



All About Alerts

ACBL's Alert System is meant for the benefit of the opponents, not the Alerting side. An Alert informs the opponents a bid's meaning is not what would customarily be assumed and is consistent with ACBL's policy of no secret agreements between partners.

Alerts are not meant to ensure the bidding side is on the same wavelength. Thus, when partner fails to Alert or mistakenly Alerts, you must resist the involuntary urge to react or speak up. Nor are Alerts meant to inform partner of the details of your agreements. So, when you provide full disclosure of your agreement after Alerting partner's call, partner has two (2) conflicting duties:

1. To ignore your explanation, and
2. To pay close attention to it.

Partner ignores the explanation, in essence, because the information given is unauthorized for him to use in the subsequent bidding and play. Partner pays attention because it his duty to inform the opponents of possible misinformation at the appropriate time. The proper time to correct misinformation is:

- if declaring the contract—after the auction has ended but before the opening lead is made.
- if defending the contract—immediately after play has ceased and the result agreed to.

The requirements of the last paragraph also pertain to information gained from Alerts or lack of Alerts. If you've forgotten your agreement on a bid and partner correctly Alerts, you cannot let the Alert serve as a wake-up call to guide your subsequent bidding. You ignore the Alert and continue bidding in a manner consistent with your prior thinking. However, if other clues give you reason to alter your bidding path, you don't have to continue to distort your subsequent bids in an attempt to ignore the "wake-up" nature of the Alert.

If partner fails to Alert an Alertable bid or provides misinformation in explaining an Alertable bid, you may not make any indication during the auction. In addition, you must assume partner knows the true meaning of your bid. The laws require you to assume your partner knows your bidding system and made his/her subsequent calls accordingly.

Generally speaking, the Alert System imposes these requirements:

- 1) to Alert when appropriate,
- 2) to not react or blurt out surprise when an Alert (or non Alert) has gone astray,
- 3) to be uninfluenced by unauthorized information, and
- 4) to correct misinformation—if any—given by partner and to do so at the proper time.

Pre-Alerts

For some pairs the Alert System actually starts with pre-Alerts. Pre-Alerts are given verbally before the start of play for each round or each match, and are often accompanied by card or sheet with the pre-Alert information. Pre-Alerts are designed to act as an early warning of any unusual methods for which the opponents may need to prepare. For instance, if your partnership plays very light openings (fewer than 10 HCP) and/or very light overcalls (fewer than 6 HCP), you are required to pre-Alert these agreements. These pre-Alerts do not relieve you of the requirement to alert at the proper time in the auction.



Immediate Alerts

Immediate Alerts—the most common Alerts—are given at the time partner makes a call which requires an Alert and are the means by which opponents are notified of your pair’s special agreements. Your duty is to alert the opponents before your right hand opponent makes a call. Your side is also responsible for ensuring the opponents noticed the alert, and that every review of the auction includes all alerts made.

Alerts in the Pass Out Seat

Calls in the balancing seat are often ascribed a different meaning than in a more direct seat. For instance, pass out seat jumps to the 2-level are normally played as constructive rather than preemptive. Thus, in the balancing seat, it is the preemptive call that is Alerted, not the constructive call. Another example is: 1♣-PASS-PASS-1NT; if the 1NT bid is a balanced 10-14 HCP, it is not Alerted, but a balanced 15-17 HCP range is Alerted.

Delayed Alerts

Delayed Alerts are not given until the auction has ended. They are for Alertable calls above the level of 3NT starting with the opening bidder’s second turn to call.

- The dummy or declarer Alerts the defenders before the opening lead.
- The defenders Alert after the opening lead has been made but before it is faced.

Announcements

An announcement is an Alert that may be accomplished in a word or short phrase. Five frequently heard announcements are:

“May be short”

The range of a natural 1NT opening bid, e.g. “15 to 17”

“Transfer”

“Forcing”

“Semi-forcing”

Expected Length for Natural Bids for the Alert Procedure

- Suit bids:
 - 3+ in a minor and 4+ in a major for opening bids, rebids and responses.
 - 4+ for an overcall at the one level, 5+ for higher levels.
 - 5+ for a weak two-bid.
 - 6+ for a weak three-bid.
- Notrump openings and overcalls:
 - A notrump opening or overcall if not unbalanced (generally, no singleton or void and only one or two doubletons) is considered natural.

Conventions Generally Not Alerted


Some common conventions do not require an Alert during the auction: Stayman, ace-asking bids (unless made as the opening bid), most meanings of cue-bids, strong artificial 2♣ openings and most doubles & redoubles (unless highly unusual or a support double/redouble) and passes (unless highly unusual). Some Alerts are delayed until the auction is completed.

