
Bridge Bidding

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- Web pages are available at:

<https://pfdubois.github.io/BridgeBidding/index.html>

- A PDF is available at:

<https://pfdubois.github.io/BridgeBidding/BridgeBidding.pdf>

The PDF contains electronic links and an expanded table of contents. It is printed two-sided with margins appropriate for binding.

- A file suitable for most e-book readers is available at:

<https://pfdubois.github.io/BridgeBidding/BridgeBidding.epub>

Note: If your specific e-book reader does not accept epub format, you can convert an epub file to the needed format using the free program Calibre (<https://calibre-ebook.com>).

- The website in HTML can be downloaded for offline use at:

<https://pfdubois.github.io/BridgeBidding/BridgeBidding.zip>

- A collection containing each chapter as a plain text file, for easy sharing with partners, can be downloaded at:

<https://pfdubois.github.io/BridgeBidding/BridgeBiddingChapters.zip>

- The sources for building these items is in a public repository BridgeBidding, at:

<https://github.com/pfdubois>

The file buildnotes.txt explains the necessary environment, using Sphinx, Python, and LaTeX.

PRELIMINARIES

How I Came To Write This Book

As I retired in 2005, I began playing bridge online. The players were no longer using the Goren system of bidding that I had read about as a child. Although I had played a small amount of party bridge as an adult I had avoided bridge after seeing the cream of my class of mathematicians at U.C. Berkeley flunk out when they played bridge at the Student Union all day and night. So then, about to retire, I found myself with only a bare-bones document on OKBridge to explain this mysterious “Standard American Yellow Card” (SAYC) and the more advanced extension of it, “Two Over One Game Force”, not to mention the seemingly endless collection of conventions, bids that did not mean what they appeared to mean.

I set out to remedy the situation for myself. I soon realized others were in the same boat, especially people in other countries for whom bridge books were expensive. So I made it my goal to provide an Open Source book that helps a bridge player get from intermediate to advanced. I have constantly revised my set of explanations as my own understanding has grown.

In 2024 I was fortunate to place in the top 10 in the world in the Realbridge.online bidding contest. I wish my cardplay and defense would keep up!

The Bidding Rules Have Two Branches

The first part of this book presents the Two Over One Game Force (2/1) system that is popular in North America. The more basic Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC) is subsumed in that system. Here is what I mean.

Let’s suppose I deal and I open a heart. The next person passes and you, my partner, bid two diamonds. You have made a two-level bid over my higher-ranked suit. In the 2/1 system, that bid promises an opening hand, which means that together we have enough points for game. Hence we are in a “game-forcing” auction, meaning that neither of us can pass short of 3N or a four-level bid.

By contrast, suppose you deal and pass, and the next opponent passes. I bid a heart, and you reply two diamonds. You already passed, so you cannot have an opening hand, and so your bid cannot “force to game”. Obviously, whatever our bidding rules are going to be in this situation, they have to be different now. As it happens, the rules we will use are the older SAYC set of rules that historically preceded the adoption of 2/1. We also need to use those rules when the opponent to the left of the opener makes a bid before the responder can speak.

You will still find people playing SAYC. The predecessor to that was “Goren”, the system popularized by Charles Goren and that I learned as a child 70 years ago. The name SAYC originated in a convention card the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) created for an event in which everyone was to play the same convention card. Apparently the sample cards were yellow in color. Few people play SAYC as it was written. In cases where the standard is sometimes or often ignored, I’ll point that out.

How to Use This Book

You can use this book for initial learning, or as a reference. For that reason it has an index. It frustrates me no end that most bridge books do not. There is also a glossary of bridge terms. In electronic manifestations of this book, there are many operable links in the text. What this book lacks is the kind of things that are in good books written by professionals: extensive examples, and quizzes. I list some of my favorite sources in *Resources* (page 163).

Bridge has three big topics: bidding, declarer play, and defense. An expert friend who has read my notes commented that the defensive part of your notes ought to be as big as the bidding section. Indeed, your side is on defense half of the time. Few of us measure up – for some reason, learning another convention that comes up twice a year is more compelling than the basics of carding that happens on every hand.

While I want to present the major conventions so you will know what your opponents are up to, do not take this as

advice to master them, rather than spending equal time on the other two-thirds of bridge.

Here's a guide to what follows. First we cover 2/1's key bids, competitive bidding, and basic slam bidding. The 2/1 system really has two parts: the two-over-one and 1N-forcing bids and their followups; and this set of expected conventions:

- *Reverse Drury* (page 49),
- *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 43),
- *New Minor Forcing* (page 44),
- *Inverted Minors* (page 42), and
- *Roman Keycard Blackwood* (page 93).

There is no real connection between the 2/1 bids and this set of conventions except that most players of 2/1 also play those conventions. As you are learning you'll need to tell potential partners which of these conventions you haven't mastered yet. Fourth Suit Forcing and New Minor Forcing are so close in spirit that you should learn them at the same time. Roman Keycard Blackwood is likely to be high on the want list from your partner.

Warning

Do not agree to play a convention unless you have a solid knowledge of it, including not just the initial bids but the followups, including what to do if the opponents interfere. Everyone now and then fails to recognize that a bid is conventional, both when they make it and when partner makes it, but each such error cancels out a year's worth of benefits from playing it.

I believe that new players should learn 2/1 from the beginning, adding in the conventions just mentioned ASAP. You have to learn the SAYC meanings as well, since they apply when opener is a passed hand or there is interference. That's the approach we're taking here.

There are many aspects of bidding, including the vital areas of competing for part scores and making game tries, that are not explicitly in these systems at all.

Until we get to the Advanced chapters, I will not present many alternative ways of doing things. I didn't like, when I was learning, books that said I could do this or that, when I had no basis in experience to make an informed choice.

Casual Partners

Even a person with the most dedicated partner plays with someone else once in a while; this is especially true online. Therefore, you have to learn two things: your system, and the system you can count on a stranger to know. For casual face-to-face play, an intermediate pair who agrees on SAYC or 2/1 still needs to fill in some details as they fill out the card.

I like to be in a position to say, "Let's play your card"; armed with this book, you'll know what most of their stuff means already. My philosophy is that this way, at most one person is confused: me.

Many online sites have a definition somewhere of one or more systems that you can expect people to use there – but frankly not many people bother to read them.

If you are learning to play using robots online, be sure to check what the robot thinks bids mean. None of the various robots play vanilla systems.

Contributing

I encourage others to help me build a community resource by furnishing corrections and additions. The source for the book is written in "reStructuredText" and uses a system called "Sphinx" to render the book into web pages, e-books and PDF files.

Sphinx is the standard system used to document computer programs written in the popular Python computer language, so it is heavily used, is free, and has the advantage that the source is a simple, readable text file with a very natural markup system.

Send corrections by indicating section and nearby content, rather than by page number, as the latter depends on the rendering device, unless using the PDF. Since the book is revised fairly often, the only "versioning" I am doing is the date, so please include that date (visible near the top of the opening page in the web version) with your corrections.

You can contribute additions such as examples and quizzes for chapters by sending a plain text file. Extra points for using reStructuredText markup. Use Bridge Books in the subject and mail to me at pdfdubois@gmail.com.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my long-time teacher, Mike Moss, who taught me almost everything I know. Lately I have greatly profited by taking lessons from Marc Smith. I have also learned from expert players including Marty Bergen, Rob Barrington, Gavin Wolpert, Howard Schutzman, Oliver Clarke, Alex Martelli, and Jim and Pat Leary; and received encouragement from my fellow learners and partners, especially Douglas Schmickrath, David Silberman, Julia Beatty, Ally Whiteneck, and John Engstrom.

I am definitely a #Gavinista. Gavin's set of video lessons at wolpertbridge.com covers everything; if you learn better from people than from books, this might be the best path for you.

About The Author

I am a retired mathematician and computational scientist. I founded the first successful system for computational steering in 1984, which has become the main way scientific computation is done now. My professional biography is available, along with this book, at <https://pfdubois.com>.

NOTATION AND NOMENCLATURE

In the beginning there was a Dealer. The Dealer gets the first chance to *call*, and sits in the first chair. When in turn each person makes a call, the first one to make a call other than Pass is called the opener. Technically, a call other than a Pass is a *bid*, but we confess sometimes we give a list of possible bids and one of them is Pass.

LHO means “left hand opponent”, that is, the person bidding and playing after the opener. *LHO*’s partner is *RHO*, the “right hand opponent”. The partner of the opening bidder is called the *responder*. If the opener’s bid is overcalled, that bidder is the “overcaller” or *intervenor*, and his partner is the *advancer*.

The terms “first seat” through “fourth seat” refer to position with respect to the Dealer. Thus “opening in third seat” means opening the bidding after two preceding passes.

In writing bids, we write a level number from 1 to 7, followed by either a suit symbol or:

- M meaning a major, either hearts or spades
- m meaning a minor, either diamonds or clubs
- W meaning the “other” major after one has been mentioned
- w meaning the “other” minor after one has been mentioned

It might help to remember the W and w if you think of these letters upside down.

Bids by a partnership without interference are separated by spaces or a dash, as in 1N - 2♥ - 2♠ or just 1N 2♥ 2♠. If a bid is alertable, it is followed by an exclamation point and a suggested explanation, as in

1N - 3♥!(both majors, game force)

where the suggested alert is either in parentheses, or immediately follows, or has just been explained. When opponents intervene, their bids are shown in parentheses, as in

1♦ (2♥) 2♠ - 4♠

which shows a 2♥ overcall of an opening 1♦, followed by a bid of 2♠ by the responder, and the opener going to game with 4♠.

The adjectives “weak”, “competitive”, “invitational” (abbreviated *inv*), “game-forcing” (abbreviated *gf*), and “slam interest” are descriptions of hand strength. We use these descriptions often rather than point counts so that they make sense in varied contexts. We say “Responder is competitive” as a shorthand for, “Responder’s hand has competitive strength”, i.e., good enough to cause trouble but not good enough to invite game.

When we get to discussing competitive and invitational hands, the numbers 10 and 12 are very important. When we say “bid 2♥ with 6-10 points” and in the next sentence say “bid 3♥ with 10-12”, what we mean is in the first case a “bad” 10 and in the second an ordinary 10. A similar apparent overlap at 12 happens too. We’ll talk about upgrading and downgrading hands in *Hand Evaluation* (page 9). “Bad” means the hand has more flaws than usual.

In showing hand shapes, hyphens (or mere conjunction) show shapes without assuming precise suit order, as in 4-3-3-3 or 4333 meaning a flat hand, the four cards being in an arbitrary suit. Equal signs show an exact spades = hearts = diamonds = clubs count, as in 4=4=4=1, showing a singleton club. Parenthesis show an exact order outside them and an arbitrary order within, such as (45)22 meaning 4=5=2=2 or 5=4=2=2.

A *good suit* is a 5(or more) card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5 (not including QJT). And, by the way, we’ll usually use a “T” like that rather than “10” when we mean a card whose rank is 10.

