



Lesson 11 – Competitive Bidding

Overview and Preemptive Opening Bids

What is Competitive Bidding?

There are two partnerships at the bridge table. Just because one partnership opened the bidding, does not mean the opposing partnership should not bid. In fact, the other partnership may have most of the points, and the hand belongs to them. Competitive bidding is coming into the auction after your opponents have opened the bidding.

Frequently both partnerships can make a part score, and you want to get into the auction so you and your partner can get to your best contract. Sometimes with very distributional hands both sides can bid and make game, so the auction becomes very competitive.

Competitive Bidding Strategy

There are four goals in competitive bidding:

1. If your partnership has most of the points, the hand belongs to you, and you want to try and get to your best possible contract.
2. If the other partnership has most of the points, you want to disrupt the opponents' bidding and take away bidding room from them to make it more difficult for them to find their best contract.
3. If your partner ends up on opening lead, your bid gives them an idea of what suit is best to lead. Leading partner's bid suit is frequently the best opening lead. Good defense starts with competitive bidding.

4. Sacrifice – Sacrifice is when you deliberately bid to a level you know you can not make but you expect the negative score that you will get for being set is less than the negative score you will make defending the opponents' game or slam contract. Even better sometimes the opponents take the push to the 5-level and end up being set giving your side an almost impossible positive score

Competitive bidding is difficult, you can compete too high, and give your opponents a better score by setting you. However, if you are too timid, you will let your opponent's get to their best contract every time, resulting in a poor score. It takes judgement and experience to know when to compete and how high to compete.

Why Compete?

When you enter the auction, you disrupt the opponents bidding. You take up bidding space, and you make it harder for them to communicate with each other. In addition, you are letting your partner know what your best suit is which gives them an idea of what to lead, should they be the opening leader.

Getting to your best contract puts pressure on the opponents to decide whether to bid on or not. Sometimes you can push your opponents to a level where they go set, and so you can get a positive score even if you could not make the contract you bid. Frequently even if your bid will go set, the opponents will get a worse score than they would by making their contract.

Consider a case where the opponents can make 2♠ and your side can make 2♥. If the opponents bid to 2♠ there are three outcomes:

1. You can let the opponents play 2♠ and they will score 110.
2. You can bid to 3♥ and go set 1 trick so your opponents score either 50 or 100.
3. Your opponents bid 3♠ over your 3♥ bid, and go down 1 and you score 50 or 100.

As you can see competing on to 3♥ is better than leaving your opponents to play 2♠ even though you expect to go down 1 trick.

THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS – how high to compete?

Analysis has shown that if the high cards are fairly evenly split between the two sides, that your side is safe to bid up to the level of the number of trump held by the partnership, so:

- An eight-card fit is safe to play at the two level
- A nine-card fit is safe to play at the three level.
- A ten-card fit is safe to play at the four level.

You may not make your contract, but you will get a better score by bidding to this level rather than letting your opponent's play at a lower level. You should always try to bid to the level of the number of trumps your partnership holds.

What is a preemptive opening bid?

When your hand is too weak to open at the 1 level, but you have a long suit (6, 7 or 8 cards), you can open at the 2, 3 or 4 level. The long suit provides protection against getting penalized. When you open at a high level you take bidding room away from your opponents, making it harder for them to find their best contract. Since you have a weak hand, the opponents will often have most of the points.

The exception to a preemptive opening is 2♣, which is a convention that shows a strong hand and will be covered in a future lesson. When you want to make a preemptive bid in clubs, you must open with 3♣.

Why would I make a weak preemptive opening bid?

When you make a preemptive bid, your objective is not to necessarily make your bid. The reasons to open with a preemptive bid:

1. It disrupts the opponents. The more bidding room you take away the harder it is for the opponents to find their best contract
2. Bidding a contract that you do not expect to make is called a "sacrifice". You are trying to achieve a better score! When both sides are vulnerable, 5♦ doubled down 2 is -500 while 4♠ making by the opponents is -620. You get a better score by sacrificing in 5♦.
3. Sometimes you will make your contract!

What are the Requirements for a weak preemptive opening bid?

When you preempt, you want to have less than opening values, 5-11 total points. The fewer points you have, the more likely the hand belongs to the opponents, and so your preempt will disrupt their bidding.

You want to have a long, reasonably strong suit. The length of your suit dictates the level at which you will preempt:

To make a weak preemptive opening bid...	You want to have...
2 Level – called a weak 2 bid	6 cards in your long suit (not 2♣)
3 Level preempt	7 cards in your long suit
4 Level preempt	8 cards in your long suit

What is reasonably strong? A good guideline is 2 of the top 3 honors, or 3 of the top 5 honors. The following suits would all qualify for preempting:

A K 9 8 7 4

K Q 8 7 5 3

A J T 5 3 2

Q J T 7 6 2

When you preempt, you do not want to hold a 4 card major suit. The reason is that there is some chance that your partner holds an opening hand, and you may have a major suit fit with your partner.

