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WE LOVE THE MAJORS!

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Introduction

Welcome to the world of bridge! Thanks for inviting us to be your guide. We hope you'll come to love the game as much as we do and that we'll see you some day soon at the local bridge club.

The guidelines in this book are based on Standard American bridge. Though there are other bridge systems in common use, Standard American is the most popular and the easiest for beginners to master. Since Standard American is an ever-evolving system, we've taken some liberties with Standard here and there to reflect what's really happening at today's bridge tables.

This is not a book to pick up and read at one or two sittings. It's a workbook. Each chapter builds on the ones that came before. Try to "process" each chapter before moving on to the next.

Each chapter contains:

- A narrative—the "lesson."
- A Summary—highlighting the key ideas.
- Homework and Homework Solutions—to test what you've learned. Don't move to the next lesson until you can do the homework with little difficulty.

If you're ready to get started, turn the page and we're off.

Chapter One

Getting Started

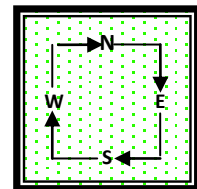
To get started in bridge you need to learn a little bit about a whole lot of things. In this chapter you will learn:

- How the game flows.
- The vocabulary we use to talk about the game.
- Some things bridge players LOVE and HATE.
- A little bit about the most important things--evaluating, bidding and playing your hand.
- Some important information about the score.

Some Mechanics

The game is played at tables of four people. The players who face each other at the table are **partners** in the game. We call them the North-South pair and the East-West pair. These labels have no significance whatsoever for playing, but they are a convenient way to talk about the game. Win or lose, you and your partner will get exactly the same score. So you and he will work together to outplay the other pair.

Players cut to decide who deals first. High card wins the deal. The dealer gives the first card to the player on his left and--proceeding clockwise--passes out all the cards. With 52 cards--no jokers--each player has a **hand** of thirteen cards. For later hands, the deal rotates clockwise.



What's the Object of the Game?

To win tricks. The more tricks you win, the better your score will be. But what is a trick? A trick consists of four cards played in clockwise order--one by each player. For each trick,

Getting Started

someone will **lead** a card--say, a diamond. A **lead** is simply the first card played to a trick. Each player will follow suit--that is, he will also play a diamond if he has any. If he has no diamonds, he may play whatever he chooses. Since each player holds thirteen cards, thirteen tricks will be played on each deal.

There are three ways to win a trick. To illustrate, let's look at a theoretical trick. One of the players leads the **♦A**. Who will win the trick? That depends.

- Ordinarily, the highest card of the suit led wins. The player who led the **♦A** expects to win the trick.
- For most bridge hands, some particular suit is designated as **trump**--a term derived from "triumph." Trump cards are more powerful than other cards. If any player has no cards in the suit led, he can win the trick by playing a trump suit card. Let's say that spades is the trump suit. A player who has no diamonds will win our theoretical trick if he plays a spade--say, the deuce. We call that **ruffing** or **trumping**.
- If another player also has no diamonds, he may win the trick by playing a higher spade--say, the five. We call that **overruffing** or **overtrumping**.



So we LOVE bridge hands with:

- Lots of honor cards--aces, kings, queens, and jacks.
- Lots of trump cards.
- Short suits. We can use our trump cards to ruff tricks in those suits.

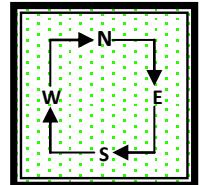
The Idea of an Auction

We start each bridge hand with an **auction**. As in any auction, the highest bidder wins. The dealer always has the first opportunity to make a **bid**. Let say the dealer opens the auction by bidding--saying--"one diamond." He is now the **opener**. His is the **opening bid**. What does his **bid** of **1♦** mean?

Getting Started

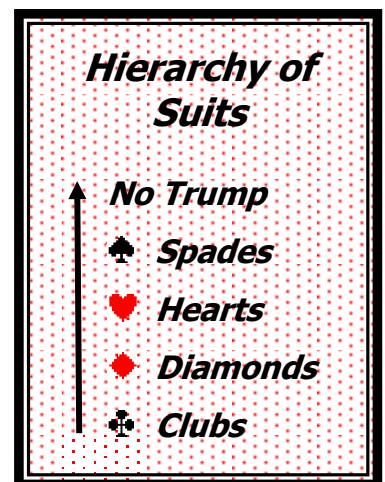
- He is saying: I think partner and I can win at least seven tricks if diamonds is the trump suit--a **book** of six tricks, plus the one that he is bidding.
- His bid is also a message to partner about the **strength** and **shape** of his hand. You will soon learn more about what this particular bid says about strength and shape.

