

One of the first things you're told when you learn to play bridge is you only raise partner's major-suit response to your one-minor opening (1D – 1S – 2S) with 4-card support. You are told this because there are so many rules to learn, learning when to break them at the same time would cause your brain to explode. Now that you have mastered the art of raising to 2M (M=major) with 4-card support and 12 to 15½ support points it's time to consider raising with 3-card support (The hands that you raise to 3M with 3-card support are really rare, contentious, and won't be discussed here. Suffice it to say that there is almost always a better bid to make than 3M). "But partner may only have a 4-card suit," you whine. Surprisingly, partner will have a 5-card suit more often than not. If he/she has a weak hand, you are immediately better off, as the room is likely to be playing 1NT, while you're playing in your major fit. If partner has an invitational or game-forcing hand, it doesn't matter whether they have a 4-card or longer suit, the subsequent bidding will uncover that information (see below). The 3-card raise yields a bad result when partner has a weak hand, a 4-card suit, and 2M is not as good a contract as 1NT, and the opponents do not balance. This chance for a bad result is more than offset by the advantages, as we shall see.

There are 3 cases to discuss: you have 3-card support but are considering rebidding (A) 1NT, (B) 2m (rebidding a minor), and (C) 1S (after 1m – 1H)

(A) Rebidding 1 NT. You open 1C or 1D (your choice) with xx Axx Kxxx AJ9x and partner bids 1H. Do you bid 1NT? You have no spade stopper, so partner will likely need 3 good ones to withstand the assault on the suit. If partner only has 1 stopper (or none) a raise to 2H is probably better. Partner can likely arrange to ruff a small spade with one of your trump, scoring a trick he would lose in 1NT. Let's change things around – AJ9 Axx Kxxxx xx? This doesn't fundamentally change anything, except partner is now ruffing a small club. When do you rebid 1NT?

Kxx Jxx AQxx Kxx.	Now you have stoppers in the unbid suits, No ruffing value. 1NT is best by far.
xxx Axx AJxx KJx	No ruffing value. 3334 should bid 1NT even without spade stopper.
Kxx Axx Axxxx Kx	Stopper in clubs and ruffing value. Your choice. I personally raise with controls...
QJx QJx Axxxx Kx	but I rebid 1NT with soft cards. Better players than I may violently disagree.

(B) Rebidding 2m. Kxx xx AJx KJxxx? Over 1S, do not even think about rebidding 2C. "But partner doesn't know I have 5 clubs!" News flash: partner, in almost all cases, will care far more about your 3 spades than your ♣3.¹ If you have game, it is far more likely to be in spades than NT. Partner probably doesn't have 4 hearts so the suit is vulnerable in NT. If he/she has 4 hearts, he/she has 5 spades (think about it!).

xxx Kx Kx AQ10xxx	OK, now you have 6 clubs, a good suit, no singleton, no spade honor. Bid 2C.
xxx x AQx AQxxxx	Getting closer. Singleton, weaker long suit (bad for NT). 2C still better?
Kxx x AQx Kxxxxx	2C will encourage partner holding ♣Qxx (or even ♣Qx). I bid 2S.
x Kxx AJxxx Axxx	Raise 1H to 2. 2C is a common mistake. The likely game is 4H, not 3NT. If the

¹ In fact partner will assume you have 6 clubs. While there are hands where rebidding a 5-card minor is the least of evils, this is certainly not one of them. Rebidding a 5-card minor is like peeing behind the nearest tree: it should only be done in desperation and when no other alternatives are available.

opponents bid 2S over 2C, you'll want to bid 3H, *which shows a better hand*.
 x Kxx AQxxx AKJx Now bid 2C (!!). If partner bids anything you can support hearts, showing extras.

This last hand demonstrates that you should not raise to 3M with 3-card support, straining to bid a new suit, then supporting partner, *which promises extras*. Temporizing by bidding a new suit produces a bad result only when partner has a 5-card suit and passes your second bid, a rare occurrence.

(C) Rebidding 1S. In keeping with the immediately preceding discussion bid 1S over 1H with KJxx Axx AQJxx x, then bid 2H as you have extras (if partner passes 1S, you're in the right contract).

KJxx Axx Axxxx x	No extras. I bid 2H; can't get there if I bid 1S (2H later shows extras)
KJxx Axx Axxx xx	Still 2H as I think hearts likely to be better than NT. But others may disagree.
KJxx Axx Axx xxx	1S. No ruffing value, NT is better than hearts.
xxxx Axx Axx KJx	1NT. Even if partner has 4 spades, I would rather play NT

How does the rest of your bidding have to change if you raise frequently with three card support? If your partner rebids 1NT rather than raising your major, he probably doesn't have 3-card support, so you don't have to guess whether to bid 2S after 1D-1S- 1NT with A10xxx Kxx xxx xx. If partner had 3-card support and weak clubs, he would have raised.

Your partner opens 1C and raises your 1H to 2H:

Kx KQxx AQxx xxx	Bid 3NT. Partner will correct to 4H with 4-card support.
xxx Axxx AKxx xx	<i>Do not invite with 3H!</i> Partner will think that you have 5. 3D best.
xxx KQJx AKxx Kx	Don't jump to game, it shows 5 hearts. Start with 3D, then 3S, looking for 3NT.

Raising with 3-card support is not without its problems as the examples immediately above intimate. The re-raiser must realize partner may have raised with 3 cards, the raiser must realize that is partner may be bidding so as to "check back" whether partner has raised with three, and strain to bid NT if he has done so. But the advantages outweigh the disadvantages; you'll benefit in ways that you don't even realize. Occasionally you will get to ridiculous contracts that could have – perhaps - been avoided, but far more often you will be playing 2M (or competing to 3M) and getting very good results that might not otherwise be possible.