit.

Strong two bids in all suits, forcing to game. Lacking a positive response, responder bids the next higher denomination as a negative or "waiting" response. As said before 2C can be either a strong two based on clubs or a 23+ HCP notrump hand. With 23-24 make a minimum rebid in notrump, with more, jump to an appropriate level in notrump. A positive response need not require a great suit. Examples: AJxxx KJxxx KQxxx. Six to the ace or king is okay, as is four very strong. The hand must have three controls (A = 2, K = 1). A 2NT response to 2D or 2H shows values, including at least three controls, but a 2NT response to 2S is a negative/waiting response. 2NT should rarely be bid in response to a 2C opening, so it should show stoppers in all suits except maybe clubs. When opener bids a new suit, responder bids notrump as a "second negative."

HCP total is not the criterion for a strong two bid based on a suit or suits. The hand should have at least 9-1/2 playing tricks when featuring a major suit, 10-1/2 for a minor one-suited hand.

Three and four-level suit openings are weak preemptive bids. In first or second seat 3C/3D denies an ace (warns partner your hand may be entryless). Preempts follow rule of 2 and 3 (within two tricks of contract if vulnerable, three otherwise, but count losers, not winners--Qxx is two losers, Kx one).

RESPONSES TO ONE OF A SUIT

- A 1/1 response requires 6 HCP (stretch with a good five-card major) A free 1/1 response should include at least one defensive trick, and 1/1 suit responses show a "biddable" suit (Q10xx or better) unless no other response is reasonable. We raise freely with three-card support, and like partner to lead our suit from Kx, those are the reasons.

With four-card support for opener's minor and 6-7 HCP, prefer to raise rather than bid a weak major. This is especially true in competition. Partner may be able to go to the three level, when you could not do that, and the raise robs the opponents of some bidding space. If partner is strong he may be able to bid your major himself.

- 1NT 6-9 maybe 7-10 in competition
- 2NT 13-15 (11-12 by a passed hand, or by an unpassed hand in competition if the opening was 1C or 1D). But 1H-1S-2NT is 13-15 (bid some minor with 11-12, then bid 2NT)
- 3NT 16-18 (but 13-16 if 2NT would be 11-12). Should be a 4-3-3-3 hand when it's 16-18.

- 4NT is invitational. 19-20 HCP when 3NT would be 16-18, 17-19 when 3NT would be 13-16.
- A 2/1 response implies at least 10+ HCP, forcing, and does not promise another bid. A very fine suit like AQJxxx justifies a 2/1 response. Skeleton bidders don't like to bid notrump with a suit-oriented hand. A 2/1 response in competition, even in a suit higher ranking than opener's, does not promise another bid, and may be a stretch. We like to bid in competition.
- New suit response by a passed hand is not forcing, except 1D over 1C. Therefore it implies five or more cards or a strong four at the one level, five or more at the two level.
- Jump in a new suit by an unpassed hand shows slam interest and a solid suit (or strong suit with good support for opener's suit). Never a two-suiter, so a following new suit bid is a cue bid. A passed hand's jump in a new suit shows 4+ card support for opener's major, inviting game. Over a minor opening just shows a great 6+ card suit.
- No weak jump shift, even in competition (see previous item for the reason).
- Double jump in a new suit is weak, preemptive (1H-3S, 1S-4C, etc), no defense. Seven spades to the QJ10 is typical for a 3S response to 1x.
- Jump raises of a major forcing (limit raise in competition only). The forcing jump raise is not unlimited and should not have as much as an ace extra. With that, bid something else first. Also, minimum trump holding is Jxxx. Jump raise of a minor is always invitational, not forcing.
- Double jump raise to game is preemptive, but a single jump (i.e., over competition) is strong. When unable to double jump with a weak major suit game raise because of competition, just bid the suit minimally (1H-3D-3H) and then bid again

PENALTY DOUBLES OF OVERCALLS

Double of a suit overcall is primarily penalty, but "cooperative":

Pull the double with a void

Pass with a singleton only if strong (16+)

Pass with a doubleton unless weak and long-suited or two-suited

Pass with three or more

Opener may prefer bidding game to passing. A simple rebid of his suit shows at least six and a weak hand, and a jump rebid in that suit is highly invitational but not forcing. A new suit bid is not forcing, implying weakness, so bid something else if game is in sight.

Don't double with just a trump stack, you need 10+ HCP in the hand (in case partner pulls the double or doubles a rescue bid).

If in doubt about passing as opener, consider that responder is short in your suit, so an AK or KQJ suit, especially four long, is great.

When it is opener who doubles an overcall, that is penalty if partner has acted, takeout otherwise. 1H-P-1S-2C; Dbl is penalty, but 1H-P-P-2C; Dbl is takeout.

Responder should rarely pull this penalty double, but may use judgment in the same way opener does when responder doubles an overcall. A simple rebid of his suit shows at least six and a weak hand, and a jump rebid in that suit is highly invitational but not forcing. A new suit bid is not forcing, implying weakness, and almost surely 5-5, so bid something else if game is in sight.

