

# Acol Light Opening Bids

NG34Bridge

In first or second seat the accepted guidelines for opening the bidding at the 1 level are:

HCP	Action	Notes
10	Generally pass	But open with a good 6+ cd suit or 5-5-x-x
11	Generally pass	As above but also with 5-4
12	a) Pass b) Open	With a bare 12 HCP and 4333 With extras, such as a 5 card suit, two 10's, or 4432
13	Always open	Except with a looming rebid problem, such as ♠AK ♥KQ ♦109843 ♣8742

It is a well-known feature of Acol that it is permissible to make light opening bids when third-in-hand. This is not an excuse to open with any rubbish.

Third in hand is ideal for aggressive pre-empting, because if you have a very weak hand, *and* your partner was unable to open, you can be sure your opponents have most the strength and are about to start bidding strongly as soon as 4th hand comes into the bidding.

The same argument applies, with reduced force, when you have a 10-12 point hand. Your side *might* still have more than half deck, if partner had a maximum pass. But *if* anyone at the table has a good hand, it can only be the person on your left who hasn't had a chance to speak. A 1♠ opening can be valuable as a pre-empt if LHO has a good hand that's hard to describe in one bid, especially if your partner is able to raise spades.

When opening light in third seat, you are pre-empting, and are expected to pass partner's response. Opening in third seat and bidding again indicates a sound opening. Before opening light you must ask yourself whether you will be happy to pass any response from partner.

With 13 HCP or more make your normal opening bid. With fewer HCP, ask yourself the following questions before you open light:

## **Will your hand be difficult to describe later with an overcall, if you don't open?**

If so, you want to describe it now while you have the chance. This is an argument in favour of opening ♠ Ax ♥ AJxxx ♦ Jxx ♣ xx. This is your only chance to compete in hearts; if you pass and hear 1♠-Pass-2♠ back to you, you're out of luck, even if partner has the cards to let you make 3♥.

On the other hand, there is not so much of a hurry to open ♠ xx ♥ x ♦ KQTxx ♣ KQTxx: you are very likely to be able to come back in with an Unusual 2NT bid (a popular conventional overcall showing the two lowest ranking unbid suits) at your next turn.

### Is it safe?

You still have a partner. If you open a sub-minimum hand, *you normally have to be prepared to pass any response your partner makes*. If you bid again your partner will assume you have a full opening bid.

It is safe to open with ♠ AQxxx ♥ xxx ♦ Qxx ♣ Qx: if partner responds with 2 of a new suit, he is denying spade support and showing a decent 5-card suit of his own, and will be happy with your support for him. Of course you *hope* partner bids 1NT or 2♠, both of which you will also pass.

It is *dangerous* to open a hand like ♠ AK4 ♥ 10943 ♦ Q873 ♣ 9 64. A light opening bid of 1♥ has very little going for it, other than possibly obstructing the opponents. While you can pass any of partner's responses without a lot of guilt, your partner will be expecting some high cards in hearts. And if partner raises to 2♥ with three small, you won't be too happy. Also, you don't really want to suggest a heart lead on defence. Pass this hand.

### Are you making the opponents' life difficult?

Opening 1♣ doesn't take away any bidding space at all from your opponents; opening 1♠ takes away a full level of bidding from them. Opening ♠ A10xxx ♥ xxx ♦ Kxx ♣ Kx puts some pressure on fourth seat. Opening ♠ xxx ♥ Kxx ♦ Kx ♣ A10xxx doesn't. It's not worth opening 1♣ just for the lead.

### Are you prepared to have your suit led?

Opening a 4-card major is tempting in third seat, because of the higher-ranking bid's pre-emptive value. And opening 1♠ is a better bid on ♠ KQJx ♥ Kx ♦ xxx ♣ Jxxx than 1♣ is, for that very reason. But if you hold ♠ K10xx ♥ xx ♦ AKxx ♣ xxx, and your LHO winds up declaring 4♥, you will be sorry if your partner leads a spade into declarer's ace-queen because you asked him to with a foolish 1♠ opening. Either pass, or open in diamonds, the suit you want led.