Some other language issues:

- We will say “four spades” or “4(or more) spades” to mean this, and “exactly four spades” when we mean that.
- When we say someone is 5-4 in two suits, we mean either five of the first and four or five of the other, or vice-versa, unless we are explicit about which one is

the longer. It being rare to treat a 6-4 hand the same way you would treat a 5-4 hand, when we say 5-4 we do not mean longer than 5.

- When we say something like “5-4 or better” we mean not only 5-4 but 5-5, 6-5 etc.
- When we speak of a *control bid* we refer to a bid of a side suit to show features in that suit that prevent fast losers. These bids used to be called *cue bids* but the term is easily confused with artificial bids in a suit an opponent has already bid, which are also called cue bids, so we use the modern term.

Control bids are explained in the chapter on *Slam Bidding* (page 93).

- “Controls” as a noun usually refers to Aces and Kings. When a number of controls is referred to, we are counting Aces as two and Kings as one, so that “a hand with four controls” would include hands with two Aces, or an Ace and two Kings.

HAND EVALUATION

I know, you want to get on with the bidding. But wait! Bidding is a little language for exchanging information with your partner about your hand: its strength, its shape, its stoppers in other suits. You can't tell your partner anything without first knowing what you want to say.

Learning this is the work of a lifetime. Further, this judgment must change with every step of the auction; our ♠KJ75 becomes decidedly less valuable when the opponent to our left bids spades. The same holding became decidedly more valuable when partner bids or supports spades.

Since we have to have some estimate of strength to even begin to play bridge, we must adopt simple methods that beginners can learn and then refine our methods as we progress.

Our First Estimate

The basic "high card points" (*HCP*) of a hand is found by adding up points for each Ace (4), King (3), Queen (2), and Jack (1). This means a deck has 40 points, and an average hand is 10 points.

The number of points in a hand with adjustments for suit lengths or other factors is called its *points*. Thus if we say a hand has 10 points, that total may include some adjustments such as adding points for length or deductions for doubleton honors; but if we say a hand has 10 HCP then we mean that many points attributable to honor cards.

If counting HCP is all you do, it isn't that bad for most hands. We will now describe a number of adjustments that you should make, but on a lot of hands the adjustments cancel each other out and the basic HCP count is a pretty good evaluation of the hand. If you use the "Rule of 20" that we will describe shortly and the basic count, you'll get most hands right.

We need to correct for badly placed honors. Subtract one point from stiff Kings or "bad doubletons" (a doubleton which has a Queen or Jack but not the Ace) such as Qx, KJ, and KQ. If partner bids the suit, remove this correction.

Subtract one for each singleton K, Q, or J. Subtract one for no Aces, and add one for three or four.

If HCP is all we do, then we are claiming that these hands all have the same value, 13 HCP:

- ♠AQ7 ♥K54 ♦K32 ♣J432
- ♠AQT ♥KT9 ♦KT9 ♣JT98
- ♠AKQJT987 ♥- ♦KT987 ♣-
- ♠A32 ♥K54 ♦KQJ ♣5432
- ♠QJ ♥QJ ♦QJ2 ♣KJ7654

Clearly we need to account for distribution, intermediate cards such as 10's and 9's, and the way our honors are grouped together or scattered. The third hand will take eight tricks in spades for sure; the last one might well take very few tricks.

Add points for length: add one point for every card in a suit in excess of four. Subtract one point for a *flat* (4-3-3-3) hand.

If you get a very distributional hand, such as a 6-5-1-1, be very aggressive; such hands will take a lot of tricks. "Six-five, come alive" is wise advice.

A "good" or "upgradeable" hand for a given point count is one with the honors concentrated and / or touching, and with more than its expected share of 9's and 10's, with Aces and Kings more than Queens and Jacks. A "bad" or "downgradeable" hand is the opposite. .

Revaluing

As the auction continues, revalue your hand. Discount the values in suits bid on your left, and discount bad holdings such as QJ doubleton in suits bid by the opponents. But don't discount such things in suits your partner bids.

"When you and your partner find a *fit* of at least 8 cards, stop and smell the roses", says my teacher, Mike Moss. It is crucial to take a moment to re-evaluate your hand. There are two parts to this process.

First, add points for shortness. Count 1 for a doubleton, 3 for a singleton, and 5 for a void. (If you are the original opener and have supported partner's suit, count a void as one point for each trump you have).

Alas, you will frequently find you have a *misfit*, and your evaluation of the hand must decline unless you have such a strong suit you are able to make it the trump suit on your own. When you have a misfit, your HCP alone should be considered.

Now, let me admit that every single statement in the last four paragraphs is sometimes wrong. That's why it takes a lifetime to evaluate hands correctly. There are always hands that refuse to play by the rules.

Losing Trick Count

Secondly, when a *fit* has been found, and only then, make a *Losing Trick Count* (LTC). A full exposition of LTC is in "The Modern Losing Trick Count", by Ron Klinger. Here is a simplified (albeit less accurate) version.

Warning

LTC is used *only* when you have found a fit.

In each suit count a loser for each Ace, King, or Queen you do not have, up to the number of cards you hold in that suit. A stiff King is one loser and a doubleton Queen is two losers. The maximum number of losers per suit is the smaller of three and the suit's length.

Add a loser if the hand has no aces. A Queen without another honor is 2.5 losers.

Example: ♠AQ8 ♥Q8 ♦KJ32 ♣AQJ3 has 1 + 2 + 2 + 1 or six losers.

Take your number of losers, add those of your partner's hand, and subtract from 24 to get an estimate of the number of tricks you should take with your agreed-upon trump suit.

Unfortunately you can't say, "Partner, how many losers?", so you have to infer this from the bidding: an opening hand is about 7, a limit raise is 8, a simple raise is 9. A two-club opener is about 4. The hands in-between are 5 or 6.

Thus if you open one spade, and partner raises you to two spades, you want to be in game if you have five losers: $5 + 9$ is 14, and $24 - 14 = 10$. If you have six losers, you might want to seek more information with something like a *help-suit* game try, because you should be safe at the three level.

Use your adjusted point count together with your LTC to decide on game and slam tries. Often the LTC reveals that a hand is better or worse than it first appeared, such as an opening hand with an LTC of six or eight. When in doubt, go on with a known nine-card fit, but hold back with only eight.

Conversely, when you have a misfit, you usually want to stop as soon as you can. However, it is often true that 3N is the right place if you have the points for game. Most of the time you want to be in game if you have the points for it.

One final note: two hands of approximately equal value play better than two hands with much different strengths. In other words, 12 opposite 13 will usually play better than 20 opposite 5, because you will have fewer entry problems.

Bergen Method

Marty Bergen has invented a more elaborate method in his book, "Better Slam Bidding". His long series of articles in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin are comprehensive. I urge you to consult his lessons as there are many fine points to cover.

The initial "starting points" for Bergen are determined by a five-step process:

1. Calculate the Work Count, or "Formal HCP". The Work Count underestimates Aces and 10s, and over-values Queens and Jacks ("quacks").
2. Add 1 for every card over 4 in a suit
3. Add 1 for each "good" suit, a 4-card suit containing three of the five honors.
4. Adjust for the following features:
 - -1 for a questionable honor in a short suit, such as a stiff King, or a "dubious doubleton", a doubleton honor lacking the Ace. Thus, subtract one for KQ, Qx, Jx, etc.
 - -1 if you have 3 "quacks"; subtract 2 if you have six.
 - -1 if the hand has no Ace.
 - +1 if the hand has three Aces.
 - +1 if 5-5 or better
 - +3 if you have a void – the theory being that you are going to have a fit.
5. Classify the hand as upgradable or downgradeable.

A hand is upgradeable if:

- It has 10s, 9s, or 8s – these intermediate cards make a big difference. A normal expectation is one of each.
- A good shape, such as 5422 or 6331, rather than 5332 or 6322.
- The honors are in your long suits, or together, rather than in separate suits, or in short suits. An AK doubleton will not help to set up other tricks compared to AKx, AKxx, or AKxxx.

A hand is downgradable if it has a poor shape such as 4333, or 5332.

When you have a close decision, use the upgradable or downgradable factors to help make the decision.

Bergen Revaluing

As the auction proceeds, and a fit is found, adjust your hand as follows.

If you are going to be the dummy, add 1 for each doubleton, 2 for a singleton (but 3 if you have four or more trumps), and add up to five points for a void, but no more than you have trumps).

If you are going to be the declarer,

- Add 2 for a singleton, 4 for a void, and exactly 1 point if you have two or more doubletons. Do not add anything for a single doubleton.
- Add one point for each trump after five.
- Add one point for a side suit with 4+ cards.

If you believe from your own count and that promised by partner that the partnership has 33 or more points, you should explore for slam; below 33, forget it.

Finally, when it becomes clear the hand is a misfit, count formal HCP only.

Examples

Let's look at a comparison of the basic and Bergen models.

- ♠AQ7 ♥K54 ♦K32 ♣J432

This hand has 13HCP - 1 for a flat hand = 12 HCP in either system. The hand has the honors in different suits, which is not a plus.

- ♠AT942 ♥KJ832 ♦ void ♣AKQ

This hand has 19 points, 17 HCP plus 2 for length in the basic system.

In the Bergen system we add 2 for length and 3 for the void and 1 for the 5-5 shape, for a total of 23 points. Clubs has three honors, but it doesn't get the "good suit" bonus because it doesn't have four cards.

- ♠AT942 ♥KQJ4 ♦ void ♣AKT7

This hand has 17 HCP, plus one for length in the basic system. In the Bergen system we add 2 for the 2 "good suits", hearts and clubs, and 3 for the void, for a total of 23 points.

- ♠QJ ♥QJ ♦QJ2 ♣KJ7654

This hand has 13 HCP, minus two for bad doubletons, plus two for the six card suit, or 13 points. In the Bergen system we have seven Queens and Jacks, and no Aces or tens, so our adjustment is -2. The Bergen method would not open this hand 1♣

One cannot emphasize enough the need to revalue continuously as the auction proceeds.

Assuming a fit has been found, the losing trick counts here are 8, 3, 2, and 8, respectively.

There are several other hand evaluation methods. In the end, it takes judgment, not a mechanical adherence to points.

The Hand

As a final example, here are the West / East hands of an example we will use repeatedly in this document. It is a real hand from a tournament, and I happened to be West. East was Dealer.

West	East
♠K862	♠AQ
♥AKJ95	♥T632
♦T5	♦AKQ6
♣KJ	♣964

To evaluate the East hand, we get 15 HCP, and a balanced hand with shape 2=4=4=3. We're feeling neutral: the honors are all together, but the shape is uninspiring.

To evaluate the West hand, we have 15 HCP. Using the simplest evaluation, we add one for the fifth heart. If we were using Bergen, we'd add one for the fifth heart, one for the "good" heart suit, and subtract one for the dubious doubleton clubs. We're feeling good about the shape of

$4=5=2=2$, although $4=5=3=1$ would be better. Our honors are pretty well together – if we changed the ♥K to the ♦K we'd be less enthusiastic.