REBIDS BY OPENER

- Jump in same suit not forcing, even after a 2/1 response!
- Jump in new suit forcing to game.
- Minimum notrump rebid 15+ to 18-, 1+ point less for a fourth-seat opener (whose 1NT opening shows 11-13). After a 2/1 response 15+ to 17 (not quite forcing).
- Jump to 2NT after a 1/1 response 18+ to 20-, 1+ point less for a fourth-seat opener, bid 3NT with more. After a 2/1 response a jump to 3NT shows about 17+ to 18. With 19-20 rebid 4NT.
- Raise of minor suit 2/1 response 15-17 not quite forcing.
- Raise of heart 2/1 response (1S-P-2H) is not forcing, bid 4H if sure of game. We stretch to bid 2/1 in hearts.
- Jump raises of a 2/1 minor suit response are forcing to game. If responder now bids 4NT, that is natural, showing a minimum hand such as K83 64 Q1084 AQ75. If he bids four of opener's major, he is just showing too much for a simple raise originally, not forcing.
- A reverse is not quite forcing after a 1/1 response, jump if you must be in game. Reverses are forcing after a 2/1 response, not quite game-forcing but do promise another bid if responder doesn't show a weak preference for the first suit..
- 1S-P-2H-P; 3C/3D is a very strong bid, promising not to pass if responder doesn't bid game. If not very strong, just rebid the major. Never do this with 4-4, open the minor. May be a little weaker in competition. 1H-P-1S-2D; 3C is not forcing although strong. However, 1S-P-2D-2H; 3C is forcing (because of the 2/1 response)

After receiving a single raise, a new suit by opener is forcing and 1-2-3 is invitational, implying a balanced hand. In competition 1-2-3 is not invitational over RHO's raise. To invite game, bid a new suit below the raised suit or, if that isn't possible, double (1S -2H -2S -3H ; Dbl is a game try in spades-- "Maximal Double"--while 3S is merely competitive). When it's possible to bid a new suit cheaply, a double of a raised bid is takeout (1S-2C-2S-3C; Dbl), showing a four-card original opening, four cards in any unbid major, and a good opening bid (partner may pass) but no strong desire for game. Opener has to bid 3D or 3H with game interest. These doubles are not Alertable. Because they may be passed, we won't classify them as conventions.

A 2NT rebid by opener (17-18) is not forcing after a single raise, but responder usually doesn't pass with four-card support.

REBIDS BY RESPONDER

- Minimum rebid of same suit is weak.
- Jump in same suit is not forcing.
- Jump in opener's first suit is not forcing.
- 2NT 11-12 HCP
- New suit forcing by an unpassed hand, but weak if opener's rebid was 1NT (except for a reverse)
- Reverse is forcing by an unpassed hand, but not forcing to game. Responder can pass a discouraging rebid by opener.
- After a simple raise by opener, a return to opener's suit by responder is forcing unless he is a passed hand: 1C=1S=2S=3C can be passed only if responder is a passed hand. Why? Because responder could be 4-4 with opening bid strength but unable to bid notrump. Even when not forcing, responder must have a game-invitational hand, without which he must either pass 2S or bid 2C on the first round.
- After opener's reverse responder must rebid his major (forcing) with five or more in the suit, regardless of suit or hand strength. Failure to rebid the suit denies five. He can jump in a suit playable opposite a singleton. A bid of 2NT or return to opener's first suit is not forcing, weak, so do something else if you see game. Important: An immediate bid in the fourth suit shows a good raise for opener's first suit but is not forcing to game. A later bid in that suit is natural, showing five-card length. Responder's raise of opener's second suit is forcing (since a weak hand could pass).

1C=1S=2D (opponents silent)

- 2S is mandatory with five or more spades, regardless of the rest of the hand. 3S is okay if the suit can play opposite a singleton.
- 2H shows a decent club raise, but does not promise another bid.
- Pass shows four diamonds and a very weak hand, so
- 3D shows four or more diamonds and is forcing (but not to game).
- 2NT is weak, only four spades, fewer than four diamonds, fewer than three clubs. Bid 3NT with 8-9 HCP.
- 3C is a weak preference

Note that the 2NT rebidder denies five cards in his suit, or three in opener's first suit, or four in opener's second suit, so he must have at least four cards in the fourth suit.

Oddity: with 5-5 in the majors opener responder must bid 2S (forcing) when opener has opened 1C and reversed with 2D. The heart suit won't be lost because a later bid in the fourth suit shows five!

DEFENSIVE BIDDING

- Bid of opener's suit is natural over RHO's bid of a new suit: 1D-1H-1S-2D is natural. A bid in RHO's suit is a cue bid.
- A jump raise of an overcall only shows too much for a single raise. Instead of raising twice, bid the limit right away. It is not strongly invitational. With game hopes, cue bid and then raise.
- New suit advances of an overcall not forcing.
- Cue bid response to an overcall does not promise support in overcaller's suit. It only says, "Tell me more about your hand." The cue bidder may pass a simple rebid of the same suit, but will not pass any other bid, including 2NT.
- A jump shift response to the overcall by an unpassed hand is natural and invitational, like a weak two bid. However, a jump in opener's suit to advance an overcall is natural in all situations: 1C-1H-P-3C is natural and non-forcing. There is just no other way to show a real suit in opener's denomination.
- Doubles of artificial bids at a low level show the suit and deny the ability to bid at a higher level unless the doubler has a two-suited hand. If you have values to bid higher, do so. Such doubles at a high level merely show strength.

Overcalls show a good suit, and follow the rule of 2 and 3: Within two tricks of the contract vulnerable, three if not vulnerable. With favorable vulnerability a 1S overcall can be worse, especially over 1C. Overcalls at the two level should show a substantial suit, not something like AJxxx unless the hand is very strong.

