

BUILDING A BIDDING SYSTEM

ROY HUGHES



FOREWORDS BY
FRED GITELMAN
AND ERIC KOKISH

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AFTERWORD

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FOREWORD

BY FRED GITELMAN

I had the good fortune to learn to play bridge in Toronto in the early 1980s. At that time I was a teenager, but there was already a sizable group of experienced players in the Toronto bridge community who were not much older than I was.

The member of this group who impressed me the most was Roy Hughes. After playing against Roy a few times, it became clear to me that he was not only brilliant, but that we shared a deep passion for trying to understand what our very humbling game was really all about. I also learned that we shared an interest in computers. Naturally, we became friends and, over the past 25 years, Roy and I have enjoyed many stimulating conversations about bridge (and non-bridge) ideas.

I have to admit that I am one of those bridge players who derive most of their satisfaction from the game by thinking about the play of the cards. I have studied bridge intensely and read hundreds of bridge books, but almost all of these books have been about declarer play and defense. In general I do not enjoy books about bidding.

This book is different. Roy started sending me drafts of the chapters of his book as he was writing them. I agreed to offer my feedback, mostly because he was my friend. I was pleasantly surprised (since I had little interest in reading a book about bidding) that I found the subject material to be fascinating. This book is about how to go about designing an effective bidding system. Roy approaches this difficult subject with the precise logic of the computer programmer that he is, but his writing and thinking has a clearly artistic element as well (which is perhaps not surprising given that Roy also happens to be a gifted musician). He writes with clarity, but his love of the mysteries of our wonderful game is very much evident in these pages.

I suppose that first and foremost I will always be a card player, but Roy's writing has given me a new appreciation and respect for the bidders out there and the problems that they are intent on solving. Anyone who considers himself to be a serious student of the game will enjoy reading this book and learn plenty in the process.

FOREWORD

BY ERIC KOKISH

All too often, players who begin to take the game seriously adopt a system, conventions and even a style that is popular in their area, typically the general approach of the leading players in their club or circle of influence. As Roy Hughes points out in this long-overdue book on a neglected subject, building a system is one of the most important bridge activities any partnership will ever undertake. It requires cool reflection and a meeting of the minds on not only the objectives of the partnership but also on the boundaries of the partnership's viable database for maximum effectiveness.

Some partnerships can master a complex relay system without sacrificing efficiency in other areas of the game, but others will function best within a simple but aggressive system based on natural bidding. While Roy presents seductive examples of relay and strong club methods at their best, he is careful to point out that earlier partnership decisions are more important — four-versus five-card majors, a light versus conservative opening style, choosing a notrump range compatible with the minimum length for a major-suit opening, to name a few.

This is a provocative book that everyone should read. It provides insights that are easily overlooked, and will raise awareness of important issues without stooping to proselytizing. While the author has his preferences, this is not a system book. Roy is not selling a method, *per se*, but rather the idea that it's worth considering the partnership's objectives before adopting a particular method, and that building a harmonious system that caters well to both constructive and obstructive goals is essential to long-term satisfaction and success at bridge.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Bridge is unlike any other game, and partnership bidding in bridge is unlike anything else in any game. The complexities of determining the best contract could easily fill a hundred books the size of this one, even if bridge were a game for only two players. Add in opponents, intent on harassing us and pursuing their own ends, and the subject approaches the intractable.

That is what this book is about: how to bid correctly to our own contracts while frustrating the aims of the enemy. The themes central to this are the use of bidding space, priorities in passing information, naturalness and artificiality. And as we consider these weighty issues, we will examine a variety of situations that arise in bidding and how we might deal with them.

Most of the illustrative deals arose in world championships or late rounds of important events, and feature the very best players in the world. For the most part, I include names when they may be of interest to the reader. Often I find myself in disagreement with one of the actions taken. That is to be expected; the world of bridge has not achieved consensus about bidding. Look at the bidding panel feature in any bridge magazine and you will find experts disagreeing all the time.

In days when there was more uniformity of style, and fewer specialized partnerships, it was perhaps easier to be critical of a particular call. Now, it is almost impossible for the author and readers to be aware of all the subtle, indirect inferences that abound in a serious partnership's understanding, and almost impossible to criticize a call or auction fairly. The most we can realistically hope for is to report successes and failures, and speculate on the reasons behind them. There are no blunders reported here, only different approaches to the game we all love.

Hand pattern designations that include dashes refer to the suits in order of rank; 4-3-3-3 means four spades and three of everything else. When no dashes are included, the generic pattern is implied; 4333 means any hand with a four-card suit and three tripletons.

High-card strength is calibrated on the familiar 4-3-2-1 point count. No attempt is made to quantify distributional values; it is assumed that the reader will make appropriate allowances. For example, if an opening bid of 1♠ is described as “5+♠, 11-16”, it is implied that an average-looking 5332 with 11 high-card points (HCP) qualifies. The total is subject to adjustments up or down based on honor structure and intermediates. In some situations, particularly when raising, extra distributional values can take the place of high-card values.

On occasion I use masculine pronouns where no gender is implied, as I was taught in school. I ask the indulgence of those who would do otherwise.

Bridge has been a joy for me from a very early age, and I want to thank particularly my parents and grandmother, who got me started. I have been supported in this endeavor by my wife, Erika, who provided much needed help with the manuscript, and by my mother and my sister, Dianne.

Much of my bridge education has come from books, especially those of the great writers Terence Reese and Hugh Kelsey. One of my favorite features in *The Bridge World* is entitled “What’s New in Bridge?”, but on occasion when I reflect on what I have written here I fear the answer may be “very little”. Ideas I

thought my own keep showing up when I return to the books of my favorite authors: Ely Culbertson, Albert Dormer, Sam Fry Jr., Benito Garozzo, Charles Goren, Edgar Kaplan, Marshall Miles, Victor Mollo, Albert Morehead, Jeff Rubens, Howard Schenken.

Much of the inspiration for this book came also from partners, teammates, opponents and colleagues. I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of Ray Lee and Suzanne Hocking of Master Point Press, and all others who helped produce this book. My friend Fred Gitelman assisted through discussion, and by making many of the deals available through the Vugraph at www.bridgebase.com.

Thank you, all.

Roy Hughes
July 2005



At the 1978 World Bridge Championships. Left to right: Ted Horning, Audrey Grant, Sami Kebela, and the author.

A DAY AT THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

1

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Idylls of the King'

Historic Istanbul lies on the north shore of the Sea of Marmara, straddling the Straits of Bosphorus, which divide Europe from Asia. Time and again, the mighty have fought for the ancient city and control of the passageway between the two great seas, the Mediterranean in the west, and the Black in the east. In the seventh century B.C. the city's name was Byzantium, after Byzas the Megarian. Later it became Constantinople, the city of Constantine the Great. In 1453 when it fell to Sultan Mehmed II, it became Istanbul, meaning simply "the city".

In October 2004, the battleground would not be the waters, beaches and cliffs, but the green felt of the bridge table. From all over the world, teams converged for the twelfth World Bridge Olympiad. Seventy-one countries were represented, including the traditional competitors, England, France, the United States, and ever-powerful Italy. Newer to the world bridge stage, but now firmly established, China would also be in contention. And Russia and the countries of eastern Europe, dormant for years under the Soviet suppression of card games, were also ready to make their presence felt.

The long tournament is well into its late stages. Bridge war has been waged for over a week now, and only two countries remain in the hunt for world bridge supremacy. You think back over that fateful week, so full of drama, triumphs and disasters. The role of a bridge journalist rather than a player has been a new one for you. It has been a week of watching, studying, looking for things that might be of interest to readers.

Bidding has always been a fascination for you, and particularly systems, the language of bidding. So much has been learned about the game over the decades of its existence, and much of the game is well understood. But bidding systems continue to provoke controversy.

Over the past week you have made a study of the competitors' bidding methods. There are quite a few five-card major systems, mostly with the strong two-over-one approach favored today. Numerous strong club systems. Some "multi" club systems, where an opening of one club is usually a balanced minimum, but could be long clubs or a number of less likely alternatives. Some extremely artificial systems, where none of the bids bears any relation to the suit named. Two- and three-level openings come in a complex assortment of multiple meanings, clearly meant to bewilder.

Now the start of the final is just minutes away, and you walk into the auditorium to find a seat. The game has changed over the years — how it is played, how it is watched. You remember a photograph in a book from the library: another world championship, half a world away, forty years ago. Terence Reese fans his cards, held high over his head, for the spectators seated on risers behind. A hush pervades the room. Everyone watches intently, not wanting to miss a bid and never knowing what moment might prove to be the crucial one.

Today's crowd is raucous. Members of the audience cheer, groan, offer opinions, make bets. The action is displayed on Vugraph — four giant screens at the front of the hall. All the bids and plays from both tables in the match are shown, along with big-screen close-ups of the players' expressions as the drama of each deal unfolds. All four hands are visible to the audience, making everyone an instant expert, impatient with the pace of play. Over the din, the expert panel is trying to keep the crowd entertained with their analyses and stories.

The players are safely off in another room, far from the crowd. Officials armed with laptop computers type in the players' bids and plays, which are transmitted both to the Vugraph theater and off into cyberspace for the enjoyment of thousands sitting at home in front of their personal computers.

The East-West pair plays a complex strong club system, with five-card majors, a nebulous diamond and lots of relays. The system description of the North-South pair is extensive also, but their opening bids are old-fashioned: a strong notrump and four-card majors.

Three unremarkable deals serve to build the anticipation. Then you see that the slam bidding of the East-West pairs is about to be tested.

<i>Board 4</i>	♠ 10
<i>Dealer West</i>	♥ K 7 5 4 3
<i>Both vul.</i>	♦ 10 7 5
	♣ 9 8 6 5
♠ K 9 7 4 2	♠ A J 5 3
♥ 8	♥ A 9 6
♦ A J 6 2	♦ K Q
♣ K Q 4	♣ A J 10 2
	♠ Q 8 6
	♥ Q J 10 2
	♦ 9 8 4 3
	♣ 7 3

N
W E
S

One of the commentators sets the scene: "A slam for East-West. They should stop in 6♠, missing four trumps to the queen. Seven could actually be made with a lucky guess. Let's see — the result is in from the other room." A box pops up on the screen, showing what happened moments earlier when Board 4 was played in the Closed Room:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	pass	2NT ¹	pass
3♥ ²	pass	4NT ³	pass
5♥ ⁴	pass	6♠	all pass

1. Game forcing spade raise.
2. Singleton or void in hearts.
3. Roman Keycard Blackwood.
4. Two keycards, no trump queen or extra length.

“Should be duplicated. North-South can’t get in, so our relay bidders will have a free run. Actually, 7♣ is a good contract. Impossible to bid, really.”

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠ ¹	pass	1NT ²	pass
2♦ ³	pass	2♥ ²	pass
2NT ⁴	pass	3♣ ²	pass
3♦ ⁵	pass	3♥ ²	pass
4♦ ⁶	pass	4♥ ²	pass
5♥ ⁷	pass	5♠ ²	pass
6♣ ⁸	pass	7♣	all pass

One of the commentators is busy leafing through a thick stack of sheets, trying to come up with explanations for the audience. The 5♥ bid is particularly difficult.

1. Five or more spades, 11-16.
2. Tell me more.
3. Four or more diamonds.
4. Three or four clubs.
5. 5-1-4-3.
6. 1 or 3 aces, plus the ♦K or both black kings.
7. (♣Q or ♠Q♦Q) and no ♥K.
8. ♦J or ♠J♣J.

There is a buzz through the hall as the auction slowly proceeds. Some cheering breaks out when 7♣ appears. The play is a little faster — had East planned it during the auction? Declarer wins the ♥Q lead in hand and ruffs a heart. He crosses to a diamond and ruffs the last heart. Then dummy’s last trump, cross to a diamond, draw trumps. You see the players lean forward, peering under the screen at declarer’s remaining cards, now face up. Then the recorder announces “East-West +2140” over the audio feed.

The excited chatter continues through the next deal, which is uneventful. Then:

Board 6
Dealer East
E-W vul.

♠ 6 4 2
♥ A K 2
♦ K 8 6 3
♣ A 7 4

♠ Q 8 7 3
♥ J 9
♦ J 4
♣ J 10 6 3 2



♠ J 9
♥ Q 10 8 6 3
♦ A Q 9 5
♣ 9 8

♠ A K 10 5
♥ 7 5 4
♦ 10 7 2
♣ K Q 5

East deals and passes, and South opens 1♠. You consider the West hand — surely too dangerous to double, isn't it? Game is unlikely opposite a passed hand, and if North has the balance of power and is able to redouble, any runout could be doubled and massacred. West apparently thinks along the same lines, as a "pass" is posted on the screen. Your eyes drift over to the East hand. Wait a minute: it looks like we can make something here. Let's see, everything is splitting... we lose two spades and a club... why, we can make 4♥! We can't let ourselves be shut out like this! In the modern game, people are always stealing. East will reopen 2♥, though, so perhaps everything will be alright. Responder isn't going to bid on that garbage, surely? Wrong: you see North place a 2♠ card in the bidding tray, and East and South pass. West is taking some time, giving the commentators a chance to discuss his problem. North-South open 1♠ on four, and raise freely with three, so there is a real chance that East has three spades. There could easily be no eight-card fit for anyone, and clearly North-South are in a superior competitive position should West reopen with a double. Eventually West passes and leads the ♥K. East-West defend accurately to get their five tricks and North-South score +110.

Back at the hotel, you lie down on the bed and mentally replay the hands you saw. Your mind wanders to the question that has perplexed you ever since you took up bridge: what are the perfect bidding methods? You suspect that you haven't seen them yet. The relayers looked awfully good on that 4-3 7♣. What a contract. To be able to get to great contracts, all the time, that's what great methods must be about: 100 on Challenge the Champs. And yet bidding is a war, too, and sometimes we need to push the opponents around, or fend off their blows — the perfect methods must be good at that, too. Board 6, where the light four-card major opening and raise kept East-West out, was an example.

Another thought comes to mind. Suppose you knew the perfect methods — would the world see their value? Would anyone play them with you? Methods are a dime a dozen. To be appreciated, they must be compelling, their inner logic so unassailable that your partner will be convinced of their worth, inspired to learn them, and able to execute them. You pull out a notebook and start to describe what you want from a bidding system, your "attributes of good methods".

METHODS AND PARTNERSHIP

2

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

William Shakespeare, 'Hamlet'

Bridge is a game of partnership, and it is in the twin realms of bidding and defensive card play that partnership reigns supreme. In these two endeavors, it is seldom that success can be achieved with only thirteen cards. There may be the occasional solo effort, maybe a Merrimac Coup or daring penalty double, but by and large it is through consideration of our combined cards, thirteen seen and thirteen imagined, that we achieve our ends.

And so we need bridge language, or methods, and partnerships to play them. Well-tuned methods are indispensable for consistent success in the game as it is today, yet they can be so demanding, extensive and complex that practiced partnerships are required to master them. Just as well, perhaps, because time is also needed for two people to foster the sharing of trust and support that makes winning more likely and life more enjoyable. Two cheerful optimists who mind their own business could perhaps do that quickly, but these are in sadly short supply. For the rest of us, it takes time.

Early on in any prospective partnership the question arises: what shall we play? The same question will be asked later on, as well, for it is human nature to be dissatisfied, and we learn things about methods throughout our entire lives. Whether or not the question is a pressing one for you right now, I hope you enjoy what follows. The pursuit of excellence in partnership methods makes a fascinating topic for those who truly love bridge, and I hope I can do it justice.

If you are thinking of building your own bidding system, a word of caution is in order. System design can be intriguing, exhilarating, rewarding, but it is not on the critical path for success at bridge. Even if you devote your days to bridge — perhaps in place of reading poetry, making a living, or enjoying the company of others — you should consider that devising a system still takes away time from say, brushing up on your compound squeeze technique. You can work on card play by playing, reading, thinking. Develop your powers of concentration. Get fit! Find and cherish a partner. Work on bidding methods, yes, but use well-documented, successful methods. They are easily available for the cost of a book. Your partnership time can then go to refining, extending and verifying common understandings, things that need to be done in any topflight partnership.

What should we ask of our methods? Our first two requirements — suggested in the fictional scenario of the opening chapter — are the ability to bid correctly to our own contracts and to make life difficult for the

opponents. I'll call these two attributes, which will be discussed throughout the book, accuracy and antagonism. They are the primary concerns of bidding and bidding methods. But before going into depth about them, I would like to suggest two others.

Methods do not bid to great contracts — people do, using methods. Our methods need to be *playable*: easy to learn, if possible, but more importantly, easy to execute. If methods take hundreds of hours to learn, that is a price, but perhaps one we are willing to pay. If, however, we cannot execute the methods f lawlessly when it counts, then it is likely that the gains of the methods can never make up for the accidental losses. People often don't like to admit that. They often excuse the system and blame the player, but the reality is that people are fallible, and some systems are simply more error-prone than others.

It is one thing to be asked to recall something when you are sitting comfortably in your living room with all the time in the world. It is a different matter entirely to need to recall something immediately, when you have many other demands on your thinking and composure, and no control over your environment. A parallel from another love of mine is the need for a pianist to play from memory. This is another activity where one doesn't get to take time. The memory must be immediate, fluid, fitted in with everything that is going on. And it must not take all of one's mental resources. There must be something left over for musicality, listening to other players, following the conductor and keeping a watchful eye for potential mishaps. A teacher of mine, referring to a particularly demanding passage, once said, "You have to be able to play this in a hurricane." I think that is a good model for bridge, too. Total familiarity, effortless, unshakable recall, that is what we need for our methods. We want them to spring to mind on demand with no possibility of error, leaving us free to visualize, hypothesize and calculate. That also allows us to alert the opponents promptly and confidently, to avoid acquiring unauthorized information, and to have plenty of time left to play the cards.

While enabling success at the bridge table may be the primary criterion for the evaluation of bridge methods, it is not the only one. For my part, if I am going to spend hundreds, even thousands of hours with my methods, we have to get along. I want to appreciate them, find them elegant and admire them. I want my time spent at the bridge table to be in the company of beautifully crafted things. Life is too short for second-rate methods.

"Elegant" is a description mathematicians are fond of. They mean "no more complicated than necessary". My dictionary says "ingeniously simple and pleasing". Elegant methods are effective, yet simply expressed. They display a logical structure. They have a certain obvious "rightness" to them.

Whether or not you believe in elegance for its own sake, in bridge it has practical advantages. Elegant methods can inspire us when the going is difficult. Elegant methods are easier to remember because they flow from basic principles. They are self-sustaining in that every time we use a sequence that derives from basic principles, those principles are reinforced in our memories.

So we want our methods to be accurate, antagonistic, playable and elegant. Now: do we want them to be natural?

ARTIFICIALITY AND NATURALNESS IN BRIDGE

In the early days of bridge, all bids were "natural": they suggested a contract or at least related directly to the denomination named. Then along came the takeout double, and there's been no looking back ever since. Progress, I suppose. Many people prefer the simple game. Some advocate natural methods as being better

for the promotion of the game. Of course, people see things differently. Some decry “artificial methods”, but themselves play Stayman, Flannery, Drury and a host of other conventions, and would be horrified if asked to do without. And they find it perfectly normal to open their third-longest suit, something I still find odd.

There are levels of naturalness in bidding. The most natural bid is one that primarily suggests a contract. Natural opening bids do that, as do non-forcing raises. Then come bids that suggest the denomination but not the level, i.e. “forcing” bids. After that come bids that suggest length in the suit named, but are not real attempts to play that strain; long-suit game tries would be an example. Then come bids which refer to the suit named, but show control or some aspect other than length: cuebids, splinters. And finally we have bids that bear no relation at all to the strain named, like Blackwood and Stayman.

Keeping things natural has an inherent appeal to some, myself included. I can admire old-fashioned Acol, even if it can’t duplicate all the results of the Ultimate Club. Bridge is a game, and the idea of being able to immerse oneself in it without transfers, relays and this-that-and-the-other-thing doubles can be refreshing.

The usual justification for the introduction of a convention is that some new use is of more value than the natural one it replaces. It can certainly be argued that a response of $4\clubsuit$ to one of a major is not needed in the natural sense. It is less clear that the natural double jump to the three-level should be dispensed with, or a jump to 2NT.

Here is an interesting situation where artificial is better, almost *because* it is artificial. The Acol 4NT opening was designed for the rare hand that has eleven or twelve tricks, the only losers being aces. The responses are:

$5\clubsuit$	no ace
$5\heartsuit/5\spades/5\clubsuit/6\clubsuit$	that ace
5NT	two aces

That is simple enough, and works in many cases. But suppose we hold

♠ — ♥ K Q J 10 8 7 6 3 ♦ K Q J 10 ♣ A

A 4NT opening is dangerous here, in that a $5\spades$ reply will get us too high. (A 5NT reply leaves us badly placed also, but for the purposes of the discussion I’m going to ignore the cases where responder has two aces, or the ace of clubs.) An improvement is to rearrange the five-level one-ace responses, so that you bid “over” your ace:

$5\heartsuit$	♠A
$5\spades$	♦A
$5\clubsuit$	♥A

Now we can handle any one-ace reply. While there is more to it than this — perhaps we can find a better way to show the club ace, two aces, and maybe key kings — it appears that anything close to optimal will be considerably more artificial than the original, simple idea.

METHODS AND HUMAN PERFORMANCE

One of the costs of artificial methods (and it should not be underestimated) is the potential for error. Myriads of IMPs are tossed away, a dozen or so at a time, when players forget their methods or encounter a situation not considered beforehand. A playful adage from years ago went like this: “To err is human, but to really mess things up, you need a computer.” A parallel observation for bridge might be that it is quite normal to get to bad contracts, but to get to horrible ones requires methods.

WEST	EAST
♠ A K 5	♠ J 10 2
♥ A 9 5 3	♥ Q J 8 6 4
♦ A 3	♦ J 10 9 6
♣ A J 9 5	♣ 10
2NT	3♦
3♠	4♦
4♣	pass

Apparently, 3♦ was a transfer, 3♠ a super-accept and 4♦ a re-transfer, but then a wheel fell off. At the other table the bidding was equally mysterious:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	pass	1♦	pass
2NT	pass	4♣	dbl
4NT	all pass		

This odd contract was just in; four spades on the 3-3 was less fortunate. The scene of this debacle? A local club game with inexperienced players, perhaps? No, it was the 2004 World Bridge Olympiad.

Natural bids, particularly non-forcing ones, are not only easier on the memory, they also make the rest of the auction simpler. Consider this natural auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	2♥	2♠
pass	pass	3♣	

Here 2♥ was natural, to play; therefore 3♣ must be also. If this sequence were to come up in play, it would not matter if your partnership had never discussed the 3♣ bid; the meaning is clear from the context. Contrast that with this auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	2♦1	2♠
pass	pass	3♣	

1. Transfer to hearts.

I would be willing to wager that half the pairs using Jacoby transfers have not discussed this simple situation. Without the overcall, most pairs play 3♣ as forcing, either to game or for one round. Here, it would also be reasonable for it to be merely competitive.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	pass	1♥	1♠
dbl			

Many partnerships play “support doubles”, so that the double here would show three hearts, as opposed to the four promised by a bid of 2♥. That much everyone who plays the convention knows. How high it applies is usually known also. Whether it applies after a 1♦ response, or if North has overcalled 1♦, is often less clear. The worst accidents, and they have happened to world-class pairs, have to do with later developments. Some pairs use the double only on hands that are in the range of a single raise. That makes double a narrowly defined action and all should be well once you firm up the meanings of East’s below-2♥ rebids. Other pairs agree that opener doubles whenever he holds three hearts. This creates a situation without parallel in standard methods — a completely unlimited raise in what may well be only a seven-card fit. No wonder accidents happen.

We could develop different sets of methods, varying from very natural to extremely artificial. The very natural methods would be easy to remember, could be played everywhere, but would not be optimal. The extremely artificial methods would demand a great deal of work, and might be allowed only in some events.

CONSISTENCY

The meanings of bridge actions are *consistent* when they remain the same over slightly different contexts. For example, it might be considered consistent for a 2♦ overcall of 1NT to mean the same thing regardless of whether it is bid directly or in the balancing position, or whether it is bid over a strong notrump or a weak one, or by a passed hand or an unpassed hand. There are so many situations in bridge that we would go mad if we couldn’t group some of them together, saying, in effect, “These differences do not matter.”

Every time we choose to make distinctions, and have our bids mean something different in slightly different contexts, we create work for ourselves. It is not so bad if the differences are slight, like lowering your standard for an opening bid by a point in third chair. It is large differences that cause difficulties. Suppose you like the weak notrump, but having had a few unfortunate results, you decide to play it only when not vulnerable. You may survive that without accident, but perhaps you feel transfers are not optimal over a weak notrump and you prefer Two-way Stayman instead — except of course in third and fourth, when slam is unlikely. After you get that all sorted out, you start to look at some of your competitive auctions:

YOU	LHO	PARTNER	RHO
1♣	pass	1♠	2♥
2			

Partner likes support doubles, so you play them. But when the weak notrump is on, it is more important to be able to take some action here with a balanced 15-17, so you play that double shows that. It goes on and on. Some of these distinctions are necessary for high-powered partnerships. But they all come at a cost.

Sometimes logic demands structures that, at least on the surface, appear inconsistent. Compare the following two situations.

Normally, a preemptor does not speak again, uninvited, and if these doubles are forbidden in your partnerships, you can treat the following as a hypothetical discussion. But for the rest of us (and for every player who maintains discipline in these situations, there are a dozen or so who are willing to bend the rules), what should these doubles mean? Should they be “the same”? Pure penalty with trump tricks would be one possible meaning, but suppose that’s not our style. What would tempt you to bid again after 4♠ on your right? Double here could be a courtesy to partner, showing extra offense and short spades. It is the equivalent of a 5♥ bid, shown by means of a double in case that suits him better. What if the 4♠ bid is on the left? On occasion, a double with the same meaning might be of value, but note that partner passed up a chance to double. In any event, there is a more useful purpose. This double, with partner on lead, should suggest a couple of trumps and a side void.

COMPLETENESS

A system is *complete* if it covers every possible situation. This cannot be done by writing down every sequence: the number is immense. We need principles that let us figure out the meaning of unfamiliar actions. The broadest principle, which some would call a meta-principle, gives an answer to the question “What is the meaning of a call in the absence of any agreement?” I like the answer, “It suggests a contract.” Others think that it is safer never to pass an unclear call: “When in doubt, it’s forcing.” Having either agreement is certainly much better than having none. I prefer the non-forcing treatment, because to me, naming a contract is the most basic aspect of bidding, and it always has a meaning. By contrast, if you treat an undiscussed bid as forcing, the replies are devoid of meaning as well.

A useful exercise for any partnership is to have a look at obscure situations to see whether their methods cover them. For example:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
4♥	4♠	pass	4NT

For many that would be Blackwood. Consideration of the situation might clarify when Blackwood applies, and whether it is Keycard. It is possible, though not popular, to treat the 4NT bid here as natural, in which case one could have a discussion about how strong that should be. It is even possible for it to be a forcing takeout.

Now consider this sequence:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
4♥	4♠	pass	5♣

It is natural for me, and a cuebid for many. For still others, it is a transfer or asking bid. Figure it out.

Then look at the same situations one level lower: a 3♠ overcall of 3♥, and when you are finished with that, a 4♣ overcall of 3♥.

You can also have some more specific agreements, such as “Redouble is never, *ever* for play.” The logic of bridge is tricky and it is easy to have conflicting agreements. You might want to write out your agreements as best you can and ask a friend to look for problems.

BIDDING TO TELL AND BIDDING TO PLAY

At times, we are more concerned with our own cards than with the partnership’s combined holdings. We may wish to name a contract, or to preempt or deceive the opponents, without inviting partner’s well-meaning cooperation. At those times, we would like our system to give us room to do as we wish rather than have it dictate our actions.

Suppose you hold this hand

♠ K 2 ♥ A 4 3 ♦ A 3 2 ♣ K Q J 10 4

and the dealer on your right opens 1♠. Depending on your style and methods, you might consider an overcall of 1NT or 2♣, or a takeout double. All three mean something in our methods and will cause partner to react accordingly. In addition, 1NT and 2♣ name moderately likely final contracts.

The action we take may depend on how much weight we give to naming an immediate, practical contract. A takeout double may lead to a poor 4-3 fit. It is probable that 1NT will play very well. The opponents are likely to lead spades; we will win and knock out the ♣A; they will run some spades as we throw losers, and then we will claim. On the other hand, 2♣ is less likely to be successful. Assuming we get a spade trick, and there is some danger of having the king ruffed, we still have only seven tricks and need some help in the dummy.

So, as an attempt to name the final contract, bidding 1NT is likely to work out well. However, as a description of our hand, it is less satisfactory. We have much more in the way of controls and trick-taking potential than partner will expect. Responder, with a hand like this one

♠ J 8 4 ♥ K Q 7 ♦ K Q 6 4 ♣ 9 7 3

would raise to 3NT without a second thought and be surprised to find that the correct contract is 5♣. Not that it would be easy to get to 5♣ in any event.

LIMITS TO ACCURACY

Real bidding is too difficult a task — there are too many hands, too many issues, to be perfect all the time. Consider the following game instead, which we can call “Let’s bid 7NT”. You and your partner are given a pair of hands and your sole task is to reach 7NT whenever it is a 70% or better contract, and to stop lower, anywhere, when it isn’t. To make things a little easier, we’ll throw out the board when it is too close, say if 7NT is between 50% and 70%, and we won’t require you to play the contract from the right side. How well can this game be played? If you are allowed to create custom methods and retain a perfect partner, can you get every deal right? If you think so, you are ready for “Let’s bid 7♠”. In this game you have to reach 7NT when it is 70% or more, 7♠ if that is 70% or more, and otherwise stop lower, and we’ll still throw out the 50%-70% deals. If you think this game can be played perfectly, move on to “Let’s bid 7♥”. Now — how low do you think you can go? It is clearly impossible to open all the hands that can make 1♣ and never get overboard, so there has to be a limit somewhere.

As we ponder the thirteen cards dealt to us, it is somewhat daunting to think about how many different hands partner might hold. It is the number of ways to choose thirteen items from thirty-nine, which comes to 8,122,425,444. We can never know exactly what partner has; we need to be content with an approximation. One or two bids yields a rough idea of partner’s hand, and, if we have space to investigate, we can refine our picture, focusing on what is important to us.

As East, you hold

♠ A 4 3 ♥ K J 2 ♦ 8 3 ♣ A 7 4 3 2

Partner opens 1♠, and you are playing a relay system that lets you find out about partner’s pattern and high cards without disclosing anything about your hand except that it is of game-going strength. You relay several times and discover that partner is 8-2-2-1 with the ♠KQ, the two red aces, and no other high-card points. Do you need to know anything more? Where would you like to play?

WEST	EAST
♠ K Q 9 8 7 6 5 2	♠ A 4 3
♥ A 5	♥ K J 2
♦ A 4	♦ 8 3
♣ 5	♣ A 7 4 3 2

Say they lead a diamond. You win, cash the ♠K, cross to the ♣A and ruff a club. Now a second trump to dummy, ruff another club as they all follow, cross to the ♥K, ruff the fourth round of clubs. Now back to dummy to cash the fifth club and claim.

Are you working, or just reading along? You are not asked to play many hands in this book; in fact, most of the play problems occur during the auction. Did you notice the need for the deuce of spades?

Without that deuce of spades, the grand slam is inferior. It makes if the queen of hearts is onside or singleton, or if the opening leader is 6-5 or longer in hearts and clubs. The nine or ten of hearts in declarer's hand would improve things a bit. But the presence of the deuce of spades gives us about a 60% chance with clubs alone, and at least the heart finesse in reserve, for over 80%.

This contrived example is meant to show how hard bidding is. Maybe in another hundred years someone will come up with a deuce-asking bid and solve hands like the above. (Let me be more precise. I am almost positive someone already *has* come up with a deuce-asking bid. What I meant was, maybe some system will have solved all the important problems up to and including spot-card entries.) In the meantime, if your system is really good enough to place the West spades at king-queen-eighth, you have the right to play him for the deuce. Relay practitioners call this "a finesse in the bidding".

SYSTEM REGULATION AND GOOD CITIZENSHIP

If you restrict your methods to natural bids and generally accepted conventions and treatments, you won't have any trouble here. If, however, your system uses unusual, artificial bids, you will not be able to play it in all events. This is as it should be. Unfamiliar, difficult to comprehend methods give opponents an unpleasant choice. They can either accept a competitive disadvantage, or spend a lot of time and effort preparing. It isn't fair to have to put up with that all the time.