We'll be back later to see how we would bid these hands.

ALERTING AND ANNOUNCING

It is hard to know where to put this information since it mentions two concepts that are used with bids not yet discussed. It is necessary to know this very early. Come back and use this as a reference as you learn more.

Alert!

An alert is a procedure required when someone makes a bid that does not show the “expected length or strength” that it appears to mean. Such bids are shown in my books with an exclamation mark after them.

Some bids that would appear to need an alert do not because they have become so common that they are no longer “unexpected” meanings. In some cases the ACBL has decided the alert is helping the offense by reminding partner of the special meaning more than it is helping the defense. The most famous of these is Stayman: 1N - 2♣ would seem to require an alert because it does not show clubs. But by now, “everybody” knows that.

It is better to alert if you aren’t sure. Opponents will help you learn when it is not necessary.

Say “Alert” and show the Alert card, promptly, when your partner makes an alertable bid. Do NOT explain the bid unless asked. When asked, give the explanation. Tell what the bid means (“a limit raise”) rather than the convention name (“Reverse Drury”). Do not explain until asked.

When playing online, you alert your OWN bids. Partner cannot see the explanation so there is no harm to alerting anything unnecessarily.

It is unfair to your opponents not to give a clear explanation. If you aren’t sure, say your best recollection without any hemming and hawing. If you do not think you have an explicit agreement with your partner, say “No explanation”. If you’re wrong, you’re wrong.

If your partner explains your bid incorrectly, or failed to alert, you have to tell the opponents that, but only at the right time:

- If your side declares, call the director at the end of the auction.
- If you are on defense, do it after the hand is over – to do it earlier is to help your own side’s defense and not allowed.
- Absolutely NEVER correct what your partner just said. It is a terrible case of unauthorized information. Don’t do it by making a big face, either. It amounts to cheating. Some expert tournaments use screens so that people can’t see their partner for this reason.

You do have to volunteer this information. You might say to the opponents, for example, “There was a failure to alert my 2N bid. It showed a game-forcing spade raise”; or, “My partner’s explanation of my 2N bid was not correct. We do not play it that way over an overcall.”

If your partner explains your agreement correctly but you didn’t bid it that way, whether mistakenly or on purpose, you need not and must not say anything. An upset opponent may call the Director or press you about it, and your answer is, “My partner explained our agreement correctly.”

If you deviate from your agreement frequently, it creates an illegal implicit understanding; if you forget now and then, or very rarely do something odd because you want to, it is ok. The test is that your partner should be no more likely to guess that you’re not following the agreement than your opponents are.

Read the ACBL’s documents for more information. When playing in other jurisdictions you will have to learn their procedures.

Some advice: when an opponent alerts a bid, or makes a bid you do not understand, it is good strategy not to ask for an explanation until the end of the auction or at some point when it might affect your bid. You’re only helping them remember or discover a misunderstanding. They aren’t supposed to profit from the latter but they often do and directors have a horrible time with such cases. I call this, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, because a consequence of asking

is telling their partner, not just you. When you do ask, ask the partner of the person who made the bid.

If on defense, and your partner has the opening lead, you should wait until he places his lead on the table face down and says, “Questions, partner?” My favorite answer is, of course, “Why are you leading? It isn’t your lead.” That’s why he puts it face down, to save penalties if he’s leading out of turn.

Announcing

A very limited number of bids are “announced” rather than alerted. An announcement is basically an alert where you explain it without asking. It is therefore confined to cases where your partner will not benefit from the explanation because there less chance it helps your partner. The cases are:

- Announce the range of your partner’s 1N opener (e.g., “Fifteen to Seventeen”). You do not announce the range of a 1N rebid. A pair playing a weak NT will open a suit and then rebid a strong NT, but they alert rather than announce.
- On Jacoby transfers to a major, announce the suit partner has shown (e.g., “spades”). Note that 1N - 2S as the Minor Relay is alerted. It is a relay not a transfer.
- When 1N is forcing, partner announces “forcing”.

OPENING THE BIDDING

What Hands To Open

Open all hands with 13 or more HCP, almost all hands with 12, and any hand with an Ace in one suit and an AK in another.

Hands with more extreme distributions can open with fewer points. Use the *Rule of 20*: Add your HCP and the lengths of your longest two suits; if the total is 20 or more, consider opening the hand if you have at least 10 HCP.

However, I suggest you do not open using the rule of 20 when your two suits are the minors. Why? Because opening the bidding is a two-edged sword. When you bid, the requirements for your opponent to bid over you are less than for them to open the bidding. When you open one of a minor, the opponents can mention either major cheaply. Conversely, opening 1♠ makes life tough on them, and so you can shade your 1♥ requirements.

In third seat, chances are greatly increased that your LHO will open. Bergen says one estimate is to subtract your points from 24, and that's the average number LHO will have. Therefore your incentive to bid to at least show your partner what to lead goes up in third seat, and so does your incentive to *preempt* (opening a weak hand at the two or three level). You may open "light" (perhaps as few as 10 HCP with a major suit).

In fourth seat, use "Pearson Points": add your HCP and your number of spades. If you have 15 or more, open. Always open with 13 HCP.

There are always other considerations to ponder as well, such as seat and vulnerability. Generally, second seat and vulnerable are good times to be somewhat careful.

In the *ACBL* it is not legal to open one of a suit with a hand containing fewer than 8 HCP unless it fulfills the "Rule of 17". In a limited game using the "Basic" chart this is the "Rule of 19". However, be very reluctant to open one of a suit with fewer than 10 HCP. Your opponents are more likely to compete than usual, and your partner may end up doubling them because he thinks you have a better hand than you do.

The opening bids are:

- Opening 1N to show *balanced* (and sometimes *semi-balanced*) hands of 15 to 17 HCP.
- Opening 2N to show *balanced* (and sometimes *semi-balanced*) hands of 20 to 21 HCP.
- Opening one of a suit to show an unbalanced hand or a balanced one with too few HCP to open 1N, and up to 21 HCP.
- Opening 2♣ (artificial) to show a very strong hand (22+ HCP balanced or somewhat fewer with a long, strong suit). Forcing!

The opening bids from 2♦ through 5♦ are *preemptive*. Do not make them with weak hands even though you have the correct length. Note that you and your partner must agree on how strong your suit is. One suggested agreement is that a preempt promises at least a Queen in the suit if non-vulnerable, or a *good suit* (two of top three honors or three of the top five, excluding QJT) if vulnerable.

In third seat you can stretch a bit. Be careful not to preempt with too good a holding; many 10 HCP hands are too good for that.

- 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ show a usually 6(or more)-card suit and 5-10 HCP.
- 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ show a usually seven-card suit and 5-10 HCP. Sometimes 3♣ is bid with six good clubs, since the 2♣ bid can't be used.
- Opening four of a major shows an eight-card suit. Usually we don't do that in a minor since it tends to push them to bid a major game out of desperation. Instead use five of the minor. These are weak bids – don't make them with good hands.

The next few chapters will give details on these bids and their sequelae.

Choosing An Opening Bid

The basic rules are simple and depend only on your strength and shape. Choose the first bid in the following lists that applies:

- If a *preempt* is appropriate, make it.
- Open 2♣ with 22+ points (some slightly weaker hands with great long suits are also appropriate).
- Open 2N if you have a balanced hand with 20-21 points.
- Open 1N if you have a balanced hand with 15-17 points.

If you have 12-21 points (or an 11 HCP hand with an AK in one suit and another A):

- Open the longest five-card or longer suit at the one-level. If you have two suits that are the same length, open the higher ranked.
- Open 1♦ if you have four diamonds and four or fewer clubs.
- Open 1♦ if your shape is exactly 4=4=3=2.
- Open 1♣.

"It's not how good, it's how many." --
Mike Moss

In following the rules for bidding, you almost always disregard the quality of the suits. It's all about shape. This applies to many situations, not just the opening bid.

Beyond The Basic Rules

Breaking the rules is possible. The cases where you might consider it involve thinking ahead to what happens later.

Note

Ignore this section until you are utterly reliable recognizing the basic bids.

- With five clubs and four diamonds, you can open one diamond with less than 17 points. You aren't strong enough to bid 2♦ on your second bid if you open 1♣, and rebidding clubs usually shows 6(or more) clubs. So you can consider the qualities of each suit to choose which lie you are willing to tell. Experts

don't do this but they have additional tools to cope with the situation.

- With a 4=5=2=2 hand and 14-16 points you might open 1N, as long as one of the doubletons is Kx or better. You aren't strong enough to bid 2♠ on your second bid if you open 1♥.
- With a hand 4-4 in the minors, you have to think about what you are going to do if your partner responds with a major. If you are going to be bidding 1N, you are losing a club suit fit if one exists. If you are going to rebid 2♣ your partner will expect an unbalanced hand. So if you plan to rebid 1N, open 1♣.
- Some players play "better minor", that is, if 3-3 in the minors they will open the diamond suit if it is better than the club suit. This is especially true in third seat with a minimal opener – you rather expect your LHO is going to overcall and your partner may end up on opening lead, so you show the suit you want led.
- With a balanced hand with 17 HCP, if you have a decent five-card suit as well, consider bidding the hand as an 18 point hand, which means open the suit and rebid 2N if not raised.

This has a downside: if you don't do this, partner can count on your having 4 diamonds when you open a diamond 95% of the time.

Conversely, do not downgrade 18 HCP to a 1N opener, ever. There is no "bad 18".

- It is legal to open 1N with a singleton A, K, or Q. If you never do this it will be fine. Strangely, it is better with a K or Q rather than an Ace since someone with the Ace may underlead it. Again, people tend to do this because looking ahead, they worry about a 1N rebid underselling their hand, but 2N overselling it.

Opening in 4th Seat

Pearson Points: To find your Pearson Points, add your HCP to the number of spades you hold. If this number is 15 or more, open the bidding. The idea is that getting into a part-score battle when your opponents are likely to have the spade suit is probably changing their score from zero if you pass it out to some positive number.

Larry Cohen has this take on it: **CRIFS** (Cohen's Rule In Fourth Seat): If you have a borderline situation (10-12

HCP), evaluate your opponents! If you are playing one of the better pairs, pass. They may take you to the cleaners in a part-score battle.

In fourth (“passout”) seat it makes no sense to preempt. You can “keep them out of it” with a pass. So the range of a “weak two” becomes 10-14 HCP.

Opening at the three- or four-level is likewise not weak in passout seat.

In *The Hand* (page 11) we met these two hands and evaluated them to around 16 and 15 points each:

West	East
♠K862	♠AQ
♥AKJ95	♥T632
♦T5	♦AKQ6
♣KJ	♣964

What would East open? 15 HCP, balanced, we open 1N. In real life East was the dealer and did so.

