



How to Bid in Competition

For the Exciting Game of Bridge

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Preface

This book, like the rest of the Watson bridge series, is for all bridge players who actively seek improvement. They keep the game thriving and are the advanced and expert players of the future. This book was made with new players in mind to bring them up to speed.

However, this is a good review for intermediate players to fill in the holes in their understanding of the game. If an advanced player does not know the basics, it is long overdue that they read a book like this one. Any player who makes minimum offshape doubles will never be a true advanced player. Doubling with two cards or fewer in an unbid suit without extra values makes the partnership less competitive.

When the opponents bid, the fighting words not otherwise available are double, pass, and redouble. A good competitive bidder is an effective user of overcalls (suit and Notrump), doubles and pass. A player who understands competition including when to stay out, will have satisfying success at bridge.

Bidding the limit of the hand, balancing, and not delaying raises are concepts discussed here. The opponents should not be given clean auctions (uncontested) when practical. The strength of the hand should be defined to a small range as much as possible, so that the partner can better judge when to compete.

The appendices are like those of the other books in the Watson bridge series. There are the Watson bridge book titles, links to Watson bridge resources, a Chicago scorer which is duplicate scoring, a glossary, references and inputs for a bridge solver online.

The examples in this book give a player practice with fighting words in competition. They are brand new hands played online on BBO¹.

¹ Bridge Base Online is a bridge playing site at <https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/>





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1. A Review

1.1 Uncontested Auctions

1.1.1 Balanced Hands

12-14	1 of a suit then 1NT rebid.
15-17	1NT
18-19	1 of a suit then a jump in Notrump.
20-21	2NT
22-23	2♣ then 2NT
24-25	3NT
26-27	2♣ then 3NT
28-29	2♣ then 4NT

The first two ranges are three points, and the rest are two points. A player can memorize or calculate the chart in his head. The reader can calculate what 30-31 is, but he should pinch himself because he is really in dreamland.

Over 1NT, 2♣ is Stayman, 4♣ is Gerber, and transfers are on. Over 2NT, 3♣ is Stayman, 4♣ is Gerber, and transfers are on. Over 3NT, 4♣ is Stayman, 5♣ is Gerber (Super Gerber), and transfers are on. Stayman wins the 4♣ slot because finding a four-four major fit can lead to an extra trick over Notrump. Opening 4NT is just standard Blackwood.



Example 1.1: 1NT Rebid is Unnecessary with 4+ Spades



Example 1.2: Zero Points Must Bid

Neither vul.

♠87654 ♥10987 ♦65 ♣54
 ♠109 ♥AQJ6 ♦743 ♣9632  ♠AQ3 ♥543 ♦AQJ10 ♣QJ10
 ♠KJ2 ♥K2 ♦K982 ♣AK87

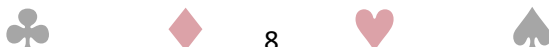
W	N	E	S
			1NT
P	2♥	P	2♠
all pass			

Bridge Solver Online: 1♠-NS, 2♣-W, 2♦-EW, 2♥-EW, 3♣-E, 3NT-EW

North cannot pass 1NT even though he is weak (0-7). He must transfer to a five-card major and pass. When partner opens 1NT (15 to 17), 0-7 is the partscore zone, and 0 to 4 is the dead zone where a positive score is unlikely. The Rule of 22 states that 22 points are roughly needed to make or to set 1NT. Therefore, a suit will fare better than 1NT.

A suit (even a seven-card fit) will play better than 1NT when one hand is bust. North gets at least two entries in 2♠. In 1NT, North gets no tricks, and South must lead from his hand depending on what help he gets from the defenders.

North does not use Stayman because 2♣ then 2♠ over 2♦ shows five-four in the majors and 8 to 9. Some play that as weak, but the bid is more useful as a constructive bid.





Example 1.3: Bring Out the Trash!

N-S vul.

