

Announce Club Length, No Trump Strength

By now you will have encountered bids which have “special meanings”. Bids where we agree that it **won’t** show the suit you’ve bid but will rather show a major, a fit, some number of points....there are many options that you and your partner will agree on.

However, bridge is a game of *full disclosure*. What that means is that if you have some agreement about the meaning of the bid, you are obligated to share that with the opponents. You’re allowed to pass messages to your partner in lieu of special bids or plays, but you’re not allowed to pass **secret** messages!

There are a number of procedures that have been developed to draw players’ attention to these agreements their opponents may be playing. We don’t care if anyone forgets these procedures in supervised, but as with the rest of supervised play – it’s a place to learn them, practise them and become familiar with them.

Alert any Conventional Bid

The first part of this suite of rules is the concept of an “Alert”. An alert occurs when your partner makes a *conventional* bid. You (the partner of the bidder) says “Alert” and places their alert card in the centre of the table. (Note that you do not alert your own bid. Nor should you point out to your partner that she may have forgotten to alert a bid)

What is a conventional bid? A conventional bid is any bid that shows something unexpected – something other than just the suit you have bid. For example, if my partner and I agree that we will open Two Hearts whenever we have a weak hand and at least five cards in each Major suit, we must alert every time our partner opens Two Hearts. The reason is that we know our partner has Spades as well as the Hearts they have bid. We shouldn’t explain what the alert is for unless we are asked, but it draws the opponents’ attention that there is *extra* information or *unexpected* information contained in the bid and they can ask about what that information is if they like.

Well, not EVERY Conventional Bid – exceptions!

As ever in bridge, there are exceptions. Although you should alert every conventional bid by your partner, there are some bids that are considered **self alerting**. That is, it is assumed that they will have an agreed meaning and so your opponents do not need to be told about them. They can ask about any bid you make, but you don’t need to alert the following:

Any bid of the opponent’s suit. Any Double or Redouble. Any bid above Three No Trumps. Or any response of Clubs in Response to a No Trump Opening (yes – this is a strange rule, but there we go. It IS a rule. Stayman is not alertable, even though responding Two Clubs to a One No Trump opening shows a major and says nothing about Clubs).

Announce No Trump Strength

Although most of you play the same system, there are many systems in play around the world. One of the defining features of any bidding system is the strength of the One No Trump opening bid. Whenever your partner opens One No Trump, you should announce to your opponents the range of points she may have. “Fifteen to Seventeen” for most of you.

Announce Club Length

Similarly to the One No Trump opening bid, many bidding systems have strange agreements about opening One Club. For us, it is a better minor and will always have at least three cards in the suit. However, there are other systems where opening a club can show Two, One or even Zero clubs. To draw your opponents’ attention to any possible misunderstanding here, you should announce how many clubs are shown when your partner opens One Club. As simple as “Three or more clubs” or just “Three plus”.

These rules are a little silly and it takes time to get used to them. It is very rare (even in open play) that neglecting to alert a conventional bid or failing to alert your minimum club length will lead to any problems. Nonetheless, it is a habit any developing club bridge player needs to acquire.