A cue bid overcall of an opening suit bid or a suit response is a very strong hand, possibly two-suited. 1C-2C-Pass 2D; P-2S (forcing) - P-3D-P-3H (forcing) is a two-suited hand with the majors. Similarly, 1C-P-1S-2S is a strong cue bid, possibly with both red suits (but 2C would be natural).

Cue bid by a passed hand implies a weakish 5-4-4 hand, or a 5-5 hand if opponents have bid two suits.

A cue bid in notrump (!) 1NT-2NT shows some distributionally sort of strong hand, probably two-suited. When partner bids a suit, a new suit is forcing, and if partner can't raise the cue bidder's suit he bids another new suit. When the cue bidder rebids a suit, partner can pass with a really bad hand.

All doubles of 1NT are primarily for business. Repeat, ALL, even balancing. Asks for the lead of dummy's suit if dummy has bid and we have not.

Double of a 1NT opening does not show equal strength, it shows a desire to beat 1NT. With 7 spades AKQ double 1NT, but that is not "equal strength." With KJx KJx KJx KJxx, do not double a strong 1NT contract, it will probably make. With QJ1098 Axx Axx Axx double 1NT. Since the double is unlimited, partner does not pull with a weak hand and no suit longer than four cards.

Double of 3NT when no suits have been bid implies a long solid suit. Partner must guess which suit (usually a major) to lead. A double of 3NT when the doubler has previously bid a suit demands the lead of that suit, even if dummy has bid a suit. If the opening leader has bid a suit, it asks for the lead of that suit. If both partners have bid a suit, lead whichever seems right to you.

Balancing doubles of 1NT responses and rebids are primarily for business. Doubler is sitting over dummy's suit(s).

Direct double of a 1NT response is a takeout of opener's suit, but must be strong enough (15+?) to play 1NT doubled if partner has a stack over opener's suit and passes. With less strength pass and double for takeout on the next round (e.g., 1S-P-1NT-P; 2S-P-P-Dbl with 1=4=4=4 and moderate strength).

Natural bidding over an artificial strong 1C, but jump overcalls are very weak. Jam their bidding. After a 1D response to 1C and a 1NT rebid, double is penalty and 2C is Landy. After a suit rebid, double is three-suit takeout. Double of 1C or any other artificial bid shows the suit. If the hand is one-suited, it denies the ability to bid higher in the suit, but if the hand is two-suited the double is unlimited.

TAKEOUT DOUBLES

A takeout double of a major strongly implies at least three cards in the other major. The double of a minor suit implies at least three cards in each major. Lacking the card length expected, doubler must be quite strong.

Advancing partner's response by bidding a new suit at the two level does not require extra strength. 1S-Dbl-P-2C; P-2D implies four hearts and short clubs (but long diamonds). With a strong hand a non-forcing 3D bid is available. However, if the doubler goes to a higher level, that shows a strong hand. 1S-Dbl-P-2D; P-3C requires a strong hand and good clubs. 1D-Dbl-P-1S; P-2H merely implies three spades and five good hearts, not a strong hand. With a strong six-card heart suit and short spades a strong jump overcall is available.

A takeout double when repeated, whether or not partner has responded, remains a takeout double, through 4H.

1H-Dbl-4H-P; P-Dbl is still for takeout. 1H-Dbl-2H-2S; 4H-Dbl implies just three spades, not a strong desire to defend (but requires a strong hand, of course).

Passing a one-level opening and doubling opener's rebid in the same suit is a penalty double that should not be pulled without an unusual hand. Doubling a new suit by opener is for takeout. 1D-P-1S-P; 2D Dbl is a penalty double. Had the rebid been 2C a double would be for takeout (while implying good diamonds).

A cue bid response to a takeout double promises another bid. 1D-Dbl-P-2D promises another bid if doubler makes a minimum bid. Just bid 1S with 4-4 in the majors if not prepared for that.

BIDDING OVER A TAKEOUT DOUBLE

New suit not forcing, expect to be passed. Raise partner's minor suit opening rather than bid a weak major suit.

Jump shift over a double shows a good six-card suit, invitational (not weak!)

Redouble with a good hand, so a jump raise denies redoubling strength. Invitational, however. After a redouble, opener's jump in the same suit is not forcing. Responder can pass with a singleton and a minimum redouble. Opener must bid game if that is enough.

When the opening was in a minor, 2NT is natural and non-forcing, based on long support for partner and stoppers in the majors, maybe Qx Example Kx Qx A10xxxx xxx. 3NT is the same, but an even better hand. Since these bids imply five or six-card support for opener, he can retreat to his suit of even four cards if he wants to.

In our reluctance to add conventions, a 2NT bid over a double of partner's major is undefined.

BIDDING OVER A NEGATIVE DOUBLE OR SUPPORT (RE) DOUBLE

Any suit bid (other than a jump in a new suit) denies a strong hand, even a jump raise or jump rebid in the same suit, which will be based more on distribution than on HCP. Redouble with a strong hand. Notrump bids are as usual, however. You can't redouble a support redouble, so just pass and act later with a good hand.

GENERAL BIDDING PRINCIPLES

If our side has bid notrump, all doubles are penalty. Exception: 1NT-2x-P-P-Dbl is takeout (a balancing double with a maximum 1NT bid and a weak doubleton in the opposing suit). Implies 4-4 in the majors if the overcall was in a minor suit. A dangerous call over a major suit overcall, which may require a three-level bid by responder. However, responder may be able to pass the double with good trumps, knowing you have a maximum.

