

4441 hands, any order

These hand shapes seem to cause a problem with many bidding systems. Principally because if you bid one suit and then rebid in a lower ranking suit, you usually show 5 of the first bid suit. Let us just confirm my recommended opening bids, the golden rule is ‘**open your lowest suit**’.

Some people believe that there are exceptions to this rule and some believe that ‘suit below the singleton’ is best. Whatever scheme you use you sometimes have to ‘lie’ with your 2nd bid; it is acceptable to ‘lie’ in a minor but not in a major. Let us consider examples of all of these ‘problem’ hands. I do **not** have a problem with these hands. As far as I am concerned, ‘lowest suit’ always works; but I guess I have to explain where the others have gone wrong and want to complicate matters.

a) 1444 shape Obviously, whatever you choose with your opening bid, you will be embarrassed by a 1♠ response. 1♥ is out of the question even if you play 4 card majors, a rebid of 2♦/♣ would confirm a 5 card ♥ suit.

♠ 4
♥ K1097
♦ KQ86
♣ AJ43

We do not wish to lie in a *major* suit with a weak hand. So the choice is between 1♣ and 1♦. It appears that some people open 1♦ and rebid 2♣. This sequence shows 5♦’s and 4♣’s. An opening of 1♣ followed by 2♣ shows 5♣’s, so both are lying and it does not really make much difference. However, if there is nothing in it, a 1♣ opening allows more latitude for responder and enables a ♣ fit to be established immediately. If the bidding goes 1♣ - 1♦ - then we bid 1♥, showing an unbalanced hand and we know about the ♦ fit if we need to rest somewhere safe. Of course, if we are playing a strong NT, we can happily rebid 1NT over the 1♠ response. So, either way, no need to break the ‘lowest suit’ rule yet.... Let’s look at:-

b) 4441 shape To me, this seems very simple. Of course we have to lie, but we simply lie in ♦’s. The people with a ‘problem’ seem to think that a 2♣ response is unmanageable. They suggest opening 1♥ and rebid 2♦, thus lying about having 5♥’s. This is, of course, total nonsense.

♠ K986
♥ KQ96
♦ A986
♣ J

It is simply better to open 1♦ and rebid 2♦ over 2♣, thus only lying in the minor suit. Playing a strong NT we may bid 2NT over the 2♣ response.

c) 4414 shape Amazingly, some people seem to have a problem with the easiest of hands. I have even read a booklet suggesting that the ‘problems’ are so insurmountable that you should pass! Crass stupidity of course, the trick making potential of the 4441 hand is enormous if a fit is discovered.

♠ KQ86
♥ AQ96
♦ J
♣ 9753

With *two* good 4 card majors it would be absurd to pass. There is absolutely no problem with opening the obvious 1♣, it stands out a mile. Now I will not name the above mentioned booklet (of course) but I believe that the ‘problem’ was that this booklet is aimed at Acol players who are used to opening 4-card majors. So I agree that it’s a problem in Acol – so you simply have to adjust and accept that 1♣ is the only sensible opening with this hand even if you play 4-card majors.

Indeed, if we cannot find a 1♣ opening on this hand, then perhaps we should take up another sport? A sparring partner for Mike Tyson springs to mind. What was the argument for passing? – ‘opening 1♣ has no real advantage’ (!!), ‘wait for the opponents to bid ♦’s and then make the perfect take out double’? Unfortunately, since you hold good cards in both majors, the opponents may not bid. Opponents are not always so obliging, especially with no majors. And even if they did, partner would never believe you had such a good hand. If you pass and partner opens then you have an even bigger problem, how can you possibly ‘catch up’? No, let’s keep it simple, an opener is an opener; especially with excellent shape and two really good major suits.

- d) 4144 shape It appears that a few people can even mess this up (the same booklet as above).
They suggest opening 1 ♠, intending to support any minor suit
response and bid 2 ♠ or 2NT over 2♥. No further comment.
- ♠ KQ86
♥ J Bridge would not be such a fun sport without these people.
- ♦ AQ96 We simply open 1 ♣. There is obviously no rebid problem: bid 1 ♠ over 1 ♦/♥.
- ♣ 9753

So, with 4441 type hands we keep it simple and always bid the lowest suit.

And if you play Acol then you have to be sensible and realise that you cannot always open a 4 card major in preference to a 4 card minor.

There is one 'undisputed' golden rule in bridge – when you make your opening bid, have your rebid instantly ready for any non-jump response from partner. If you have to subsequently think about (or simply cannot find) a sensible rebid then you probably made the wrong opening bid. Acol players simply have to accept that opening 1 ♣ with hand types c) and d) is the only sensible opening bid.