

**"As a Bridge Responder Bidding When (1) Partner
Opened With a 1-Level Suit Bid and
(2) Opponent(s) Who Bid Before You PASSEd and
(3) You Hold a 'Weak' Hand:
The Bridge 'Rule of 6' or 4 or 5"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss **"As a Bridge Responder Bidding (1) When Partner Opened With a 1-Level Suit Bid and (2) Opponent(s) Who Bid Before You PASSEd and (3) You Hold a 'Weak' Hand: The Bridge 'Rule of 6' or 4 or 8"**. Well, Esther, thank you for talking to us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, well, Est... err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, sorry about that. Well, at the outset why don't you tell us from where the ideas and example today's lesson come from?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Today's ideas and example come from a bridge posting by Andrew Robson titled "Responder's Six-point Rule":
<https://www.andrewrobson.co.uk/article/articles/3542>

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

I may have altered some of the cards in the example bridge Board.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm... Would you then tell us a little about this Andrew Robson fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course!

About Andrew Robson

Andrew Robson (1964 -) is an English professional bridge player, writer, and teacher. He has won **7** Gold Cup competitions and **3** North American Bridge Championships. He also was “runner-up” in **2** Gold Cup competitions and **1** North American Bridge Championship competition. Robson is bridge columnist for The Times and Country Life. He previously also wrote bridge columns for The Oldie, The Spectator, and the Express on Sunday.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, before we get into the primary substance of today’s lesson would you briefly review your primary concerns as a bridge Responder when **(1) Partner Opened With a 1-Level Suit Bid and (2) Opponent(s) Who Bid Before You PASSEd and (3) You Hold a ‘Weak’ Hand?**

Esther: Well, Bruce, here are some concerns as Responder in this situation. With respect to your Partner who opened with a **1**-level Suit bid you *know* that:

1. Partner holds a *minimum* of **13** HCPs and (a) **3+** Clubs if Partner opened **1C**, (b) **4+** Diamonds with Diamond Honor(s) if Partner opened **1D**, (c) **5+** Hearts with Heart Honor(s) if Partner opened **1H**, or (d) **5+** Spades with Heart Honor(s) if Partner opened **1S**. Your Partner may hold *fewer* than **13** HCPs if Partner bidding using Marty Bergen’s “**Rule of 20**”.² If Partner sat **3rd** in auction, following **2** PASSes Partner may hold only **11** HCPs, and if sat **4th** in auction, following **3** PASSes Partner may hold only **10** HCPs.

² Within the “Esther Bridge Lessons” see “Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play ‘Rules’”: <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

2. Your Partner holds a maximum of about **19** HCPs. If Partner held **>19** HCPs Partner would have been likely to have bid a "strong" **2C** opening.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, given what Responder *knows* about Partner's Hand, what should then be the concerns of Responder holding a "weak" Hand in this situation?

Esther: Well, Bruce:

1. If you as Responder are (a) "short" in Partner's bid Suit, especially if you hold a void or singleton in that bid Suit, but (b) you hold a "biddable" higher-ranking Suit that you can bid at the **1**-level, you would like to share this information with Partner by bidding your higher-ranking Suit. But you usually will not want to "rescue" Partner more than **1** time.
2. If you hold (a) *only* about **6** HCPs and (b) Partner happens to be at the "top" of his opening bid but holds as many as **19** HCPs, you do not want to PASS Partner even though your Hand is relatively weak because your Partnership may still be able to set and "make" a Game contract notwithstanding the "weakness" of your own Hand. You therefore may want to give Partner a chance to say more by keeping the conversation open.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is there a general "Rule" that you as Responder in this situation can use to help guide your bidding decisions?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Andrew Robson suggests that you should invoke the bridge "**Rule of 6**" in these situations":

"Rule of 6"

1. If Partner opens **1C**, your RHO PASSes and perhaps your LHO also PASSed, and you hold (a) **~6³** HCPs and (b) **5+** Diamonds with Honor(s), as Responder you may wish to bid **1D**.
2. If Partner opens **1C**, your RHO PASSes and perhaps your LHO also PASSed, and you hold (a) **~6** HCPs and (b) **4+** Hearts with Honor(s), as Responder you may wish to bid **1H**.

3 "~" = "approximately".

3. If Partner opens 1**C**, your RHO PASSes and perhaps your LHO also PASSed, and you hold (a) ~6 HCPs and (b) 4+ Spades with Honor(s), as Responder you may wish to bid 1**S**.
4. If Partner opens 1**D**, your RHO PASSes and perhaps your LHO also PASSed, and you hold (a) ~6 HCPs and (b) 4+ Hearts with Honor(s), as Responder you may wish to bid 1**H**.
5. If Partner opens 1**D**, your RHO PASSes and perhaps your LHO also PASSed, and you hold (a) ~6 HCPs and (b) 4+ Spades with Honor(s), as Responder you may wish to bid 1**S**.
6. If Partner opens 1**H**, your RHO PASSes and perhaps your LHO also PASSed, and you hold (a) ~6 HCPs and (b) 4+ Spades with Honor(s), as Responder you may wish to bid 1**S**.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you give us some concrete examples?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you! In all these 4 examples let's say your Partner opened 1**H** and either (a) your Partner was Dealer and your RHO PASSed or (b) your LHO PASSed, your Partner bid 1**H**, and your RHO PASSed. You hold:

YOU (6)
S: J 9 8 3
H: T 7 4
D: A 9 8 4
C: J T

Robson suggests that you should bid 1**S** to "show" Partner your Spades and your Hearts are too "weak" to "support" Partner's Hearts.⁴ Perhaps Partner also holds Spades or has a 6th Heart card he may wish to "show".

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how about another example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. You hold:

⁴ Many other bridge experts instead would insist that as Responder you must bid 2**H** to "show" Partner your 3 Heart card "support".

YOU (5)
S: J 9 3
H: J 7
D: Q J 7 3
C: 9 5 4 2

You should PASS. You cannot "support" Partner's Hearts because you *only* hold **2** Heart cards. You have *too few* Spades to bid 1**S**. You have *too few* HCPs to bid 1**NT** or bid at the 2-level in a Minor.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how about another example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. You hold:

YOU (4)
S: 5
H: J 9 7 3
D: K 5 4 2
C: 9 7 5 3

You should bid 2**H**. You hold **4** of Partner's Hearts including an Honor. Your singleton Spade is worth **3** "Dummy points" given that you know you and Partner have found a "fit". Partner should be expected to PASS unless he holds a "big" Hsnd.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, maybe you could talk us through a **4th** example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. You hold:

YOU (5)
S: J T 8 6 3
H: 4
D: K J 5 3
C: 7 5 3

Your holding both **5** Spades with **2** Honors together with your holding a singleton in Partner's bid Hearts makes a Responder's bid of 1**S** the "correct" bid.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, the "Rule of 6" for Responder bidding when Partner opens a 1-level Suit bid seems to be more like the "**Rule of 6, or 4, or 5**"...

Esther: Well, Bruce, you make a fair point. Of course, all "Rules" ought to be used *thoughtfully* and *flexibly* and not rigidly!