If both partners have acted, all doubles are penalty, but there are exceptions. See above discussion of doubles when opener's major has been raised.

After passing a one-level suit bid, bidding the suit on the next round is natural except when it's a cue bid advance of partner's overcall. 1C-P-P-1S; P-2C is a cue bid, not natural. The only way to show a very good club suit is to bid 3C.

Doubles of artificial bids are suit-showing at low levels, strength-showing at high levels.

Very weak major suits often bypassed.

Bidding three suits, including a jump, promises a singleton or void in the fourth suit.

No "fast arrival" jumps. When a non-jump would be forcing, a jump to game implies a good hand AND good strength in the partnership's suit(s), maybe not much outside, and some slam interest.

After doubling a 1NT opening, their side cannot play the hand unless they play it doubled. Either partner can make a forcing pass if unable to double an escape bid.

When a notrump probe is doubled, a redouble says "Go ahead and bid 3NT." It does not show anything in the redoubled suit. (Prevents a lead through partner's hand). E.g., 1C-P-3C-P; 3S-dbl-rdbl says go ahead and bid 3NT, I have hearts and diamonds stopped.

In high-level competitive bidding a *forcing* pass followed by the pull of a double ("Pass-and-Pull") is stronger than bidding immediately. Not true after a *non-forcing pass*. This is Bridge World Standard. It follows that an immediate double when a pass would be forcing strongly suggests that partner not bid on, while an immediate double when a pass would not be forcing merely shows "cards" and does not discourage further bidding.

A player who has shown nothing and could be busted cannot be subjected to a forcing pass unless the opening was a strong two bid. Don't say "You had to double or bid" if I pass.

DISCARDS

The discard of the jack shows a J109.. suit, since we signal from the top of a sequence. With an interior sequence headed by the jack (e.g., KJ10) discard the 10 to encourage.

FORCING AND NON-FORCING SITUATIONS

It is very important that Skeleton bidders have a good agreement as to what calls are forcing. This knowledge will do more for their game than any conventions.

Responses to One of a Suit

1♣ 1NT	3♠	Not forcing, but distributionally strong and invitational. Responder's hand is not suitable for a double.
1♥ P 4♣	2♣ P	Forcing. Responder can bid 4NT to sign off, e.g., with maybe xxx in clubs. 4♥ would just show too much for a simple raise, no more.
1♥	P 3♥	Forcing, Jxxx or better, but limited (an extra ace is too much)
1♠	2x 3♠	Limit raise, invitational. Cue bid with more.

Rebids by Opener

1♠ P 3♠	2x P	Not quite forcing. Responder can pass with a weak two-over-one response and a singleton or void in spades.
1♠ P 3♣	2♦ P	Forcing, and promises another bid even if responder bids 3♦, 3♠, or 4♣.
1♠ P 3♦	2♥ 3♣	Also forcing, but does not promise another bid if responder bids 3♥. Here the bidding has been crowded, and opener may have planned a 2♠ rebid over a 2♥ response with something like ♠AK1074 ♥Q3 ♦AJ96 ♣42. A weaker hand should pass.

1♣ 1♦ 1♠ P
2♥

Not forcing unless responder has five or more spades, with which he must bid 2♠. He can pass with ♠KJ32 ♥7654 ♦Q85 ♣62. With a weak 4=3=4=2 he bids 2NT, with a weak 4=3=3=3, he bids 3♣. With stronger holdings of that shape, he bids 3NT or 3♦ (a good club raise)

1♦ P 2♣ P
2♠

Forcing. Reverses are forcing on a two-over-one bidder, and promise another bid unless responder merely rebids her suit or returns to opener's diamonds. A return to hearts, however, (e.g., 1♥=2♣=2♠=3♥) is forcing, as is a 2NT bid.

1♠ 2♣ 2♠ 3♣
3♦/3♥

Forcing, a game try. A double of 3♣ would be takeout, with perhaps no great interest in game. 3♠ would not show interest in game.

1♥ P 2♦ P
2NT

Not forcing. With a long broken suit and a weak hand responder should bid 3♦ to sign off.

1♦ 2♥ 2♠ P
3♣

Forcing, even if 2♠ was by a passed hand. Does not promise another bid (nor did 2♠).

1♥ P 2♣ P
4♣

Forcing. Jump raises of a two-over-one minor suit response are forcing to game. If responder now bids 4NT, that is natural, showing a minimum hand such as ♠K83 ♥64 ♦Q1084 ♣AQ75 (and maybe xxx in clubs!). 4♥ would be to play, not a cue bid.

1♠ 2♥ Db1 3♣
P

A forcing pass. If the doubler is not strong enough to keep the ball rolling, she should not have doubled--no matter how many hearts she has.

1♥ Db1 Rdbl P
3♥

Not forcing, but the redoubler should pass only with a small singleton heart and a minimum redouble. Opener should bid 4♥ if able to make game opposite such a hand.

1♣ P 1♥ P
2♣ P 2♠ P
3♥

Not forcing. If opener has three small hearts and extra values, he must bid 4♥ (responder guarantees five in this sequence). A reverse by responder does not promise another bid if opener's next bid is discouraging.

