



Hamilton Bridge Centre

100 Ray Street North, Hamilton ON
L8R 2X9 905-777-1465

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Minor Suit Raises

How to raise partner's minor suit with poor, fair, and good hands.



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Introduction

This article discusses methods used to raise partner's minor suit opening bid (i.e., an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦) with the following types of hands:

- **Poor:** Five to nine points.
- **Fair to Good:** Nine or more points.

Unlike [major suit raises](#), there is no distinction between fair and good hands. The reason is that in most cases, you aren't looking to play in a minor suit fit: instead, you are looking to play in notrump (particularly at matchpoints). For that reason, minor suit raises are geared towards determining if notrump is a playable contract.

Note: Never raise partner's minor suit opening if there is any potential for a major suit fit. In other words, when responding to partner's minor suit opening, always respond in a four card or longer major first, before showing any support for the minor suit.

Warning: The system described in this article uses "inverted minor raises", which must be alerted.

Note: When raising partner's minor suit opening bid, be sure to add points for short suits (see [Counting For Short Suits](#)).

Minor Suit Openings

Before discussing minor suit raises, let's spend a bit of time discussing minor suit openings, since these often cause problems for newer players. Here are some guidelines:

1. Never open in a minor suit with a five card or longer major, regardless of how weak the major suit might be.
2. When holding three cards in each minor, open 1♣.
3. When holding one four card minor and one three card minor, open in the four card minor.
4. When holding two four card minors, open 1♦ and rebid either 1NT or 2♣.
5. When holding five diamonds and four clubs, open 1♦ and rebid 2♣.
6. When holding four diamonds and five clubs, **open 1♦ and rebid 2♣** unless your hand is strong enough to reverse (see the article on [Reverses](#) for more information).
7. **Never open a "short club"** (i.e., opening 1♣ with fewer than three clubs). Although this is a treatment that many players use, they aren't players who win very often. It's a very poor treatment, and you will do best to avoid it (and to avoid potential partners who want to use it).

Rebidding Minor Suits

Players are taught that as a general rule, they should not rebid a **major suit** that they have opened unless they hold six cards or more.

The same rule applies to minor suits. If you open 1♣ or 1♦, do not rebid your minor unless you hold at least six cards (there are some exceptions which will be shown later).

Poor Hands

When partner opens 1♣ or 1♦, raise partner's suit to the **three** level with a poor hand that has at least **four** card trump support and no major suit that has four cards or more. **This raise must be alerted as showing a weak hand with trump support.**

Raise even if your right-hand opponent has made a takeout double or an overcall.

Bypassing A Diamond Suit

When partner opens 1♣, it is generally acceptable to bypass a four (or even five) card diamond suit when responding with a weak hand. Your initial response should be either 1NT (showing 6 to 9 points) or a preemptive raise of partner's minor suit opening if you have at least four card support.

Why Raise To The Three Level With A Poor Hand?

When raising a major suit opening, you raise to the two level with a poor hand. Why raise a minor suit opening to the three level with a poor hand? The reason is that no reasonable opponents will allow you to play a minor suit contract at the two level.

The opponents should (almost) always make a balancing bid, and will probably find a major suit fit at the two level themselves. Since you don't want the opponents playing at the two level, make the jump raise with a weak hand as a "preemptive" raise. The opponents may still find major suit fit at the three level, but it's okay to let them play there.

Why Raise With Only Four Card Support?

New players are almost always told to never raise a minor suit opening without five card support, since opener may have only a three card suit.

While opener may very well have only three cards in his suit, the odds overwhelmingly favour opener having at least four. Opener will have at least four clubs for a 1♣ opening about 85% of the time, and will have at least four diamonds for a 1♦ opening about 97% of the time. Waiting for five card support before raising will result in many bad results for your side.

What Does Opener Do After Your Weak Jump Raise?

Unless opener has an exceptional hand, he should pass your weak jump raise. If the opponents wish to compete, let them. Opener should not continue bidding without significant extra strength or good distribution.

Example 1

Partner opens 1♣, and you hold the following hand:

♠ 10 7
♥ 10 9 2
♦ K 9 7 5
♣ A 8 6 3

Raise to 3♣, even if your right-hand opponent intervenes with a takeout double or an overcall. Note that you are bypassing a four card diamond suit because you have a weak hand.

Example 2

Partner opens 1♣, and you hold the following hand:

♠ Q 10 6
♥ A 9
♦ 10 9 7 5
♣ 8 6 4 2

With this hand, a 1NT response is better than a raise to 3♣ even with four card support, since your points are outside the club suit. With one more club and one less spade, a response of 3♣ would be better. Note that again you are bypassing a four card diamond suit.

