

What's Standard?

by David Lindop

This series is based on *Grant Standard*, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of *Grant Standard* and the corresponding convention card can be found at www.AudreyGrant.com. The site also has *Grant Basic*, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the *Bridge Bulletin* and can also be found under 'Articles' at www.AudreyGrant.com.

In Grant Standard, there are no conventions directly associated with minor suit openings. The opening bids and responses are all "natural." That doesn't mean there's nothing to consider. We still have to discuss our "treatments" to make sure we are in agreement with partner on the meaning of certain bids.

Minor Suit Openings

When opening a minor suit, we use the following guidelines:

MINOR SUIT OPENINGS

- Open the longer minor.
- With two four-card or five-card minors, open 1♦.
- With two three-card minors, open 1♣.

♠ 4 3
♥ A 9 5 2
♦ K J 5
♣ K Q 8 3

1♣. With no five-card major suit and a hand too weak to open 1NT, we open the longer minor.

♠ A Q J 4
♥ Q 9 7 2
♦ J 7 5
♣ A 4

1♦. One consequence of requiring a five-card major to open 1♥ or 1♠ is that we sometimes have to open with a three-card minor suit. We still open the longer minor. This is considered a standard bid and is not alertable.

Some players prefer to open 1♣ with this type of hand, so that an opening bid of 1♦ always promises

Minor Suit Openings and Responses

a four-card or longer suit. This style — where 1♣ could be a two-card suit — is alertable since it is not standard.

Opening a three-card minor suit is sometimes referred to as the "short club." This is a misnomer. We actually **open the longer minor**, which could be a "short" diamond suit. It's best to eradicate the term "short club" from our vocabulary. It creates too many problems in our thinking.

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ 5
♦ Q 10 7 5
♣ A J 8 3

1♦. With two four-card minors, the popular practice is to open 1♦, although opening 1♣ is also acceptable.

♠ A 8 6 3
♥ K 7 5
♦ A Q 5
♣ A J 3

1♣. This hand is too strong to open 1NT. With a choice between three-card minors, it's standard to open 1♣.

♠ K J 4
♥ A J
♦ K 8 3
♣ K 8 7 5 2

1NT. Opening 1NT takes priority over opening a minor when we have a balanced hand of 15-17 points.

♠ K 4
♥ Q 8 7 6 4
♦ A K J 7 5
♣ 7

1♥. With two five-card suits, we open the higher-ranking. This will usually make it easier to show both

suits. If we are West, for example, the bidding might go like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♦			

We conveniently show both our suits and partner can choose to play partscore in either suit at the two level ... by passing 2♦ or bidding 2♥.

♠ A 10 8 7 3
♥ —
♦ J 5
♣ A Q 8 7 5 4

1♣. We generally open the longer suit, even when we have a five-card major suit. By starting with 1♣

we can plan to describe the hand to partner with some sequence such as:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♠			

By bidding and rebidding spades, partner will assume we have five of them. However, since we opened 1♣, partner can infer that we must have six clubs. With five spades and five clubs, we would have opened the higher-ranking suit, 1♠. Partner should be well placed to decide the best contract.

Being Prepared

Having said that we generally open the longer suit, there are exceptions. **With a minimum opening bid, we want to avoid reversing: bidding a second suit at the two level that is higher-ranking than our first suit.**

♠ J
♥ 8 7 5
♦ A K Q 6
♣ Q 8 6 4 3

If we open 1♣, we will be awkwardly placed if partner responds 1♠. We don't want to rebid 1NT with an unbalanced hand and we don't want to rebid 2♣ with such a weak five-card suit.

A bid of 2♦ would be a reverse — a bid at the two level in a higher-ranking suit. The trouble with reversing with a minimum hand is that it may leave responder poorly placed. If responder has only 6 or 7 points, we may get the partnership much too high. Responder would now have to bid 3♣, for example, if responder prefers clubs to diamonds. So, we should reverse only with a medium strength or stronger hand.

With this hand, we can avoid the problem by opening 1♦. If partner responds 1♠, we are now prepared to rebid 2♣, a lower-ranking suit at the two level. We won't have reversed and partner won't expect us to have extra strength. Of course, partner will assume our diamonds are as long or longer than our clubs. But that's the small price we pay for avoiding an awkward rebid problem if we open 1♣.

♠ A This hand presents a
♥ K J 8 6 3 similar dilemma. In
♦ Q J 7 6 5 2 theory, we'd like to
♣ 2 open 1♦ and then bid
and rebid hearts to show six diamonds
and five hearts. However, we don't
want to reverse with a minimum hand.
The practical solution is to open 1♥,
leaving us with a convenient rebid of
2♦ if partner responds 1♠ or 1NT.

So, even with the straightforward
guidelines for opening a minor suit,
there is still some room left for
judgment if we want to be prepared
for our rebid.

