




This series is all about opening the bidding and responding with 1NT - the catchall response. SA version. Part 1 of 2. Updated winter 2015.

VB#9 Y1 One-level opening bids and the 1NT response	Contract: 1N
Part 1 SA	By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North			
♠ AT963			
♥ KJ8			
♦ A9			
♣ QJ4			
West		East	
♠ KQ4		♠ J752	
♥ 942		♥ AQ5	
♦ QJT63		♦ 875	
♣ 86		♣ A73	
South			
♠ 8			
♥ T763			
♦ K42			
♣ KT952			

In this series (and its cousin, also to be found in this edition of V-Blue) we are looking at the 1NT response to opening bids. This bid, frequently made, is a *jack-of-all-trades* bid, made on many poor responding hands when nothing else presents itself.

It is important to remember that two-level responses in a new suit (such as responding 2♦ to an opening bid of 1♠) promise a minimum of 10 points.

If you don't have the money, you can't buy the goods. So if you have under 10 points you can't afford to respond at the two-level. What can you do? Well, the response of all desperate bridge players is 1NT. This says...

I have 6 to 9 points;

I cannot support your suit;

I have no suit that I can bid cheaply at the one-level.

Hand 1 sets the scene.

West	North	East	South
-	1♠	P	1NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ Q

Bidding.

Partner opens 1♠ as dealer and East Passes. Everyone else at the table is now looking at us to make a call.

Now, it may make us sick to do this with a horrible 1·4·3·5 shape and a miserable 6 points but we simply must bid with that South hand in response. Since we don't have the money needed to bid Clubs at the two-level we have no option but to make the bid of desperate responders everywhere, 1NT.

How many times have bridge players tried to justify Passing an opening bid by saying "I didn't like my hand"? Too bad. We have a partner and he probably doesn't want to play at the one-level in a suit contract with fewer trumps than the defenders.

After the 1NT response North adds up what he can see in front of his face (15 points) to our announced total (6 to 9) and finds it easy to calculate that a part-score is the limit of the deal. With a balanced hand himself (5·3·3·2) it is routine to Pass out 1NT. 2♠ would have been an appalling bid.

Play.

West leads the ♦Q from his five-card suit headed by a sequence and we settle down to **Count** and **Plan**. In No-trumps we count *top tricks* and here we have only three (one Spade and two Diamonds) We need, therefore, four more tricks and the Clubs, missing only the ♣A, should provide. Our concerns are *entries* and *timing*.

We need to keep an entry to the long Clubs in the South hand so the right play is to stick the ♦A on the ♦Q, preserving the ♦K to be used later as access to the Clubs. At trick two we start playing Clubs. On the third Club trick East, having meanly held his Ace back as long as he could, finally takes his ♣A.

Let's focus on East for a moment. He now has to lead something. Only a recently escaped mental patient would lead a Heart and the Spades aren't much more attractive so – sticking to first principles – he returns his

partner's original Diamond lead and we're in with our ♦K. East knows we have the King, of course, his partner's opening lead told him that. Still, there is nothing else for the defense to do.

Again a reminder: It's always wise to pause mid-hand for a recount. We see that we now have all the tricks we need, provided we cash the Club winners now that the lead is in the closed hand for the last time. Once we see that, we employ our **hit and run** strategy, cashing out our sure tricks.

Seven tricks come from one Spade, two Diamonds and four Clubs.

The essential card-play techniques of this deal? Preserve entries and play on the trick-producing suit.



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VB#9 Y1 One-level opening bids and the 1NT response	Contract: 3N
Part 1 SA	By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

<p>North</p> <p>♠ AJ942</p> <p>♥ AJ2</p> <p>♦ A6</p> <p>♣ KQT</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ KQT75</p> <p>♥ KQ98</p> <p>♦ 753</p> <p>♣ 9</p>	
<p>West</p> <p>♠ 63</p> <p>♥ 54</p> <p>♦ JT982</p> <p>♣ A763</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ 8</p> <p>♥ T763</p> <p>♦ KQ4</p> <p>♣ J8542</p>	

Here you have a similar collection to that of Hand 1.

Same bidding? Same result?

Not entirely...

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
P	1♠	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

We have a similar collection to that of Hand 1 – a poor 6 points and a 1·4·3·5 pattern – and don't expect to have much of a role to play in this deal. Just how wrong can you be..?

North opens 1♠ after three Passes and yet again we are obliged to respond 1NT with our tatty hand. What alternative do we have? Passing would only force partner to toil away in an unpromising one-level contract and we simply aren't well enough endowed with high cards to respond at the two-level.

North raises us to 3NT, so we know that at least someone around the table has a decent hand...

Play.

West leads the ♦J, from his long suit headed by a sequence, against 3NT and we **count** our *top tricks*. Here we have just five on top (one Spade, one Heart and three Diamonds) so need four extras. Our source of tricks is, of course, Clubs so that is the suit we need to play on – and we need to do so at once.

