

INTRODUCTORY ACOL BIDDING

Chapter 1 : Basics

The system described below is the basics of the ACOL bidding system, with a 'weak no-trump'. This is by no means definitive, and it includes some slightly non-standard bits, but is not a bad starting point. For a full bidding strategy including some conventional and competitive bids, see also chapter 2.

Bear in mind that this cannot be a complete guide to ACOL. Whole books are written on that, but it should account for most eventualities.

Counting Points

To evaluate the strength of your hand, you count points on the following basis:

Ace	4 points
King	3 points
Queen	2 points
Jack	1 point

For the 5th and 6th cards in a suit, count an extra point each
For the 7th, 8th...etc count 2 points each

As a general rule, you should have 13 points to open the bidding, and 6 to respond to your partner's bid.

Scoring

This has nothing to do with women, but it's almost as complicated. The basic idea is to bid 'a game' if possible, as the bonus is large.

Add 6 to the level you bid at, and you get the number of tricks you are saying you will win.

Note that there is a difference in scoring between major suits (hearts and spades) and minor suits (clubs and diamonds).

For game, you need to bid	3NT (i.e. 9 out of the 13 tricks)	>= 25 points pair
	4H or S (i.e. 10)	>= 26
	5C or D (i.e. 11)	>= 29

You also get some score for bidding and making less than these, and there are huge bonuses for bidding and making 6 or 7 (i.e. 12 or 13 tricks) Making less tricks than you promise costs points.

Basically, bidding is geared towards finding a game if possible.

Opening Bids

a) Balanced Hands

In this context, a balanced hand means 4-3-3-3 suit distribution, or maybe 4-4-3-2 or even 5-3-3-2. You should not have a singleton or void.

12-14 points : Open 1NT

15-18 points : Open your best suit as defined below at the 1 level, then bid NT at the cheapest level for your re-bid.

19-22 points : Open 2NT

23+ points : Open 2C. Depending on partner's response, you can then bid 2NT.

b) Non-balanced hands

With non-balanced hands, you should open with a suit bid, usually in your 'best' suit. Your best suit is defined almost always as your longest suit, but it should be headed by at least a queen. 4 cards in a suit are sufficient to make an opening bid.

13-18 points : Open in your best suit at the 1 level. Where you have two suits of equal length, there is an opportunity to show a bit more precisely what your values are. Especially if the suits are touching, bid the upper one first with 13-15 and the lower one first with 16-18. Another consideration should be the need to show good major suits early on. General rules to follow are:-

With one 4 or 5-card suit : Open it

With two 5-card suits : Bid the higher ranked first with 13-15

Bid the lower ranked first with 16-18

With two 4-card suits : Follow the same rules as two 5-card suits

if they are touching. If they are not touching, open clubs if you have them. Otherwise, the one below a doubleton, or else the stronger suit.

With three 4-card suits : Open the one below the singleton.

19-22 points (or 8 playing tricks): Open your best suit at the 2 level (unless it is clubs).

23+ points (or 9 playing tricks): Open 2C. This is an artificial bid, and does not mean that you have clubs!

c) Very non-balanced hands

5-10 High card points and a 7+ card suit : Consider a pre-emptive bid. This means that you open your long suit at the 3 level, thereby denying the opposition the opportunity to get into the auction. Remember that you are also pre-empting your partner if he has not already passed. With more than 10 points and a 7 card suit you should open at the 1 level, the 2 level if you have 8 playing tricks, or even directly at the 4 level if your suit is very powerful and you also have outside controls.

Long solid minor and few outside values : Open 3NT (Gambling). Partner can then either leave you there if he is strong, or else bid 4C. If your suit was clubs, you then pass. If it was diamonds, transfer into that suit.

Responses and re-bids

To 1NT

If you have less than 10 points, and a balanced hand

PASS

If you have less than 11 points and a good 5-card suit,
MAKE A TRANSFER BID, THEN
PASS.

This means that you bid the suit below
your long one; partner is then forced to bid your suit.

e.g. 1NT - 2D - 2H - PASS if your suit is hearts.
1NT - 2H - 2S - PASS.....spades.
1NT - 2S - 3C - PASS.....clubs.
1NT - 3C - 3D - PASS.....diamonds.

