

What Do You Mean That's an Alert?

Simpler Is Better

The ACBL Competition and Conventions Committee (C&C) and ACBL Board of Directors (BOD) recognize that the Alert procedure can never be perfect. It is a work in progress and hence requires periodic changes; the game itself is constantly evolving and changing. Every Alert, pre-Alert, Announcement or delayed Alert has potential drawbacks: it makes the game more complex, it places a strain on newer players to know what is required, and changing it risks confusing experienced players who have gotten used to the old way. On the other hand, every unusual or conventional call that isn't Alerted, Announced or the like creates other, potentially more serious problems. Opponents have to ask questions or look at the convention card every time they suspect a call doesn't mean what it seems to mean, which slows down the game and risks passing unauthorized information – especially when many players ask or look only when they are “interested.”

The major objective in revising the Alert procedure this time was to simplify the procedure while maintaining the principle of full disclosure. In order to accomplish this task, the C&C and the BOD have used the admittedly “fuzzy” terminology of “highly unusual and unexpected (HU&U)” as the general standard for judging when a call requires an Alert when there is no specific requirement to Alert.

This is especially apparent when you look at doubles and redoubles on the chart. Rather than trying to itemize specific doubles and redoubles which require an Alert, only doubles and redoubles with a HU&U meaning will now require an Alert. Some examples of highly unusual doubles or redoubles are:

1. A **penalty double of a low level overcall immediately over an opening bid.** For example, 1♦-1♥-Double (penalty).
2. A **double of an artificial bid which asks partner to lead a suit other than the artificially bid suit.** For example, 1♥-Pass-4♣ (singleton or void in clubs) – Double (asking partner to lead a diamond).
3. A **double of a low-level natural opening suit bid as penalty.** For example, 1♥, 2♥ or 3♥- Double (penalty).
4. A **redouble after a 1NT opening bid as a run-out.** For example, 1NT-Double-Redouble.
5. A **double or redouble which shows three-card support for partner.** For example, 1♦-Pass-1♥-2♣-Double where the double shows three hearts and 1♦-Pass-1♥-Double-Redouble where the redouble shows three hearts.

In line with this simplification, in order to aid “full disclosure,” after the auction is completed, declarers are encouraged to volunteer to explain the auction before the opening lead. This offer to explain is especially important when there have been protracted and/or complicated auctions.

The following introduction will appear on the new ACBL Alert Chart:

“This Alert procedure uses the admittedly ‘fuzzy’ terminology of ‘highly unusual and unexpected’ as the best practical solution to creating a simple Alert procedure. The ‘highly unusual and unexpected’ should be determined in light of historical usage rather than local geographical usage. To ensure full disclosure, however, at the end of the auction and before the opening lead declarers are encouraged to volunteer to explain the auction (including available inferences).”

While we are all resistant to change, most of the changes were made with the motto “simplify” ever before us. So try not to cringe as we look at some of the other changes.

The number of definitions on the Alert Chart has been expanded. These are useful terms to use to explain your methods whether Alertable or not.

The number of categories of pre-Alert (a pre-Alert is given to opponents prior to starting the first board of a round) has been increased by one. If your agreement is to lead low from a doubleton, you **MUST** pre-Alert your opponents.

The following **natural bids** no longer require an Alert:

Natural but limited openings such as Precision 1♥ and 1♠ openings.

Natural jump raises will no longer require an Alert except for a weak jump raise in a non-competitive auction. 1♠-Pass-3♠ (weak) is the only type of auction where a jump raise requires an Alert.

Natural three-level responses to notrump openings and overcalls whether a jump or not and whether or not in competition.

1NT responses and rebids showing a balanced hand even if a four-card major may be bypassed.

A natural 2NT response to an opening bid of one in a suit which is invitational or better.

A cuebid (a bid in a suit which an opponent has either bid naturally or in which he has shown four or more cards) no longer requires an Alert except for a DIRECT cuebid of an opening natural bid where the cuebidder is offering to play in that suit (shows length). For example, 1♦(3+ diamonds) – 2♦ (natural showing diamonds) requires an Alert; however, 1♣ (Precision) – 2♣ (natural showing clubs) does not require an Alert.