♠654 ♥10987 ♦10765 ♣54			
♠J1098 ♥J32 ♦A43 ♣932		♠AKQ7 ♥K654 ♦QJ ♣QJ10	
♠32 ♥AQ ♦K982 ♣AK876			
W	N	E	S
			1NT
P	2♣	P	2♦
all pass			

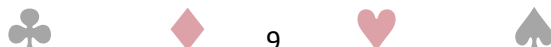
Bridge Solver Online: 3♦-NS, 1♣-NS, 1♠-W, 1NT-EW, 2♥-EW, 2♠-E

2♣ is called trash or garbage or rescue Stayman because North passes any response. It denies a five-card major and shows club shortness. It is done when short in clubs with four or three cards in the other three suits. The hand must be in the dead zone. With 5 to 7, 1NT is likely a better spot than a suit (especially a minor) Moysian.

Example 1.4: Length Points in a Decent Suit

E-W vul.

♠KQ87 ♥QJ109 ♦987 ♣76			
♠654 ♥A87 ♦A432 ♣KJ5		♠32 ♥6543 ♦QJ65 ♣432	
♠AJ109 ♥K2 ♦K10 ♣AQ1098			
W	N	E	S
			1♣
P	1♥	P	2NT
P	3♦	P	3♠
P	4♠	all pass	





Bridge Solver Online: 4♠-S, 3NT-NS, 3♠-N, 3♥-NS, 3♣-S, 2♣-N

1, 1, 3, 3, 3 are the length points for the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth cards, respectively. The points are accumulative. South has 18 not 15 to 17. If somebody does not recognize the importance of length points, they probably do not realize that the 1234 high card point system is just an approximation of playing strength. Some count 10's in long suits accompanied by higher honours as 0.5 points. Clearly opening 1NT is wrong.

South skips spades to get to Notrump first and to define his point range. 3♦ is New Minor Forcing. Regardless how it is played, bidding over an invite is forcing, and South tells his partner something on the way to 3NT. If North responded with 5 HCP, the only sure way to play a partscore is to pass 2NT.

4♠ is cold. The declarer wins the opening lead in the dummy. He then plays a heart. He does not play a club until later in case East has the ♥Ace. He leaves him with a trump to make an exit and with a guess on which minor to attack. Drawing trump and taking the club finesse early make a diamond switch by East very easy. However, the point is moot because West has the ♥Ace. He has everything hence the trump lead. If West does not cash the ♦Ace, South draws trump and pitches two diamonds on hearts. He then takes the club finesse to the ♣Queen. He makes +450. West, however, cashes the ♦Ace, and the declarer makes +420.

This is not a situation where the declarer only draws two rounds of trump to get two ruffs in both hands because the heart and club suits are so strong.





Example 1.5: One of a Minor Opening Misses Game

E-W vul.

♠KJ109 ♥10987 ♦765 ♣76			
♠Q54 ♥AQ6 ♦432 ♣J1098		♠32 ♥J543 ♦KJ ♣K5432	
♠A876 ♥K2 ♦AQ1098 ♣AQ			
W	N	E	S
			2NT
P	3♣	P	3♠
P	4♠	all pass	

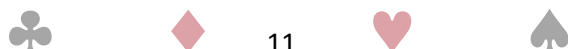
Bridge Solver Online: 5NT-S, 5♠-NS, 4NT-N, 5♦-NS, 2♥-NS, 1♣-EW

If 1♦ is opened, and North has 5 HCP or less, South likely plays 1♦. However, if he counts a length point and opens 2NT, he will be in game if his partner has 5 HCP or more. Furthermore, North goes to game with 4 HCP if he has one of the following.

- Five-card suit or longer
- A four-card major (even if four-triple-three).
- An Ace.

Which way to guess spades? Who knows? Therefore, South does not guess. He plays to the ♠King intending to finesse diamonds to the ♦10 but covers the ♦Jack with the ♦Queen. His ♥King remains protected if West gets in, not East, the danger hand. However, North has insufficient entries to take every finesse into West.