As you are unlikely to win the auction if partner could not open and you are below 13 HCP, your opening will be useful as long as it indicates a sound lead for partner. Be prepared to make a light opening in third seat as long as you are bidding a 5-card suit headed by KQ or better or a 4-card suit KQ10x or better.

a) ♠AK10762 ♥98 ♦K1098 ♣8

Hand (a) is a reasonable 1♠ opening bid at any vulnerability and in any position

(b) ♠ 87543 ♥ KJ ♥ AK ♣ 8542

To open 1♠ with (b) is unwise for many reasons. Firstly, you do not want a spade lead. Secondly, to rebid 2♠ if you open 1♠ and your partner responds 2♦ or 2♥ is hardly attractive. Thirdly, if the auction becomes competitive partner is very likely to misjudge.

Your HCP in (a) are in your long suits. That makes them suitable for offence (playing the contract) but less so for defence. If you play in spades the ♠AK will help promote your lesser spades into winners. If your opponents play in hearts you may be unable to cash more than one spade before they can ruff.

Your HCP in (b) are in your short suits, making them more suitable for defence than for offence.

Generally speaking, beware of giving full value to high cards in your short suits.

♠Q8765      ♥Q7532      ♦KQ      ♣K

This hand contains 12 HCP, and perhaps you would count two extra points for length, scoring 22 on the Rule of 20. However, your high cards are very badly placed and there is no strong case for opening the bidding. You should deduct at least one HCP for holdings like singleton king, doubleton K-Q and tripleton KQJ unless partner is known to have 4+ length in these suits.

When considering a borderline opening bid always consider whether your planned rebid will fully describe your hand. This is particularly important when contemplating opening in a minor.

(c)    ♠AQJ7    ♥98    ♦74    ♣A873  
 (d)    ♠74    ♥98    ♦AQJ7    ♣A8732  
 (e)    ♠74    ♥98    ♦A8732    ♣AQJ7

With (c) open 1♣. A 1♠ rebid after a red suit response will be very descriptive. If the response is 1NT you can pass or rebid 2♣. Better to pass because 2♣ will make it easier for your opponents to protect and find their 8-card heart fit. You should not open 1♠. If partner responds 2♦ or 2♥ you have no sensible rebid.

Hand (d) has the same values as (c) but if you open 1♣ you will be forced to make an unattractive 2♣ rebid in the likely event that partner responds in a major suit. That should tip your decision towards a pass. Note that it is not a good idea to open 1♦ with the idea of rebidding 2♣ because partner will expect you to have five diamonds and four clubs, not the other way round. Partner may then choose the inferior trump suit, aided and abetted by your choice of opening bid.

Hand (e) is worth a 1♦ opening bid because you have a natural 2♣ rebid. You can show both your suits, without bidding beyond your 2♦ barrier.

Other examples:

♠:85 ♥:Q8743 ♦:KQ ♣:A642      Pass. If you open 1♥ you might spur the opponents into finding a spade contract. If the opponents don't bid and partner responds 1♠ with four poor spades you will have to pass.

♠:85 ♥:8632 ♦:KQ ♣:AQ943      Open 1♣. You have a 2♥ rebid.

♠:AKJ2 ♥:J764 ♦:Q103 ♣:53      Open 1♠ (Rule of 15)

♠:K8 ♥:Q763 ♦:AJ6 ♣:Q532

Pass. This is a poor 12 HCP for a preemptive 1NT opening bid. Your honours are scattered, you have no sequences, and your risk of getting doubled by fourth suit are quite high after two passes.

♠:42 ♥:AKQ2 ♦:82 ♣:J9864

Open 1♥ or pass. If not prepared to open 1♥, pass. Do not open 1♣. If partner responds 1♠ you don't have a rebid.

♠:8742 ♥:K852 ♦:74 ♣:AKQ

Open 1♣, or, if you can't bear to do so, pass.