



Keeping Up With Conventions

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CONVENTIONS FOR MINOR SUIT OPENINGS

In this set of articles we look at how to fill out the standard convention card listing all the partnership bidding and defensive carding agreements. Both partners are supposed to have a completed card for club games and tournaments. Filling out the card with your partner before the game begins gives you the confidence that you are on the same wavelength.

The card is color-coded:

1. Items in **black** indicate “standard” methods which don’t require any special notification to the opponents.
2. Items in **red** indicate non-standard agreements that require you to alert your opponents.
3. Items in **blue (grey)** are somewhere in between. They are fairly standard agreements but you have to announce them to your opponents when they apply.

Previous issues covered Notrump and Major Suit Opening Bids and Responses. Now we move on to Minor Suit Opening Bids and Responses. This is what this area on the convention card looks like:

MINOR OPENING			
Expected Min. Length	4	3	NF 0-2 Conv.
1♣	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1♦	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RESPONSES			
Double Raise:	Force <input type="checkbox"/>	Inv. <input type="checkbox"/>	Weak <input type="checkbox"/>
After Overcall:	Force <input type="checkbox"/>	Inv. <input type="checkbox"/>	Weak <input type="checkbox"/>
Forcing Raise:	J/S in other minor <input type="checkbox"/>		
Single raise	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
Frequently bypass 4+♦	<input type="checkbox"/>		
1NT/1♣	_____ to _____		
2NT Forcing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inv. <input type="checkbox"/>	_____ to _____
3NT:	_____ to _____		
Other	_____		

Three-card Minors?

What would you open with this hand? If the answer is 1♦, then you are playing the popular North American style of five-card majors where you open the longer minor with no five-card major.

The 1♦ opening is a natural, non forcing bid. Partner could pass with fewer than 6 points, even when short in diamonds.

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A 1♣ or 1♦ opening is more likely to be made on a four, five, or six-card suit than a three-card suit. Partner, however, is aware that it can occasionally be made on as few as three cards and this is indicated by marking the convention card like this:

Expected Min. Length	4	3	NF 0-2 Conv.
1♣	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1♦	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What Are The Other Choices?

If the partnership plays four-card major suit openings, it could check off that both a 1♣ and 1♦ opening promise at least four cards. That’s unusual, however. Even playing four-card majors, 1♣ is sometimes opened on a three-card suit . . . when the four-card major is very weak, for example.

Some partnerships like to play that a 1♦ opening bid shows at least a four-card suit. That leaves the 1♣ opening to handle every hand that doesn’t contain a five-card major or a four-card diamond suit. The above hand, for example, would be opened 1♣ instead of 1♦ because there are only three diamonds. So, 1♣ could be opened on two or fewer cards and this style would be indicated like this:

Expected Min. Length	4	3	NF 0-2 Conv.
1♣	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1♦	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The NF at the top of the third column indicates that even though the 1♣ opening may be made on fewer than three cards, it is still non forcing . . . partner can pass. Although the column indicates 0-2 cards, the 1♣ opening would not be on a void or a singleton unless the partnership plays some very unusual methods. Partnerships that use an artificial 1♣ opening, however, will sometimes open a non-forcing 1♦ on a singleton or a void.

This column is in blue (grey) indicating that such a bid must be announced. If your partner opens 1♣ and it could be on two or fewer cards, you would say “May be short.”

If the partnership uses an approach in which the 1♣ opening is totally artificial and forcing, such as the Precision Club, then the last column would be checked. This column is in red, so such a bid must be alerted.

What About The Short Club?

Some players still refer to their approach as the “short club,” perhaps putting too much emphasis on the possibility that 1♣ may not show four or more cards. This is fine if they are really using the standard style of opening the longer or “better” minor . . . typically opening 1♦ with two four-card minors and 1♣ with two three-card minors.

If, however, they insist that partner respond to their 1♣ opening, even with fewer than 6 points, they are actually playing a forcing 1♣ opening. If that’s the case, they need to check the red box and be sure to alert the opponents whenever they open with 1♣.

Limit Raises?

Suppose your partner ♠ 6 2 opens 1♦ and this is ♥ Q 8 4 your hand. What do ♦ Q J 9 7 5 you respond? If the ♣ A Q 5 answer is 3♦, showing support and an invitational hand of about 11-12 points, you are playing limit raises. You would check the box for Inv. (invitational) beside Double Raise under Responses.