Even if your system is strictly within the rules, it is fair to ask about the ethics of playing inscrutable methods. Some have taken the position that in order to promote the game, we should all be ambassadors, and that the public will be more readily drawn to the game when the way it is played is more understandable. System inventors may reply that new methods keep the game fresh and create new interest.

THE GOOD METHODS

The two deals we watched on Vugraph epitomize the twin aims of bidding and bidding systems: accuracy for us and confusion to the enemy. In addition, we have looked at some other desirable traits, and it is time to put pen to paper and set down the characteristics of "good methods".

1. Accuracy

We expect to reach the best contract most of the time, a reasonable contract most of the rest of the time, a bad contract as seldom as possible, and then preferably only on a "small" deal. If we can get to our games and bid the slams accurately, then it doesn't matter too much if we occasionally overbid to game or land in the second-best partscore.

2. Antagonism

Good opponents will become great opponents if we make things easy for them. Whatever is good for our opponents is bad for us. If accuracy is our first goal, then our second, just as important when possible, is to keep our opponents from being accurate. Sometimes this will be achieved by removing their bidding space, by preempting, or by taking light actions. Other times it will mean withholding information, or providing false information, or true but incomplete information, to lead them down the wrong path. We need our methods to support us in being difficult.

3. Playability

We want our methods to be (relatively) easy to learn and execute. We need the system to be legal, for whatever arena we intend to play in, and we need to be satisfied that we are playing responsibly.

4. Elegance

We want our methods to be elegant and compelling, for our own joy and inspiration, and for the benefits provided to memory and performance.

In the next few chapters, we are going to explore some aspects of bidding, paying particular attention to how they relate to the use of space.

USE OF SPACE IN CONSTRUCTIVE BIDDING

3

Wagner's music is better than it sounds.

Mark Twain

Bidding can be *rough*, or *refined*. Rough bidding is characterized by fast arrival at a contract that rates to be, if not ideal, at least reasonable. When we bid 1NT-3NT, we are taking the position that detailed investigation is unwarranted, since what we lose by surrendering useful information to the enemy more than offsets any potential gain through finding a superior contract. Similarly if we bid 1♠-4♠ at favorable vulnerability on say

♠ K 8 7 5 2 ♥ 7 ♦ J 8 4 2 ♣ 9 7 3

we are taking the position that detailed investigation costs more than it gains. Four spades may be cold or down four, but the reward for making it is high, and the opponents may have game or slam. Even if they can't make much, it will be hard for them to catch us, and the penalty for going down is modest.

Refined bidding, on the other hand, is characterized by patient exchanges, leading to a highly informed decision by one of the partnership on what the final contract should be. Refined bidding comes into its own in the slam zone, where there is both room to investigate and a high reward for success. Consider this pair of hands:

WEST

♠ A Q J 2
♥ 7 6 5
♦ A Q 7
♣ A 3 2

EAST

♠ K 7
♥ A 4 2
♦ K J 4 3
♣ K Q J 8

We are cold for 7NT. Now, replace either minor-suit jack with a spot card, and 7NT is a poor contract. Without the spade jack, it will be horrible. This is a perfect situation for science: plenty of room, a critical decision to make, and it matters very little what is revealed to the opponents. Nothing they learn will help them either on opening lead or on subsequent defense.

Bidding 7NT in a convincing manner on the hands above is a difficult task. It is perhaps most likely accomplished by a relay system; “dialogue” (cooperative) bidding might do it, too, but it would require very skilled bidders, well attuned to each other and playing great methods.

In this chapter, we are going to have a look at refined bidding and how it uses bidding space. We will start with unobstructed auctions; the opponents don’t get to bid until later. It is almost traditional for books on bidding to ignore the opponents, at least to begin with. It’s not that contested auctions are less important or less frequent — they aren’t. The Italy-Indonesia Rosenblum 2002 final, for example, did not include hyperactive bidders, but there were competitive auctions on seventy-one of the ninety-six boards. However, bidding is a complex subject and we need to start somewhere.

Suppose West holds:

♠ K Q 7 ♥ A 6 3 2 ♦ K J 7 ♣ A K 2

Most systems call for an opening of either 2NT or 1♣ (either strong or natural). Suppose also that East holds a hand that might make a slam, but may also be best played in 3NT. How much room is there to investigate? One way to think about that is to ask how many sequences there are that start with a 2NT opening and end in 3NT.

2NT-3♣; 3♦-3♥; 3♠-3NT	2NT-3♦; 3♥-3♠; 3NT
2NT-3♣; 3♦-3♥; 3NT	2NT-3♦; 3♥-3NT
2NT-3♣; 3♦-3♠; 3NT	2NT-3♦; 3♠-3NT
2NT-3♣; 3♦-3NT	2NT-3♦; 3NT
2NT-3♣; 3♥-3♠; 3NT	2NT-3♥; 3♠-3NT
2NT-3♣; 3♥-3NT	2NT-3♥; 3NT
2NT-3♣; 3♠-3NT	2NT-3♠; 3NT
2NT-3♣; 3NT	2NT-3NT

These sixteen sequences have been arranged to make a point: if you compare the two columns, you will see that they are identical except for the inclusion of 3♣ in all the left-hand entries. Eight of the sixteen total sequences start with 3♣. If we were to add one step, allowing ourselves to end in 4♣, we would have thirty-two sequences. You can visualize them by looking at the sequences listed, and first replacing all the final 3NTs with 4♣, which gives you sixteen, and then by instead adding 4♣ on to the end of each sequence, which gives you another sixteen. So each step we can use doubles the number of available sequences.

Another way to look at it is that a 3♣ response to 2NT, with its eight sequences to 3NT, is twice as valuable for investigating higher contracts as a 3♦ response, which has only four sequences. If our system had called for a 1♣ opening instead of 2NT, we would have had fourteen steps available, and there would have been 8,192 possible ways to get to 3NT.¹

This idea that lower bids are more valuable for investigation than higher ones holds true at every level. Over a 1♣ opening, for example, it is common to play 4♣, 4♦ and 4♥ as splinters, game raises with shortness. Suppose instead we use a conventional 3NT to show a game raise with an undisclosed shortness, which opener can bid 4♣ to query. That is a reasonable thing to do, with some gains and losses, but we

mustn't think we've done anything magical, replacing three bids with one. Three notrump actually has more investigative potential than the three four-level bids combined.

Bidding space is precious. The rules of the game prescribe that each bid must be higher than the preceding one, and once space is used, it is irretrievably gone. Optimal refined bidding makes heavy use of economical bids, keeping the bidding low and slow. Space-spending bids are appropriate only when sending a very specific message or asking a very specific question. We have to save space in order to determine what we can make before we get beyond what we can make. A safety margin is advisable, as well. If we plan to stop below game, two levels below game is better than one. If we don't intend to bid a slam, we want to stop in game whenever possible.

We can define the *bidding space principle* as follows:

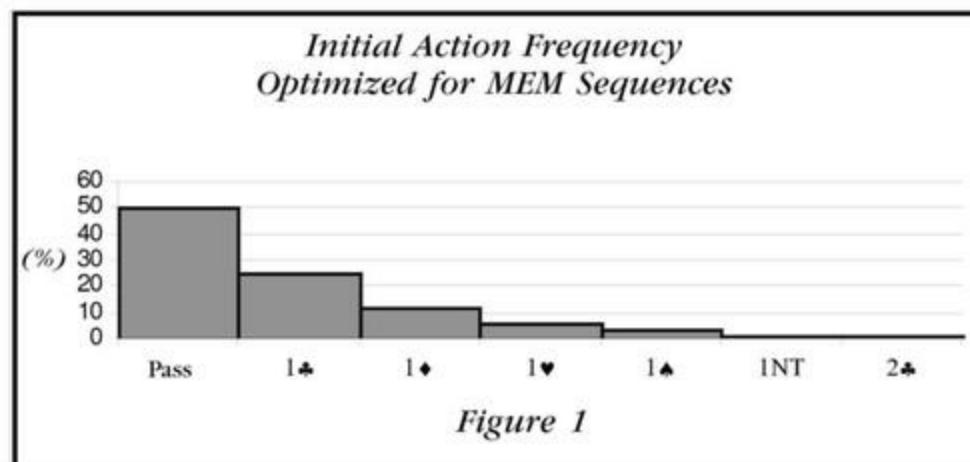
In allocating meanings to calls in an unobstructed, constructive auction, the higher the call, the more specific and less frequent it should be.

PARTITIONING

We want to design a bidding system. There is no need for modesty, since no one else is listening; we can call it MEM, for Maximally Efficient Methods. For this chapter, we are going to concern ourselves solely with the first of our good methods goals, accuracy. We won't worry about the opponents, who aren't allowed to bid yet anyway. And although we have noted the advantages of "naturalness" and may choose to make it a requirement later, for now we will not insist that our bids be "natural".

The bidding space principle tells us that higher calls should be more specific than lower ones. Initial actions in MEM will congregate around the lower end of the bidding spectrum: pass, 1♣, and 1♦ will be used more often than higher calls. The lower calls have more potential sequences available for determining the best contract. To be precise about it, the optimal way to spread out potential sequences is for each initial action to be half as frequent as the one below it: open 1♦ half as often as 1♣, and 1♥ half as often as 1♦.

For any bidding system, we can determine the frequency of each initial action and plot them on a graph. This *initial action frequency profile* for MEM should look something like Figure 1.



The caveats are important. Our MEM is not constrained to be natural. This distribution represents the ideal for maximizing the number of sequences below a given level, such as 3NT. It does not reflect the need not to bid beyond what we can make, or the fact that some deals, like potential slams, are more important than others. And, most importantly, it ignores the possibility that the opponents may bid.

Suppose instead that you knew that opening bidder's LHO was going to overcall 3♦. What would be the ideal initial action frequency profile now? All the advantages of staying low to allow investigation are gone, and responder will have to take action based on what is known from the opening bid. The ideal initial action profile in this case would be absolutely flat, with all actions from pass to 3♥ having the same frequency.

OPENING THE BIDDING

In the previous section, “pass” was treated as just another call, along with 1♣, etc. Of course, this is not the traditional viewpoint. In mainstream methods, you open the bidding if you have “enough”, and pass, or possibly preempt, if you don’t. What constitutes “enough” varies from partnership to partnership, and the norm has evolved over the years. Charles Goren popularized the standard of about 13 points: a 14-point hand was a mandatory opening, and a 13-point hand should be opened unless there were insurmountable rebid problems.

This traditional standard for opening the bidding has its basis in the scoring table. The large bonus for bidding and making a game makes it of primary importance to bid games that have a fair chance of success. Reaching game requires an initial action by someone; if we divide the responsibility equally between the two partners, we can see that an opening bid is required on any hand containing half the values for game. If we put the requirements for game at about 26 points (there are huge over-simplifications going on here; please bear with me), we come up with the opening bid standard of 13.

There are other reasons for requiring a certain strength before opening the bidding:

- Bidding without values exposes us to penalties.
- Weak hands often wind up defending, and it may be disadvantageous in both the bidding and the play to have revealed our hand.
- Valuable bidding space needs to be allocated to hands where we can make higher-scoring contracts.

On the other hand, there are plenty of reasons to open with less than traditional values:

- to bid and make a partscore.
- to bid and make game on less than 26 combined points.
- to harass the opposition.
- to direct a lead.
- to assist partner should our LHO open.

Another reason, for intervening in general, is that for most of us bidding is more fun and more self-assertive than passing. It is worth noting that the chief drawback of light action is that it reveals your hand to the opposition, but that matters little unless the opposition is strong enough to notice, remember and react. For

whatever reasons, today practice varies, but the opening standard looks to be about 1 ½ points lower than Goren's.

DRAWING THE BOUNDARIES

The above discussion gives us some ideas about how many hands in our system should be passed and how many opened 1♣, 1♦, etc. Now we need to consider what hands should be grouped together into the various possible initial actions. What characteristics should be shared by hands that are passed, or opened 1♣, or opened 1♠?

In all normal systems, all hands opened with a particular bid are alike in some important way or in one of a small number of ways. We call bids where all the hands are alike in the important ways *homogenous*. An example is a 1♠ opener in five-card major Standard: it shows, roughly, 11-20 HCP and 5+ spades. Bids whose message is that the hand is one of a number of types, we call *multi-meaning* or *multi-coloured* or just a *multi*. In bidding systems designed for humans (as opposed to computers), bids are either homogenous, or multi with a relatively small (2-4) number of alternative meanings.

Systems where the bids are by and large homogenous are simpler to learn and execute. Homogenous bids also have a large technical advantage. The information they provide is much more usable than that given by multi bids, at least for constructive bidding. For example, when responding with a strong hand to a 2♦ opener that shows a weak two in either major, you may have to ask the question, “Well, which is it?” before going any further.

Suppose we were to design our system around HCP ranges, something like:

pass	0-10 HCP
1♣	11-12 HCP
1♦	13-14 HCP
1♥	15-16 HCP

etc., in increments of 2 HCP. This would match up nicely with our idea of making lower bids more common, as hands with specific HCP totals get successively less frequent as one moves upwards from the average of 10 HCP.

Or maybe we care more about hand pattern than point-count. We could still require above-average HCP for opening, but then arrange the opening bids by pattern in order of probability. The most common hand pattern is 4432, and then 5332, so our scheme would be:

pass	0-10 HCP
1♣	11+, 4432
1♦	11+, 5332
1♥	11+, 5431
1♠	11+, 5422
1NT	11+, 4333

These two contrived schemes fit, roughly, our frequency model and desire for homogenous bids. But they won't work in practice. Although they might do a reasonable job on slam deals where there is plenty of room to catch up on other important information, they will not perform well on game and partscore deals, or when the opponents intervene.

The reason for this is that the information provided is not sufficiently pertinent to the problems we face at the bridge table. Suppose partner opens the bidding, the next player bids 4♦, and you hold:

♠ Q 8 6 ♥ A J 4 2 ♦ J 5 ♣ K 5 3 2

If partner's bid was 2♠, a weak two, you have a lot of usable information and are well placed to make an informed choice. If partner's opening was 1NT (a very homogenous bid) or 1♥ (playing five-card majors), again you may have a problem but you have useful information to work with. If partner's bid was a standard 1♣, you are less well placed, because 1♣, in standard five-card major methods, means real clubs or a balanced hand with three or more clubs, and that information is less pertinent, less usable.

Another example: suppose you hold the following hand, neither vulnerable at IMPs.

♠ K 7 6 3 ♥ 8 ♦ Q 9 7 3 2 ♣ 8 3 2

Partner opens 1♠ (five-card majors) and the next player bids 4♥. What do you do? Not everyone would agree, but I recommend bidding 4♠. This may turn out badly, but you have several ways to win. You may make 4♠; it may be a good save; the opponents may bid 5♥ and go down, either by judging badly or by making a reasonable decision that doesn't work out. You are able to take this percentage action because you know the partnership has at least nine spades (although I would take the same action playing four-card majors). Now suppose partner opens a strong club and the next hand bids 4♥. What do you do now? The specific answer to that depends on your methods over interference, of course, so let me ask you a different question. How do you feel? I know how I would feel. I would be disappointed to be playing these methods on this deal.

COLOURSFIRST

In a refined auction, one or both players will paint an accurate picture: this will include some combination of general honor strength, hand pattern (either exact or some information about the longest suit or suits, and maybe information about the presence of a short suit), some count of high cards, perhaps specific high cards, and the internal solidity of the long suit. I am going to argue that in a wide range of situations, the information that should be given first is what suits are long. Since it will come up time and again throughout the book, I'll give this principle a name, referring to it as **ColoursFirst**. (This name comes from the British term for suit, "colour". I thought of "SuitsFirst" or "StrainFirst", but settled on the choice that I found to be more, well, colorful. I have retained the British spelling for this term.)²

ColoursFirst bidding means primarily giving information about suit lengths, as opposed to other possibly useful information. The usual ways are to show your longest suit, raise partner, or bid notrump to suggest no long suit. Also qualifying are takeout doubles that truly promise support for unbid suits, and bids that show two or three specific suits.

It is ColoursFirst to overcall in your long suit, as opposed to starting with a takeout double to show your strength. If you play that overcalls have a wide range and are content to bid 1♠ over 1♥ with, say,

♠ A Q 9 7 3 2 ♥ A 6 ♦ A Q 4 2 ♣ 7

you are exhibiting a ColoursFirst tendency. The same is true if all your opening one-bids show suits, as opposed to systems where 1♣ artificially shows strength. Showing two or three specific suits qualifies also, as does indicating that no long suit is held, say by bidding notrump.

Many hands are too complex to be described in one bid. We have to make a start with our first bid and hope to add to the description later. The rationale behind ColoursFirst is that if things unfold in such a way as to make completing the description difficult, it is often better to have given as much distributional information as possible in the first bid. For example, if you start with a double on the hand above, because it is too strong in your methods for an overcall, then you are more or less committed to bidding 4♠ if the bidding goes like this:

RHO	YOU	LHO	PARTNER
1♥	dbl	2♥	pass
4♥	?		

There is precious little safety in that. And if the bidding were to go

1♥ dbl 4♥ 5♣
pass or dbl ?

you would not be well placed, either. In contrast, if partner is trained to raise aggressively with a fit, an overcall will lead to better-informed decisions about whether to bid on.

It does not matter whether the bid that shows the suit is natural or artificial; what matters is that length is shown. For example, playing that a 2♦ response to 1NT shows hearts is ColoursFirst. Suppose, though, that you play that 2♦ is hearts most of the time, unless followed by 2♠, which shows clubs. That is not ColoursFirst. If you play that way, suppose you hold:

♠ 7 ♥ A 8 2 ♦ A 7 3 ♣ K 10 8 6 4 3

Partner opens 1NT and you set the machinery in motion with 2♦. The next hand, Luddite that he is, bids 3♣. This comes back to you. What do you bid? Perhaps 4♣. But wouldn't you also want to bid that on this next hand?

♠ 7 ♥ A J 9 8 2 ♦ A 7 ♣ K 10 8 6 4

And what does doubling 3♣ say about what suit you have? Or bidding 3NT? Even if you have the answers to these questions (and you are better prepared than most if you do), you would clearly be in a much better position if the first bid unambiguously promised hearts. And it isn't hard to design methods that way: just stick with ColoursFirst without strong reasons for not so doing — and even then, think twice.

COLOUR GROUPS

Making categories is a fundamental aspect of reasoning. From our first lessons in the game, we are told about *major* and *minor* suits. This, the most important grouping of the suits, is of course founded in the scoring table, in the fact that eleven tricks are required for game in clubs or diamonds, while ten suffice for hearts and spades. In non-competitive game bidding, then, we look to play in a minor suit only if there is no satisfactory major-suit fit and 3NT is impractical.

This distinction between major and minor suits has been greatly accentuated by two factors: matchpoint scoring, and the domination of North American bidding by five-card majors. At matchpoints, there is always an advantage to choosing a major suit as trumps, unless you plan to go down. (When sacrificing, you may as well play where there are the most tricks.) Modern North American bidding has sharpened the distinction between majors and minors by creating two completely different approaches: for majors, five cards to open, three to raise, 2/1 game-forcing and perhaps a forcing 1NT response; for minors, three-card openings and inverted raises.

At IMPs, the suits are roughly equal in importance on non-competitive partscore or slam deals. If playing in a minor suit will be safer, it is practical to make the 1- or 2-IMP investment. In competitive deals, however, rank determines the importance of the suits. The side with the highest-ranking playable trump suit can get away with contracting for one fewer trick than the other side.

If one side is in 4♠ or 5♣, then for the other side, the red suits are equal. Here is an example from the USBF trials for the 2003 Bermuda Bowl:

<i>Dealer South</i>	♠ —		
<i>Both vul.</i>	♥ A 9 7 6 3		
	♦ 10 9 7 4 3 2		
	♣ 8 4		
♠ A Q 8 5 4 2		♠ 10 7 6 3	
♥ K		♥ 10 8 4 2	
♦ —		♦ Q 5	
♣ A Q J 9 6 2		♣ K 5 3	
		♠ K J 9	
		♥ Q J 5	
		♦ A K J 8 6	
		♣ 10 7	
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Fallenius	Morse	Welland	Wolff
			1NT
2NT ¹	3♥	4♦	4♥
5♣	all pass		

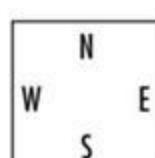
1. Minors or any strong two-suiter.

This is a complex deal, and it is difficult for both pairs to gauge how much each side can make. If North-South could see all the cards, they would probably like to buy the contract for 5♦ if possible, and would bid 6♦ over 5♠. But diamonds were never bid, and it is interesting to consider why. South has strong diamonds and a weak doubleton club; in the past, this would have argued for a 1♦ opening, but the standard practice today is to open 1NT on all hands in the range. It is unclear what bids North had available over the multi-purpose 2NT, and whether they were all well defined; one seldom has customized countermeasures for all the weapons encountered today. At the table, North chose to bid hearts, the major. This aims at the likeliest game, if the opponents subside. However, North's hand suggests that West does not have the minors, but rather the strong two-suiter, probably spades and clubs. If East-West are going to bid to at least 4♠, not certain but likely, then the red suits become equal and there is a case for showing the longer one. North might later be able to bring hearts into the picture by way of bidding 4NT over 4♠. After the actual choice of 3♥, there was one other chance below game for diamonds, in theory at least. It certainly would have been effective if South could have bid 4♦ to show a good suit with heart support.

SPADES ARE DIFFERENT

Spades are unique in that they outrank every other suit. Diamonds outrank clubs, but ultimately that matters only on the rare occasion where neither side can play in a major. The side with spades has the advantage no matter what suit the opponents have. So, in some situations, the most relevant categorization of the colours is spades and non-spades.

<i>Dealer West</i>	♠ Q 9 3 2	
<i>Neither vul.</i>	♥ 7 5 4	
	♦ J 8 3	
	♣ A Q J	
♠ K 6 4		♠ 10 5
♥ Q J 6		♥ K 10 8 3 2
♦ A K 7 4		♦ Q 9 2
♣ K 8 3		♣ 9 5 4
	♠ A J 8 7	
	♥ A 9	
	♦ 10 6 5	
	♣ 10 7 6 2	



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT ¹	pass	2♦ ²	pass
2♥	pass	pass	dbl
pass	2♠	all pass	

1. 15-17.
2. Transfer to hearts.

Barring a defensive slip-up, West's 1NT will fail by a trick or two on a spade lead. Instead, 2♥ will succeed, but South balances. Now East-West can defend 2♠, which will make, or they can go on to 3♥ and go down.

Now imagine the hearts and spades switched. (You can manage without a new diagram.) Now East transfers into spades and South can either sell out for -110, or balance for -50 in 3♥.

One deal does not prove anything, of course, but it illustrates the idea. Being able to stop in 2♠ is important. How important do you think it is to be able to stop in 2♥ over partner's 1NT opening? It is a bit of a three-way parlay. The significant gains come when 1NT would fail, while 2♥ will succeed and the opponents allow us to play there.

I once tested my theory that opponents are more likely to subside against 1NT than against a low-level suit contract by passing partner's 1NT holding seven small hearts and a queen. The result was inconclusive. The opponents did in fact pass out 1NT, beating it for 150, and would have bid spades over 2♥, but they would have made only nine tricks rather than the ten I had hoped for.

The difference between hearts and spades has many possible ramifications for bidding systems. Here are a few:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♦
?	

Super-accept freely. Good opponents are unlikely to let you make a comfortable 2♥, anyway. With a borderline game invitation as responder, transfer and give up over opener's 2♥.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♥
?	

Don't play super-accepts, or only use them with a beautiful maximum and four-card support. Consider using Stayman followed by 2♠ as invitational, which lets you stop lower than transferring and continuing.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♥	2♥
3♥	

Play this sequence as preemptive, to play, if you like. Personally, I prefer to try to buy the contract for 2♥: if I wind up having to bid 3♥, I may learn something of value along the way. My experience is that the opponents, having successfully pushed us to the three-level, seldom bid higher.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♠	2♠
3♠	

By contrast, playing this as preemptive is handing away IMPs. If you play some kind of scientific game-trty structure, this sequence can show long spades without singling out any of the other suits.

Whether we group the suits into majors and minors or spades and non-spades, it is clear that the order of the suits by importance is spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs. This principle will also figure into our system design and we can call it **RankFirst**.

Natural systems, from this perspective of the relative importance of suits, are built exactly upside-down. Spades, the most important suit, should be given the most bidding space and should be shown frequently. Clubs, the least-important suit, should be bid seldom and be given the least bidding space. Or at least there's an argument for it. Of course, there are good reasons for keeping opening bids natural. Three are: not wanting to make completely artificial what is only a game, not wanting to inflict artificiality on our opponents, and conforming to the rules of organized play.

Before continuing with our discussion of system design principles, we are going to survey three topics in bidding for accuracy: relays, transfers and dialogues.

¹ We started with five steps and obtained $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 2^4$ sequences; in general, if we have n steps, then there will be $2^{(n-1)}$ sequences. Thus fourteen steps produce $2^{13} = 8,192$ possible sequences to 3NT.

² ColoursFirst is not a theorem, or even an exact statement, just a principle or tendency. Everyone agrees about the importance of showing suits, just not the relative importance in all cases. Having a single term provides a shorthand for justifying a bid or system design choice.

relay /reelay/ n. & v. 1. a fresh set of people or horses substituted for tired ones. 2. a gang of workers, supply of material, etc., deployed on the same basis. 3. a relay race. 4. a device activating changes in an electric circuit.

adapted from ‘Reader’s Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder’

Exactly what dictionary definition is supposed to be appropriate to the bridge term “relay” has always been a bit of a mystery to me. The tired horses often seem apropos, but perhaps it is the electric circuit... No matter. In bridge, a relay is an economical, uninformative bid designed to allow partner to further the description of his hand. The idea has been around a long time, with the ubiquitous Stayman convention over notrump openings being a good example.

Some of the material in this chapter will be a bit dense, and none of it is really essential to the reader who does not plan to play relay methods. The intent is to illustrate relay bidding, to show where it works well and badly, and to suggest some relay techniques that may be of interest to the assiduous system designer.

THE HISTORY OF RELAY BIDDING

A system can employ relay methods anywhere from a little to a lot, so the exact point at which the title “relay system” is warranted is open to debate. The first such is perhaps Pierre Ghestem’s Monaco, played in World Championships in the 1950s.

At about the same time, Italian system designers were wrestling with a problem. In their distributionally disciplined methods, unbalanced hands were bid in accordance with canapé principles: the shorter suit was bid first, while their second suit bid promised five or more cards. But what to do with 4441 and 5440 hands? The Roman Club solution was to use a 2♣ opening for the minimum three-suiters and 2♦ for strong ones. In Neapolitan, 2♣ was needed for clubs, so minimum three-suiters were opened one of a suit but the strong ones were assigned to the 2♦ opening.

One of my fond bridge memories is of an occasion when I was a teenager visiting London in the summer of 1970 with our church choir. I went into a little bookstore there and found a copy of *The Blue Club*. This was the English-speaking world’s introduction to the systemic successor to Neapolitan. The book was an adaptation by Reese of *Bridge de Compétition* by Benito Garozzo and Leon Yallouze. It was

a revelation. The beauty, elegance and completeness of the system were breathtaking. I was especially taken with the Blue Team 2♦, with its relay methods showing precise pattern, strength, number of controls and number of queens. It was a glimpse of the future.

In the decades since, relay technology has matured. Many partnerships today use relay techniques in limited situations, while the true aficionados play complete relay systems like the Ultimate Club, Super Precision, MOSCITO or Viking Club.

TERMINOLOGY

Before we can discuss relay methods in a meaningful way, we need to clear up some questions of terminology. One player asks the question and the other answers. How should we refer to them? There have been many terms employed. Captain-puppet and master-slave are too demeaning. *Relayer*, shortened to R, is popular for the asker; that will do. Sometimes *responder* is used for the partner, but the word is somewhat overused in bridge and does not abbreviate conveniently. Following David Morgan, I'll use *relay-responder*, which shortens to RR.

The *relay determination* rule describes which bid is the relay, or, more generally, which bids are what relays, as there may be more than one. In a simple relay mechanism, there is only one relay available at each turn, asking the next of a fixed series of questions. The following are all possible relay determination rules for a simple relay mechanism.

The relay is:

- The cheapest bid, up to a certain maximum (say, 6♠).
- The cheapest bid, up to a certain maximum, but not 3NT.
- The cheapest bid, excluding game in the suit set by the relayer.
- The cheapest bid in RR's shortest suit.

The relay determination rule must allow for intervention by either opponent. One approach is to say that we will continue to relay unless the intervention pushes us higher than we would have been, uninterrupted. A rule based on this premise is:

- If the LHO of relayer makes a bid of three or more steps, relays are off.
- If the LHO of relayer makes a bid of one or two steps, double becomes the first step, pass the second (with double the next relay), the cheapest bid the third, and so on.
- If the LHO of relayer doubles, then redouble is the first step, pass the second (with redouble the next relay), and bids for the higher responses.
- If RHO of relayer bids, “pass” becomes the relay.

Breaking the chain means terminating the relay process by making a bid which is neither a relay nor a signoff, thereby initiating or returning to dialogue bidding. Sometimes the chain-breaking bid sets the trump suit, either naturally or artificially.

Zoom is a space-saving technique whereby responder, when he would otherwise make the most expensive reply to the relay, anticipates the next question and answers it as well (and conceivably answers further

questions too, occasionally leading to the relay hazard, “zooming out of control”). If this is unclear, don’t worry — our first example will show you how it works in practice.

The *relay initiator* is the first relay, which begins the whole business. In Ultimate Club, for example, a 2♣ response to one of a major is artificial, game-forcing, and the relay initiator.

SHOWING PATTERN

As an example, let’s take a 1NT opening that is restricted to three patterns: 4333, 4432, 5332 with a long minor. Our relay initiator will be 2♣, forcing to game and asking for pattern by a scheme we can call “spade-count”: opener shows how many cards he holds in each suit, working downwards starting with spades. For this purpose, and for some reason that was terribly compelling at the time, I used to order the suits: hearts, spades, clubs, diamonds. (It is the order of game contracts, 4♥ through 5♦.) Now I find the spades-first scheme most natural, since it corresponds to how we name hand patterns.

1NT (15-17)

2♣?	(relay initiator)
2♦	two spades, the fewest possible
2♥	three spades

The question mark traditionally denotes a relay bid, not rising inflection.

Four is the most spades opener can have, so with that holding he “zooms”, giving a count of the next suit, hearts.

1NT

2♣?	
2♠	four spades, two hearts
2NT	four spades, three hearts

With four spades and four hearts, opener zooms on to give a diamond count, and with three diamonds he zooms yet again, answering whatever question follows pattern completion.

1NT

2♣?	
3♣	4-4-2-3 (zooming on to number of diamonds)
3♦&up	4-4-3-2

Until opener’s pattern is revealed, relays by responder ask for a count of the next lower suit.

1NT

2♣?

2♦

two spades

2♥?

2♠

three hearts (the fewest possible, since
5422 hands are not allowed)

2NT?

3♣ 2-3-3-5

3♦ 2-3-4-4

3♥&up 2-3-5-3

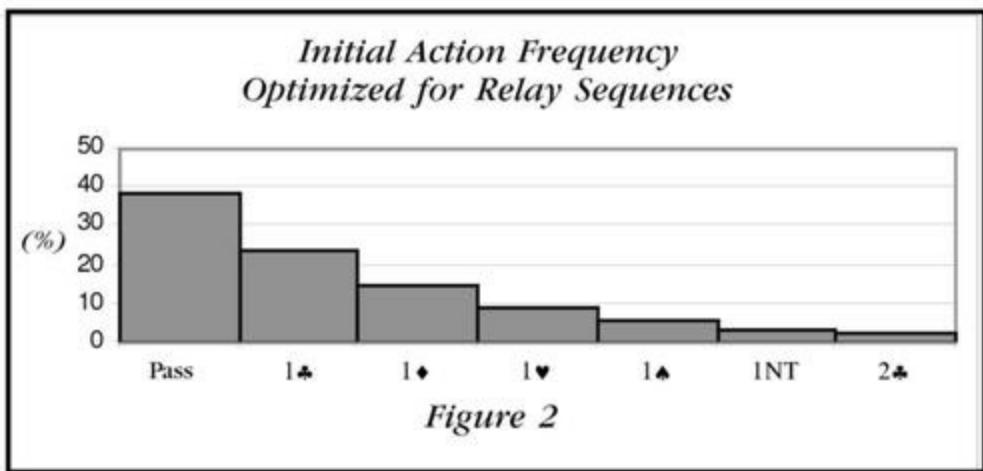
One big advantage of a scheme like this is that it accommodates itself to different situations. You want your 1NT openings to include five-card majors or six-card minors or 5422 hands? Fine! The method is happy to oblige.