1♣	P	1♥	P
1♠	P	3♣	P
3♥			

Forcing, accepting the game try. Opener must pass 3♣ with ♠AJ97 ♥762 ♦63 ♣AQJ3. Exchange the ♥7 for the ♥Q and the 3♥ bid is okay. If this seems too aggressive, raise a 1♥ response to 2♥ instead of bidding 1♠. Opener cannot have just three clubs, with which a 1NT rebid or 1NT opening bid is mandatory.

1♥	P	1♠	P
2♠	P	3♣	P
3♥			

Not forcing. Shows five or six hearts, a minimum hand, and only three spades. To accept the game try, opener must bid something else, perhaps even 4♥.

1♣	P	1♥	P
1NT	P	2NT	P
3♥			

Forcing, accepting the invitation to game and giving responder a choice of contracts.

Rebids by Responder

1♣	P	1♥	P
1♠	P	3♣/3♥	

Not forcing. Bid 2♦ if stuck for a good bid with a game-going hand.

1♦	P	1♥	1♠
P	P	2♣	

Not forcing. When opener refuses to make a free rebid, a non-jump new suit by responder is not forcing unless it is a reverse or comes at the three level.

1♣	P	1♠	P
1NT	P	2♥/2♦	

Not forcing. A new suit by responder after opener's 1NT rebid is weak (barring reverses).

1♣	P	1♠	P
2♣	P	2♥	

Not forcing, but invitational. May be a stretch at matchpoints, when you can't risk missing a heart contract. Forcing at IMP scoring.

1♣	P	1♠	P
2♣	P	2♦	

Forcing. Pass with no game interest. May not be a real suit, just showing strength.

1♣	P	1♦	P
2♣	2♥	2♠	

Forcing. Reverses by responder are forcing, even in competition.

1♣	P	1♦	P
2♣	P	4♣/4♦	

Not quite forcing. Too strong for a simpler invitation.

1♠ P 2♠ P
2NT P 3♥

Not forcing. With a hand like ♠Q65 ♥KQ943 ♦8 ♣6542 responder must bid 4♥, not 3♥, which he would bid without the queen of hearts. A minor suit rebid is somewhat of a signoff, weak hand, six-card suit.

1♠ P 2♠ P
3♣ P 3♥

Forcing. Responder may not have a heart suit, and is perhaps making a trial bid with a holding such as KJx. The difference between this and the previous auction is that opener, with five spades and four clubs, is unlikely to have heart support. A 3♥ bid is therefore more valuable as strength-showing than suit-showing.

1♠ P 2♣ P
3♣ P 3♠

Forcing. Responder shows too much for an original 2♠ raise and opener shows extra values by going to the three level. The logic of the auction says that game will be bid.

1♣ P 1♠ P
3♣ P 3♠

Forcing. Whenever responder bids over a strong but non-forcing jump by opener, opener must bid again. The only way to stop short of game now is for opener to bid 4♣.

1♣ P 1♠ 2♥
3♣ P 3♠

Not forcing. Opener has a good hand, but may not have been planning a jump to 3♣ over 1♠. If he was stretching, he can pass 3♠.

1♣ P 1♦ P
2NT P 3♣

Forcing, but 3♦ would be a signoff.

1♥ P 2♦ P
2NT P 3♦

Not forcing. Opener needs a diamond fit to go on. Any other three level bid by responder, including 3♥, would be forcing.

1♦ P 1♠ P
3NT P 4♥

Not forcing, but invitational. Do not “rescue” a 3NT bid with a very weak hand, since opener could have 2-2 in the majors and long solid diamonds.

1♠ P 2♣ P
2NT P 3♠

Forcing. Responder's hand is unlimited. He is probably offering a choice between 4♠ and 3NT, but he could even have slam in mind.

1♥ P 3♣ P
4♣ P 4♥

Forcing, in view of the double fit.

1♣ P 1♠ P
2♥ P 3♥

Forcing. When a reverse suit gets raised, opener must go on unless the original response was 1NT, thereby limiting responder's hand. A jump raise to 4♥ shows slam interest with strength only in the partnership's suits (no diamond control).

1♥ P 2♣ P
2♠ P 3♥

Forcing. Responder must have heart support and too much for a raise of 1♥ to 2♥.

1♦ P 1♠ P
2♥ P 2NT

Not forcing. Theoretically denies five spades, but might have five weak spades and strong clubs: ♠108765 ♥92 ♦85 ♣AQJ9

1♥ P 2♣ P
2♠ P 2NT

Forcing, in view of the two-over-one response and opener's reverse. If opener had rebid 2♦, 2NT would not be forcing.

1♦ P 1♠ P
2♥ P 3♦

Not forcing, weak signoff. Denies five spades.

1♦ P 2♣ P
2♥ P 3♦

Also a weak signoff, despite the two-over-one response: ♠432 ♥8 ♦Q87 ♣AQ10874. A 3♣ rebid would also be weak.

1♣ P 1♠ 2♥
P P 3♦

Forcing, despite opener's pass.

1♣ P 1♠ P
2♠ P 3♣

Forcing. After a raise by opener, a return to opener's suit is forcing unless responder has previously limited his hand (a passed hand, or failure to redouble over a double).

1♣ P 1♠ P
2NT P 3♣

Forcing. When opener rebids 2NT, jump or not, responder's first-time raise of opener's suit is forcing. With a weak 4-4 in the two suits, responder must raise instead of bidding one-over-one.