The auction continues clockwise. Other players may make higher bids. If any player decides not to compete, he simply says “pass” but retains the right to enter the auction later.



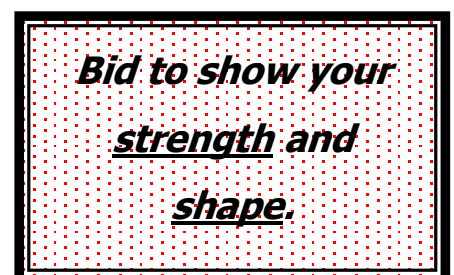
What is a higher bid? The four suits are not created equal. From lowest to highest, the hierarchy for bidding is: clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades. If the dealer opens 1♦, another player might bid 1♥. That is a higher bid because hearts outrank diamonds. He is saying: I think my partner and I can win seven tricks if hearts is the trump suit--a **book** of six, plus one.

But suppose another player wants to bid clubs. He would have to bid 2♣ because his suit is lower in rank than diamonds. If he bids 2♣ he is saying: I think my partner and I can win eight tricks if clubs are trump--a **book** of six, plus the two he is bidding.



You may also bid in no trump. When you play in no trump, there is no ruffing because there is no trump suit. No trump outranks all four suits. If the opener bids 1♦ and another player bids one no trump, that is a higher bid. It says: I think we can win seven tricks if nothing is designated as trump. You like to have good cards in all the suits to play in no trump.

Often, you will open the auction—say, with 1♥--and partner will make a higher bid--say, 1♠. Is he competing with you? Of course not; he is your partner. Rather, he is telling you something about the **strength** and **shape** of his own hand. You and he are having a conversation to decide two things:



- How high should the partnership bid? That depends on combined partnership **strength**.
- Where should you play? In some particular suit or in no trump? That depends on the **shapes** of the partners' hands.

Getting Started

The auction continues until no one is willing to bid higher and there are three passes in a row. The highest bid is now the **contract**. If players fulfill their contract--by winning the number of tricks promised--they will score points. If they don't, the other pair will score points. So bidding is a balancing act. You want to bid high enough to find the best contract, win the auction and get the best possible score. At the same time, you don't want to bid more than you can make.

Can You Afford to Bid? Counting Points

If you want to bid, you need a budget. In bridge, your "budget" is the points you assign to your hand for features that win tricks.

High card points: Since most tricks are won with high cards, we LOVE honor cards. Assign points to your honor cards as shown. Tens are also honor cards but aren't quite valuable enough to warrant assigning points.

High-Card Points	
Ace	= 4 points
King	= 3 points
Queen	= 2 points
Jack	= 1 point

If You Hold:	Your High-Card Points Are:
♠ K8 ♥ J843 ♦ A765 ♣ Q62	10
♠ K8 ♥ J843 ♦ AK65 ♣ Q62	13
♠ AJ43 ♥ KQ7 ♦ T98 ♣ AQ6	16
♠ QJ8 ♥ AK73 ♦ AQT6 ♣ K9	19

Given this point scheme you can calculate that there are 40 high-card points in a deck of cards--four for each ace, three for each king, and so on. The first hand is average with exactly ten points. The second hand--with 13 points--is "a king better" and just enough to open the auction. We call 13 points a **Minimum** opening hand. The third hand--with 16 points--is "a king better" than that. We call it an **Invitational** opening hand. The last hand is "a king better" than that--WONDERFUL with almost half the points in the deck. We call that a **Strong** opening hand.

Short-suit points: Two pages ago you learned that you like hands with long trumps and short suits. Before the auction starts, however, you don't know what will be trump. Who knows? Maybe your short suit will be trump. Maybe the hand will be played in no trump. So we don't assign any points for short suits until later in the auction when we know what will be trump.

Getting Started

Length points: Long suits are always valuable. When you have a long suit you are often able to win tricks with small cards. Let's say that hearts is the trump suit and you hold ♥AKQ32. There are only 13 hearts—ace through deuce.

**Bridge players
LOVE long suits.**

- If you lead the ♥A and all follow, four hearts are played.
- If you lead the ♥K and all follow, eight hearts are played and you have three of the remaining five.
- If you play the ♥Q and two players follow, you now have all of the remaining hearts.
- Play the ♥3 and you will win the trick because nobody has any hearts left.
- Finally, play the ♥2 and win that trick, too.

