



Dear Bridge Friend,

Welcome to *Bridgehands* eMag Newsletter, Issue 14. In this issue, we begin our exploration of forcing bids. Categorically, there are three types of bids: forcing, invitational, and signoff calls. Generally, we know that when responder bids a new suit, it's forcing for one round. Unfortunately, there are many scenarios where partnerships are not of the same mind on some auctions. And of course without harmony and trust, miscommunication can result in a missed game when partner mistakenly passes. [Quiz yourself here on forcing bids.](#)

Also in this newsletter, we're up to the Rule of 12 in our "Rules of" tips. In a competitive auction, sometimes it's unclear whether to double the opponents for penalty. Using a bit of math and subtracting by the number 12, we can quickly determine if it's appropriate to double the opponents.

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Forcing Bids – Persuasive bidding for the strong silent type!

When we make a call, our partner must determine if the bid is forcing, invitational, or a signoff request. When either partner bids or rebids Notrump at the lowest available level, it's a signoff attempt. Ditto when either partner rebids either their own suit or partner's suit at the lowest level – there's another common instance of a signoff attempt. However, when we open the bidding and partner responds with a new suit, it's clear that the bid is forcing (unless partner already passed the bidding). How about when opener rebids a new suit? Sometimes it's forcing, sometimes it's not – hmm. And what about jump bids? How about cuebids? Inquiring minds must know so let's explore the world of forcing bids.

First off, let's establish some basic thoughts on how to be a good partner:

1. Learn the basics of what bids are forcing, invitational, and signoff.
2. Be aware of who is the "captain" (in control) on a given auction. The partner of the bidder limiting their hand is the captain and as any good sailor knows, the captain steers the ship (contract) to safe harbor.
3. Avoid making confusing bids that will torture partner – don't "get creative" at the table.
4. Consider all strange bids as forcing.
5. When a bid could be interpreted as natural, take that inference.
6. Never mastermind the bidding. Bid your values and respect partner's bids.
7. New bids should show new values – suit rebids should show extra length (don't repeat yourself).
8. Never pass a known forcing bid by partner. Even if you think you know the bid as right, your partner may not trust you again. For instance, if your partner opens 2C and you pass with a Club bust, partner will not be happy missing a major suit game or even a slam!
9. When an opponent makes an intervening bid after a forcing bid by partner, you may temporarily pass, knowing partner will not pass an open auction.
10. When partner makes a forcing bid and you are forced to make a difficult bid, consider making the cheapest available non-conventional suit bid (not Notrump).
11. For mortal partners, avoid psyches - false bids without appropriate length or strength. Your partner may not understand or appreciate the "joke." If you elect to psyche, take full responsibility for the false bid and apologize to partner.
12. Do not make bids that punish your partner (balancing bids).

The bidding used in this newsletter is based on the modern [Standard American](#) system, including [preemptive weak two opening bids](#).

Categorically, opener and responder hand strengths come in three varieties: minimum, medium, maximum. According to partner's bid and our hand strength, partner's bid solicits one of three actions: signoff, invitational, or forcing.

The general strength ranges are:

Opener: 12-15 minimum, 16-18 medium, 19-21 maximum (22+ super maximum).

Responder: 6-9/10 minimum, 10-12 medium, 12/13+ maximum.

In our early Bridge days, we learned the point requirements for game:

Less than 25 playing points: part score.

4 major or 3 Notrump game: 25/26 playing points.

5 minor: 29 playing points.

6 level slam: 33+ points with Aces.

7 level slam: 37+ points with Aces and Kings.

Okay, let's jump into a wide range of bids and their meanings:

Opening bids are not forcing, except for conventional bids such as a strong 2C opener.

1H - ? 12-21 points, responder may pass with less than 6 points.

1N - ? 15-17 (or 16-18 points), responder may pass with less than 8 (7) points.

2N - ? 20-21 points, responder may pass with less than 5 points.

2C - ? 22+ points artificial, responder must bid.

2S - ? Less than 12 points, responder may pass without 4+ controls (Aces, Kings) or long trump.

(P) – P – (P) – 2S;

However, fourth seat 2 level opening a major suit shows a good suit and hand, inviting partner to consider game with reasonable help.

3N - ? Game values, unless partnership plays conventional Gambling 3 Notrump, etc.

Opening bids above 3 Notrump as: 4C, 4N, 5N

Discuss with partner, some play conventional methods.

Responding in partner's suit or bidding Notrump at the lowest level is non-forcing, showing minimum values. These bids are an attempt to signoff, relinquishing control (captaincy) to partner who will then steer the auction with a signoff, invitational, or forcing bid.

1C – 2C; Signoff.

1S – 2S; Signoff.

1H – 1N; Signoff.

2S – 3S; Playing preemptive weak two bids, 3S increases the preempt (not invitational), again a signoff non-forcing bid. The opener must pass.