Examples

Your hand	Opening Bid
♠KQJT654 ♥76 ♦63 ♣43	6 HCP, 9 total points, 7 spades, 2 of the top 3 honors <i>Open 3♠</i>
♠2 ♥AQT8732 ♦654 ♣53	6 HCP, 9 total points, 7 hearts, 2 of the top 3 honors <i>Open 3♥</i>
♠KQT9542 ♥4 ♦87 ♣QJT	8 HCP, 11 total points, 7 spades, 2 of the top 3 honors <i>Open 3♠</i>
♠2 ♥AQT8754 ♦A54 ♣64	10 HCP, 13 total points <i>Open 1♥</i>
♠72 ♥64 ♦KQT542 ♣654	5 HCP, 7 total points, 6 diamonds, 2 of top 3 honors <i>Open 2♦</i>
♠KQJ872 ♥54 ♦JT4 ♣75	7 HCP, 9 total points, 6 spades, 2 of top 3 honors <i>Open 2♠</i>
♠K4 ♥854 ♦T4 ♣AQ9875	9 HCP, 11 total points, 6 clubs, 2 of top 3 honors <i>Open 3♣</i>
♠K4 ♥AKJ854 ♦T4 ♣875	11 HCP, 13 total points <i>Open 1♥</i>

How to Respond to a preemptive bid with a weak hand (0-14 HCP)?

When partner has preempted, you know a lot about their hand, and so responder is the captain in the bidding. There are two cases:

1. A weak hand (0-14 HCP) with no fit. You should simply pass. The stronger your hand is the more likely partner can make their preemptive bid.
2. A weak hand (0-9 HCP) with a fit. Bid to the level of total trump. Your partner has told you with the level they preempted, how many cards they have in the suit, so you can simply add your cards to come up with the proper level. This is called extending or continuing the preempt. Suppose partner opened 2♠ and you hold:

♠K987 ♥9 ♦QJ54 ♣8765

Raise to 4♠, partner has 6♠ and you have 4♠, with a 10 card fit bid to the 4 level.

3. A weak hand (10-14 HCP) with a fit. Here you can pass, expecting the opponents will not come into the bidding. If the opponents do bid, you can support partner to the level of your total trump.

How to Respond to a preemptive bid with a strong hand (15+ HCP)?

When partner has preempted, the responder is captain because they know the most about the combined hands. You need 15 HCP to bid a new suit or to explore for game. Typically, you want to play the hand in opener's suit or notrump. If you decide to play in notrump you should have a fit with partner, because entries to a preemptive hand are often limited to their suit.

If you have a strong hand and a 5+ card major suit, you can bid your major suit. This is forcing and asks your partner to raise your suit with 3 card support. With no support, opener will simply rebid their suit.

When opener has preempted at the 2 level, responder has a special bid available, 2NT. This asks opener to bid a new suit where they have an outside "feature", an Ace or King. Having this outside honor is often the key to being able to make a game.

To summarize your options with a strong hand:

- Bid a new 5 card major to look for 3 card support from opener.
- Bid game in partner's suit when you have a fit
- Bid 2NT over a weak two bid to ask for a feature (outside A or K)

Examples: Choose a responding bid

Partner's Opening Bid	You Hold	Your Call
2♥	♠AKQT2 ♥74 ♦T53 ♣865	9 HCP, 2 cards in heart suit <i>Pass</i>
2♥	♠AKJ2 ♥JT4 ♦QJ3 ♣A86	16 HCP, 3 cards in heart suit <i>Bid 2NT</i> asking for a feature
2♠	♠KT42 ♥4 ♦T42 ♣87532	3 HCP, 4 cards in spade suit <i>Bid 4♠</i> extending the preempt.
2♠	♠KT42 ♥4 ♦AKT ♣AQ875	16 HCP + 2 support points, 4 cards in spade suit <i>Bid 4♠</i> expecting to make game.
3♥	♠Q5 ♥AT5 ♦QJ53 ♣QJ98	12 HCP, 3 hearts, useless Quacks <i>Pass</i>
3♥	♠65 ♥A75 ♦A953 ♣AQ98	14 HCP, only 2 outside Aces <i>Pass</i>
3♠	♠65 ♥A75 ♦A953 ♣AQ98	14 HCP, 2 spades, 3 outside Aces <i>Bid 4♠</i>

Opener's Second Bid?

If partner raises your suit or passes you should pass. You have shown your hand with your first bid, there is no reason to bid again. However, there are two cases where you are forced to bid:

1. Responder bids a new suit.
 - Raise responder's suit with 3 card support.
 - Bid NT at the cheapest level with scattered honors.
 - Rebid your suit at the cheapest level.
2. Responder bids 2NT over your weak 2 bid
 - Bid a suit where you have an outside A or K (this is called a feature)
 - Bid 3NT with a solid suit (e.g., A K Q x x x)
 - Bid your suit at the 3 level.