RESPONSES

Double Raise: Force Inv. Weak

This is the standard use of the double raise of opener's minor although, for reasons discussed shortly, some partnerships use this as a forcing bid or as a weak bid . . . which would be alertable.

What If There Is an Overcall?

What if you hold the same hand opposite partner's 1♦ opening bid but the opponent on your right makes an overcall of 1♠?

If you would still jump to 3♦ to show an invitational hand, you would check the Invitational box beside After Overcall:

After Overcall: Force Inv. Weak

The modern trend is to treat a jump raise as preemptive (weak) after an overcall. The overcall has made two bids available: a double and a cuebid. Most partnerships use the double as takeout (negative) and the cuebid is used to show a limit raise or better in opener's minor. So, with the above hand, you would cuebid 2♠. That frees the jump response to 3♦ as a weak bid in competitive auctions.

The Forcing Raise?

What if partner ♠ K J 5 opens 1♣ and you ♥ 9 2 hold this hand? You ♦ A 8 4 have support for ♣ K Q J 8 4 clubs and enough to take the partnership to game. A jump to 3♣ would only be invitational and you don't want to go beyond 3NT because that might be the best contract.

Over a major suit opening, an artificial jump to 2NT is often used to show support for the major and enough to reach game. Over a minor suit, notrump responses are usually treated as natural. On this hand, you don't want to respond in notrump with a low doubleton heart.

Many partnerships skirt this dilemma by having no forcing raise over a minor suit. If the hand is unsuitable for a response in notrump, then there is usually a side four-card suit to bid. If not, as in this hand, a response is made in a three-card suit. A response of 1♦ has the advantage that it is forcing and little can go wrong. If opener raises diamonds, you plan to show the club support and get the partnership to game in clubs or notrump.

If this is your approach, leave the lines beside Forcing Raise blank.

Forcing Raise: J/S in other minor
Single Raise Other: _____

Some partnerships prefer to have a way of showing a forcing raise. One possibility is to use a jump shift (J/S) in the other minor as artificial and forcing . . . giving up on the natural meaning. Using that approach, you would jump to 2♦ on this hand.

Another approach is to use inverted minor suit raises. In this style, a raise of opener's minor to the two level is forcing for one round, showing either a limit raise or a game-going raise. A jump raise to the three level can then be used as a weak raise with about 6-9 points.

Using this approach, you would show the support by simply raising to 2♣. Opener would have to make a rebid and you would then make sure the partnership reached game. You would check the box beside Single raise to indicate that this is a forcing raise and you would also put a check beside Weak in the earlier section covering the Double Raise. Since both these bids are in red, you would have to alert when your partner raises a 1♣ or 1♦ opening to the two or three level.

Do You Bypass Diamonds?

What do you respond ♠ 8 5 with this hand if ♥ K 10 8 5 partner opens 1♣? ♦ K 9 6 3 2 With a choice of suits ♣ 7 2 to bid at the one level, the basic approach is to bid the longer suit. Even with only four diamonds, a response of 1♦ would be in keeping with bidding four-card suits "up the line."

Many players, however, would respond 1♥. One reason is that the emphasis over a minor suit opening is to look for a major suit fit before settling on notrump or a minor suit. With a weak hand that is only likely to make one bid, getting the major suit in takes priority. Also, if you were to respond 1♦ and the next player overcalls 1♠, it might become difficult to find a heart fit if you both have four cards in the suit.

If you do tend to bypass a four-card or longer diamond suit after partner opens 1♣, check appropriate box. You don't have to alert.

Frequently bypass 4+♦

Notrump Responses?

It used to be popular to use the response of 1NT over an opening 1♣ (1NT/1♣) to show about 9-11 points. With a weaker hand of 6-8 points and no suit to bid at the one level, you could raise to 2♣. The modern trend, however, is to use a range of 6-10 points for the 1NT response.

Similarly, a 2NT response classically shows a balanced hand of about 13-15 points, with 3NT showing 16-17 points. A popular modern style, however, is to use the "limit bid" approach and treat 2NT as an invitational response with about 11 or 12 points and 3NT to show a balanced hand of 13-15 points. With 16 or more, start by bidding a new suit. You would then fill out the last part of this section like this:

1NT/1♣ 6 to 10
2NT Forcing Inv. 11 to 12
3NT: 13 to 15

And, unless you play any other fancy conventions over a minor suit, you're done. ♦