

Points

Each suit contains ten HCP (high card points) for a total of 40 HCP in the deck. A “game” is the standard objective of each partnership in each deal of the cards. Game, varies depending on the suit / no trump. The score points for a game is 100. The points the partnership needs in their hand between the two of them, and the number of tricks which needs to be taken, also varies:

Minors (clubs and diamonds)

- Must bid and take 5 tricks (plus the 6 trick book) total of 11 tricks
- Minimum of 29 points
- Each trick bid and made is scored 20 points (100 total)

Majors (hearts and spades)

- Must bid and take 4 tricks (plus the 6 trick book) total of 10 tricks
- Minimum of 26 points
- Each trick bid and made is scored 30 points (120 total)

No Trump

- Must bid and take 3 tricks (plus the 6 trick book) total of 9 tricks
- Minimum of 26 points
- First trick bid and made is 40, additional tricks are 30 (100 total)

Points are as elusive and varied as the methods used to count them. The most common HCP count is:

- A – 4pts
- K – 3pts
- Q – 2pts
- J – 1pt

Along with HCP, there are distribution points. No one agrees on distribution points! Some count a void as 3pts (meaning no cards in a suit), a singleton as 2pts (a single card in a suit), and a doubleton 1pt (two cards in a suit). But then what happens if you are playing no trump ... obviously there is value in all those short suits if you can trump using all those amazing trump you were dealt ... but ... not in no trump! And ... what if that 3pt K is also a singleton ... you are now counting that K as 5 pts when if the opponents have the A it is likely it is worthless? Well, of course not ... please do not do this!

Personally ... and thus, for the purposes of this book, I use length distribution. A 5-card suit is worth 1pt, 6-card suit worth 2pt, and a 7-card suit worth 3pt. Now, what about no trump? My 7 card suit is still worth 3pts! There are 6 other cards in that suit out there, if they are distributed evenly between the other 3 hands, which is 2 cards per hand. Even if I do not have the A and/or K I only lose two tricks ... in no trump. My 7 card suit is worth 5 of the 9 tricks I need to make game in no trump, YES, it is worth the 3 distribution points.

Now, you take all those HCP and distribution points in your hand and you add them up. If you come up with 13 points, you can, and should, open (you could also overcall, but we are just going to get the game going here with someone opening). What do you open in? There are requirements here!! Because, what you say is going to have meaning to your partner and during the bidding, you and your partner are going to use the meanings of each bid to determine how many points you have between you, and what suit you should be in, or if you should be in no trump, and at what level you should stop bidding. That is A LOT! (Perhaps is why the run on sentence).

Always open your longest suit first! Even if it is a 9 high minor suit and you are sitting with A K Q J of spades, open the 5 card minor. To open a major suit the requirement (what you are telling your partner) is that you have 5 of them. First exception to the very first rule (this is why we love bridge!) if you have 13 pts and a 6 card minor, and a 5 card major, open the major. Always open a 5 card major. The reason is ... remember the points required for game, and the tricks required for game? A major suit is much more preferable because it takes less points and less tricks to get to game.

Okay, if you are the least bit apprehensive about learning bridge, SKIP THIS PARAGRAPH! There is an exception to the exception of the first rule we have discussed. There are always exceptions in bridge. Believe me! Even if one does not exist ... at some time or another either you (or your partner) will conveniently make one up (and that is not *always* a bad thing). If you have an powerful hand, one that could be opened in no trump, which tells your partner it is powerful, you can open in no trump instead of opening the 5 card major. Really I did not put this in here to scare you off. I put it in to emphasize a couple things. One, no one is going to arrest you if you don't follow the requirements (although for the sake of keeping a partner you know and love, do not do this often). Two, keep an open mind. This may all sound confusing and overwhelming to start, but we will tie it all together so it makes perfect sense.

So, to get things back to simple, you are the dealer, you are going to have a most sought after hand with 13 HCP and 5 hearts. We are going to open 1♥. Immediately that assigns you as "the opener", your partner is now the responder and does not have to have nearly as many points to bid. It does not make your partnership the only people bidding. The opponents may overcall and advance. The same goes for them, they do not need as many points to do so.

Oh, what do I do if I don't meet the requirements to open? What if I only have, say 11 points? You perform the bid which is sometimes the hardest to learn. You pass. This does not mean you will not be able to bid later on, there must be three passes in a row to end the bidding. Your partner may open, or overcall. Once that happens you become the Responder or the Advancer and you do not need as many points to bid.

Believe me, once you have played several hands of bridge, you will open up a hand, and before you even have it sorted you will know if it is not an opening hand. Unfortunately there seems to be a significant number of these hands dealt.

Count the points in the following hands.

Hand 1



Hand 2



Hand 3



Hand 4



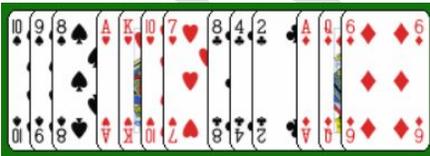
Hand 5



Hand 6



Hand 7



Answers below.

Hand 1: $12\text{HCP} + 1 \text{ dist} = 13$ open $1\spadesuit$

Hand 2: $14\text{HCP} + 1 \text{ dist} = 15$; open 1NT

Hand 3: $16\text{HCP} + 1 \text{ dist} = 17$; open $1\spadesuit$

Hand 4: $8\text{HCP} + 1 \text{ dist} = 9$; pass

Hand 5: $13\text{HCP} + 2 \text{ dist} = 15$; open $1\heartsuit$

Hand 6: $17\text{HCP} + 3 \text{ dist} = 20$; open $1\heartsuit$

Hand 7: $13\text{HCP} = 13$; open $1\clubsuit$

RGV Bridge