But what would West open? That’s a little harder. The textbook says 1♥. Hearts is the longest suit, and it is a five-card major. Is that all there is to say? No. West would also consider opening 1N to avoid the rebid problem: if East answers 1N, West is shy of the values for a reverse to 2♠. As we’ll see, West would be forced into a lie of one kind or another.

PLANNING THE AUCTION

Before making any bid we should note our position, vulnerability, and classify our hand. We sometimes have to anticipate our next bid in choosing the current one.

Note Your Seat!

You must always check your position and vulnerability. If you have not previously passed (“an unpassed hand”), there are slightly different rules than if you are. Some rules for passed hands are sometimes labeled “BPH” (By Passed Hand). Vulnerability factors in less than you think, but it is important in preemptive bidding and other competitive situations.

Also note whether or not your partner is an unpassed hand, passed hand, or opened or overcalled / doubled.

Classifying Your Hand

If you are the dealer or everyone before you has passed, you are considering opening the bidding. We’ll discuss the details of what you open and what strength you need as we go, but the dividing line is around 12 HCP – below that you pass, above it you open.

In all other situations, the key is to know whether your hand is weak, competitive, invitational, game-going, or stronger, and to constantly re-evaluate it as the auction proceeds. You make an initial assessment of this and then modify it as the auction gives you more information.

If your partner opened, you are the *responder*.

- Weak: under 6 points
- Competitive: 6 to a bad 10 points. Also called “minimal”.
- Invitational: 10 to a bad 12 points. A raise of this size is called a “limit” raise.
- Game-forcing: A good 12 or more points. Also called “an opening hand”. An opening hand opposite an opening hand should be in game (3N or

higher).

- Strong: 15-19: we have to get to game but may also explore more to see if we have slam interest. When we either have 33 points between us, or have found a suit fit and are not too far below that, we probably belong in slam.

Our goal is to bid to the best *strain* and *level* for our combined hands. To be at the two-level it would be nice if we had at least more points than they do. After all, we’re contracting to make 8 out of 13 tricks, which is 62% of the tricks. While being able to name the strain will help, having fewer than 50% of the points could be a problem.

For a game at 3NT we need at least 25 points; for the four-level in a suit, 26 points. For a minor game 29 points. The six level usually needs 33 total points, and the seven level 37 points. When we are in a suit contract, these figures include points that are gained due to distribution and support. In a misfit, HCP may be all that matters.

Deciding what to do with 10 or 12 points is where a lot of the agony happens. It used to be that a minimum opening hand was 13 HCP. So if responder had 12, they wanted to be in game. But with the opening requirements now down to 12, responder wants a decent 12 or 13.

Competitive auctions we will cover later – but the concepts and need to classify our hand are the same.

Is This Forcing?

As we begin our study, some advice: the key to bidding is understanding passing! The most two common mistakes are:

- Bidding when you should have passed, and
- Passing when you were required to bid.

So, pay great attention in studying to know which bids are forcing to game, forcing for one round, or not forcing. If your partner makes a bid you don’t understand, don’t just pass in confusion. Rethink the sequence so far to see if

you've misinterpreted something – not an easy task, as the brain tends to take us down little rat-holes. Was there a conventional bid you missed? If still confused do something, something as obvious as possible. The GOAT, Bob Hamman, said: when in doubt bid three no-trump.

When partner makes a forcing bid you must notice their message and respond, but if the opponents bid before you get that chance, you're "off the hook". You must estimate your joint strength and proceed accordingly.

One rule is ironclad: a new suit bid by an unpassed *responder* is forcing for one round; that is, the opener must respond to it IF the opponents are silent. Even this rule has exceptions, the most important being that if you were forced to bid, such as when partner makes a takeout double, you are not promising anything.

The opposite is true when a passed hand bids – almost nothing partner did is forcing except some doubles and artificial bids.

The Captain Concept

The *Captain* of a hand means the partner who becomes in charge of guiding the partnership to a good spot to play. When one player has shown the strength and nature of his hand (generally called limiting his hand, because it refers to having shown limits on the hand's strength), the other partner becomes Captain. For example, after a no-trump opener, opener's strength is known to within three points, and the responder is the Captain.

When partner is Captain, go to your cabin, look out the porthole, and enjoy the view. Your partner may go to game or tell you to stop; obey the Captain. Otherwise, just answer his questions or show something new about your hand if his bid was forcing. The Captain may put control back into your hands by making an invitational, non-forcing bid.

During the auction, both as opener and as responder, we need to plan our path forward. There is a concept called a reverse that is crucial, so we have to discuss that before we get specific.

Reverses by Opener

Imagine an auction that begins 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♥. As we will see, if responder has six to a bad ten HCP, they can only bid once, except to make a final choice of suits if necessary. For example, after 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♥, responder with such a hand must choose between diamonds, hearts, or his own

spades. If he only has four spades, he has to choose one of opener's suits.

But if responder cannot agree to hearts, his bid of 3♦ may be too high. The partnership might have fewer than half the points between them, yet we're promising to take 9 of the 13 tricks. For this to be safe, opener would need around seventeen points.

Compare this to 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣. Now if responder has to prefer hearts to clubs, a 2♥ bid is comfortable. Opener with a big hand might bid again, but at least they know we have a minimum.

So what caused the problem? It was that opener's first suit was lower ranked than his second. Therefore the opener needs a very good hand to do that.

A *reverse* by opener is a rebid that meets two tests:

1. Opener's rebid is in a suit higher than his original suit, AND
2. Opener's rebid is a level higher than responder's bid.

A reverse shows about 17-18 points and an unbalanced hand with more cards in the first suit than in the second. A reverse is absolutely forcing for one round unless opponents interfere, but not forcing to game. We can take length points into account. A few shapely hands with 15-16 hands qualify as well.

Note

The second bid suit is always shorter and higher-ranked than the first bid suit. Opener cannot "reverse" from one four-card suit into another.

Example: 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♥. Hearts is higher than diamonds, and the 2♥ bid is up a level. Opener has more at least as many diamonds as hearts (typically 5-4).

There is one important exception. If responder has made a two-level bid he has shown at least 10 points, so if responder has to preference to 3♥, there is no problem – we're already known to have around 23 points. Therefore, we do not consider a 2-level continuation a reverse. For example, Pass - 1♥ - 2♣ - 2♥. The 2♣ bid shows 10+ points.

Downey and Pomer's book *Standard Bidding With SAYC* has a long section on reverses with a lot of examples.

When you have a five-card suit and a higher four-card suit, you have to open the five-card suit, but on your rebid you cannot show your four-card suit unless you have the values.

For example, with five diamonds and four hearts, if the auction goes 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♥, opener has reversed. Lacking that many points, opener may have to bid an imperfect 1N or repeat diamonds instead.

With 4 diamonds and 5 clubs, such as ♠92 ♥Q9 ♦AQJ5 ♣KQT43, we have a similar dilemma but without the risk of hiding a major. If we open this hand 1♣, and partner answers with a major or notrump, we have a problem. So some people will open this hand 1♦ instead. Others will bite the bullet, open 1♣, and rebid 2♣ if they have to, even though that suggests you might have a six card suit.

Obviously the quality of the two suits will influence the decision, unless you just always open 1♣.

When Opener Is Stronger

Since a reverse is forcing one round, you can sometimes use it when nothing else is available to keep the auction going. But in general, if your hand is 19+ points, and you have a good suit, opener might think of jumping a level in a new suit. This is called a *jump-shift* by opener, and it is always strong.

Responding To Partner's Reverse

Suppose partner reverses: 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♥. This is forcing, so you have to bid.

If you bid opener's first suit, it is a simple preference with a minimal hand. If you repeat your own major suit, you're showing five cards and a minimum. Otherwise you bid naturally.

Some situations are ambiguous. Consider these two hands:

- (1) ♠KT9832 ♥K98 ♦T86 ♣9
- (2) ♠KQJ984 ♥K95 ♦T63 ♣A6

Hand (1) had to respond 1♠ on his first bid, with six points. But after opener reverses into 2♥, what would it mean to bid 2♠? And if that means something like (1), what bid should be made with hand (2) so that we get to some game? It seems like 2♠ had better mean a weak hand, and an offer to play there. And with (2), we get to start guessing.

Optionally, 2N!(relay) is a conventional bid telling your partner that you may have a minimal hand. It asks opener to rebid his first suit; then you will pass or correct to your suit. This convention is called Ingberman 2N or Lebensohl Over Reverses. Your partner should say "alert" (which is why I used the exclamation point).

Any bid other than a suit preference or 2N is game forcing when using this convention.

2N!(relay) - 3♣(forced) - 3♠(to play) shows a minimal hand like (1), while a direct 2♠ is forcing a round and shows 5+ spades. After the relay, bidding one of partner's two suits is showing a suit preference with a weak hand.

In this context 2N! is called Ingberman and it is a use of the Lebensohl principle. If the opener has extra values they may choose to break the relay.

The full solution is covered in the chapter on *Lebensohl* (page 101). However, you can play the 2N! relay discussed in the above two cases without playing full Lebensohl.

Reverses By Responder

When responder reverses, it is just a game-forcing natural bid. For example, 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♠ - 3♦ is a game-forcing reverse, since diamonds are a higher suit than clubs. Again, the same principal is at work; an opener who wanted to prefer clubs is now forced up a level compared to bidding diamonds first and clubs second.

Note that 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ does not count as a reverse; we're not up a level. But bidding 2♠, not 1♠, is a jump shift and game forcing. For this reason it is best to treat this 1♠ bid as forcing.

Sometimes a responder reverse is the fourth suit bid and therefore unlikely to find a fit with partner, so most play it as a conventional bid that is one-round or game-forcing but not showing that suit, asking partner to bid notrump with a stopper in the fourth suit. See *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 43).

NOTRUMP OPENINGS

If using this chapter as a reference, be sure you've read *Notation and Nomenclature* (page 7) and review *Classifying Your Hand* (page 19) to classify your hand as weak, competitive, invitational, opening-strength, or strong.

When a hand is eligible to open in notrump, we are anxious to do so. As we will see, we will have an entire system devoted to bidding such hands that almost always gets us, if we are not disturbed, to a good contract. The "system" is very extensive, which is why this chapter is so long.

If you are not very experienced, a good target is to get through the section *Major Transfers* (page 26) and make sure you and your partner are solid on that much.

When Do You Open Notrump?

With many bids it matters what your strength and shape are and these might vary with which *seat* you're in. With notrump, there is no variation with seat. The hand must have:

- A shape that is *balanced*, 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2. No voids, no singletons, and at most one doubleton.
- A HCP strength in a specific range:
 - 15-17 open 1N
 - 20-21 open 2N
 - 22-24 open 2♣ and rebid 2N
 - 25-27 open 2♣ and rebid 3N, and so on.

What about hands with the right shape but wrong strength?

- 12-14 points with no five-card major: open a minor and bid notrump on the second round. If you do have a five-card major, open it.
- 18-19 points open a suit, and bid 2N on the second round.