The advantage of this is firstly that the weak hand is now on the table, and
secondly that if you are stronger, you can bid on (see below).

If you have 11-13 points and a balanced hand,
BID 2NT.
Partner will raise to 3NT with a
maximum

If you have 14-19 points and a balanced hand,
BID 3NT.
Partner should pass.

If you have 20+ points, and a balanced hand,
Investigate slam by bidding 4C (Gerber)

If you have 11+ points, and a non-balanced hand.
If you have a 4 card major, think about
bidding 2C (Stayman). Note that it is your responsibility to have something else to
say if your partner does not turn out to have the suit you want him to have. You
MUST have an escape route.

Otherwise, make a transfer bid into your
best suit, but this time bid on after opener has made his bid of your suit. You can do
this either by showing another suit, or by rebidding your first bid suit if you are
single-suited.

To 1 of a suit

Responses here can again be divided between balanced and non-balanced hands. The
options are as follows:-

PASS - 0-5 points

NEW SUIT AT THE 1 LEVEL - 6+ points, 4 card suit. Forcing

NEW SUIT AT THE 2 LEVEL - 9+ points, 4 card suit. Forcing

1NT - 6-9 points

2NT - 10-12 points

3NT - 13-15 points

RAISE OF PARTNER'S SUIT - 4 cards in the suit. The level is best determined using the losing trick count. As a general rule of thumb, the 2 level is about 6-9 points, the 3 level is 10-12 and the 4 level is 13-15. Note that 4 level bids here would usually be passed, so if you have slam interest, show it in some other way. - for example, a jump shift or a Swiss bid. All raises of opener's suit are non-forcing.

JUMP SHIFT - 13+ points. Forcing.

4C / 4D Swiss bids. These show opening values, 4 card support for opener's suit, and slam interest. They are forcing at least to game. 4C should show one out of AKQ of trumps, and 4D should show two. Opener is then entitled to immediately fall back into game in his suit, or with slam interest, a cue-bidding sequence can begin. Note that the Swiss bids always implicitly agree the trump suit, and that even the sequence 1C - 4C is Swiss (though may not be the best thing to do!)

As far as the rest of the auction is concerned, it is now just a question of trying to find a fit in some suit or other, or else of playing in no trumps. A fit is defined as 8 or more cards in a suit. The opener should have quite a good point count for the responder by this stage, so should have some idea about whether to go to game. Remember that new suits are always forcing, and that NT should always be considered if possible where there is no obvious fit. It is often worth showing 4 card major suits, even if you have a fit in a minor.

To 2NT

The options here are:-

PASS : 0-4 points.

3C : This is the Baron convention here. The partnership then bid 4 card suits in ascending order until either a fit is found or 3NT is reached.

3D/3H - TRANSFERS INTO MAJOR SUITS ONLY : Bid on after your first response only if there is a chance of slam.

3S - Transfer into clubs. This is allowed, but to be avoided. It is usually better to play in either 2NT or 3NT.

3NT - 6-11 points and balanced distribution.

4C - Gerber. Implicit agreement of NT and slam interest.

4D - Weak take out in diamonds (transfer not possible because 4C is Gerber)
Again, this is to be avoided.

4H/S - Straight forward game bids with no slam interest. If slam is possible, use transfers.

To 2C

This is an artificial response to an artificial bid:-

If you have 0-3 points

BID 2D. You will then start
trying to find best suit below game

Otherwise, you are definitely going to bid game in something. Start trying to find the suit by bidding your preference.

To 2 of a Suit

This is similar to 2C:-

With less than 7 points

BID 2NT

Otherwise, bid as if partner opened at the 1 level, but again, you are definitely going to game.

That describes the basics of bidding. There are many other points that will come later, including a huge number of conventions (artificial bidding sequences). These will be described in chapter 2.

At present, this probably seems like a meaningless list of numbers. Well, it is! Things seem more logical if you keep in mind that you are constantly trying to find a game, and the bids are designed to tell you whether or not you have the points required to do so.

