

Reverse Bids Bridge Convention - Bidding and Responses

 bridgebum.com/reverse_bids.php

In bridge, a reverse is a type of bid by opener that shows extra strength. Specifically, it occurs when opener is unbalanced with 16+ points (some players require 17+ points) and hears a one-over-one response from partner. An example auction:

West

♠ K

♥ AK52

♦ T92

♣ AK643

West

1 ♣

2 ♥

North

Pass

East

1 ♠

South

Pass

Here, your 2 ♥ bid is natural (4+ cards) and forcing for one round. 2 ♥ is a reverse because you bypassed the opportunity to rebid your original suit cheaply - namely 2 ♣ . Since 2 ♥ might force partner to make a preference bid of 3 ♣ , your reverse must show a good hand to potentially elevate the bidding to the 3-level.

A reverse indicates that your first suit is longer than your second suit. With equal length like 5-5, don't make a reverse. Instead, open the bidding with your higher-ranking suit. Note that a few experts advocate reversing occasionally with 4-4 distribution in two suits. For example, 1-4-4-4 or even 3-4-2-4 shape.

Note that your choice of bids is limited in this scenario. 1NT would have shown a balanced hand. 2 ♣ or 3 ♣ would have promised a 6+ card suit.

Rules for Reversing

You can make a reverse bid when ALL of the following criteria are met:

1. You open the bidding with 1-of-of-a-suit and partner responds at the 1-level.
2. Your hand is unbalanced so you can't rebid no-trumps.
3. You lack 4-card support for partner and therefore can't raise her.
4. You have a second suit whose rank is higher than your first suit. (See the note above about 4-4 reverses.)
5. Your second suit is shorter than your first suit.
6. You have a strong hand worth 16+ (or 17+) points.

Whew! Let's see more examples....

Examples

West

♠ 4

♥ AK52

♦ KQJ83

♣ A87

West

1 ♦

2 ♥

North

Pass

East

1NT

South

Pass

2 ♥ is a reverse. (You can check it against all the rules above.) It's a new suit at the 2-level that bypasses a simple rebid of 2 ♦.

West

♠ KJ3

♥ 5

♦ AKJ4

♣ AJT98

West

1 ♣

2 ♦

North

Pass

East

1 ♥

South

Pass

Again, 2 ♦ is a reverse.

West

♠ -

♥ AK83

♦ KQ8

♣ KQT732

West

1 ♣

2 ♥

North

Pass

East

1 ♠

South

Pass

What to do with a 6-card minor? Holding a 4-card major, it's worth investigating a major-suit fit rather than rebidding clubs.

West

♠ AQT73

♥ AK9752

♦ 5

♣ 9

West

1 ♥

2 ♠

North

Pass

East

1NT

South

Pass

You can also reverse with 6-5 (or longer!) shape. Here the strict point count of 16+ can be relaxed a bit. As Grant Baze used to say, "6-5 come alive."

Responses to a Reverse

A reverse bid is forcing for one round. Don't pass a reverse! There are many different philosophies on response structures. You can get fancy by using 2NT response as Lebensohl, for instance. The following are loosely based on Bill Root's "Commonsense Bidding" which I feel are fairly intuitive... about as intuitive as reverses get.

With a Weak Hand

With a weak hand (6-8 points), you choose from the following non-forcing bids.

Raising Partner's Second Suit

You can raise partner's second suit with 4-card support. Example:

East

♠ K9862
♥ 7
♦ A653
♣ 974

West

1 ♣
2 ♦

North

Pass
Pass

East

1 ♠
3 ♦

South

Pass

Your 3 ♦ shows 4+ card support and is non-forcing. Rebidding no-trumps is impractical with a singleton heart. Also, raising diamonds is also preferable to raising clubs. Assuming partner holds 5 clubs and 4 diamonds, the 4-4 fit will tend to play slightly better than the 5-3 fit. Partner is allowed to continue bidding with extra strength.

Bidding 3 of Partner's First Suit

Holding a weak hand and 3+ card support for partner's first suit, you can sign off at the 3-level. Example:

East

♠ 43
♥ K986
♦ 532
♣ KJ92

West

1 ♣
2 ♦

North

Pass
Pass

East

1 ♥
3 ♣

South

Pass

Your 3 ♣ shows 3+ card support and is non-forcing. Note the lack of a spade stopper, which should discourage you from bidding 2NT. Partner is allowed to continue bidding with extra strength.

Bidding 2NT

With a weak balanced hand and a stopper in the fourth suit, you can bid 2NT. Again, this is non-forcing.

East

♠ K73

♥ Q984

♦ J86

♣ J62

West

1 ♣

2 ♦

North

Pass

Pass

East

1 ♥

2NT

South

Pass

Similar hand as before but this time you have a stopper in the fourth suit, spades. Bid 2NT instead of 3 ♣ because this gives you a better chance at reaching a game contract - 3NT.

Rebidding Your Suit

You can choose to rebid your 5+ card suit like so:

East

♠ AK753

♥ 83

♦ T76

♣ 943

West

1 ♣

2 ♥

North

Pass

Pass

East

1 ♠

2 ♠

South

Pass

You **could** bid 3 ♣ instead, but it may be worth showing your concentrated spade strength in case partner can muster a raise. Swap a club for a sixth spade and 2 ♠ becomes automatic.

With a Strong Hand

With 9+ points, you want to reach game and possibly slam. Here are your common rebid options (excluding Blackwood, etc.).

Jump-Raising Partner's First Suit

With a strong hand and 3+ card support for partner's first suit, you can jump-raise to create a game force. Example:

East

♠ AQJ3
 ♥ Q
 ♦ AJ87
 ♣ 6432

West
 1 ♦
 2 ♥

North
 Pass
 Pass

East
 1 ♠
 4 ♦

South
 Pass

4 ♦ is forcing to game.

Jump-Raising Partner's Second Suit

You can jump-raise if you're lucky enough to hold 4-card support for partner's second suit plus game-forcing strength.

East

♠ K9432
 ♥ AQ86
 ♦ 87
 ♣ 92

West
 1 ♣
 2 ♥

North
 Pass
 Pass

East
 1 ♠
 4 ♥

South
 Pass

4 ♥ is to play, showing about 9-12 points. Partner can bid again with slam interest.

Bidding 3NT

With a balanced 9-12 points and a stopper in the fourth suit, you can sign off in 3NT.

East

♠ K732
 ♥ A73
 ♦ JT2
 ♣ K98

West
 1 ♦
 2 ♥

North
 Pass
 Pass

East
 1 ♠
 3NT

South
 Pass

3NT is to play, promising a club stopper. Again, partner can keep bidding with extra goodies.

Bidding the Fourth Suit

Bidding the fourth suit is natural after opener reverses. If you play Fourth Suit Forcing, it is off after a reverse. This is because responder doesn't really need to show an invitational hand opposite a strong one.

East

♠ KQ872

♥ A732

♦ 842

♣ Q

West

1 ♣

2 ♦

North

Pass

Pass

East

1 ♠

2 ♥

South

Pass

2 ♥ is natural. Partner is asked to support spades with 3-card support. Otherwise, she must find another useful bid, such as 2NT.

Reverses in Competition

Reverses in competition are a matter of partnership agreement. Generally speaking, it's easier to remember if reverses are always "on." However, it may be more practical in competitive auctions to loosen the point count requirement. It's worth discussing with your partner when reverses are really off in competition.

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