Only a highly unusual and unexpected meaning of a **pass** requires an Alert.

For example, you are required to Alert the pass in the auction, 1♦-Double-Redouble-Pass, if the pass means you want to penalize the opponents at 1♦ (a penalty pass).

Please note that forcing passes are not Alertable.

The **Announcement** category has been expanded to include additional Announcements.

All opening 1NT ranges are to be Announced. This was done for two reasons. First of all, it is simpler. One doesn't have to

decide whether one's 1NT opening fits into the strong category or not. Everyone knows that when they play in a sanctioned ACBL tournament the range of partner's 1NT opening is Announced, period. Second, this Announcement is also intended to decrease the transfer of unauthorized information. You no longer have to wonder if an opponent has just forgotten to Announce his range or if they really do play a strong notrump or how strong it is (15 to 17, 16 to 18, 14 plus to 17 minus, etc.). Everyone knows immediately – what could be simpler, easier and nicer! No need to ask or look at a convention card.

Transfer bids of diamonds to hearts and hearts to spades are Announced after opener's natural notrump rebid.

For example, 1♦-Pass-1♠-Pass; 2NT-Pass-3♦ (transfer to hearts showing four or more hearts) is now announced, "Transfer."

The Alert procedure is simpler. If you are in doubt (in the heat of battle) about whether a call requires an Alert, do not fret or worry. For the moment go ahead and Alert. You can then ask a kindly director later whether the call requires an Alert or not. Also, do not worry if your inexperienced opponents Alert calls for which an Alert is unnecessary. After all, they are trying to keep you informed. When you are a declarer, try to remember to offer an explanation of the auction prior to the opening lead. Bridge is a social game – this is an opportunity to be social and more importantly an opportunity to exhibit bridge courtesy.

The bottom line is that when you play a natural method or treatment which has a HU&U meaning, there is an overriding requirement that you Alert even if your method is not specifically noted as requiring an Alert.

So, sit back, relax and enjoy your bridge game and the simpler ACBL.

Comparison: New Alert Procedure (2002) vs the Old Procedure

New Alert Procedure

- I. Natural Bids
No natural calls are Alertable except for:
 - a. Those which show an unexpected feature that is unrelated to the denomination named.
 - b. Those which are played by most players as forcing (or non-forcing) or as showing a particular range or strength, but which you play differently.
 - c. Direct cuebids which are played as natural (*e.g.*, 1♦ - 2♦ = diamonds).
- II. Conventional Bids
All conventional calls are immediately Alertable, except for:
 - a. Those which require an Announcement, a delayed Alert, or are specifically exempted herein.
 - b. Stayman, including Stayman after the notrump opening is doubled.
 - c. Gerber, Blackwood, their variations, and the expected responses thereto.
 - d. Unusual notrump.
 - e. A conventional 2NT response to an opening two-level suit bid.
 - f. Cuebids, regardless of their meaning (but see I.c.).
 - g. Opening strong artificial 2♣ and a waiting or negative 2♦ response thereto.
- III. Doubles, Redoubles and Passes
 - a. No double requires an Alert except one with a highly unusual or unexpected meaning.
 - b. No redouble requires an Alert except one with a highly unusual or unexpected meaning.
 - c. No pass requires an Alert except one with a highly unusual or unexpected meaning.
- IV. Announcements
The following bids require an Announcement:
 - a. Transfers (diamonds to hearts or hearts to spades) at any level by the partner of a notrump opener, overcaller or after opener's natural notrump rebid (say "Transfer").
 - b. A forcing or semi-forcing 1NT response to a one-of-a-major opening (say "Forcing" or "Semi-forcing" respectively).
 - c. All opening 1NT ranges (state the range).
 - d. Non-forcing opening bids of 1♣ or 1♦ which may be fewer than three cards (say "May be short").
- V. Delayed Alerts
Beginning with and including opener's second call, Alertable bids above 3NT require a delayed Alert. (Note: Alertable passes, doubles and redoubles require immediate, not delayed, Alerts.)
- VI. Calls with Highly Unusual or Unexpected Meanings
Any call which conveys a highly unusual message, either by partnership agreement or past experience, of which the opponents are likely to be unaware, requires an Alert irrespective of items I through V above.

