

SYSTEM CLASSIFICATIONS AND SYSTEM CARDS

Many thanks to Peter Busch, author of this article which was first published in *Bridge Matters*, Newsletter of the Caloundra, Coolum and Sunshine Coast Bridge Clubs, September 2014.

Regulations require that each player at the table has an approved system card that opponents can refer to. This is in accordance with the general principle that your opponents are entitled to know everything about your system and agreements that your partner does. Your opponents can refer to your system card and/or they can ask your partner about the agreed meaning of your bid or play.

The system card is divided into several areas:

Basic system

This will be Standard American for most newer players, though it might also be Precision, 2 Over 1, or Acol. There are others but these are quite rare.

Classification by colour: This is a broad classification of your bidding system and refers to your opening bids. Green is the most common, and says that most/all of your opening bids are natural, though there are some exceptions. Short club and Multi-2 opening bids, though not natural, can still be part of a green system. Artificial strong 2 level openings (2♣ and 2♦) can also be in a green system.

Precision players whose 1♣ and 1♦ opening bids are not natural (i.e. 1♣ might not have any clubs, and 1♦ doesn't necessarily show diamonds) will have a Blue system.

Red systems are quite rare, and the only example I have seen here on the Coast is where a 1♣ opening might only contain a singleton club but isn't forcing.

As for Yellow systems, don't even go there! These are known as HUM systems, standing for Highly Unusual Methods, and include things like an opening pass that shows values, or an opening bid at the 1 level which denies an opening hand.

Any of these systems can also have a Brown Sticker. This means the system has particular bidding sequences which the regulators feel might need special defence. They are reasonably uncommon, but an example is where you have an opening bid at the 2 level that shows a two-suited hand but neither suit is known e.g. 2♣ shows 5/5 in either the minors or the majors.

Opening Bids

Strength and minimum length: Record the points and minimum length of the suit e.g. 1♣: 12 HCP (3); 1♦: 12 HCP (3), 1♥: 12 HCP (5); 1♠: 12 HCP (5). Don't worry if you might open with a point or two less occasionally – it is assumed that this will happen. Show your 1NT opening HCP range (e.g. 15-18) and if it might include a 5-card major, tick the box.

1NT Responses refers to transfers and Stayman after a 1NT opening by partner. Against 2♣, write whatever version of Stayman you use (simple, extended, puppet). The rest of this space is used to show transfers if you play them – you show the suit responder bids and what it means e.g. "2♦-2♥" means a 2♦ response to 1NT asks opener to bid 2♥. If you don't do transfers, leave this part blank.

2-level Openings: Here you describe the meaning of all your 2 level opening bids, and there is a huge variety seen here. Be as complete as you can be. If you play all weak 2's except 2 clubs (as taught in the beginners' lessons), you might write "2♣ game force; 2♦ 6-10 HCP 6 card suit; 2♥ 6-10 HCP 6 card suit; 2♠ 6-10 HCP 6 card suit". But if you play Multi-2's, you might show "2♣ 19+ HCP any shape (or whatever is your agreement); 2♦ 20-22 HCP balanced or 6-10 HCP 6-card major; 2♥ 6-10 HCP 5/5 in hearts and a minor; 2♠ 6-10 HCP 5/5 in spades and another". Against 2NT write your HCP range if you play this as strong, or "5/5 minors 6-10 HCP" or similar if you play it as showing the minors. Likewise against 3NT.

Pre-Alerts

These are things that your opponent should be aware of and would not be expecting. The most common one you see here on the Coast is the "weak re-double" – if your partner opens and your LHO doubles for takeout, your opponents would reasonably expect a re-double by you to show values, but some people play it as showing weakness. As doubles cannot be alerted, the opponents need to be pre-alerted to this situation. Most newer players would not have anything in their system that requires a pre-alert.

Competitive Bids / Overcalls

Here you record how you bid in competitive auctions i.e. an auction where you and the opponents are bidding. To explain some of the terms:

Negative doubles – when your opponent overcalls a major and you double to show the other major, record how high this would apply (up to 2S, 3S or whatever).

Responsive doubles – when your partner has doubled for take-out and your RHO bids, a double by you is a responsive double asking your partner to bid, and you need to record how high this would apply (up to 2S, 3S or whatever).

Jump overcalls – your RHO opens and you overcall at a jump level e.g. 1♦-2♠. This is usually weak so you would write "weak".

