

Hand Evaluation Concepts for the Advancing Intermediate/Novice Bridge Player



**Written by Shawn Stringer
on behalf of District Six of the ACBL
and the Washington Bridge League**

Introduction

Intermediate and Novice Players are the foundation of the game of bridge. They outnumber expert players, and their ranks consistently bring new energy and life to the game.

The various units that make up District Six of the ACBL have strong programs in place to draw new players, and to help them expand their knowledge and skills. There are games throughout the District where novices and intermediates can play and learn, and be successful against their peers in relaxed and friendly environments.

In appreciation of the intermediate/novice players and teachers, we in District Six have compiled a collection of concepts that we feel are important to every advancing bridge player. These are not new bids that have to be memorized. Instead, they are fundamental bidding concepts that are applicable to whatever system you and your partner may play.

Once you assimilate these concepts, they will become part of your basic bridge knowledge and judgment. We hope that the ideas contained in this booklet will increase your confidence that you are making the bid that best describes your hand to partner.

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NOTE: Many novice players start out playing Standard American, but many play or switch to the Two Over One System. The concepts that follow are relevant regardless of the bidding system. Sometimes the strength required for a particular bid may vary depending on the system played. Such situations will be noted.

Concept One: How to Count Support Points

When partner opens 1 of a Major, your first duty is to support partner if you can. Even though your hand appears to be weak, you may still have a good supporting hand.

To determine if you should bid, first count your High Card Points (HCP.) Next, note the distribution (or shape) of your hand. Whether you are balanced or if you have a void, singleton or doubleton can affect the value of your hand to your partner. For purposes of this book, the combination of HCP and distribution points will be called "support points" and support points should be counted as follows:

With 3 card trump support:

- a. Count your HCP and add 3 points for a void
- b. Count your HCP and add 2 points for a singleton
- c. Count your HCP and add 1 point for a doubleton

With 4+ card trump support, upgrade your hand by adding one more point to your support points.

NOTE: You should downgrade for singleton or doubleton honors that are likely to be worthless.



Partner opens 1S.

Your Hand:

Support Points:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. J82/A752/J87/T82 | 6 – 6 HCP and no distribution points |
| 2. QT5/6/AT643/J543 | 9 – 7 HCP and 2 distribution points |
| 3. 9743/KQ864/5/Q63 | 10 – 7 HCP, 2 distribution points, and 1 point for 4 th trump |
| 4. 9743/KQ864/52/Q6 | 8 – 7 HCP, 2 distribution points, 1 point for 4 th trump but discount doubleton Q |
| 5. AT6/93/KQ92/AT97 | 14 – 13 HCP and 1 distribution point |
| 6. T975/92/A9/K98642 | 10 – 7 HCP, 2 distribution points, and 1 point for 4 th trump |
| 7. AJ42/AJ86/62/KQ3 | 17 – 15 HCP, 1 distribution point, and 1 point for 4 th trump |
| 8. K82/K53/8642/T76 | 6 – 6 HCP, no distribution points |
| 9. 6/T74/KT75/Q9543 | 5 – 5 HCP, no distribution points because no trump support |
| 10. KT75/6/T74/Q9543 | 8 – 5 HCP, 2 distribution points, 1 point for 4 th trump |

NOTE: Hands 9 and 10 have the same cards but in different suits. Hand 10 is much more valuable after partner opens 1S.

Concept Two: What Constitutes a Single Raise of Partner's Major? (Playing Standard American)

A **single raise** of partner's major promises **6 to 10 support points** and **3+ trump**.

Remember that when you have a 4th trump, you can add one point in figuring your support points.

NOTE: If you are playing Two Over One, then a single raise generally promises 8-10 support points and 3+trump. With 6-7 support points, you bid 1NT (forcing) and then support the major.

Therefore, for a few of the hands that follow, those playing Two Over One would not support directly, but would go through 1NT first, and then support spades.



Partner opens 1S.

