

Alerts – why, when and how

Success in Bridge requires effective communication with your partner. However, that communication must be ‘out in the open’; you are not allowed to send secret messages. Any communication with your partner must be according to the Law, and must be interpretable by the opposition.

One way of ensuring this is the case is the requirement for “Alerts”. An alert warns the opponents that partner’s bid may require an explanation.

In any bidding system, there will be bids that are ‘artificial’ or ‘conventional’; they carry a meaning that is different from their face value. A simple example would be an opening 2C bid that does not mean “I have a lot of clubs and want to play in Clubs”, but rather simply states that you hold a strong opening hand. If your partner makes an artificial bid, you MUST ALERT that bid. i.e. you are alerting the opposition to the fact that the call may need an explanation. If you do not alert an artificial bid, and this causes problems for the opposition, the Director may well award an adjusted score in favour of the opponents.

What bids need to be alerted?

- Any bid that means something other than “I want to play in this suit” is by definition a conventional bid and must be alerted.
- This includes bids that show the suit named plus another suit. So, for instance, if you play multi-2s, and an opening 2H bid shows hearts and another suit, that is conventional and must be alerted.
- It also includes bids that you are forced to make by convention. e.g. if you play the Lebensohl 2NT convention, a bid of 2NT (alerted) requires a response of 3C, and that response must be alerted.
- Suit bids that are surprisingly weak should also be alerted. This includes weak jump raise of partner’s opening suit or a weak jump shift showing less than 6 HCP, and “inverted minors” where a single raise is stronger than a jump raise.

Exceptions:

1. Do not alert **any double or redouble**. These bids are deemed to be self-alerting.
2. **If your partner opens 1C or 1NT**, you immediately ‘announce’ the meaning of that bid. This takes the place of alerting for those bids.
3. Do not alert **Cue bids** (i.e. when your partner bids a suit already nominated by the opponents).
4. Do not alert **any bid above 3NT**.
5. Do not alert your partner’s **2C response to your opening 1NT**. 2C here is deemed to be “self-alerting”—regardless of what it means. [NB: This only applies in an uncontested auction. You must alert the 2C bid (if it is not a natural club suit) in auctions such as: 1NT – X – 2C; or 1H – 1NT – Pass – 2C.]
6. Do not alert single suited overcalls, regardless of strength.

How to alert

If your partner makes an alertable bid, you must indicate this **immediately the bid is made**. (If you alert the bid after the next player has called, that player may have the right to amend his/her call, and should call the Director if he/she wishes to exercise that right.)

Alerts are made by immediately circling the bid on the bidding pad and audibly saying “Alert”. (The ABF Alerting Regulations require **both** the statement and the circling; just putting a circle on the pad is not sufficient.)

Some important notes

1. Do not explain your alerted calls unless specifically asked to do so.
2. Do not ask for an explanation of an alerted bid unless it could affect your bidding or play. Asking ‘out of curiosity’ just holds up play unnecessarily.
3. If you know that partner’s bid is alertable but you can’t remember what it means, you should nevertheless alert the bid. If asked what it means, explain that you can’t remember what it means. The Director should be called immediately, and will probably send you away from the table so that your partner can explain the meaning of the bid to the opponents.

Peter Peterson, Tournament Director