

# What's Standard?

by David Lindop

This series is based on *Grant Standard*, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of *Grant Standard* and the corresponding convention card can be found at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com). The site also has *Grant Basic*, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the *Bridge Bulletin* and can also be found under 'Articles' at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com).

In Grant Standard, there are no conventions directly associated with minor suit openings. The opening bids and responses are all "natural." That doesn't mean there's nothing to consider. We still have to discuss our "treatments" to make sure we are in agreement with partner on the meaning of certain bids.

## Minor Suit Openings

When opening a minor suit, we use the following guidelines:

### MINOR SUIT OPENINGS

- Open the longer minor.
- With two four-card or five-card minors, open 1♦.
- With two three-card minors, open 1♣.

♠ 4 3  
♥ A 9 5 2  
♦ K J 5  
♣ K Q 8 3

1♣. With no five-card major suit and a hand too weak to open 1NT, we open the longer minor.

♠ A Q J 4  
♥ Q 9 7 2  
♦ J 7 5  
♣ A 4

1♦. One consequence of requiring a five-card major to open 1♥ or 1♠ is that we sometimes have to open with a three-card minor suit. We still open the longer minor. This is considered a standard bid and is not alertable.

Some players prefer to open 1♣ with this type of hand, so that an opening bid of 1♦ always promises

## Minor Suit Openings and Responses

a four-card or longer suit. This style — where 1♣ could be a two-card suit — is alertable since it is not standard.

Opening a three-card minor suit is sometimes referred to as the "short club." This is a misnomer. We actually **open the longer minor**, which could be a "short" diamond suit. It's best to eradicate the term "short club" from our vocabulary. It creates too many problems in our thinking.

♠ A Q 7 2  
♥ 5  
♦ Q 10 7 5  
♣ A J 8 3

1♦. With two four-card minors, the popular practice is to open 1♦, although opening 1♣ is also acceptable.

♠ A 8 6 3  
♥ K 7 5  
♦ A Q 5  
♣ A J 3

1♣. This hand is too strong to open 1NT. With a choice between three-card minors, it's standard to open 1♣.

♠ K J 4  
♥ A J  
♦ K 8 3  
♣ K 8 7 5 2

1NT. Opening 1NT takes priority over opening a minor when we have a balanced hand of 15-17 points.

♠ K 4  
♥ Q 8 7 6 4  
♦ A K J 7 5  
♣ 7

1♥. With two five-card suits, we open the higher-ranking. This will usually make it easier to show both

suits. If we are West, for example, the bidding might go like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♦			

We conveniently show both our suits and partner can choose to play partscore in either suit at the two level ... by passing 2♦ or bidding 2♥.

♠ A 10 8 7 3  
♥ —  
♦ J 5  
♣ A Q 8 7 5 4

1♣. We generally open the longer suit, even when we have a five-card major suit. By starting with 1♣

we can plan to describe the hand to partner with some sequence such as:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♠			

By bidding and rebidding spades, partner will assume we have five of them. However, since we opened 1♣, partner can infer that we must have six clubs. With five spades and five clubs, we would have opened the higher-ranking suit, 1♠. Partner should be well placed to decide the best contract.

## Being Prepared

Having said that we generally open the longer suit, there are exceptions. **With a minimum opening bid, we want to avoid reversing: bidding a second suit at the two level that is higher-ranking than our first suit.**

♠ J  
♥ 8 7 5  
♦ A K Q 6  
♣ Q 8 6 4 3

If we open 1♣, we will be awkwardly placed if partner responds 1♠. We don't want to rebid 1NT with an unbalanced hand and we don't want to rebid 2♣ with such a weak five-card suit.

A bid of 2♦ would be a reverse — a bid at the two level in a higher-ranking suit. The trouble with reversing with a minimum hand is that it may leave responder poorly placed. If responder has only 6 or 7 points, we may get the partnership much too high. Responder would now have to bid 3♣, for example, if responder prefers clubs to diamonds. So, we should reverse only with a medium strength or stronger hand.

With this hand, we can avoid the problem by opening 1♦. If partner responds 1♠, we are now prepared to rebid 2♣, a lower-ranking suit at the two level. We won't have reversed and partner won't expect us to have extra strength. Of course, partner will assume our diamonds are as long or longer than our clubs. But that's the small price we pay for avoiding an awkward rebid problem if we open 1♣.

♠ A This hand presents a  
♥ K J 8 6 3 similar dilemma. In  
♦ Q J 7 6 5 2 theory, we'd like to  
♣ 2 open 1♦ and then bid  
and rebid hearts to show six diamonds  
and five hearts. However, we don't  
want to reverse with a minimum hand.  
The practical solution is to open 1♥,  
leaving us with a convenient rebid of  
2♦ if partner responds 1♠ or 1NT.

So, even with the straightforward  
guidelines for opening a minor suit,  
there is still some room left for  
judgment if we want to be prepared  
for our rebid.