Your Hand:

Your Bid:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. K82/Q543/J8/8542 | 2S – 6 or 7 support points (6HCP, 1 point for doubleton, J is questionable value) |
| 2. K93/Q872/972/863 | Pass – 5 support points (5 HCP, no shape) |
| 3. 852/AJ93/86/Q652 | 2S – 8 support points (7HCP, 1 distribution point) |
| 4. KQ7/5/T852/98765 | 2S – 7 support points (5HCP, 2 points for singleton) |
| 5. Q76/A62/K863/J76 | 2S – 10 support points (10 HCP, no shape) |
| 6. 873/A92/KQJ65/87 | Make a Limit Raise – 11 support points is too good to bid just 2S |
| 7. J93/652/AK86/J63 | 2S – 9 support points (9 HCP, no shape) |
| 8. A94/96/Q975/Q852 | 2S – 9 support points (8 HCP, 1 distribution point) |
| 9. 8543/KJ98/A72/93 | 2S – 10 support points (very close to a Limit Raise) (8 HCP, 1 point for doubleton, 1 point for 4 th trump) |
| 10. K82/8542/K63/976 | 2S – 6 support points (6 HCP, no shape) minimum hand for single raise |

Concept Three: When Opener Should Invite and Bid Game after Partner's Single Raise of Opener's Major (playing Standard American)

The primary factors that affect your decision to invite or bid game are your High Card Points and your shape. The more distributional your hand, the fewer HCP you need to take a second bid, whether your second bid is an invitation or a game bid.

Following are various distributions you may have, and the corresponding HCP guidelines, for your second bid:

- a) 5-4-3-1 shape: with 15-16 HCP, invite game
with good 17+, bid game
- b) 5-4-2-2 shape: treat like 5431 – try to have no wastage (such as Qx)
- c) 5-5 shapes: with good 13-14 HCP, invite game
(or 6-4 shapes) with 15+ HCP, bid game
- d) 6-3-2-2 shape: with 15-16 HCP, invite game
with 17+ HCP, bid game
- e) 6-3-3-1 shape: with 14-15 HCP, invite game
with 16+ HCP, bid game
- f) 5-3-3-2 shape: with 14-15 HCP, pass
with 16-17, invite (or open 1N)
with 18-19 HCP, bid 3N or 4M

NOTE: If playing the Two Over One System, a single raise of partner's 1H or 1S opener promises 8-10 support points. Therefore, the opener can invite or bid game with somewhat less strength than indicated in the above guidelines.

You open 1S and partner bids 2S:

<u>Your Hand:</u>	<u>Invite or Bid Game:</u>
1. AKxxx/KJxx/Axx/x	Invite
2. AKxxx/KQxx/Axx/x	Bid Game
3. KQJxx/Kx/AQJx/xx	Invite
4. KQJxx/Kx/AKJx/xx	Bid Game
5. AQT9x/AKxxx/xx/x	Invite
6. AKJxx/AKxxx/xx/x	Bid Game
7. AKxxxx/Qxx/Kx/Ax	Invite
8. AKxxxx/Kxx/Kx/Ax	Bid Game
9. AQJxxx/Kxx/x/Kxx	Invite
10. AKxxxx/KQxx/x/Ax	Bid Game
11. AKxxx/Kxx/xxx/Ax	Pass
12. AQJxx/KQx/KJx/xx	Invite (or open 1NT)
13. AQxxx/AJx/KJx/Kx	Bid Game

Concept Four: What Constitutes a Limit Raise of Partner's Major

It is critical that an advancing bridge player fully understand the elements of a Limit Raise. A limit raise describes a hand that 1) has 3+ card support for partner's suit; 2) is limited in strength to an invitation to game (not forcing to game); and 3) suggests that if partner holds a maximum for his bid, he should bid game.

Whatever bidding system you use to show a Limit Raise, the hand should have **11 support points**. With 3-card trump support, the following combinations of HCP and distributions points constitute a Limit Raise:

- 11 HCP and 4333 shape
- 10 HCP with 4333 shape ONLY if your 10 HCP consist of two Aces and a Q (Aces are known as "prime" cards)
- 10 HCP and a doubleton
- 9 HCP and a singleton
- 8 HCP and a singleton, but only if the 8 HCP consist of two Aces (remember, Aces are "prime")

If you have 4+ card trump support, you can add one point to your hand because the fourth trump is very valuable. In other words, you can decrease the required point counts listed above by one point if you have that fourth trump.

Partner Opens 1S.

