

CHOICE OF SUIT

When your distribution is:

4-3-3-3

If the four-card suit is clubs, open 1♣. Otherwise, open the four-card suit only if it is a good suit and the hand has no rebid problem. With ♠K63 ♥AQ85 ♦986 ♣KQJ open 1♥, raise a 2♣ response, and rebid 2NT if partner responds 2♦. Raise a 1♠ response rather than rebid 1NT, choosing the stronger rebid because of the 15 HCP. If the hearts were weaker, or the hand weaker, a 1♣ opening would be correct.

If the four-card suit is diamonds, a 1♦ opening is usually right, but if the diamonds are weak and the clubs strong, a 1♣ opening is preferable when the hand is minimum. After opening 1♦ with a minimum such as ♠Axx ♥Kxx ♦AQ10x ♣xxx, the rebid has to be 2♦ if partner responds 2♣, since a 2NT rebid requires more strength. That is why a 1♣ opening is preferable with ♠Axx ♥Kxx ♦10xxx ♣AQx.

Sometimes a three-card diamond suit may be opened: ♠Q874 ♥AQJ ♦KQJ ♣983. The spades are weak, and it is unwise to open 1♣ with a suit weaker than Qxx (which is bad enough). After opening 1♦, the hand is good enough for a 2NT rebid if the response is 2♣. Substitute a small card for the Queen of spades and you have a real problem. What to do? Just pass! Thirteen HCP do not always make for a mandatory opening. Or you can open 1♦ with the plan of rebidding 2♦ if partner bids 2♣. Better to lie about a suit than lie about the strength of the whole hand, as Goren used to say.

4-4-3-2

Open the higher ranking of touching suits, but with both minors a 1♣ opening is sometimes preferable if the diamonds are weak and the clubs strong. For this purpose spades-clubs are not treated as "touching."

With four spades and four diamonds it is usual to open the suit below the short suit (spades are "below" clubs): Bid 1♠ with ♠AK43 ♥1075 ♦A943 ♣K2. Raise a 2♥ or 2♦ response, rebid 2♦ over a 2♣ response, pass 1NT. With the hearts and clubs reversed, however, open 1♦. If partner bids 2♣ you can make a stretched 2NT rebid (not 2♠!). With some hands it may be necessary to rebid a four-card diamond suit with a minimum hand (e.g., ♠AQ102 ♥83 ♦AQ103 ♣432).

With weak spade-diamond suits and a strong three-card club holding, a 1♣ opening is the least of evils: ♠J852 ♥KQ ♦J653 ♣AK3. You must rebid 1NT after a 1♥ response, however, to avoid the trap of a jump preference in clubs after a 1♠ rebid (which you would have to pass with this minimum). The rule is this: If you open a minimum hand with a three-card suit, you must not rebid one of a suit. Why? Because responder's invitational jump in the three-card suit must be passed with a minimum hand. Using Checkback Stayman (see section 4-8, Checkback Stayman by Responder), a 3♣ jump rebid by responder is forcing after opener's 1NT rebid, so the three-card club suit is not a problem in that sequence.

With four hearts and four clubs the usual call is 1♣, but there are exceptions. With ♠84 ♥AKJ2 ♦1043 ♣AK85 open 1♥ and raise a response in either minor. If you open 1♣ and the response is 1♠, you lack the 4-5 distribution implied by a 2♥ reverse, and a 1NT rebid is undesirable with this suit-oriented hand. In addition you hide the best feature of the hand: a strong four-card heart suit.

With 4-4 in the majors the general rule is to open 1♠, but if the spades are weak it is usually better to find another call:

1) ♠Q832 ♥AK104 ♦A3 ♣Q32

2) ♠J853 ♥Q874 ♦AQ ♣KQ3

3) ♠10873 ♥K1084 ♦KQJ ♣A4

With hand 1) open 1♥, rebid 2NT after a minor suit response. With a weaker hand it may be necessary to rebid a strong four-card heart suit. To avoid that, don't open a light hand of this type with 1♥ unless the hearts are strong.

With hand 2) open 1♣, rebid 1NT after a 1♦ response. A one-over-one rebid of 1♥ promises at least four clubs, or a stronger hand. Why? Because an invitational jump to 3♣ must be passed with a minimum hand. Change the queen of diamonds to the king and a 1♥ rebid is okay because over 3♣ you can bid 3NT.

With hand 3) open 1♥ (or pass), bid 2♦ (!) after a 2♣ response.

4-4-4-1

These hands require judgment. The usual practice is to open the suit below the singleton, but there are plenty of exceptions. If that suit is "unbiddable," open the next lower biddable suit, but a weak club suit is okay:

1) ♠AKJ8 ♥J932 ♦A943 ♣6

2) ♠J932 ♥AKJ8 ♦A943 ♣6

3) ♠J932 ♥Q943 ♦AKQ4 ♣6

4) ♠A943 ♥6 ♦J932 ♣AKJ8

5) ♠AKJ8 ♥A943 ♦3 ♣J932

With hand 1) open 1♠, the suit "below" the singleton.

With hand 2) open 1♥.

