



Which System?

When you start out you don't choose a system so much as inherit one from whoever taught you. But behind almost every natural method sit two big decisions — and Bridge Unlocked teaches both, as two full lanes.

How strong is your 1NT opening? A **weak** no-trump shows 12–14; a **strong** one shows 15–17.

How long is a major-suit opening? In **ACOL** 1♥ or 1♠ promises **four**; in the **five-card-major** style it promises **five**.

Weak no-trump, four-card majors — ACOL

Open **1NT on 12–14** and it swallows a huge slice of your balanced hands at once — which is why it can afford to be aggressive. A weak no-trump is **frequent** and **pre-emptive**: it robs the opponents of the whole one level and forces them to enter the auction, if they dare, at their peril. Describing a narrow three-point range in one bid is a real weapon in the part-score battles where most matchpoints live.

With those hands handled, your one-of-a-suit openings carry the rest, and you can comfortably **open a four-card major** — so 4-4 major fits surface early. The costs are the mirror of the virtues: a weak no-trump can occasionally be doubled and punished, and a four-card major doesn't *promise* a fit, so responder bids with a touch more care. A descriptive, obstructive, high-frequency style — the club standard across these islands for generations.

They come as a package

Each choice supports the other. The weak no-trump *needs* somewhere to put its many balanced hands, and four-card-major openings give them a home; the strong no-trump *frees* the majors to promise five, and five-card majors *reward* the extra precision. That's why you rarely meet a weak no-trump with five-card majors, or a strong one with four.

Neither is better. A weak no-trump wins part-scores by frequency and pressure; a strong one wins by safety and clean fits. Strong players win with both. What matters is **playing your chosen method well** — knowing your ranges cold, and why each bid means what it means.

Strong no-trump, five-card majors

Open **1NT on 15–17** and you gain safety and precision at the top: a strong no-trump is rarely doubled, so it's a calm bid when vulnerable, and it pin-points a good balanced hand for slam purposes. Pair it with **five-card majors** and a raise of partner's major *guarantees* an eight-card fit immediately — which is what lets the modern response structures work so cleanly.

The trade-off is where your *other* balanced hands go. With 12–14 (and 18–19) too weak or too strong for the no-trump, they open a minor — so minor openings become frequent, and your **1♣ can be short**. You also can't open a four-card major. More precision and safer fits, at the price of a busier minor-suit apparatus.

In the app

Bridge Unlocked runs the two styles as parallel lanes, taught to the same depth — the **ACOL lane** (12–14, four-card majors) and the **five-card-major lane** (15–17, five-card majors, opening on 12 or more). They share their play technique and most of their defence, and diverge exactly where the two decisions force them to. You can sit at different levels in each lane, so pick the lane your club plays and go deep, or explore both and feel the difference.

WHICH LANE?

Ireland and the UK → traditionally ACOL, though more and more clubs in Ireland are playing five-card majors and a strong no-trump. **North America**, and most online play → five-card majors and a strong no-trump. Not sure? Ask what your club plays, and start there.