

## Learning Points – Opening Bid Preempts

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Bidding Level: BASIC

Why preempt? We want to get in our opponent's way so they can't get to their best contract and their highest score. We take a calculated risk, take away bidding space at low cost, suggest a sacrifice, and tell partner we've got a good suit with little defense outside. How do preempts at the 2, 3 or 4 level compare? How can we best balance risk and reward? What can partner count on? Partner needs to know what we mean when we preempt.

**Discipline** requires we are clear about:

1. Length and strength in the **suit**.
2. Opener's **distribution**.
3. **Strength** / HCP outside the suit / **Defense**.
4. Opener's approximate **playing strength** (Rule of 2-3-4).

*Preempting is  
a calculated  
GAMBLE*

When should you preempt? When in doubt, **DON'T**. Your decision is influenced by your seat or position, and vulnerability. For disciplined opening preempts (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> seat):

	<b>Suit</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Defense</b>	<b>Playing Strength</b>
Weak 2	6 Cards with 2 of top 4 honors good internal strength <u>Minimum:</u> 5-7: KQ1098x 8-11: QJ98xx	6322, 6331, some 6421 No side 4 card major. Side 4 card minor OK. Prefer Singleton, but no VOID.	5-11 HCP Most in suit <u>IN / Out</u> 5 / 0    9 / 4 6 / 1    10 / 5 7 / 2    11 / 6 8 / 3	One A or K outside only if hand is maximum. Never 2 Aces or 2 Quick Tricks Outside	N vs V 4+ Tricks N vs N 5+ Tricks V vs V 5+ Tricks V vs N 6+ Tricks
3-Bid	7 Cards with good internal strength QJ98xxx	7222, 7321, some 7241 No side 4 card major. Prefer Singleton. Never VOID.	<10 HCP <i>Beware Qx and Jx outside</i>	One A or K outside. Never 2 Aces or 2 Quick Tricks Outside	N vs V 5+ Tricks N vs N 6+ Tricks V vs V 6+ Tricks V vs N 7+ Tricks
4-Bid	7-8 Cards with 2 of top 4 honors KJ1098xx	No side 4 card suit. Singletons preferred. VOID ok.	<12 HCP 1-bid instead with opening strength	One outside A or K. More outside? open 1. Open Strong 2♣ with 4 losers and 4 defensive tricks.	N vs V 7 Tricks N vs N 7 Tricks V vs V 8 Tricks V vs N 8 Tricks Never with 9 Tricks

4-bids differ from 3-bids mainly in the number of playing tricks from suit quality – top honors and middle cards. Be careful opening 4 of a minor – you are giving up on 3NT as a possible contract for your side.

Avoid opening with a preempt in 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> seat with 2 or more defensive (Quick) tricks. Avoid 2- or 3-bids holding 2 aces, or lots of HCP outside your suit – you might defeat their contract. Prefer suits with good intermediates – the idea is to have **no more than 2 losers in your suit**. (7222 is not a great shape).

**1<sup>st</sup> seat** preempts are great if disciplined. With a borderline hand (say a choice between 2 or 3), preempt higher Not Vulnerable and lower Vulnerable. **2<sup>nd</sup> seat** preempts are more risky – RHO has passed, so your side might own the hand. Many pairs play disciplined preempts in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> seats. The **3<sup>rd</sup> seat** is safest for preempting. After two passes you know the hand belongs to the opponents. Step right up and get in their way. Many pairs relax restrictions within reason in 3<sup>rd</sup> seat.

You should open the bidding in **4<sup>th</sup> seat** only if you will create a positive score for your side. Pass otherwise. In the 4<sup>th</sup> seat, 3-bids are sound (1-2 tricks away) and weak-2's are opening bids (10-13 HCP with 6 cards in the suit and 2+ defensive tricks). **Once you have preempted, pass throughout the auction - unless PARTNER forces you to bid.** Responder can only force you with a new suit, a cue bid, or an Ace Asking bid. All raises and game bids are to play. Over weak 2's 2NT is a conventional asking

bid for 1) **Feature**, 2) Strength and suit quality (OGUST) , 3) Strength and suit length, or 4) shortness. Wide ranging weak 2 bids require adjustments by responder - they are more complex than **BASIC**.

### Rule of 2-3-4

Depending on vulnerability, here's how many **playing tricks** you need for a disciplined preempt. The worst vulnerability is when you are vulnerable and they are not. If a partial is their limit on the hand, a poor preempt could give them a big plus score (the dreaded minus 200 - you go down 2 or they double you and you go down 1 Vul) they cannot get on their own. The best situation is when you are not vulnerable and they are. You can afford to go down 3 tricks doubles if they are making game. When we are NV, being set 1 doubled can be a good score if they can make a partial worth 110 or more. Many do not apply this to weak 2 bids.