Note

You'll encounter people playing "weak notrumps", where the range does not include 16, such as (most popularly) 12-14. They open 1N in that range. They open a suit then rebid 1N when their hand is a traditional 1N opener, alerting that 1N bid.

Hands You Sometimes Open 1N

- As you get more experience, you may want to open 1N with some *semi-balanced* hands in the 15-17 HCP range. You can consider this with these shapes:
 - A 5-4-2-2 hand, as long as one of the doubletons is Kx or better, and the long suit is a minor or you are specifically 4=5=2=2. With 5=4=2=2 you always open 1♠ and rebid 2♥.
 - A 6-3-2-2 hand if the long suit is a good minor and both doubletons are Kx or better, and the long suit is a minor.

Should you open 1N with a five-card major? Almost always. There are a few hands, where the major contains say 9 or 10 of the points, that you might open 1M, but you'll always struggle to get partner to believe your strength.

When you are more experienced you'll likely find yourself wanting to upgrade some 14 point hands that contain a good five-card suit and open them 1N.

When overcalling the opponents, be careful about doing it with 15 HCP hands – you'll need a five-card or longer suit anyway, and bidding that suit may be preferable.

Warning

Never downgrade a hand with 18 HCP to open 1N. Do upgrade 17 HCP hands with five-card suits, especially if that suit is a good minor, rebidding 2N next.

How To Choose A Response To 1N

The responder is going to reply using an extremely well-defined structure, the “system”, which has a high probability of getting you to a good contract. This “system” is so useful that we try to use it whenever we can:

1. After we open or overcall 1N;
2. When we open 2N;
3. When we open 2♣ and rebid notrump.

Important:

- The system is not on when opener bids a suit and rebids notrump.
- When the 1N opener’s LHO bids or doubles, it varies.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to explaining the “system” over 1N. You’ll notice it is a very long chapter, because there are a lot of subtleties. The ideas mostly carry over to the higher-level notrump bids as detailed in *The 2N Opening Family* (page 35).

When you open in notrump, you have told your partner your strength within 3 points, and that you have a balanced shape. This means your partner is actually best placed to decide where you are going, because he knows his own hand and a lot about yours, while you know nothing of his yet. For now at least, he’s the *Captain*.

Assume your partner has opened 1N. You, as responder, should:

- Classify the strength of your hand (weak, competitive, invitational, game forcing, or slam interest). Opposite a 15-17 1N bid, 8 or 9 HCP is invitational, while with 10 HCP you must force to game – you can’t make a bid that opener can pass short of game.
- See if you have a four-card, five-card, or longer major(s), or not. These cases are each treated differently. We have special rules when 5-4 in the majors.
- In hands with no majors, note if the hand has a 6(or more)-card minor. Do not do anything special on your first response with a five-card minor.

Generally, a hand whose principal feature is a long minor wants to be in 3N if it is strong enough, unless it is a strong hand that might want to be in a minor slam. This is especially true playing matchpoints.

Responding With No Major Suit Or Long Minor

In responding to your partner’s 1N opener, if you determine that there is no 4(or more) card major suit or 6(or more) card minor, your actions are determined by your point count alone:

- With fewer than 8 HCP, pass.
- With an invitational hand (8-9 HCP) bid 2N.
- With a game-going hand (10-15 HCP), bid 3N.
- With a slam invitational hand (16+-17 HCP) bid 4N.

4N is a *quantitative* raise. Responder has enough for 6N if the opener is on the top of his bid, a good 16 or 17. If responder is SURE that the partnership has 33 points, this bid is not appropriate.

There are times a bid of 4N is asking your partner about Aces, but not here. A bid of 4N is also *quantitative* after 2N or 3N openers, or after the opener rebids 1N after a suit opening, or bids 2N after a strong 2♣ opening.

Classically:

- With 18-19 HCP, bid 6N. We’re sure we have 33 HCP, so we can’t be off two Aces.
- With 20-21 HCP, Grand Slam Force with 5N. The opener should reply 6N or 7N.
- With 22 or more HCP, give your partner a thrill with a bid of 7N.

You can ask for Aces with 4♣ (*Gerber* (page 95)) in lieu of the direct slam bids, if you are worried about having fast losers in a suit or an opener that upgraded a 14 HCP hand. It doesn’t hurt to be careful.

The 5N bid as Grand Slam Force is the standard but it has been all but replaced by *5N Pick-A-Slam* (page 132). Whichever you play it applies to a 5N bid over a quantitative 4N bid or below.

Responding With A Major Suit Or Long Minor

When your hand does have a 4(or more) card major suit or a 6(or more)-card minor suit, you’ll begin with one of the techniques discussed later in this chapter (*Stayman* (page 25), *transfers to majors* (page 26), or *Minor Relay* (page 28)). These all force your partner to reply in a certain way.

After he replies, if you bid 4N when it is your next turn, that's *quantitative*, not Ace-asking. If he bid a suit because you made him do it, it doesn't mean you have agreed on a suit. You may have found a fit but he doesn't know about it yet.

Important

Whenever 4N is *quantitative*, 4♣ (*Gerber* (page 95)) is Ace-asking.

With no other agreement, responses of 4♦, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, 5♦ are natural, to play, with at least a six-card suit; but see *Texas Transfers* (page 28) as an option for getting to 4♥ or 4♠.

We'll now start digging into those special cases where responder has a four-card or longer major, or a six-card or longer minor.

Stayman Convention

After a 1N opener, 2♣ is an artificial bid called *Stayman*, promising a four-card major and asking the opener to say if he does or does not have a four (or five) card major. There are three circumstances in which responder bids 2♣ Stayman:

1. Responder has an exactly four-card major, the hand is not *flat*, and it has at least invitational values.
2. Responder has a less than invitational hand with a stiff or void in clubs, and intends to pass whatever response he gets. Ideally responder has a shape like 4=4=5=0 or 4=4=4=1.
3. Responder's hand is 5-4 in the majors, any strength. See *When Responder Is 5-4 In The Majors* (page 27). See *Garbage Stayman* (page 27) for when it is weak.

The goal of Stayman is to discover if we have a major fit, and at the same time to decide if we have a game or not. We first answer the question about the fit, and then the question about the game.

If you have a five-card major and fewer than four in the other major, we use *Major Transfers* (page 26), regardless of strength, not Stayman.

Note

Stayman 2♣ is artificial but not alerted, because it has become common practice. Responder might have no clubs.

Opener Reveals His Major Holdings

After 1N - 2♣, opener *must* choose one of three replies: 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠.

- 2♦ no four-card major.
- 2♥ 4+ hearts, and maybe 4 spades.
- 2♠ 4+ spades, but denies 4 hearts, or the spades are longer than your hearts.

If opener has four hearts and four spades, he bids 2♥.

Warning

Opener must bid 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠, never anything else. Never 2N.

Responder Indicates Strength and Fit

After the reply to Stayman, responder continues:

- With a weak hand short in clubs, he passes.
- With a less than invitational hand that is 5-4 in the majors he bids the five-card suit, *Garbage Stayman* (page 27).

Otherwise he indicates whether a fit has been found, and whether his hand is invitational, game forcing, or has slam interest:

- If a fit has been found, responder tells opener the good news: he raises the major suit to the 3-level to invite game, or to the four level to play.
- If a fit has been found but responder has too good a hand to bid game, bidding three of the other major (3W) shows a power raise (18+ HCP). It is a game force, of course.

For example: 1N - 2♣ - 2♠ - 3♥!(power raise). Now opener should start *control bidding*. (Control bidding will be discussed later).

- With no fit, Responder bids notrump; how many notrump shows responder's strength:

- 2N no fit, with an invitational hand.
- 3N no fit, but enough points for game.
- Three level bids in a new suit are game forcing and may show interest in a slam.
- 4N is a *quantitative raise* (page 24) denying a fit.
- 4♣ is plain *Gerber* (page 95), asking opener how many Aces they have.

Note that having checked for a fit, the responder may know whether there is a fit or not but the opener does not know it yet. So, a sequence like 1N - 2♣ - 2♠ - 4N is a *quantitative raise*, not Ace-asking; and 4♣! is asking for Aces with *Gerber* (page 95) and agreeing to the suit.

Opener's Third Bid

If opener has both majors he first bids 2♥. If responder bids 2N in reply, then there is no heart fit, but opener knows there is a spade fit. Opener should bid spades at the three-level to decline the invitation, and at the four-level to accept it. If responder has bid 3N, opener can switch to 4♠.

Major Transfers

So much for hands with four card majors – but what if you have a five-card major? You may have a fit if opener has three cards in your suit.

Note

If you have 5-4 in the majors, you use Stayman. This section applies when you have fewer than four cards in the other major.

Rather than bid our major suit in response to 1N, we bid the suit below it. This is called a *transfer*, also known as a Jacoby Transfer. Opener announces “transfer”. The opener will accept the transfer by bidding the next suit up.

See *Transfers and Relays Expand Our Language* (page 147) for more explanation of the benefits of transfers and relays. Jacoby Transfers and Stayman are the first two conventional bids that you learn. They are not some esoteric thing you can skip – any partner will assume you know them. But for now, you don't have to reason why, yours is to but do or die.

- 1N – 2♦ is a transfer to hearts.

- 2♥ Opener completes (“accepts”) the transfer. Opener might have two cards in the suit, so no fit has been found yet.
- 3♥ Opener has 4+ hearts and a maximum 1N bid (*super-accept*)
- 1N – 2♥ is a transfer to spades.
- 2♠ completes the transfer.
- 3♠ Opener has 4+ spades and a maximum 1N bid (*super-accept*).

Unlike Stayman, responder's strength is not an issue. A poor hand containing one five-card or longer major, even if it has zero points, must transfer to that suit, since responder's hand will be worth something with that suit as trumps and little or nothing otherwise.

Note that the weaker your hand is, the more important it is to transfer – to make something out of nothing. Transfer to spades even if your spade holding is ♠65432. Or, not to put too fine a point on it, as Charles Dickens would say, *especially* if your spade holding is ♠65432.

Warning

Opener must remember that responder has not promised anything yet except five cards in the target suit – not even ONE high-card point.

If you ever find yourself arguing to yourself that your partner *probably* has some points because he transferred, you've fallen in love with your hand again, and you know these affairs end badly.

The opener has to accept the transfer precisely because his partner may have absolutely nothing else.

For an advanced choice for a “superaccept”, see *Advanced Superaccepts* (page 147).

After The Major Transfer

After a transfer to 2M is accepted, responder bids:

- Pass with less than invitational values.
- 2N invitational. Opener can pass, bid 3N, or bid 3M or 4M with 3-card support.
- 3m a second suit, absolutely game forcing, usually with at least mild slam interest.

- 3M invitational, 6+ cards in the major. Now we have an 8-card fit for sure. Opener must revalue his hand, but he may then choose to pass.
- 3N to play, opener can correct to 4M with 3 trumps.
- 4M to play, 6+ cards in the major.
- 4♣ Gerber
- 4N *quantitative*.