We call this **establishing** the suit. Of course, things don't always work out perfectly. It's possible—but unlikely—that one player has no hearts at all. On average, though, a five-card suit will be an asset. So we LOVE long suits. Assign one **length point** for each card in excess of four in a suit.

- With a five-card suit, assign one point.
- With a six-card suit, assign two points; and so on.
- If you have two long suits, assign length points for both.

If You Hold:	Your High-Card Points Are:	Your Length Points Are:
♠AJ54 ♥KT7 ♦AKT ♣952	15	0
♠AJ542 ♥KT7 ♦AKT ♣95	15	1
♠AJ5432 ♥KT7 ♦AKT ♣9	15	2
♠AKJ543 ♥T ♦AKT76 ♣9	15	3

Each of these hands has the same high card points but they are not equally valuable. The first hand is not as good as the second, which is not as good as the third, which is not as good as the fourth.

Your **starting** points are a rough estimate of the trick-taking potential of your hand when you first pick it up—before the auction begins. You will often revise that estimate as the auction progresses.

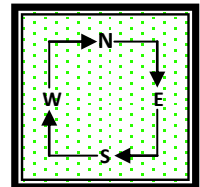
**Starting points =
High-card points
+ length points.**

Getting Started

If You Hold:	Your High-Card Points Are:	Your Length Points Are:	Your Starting Points Are:
♠KQ64 ♥32 ♦KT75 ♣Q96	10	0	10
♠KQT64 ♥32 ♦K75 ♣Q96	10	1	11
♠KQ642 ♥3 ♦KT753 ♣Q9	10	2	12
♠KQ6432 ♥3 ♦KQT53 ♣9	10	3	13

A Sample Auction

We are going to have a simple auction with the opponents passing throughout. You and partner will exchange information to reach the best contract for the **strength** and **shape** of the two hands. Remember that the bidding proceeds clockwise.



The Opening Bid

Opening hands come in sizes Small, Medium and Large—called Minimum (13-15), Invitational (16-18) and Strong (19 or more). Don't worry about memorizing these numbers right now; we will repeat them often in lessons to come.

**Minimum needed to open the auction:
13 starting points.**

Whether you have a Minimum opener or a much stronger hand, you will almost always open the auction by bidding one of a suit. But what suit will you open? Hearts and spades are called **major** suits; diamonds and clubs are called **minor** suits. Bridge players LOVE to bid in majors and HATE to bid in minors. It's all about the score. You will almost always get a better score--with fewer tricks!--for making a major suit contract than for making a minor suit contract. For example, the score for making 3♥ is higher than the score for making 4♦!

**Bidding priorities:
We LOVE majors.
We HATE minors.**

Getting Started

Let's start with a simple guideline which we will expand as the lessons progress.

- You will always open one of a **major** suit if you possibly can. To do that you need at least five cards in the suit.
- If you do not have a five-card major, open your **longer minor**.

Open one of a major with at least five cards in that suit.

If You Hold:	You Will Open:
♠QT532 ♥A6 ♦AJ86 ♣Q7	1♠—a five card major.
♠QJ5 ♥96 ♦J8642 ♣AKQ	1♦—your longer minor.
♠QJ5 ♥AQ7 ♦Q654 ♣QJ3	1♦—your longer minor.
♠AJ52 ♥AT76 ♦Q64 ♣K5	1♦—your longer minor.

There are some important things to notice.

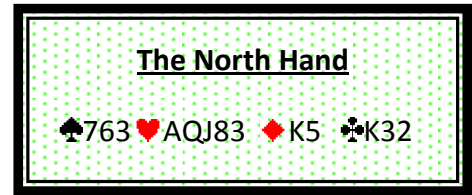
- Your opening bid depends on the **shape of your hand**--not the placement of your honor cards. In the second example, you have great club honors but you will open your diamonds because you have more of them. Remember: It is important to have lots of trumps, so it is right to bid a longer suit.

Select an opening bid based on the shape of your hand.

- An opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠ gives partner a lot of information about your hand. You promise at least thirteen **starting** points--your **strength**--and at least five cards in your suggested trump suit--your **shape**.
- When you open in a minor suit, you will not always have five. The last example is a drastic case; you must open 1♦ even though you have only three of them. Your bid promises at least 13 starting points--your **strength**--but it is not very descriptive of your **shape**. Sometimes that is the best you can do. You will clarify your shape on the next round of bidding.