Disciplined Preempts Vulnerability			Weak-2 (8 tricks)	3-bid (9 Tricks)	4-bid (10 Tricks)	
	You	Them	Rule 2-3-4	Play Strength	Play Strength	Rule of 2-3
Unfavorable	NV	Vul	4 Under	4	5	7
Equal	NV	NV	3 Under	5	6	7
Equal	Vul	Vul	3 Under	5	6	8
Favorable	Vul	NV	2 Under	6	7	8

Disciplined	Not	What's Up / Flaws
<b>Weak 2-Bids</b>		
♠ KQJ876 ♥K103 ♦42 ♣96	♠ J87642 ♥K103 ♦KQ ♣96	Poor suit. Too much defense
♠ KQ10876 ♥103 ♦4 ♣J962	♠ K108763 ♥103 ♦42 ♣K96	1 of top 4 Honors-ok NV 3 <sup>rd</sup> seat
♠ AJ9876 ♥K103 ♦4 ♣962	♠ AJ9876 ♥K103 ♦ - ♣9642	Void
♠ KJ8763 ♥K103 ♦42 ♣96	♠ KJ8763 ♥K1043 ♦2 ♣96	4 Card ♥ suit.
♠ AJ9876 ♥K103 ♦4 ♣9652	♠ A109876 ♥A103 ♦4 ♣9652	Two Aces (too much defense)
♠ QJ9876 ♥K103 ♦4 ♣9652	♠ QJ9876 ♥32 ♦4 ♣ K10965	Side 5 card suit
♠ AQJ876 ♥J103 ♦K4 ♣96	♠ QJ9876 ♥J103 ♦AK4 ♣6	2 defensive tricks outside
<b>3-Bids</b>		
♠ KJ98765 ♥K103 ♦4 ♣96	♠ KJ98762 ♥K1053 ♦4 ♣96	4 Card ♥ suit
♠ KJ98765 ♥K103 ♦4 ♣96	♠ KJ98762 ♥K105 ♦ - ♣963	Void
♠ KJ98765 ♥K10 ♦43 ♣96	♠ KJ98765 ♥ - ♦4 ♣ K10963	Two suiter.
♠ AKQJ987 ♥109 ♦43 ♣96	♠ QJ98763 ♥109 ♦AK4 ♣9	2 defensive tricks outside
♠ AKQJ987 ♥109 ♦43 ♣96	♠ AKQJ987 ♥K94 ♦3 ♣96	Too strong –open 1.
♠ AKQJ987 ♥109 ♦43 ♣96	♠ AKQJ987 ♥ - ♦10943 ♣96	Void
<b>4-bids</b>		
♠ QJ1098762 ♥109 ♦A3 ♣96	♠ J1098762 ♥109 ♦AQ3 ♣96	3 losers in ♠; too much in ♦
♠ AQJ10987 ♥109 ♦A3 ♣96	♠ AKQJ987 ♥K9 ♦A3 ♣96	Two outside A/K's
♠ AKQJ9872 ♥ - ♦ J1093 ♣96	♠ AKQJ987 ♥J1093 ♦ - ♣96	4 Card ♥ suit
♠ AQ1098732 ♥ - ♦ A109 ♣96	♠ AKQ109872 ♥ - ♦A93 ♣96	9 playing tricks – too many.
♠ KJ1098762 ♥ - ♦ A109 ♣93	♠ KJ1098762 ♥ - ♦ 1096 ♣93	6 ½ losers. Open 3 instead

**References:** Ron Andersen and Sabine Zenkel, Preempts from A to Z, Magnus Books, Stamford Connecticut 1996 pp 307. ISBN 0-9637533-3-9

See Karen Walker's website for additional examples:

Weak Twos: <http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/weak2.htm>

Opening 3 Bids: <http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/3bids.htm>

Opening 4 Bids: <http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/4bids.htm>

Bidding Over Opponents Preempts: <http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/preempts.htm>

## Example

<b>South</b> <b>Deals</b> <b>Both Vul</b>	♠J87642 ♥K103 ♦KQ ♣96	
♠K ♥J6 ♦AJ86543 ♣Q32	N W 13 E S	♠AQ10 ♥942 ♦10972 ♣A87
	♠953 ♥AQ875 ♦ ♣KJ1054	

Here's a hand from January 5<sup>th</sup>'s Novice game. This is a fascinating deal with lots to talk about. Some would open 1♥ with South's hand. South holds 2 good suits and 10 high card points in those suits. West has a hand that some would open 3♦. West holds a 7-card suit with 2 of the top 4 honors and less than opening strength. Some might be tempted to bid 2♠ with North's hand (are you?). After all, North holds a 6-card suit and 9-HCP. What could go wrong? Maybe -800.

### Novice Game

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
MPs	2.36	6.93	2.36	4.64	5.79	-	-	2.36	0.07
Score	-110	650	-110	140	300	-	-	-110	-130

Looking at the press report from that night, we can see that 4 East West pairs played in a minor suit partial. 2 North South pairs played in a major, one bid and made game with an overtrick and one bid and made 3. One North South pair set a doubled contract 2 tricks. Many different things happened on this one hand.

### Open Game

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
MPs	0.06	2.31	6.25	1.19	4.56			6.25	3.44	7.94	
Score	-800	-100	140	-150	100			140	PASS	500	

In the open game we find an even wider range of results! 3 North South pairs went down in their contracts. One doubled down 3, one down 3, and one down 2. Curiously, one table passed out the hand. How could that be??? I'm willing to be some

North opened a weak 2 with that hand, and paid the price for partner believing s/he had their bid.

If you and your partner adopt wide-ranging or undisciplined preempts, you need more artificial methods to manage your bidding accurately. If your preempt is undisciplined, and partner makes a disciplined response, your side might be in for a bad result.

NS Result	Frequency
+650	1
+500	1
+300	1
+140	3
+100	1
0	1
-100	1
-110	3
-130	1
-150	1
-800	1

Keywords: Disciplined preempts, playing strength, vulnerability and position/seat, flaws