So, avoid confusion by remembering that after a transfer, any bid at the three-level or higher except for the raise to 3M establishes a game force. If your partner transfers you to hearts and then bids 3♣, you can't pass just because you have two hearts and five clubs. Partner may be interested in 3N or maybe even 6♣. If the latter does not look likely, you'll probably just bid 3N.

After a super-accept, the responder decides on whether to pass or bid game or try for slam. He knows a great deal about opener's hand. Bidding another suit should be a control, looking for slam.

Responding With 5-5 Hands

Remember that after a transfer, any bid at the three-level is game forcing. With less than a game-forcing hand you cannot show the second suit. Also remember that with 5-4 in the majors you start with *Stayman* (page 27).

With 5-5 in the majors:

- Transfer to the better major with a weak hand, then pass.
- Transfer to hearts and bid 2♠ with an invitational hand.
- Transfer to spades and bid 3♥ with a game-forcing hand.

Note how in the last two cases responder must be 5-5 because if 5-4 he would have started with Stayman.

When you have five in a major and a 4(or more)-card minor:

- Transfer to the major first. Then:
 - Pass with a less than invitational hand
 - Bid 2N with an invitational hand
 - Bid the minor with a game-forcing hand. You may be very strong with interest in a minor slam.

Interference by LHO

When opener's LHO interferes, such as 1N (2♠), see *Dealing With Interference Over 1N* (page 31). Short answer: the standard is that bids are natural, and a redouble is Stayman. Double is by agreement but most usefully takeout at the two-level.

One thing to know right now is that you cannot transfer on the three-level, as in 1N (2♠) 3♦ – not a transfer to hearts. This is a common beginner error.

Doubles of artificial bids such as Stayman and transfer bids are almost always asking for that suit to be led. This is called a *lead-directing* bid.

If opener's RHO doubles or overcalls Stayman or a transfer bid, responder will take the lead in punishing them since only responder knows how many points he has. Neither Stayman nor a transfer promised any points. See:

- *When Stayman is Doubled* (page 32)
- *When Our Transfer is Doubled* (page 31)

You should learn these defenses as part of learning Stayman and transfers.

Garbage Stayman

The term *Garbage Stayman* is often mistakenly used. A standard part of Stayman is that you can bid 2♣ with a weak hand having a club shortage and three-card or better support in the other suits. You're willing to pass any reply, including 2♦. Your hand may be garbage, but you're not bidding Garbage Stayman.

Garbage Stayman refers to bidding weak hands that are 4-4 or better in the majors. The idea is that you can bid Stayman even if you are not willing to pass a 2♦ reply. Playing Garbage Stayman, you now rebid 2♥!(weak, 4-4 in majors) and opener passes or corrects to 2♠.

There is a more complicated version I am not mentioning, so check with partner.

When Responder Is 5-4 In The Majors

If you have five in one major and exactly four in the other, some special bids are available. Here is our scheme to try to find either a 4-4 or 5-3 fit:

- If your hand is weak, transfer to the five-card suit and pass. This gives your partner no chance to go

wrong. But use judgement: with a terrible five-card suit, you might try Garbage Stayman.

- If your hand has five spades and four hearts, invitational or better, bid 2♣ Stayman, and then:
 - If opener shows a major, just raise it. Example: 1N - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♥ invitational; 1N - 2♣ - 2♥ - 4♥ with a game-forcing hand.
 - If opener answered 2♦, you may still have a 5-3 fit. Bid 2♠ to invite; 3♠ to force to game. See note below.
- If your hand has four spades and five hearts, invitational or better, a similar scheme does not work. The problem arises after 1N - 2♣ - 2♦, because to bid 2♥ is *Garbage Stayman* (page 27); opener might pass. And you can't bid 3♥ if you do not have a game-forcing hand; you're already too high for an invitational hand if partner doesn't have hearts. So:
 - With an invitational hand 4=5 in the majors, you have to transfer to hearts and then bid 2♠.
 - With a game-forcing hand, use Stayman and if opener bids 2♦, bid 3♥. See note below.

Partners must be on their toes not to pass the game-forcing bids.

The Hand And Stayman

In *The Hand* (page 11) we met these two hands and evaluated them to around 16 and 15 points each:

West	East
♠K862	♠AQ
♥AKJ95	♥T632
♦T5	♦AKQ6
♣KJ	♣964

East was the dealer, and with 15 HCP and a balanced hand opens 1N. West is 5-4 in the majors so replies 2♣, Stayman. East bids 2♥, her lowest four-card major.

Extra points if you know what West does next: 3♠! which is the power raise for hearts. It agrees that hearts are trump and asks partner to start showing controls. East would then bid 4♦ to show the A♦ but deny the A♣.

With a minimal opening hand West would just have bid 4♥ over 2♥. Note that 1N - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♥ would agree that hearts are trump but would be just invitational, 8-9 points.

That's why we need the 3♠ bid, agreeing hearts but game forcing at least.

Texas Transfers

Texas Transfers are not standard, but are so common you must be sure you agree on this with your partner. Check the boxes on your convention cards.

If you have a six-card major and a minimum game forcing hand, you can use a Texas Transfer:

- 1N - 4♦ transfer to hearts (6+, GF)
- 1N - 4♥ transfer to spades (6+, GF)

Texas Transfers are on over interference. The name Texas for Americans implies “big”: big hats, big toast, big meat, big suit.

You don't use Texas if:

- you have an invitational hand; instead you would transfer and then raise to 3M.
- with mild slam interest; instead transfer and then bid 4M. This sequence shows you must have a six-card suit because you are willing to play 4M even if opener has only two trump. But, you didn't get to 4M fast with Texas – so the motto, “slow shows” applies; you must have extras. But it is only mild extras; if you have strong slam interest, make a forcing bid such as a 3-level bid of a new suit. That is game forcing, so you'll get another bid.

Minor Relay

The 2♠!(long minor) response to 1N forces opener to bid 3♣!(forced), which responder can pass or correct to 3♦, to play. This is called a *relay*.

Opener alerts 2♠, and partner should alert the 3♣ reply because the opener doesn't necessarily have clubs. Since it is an alert, not an announcement, you do not say “relay to clubs” unless asked.

The Minor Relay is not for five-card minors, and not for invitational or better hands or hands that have a four-card major. Minor relays are to be used only in the case of 6 card suits, and usually only with weak hands. A six-card suit is very powerful opposite a 1N opener, so weak means not close to invitational.

Note

It is incorrect to call 2♠ a “minor suit transfer”. Technically, a transfer is a bid asking partner to bid a suit that you hold for certain; a *relay* is asking partner to bid a certain suit (usually but not always the next *strain* up) but that suit isn’t necessarily the suit you have; you are going to reveal that later.

Minor Slam Tries

A Minor Relay can be used as the start of a slam try in a minor. You must have a belief that a minor slam is likely, because otherwise 3N is your goal.

- 1N - 2♠! - 3♣! - 3♥! slam try in clubs.
- 1N - 2♠! - 3♣! - 3♠! slam try in diamonds.

You would never be bidding a major after a Minor Relay, because you would have used Stayman or a transfer to that major in the first place. These bids are clearly artificial. The lower bid (hearts) corresponds to a slam try in the lower minor (clubs), and the higher bid (spades) to the higher minor (diamonds).

Three-Level Suit Responses

The standard is that 3-level bids over 1N are natural, showing 6+ cards in the suit, with invitational values. However, there are about as many schemes for the bids from 3♣ to 3♠ as there are bridge players. In *Advanced One Notrump Structure* (page 115) I will give you a complete scheme for the bids from 2♠ to 3♠ that replaces the Minor Relay and these three-level natural bids with something more useful.

Recommended 1N Structure for Intermediates

Here is what I recommend for intermediates. You’ll need partnership agreement.

- Play the major transfers and Texas transfers, and *Minor Relay* (page 28).
- Play the natural 1N - 3x bids as invitational.

Do not try to get to five of a minor; the basic decision is whether to go past 3N or not. Once you go past 3N, you’re going to really hope you can bid the slam because 5m is usually a bad outcome (especially in matchpoints) if 3N is

making. The minor relay slam try has the virtue of letting opener call it off with 3N or 5m depending on his hand; or he can control-bid or ask for Aces.

Warning

A great many players, some with considerable experience, are misinformed about sequences like 1N - 2♣ - 2M - 4N and 1N - 2T(transfer) - 2M - 4N. These are all quantitative. Direct skeptics to any good book or professional web page on 2/1. Do not let an allegedly more experienced partner bully you on this.

Between 1N and 2N

If you have 18-19 or more points, do not open 1N, even if your partner is a passed hand. It isn’t going to take much to get you to game, so you don’t want to lie about your strength by limiting it to 17 HCP. A seventeen with a great five card suit should also be treated this way.

- With a balanced 18-19 points, open a suit and then rebid 2N. This does not deny any major that has been skipped over. For example,
 - 1♦ - 1♥ - 2N shows 18-19 balanced but does not deny holding four spades. The convention *New Minor Forcing* (page 44) helps sort out whether the 1♥ bidder here has four or five hearts. It is worth learning.
 - Opening one of a suit and then overcalling 1N when partner passes shows 18-19 points and a stopper. (Double shows the same strength without a stopper.) After the 1N bid, the bids that follow are natural, not the “systems on” bids. In effect, the 1N rebid shows that you didn’t open 1N because your hand is too good.

For example, suppose opener has an 18 point balanced hand with the Ace of Spades, and responder has a 5 point hand with diamonds such as ♠98 ♥J42 ♦KJT93 ♣974

The bidding begins:

```
1♣ (1♠) P (P)
1N ( P ) 2♦
```

Systems are off. The bid of 2♦ would be to play, not a transfer to hearts.

Smolen

Smolen is an optional convention, but quite common for advanced intermediates. When partner opens 1N and we have a hand that is 5 - 4 in the majors, game forcing, we begin with Stayman. If opener replies 2♦, denying a four-card major, we now bid the four-card suit, *at the three level*; this is a *puppet* that lets the opener declare the 5-3 fit if he has 3 of the long suit.

Summary Charts

These charts are for the standard 15-17 HCP 1N opener. System On means that transfers and the minor relay are on. NMF means they are not, use *New Minor Forcing* (page 44).

Table 1: Balanced Openings

HCP	Opening Bid	System On?
12-14	1x then 1N	NMF
15-17	1N	Yes
18-19	1m then 2N	NMF
20-21	2N	Yes
22-24	2♣ then 2N	Yes
25-27	2♣ then 3N	Yes
28-30	2♣ then 4N	Yes

Summary of Notrump Raises

The point ranges given here are for a 15-17 1N bid. Over a weak 1N or a 2N opener, make the corresponding adjustment. All these responses deny a four card major and show a balanced hand.