### Responder's First Priority

When partner opens 1♣ or 1♦, **our  
priority is to bid a four-card or  
longer major suit.** Major suits get a  
higher trick score than minor suits  
and it's easier to make game in a  
ten-trick contract of 4♥ or 4♠ than  
an eleven-trick contract of 5♣ or 5♦.

If partner opens ♠ J 10 5 3  
1♦, we respond 1♠ ♥ 4  
with this hand rather ♦ K Q 10 7 2  
than raising to 2♦. If ♣ 8 6 2  
partner has support for spades, we've  
found a major suit fit. If partner  
doesn't have support for spades, we  
can always return to diamonds.

For example, consider how the  
auction might go if these are the  
combined East-West hands:

<b>WEST</b>		<b>EAST</b>	
♠ K Q 9 4	♠ J 10 5 3	♥ Q J	♥ 4
♥ Q J	♦ K Q 10 7 2	♦ A J 9 3	♦ K Q 10 7 2
♦ A J 9 3	♣ 8 6 2	♣ K Q J	♣ 8 6 2
♣ K Q J			

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

In 4♠, we'll make ten tricks, los-  
ing a spade, a heart, and a club. 5♦  
has no chance, since we have to lose  
the same three tricks. If we were to  
raise diamonds right away, partner  
would likely try 3NT, which will be  
defeated three or more tricks.

### Responder's Second Priority

With no four-card or longer major  
to bid, **responder's next priority is to  
bid notrump with a balanced hand.**  
If the partnership has enough  
combined strength for game, it will

usually be easier to take nine tricks  
in 3NT than eleven tricks in 5♣ or  
5♦. Even if the partnership stops in  
partscore, notrump contracts score  
better than minor suit contracts.

In Grant Standard, we use the  
most straightforward set of ranges  
for notrump responses:

#### NOTRUMP RESPONSES TO 1♣ OR 1♦

1NT	6-10 points
2NT	11-12 points
3NT	13-15 points

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	?	

With 7 high-card ♠ K 8 4  
points plus 1 length ♥ Q 7 3  
point for the five-card ♦ J 5  
club suit, we would ♣ J 9 8 6 3  
respond 1NT with this hand. A  
response of 1NT shows 6-10 points  
but no four-card or longer major suit.

With 12 high-card ♠ Q 10 8  
points, we would jump ♥ K J 7  
to 2NT with this hand. ♦ Q 9 2  
This is an invitational ♣ A 9 8 5  
bid. With a minimum opening, partner  
can pass and stop in partscore.

It's important to check that our  
partnership is in agreement with the  
meaning of the 2NT response to 1♣  
or 1♦. At one time, it was common  
to treat the jump to 2NT as forcing,  
showing 13-15 points. However, the  
popular modern style is to use it as  
an invitational bid.

This hand has 14 ♠ K 10 6  
high-card points plus ♥ A Q  
1 length point for the ♦ Q 9 7 5 2  
five-card diamond suit. ♣ K 8 3  
Even though we have support for  
diamonds, notrump takes priority  
when we have a balanced hand and  
no four-card or longer major suit.

### Raising Opener's Minor

With no four-card or longer major  
suit to bid and a hand unsuitable for  
notrump, responder's next option is  
to raise opener's minor suit:

#### RAISING OPENER'S MINOR SUIT

6-10 points	Raise to the two level
11-12 points	Raise to the three level

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	?	

This hand has 6 ♠ 8 4  
high-card points plus ♥ Q 3  
1 length point for the ♦ 9 8 5 2  
five-card suit. With no ♣ K J 7 6 3  
major suit to bid and an unbalanced  
hand, raise to 2♣.

A jump raise to 3♣ ♠ K 8 4  
is an invitational — ♥ 4  
limit — raise showing ♦ Q 7 6 2  
about 11-12 points. ♣ A J 8 6 3

When raising a minor suit, responder  
usually does not count dummy  
points. The heart shortness will be  
useful if the partnership plays with  
clubs as trumps. However, if opener  
chooses to play in 3NT, the heart  
shortness will be a liability, not an  
asset. Since game is more likely to  
be played in notrump than a minor  
suit, it is usually best to err on the side  
of caution ... but it's a judgment call.

Responder will tend to have five-  
card or longer support for opener's  
minor suit when raising. After all,  
opener could have a three-card suit.  
Responder will usually have other  
options with only four-card support.  
Still, if nothing else seems suitable,  
a raise with four-card support is  
fine. **Opener is more likely to have  
four, five, or six cards in the minor  
suit than three cards.**

### A Forcing Raise

In Grant Standard, there is no artificial  
forcing raise of opener's minor suit  
when responder has 13 or more  
points. There are methods available  
(such as inverted minor suit raises),  
but they involve complexities outside  
our current scope.

This doesn't usually present a  
problem since responder has other  
options. **A new suit response is  
forcing,** so responder can start by  
bidding the other minor suit and  
show the support later.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	?	

With this hand, we ♠ 8 7 2  
simply respond 1♦ ♥ 6 4  
and wait to hear ♦ A J 3  
opener's rebid. We'll ♣ A K J 7 5  
then take the partnership to game. ♠