Changes from Old Alert Procedure

- I. Natural Bids
The following will no longer require an Alert:
Jump raises, except those played as weak in non-competitive auctions (*e.g.*, 1♥-Pass-3♥=weak); all natural three-level responses to notrump openings or overcalls, whether a jump or not; natural but limited openings (*e.g.*, Precision 1♥ and 1♠); 1NT responses and rebids showing a balanced hand, even if a four-card major may be bypassed; invitational or better natural 2NT response to an opening bid of one in a suit.
- II. Conventional Bids
Cuebids will no longer require an Alert except for a direct cuebid of an opening natural bid which is played as natural (*e.g.*, 1♦-2♦=diamonds). Note: 1♣ (artificial) - 2♣ = natural is not Alertable.
- III. Doubles, Redoubles and Passes
Doubles, redoubles and passes will no longer require an Alert except for those with highly unusual or unexpected meanings (*e.g.*, 1♦-Dbl=penalty; 1♦-1♥-Dbl=penalty; 1♠-Pass-4♦-Dbl=lead clubs; 1NT-Dbl-Rdbl=asks opener to bid 2♣; 1♣-Dbl-Rdbl-Pass=penalty).
Note: forcing passes are not Alertable.
- IV. Announcements
All opening 1NT ranges now are Announced. Non-forcing opening bids of 1♣ or 1♦ which may be fewer than three cards now are announced (say "May be short").
Transfers after opener's natural notrump rebid.
- V. Delayed Alerts
No changes.
- VI. Calls with Highly Unusual or Unexpected Meanings
No changes. This category codifies that Alerts are required for any unusual or unexpected method, including legal home-made methods.

New Alert Procedure (2002) with Examples

Below is the new Alert procedure in summary form, including some typical examples illustrating each principle. In the procedure's final form the examples will appear in a separate table and expanded to a more extensive set.

I. Natural Bids

No natural bids are Alertable except for:

- a. Those which show an unexpected feature that is unrelated to the denomination named (*e.g.*, a weak 2♥ opening showing hearts *and another suit*; 1♥-Pass-3♥ =raise promising a singleton somewhere).
- b. Those which are played by most players as forcing (or non-forcing) or as showing a particular range or strength, but which you play differently (*e.g.*, any of the following by an unpassed hand: 1♦-Pass-1♥ or 1♠-Pass-2♣=non-forcing; 1♠-Pass-1NT=game forcing; 1♠-Pass-3♠=weak; 1♦-Pass-2♦=forcing; 2♥-Pass-2NT=natural and non-forcing; 1♥-3♣ or 1♦-2♠=intermediate or strong; 1♦-1♠=could be fewer than 6 HCP [also requires a pre-Alert]; 1♣-Pass-2♥=non-forcing, weak or invitational; 1♦-Pass-1♠-1NT=takeout; 1♦-1NT=12 to 15; 1♥-1NT-Pass-2♣ or 1NT-Pass-2♣=natural; 1♠=8+ HCP [also requires a pre-Alert]; 2♥=intermediate or strong; 2♣=weak or intermediate; 1♦-Pass-1♠-Pass; 1NT=strong). NOTE: Opening suit bids somewhere in the range of 10 to 21+ (such as Precision natural one-level opening bids) do not require an Alert.
- c. Direct cuebids of natural opening bids which are played as natural (*e.g.*, 1♦-2♦=diamonds).