Alert Chart

This Alert Chart may not pertain to bids made in the pass out seat. Calls in the balancing seat are often ascribed a different meaning than in a more direct seat. For instance, in the auction 1♣-PASS-PASS, the standard meaning for a 4th seat 1NT bid is a balanced 10-14 HCP, which is not Alerted. But, if you play a completely different range, which is not the norm in balancing seat, that should be Alerted.¹

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Natural Calls Not Specifically Noted	About expected strength and shape	Highly unusual strength, shape, etc.	⇒ ⇒ ⇒ "Fuzzy" phrasing under Alert is deliberate
Conventional / Artificial	Stayman (next higher level of clubs)	All other conventional and/or artificial bids. * See Delayed Alerts (in Alert column on the last page of this chart) for when to Alert* Blackwood & Gerber are Alertable as opening bids	Limited number of conventions considered the norm
	Blackwood (4NT) and expected responses		
	Gerber (4C)/NT		
	Conventional 2NT response to an opening two-level suit bid ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ Generally refers to weak 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ openings.		
	Two diamond response to strong artificial two club opening which is waiting or negative ⇒ ⇒ ⇒	Step responses showing specific point ranges. Step responses showing # of controls.	
Notrump Openings		Conventional	State Range, if natural, for all 1NT openings
Notrump Overcalls	Conventional overcalls by a passed hand	Other conventional notrump overcalls (unpassed hand)	Some sort of unusual NT is the norm for jumping in NT (except for a jump to 3NT or to 2NT in balancing seat)
	Jumps to 2NT (for example, Unusual NT) or any four-level or higher notrump bid that is unusual	Natural jumps to 2NT, except in balancing seat Jump to 3NT that is unusual	
		A natural notrump overcall with an expected lower limit of less than 14 HCP and/or an upper limit of more than 19 HCP	

¹ Similarly, in an auction of 1♣-PASS-PASS-2♦ / 2♥ / 2♠, the jump to the 2-level is no longer (normally) played as preemptive, but as constructive. Since you might bid 1 of a suit on a weak hand, you need to distinguish a full opener. Also, the need/desire to preempt the opponents no longer exists since the responder has already passed. Thus, the jump shift with a 6-card suit and 12-15 HCP is the norm and is not Alerted, but if you play it as preemptive, that should be Alerted. You may, nonetheless, Alert the constructive jump for 2 reasons: a) it is better to Alert unnecessarily than miss a legitimate Alert, and b) many players, especially the relatively inexperienced, are unaware that intermediate is the standard meaning of a balancing jump to the 2-level.

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Responses to Notrump Opening Bids and Overcalls	<p>Stayman (<i>next higher level of clubs</i>) asking for a four-card major. (Also, Stayman after the NT opening has been doubled.)</p> <hr/> <p>Natural signoffs at the next higher level in diamonds, hearts and spades</p> <hr/> <p>Three-level natural responses whether a jump response or not</p>	<p>Stayman (<i>next higher level of clubs</i>) if other than asking for a four-card major, and rebids</p> <hr/> <p>Rebids (e.g. 2NT) after use of Stayman by responder which do not promise a major</p> <hr/> <p>Transfers, except for those which are announced and other artificial responses above <i>next higher level of clubs</i></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p>Transfers to minors are Alerted</p> </div> </div>	<p>State "Transfer" any time a diamond response to a natural notrump bid at any level is a transfer to hearts. *</p> <hr/> <p>State "Transfer" any time a heart response to a natural notrump bid at any level is a transfer to spades. *</p> <hr/> <p>* If the transferer may occasionally hold a Game Forcing hand without the next higher suit, state "Transfer" and Alert the subsequent bid which cancels the transfer meaning</p> <p>NOTE: Announcements of transfers as above apply after a natural NT rebid by opener</p>
Opening Suit Bids at the One Level	Natural non-forcing openings with an agreed range of somewhere between 10-21+ HCP	<p>Conventional and/or artificial openings which do not require an Announcement such as a strong/artificial forcing club</p> <hr/> <p>Frequent very light openings (fewer than 10 HCP by agreement). Also, pre-Alert</p>	State "may be short" for non-forcing 1C and 1D calls which may be shorter than three (3) cards

