What's Standard?

by David Lindop

This series is based on Grant Standard, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such a 15-17 1NT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of Grant Standard and the corresponding convention card can be found at www.AudreyGrant.com. The site also has Grant Basic, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the Bridge Bulletin and can also be found under 'Articles' at www.AudreyGrant.com.

When we open 1♥ or 1♠ in first or second position, we typically have a hand worth about 13 or more points. (With a borderline hand we can apply the *Guideline of 20*: add the high-card points to the number of cards in the two longest suits and open if the total is 20 or more.) Partner may have enough strength to take the partnership to game or slam, or the auction may become competitive and partner may have to decide whether to pass, double for penalty, or compete further. Partner will rely on our opening bid when making such decisions.

When we have an opportunity to open the bidding in third or fourth position, things are a little different. Our partner is a *passed hand*. Partner didn't open in first or second position and presumably has fewer than 13 points. Unless we have extra strength, the prospects for game – and especially slam – are significantly reduced, and the opponents may have the majority of strength. This introduces some new considerations.

Opening Light in Third

Although we will still have 13 or more points most of the time when we open 1♥ or 1♠ in third position, we can occasionally open *light* – with fewer than 13 points. This is a commonly accepted tactic for a number of reasons:

Reverse Drury

1. We may be able to make a partscore. Suppose partner has 11 or 12 points and we have 11 or 12 points. If neither of us opens, we may pass out a hand where we have the majority of strength ... as much as 24 combined points.
2. We may interfere in the opponents' auction. By opening, we take bidding room away from the opponents and they may misjudge how high to bid. We might 'steal' the contract, or might push the opponents higher than they would like to be.
3. We may get the partnership off to the best defense. For example, if the opponents win the auction, our opening bid may help partner find the best opening lead.

We can use the following guideline:

> **Opening Light in Third Position**
> An opening bid in third position can be made with as few as 10 or 11 points.

Some players open even lighter on occasion, but this is a reasonable approach. For example, suppose we are East and the auction begins:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	?	

This hand has 10 high-card points and 1 length point for the five-card suit. That's not quite enough to open in first or second position because partner will expect a little more. In third position, however, we can open 1♥.

♠ 8 4
♥ K Q J 9 5
♦ K J 5
♣ 9 6 2

If partner has 9 or 10 points, we can probably make a partscore in hearts or some other suit. If the opponents have the majority of strength, our 1♥ bid may get in their way. South can no longer open 1♣ or 1♦, for example. Also, if South were to become declarer, we'd prefer that partner lead a heart rather than, say, a spade.

Opening Light in Fourth

In fourth position, we can also open light, but only if we expect to make a partscore. If the deal belongs to the opponents, we'd be better off to pass. We don't want to open the bidding and then get a minus score if the opponents get into the auction and reach a makeable contract or push us too high.

How do we know if the deal belongs to our side? We don't. However, our holding in the spade suit is a useful guideline. A partnership that has a fit in spades has a big advantage in a competitive auction. If the opponents are competing in spades and we want to compete in hearts, for example, we always have to bid one level higher. If we bid 2♥, they can bid 2♠, staying at the same level. We'll have to go to 3♥ if we want to outbid them.

So, many players use the *Guideline of 15* when considering whether to open light in fourth position:

> **Opening Light in Fourth Position**
> Add the high-card points to the number of spades. If the total is 15 or more, open; otherwise, pass.

Suppose we are South:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	?

We'd open a 'light' 1♠ with this hand in third or fourth. There are 10 high-card points plus 5 spades, for a total of 15. So, we open in fourth seat, hoping for a small plus score.

♠ A Q J 7 4
♥ 9 2
♦ K 10 7 5
♣ 6 4

We'd open this hand light in third chair, but in fourth it's probably best to pass the deal out. 10 high-card points plus 2 spades gives a total of only 12.

♠ 9 2
♥ A Q J 7 4
♦ K 10 7 5
♣ 6 4

Four-Card Majors

In addition to sometimes opening light in third or fourth position, we can occasionally open with a four-card major suit. For example:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	?	

In first or second position, the standard approach is to open 1♣ with this hand.