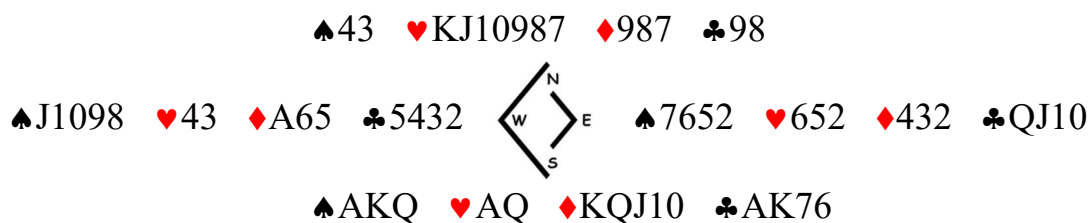
South cashes the ♠Ace and his last club. He does not want to make a heart switch obvious if East gets in, but he wants the suits eliminated if West gets in and that is the hope. He then runs his diamonds. If West does not ruff, South exits a spade, and West must play hearts for +450. See finesse, take finesse is a motto for novice players.





Example 1.6: Dreamland

E-W vul.

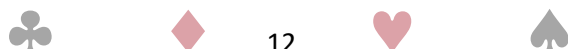


W	N	E	S
			2♣
P	2♦	P	4NT
P	5♦	P	5NT
P	6♥	all pass	

Bridge Solver Online: 6NT-NS, 6♥-NS, 6♦-NS, 4♠-NS, 5♣-NS

4NT shows a balanced hand with 28 to 29 and is not asking for Aces. 5♦ is a transfer to hearts and South with a doubleton refuses. North know there is enough for a small slam, not a grand, and bids 6♥.

6♥ is a safer bid than 6NT in case South has Ax of hearts. This way the weak hand always has an entry to run the hearts. If South has three hearts, 6NT is the best contract at matchpoints. At teams or in Rubber Bridge, 6♥ is a fine contract.





1.1.2 Strong Hands

2♣ Opener:

- Game or better was dealt to the opener.
- 22+ HCP
- 8½ quick tricks with three defensive tricks

2♣ is not opened with a strong two suiter because there could be a high preempt in one of the short suits. The following is opened 1♠, so both suits can be bid.

♠AKQ543 ♥AKQ543 ♦A ♣---

2♣ is also not opened with a strong 4441 which needs entries from partner to play the hand. The following hand is opened 1♦ because after a 2♣ opening, and a 3♦ rebid, a four-four major may be missed. If partner cannot respond to 1♦, he cannot have the necessary entries to play the hand.

♠AKJ3 ♥AQJ10 ♦AKJ3 ♣3

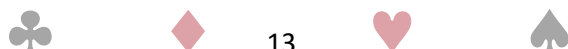
Strong rebids by the opener:

- A new lower-ranking suit at the two-level is 11 to 17. It is not forcing.

W	N	E	S
			1♥
P	1NT	P	2♣

- A new higher-ranking suit at the two-level (reverse) is 16+. It is forcing one round.

W	N	E	S
			1♥
P	1NT	P	2♠





W	N	E	S
			1 ♣
P	1 ♥	P	2 ♠

What about the above auction? Does 2 ♠ show 16+ with five clubs and four spades? Is it a jump shift with 18+? Is it forcing without four spades? Partner should be consulted. All methods have been used at the table, but the jump shift showing 18+ is likely the most common.

The following is not a reverse because South could have intended to rebid 1NT or 2 ♣.

W	N	E	S
			1 ♣
1 ♠	dbl	P	2 ♦

- A new higher-ranking suit at the three-level (reverse) is 19+. It is game forcing.

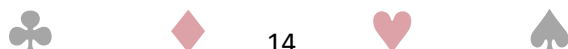
W	N	E	S
			1 ♣
1 ♥	1NT	2 ♥	3 ♦

- A jump rebid is 16 to 17, not 18. It is invitational. It is an old suit at the three-level.

W	N	E	S
			1 ♥
P	1NT	P	3 ♥

- A jump shift is 18+ and game forcing. A jump shift into a minor may be a short suit with a stopper.

