



Lesson 14 - Preemptive Opening Bids

What is a preemptive opening bid?

When your hand is too weak to open at the 1 level, but you have a long suit (6, 7 or 8 cards), you can open at the 2, 3 or 4 level. The long suit provides protection against getting penalized. When you open at a high level you take bidding room away from your opponents, making it harder for them to find their best contract. Since you have a weak hand, the opponents will often have most of the points.

The exception to a preemptive opening is 2♣, which actually shows a strong hand and will be covered in a future lesson. When you want to make a preemptive bid in clubs, you must open with 3♣.

Why would I make a weak preemptive opening bid?

When you make a preemptive bid, your objective is not to necessarily make your bid. The reasons to open with a preemptive bid:

1. It disrupts the opponents. The more bidding room you take away the harder it is for the opponents to find their best contract
2. Bidding a contract that you do not expect to make is called a “sacrifice”. You are trying to achieve a better score! When both sides are vulnerable, 5♦ doubled down 2 is -500 while 4♠ making by the opponents is -620. You get a better score by sacrificing in 5♦.
3. Sometimes you will make your contract!

What are the Requirements for a weak preemptive opening bid?

When you preempt, you want to have less than opening values, 5-11 total points. The fewer points you have, the more likely the hand belongs to the opponents, and so your preempt will disrupt their bidding.

You want to have a long, reasonably strong suit. The length of your suit dictates the level at which you will preempt:

| To make a weak preemptive opening bid... | You want to have... |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 2 Level – called a weak 2 bid | 6 cards in your long suit (not 2♣) |
| 3 Level preempt | 7 cards in your long suit |
| 4 Level preempt | 8 cards in your long suit |

What is reasonably strong? A good guideline is 2 of the top 3 honors, or 3 of the top 5 honors. The following suits would all qualify for preempting:

A K 9 8 7 4

K Q 8 7 5 3

A J T 5 3 2

Q J T 7 6 2

When you preempt, you do not want to hold a 4 card major suit. The reason is that there is some chance that your partner holds an opening hand, and you may have a major suit fit with your partner.

Examples

| Your hand | Opening Bid |
|-----------------------|---|
| ♠KQJT654 ♥76 ♦63 ♣43 | 6 HCP, 9 total points, 7 spades, 2 of the top 3 honors <i>Open 3♠</i> |
| ♠2 ♥AQ T8732 ♦654 ♣53 | 6 HCP, 9 total points, 7 hearts, 2 of the top 3 honors <i>Open 3♥</i> |
| ♠KQT9542 ♥4 ♦87 ♣QJT | 8 HCP, 11 total points, 7 spades, 2 of the top 3 honors <i>Open 3♠</i> |
| ♠2 ♥AQ T8754 ♦A54 ♣64 | 10 HCP, 13 total points <i>Open 1♥</i> |
| ♠72 ♥64 ♦KQT542 ♣654 | 5 HCP, 7 total points, 6 diamonds, 2 of top 3 honors <i>Open 2♦</i> |
| ♠KQJ872 ♥54 ♦JT4 ♣75 | 7 HCP, 9 total points, 6 spades, 2 of top 3 honors <i>Open 2♠</i> |
| ♠K4 ♥AQ9854 ♦T4 ♣875 | 9 HCP, 11 total points, 6 hearts, 2 of top 3 honors <i>Open 2♥</i> |
| ♠K4 ♥AKJ854 ♦T4 ♣875 | 11 HCP, 13 total points <i>Open 1♥</i> |

How to Respond to a preemptive bid with a weak hand (0-14 HCP)?

When partner has preempted, you know a lot about their hand, and so responder is the captain in the bidding. There are two cases:

1. A weak hand (0-14 HCP) with no fit. You should simply pass. The stronger your hand is the more likely partner can make their preemptive bid.
2. A weak hand (0-9 HCP) with a fit. Bid to the level of total trump. You partner has told you with the level they preempted, how many cards they have in the suit, so you can simply add your cards to come up with the proper level. This is called extending or continuing the preempt. Suppose partner opened 2♠ and you hold:

♠K987 ♥9 ♦QJ54 ♣8765

Raise to 4♠, partner has 6♠ and you have 4♠, with a 10 card fit bid to the 4 level.

3. A weak hand (10-14 HCP) with a fit. Here you can pass, expecting the opponents will not come into the bidding. If the opponents do bid, you can support partner to the level of your total trump.

How to Respond to a preemptive bid with a strong hand (15+ HCP)?

When partner has preempted, the responder is captain because they know the most about the combined hands. You need 15 HCP to bid a new suit or to explore for game. Typically you want to play the hand in opener's suit or notrump. If you decide to play in notrump you should have a fit with partner, because entries to a preemptive hand are often limited to their suit.

If you have a strong hand and a 5+ card major suit, you can bid your major suit. This is forcing and asks your partner to raise your suit with 3 card support. With no support, opener will simply rebid their suit.

When opener has preempted at the 2 level, responder has a special bid available, 2NT. This asks opener to bid a new suit where they have an outside "feature", an Ace or King. Having this outside honor is often the key to being able to make a game.

To summarize your options with a strong hand:

- Bid a new 5 card major to look for 3 card support from opener
- Bid game in partner's suit when you have a fit
- Bid 2NT over a weak two bid to ask for a feature (outside A or K)

Examples: Choose a responding bid

| Partner's Opening Bid | You Hold | Your Call |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|
| 2♥ | ♠AKQT2 ♥74 ♦T53 ♣865 | 9 HCP, 2 cards in heart suit <i>Pass</i> |
| 2♥ | ♠AKJ2 ♥JT4 ♦QJ3 ♣A86 | 16 HCP, 3 cards in heart suit <i>Bid 2NT</i> asking for a feature |
| 2♠ | ♠KT42 ♥4 ♦T42 ♣87532 | 3 HCP, 4 cards in spade suit <i>Bid 4♠</i> extending the preempt. |
| 2♠ | ♠KT42 ♥4 ♦AKT ♣AQ875 | 16 HCP + 2 support points, 4 cards in spade suit <i>Bid 4♠</i> expecting to make game. |
| 3♥ | ♠Q5 ♥AT5 ♦QJ53 ♣QJ98 | 12 HCP, 3 hearts, useless Quacks <i>Pass</i> |
| 3♥ | ♠65 ♥A75 ♦A953 ♣AQ98 | 14 HCP, only 2 outside Aces <i>Pass</i> |
| 3♠ | ♠65 ♥A75 ♦A953 ♣AQ98 | 14 HCP, 2 spades, 3 outside Aces <i>Bid 4♠</i> |

Opener's Second Bid?

If partner raises your suit or passes you should pass. You have shown your hand with your first bid, there is no reason to bid again. However there are two cases where you are forced to bid:

1. Responder bids a new suit
 - Raise responder's suit with 3 card support
 - Bid NT at the cheapest level with scattered honors
 - Rebid your suit at the cheapest level
2. Responder bids 2NT over your weak 2 bid
 - Bid a suit where you have an outside A or K (this is called a feature)
 - Bid 3NT with a solid suit (e.g. A K Q x x x)
 - Bid your suit at the 3 level