

lebensohl

ABOUT THE DEALS

Note:

The lebensohl convention is used in three completely different situations:

1. After an opponent overcalls your side's 1NT opening
2. After your side makes a takeout double of a Weak 2-bid
3. After opener makes a Reverse rebid

The most common use by far is the first one, and that is the one covered here.

You will always be in the South position. Either you or partner may open 1NT.

The first page (or two) of each Deal shows only your hand. The initial bidding is given and you are asked to decide what you would bid, then click the word **BID** up in the bidding table. The next page will then appear telling you what you should have bid and continuing the auction. On the final page of each Deal partner's hand will be shown.

About lebensohl

Many bridge conventions are given the name of their inventor. In the case of lebensohl the originator is unknown, so you will often see the name uncapitalized.

Defensive bidding has grown much more aggressive, so having an opponent stick an overcall in over your side's opening 1NT bid is a common occurrence. Common, but still a pain to deal with. It immediately derails your fancy Stayman and Jacoby Transfer sequences, which of course is just what the bad guy had in mind. The lebensohl convention is designed to get you back on track.

North opens 1NT and East overcalls in a suit.

South's bid is based on this lebensohl structure:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| double | is for penalties |
| 2 of a suit | is weak and asks partner to pass |
| 3 of a suit | is a 5-card suit and is forcing to game |
| 2NT | is lebensohl, a relay bid asking partner to bid 3♣; you will describe your hand with your next bid |
| immediate cue-bid | is Stayman, and denies a stopper in their suit |
| 3NT | shows a desire to play there ONLY if opener has a stopper in their suit |

The big deal is the 2NT bid that initiates the lebensohl relay. It is a big deal because when you agree to use lebensohl you no longer have the ability to use 2NT as an invitation for partner to bid 3NT. In fact, once the opponents have overcalled your side's 1NT opening, your bidding precision suffers. Responder will often have to decide unilaterally whether to go for game or settle for partscore.

The penalty double:

When your partner's 1NT opening has been overcalled you are in a very advantageous position. You know what is in your hand and you have a pretty good idea what is in partner's hand. That makes it easy for you to punish unsound overcallers.

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♥ double

♠ K 5 ♥ Q 10 8 6 ♦ K 8 7 3 ♣ 9 6 2

Your side has the balance of strength, probably about 24 points, but game is unlikely. You should be able to exact a hefty penalty on East at the 2-level.

The sign-off at 2-level:

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♦ 2♥

♠ 10 6 5 ♥ Q J 10 8 6 ♦ 7 3 ♣ K 9 8

You have no thought of making game, but you should not let East play 2♦ either. Partner will pass.

The game-force at 3-level:

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♠ 3♥

♠ 10 6 5 ♥ Q J 10 8 6 ♦ 7 3 ♣ A K 8

You must have a 5-card suit to force at the 3-level. Partner will bid 4♥ if he has 3 trumps, or find another bid if he has only 2.

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♦ 3♥

♠ 10 6 5 ♥ Q J 10 8 6 ♦ 7 3 ♣ A K 8

Bidding a suit at the 3-level conveys the same message whether you have made a jump-bid or not. It is the 3-level itself that is forcing to game.

The sign-off at 3-level using 2NT relay:

Three examples ago you saw how to sign-off at the 2-level. It's like the old "drop-dead" bid we used before Jacoby Transfers. However, this 2-level sign-off only works when your sign-off suit ranks higher than the suit the opponent overcalled in. This is because a 3-level bid (even without a jump) is forcing to game.

If you want to sign-off in a suit ranking lower than the overcalled suit you must first bid 2NT. Partner is required to say 3♣, and if your suit is ♣s you will pass. Or, you will bid your suit at the 3-level and partner will pass.

LHO Pard RHO You

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♦ 2NT
pass 3♣ pass 3♥
pass pass pass

♠ 6 5 ♥ K J 10 8 6 3 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ 8 5

Knowing there was no game you want to be able to play 3♥ so you must get there via 2NT.

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♦ 2NT
pass 3♣ pass pass
pass

♠ 6 5 ♥ 8 3 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ K J 10 8 6 5

When ♣s is your suit it is even easier.