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Chapter 2 : Conventional Bids

1) Conventional bids in the uncontested auction

Stayman Convention

Used over 1NT where there is a chance of at least game.

If responder has a 4-card major, he bids 2C.

Opener's rebid is then

2D - To deny a 4 card major.

2H/S - To show a 4 card major.

If the result is that a major fit is found, responder can either jump directly to game, or else raise to 3, which is invitational. The important thing to note is that in a weak NT system, Stayman is not as useful as it is with strong NT. Only use it if there is a chance of game, and think hard about what you will say if you don't get the response that you want to hear.

2) Slam finding bids

Roman Key Card Blackwood

This is used in suit contracts to investigate the possibility of a slam.

Bid 4NT to ask about "key cards".

There are 5 key-cards in the pack. The 4 aces and the king of trumps.

Response is

5C - 0 or 3 key cards.

5D - 1 or 4 key cards.

5H - 2 key cards and not the queen of trumps.

5S - 2 key cards and the queen of trumps.

After the response, the 4NT bidder should be very careful about bidding any further unless he is certain that the partnership can make at least small slam. Otherwise he should sign off in trumps.

Possible follow up bids are:

Next suit up (excluding trumps) to ask for the queen of trumps if it is not already clear. Responder then signs off as cheaply as possible in trumps to deny the queen, or else cue bids a king or singleton to say he has got it. Bidding can then proceed with cue bids of specific second round controls.

Next suit up (excluding trumps) to ask about kings, where it is already clear whether or not partner has the queen of trumps. Responses are then each of the next 3 suits (including trumps and NT) depending on how many kings you have, (excluding the king of trumps). e.g 4NT - 5H - 5S - 6C shows 2 key cards, the queen of trumps and one other king.

5NT to ask about kings where it is not clear whether or not partner has the queen of trumps. Responses are as before.

Gerber Convention

This is used to investigate slams exclusively in NT.

Bid 4C to ask how many aces your partner has.

Responses are

4D - 0 or 4 aces

4H - 1 ace

4S - 2 aces

4NT - 3 aces

It is then possible to follow up by bidding the next suit up (excluding NT) to ask about kings. The responses are similar to those above. e.g 4C - 4H - 4S - 4NT shows 1 ace and no kings.

Cue Bids

Where a trump suit has been agreed, it is usually easier to find slams by bidding controls in specific suits than by asking for aces or kings. e.g 1H - 4H - 4S shows a first round control (ace or void) in spades. The partnership can then continue to bid the cheapest control that they haven't already mentioned for as long as is necessary. If you want to sign off, bid trumps. If you want to cue bid trumps, make a NT bid. e.g. 1H - 4H - 4S - 4NT shows the ace of trumps. Be careful here, though. For example, 1D - 3D - 3H is not a cue bid, but an attempt to show a genuine major suit, and avoid playing in 5D. Also 1S - 4S - 4NT is Blackwood. It would only be a cue-bid if cue bidding had already begun.

If you have no more first round controls, but want to keep the bidding alive, you can bid a second round control (King or singleton) in a suit that has already been bid. You can do this even if a first round control in the suit has not already been shown, but beware of making partner think you have something that you haven't got.

You have to keep an open mind with cue bids, and treat every situation on its merits. Use your intelligence in deciding which cue bids will be understood in which way by your partner, and think hard about what he might be holding when he makes a cue bid.

Swiss Bids

See Chapter 1

3) Bids for the contested auction

Overcalls

This is a real hotbed. The main thing to remember is that an overcall shows a strong suit first, and a large number of points second. Really high point counts are best shown with doubles. The exception is a 1NT overcall, which shows 16+ points and stoppers in opponents' suit. Modestly high point counts (13-15) can still be shown with a simple overcall

Jump overcalls

These are always weak and should show a good 6+ card suit and less than opening values.

Take-out doubles

Opening values, and take-out of a major should show 4 of the other major. Jump responses are 12+. In defence, redouble is 10+ denying partner's suit.

Defence to 1NT - Aspro

Where the opposition have opened 1NT, double with 16+ points. With 13-15 points, use the Aspro convention:-

2C - Shows 4-5 distribution or better in hearts and a minor.