Your Hand:

1. Axx/x/KT9xx/xxxx

2. Axx/x/QT9xx/Qxxx

3. Axx/x/KQT9x/xxxx

4. Kxx/xx/KQJxx/xxx

5. xxx/AQxx/Axx/xxx

6. xxx/AJxx/Qxx/Kxx

7. QJx/AT9/xxx/AT9x

8. Kxxx/Axxx/x/xxxx

9. xxxx/Axx/Kxx/Kxx

10. Qxx/Kxx/Axx/Jxxx

11. Qxxx/Kxx/Axx/Qxx

12. xxxx/KQx/KQxxx/x

Single Raise (SR) or Limit Raise (LR)

SR – only 9 support points

SR – with only 8 HCP, need 2 Aces

LR – 9 HCP, singleton, nice second suit

SR – 9 HCP, no singleton

LR – only 10 HCP, but they are prime

SR – 10 HCP, no shape, not prime cards

LR – 11 HCP, even without spade J, this would be LR because prime cards and excellent spot cards

LR – only 7 HCP, but you have singleton, Prime cards, and 4th trump

LR – only 10 HCP, no distribution BUT you have 4th trump

SR – 10 HCP, no distribution points

LR – not much better than above hand, but 11 HCP and 4th trump

LR – 10 HCP, singleton, 4th trump

**Concept Five: When to Bid 4 of a Major over 1 of a Major
(whether partner opened or overcalled)**

Regardless of your bidding system, jumping to 4 of the Major after partner opens or overcalls that Major is considered preemptive. In reality, by following these guidelines, many of these hands have a good chance of making the contract. Other benefits of jumping to 4M are that you may keep the opponents out of their game; you make the opponents guess whether to bid at the five level; and, even if doubled, the opponents may score less than their game or part score.

The strength of the hand should be limited to 9 HCP, because with more than that you are too strong to jump to 4M. The shape of the hand also affects the decision to jump or not. The basic strengths and shapes to think about are below:

- a) 5 trump and a singleton or void (5431, 5530, 5440 shapes):
with all of these shapes and 3-9 HCP, bid 4M
("Ten Trump Rule" – with 10 trump, and a singleton or void, bid game)
- b) 4 trump and a void (4540 shapes):
with 3-9 HCP, bid 4M
- c) 5 trump and two doubletons (5422 shapes):
with 3-9 HCP, and concentration of points in long suits, bid 4M
- d) 6 trump and two doubletons (6322 shapes):
with 3-9 HCP, bid 4M
- e) 4 trump and 6 card side suit (4126 shapes):
with 3-9 HCP, bid 4M
- f) Do NOT bid 4M with 5332 shapes unless all points are in the major and the vulnerability is favorable

Partner opens or overcalls 1S.

Your Hand:

Your bid:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. xxxxx/Axx/Qxxx/x | 4S (5 trump and singleton) |
| 2. xxxx/Axxx/Qxxxx/--- | 4S (4 trump and void) |
| 3. KJxxx/Axxx/xx/xx | 4S (5 trump, points in long suits) |
| 4. Jxxxxx/Qxx/Kx/xx | 4S (6 trump, 2 doubletons) |
| 5. Qxxx/x/Axxxxx/xx | 4S (4 trump, singleton, points in long suits,
4162 shape) |
| 6. Qxxxx/Kxx/xxx/Qx | Do not bid game (5332 shape, scattered
values) |
| 7. QJxxx/xx/Qxx/Kx | Do not bid game – this is worth repeating:
With 5332 shape and scattered values,
do not jump to 4S |



Concept Six: What is the Minimum Hand for a Simple One Level Overcall?

There are several good reasons to make a one level overcall of the opponent's opening bid. Here are the reasons, in order of priority:

- a. Your side wants to compete safely for a part score.
- b. You want to take up some of the opponent's bidding space.
- c. Despite the opponent's opening bid, you may be able to make a game.
- d. You want to get partner off to the best lead if the opponent's win the bid.

In deciding whether to overcall, first look at your suit length. You should have five or more cards in your suit. Then look at your High Card Points and where those HCP are located. A general rule is that the fewer your High Card Points, the more those HCP must be in your suit. Take these guidelines into account:

---- With **less than 8 HCP**, you must have a very good suit. It is acceptable to overcall with AKxxx/xxxx/xx/xx (7 HCP), but not with Jxxxx/Kxxx/Qx/Qx (8 HCP).