Unusual 2NT – this refers to a 2NT jump overcall that usually shows the minors or two other agreed suits, and you should record what this shows for you e.g. “minors” or “two lowest unbid suits”.

1NT Overcall Immediate applies when your RHO opens at the 1 level and you overcall 1NT. This usually shows 1NT opening points and stopper/s in their suit and your card should show the range e.g. 15-18 (some players have a different range for a 1NT overcall from a 1NT opening).

1NT Overcall Re-opening refers to the specific situation where a player opens at the 1 level and this is followed by 2 passes. Many players in 4th position will bid 1NT rather than passing and letting the opener play at the 1 level. This is known as a re-opening 1NT bid and sometimes has many fewer points than a full 1NT overcall – typically 9-11. You need to record this on your card as 9-11, or as 15-17 or whatever, if you still play a full strength 1NT in this situation.

Immediate Cue of Major/Minor: A cue bid in this situation is bidding the opponent’s suit. This refers to Michaels Cue-bid and you need to record what it means when your RHO opens at the 1 level and you bid their suit at the 2 level. An example might be “Immediate cue of major: 5/5 other major and a minor; immediate cue of minor: 5/5 both majors”.

Over Weak 2’s and Weak 3’s: Record anything you do differently when your RHO opens weak at the 2 or 3 level.

Over Opponent’s 1NT: There are many different systems played when RHO opens 1NT – Pottage, DONT, Cappeletti, Modified Pottage etc, all of which have the ability to show single suited or 2-suited hands. You need to record which you’re playing if any. If you bid naturally over RHO’s 1NT, then write “natural”.

Basic Responses

These items are reasonably self-explanatory. To define the terms, a “jump raise” is when your partner opens and you agree the suit at a jump level e.g. 1♥ - 3♥. Most players play this as a limit raise i.e. “opposite your opening we have a fit but I don’t have points for game unless you’re maximum”. If this is what you do, write “limit”, otherwise record the agreement you do have. Some players play “inverted minors” where 1♦ - 2♦ shows a strong diamond raise and 1♦ - 3♦ shows a weak diamond raise.

A “jump shift” is when your partner opens and you bid a different suit at a jump level e.g. 1♥ - 3♣. Some players never play this and can ignore this on the card, but others play this as weak or as showing a fit with partner and whatever the agreement is needs to be shown on the card.

Responses to strong openings refers to how you bid after partner opens with your strongest opening e.g. 2♣. If you always make a 2♦ waiting bid, write “2♦ waiting” but if your system allows for other bids to show suits or a point count, record those details here e.g. “2♦ negative, other bids natural”.

Play Conventions

This section deals with what happens during the play of the hand.

Sequence refers to what you lead from sequences in a suit e.g. AK or KQ – most players lead the higher one and therefore should show “overlead”. Your leading style from non-sequences also needs to be shown. People have different agreements about what to lead with the various holdings listed, but an example might be “Four or more with an honour - 4th highest; 4 small - top; 3 small - middle-up-down.”

Discards might be high or low encourage, odds and evens, McKenney.

If you show **Count** on partner’s or opponent’s lead, record “natural” if you discard high-low to show an even number or whatever other agreement you have. If not, leave it blank.

Signal on Partner’s Lead – e.g. high encourage, count, low encourage, etc

Signal on Declarer’s Lead – e.g. count, or leave blank

Slam Conventions

This refers mainly to ace-asking. You need to indicate what method you use (Gerber, Blackwood, RKCB etc) and you should also indicate when it is used if you have an agreement e.g. “4♣ Gerber only after NT bid”. You can also indicate whether you use cue bids (showing or asking for control in a suit) or asking bids (requesting specific information about a suit) after agreeing suit.

Other Conventions

List here any other conventions you employ. The list might include Fourth Suit Forcing, Truscott raises, Lebensohl, Checkback Stayman.

Finally, remember that your opponents are entitled to a full disclosure of your methods. The system card is often only the first step, as your agreements with partner may well go beyond the scope of the information on the card.

In the interest of full disclosure, don’t give abbreviated answers to an opponent’s questions, even if the card itself is short on detail. Your card might say “Michaels” but if an opponent asks what your partner’s Michaels Cue-bid means, don’t just say “Michaels”, state the full details e.g. “Michaels showing 5 hearts and 5 of a minor and 6-11 HCP”