II. Conventional Bids

All conventional bids are Alertable, except for:

- a. Those which require an Announcement, a delayed Alert, or are specifically exempted herein.
- b. Stayman (a 2♣ or 3♣ bid by the partner of a notrump opener or overcaller asking for a four-card major), including Stayman after the notrump opening has been doubled.
- c. Gerber (4♣ either immediately or delayed over partner's notrump asking for aces), Blackwood (4NT), their variations (*e.g.*, KCB, RKCB, 1430, etc.), and expected responses thereto. (Note: Non-4NT ace-asking bids such as Kickback, those below 3NT, opening ace-asking bids, and any of their responses require either an Alert or delayed Alert.)
- d. Unusual notrump (*e.g.*, a 2NT jump overcall [*e.g.*, 1 of a major-2NT=minors or 1 of a minor-2NT=lower two unbid suits] or any four-level or higher notrump bid that is unusual; Pass-1♦-Pass-1♠; 1NT=takeout). (Note: A natural jump to 2NT in balancing seat [*e.g.*, 1♠-Pass-Pass-2NT=strong, balanced] does not require an Alert.)
- e. A conventional 2NT response to an opening two-level suit bid (*e.g.*, asks for a feature; Ogust).
- f. Cuebids, regardless of their meaning (but see I.c.).
- g. Opening strong artificial 2♣ and a waiting or negative 2♦ response thereto.

III. Doubles, Redoubles and Passes

- a. No double requires an Alert if it is for takeout, for penalty, shows general values, or requests partner's input (*e.g.*, optional, do-the-right-thing, co-operative, action, etc.). Doubles with highly unusual or unexpected meanings (*e.g.*, 1♦-Dbl=penalty; 1♦-1♥-Dbl=penalty; "don't-lead-my-suit" doubles; 1♠-Pass-4♦-Dbl=lead clubs; 1♣-Pass-1♠-2♦-Dbl=support) require an Alert.
- b. No redouble requires an Alert if it is for penalty, shows general values, or shows or denies a control in the suit redoubled. Redoubles with highly unusual or unexpected meanings (*e.g.*, 1NT-Dbl-Rdbl=asks opener to bid his better minor, or forces him to rebid 2♣; 1♣-Dbl-Rdbl=SOS; 1♣-Pass-1♠-Dbl-Rdbl=support) require an Alert.
- c. No pass requires an Alert if it indicates weakness, shows no desire to bid, or indicates that no suitably descriptive call is available. Passes with highly unusual or unexpected meanings such as those which show values or a specific feature (*e.g.*, 1♣-Dbl-Rdbl-Pass=penalty; 2♣[strong, art.]-2♠-Pass=values; 1♠-2♣-Pass=forcing) require an Alert.
- d. No forcing pass requires an Alert.

IV. Announcements

The following bids require an Announcement:

- a. Transfers (diamonds to hearts or hearts to spades) at any level by the partner of a notrump opener, overcaller or after opener's natural notrump rebid (say "Transfer").
- b. A forcing or semi-forcing 1NT response to a one-of-a-major opening (say "Forcing" or "Semi-forcing" as appropriate).
- c. All opening 1NT ranges (state the range, *e.g.*, say "12 to 14").
- d. Non-forcing opening bids of 1♣ or 1♦ which may be fewer than three cards (say "May be short").

V. Delayed Alerts

Beginning with and including opener's second call, Alertable bids above 3NT require a delayed Alert. (Note: Alertable passes, doubles and redoubles require immediate, not delayed, Alerts.)

VI. Calls with Highly Unusual or Unexpected Meanings

Any call which conveys a highly unusual message, either by partnership agreement or past experience, of which the opponents are likely to be unaware, requires an Alert irrespective of items I through V above.

ALERT CHART (Effective 3/1/02)

The new Alert procedure includes a number of definitions whose purpose is to clarify important concepts and create a standard terminology.

This procedure uses the admittedly “fuzzy” terminology of “highly unusual and unexpected” as the best practical solution to simplifying the Alert procedure. The “highly unusual and unexpected” should be determined in light of historical usage rather than local geographical usage. To ensure full disclosure, however, at the end of the auction and before the opening lead declarers are encouraged to volunteer to explain the auction (including available inferences).

