

## 1.3

### OPEN WITH LESS THAN 13 POINTS

(25-06-23)

The answer is categorical: **NO, regardless of the player's position**, unless the suit is a Specified fifth suit with 12 HL points!

#### PRINCIPLE 1.3:1 THE MINIMUM CONDITIONS FOR OPENING AND OPENING OVERBIDDING

**You should never declare at the Level 1 an Opening or an Opening Overbid with *anonymous* suit worth less than 13 points.**

**Corollary: When the Complement is present, a hand with 11 HL is actually worth 12 points; therefore, in the presence of a Specified fifth suit, it is technically correct to open. This is why you should note on the alert sheet that you occasionally Standard open with 11 HL points.**

This principle is fundamental to developing a rational system. There can be no exceptions, even if this seems inconceivable to many players. There is indeed a buffer zone where it is permissible to lower a point to open the bidding or make an opening overbid, however, this is done under very specific conditions.

In fact, there are three categories of contexts where it is possible to open or overbid to a suit with a hand containing less than 13 points. These are not strictly speaking exceptions, but rather specific contexts that are objectifiable and where the conditions for opening are logically and specifically adapted.

Here are the statements of these three groups of situations.

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There are therefore three contexts where it is possible to hold slightly less than the 13 HL points required to declare a First Bid. These are:

- Opening/Overbid where the presence of a specified fifth suit compensates for the missing point;
- Opening by courtesy (See *Theme 1.3.1*);
- Weak Openings at Level 2 and barrages.

These three general contexts are therefore not exceptions, as there are specific and logical conditions associated with them that must be met.

Based on the above observation, we can now establish absolute certainty regarding the conditions for Openings and Overbids.

It is **NEVER PERMITTED TO OPEN AT LEVEL 1 WITH A HAND OF 11 POINTS**, even if this hand contains a chicane or a very good fifth suit. These conditions are those of an opening in color overbid after having previously passed.

In summary, these three groups of contexts have one thing in common: a specified suit with a minimum length of 5 cards is required. In the case of a polite opening situation, a robust suit is acceptable if desired, but there must absolutely be 12 HL (including the complement).

Some seasoned players will be surprised by this absolute prohibition on opening or overbidding in the Standard manner with a 12-point hand containing an unspecified suit, as well as with an 11-point hand (including the complement, if applicable) with a fifth suit.

But "regular" players will finally be relieved to see that it is possible to bring some order to this point. It is essential to agree on this matter. Otherwise, it is impossible to construct anything logical if the basic premises are "elastic" and imprecise. You've probably figured out that, in order to avoid opening at level 1 with hands that score below 13 points, it's necessary to use a specific convention called "Specified suit."

From a pedagogical point of view, it's essential that teaching be identical for all types of players and all styles. It's unthinkable to teach differently to a beginner under the pretext that "it's for his own good"; or to teach with "for now" or "you will learn later that...".

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Or, try to categorize the different rules, conventions, and principles according to performance level; such as: "*use if you are a beginner*," "*for advanced players only*," "*if you like to play hard and your partner is cautious*" ...

The teaching approach used structures all the knowledge presented into a coherent system of thought. This is the only way to develop your judgment and self-criticism. Thus, intellectual rigor will subsequently allow you to reap the rewards of your efforts.

With this in mind, the concept of SPECIFIED COLOR must be incorporated without delay, regardless of the system you are currently using.

The first case where this concept can be used is the following. Look at the following two hands.

**Ex. 1.3:1 What do you declare in opening position with each of these hands?**

a)      K 10  
         J 8 6 5 2  
         A Q 4  
         J 9 8

b)      K 10  
         A Q 6 5 2  
         J 8 4  
         J 9 8

These two hands are worth 12 points. At level 1, suit strength is not taken into account; the suit is considered anonymous. However, in certain situations, the hand may have valuable potential and deserve special attention.

To open at level 1 with 12 points, instead of 13 points, it is absolutely necessary to hold a 5-card suit with 2 of the 3 GH (Great Honors). If these three requirements are not met at least, then it is mandatory to fold in example **a)**.

Hand **b)** can, however, open the bidding with **1 Heart**.

The following principle follows:

## PRINCIPLE 1.3:2 OPENING HAND WITH A SPECIFIED COLOR

**A hand containing 12 HL points and a specified suit at least fifth, or equivalent, is suitable for being declared by a Level 1 Suit Opening (or a Standard Level) OR Opening Overbid at the level 1 or 2 without a jump .**

**Corollary: It is therefore not recommended to open at Level 1 with a suit or to make an Opening Overbid with a hand of 11 HL points (including the presence of a Complement, if applicable), EVEN IF THERE IS A SPECIFIED SUIT AND A CHICANE.**

**However, such hands may be declared by a Level 2 Weak Opening if they meet the requirements; otherwise, they must be *Passed* and possibly re-declared in the second round of bidding by a Second-Round Opening Overbid.**

**Ex. 1.3:2**

K J 5  
K Q 9 6 2  
K 10 6  
K 9

There are **12** points, but the ***heart* suit is Specified color**, so the bidding must open with **1 heart** even if this hand does not have the required 13 points; there is a surplus to compensate for the missing point even if there is no heart fit.