1H – 4H; Usually 5+ trump and minimum values (0-9 points) intended as a shutout bid. With 10+ points and good trump support, responder can first bid 1S with 4 Spades or "temporize" the bidding with a 2C/D call.

Responder's bid in a new suit is forcing:

1H – 1S; Responder has 6+ points, forcing but is not promising a rebid unless forced.

1S – 2C; Responder promises 10+ points. Bid is one round forcing, responder promises at least one rebid.

1H – 2N; Game forcing - some use conventional agreements here (Jacoby 2 Notrump).

1D – 2N; Classically forcing game, however the modern treatment is to play this auction as inviting 3 Notrump.

P – 1H;
2C - ?; Since responder was a passed hand, opener may pass non-jump bids, unless playing conventional methods as the Drury convention.

P – 1H;
3C - ?; Hopefully partner knows jump bids after passing shows a fit in partner's major and a nice secondary suit, forcing to at least the 3 level in opener's suit. Now then, don't you wish you discussed this with partner?

Rebidding your own suit or Notrump at the lowest level is non-forcing, showing minimum values.

1D – 1S;
2D Opener wishes to signoff unless responder makes a forcing call; opener is most likely rebidding a 6 card suit.

1H – 1N;
2H Ditto here.

1H – 1S;
2D – 2H This time it's responder who belatedly signs off in opener's suit.

2S – 2N;
3S Playing preemptive weak two bids, [2N is forcing asking opener to show a feature \(A-K\)](#). Rebidding the preempt suit is a signoff attempt, denying a control.

Bidding Notrump at the lowest level by either partner is non-forcing:

1N – ?;

1C – 1N;

1C – 1H;
1N

1H – 1S;
2D – 2N;

Depending on the auction, invitational bids come in various flavors. See responder's rebids in next section for more invitational bids.

- 1N – 2N; Responder invites straight away.
- 1C – 3C; Responder is probably hopeful opener can bid 3 Notrump with stoppers.
- 1S – 3S; Modern treatment is a "limit raise" – validate with your partner
(legacy style was game forcing).
- 1C – 1N;
3C Opener invites 3 Notrump.
- 1C – 1H;
3H Opener invites 4 Heart game.
- 1D – 1S;
2N Opener's 2N jump rebid is highly invitational with values above
opener's 1 Notrump opening range (e.g. 18-19 points).
- 1H – 2C;
3H Opener's jump rebid is game forcing after responder promises 10+ points.
- 1D – 1H;
1S While highly invitational, opener's 1S rebid is not absolutely forcing.
With a bad 6 points, no fit, and 4-3-3-3 shape responder might pass.

After opener attempts a signoff with minimum values, responder must rebid carefully to ensure the rebid is interpreted correctly as signoff, invitational, forcing one round, or game forcing.

- 1C – 1S;
2C – 2S; Signoff bid, lacking partnership fit but showing a good 6 card suit.
- 1C – 1S; Goodness, this couple both love to get the last word.
2C – 2S; Nothing like taking a swim in the proverbial quicksand!
3C – 3S; Since 2C and 2S were signoffs showing misfits, why keep bidding higher?
- 1D – 1H;
1S – 2S; Signoff attempt in opener's second bid suit, showing 4 trump with
a minimum hand.
- 1D – 1H;
1S – 1N; Signoff with a minimum hand. Responder generally promises 2 Spades or at
least a stiff Ace or King.
- 1D – 1H;
1S – 2N; Inviting 3 Notrump game with a balanced hand.
- 1D – 1H;
1S – 3S; Inviting 4 Spade game.
- 1C – 1S;
2S – 3C; With a known major fit, opener is exploring game with a double-fit,
one round forcing. It stands to reason that since partnership would
get a higher score in a major, bidding a higher level in a minor must
be an invitational bid even if responder rebids a minor.

1D – 1S; 2D – 2H;	By definition, when opener rebids 1 Notrump, responder's bid is non-forcing. However when opener rebids a suit, responder's new suit is forcing one round.
1C - 1S; 1N – 2H;	Contrast this with auction above. Here responder's bid is not forcing since opener rebid 1 Notrump. Warning – these bids can be confusing to casual players so adjust your bidding accordingly and be sure to discuss these bids with partner.
1C – 1D; 1H – 1S;	Natural bidding, highly invitational.
1C – 1D; 1H – 2S;	Responder's 2S bid is played as artificial and game forcing by most players.
1C – 1H; 1N – 2S;	When responder "breaks the one level barrier" by bidding a new suit in a higher rank at the two level, the " reverse " is game forcing by responder.
1H – 1S; 3H – 3S;	Most play this auction as game forcing after opener's jump invitational bid.
1C – 1S; 2C – 3S;	Partnership agreement here on this tough auction. Classically, this was forcing; some strong players also like this style while others prefer the fundamental game inviting approach when responder jumps in own suit without a fit.
1H – 1S; 2C – 3S;	Similar to above auction, partnership agreements are required for these challenging auctions. When in doubt, consider playing these bids as forcing. Recall Rule #4 above: consider all strange bids as forcing.
1H – 2D; 2N – 3H;	Many play responder's belated 3 level support as game forcing after responder's 2 level bid (showing 10+ points) and delayed support.
1C – 1S; 1N – 3C;	Inviting game, probably 3 Notrump.
1H – 1S; 2C – 2N;	Inviting Notrump game with a balanced hand.
1H – 1S; 2C – 3C;	Inviting game, possibly in 3 Notrump or 5 Clubs.
1H – 1S; 2C – 3H;	Inviting a 4 Heart game.
1N – 2C; 2D – 2N;	After responder makes a 2C Stayman bid asking opener for a major, responder invites a 3 Notrump game.
1N – 2C; 2H – 3H;	Responder is inviting opener to bid a 4 Heart game.
1D – 1H; 1N – 2N;	Invitational Notrump bid.
1D – 2C; 2D – 2N;	Invitational Notrump bid.