Definition of expected length for natural bids for the Alert procedure are:

Suit bids:

1. Three or more in a minor and four or more in a major for opening bids, rebids and responses.
2. Four or more for an overcall at the one level, five or more for higher levels.
3. Five or more for a weak two-bid.
4. Six or more for a weak three-bid.

Notrump openings and overcalls:

A notrump opening or overcall if not unbalanced (generally, no singleton or void and only one or two doubletons) is considered natural.

DEFINITIONS:

Alert: A manner specified by the sponsoring organization by which opponents are notified of your pair’s special agreements. These may be given aloud, in writing and/or by using an Alert card or strip.

Convention: A bid which, by partnership agreement, conveys a meaning not necessarily related to the denomination named or, in the case of a pass, double or redouble, the last denomination named. In addition, a pass which promises more than a specified amount of strength, or artificially promises or denies values other than in the last suit named.

Transfer: A bid of a suit to show another specific suit (*e.g.*, a diamond bid showing hearts).

Cuebid: A bid in a suit which an opponent has either bid naturally or in which he has shown four or more cards.

Control-bid: A bid, not intended as a place to play, which denotes a control (usually first or second round). The control need not be in the denomination named. These bids are usually used to investigate slam.

Doubles (in increasing order of penalty orientation):

Takeout: Partner is requested to bid.

Competitive: Shows a desire to compete further; partner normally bids.

Optional: Shows extra high-card values; offers partner a choice between bidding and passing.

Penalty-oriented: Partner normally passes but occasionally bids.

Penalty: Partner is requested to pass.

OTHER USEFUL DEFINITIONS:

Treatment: A natural call which, by partnership agreement, carries a specific message about the suit bid or the general strength or shape of the hand.

Relay: A bid which does not guarantee any specific suit; partner is requested to make the next-step bid (usually) or make another descriptive bid if appropriate (*e.g.*, a diamond bid which usually shows hearts but may not have hearts in some cases).

Puppet: A bid which requires partner to make a specific bid (*e.g.*, a 2NT bid which requires partner to bid 3♣).

Alerts: Many previously Alertable calls no longer require an Alert. However, when in doubt Alert (there is no penalty for Alerting unnecessarily but there may be one for failing to Alert when one is required).

Pre-Alerts (Alerts before hands are removed from the first board of a round or match segment):

1. Two-system methods (*e.g.*, strong club when equal or favorable vulnerability; a natural two-over-one when not).
2. Systems based on very light openings or other highly aggressive methods or preempts.
3. Systems which may be unfamiliar to opponents, such as canapé.
4. SuperChart and Mid-Chart methods.
5. Leading low from a doubleton.

Delayed Alerts: Beginning with and including opener’s second call, an Alertable bid above the level of 3NT bid is a delayed Alert. **Passes, doubles and redoubles requiring an Alert must always be Alerted immediately.**

A delayed Alert is made as follows:

Declaring side: The partner or the person making the Alertable call Alerts after the auction is completed and prior to the opening lead.

Defending side: The partner of the player making the Alertable call Alerts after the opening lead is made face-down and before the dummy is tabled.