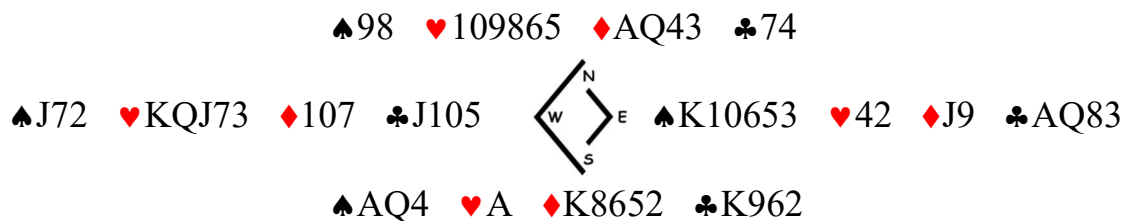
W	N	E	S
			1 ♥
P	1NT	P	3 ♣





Example 1.7: Delayed Raise to the Three-Level

E-W vul.



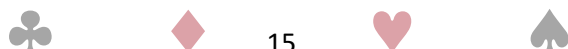
W	N	E	S
		P	1♦
P	1♥	P	2♣
P	2♦	P	3♦
all pass			

Bridge Solver Online: 5♦-NS, 3NT-NS, 2♥-NS, 2♣-NS, 1♠-NS

South shows 11 to 17 HCP with his 2♣ rebid. A jump shift to 3♣ needs 18+ HCP. His raise of 3♦ shows the upper range 16 to 17 and is invitational. An old suit at the three-level is invitational.

North chooses diamonds whenever possible to leave the opportunity for a delayed raise. A false preference sometimes makes sense. Here, it was not necessary.

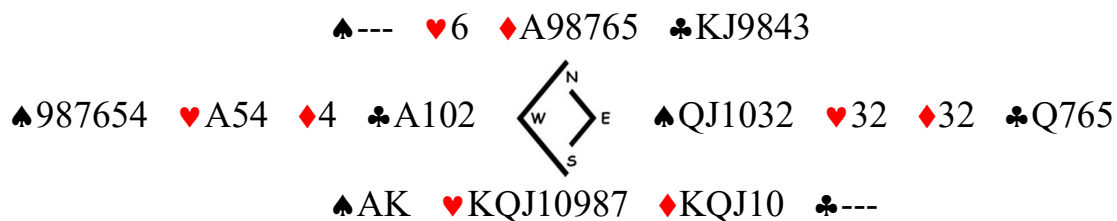
Passing 2♦ because of the stiff in partner's suit is not wrong. Nevertheless, this example shows that a jump shift does not describe South's HCPs, but a delayed diamond raise does.





Example 1.8: 4NT with a Void

E-W vul.



W	N	E	S	
			2♣	
P	2♦	P	3♥	
P	4♦	P	4NT	1430
P	5♣	P	6♥	
all pass				

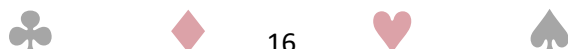
Bridge Solver Online: 6♥-NS, 6♦-NS, 4NT-NS, 2♣-NS, 2♠-EW

South has game in his own hand, so he opens 2♣. Three defensive tricks are not necessary, although he likely has them.

South jumps to 3♥ to show a self-sufficient suit. It sets trump and asks partner to immediately cuebid if he can. North does not show a spade void with only one trump. 4♦ shows first-round diamond control, but also denies first-round control in spades and clubs.

A player does not use keycard with a void or a worthless doubleton unless information from cuebidding allows it. North denied the ♣Ace during cuebidding, so his one keycard is the ♦Ace. With a diamond void and the ♥Ace, North replies 6♦ to keycard showing an odd number of keycards and a diamond (working) void.

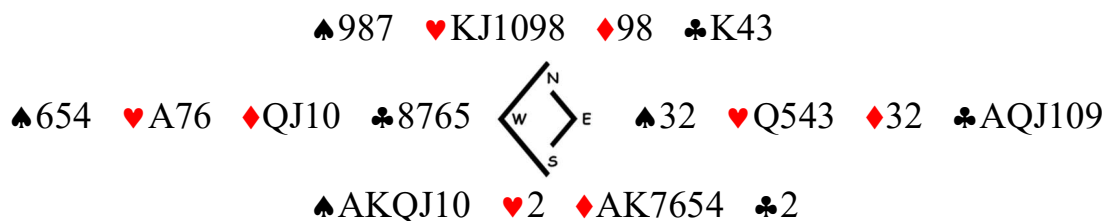
A working void is not in a natural suit of partner. It is useful.





