Trial bids - teacher's notes

Typically, these bids apply after opener has started with one of a suit and partner has raised that suit to the two-level.
Any further bid in a new suit at the lowest level by opener will suggest 17 or 18 points (or a 6-loser hand) and invites partner to bid game with a maximum or sign off if minimum.

The nature of the trial bid is a matter for partnership agreement.

When the agreed suit is a minor then any bid in a new suit is likely to promise a no trump stop and at least 17 points – the requirement for a rebid of 2NT. Note that responder has denied a 4-card major with his first bid.
Responder can sign off on a minimum with either 2NT or 3 of the agreed minor.
Any other bid in a new suit will suggest a further stop for no trumps and will be forcing for at least one round.

When the agreed suit is a major and opener makes a trial bid in a new suit then
o*pener's holding in the agreed suit should be at least 5-card.*

This works for two reasons. First it covers the possibility that partner's raise was based on no more than 3-card support.
Secondly, if you have followed my guidance (and increasingly common modern practice) to open all 4-4-4-1 hands with a minor then your opening one of a major will always be either at least 5-card or exactly 4-card in a balanced hand. With 17 or 18 points and only four trumps in a balanced hand then opener's trial bid should always be in no trumps – such a bid does not guarantee stops in all the side-suits. It will usually be correct for responder to revert to the major when holding 4-card support.

Alternative versions of trial bids are available.
My preferred option, which is the one used in the commentary in this section, is natural promising in principle a 4-card suit headed by good honours holding – perhaps at least two of the top four honours.
Occasionally it will be necessary to make a bid in a 3-card suit but the honours strength should be as above.

Note that many club partnerships play 'long-suit trial bids' in which opener typically bids a weak 3-card suit in which he would like a little help.

Opener's raise to 3
This bid is frequently used in club play as invitational. You may have to go along with it with occasional partners.

However, it is less informative than the various alternative styles of trial bid, and it also wastes the opportunity to put a further pre-emptive spanner in the works when holding extra length in a minimum opener - not recommended.