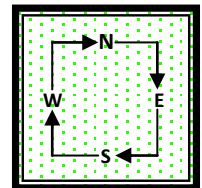
Getting Started

Sitting North, you are the dealer and have the first chance to bid. You hold these cards. You have 14 **starting** points: 13 high-card points and one length point. For this particular auction you correctly open 1♥. Your message to partner is that you have at least 13 **starting** points--something about your **strength**--and at least five hearts--something about your **shape**.

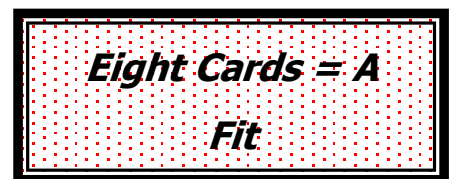


The Responder Bid

Partner, sitting North, has opened the auction 1♥. He is the **opener**. Proceeding clockwise, East passes. You are sitting South and it's your turn to bid. As the opener's partner, you are the **responder**. Consider these questions.



1. **Do I have a fit with partner's suit?** If you and partner have a combined total of eight or more cards in a suit, you have a **fit** and that suit is a candidate to be trump.



- If partner has opened 1♥ or 1♠, you know that he has at least five cards. If you have at least three, you have a **fit**.
- If partner has opened a minor, you don't know exactly how many cards he has in that suit. Always assume he has at least four--despite the odd example on the last page. Openings of three-card suits are rare indeed. If you have at least four cards in partner's minor suit, assume you have a **fit**.

2. **Should that suit be trump?** Let's pretend for a minute that partner opened 1♠ and you have three spades--a **fit**. Remember our bidding priorities. If you and partner have a fit in a major suit, you definitely want that suit to be trump. We LOVE the majors. Now let's pretend that partner opened 1♣ and you have four clubs. You assume that partner has at least four clubs so you have a **fit**. But we HATE minors. You'd prefer to bid a major contract or--failing that--a possible no trump contract.



Getting Started

3. **Am I strong enough to respond?** Responder hands also come in sizes Small, Medium and Large—Minimum (6-9), Invitational (10-11), and Strong (12 or more). With fewer than six points you will pass. It is too dangerous for the partnership to bid any higher. With at least six, you should definitely bid to give partner more information about your hand and to find the best possible contract.

The minimum needed to respond is six points.

Let's return to our sample auction. Partner opened 1♥ and East passed. You hold these cards. You have nine **starting** points--nine high-card points and no length points. If Minimum (6-9), you have only three possible bids:

The South Hand
♠T92 ♥K6 ♦A762 ♣Q985

- **Raise partner to two with a fit.** You can't do that with only two hearts. Partner has promised only five hearts so you cannot count a partnership total of eight cards.
- **Bid a higher-ranking suit at the one level** with at least four cards. You don't have such a suit. You like your clubs and diamonds but a Minimum responder may not bid a new suit at the two level--just the one level. Besides, we HATE minor suits.
- **Bid one no trump** with:
 - A **balanced** hand **OR**
 - No other possible bid.

For now, let's say that a hand is **balanced** if it has at least two cards in every suit. We'll refine that definition in lessons to come.

A balanced hand has no singletons or voids.

With these specific cards, you correctly respond to partner's opening by bidding one no trump with your **balanced** hand. You are telling partner you have a Minimum responder hand of 6-9 **starting** points--your **strength**. With ten or more points, you would have made a more encouraging response--say, two no trump. Partner will understand that you do not have three hearts and you do not have a four-card spade suit to bid--a lot of information about your **shape**. He will also assume that your hand is **balanced**--something more about your **shape**--but will realize that you might simply have no other possible bid. Notice that responses--like opening bids--depend on the **shape** of your hand rather than the placement of your honor cards.

Getting Started

Here are some alternative hands you might have held opposite partner's 1♥ opening.

If You Hold:	You Will Bid:
♠KJ7 ♥KJ7 ♦T8542 ♣63	2♥. You have a fit with partner and we LOVE majors.
♠T972 ♥J5 ♦K763 ♣KJ2	1♠. You do not have a fit with partner's hearts but you have a higher-ranking suit of at least four cards. It's not pretty but we LOVE majors. Respond based on your <i>shape</i> .
♠K8 ♥T5 ♦KQT93 ♣J932	One no trump. You do not have a fit with partner's hearts and you do not have four of a higher-ranking suit. You have a nice diamond suit but, as a Minimum responder, you are not strong enough to bid a new suit at the two level--only at the one level.

