

# BRIDGE LESSONS AT SEA

## RESPONDER'S NEW SUIT RESPONSES With 4-CARD, 5-CARD, & 6-CARD SUITS

If Partner opens the bidding with one-of-a-suit, and there is no interference, Opener's Partner, should respond, whenever possible, with six or more HCP's. Absent a fit in the suit first mentioned by Opener, Responder's bid in a new suit is made either to seek an alternate trump fit, a possible no-trump contract, and/or to attempt to find a trump fit in a higher-scoring Major suit, even if a fit is present in the Minor suit first bid by the Opener.

**1. New Suit Forcing:** Responder's first bid at the 1-level of any new 4-card or longer suit shows a minimum high-card point count of six, but, until a further description by Responder is made, Opener does not know the full extent of Responder's strength. Responder is, likewise, unaware of the full strength of Opener's holding. In order to ensure the Partnership has an opportunity to explore for a possible game-level contract, and, occasionally, even for a slam-level contract, the bidding must remain open until further clarification can be made by both Partners. To ensure this, and to keep the bidding open, **any new suit bid by Responder is forcing for one round.**

**2. Responding, Without Competition, with Two or More 4-Card Suits and With Two 5-Card Suits:** Responder's order of selection as to which new suit to choose when responding must be based solely upon length and not upon strength.

- a. **With Two or Three 4-Card Suits: Bid "Up-the-Ladder"** without regard to the strength of the possible suits choices; i.e., bid without by-passing any 4-card suit held, in particular, without ever by-passing a 4-card Major suit, and an honor in the suit chosen is not mandatory.

*Responder holds: AK64 974 9753 AK* (Opener opens 1C. Responder should first respond 1D, the lower of any available 4-card suit. ("Up-the-Ladder"))

- b. **Some Players prefer to respond a 4-card Major before an available 4-card, or even a 5-card Minor, when holding a weak hand.** With 6-8 HCP's, Responder may be concerned that any interference by Responder's left-hand Opponent (LHO) might preclude the ability of the Partnership finding the potential Major suit fit, if it is present.

*Responder holds: 64 A974 QJ753 32* (Opener opens 1C. Responder might choose, here, to respond 1H with this weak holding, fearing that a 1S or a 2S bid by Responder's LHO might interfere with a potential Heart fit with Opener.)

- c. **With Two 5-Card Suits: Bid the higher-ranking suit first.**

*Responder holds: A8754 54 AKJ63 4* (Opener opens 1C. Responder's first call should be 1S, prepared to re-bid 2D at his/her next opportunity. Bidding the higher-ranking suit first and the lower-ranking suit second, not "Up-the-Ladder", shows a 5-5 or a 5-4 length in the two suits mentioned.)

- d. **With a new suit which is lower-ranking than Opener's bid suit:** Responder must hold 11 or more HCP's in order to be able to bid his/her new suit at the 2-level. Obviously, 12 or more HCP's would be needed in the "Two-Over-One" bidding system. With a weaker holding, Responder must either bid an alternate 4-card suit at the 1-level (1) or a "default" bid of 1-NT (2).

(1) *Responder holds: 9864 97 53 AKJ75* (Opener opens 1H. Responder should respond 1S, an available 1-level 4-card suit. The hand is too weak to first respond 2C.)

(2) Responder holds: 986 97 53 AKJ753 (Opener opens 1H. The hand, here, is, once again, too weak to first respond 2C. Responder should respond a "default" 1-NT, which says nothing, necessarily, concerning the presence of either an evenly-balanced hand, or stoppers in the other suits.)

### **3. Responses, Without Competition, With a 5-Card Suit and a 4-Card Suit:**

- a. If the 5-Card suit is *lower-ranking* than the 4-card suit, bid the *lower-ranking* suit first.  
Responder holds: AK64 AJ972 53 75 (Opener opens 1D. Responder should respond 1H, "Up-the-Ladder.")
- b. If the 5-card suit is *higher-ranking* than the 4-card suit, bid the *higher-ranking* suit first.  
Responder holds: AK642 AJ97 53 75 (Opener opens 1C. Responder should respond 1S, with intent to re-bid 2H, showing 5-5, or 5-4.)

### **4. Responses, Without Competition, That "Guarantee" a 5-Card or Longer Suit:**

When Responder makes a call of any new suit at the 2-level it can be in a suit with as few as 4-cards. However, if the response at the 2-level is in a new suit *immediately below Opener's bid suit*, it **guarantees** 5-cards or longer. Therefore:

- a. A bid of 2C, by Responder, in response to an opening bid of 1D shows 5 (+) Clubs
- b. A bid of 2D, by Responder, in response to an opening bid of 1H shows 5 (+) Diamonds
- c. A bid of 2H, by Responder, in response to an opening bid of 1S shows 5 (+) Spades

Responder holds: 64 AK972 53 KJ75 (Opener opens 1S. Responder can and should respond 2H. This shows 11 or more HCP's and at least 5-Hearts. (Note that if Responder had held only 4-Hearts, such as in (64 AK97 532 KJ75); no 3-card support for Opener's Spade suit, and two 4-card choices were available, Responder's preference would have been for the lower of the two possible choices, 2C in this instance.)

**5. Responses That Show a 6-Card Suit:** In order to show a 6-card or longer suit, Responder needs to bid the 6-card suit twice, one rarely re-bids an unsupported 5-card suit.

Responder holds: 64 AK9732 53 KJ7 (Opener opens 1D. Responder's first response is 1H (showing 4 or more Hearts). If Opener now re-bids 1S, or 1-NT, or 2C, Responder's re-bid is now 3S (showing 6 or more Hearts and 11-12 HCP's.)

An exception to the need to have two bids for Responder to show a 6-card holding would be if the Partnership agrees that weak jump-responses necessarily show 3-5 HCP's and a 6-card or longer suit.

Responder holds: 64 A97532 53 987 (Opener opens 1D. Responder bids 2H)

**5. Responses in Competition Absent at Least a 5-Card or Longer Suit:** With any interference overcall by the would-be-Responder's right-hand Opponent (RHO), the rules governing responses, absent competition as outlined above, must change. As a result of the overcall, a would-be Responder is required to hold *five or more* pieces of any new suit presented with the same HCP levels as before; namely, 6-10 HCP's at the 1-level, and 11 or more at the 2-level (12 or more in the "Two-Over-One" bidding system. Without a suit of 5-cards or more, a would-be Responder must use a "**Negative**" Double in order to show a new suit. A "**Negative**" Double is a "**Double**" by Responder at his/her *first opportunity, opposite a one-of-a-suit opening bid by Partner followed by an interference overcall by the would-be Responder's RHO (Right-Hand Opponent)*. It is a take-out double rather than a double for penalties. A Negative Double shows 6 (+) HCP's at the 1-level, 8 (+) HCP's at the 2-level, and 10 (+) HCP's at higher levels. There is no upper limit to the strength of Negative Doubles, and they are *not* alertable.

Responder holds: A975 AQ53 987 43 (North opens 1C. East overcalls 1D. South cannot make a suit response, but can make a "Negative Double.")