Example 3

Partner opens 1♣, and you hold the following hand:

♠ 10 9 7 6
♥ A 2
♦ 10 8 5
♣ K 10 8 6

Respond 1♠, even though the suit is weak and you have club support. Finding a major suit fit takes precedence over raising a minor suit. While you usually bypass a diamond response with a weak hand (if you have a suitable alternative), you never bypass a major suit.

Fair To Good Hands

When partner opens 1♣ or 1♦ and you hold a fair to good hand (generally 9+ points), you will either invite or force to game depending upon your strength (and opener's rebid).

At this point the difference between major suit raises and minor suit raises becomes important. When you have a fit with your partner in a major suit, the bidding is fairly simple. You either invite game or force to game in the major, without worrying about notrump. When you have a fit with your partner in a minor suit, the bidding is more complex. You should always prefer notrump to a minor suit contract (particularly at the game level), so your bidding system needs to investigate whether notrump is suitable or not.

To raise with a fair to good hand, start with a **single raise** of opener's minor (in other words, raise a 1♣ opening to 2♣, and a 1♦ opening to 2♦. This raise promises 9+ points, at least four card support, and **denies a four card or longer major**.

This raise is **forcing for one round**.

Raise even if your right-hand opponent has made a takeout double or an overcall.

This single raise showing a fair to good hand must be alerted.

Example 4

Partner opens 1♣, and you hold the following hand:

♠ K 10
♥ 9 8 3
♦ A 9 7 3
♣ A 10 8 6

Raise to 2♣. You will play notrump if partner shows a heart stopper, otherwise you will play in clubs. You can bypass the four card diamond suit with this hand because the investigation of a notrump contract takes precedence.

Example 5

Partner opens 1♣, and you hold the following hand:

♠ 7
♥ A K 8
♦ 10 9 7 3
♣ K 9 8 6 5

With this hand a 1♦ response is probably best. Notrump is unlikely to be satisfactory when you hold a singleton spade and partner can have no more than four. If partner rebids 1♥, you can raise to 2♥ (you have only three hearts, but they are certainly good enough for a raise). If partner rebids 1♠, you can rebid 2♣.

Example 6

Partner opens 1♣, and you hold the following hand:

♠ K 10 8 7
♥ 9 8
♦ A 9
♣ K 9 7 3 2

Respond 1♠, looking for a major suit fit, even though you have club support. If partner does not have spade support, raise clubs on the next round of bidding.

Opener's Rebid After A Single Raise

When you make a single raise of opener's minor suit opening, you are telling your partner that you have a fair to good hand (9+ points) with at least four card support for opener's suit. However, you are also telling opener that you wish to investigate notrump.

Opener cooperates in this investigation by bidding **major suit stoppers** if he has them. With a minimum opening bid, opener bids 2♥ to show a heart stopper, 2♠ to show a spade stopper, and 2NT holding stoppers in both majors. **These bids must be alerted as showing stoppers, not real suits.**

If opener has no major suit stoppers, he rebids his suit at the three level. **This is the exception to the rule about rebidding minor suits holding less than six.**

Opener may bid 3NT directly over the single raise holding a good hand (16+ points) and stoppers in both majors.

The other minor suit gets "left behind" in this system. There is no way to guarantee a stopper in the unbid minor suit.

Responder's Continuation

This is largely a matter of common sense. If both major suits are adequately stopped, responder bids 2NT

(holding 9 to 12 points) or 3NT (holding 12 points or more). If there is a missing major suit stopper, responder returns to opener's original minor.

If opener has rebid 2NT showing stoppers in both majors, responder passes with 9 to 12 points since the best contract has already been reached.

Minor Suit Games

Minor suit games usually require a combined point count of 29 to 31, since they must be bid at the five level. The extra points are needed to provide reasonable assurance of taking eleven tricks. Minor suit games may be bid with fewer points if the hands have distributional features that allow extra ruffing tricks.

Conclusion

With a poor hand, you raise partner's minor suit opening preemptively to the three level. After this preemptive raise, neither you nor your partner should normally continue bidding if the opponents decide to compete.

With fair to good hands, you make a single raise of opener's suit to allow additional bidding room to investigate a possible notrump contract.

Under no circumstances do you bypass responding in a four card major opposite a minor suit opening. However, it is normally a good idea to bypass a four card diamond suit if you hold a weak hand or the investigation of a notrump contract takes precedence.

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