

EGCC Bidding Balanced Hands

What is Balanced?

Hands are balanced or unbalanced based on their shape. **Balanced** hands have shape 4333, 4432 or 5332 (the suits are irrelevant). Any other shape is **Unbalanced**.

Bidding Approach

With a balanced hand you want to aim to bid No Trumps – either immediately or as your second bid.

Points	Bid
12-14	Open 1NT
15-16	Bid longest suit, rebid NT at the lowest possible level
17-18	Bid longest suit, rebid 2NT
19+	Bid longest suit, rebid 2NT

Bidding longest suit: If you have two longest suits (they must be 4 card suits), pick the Major (♠, ♥) over the Minor (♦, ♣). If they are both majors or both minors, pick the lower ranking one (♥ or ♣).

Of course you may not get to rebid NT. If you open 1H, intending to rebid NT, and you partner bids 2H, then you have found your fit.

5 Card Majors

Because major fits are important, there is a special rule for 5332 hands with 12-14 points a 5 card major.

If you have 12-14 points, are 5332 with your 5 card suit being ♠ or ♥, open 1 of your major, and after that follow the bidding rules for an unbalanced hand.

Responding to Partner's Opening 1NT

Raises

The rules about points needed for game are the same in NT: 25+.

Points	Bid	Why
13+	3NT	Even if partner has the minimum (12) you still have enough for game.
11-12	2NT	If partner has 14 or a good 13, you have enough for game, so "invite"
10	Pass/Takeout	If there is a better contract than 1NT then bid it, otherwise pass.

Weak Takeouts

If you are weak (<6 points) then 1NT may not play well as you have less than half the points. If you have a 5 card suit you are guaranteed 7 in the suit between you (partner is balanced and so has at least 2

cards in each suit). Experience has shown that playing at the 2 level in a suit when you have 7 cards in the suit plays better than 1NT when weak. And of course partner could have more than 2 in your suit – maybe as many as five (although they do usually have just 2!)

So if you have <6 points and a 5 (or more) card suit, bid 2 of that suit.

Strong Hand, Long Suit

Occasionally you may have a hand that has quite a few points and a long suit - 6 or more cards. Bid the appropriate number of that suit, based on the combined point count.

Stayman and Transfers

You may have heard of these – they are called conventions and are used after a 1NT opening bid. A convention is where a bid does not show the suit bid (or not just that suit) – for example a conventional 2C bid would not show clubs.

Conventional bids are hard to understand when first learning to bid, so we will leave them for later.

Opener's Next Bid (after opening 1NT)

If partner has bid 2NT, raised to 3 with 13 or 14 points.

If partner has bid a suit at the 3 level, raised to 4 if you have 13 to 14 points, otherwise pass.

If partner has bid a suit at the 2 level (weak takeout), then pass.

Opener's Next Bid (after opening 1 of a suit, intending to rebid NT)

If partner has raised your suit you have a fit. Bid accordingly (as for unbalanced hands)

If partner has bid a suit you also have 4 cards in, you have a fit. Bid accordingly.

If neither, make your originally intended NT rebid.

Some Examples (showing only NS bids - EW pass throughout)

Simple Raises

Consider these hands:

North	South
♠ AKJ53	♠ Q974
♥ QT8	♥ A732
♦ KQ5	♦ 963
♣ Q4	♣ KT

Bidding:

N	S
1♠	2♠
3♠	4♠

The 1♠ bid shows 4+ spades and 12+ points.

The 2♠ bid shows 4+ spades and 6-9 points. Both players now know they have a fit (8+ cards) in spades, so the denomination is agreed.

The 3♠ bid shows 16-18 points ("Partner we have enough points for game if you are at the top of your range of 6-9")

The 4♠ bid shows 8-9 points ("Yes partner I am at the top of my range")

Compare this to:

North	South
♠ AKJ53	♠ Q974
♥ QT8	♥ A732
♦ KQ5	♦ 963
♣ Q4	♣ 32

Bidding:

N	S
1♠	2♠
3♠	Pass

Where South's pass says "Sorry partner I have 7 or less points so we do not have enough for game"

And:

North	South
♠ AKJ53	♠ Q974
♥ QT8	♥ A732
♦ Q75	♦ 963
♣ Q4	♣ K3

Bidding:

N	S
1♠	2♠
Pass	

Where North's pass says "Sorry partner I only have 12-15 points so even if you are maximum for your bid we do not have enough for game".

Change of suit responses

North	South
♠ QT2	♠ Q974
♥ AKJ53	♥ 963
♦ 5	♦ A732
♣ QJT4	♣ K3

Bidding:

N	S
1♥	1♠
2♣	...?

The 1♥ bid shows 4+ Hearts and 12+ points.

The 1♠ bid shows a 4+ spades, 6+ points, and denies having 4 hearts (otherwise South would have raised hearts). This bid is forcing (A bid of a different suit in response to an opening bid) - North cannot pass. The reason it is forcing is that South's bid is unlimited - he could have 28 points!

The 2♣ bid shows a hand with 12-15 points, 5+ hearts, 4+ clubs and denies having 4 spades. Can you see why?

Firstly, a bid of a second suit shows at least 4 cards in that suit and 5+ in the first suit, so North must have 5+ hearts and 4+ clubs. If North had 4+ spades he would have raised spades - bidding 2♠ or 3♠ according to his point count. Finally, if he had 16+ points he would have bid higher - probably 3♣.

What should South bid next?

You can see from this example how much information you can get about partner's hand from just a few bids.