- 1N - 2N invitational, 8-9 points
- 1N - 3N to play, 10-15 points
- 1N - 4♣ Gerber, asking for aces.
- 1N - 4N quantitative; this shows a balanced hand with a good 16-17 points. Opener bids 6N with a good 16 or 17. Note that 33 points is sometimes not enough for 6N, without a source of tricks.
- 1N - 6N to play, 18-19
- 1N - 5N asks for 6N or 7N, 20-21.
- 1N - 7N to play 22+

If you agree with partner to upgrade good 14 HCP hands to open 1N, then the wise thing to do is asking for Aces on the way to slam.

Summary of Responses to 1N

The columns are the responder's strength; the rows are his hand shape. In the cells, two bids separated by a plus sign mean, first bid is the reply to 1N, second bid is your next bid.

Slam bids often depend on exactly what you are playing such as Texas Transfers, etc. So we just show the first bid and then a question mark.

Table 2: Responses to 1N Opener

Shape / Strength	Weak 0-7	Invitational 8-9	Game 10-15	Slam? 16+
Balanced	Pass	2N	3N	4->7N
4-card major	Pass	2♣ + invite	2♣ + game	2♣ + varies
5-card major	T + pass	T + 2N	T + 3N	T + varies
5-5 majors	T ♥ ♠, pass	T-> ♥, +2♠	T->♠, +3♥	T-> ♥, +3♥
S 5♠ - 4♥	2♣, +2♠	2♣, +2♠/2♦	2♣, Smolen?	2♣, Smolen?
S 4♠ - 5♥	2♣, +2♥	T + 2♠/2♦	2♣, Smolen?	2♣, Smolen?
4441 or 4450	2♣ + pass	2♣ + invite	2♣ + game	2♣ + varies
6+ M no Texas	T + pass	T + 3M	T + 4M	T + varies
6+ M w/ Texas	T + pass	T + 3M	Texas T	T + 4M
6+ minor	2♠ R	3m	2♠ R + 3N	2♠ R then 3M

Notes:

- “+ something” means what you bid next, depending on opener's rebid.
- T means *transfer* (page 26) to the major M.
- R is *Minor Relay* (page 28) and its slam try followup.
- The 5-4 majors hands all begin with 2♣.

- Smolen?: over a 2♦ reply, bid the five-card major unless playing *Smolen* (page 30), in which case bid the other major.

Dealing With Interference Over 1N

The no-trump structure is highly evolved and generally gets you to the right place – so much so, that your opponents will be anxious to get in your way so that you can't use it. Ron Klinger lamented, "Nobody leaves anyone alone any more." In a later *section* (page 81) we'll learn some of these evil schemes; meantime, here are the basics of how to deal with interference after you've opened 1N.

The treatments for interference with major transfers and Stayman are a standard part of those conventions. Note that in either case responder has promised absolutely no points, so generally responder controls the action.

When 1N is doubled:

- Doubling a 2♣ overcall is Stayman.
- If they make a penalty double, whatever agreements are in place for a *Runout* (page 32) apply.
- If they make an artificial double, systems are on.
- A cue-bid of diamonds, hearts, or spades is Stayman.
- A double of diamonds, hearts, or spades is penalty – but this is one of those areas where many players treat it as takeout at the two-level.
- Bids at the 2-level are less than invitational, natural, to play.
- Bids at the 3-level are game-forcing, natural.
- Bidding 2NT is natural, invitational and promises a stopper in their suit.
- Bidding 3NT is natural, and promises a stopper in their suit.

Note

Many intermediates play *stolen bids* (page 32), instead. See below. The defense played by advanced players is *Lebensohl* (page 101), a somewhat difficult convention.

We'll talk later about defending against interfering bids that are artificial and show two suits, one of them possibly unknown, in *General Defense To Two-Suited Bids* (page 83).

Dealing With Interference To A Transfer

A double of an artificial bid is lead-directing. So, opener's RHO may double to show that he wants a lead of the (artificial) suit that responder just bid. Opener can take advantage to tell responder if he has three or more of responder's suit. A decided minority of intermediates know the correct bids here.

Let T be the suit of the transfer bid, and let M be the target suit of the transfer. For example, in 1N - 2♦(transfer), T is diamonds, M is hearts.

After 1N (P) 2T (X), the opponents are presumably bidding T:

- Pass: Opener has 2 cards in M. M is not agreed trump. Subsequently, if the next player passes, a XX by responder transfers again to M. A bid of the transfer suit, such as 1N (P) 2♥ (X); P (P) 3♥ is *Western Cue* (page 79) asking opener to bid 3N with a stopper.
- 2M: Agrees M as trump, shows 3+ cards in M.
- 3M: Agrees M as trump, shows 4+ cards in M, and a maximum opener.
- XX: Opener has the transfer suit, willing to play in 2T redoubled. Opener should have a positively scary holding in T.

An overcall of a transfer leaves the opener in a bit of a bind because the act of transferring in itself only shows a five card suit; responder could have zero points. So, opener only bids with a great holding in the overcalled suit, or holding a maximum.

Thus after 1N - 2T (2Z):

- Pass: waiting to hear from partner. Responder can double to show points.
- X: penalty oriented, a great Z suit.
- Completing the transfer shows a maximum with four-card support.

Note the theme again: 4N is quantitative any time we have not affirmatively agreed on a suit.

The responder is still *Captain*, and we're waiting to hear his opinion.

When Stayman is doubled or overcalled

When Stayman is doubled, opener will answer only if he has a club stopper. Otherwise he passes it around to the responder, who can redouble to ask for Stayman again, or pass for penalty.

When Stayman is overcalled, opener should usually pass and let responder decide to double for penalty or not. I say this on general principles, I've never seen it discussed.

Stolen Bids

A system popular with intermediates for dealing with overcalls of our 1N opener is called "stolen bids". I think it is correct to mention it here because so many of your intermediate partners will think it is standard. More advanced players will know how to play it but will be complaining that you should learn *Lebensohl* (page 101).

- 1N (2a) X! means the same as if responder had bid the overcalled suit, up to 2♠. In other words, a double means, "He stole my bid!". In particular a double of (2♣) is Stayman.
- Any bid above the overcall has an unchanged meaning. However, bidding NT promises a stopper in the overcalled suit. Example: 1N (2♦) 2♥!(transfer to spades).
- The three level bids don't have their special meanings; if a jump, it is a weak bid in the suit, such as 1N - (2♦) - 3♥(preemptive, hearts).

You're giving up the chance of a penalty double. Also, when the opponents know this is what you play, as they will at your club, or if they look at your card, they can get away with murder interfering with you, knowing you can't double them.

The right answer is some form of the *Lebensohl* convention, which is quite advanced. You're lucky to find a partner who knows it. People who say they know it and don't really are legion at the advanced-intermediate level.

Natural

You can just play responder overcalls as natural, with two-level bids being competitive and three-level bids game forcing. 2N is invitational showing a stopper. Bidding their suit (a *cue bid*) is game-forcing Stayman. However, over a 2♣ overcall you have a double as Stayman.

Runouts

You also can agree on a system, called a "runout", when your 1N opener gets doubled for penalty. You've played 1N with a *yarborough* dummy before? You don't want to go there. Here's the simplest way out.

After 1N (X) or 1N (Pass) Pass (X) Pass (Pass), responder has the following choices:

- Pass if you are willing to play 1N doubled (typically a balanced hand with at least competitive values). This is often your best contract.
- XX is a relay to clubs, pass or correct. If responder is weak, we'll be better off in any suit fit. If opener has just two clubs he could bid diamonds instead; assuming he did not open with two doubletons, he has at least three of each of the other suits.

If their double does not show strength, but rather is something like a double for a single-suited hand, responder with a strong hand may pass and wait for the suit to be shown, or just bid normally. Generally delayed action, when you could have taken immediate action, shows strength.

If responder initially passes, and the opponents bid a suit or suits, responder's double is penalty-oriented.

For a wide variety of runout schemes see *Advanced Runouts* (page 143).

Unusual 2N interference

1N (2N) is a very effective bid showing 5-5 in the minors. Against it, use the *General Defense to Two-Suited Bids* (page 83).

As the defender, you do not bid (1N) - 2N to show you have a notrump opener too – you double for penalty. That's why 2N is free to have a special meaning.

Three-Level Interference

- 1N (3a) 3N to play, suit stopped
- 1N (3a) 4M to play
- 1N (3a) X takeout double or penalty, partnership agreement.
- 1N (3a) 3y is game forcing

What Partner May Want

Partners may come with their own ideas. Here are some that you could agree to play in good conscience:

- 1N - 3♣ and 3♦ as showing 5-5 in the minors (invitational and game-forcing respectively).
- 1N - 3♥ and 3♠ showing 5-5 in the majors, similarly. See note below.
- 1N - 3♣ as a game forcing bid asking if you have a five-card major. There are two forms of this, *Five Card Stayman* (page 115), preferred, and *Puppet Stayman* (page 152), a convention normally played over 2N. Actually, Five Card Stayman is what you want to play.
- *Stolen Bids* (page 32). This is ok, but a dead end. Learn *Lebensohl* (page 101) eventually.
- *Alternate Advanced Runouts* (page 143).

Note that you don't really need special bids for 5-5 in the majors, as explained in *Responding When 5-5* (page 27).

THE 2N OPENING FAMILY

What Hands Are Included?

Opening 2N shows a balanced hand with 20-21 points. The hand may contain a five card major. Experts will often open a 5-4-2-2 hand with 2N, and certainly a 5-3-3-2. As with opening 1N, opening 2N nails down opener's strength to a small range, and responder becomes *Captain* of the hand.

With 22-24 points, a balanced 2♣ opener rebids 2N; respond to that 2N bid *exactly* as if the opener had opened 2N except that he has a few more points. We refer to these agreements as the 2N opening family.

A hand that is 1=4=4=4 can be opened 2N with a singleton ♠K, but not an ♠A. If you open it 1♦ you'd have a choice over partner's expected spade bid of jump shifting to 3♣, losing the hearts, or reversing into hearts without longer diamonds than hearts, which is not permitted. Opening 2N may be the least evil.

Responses

Unlike the situation over 1N, there is no room for many conventions; in particular, there is no escape sequence to get out in a minor. Otherwise:

- Pass with less than game-going values (5 HCP or perhaps an Ace)
- 3♣ is Stayman. What variant of Stayman is a choice, see below.
- 3♦ and 3♥ are major transfers.
- 3♠ is up for discussion; see below.
- 4♣ is *Gerber* (page 95).
- 4♦ and 4♥ are *Texas Transfers* (page 28), if you play them.
- 4N is quantitative, asking opener to bid 6N with a hand with good trick-taking ability.

- 6N means you are sure we have 33 HCP but not 37 HCP.
- 7N means you're having a good day.

Some play 3♣ as *Puppet Stayman* (page 152). Unfortunately you can't play both *Smolen* (page 30) and *Puppet* because of the different meanings of a 3♦ reply by opener. Expert opinion favors plain Stayman with *Smolen* or a more complicated version of *Puppet*, according to Gavin Wolpert. Most ordinary players play *Puppet Stayman*, or even ordinary Stayman without *Smolen*. You can do fine with just ordinary Stayman.