RELAY SYSTEM DESIGN

In the previous chapter, we looked at how many possible sequences there are going from 2NT to 3NT. Here we are interested in something different. If the 2NT bidder is the RR, how many distinct hand types can be shown to a relaying partner without going beyond 3NT? Suppose we start the relay with 3♣. RR can show one hand type by bidding 3NT and another by bidding 3♠. If he bids 3♥, we can't ask another question without the response taking us past 3NT, so 3♥ can represent only one type as well. If RR bids 3♦, however, we can allow him to have either of two types; we then relay again with 3♥, and he distinguishes between them with 3♠ and 3NT.

That's a total of five hand types that can be shown, for the five steps of space between 2NT and 3NT. If you count the number of hand types that can be shown for each number of steps, you get the series 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, 377, This famous series first appeared in a book printed in 1202, describing the propagation of rabbits. The author was Leonardo Pisano of Pisa (ca. 1170-1250), better known as Fibonacci. If you haven't heard of him, you are not up on your mathematics. There is even a "Fibonacci Quarterly".

In Chapter 3, we examined the initial action frequency profile of a system designed to spread out available sequences equally. This led to a distribution where each opening bid was half as frequent as the one below it. If we concern ourselves only with relay sequences, the ideal distribution is the flatter one based on the Fibonacci sequence, as shown in Figure 2.



Of course, it would be tremendously wasteful of bidding space to use only relay sequences. Relay systems are much more efficient if they use all the bidding space. This can be done in two major ways. One is to have, instead of a single question available at each turn, multiple questions. The relayer then asks the question he is most interested in, the system being designed so that the likeliest useful question is asked by the cheapest relay. The second way is accept “breaking the chain” as a frequent strategy. The way to make that effective is to ensure that at every turn, the information provided by RR is useful to a potential chain-breaker. For example, a bid that shows either 1-4-2-6 or 7-3-3-0 is useless without further clarification. But a bid that always shows five spades and four hearts lends itself to a descriptive breaking of the chain. ColoursFirst!

HOW EFFECTIVE IS RELAY BIDDING?

Some situations favor dialogues, others relay bidding. Relay bidding is often superior when a strong hand faces a narrowly defined opening, such as the Blue Team 2♦ referred to above, or Flannery, or a Roman Two. Dialogue bidding would be at a distinct disadvantage here because of the discrepancy in description: one partner is way ahead of the other in describing his hand. So you will often come across relay methods in reply to specialized openings or responses.

The Roman, Neapolitan and Blue Team three-suit bids were designed to accommodate patterns that had no other place in the system. Other system inventors seem to devise three-suit bids for the sheer joy of it. Did you ever wonder why relay methods are so prevalent in three-suit methods, compared say to balanced-hand auctions, which are surely much more important?

Relay methods show better when the number of cases to be resolved is a good fit with the amount of room available to resolve them. If a bid shows a balanced hand, say 4333, 4432, or 5332, then there are four patterns of 4333, and a dozen each of 4432 and 5332, for a total of twenty-eight. In contrast, there are only four 4441s. Now suppose for argument’s sake that we are trying to place all the aces, kings and queens. If the hand is patterned 4333, then for each suit there are eight possibilities, i.e. no top honor, all three, three ways to have one honor, three ways to have two. For the hand as a whole, we have $8 \times 8 \times 8 \times 8$ possibilities (most, of course, excluded because of the range description). For a 4441, however, the singleton affords only four possibilities, so the number of cases is $8 \times 8 \times 8 \times 4$, and if we can restrict the hands to those with small singletons, the number of cases shrinks to $8 \times 8 \times 8$.

Simply put, hands with a singleton or void have fewer cases that need to be distinguished. A system employing relays can take advantage of this by arranging for the balanced hand to do the asking and the hand with shortness to do the showing; we call this principle **ShortnessShows**. (See “The Balanced Hand Principle” by David Morgan in *The Bridge World*, December, 1989.)

The best methods will use relay techniques when they are best and dialogue techniques when they are best. This may sound obvious, but few systems are well developed in both areas. I played a relay system for a while, with a strong club and limited 12-16 openings for bids from 1♦ through 2♥. Responder to the limited openings had the choice, when strong, of employing the relay or of conducting a dialogue. It struck me that the hands that were really well suited to relaying looked a lot like old-fashioned 2NT openings: balanced, bursting with honors.

Let’s think why this might be so. Relay auctions are a race against space — you have to determine the right contract before you are past it, or find yourself in the frustrating position of being unable to name it because that would be a relay! A useful concept is that of *safety level*, which is the contract one is willing to reach even in the face of disappointing replies. If you know the partnership assets can underwrite 6NT, and it’s a question of finding the right jacks to make a grand slam, you’ve got plenty of space. If your safety level is a suit game, you have less, and if it is 3NT, you are quite restricted in what you can afford to look for. Embarking on a relay sequence when needing four or five lucky replies is like playing the lottery, with similar odds.

Information from RR can be completely specified (“I have the aces of clubs and spades”) or only partially specified (“I have two aces”). Completely specified information can be interpreted immediately regardless of what R holds. The same is not true of partially specified information; interpretation depends on what R holds. In the “two ace” example above, R will know what the aces are only if he holds two himself. In general, the stronger and more balanced R is, the more successful he will be at interpreting partially specified information.

Another reason balanced hands are better for relaying is that if RR shows a shortage, R may be able to make an early decision about whether to stop in 3NT or carry on, based on his holding in RR’s short suit. The hand with the shortage is not as well placed to make such a decision. Of course, this is partly a function of what the relays ask, and relay methods are still undergoing development. A recent addition is the “anti-splinter” to describe holdings that are suitable for 3NT opposite shortage.

One clear advantage to a relay auction is that the opening lead is difficult with one hand largely or completely unrevealed. Pity the poor Italian leader here in the first-round match against Iceland in Istanbul, 2004:

Board 6
Dealer East
E-W vul.

♠ A 7 5 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ K J 9 5 3
 ♣ 7 6 4

♠ K Q 4
 ♥ 6 4
 ♦ A 7 6 4
 ♣ A 9 3 2



♠ 10 9 6 3
 ♥ J 10 7 5
 ♦ 10 2
 ♣ 10 8 5

♠ J 8
 ♥ A K Q 8 3 2
 ♦ Q 8
 ♣ K Q J

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Jorgensen	Fantoni	Armannsson	Nunes
		1♣ ¹	pass
2♦ ²	pass	2♥ ³	pass
2♠ ⁴	pass	2NT ³	pass
3♥ ⁴	pass	3NT	all pass

1. Strong.
2. Natural positive.
3. Relay.
4. Showing shape.

With no information about the declarer's hand, South tried ♥7 and that was nine easy tricks. Against a normal auction in the other room, a club lead and spade shift ensured one down.

If the relaying hand is the declarer, the advantage is maintained throughout the play, not just for the opening lead. Alan Sontag estimates the value of having the strong, relaying hand declarer at about a third of a trick. That is enough to get many relayers to design their methods in a way to make the relayer declarer as often as possible.

MAINSTREAM RELAY STRATEGY

While there is an unlimited number of ways to design relay methods, one model can be considered mainstream. One hand makes a descriptive bid, such as a limited one of a major opening or a natural positive to a strong club, and partner bids the relay initiator, becoming R. RR provides more distributional information, such as the presence or absence of secondary suits. The relayer continues to make economical relays. RR reveals his exact pattern. If the relays continue, he goes on to give information about high cards,

perhaps starting with a bulk count of controls (A=2, K=1) or 3-2-1 points (A=3, K=2, Q=1). This information can then be refined, giving location, before going on to lower honors.

HUMAN PERFORMANCE

Any partnership setting out to use relay methods needs to deal with the issues of memory and performance. If you are designing a system for a computer, you are free to make it arbitrarily complex. Humans, on the other hand, need tender loving care. It is not enough simply to be able to remember the system. Before making a relay, you need to see in your mind all the possible responses, and whether each one will leave you well placed. If not, breaking the chain may be better. And the whole process must leave you in a frame of mind to tackle the problems of declarer play.

Each partnership must make its own decision as to how much complexity to take on in the pursuit of technical perfection. It is much better to play simpler methods well than to play more advanced methods badly.

ALGORITHMIC AND CUSTOM REPLIES

The spade-count scheme described earlier could be called *algorithmic* in that it is based on rules. It can be applied without much extra mental effort to many different situations. A *custom* set of replies, in contrast, is hand-crafted to a particular situation. Forcing Stayman is an example:

1NT	
2♦?	
2♥	four hearts
2♠	four spades, not four hearts
2NT	no four-card major or five-card minor
3♣	five clubs
3♦	five diamonds

Traditionally, custom replies have been used to make relay schemes more palatable by making them “natural”, hence easier to remember. This tends to be satisfactory when dealing with situations where there are relatively few possible replies, but it creates headaches if used as the basis for a general relay technique. It’s all well and good when the suit ranks line up just the way you want, but that doesn’t always happen. You start to do some substituting (“we’ll bid notrump when holding hearts, since hearts is the relay”), deal with intervention, then bend your requirements a little to fit the space, and before too long you have a hodgepodge of exceptional situations to try to keep track of. And what seems natural to the system designer isn’t natural to everyone. It’s better to bite the bullet, define an algorithm, and forget about having little parcels of naturalness. Jeff Rubens stated this in his Useful Space Principle (*The Bridge World*, November 1980): “When allocating bidding space under partnership agreements, assign it where it is most useful without reference to natural or traditional bridge meanings of calls.”

The real value of custom replies shows up when responder may wish to pass the response. It is common in relay systems for a relay to establish a game force, and indeed this is convenient. However, it may not be optimal in all situations. An example of a “custom” treatment is for a player who has shown a 4441 to describe his pattern by bidding the suit under the singleton, instead of bidding the singleton. This makes for a more likely resting place than the short suit and it conveniently leaves the economical bid of the short suit as the next relay. Another example: in my old relay system, 1♦ showed 12-16, balanced or three-suited. A response of 1♥ was a relay, with at least game-invitational values. The three-suited patterns were shown at the two level, and 1♠ and 1NT were used for balanced hands, distinguished by strength. The minimum was shown by rebidding 1NT, which responder might want to pass. The maximum was shown by 1♠, which allowed 1NT by responder to be the next relay.

OPTIMIZING THE RELAY RESPONSES

One piece of optimization you may want to consider is making the replies to the relay run from most to least likely. For example, in a 1NT opening hand, the likeliest number of spades is three, then four, then two, and you could structure the responses that way. It probably wouldn’t be worth the brain strain if this were the only place you did it, but it might be a good principle throughout the system. Suppose, for example, you play Flannery (I know, but suppose). You could play numerical rebids over the relay, showing the number of diamonds you hold. But it would be wasteful to have the first step show a void in diamonds — voids are rare. The probabilistic order (breaking ties “numerically”, lower pattern number first) is 2,1,3,0,4. If you are fluent in probability theory, you may like that. There is something right about tying our methods to immutable, mathematical laws rather than the whims of a system inventor. Complicating matters is that if zoom is on, the least privileged place is second last, rather than last.¹ I think a good scheme for human performance, and reasonable in theory, is to start at one and put the void last: 1, 2, 3, 4, 0.

Within a system, pattern completion will occur in different contexts. In one common situation, RR has shown a primary suit of at least five cards, and a second suit, not longer than the first, of at least four. One way to complete the pattern is to show the lengths of the two suits first, in probabilistic order: 5-4, 5-5, 6-4, 6-5 etc. Then, if asked, you show the number of cards in the higher-ranking side suit. If a length-pair is impossible, it can be removed from the list — perhaps 5-5 is excluded because the opening bid would have been in the other suit. But if a length-pair is only partially excluded, and therefore simply less probable, it is not worth changing the order of the list.

Knowledge of partner’s exact pattern can be of great value to the relayer. In fact, if you wanted to ease into relay methods gradually, you could forgo subsequent relays and always break into a dialogue after pattern completion. A common technique is for the relayer to set the trump suit, at least provisionally. This is done numerically: the cheapest bid sets the longest suit, next cheapest next longest, etc., with ties broken by rank.

IDENTIFYING HONORS

At this point, RR has shown his exact pattern. Some limit on overall strength is needed as well. We don't want: "Do you have the spade ace, no, do you have the heart ace, no, ... well what do you have, why nothing at all!" If the strength range is too broad, it can be narrowed here by a step response on HCP, controls, or 3-2-1 points. In the methods being developed here, that won't be necessary, and the next step will be to show aces.

When showing aces, it is normal to rely on partial specification, showing the number of aces but not their location. This is a compromise intended to save space. The partnership often holds all the aces, and if only two aces are held, slam investigation is curtailed and the nearest safe shelter sought. Of course, in the case where exactly one ace is missing, it would often be helpful to know which one it is. We may need an ace for control of a side suit, or prefer one over another to combine with other honors. For example, ♦xxx ♣Axx opposite ♦x ♣KQx is one loser, whereas ♦Axx ♣xxx opposite ♦x ♣KQx may be two. But showing aces in bulk is a good compromise: efficient, and usually effective.

To save space, replies are often made to do double duty, or worse. Even the original Blackwood 5♣ response shows either no aces or all four. A difference of four aces should be easy to recognize, and if you are off four aces, it's too late anyway. When Roman Blackwood came along, with its need for three two-ace replies, further doubling up was required. Now, 5♣ showed zero or three and 5♦ showed one or four — still a relatively safe three ace difference. Roman Keycard Blackwood uses 03/14 (or 14/30) also, so the separation between weak and strong possibilities is down to potentially two aces and a king. The last word in packing may be the Italian Turbo 4NT, which puts hands with an even number of keycards in one group and those with an odd number in the other.

The more replies are packed, the greater the chance the reply will be misread. As a cautionary tale, it should be noted that once even the 0-or-4 reply was misdiagnosed.

	♠ Q	♠ K J 4 3	
	♥ K Q J 8 3	♥ 10 9 7 2	
	♦ Q	♦ J 9 7 6 2	
	♣ K Q J 10 9 3	♣ —	
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	pass	1♦	pass
1♥	pass	3♥	pass
4NT	pass	5♣	pass
7♥	dbl	all pass	

This was in the 1971 World Championships. Admittedly, the French had already qualified for the final, and the above sequence was perpetrated by an unfamiliar partnership who did not see eye-to-eye about 3♥. Still, it should give one pause whenever hearing, "You'll be able to tell."

While partial specification works reasonably well for aces, the same cannot be said of cards of lower rank. Almost always a king or queen or so is missing, and we may need to know which ones so that we can determine trump solidity and trick potential. How to identify high cards is a complex question, and there is lively debate on the matter in the relay community. The best answer in any given situation will depend on many factors, including what is known about the high cards to begin with, what hands are likely to be relaying and what complexity the relayers are willing to accept in their pursuit of relay heaven. Serious

relayers often have dynamic methods, optimized to different situations. I am going to present a less onerous approach, which I find a good compromise between theoretical efficiency and practical usability.

The first reply after pattern specification will show the number of aces Turbo-style, even or odd, i.e.

1 step	0, 2, or 4 aces
2+ steps (zoom)	1 or 3 aces

This is living on the edge, and it would be entirely reasonable to use a 03/14/2 scheme instead, either all the time or when RR's range exceeds a certain threshold. The reason the even-odd scheme rates to be safe is that in the proposed methods, the relayer is likely to be balanced and quite strong. The danger of ambiguity is greater when one relays on a distributional hand weaker in high cards, hoping to find aces opposite but perhaps getting a plethora of kings and queens.

Kings and lower cards are shown by a variation on denial cuebidding. RR mentally lists his honor cards in order as follows: first kings, in suit length order, ties broken by rank; then queens, then jacks, similarly. Singleton honors get demoted; singleton kings come after queens. RR's first message tells about the first three cards on the list:

1 step	none or all three
2 steps	1st, or 2nd & 3rd
3 steps	2nd, or 1st & 3rd
4+ steps (zoom)	3rd, or 1st & 2nd

When holding the four-step case, zoom as follows. If not holding the fourth card on the list, stop on the fourth step; if holding the fourth card but not the fifth, stop on the fifth; continue zooming until not holding the relevant card or until the list is finished. After the first reply, relayer may ask about the next three cards on the list in the same manner.

If the relayer holds any one of the three cards in question, the reply will be unambiguous. Holding none, he can always break the chain. An alternative relay could be devised, but I doubt it is worthwhile.

We need to know how long to make the list so that we don't find ourselves in 7NT with all the key nines but no ace of spades. As a default, we can stop after jacks. Different situations may call for different limits.

Time for an example. You hold

♠ K J 7 4 ♥ Q 9 2 ♦ A K J 8 ♣ A 7

and partner opens 1NT, 15-17. Using the spade-count pattern relay methods, you inquire with 2♣, and partner replies 3♣. Since 2♦ would have shown two spades and 2♥ three, 2♠ and higher bids show four spades, with zoom to the number of hearts. Thus 2♠ would show a doubleton heart, 2NT a triplet, and 3♣ and higher bids show four hearts, with zoom to the number of diamonds. So partner must be exactly 4-4-2-3. You relay with 3♦ to ask about high cards and partner bids 3♥, showing an even number of aces, clearly two. You now visualize partner's KQJ list. Remember, it is kings, then queens, then jacks, from his longest suit to his shortest, highest rank to lowest, so it is:

♠K ♥K ♣K / ♦K ♠Q ♥Q / ♣Q ♦Q ♠J / ♥J ♣J ♦J

You relay with 3♠, asking about the first three cards on the list, and partner's reply is 4♣. The first step, 3NT, would have been none or all; this shows the first card or the next two. We are looking at the ♠K, so partner has the ♥K and the ♣K. You ask about the next three cards with 4♦ and partner, using his time wisely, produces a prompt 4♥, none or all. Evidently none, since we have a couple of them ourselves. You ask again with 4♠, and partner bids 5♦. This shows the ♦Q, as we have the ♣Q and ♠J. You ask the final question, 5♥, and partner bids 5NT. That must be the ♥J, so you bid 7♥. Well done!

Here's the complete auction we have just constructed:

WEST	EAST
♠ A 8 3 2	♠ K J 7 4
♥ A K J 8	♥ Q 9 2
♦ Q 3	♦ A K J 8
♣ K 8 4	♣ A 7
1NT	2♣?
3♣ ¹	3♦?
3♥ ²	3♠?
4♣ ³	4♦?
4♥ ⁴	4♠?
5♦ ⁵	5♥?
5NT ⁶	7♥

1. 4-4-2-3.
2. Even number of aces.
3. ♠K or both the ♥K and ♣K.
4. All or none of ♦K, ♠Q, ♥Q.
5. ♦Q or both the ♣Q and ♠J.
6. ♥J or both the ♦J and ♣J.

If you found that easy, good for you. Most of us would have to practice, but dedicated relayers have proved that this sort of performance is within reach.

¹ If you don't play zoom, then the worst reply, in terms of the efficient transfer of information, is the highest one — which (other things being equal) should therefore be the least probable one. When you play zoom, that "last" reply becomes more efficient, since the next question gets answered without an intervening relay, and therefore the worst reply becomes the second-highest one.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”

Lewis Carroll, ‘Through the Looking Glass’

The word in question is “transfer”, by which I mean any bid that suggests or requires a particular reply. The issue of what the bid *shows* is a separate matter. A 2♦ response to a 1NT opening is a transfer if it suggests opener rebid 2♥, regardless of whether opener is allowed to bid more (a super-accept) or whether responder might have a hand-type without a heart suit. A bid that shows length in a suit other than the one named, without requesting a particular reply, is not a transfer, just an artificial bid. Another modern usage is “marionette” to indicate that more than one reply is allowed, in contrast to “puppet”, where the response is forced. Can dolls and mannequins be far behind?

The most widely used transfer is in response to natural notrump openings, either for major suits (“Jacoby”) or for all four suits. “Texas” transfers, which apparently originated in Missouri and Stockholm, are bids of 4♦ and 4♥ in response to 1NT or 2NT. The same name is sometimes given to 4♣ and 4♦, but at least in North America these are “South African Texas” when used as a response to a notrump opening, and “Namyats” when used as opening bids.

Transfers serve one or both of two ends: passing the declaration, and increasing expressiveness by creating sequences.

PASSING THE DECLARATION

The traditional justification for playing transfers is to place the declaration in the strong hand, which, other things being equal, is more likely to have tenaces that benefit from having the opening lead on the left. The stronger the opening hand, the more likely it is to matter. Strong notrumps, 2NT openings and strong clubs are the most likely to benefit from having the declaration.

In old-fashioned, pre-Jacoby methods, a hand like

♠ A 2 ♥ A K J 7 3 ♦ 6 4 2 ♣ 7 3 2

poses a problem opposite a strong notrump. You can ignore the right-siding issue and bid 3♥, or you can forgo the hearts and raise to 3NT, or you can maybe try to get lucky via Stayman. The 2♦ transfer is a better solution. The advantage of declaring the hand from the right side is easy to see, and many pairs play transfers over notrump in all four suits and in many follow-up sequences.

If super-accepts are played, responder's desire to place the declaration may be temporarily frustrated, and a re-transfer may be part of the methods. It is particularly worth knowing if redouble is ever such a re-transfer.

Consider this hand over an opening 2NT.

♠ 5 2 ♥ A Q J 8 3 ♦ K 8 3 2 ♣ 7 3

Most of us transfer with 3♦ and go from there, but dedicated right-siders have methods that accommodate getting to six or seven diamonds by partner. For a comprehensive schema, try the "Bridge for Dummies" structure described in Danny Kleinman's *The Notrump Zone*. Older readers may be reminded of the Captain-Crew article that appeared in the *The Bridge World* years ago. Captain, who declared all contracts, bid his suits in descending length order, Crew in ascending.

A more advanced concept than declaration placing is declaration postponing. Opposite a strong notrump, you hold this hand:

♠ K 6 2 ♥ A K 10 7 3 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 7 4 2

Notrump declaration has already been settled, but who should play the hand if we arrive in 4♥? Probably partner, but the card that needs protecting could be the king of spades. In times past, notrump openers could be counted on for a balanced hand with stoppers, but nowadays a hand like this

♠ 8 4 3 ♥ 9 8 2 ♦ A K Q 9 7 ♣ A K

which would make a good dummy for the previous hand, is likely to be opened a strong notrump. A transfer to hearts will proceed to make the wrong hand declarer. However, I doubt that it is worth the trouble to have methods to solve problems like these. There are too many other important demands on our bidding sequences. It's too tough a problem, and there's too great a chance of helping the defense.

There is a modern trend to open 1NT on hands with the right number of high card points, in spite of non-traditional patterns, in order to avoid rebid problems. Mostly these are one-suiters that are deemed too strong for a simple rebid or 5-4s that are not up to today's stringent reverse standards. In a recent edition of *The Bridge World*, there was expert support for opening 1NT on

♠ 3 ♥ Q 7 4 2 ♦ A K J ♣ A Q 6 4 2

The question posed was what to do after a 1♠ response to 1♣. Many methods would not have a problem here: weak notrumps (allowing a 1NT rebid), wide range 1NT rebids, non-forcing reverses, or canapé. The hand hits a seam in North American methods, which is of course why it was included. But to open 1NT! To me, that seems like misbidding immediately and for sure, rather than later and maybe.

Suppose you are playing four-card majors, partner opens 1♦, and you hold:

♠ 8 3 2 ♥ 7 5 3 2 ♦ A 7 3 ♣ A 6 2

The old-fashioned bid is 2♦, because this hand should try to be dummy. There is plenty of time to get to hearts if partner is strong, and even if 2♥ is a better contract, being in 2♦ is unlikely to cost much. Modern systems often interfere with our ability to make such judgments, dictating bids based on distribution with no allowance for honor dispersion. For example, the systemic rebid after 1♥-1♠ holding 2-5-3-3 might be 1NT, but if you hold

♠ A 2 ♥ A Q J 10 4 ♦ 7 5 2 ♣ 6 4 3

you might be better served by a 2♥ rebid. Relay systems tend to be particularly rigid about distribution; it's simpler that way. But really advanced relay methods might let you rebid 2♥ with that hand, and later show 2-5-3-3, and by implication, good hearts and weak minors.

Systems can tilt the odds in favor of getting the right hand on play through the use of surrogates — artificial bids that replace natural length-showing bids. In classical Precision Club, one of a major in response to one club is a natural positive, with a five-card or longer suit. Switching these two positives, bidding 1♥ with spades and vice-versa, increases the likelihood that the stronger, and possibly relaying, hand will declare. This can be done with essentially no impact on the rest of the system. If you are truly passionate about right-siding, you will worry about the possibility that responder will accidentally bid opener's suit, or that he should be declarer himself. Then you will design a responding strategy that makes more use of a 2♣ bid, which can't steal the declaration. Eventually you will go mad.

TRANSFERS TO INCREASE EXPRESSIVENESS

Viewed from the perspective of the use of bidding space, transfers are the opposite of relays. When we relay, we make economical, meaningless bids that ask for information. When we transfer, we consume space and give information ourselves, and ask that partner make a meaningless economical bid. This has the effect of unbalancing the information flow between the partners. One is mute, while the other passes information. When would this be an effective strategy?

Consider a standard Jacoby transfer schedule:

1NT (15-17)

2♥	transfer, 5+ spades
2♠	forced
pass	to play in 2♠
2NT	invitational, choice of strain
3♣	natural, forcing
3♦	natural, forcing
3♥	natural, forcing
3♠	invitational, long spades
3NT	choice of games
4♣	self-splinter slam try, approximately 6-3-3-1
etc.	

So many sequences! Compare this to older methods where one had the choice between signing off in two of a suit or forcing with a jump to three. We have all these sequences because we start low and ask opener not to get in our way. We can afford to do that because a natural notrump opening is a narrowly defined bid, a 2-3 HCP spread with strict distributional requirements. Transfers provide a means for responder either to get out or to “catch up” in hand description. In effect, we say, “We heard you. Now listen to us!”

SECOND-ROUND TRANSFERS AFTER 1NT

If responder has several things to say, a second transfer may be efficient:

1NT (15-17)

2♥	transfer, 5+ spades
2♠	
2NT	clubs
3♣	diamonds
3♦	hearts
3♥	rebidding spades

I like to play these as transfers, forcing to game. Unless opener’s hand qualifies for a highly specialized bid, he accepts the transfer. Responder gives one more piece of distributional information and then surrenders captaincy. Opener can now sign off, relay, or start a dialogue. If you recall the ShortnessShows principle from the previous chapter, you will see how this whole structure can be viewed as a way of setting up the balanced hand as relayer:

WEST	EAST
1NT ¹	2♦ ²
2♥	2NT ³
3♣	3♦ ⁴
3♥ ⁵	3NT ⁶
4♣ ⁷	etc.

1. 15-17.
2. Transfer to 2♥.
3. Transfer, shows clubs.
4. x-5-x-4 pattern.
5. Relay.
6. 1-5-3-4 pattern.
7. How many aces?

With the second-round 2NT doing duty as a transfer, we need something else for invitational hands. With spades, we can bid 2♣ and follow with 2♠. There are some minuses with that, but it's great to stop at the two-level when opener rejects. With hearts, transfer and follow with 2♠, artificially inviting game with 5+ hearts. Opener rebids as follows:

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠

?

2NT	minimum, no fit; responder's three-level continuations all invitational
3♣	maximum, no fit
3♦	maximum, fit, game force
3♥	minimum, fit

SECOND-ROUND TRANSFERS AND THIRD-SUIT BIDDING

Suppose the bidding starts out 1♣ from partner, 1♠ from you, and 2♣ from partner. You may now face a number of issues. Are we high enough already? Might partner have secondary support? Can we play notrump? Perhaps we might yet belong in a new suit. Should we get to a partscore or game or slam? How can we investigate all that, and how high do we have to get?

The old approach is to play 2♦ and 2♥ as non-forcing. Although you can't beat that for staying low, we don't want to give up such useful, economical probes (except, perhaps, by a passed hand). At least one of

these will have to be forcing. If you had a choice, when designing your methods, of being able to play in only one of 2♦ and 2♥, you would clearly prefer hearts, because:

- there is more likely to be game in hearts, which requires only ten tricks.
- if we stop in 2♦, the opponents may yet bid 2♥, while the converse is not so.
- hearts score 30 a trick.

Well, we can explore hearts and still sometimes stop at the two-level if we make 2♦ our heart-showing bid, either by switching the meanings of 2♦ and 2♥ or perhaps by doing something involving other bids as well. So after the auction

WEST	EAST
1♣	1♠
2♣	2♦

we ask opener to bid as he would over a non-forcing heart bid; i.e. bid 2♥ if he would have passed a non-forcing 2♥, and make his normal third bid otherwise. Now we can bid out our pattern on

♠ A 5 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 9 3 2 ♦ 5 2 ♣ 9

and still play in 2♥ opposite

♠ 8 ♥ J 5 4 ♦ K Q 7 ♣ A Q 7 6 4 2

while if we happen to catch

♠ 8 ♥ A 8 5 4 ♦ 9 4 ♣ A K J 7 3 2

partner will jump raise hearts and we will get to game.

This seems to work rather well. Why is that? Basically it works for the same reasons that make Jacoby over 1NT effective. The transfer-acceptance may be a reasonable contract, and one you might not want to get beyond. Opener is ahead of responder in hand description, and so may be well suited to making a neutral noise. Another factor here is that we have taken the most economical and hence most valuable bid, removed from it the less important meaning of diamonds and given it a more important meaning, hearts.

The same thinking can be applied to responder's other non-jump actions as well, leading to the following "one-under" structure:

WEST	EAST
1♣	1♦
2♣	?
2♦	length and/or values in hearts
2♥	a rebid of spades
2♠	a balanced hand, trying for game in notrump
2NT	a raise of clubs, at least invitational values
3♣	diamonds

Each of the five strains is treated in the same manner: a bid one below the natural one, permitting a graceful stop when necessary, while allowing responder to continue to provide distributional information on hands which are destined for bigger things. The 2♠ transfer to notrump is a useful device, here and elsewhere. It allows responder to show a balanced hand without needing to be within a narrow range and without having ideal positional values for declaring notrump. For example, it could be used here prior to supporting clubs, on hands that might best be dummy in 3NT.

ONE-LEVEL TRANSFERS

Suit permutations can also be useful at the one-level, as in the “transfer” responses to 1♣ used by Bocchi-Duboin and others:

WEST	EAST
1♣	1♦ (hearts) 1♥ (spades)

I put quotation marks around “transfer” in the previous sentence because these are not pure transfers. Opener does not “accept the transfer” with inordinate frequency and the method is not designed with the idea of stopping at the one-level. The fact that the suit shown is one above the suit bid is largely accidental. It is much more about making the economical responses frequent and pertinent. In the 1950s, the “Walsh” style of frequently bypassing diamonds in response to 1♣ attracted a following. Transfer responses take the idea one step further. If you are not going to bother showing diamonds, why not use the two most economical bids for the two most important messages?

SOME OTHER TRANSFERS

Suppose your three-level methods in response to a 2NT opening are Stayman, major-suit transfers, 3♠ a minor-suit slam try and 3NT for play. Some new possibilities can be created as follows. Make 3♠ a transfer to 3NT, serving both as the way to get to 3NT and a springboard for describing various other hand types. A direct 3NT can be either forcing or invitational, depending on how you design the methods. While interesting, this permutation isn’t clearly a net gain over normal methods. There are some obvious

disadvantages, not the least of which is the need to remember the treatment. I had a teammate forget in a Rosenblum Cup match that 2NT-3NT was forcing. Fortunately, his partner forgot, too! The silly affair only came to light in the bar after the session.

In general, bids that ask partner to pass, like 2NT-3NT, kill potential sequences and eliminate bidding space. That doesn't make them wrong: sign-offs are a useful part of a system. But consider a transfer to a likely contract when looking for ways to preserve bidding space.

Possibilities like the above abound. There are advantages both to weak jump shifts and to strong jump shifts — perhaps you can have both. For example, 1♠-3♣ could show either a strong or weak jump shift in diamonds. Opener rebids 3♦ whenever he would have passed a weak 3♦ response, which will be most of the time. Responder then passes when weak and continues when strong. It blends well with the idea that opener should preserve space opposite a strong jump shift.

A neat space-saving transfer is a 3♠ response showing an unspecified solid suit, say AKQxxxx or better, with no side cards. In the following discussion, let's make it a response to a forcing club, although it works over natural openings too. (Some people even use an opening 3♠ that way; I prefer natural preempts, for reasons that will be developed later.) The transfer element is that if 3NT is the right contract, it should be declared by the other hand. The space-saving idea is that most of the time opener will know what the suit is. When he doesn't, 3NT is unlikely, and the fact that opener's strength is concentrated in two suits can be exploited by the methods.