Example 1.9: 1♠ Could be Strong

E-W vul.

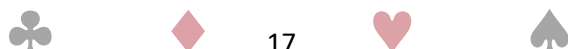


W	N	E	S
			1♦
P	1♥	P	1♠
P	2♥	P	2♠
P	4♠	all pass	

Bridge Solver Online: 5♠-NS, 4♦-NS, 2♥-N, 1NT-NS, 1♥-S, 1♣-EW

North can never pass 1♠. He does not know South has a strong hand until he bids 2♠. North bids 4♠ because he has enough opposite 16 for game.

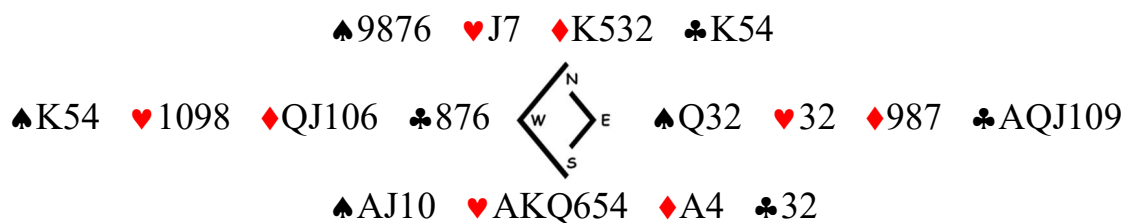
North could rebid 1NT because he does not have six hearts, and he needs opening lead protection in clubs. The rebid of 2♥ strictly shows six hearts and 6 to 9 HCP, but he chose hearts because most of his points are in hearts, and it is a two loser suit (because of the nice intermediates). In 1NT, it is quite possible, he does not have an entry to cash the fourth and fifth hearts.





Example 1.10: Jump Shift into a Short Suit

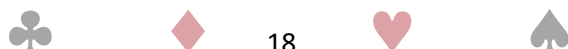
E-W vul.



W	N	E	S
			1 ♥
P	1 ♠	P	3 ♦
P	3 ♥	P	4 ♥
all pass			

Bridge Solver Online: 4NT-N, 4♠-N, 4♥-NS, 3NT-S, 3♠-S, 1♦-NS, 1♣-N

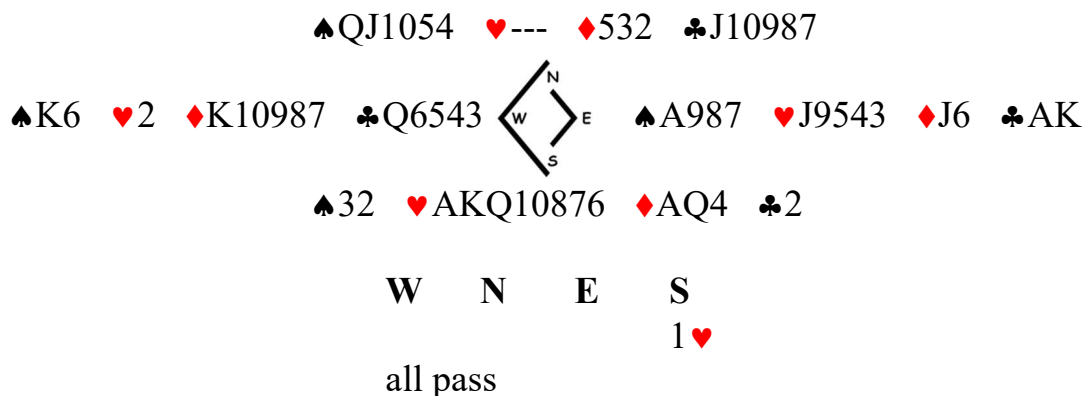
If South jumps to 3♥ showing 16 or 17, North passes. South cannot jump to 4♥ because North may have five spades or 3NT may be the best spot. North does not bid 4♦ unless he thinks there is a chance for 6♦. He either bids 3NT or 3♥. With four miserable spades (no spade stopper) and one stopper in the unbid suit, 3♥ is the superior bid.