Responder's First Priority

When partner opens 1♣ or 1♦, **our
priority is to bid a four-card or
longer major suit.** Major suits get a
higher trick score than minor suits
and it's easier to make game in a
ten-trick contract of 4♥ or 4♠ than
an eleven-trick contract of 5♣ or 5♦.

If partner opens ♠ J 10 5 3
1♦, we respond 1♠ ♥ 4
with this hand rather ♦ K Q 10 7 2
than raising to 2♦. If ♣ 8 6 2
partner has support for spades, we've
found a major suit fit. If partner
doesn't have support for spades, we
can always return to diamonds.

For example, consider how the
auction might go if these are the
combined East-West hands:

WEST		EAST	
♠ K Q 9 4	♠ J 10 5 3	♥ Q J	♥ 4
♥ Q J	♦ K Q 10 7 2	♦ A J 9 3	♦ K Q 10 7 2
♦ A J 9 3	♣ 8 6 2	♣ K Q J	♣ 8 6 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

In 4♠, we'll make ten tricks, los-
ing a spade, a heart, and a club. 5♦
has no chance, since we have to lose
the same three tricks. If we were to
raise diamonds right away, partner
would likely try 3NT, which will be
defeated three or more tricks.

Responder's Second Priority

With no four-card or longer major
to bid, **responder's next priority is to
bid notrump with a balanced hand.**
If the partnership has enough
combined strength for game, it will

usually be easier to take nine tricks
in 3NT than eleven tricks in 5♣ or
5♦. Even if the partnership stops in
partscore, notrump contracts score
better than minor suit contracts.

In Grant Standard, we use the
most straightforward set of ranges
for notrump responses:

NOTRUMP RESPONSES TO 1♣ OR 1♦

1NT	6-10 points
2NT	11-12 points
3NT	13-15 points

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	?	

With 7 high-card ♠ K 8 4
points plus 1 length ♥ Q 7 3
point for the five-card ♦ J 5
club suit, we would ♣ J 9 8 6 3
respond 1NT with this hand. A
response of 1NT shows 6-10 points
but no four-card or longer major suit.

With 12 high-card ♠ Q 10 8
points, we would jump ♥ K J 7
to 2NT with this hand. ♦ Q 9 2
This is an invitational ♣ A 9 8 5
bid. With a minimum opening, partner
can pass and stop in partscore.

It's important to check that our
partnership is in agreement with the
meaning of the 2NT response to 1♣
or 1♦. At one time, it was common
to treat the jump to 2NT as forcing,
showing 13-15 points. However, the
popular modern style is to use it as
an invitational bid.

This hand has 14 ♠ K 10 6
high-card points plus ♥ A Q
1 length point for the ♦ Q 9 7 5 2
five-card diamond suit. ♣ K 8 3
Even though we have support for
diamonds, notrump takes priority
when we have a balanced hand and
no four-card or longer major suit.

Raising Opener's Minor

With no four-card or longer major
suit to bid and a hand unsuitable for
notrump, responder's next option is
to raise opener's minor suit:

RAISING OPENER'S MINOR SUIT

6-10 points	Raise to the two level
11-12 points	Raise to the three level

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	?	

This hand has 6 ♠ 8 4
high-card points plus ♥ Q 3
1 length point for the ♦ 9 8 5 2
five-card suit. With no ♣ K J 7 6 3
major suit to bid and an unbalanced
hand, raise to 2♣.

A jump raise to 3♣ ♠ K 8 4
is an invitational — ♥ 4
limit — raise showing ♦ Q 7 6 2
about 11-12 points. ♣ A J 8 6 3

When raising a minor suit, responder
usually does not count dummy
points. The heart shortness will be
useful if the partnership plays with
clubs as trumps. However, if opener
chooses to play in 3NT, the heart
shortness will be a liability, not an
asset. Since game is more likely to
be played in notrump than a minor
suit, it is usually best to err on the side
of caution ... but it's a judgment call.

Responder will tend to have five-
card or longer support for opener's
minor suit when raising. After all,
opener could have a three-card suit.
Responder will usually have other
options with only four-card support.
Still, if nothing else seems suitable,
a raise with four-card support is
fine. **Opener is more likely to have
four, five, or six cards in the minor
suit than three cards.**

A Forcing Raise

In Grant Standard, there is no artificial
forcing raise of opener's minor suit
when responder has 13 or more
points. There are methods available
(such as inverted minor suit raises),
but they involve complexities outside
our current scope.

This doesn't usually present a
problem since responder has other
options. **A new suit response is
forcing,** so responder can start by
bidding the other minor suit and
show the support later.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	?	

With this hand, we ♠ 8 7 2
simply respond 1♦ ♥ 6 4
and wait to hear ♦ A J 3
opener's rebid. We'll ♣ A K J 7 5
then take the partnership to game. ♠