

Karate

Introduction

Karate is a system for bidding in competition, based on some of the pioneering ideas in my 1981 book, *3D and the MAFIA Club*. *3D* proposed for the first time the use of 3 different defensive bidding systems, depending on the number of specific suits previously shown by the opponents. *Karate* can be used no matter which side has opened the bidding, and is based on two distinct bidding structures designed on the premise that there is a distinct advantage in being able to show two different suits with a single bid.

The key concept is to have a firm agreement with partner about which suits are available as potential trump suits. This, in turn, depends upon agreeing upon whether all four suits are available or whether a suit should be treated as unavailable because it has been specifically shown by the opponents. Each partnership must be in agreement about when an opponent's suit has been specifically shown. For instance, should a 1C opening bid in Standard American or 2/1 be treated as showing a suit or a non-suit? In this document, the Default Agreement will be that in order for an opponent's suit to be treated as having been shown specifically it must be at least a 5+ card suit, and thus not a candidate trump suit for our side. We will use the term semi-suit to describe any suit bid naturally by an opponent that could be shorter than a 5-card suit. Such semi-suits of only 2-4 cards can thus be considered potential trump suits for both sides. Other private agreements can be easily accommodated by *Karate*. For example, *3D* suggested treating a 1C opening on 3+ cards as not shown specifically, but treating a 1D opening (that is made only rarely with 3 cards) as having been shown specifically.

The dominant theme in *Karate* is that showing two suits with a single bid is likely to be more effective than traditional methods that show only one suit (overcalls and jump overcalls) or three suits (takeout doubles) or no suits (a 1NT overcall). Showing two suits when no suit has been yet ruled out as a potential trump suit requires using six different bids to show all possible two-suit combinations (CD, CH, CS, DH, DS, HS). With only four possible suit bids available without jumping, we can include the cheapest NT overcall to handle a fifth combination and the cheapest jump overcall for the sixth combination. In *3D*, that structure was called *NoD*, since the opponent had shown **no** suit. We'll call this system **Hex** (short for hexagon, a six-sided figure). When the opponents have shown one specific suit, and thus ruled it out as a potential trump suit for our side, only three bids are needed to show the three possible combinations of potential trump suits. *3D* called that structure *1D*, since only **one** suit had been shown. We'll call that system **Tri** (short for triangle). Both partners must be in firm agreement concerning which structure to apply, depending on the length of the opponent's suit. *3D* also included a *2D* structure to handle cases where the opponents had introduced **two** suits before we could enter the bidding, but this has been abandoned in *Karate* since this situation is relatively rare and can usually be handled by treating one or both of their suits as non-suits. Usually this means using **Tri** when one of their two suits is a major, and **Hex** otherwise, with the agreement that a bid that shows one of their two suits could be just a 3-card suit, but will guarantee a NT stopper in that suit.

The Tri Structure

In *Karate*, a jump overcall shows a decent 6+ card suit that lacks Qxx or xxx support for any unbid suit. High-card strength is undefined, but is limited by the lack of support requirement, so the bid is non-forcing, but can be either weak and preemptive or mildly game-invitational. Any non-jump bid in a new suit shows that suit and the next higher unbid suit. Thus, over a 1H opening, 1S shows spades and clubs, 2C shows clubs and diamonds, and 2D shows diamonds and spades. Two biddable four-card suits are permissible, so long as overall strength is adequate, and of course extra length can at least partially compensate for lack of defensive strength. Partner will assume each suit is at least as good as Q10xx, but the lesser lie principle applies, so that 9864 could be permissible for one of the suits with compensating values elsewhere, provided

no better alternative bid is available. The overall HCP requirement depends on vulnerability and making a good estimate of the potential gain vs loss. These non-jump bids are not forcing, so with strong game interest a traditional takeout double must be used. A 1NT overcall shows a balanced 15+ to 17+ HCP with a stopper, and ideally a second stopper (or at least Axx, to permit a holdup). A takeout double can be used for any hand with a good reason to compete that is not suitable for either a two-suited overcall, a jump overcall, or a NT overcall. In addition to very strong hands (something like 18 HCP with any shape), this would also include very strong one-suiters, 4441, 4432, 5332, or 5431 shapes, or perhaps a 5+ card suit with Qxx or xxxx support for another suit, but with no second 4-card suit as strong as Q10xx. The takeout double response structure will be described later. This leaves the cue-bid so far unused. I suggest that it be used to show a double stopper in their suit plus two of the three unbid suits (a hand that would have been a sound Standard American takeout double of a different suit). In *3D* this bid was called the 2+2 Q.

