



Ask Jerry

by Jerry Helms

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to jerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: I enjoy your lectures. Do you think I should read your book, *HELMS TO HELLO*?

—Britney Sauvage, IL

Dear Britney: HELMS TO HELLO discusses a method for competing when your opponents open 1NT. Even if you have no intention of using HELLO—a combination of my name and Bill LOhmann, who was my partner when the method evolved—there are useful ideas that can be applied if you use natural methods. You can simply ignore the concepts that seem too complex.

A familiar comment I often hear is “Should I be competing after the opponents open 1NT? Isn’t it risky to come into the auction when they have shown a hand with 15-17 points?” My view is that **being in the auction is generally better than being out of the auction** and I follow this philosophy:

Look for reasons to bid before finding excuses to pass.

Let’s consider some examples. We are West and the auction begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1NT	?
♠ A J 10 7 6 3 ♥ 4 ♦ K J 10 5 ♣ 8 3			There are only 9 high-card points but that’s no excuse to pass. With a good six-card suit and 6-4 distribution, overcall 2♠. That’s a natural call that takes away bidding room from the opponents. West can no longer bid 2♣, 2♦, or 2♥.

It’s possible West might double for penalty, but many partnerships would treat a double as takeout, or value showing, or something else and East may bid rather than risk passing. Even if we are doubled, there’s no reason to believe the

penalty will be more than the value of the contract they would reach if we didn’t interfere.

♠ 9 3
 ♥ A K Q J 7 5 3
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ 9 2

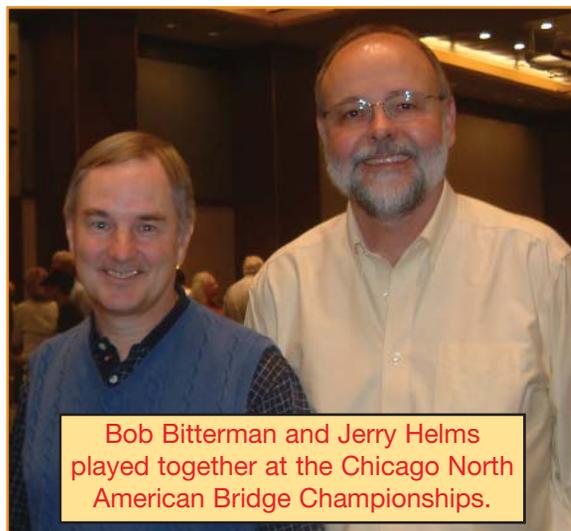
We have only 10 high-card points and many players would simply bid hearts with this hand. It’s true that we can likely make a partscore of 2♥ and there is little risk of being doubled for penalty, but I would be looking for bigger things.

I would prefer to start with a penalty double! If they stay in 1NT doubled, my heart lead will defeat them one trick—perhaps more if partner has something. If they are vulnerable, a penalty of 200 points will be more than we would get for a partscore in hearts. If they do find a better spot, we can always bid hearts later.

♠ K Q J 10 9 7 2 ♥ — ♦ A Q J 6 4 ♣ 5	With a hand like this, we should jump right to 4♠, expecting to make it despite the 1NT opening on our right. I don’t expect to lose more than a spade, a diamond, and a club even if partner has nothing at all.
---	---

Even better, the opponents may double us for penalty with all their high cards when they can make a game or a slam of their own.

♠ 5 ♥ K J 10 9 8 6 3 ♦ Q J 10 ♣ 7 5	Only 7 high-card points but I’d be happy to make a preemptive jump overcall of 3♥ with this hand, especially if we are non vulnerable. Let’s see if the
--	---



Bob Bitterman and Jerry Helms played together at the Chicago North American Bridge Championships.

opponents are able to find their best contract after this start! Maybe they will, but even the best partnerships sometimes misjudge what to do when we put pressure on them.

These four example hands had 9, 10, 13, and 7 high-card points. As you can see, points are not the key to competing over the opponents’ 1NT opening; distribution is the key. I like to get into the auction with any decent six-card or longer suit. In contrast, consider this hand after right-hand opponent opens 1NT.

♠ K J 5 ♥ A Q 7 ♦ K 9 3 ♣ K J 7 4	17 high-card points, but I would have no hesitation in passing with this hand. It’s a pure guess which suit to lead and it wouldn’t surprise me if the opponents made an overtrick or two in 1NT doubled. Besides my double may warn them to run to a better spot. Best to keep quiet and hope declarer doesn’t figure out where all the missing high cards lie.
--	--

All these natural calls fit into the HELLO methods. If you and your partner are experienced enough to handle some additional creative ideas, pick up a copy of the book. It’s a short 50 pages.

—JH ♦