This kind of bidding is *extremely* complex, and if you understand it completely, you are one up on me. Feel free to skip ahead to the next section. The question is how to manage a hand like

♠ 7 2 ♥ A K Q 8 ♦ 9 5 3 ♣ A K J 4

opposite an unspecified solid suit. Although this kind of 3♠ bid is playable in many contexts, the discussion will assume that it is a response to a strong 1♣. The straightforward approach is to play something like this: 4♣ queries the long suit, and over a 4♠ reply, 5♦ is an asking bid. The high-tech space-saving approach is something like this:

WEST	EAST
1♣ ¹	3♠ ²
1. Strong. 2. Some AKQxxxx.	

And now:

3NT	for play
4♣	slam try with honors in ♣+♥ or ♦+♠ or ♥+♣
4♦	slam try with honors in red suits or black suits
4♥	pass or correct, honors in minors
4♠	pass or correct, honors in minors, short in spades

Other rebids can be defined and the given four-level bids can absorb other meanings. For now, however, the above will give us enough to talk about. After a bid of 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, responder will know which suits opener controls, so he can simply sign off or jump to slam with the right shortness. If you have the time, work out how to handle two singletons, a void, an eighth trump, solidity opposite a void, and how to stop in 4NT with the right 3-3 side-suit fit. No letters, please.

After the 4♣ rebid, things are much more complex. Notice that opener has red and black honors. We can exploit this by having responder show just the color of his suit, and combine that with information about potentially valuable short suits. Bidding diamonds or hearts can show that the solid suit is red, and bidding spades or clubs can show that the solid suit is black. With a solid minor and no valuable shortness, we can bid 4NT, in case that is a better stopping place.

WEST	EAST
1♣	3♠
4♣	

And now:

4♦	(7+♦ and 1♣) or (7+♥ and 1♣)
4♥	(7+♦ and 1-♠) or (7+♥ and 2+♣)
4♠	(7+♣ and 1-♦) or (7+♠ and 2+♦)
4NT	(7+♣ and 2+♦ and 2+♥) or (7+♦ and 2+♣ and 2+♠)
5♣	(7+♣ and 1-♥) or (7+♣ and 1♦)
5♦	(7+♦ and 0♣) or (7+♥ and 0♣)
5♠	(7+♠ and 0♦)

TRANSFERS IN COMPETITION

The first competitive transfers to become popular were by responder after a takeout double of an opening one-bid or weak two. The double creates the new options of pass and redouble for responder, making a full set of transfers more workable. Transfers can put the takeout doubler, with his potential tenaces, on lead. They also give responder the option of suggesting a lead before returning to opener's suit.

Transfers are available to the advancer, too. In the "Useful Space Principle" articles in *The Bridge World*, Jeff Rubens suggested a method that has been part of my arsenal ever since. The idea is that when you and your partner are searching for a playable strain, you have more need of space than when you have already found a fit. A permutation of the responses to an overcall can take this into account, allocating more room to search for strain.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	1♣	pass	?

and now:

2♦	a heart suit
2♥	a cuebid raise

This allows hearts to be shown both on hands where one would bid 2♥ non-forcing and on those requiring a force. Overcaller simply takes the transfer whenever he would have passed a non-forcing 2♥ and bids normally otherwise. Transfer advances can remain “on” when third hand doubles or bids 1NT instead of passing.

Several alternatives were presented in the articles. I have always played that the transfer advances applied only to suits that were “bypassed” by the overcall. In the case above, therefore, 2♣ would be natural. At first it was a bit of work to remember. Then I got in the habit of thinking, whenever our side made an overcall, of what suits had been bypassed and were therefore to be given the transfer treatment. I was then ready to alert the opponents and plan my bidding.

Responding to takeout doubles is also a fertile area for transfers. For example, after

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	dbl	2♠	?

one could play:

dbl	responsive
2NT	clubs
3♣	diamonds
3♦	hearts
3♥ and up	specialized

The takeout doubler accepts the transfer on normal hands, which allows advancer to pass or continue.

Contrast the above with this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♠	dbl	pass	?

Transfers here would work fine on weak or strong hands, but dismally on the in-between hands that warrant a game invitation. ColoursFirst is a fine principle, but here the range is just too wide — from a balanced yarborough to slam-going hands. Also, the doubler has already given distributional information, so there is less need than otherwise to explore strain. Most tournament players use Lebensohl here: three of a suit is invitational, while 2NT, a transfer to 3♣, is used on all bad hands.

Lebensohl is an example of a general technique in bidding. A step bid is used for all hands of a particular strength; all other bids give distributional information about hands of a different strength. It's a bit like zoom; we could call it step-strength-zoom-colours. Other examples are strong clubs, negative one diamond responses and the Serious 3NT slam convention.

PLACING THE DECLARATION AFTER INTERVENTION

Which hand should be made declarer is an issue whenever we have a choice about it. In competitive situations, it is often especially critical, because the opponents have given an indication of where their length and strength is and what they may be leading. It is generally best to have the opponent with the length and strength on lead... well, second-best to having the defender who is void on lead! Even relatively robust holdings like AQx may be better when put on the table, protecting Jx or 10xx in declarer's hand. This suggests that natural bids of notrump after an intervention on your right are inefficient. Suppose it goes:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	2♠	?	

If you play 2NT natural here, then unless you have a holding like AQ10, you run a serious risk of wrong-siding. For example, if you bid 2NT with Qxx, partner may have Kx. Or if you have AJx, he may have Qx. Another problem with a natural 2NT is that it is extremely narrowly defined — about 10-11 HCP — and therefore rare as well as wasteful of a low-level, space-preserving bid; if you hold any more, you have to jump to 3NT. And if you play natural notrump bids after a 1♦ overcall, you have 1NT, 2NT and 3NT all devoted to hands of similar type, differing only slightly in strength. In contrast, if double is your action on balanced hands, you can double with all strengths and spade holdings.

PASS AS A TRANSFER

When a force has been established and an opponent intervenes, the traditional use of double is penalty. This wastes space, as does any bid that asks partner to pass. If instead we pass when we want to penalize the opponents and ask partner to double when he would have stood for a penalty double, we create extra sequences.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	dbl	redbl	2♥
?			

In the modern style, redouble suggests a balanced hand without good support. If we now double for penalty, partner will inevitably pass. This means that all the other sequences starting with a double will lie unused. Suppose instead we make pass a request that partner double. We can do that on all the penalty double hands, and others as well, since we will get another chance to bid. On the hands that traditionally would have been passed around to partner, we double, showing willingness to defend but denying strong trumps.¹

TRANSFERS AFTER INTERVENTION OVER A STRONG CLUB

Another good place for transfers is after intervention over a strong club. ColoursFirst is in the forefront here. By opening an artificial, strength-showing 1♣, we have made it attractive for the opponents to interfere. We haven't shown suits, and they don't have to worry much about their own games and slams, so there isn't a moment to lose. As soon as one of them bids, the odds are increased that the next one is going to raise the bidding level. Suppose partner opens 1♣, strong artificial and forcing; the next hand bids 1♠, and we have a heart suit. Our belief in ColoursFirst tells us to show our hearts, not how many points we have. We need to do this regardless of whether we have game-forcing values or just competitive values. So either we need two bids to show hearts, one for the game-going hands and one for weaker hands, or whatever shows hearts has to be forcing for one round. And yet it would be nice if we could stop in 2♥ if opener has nothing special. The conditions are perfect for transfers. We bid 2♦, showing hearts. If the next hand passes, opener rebids as though responding to a non-forcing 2♥, accepting the transfer if he would have passed. Now we can pass if content, or continue bidding, depending on what we have. If LHO doesn't pass, but raises spades or takes some other action, we may have problems but at least partner knows our best suit. We may want to play forcing passes at some levels and define some other countermeasures.

Let's look at a scheme after a forcing 1♣ and a 1♠ overcall:

1NT	clubs, enough values to bid
2♣	diamonds
2♦	hearts

That covers the one-suited, apart from the suit they have bid. We can pass very weak hands, and double on balanced hands good enough to act on, whether or not we have a stopper. That is convenient because we can show the general nature of our hand (balanced) and we don't have to worry about wrong-siding the notrump. It also allows for a penalty pass by opener, which maybe isn't so likely at the one-level, but may become more important if we keep the same structure at higher levels. That leaves three-suited hands, short in the opponents' suit, and hands with length in the opponents' suit. We can also have bids for two-suited hands and some alternatives for clubs that don't declare the notrump. For example:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦ ¹	1♠	?	

1. Strong.

pass	weak, or length in spades
1NT	clubs (but consider some other action if right-siding notrump looks more important)
2♣	diamonds
2♦	hearts
2♥	3-suited, short spades
2♠	minors
2NT	clubs and hearts
3♣	diamonds and hearts
3♦	game-going club hand with no spade shortness or stopper
3♥	game-going club hand with spade shortness
3♠	AKQxxx or longer in some suit
3NT	minimum game force with all strength in opponents' suit (e.g. AKJ xxx Jxxx xxx)

These are just ideas, which must look rather arbitrary. What is needed is to take the entire partnership methods, evaluate where transfer technology is appropriate and then apply it in a consistent way.

¹ Another advantage of this method is that North has to guess whether to run when you double, since he doesn't know whether East is going to sit for it.

Ask him.

Helen Sobel, on being asked (yet again) what it was like to play with an expert.

In bridge, a *dialogue* is a bidding sequence where the partners converse on a more or less equal footing. Each offers information, listens to the other and responds accordingly. That contrasts with relays, transfers, asking bids and other devices where the information flow is more one-sided. Dialogues can be natural or artificial — the defining characteristic is that both partners are contributing information.

Dialogues have the advantage that each partner is always evaluating his hand in light of what the other has shown. Suppose you hold

♠ Q J ♥ A 6 4 3 2 ♦ K Q 9 8 2 ♣ 8

playing a strong club relay system. You open 1♥, showing 5+ hearts and 11-15 HCP. Partner relays a few times, uncovering your exact shape, and then asks for a quantitative assessment of your hand. It's hard to say, but in the context of what you have shown, you have a minimum with bad hearts. Now suppose you have the same hand but you are playing natural methods, and the bidding goes 1♥-1♠; 2♦-4♦. Now you have strong trumps, two honors in partner's suit, control of the fourth suit, and the likelihood of shortness opposite your Axxxx. This is a terrific hand!

Playing a relay system, one is often locked into a particular view of a hand. Suppose your system calls for a 2♥ opening on 12-16 HCP with five or more hearts and four or more clubs. Bids like this can be effective if responder can raise immediately or relay extensively, but they are not well suited to low-level explorations.

WEST	EAST
♠ K Q 7	♠ A J 10 5
♥ A J 7 3 2	♥ 9
♦ 9	♦ Q 8 7 4 3
♣ K 10 4 2	♣ Q 6 3
2♥	3♣
pass	

Dialogue methods, in contrast, call for the exchange of strain information one piece at a time, and one is free to re-evaluate the priorities in light of partner's bidding. Here, after 1♥-1♠, you can redefine your hand from "heart-club two-suiter" to "heart suit with spade support", and raise to 2♠, getting to a much more manageable contract.

Nowadays, most system designers consider devoting a two-level opening bid to such constructive purposes as old-fashioned; much better that a two-bid be the latest generation of germ warfare.

PROBING FOR STRAIN

In dialogue methods, early bids are a hunt for the best strain. Consider the sequence:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♥	1♠
2♦	2♥

Opener begins by showing hearts and responder spades. Opener then suggests diamonds and responder indicates a preference for hearts over diamonds. The proposal to play in hearts is at this point highly tentative; the fit may be relatively poor. Opener may now pass or bid 4♥, if he feels he has learned enough to make a decision for the partnership. Any other action will be interpreted as a try for game, with a further suggestion about strain. Since opener is limited by the 2♦ rebid, and responder by the 2♥ rebid, any non-jump rebid is non-forcing, even 3♣. The search for the right strain can go on for a long time, becoming more and more refined.

WEST	EAST
♠ 7	♠ A Q 10 5 3
♥ A J 6 3 2	♥ 7 5
♦ A K J 8 3	♦ Q 10 4
♣ A 2	♣ 7 6 5

1♥	1♠
2♦ ¹	2♥ ²
3♦ ³	3♠ ⁴
3NT ⁵	4♦ ⁶
5♦ ⁷	pass

1. A strong hand, but not worth a jump shift with so much strain uncertainty.
2. False preference, better than passing since there may be game. Bidding 2♠ is too unilateral, 3♦ too much.
3. Continues describing, without committing to hearts.
4. A spade game is possible, especially if partner has Kx or Jx.
5. Having shown 5-5, opener can make a tentative 3NT suggestion.
6. Diamond support, no club help, and good potential to ruff hearts.
7. Diamonds it is.

PRESERVING BIDDING SPACE

Before the conquest of Standard American bidding by five-card majors, space preservation began with the opening bid. Theorists taught that it was important to have a convenient rebid, especially if partner should respond in your short suit. The “principle of preparedness” was applied to determine what suit to open. The following examples from *Goren’s Bridge Complete* (1971) illustrated the need to be prepared.

♠ A K x x	♥ Q J 10 x x	♦ Q x	♣ Q x	Open 1♠
♠ x x	♥ A K x x	♦ A Q x x x	♣ x x	Open 1♥
♠ K x x x x	♥ x	♦ x x	♣ A K J x x	Open 1♣
♠ A K x x	♥ K J x	♦ K 10 x x x	♣ x	Open 1♠

Today’s methods generally don’t give opener as much latitude in choosing what to open. The system dictates the opening bid based on the distributional pattern. Discussion of space preservation is more likely to focus on later rounds.

♠ A 4
♥ A J 6 3 2
♦ A K J 6
♣ 7 2

WEST	EAST
1♥	1♠
2♦	2♥
?	

While 2♥ may be the last plus, it looks cowardly not to investigate game. The traditional meaning of 2♠ here is three-card support and extra values, typically 3-5-4-1. However, it would also be convenient to be able to bid 2♠ on the hand shown, allowing game investigation while retaining 2♠ and 2NT as possible resting places. Economical bids are always in high demand, and you can't have everything. Whether 2♠ should be allowed on a doubleton is a complex question. It depends, among other things, on how often opener can have three spades (do you ever jump raise on three?), and on what hands responder gives a 2♥ preference as opposed to rebidding 2♠.

Space is at a premium when opener jump shifts after a one-over-one. Suppose the bidding goes (all by you) 1♥-1♠; 3♦. The modern style, as advocated by Eric Kokish, is for opener to have a clear idea of where he is going and for responder to try to keep out of the way. The most out of the way you can keep is to bid 3♥, opener's suit. This is indeed the modern way, but there were early trailblazers. Marshall Miles, who told me he got the idea from Alvin Roth, gave the following as an example of a 3♥ preference (over 1♥-1♠; 3♣) in his remarkable *How To Win At Duplicate Bridge* (1957):

♠ J 9 x x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ A 10 x

Howard Schenken quoted the following hand as an example of what was wrong with natural American methods.

WEST	EAST
♠ A K x	♠ J x x x x
♥ K Q 10 9 x	♥ J x
♦ A K Q x	♦ J x x
♣ x	♣ Q J x
1♥	1♠
3♦	3NT
pass	

Two down on a club lead, with 4♠ cold. Schenken blamed neither bidder but rather the methods that give such a wide range of strength to the 1♥ opening. His solution was a strong club, and it is easy to see that a forcing 1♠ and negative 1♦ is a comfortable way to begin with these hands. Modern natural bidders might have solved this problem with a space-preserving 3♥ preference, allowing opener room to support spades.

Giving preference on ♥Jx in a sequence like this seems natural nowadays; I certainly wouldn't expect to receive an alert for that kind of use. Hands with even less in the way of support, however, can benefit from an economical, noncommittal bid. Where does one draw the line between natural and artificial?

Suppose responder's hand had been:

♠ K Q 3 2 ♥ — ♦ Q 7 2 ♣ 8 6 5 4 3 2

I can imagine adherents of the "3♥ as stall" school still advocating that choice here. It would be a bit of a stretch to call such a use natural, though I suppose one could say that hearts was as likely a final strain as

anything else. It would be clearer to call 3♥ an artificial waiting bid, denying the ability or desire to make a descriptive bid.

There are four sequences where opener can make a jump shift after a one-over-one. In three of the four cases, a preference is the cheapest bid and the natural choice if you want to define a stall. After 1♥-1♠; 3♣, the cheapest bid is 3♦, and you could use that as your stall, reserving 3♥ for true support.

FOURTH SUIT FORCING

Fourth Suit Forcing sequences are fertile grounds for space preservation discussion. To set the stage, we are talking about sequences where responder bids one-over-one, opener makes a simple bid of a third suit and responder bids the fourth suit as an artificial force. For the sake of discussion, let's take the simpler treatment, where the fourth suit is played as forcing to game.

The convention is usually presented by stating what opener requires for various third-round actions:

- bidding notrump shows a stopper in the fourth suit
- rebidding the first suit shows six
- rebidding the second suit shows five
- supporting partner's first suit shows three
- raising the fourth suit shows four

Those are all nice, comfortable things to have, but what are you supposed to do here?

<p>♠ Q 4 ♥ 6 2 ♦ A Q 5 3 2 ♣ A Q 4 2</p> <p>WEST</p> <p>1♦ 2♣ ?</p>	<p>EAST</p> <p>1♠ 2♥</p>
--	-------------------------------------

Surely you bid 2♠; I can't imagine another bid. (Well, of course I can. I can imagine 2NT or 3♦, but you couldn't get me to bid them.) If you think a preference on ♠Qx is barely acceptable, consider what you would bid with the ♠Q replaced by a spot card: I'm still a 2♠ bidder. Now rearrange the suits a bit, and we have:

♠ 6 4
 ♥ A Q 5 3 2
 ♦ 7 2
 ♣ A Q 4 2

WEST	EAST
1♥	1♠
2♣	2♦
?	

My guess is that most players would rebid 2♥, and some 2♣. So bidding 2♥ apparently doesn't promise such a great suit. And give an expert ♦Qx and he'll bid notrump — so that musn't show a stopper. And now for something really disturbing:

♠ 6 4
 ♥ A Q 5 3 2
 ♦ A Q 6 2
 ♣ 7 2

WEST	EAST
1♥	1♠
2♦	3♣
?	

Now 3♠ on a small doubleton, bypassing two other bids, doesn't feel nearly as nice as when we bid 2♠ over 2♥. And 3♥ on this suit (and it could be worse with the same pattern) feels awful, too. Since diamonds and hearts are each minimum length, I might as well bid the lower one. Put me down for 3♦.

Hands with three small in the fourth suit are a special problem. A good solution positionally is to raise with that, and rebid notrump with four-card holdings. I am quite content to bid notrump with Jxx or offer preference with Qx. Rebidding my first suit with KQJxx is fine. If pressed, I will bid notrump on Qx or give preference on xx. After that we get into outright lying.

It may be my pessimistic outlook, but the problem of having more than one attractive rebid seems rare. If you *like* giving preference on Qx, as opposed to being willing to do it with a gun at your head, you may have a problem similar to this one:

♠ Q 2
 ♥ A 4
 ♦ A J 5 3 2
 ♣ Q 10 5 2

WEST	EAST
1♦	1♠
2♣	2♥
?	

Now you have a stopper *and* support for partner's first suit. Notrump might be better from partner's side if he has ♥Qxx, but better from your side if he has ♥J10x. I like 2♠, economical. I guess I can sum it up by saying, "With many possible, the cheapest truth; with nothing possible, the cheapest lie."

RAISES AND USE OF SPACE

Raising partner is often an admirable thing to do; it is unfortunate that in natural bidding, it is the most expensive thing to do in terms of bidding space. Suppose you hold

♠ A Q 7 6 2 ♥ 7 3 2 ♦ J 6 2 ♣ A J

and partner replies 2♦ to your 1♠ opening. Perhaps your system dictates your rebid here (2♠ or 2NT or 3♦) or perhaps you don't open the bidding with this hand. But as an exercise, consider it from first principles, regardless of system. What would you like to tell partner? I think the moderate diamond support is important. Learning about support opposite one's length is almost always of interest.

The problem with raising to 3♦ is that we have to cover a wide range of both general strength and quality of trump support. Some players and systems would require better trumps for an immediate raise. Playing Goren, the hand would be considered too weak; a non-forcing 2♠ would be correct. In some modern two-over-one methods, 2♠ by opener is neutral, not suggesting more spade orientation, and that would probably be the choice here. Surely you don't want to be forced to bid 2NT just because you have neither six spades nor four of anything else.

If you accept the importance of both showing fit and preserving space, and are willing to embrace an artificial solution, we could shuffle around opener's rebids to achieve a more space-efficient structure. For example, after the 1♠-2♦ start above, we could take opener's five natural non-jump rebids and redistribute them artificially as follows:

2♥	(1 step)	neutral, 5+ spades, fewer than 3 diamonds, no other 5-card suit
2♠	(2 steps)	3+ diamonds, but not a splinter or special raise
2NT	(3 steps)	6+ spades
3♣	(4 steps)	5+ higher side suit (here, hearts)
3♦	(5 steps)	5+ lower side suit (clubs)

Where 2♦ is a game force, this could form the basis of a solid, space-efficient structure. Positional considerations were ignored, of course, and could be included at the cost of added complexity. If 2♦ is not game-forcing, more custom fitting would be necessary to provide for stopping below game.

We have seen how dialogues allow us to see our cards in a continually shifting perspective as we learn more about those our partner holds. We have also seen how space and the need to conserve it shape what we can say. We are also restricted in what we can say by limitations in our agreements and by our acceptance of naturalness as a constraint on our system design.

These themes will continue to be important in the next chapter, where we proceed beyond game.

baker's dozen *n.* thirteen, from the custom of adding one for good measure.

adapted from 'Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder'

As contract bridge took over from auction in the 1920s, the need for a partnership to estimate trick-taking potential became paramount. No longer could one buy the bid for 1♥, make four, and at eight points a trick secure the thirty needed for the game bonus. From then on, partners had to judge how many tricks could be taken in order to decide whether to contract for partscore, game or slam.

Games were rewarded much more handsomely than partscores and were available much more frequently than slams, and so the successful early bidding methods concentrated on game bidding. The same emphasis is warranted today, and the early stages in a dialogue are mostly spent identifying possible strains and determining whether the overall strength of the two hands justifies a game contract. We seldom have the luxury of devoting a low-level sequence to slam investigation. Mostly, slams will be bid beginning with the same sequences that are used to investigate game. Once game issues have been dealt with and it appears that the extra values required may be present, the emphasis will switch to the issues particular to slam bidding.

DEFINITION OF SEQUENCES

It is apparent, then, that successful slam bidding depends on rigorous definition of early sequences. A partnership looking to improve its slam bidding should perhaps direct its attention there first. Slam-specific conventions, such as fancy variations of the grand slam force, can come later.

As an example, consider the following Jacoby transfer sequence:

WEST	EAST
1NT ¹	2♥ ²
2♠	3♦ ³
3♥	

1. 15-17.
2. Spades.
3. Game force, natural.

Without prior discussion, the 3♥ bid could mean any of the following.

- a five-card suit
- a chunky four-card suit, looking to play a 4-3 fit
- a stopper
- concentration, e.g. QJ10x, making 3NT playable opposite shortness
- a control, with 4+ diamonds and slam suitability
- a control, with either 4+ diamonds or 3+ spades
- any of the above, but also denying three spades

Combinations are possible, too. The 3♥ bid could first suggest concentration, but promise control if followed by a further bid over 3NT. Theorists have argued over these possibilities for decades and will continue to do so; what is indisputable is that accurate slam bidding depends on clear definition of the early auction.

COLOURSFIRST AND SLAMS

One of the themes of this book is the advantages of bidding suits. In slam auctions, the bidding of suits can facilitate the counting of tricks, and the identification of alternative strains.

WEST	EAST
♠ 8	♠ J 7
♥ A J 6 3 2	♥ K Q 8 7
♦ A K 4	♦ 8 7 3
♣ K Q 9 6	♣ A J 5 3
1♥	3♥
4♣	6♣
pass	

Opener, with considerable values beyond what would be required to bid game over the limit raise, tries for slam by bidding his second suit. Opposite a club suit, responder has maximum values for a limit raise and

he jumps to slam to offer a choice of strains. Opener sees the singleton spade and third-round diamond loser, and visualizes the extra trick playing in clubs.

Note that there was no way responder could visualize opener's hand, and no need. If KQxx and AJxx in opener's suits is not enough for slam, it simply is not responder's fault. This is because responder's hand is strictly limited, while opener's is wide-range. There isn't room for opener to show his whole hand, so he helps responder evaluate his. Showing suits can do this.

WEST	EAST
♠ A Q 6 5	♠ K J 8 2
♥ A	♥ 7 4
♦ J 6 2	♦ K Q 10 5 3
♣ A K 6 5 3	♣ Q 7
1♣	1♦
1♠	3♠
4♦	?

Here, the showing of support tells responder that his interior diamond values are working. In other circumstances, the ace would be a stronger holding. The 4♦ bid also opens up an alternative strain. On a slightly different hand, say,

♠ A 7 6 5 ♥ A ♦ J 6 2 ♣ A K J 10 3

it could lead to a good 6♦. Responder should now proceed past game. Depending on agreements and style, he could continue with one of 4NT (slam try with no heart control, not Blackwood by a limited hand), 5♣ (help in opener's main suit) or 5♦ (strong diamonds).

All this suit bidding has an old-fashioned air to it; here's a hand from the 1930 Culbertson-England match (from *The Golden Years of Bridge*, by J. N. R. Griffiths).

T. Lightner	Mrs. Culbertson
♠ Q 10 5	♠ K J 9 7 2
♥ A 10	♥ Q 8
♦ A 9 4 3	♦ 7
♣ Q 9 4 3	♣ A K J 8 6
1NT	3♠
4♠	5♣
6♣	pass

A good contract, unbeatable as the cards lay, and nothing to suggest a heart lead over a diamond.

Bad suits may be more important to show than good ones. Suppose you play the Jacoby 2NT response to one of a major, showing a minimum balanced game force with four trumps. Some people play that opener's jump shift shows a five-card suit to two top honors. Those are nice suits to have, but I find KQxxx a good candidate for Blackwood and AQxxx for cuebidding. The suits that are a real problem are empty ones, like Axxxx or Kxxxx. Now you want very good control opposite, and if instead partner has three small and no long suit for discards, slam may have no play.

Limit bids are a great help in estimating trick-taking potential. When one player limits his hand, the other has a framework for evaluating slam prospects, and at least temporarily assumes captaincy.

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♥
2♠	3♠
?	

In systems where neither 2♠ nor 3♠ is forcing, slam is unlikely after this start and worth investigating only on exceptionally fitting hands. If 2♠ is forcing but 3♠ is not, opener is well placed to evaluate the potential of the two hands and will not make a slam try without considerable extra values. When both 2♠ and 3♠ are forcing, as in modern two-over-one methods, neither player has a good grasp of the total partnership assets. Opener can give a picture of his strength by signing off in 4♠ if minimum, making a slam try below game when holding moderate values, and by going beyond game when very strong. Better definition would be more comfortable, and some partnerships use an artificial quantitative statement here. A “Serious 3NT”, for example, shows a real slam try, as opposed to just willingness to go along.

With this hand

♠ A K 7 3 2 ♥ 8 3 ♦ A 8 3 2 ♣ J 5

you open 1♠, and partner bids 4♦, a splinter. Depending on how good a hand that shows in your methods, you might want to suggest slam suitability, without committing to the five level. The only way to do that is to bid 4♥. This is “faking a control” if done without discussion, but “Last Train” when used conventionally to suggest slam without promising a control.

When designing a system, it is important to realize that although artificial quantitative bids may be useful, they always have a cost. “Last Train” devalues the message of control. “Serious 3NT” takes a bid that might have been useful as natural. Even if 3NT was not essential as a contract, it could serve to warn about soft values in the side suits. Alternatively, it could be used conventionally as a trump cuebid or part of a shortness-showing method.

Here is an example of the difficulties in handling wide-range forcing bids. In the last Olympiad, Thorvaldsson for Iceland and Fantoni for Italy held:

♠ 7 4 ♥ A Q ♦ A Q J 10 9 8 5 ♣ K 6

Partner opened 1♠ and both players bid 2♦. A strong jump shift was not available for either player: 3♦ would have been invitation for Thorvaldsson and a game-forcing two-suiter for Fantoni. Partner bid 2♥,

both players continued with 3♦, and partner bid 3NT. What would you do? You have plenty of extra strength and there could easily be a slam opposite a minimum with some controls, such as:

♠ A J 8 6 3 ♥ K 10 3 2 ♦ — ♣ A J 3 2

Thorvaldsson understandably continued, with 4♦, and perhaps should have been able to stop in 4NT, but he in fact ended up in 5♦, which went down. Fantoni passed 3NT, the winning action for partner's actual hand:

♠ Q J 9 8 5 ♥ K 10 9 8 ♦ — ♣ A Q 9 2

REQUIREMENTS FOR SLAM

What would you say are the ingredients of a successful slam in order of importance? A simplistic question, to be sure, but important. Let's attempt an answer:

- enough potential winners
- solidity of trumps (or key suits, in notrump)
- first-round control of at least three suits
- control of every suit

Or, more succinctly: tricks, trumps, aces, controls. Include the king of trumps as an ace if you like, and allow voids to take the place of side-suit aces.

Slam can be made missing any of these ingredients, but the hardest to overcome is a lack of tricks.

WEST	EAST
♠ A J 10 2	♠ K Q 8 4
♥ A J 4	♥ K Q 10
♦ A 3 2	♦ K 7 4
♣ A K 7	♣ J 5 2
2NT	3♣
3♠	6♠
pass	

Trumps are solid, and one couldn't ask for more controls, but you aren't likely to make this slam. The traditional standard of 33 HCP for balanced-hand slams is based on there usually being four-card length in at least two suits; matching 4333 hands decrease the winner count severely. Not having enough trick-taking potential means you will probably need some kind of defensive error to make your contract. Moreover,

slams are the easiest contracts to defend because the defensive assets are few, the defenders don't gain the lead often, and the auction tends to reveal more than for games and partscores.

Insufficient trump strength is also very hard to overcome at the slam level. No matter how often you read about Devil's Coups on A9xx opposite K10xx for no losers, or getting the defenders to crash their ace and king of trumps, it doesn't happen often at the table.

To make a slam off two aces, you generally need solid trumps and either a long solid second suit, making twelve tricks in two suits, or the wherewithal to throw all your losers from a third suit and set up the remaining required winners in the fourth suit. It doesn't happen often, although I do remember an event when my partner and I were third time lucky on slams off two aces.

The requirement you are most likely to get away with is the control of all side suits. You can at least hope for a favorable lead, especially if your sequence is not overly revealing. For example, what would you make of your chances here?

WEST	EAST
♠ A J 10 2	♠ K Q 3
♥ K J 10 3	♥ A Q 4
♦ A 9	♦ K Q J 10
♣ Q 10 7	♣ 8 6 4
1NT	6NT
pass	

One quarter of the time opening leader has ♣AK, and we are down right away. One eighth of the time he has no club honor, and if he picks a suit randomly (no “lead-a-club” doubles!), we go down roughly a quarter of those times. The rest of the time, conventional wisdom being to avoid leading from an honor, we will make 6NT. All the math was approximate, and ignoring stiff honors and voids, our odds are about 72%. Curiously, if we add the ♣J, our chances decrease to about 69%. Even more curiously, if opening leader held ♣AJxx or ♣KJxx and our auction started 1NT–4NT, we would go down if we passed and make our slam if we bid six.

If our prioritized list of slam ingredients is tricks, trumps, first-round controls and control of all suits, what does this imply for our bidding system? A simple answer would be that the bidding system should assign the priorities the same way. First we should see that there are lots of tricks, then we should check on trumps, then on the number of first-round controls, and lastly whether all suits are controlled.

TRICK-TAKING POTENTIAL

We have seen already how showing suits and support can aid in trick estimation. A source of tricks can also be shown by a hand that has already bid notrump. Particularly when the hand is very strong, fit and tricks may be more important than controls.

WEST

♠ K Q 4
♥ A 7
♦ A K J 7 2
♣ A 6 3

EAST

♠ A J 10 8 3
♥ Q 6 3
♦ Q 10
♣ J 8 2

2NT

3♥¹4♦²5♦³5♥⁴5♠⁵

6♠

pass

1. Transfer.
2. Super-accept with diamond tricks.
3. Help in diamonds.
4. First-round control, in case of interest in grand slam.
5. Nothing more to say.