Jacoby & Texas Transfers are announced

e.g. = *exempli gratia* = for example

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Responses to One-Level Opening Bids in a Suit	Non-forcing 1NT response whether four-card majors are bypassed or not	Conventional 1NT response which is not Announced	State "Forcing" if a 1NT response to a major is simply forcing
	Forcing natural 2NT response that may bypass four-card majors	Non-forcing suit bid by an UPH	State "Semi-forcing" if a 1NT response to a major is forcing except when opener has a balanced minimum
	A one-level major-suit response to 1C that may bypass longer diamonds	A weak jump raise after a pass by RHO (no competition)	
	2/1 which shows at least game invitational values	A natural, non-forcing jump shift after a pass by RHO (no competition)	
	All jump raises in or out of competition except a weak jump raise after a pass by RHO (no competition)	All conventional responses not listed under no Alert	
	Natural forcing jump shifts and all natural jump shifts in competition	Weak jump shifts not in competition.	
	Natural 2NT response invitational or better		
Opener's and Responder's Rebids	Two-of-a-minor after a forcing or semi-forcing 1NT response	Opener's 1NT rebid, if strong	
	A 1NT or 2NT rebid that implies a balanced hand (may contain one or two four-card majors)	Responder's artificial third- or fourth-suit bids Responder's "checkback" bids (of 2 or 3 C or D)	

[RHO = Right Hand Opponent](#)
[UPH = Unpassed Hand](#)

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Opening Two-Level Bids in a Suit and Responses	2C strong, artificial, and forcing	Natural weak or intermediate 2C	
	Weak, natural 2D, 2H or 2S	Natural 2D, 2H or 2S, if intermediate or better	
	Conventional and/or forcing 2NT responses	Natural and non-forcing 2NT responses	
	Natural, forcing responses in a suit	Natural, non-forcing responses in a suit Other conventional and/or artificial bids, e.g. Flannery , Mini Roman	
Doubles and Redoubles	Most Doubles and Redoubles. *See Alertable Doubles* in next column \Rightarrow	Doubles and redoubles with highly unusual or unexpected meanings, including support DBLs/ReDBLs	
Cue-bids	Most Cue-bids. *See Alertable Cue-bids* in next column \Rightarrow	Direct cue-bid of natural opening bid played as natural	
Passes		Passes with highly unusual or unexpected meanings	
Other Constructive Calls	Over suits, 4NT ace-asking and responses	Ace-asking calls and responses at or below the level of 3NT or any opening ace-asking call and response Delayed Alerts Ace-asking calls and responses above the level of 3NT beginning with opener's second call except for those listed under not Alertable	
	Over notrump, 4C ace-asking and responses		
Defensive Bids	Weak jump overcalls (two or three level)	Very light overcalls (fewer than 6 HCP) Also pre-Alert	
	All constructive or better jump-shift advances	Intermediate or better jump overcalls (two or three level)	
	All natural jump raises of an overcall	Weak jump shifts after partner's overcall	



Partial List of Alertable Conventions/Bids

Most Conventions Must Be Alerted

1♣ Forcing Opening		
1NT Forcing response		
3NT Major suit raise	Lebensohl	Sandwich NT
4-Suit Transfers	Leaping Michaels	Short 1♣ NF² opening
		Short 1♦ NF opening
Bergen 3♣ & 3♦ Major raises		Smolen
Blackwood (unless opening bid)		Splinters {delayed if by opnr}
Brozel		
Checkback Stayman		Stayman
Constructive Major raises		Step Responses to 2♣ Opener
Control Responses to 2♣ Opener		
Cue Bid (unless of a natural opening bid meant as natural)		
	Mathe over Big ♣	Stolen Bid Doubles
	Maximal Doubles	Support Doubles / Redoubles
DONT	Michaels	
Drury & Reverse Drury	Mini Roman	
	Minor Suit Stayman	
Exclusion Blackwood		
Flannery		
Forth Suit Forcing		Texas Transfer
Forcing Stayman	Namyats	
	Negative Doubles	
Garbage Stayman	New Minor Forcing	
Gerber (unless opening bid)		
	Ogust	
		Unusual NT
Hamilton (aka Cappelletti)	Puppet Stayman	Unusual vs. Unusual
Intermediate 2♣ Opener		
Inverted Minor Raises	Responsive Doubles	
	Revised Ogust	
	Roman Key Card	Weak Jump Shift not in comp.
Jacoby 2NT		Wolfe Sign Off
Jacoby Transfer		
Jordan 2NT		

² LEGEND: ~~Strikeout~~ = not alerted, ~~Strikeout~~ in blue = announced (possibly at end of auction), NF = non-forcing