

Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player Jerry Helms answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to "Ask Jerry," c/o Jerry Helms, 5000 Montclair Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28211.



Dear Jerry: Does the strength range for a 1NT opening vary depending on your position at the table? What about an overcall of 1NT?

V. Bertrand
Topeka, KS

Dear V.B.: I think a 1NT opening bid should be the same in any seat, whether or not your partner is a passed hand, and at any vulnerability. It matters not whether the range is 15–17, which I prefer, or 16–18 or 15–18. What matters most is the partnership agreement.

When you are overcalling 1NT, there are additional factors to consider. When your right-hand opponent opens one-

of-a-suit, you are in direct position. With my regular partners, I use a range of 15–18. We even add that occasionally we have 19 points. There's a reason for this extra strength requirement. Once the opponents have identified strength with an opening bid, it gives the responder a lot of information. The opponents are in a good position to double for penalty if you overcall 1NT. This isn't the case when you open 1NT and could be in trouble, but neither opponent has enough values to double.

We also need some strength in right-hand opponent's suit. That's the suit left-hand opponent is most likely to lead if you win the auction.

It's different when the opening bid is on the left, partner and responder pass, and the auction rolls to you in the balancing chair.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	Pass	?

Now you can bid 1NT with about a king (3 points) less than in the direct position ... around 12–14 points. This is similar to a takeout double in the balancing position. Partner is marked with some strength because the opponents have stopped in partscore.

If you have 15–17 or more points in this position, start with a takeout double, planning to rebid notrump at the next opportunity. This shows too strong a hand for a 'balancing' 1NT.

In my partnerships, we often use a slightly different range in the balancing position, depending on whether the opening bid was a minor or a major. Over 1♣ or 1♦, there is more room at the one level, so 1NT can be reserved for 12–14 point hands. Over 1♥ or 1♠, there are fewer options, so the range of 1NT is anywhere from 11–15.