Indeed, a Specified suit is as useful for trump as it is for no trump.

**Ex. 1.3:3**

<p><b>a)</b>     5          K Q 10 6 2          K Q 9 6 2          9 4</p>	<p><b>b)</b>     5          K Q 10 6 2          K J 9 6 2          9 4</p>
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Hand **a)** has 10 PH and 2 HL, or 12 points and two fifth suits, so the bidding must open with 1 heart because there is (at least) one specified suit. Hand **b)**, on the other hand, contains only 11 points. It would be tempting to bid a 1-heart opening, as one might think that holding a singleton and two fifth suits, of which a specified sequence is worth well a surplus.

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It's this kind of simplifying reasoning that forever muddys the waters for developing a logical and methodical game. Here's why.

In this common example, there are several dangers. Mainly the risk of not finding a fit with partner and the insufficient score of 2 points (which greatly reduces effectiveness even if there is a fit). In short, in example **a)**, the lack of a fit, the strength of the suit will more than compensate for the missing point. Whereas in **b)**, in the absence of a fit, the lack of **2** points, a singleton, and the presence of only one good suit makes opening with such a hand much more risky. Note that the presence of the 8 of Diamonds and another small Honor would have added 1 Honor point, the Complement, which would provide the necessary boost to open.

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The STANDARD INTERNATIONAL BRIDGE system therefore recommends **always opening with 13 points**, but you must note on your alert sheet (or warn others at the start of the game) that the opening can occasionally be declared with 11 or 12 points; this is because the concept of the **Complement** and the **Specified color** are not taken into account on the alert sheet.

One last point on this subject for beginners. It is not forbidden to open with 14 points, but the test of time has empirically demonstrated that opening with 13 points is the best starting point for the bidding dialogue.

So, even though it may happen that you get a poor score against a team playing excessively cautiously, you must continue to follow the opening recommendations developed by the Standard system and its extension, the Standard International Bridge, which you are taught.

It is important to realize and understand that the precision in hand categorization according to the Standard system is on the order of plus or minus half a point. Therefore, a 1-point error from the start can have disastrous consequences on the performance of the dialogue used via bid declarations.

### PRACTICE SECTION 1.3

**Ex. 1.3:4** You are in first position to bid. What do you declare with each of the following hands?

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>a)</b>    K 9<br/>      A 8 5<br/>      K Q 2<br/>      10 7 6 5 2</p> | <p><b>b)</b>    K Q 8<br/>      V<br/>      K Q 10 9<br/>      10 7 6 5 2</p> | <p><b>c)</b>    K 9<br/>      V 8 5<br/>      K Q 9 6 5<br/>      Q 10 7</p>  |
| <p><b>d)</b>    K 9<br/>      5<br/>      J 8 4 2<br/>      K Q 8 7 6 5</p>  | <p><b>e)</b>    A 9<br/>      K 9 8 7 6 5<br/>      Q 8 4 2<br/>      V</p>   | <p><b>f)</b>    10 2<br/>      K J 8 7 2<br/>      K Q 10 9 8<br/>      7</p> |

**ANSWERS:**

- a) 1 Club:** 12 PH + 1 PL, there are 13 HL points and no fifth suit in the major, the best of the minors must be chosen.
- b) Pass:** 11 PH + 1 PL, the Club suit is anonymous and weak; If the hand had 1 more point, it would be necessary to open with *1 Diamond* in order to be able to rebid with 2 *Clubs* in the next round, possibly to describe a two-suited hand with between 13 and 17 points; in this case, this hand is a little too weak to enter the bidding battle head-on.
- c) 1 Diamond:** 11 PH + 1 PL; there are 12 points and a fifth suit specified in Diamond, which allows opening the bidding with a hand not having 13 PH points. The Diamond suit allows for an acceptable fit, otherwise this hand still has good value for playing No-Trump. Losing points should not be taken into account when evaluating a Standard Opening hand, that is, a hand that can open the bidding at level 1 or make an Opening Overbid without a first-round jump to the suit.