Some additional responder rebids are included in a subsequent section.

With extra values, opener can make a forcing rebid:

1C – 1H: Opener “breaks the 1 level barrier” when making a [“reverse”](#) rebid.
2D Reverse bids can be confusing to Bridge players so let’s be sure we all have a sound grasp of the concept. When a player rebids a new suit, that suit is **never** longer than the first suit. Here the opener begins bidding 1C and responder’s bid at the 1 level does not promise more than 6 points. So when opener breaks the 2 level barrier and bids a higher ranking (and shorter) suit than the first bid, the responder is forced to bid at the 3 level to bid to support opener’s suits. Even if we were to assume a fit (often not likely), the partnership should have about 23 points to make a 3 level contract. Subtracting 23 from responder’s 6+ points, the opener should have 17+ points to make a reverse bid. So a reverse bid by opener must show a very powerful hand and is generally one round forcing - some play reverses as game forcing. Responder note: don’t panic since opener promises 17+ points. With 6-7 points, attempt to signoff by bidding the lowest unbid suit (artificial) or Notrump – whichever suit is lower. If opener persists to game, at least you have a clear conscience.

1H – 1S; When opener jumps to the 3 level in a new suit, the [strong jump shift](#)
3C is game forcing showing 19+ points. With extras, responder considers slam.

1H – 1S; Opener shows 19+ points and a great suit. With extras, responder can seek slam.
4S

Are you ready to test your skills on forcing bids? [Take a 20 question quiz here.](#) Good luck!

In Part II of forcing bids, we will explore bidding in competitive auctions, balancing bidding and other challenging auctions.

The Rule of 12: Subtract from a dozen, double for pleasure

[Rule of 12](#) – We’ve been counting up the “Rules of” and have reached number 12. In a competitive auction, sometimes it’s unclear whether to double the opponents for penalty. Using a bit of math and subtracting by the number 12, we can quickly determine if it’s appropriate to double the opponents’ errant auction.

Okay, you’re in a competitive auction with the opponents who keep outbidding your side. So what’s a Bridge player to do? Enter the dozen, aka the Rule of 12. The idea is that when you do not have a good fit with partner and have ruffing potential, it may be time to whack pesky opponents that try to steal your auction. First off, here’s the prerequisites:

1. Your combined partnership High Card Points are 20+ points.
2. You have a suit misfit with partner.
3. Your trump length plus the opponents bidding level is 12 or more.

Example:

1S – (P) – 2C – (2D);
2H – (3D) - ?

You hold (see graphic at top of newsletter):

S 3
H 8 6
D Q 9 8 7
C A K Q 3 2

Partner's open shows 12+ points and we hold 11 points, definitely more than the required 20 HCP. We also have a misfit with partner who apparently holds 9+ cards in the major suits. So we do not have a partnership fit. Third, we have length in the opponents trump suit, holding 4 Diamonds. Here's the auction:

1S – (P) – 2C – (2D);
2H – (3D) - ?

Okay, we've meet the criteria, now let's do the math:

The opponents 3 level bid promises 9 tricks. Adding our 4 trumps to the opponents bidding level, the calculation is: $9 + 4 = 13$

According to the Rule of 12, a penalty double is warranted since the number 12 has been reached (exceeded here). Certainly we do not want to bid 3 of partner's suit, likely to result in a penalty double from the opponents! Bidding 4C would probably result in a similar fate. We might consider bidding 3 Notrump if we held the Jack of Clubs but not with this holding – this hand will probably only contribute 3 tricks towards Notrump.

Incidentally, if we were to pass opponents' 3D bid, our partner might be tempted to bid on to 3H holding a fifth Heart. So clearly it's time to invoke a penalty double to avoid such temptation by partner. No doubt on this auction, we have a misfit with partner so we must seize the opportunity to capitalize with a juicy double!

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