1♥ P 1♠ P
2♠ P 3♥

Forcing. If responder has ♠AK93 ♥Q87 ♦42 ♣J432 she must bid 3♣ as a game try, avoiding this situation. Opener can bid 3♥ or 3♠ if minimum, which responder can pass. With more, opener can bid 4♠, 3NT, or even 4♥ (with six, or a strong five).

1♠ P 2♥ P
3♥ P 3♠

Forcing. Don't bid 2♥ with a four-card suit, spade support, and 11 points or so--or you might find yourself in this forcing sequence. With five hearts and a doubtful hand, just pass 3♥.

1♣ P 1♥ P
1NT/2♣ P 2♠ P
2NT P 3♣

Forcing.

1♦ P 1♥ P
2♣ P 2♠ P
3♣ P 3♦/3♥

Forcing. After the fourth suit bid, only a direct raise (4♣ over 3♣), a rebid of the fourth suit, or a notrump bid is non-forcing. Responder could have made the 3♦/3♥ bid over 2♣ in order to invite.

1♦ P 2♣ P
2♦ P 2♠ P
3♣ P 3♦

Forcing. Responder could presumably have passed 3♣ (or bid 3♦ over 2♦) with insufficient values to force.

1♣ P 1♥ P
1♠ P 1NT P
2NT P 3♣/3♥

Forcing, accepting the game try. You can't say you like notrump and then say you don't.

HONOR COUNT VS POINT COUNT

Ace, king, queen jack: four, three, two, one. How simple! How easy to remember! This is the Work count, named after Milton C. Work, the mentor and employer of Charles Goren. It was based on the McCampbell count of 1915, publicized by Work in the 20s. He actually did not like point count (PC), writing this in *Auction Bridge Complete*, 1926:

"Many teachers and writers advocate schemes by which a bidder may determine mathematically whether his hand is strong enough to justify bidding an original No Trump...A more difficult, but much more satisfactory, method is figuring an Ace as one trick, giving to all other single honors and to all combinations of honors arbitrary values which in most cases are fractions of a trick, or one or more tricks and a fraction." Ely Culbertson later incorporated this principle in the development of Honor Count (HC)

By 1929 Work, in *Contract Bridge for All*, gave in to PC's popularity and accepted it for notrump bidding only. For suit bidding he wrote:

"Contract suit bidding is so simple that only the number of 'probable' and 'high card' tricks in the hand need be noticed."

The great Ely Culbertson agreed with that in his *Contract Bridge Complete*, 1936, while eschewing point count altogether. Instead he used HC for both notrump and suit bidding. No doubt he could see that PC had two serious drawbacks: (1) 4-3-2-1 is not an accurate measurement of the relative values of high cards, especially for suit bidding, and (2) honors in combination are worth more than the same honors lying in different suits.

In his book *Contract Bridge in a Nutshell* (1952 edition), Goren wrote:

"The point count method for No Trump bidding as we know it today was first introduced by me in *Winning Bridge Made Easy* (1936) and has for many years been standard with an overwhelming majority of the most successful players in the country. The carryover into suit bidding was accomplished in 1949 and has now been universally accepted." Notice that he gave no credit to Work (who had given no credit to McCampbell!).

He didn't say that he used HC, not PC, for suit bidding up until 1944, when he gave PC and HC equal value for both notrump and suit bidding, as in his *The Standard Book of Bidding* (1944-49). "Take your pick, it doesn't matter," he seemed to say.

Then he saw a way to gain ground on his rival Culbertson by using PC exclusively. He knew that this was an inferior approach (giving him benefit of doubt) but realized that most players wanted one simple hand evaluation method, not two, for all bidding. He started with *Point Count Bidding in Contract Bridge* (1950). The book was so successful that he followed it up with many others. In his highly successful system summary, *Contract Bridge in a Nutshell*, 1952 edition, he wrote:

"With the introduction of my point count method the honor trick began to fall into disfavor, and today it is all but obsolete. Even those authorities who sponsored the honor trick for twenty years have decided, after witnessing the acceptance of point count, to abandon the old table and to adopt the methods which you will find set forth in this and my other books. Such action became indispensable to survival." True, not because of PC's superiority but because of its popularity. "Authorities" had to go along or lose students and readers.

Culbertson was caught out and desperately tried to catch up, coming out with *Culbertson Point Count Bidding*: "Improved and simplified 4-3-2-1 with the new rule of 3&4." But it was too late, Goren had cornered the market.

So what about this 4-3-2-1 count? The Four Aces (Oswald Jacoby, David Burnstine (later Bruce), Howard Schenken, and Michael T. Gottlieb) in their *Four Aces System of Contract Bridge*, 1935, featured a 3-2-1-1/2 count. These men were very qualified to write such a book, having as a team won 11 out of 13 major team championships between 1933 and 1935, while none were won by Culbertson's team. Their very complicated book did not sell well and was soon forgotten. Actually the 3-2-1-1/2 count more nearly expresses correctly the relative values of honor cards for suit bidding, but not for notrump bidding, for which they should have retained the 4-3-2-1 count. The Four Aces made a mistake in having a point count that includes a fraction, and should have doubled the values yielding 6-4-2-1, which players might more readily have accepted. It entails larger sums but the arithmetic is simpler. Incidentally, Goren included the Four Aces PC in *The Standard Book of Bidding*, treating it as an equal to the 4-3-2-1 PC, despite the great difference.