It is important to take the ♦A at trick one (yet another example of *play the high cards from the short suit first*) and then we must play on Clubs. With the previous "rule" still in mind we must lead the ♣K first, then the ♣Q and finally the ♣10. West stubbornly refuses to take his ♣A early and we must be alert enough to overtake the ♣10 with our own ♣J.

We can afford to do this because East dropped the ♣9 on the first round of the suit, giving the ♣8 heightened status.


West takes his ♣A finally and plays another Diamond. Well, we can see the finishing line and should sprint for it. We take the ♦Q, cash the remaining Club winners and take the ♦K as well.

The two Aces remaining in dummy make up the total of nine tricks and we score our game.



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VB#9 Y1 One-level opening bids and the 1NT response	Contract: 2D
Part 1 SA	By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North			
♠ K43			
♥ K65			
♦ 752			
♣ Q753			
West		East	
♠ JT98		♠ Q6	
♥ Q8742		♥ T93	
♦ K		♦ A84	
♣ KT4		♣ AJ962	
South			
♠ A752			
♥ AJ			
♦ QJT963			
♣ 8			

When partner makes a 1NT response to your opening bid he is making a **limit bid**.

You (the opener) are now the one who has to pick the spot to play in.

What contract do you want to play in here?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♦
P	1NT	P	2♦
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ J

Bidding.

We open 1♦ and partner responds 1NT. What do we know? Well, North is showing 6 to 9 points and (in principle) a balanced hand. Partner would also show a four-card major in preference to a response of 1NT so we know that our side has no eight-card Spade fit.

We can deduce that the combined point-count is 18 to 21 (obtained by adding up our 12 points to partner's announced 6 to 9) so we can see immediately that game is out of the question. A part-score is the best we can hope for and, with our unbalanced hand, that part-score ought to be in Diamonds.

So we rebid 2♦ (a **sign-off**; partner is not supposed or expected to bid again) and everybody Passes.

Play.

Dummy is as advertised – a balanced hand with 8 points.

[Note. Partner doesn't have to be balanced (we have seen two examples already of reluctant 1NT responses in Hands 1 and 2). However, over a 1♦ opening bid a 1NT response denies four Spades and four Hearts. With that proviso it is that much more likely to advertise a balanced hand than over an opening bid of 1♠].

In a suit contract we ought to count winners and losers.

Counting losers we see two Spades (unless the suit breaks 3-3), two Hearts and a Club. That's four or five losers.

Counting winners we see two Spades (maybe three), two Hearts and four (slow) Diamonds. There are eight tricks, maybe nine on a 3-3 Spade split, so the contract ought to make easily enough. The best play when we can see sufficient tricks is, naturally, to **draw trumps**.

So we win the Spade lead (actually with the ♠K on table, although it doesn't matter) and play a Diamond. West gets the temporary pleasure of

winning a trick with his singleton King and plugs away in Spades.

[By the way – can you see what horrible defense it would have been for East to blunder in with his Ace of trumps on the first round? What would West have said then, do you think?]

We take the ♠A and continue with trumps, driving out the ♦A. East gets off lead with a Heart, which we win on table with the King to pull the last trump. We'd make an extra trick if Spades broke 3-3 but they don't oblige so we have to lose two Spades and a Club in the fullness of time.


No matter, overtricks at 20 points a go are of little account. As calculated earlier we make two Spades, two Hearts and four trumps for a total of eight tricks.

2♦ bid and made.



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VB#9 Y1 One-level opening bids and the 1NT response	Contract: 3N
Part 1 SA	By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North			
♠ AKJ			
♥ AJ743			
♦ J95			
♣ KJ			
West		East	
♠ T9863		♠ 742	
♥ Q6		♥ KT95	
♦ K6		♦ QT83	
♣ A642		♣ 73	
South			
♠ Q5			
♥ 82			
♦ A742			
♣ QT985			

A 1NT response shows a poor hand – 6 to 9 points.

However, how poor is poor? There is a big difference between a minimum 6 points and a maximum 9 points...

West	North	East	South
P	1♥	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ T

Bidding.

Partner opens 1♥ and we are obliged to reply 1NT. True, we aren't classically balanced (being 2·2·4·5) but then we didn't have a balanced hand to respond 1NT on Hands 1 or 2 either. With only 8 points we don't have the goodies to bid at the two-level and we have to bid something, so 1NT it is.

Partner now raises us to 2NT and we have to reassess our modest collection. Partner is inviting us to bid game, knowing that we have a modest 6 to 9 points.

Well, when partner passes the buck in such a manner it's useful to ask ourselves how much worse our hand might have been. We have shown 6 to 9 points and could have had as few as 6 points. Here we have 8 points and a potentially useful five-card suit to boot. Given that we are far from minimum we decide to advance to game.

Play.