Here are some examples if partner had opened 1♦.

If You Hold:	You Will Bid:
♠K7 ♥KJ7 ♦T854 ♣J632	One no trump. You have a fit with partner but we HATE minors. With a balanced hand you prefer to bid one no trump.
♠KJ72 ♥J5 ♦K763 ♣632	1♠. Again, you have a fit with partner's minor but we HATE minors. Show your four-card major.
♠K82 ♥T ♦KQT93 ♣T932	2♦. We HATE minors but you do not have a four-card major and your hand is too unbalanced for no trump.

.....

The Opener Rebid

.....

Put on your opener hat again. Sitting North, you hold these cards. You opened 1♥, East passed, partner responded one no trump and West passed. Now what?

The North Hand
♠763 ♥AQJ83 ♦K5 ♣K32

May you pass? Most bids are what we call *limit* bids--bids which define the upper limit of your hand. In this particular case, South made a *limit* bid. He is strong enough to bid one no trump but he is not strong enough to bid two no trump. He is showing exactly 6-9 points--a Minimum responder hand. You may always pass a *limit* bid.

Should you pass? Here's a general bidding guideline: **Don't tell the same story twice.** Your opening bid of 1♥ promised at least a Minimum of 13-15 starting points and a five-card heart

Getting Started

suit—your **strength** and your **shape**. You have nothing to add to that story. With a slightly different hand, you might have something more to say. For example:

- If you had a singleton diamond and a fourth club, you would bid 2♣ to warn partner that you are **unbalanced**--that is, helpless in at least one suit. You would rather not play in no trump but you have a second suit to suggest as trump.
- If you had a stronger hand--more than the Minimum of 13-15--you would also have something to add to your story, your extra values.

So, for this particular auction, you will pass. You have nothing more to say and responder has suggested a reasonable contract for your **balanced** Minimum hand. All pass.

Playing the Hand

In Lesson Two we will have a complete discussion of how to play a hand. Here is a preview of things to come.

North-South now have a one no trump **contract** to make. They need seven tricks--a **book** of six, plus one. They can afford to lose six of the thirteen tricks. Only high cards and established suits will win tricks because nothing is trump. South is the player who first named no trump, so he is the **declarer** for this hand. North will be the **dummy**. That's not an opinion of North's bidding! It just means that North will sit out this hand while his partner plays both hands. The East-West pair are the **defenders**. They need seven tricks to defeat the contract.

The Opening Lead. The defender sitting left of the **declarer**--West in this case--makes the opening lead. For later tricks, whoever wins a trick will lead to the next trick.

The Dummy Is Tabled. AFTER the opening lead, the dummy places his cards face up on the table. We never give the player on lead any helpful information! For the hand just discussed, dummy will look like this--with black suits separated from red suits. For a suit contract, the trump suit would be arrayed on the far left--again with red and black suits separated.

The Dummy			
North			
♠	♥	♣	♦
7	A	K	K
6	Q	3	5
3	J	2	
8			
3			

The LONG Pause. Declarer will use the dummy's cards as well as his own cards to make his contract. He uses the pause to plan how to play the hand to win at least seven tricks.

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13 Tricks Will Be Played. Declarer attempts to carry out his plan and defenders attempt to make his life difficult. At each trick, declarer will decide what card to play from dummy as well as what card to play from his own hand.

The Score

To discuss the score we have to discuss briefly the difference between **social** bridge and **duplicate** bridge. When you play bridge at home with your friends, you play **social** bridge. When you play at a bridge club or at bridge lessons, you typically play **duplicate** bridge. What's the difference?

At a **social** game, you shuffle, deal, play and score a hand. Then you shuffle, deal, play and score the next hand. Even if you are an excellent player you won't score much on any given day if you never get any good cards. Of course, if you and your friends play often, the luck will even out and--over the long haul--the stronger players will win more often.

When you play **duplicate** bridge, all the hands to be played that day are dealt at the beginning of the day and placed in holders, called **boards**. After you play and score a hand, you return your hand to the board and pass it to the next table for others to play. Your score for the day depends on how well you played compared to the other players who held exactly the same cards. Even when you have poor cards, you will win that day if you play those cards better than others do. Your score is based primarily on your skill--not your luck.