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- d) **Pass:** 9 PH + 2 PL; it would be dangerous to open the bidding with *1 Club* without letting partner and the other players speak; the suit is holed and, in the absence of a fit, the hand is not strong enough to regain control of the game; however, after listening to the first-round bids, this hand may very well demonstrate very interesting competitive potential. A weak Opening with *2 Clubs* is prohibited for reasons you will see later.
- e) **1 Heart:** 10 PH + 2 PL; the Heart suit has 1 high honor and 1 low honor (the 9 with the 8) and a sixth card, making it a specified fifth suit of Equivalent; one should not open or preempt with a similar hand because the suit is not strong enough and there are too many points to consider it a weak Opening.
- f) **1 Heart:** 10 PH, including 1 PH from the "Complement" and 2 PL; there is at least one specified fifth suit. It is recommended to open even if the suit to be bid is different from the one specified.

**Ex. 1.3:5** You are in third position and the bidding is not open. What do you declare with each of the following hands?

	1	2	3	4
	Pass	Pass	You	...
a)	Q 9 K 9 7 5 4 A 2 Q 10 7 6	b) K Q J 8 7 — J 10 9 4 2 Q 6 5	c) K 10 8 6 5 4 9 8 5 K Q Q 10	d) Q 10 9 J 4 K Q 9 8 K J 6 5

**ANSWERS:**

- a) **Pass:** 11 PH + 1 LP, the suit is anonymous. Announcing an opening bid with the expectation of "harming" your opponent in fourth position would, on the contrary, only help him. Indeed, he may very well have a good hand, and your irrelevant opening to Hearts would allow him to make an informed decision that could, possibly, be an "indirect" Double or a calling Double.

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- b) Pass:** 9 PH + 2 PL. It would be tempting to bid *1 Spade*, but there is less than half the chance of finding a fit in this suit, and it would be dangerous to eventually play No Trump due to the chicane and the low score of the hand. You should *Pass* in the first round with this type of double-edged hand. However, in the second round, whether your partner has bid or not, this type of hand can be described very effectively and produce excellent contracts because a declaration at this point clearly states that playing No Trump is out of the question.
- c) 1 Spade:** 10 PH + 2 PL. The score reaches the "limit" zone for a Standard opening. The Spade suit is ***Equivalent*** to a ***Specified fifth suit***, so this hand can open the bidding. It is especially important not to make a Weak Opening at level 2, as this describes the hand less well than a Standard opening.
- d) Pass or 1 Diamond:** 12 PH + 1 additional PH due to the presence of the "Complement" (there are 4 low Honors and the Queen of Diamonds, which is half-losing). This hand is therefore worth 13 points. Here we can see the relevance of the Complement and its versatility. It can "work" just as well with balanced hands as with very unbalanced hands. It truly proves that there is additional quantitative power in a hand and that this is independent of the final nature of the contract; hence its name, Complement.



### 1.3.1 POLITE OPENING

We must avoid the trap of lowering opening criteria in order to bid a hand containing between 10 and 12 points at all costs, believing that the disadvantages will be offset by the fact that opponents will have more difficulty describing their respective hands and thus finding a fit and a possible contract.

This way of thinking has **three negative consequences**.

First, and the worst consequence, this way of reasoning **CAUSES ALL SUBSEQUENT BIDS TO LOSE ALL ACCURACY**.

The second consequence of this habit of bidding at random is that it makes it easier for opponents to play the hand if they win the contract, because this opening bid will have revealed the score and suit held by one of the two defenders of the contract.

The third and most surprising consequence is that an unexpected and inadequate opening generally **does not cause any significant obstruction**, and often has the opposite effect. That is, an *"insignificant" opponent's opening very often allows opponents to **discover a fit** that would otherwise have been almost **impossible for them to find***.

Indeed, the International Standard Bridge communication system allows for the efficient and very precise description of the majority of interesting hands that do not meet the opening criteria, precisely by using the "reference points" made possible by talkative opponents, namely Doubles and Cue-Bids.

In **third** position, one must particularly avoid opening the auction with a hand that does not meet the opening criteria. One must be absolutely convinced that it is never justified to declare a polite opening in third position. This tactic is more of an excuse for those who like to play Captain.

On the other hand, in fourth position, when the three preceding players have passed, there is the certainty that no other player can hold more than 13 points.

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Then, and only then, does it become acceptable to open with 1 point less, no more. This is simply and truly a matter of courtesy, and is not mandatory.

You shouldn't get into the habit of opening with an 11-point hand. Of course, you must take into account the possession of the Complement, which gives you 1 point; and the presence of a Specified fifth suit (or Equivalent), which grants a "lowering" of 1 point (this is a nuance to avoid saying that this automatically adds a point because it would desynchronize the scoring categories).

The context is therefore very simple.

**PRINCIPLE 1.3.1:1 THE POLITE OPENING: THE CONTEXT**

**This opening can be announced exclusively in Fourth Position after the other three players have declared *Pass*.**

Here are the requirements recommended for politeness and which should not be lowered further.