Dummy is about what we might expect – a balanced 18 points. North lacks the values to bid game himself (and his long suit lacks any sort of playing strength) but he certainly has enough to issue an invitation. We should expect something in the region of 17 to 18 points to raise a 1NT response to 2NT.

Anyway – the auction's over and the contract is set in stone. West leads the ♠10 and it's time to make a **Plan**. Where are the tricks coming from? The obligatory **Count** shows there to be just five *top tricks* (three Spades, one Heart and one Diamond).

That's a shortfall of four tricks but they can be harvested from Clubs. We take the Spade in lead in dummy (we may need an entry to hand later so it's good technique to take the ♠K first) and play the ♣K. The tiresome opponents refuse to take the ♣A so we persist with the ♣J. Now, with this combination, it is the right play to overtake that with the ♣Q – we can afford to do this because of the power of the ♣Q 10 9 8.


That forces the ♣A and West persists with Spades. Winning this one in hand with the ♠Q we cash out the Clubs and then it's just a matter of good housekeeping – tidying up the remaining winners to make nine tricks.

Nine tricks come from three Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and four Clubs.



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VB#9 Y1 One-level opening bids and the 1NT response	Contract: 1N
Part 1 SA	By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North		East	
♠ KT4		♠ 72	
♥ A9753		♥ KJ86	
♦ AJ6		♦ QT98	
♣ JT		♣ A76	
West		East	
♠ AJ865		♠ 72	
♥ QT2		♥ KJ86	
♦ 53		♦ QT98	
♣ K42		♣ A76	
South			
♠ Q93			
♥ 4			
♦ K742			
♣ Q9853			

When you respond 1NT to an opening bid the final contract could be just about anything.

It might even remain in 1NT.

West	North	East	South
-	1♥	P	1NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ 6

Bidding.

This is short and sweet. Partner opens 1♥ and our clear-cut 1NT response (what else?) ends the auction, partner dropping the bidding like a hot potato.

We might not like bidding 1NT with a singleton Heart but there is simply no alternative.

Play.

West leads his fourth highest Spade and we should see that the **split tenace** in the suit gives us a certain two tricks in Spades, regardless of the location of the ♠A and the ♠J. As the cards lie we are allowed to win trick one cheaply with the ♠9 and should immediately set about our long suit – Clubs.

A Club to dummy's ♠10 is taken by East who plays back a Spade to his partner. West clears the Spades, setting up two winners for himself. We continue with the ♣J and make sure we **overtake** it in hand (it would be most inconvenient if the ♣J were allowed to hold the trick – what would we do next?) and West takes his ♣K.

West takes his two long Spades while we patiently chuck some trash away (Hearts from table, Diamonds from hand) and West now shifts to a Heart.

That's game over. We take the ♥A, come to hand with the ♦K and cash our long Clubs. The ♦A takes our eighth trick.

That's 1NT made with an overtrick.



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VB#9 Y1 One-level opening bids and the 1NT response	Contract: 4S
Part 1 SA	By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North	
♠ 3	
♥ J952	
♦ Q763	
♣ K972	
West	East
♠ 74	♠ A652
♥ K84	♥ AT6
♦ JT98	♦ 42
♣ J843	♣ QT65
South	
♠ KQJT98	
♥ Q73	
♦ AK5	
♣ A	

When you have a good hand and partner responds 1NT you have to be the one who takes control.

What contract do you want to play here?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	1NT	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

We open 1♠ (with a maximum hand for a one-level opening bid) and partner dredges up a 1NT response. What now?

Well, with 19 points and a robust suit we simply have to take a shot at game. 3NT doesn't appeal with our hand pattern (6-3-3-1) so we try 4♠. (Note, in passing, that a jump to 3♠ would be invitational – with a minimum 1NT response partner would Pass).

Play.

West leads the ♦J and we see a pretty poor dummy, a 1-4-4-4 hand with a mere 6 points. Still, what else could the poor guy do but respond 1NT? Pass 1♠? That's not the way to make friends and influence people...

Anyway, the play's the thing. We can count five Spades, three Diamonds and two Clubs for ten winners. We only have three losers (one Spade and two Hearts). The danger to the hand is that the defense can obtain either a Diamond ruff or a Heart ruff.

There is little we can do to counteract this threat – all we can do is attempt to **draw trumps** as quickly as possible and hope that the defenders might go wrong if there is a possible adverse ruff.

We take the Diamond lead in hand (the ♦Q is needed on table as an entry for later) and immediately lead a trump. East takes his ♠A and – to our relief – plays back a second Diamond. We take this in hand (we must retain that ♦Q in dummy!) and draw all of the remaining trumps.

Now we unblock the ♣A, cross to the carefully preserved ♦Q and cash the ♠K, pitching a Heart. We make five Spades, three Diamonds and two Clubs.

As the cards lie, Hearts are 3-3 so there was never a possibility of a defensive Heart ruff. Had Hearts been 4-2, though, East-West could have defeated 4♠.