2D - Shows 4-5 distribution or better in spades and another suit.

2D over 2C and 2H over 2D are then both weak, and deny 3 cards in partner's major. On the basis of your hand, you think that game is not on, and are looking for a safe haven to play in. These ask partner to bid his cheapest 5 card suit, where you will normally play.

2H over 2C and 2S over 2D are also weak, but show 3 card support for partner's major. The worst that will happen is that you will be playing in a 4-3 fit, and with NT bid against you, things should not break too badly.

2NT shows invitational values, and asks partner to bid his other suit.

3C/D shows invitational values, no support for partner's major, and a single suited hand.

3H/S are invitational to game.

4H/S are shut outs.

Bear in mind when using Aspro whether the opposition are playing strong or weak NT. If they are strong then the opener had 16 points, and game on our side is unlikely. The convention is then competitive. On the other hand, against a weak NT, it should be used with genuine interest in finding a game.

Remember also that simple overcalls of 1NT are also still available.

Sputnik (negative) doubles

Any point-count from around 7-13 showing both the two unbid suits. With more points than this, you should prefer to bid a suit. Play Sputnik doubles up to 3S, and penalty doubles thereafter.

Responsive doubles

Responding to partner's take-out double with another double where RHO agreed his partner's suit shows no particular suit preference for any of the other three, but a desire to continue to contest. They should be used up to 3S. Doubles above this level are for penalties. (except Lightner)

Michael's cue bids

The traditional use in ACOL for an immediate overcall in an opponent's suit is to show a huge hand. Since this doesn't happen very often, Michael's bids are introduced. The idea is to show 2-suited hands, with a variety of values.

Over a minor suit, a cue-bid shows 5-4 or better in the majors and 6 to 11 points. In response, 2NT is natural, and a further cue bid of the same suit (e.g. 1D -2D -3D) asks for the cue-bidder to say which major is longer.

Over a major, a cue bid shows 5-4 or better in the other major and a minor. The point count here is not limited. A response of 2NT now asks for the cue-bidder to show his minor.

Note that cue-bids are only Michael's if your side has not already entered the auction. Otherwise, they are unassuming cue-bids.

Unassuming Cue-bids

Wherever the auction has been contested, a cue bid of one of opponents' suits (the last bid if possible) shows a sound raise to 3 in your partner's suit. These are restricted to the situation where RHO just bid. A normal raise to 3 in partner's suit is then retained for its pre-emptive value only.

e.g 1S - 2C - ?

3C would show a sound 3S bid

3S would be pre-emptive only.

See also competitive doubles and the Truscott 2NT.

Competitive double

These are for use where the Unassuming cue-bid is not available. (e.g where the cue bid is above the normal raise to 3)

e.g 1H - 2C - 2H - ? 3H would be silly!
Double shows the same as an unassuming cue-
bid here.

Note that where an UCB and a competitive double are both available, the UCB should always be used in preference. The double is then Sputnik.

e.g. 1H - 1S - 2H - ? 3H is an UCB, showing a sound 3S.
Double is Sputnik, showing C and D.

Truscott 2NT

If partner opens and RHO doubles, 2NT shows a sound raise to 3 in partner's suit.

Unusual NT

Where a NT bid is particularly unexpected, it shows 5-4 or better in the lowest 2 suits not bid by the opposition. e.g. PASS - 1H - PASS - 2H -
2NT

is unusual, showing both minor suits. Point count should be less than opening values. These can also be useful for finding a good sacrifice.

e.g 1H - 2D - 4H - PASS -
PASS - 4NT

is unusual, asking for a sacrifice in either clubs or diamonds, with a clear preference for diamonds.

Lightner Double

Where opponents are in a slam, a double asks partner for an "unusual" lead. In particular, a lead of a suit that was bid by the dummy.

Defence to Pre-empts (Fishbein)

NT is to play, double is for penalties, and next suit up is for take-out.

e.g. 3D - 3H is asking for take out. Responder can then either bid 3S, 4C or 4D. If he wants to bid hearts, he can either pass or bid 4H depending on his strength.