The game and the winning strategies are exactly the same in both settings but there are definite differences in scoring. Some good news for beginners! You don't have to memorize scoring rules. Standard score cards come with crib sheets. There are a few things you should know, however, because they actually affect how you play the game.

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Trick Points

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If You Made Your Contract, You Win:	If You Did Not Make Your Contract, the Defenders Win:
In a major, 30 points for each trick over book.	■ If you are vulnerable , 100 points per undertrick. ■ If you are not vulnerable , 50 points per undertrick.
In a minor, 20 points for each trick over book.	
In no trump, 40 points for the first trick over book and 30 points for each additional trick.	

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Are you vulnerable? In **social** bridge, if you bid and make a contract worth a hundred or more trick points, you win a **game** and become vulnerable. In **duplicate** bridge, the boards specify who is vulnerable.

What you need to know: Major suit contracts and no trump contracts are worth more trick points than minor suit contracts. That's why we LOVE majors and HATE minors.

Bonus Points for Games and Rubbers

In duplicate bridge: You compete for **game** bonuses. If you bid and make a contract worth 100 or more trick points, you win a **game**.

- Four of a major (10 tricks) = 120 trick points = game.
- Five of a minor (11 tricks) = 100 trick points = game.
- Three no trump (9 tricks) = 100 trick points = game.

Your bonus for making a **game** is 300 points when **not vulnerable** and 500 points when **vulnerable**. You also get a bonus of 50 for a **partscore**--making a contract below game level.

In social bridge: You compete for **rubber** bonuses. There are no bonuses for making a game but, if you win two games out of three, you win the **rubber**. Your bonus is 750 points for winning a rubber with two games in a row, 500 points for winning two games out of three.

What you need to know:

- It is EXTREMELY important to bid game if you possibly can. In **duplicate** bridge, you win a huge bonus for bidding and making a game-level contract. In **social** bridge, you are strategically well positioned to win the rubber if you have already won a game.

It is EXTREMELY important to bid game if you possibly can.

- You have to win all but two tricks to make game in a minor suit--a very difficult undertaking. That's another reason we HATE minor suits.

The numbers you have just seen might suggest that no trump contracts are preferred because you only need nine tricks for game. Not so. No trump contracts are very difficult to

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play. If you and partner have an eight-card fit in a major suit, you have a better chance to make four of a major--worth 120 trick points--than to make three no trump--worth 100 trick points.

A Word about Slams

In both duplicate and social bridge, large bonuses are paid for **slam** contracts. If you bid and make a six-level contract you have made a **small slam**--a **book** of six tricks plus the six you bid, all but one trick. Your bonus is 500 points when not vulnerable, 750 when vulnerable. When you bid and make a seven-level contract, you have made a **grand slam**--all thirteen tricks. You win 1000 points not vulnerable or 1500 points vulnerable. Slam bids are rare but very profitable indeed.

We won't have much to say about slams in these basic bridge lessons. We've provided a brief introduction, however, in Chapter Ten. Our advice for beginners is: Don't worry about slams for now. Stay focused on the kinds of hands that come up frequently.

Congratulations!

You're playing bridge!

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Summary

A General Bidding Idea: Bid to show the *strength* and *shape* of your hand.

Starting Points: When you first pick up your hand, count your *starting* points.

- Starting points = high-card points + length points
- High Card Points:
 - A=4
 - K=3
 - Q=2
 - J=1
- Length Points: One point for each card in excess of four in a suit.

Classifying Your Strength: Opening hands and responder hands come in sizes Small, Medium or Large.

You Are:	Opening Hands:	Responder Hands:
Minimum if you have:	13-15	6-9
Invitational if you have:	16-18	10-11
Strong if you have:	19 or more	12 or more

Opening Bids:

- You need 13 *starting* points to open.
- Always prefer to open a major suit (hearts or spades) if you can. To open a major you need five or more cards in your suit.
- There is a suit hierarchy. From lowest to highest, the hierarchy is: Clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, no trump.

Responder Bids:

- Before bidding, ask:
 - Do I have an eight-card fit with partner?
 - If he opened a major, he has at least five.
 - If he opened a minor, assume he has at least four.
 - If yes, should partner's suit be trump?
 - With a major suit fit, yes.
 - With a minor suit fit, probably not. You will look for a better contract—in a major or in no trump.
 - Am I strong enough to respond? You need at least six points.