Most slams come from a combination of power, fit and control:

WEST

♠ K Q 7 3 2
♥ 10 8
♦ A 7 5
♣ K Q 6

EAST

♠ A J 5 4
♥ 9
♦ 6 3 2
♣ A J 8 4 3

1♠

2♣

3♣

4♥¹

4NT

5♥

6♠

pass

1. Splinter raise, 4+ spades and a singleton heart.

This deal can be thought of as a prototype for a whole family of slams. The requirements are: a solid 5-4 trump fit, a side suit good for five tricks, the ace of a third suit, and a singleton in the fourth suit, in the short trump hand. That gives eleven tricks in top cards and a ruff for twelve. The fourth trump is needed so that trumps can be drawn without exhausting the short hand, should the opponents lead the suit of the fragment. The missing ace has to be in the singleton suit, unless there are compensating values. In the deal above, if opener's ace were in hearts, the partnership would need secure second-round diamond control. Many would splinter directly on responder's hand, but the solidity of the 5-3 club fit is an integral part of the good slam, and opener's hand is not nearly as attractive opposite a direct splinter.

TRUMP STRENGTH

Second on our checklist, after trick potential, comes trump strength. Below game, standard methods have little to offer in the way of conventional checks on trumps, relying mostly on the judgment of the players. The reason is that cuebidding, the backbone of standard slam methods, is not generally available for the trump suit, or indeed for potential trump suits.

This is another hand from Marshall Miles' 1957 book, *How to Win at Duplicate Bridge*:

	♠ K Q x
	♥ A x x x x
	♦ x x x
	♣ x x
WEST	EAST
1♠	2♠
3♥	?

Miles suggests 5♥, which he freely admits breaks a rule of partnership bidding. A limited hand is not permitted to go uninvited to a higher level; partner's 3♥ invited you to bid game, and you have no right to go beyond. But with partner promising length in hearts, this hand is surely an exception. What can you do, below game, to suggest a slam? Contriving a cuebid of 4♣ is not the answer. That will discourage partner if he is short in clubs. It is not clubs that he needs, but hearts and spades, and we have them. It can't be up to us to provide a minor-suit control when we hold KQ/A in partner's suits, and 5♥ is the clearest statement you can make without special methods.

CHECKING ON ACES

Almost from its introduction in 1933, Blackwood has been the way to check on aces. Most tournament players today play one of the Roman Keycard variations. On occasion I play with casual partners and my preference for simple methods in such encounters leads me to suggest playing old-fashioned Blackwood. I fear that the advantages conferred by the newer convention are outweighed by the potential for accidents in all but well-prepared partnerships: what suits are key? are we playing 1430? etc. Usually I am indulged, if thought old-fashioned. On one occasion, though, my younger partner looked genuinely perplexed. "I don't think I can do that," he said. I pleaded that we might not know when Blackwood was Keycard, but he would have none of it. "It's simple," he said. "4NT is always Keycard. Just assume the likeliest trump suit." That struck me as one of the better guidelines I had heard.

There are plenty of ace-asking alternatives to Blackwood. I always thought that Byzantine 4NT, developed by Jack Marx and publicized by Hugh Kelsey in *Slam Bidding* (1973), deserved a better fate. I found it well thought out and easy to play; maybe the time wasn't right.

There are also conventions that show aces rather than ask for them; some do both. In the Culbertson 4-5NT convention, 4NT shows three aces or two aces and the king of a suit bid by the partnership, with conventional continuations defined. The Declarative-Interrogative 4NT, developed as part of Neapolitan Club, shows two aces if bid by an unlimited hand, and one otherwise. Both of these work well when they come up, and when they don't the negative inference may be just as valuable. But they are unsuitable for those who want to bid 4NT in all slam auctions. The Blue Team 4NT is more of a generalized slam try, non-specific, but good for well-tuned partnerships. The Blue Team certainly did not have much trouble with slams off two aces, a tribute to their superb judgment.

Ace-asking shows to best advantage on strong, distributional hands rich in second- and third-round controls, where you need only to locate specific cards. In complex dialogues, where each partner is evaluating, it is better to show than to ask. I think the Italian Turbo 4NT, showing an even number of key cards, may be the best in such situations. It is optimally space-efficient, using only one bid, and none spent asking. Bypassing 4NT implies an odd number. It can be used equally by weak or strong hands.

Aces was third on our checklist, and controls fourth. But standard methods check on controls first, via cuebidding, prior to ace-asking. The main reason is that the usual ace-asking bid is 4NT, and when possible it is advisable to make the first slam try below that. An alternative approach, not a new idea, is to give a count of aces ahead of showing individual controls. "Automatic aces" can be used in numerous situations, such as after a forcing three-level takeout of 1NT. With an unsuitable hand opener raises or bids 3NT, otherwise he gives a count of aces. This concept could be modernized to include the king of trumps as an ace, and could perhaps borrow the Turbo and zoom concepts, e.g.:

WEST	EAST
1NT	3♠
?	
3NT	no fit
4♣	fit, even number of keycards
4♦	fit, odd number of keycards, ♦K

This is an interesting idea, and may be appropriate in some situations. In general, though, bids below 4NT are useful not just for checking on controls, but also for evaluating the fit and trick-taking potential.

CONTROL OF ALL SUITS

Suits can be controlled in four ways: ace, king, void, singleton. The traditional cuebidding style is to show first-round controls first. A second-round control may be shown where first-round control has been denied, or where partner has shown first-round control. The Italian style, in contrast, permits the showing of second-round controls right away. This is extremely efficient and lends itself to subtle inferences.

WEST

1♠

4♦¹**EAST**

3♠

4♥²

1. Control of diamonds, not of clubs.
2. Control of both hearts and clubs (would sign off with no club control).

A third way is to cuebid aces and kings first, and shortnesses afterwards. This can help in the evaluation of fit. If you hold AQJx, for example, then it is encouraging to know that partner's cuebid is the king and not a singleton. Distinguishing control by shortness from control by high card can gain in other ways, too. Consider this deal from the World Pairs championship in Biarritz in 1982.

Irving Litvack

♠ K Q 9 5 4 3

♥ A Q J 3 2

♦ A 8

♣ —

1♠

3♥

5♦

6♣

Me

♠ A J 8 2

♥ K 10 8 7

♦ 7 5 3

♣ 8 6

2♠

4♠

5♥

?

Opener surely has first-round control of both minors, clearly the ♦A and a club void from the order that he bid them. With 1♠ limited to 16 HCP, I could place partner with almost exactly what he had. I had the missing major honors and two clubs to ruff. A superficially stronger pattern, 4-4-4-1, would not do. I thought about playing in 6♥, which would beat the pairs in 6♠ and be safe against an opening spade ruff, but then I figured I hadn't come all the way to Biarritz for that, so I bid 7♥ and partner made it.

It has occurred to me that this, my favorite hand in a very modest career, would have made a better story had it come up on the next round, when we played against Omar Sharif and Paul Chemla. Of course, they might have been more enterprising on the opposing cards. After the session we buttonholed our countryman Eric Kokish, wanting to give him a chance to share in the appreciation of our fine result. He thought it very nice that we had been given so much bidding room; he and Peter Nagy had faced, over their Precision 1♣, a 2♣ overcall and a raise to five.

Undoubtedly the optimal cuebidding technique is to vary what qualifies, depending on the situation. That requires a great deal of work, but who ever said bridge was easy? First, make sure you know which bids are control-showing cuebids, which are natural, and which are various other things including the happy noises like Last Train and bidding the opponents' suit to show a strong raise. Then have a general rule, and then the exceptions. For example:

- In general, a cuebid shows ace, king, void or singleton.

But:

- Shortness in partner's main side suit is not shown until both players have had a chance to cuebid the suit.
- The first cuebid by a hand that has shown only one suit is the ace or king.
- Subsequent cuebids by either side in a splinter suit show first-round control.
- Cuebid first-round controls first if partner has promised 6-5 or more.

Agreements like this might have helped in the example below, from the 2003 Bermuda Bowl final. Opener had the perfect hand if his partner's club cuebid was based on the ace.

<i>Versace</i>	<i>Lauria</i>
♠ A K J 3	♠ 10 9 8 5 2
♥ 10	♥ A Q 8 2
♦ 9 7 4	♦ A 10 6
♣ K Q J 8 7	♣ 5
1 ♣ ¹	1 ♠
3 ♠	4 ♣ ²
4 ♥ ²	4 ♠
5 ♣	6 ♠

1. 14+ unbalanced with 4+ clubs, or 15+ balanced
2. A, K, singleton or void

The report in *The Bridge World* called this a near-hopeless slam. That is unfair, because the auction did not strongly suggest a diamond lead over a heart. The opening leader happened to have ♦KQ. It's a funny hand: on a diamond lead, you can easily go two down in four, while without one, you have a chance in six.

Be that as it may, it would have been smoother if bidding 4♣ required an honor. That would have led to a bid of 4♦ instead, denying a high club, and opener would have known that this wasn't another one of those "two solid five-suit" slams alluded to earlier.

One shortcoming with standard cuebidding is that it doesn't directly address controls in the most important suit, trumps. Some partnerships use 3NT as a cuebid in the trump suit when a major suit is strongly agreed. For example, 1♠–3♠; 3NT can show the ace or king of spades. Four of an agreed minor, in a game-forcing auction, can be used similarly. A variation, trappy but space-efficient, is for the partnership's first trump cuebid to show either both top honors or neither; bypassing the trump cuebid implies exactly one. Either of these treatments fits easily into any of the cuebidding structures discussed earlier.

Of course, one needs rules as to when 3NT is a trump cuebid. I find 1♠–3♠; 3NT unneeded in a natural sense, because even if 3NT is in fact a better contract than 4♠, opener is not in a position to know. A superior 3NT is more likely to be reachable where there are plenty of third- and fourth-round controls, suits like QJ9x, and that is knowable only in a more complex auction.

But trump cuebids are just a partial solution to a bigger problem. In natural bidding, we are at the mercy of the rank of the suits. Look again at Miles' example, where after 1♠–2♠; 3♥ we held

♠ K Q x ♥ A x x x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x

We are tight for space. After 1♠–2♠, hearts is not only the most expensive new suit, but also the only real alternative trump suit below slam. An artificial permutation of the suits would help; it's another situation where hearts needs a head start because 4♥ is the lowest suit game.

The chosen bid of 5♥ was an imaginative response to an awkward situation, but not ultimately satisfying. If we had had one fewer heart, or no ♠Q, we would have been completely stuck. A better solution, if we are willing to accept complexity and artificiality, is a scheme that lets us send a message about what is most important, regardless of what bids happen to be available.

BEING ANTAGONISTIC: OBSTRUCTING,⁸

CONCEALING, DECEIVING, CONFUSING

What does it cost to destroy them?

Charles Goren, upon being offered the 1956 France-USA hand records for 100 Francs.

The branch of mathematics known as game theory distinguishes games of complete information from those of incomplete information. Chess is one of the former. The pieces are in full view of both players, and the complexity of the game derives not from any obscurity of the current position, but from the depth of possibilities inherent in it. Bridge becomes a game of complete information when all the cards are known. It can even then be a very deep game, as the excruciating difficulty of double-dummy problems can attest. But cards-on-the-table is the dénouement; the main part of the battle is fought with incomplete information — indeed it is over information that it is primarily fought.

We wish to deprive our opponents of useful information or impede their attempts to acquire it. We can deprive our opponents of information about our cards in two ways: by passively saying no more than is necessary or by being actively deceptive. If they need to exchange information, they will need bidding space; perhaps we can steal it. And while we, as combatants, may strive to be antagonistic, we need support from our methods. Our system needs to provide us with weapons that allow us to interfere with our opponents' sequences, while allowing maximum concealment as we conduct our own.

Compromise will be necessary. Accuracy in bidding is furthered by the use of all available sequences, and particularly slow, revealing ones. The tension between accurate and antagonistic bidding is the central issue in bidding system design.

OBSTRUCTING

The primary antagonistic tactic is obstruction, the removal of bidding space. We gain an advantage by the removal of bidding space whenever that space would be of more value to our opponents than to us. That advantage has to be weighed against the disadvantages associated with an obstructive action, which are

primarily the dangers of conceding a penalty if we wind up declaring, and of revealing our hand if we wind up defending.

Anyone who has played competitive bridge since the 1970s has seen a dramatic increase in preemptive tactics. My first instruction in preemptive bidding came from *How to Win at Bridge with Any Partner* by Sam Fry Jr. (1960). The author advises that if you hear your partner open 3♠ not vulnerable, you should visualize something like

♠ K Q J 8 6 4 3 ♥ 9 2 ♦ 8 4 ♣ 6 3

and an eighth spade if vulnerable, which certainly seems quaint from today's perspective. The standard of the day was the Rule of 500 — that being the penalty one should expect to concede if doubled and given an unhelpful dummy. Some of today's weak two-bids might take no tricks at all.

In comparison, consider this hand from the 2004 World Olympiad in Istanbul, U.S.A. vs. Italy:

♠ J 10 9 7 5 4 ♥ 9 7 4 ♦ 8 ♣ 10 6 4

As dealer, at favorable vulnerability, Weinstein for the Americans opened 3♠. Perhaps influenced by his country's tradition of conservatism in preempts, Duboin opened more soberly at the two-level.

A preempt can force a decision at an uncomfortable level, with little or no space for partnership consultation. Here are Meckstroth and Rodwell on their way to winning the final of the 2004 Springold.

Board 18

Dealer East

N-S vul.

♠ 10 8 3 2
♥ K J 8 3
♦ J
♣ A Q 9 8

♠ A 5

♥ 2

♦ A K Q 10 9 8 2

♣ 6 5 2



♠ 7 6
♥ 10 6 5 4
♦ 7 6 5
♣ K J 7 3

♠ K Q J 9 4
♥ A Q 9 7
♦ 4 3
♣ 10 4

WEST

Rodwell

4♠

dbl

NORTH

Demuy

5♦

all pass

EAST

Meckstroth

1♠

pass

SOUTH

G.Wolpert

pass

pass

It is hard to fault Demuy for the 800 penalty, since he might have lost a double game swing by passing. And yet it would have been even worse had 4♠ been destined to fail. You just have to give credit to Meckstroth and Rodwell. They exploited the limited nature of the 1♠ opening by jumping to game and forcing a unilateral decision, and then by taking the practical action of doubling. Most partnerships would take some slower route with Rodwell's cards, allowing North to test the waters with a lower overcall and then subside in deference to the vulnerability. At the other table East-West scored a comfortable 450 via this auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Spector	Nickell	Feldman	Freeman
		1♠	pass
3NT (♠ raise)	4♦	4♠	all pass

A similar coup was scored by Helgemo and Armstrong in the 2004 Yeh Brothers Cup in Beijing, reported by Paul Marston in *Australian Bridge*. In the Open Room, the action was subdued:

<i>Board 2</i>	♠ A J 10 4 3 2
<i>Dealer East</i>	♥ K 3
<i>N-S vul.</i>	♦ A K
	♣ A 10 7
♠ 9 6	♠ K Q 7 5
♥ 8 6 5 4	♥ A Q 9 2
♦ Q 8 6 5	♦ J 2
♣ K J 3	♣ 9 6 4
	♠ 8
	♥ J 10 7
	♦ 10 9 7 4 3
	♣ Q 8 5 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Sementa	Justin Hackett	Versace	Jason Hackett
		1♣	pass
1♦	1♠	all pass	

Over 1♦, Justin Hackett could afford to bid a simple 1♠, secure in the knowledge that there was plenty of room to investigate higher contracts. One spade scored a quiet +80.

Helgemo-Armstrong gave their opponents a much more exacting problem:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Armstrong	Garozzo	Helgemo	DeFalco
3♥	4♠	1♥ dbl	pass all pass

North's unenviable choice was 3♠, with the severe risk of a missed game, or the action taken. We just have to give credit to the system played by Helgemo-Armstrong. In order to get this great result, they had to be playing light enough requirements for an opening bid, four-card majors and preemptive jump raises. Then Helgemo had to be able to double, with no modern, scientific "I'd like to compete further" meaning!

Notice that both these successful obstructive efforts were made before the strong hand had had a chance to speak. This implies a preempt in first, second or third chair, or a two-step effort — a third-hand response to an action by dealer. Position at the table alters the dynamics of obstruction considerably. Let's look at the effects of position at the table, taking for example a preemptive 3♦ opening.

Dealer

Here either opponent may have a strong, complex hand requiring investigation, which argues for preemption. It is difficult for the opponents to penalize us, as typically they will use takeout doubles, and a trap pass by second hand risks collecting undoubled undertricks that are insufficient compensation for what could be made by declaring. On the other hand, partner may be the one with a strong hand needing investigation. If our 3♦ bid promises something never far from

♠ x x ♥ x x ♦ K Q J x x x x ♣ x x

i.e. a good suit, playing strength, little support for other suits, and little defense, then the opening will actually assist us in getting to the right contract. If our 3♦ bid is highly variable, sometimes with an empty suit, four- or five-card length on the side, maybe some side high cards, maybe a void, then we will have lost our gamble if partner has a strong hand, either by being too high already, or by having lost the space needed to determine our best contract. On the other hand, if our requirements are too strict, we lose opportunities to be difficult.

Second Chair

The fact that the dealer has passed tilts the odds against aggressive preemption for the following reasons:

1. There is now only one potentially strong opponent to obstruct.
2. Partner's expected (long-term average) strength is higher, making it more likely that we need to investigate.
3. The preempt is less effective because LHO knows more about his partner's hand. Also, RHO will be able to reopen or advance freely without deceiving his partner.
4. Similarly, the preempt is more dangerous because LHO can trap on more hands, knowing that partner can double in the reopening position without overstating his values.

These reasons against preempting wildly in second chair are all probabilistic. One might get a terrific result opening 3♦ second chair, neither vulnerable, with something like:

♠ 8 ♥ Q 10 4 2 ♦ K 10 8 4 3 2 ♣ K 6

For that matter, opening 2♥ or 1♠ might work, too. But it's against the odds.

Third Chair

This has traditionally been the position in which to be adventurous. The reasons are that you don't have to worry so much about what partner has and, if you are weak, it is likely the deal belongs to the opponents. However, points 3 and 4 under Second Chair still apply.

Fourth Chair

It is an entirely different situation here, since if we don't fancy our chances we can throw it in. Opening 3♦ in this chair is a combination of hoping for 3NT and making it hard for the opponents if it is a partscore deal.

Does your minimum for a direct 3NT overcall of a preempt vary by position? Second chair is the one in which you should have the lowest minimum: you have a chance to catch an opening bid opposite and partner cannot balance lightly because he is not a passed hand. Third- and fourth-chair overcalls should be slightly sounder. It's a subtle distinction, but worth thinking about for the well-prepared partnership. Another thought is that against most opponents, it is safer to overcall in fourth seat than in third, particularly if the overcall is 1NT. Partner is a passed hand in both cases, but dealer can rely less on his partner's third-hand opening.

Any indication that the opponents need space more than we do suggests preemptive tactics. Suppose your RHO opens 1♣ and you hold, at favorable vulnerability:

♠ 7 6 3 ♥ 6 3 ♦ K J 10 8 3 2 ♣ 7 2

If you don't want to bid on hands like this, I don't feel like telling you that you should. But over what kinds of 1♣ would you feel most like bidding 3♦?

- natural, 3+
- natural, 4+ (four-card majors)
- strong, artificial
- multi-type: balanced 12-14, or long clubs, or strong with any suit

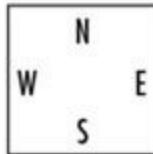
You will give the most complex problem to your multi-type 1♣ opponents: they have the least information. On the other hand, the strong club bidders are more likely to have game or slam. You have less to gain against the natural 3+ 1♣, which gives some, albeit limited, distributional information. You have least to gain against a 4+ 1♣, the most descriptive opening of the four.

If your RHO instead opens a strong notrump, or a five-card 1♣, or a strong 2♣, the jump to 3♦ has less going for it for two reasons: it takes up less space, and all these openings are more narrowly defined than a 1♣ opening.

Sometimes it's hard to know who needs the space. When we are weak, at favorable vulnerability, we may want to remove space from our opponents, who may have great things. However, they may need to preempt us, to keep us from finding a save. Sometimes a 2NT opening works well in this regard. From the 2003 Bermuda Bowl final:

Board 22 ♠ J 5 4 3
 Dealer East ♥ 2
 E-W vul. ♦ 6 5 4 2
 ♣ Q 9 8 6

 ♠ Q 10 8 6 2
 ♥ Q 8 7 6
 ♦ K J
 ♣ J 10



♠ K 9
 ♥ A J 9 5 4
 ♦ Q 9 8 7 3
 ♣ 4

♠ A 7
 ♥ K 10 3
 ♦ A 10
 ♣ A K 7 5 3 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Rodwell	Fantoni	Meckstroth	Nunes
		2NT	pass
3♣	pass	3NT	all pass

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Versace	Hamman	Lauria	Soloway
		1♣	2NT
dbl	4♦	dbl	pass
4♠	pass	5♣	all pass

Meckstroth's 2NT, though under strength in HCP, was over strength in controls and playing strength. If partner had held something like

♠ K Q 3 2 ♥ A 7 ♦ 7 6 5 ♣ 9 8 6 4

a slam certainly could have been missed. Here, though, 2NT served to keep the opponents out, and led to +430 on a heart lead. At the other table 5♣ was one down.

CONCEALING

Concealment is a subtler form of antagonism, often achieved by judicious silence rather than brash jumps. In *Develop Your Bidding Judgment*, Reese posed the following problem.

You hold

♠ 8 5 ♥ K Q 8 7 5 ♦ 3 ♣ A Q J 8 4

and in a team match, neither vulnerable, the bidding proceeds as follows:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	pass	2♦	?

Reese considers the dangers in revealing our holdings and the decreased likelihood of winning the declaration because of the ranks of the suits held, and recommends passing. This would not be a popular view in the compete-at-all-costs environment of today. Whether he was right about that particular hand is hard to tell. It is clear that the danger of revealing one's hand, particularly to strong opponents, is often underestimated. Reese went on to recommend a pass as West holding

♠ x ♥ x ♦ Q 10 x x x x ♣ A 9 x x x

at teams, neither vulnerable, after:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	pass	1♠
?			

This advice from the past echoed oddly in the 2003 Bermuda Bowl final. Lauria and Meckstroth both passed as dealer, with neither vulnerable, holding:

♠ 2 ♥ 10 2 ♦ K 9 8 4 3 ♣ K 9 5 3 2

The bidding proceeded 1♥—pass—1♠, just as in Reese's example, and the decision was at hand. Now, a writer gets to pick and choose his examples. If an intervention here had led partner to jump to 5♦ on

♠ 8 6 5 4 3 ♥ 9 ♦ A 7 6 5 2 ♣ A 4

and wrap up 5♦ doubled, this deal would not have been featured here. In the event, Lauria came in with 1NT and paid out 1400 (it would have been only 1100 in 1962, old scoring). Rodwell passed throughout, and won 9 IMPs when his opponents stopped short of the reasonable, but not cold, grand slam.

Sometimes we put too much emphasis on accuracy, at the expense of concealment. For example, basic bridge texts (Goren for my generation) advise raising 1NT to 2NT when holding not quite enough for game. Opener then goes on to game with extra values. Simple, logical — and wrong. The obvious upside to inviting is that we may bid and make game, while the obvious downside is that we may bid game and go down. But there are other disadvantages:

- We force opener to reveal more about his hand to the defenders.
- We alert the opening leader that the contract is marginal.
- We may go down in 2NT.

- We alert the opponents to the possibility of a speculative double, given that there are no reserves of strength.
- We allow fourth hand to bid at the three-level.
- We lose the possibility of using 2NT for something really useful.

It is hardly as though the raise to 2NT gives opener the chance to make an informed choice between an ironclad 2NT with no play for nine tricks, and an ironclad 3NT. Raising to 2NT increases your accuracy only a little. Vulnerable at IMPs, if you estimate 3NT at 30-50%, you are better off just bidding it. Even if it turns out to be 30%, your mathematical expectation against par is a loss of about 1 IMP, a very modest investment.

Some systems, which use 1NT–2NT for other purposes, call for responder to ask about four-card majors, even when he is not interested, simply to provide a way to invite with 2NT. I find that method gives you the worst of everything. If partner is really keen about it, I'll say "Fine, whatever," but I'll never actually do it. In a partnership, of course, I try to solicit partner's understanding so he isn't shocked when I table a balanced 8-count for my raise to 3NT.

If we want to check on possible 4-4 major-suit fits and maintain maximal concealment, we need to be able to check for the presence of one four-card major without simultaneously forcing opener to reveal whether he has four cards in the other. Puppet Stayman accomplishes this by using 2♣ almost as a transfer, asking opener to bid 2♦ with no five-card major. Responder then follows with 2♥ if he has spades, and 2♠ if has hearts, with different schemes available when responder has both majors. By naming the suit he does not have, responder keeps the strong hand protected from the opening lead, and makes the hand that has shown the four-card major dummy.

We might prefer to reserve the economical 2♣ for our interrogative slam auctions and devote less precious bids to the search for a 4-4 major-suit fit when we know we are going to stop in game. For example:

1NT	3♥	raise to 3NT with four spades
	3♠	raise to 3NT with four hearts

You can play these bids the other way around with a weak notrump or if you care more about avoiding lead-directing doubles than about making the opener declarer. Hands with both majors would have to be handled some other way, and you would have to believe in not inviting with balanced hands. In a complete method, some other slam-going hands would be bundled into the responses, with four-level continuations defined.

Of course, the maximum in concealment is not to ask for majors at all! Stayman is probably overused. Before quoting Terence Reese on the subject, it is worth noting that the more all-encompassing your 1NT openings, the more you need investigation. If you open 1NT on anything within the range, regardless of small doubletons, strong suits, good controls, etc. — for example, on hands like

♠ A K Q 7 2 ♥ 4 2 ♦ A K 10 ♣ 4 3 2

— then you need to do more checking than if your 1NT openings are old-fashioned — balanced with spread-out honors.

Reese, in *Modern Bidding and the Acol System* (1952), had this to say: “Most of the scientific players who fall over themselves in their endeavours to find a 4-4 fit in a major suit just cannot see the wood for the trees. For every game that can be made through careful exploration of the major suits, there are half a dozen that can be slipped through in three no-trumps by concealing those very facts that the scientists are at such pains to disclose.”

He goes on to examine

♠ AJ 10 5 ♥ K 3 ♦ A 6 2 ♣ K Q 8 4

and says, in an Acol weak notrump context, “it would not be wrong to open 1♣ and rebid 1♠ — indeed one would not advise a beginner otherwise; but, for my money, open 1♦ and, over 1♥, rebid 2NT.”

Nickell-Freeman bid effectively on this deal from the U.S. 2003 Trials:

♠ A 9 5 2	♠ Q 10 4 3
♥ A 10 8	♥ K Q 7
♦ A J 4 3	♦ 9 8 5
♣ J 5	♣ A Q 6
1♦	2NT
3NT	pass

The notrump contract made ten tricks. At the other table, the nebulous diamond opening made suppressing spades less appealing and the resultant 4♠ went one down.

We need a mindset change from “show my hand” to “get where we need to go”. There are no extra points awarded for eloquence or honesty, and some common methods reveal information without much gain. Consider, for example, this common modern sequence

1♠	1NT
2♦	3♠

where responder “went through” the forcing notrump simply to provide a description and avoid promising four trumps. The information shown by opener’s choice of rebid may be of very limited value to responder, who was perhaps going to bid 3♠ over any simple rebid. The defenders are the sole beneficiaries.

The bridge-playing public seems resigned to the necessity of science and its attendant drawbacks. In *The Bridge World*’s June 2003 Challenge the Champs, the following hands were presented:

♠	A	K	7	3	2
♥	8				
♦	A	9			
♣	A	J	10	8	6

♠	10	9	6	5	4
♥	K	Q	J	3	
♦	8	7	6	3	
♣	—				

Both pairs conducted lengthy, revealing auctions and successfully stopped below slam, scoring 10 and 9 for 4♠ and 5♠ respectively. The award for 6♠ was 2. Now I know this is a bidding contest and has its own conditions, but at the table, suppose you were able to bid 1♠–4♠; 6♠. How often would you expect to succeed? Over half the time, surely. Such bidding is often labeled unscientific. “Scientific” in bridge means “patient, detailed, thorough”. It does not necessarily mean “well-advised”.

Suppose your side has thirteen tricks in two suits with two losers in one of the side suits and a void in the other. If you can keep from telegraphing the lead, the best IMP strategy (and an even better rubber bridge strategy) is to bid a grand slam. That’s not bad science, just good mathematics.

A step beyond passive concealment is *encryption*. It is possible to send messages to partner that the opponents are unable to listen in on — entirely within the rules of the game! The technique, also applicable to signals in defensive card play, was described by Peter Winkler in a number of articles in the 1980s. The following example is drawn from the hilarious “My Night at the Cryppie Club”, *Bridge Magazine*, August 1981.

Suppose you play, like a good deal of the world, that 2NT in response to one of a major shows a game-forcing raise. Suppose further that you agree that it shows exactly one of the ace and king of trumps, and that opener rebids 3♣ if holding the other. So far, all in the clear. Now comes the encrypted part. You agree to play one set of methods when responder holds the ace of trumps, and a different set when he holds the king. Perhaps you will play regular cuebids in one case and denial cuebids in the other. Or you can permute the suits in one case. You will always know which methods are in use, and the opponents won’t — until dummy comes down.

Be careful trying this at the local club; the approach is banned in many jurisdictions.¹ It makes people unhappy, and sounds vaguely disreputable. In theory, however, and according to the laws of bridge, it is completely legitimate.

DECEIVING

Deception in the auction is under a bit of a cloud these days. Psychic actions are treated with suspicion or outright hostility.

And it is easy to see why. The game has been changed by the establishment of well-prepared partnerships. In a rubber bridge setting where all the players know each other, if you feel like responding 1♠ as North to partner’s 1♥ opening on, say,

♠	8	7	2		♥	K	J	4	3		♦	7	3	2		♣	8	3	2
---	---	---	---	--	---	---	---	---	---	--	---	---	---	---	--	---	---	---	---

you are entitled to do so. It may turn out badly or well, but where the opponents and your partner are equally familiar with your habits, there is no ethical problem. Now suppose instead that North-South are a

twenty-year partnership, playing in a pairs tournament against strangers. North-South know their own history; they know how reliable a one-over-one is. Maybe they know also that a raise by opener to 4♠ is barred, that game raises go through 3NT, and that responder's return to 4♥ is for play. Now the situation is very different.

In theory, your opponents are entitled to know as much about your partner's playing habits as you do. Not just the written partnership agreements, but his tendencies: for example, whether he is generally passive on opening lead or aggressive in bidding games. Of course, this is not the way the game is played. Opponents seldom know as much as partners, other than at rubber bridge or individual events. In most situations, it doesn't matter too much. If your partnership has a long constructive auction to a slam, and on defense an opponent needs to imagine what hands declarer might hold, he can ask what the sequence showed. You, an ardent believer in full disclosure, will tell him all he is entitled to know. Psychic bidding, on the other hand, creates situations where it is difficult to get full disclosure without giving unauthorized information. You can't, when confronted by the 1♥—pass—1♠ sequence we have been considering, look at your left-hand opponent and ask, "And just how reliable is this 1♠ bid?" Psychic bids, for their success, rely on a failure by the opponents to guess that the announced values are not held. If the reliability of the bid in question is not equally known to all, it just isn't fair.

For years, with both Irving Litvack and Jim Green, I played a strong club system where one of a suit by dealer, other than 1♣, is either normal or 0-4 HCP. We always made the opponents fully aware of these opening bids, together with some of the later developments. After a 1NT overcall, for example, the expected action by responder with a balanced thirteen is to pass. Sometimes this approach runs afoul of the authorities and judicious warning description may be in order. "We play two-way opening bids and systematically pass good hands after a 1NT overcall" is much less confrontational than "We psyche and we field them."²

Opening bids like these, when they are the expected action for any hand in the range, are not true psychic bids. They are in fact conventions, and need to be treated as such. The true psychic bid, a sudden whim or flight of fancy for which everyone else at the table is equally unprepared, is almost impossible in long-term partnerships.

In spite of our scrupulous disclosure, I have a guilty conscience when I play this system, because I know the opponents will not be fully prepared. Maybe their correct counter is to play Comic Notrump overcalls, or perhaps they should trap more. They are likely unprepared for even simple sequences like this one:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
pass	?		

How much does double show? Is Lebensohl on? What is 2♠, when the 1♠ opening can systematically be on a suit as bad as four small? To be properly prepared, opponents would need our system notes and at least an hour or two.