The Hex Structure

This structure covers all six two-suit combinations. Each non-jump suit bid shows that suit and the suit just above it (where clubs are considered just above spades). That rule does not provide a way to show the two pairs of non-touching suits, clubs & hearts and diamonds & spades. A NT bid could show one such pair, and a Double could be used to show the other non-touching pair, but it is desirable to retain the traditional takeout meaning for a Double, but restrict its use to pure 3-suiters (4441 or 5440), very strong balanced hands, very strong 1-suiters, or **extremely** strong 2-suiters. This leads to the following rule -- **The cheapest jump in a new suit shows the non-touching pair that includes that suit, and the cheapest NT bid shows the other non-touching pair.**

Responding to a *Tri* Takeout Double

All suit bids are 5-suit conditional transfers (S÷NT, NT÷C, C÷D, D÷H, & H÷S). Doubler should accept the transfer to a new suit with Qxx or better support. Jump acceptance is permissible with sufficient extra strength (about an ace above a minimum). If partner declines the transfer, a NT rebid shows 18-20 HCP (too strong for a 1NT overcall), a new suit rebid shows a 5+ card suit with weak 3-4 card support for the 4th suit, and a jump in a new suit shows a strong hand with a 6+ card suit. A transfer to NT shows a partial stopper, so Doubler will accept only if he holds at least a partial stopper himself. A transfer to Opener's suit asks Doubler for a full stopper. Holding such, Doubler can accept the transfer if he feels partner should be declarer in NT, or can bid NT at the appropriate level to become declarer himself

Responding to a 2-Suit Overcall

All non-jump responses by Advancer are 5-suit conditional transfers, just as responding to a Double. In Hex a non-jump bid in Opener's suit is natural, and the meaning of a jump "cue" in Opener's semi-suit depends on whether partner has shown that suit or not. If the suit is one of partner's two suits, the jump cue is an absolute transfer to 3NT; if not, it asks partner to bid 3NT with a full stopper, and a transfer to NT shows only a partial stopper; bidding 3NT directly shows a full stopper..

Using Karate in Various Situations

When *Karate* was developed, the intent was to use it only when the opponents open the bidding. It can also be used effectively after we open the bidding, but each partnership must decide whether to do so or not. Possible cases are listed in the table below, but if you choose not to use *Karate* when your side opens the bidding, only the first two rows of the table are pertinent.

Situation	System
They Open with a Semi-Suit (e.g., SA 1C/?)	Hex
They Open with a 5+ Card Suit (e.g., SA 1H/?)	Tri
We Open, They Double or Bid 1NT	Hex
We Open, They Overcall at 1- or 2-Level	Hex

Some Exceptional Situations in Competitive Auctions

- (1) After an opponent's non penalty Double of a suit bud by partner, a Redouble implies 3+ card support if partner's suit is a major or 4+ card support if it's a minor..
- (2) **Hex** can also be used as a defense against a NT opening. As in DONT, two 4-card suits are permissible, but **Hex** is superior because it shows both suits with one bid, and offers two possible places to play as well as two possible opening lead suggestions.
- (3) When the opponents have shown two suits before we have entered the auction, there are two possible ways to cope **(a)** Always use **Hex**, showing a 3+ card stopper if their suit is a major, but a 5+ card suit if it's a minor; or **(b)** Use **Hex** if both of their suits are minor, but use **Tri** if at least one of their suits is a major, treating their only major, or their first-bid major as unavailable to you as a trump suit. Again, showing either or both of their majors merely shows a 3-card NT stopper. Option **(a)** would usually be preferable because of its simplicity.

Karate In Action

Here are a few example hands, so you can get a feel for the way *Karate* works. Assume that the opponents are playing Standard American, and you have agreed to treat their 1C or 1D openings as semi-suits.

(1) ♠9 ♥AKJ107 ♦1032 ♣Q1054 1D/? This is a **Hex** 2H bid, showing hearts and clubs. Partner holds ♠AQ872 ♥63 ♦K6 ♣9732 and will bid 2NT.

(2) ♠AQ1087 ♥87543 ♦-- ♣AK5 1D/? This is a **Hex** 1H bid, showing both majors. Partner holds ♠J62 ♥K1062 ♦A6 ♣7642 and will bid 2D → 2H, with 4H as the ultimate destination, since both partners have extra strength.

(3) ♠3 ♥Q1065 ♦KQ10532 ♣K2 1S/P/1NT/? This is a 2D bid in either **Tri** or **Hex**, showing the red suits. Partner holds ♠KJ965 ♥A983 ♦6 ♣1083 and will bid 2D, inviting game in whichever major is bid next.

(4) ♠A10654 ♥7 ♦KQ107 ♣QJ10 1C/? This is a **Hex** 2D bid, to show D+S. Partner holds ♠KJ98 ♥A1096 ♦842 ♣98 and will bid 2S, and then compete up to 3S if necessary.

(5) ♠J2 ♥83 ♦Q8 ♣AQJ9632 1S/? This is a strength-ambiguous **Tri** 3C bid. Partner holds ♠4 ♥KQ1054 ♦97654 ♣104 and will pass, with no temptation to pursue a red-suit contract.

(6) ♠AK65 ♥J5 ♦K642 ♣J76 1H/? This is about a minimum for a **Tri** 1S bid, showing S+D. Partner holds ♠104 ♥872 ♦AQ98 ♣K932 and will bid 3D.

