



Bidding Basics

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A tour of the bidding box for newer players

2NT

A 2NT opening shows 20–21 HCP and a balanced hand. It is possible to extend the upper range to 21-plus or even 22, but I recommend opening 2♣ with that strength (and rebidding 2NT).

“Balanced” means 4–3–3–3, 4–4–3–2 or 5–3–3–2. Accordingly, a hand in range with a five-card major should be opened 2NT. For example:

♠K J 7 6 5 ♥K J 2 ♦A K 7 ♣K Q.

Can opener have any other distribution? Generally, no, but if you don’t tell anyone, here are two hands where I confess that opening 2NT might be the least of evils:

♠A Q ♥K Q ♦A J 7 6 5 2 ♣K J 2

If you open 1♦ or 2♣ instead of 2NT, this is an awkward hand to describe.

♠K ♥K Q 7 6 ♦A J 7 6 ♣A K J 5

Any other opening bid could make for a difficult rebid problem.

Don’t take too many liberties. Don’t open 2NT with two low doubletons, nor with a low singleton. With a six-card major, don’t open 2NT.

What if you have more than 21 balanced? In that case, you start with 2♣. If you open 2♣ and your next bid is 2NT, you show 22–24 balanced. Your partner can pass if they are totally broke.

Hand evaluation should be used in considering if your hand is worth 20–21. For example, this “19” is really worth more:

♠A 10 ♥K Q 10 ♦K Q J 10 9 ♣A 10 9.

I would proudly open 2NT with that hand. If you add for 10s and the good five-card suit, it might even be too strong for 2NT!

At this point in this series, it might be useful to give a brief review of how to show your high-card values as opener with any balanced hand:

- 0–11 balanced: Pass.
- 12–14 balanced: Open in a suit and rebid 1NT.
- 15–17 balanced: Open 1NT.
- 18–19 balanced: Open in a suit and rebid 2NT.
- 20–21 balanced: Open 2NT.
- 22–24 balanced: Open 2♣ and rebid 2NT.

3NT

A 3NT opening can be used to show 25–27 balanced. If you want to keep things simple, read no further.

However, 25–27 is very rare, so it is a shame to waste an opening bid on a hand you will hold once a decade. Furthermore, if you did have 25–27 balanced, you could start with 2♣ and rebid 3NT. Accordingly, most players use a 3NT opening for another purpose. “gambling” 3NT is typical. This means that you are “gambling” on making 3NT because you have a long, running suit (usually a seven-card or longer minor suit). In actuality, the main purpose is to preempt the opponents.

A 2NT opening shows 20–21 high-card points and a balanced hand.

A 3NT opening can show 25–27 high-card points and a balanced hand.

2
NT
3
NT

It is up to your partner to leave you in 3NT, which is attractive if she has the other three suits stopped or almost stopped (maybe 10–x–x–x). If your partner expects 3NT to be disastrous, they bid 4♣ (artificial). You then pass if your suit is clubs, or correct to your real suit. If your partner has a really nice hand, they can pull to a higher level. For example, with:

♠5 ♥A K Q J ♦K Q 7 6 5 ♣4 3 2,

they should remove to 5♣. With:

♠A K ♥K Q J 10 ♦A K 5 4 3 ♣3 2,

they should remove to 6NT! Good luck waiting for that one.

Typically, a gambling 3NT opener denies any side aces or kings. Unless, that it is, your partner is already a passed hand. For example, in third or fourth position (where – from partner’s pass – you don’t expect to miss a slam), you can open a gambling 3NT with, say:

♠K 2 ♥K 3 ♦10 4 ♣A K Q J 10 8 6.

BIDDING BASICS QUIZ

You deal with neither side vulnerable. What is your opening bid with each hand below?

1. ♠AKQ ♥QJ32 ♦AKQ ♣432
2. ♠K2 ♥AK654 ♦KJ3 ♣KQJ
3. ♠5 ♥AKQJ2 ♦AKQ10 ♣J32
4. ♠AK7 ♥KQ ♦AKQJ ♣J654
5. ♠KQ2 ♥AQ ♦AJ7654 ♣KJ
6. ♠AQ76 ♥43 ♦AKQJ10 ♣AJ
7. ♠54 ♥Q2 ♦J2 ♣AKQJ986
8. ♠A2 ♥543 ♦AKQJ10762 ♣—

Answers

1. 2NT. In range and you don't need all four suits stopped.
2. 2NT. A five-card major is OK if you are in range and 5-3-3-2.
3. 1♥ (or 2♣). Don't open 2NT with a low singleton.
4. 2♣. Too many points for 2NT.
5. 2NT. Probably the best description for this "balanced" hand.
6. 1♦. Much better description to start with 1♦ and then jumpshift into spades. 2♣ is also possible.
7. 3NT. Gambling: seven-card (or longer) solid suit and no side ace or king in first or second seat.
8. 1♦. Don't gamble with a side ace/king: It's too easy to miss slam. And don't open 2♣ with only 14 HCP.