Sometimes a bid that does not meet its book description is actually the best technical choice because of the effect it may have on partner. You hold this hand:

♠ A 7 ♥ A Q J 6 ♦ A 4 2 ♣ K J 5 2

Partner opens 1NT (15-17). Obviously you are going to slam and are close to a grand slam. Let's say you don't have much in the way of fancy methods. You start with 2♣ and hear 2♥. You think about what you need to make seven, and realize that cards that mesh with yours are important. An unsupported queen of diamonds would be wasted, whereas the ♠K, ♥K, and ♣Q are valuable. And since you have no convenient forcing raise anyway, you invent a "splinter" of 4♦. Partner, holding

♠ K Q J 6 ♥ K 9 3 2 ♦ 8 7 6 ♣ A Q

goes past game, and eventually you bid and make a grand slam. Such a bid is not really a psychic bid, more a partner-manipulator. It is actually intended more to fool partner, and thereby get him to do the right thing, than to fool the opponents. However, if it becomes part of your methods, they are entitled to know.

CONFUSING

Another way to make life difficult for the opponents, without actually fooling them, is to put them in situations with which they are less familiar. This can be as simple a matter as opening the bidding. Most partnerships spend a disproportionately large amount of time on their own unobstructed auctions, to the detriment of contested auctions and defensive card play. Have a look at how convention cards are laid out, or look at an elementary bridge book, and you will see the bias. Things are beginning to change; as opening-bid standards have fallen, serious partnerships have come to realize how many of the points to be won and lost are in contested auctions.

Opening the bidding is a good start to making life harder for the opponents. Continuing to bid is also good. Consider the following two sequences:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	pass	pass	?
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	pass	1NT ¹	pass
2♦	pass	pass	?

1. Forcing, neutral, does not promise values.

In the first case, any moderately advanced partnership will have had some relevant discussion on issues including ranges for reopening notrump bids, sequences after a balancing double, and so forth. The second case, apart from the extra difficulty of being at a higher level, is much less likely to have been adequately treated. Many good partnerships treat later balancing actions — ones other than to an opening bid — as *partscore mode*. By this I mean that bids are directed to finding the best partscore, with the justification that this simplifies the bidding and that game is unlikely. For example, in some sequences 2NT might be looking for the best strain instead of showing values and suggesting game in notrump. This is a sensible way to play when opponents promise thirteen HCP to open and six to respond. When they open on ten and respond on zero this is a much more hazardous policy.³

While artificial weaponry may be the most potent way to put people into unfamiliar situations, you can also do the same thing quite naturally nowadays — at least in North America: just play four-card majors!

A multi is a common way to create confusion. A bid is made promising certain distributional values, without naming the long suit or suits. This can give the next hand an unpleasant choice. Any bid relieves the other side (confusers) of the necessity of revealing the suits held. Thus the bidders (confusees) are denied access to a cuebid, since any of the five strains may be playable. On the other hand, if one passes over the multi, things may get worse. The second confuser may be able to raise the level of the auction, secure in the knowledge that there is a fit, even if he doesn't yet know what it is. Alternatively, he can afford to sow a little more confusion by passing or making misleading advances, prepared to pay out fifty a trick if he lands in a silly spot.

The most familiar multi today is an opening 2♦, showing a weak two-bid in a major. The defending side has numerous options, which will be considered in the next chapter. One way to up the ante is to use 2♥ for the multi opening — a bid I call MachoMulti. This makes things much harder for everybody, for reasons which will be discussed in the next chapter. Another newly popular method is 2♥ showing spades and another suit. The ACBL puts that in a more restricted class if the second suit might be hearts — maybe that's too effective! In the next chapter we will look at how to fight back against all these dastardly tactics.

[1](#) In fact, it is barred at all levels of play by both the WBF and ACBL. -Ed.

[2](#) Systemic psychics and psychic controls, including agreements like this one, are illegal in many bridge jurisdictions, including the ACBL, at any level of play.

[3](#) Relays that are not game-forcing are disallowed on the ACBL Mid-Chart.

FIGHTING BACK — COUNTERING OBSTRUCTIVE METHODS

9

Our antagonist is our helper.

Edmund Burke, ‘Reflections on the Revolution in France’

Whenever the deal belongs to our side, we are potential targets for nefarious acts: preempts, light obstruction and raises, psychic bids, confusing artificial intervention. We have to stand up and defend what is rightfully ours. We cannot hope to hold on to every piece of it every time; enemy action acts as kind of tax on our good cards, and tax is inevitable. But we need to defend what we can. And at times, we can hope to turn our antagonist’s weapons back at him.

This chapter will explore how we can combat obstruction, with a particular eye to artificial obstruction. We are going to examine two cases in depth: a high-level transfer opening, and the Multi 2♦. The purpose is twofold. First, I hope that some of the suggested countermeasures may be of direct use to the reader. Second, in the examination of those countermeasures, we can perhaps gain insight into how to make our own obstructive tactics more effective.

THE MULTI 2♦

One of the first of the artificial barrage bids, the Multi 2♦, was developed in the late 1960s by Reese and Flint in collaboration with other English experts. For a long time it was almost unknown in North America, where weak two-bids were firmly established. In England, though, many players were fond of Acol Twos, at least in the majors, and in Europe there were other calls on two of a major. So the multi filled a niche for players who wanted the preemptive advantage of the weak two but didn’t have two of a major available.

The original idea was for 2♦ to show either a weak two-bid in one of the majors, or a strong hand, balanced or three-suited. Responder has a number of alternatives; if he wishes to stay low he bids 2♥. Opener now passes if hearts is his suit, bids 2♠ with spades, 2NT when strong and balanced, and the suit under the singleton when holding a strong 4441.

The inclusion of strong types in the 2♦ opening was originally designed to scare off unwanted intervention, while simultaneously helping constructive bidding by taking some of the load off other openings. These justifications are not terribly compelling. Forcing the partnership to at least 3♠ (the rebid with a singleton club) on a hand such as

♠ A Q 7 2 ♥ A Q 8 4 ♦ A J 8 2 ♣ 2

could result in a lovely auction opposite a strong hand, but opposite

♠ 8 4 ♥ 10 7 5 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ J 9 7 4 3

it doesn't look advisable. These hands belong at the one-level. Having an extra range for balanced hands was useful, but hardly essential. Also, a forcing 2♦ opens up possibilities for the defending side, who may pass at their first turn as a first move in describing particular holdings. All in all, it looks better to restrict the opening to the weak types.¹ This has the major benefit of giving responder a free hand in preempting, or perhaps making a tricky pass, without worrying about getting the auction back on the rails should opener turn out to be strong.

Let's begin our discussion of countermeasures by assuming that the opponents open 2♦ in first chair, neither vulnerable, at IMPs, showing a weak two in hearts or spades. What is most critical? Of all the bidding issues, among which are accurate slam, game and partscore bidding, safety, penalizing the opponents, obstruction, lead-direction, etc., surely the most important is getting to a reasonable game contract when our cards warrant it. The idea behind the 2♦ opening is to make that difficult; our job is to overcome the loss of bidding room, get into the auction and find our game.

Obstructive openings, like preempts or a weak notrump, often succeed when the opposing strength is evenly divided, such as around 12-13 points in each hand. Each defender in turn faces a situation where game is unlikely and action risky. But if both pass, the obstructor steals the pot. When the opening bid is a weak 2♠, it is especially difficult. A takeout double is a commitment to the three-level, since a 2NT response is best used as Lebensohl or some other device. If you hold

♠ A 7 2 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ 10 8 4 ♣ A Q 9 6

it is a losing proposition to act over a weak 2♠, especially in view of the need to describe stronger holdings. But if you pass, and partner passes something similar, you may easily be collecting a couple of fifties into your own 3NT — if you defend well! An opening 2♠ is particularly difficult in this way. But if the opening bid is a Multi 2♦, there is an available action that has a high degree of safety.

THE NONCOMMittal DOUBLE

This is how we strike back against the multi. When we double a natural weak two, we are committed to bidding almost all of the time; when we double a Multi 2♦, we are not. The opponents are unlikely to belong in 2♦ doubled, and even if they do, they may not be able to work that out given that opener's suit is unknown. We can exploit this fact by doubling on the common hands we wouldn't dare act on over natural weak twos: weak-notrump hands. That lets us in on the 13-opposite-13 hands that are otherwise so vulnerable to preemption.

We cover the rest of the balanced hands by overcalling 2NT holding a strong notrump and doubling with more. A large, homogenous range for the double would be impractical, but two ranges with a gap in between works well. It is like opening one of suit with either less or more than a strong notrump opening.

The strong type is shown by bidding again, uninvited. I've been happily playing this way since the early 1970s. There are different ways of dealing with unbalanced hands: a natural scheme will be presented at the end of the chapter.

The noncommittal double is the countermeasure of choice when faced with a weak bid that does not specifically include length in the named suit as one of the types. A hearts-or-spades 2♦ could happen to include four or five diamonds, but that is not part of its definition, so the noncommittal double applies. It applies also against bids like 2♥ showing spades and a minor, and one-under and two-under preempts, although you should adjust the ranges upwards a point or two against three-bids since 2NT is no longer available as a contract.

Some artificial obstructions are not susceptible to a noncommittal double. Take the 2♥ bid, showing a weak two in a major, played by some of the Italian champions. This is much harder to defend than the traditional Multi 2♦. In part this is because it is one step higher, but mostly because one cannot double freely as hearts may be the long suit. Doubling also helps the opponents to settle in their suit at the two-level, something they can't ensure on their own.

What is the cost of using 2♥ as Multi instead of 2♦? If responder passes and opener has spades, it may be a silly contract, but it may also be fifty a trick into a game. Any time responder has three or more hearts, then 2♠ or 3♥ is available (2♠ should not promise game interest). The most dangerous case is when responder has moderate spade length and short hearts. Then he may guess to go with the odds and pass. If the opening promises a six-card suit and responder holds four spades and a singleton heart, then it is about 5-to-1 that opener's suit is hearts.

A TRANSFER PREEMPT

Many pairs today use artificial preempts — bids that promise a long suit, just not the one named. We are going to look in particular at defending against a 4♣ opening that shows hearts ('Namyats'). One might argue that this isn't really an obstructive device, since the 4♣ opening may be quite strong. That is true. But what the opponents are trying to do is gain all the preemptive advantage of starting at the four-level, while using artificial means to avoid having impossible guesses over their 4♥ openings. We must not sit idly by and let this happen! Also, some of the discussion will be applicable to transfer preempts in general.

Suppose your RHO opens 4♥. If you have a good hand, you may face an unpleasant guess. Your partnership will need to know what double promises, and often there is a lack of clarity here. If you describe your double as "takeout", you may envision

♠ A Q 7 2 ♥ 8 ♦ K Q 8 3 ♣ A J 7 4

But you also have to contend with hands like:

♠ A J 7 ♥ 8 2 ♦ K Q 8 3 ♣ A K 7 3

(support, but balanced), and

♠ A J ♥ K 5 ♦ A K Q 7 2 ♣ A J 7 5

(very strong)

Most experts would double on these hands as well and call it “flexible”. Whatever double shows, it represents a serious commitment, after which we must contract for at least ten tricks or be willing to have the opponents play doubled.

Now suppose instead your RHO opens 4♣, showing hearts. The opponents have more important things to do than to suddenly choose to play in clubs, so we have at our disposal the noncommittal double. We also have two extra overcalls as well as possible delayed actions. So much choice! There are three issues we may wish to address, and we need to consider their relative importance:

- a. can we make something or save profitably?
- b. should we double to increase the penalty?
- c. what should we lead?

Most people play the opening 4♣, which allows a slam try of 4♦, as stronger than 4♥, so (b) is probably least important. When the 4♣ opener is dealer, (a) is where the points are to be won. Over a fourth-hand opening, probably (c) is most critical. The optimal strategy may depend on chair and vulnerability and on what hands your partnership opens; however, you wouldn’t be far off if you simply focused on (a) all the time.

In deciding whether to compete, we need to consider three types of hands:

- distributional hands with one or two suits
- true takeout patterns
- balanced hands with high-card strength

The noncommittal action is double followed by pass — we are then out of the auction. Two actions are “semi-committal”: pass followed by double, and doubling twice. After these actions, we must either bid or let the opponents play doubled. Other actions are fully committal — we contract for ten tricks or more.

Trying to get the best meanings for all these possibilities is very complicated. When the opponents open 4♣, showing hearts, I believe the most important question is whether or not we should be bidding 4♠. For years I played double as takeout of hearts, potentially quite light, exploiting the noncommittal aspect. That is quite playable, as is having double show five or more spades. I now suggest that double show spades: five or more, or four in an unbalanced hand. Advancer “raises” to 4♠ with almost any hand with four spades. With three spades and some values, he may make a responsive double of the conversion to 4♥. Here’s an example:

Dealer North

Both vul.

♠ K 9 5 2
♥ 9 4
♦ Q 10 8 2
♣ A J 6

♠ —

♥ A Q J 8 6 5 3 2
♦ K 7 3
♣ 9 7



♠ A J 10 6 4
♥ 10
♦ A J 9 4
♣ 8 5 4

♠ Q 8 7 3
♥ K 7
♦ 6 5
♣ K Q 10 3 2

WEST

4♠

NORTH4♣
pass**EAST**dbl
pass**SOUTH**4♥
?

Whatever happens next, East-West have done better than selling out to 4♥.

Here is a possible scheme over 4♣ showing hearts.

dbl

5+♠, or 4♠, unbalanced.

2nd round: dbl = takeout, 4♠ strong

4♦

natural

4♥

takeout, typically 3-1-4-5 or 3-1-5-4

4♠

natural, medium (double when weaker or stronger)

4NT

minors, limited

5♣

clubs, limited

5♦

diamonds, limited

pass, and then, over 4♥—pass—pass

dbl balanced, high cards

4♠ spades and a minor

4NT minors, strong

5♣ clubs, strong

5♦ diamonds, strong

PURSUE OR IGNORE?

Partnerships should spend a little time establishing a general strategy when faced with aggressive obstruction. One important question is how diligently to pursue the opposition when they may be out on a

limb. Do we design our methods to maximize the opportunity to penalize them? Do we speculatively double them at low levels, justified by a balance of probabilities, knowing that on occasion we may have to write -670 in our scorecards? Or do we turn a blind eye to their shenanigans and go about finding our best contract?

When the opponents' obstruction is high, frequent, and blatantly risky, our approach has to include penalizing them from time to time. There is no way to restore our ability to have a careful, discerning auction after two or three levels have been snatched away. In the less disturbing case of lower intervention, whether we pursue or ignore is more a question of partnership style. The opponents have not, at least yet, taken away our ability to have an investigative auction. In fact, they may have even given us room. Suppose partner opens 2♣, an artificial near game-force, and RHO overcalls 2♦. We can no longer bid 2♦, but we can pass or double, so we have gained one call. If, instead, RHO makes a conventional double, we have redouble available as well, for a net gain of two calls. If we know how to make use of them, we make the opponents pay the full cost of their methods. If not, they are off the hook.

Interventions of a single step, when we are not in a force, are a net wash in terms of bidding space. We lose a bid, but gain a double. This means that we have the option to play our regular, unobstructed methods. We can play "front of the card", so called because that's where unobstructed bidding is shown on the standard convention card. For example, if our 1NT opening is overcalled with 2♣, meaning any number of wonderful things, we have the option of playing double as Stayman, 2♦ as a transfer to hearts, and everything else we might normally play, all the way up.

A cautionary tale. You must be absolutely clear if you are playing completely "front of the card" or if there are exceptions. Wanting something a little different for the upcoming World Championships, Jeremy Flint devised the "Boomerang Club". This was a normal system, except that the first and second-chair meanings of pass and 1♣ were switched. "Wouldn't hurt a fly," said one critic. True, if the flies are fully prepared. One pair, playing "front of the card", produced this auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	2♣	all pass	

North (who had a 2♣ opener) had taken the literal interpretation of "front of the card"— but not South.

"Front of the card" is a simple way to play, allowing partnership time to be spent in other places. It is a convenience, but seldom an optimal method for keen partnerships. Artificial interventions create new situations, and to maximize our return we must adapt.

Artificial interventions are often vulnerable to a *train-the-guns* strategy. One player announces tentative willingness to defend, and the other cooperates. One aims, the other fires. For example, over Unusual Notrump:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	2NT	?	

Here, double can announce general willingness to defend and create a force to, say, 3♠. East-West are in a good position to collect a penalty if such is available. No matter how North-South try to escape (without jumping!) they can be caught if one of the opening side has willingness and the other desire. "Willingness" usually means some defensive values and no great fit or unshown suit. "Desire" usually means a strong

trump holding, but sometimes it can be just some trump length combined with good defensive values. The old-fashioned way is to double the runout suit with strong desire and pass with willingness, but you can play the other way around if you wish. Another option over the artificial intervention is to pass and double later. Many pairs play that sequence as almost a command to pass — a penalty double that needs no cooperation.

Train-the-guns, like the noncommittal double, is available whenever the opponents are in a contract that they are unlikely to wish to declare. For example, any takeout double is vulnerable to a train-the-guns redouble. Other at-risk conventions are Michaels Cuebids and artificial defenses to 1NT. Natural interventions are much less at risk. People play takeout doubles of preempts, and negative doubles of overcalls, for good reasons. Double is the most flexible way to enter the auction; reserving it for penalty-oriented hands would be expensive. Also immune to train-the-guns are semi-natural bids, which show length in the suit bid. A Roman Jump Overcall, like 3♣ showing the minors, is safer than the Unusual 2NT.

Another drawback to “front of the card”, in addition to letting the opponents off the hook, is that it does not re-prioritize bids in light of the suits the opponents have shown. If an opponent bids 2♦ over our 1NT, showing spades, then it is hardly optimal for us to play that 2♥ is Jacoby. Come to think of it, the prevalence of “front of the card” is a good argument for playing some form of Astro over 1NT.²

Sometimes we belong in a suit bid by the opponents. Although we may not wish to spare a valuable, economical bid, having some bid to show length in the suit the opponents announce can be handy should one run into a psychic bid. It is quite common today to find pairs with the agreement that this auction

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	dbl	1♠	2♠

shows length in spades. Some years ago, in a friendly IMP game, Fred Gitelman on my right opened 1♠ first in hand, at favorable vulnerability. I had a strong notrump with four spades and overcalled 1NT. Partner bid 2♠, which showed, if we were both in form, a strong 4441. I bid 2NT, which asked for the shortness, and partner showed it. Our only 4-4 fit was in spades. I ran through some relays, and partner showed suitable cards for slam. I pondered. What if we bid 6♠ and went down on the 5-0 split? What would our teammates say? They might think a 1♠ opening was a bit of a clue. Would they get wind of the full story? I glanced around — no kibitzers. Our opponents, I was sure, would not tell. So I bid the slam, and when trumps split, all was well.

HIDDEN COSTS OF CONVENTIONAL INTERVENTIONS

It is apparent that much can be done to combat artificial obstruction, but a great deal of work is involved. Most defenses are just a quick outline of the meaning of immediate actions, when what is needed is detailed treatment of responses, rebids, and how they are affected by further enemy action. As a result, the artificial obstruction works better than it should.

Often when a new method is proposed, it is given a quick once-over to see if it “handles” various possibilities without regard to possible losses in the details. For example, some methods over an opening

notrump call for a double on any one-suiter: advancer pulls to 2♣, and then the suit can be shown. All well and good, but, as usual, artificial competitive measures give opportunities to the other side:

Dealer West

Neither vul.

♠ A K 8
♥ 10 6 4
♦ A K J 4 2
♣ J 4

♠ J 5 3

♥ A Q J 7 3 2
♦ 8 5
♣ A 9



♠ 10 9 7 6
♥ K 5
♦ 10 6 3
♣ K Q 6 5

♠ Q 4 2
♥ 9 8
♦ Q 9 7
♣ 10 8 7 3 2

WEST

1NT

2♦

NORTH

dbl

2♥

EAST

pass

3♦

SOUTH

2♣

all pass

A natural 2♥ overcall might well have bought the contract.

A treatment, common particularly for weak and ultra-weak notrumps, is for pass to be a transfer to redouble after a double of the opening 1NT. That creates various escape sequences and is a quite reasonable way to play. However, do not be fooled into thinking that the method has no drawbacks. The first, and most obvious, is that 1NT doubled may well be the opening side's best contract. Second, and seldom noted by advocates of the method, is that the pass does not completely replace a strength-showing redouble. The most important difference shows up when the fourth hand bids:

WEST

1NT

?

NORTH

dbl

EAST

pass¹

SOUTH

2♣

1. Forcing a redouble by opener if South passes.

Holding strong clubs, West faces a dilemma: pass and miss a penalty when partner is strong, or double and stir up trouble when partner was just trying to get out with his life. Against this transfer-to-redouble, I recommend that advancer preempt train-the-guns by bidding with weakness — bid any five-card suit, or 2♣ without one. Delayed actions can be invitational or suggest alternative strains.

Even if the auction proceeds like this

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	pass ¹	pass
re dbl	pass	pass	

1. Forcing a redouble by opener if South passes.

East-West is not in as strong a position as after a traditional strong redouble. East may be gambling, not wishing to play in a poor fit at the two-level. He might prefer to let the opponents play should South run, but opener may get in the way by doubling.

PLAY GOOD METHODS!

If the better players would put more effort into combating artificial treatments and explaining their disadvantages, the value of those treatments would decline in the public's estimation and we would wind up with more natural bidding. Textbooks address coping with natural obstruction first; that provides an incentive to play artificial methods instead. When defense to artificial methods becomes better understood, perhaps there will be a return to natural bids that can't be exploited by noncommittal doubles and train-the-guns.

I once heard about a pair who played two ranges of one notrump opening. They marked their convention card very clearly:

1NT	12-14 Vul
	15-17 NV

The treatment was of no bridge merit, but led to an advantage because hasty opponents did not take care to see what was happening. Read it again if you saw nothing out of the ordinary.

Playing inferior methods, ones that work because people will be unprepared for them, is a similar tactic. I think it is more responsible to play only methods that you feel will be advantageous even against the best possible preparation. If you think that opening 2♠ to show a club preempt is a good idea no matter how well the opponents are prepared, then by all means go ahead. Personally, I think that a bid that allows a noncommittal double *and* a 2NT overcall *and* train-the-guns *and* a cheap cuebid is atrocious. I know it allows for a 2NT interrogative relay and some positional gains. But that isn't why one preempts — it is to remove space. A natural 3♣ removes more.

There is considerable sentiment among some of the best players that the world of bridge has not been well served by the ever-increasing use of artificial methods. They argue that many conventional treatments provide their users with an unfair advantage, make the game more difficult to promote, and spoil its beauty. It is a reality that any well-prepared partnership that uses unfamiliar methods will derive an advantage from them. If everyone decided to do so, then every pair encountered would bring to the table a new set of weird and wonderful methods, and a large part of one's thinking would have to go to understanding and combating them. Some people think that's great; they love the battle of systems. Others prefer devoting their thinking time to bidding judgment and card play, and remember fondly when the bidding at the table resembled the bidding in the daily newspaper.

It is almost impossible to be fully prepared for unfamiliar methods. First off, conventional understandings are seldom fully disclosed. Players of complicated systems can't make them transparent even when they want to — there is too much to say. Sometimes there is also a language barrier, particularly at world events. In any case, full preparation for a match against a pair playing a complicated, unfamiliar system requires weeks, not minutes. Chip Martel had this to say about one Bermuda Bowl experience: "For this Bermuda Bowl not one pair playing brown sticker conventions gave a complete description of both their bids and the follow-ups. A (small) minority gave descriptions which were reasonable, and most were woefully inadequate."

Bob Hamman particularly detests weak multis and believes that bids that do not show strength should have a known five-card or longer suit. He cites the following as an example of problems arising from the Multi 2♦. You are South, playing IMPs at favorable vulnerability.

♠ A 10 9 x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ Q 10 x x			
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	dbl	2♥ ¹	?
1. Alerted.			

Most multi practitioners play 2♥ here as pass-or-correct. Under that assumption, it is reasonable to compete with 2♠. It turns out, though, that 2♥ was natural, making 2♠ a very bad bid — almost certainly LHO's suit. It's easy to say in retrospect that South should ask the meaning of East's bid, but such questions can be revealing and create ethical problems for partner. Hamman comments, "Certainly, it is probable that the 2♠ bidder deserves no protection, but are the multi bidders really entitled to benefit from a situation which has nothing whatsoever to do with proficiency at the game?"

When my opponent makes a bid, I feel entitled to full knowledge of exactly what the bid means and what developments may ensue, regardless of what I hold. Even in completely unobstructed auctions, I want to be in a position to assess what my opponents may be thinking about. I want to think ahead about what bids I might want to double for a lead or for penalty, and I want to be thinking ahead to our opening lead. These things are all possible against players who use known methods, and mostly impossible against players using unfamiliar methods.

On the other side of the coin, many people get profound enjoyment from developing and experimenting with partnership methods, both in bidding and defensive card play. For them, exploring the limits of partnership methods is what studying clash squeezes is for card play enthusiasts. Without continual innovation, bridge would have fewer books, thinner magazines, less debate. In the past, developments in bidding have stimulated the game and public interest. The 1931-32 Culbertson-Lenz match, the "Bridge Battle of the Century", generated tremendous excitement, much of it centered around the clash of systems: Culbertson vs. the Official System. The Omar Sharif Bridge Circus tours in the 1970s created widespread publicity, drawing enthusiastic audiences and extensive newspaper coverage. Would interest have been the same without the novelty of the Italian Club systems, Blue Team and Roman? I doubt it. Precision Club energized bridge in China, just as the Polish and Swedish systems have in their countries.

Attempts to limit bidding methods are bound to run up against national differences. There may be American resentment of the multi, but Europeans have faced it in their tournaments for over thirty years and don't see what all the fuss is about. North Americans are used to D.O.N.T. over notrump openings,

which uses a multi double and by definition is meant to disturb. Then there is Drury, which the British see as a psychic control — and aren't those supposed to be illegal?

Currently, the ACBL Super-Chart requires that weak two- and three-level openings have either a suit that is known, or known to be one of just two possibilities, in which case neither of the suits may be the suit actually bid.³ The justification for this last clause, which excludes things like the Multi 2♥, is apparently that such bids are too hard to play against, but isn't that the point? The Multi 2♥ is just as easy to describe as the Multi 2♦, but it is much harder to play against. Restrictions like this one serve to limit what people have to prepare for, and that is certainly a laudable goal. I find it inelegant, though, to allow things that have achieved a certain popularity while excluding other, equally logical, alternatives. With the ACBL General Convention Chart, this discrimination starts with definition #1. "An opening suit bid or response is considered natural if in a minor it shows three or more cards in that suit and in a major if it shows four or more cards in that suit." So if you want to open 1♣ on three small, that's natural, but if you want to bid a three-card major, because majors are more important or more preemptive or because you hold AKJ, that's artificial. Furthermore, in the General Convention Chart, an opening 1♣ or 1♦ need not be natural at all, but can be bid on a void.

There is unlikely to be a solution that will make everyone happy. I think severe system restriction is appropriate for pairs and individual events. Just takeout doubles and Blackwood would be fine with me. In team games, I want full disclosure at all times, with no attendant unauthorized information difficulties. This may require at-the-table computer access to pre-approved system descriptions. Software could also record system violations, thereby monitoring the correctness of the descriptions.

The need to prepare defenses is a more difficult problem. There should be a reasonable limit to how much work one needs to do to prepare for matches. Being expected to use other people's defenses and written aids is not satisfactory. Perhaps pairs should be restricted in the total complexity of their methods: for example, it might be legal to play the Multi 2♥, but not eight different weak multi openings.

DEFENSE TO MULTI 2♦

We conclude this chapter with more on a comprehensive defense to the Multi 2♦.

pass	normal, or takeout pattern, short in a major
dbl	balanced 12-15 or 19+
2♥/♠	natural, wide range
2NT	balanced, 16-18
3♣/♦	natural, wide range
3♥/♠	natural, 8 tricks
3NT	natural, based on long minor
4♣	minors
4♦	slammish major one-suiter

For the balanced-hand ranges, we don't worry much about stoppers. That can be bad positionally, but sometimes we gain when opening leader doesn't know his partner's suit. Adjust ranges upwards by 2 HCP

when partner is a passed hand. Play regular methods after the 2NT overcall. Over a fourth-hand 2♦, double shows diamonds.

After the Noncommittal Double

At his second turn, with no bid from partner, doubler subsides with the weak range. With the strong type, he bids naturally or doubles for takeout. Third hand will often bid a pass-or-correct 2♥.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	dbl	2♥	?

We now play

dbl	takeout (doubler jumps with the strong variety)
2♠	competitive
2NT/3♣/♦/♥	transfers (doubler takes the transfer with 12-15, otherwise bids more)

South can also pass and bid later:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	dbl	2♥	pass
2♠	pass	pass	?
2NT	minors		
dbl	takeout, limited by failure to act over 2♥		
3♣/♦	natural, but suggesting length in hearts, from failure to bid over 2♥		

If third hand passes or redoubles

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	dbl	pass/redbl	?

we play simply

2♥/♠	weak
2NT	for play opposite 12-15, to be raised by the strong type

After a pass of 2♦

With three-suit pattern, short in a major, we pass 2♦. Later, double at the two-or four-level is for takeout. At the three-level, double shows shortness in the other major, i.e. a penalty suggestion; with shortness in their suit, make the cheapest bid.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	pass	2♥	pass
pass	?		
	dbl	equivalent to doubling a weak 2♥, with true takeout pattern	
	2♠	natural, less than a direct overcall, could be four-card suit with short hearts	
	2NT	minors	
	3♣/♦	balancing (i.e. less than a direct overcall)	
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	pass	2♥	pass
2♠	?		
	dbl	equivalent to doubling a weak 2♠, with true takeout pattern	
	2NT	minors	
	3♣/♦	balancing	

The same structure is used after

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	pass	2♠	pass
pass	?		
	dbl	equivalent to doubling a weak 2♠, with true takeout pattern	
	2NT	minors	
	3♣/♦	balancing	

Other Sequences

After a direct overcall of 2♥ or 2♠, we assume for cuebidding purposes that opener's suit is the other major, i.e., that opener and overcaller are not bidding the same suit. Treat 2♦–2♥ like 1♠–2♥, including the use of Rubens Advances.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	2♥	pass	?
2♠		clubs	
2NT		natural	
3♣		diamonds	
3♦		strong raise to 3♥	
3♥		weak raise to 3♥	
3♠		natural, forcing	

After a 2♦ opening and a 2♠ overcall, there are no transfers, and new suits are forcing.

After a 4♦ overcall (showing a slammish major one-suiter):

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	4♦	pass	?
4♥		pass-or-correct	
4♠		slam suggestion opposite hearts	

Defense in Fourth Chair

Things are a little more awkward in fourth chair after 2♦—pass—2♥, not to mention after 2♦—pass—3♥ or worse. It is no longer possible to make the noncommittal double, since the opponents are now in a likely contract. This is one reason why it is important to be aggressive in the direct chair and to double with a straggly weak notrump. The noncommittal double disappears after the response to the multi.

This is one situation where the opponents are unlikely to preempt further, so it is reasonable to limit overcalls and double when strong, contrary to usual ColoursFirst procedure.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♦	pass	2♥	?
pass		includes spade-takeout hands up to about 16	
dbl		takeout double of hearts, or very strong	
2♠		natural	
2NT		16-19	
3 any		natural	

¹ It is also necessary to comply with regulations in some jurisdictions -Ed.

² In the original version of Astro, 2♣ shows hearts and a minor, 2♦ shows spades and a second suit.

3 In other words, it is legal to open 2♦, showing either hearts or spades, but it is illegal to open 2♦ showing either diamonds or spades.

A TOUR OF THE SYSTEMS WORLD

10

Observe how system into system runs,
What other planets circle other suns.

Alexander Pope, 'Essay on Man'

In 1995, astronomers confirmed the existence of a planet circling 51 Pegasus, a naked-eye star in the great constellation of the winged horse. Since that time, over a hundred suns have been found to have planets, thus providing a technical, if not a philosophical, answer to Pope's question.

In the more down-to-earth realm of contract bridge, discoveries and inventions take place every day. Some stem from truly fresh ideas; rather more are refinements or variations on familiar themes. The high-low signal was new once, in whist days, and called for a trump lead. In bridge it proved more useful to call for a lead or continuation of the suit in which the signal was given. Odd-even or upside-down signals are just variations. Suit preference is an extension of the idea to outside suits. The takeout double, or informative double, was new once, too. It was a revolutionary way to get into the auction on hands without a good trump suit. The negative double (Alvin Roth's idea that the double of an overcall be a way into the auction rather than a suggestion to end it) provoked a great deal of controversy when it was introduced. In retrospect, it looks like just a natural extension of the takeout double: the most economical, flexible way to show values.

