



# Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

One of my partners insists that to open 1♦, I must hold at least a four-card suit. This means that sometimes I have to open 1♣ with a doubleton, which we announce as "may be short." Although I have agreed to do this, I feel uncomfortable and I am not even sure why. What do you think of this agreement?

### Minor Confusion

Dear MC,

Not much! I am really glad you asked this question because it is a subject that I have a strong opinion about ... but by now, I guess that's no surprise!

I play that a 1♦ opening bid implies at least four. By agreement, if we must open a three-card minor suit, we open 1♣ irrespective of suit quality. This means the only time 1♦ would be the choice on a three-card suit is when holding exactly four spades, four hearts, three diamonds and two clubs. According to *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, the probability of holding any 4-4-3-2 distribution is 21.55%, but the probability of specifically holding four spades, four hearts, three diamonds and two clubs is 1.796%. So on this basis, your 1♦ openings will include at least four diamonds 98.204% of the time. But wait! If you further calculate that a one-level opening

bid shows between 12 and 21 high-card points (and factor out the 15 to 17 HCP with this shape that are opened 1NT), the probability of a four-card or longer diamond suit for a 1♦ opener increases to 99.56%. The odds of being forced to open 1♦ with a three-card suit, therefore, are extremely low.

Now that you have skimmed over this statistical mumbo jumbo, which by the way, was provided and confirmed by some of my more geeky, mathematically gifted friends, let's apply this to real life. Do you really need a 100% guarantee of four or more diamonds? Or is 99.56% high enough? I think so.

This has implications for 1♣ openings, too. Consider the following hand and auction:

♠974 ♥AK ♦Q863 ♣9832.

Partner	RHO	You
1♣	1♠	?

Integrate what you can see in your hand with what you have heard. Partner has suggested 12 or more points and you have 9. At this point, you are aware that your side possesses at least 50% of the total values available on this deal. 1NT, while accurate on both values and shape, lacks the requisite spade stopper. In competitive auctions, it is important to communicate values as quickly as possible before the opportunity goes away. A simple raise to 2♣ showing 6 to 10 points with support seems about right ... unless of course, partner could hold a doubleton using the "may be short" method! Although the possibility of three clubs in opener's hand is troubling, I know we have at least a 4-3 fit, which provides a small mea-

sure of comfort. Regardless of how the auction continues, my partner is armed with the knowledge that I have a smattering of values with some form of club support.

I am prepared for the statistical assault by those in favor of opening 1♣ with a doubleton.

Call me an old-fashioned traditionalist if you wish. Personally, I prefer the 100% guarantee that opener holds at least three clubs when they open 1♣ even though it means there is only a 99.56% chance he holds at least four diamonds when he opens 1♦. □