---- With **8 to 10 HCP**, whether or not to overcall is a matter of style. With good to medium suit quality, look for reasons to bid. With medium to poor suit quality, overcall only if you have shortness, especially a singleton or void.

---- With **11 or more HCP**, overcall at the one level regardless of suit quality. Overcall 1S with Jxxxx/KJT/AQx/xx. Even though the spade suit is weak, you have enough strength to overcall at the one level.

Right Hand Opponent (RHO) opens 1C. What do you bid with these hands?

Your Hand:

Your bid:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. xxx/AKxxx/xxx/xx | Overcall 1H. You have a good suit that you want partner to lead. You may keep the opponents from finding their best contract. |
| 2. Kxx/Jxxxx/Kxx/xx | Pass. You do not want hearts led. Your HCP are not in your suit. |
| 3. KQx/Jxxxx/Axx/Kx | Overcall 1H. Your suit is not good but you have an opening hand and want to compete. |
| 4. KJx/KQxxx/xxxx/x | Overcall 1H. You have a good quality suit and shortness in opponent's suit |

Guidelines for Bidding after Partner's One Level Overcall:

- a. New Suit - You need a five+ card suit and 8 to 15 HCP to bid a new suit.
- b. One No Trump – 9 to 12 HCP
- c. Two No Trump – 13 to 15 HCP
- d. Supporting Partner
 - make a **single raise** of partner's suit with 6 to 10 support points and 3+ trumps
Example: (1C) – 1S – (P) – 2S = single raise
 - with a **Limit Raise** (11+ support points) and 3+ trumps, cue bid the opponent's suit.
Example: (1C) – 1S – (P) – 2C = Limit Raise
- e. Preemptive Raise
 - jump to 3S with less than 6 support points and 4 trump
- f. Bid 4 of the Major as detailed in Concept Five.

Concept Seven: What is the Minimum Hand for a Simple Two Level Overcall?

Overcall at the Two Level for the same reasons listed above that you would overcall at the one level.

These are the guidelines for a two-level overcall:

- a. With a 6-card suit:
 - 10+ HCP and at least a medium quality suit
 - a good "weak two" bid is sufficient
- b. With 5-4-3-1 shape:
 - 12+ HCP and a good suit
- c. With 5-3-3-2 shape:
 - 13+ HCP and a good suit

RHO opens 1S. What do you bid with these hands?

Your Hand:

Your bid:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. xx/AKxxx/Kxxx/Kx | Overcall 2H. Good suit, good hand |
| 2. Qx/AJxxx/Kxx/Qxx | Pass. Wasted spade Q; 5332 shape is a drawback |
| 3. Jx/Axxxx/KQx/Qxx | Pass. Poor suit quality and bad shape |
| 4. x/AKxxxx/Axxx/xx | Overcall 2H. You have only 11HCP but you have a good suit and prime cards and a second 4 card suit |
| 5. x/AQJxxx/Kxx/xxx | Overcall 2H. You have a good weak 2 hand, and you have good shape with singleton in their suit |

Guidelines for Bidding after Partner's Two Level Overcall:

a. Balanced hand without support:

2NT = 10 - 12 HCP, stopper in opponent's suit

3NT = 13+ HCP, stopper in opponent's suit

b. Support for partner's suit:

Single Raise = 8 - 10 support points and 3+ trump

Limit Raise = 11 – 12 support points. Show this hand by cue bidding opponent's suit

Bid Game with 13 support points after partner's major suit overcall

Bidding has gone (1S) – 2H – (P). What is your bid?

Your Hand:

Your Bid:

1. KJxx/xx/Kxx/QJxx

2NT – balanced hand, stopper(s) in opponent's suit, no 3 card support for partner

2. KJx/Qx/AJxx/QJxx

3NT – as above, but extra strength

3. xx/QTx/AJxx/Qxxx

3H – 10 support points and 3 card trump support

4. xx/KTx/AJxx/QJxx

2S – cue bid to show 12 support points and 3 trump

5. x/KTxx/QJxx/AJxx

4H – with support points, bid game

Concept Eight: After the 4-4 Fit, What's Next?