Timeliness, marketing and good fortune, not just technical merit, contribute to the longevity of ideas. Bryan McCampbell invented the 4-3-2-1 point count; Milton Work promoted it, and Charles Goren made it the foundation of his system. The compromise between comprehensiveness and simplicity was just what the public wanted. Its critics bemoan the undervalued aces and overvalued jacks. Numerous refinements and replacements have been proposed. The 3-2-1 count, counting only aces, kings and queens, reflects their relative values more accurately, and more simply. Leaving jacks out is fine, since we have to make adjustments for intermediates, anyway. But the 4-3-2-1 count is just too firmly entrenched, documenting our bidding systems and guiding our thinking. Try bidding a few hands without it! And your opponents will not be interested in how many 3-2-1 points your notrump opening has, even if you tell them the conversion to HCP is just like miles to kilometers.

In my early bridge-playing days in Toronto, almost everybody played four-card majors. My country, forever caught between the sway of Britain and the United States, played Acol, but with strong notrumps. There wasn't much in the way of gadgetry: Stayman and Blackwood, Fourth Suit Forcing to game, maybe

Landy over one notrump. Our heroes, Murray and Kehela, Sheardown and Elliott, called it “Colonial Acol”. We played much the same and called it “Buller”. (Colonel Walter Buller led the English side against Culbertson in the first Anglo-American match in October 1930 at Almack’s. He was one of the unrepentant four-card majorites about whom it can truly be said, he called a spade a spade and made no bones about it.)

In playing four-card majors, we were just following Culbertson and Goren. Now, of course, Standard American bidding has gone over to five-card majors. The change was gradual. The Roth-Stone and Kaplan-Scheinwold systems were published in the 1950s, and although neither ever became dominant, their message about five-card majors affected the bridge-playing public. There always had been a continuum in the matter of major-suit lengths. Only a few would follow Adam Meredith and open 1♠ on four small.¹ Others, maybe because their partners raised their major opening more freely with three trumps, avoided four-card major openings without a very strong suit. Still others opened a minor when 4-4 in the majors, since choosing either one risked missing a fit in the other. And there were those who claimed to open four-card majors, just not when 4333, or 4-4 in the majors, or when there was a four-card minor.

I like to see the shift to five-card majors as a historical, unconscious acknowledgment of the bidding space principle: open the bidding lower and have more room. Restricting one of a major to suits of five or more cards made the forcing notrump possible, which led to the strong two-over-one. Evolution, the survival of the fittest, is a powerful refiner of bidding methods. Popular systems that evolve over decades will be good, if evaluated with allowances for the constraints they develop under. For Acol and Standard American, those constraints have been relative naturalness and simplicity.

Five-card majors is certainly simpler. Eddie Kantar once wrote an article for *The Bridge World* on what to open with 4-4 in the majors, and had plenty to say. When you play five-card majors, you don’t have to worry about any of that: the rules for choosing the suit to open are simple and automatic. You also don’t have to worry about when to raise on three trumps, and how to handle a 4-3 fit in the play.

In the Open division of the 2004 Olympiad, almost two-thirds of the pairs played natural five-card major methods, when those who open 1♣ on 4-4-3-2 are included in the count. The breakdown was as follows:

5-card majors, 1♣ 3+	41%
5-card majors, 1♣ 2+	23%
strong club	18%
multi club (Polish, etc.)	10%
4-card majors	4%
1♥ 4+, 1♠ 5+	3%

We call the strong 1♣ systems artificial and the strong 2♣ systems natural, which doesn’t seem fair. I suppose it’s a holdover from “strong two” days. From a sufficiently broad perspective, we could call all these systems “normal methods”. They all

- open hands of roughly 11 HCP upwards primarily with the bids between 1♣ and 2♣.
- pass hands of lesser high-card strength, unless preempting.
- use natural 1♥ and 1♠ openings, possibly using canapé principles.
- use a natural 1NT opening, with a range of around 3HCP.

- force artificially with a 1♣ or 2♣ opening on strong hands.

We are going to have a brief look at all these systems, and a few others, with an eye to the book's themes of use of bidding space and showing suits.

STANDARD AMERICAN

The new Standard American is based on five-card majors in first and second seat, strong notrumps around 15-17, and two-over-one game forcing or almost. It is the result of years of refinement by countless contributors. Of particular importance was the intense system work of the Dallas Aces, brought together by Ira Corn in February of 1968. Aces Scientific, later written up by Bobby Goldman, is structurally very much like what many experts play today. Lots of things have been added on: Smolen, Bart, Bergen raises, D.O.N.T., Roman Keycard Blackwood, etc. But if you played what Goldman-Eisenberg played in 1970, you wouldn't be doing badly.

Perhaps the new system should be called World Standard, or perhaps it is too diverse in its details to be called a system at all. Expert partnerships all have extensive private refinements. For pickup partnerships, there are standard flavors provided by bridge magazines, governing bodies and online clubs.

The idea of opening 1♣ on 4-4-3-2 used to be more associated with the afternoon duplicate than with expert practice, but it has become more reputable, particularly outside North America. It accords well with the bidding space principle, and having 1♦ promise four cards seems more ColoursFirst than having 1♣ promise three.

FOUR-CARD MAJORS WITH STRONG NOTRUMP

The methods of Culbertson and Goren are definitely in retreat on the high-level bridge stage. Proponents of four-card majors point to the advantages of generally being able to open in the best suit, which can help responder judge the fit in constructive auctions and compete and lead more effectively. The one of a major opening on a balanced minimum has a significant preemptive effect without suffering the disadvantages of the weak notrump, and the preemptive effect can be enhanced by raising aggressively with three-card support. The strong notrump lets one show the extra strength immediately and safely.

Within the framework of four-card majors and strong notrumps, there are a number of choices to make. Invoking author's privilege, I present my own preferences (when constrained to simple, natural methods):

- Open the longest suit, no worse than Qxxx if a major.
- With two four-card suits: 1♥ with hearts, 1♣ with the blacks, 1♦ with minors, 1♠ with spades and diamonds.
- With 4441, 1♥ with short clubs and otherwise under the singleton.
- 1♣ with 5-5 in the blacks.
- Fourth Suit Forcing to game, second-round jumps by responder invitational.

- Raise a major on xxx; a response of 1NT denies three-card support. This gets you to some bad 4-3s, but also some good ones, and makes it harder for the opponents to gauge when to balance.

WEAK NOTRUMP WITH FIVE-CARD MAJORS

Any system with this structure is likely to be called Kaplan-Sheinwold, a nod to the influence of a system published in the 1950s. Its proponents like getting the bad hands out of the way early with the preemptive 1NT. Other openings, particularly minor suits, will have extra strength in high cards or distribution. Some partnerships avoid the weak notrump when vulnerable or just when vulnerable versus not, but practical experience suggests that may not be essential; many prefer to play one way throughout.

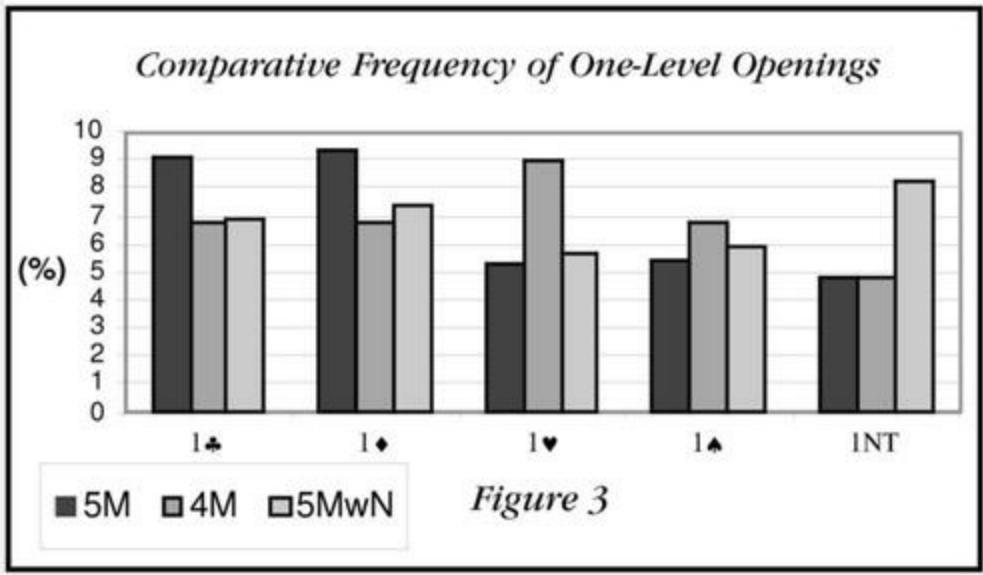
Let's look at the opening frequency profile for the above three systems, which I'll designate as 5M, 4M, and 5MwN. For the purpose of the exercise, accuracy is not required, and I will make a succession of rash approximations. All hands 12-20 HCP are opened with a one-bid. The notrump range for 5M and 4M is 15-17, and for 5MwN 12-14. Notrump patterns include all 4333s and 4432s and 5332s with a long minor. The strong notrump also includes 5332 with a five-card major. For the 5M systems, we'll open 1♣ with 3-3 in the minors and 1♦ with 4-4, and 1♠ with 5-5 in the black suits. We will ignore openings above 1NT, which are very dependent on style and, in any event, similar for the three systems. The figures needed are as follows, all from *Bridge Odds Complete* by Frost:

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Probability</i>	<i>HCP</i>	<i>Probability</i>
4333	10.54%	0-11	65.19%
4432	21.55%	12-14	20.63%
4441	2.99%	15-17	10.09%
5332	15.52%	18-20	3.21%
55xx	4.07%	21-37	0.88%

The probabilities of the various high-card point totals depend to some extent on the pattern, but the effect is small here and can be ignored. So the odds of a 15-17 notrump under our assumptions are

$$\begin{aligned}
 & (\%4333 + \%4432 + \%5332) \times \%15-17 \text{ HCP} \\
 & = (10.54\% + 21.55\% + 15.52\%) \times 10.09\% \\
 & = 4.80\%.
 \end{aligned}$$

I'll spare you the rest and direct your attention to Figure 3.



The graph shows, as one might expect, that the most common openings are one of a minor when playing five-card majors, one heart playing four-card majors (as described above), and one notrump when playing the weak notrump. This reflects the high relative frequency of minimum, balanced hands.

The five-card major, strong notrump method clearly shows the most conformity to the bidding space principle, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 (Chapters 3 and 4). We should therefore expect it to be better than the others at constructive, unobstructed bidding. On hands with a five-card or longer major, 5M should outperform 4M, a system in which the opening is less specific. On the balanced, minimum hands, 5M should outperform both 4M and 5MwN, since more information can be exchanged at the one-level. For example, suppose you hold

♠ K Q 6 2 ♥ J 4 ♦ A Q 7 2 ♣ Q 9 2

Playing 5M, you open 1♦ and over 1♥ from partner, rebid either 1♠ or 1NT, depending on how you play. If the rebid is 1NT, you probably have some second-round methods, and can establish a low-level game force and perhaps get opener's exact pattern. If you open this hand 1♠ and rebid 2NT over a 2♥ response, then you are a full level higher and partner may wonder whether you have five spades. If you open 1NT, you are obviously behind too.

Viewed from the perspective of antagonism, the systems compare very differently. The popular 5M is, well, soft. The frequent minor-suit openings allow easy entry for the opponents without providing really pertinent distributional information to the opening side. The system can be spruced up with weak jump raises and weak jump shifts and the like, but there is no getting around the tale told by the opening profile. Actually, the situation is even more extreme than indicated by the graph, which details only the opening bid. Responder's first action also tends to be lower in 5M, often at the one-level on a hand that might be a limit raise or a raise to 3NT in the other methods.

Human nature is such that each of us sees certain arguments first, and those we see first resonate with us the most strongly. Give a constructive-oriented player

♠ Q 8 6 3 2 ♥ 8 4 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ 8 7 6

and ask him what he does over partner's 1♦ opening. He may well say something like, "Well, if I bid and partner has a 2NT rebid, we'll likely go minus. Even if we can get to spades, it will be from the wrong side (we really should invert the major-suit responses). I pass."

Now give it to an obstructor, and he'll say, "Wait a minute! What's the vulnerability, who dealt, what system am I playing, what's the game?" As you start to reply, he goes on, "Probably 1♣ is best; we certainly don't want to make it easy for them. But 1♥ or 2♣ might be more resourceful if partner is the dealer, at favorable." He stops long enough for you to ask if he would ever consider passing, and that slows him down a bit. "Maybe if partner opened in fourth," he says, apparently not liking it.

ACOL

Acol, like other natural four-card major methods, is much less in evidence on the world stage than it was in its glorious past. It sometimes shows up in different guises; one convention card from the recent Olympiad reads "Acol, with 5-card majors, strong notrumps and weak twos."

I always preferred the structure that traditional Acol uses when vulnerable, i.e. strong notrumps. Weak notrumps and four-card majors are both admirably aggressive things, but it seems to be a case of diminishing returns to employ both. It is the balanced, minimum hands that benefit most from being opened in a preemptive one of a major; if one is allowed to open those hands 1NT, why not accept the advantages of playing five-card majors? I know Acol lets one open a hand like

♠ 4 2 ♥ A Q 10 6 ♦ 8 7 3 ♣ A K 5 2

with 1♥, avoiding the weak notrump with a suit-orientated hand. But that type of hand is rare.

Another objection I have to the weak notrump and four-card major combination is illustrated by

♠ A 4 3 ♥ K Q J 6 ♦ K 8 3 ♣ K J 2

Playing a strong notrump, I use it. Playing a weak notrump with five-card majors, I open 1♣ and show the strength by rebidding 1NT or raising hearts. But if I open 1♥, a 1NT response is awkward; neither a pass nor a raise is comfortable.

ONE-CLUB SYSTEMS

The lowest bid, 1♣, is the most likely to be seized for special purposes. Distributionally-oriented systems like Vienna and Roman open 1♣ on balanced hands that don't meet the requirements for a higher-level opening. Other systems distinguish by strength and open 1♣ on strong hands. In either case, 1♣ leaves the most room for sorting out disparate hand types. Think about how many systems have the word "club" in their names. Plenty! There are only a few "diamond" systems around (Leghorn, Magic) and almost no heart or spade systems.

Sometimes it's hard to bid clubs naturally. Perhaps you heard the one about the man who dealt himself

♠ 4 ♥ 7 ♦ 10 7 4 2 ♣ A K Q 7 4 3 2

It was too weak for 1♣ or 2♣, too strong for 3♣, 4♣ showed hearts, and 5♣ seemed a bit much. So he passed, hoping things would get better. Left-hand opponent also passed. Partner opened 1♠, and RHO passed. Now what? Now 2♣ was Drury, 3♣ fit-showing, 4♣ a splinter and 5♣ still seemed too much. In desperation, he bid 2♦ — and everyone passed!

The idea behind the strong club systems is to show strength immediately when you have it, staying low so that there is plenty of room to investigate the important game and slam contracts. Coincidentally, other bids gain definition by virtue of being limited by the failure to open 1♣.

Strong club systems have a long and rich history. The oldest is the Vanderbilt Club, introduced in the early days of contract bridge. Eugenio Chiaradia's Neapolitan Club was refined by Benito Garozzo and Pietro Forquet, leading to the Blue Club, which was a cornerstone of the Blue Team's dominance of world play from 1957 to 1982. Howard Schenken introduced his Schenken Club, a descendent of Vanderbilt, around 1960. C. C. Wei's Precision Club came to the world's attention as the system that the unheralded Taiwanese amateurs rode to a silver medal in the 1969 world championship, second only to the Blue Team. The original form of Precision is elegantly simple: strong club, weak notrump, five-card majors and natural 1♦ and 2♣ openings. It has spawned many variations, the most famous of which today is Meckstroth and Rodwell's highly complex RM Precision.

The opening line of *Better Bidding in 15 Minutes*, Howard Schenken's first description of his system, reads as follows: "In my opinion, American bidding is obsolete and outmoded, inaccurate and ineffective." He goes on to explain that the biggest problem with American bidding of the day was the wide range of the opening bid of one.

In Schenken, as in Blue Club and later in Precision, opening bids of 1♦, 1♥, 1♠ and 2♣ are natural bids but limited to 16 HCP (15 for Precision). This means that the sequences needed to show 17-20+ HCP in natural systems can be used to provide more descriptive sequences for the 11-16 HCP hands. It also allows responder to take some pragmatic, abrupt action without worrying about slam opposite an extra-strong opener. With a strong hand, opener can show the strength early and then relax. A sequence like 1♣—1♦; 1♠ shows the strength at a comfortable level. A hand like

♠ A J 7 5 3 2 ♥ A Q 7 ♦ A K 4 ♣ 8

can be difficult to show in standard methods, no matter what the response to the 1♠ opening. It is rather easy for strong clubbers. You might note that it is not quite as comfortable with diamonds and a secondary major, and some strong club players raise the ceiling on the 1♦ opening accordingly.

The obvious cost is the loss of 1♣ for hands in the minimum opening range where the primary suit is clubs, and club systems can be compared by how they cope. Most employ 2♣ as a natural, limited bid, but only Precision among the major club systems happily does that on a mediocre five-card suit. Blue Team and related systems use canapé, and sometimes encounter ambiguity about relative lengths when clubs are involved. Other systems sacrifice the naturalness of 1♦ and use it as a catchall for hands that don't fit the other bids.

The other main problem is that the hoped-for increase in space for developing strong hands may be stolen by enterprising opponents. They can go into "obstruction mode" over a strong club; as a practical

matter, they do not have to worry about bidding game on power, a run-of-the-mill 3NT on thirteen opposite thirteen.

Now the strong club side may be at a disadvantage, having shown strength rather than distribution. It is a matter of disagreement among experts how active one should be against a strong club. The dangers of penalties and tipping off declarer are obvious. Strong club advocates have been busy devising countermeasures to hyperactive obstruction — my suggestion is a healthy dose of ColoursFirst philosophy and transfer technology. What is clear, though, is that the strong club side will be at a disadvantage when the opponents can compete effectively.

The nebulous 1♦, a feature of many strong club systems, has pluses and minuses. Its chief advantage is a negative one — it avoids gratuitously giving away information to the enemy. Most club systems featuring a nebulous diamond use it for balanced hands out of range for 1NT — for example, opening 1NT on 14-16 and 1♦ on balanced hands with 11-13. Now, information about relative minor suit lengths, valuable to the opening leader and later for both defenders, is often not disclosed. The fact that opener is almost as likely to be long in clubs as diamonds disrupts the takeout double for those who like to have support for all unbid suits, minors included. In addition, the defending side has to be aware that their best contract may be in any denomination, including diamonds. Competitive diamond bids are needed as natural strain suggestions, so there is no ready cuebid. Modern methods become unglued without cuebids.

In an unobstructed auction, there is little disadvantage to the nebulous 1♦. On distributional hands, the opening may be part one of a two-step, where the rebid simultaneously confirms real diamonds and gives a second piece of distributional information. For example, 1♦ can be nebulous but a 2♣ rebid can show both minors. When the opponents compete over 1♦, though, the opening side is behind in naming suits to compete in or lead.

Some strong club systems use conventional strength-showing replies, such as these in Blue Club:

1♦	0-5
1♥	6+, fewer than three controls (A=2, K=1)
1♠	three controls
1NT	four controls, etc.

The other main approach is to have an artificial negative, usually 1♦, and distribution-showing positives. Classical Precision uses natural positives, suits being at least five cards long. While that is simple, elegant and symmetrical, a scheme that conforms more to the bidding space principle is that of Sabine Auken and Daniela von Arnim: four-card majors at the one-level, and long minors at the two-level.

I prefer distribution-showing responses for the usual ColoursFirst reasons: suits are almost always relevant and particularly so if the opponents intervene. Here is a deal from the U.S. trials for the 2003 Bermuda Bowl.

Dealer North ♠ A 7
 Neither vul. ♥ A Q J 8
 ♦ A 7
 ♣ A K 6 5 2

 ♠ J 10 6 5 3
 ♥ 2
 ♦ K Q J 10 2
 ♣ 9 3



♠ K 4 2
 ♥ 3
 ♦ 9 8 5 4
 ♣ Q 10 8 7 4

 ♠ Q 9 8
 ♥ K 10 9 7 6 5 4
 ♦ 6 3
 ♣ J

Open Room

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Cohen	Soloway	Berkowitz	Hamman
	1♣ ¹	pass	1♥ ²
2♦	3♣	5♦	pass
pass	dbl	all pass	

1. Strong.
2. 8-11 HCP, artificial.

The 2♦ overcall in preference to the five-card spade suit is interesting. It indicates a better lead, obviously. Another advantage of having a good suit is that if partner raises to a high level on a holding such as Axxxx, the defensive potential is small.

Hamman upgraded to 8-11 because of the long hearts, but the speed of the subsequent auction left him unable to show them, and the decision to defend 5♦ doubled was made without knowledge of the 7-4 fit. This is not a horrible result at double-dummy, since +800 is available (a small loss versus the +980 in 6♥), but it must have been disconcerting nonetheless.

All was well because in the Closed Room the auction began:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Meckstroth	Rosenberg	Rodwell	Zia
	1♣	pass	1♥
2♦	4NT		

Zia-Rosenberg eventually reached 7♥, down one. In spite of the result, I like Rosenberg's 1♣ opening. Before condemning it, think about some of the difficulties over a 2♣ start or slams you might miss by opening 2NT. The 1♥ response seems to have hit a seam in the partnership's methods — no way to show

a hand this strong without simply taking control, even after the overcall (2♦ again!) created the possibility of a cuebid.

MULTI CLUBS: POLISH, SWEDISH AND FROM ELSEWHERE

These are systems with a multi-way 1♣ opening that includes a balanced hand range, hands with long clubs and often strong hands of any distribution. Non-1♣ openings are mainstream, apart from whatever destructive two-bids are played. The 1♣ opening poses difficult problems for everybody at the table. Note how the strong variety of 1♣, if it is part of the system, is protected from “obstruction mode” by the high probability that the 1♣ opener’s hand is actually weak and balanced.

As was the case for the nebulous diamond, the 1♣ opening on balanced hands does not disclose relative minor-suit lengths, and if the auction remains unobstructed and heads off to 3NT, that is all to the good. If 1♣ is not used for all the strong hands, it can be part of a two-step in the same way the nebulous diamond was: rebids that are inconsistent with the balanced minimum simultaneously confirm real clubs.

GETTING MORE AGGRESSIVE

It is interesting to speculate whether we have been caught in a rut in bidding system design. After a time, all the “normal methods” systems start to look rather alike. Thoughtful obstructers have always looked for ways to open more often. A completely natural approach from the 1960s is EHAA (Every Hand An Adventure). The main line is to use sound one-bids (13+ HCP), 10-12 1NT, and four-suit weak two-bids, which are mandatory on all 6-12 HCP hands with at least a five-card suit, even five small.

This system looks too much fun to be legal. Obviously, it creates plenty of trouble for the opponents. The weak spot is constructive bidding over the weak two-bids, which can range from

♠ Q 6 4 3 2 ♥ Q 7 6 ♦ 9 8 3 ♣ Q 8

to

♠ A K 10 9 8 3 ♥ A J 9 4 2 ♦ 8 3 ♣ —

The strict adherence to high-card point totals to distinguish between one- and two-bids is somewhat affected, part of the culture. It could be dispensed with in favor of opening at the one-level on promising hands.

WEAK ONE-BID SYSTEMS

One framework that generated a lot of notoriety in the 1980s, although the idea is older, was a set of systems where the artificial force was “pass”. In a way, this is just a logical extension of the bidding space principle; pass is the lowest call and leaves the most room for investigation. A strong opening pass is given

special treatment by WBF regulation, but really one shouldn't be concerned about it: the pass is the weak point of most of these systems. It is the weak one-bids that pose the problem. Admittedly, this is a bit like saying no one has never been hurt falling, only landing.

The theoretical foundation for “weak one-bid” systems is that opening the bidding is advantageous and should be done more often. In an earlier chapter, we examined the constructive reasons for opening on 13+ HCP. If one is looking at being obstructive, one has to reflect on the fact that about 45% of the hands you will hold as dealer have 8-12 HCP. If you want your system to be truly aggressive, you have to open them.

Many of these systems use “pass” for constructive purposes and lump the really weak hands into one bid, euphemistically known as a “fertilizer bid”, or “fert”. It needs to be 1♦ or higher, so that the opponents can't play front-of-the-card against it, but if it is too high it gets to be too dangerous: either 1♦ or 1♥ looks about right. For strategies for countering a bothersome 1♠ opening and other insightful analysis of weak openings, have a look at Jeff Rubens' “Countering Obstructionist Methods” in the April, May and June 1986 issues of *The Bridge World*.

One such system is Carrotti, a descendant of Carrot Club, featuring a medium-range pass (12-16) and a fertilizer 1♦ (0-7). Not everyone enjoys playing against these systems. The WBF categorizes fertilizers and value-showing passes as HUM (highly unusual methods) and severely restricts the events in which it is legal to play them. The Swedish experts, who had been playing Carrotti with some success, found a way to adapt. In 1995, Lars Anderson and Hans Göthe created Magic Diamond out of Carrotti by switching the offending pass and 1♦ openings, and thereby making it non-HUM by WBF standards. The version described here is the recent Magic Diamond Light, or Magic D-Light, the work of Sven-Olov Flodqvist and Tomas Brenning. It comes in two flavors: red, and the more offensive brown, shown here.

1st/2nd position (3rd and 4th are quite different):

pass	0-11 balanced or 0-7 unbalanced
1♣	12-16 unbalanced or 15-17 balanced
1♦	17+ (18+ balanced)
1♥/♠	4+, unbalanced or 5332, longer minor possible, 8-11
1NT	12-14
2♣	6+♣, or 5+♣ & 4+♦, 8-11
2♦	6+♦, or 5+♦ & 4+♣, 8-11
2♥	5-5+ ♥ & ♣ or ♠ & ♦, 6-11
2♠	5-5+ ♠ & ♣ or ♥ & ♦, 6-11
2NT	5-5+ ♠ & ♥ or ♦ & ♣, 6-11

Transfers are used extensively, starting at 1NT in response to one of a major. The overall style is natural, using dialogue bidding rather than relay. The system is sophisticated and well thought out, aggressive but natural. As Flodqvist comments, “The point is not to make the opponents confused, but to challenge them by being aggressive.”

Having neither played the system nor played against it, any evaluation by me is conjecture. In principle, I don't care for artificial openings that show strength and not distribution, and this system has two of them. However, in return for that we get extremely frequent, narrowly defined and preemptive openings of one of a major, which should be very effective.

MOSCITO

Many “weak” systems employ relay structures extensively. That might seem an odd marriage of bluster and science, until you consider that in these systems, the weaker hand speaks first much more often than in standard systems. The combination of a weaker, limited descriptive opening with a strong responder is an ideal set-up for relay methods. A relay system with a forcing pass background is MOSCITO, which stands for MajorOrientedStrongClub, with a bite! It is popular in author Paul Marston’s native New Zealand, in his adopted Australia, and in the active online community. And amongst computers! Cybernetic world champion “Jack” is among those fluent in MOSCITO.

The opening table, first and second position, features 9-14 transfer openings and a strong club:

1♣	15+
1♦	9-14, 4+ hearts, unbalanced, possible canapé
1♥	9-14, 4+ spades, unbalanced, possible minor canapé, denies 4 hearts
1♠	9-14, 4+ diamonds, unbalanced, no major suit, possible club canapé
1NT	12-14 balanced
2♣	9-14, 6+ clubs

The cheapest response is always a relay. In the case of the major openings (1♦ and 1♥), that also serves to increase the odds of having the stronger, unrevealed hand be declarer. MOSCITO players are untroubled by the fact that this arrangement precludes playing opener’s major at the one-level, barring intervention. Usually responder can bid something — requirements for non-relay responses are relaxed, allowing tough, space-consuming actions. The openings can be passed, too. That may be a silly spot, but it is quite a risk for the opponents to let it play.

MOSCITO is currently undergoing development, particularly in regard to the responses to 1♣. The new scheme employs a game-forcing 1♦ on most positives and 1♠ on double negatives, with other low bids for distribution-showing semi-positives.

LITTLE MAJOR

I can’t resist including a brief discussion of the Little Major, even though it hasn’t been on the world stage for forty years or so. It was the creation of Terence Reese and played most famously in the 1965 world championships in Buenos Aires. At first it was a bit of a lark and a protest against the artificial methods of the Italians. It then developed into something more substantial. Readers looking for more information can try to find *Bridge For Tournament Players* by Reese and Dormer, which gives a short account of the system. Details about bidding in the later rounds are sketchy, and undoubtedly the system could benefit from some of the developments that have occurred in bidding theory over the last few decades. The opening bid schedule, though, was way ahead of its time:

1♣	4+♥
1♦	4+♠, or 16-19 balanced
1♥	artificial, 20+ or 0-5
1♠	12-16, at least 5-4 in minors
1NT	13-15
2♣/2♦	6+ suit, one-suiter, 12-16
2♥/2♠	Strong major-minor two-suiter
2NT	weak with a long minor, or strong with both minors
3♣/♦	natural, strong, e.g. ♠ 5 ♥ J 6 ♦ A Q 4 ♣ A K J 7 6 4 3

A 1♦ response to 1♣, or a 1♥ response to 1♦, is initially treated as negative but may prove to be strong.

The system puts majors first by opening them with four-card length in preference to a longer minor and by devoting the valuable 1♣ and 1♦ bids to them. This leads to effective minor-suit openings of good definition and preemption reminiscent of MOSCITO and Magic Diamond. The strong, artificial 1♥ is protected from carefree obstruction by the inclusion of random 0-5 hands. Add some modern techniques to the later bidding and you could have a first-class system.

¹ Indeed, Meredith was known for a fondness for *three*-card majors.

ANOTHER LOOK AT COLOURSFIRST

11

The purest and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most.

John Ruskin, ‘The Stones of Venice’

This chapter is about what happens when our desire to show suits runs up against other priorities. If you suggest to an expert that it is important to bid suits, the odds are that he will agree. Bridge experts tend to agree about the importance of bridge matters. It is when we talk about *relative* importance that we get disagreement.

Here are some common systemic reasons for not bidding suits:

- making a takeout double because one is too strong for a simple overcall.
- making a strong artificial opening.
- making a strength-describing reply to an artificial opening.
- bidding a forcing notrump because one is not strong enough for a two-over-one.
- passing because hand or suit is not good enough.
- making a cuebid response to an overcall because a change of suit would be non-forcing.
- preferring a raise or cuebid.
- passing because one is “too strong” to bid directly over a strong club.
- making a relay bid because a new suit would be non-forcing.

We can't always bid suits, but it is worthwhile to consider in all these situations how important it is for us to do so.

For a long while (and in some places still) it was normal to restrict a simple overcall to hands of less than a sound opening bid. With opening values, one started with a double. Overcalls were seen as largely obstructive measures, partly because reaching game was less likely against the sounder opening bids of the time. The requirements for an overcall had more to do with suit solidity, playing strength and safety against penalty doubles. Goren recommended rejecting any overcall that would pay out 500 opposite an anemic dummy if doubled. Today that looks like a recipe for being stolen blind.

Edgar Kaplan described the new style in the landmark *Competitive Bidding in Modern Bridge* (1965), whose effect is still strong today, especially in North America. Overcalls approximated opening bids in strength and takeout doubles promised three-card support for all unbid suits. Weak jump overcalls were used for hands where you wanted to bid, because of a long suit, but lacked the high-card values. My

preferred methods owe a great deal to Kaplan. Overcalls can be quite strong; the takeout double suggests support for all unbid suits, although that support can shrink to a doubleton when you are stronger than a 1NT overcall.

Some overcalls can be lighter than an opening bid. Factors suggesting action are, in order: spades, playing strength, being at one-level, good suit, being not vulnerable, opponents being vulnerable. A hand with nothing but AKJxx qualifies at the one-level at any vulnerability. Partner will expect more, vulnerable, but directing the lead is too important to pass up. A 5332 with a bad suit, on the other hand, may not qualify for a vulnerable one-level overcall even if it is an opening bid.

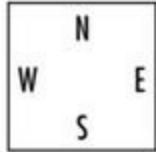
Moderate two-suiters are important, because their great offensive potential opposite a fit suggests the need for action, yet the very real danger opposite a misfit suggests caution. In line with ColoursFirst, all three two-suiters are given unambiguous representations. The two cheaper jump overcalls are given over to showing the suit bid and the suit above, and a cuebid covers the remaining pair:

1♣-2♣	♠&♦	1♦-2♦	♥&♣	1♥-2♥	♠&♦	1♠-2♠	♥&♣
2♦	♥&♦	2♥	♠&♥	2♠	♠&♣	3♣	♦&♣
2♥	♠&♥	2♠	♠&♣	3♣	♦&♣	3♦	♥&♦

The two-suit jump overcalls reduce the danger on misfits by not allowing train-the-guns. They are limited, while the cuebid two-suiters are unlimited. Other game and near-game hands unsuited to a takeout double can be covered by 2NT, which has been freed of its usual “Unusual” role. Some players would not accept this scheme because of the loss of two preemptive overcalls for each opening bid. Perhaps they could play the Comic Notrump Overcall. I was never a hyperactive jump-overcaller, and on most qualifying hands I am content to pass, or bid one less or one more.

