3 – Opening unbalanced hands

It's your turn to bid and no one has bid before you.

first count the shape

That is - count the number of cards in each suit.

You will come up with a sequence of numbers such as 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-2, 5-4-3-1, 6-3-2-2.
The present topic deals with hands which have at least 5-4 shape or at least a 6-card suit
– these are unbalanced.

Next count the points

Count 4 points for an Ace, 3 points for a King, 2 points for a Queen and 1 for a Jack – then add them up.

There are 40 points in the pack – your fair share is 10.)

Your first bid

Open with one of your longest suit,
or the higher-ranking of two equal suits.

Rule of twenty

In practice this rule tells you that **11 points** are sufficient to open the bidding with 5-4 or 6-3 shape. (An older style recommended a minimum of 12 points).
With less than this you will pass.

Of course, you will sometimes be much stronger.

It will take 2 bids to tell partner about your hand

The first bid will tell partner that you have at least 11 points, and that this is your longest suit (in the present case at least 5-card).

Your second bid will tell partner either that you have a second suit of at least 4 cards, or that your first suit is 6-card.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	K T 4 A Q T 9 4 Q J 5 3 7	You have 12 points in a 5-4 shape. Open 1♥ - your longest suit. Plan to rebid 2♦ to show your 5-4 shape.
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	K 4 A Q T 9 4 Q J T 5 3 7	You have 12 points in a 5-5 shape. Open 1♥ - the higher-ranking of 2 equal suits. Plan to rebid 2♦ to show at least 5-4 shape.
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	K T 4 A Q T 9 4 3 Q J 5 7	You have 12 points in a 6-3 shape. Open 1♥ - your longest suit. Plan to rebid 2♥ to suggest a 6-card suit and deny a second 4-card suit.

Responder's first bid

With 6 points responder should always find a bid, just in case opener is much stronger.
With 5 points he should usually find a bid in a new suit at the 1-level if available.
With less than this – pass.
(An older style insisted on at least 6 points, but this is becoming less common.)
Lacking 4-card support for partner's opening bid in a major suit responder should bid in a new suit if possible. In the present session this will always be at the 1-level.

Responder's bid in a new suit is forcing – opener has planned a second bid and now he must make it.