Example 1.12: Not Enough Defensive Tricks

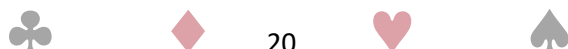
E-W vul.



Bridge Solver Online: 1♠-NS, 1♥-EW, 2♣-E, 2♦-EW, 3♣-W, 3NT-EW

South has $8\frac{1}{2}$ quick tricks but does not have three defensive tricks. With one heart defensive trick, he has $2\frac{1}{2}$ defensive tricks. 1♥ turns out to be too high as South is down one. Double dummy analysis has East and West making 1♥. That is not a typo because South has seven losers in 1♥S.

East cannot double and cannot overcall such a poor four-card spade suit. If he is playing a balancing 1NT of 11 to 14, he could plug his nose and bid 1NT. It works out nicely especially when North cannot lead a heart twice or even once. If he plays that a 1NT overcall is always 15 to 18, his only option is to pass. The balancer often passes when he has four or more cards in his LHO's suit.





Example E.10: The Contract Need Not be 3NT

N-S vul.

♠863 ♥J9765 ♦104 ♣932			
♠KQ95 ♥K ♦A7653 ♣A107		♠107 ♥A1084 ♦KJ98 ♣K64	
♠AJ42 ♥Q32 ♦Q2 ♣QJ85			

Incorrect				Correct			
W	N	E	S	W	N	E	S
1♦	P	1♥	dbl	1♦	P	1♥	P
P	1NT	dbl	2♣	1♠	P	2NT	P
dbl	all pass			3NT	all pass		

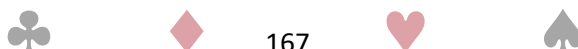
Bridge Solver Online: 4♣-EW, 3♥-W, 4♥-E, 6♦-EW, 6♠-EW, 6NT-EW

Normally, West would redouble showing extra and a desire to defend the opponents doubled. However, they are playing support doubles. Therefore, a pass says, “Let’s see if we can double them.” West’s singleton heart in East’s bid suit, his extra values and the vulnerable opponents make a pass extraordinarily easy. The opponents are in a world of hurt.

Should South make a takeout double? No, the soft values in the red suits bid by the opponents suggest that he should wait to see if it is a balancing situation. What is the hurry to tell the opponents how to take the red suit finesses? Pass is a fighting word.

Furthermore, his black suits are not very playable. ♠AQJ10 ♥432 ♦2 ♣KQJ109 would be a better hand with which to act.

Did North ever intend to play 1NT? No, of course not. It tells his partner he has equal length in the unbid suits, and that South must choose the battlefield on which to die. It was a silly bluff that took away 1♠ which did not matter. 2♣ is a worse disaster but it is still a zero.





If North passes, East redoubles, and that is where he plays. All roads lead to 100%. As an exercise, the reader should calculate what $1\heartsuit\text{Exx}+3$ gives or refer to [Appendix C](#). 3NT by East or West is such a boring contract when $1\heartsuit\text{Exx}$ or $2\clubsuit\text{Sx}$ get close to 100% instead of around average.





Trail, BC, Pencil on Paper, 24.5cm x 17.5cm, 2016

Warren Watson is a former Aerospace Engineer and is currently an artist, with a diploma in Fine Arts from Okanagan University College in Kelowna, BC, and an avid bridge player. He is an ACBL Diamond Life Master, an ACBL accredited bridge teacher, a writer of 347 columns in the Trail Times, a published author, an ACBL director, an accredited ACBL tournament assistant and the Kootenay Jewel Bridge Club manager (10+ years). He currently resides in Trail, BC, and in winter, likes to ski Grey Mountain of Red Mountain Resort.



Self Portrait, Pencil on Paper
25cm x 20cm, 2015