♠ K 8 4
♥ A K Q 10
♦ J 6 3
♣ 8 7 2

We don't have a five-card major, so we open a minor suit. With three cards in both minors, we open 1♣.

In third chair, we might prefer to open 1♥. Since partner has passed, the deal may not belong to our side. If we end up defending, we'd prefer a heart lead from partner to a club lead. So, we treat our good four-card suit like a five-card suit. Partner will assume we have a five-card suit, but that shouldn't be much of a problem. We don't plan to get too high, even if partner has support.

Responder's New Suit

One reason we can open light in third or fourth position – or even with a four-card major suit – is that we know partner has fewer than 13 points. So, if partner bids a new suit, we can pass without fear of missing a game or slam contract.

> **Responder's New Suit**
>
> A new suit response is non forcing once responder is a passed hand.

Consider how the auction might go with these East-West hands:

West	East
♠ 6 4	♠ A J 10 7 2
♥ A 9 4	♥ 7 6 2
♦ A Q 10 6 5	♦ J 8 3
♣ 8 5 4	♣ A 9

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

After two passes, East opens 1♠ in third with only 10 high-card points and 1 length point for the five-card spade suit. West also has 10 high-card points plus 1 length point. That's enough to bid a new suit at the two level.

If West hadn't passed initially, the new suit response of 2♦ would be forcing. West might have enough strength for game or slam. Since West has passed, however, East knows there isn't enough combined strength for game. So, East passes the 2♦ response and settles for partscore. By opening light, East was only trying for a small plus score anyway.

With a full opening bid, East can bid again. Here, the partnership doesn't want to be higher than the two level.

Drury

One danger of opening light is that the partnership might get too high when responder has the values for a limit raise of opener's major. Look how the auction might go with these hands:

West	East
♠ A 9 6 3	♠ 8 7 2
♥ Q 8 5 2	♥ A K J 9 4
♦ 8 4	♦ Q 10 7
♣ K Q 5	♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

East opens 1♥ light and West has the values for a limit raise to 3♥ – 11 high-card points plus 1 dummy point for the doubleton diamond. East can pass, but the partnership is too high. East is likely to lose two spade tricks, two diamonds, and a club.

East's light opening was a good idea since the partnership can make 2♥, but West's jump raise leaves the partnership headed for a minus score. Playing standard methods, West couldn't afford to bid only 2♥ since the partnership might miss a game if East had a full opening bid.

To deal with this, most partnerships adopt the Drury convention:

> **Drury**
>
> When partner opens 1♥ or 1♠ in third or fourth position, a response of 2♣ is artificial. It shows:
>
> - Three-card or longer support for opener's major.
> - Interest in reaching game – about 10 or more points, counting dummy points.

Most partnerships agree to use Drury even if responder's right-hand opponent doubles or overcalls 1♠.

Reverse Drury

In the original version of Drury, opener bid 2♦ to show a light opening. However, the modern style is for opener to use Reverse Drury rebids:

> **Reverse Drury**
>
> If responder bids 2♣ after a 1♥ or 1♠ opening in third or fourth position, opener:
>
> - Rebids the major suit with no interest in game.
> - Bids 2♦ to show a full opening but nothing extra.
> - Bids a new suit or notrump to show interest in game or slam.
> - Jumps to game in the major with enough for game but no interest in slam.

Returning to the previous hands:

West	East
♠ A 9 6 3	♠ 8 7 2
♥ Q 8 5 2	♥ A K J 9 4
♦ 8 4	♦ Q 10 7
♣ K Q 5	♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♥	All Pass

West uses Drury and East shows no interest in game by rebidding 2♥. West passes and the partnership stops safely at the two level.

West	East
♠ A 9 6 3	♠ 7 2
♥ Q 8 5 2	♥ A K J 9 7 4
♦ 8 4	♦ A Q 10
♣ K Q 5	♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♣	Pass	4♥	All Pass

With enough to want to be in game opposite support and about 10 points, East can simply bid game.

Showing Clubs

What if responder actually has clubs? There are two choices. Responder can jump to 3♣ to show an invitational hand with about 10–12 points and a good six-card suit, or responder can simply bid 1NT if unwilling to go to the three level to show the club suit.