(7) ♠72 ♥AJ10643 ♦A4 ♣K95 2S/? This is a **Tri** Double. If partner bids 3C÷3D you will bid 3H and he'll know you have club support. Actually he holds ♠KQ3 ♥Q98 ♦1087 ♣Q742 and will bid 2NT, which may not make, but if doubled you can retreat to 3H.

(8) ♠AK932 ♥QJ94 ♦1063 ♣9 1C/? This is a **Hex** 1H bid, showing H+S. Partner holds ♠764 ♥1082 ♦AQ82 ♣AQ8 and will probably bid 1NT.

(9) ♠AQ872 ♥A43 ♦A ♣KQ42 2D/? This is a Double in either **Tri** or **Hex**. If Partner bids 3D÷3H you will bid 3S to encourage him to show a black suit, and support hearts if he does not. Partner holds ♠K9 ♥1092 ♦9753 ♣10986 and will bid 2N→3C, and 130 in clubs is your limit.

(10) ♠KJ10985 ♥9 ♦K5 ♣K1084 2D/? This is a 2S bid showing S+C in either **Tri** or **Hex**. Partner holds ♠A6 ♥AKJ10643 ♦64 ♣52 and will bid and probably make 4H.

(11) ♠A ♥AQJ10 ♦AJ6 ♣A10954 1C/? This is a **Hex** 1NT bid, showing clubs and hearts. Partner holds ♠1075 ♥965 ♦Q1094 ♣732 and will probably pass. Your 1NT may have preempted them out of their 9-card spade fit.

(12) ♠AK4 ♥AK8 ♦A942 ♣765 1C/? This is the awkward big 4333 hand discussed in **The Hex Structure**. The system bid is a **Hex** 1D, but passing now in hopes of competing or making a penalty double later could be the winning action.

(13) ♠K10943 ♥A65 ♦QJ42 ♣4 1H/? This is about a minimum **Tri** 2D bid. Showing D+S. Partner holds ♠AQ65 ♥7 ♦K10865 ♣843 and will bid 4S before the opponents discover that they also have a double 9-card fit.

(14) ♠KQJ4 ♥QJ10 ♦A94 ♣AK10 1C/? Another awkward hand. The best approach is a takeout Double, followed by a NT rebid to show a big balanced hand. Partner holds ♠A9764 ♥K975 ♦4 ♣J65 so in this case all roads lead to the good slam.

(15) ♠K104 ♥84 ♦AQJ95 ♣Q43 1S/Dbl/? In competition, this is a **Hex** 1NT, showing diamonds and 3+ card spade support. Game will be reached unless partner has a singleton/void in diamonds.

Using Karate When We Open the Bidding

Showing two suits with a single bid is such a useful concept that *Karate* should not be restricted to defending against an opponent's opening bid, but can be a powerful tool when our side opens the bidding. It is even possible for the opening bidder to use *Karate's Hex* structure to show two suits simultaneously, but that is beyond the scope of the present document. Here we'll consider two main cases. Both cases will use the **Hex** structure so Responder can show all six possible suit pairs. In competitive auctions.

(A) There is No Interference Before the Response to the Opening Bid

Responder can use **Hex** to show any two suits, An overcall in a new suit shows that suit and the next-higher-ranking suit. To show a non-touching suit pair, the cheapest jump shift shows the pair that includes that suit, while the cheapest NT bid shows the other non-touching pair. The two suits that Responder shows can be 4+ card suits, but if one of the suits is Opener's suit it could be only 3+ card support. Like all non-jump suit responses, the **Hex** response is forcing one round. Subsequent bidding is natural, and only one **Hex** bid is allowed in any auction. Jump responses, except the cheapest, are natural, showing a 6+ card suit and denying either 3-card support or a second 4+ card suit. Jumps in NT, or a forcing 1NT followed by a jump raise, show a balanced hand with 3+ card support and are non-forcing, but constructive (usually a 3+ card limit raise). The NT jump can be followed by a jump in Opener's suit to show a game-forcing raise with 4+ card support.

(B1) The Opponents Intervene Immediately Before Responder Can Act

Responder can use **Hex** to show any two-suit pair, using the cheapest jump shift and the cheapest NT bid to show the two non-touching pairs. Any response showing the opponent's suit can be based on a 3-card stopper, while showing Opener's suit can be merely 3-card support. As in (A), only one **Hex** bid is allowed in any auction. Jump responses are natural, showing a 6+ card suit and denying either 3-card support or a second 4+ card suit. Jumps in NT show a balanced hand with 3-card support and are non-forcing, but constructive. As above, following the NT jump with a jump in Opener's suit shows a balanced game-forcing 4+ card raise of Opener's suit.

(B2) The Opponents Intervene and Responder Passes

Hex can be used by Opener to reopen the bidding if an opponent has overcalled and partner has passed. This leaves Opener the option to reopen with a Double in case Responder has made a trap pass. Opener can include his original suit as part of the suit pair shown by his reopening bid to show extra length in his opening suit along with a second 4+ card suit. A reopening Double shows the two unbid suits in addition to his original suit, and implies at least normal defensive strength in case Responder chooses to pass for penalty.