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Natural Calls Not Specifically Noted	About expected strength and shape	Highly unusual strength, shape, etc.	
Conventional/ Artificial Calls	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Stayman (<i>next higher level of clubs</i>) Blackwood (4NT) and expected responses Gerber (4♣)/NT Conventional 2NT response to an opening two-level suit bid 2♦ response to strong artificial 2♣ opening which is waiting or negative. 	All other conventional and/or artificial bids. *See delayed Alerts above for when to Alert*	
Notrump Openings		Conventional	State range, if natural, for all 1NT openings
Notrump Overcalls	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conventional overcalls by a passed hand. Jumps to 2NT or any four-level or higher notrump bid that is unusual. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Jump to 3NT that is unusual. Other conventional notrump overcalls A natural notrump overcall with an expected lower limit of fewer than 14 HCP and/or an upper limit of more than 19 HCP Natural jumps to 2NT, except in balancing seat. 	
Responses to Notrump Opening Bids and Overcalls	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Stayman (<i>next higher level of clubs</i>) asking for a four-card major. (Also, Stayman after the NT opening has been doubled.) Natural signoffs at the next higher level in diamonds, hearts and spades. Three-level natural responses whether a jump response or not 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Stayman (<i>next higher level of clubs</i>) if other than asking for a four-card major, and rebids. Transfers, except for those which are announced and other artificial responses above <i>next higher level of clubs</i>. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> State "Transfer" any time a diamond response to a natural notrump bid at any level is a transfer to hearts.* State "Transfer" any time a heart response to a natural notrump bid at any level is a transfer to spades.* <p>*If the transferer may occasionally hold a game forcing hand without the next higher suit, state "Transfer" and Alert the subsequent bid which cancels the transfer meaning</p> <p>NOTE: Announcements of transfers as above apply after a natural NT rebid by opener.</p>
Opening Suit Bids at the One Level	Natural non-forcing openings with an agreed range of somewhere between 10 to 21+ HCP	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conventional and/or artificial openings which do not require an Announcement such as a strong/artificial forcing club. Frequent very light openings (fewer than 10 HCP by agreement). Also, pre-Alert 	State "may be short" for non-forcing 1♣ and 1♦ calls which may be shorter than three cards.
Responses to One-Level Opening Bids in a Suit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Non-forcing 1NT response whether four-card majors are bypassed or not. Forcing natural 2NT response that may bypass four-card majors. A one-level major-suit response to 1♣ that may bypass longer diamonds. 2/1 which shows at least game invitational values. All jump raises in or out of competition except a weak jump raise after a pass by RHO (no competition). Natural forcing jump shifts and all natural jump shifts in competition. Natural 2NT response invitational or better. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conventional 1NT response which is not Announced. Non-forcing suit bid by an unpassed hand. A weak jump raise after a pass by RHO (no competition). A natural, non-forcing jump shift after a pass by RHO (no competition). All conventional responses not listed under no Alert. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> State "Forcing" if a 1NT response to a major is simply forcing. State "Semi-forcing" if a 1NT response to a major is forcing except when opener has a balanced minimum.
Opener's and Responder's Rebids	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Two-of-a-minor after a forcing or semi-forcing 1NT response. A 1NT or 2NT rebid that implies a balanced hand (may contain one or two four-card majors). 	Opener's 1NT rebid, if strong. Responder's artificial third- or fourth-suit bids. Responder's "checkback" bids (of 2♣, 2♦, 3♣ or 3♦)	
Opening Two-Level Bids in a Suit and Responses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2♣ strong, artificial, and forcing Weak, natural 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ Conventional and/or forcing 2NT responses Natural, forcing responses in a suit. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Other conventional and/or artificial bids Natural 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠, if intermediate or better. Natural weak or intermediate 2♣ Natural and non-forcing 2NT responses. Natural, non-forcing responses in a suit. 	
Doubles and Redoubles	Most doubles and redoubles *See Alertable Doubles*	Doubles and redoubles with highly unusual or unexpected meanings	
Cuebids	Most cuebids *See Alertable cuebids*	Direct cuebid of natural opening bid played as natural.	
Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Passes		Passes with highly unusual or unexpected meanings	

Category	No Alert	Alert	Announce
Other Constructive Calls	Over suits, 4NT ace-asking and responses. Over notrump, 4♣ ace-asking and responses	Ace-asking calls and responses at or below the level of 3NT or any opening ace-asking call and response. Delayed Alerts Ace-asking calls and responses above the level of 3NT beginning with opener's second call except for those listed under not Alertable.	
Defensive Bids	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weak jump overcalls (two or three level). 2. All constructive or better jump-shift advances. 3. All natural jump raises of an overcall. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very light overcalls (fewer than 6 HCP) <i>Also pre-Alert.</i> 2. Intermediate or better jump overcalls (two or three level). 3. Weak jump shifts after partner's overcall. 	