For those unaccustomed or unsympathetic to the style, the most problematic issue is the wide range of the simple overcall. Some of our stronger overcalls have provoked hilarity. From the World Pairs Championship, Biarritz, 1982:

Dealer East
Neither vul
 ♠ 5 3 2
 ♥ Q 3 2
 ♦ 7 2
 ♣ 9 7 5 3 2



♠ K J 10 8
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ J 4
 ♣ K J 10 8 6

♠ A Q 7 4
 ♥ K 7
 ♦ A K Q 10 9 6 3
 ♣ —

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Rodrigue	Hughes	Priday	Litvack
		2♦ ¹	3♦ ²
pass	3NT	pass	4♦ ²
pass	4♥ ³	pass	4♠ ³
pass	5♣ ³	dbl	redbl ⁴
pass	5♠ ³	pass	7♦
all pass			

1. Multi.
2. Natural and unlimited.
3. Ace or King.
4. First-round control.

Yes, 7♠ would have been better, but 7♦ scored well. Here, the super-strong overcall led to a very comfortable auction. It doesn't always work this well, but over the years I have found fewer difficulties with wide-range overcalls than I expected. And it is hardly the case that very strong hands are easily managed by other methods.

The lower the overcall, the safer it is to be very strong. A 1♦ overcall leaves plenty of room for partner to make a strangled noise, and the opponents are unlikely to subside. A 2♥ overcall is much more of a problem, on both counts.

I like to make weak raises freely with two or three-card support.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	1♠	pass	?

♠ J 2 ♥ K 4 2 ♦ K 7 3 2 ♣ 9 7 5 2

I bid 2♠ here, with a cuebid raise (via Rubens Advances) available when stronger. It is different when the third hand bids, particularly a two-over-one. Now bidding is less preemptive, more dangerous and may give opener a convenient pass, so a raise shows more offensive orientation.

Against a prepared club, I think it's a good idea to double on balanced hands, regardless of major-suit doubletons. If we play a 4-2 fit at the one-level, it's not the end of the world. We can play some methods like

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	dbl	pass	?
1♦/1♥/1♠	natural, 0-9 (i.e. slightly higher maximum than standard)		
1NT	7-11, no promise of stoppers, may have 4-card major		
2♣ and up	transfers, promising either 5+ cards or a rebid		

The same scheme is reasonable over a nebulous diamond, but with 2♣ natural and the transfers starting at 2♦.

Modern expert practice is to overcall a four-card suit in preference to making a takeout double lacking major-suit support. The idea is more to avoid being stolen blind in this day of nine-point openings and yarborough responses than it is to show an offensive orientation. I found the following deal from the 2003 U.S. trials interesting.

<i>Dealer South</i>	♠ A J 9
<i>Neither vul.</i>	♥ K 5 4 2
	♦ 7 6 3 2
	♣ 7 2
♠ Q 10 7 6	♠ 8 5 4 3
♥ 6 3	♥ Q J 9 7
♦ K Q 10 9	♦ A J 8 5 4
♣ K Q J	♣ —
♠ K 2	
♥ A 10 8	
♦ —	
♣ A 10 9 8 6 5 4 3	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Welland	Landen	Fallenius	Pratap
Wolff	Garner	Morse	Weinstein
			1♣
1♦	1♥	4♦	5♣
all pass			

It is unusual nowadays to get identical auctions at different tables on almost any deal, let alone one with several difficult decisions. The gentle 4♦ raises, and allowing South to play 5♣, seem to be in tune with an

overall on a balanced hand with a four-card suit. In a way, they are correct: West must play carefully to hold his losses to 500 in 5♦. But a 5♦ bid by East, even though it catches partner with a four-card suit and KQJ opposite the void, would probably have led to a plus.

Strong 1♣ openings are definitely non-ColoursFirst beasts. Problems can arise when opener is unable or unwilling to show his suit. For one thing, it is very difficult to decide when to try to penalize the opponents at a low level when you don't know the extent of your own side's fit. Take this example from the U.S. 2003 Bermuda Bowl trials. Partner opens 1♣, strong; next hand bids 2♠, showing spades and a minor, and you hold

♠ K Q 10 5 4 ♥ J 8 7 2 ♦ 6 2 ♣ 9 4

You pass, and partner reopens with a takeout double. You pass, surely. Perhaps you think it will be a slaughter, or perhaps remembering some unfortunate incidents from the past, you merely hope for the best. The full deal turns out to be:

<i>Dealer North</i>	♠ J 9
<i>Both vul.</i>	♥ Q 9 5 4
	♦ A Q
	♣ 8 7 5 3 2
♠ K Q 10 5 4	♠ —
♥ J 8 7 2	♥ A K 10 6 3
♦ 6 2	♦ J 7 4 3
♣ 9 4	♣ A K J 6



♠ A 8 7 6 3 2
♥ —
♦ K 10 9 8 5
♣ Q 10

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Hampson	H. Weinstein	Greco	Garner
	pass	1♣ ¹	2♠ ²
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

1. 16+, forcing.
2. Spades and a minor.

Deep Finesse reports that at double dummy, a club or high trump lead is required to defeat 2♠. Hampson must have been relieved to record +200 after starting a diamond.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Fallenius	Wold	Welland	Jacobus
2♥	pass	1♥	1♠
	pass	4♥	all pass

At the other table, the natural one-heart opening led to a 4♥ contract that, although not cold, made comfortably on the lead of the ♠A.

Strong clubbers also have to cope with minimum hands with a club suit. Old-fashioned Precision takes the most ColoursFirst approach, unabashedly opening 2♣ on moderate suits. On the following deal from the 2003 Vanderbilt final, Paul Soloway was looking at the “Blue Club Nightmare Pattern”, 3-3-2-5:

♠ A 8 5 ♥ K 8 4 ♦ 7 2 ♣ K Q 8 6 4

This pattern has long been problematic for forcing-club practitioners who favor a fairly natural 1♦. Hamman and Soloway play their own methods, which have a Blue Club ancestry: 1♦ suggests longer diamonds, 2♣ longer or better clubs, and 1NT is strong. Classic Blue Club actually bundled 13-15 HCP 3-3-2-5s with 16-17 balanced to make a wide-range notrump. Soloway chose to pass, quite reasonable in view of the alternatives, but then the gremlins went to work: 2♣–dbl–4♣ back to you. If partner’s double promises club support, then bidding 5♣ or 6♣ appeals, particularly if not playing against people who regularly perpetrate this kind of preemption with fewer than nine spades. Unfortunately, doubles of 2♣ don’t guarantee that much in the way of clubs for most partnerships, and it is hard to fault Soloway’s choice of a “card-showing” double. This became the final contract, and he collected 500 when the full deal was:

<i>Dealer East</i>	♠ Q 9 7 2
<i>E-W vul.</i>	♥ A Q 9 7 2
	♦ 10 9 8
	♣ 5
♠ 6	♠ A 8 5
♥ J 10 6	♥ K 8 4
♦ A K Q 4 3	♦ 7 2
♣ A J 9 7	♣ K Q 8 6 4
	♠ K J 10 4 3
	♥ 5 3
	♦ J 6 5
	♣ 10 3 2

N
W E
S

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Hamman	Pavlicek	Soloway	Rautenberg
dbl	4♣	pass	2♠
		dbl	all pass

At the other table, East opened 1♣ and Kamil-Fleisher exhibited an old-fashioned appreciation of honor tricks and fit to collect 1390:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Kamil	Nickell	Fleisher	Freeman
		1♣	pass
2♦	pass	2NT	pass
3♣	pass	4♥ ¹	pass
5♣	pass	6♣	all pass

1. Roman Keycard Blackwood for clubs.

This book has been all about bidding, so if you want a break, try playing 6♣ on various leads.

Sometimes one is faced with a choice between showing a suit, and raising. Allan Graves made an effective decision to show a suit in the following deal from the 2002 Spingold final:

<i>Dealer East</i>	♠ 10 6 4
<i>N-S vul.</i>	♥ 4
	♦ A K 9 7 4 3
	♣ J 6 4
♠ 8 7 5	♠ K 3
♥ A 9 8 7 6 5	♥ K Q 3 2
♦ 6	♦ J 5 2
♣ 5 3 2	♣ K Q 10 8
	♠ A Q J 9 2
	♥ J 10
	♦ Q 10 8
	♣ A 9 7

N
W E
S

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Versace	Graves	Lauria	Maksymetz
		1♣	1♠
dbl	2♣ ¹	2♥	3♦
4♥	4♠	all pass	

1. Transfer advance, showing diamonds.

Showing diamonds unearthed the double fit and made for an easy decision to bid 4♠, which was worth 680 to North-South. There was risk in delaying the spade support; Graves might have had to make a unilateral decision over 4♥. This hand also illustrates the value of a treatment favored by some: fit-showing jumps with three trumps. That would enable South, here, to bid 4♠. One reason to play three-trump fit jumps is that many of the hands with 4+ trumps and a 5+ side suit can afford high-level action without any help from partner.

At the other table, the diamond fit was not found and North-South ended up with only +50 for their efforts:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Moss	Bocchi	Schifko	Duboin
		1♣	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	pass
3♥	3♠	4♥	all pass

Mainstream North American methods put stringent requirements on responding in a new suit at the two-level. Much of the burden of the weaker hands is heaped on 1NT, whether forcing or not. Based on use of bidding space principles, one could predict, if not aware of it already, that there would be problems in this area. Sometimes some fancy footwork is needed to find your fit:

WEST	EAST
♠ A J 7 3 2	♠ Q 4
♥ 7	♥ Q 8 3
♦ A K 8 4	♦ 7
♣ A J 8	♣ K 9 7 6 5 3 2
1♠	1NT ¹
2♦	2♠
3♣	5♣
all pass	

1. Forcing.

On these cards, 6♣ is a playable contract and might be reached with a fancy 4♥ or 4NT by responder. One of those should perhaps show a spade honor and the other a singleton. Arguing for caution is the fact that the pair at the other table might be going down in 4♠ or 3NT, so maybe it is better to content oneself with game.

If bidding competition moderators want to embarrass their forcing notrump competitors, they can always give them some version of the forcing notrump death hand: weak, short in opener's major and three or fewer in his potentially three-card minor. Something like

♠ 7 ♥ Q 9 7 4 ♦ Q 6 4 ♣ K 8 6 3 2

after a 1♠ opening and 2♦ rebid. If over opener's 2♣ rebid the competitors play 2♦ as a transfer, switch the minor suits and specify a 2♣ rebid: that's even more likely than 2♦ to be a three-card suit. Since this kind of hand is unfair and has become trite, we can move on to hands that afford the competitors at least some hope.

WEST	EAST
♠ A J 9 6 2	♠ —
♥ J	♥ Q 9 7 4 3
♦ A K 8 2	♦ Q 6
♣ Q 7 4	♣ K 9 8 6 3 2
1♠	1NT
2♦	?

Weinstein guessed to bid 2♥, while Ravenna passed; can you blame either? It's a tough hand for the system. Only something completely different, maybe a ColoursFirst transfer approach, is likely to do well here.

Some game-forcing two-over-one partnerships take some of the load off the forcing notrump by playing invitational jumps to three of a minor. Apart from the loss of the jump shift, which has been bemoaned earlier, it is worth remarking how much more flexible lower bids are. If you hold

♠ 9 ♥ 7 6 ♦ K 7 2 ♣ A Q J 8 6 4 3

you have an admirable hand for an invitational 3♣ over partner's 1♠ opening. But not all invitational club hands are like that. Some have Qx in partner's suit; others have four hearts, or less robust clubs. Such hands need room for development.

OVER A STRONG CLUB

There is a school of thought, advocated by Ron Klinger amongst others, that one should pass with a strong hand over a forcing club. The idea is to distinguish between weak hands where one wishes to obstruct early, and strong hands. In my view this is all wrong. One should be bidding shapely hands and passing balanced ones, not bidding weak hands and passing strong ones. Staying out of the auction just because you have an excess of high-card points lets the opponents have a free run at evaluating their assets, so that they will be much better placed to deal with you when you come in later, if you are able to at all. The following deal from the 2003 Bermuda Bowl final is an illustration of passing a good hand over 1♣, although it may have had more to do with the desire to defend 3NT.

Dealer West

E-W vul.

♠ J 6 5 4

♥ 5 4

♦ —

♣ J 10 9 7 5 4 2

♠ A 10 9 8 3

♥ Q J 7

♦ 9 6 5 4 2

♣ —



♠ K Q 2

♥ A K 9 6 2

♦ 10 7

♣ K Q 6

♠ 7

♥ 10 8 3

♦ A K Q J 8 3

♣ A 8 3

WEST*Rodwell*

pass

1♦²

3♣

4♣

NORTH*Fantoni*

pass

1♠

pass

all pass

EAST*Meckstroth*1♣¹

1NT

3NT

all pass

SOUTH*Nunes*

pass (!)

dbl

pass

1. Strong.

2. Weak.

Meckwell found a safe landing spot for +130. Nunes almost scored a great coup with his pass, but as the other auction demonstrated, the simple action was the one that worked:

WEST*Versace*

pass

pass

NORTH*Nickell*

pass

5♦

EAST*Lauria*

1♥

all pass

SOUTH*Freeman*

2♦

"When in doubt, bid your longest suit" was the late Edgar Kaplan's maxim. Mark Twain put it more generally: "when in doubt, tell the truth." Here Dick Freeman did both, and was rewarded with +400.

I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man's.

William Blake, 'Jerusalem'

In his autobiographical work, *A Mathematician's Apology*, G. H. Hardy wrote: "It is a melancholy experience for a professional mathematician to find himself writing about mathematics. The function of a mathematician is to do something, to prove new theorems, to add to mathematics, and not to talk about what he or other mathematicians have done. Statesmen despise publicists, painters despise art-critics, and physiologists, physicists or mathematicians have usually similar feelings: there is no scorn more profound, or on the whole more justifiable, than that of the men who make for the men who explain. Exposition, criticism, appreciation, is work for second-rate minds."

Unlike Dr. Hardy, I find I have profoundly enjoyed writing. The subject of this last chapter is a system structure that has become increasingly popular recently: five-card majors with 1♦ promising at least four. An overall view of the method will be followed by some discussion of its strengths and weaknesses. I will then present in some detail a set of methods over the 1♣ opening. The reader who wishes to actually play the methods will have plenty of work left to do: the purpose of the exercise is more to shed some light on how relay methods can coexist with dialogue methods in a space-efficient system.

First, the general principles. As suggested earlier, undiscussed actions will be treated as non-forcing if that is at all reasonable. Also, following Jeff Rubens' formulation, subsequent calls *refine* the meaning of previous calls, rather than *override*. For example, if you bid notrump over spades conventionally showing the minors, and then bid diamonds over partner's club takeout, that shows more diamonds and more strength, not more hearts and fewer clubs.

The minimum for an opening bid of one is (approximately) a good 12 HCP if 4333, a fair 12 if 4432, most any 12 with 4441 when the singleton is a spot-card, a good 11 if 5422, a good 10 if 5431 or 6322. Any hands under 12 HCP should have their fair share of intermediates, a decent rebid and 1½ honor tricks.

OPENING SCHEDULE

1♣	5+♣, or 4-4-1-4, or bal. 12-14/18-21 with no 5+ except ♣
1♦	5+♦, or 4441 with 4♦, or minimum xx45
1♥	5+♥
1♠	5+♠
1NT	15-17 HCP, balanced.
2♣	strong, artificial
2♦♥♠	weak two, or your choice
2NT	22-24 HCP

The first thing to say about this system is that it accords quite well with the bidding space principle. By maintaining something close to the traditional standard for opening, and by opening all the minimum balanced hands with 1♣, we assign plenty of bidding space to exploring the hands that belong to us. The higher one-level openings conform by being less frequent and more specific.

A 1♦ opening is authentic, a five-card or longer suit, or four in an unbalanced hand. Under these methods, the 1♦ opener is likely to welcome a raise or lead of his suit. The 1♣ opening will be assumed to be what it most often is, balanced, pending indication to the contrary. In contrast, the distributional information given by a minor opening in standard methods, three or more cards, is just enough to be of interest to defenders without significantly helping the opening side.

Five-card major openings give excellent distributional definition. The fact that they have such a wide strength range is of course a disadvantage, but I believe it is better to show distribution first than to have the kind of strength segmentation of strong club systems. I find the strong notrump a convenient way to show values beyond a minimum opening and safer than voluntary second-round action, which can be reserved for stronger hands.

There is a great deal of complexity in the developments after 1♣. The response with a heart suit is 1♦ and with a spade suit, 1♥. Majors are shown ahead of longer minors when holding less than game-going strength, and hearts are shown with 4-4 in the majors.

The response of 1♦ is also made on hands planning to relay — generally balanced hands with 17+ HCP. I find this sharing of bidding space essential. Relay methods require plenty of room, but so do regular hands that need to test for fit and level. The information given by opener to the presumed heart bidder will be of value to the relayer, who was planning to get the full pattern in any event. On the other hand, if opener is very strong, responder probably does not have the relay type, and it is no big problem if he does.

The challenge for the system designer planning this kind of space-sharing is to make the relay bids fit seamlessly into the structure without overly restricting the development of the dialogue sequences. In these methods, this is accomplished by making the potential relay bid an unlikely stopping place. For example, 1♠ by opener always shows an unbalanced hand and 1NT in response is a relay. This causes opener to further his description, which is fine if responder plans a full relay auction. If not, he often has transfers available, which allow for stopping or describing.

The use of 1♦ and 1♥ to show majors allows opener a rebid not available in natural methods: responder's suit at the one level. This bid is used to show an unbalanced hand with long clubs and fewer than three in partner's suit, which in turn frees up some higher rebids for specific purposes. The rebid of 2♣, for example, shows a balanced 18-21, with transfer rebids by responder that may lead to relays by opener.

The schedules that follow are admittedly somewhat compact, and working out the details is left to any reader who would like to give the methods a try. When a hand qualifies for more than one bid, the more

specific or first-described bid is made.

RESPONSES TO 1♣

pass	0-4 HCP, without a long major
1♦	4+♥ unlimited or 17+ bal.
1♥	4+♠ unlimited
1♠	(5+♣ unlimited) or (5-16 <4♠ <4♥ <6♦)
1NT	5+♦ GF (= game forcing) or 6+♦ 8+
2♣	6+♦, 4-7 or 13+ semi-solid
2♦	6+♥, 4-7 or 13+ semi-solid
2♥	6+♠, 4-7 or 13+ semi-solid
2♠	AKQxxxx+ any suit
2NT	6+♣, 4-7 or 13+ semi-solid
3 any	preemptive

OPENER'S REBID AFTER 1♣–1♦

1♥	5+♣ unbal. <4♠ <3♥
1♠	4+♠ 5+♣
1NT	12-14, <4♥, bal.
2♣	18-21, <4♥, bal.
2♦	3♥ 5+♣ 15+
2♥	3+♥, 12-14
2♠	4+♠, GF
2NT	4♥ 15+
3♣&up	very strong club one-suiters

RESPONDER'S REBID AFTER 1♣–1♦; 1♥

Opener has shown long clubs, with no heart support. 1♣ is two-way, either weak and willing to play clubs, or about 17+, including the relay hands.

1♠	5-8 or 17+
1NT	3-1-4-5 or 2-2-4-5, 15-18
2♣	6+♣ 11-16
2♦	reverse F1R (=forcing one round)
2♥	x2x6+, 17-18
2♠&up	strong club one-suiters

With in-between hands, say 9-16, responder uses the five transfers starting at 1NT. Opener takes the transfer if content with it as a contract; responder's third bid is then game forcing.

1NT	9+, forcing to game or 2♣
2♣	11-14
2♦	♦ length or values 15+
2♥	2♥ 15+
2♠	♠ values 15+
2♣	4+♦
2♦	neutral
2♥	2♥, extra
other	natural
2♦	6+♥ or strong 5, F1R
2♥	4+♠ F1R
2♠	bal. GF
2NT	bal. 11-12 with positional stoppers
3NT	bal. 13-16 with positional stoppers
3♣&up	forcing club raises

OPENER'S REBID AFTER 1♣–1♥

1♠	5+♣ <3♠ unbal.
1NT	bal. or 1-4-3-5 or 2-4-2-5, 12-14
2♣	bal. <4♠, 18-21
2♦	3xx5+ 15+
2♥	reverse NF
2♠	3+♠ 12-14
2NT	4♠ 15+
3♣&up	very strong club one-suiters

RESPONDER'S REBID AFTER 1♣–1♥; 1♠

Opener has shown long clubs, with no spade support. The decreased space, compared with 1♣–1♦; 1♥, is cause for a slight change in structure. 1NT is weak or strong. 2♣ is used on constructive hands with no strong distributional message; opener will pass only with 6+ clubs.

1NT	weak or 17+
2♣	11-16
2♦	reverse NF
2♥	reverse NF
2♠	2♠, 17-18
2NT&up	strong
2♣	constructive, 8-12, could be short
2♦	4+♥ F1R
2♥	6+♠ or strong 5, F1R
2♠	4+♦; responder's 3♦ NF (likely canapé)
2NT	bal. 13-16
3♣	natural 13-16

RESPONDER'S REBID AFTER 1♣–1♦; 1♠

The structure is similar to 1♣–1♥–1♠. The weak/strong 1NT also includes invitational spade hands.

1NT	weak or 17+ or 4♠ inv.
2♣	constructive, 8-12, could be short
2♦	6+♥ F1R
2♥	4♠, 6-9 or GF
2♠	4+♦; responder's 3♦ NF (likely canapé)
2NT	bal. 13-16
3♣	natural 13-16

When the 1♦ responder shows the relay type, usually on the third round, opener completes his pattern. If the relays continue, he shows ace parity and high cards as described in Chapter 4. Sometimes responder will face a choice. With a strong 3-3-2-5, for example, he can either relay, or start with 1♠. It is likely that opener will have the weak notrump, and there are plenty of sequences to show a strong hand with clubs. Responder has to visualize how the bidding may go and which approach is likely to work better. The relay uncovers pattern first and then aces and kings. That may suit a hand with queens and jacks, while a control-rich hand may be better served by describing.

Opener's rebid of 2♣ after a major response shows a balanced 18-21 without four-card support. While it would simplify things to play continuations by responder as game-forcing, I have elected instead to provide ways of stopping. Two-level continuations are transfers, which opener accepts if willing to play there. When responder shows a balanced hand, both players show suits. When responder shows an unbalanced hand, opener signs off or relays, or raises or gives preference to start a dialogue.

1♣-1♦; 2♣ and now

2♦	5+♥
2♥	44xx
2♠	3+♠ 18-19
2NT	23xx 18-19
3♣	<4♠, 20-21
3♦	4♠, 20-21
2♠	balanced or 1-4-4-4
2NT	18-19
3♣&up	20-21, GF
2NT	5+♣
3♣&up	5+♦

1♣-1♥; 2♣ and now

2♦	4+♥
2♥	5+♠
2♠	balanced or 4-1-4-4
2NT	5+♣
3♣&up	5+♦

DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1♣—1♠

One spade is bid with clubs or on hands with no major and fewer than six diamonds. The club hands may have a major when of game-going strength. Opener rebids naturally. With 4-4-1-4 hands, the rebid is 1NT when minimum, 2♣ when medium, and 2♥ when game-going.

1♦-1♠ and now

1NT 12-14 bal. or 4-4-1-4

2♣ 5+♣ 4+♦ GF, or 5-4+ minors weak or inv.

2♦ 3+♦, neutral

2♥ 3♥ F1R

2♠ 3♠ F1R

2♥ 4♥ 2♦

2♠ likely 4-3-2-4

2♦ 4♦ 5+♣ GF

2♥ 4♣ 5+♣ GF

2♠ 5332 ♣ slam try

2NT 6+♣ slam try or to play 3♣

2♣ (5+♣) or (4-4-1-4, 15-17). NF

2♦ 5♦ 6-8

2♥/♠ NF

2♥/♠ concentration, F1R

2♦/♥/♠ F1R

2NT 18-21 GF; approx same methods as 1♦-1♠; 1NT

3♣ inv.

3♦/♥/♠ auto-splinter GF

3NT strong, balanced, long clubs

RESPONDING WITH DIAMONDS

With 6+♦, bid 2♣ with 4-7 or 13+ with a semi-solid suit. 1NT shows either 6+♦ 8+, or 5+♦ GF.

1♣-1NT and now

2♣	F1R, neutral
2♦	6+♦ 8-12 NF
2♥	4♥ 5+♦ GF
2♠	4♠ 5+♦ GF
2♦	3+♦ GF
2♥/♠	reverse GF

Two examples, one small, one big:

WEST

♠ K 7 2
♥ 8
♦ K J 7
♣ A J 8 4 3 2

1♣¹
1♥³
2♣⁵

EAST

♠ A 5 3
♥ A Q 7 4 3
♦ 6 3 2
♣ 7 5

1♦²
1NT⁴
pass

1. Clubs or balanced.
2. Hearts or balanced 17+.
3. 5+♣, <3♥, <4♠.
4. Forcing, constructive, club suggestion.
5. Nothing extra.

WEST

♠ A K J 7
♥ 8
♦ A 9 2
♣ K Q 7 4 2

EAST

♠ Q 4 2
♥ A Q 7 3
♦ K J 5
♣ A J 5

1♣

1♦

1♠

1NT¹2♦²2♥³2♠⁴2NT⁵3♣⁶3♦⁷4♦⁸4♥⁹4♠¹⁰4NT¹¹5♦¹²

7♣

1. Forcing, weak or strong.
2. 3+♦, extra values, 4-1-3-5/4-0-4-5/4-0-3-6.
3. Game-forcing relay, asks pattern.
4. 4-1-3-5 (ordered by probability).
5. Asks ace parity.
6. Even number of aces.
7. Asks for kings in three long suits, with zoom to queens.
8. (♦K or ♣K♠K), ♣Q, no ♠Q.
9. What about ♦Q, ♥K, ♣J?
10. None or all three.
11. What about ♠J, ♦J, ♥Q?
12. ♠J or ♦J♥Q.

East can bid the grand slam, planning a dummy reversal, with the diamond finesse or a squeeze in reserve if clubs are 4-1.

That concludes the presentation of the 1♣ methods. I found it interesting that so much space was created by the transfer responses. It was almost an embarrassment of riches to assign meanings to all the sequences. I was also pleased with how the relay methods fit in.

The system as a whole, of course, is open to the criticism of not being aggressive. Traditional opening standards with five-card majors and strong notrumps is as unaggressive as you can get. The system could be adjusted to open more hands, the simplest way being to lower all the balanced-hand ranges a couple of points. Or, one could play (at some vulnerabilities and perhaps just as dealer) a 10-12 1NT. Then the 1NT rebid could be 13-15 and the 2♣ rebid 16-19.

Another alternative (more work) would be to play four-card majors, perhaps in first and third. The 1♣ opening is now natural, 3+ or 4+ according to taste. The same 1♣ methods would work; you just wouldn't get to use them as often. For responses to one of a major, my suggestion would be: 1NT non-forcing denying three-card support, single raise on any three trumps, weak jump raises, and transfer two-over-ones with coded rebids showing degree of support (as suggested in Chapter 6). All things are possible — it just depends, as always, on how much work you are prepared to do and how complex a system you want to build.

AFTERWORD

The jury is still out on what the best overall system strategy is. No one knows if it is natural, or based on a strong club, or something yet undiscovered. The weak opening school has sound arguments, and some of these systems, where allowed, are likely to be effective. But perhaps one should take a long-term point of view. Do you want to try to play methods that will be good twenty years from now? Players are getting more familiar with obstructive devices, and getting better at countering them. The dangers of being overly revealing, conceding penalties, and not having enough bidding space for constructive purposes are drawbacks that will endure.

There is no ultimate bidding system for everyone; a system will be effective only to the extent that it complements the abilities of the players. For any given partnership, there may be something like ultimate methods. They will be a compromise between accuracy and antagonism, because these aims compete for bidding resources. They will be elegant yet comprehensive, because bridge at the top demands that every situation be accounted for. Given an appropriate amount of practice, the right methods will be easy to use, and forgiving, because accidents are expensive and the gains from superior methods sporadic.

If you read this book looking for the right methods, I hope at least some part of it has been helpful. If your motivation for reading was the same as mine for writing — love of the game — I sincerely hope that love has been furthered, or at least not dampened! I find the exploration of the limits of what can be achieved in partnership bidding a fascinating subject, one that will absorb the best efforts of lovers of the game for years to come.

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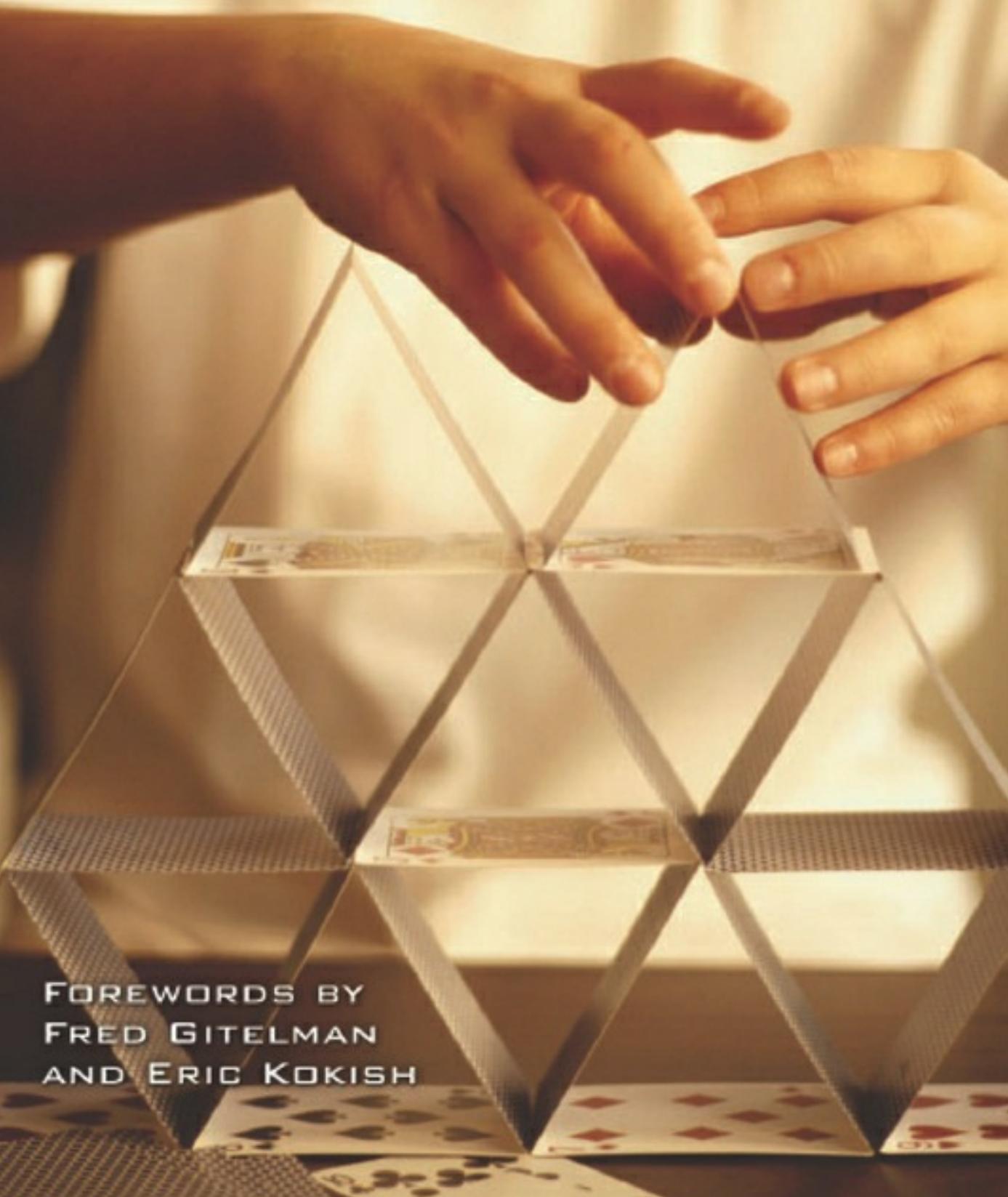
ROY HUGHES is a Canadian bridge expert who has played in a number of World Championships. His background in mathematics and linguistics has led him to think a great deal about the theory and structure of effective bidding systems. Roy is also an accomplished musician, a talent he shares with his wife, Erika.



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