While the 4-3-2-1 count is marginally acceptable for notrump bidding, although inferior, for suit bidding it overvalues queens and jacks while undervaluing aces and kings.

In the September 2001 *Bridge World*, Doug Bennion defines a more accurate PC, *Little Jack Points* (LJP), as $A = 6\frac{1}{2}$, $K = 4\frac{1}{2}$, $Q = -1\frac{1}{2}$ and $J = 1$, which Bennion's research confirms as being superior to 4-3-2-1 provided an adjustment is made for honor synergy: add $\frac{1}{2}$ point for each face card that is accompanied by a higher honor in its suit. Danny Kleinman improved this method by doubling the values, producing $A = 13$, $K = 9$, $Q = 5$, $J = 2$, with whole point adjustments instead of halves. He also added further adjustments to reflect the value of 10s when accompanied by 9s or higher honors, subtracting two points for a 4-3-3-3 hand, reducing values for singleton honors, and devaluing a hand with an unstopped suit.

The result is a much more accurate count that has a valid strength relationship among the honors and recognizes the increased value of accompanied honors (as honor count does!). Bennion researched only the value of high cards *when balanced hand faces balanced hand*. In other words, this is a notrump count, not a count for suit bidding, which would assign more value to aces and kings vs queens and jacks.

It is very sad to see the Work-Goren PC taught to beginners as the ultimate hand evaluation method, not the temporary rough tool it should be called, and to see it used faithfully by experienced players. "Faithfully" is the right word, because adherence to it is like a religious belief, blind to reason.

Now, what about HC? It has been defined in slightly different ways, but let's use Ely Culbertson's version with very slight modifications. After all, he was the one responsible for the name and for making it extremely popular for 20 years, as Goren said. Here are the honor valuations:

$AK = 2$

$AKQJ, AKQ, \text{ and } AKJ = 2\text{-plus}$

$AQ \text{ and } AJ10 = 1\frac{1}{2}$

$AQJ = 1\frac{1}{2}\text{-plus}$

$A, KQ, \text{ and } KJ10 = 1$

$AJx \text{ and } KQJ = 1\text{-plus}$

$Kx \text{ and } QJx = \frac{1}{2}$

$KJx = \frac{1}{2}\text{-plus}$

$Qx, J10x, \text{ and two isolated jacks} = \text{"plus"}$

Two plus values = $\frac{1}{2}$, so a plus is really $\frac{1}{4}$

The value for $AJ10$ is thanks to Danny Kleinman, not Culbertson.

Refinements:

With 4-3-3-3, subtract a +

With a strong five-card or longer suit, add a +

With an honor in partner's suit, add a +

Add a + for a king or queen if the suit has been bid on the right (i.e., KQx = 1-1/2).

Subtract a + from a king or queen or KQx if the suit has been bid on the left.

Somewhat arbitrarily, the same evaluations are applicable to both notrump and suit bidding. As with PC, it is too much to expect players to learn two different tables. It may seem strange that AKQ, AKQJ, and AKJ are treated as equals, but that is related (1) to their value in a suit contract, when a third-round winner is less likely especially when defending, and (2) in a notrump contract when a concentration of honors in one suit implies possible weakness elsewhere. (1) is less applicable for a declaring side in a suit contract, when winners are more important than defensive values. (2) is less applicable in a notrump contract when the other suits have strength or when partner has shown a valuable hand for notrump (when he may have the other suits well-covered). When (1) and (2) are less applicable, the HC for these holdings can be increased slightly.

Here are two hands with different PC values (11 and 13) but identical HC values (2-1/2)

AQJx KJx xx xxxx

AQxx Kxx Qx Qxxx

Despite the different point counts, 11 and 13, these hands are of approximately equal value, as HC says. The principle involved is that honors in combination are worth more than separate honors. PC adherents will say it doesn't matter in the long run, evaluation errors will even out. No they won't. PC is seldom if ever superior to HC, so its inferiority is a generally constant companion. Expert players use PC as a *starting point* in the evaluation of their hand, and make adjustments based on hand shape, location of honors, fit with partner, intermediate cards, opposing bidding, control cards, unguarded honors, and information on partner's suit length and suit strength as it becomes available during the bidding. The starting point is a poor one, unfortunately.

Consider a hand with Kxx and Qxx in different suits. The hand opposite Kxx has Qxx in that suit, and Kxx opposite the Qxx. What is the trick-taking potential. The isolated honors in one suit will take one trick for sure and possibly two (when one is not captured by the ace). Let's say that the total is 2-1/2 tricks.

Now consider a hand with KQx in one suit, the hand opposite holding KQx in another suit. The trick-taking ability for each KQx is at least one but two half the time. Let's say each is worth on average 1-1/2 tricks, a total of three tricks.

In either situation the total PC is 10, making the holdings supposedly equal in value. However, total HC is 1-1/2 for the first case and 2 HC for the second. HC is more accurate than PC.

So what rules of bidding are compatible with HC? Those who require five cards for a major suit opening and a strong hand (perhaps game forcing) for a two-over-one response can stop reading here. They must develop their own rules for HC requirements.