**PRINCIPLE 1.3.1:2 POLITE OPENING: MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS**

**A) With 12 points, it is preferable to possess a *robust suit*, either:**

- a suit of at least a fifth, major or minor, with 1 GH and 1 PH;
- or
- a Specified minor fourth suit, i.e., with 2 GH.

**B) With 11 points, one must possess either:**

- a Specified fifth suit;
- or
- a *robust fifth suit* with no losing points, WITH FAVORABLE VULNERABILITY.

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It's worth noting that allowing the Politeness Opening exclusively for fourth position has an interesting advantage. *It is no longer necessary to use a convention (Drury) that systematically asks opener in third position whether they have a true opening hand or a hand that falls below the official criteria.*

The abandonment of this convention, whose BURDEN IS HIGH RELATIVE TO ITS EFFECTIVENESS, leaves the way open for the use of another, more judicious convention because it applies to all positions.

Here are examples of 12-point hands acceptable for a politeness opening.

**Ex. 1.3.1:1**

<b>a)</b>	A 9 8 3 2 J 8 K 7 Q J 7 6	<b>b)</b>	K Q 9 7 Q 6 4 K Q 8 6 9 5	<b>c)</b>	K Q 7 4 Q 6 K 10 8 7 3 J 9
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**COMMENTS:**

- a)** There are 12 points and the spade suit is a strong fifth suit, with the 9 and 8 constituting the low honor; this hand has the STRICT MINIMUM for a polite opening with **1 Spade** in fourth position.
- b)** There are 12 points and two fourth suits specified. It is therefore possible to open the bidding, but it must be done in the MINOR suit, i.e., with **1 Diamond**. Always remember that you should never make a "double lie," so it is forbidden to open to the Major suit even if the fourth suit is specified, especially since the hand already has a low score.
- c)** There are 12 points and a strong fifth suit. It is correct to open the bidding with **1 Diamond** because the fourth position makes the opening less.

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Here are some examples with 11-point hands for a *Courtesy Opening*

**Ex. 1.3.1:2**

<b>a)</b>	A Q 8 3 2 J 8 9 7 Q J 7 6	<b>b)</b>	Q 9 7 4 K 6 K Q 8 7 3 9 5	<b>c)</b>	10 7 K 10 5 K J 7 6 4 K 5 3
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**COMMENTS:**

- a)** It is acceptable to open the bidding with **1 Spade** in fourth position because the fifth suit is specified even if the hand has only 11 points in total. One should never fall below these requirements with an 11-point hand, i.e., 4th position and a specified fifth suit; otherwise, it is preferable to Pass, especially if there is Vulnerability.
- b)** There are only 11 points left, and the bidding will stop if the fourth player Passes. The presence of a five-card suit with 2 GH is relatively reassuring for restarting the bidding. Indeed, one must be very aware that restarting the bidding will allow both opponents to declare without any risk of confusion regarding their respective scores.
- c)** There are 10 non-losing PH and 1 PL, the diamond suit is fifth and strong, it is acceptable to open the bidding in FOURTH position with **1 Diamond** if the vulnerability is FAVORABLE; these are the minimum conditions for a polite opening.

### PRACTICE SECTION 1.3.1

**Ex. 1.3.1:3** What will your call be with each of the following hands?

	1	2	3	4	
	Pass	Pass	Pass	You	
a)	K J 8 3 2 8 Q 7 K 9 7 6 5	b)	J 8 7 Q 9 7 6 4 3 A Q 8 6 --	c)	J 9 8 7 6 4 2 K 6 3 A 9 7

**ANSWERS:**

- a) Pass:** There are 11 points (9 PH + 2 PL) and only one strong suit. Moreover, the Queen of Diamonds is a loser. You must *Pass* without hesitation because the absence of a good fit would be disastrous; with a hand of 12 points or 11 non-losing points and a favorable vulnerability, the risk would be acceptable.
- b) Pass:** This hand is worth 11 points, the suit is only strong, and there is one losing point. It would require either a specified suit, or equivalent, (1 GH + 1 PH and an extra card), or no losing points, and favorable vulnerability to bid in fourth position with an 11-point hand and a suit whose quality is only strong. A hand should never be re-evaluated when opening at level 1, even if there is a chicane, because a lack of fit will result in a very difficult and likely very expensive contract.
- c) Pass or 1 Spade** ACCORDING TO VULNERABILITY: The suit can be considered strong given the presence of two low honors; and there are 11 points in total, the King is only half-losing, and there are at most seven losing tricks. Here, it is conceivable to open with **1 Spade** given the few losing points among the 11 total points and the acceptable number of losing tricks.

Be careful not to fall into the trap of opening the auction at level 2 thinking that

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this will cut off communication to opponents when a hand is too weak to declare a polite opening and does not hold a trump suit within the rules for a real *barrage*.

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