



# Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS ✉ askjerry@jerryhelms.com 🖨 jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

I am working on improving my bidding skills. I've been reading about "opener's reverses" and don't really understand them. Help, please.

Augusta

Hi Augusta,

I suspect there are many players, including some fairly experienced ones, who don't have a clear concept about reverses.

Any time opener bids one of a suit, receives a one-level response, then follows by bidding a new suit at the two level that is higher ranking than his first suit, you have a "reverse." A few reverse bidding sequences:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
2♦	
1♦	1♠
2♥	
1♥	1NT
2♠	

In each of these sequences, even if responder is very weak but prefers opener's first suit as trump, he must take a preference at the three level.

Contrast the following bidding sequences with no reverse:

1♦	1♥
2♣	
1♥	1♠
2♦	

1♠ 1NT  
2♥

By starting with a higher-ranking, and then introducing a lower-ranking one, opener allows responder to take a preference to opener's first suit at the two level.

Because of the implications of possibly forcing a three-level contract, when the opener "reverses," he guarantees extra values.

By my standards, a reverse sequence guarantees *at least* the strength of the upper end of a strong notrump, lacking the balanced shape required.

In virtually all cases, the opening bidder's first suit is longer than his second suit, and frequently he also has a singleton or a void in a third suit. Classic reverses:

♠ A 8 3 ♥ 6 ♦ A Q 6 4 ♣ A K 7 4 3  
♠ 4 ♥ A K J 5 ♦ K Q J 5 3 ♣ K 4 3  
♠ A J 10 4 ♥ A K Q 7 2 ♦ 2 ♣ Q J 2

On each of these hands, open the bidding with your longer, lower-ranking suit, planning to bid your shorter, higher-ranking suit next.

Some hands have the shape for a reverse but not the values, and some have the values but not the shape.

Hand types that do *not* qualify:

♠ 7 ♥ A K Q 9 ♦ A 8 7 5 2 ♣ 8 5 2

With this hand, if you choose to open 1♦ and partner shockingly responds 1♠, do not even think about bidding 2♥, which would show notrump strength! If you open 1♦, probably you

should rebid 2♦ over 1♠. For those who are a bit imaginative, I would prefer opening 1♥, planning to next bid my diamond suit. Yes, yes, I know you play five-card majors! I also know this hand contains only four hearts. But if you open 1♥ and later bid 2♦ over a spade response, at least your partner knows you have at least nine red cards, and you have not promised any extra strength.

♠ 3 ♥ Q 4 ♦ A K J 4 2 ♣ A K Q 8 3

You virtually never "reverse" with equal length suits. Open 1♦ and then jump shift to 3♣, which is game forcing. Just to be clear, opener's jump shift is game forcing. By the agreements favored by most, a "reverse" is forcing for one round.

There are many potential agreements governing responder's obligations for sequences involving reverses. For simplicity in casual partnerships:

- 1) If opener reverses, you must speak at least one more time.
- 2) If you initially responded in a major suit, your first priority is to rebid that suit if you hold five or more cards.
- 3) If the reverse bidder continues by bidding 2NT or three of his original suit, you are *permitted* to pass, but it doesn't mean you *should* pass.
- 4) If opener introduces a third suit after a reverse or raises responder's suit, those bids are forcing.

There are much better methods, but they are beyond the scope of this column.