Direct cue-bid - Stayman without a stopper in opponent's suit:

Just like regular Stayman you will make this bid if you have at least one 4-card Major. The problem is that everything is happening at a higher level, so make sure you have enough strength to back up your bidding.

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♦ 3♦
pass 3♥ pass 4♥
pass pass pass

♠ K J 6 5 ♥ K Q 7 4 ♦ 7 3 ♣ Q J 6

This one worked out well since you found the 4-4 fit easily.

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♥ 3♥
pass 4♣ pass pass
pass

♠ A 10 6 5 ♥ 7 4 ♦ K Q 3 ♣ J 7 6 3

Too bad partner couldn't say 3NT, but you pass and hope 4♣ isn't too high.

Slow cue-bid - Stayman with a stopper in opponent's suit:

With this method you promise at least one 4-card Major AND a stopper in the opponent's suit.

LHO Pard RHO You
1NT 2♥ 2NT
pass 3♣ pass 3♥

♠ K J 6 5 ♥ K Q 10 ♦ 7 3 ♣ Q J 6

If partner has a ♠ fit you can play in that suit, if not he can bid 3NT, knowing you have ♥s stopped.

Direct 3NT bid - without a stopper in opponent's suit:

You have enough points to insist on game, say 10 or more. You do not have a 4-card Major, nor a 5-card suit. You would have jumped to 3NT if there were no intervening overcall. But unfortunately you do not have a stopper in the opponent's suit. You make a direct leap to 3NT which tells partner that's where your side should be, **IF HE CAN STOP THE OPPONENT'S SUIT.**

LHO Pard RHO You

1NT 2♦ 3NT

pass pass pass

♠A 7 6 ♥K Q 4 ♦9 7 3 ♣K J 7 6

Partner's pass indicates he has ♦s stopped. If he did not have the stopper, he would have to find another bid and you would end up playing in ♣s or even a 4-3 Major fit.

Slow 3NT bid - with a stopper in opponent's suit:

Since the direct leap to 3NT indicates a hand that does not have a stopper in their suit, you must use a different method to show a 3NT hand which DOES contain a stopper. Simple, you bid 2NT, then after partner's 3♣ relay, you bid 3NT.

LHO Pard RHO You

1NT 2♣ 2NT

pass 3♣ pass 3NT

♠A K 6 ♥Q 9 4 ♦10 9 7 3 ♣K 7 6

If RHO had kept quiet you'd have bid 3NT and played it there. But after the ♣ overcall you must go roundabout with the 2NT bid so partner will know you have ♣s under control.

Direct denies / Slow shows:

The 2-pronged Stayman approach and the 2-pronged 3NT bids described above illustrate an important concept of lebensohl.

A DIRECT bid denies a stopper in the overcalled suit, while a SLOW (using 2NT) bid shows a stopper in the overcalled suit.

Inviting:

One last topic. Almost an insignificant topic. Feel free to skip it if you want to.

You probably noticed that you lose a lot of the fine nuances of notrump bidding once the opponents overcall. Of course that's the reason they do it. Lebensohl helps, but there are still plenty of times when Responder just has to take a stand and decide if she will play game or partscore.

There is one situation that sometimes occurs though, where Responder can make an invitational bid. Look at this hand, partner of the 1NT opener:

♠ A 7 4 ♥ K J 10 9 4 ♦ 8 2 ♣ 10 8 5

Without interference this would obviously be a hand where you would transfer partner to ♥s, then invite him to bid a game by saying 2NT. But look at what happens when your RHO interferes with a 2♦ overcall.

LHO Pard RHO You

1NT 2♦ ??

You are stuck. If you bid an immediate 3♥ you are forcing partner to bid a game. But if you bid 2NT, then 3♥ you are forcing partner to pass. In other words, YOU have to make the decision on the spot. Now let's keep the same hand, but change the overcalled suit.

LHO Pard RHO You

1NT 2♦ 2NT

pass 3♣ pass 3♥

AHA! Do you see the difference? This time, since the overcalled suit was lower than your Major suit, you could have signed off with a 2♥ bid. Or, if you preferred, you could have forced to game with a 3♥ bid. The roundabout way you actually used, bidding ♥s after the 2NT relay, is used to show a 5-card Major with invitational strength.

An example is worth a thousand words. So go check out 20,000 words worth of practice Deals.

Deal 1