With hand 3) open 1♦, rebid 2♦ after a 2♣ response.

With hand 4) and 5), open 1♣.

It is often better to pass light hands of this shape, which are difficult to describe after opening. If the opposing side bids the singleton, a takeout double will describe the hand perfectly. If they bid other suits, they may end up in a misfit.

5-4-3-1 or 5-4-2-2

The five-card suit is usually opened, but there are certain minimum hands that require opening the four-card suit, especially when the five-card suit is weak.

First, when the suits are touching and the lower ranking is a weak five-card suit, open the four-card suit if it is strong:

1) ♠AKJ3 ♥Q8764 ♦K76 ♣3

2) ♠K1032 ♥AQJ87 ♦Q76 ♣3

With hand 1) open 1♠, but open 1♥ with hand 2). Neither hand is strong enough for a reverse, so rebid 2♥ with hand 2) if the response is 2♣ or 2♦ (not strong enough for a diamond raise either). After a 1NT response a 2♥ rebid normally shows six, but it must be chanced (but pass 1NT with a 4=5=2=2 hand).

When the suits are not touching and the five-card suit is very weak, it is usually right to treat the five-carder as a four-card suit. Open 1♦ with ♠108643 ♥A ♦AKJ6 ♣976, planning to rebid 2♦ if partner bids 2♣. You wouldn't want to open 1♠ and then rebid 2♠ if the response is 2♥, and any other rebid is out of the question.

5-5

Generally open the higher ranking suit, but open 1♣ with strong clubs and weak spades: ♠Q8763 ♥K2 ♦8 ♣AK876. If the two suits are switched, open 1♠, planning to rebid 2♠ after a red suit response. If the hand is strong enough to rebid 3♣ after a red suit response, however, a 1♠ opening is okay when the spades are not strong: ♠Q8763 ♥AK ♦8 ♣AK876. If you open 1♣ it will be difficult to show the five-card spade length. Besides, a 1♠ opening has preemptive value.

With 5-5 in other suits, open the higher ranking of touching suits. With non-touching suits it is generally right to treat the higher ranking suit as a four-card suit if it is very weak. Open 1♣ with ♠A7 ♥107654 ♦5 ♣AKJ82, since a 2♦ response to 1♥ would be embarrassing. Change the clubs to diamonds, however, and a 1♥ opening would be right.

6-5

Open the longer suit generally, but if the suits are 5-6 and touching then the shorter suit should be opened if it is much stronger and the hand is minimum. Bid 1♠ with ♠AKJ83 ♥Q108742 ♦6 ♣9. If the nine of clubs were the ace the hand would have good values for a reverse, so a 1♥ opening would be correct.

Ignoring the Rules

A new suit response by a passed hand is not forcing, so the rules for suit selection, which are mainly aimed at providing a convenient rebid, can be violated freely in third or fourth seat.

The rules can also be ignored when the hand strength is such that no forcing response will be inconvenient. Open 1♠ with ♠AK93 ♥65 ♦J765 ♣AQJ, because the hand is good enough to bid 2NT after a 2♥ response, or to raise a minor suit response. Avoid bidding bad suits (which include any three-card minor) with good hands.

CHOICE OF SUIT SUMMARY

The following are generalizations about the proper action with various shapes, not to be taken too literally, especially by a passed hand. Avoid bidding a weak suit or a three-card suit if there is no likely rebid problem connected with bidding a better suit.

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| 4=3=3=3
3=4=3=3 | With a near minimum or no biddable major, bid 1♣. With extras (i.e., 15 HCP), bid the four-card major unless it is weak. |
| 3=3=4=3 | Open 1♦ unless the diamonds are weak and the clubs are strong. |
| 4=4=2=3
4=4=3=2 | Bid 1♠, unless the spades are weak. |
| 4=3=4=2 | Bid 1♠, unless the spades are weak. |
| 4=2=4=3 | Bid 1♦, sometimes 1♣ (weak diamonds, strong clubs). |
| 4=2=3=4
4=3=2=4 | Bid 1♣. |
| 3=4=4=2
2=4=4=3 | Bid 1♥ unless the hearts are weak. |
| 3=4=2=4
2=4=3=4 | Bid 1♣. |
| 3=2=4=4
2=3=4=4 | Bid 1♦ unless the diamonds are weak. |
| 4=4=4=1
4=4=1=4
4=1=4=4
1=4=4=4 | Bid 1♠ if spades are biddable, otherwise 1♥ if hearts are biddable, otherwise 1♦.
Bid 1♣, always.
Bid 1♦ if diamonds are biddable, otherwise 1♣.
Bid 1♥ if hearts are biddable, otherwise 1♦. |
| 4=5 | If touching suits, bid the five-card suit if the hand is strong enough to reverse, or if the suit is strong. With a strong four-card suit and weak five, treat them as equals and open the four-card suit. |
| 5-5 | Bid the higher ranking suit, but with weak spades and a weak to moderate hand, bid 1♣ when 5-5 in the black suits. Bid 1♠ if either the hand or spades are strong. |
| 5=6 | If touching and the hand lacks reversing values, bid the five-card suit if it is strong and the six-carder weak. |