Much bidding in bridge revolves around finding a 4-4 major suit fit. Once that fit is found, the next step is for opener to describe his or her hand as accurately as possible to get to the best contract.

Assume that the opponents are silent. You open 1C (or 1D), and partner responds 1S. You have four spades, so you have found at least a 4-4 major suit fit. Here are the guidelines for your next bid:

- a. 2S = 11-13 HCP, singleton or void, 4 spades
or 12-14 balanced, 4 spades
- b. 3S = 13-15 HCP, singleton or void, 4 spades
- c. 4S = 18-19 HCP, balanced, 4 spades
- d. 4C/4D/4H – 16+ HCP, singleton in that suit, 4 spades

After the bidding goes 1D – P – 1S – P, what is your next bid?

Your Hand:

Your bid:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. KQxx/AQxx/KJxx/x | Bid 3S. You have 15 HCP and a singleton |
| 2. KJxx/x/KQJxx/AKx | Bid 4H. A splinter bid here shows 16+ HCP and a singleton heart |
| 3. Qxxx/Kxxx/KJx/Kx | 2S. You have minimum opener |
| 4. KJxx/Kx/KQxx/AQx | 4S. This hand is similar to example 2, but this hand is balanced (no singleton or void) |
| 5. Kxxx/J/AQJxxx/Kx | 3S. This hand is worth a jump even with the wasted J of hearts – the shape (singleton) makes the hand more valuable |

Concept Nine: Playing the Odds

Bridge is a game of percentages. One way to improve your Declarer Play is to become familiar with the likelihood of getting a favorable or unfavorable break in a suit. At the same time, you will learn to determine whether a particular card is more likely to be in one hand or the other.

Sometimes, as declarer, you have what seems like too many options and that results in uncertainty at the table. Learning the odds in the following chart is an important step toward choosing the better line of play – with knowledge and confidence.

**How suits break –
What is the chance that a suit will
break in a particular way?**

Number of Cards Missing	Possible Breaks	Odds (%)
2	1-1	52
	2-0	48
3	2-1	78
	3-0	22
4	2-2	40
	3-1	50
	4-0	10
5	3-2	68
	4-1	28
	5-0	4
6	3-3	36
	4-2	48
	5-1	15
	6-0	1
7	4-3	62
	5-2	31
	6-1	6
	7-0	1

Concept Ten: How Individual Bids Fit into a System: Balanced Hands

Bidding (like other language) is more easily learned within a context and not as random individual pieces. The more you understand and visualize bids as connected to each other and as parts of a system, the easier it is to remember the parts.

The following chart is a framework for bidding almost every balanced hand that you will encounter as opener. Cover the right hand column and see if you don't already know most of these bids.

Bidding Balanced Hands Containing 12-27 HCP

HCP Range	Bidding Sequences (Opponents don't bid)
12 - 14	1C – 1S 1N
15 - 17	1N
18 - 19	1C – 1S 2N
20 - 21	2N
22 - 24	2C – 2D 2N
25 - 27	2C – 2D 3N

Sometimes new bridge players know more about bidding than they realize – they just haven't learned to see the bids they know within an overall framework. Whenever you and your partner decide it is time to learn a new bid, make sure to think about how that bid fits with the rest of the bidding system you have already mastered.

Relax, have fun, and enjoy the game!

Units that Make up District 6:

109 Richmond Bridge Association

Peggy Ward, President
thewardsofva@yahoo.com

110 Virginia Peninsula

Tom Fukawa, President
Thomas.fukawa@us.army.mil

135 Maryland Bridge Association

Jennifer Koonce, President
kooncejf@comcast.net

139 Virginia Piedmont

Ed Tomlinson, President
Ed2tomlinson@comcast.net

146 Virginia State Bridge Association

Carol Guy, President
Cmguy1@verizon.net

147 Washington Bridge League

Don Berman, President
Don.berman@verizon.net

218 Northern Virginia Bridge Association

Bob Boyd, President
BobBoyd72@aol.com

231 Southwest Virginia

Lorraine Holub, President
lorraine.holub@gmail.com

Notes



ACBL
www.ACBL.org

District 6
www.districtsix.org

Washington Bridge League (WBL)
www.districtsix.org/WBL/WBLhome.aspx