For a one-level suit opening bid, it depends on one's bidding philosophy. With no suit longer than four cards, but maybe a "poor" five-card suit, it's 2-1/2 HC for light openers ("lights"), 3 HC for

others ("heavies"). With a good five-card suit (two of the top four honors, plus at least a 9 with AJ, KJ, or QJ) it's 2-1/2 HC for either philosophy. A four-card major suit should be at least Q10xx or better. A six-card or longer suit, however weak, may be opened with 2-1/2 HC. If the suit is strong 2+ is enough.

When judging a hand's value, it is better to have high cards in the long suit(s) than in the short suit(s).

Lights can open 1NT with 3-1/2 to 4 HC, heavies should have 3-1/2+ to 4+. That means a jump rebid of 2NT is 4-1/2 for lights and 4-1/2+ for heavies, and a jump to 3NT 1/2 HC more than that. I recommend 2-1/2+ to 3+ HC for a weak 1NT opening, with a 1NT rebid showing 3-1/2 to 4 HC. Lights can eliminate the + if they wish, but their 1NT rebid then has range problems.

Single raises of an opening bid require at least 1+ HC, a non-forcing (limit) jump raise 2-1/2 HC, and a forcing jump raise 3 HC. For the jump raises, with four-card support count a singleton as an ace and a doubleton as a king. For a single raise reduce the HC held by a + with only three-card support, which is supposed to be J10x or better (Three small is okay with a side singleton or a side doubleton with too strong a hand for a 1NT response).

A 1NT response or one level suit response requires 1+ HC (but not just a bare ace) as a minimum, but one of a major suit may be a stretch with a good five-card suit. With 2 HC consider a two-over-one response, but a bare-looking 2 HC with no good suit is insufficient.

A two-over-one response requires 2+ HC, too strong for a 1NT response over a pass. A long strong suit can count as 1/2 HC extra.

Opener's raise of a one-level suit response, or a 2H response to 1S, requires no extra strength. A 1NT rebid is usually preferable with a minimum 4-3-3-3 hand. The raise of a 2C or 2D response requires an extra 1/2 HC, but four-card support or two of the top three honors can count as "extra" when opener is stuck for a rebid. After a two-over-one response, a 2NT rebid requires 1 extra HC, and a jump to 3NT an extra 1-1/2 HC. Why the difference between hearts and a minor? Because a light 2H bidder can pass a raise to three without worrying about a notrump contract, as a 2C or 2D bidder would. A raise to 3C or 3D will induce responder to bid 3NT with 2-1/2 HC, not likely to be successful if opener also has 2-1/2.

Jump raises by opener from one to three of a suit require 4-1/2 HC, but as with responder's jump raises a singleton can count as an ace and a doubleton as a king. With more, bid game.

Jump rebids in the same suit by either partner are based on playing tricks, not HC exclusively. A jump in the same suit is invitational and a jump in a new suit is forcing to game.

Most suit bidding is based on simply looking at a hand and thinking how many tricks it can take, considering partner/opposing bidding prior to the time of decision.

In his book *The Secrets of Winning Bridge*, [Jeff Rubens](#) advises players to focus on just a few hands that partner might be holding, and more particularly on *perfect minimum hands* compatible with the bidding. This means that in order to reach an informed decision in, for example, deciding whether a hand is worth an invitation to game or slam, you should "visualize" the most balanced distribution with the minimum strength partner might have *with the high cards selected such that these fit*

precisely with your own hand. He advises that "your hand is worth an invitation to game (or slam) if this perfect minimum holding for partner will make it a laydown."

HONOR COUNT REQUIREMENTS FOR SKELETON NOTRUMP BIDDING

- Open 1NT.....2-1/2+ to 3+
- Raise 1NT to 2NT.....2-1/2 to 2-1/2+ (accept with 3)
- Raise 1NT to 3NT.....3
- Open 1x and rebid 1NT....3-1/2 to 4 (raise to 2NT with 2, raise to 3NT with 2-1/2)
- Open 1x and jump to 2NT....4+ to 4-1/2 (raise to 3NT with 1-1/2)
- Open 1x and jump to 3NT....4-1/2 +
- Respond 1NT to 1x.....1+ to 1-1/2+
- Raise 1NT resp to 2NT.....4+ to 4-1/2 (accept with 1-1/2)
- Raise 1NT resp to 3NT.....4-1/2+
- Response of 2NT to 1x....3 to 3+ when forcing
- Response of 2NT to 1x....2-1/2 to 2-1/2+ when not forcing (accept with 3+)
- Response of 3NT to 1x....3-1/2 (3 if 2NT would be non-forcing)
- .Direct 1NT overcall 3-1/2+ to 4+ (double & bid notrump with more)
- Balancing 1NT same as opening 1NT -- 2-1/2+ to 3+ (double and bid notrump with more)
- Open 2NT..... 5 to 5-1/2 (raise with 1) If stronger, open 2C.
- Two over one response....2 (but not with a "poor" 2, such as two bare aces with no long suit)
- Limit jump raise.....2-1/2 to 2-1/2+ (count singleton as an ace and doubleton as a king)
- Forcing jump raise.....3 (count singleton as an ace and doubleton as a king)
- Raise of a 2C/2D response to 1H/1S shows extra values
- Raise of a 2H response to 1S does not show extra values
- Rebid of 2NT after a 2 over 1 response shows extra values but is not quite forcing.
- Rebid of 3NT after a 2 over 1 response shows too much for a 2NT rebid
- With too much for a 3NT bid in any auction, bid 4NT (or more)
- With too much to pass a 3NT bid in any auction, bid 4NT (or more)