As a general rule, when responding with a hand with a five-card major, we transfer to it and then show the other suit when game forcing. With 5=5 in the majors, a transfer to spades and then bidding hearts is offering opener a choice of 4♥ or 4♠, while transferring to hearts and then bidding spades is more interested in slam.

As with the 1N opener, holding 5-4 in the majors, responder can bid 3♣ and if opener replies 3♦, puppet the four-card major suit (*Smolen* (page 30)). Or, partners can agree to use *Puppet Stayman*.

Notes on 3 Spades

Some intermediates play that 3♠ is a relay to 4♣, analogous to the minor relay 2♠ over 1N, intending to get out in a minor. This is a bad idea over 2N; pick between pass and 3N.

Any agreement about 3♠ suffers from the problem that opener's RHO can double for a spade lead, possibly sinking the ship. We really have to be serious about a possible minor slam before risking this.

A common agreement is *Minor Suit Stayman* (page 36), showing both minor suits, below.

See *Advanced 2N Bidding* (page 119) for more expert systems.

I have no section on dealing with interference over a 2N opener because doing so is almost never advisable. As a

general rule, responder as Captain would deal with it.

Minor Suit Stayman

A bid of 3♠ shows at least 5-4 in the minor suits and of course the values for game. Opener can bid:

- 3N to deny a four-card minor
- 4m to show a four-card minor
- 4♥ to show a slam interest with 5(or more) clubs.
- 4♠ to show a slam interest with 5(or more) diamonds.

Playing in notrump is always on the table.

Note: Some play MSS over 1N too, but most experts deal with such hands using the 3-level “splinter” methods.

RESPONDING TO MINOR OPENINGS

If using this chapter as a reference, be sure you've read *Notation and Nomenclature* (page 7) and review *Classifying Your Hand* (page 19) to classify your hand as weak, competitive, invitational, game-going, or slam interest.

Our partner has opened 1♣ or 1♦. If we mean either we can write "1m". Partner could have a three-card suit but most of the time it is four or five cards. For diamonds, only 5% of the time do we have only a three card suit.

So where are we going? If we don't have 25 points or more, we want to stop in the cheapest suitable contract we can find. If we have game strength, we hope to find a 4-4 fit for a major, if possible, but more often our game, if we have one, is 3NT. If they compete we might find a suit is unstopped. In that case we may stop at 4 of a minor or press on to 5 of a minor, or even sometimes settle for a 4-3 fit in a major.

In a possible slam exploration, the point at which we go past 3N is a point of no return, and we should be thinking of the alternative to 3N as six of our minor. Especially playing matchpoints, bidding five of a minor when a 3N contract is making is a recipe for a bottom score.

Before choosing a response, remember to take note of your seat, the vulnerability, and do a classification of your hand. See *Planning The Auction* (page 17).

When choosing what suit to bid, the general principle is raise partner, and if you cannot, to bid your longest suit.

Rules For Choosing Your Strain

Here is the decision tree for responding to 1m. This list will be filtered with a constraint that will depend on your hand strength, whether you have previously passed (are a "passed hand"), whether your RHO interfered (overcalled or doubled), or neither. We choose the strain amongst the *feasible* suits:

- If you have two 5(or more)-card suits of equal length you choose the higher-ranked suit.
- Between two four-card suits of equal length choose the cheapest.

- Bid notrump if you don't have an eligible four-card suit.
- Going to 2♣ over 1♦ requires an opening hand; or if you are already a passed hand, requires 10+ HCP. Lacking that bid 1N.
- Bid a four-card major in preference to a diamond suit if you do not have an opening hand.

You will also choose a level to bid, depending on hand strength.

For example, suppose your hand is 4 spades, 4 hearts, 0 diamonds and 5 clubs. We write that hand shape 4=4=0=5. If your partner opens a diamond, then your longest suit is clubs, but clubs would need to bid at the 2-level. You can only bid that if you have a certain number of points. If you don't have enough points, then we rule out 2♣, your longest suit, and choose between your two four-card suits, hearts and spades. And that choice goes to the cheapest, hearts.

When partner opens a minor, do not revalue your hand yet, even with a fit. If you have five of his suit as required for a raise, you're likely to have more cards in the suit than he does and ruffing in your hand won't win any extra tricks.

Responding With A Weak Hand

With a weak hand just pass. If there has been interference from your RHO, and you have five of partner's minor, you can bid a weak 3m as a *preemptive* raise.

If you have 6(or more) points, you have to bid something. Your partner could have as many as 21 points, so a game is not ruled out.

Responding With A Competitive Hand

With a competitive hand, you just follow those rules subject to this constraint:

You can raise to the two-level but otherwise you have to stay at the one-level.

A raise requires 5(or more) cards in your partner's minor. Sometimes you can cheat and raise 1♦ with four good ones. Remember that 5% of the time a one-diamond opener has only three of them.

Example:

♠Q654
♥754
♦8
♣KQJ42

Partner opens 1♦. You have a competitive hand with 8 HCP. You'd like to bid 2♣, but that's out. So you look for the longest suit amongst the ones that can be bid at the one level. That's spades, so you reply 1♠.

Now change the hand to:

♠Q543
♥8754
♦8
♣KQJ4

Now you have two four-card suits you can bid at the one-level, so you choose the cheapest, hearts. Even though your hearts are worse than your spades, you bid 1♥. Maybe partner can bid spades next.

Let's suppose partner actually opens a club. You have enough points to raise to 2♣ but don't have the required five of them. You'll bid a heart. You can bid 2♣ on the second round if your hearts aren't raised. That kind of "suit preference" bid tells partner the story: I have a minimum, but do have some club support but not five of them.

Finally, let's suppose the hand is changed again and partner opens 1♦:

♠Q54
♥875
♦84
♣KQJ42

Now you cannot bid clubs (need to be invitational or better for that) and you don't have a four-card suit to bid, so you bid 1N.

Bidding With An Invitational Hand

With 10 to a bad 12, we have an invitational hand. Our primary goal is to show a major if we have one, and lacking that to raise if we can.

We raised to 2m with a constructive hand, so we will raise to 3m for an invitational raise, also called a *limit raise*.

If we have 6(or more) clubs and invitational values we can bid 1♦ - 3♣. The opener can force to game but should not bid 3♦ to try to improve the part-score.

If we don't have a major and we don't have a fit, and we have exactly 10 points, we will change our mind and treat the hand as a competitive hand and bid 1N. Otherwise we can bid 2N to show our 11 or 12 with no four-card major.

Special: We can bid 1♦ - 2♣ only if RHO interfered or we were a passed hand. In those cases it shows 10+ points and 5(or more) clubs.

With less than a game-forcing hand we prefer to bid a four-card major first rather than a five-card diamond suit:

♠A4
♥9876
♦KQ762
♣97

Partner opens 1♣. You bid 1♥. (If you had four spades as well, you'd still bid hearts, up the line.) The problem is that you can't bid 1♦ and then try to show hearts later; that would be a responder *reverse* and show a game-forcing hand.

You have plenty of time in a game-forcing auction to mention your major. When you're not strong enough for that, we mention the major first. As a consequence, if we do bid a diamond over a club, and later bid a major, it is game-forcing.

Note

Bypassing a diamond suit to show a major with less than game-forcing values is a style of bidding called *Walsh*. This book assumes this style.

Responding With A Game-Going Hand

See the discussion of weak jump shifts in *All About Jump-Shifts* (page 91). Unless we are playing strong jump-shifts, there is no game-forcing bid over 1♣, and only one game-forcing bid over 1♦.

To force to game, responder has to keep making bids that cannot be passed short of game, which usually means bidding new suits. We have one new bid in our repertoire, 1♦ - 2♣. As an unpassed hand and without interference it is forcing to game and promises 13 or more HCP and 5(or more) clubs.

The 1♦ - 3♣ bid being invitational rather than weak is a consequence of 1♦ - 2♣ being a game force. One variant of 2/1 is to play that bidding 1♦ - 2♣ and then repeating 3♣ on the next round *cancels* the game force. That kind of loses the 2/1 spirit, in my opinion.

The *Inverted Minors* (page 42) convention helps alleviate this problem. Inverted Minors is one of the *expected conventions with 2/1* (page 4).

If you cannot get to 3N you may need to stop in 4m or 5m; 5m has to usually include around 29 points.

Looking For Slam

Bidding minor slams is awkward. Until you have agreed on a suit, 4N is not *Blackwood* (page 93) (an Ace-asking bid). Jumping to five of the minor is not inviting to slam, it is just shutting down with a distributional hand. All you can do is bid as if you seek only game, and then keep going if you're positive a slam is likely. Going past 3N is crossing the Rubicon.

Opinion differs on 1m - 4m. Is it a preempt with 8 in the suit, or a slam try, or a game invite?

Preempting is so lovely but 4m tends to make desperate opponents bid four of a major and sometimes make a game they would not have found over 3m.

See *Gambling 3N* (page 65) for handling long solid suits when that's *all* you have.

The situation can be improved by playing *Inverted Minors* (page 42) and *Redwood* (page 132) but it is never easy. In most cases if the slam is not clear-cut most of the field is not going to know how to get there so there is less pressure to bid it.

Opener's Rebid

Opener's second bid is called his rebid. Choosing it depends on what responder did. It is opener's turn to classify his hand (after revaluing it considering partner's response):

- up to 14 is a "minimum" hand; we don't have a game if partner has less than invitational values.
- 15 - 17 is *game try* territory. We *might* have a game. More about that later. But note that opener must be unbalanced or they would have opened 1N.
- 18 - 19 is almost enough for game even if responder has a minimum.
- 20-21 is game forcing. We might even be in a slam hunt.

Minor openings often lead to the following scenario: responder bids a major, and opener rebids 1N or a third suit. Responder has promised four cards in his major, but he might have more.

Responder who has a five-card major would like to ask the opener whether opener has three-card support; and when opener might hold four cards in the other major, he'd also like to know if opener does too. Finding out if we have a major fit is our most important goal.

Responder's conventional second bids that ask about major holdings are called *checkback*, and the two basic ones are *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 43) when opener has rebid a new suit, and *New Minor Forcing* (page 44) when opener has rebid 1N or 2N. Those are detailed in the next chapter. To make those bids responder will have to be invitational or better.

The Auction 1m - 1M

If responder has bid a major M, and opener has four in that major, he will raise. Responder has an unlimited hand; all we know is that he has six or more points. So opener can raise to 2M at least, and 4M if he has 18/19+ points (because 19 + 6 are 25). The 3M bid says, partner, if you've got something more than six, say nine, take us to game or start looking for slam if appropriate. Opener has a good 15 to 17/18 points.

With an unbalanced hand that does not have four of partner's major, opener should bid 1♠ over 1♥ with four spades, bid an unbid suit, or rebid his opening suit. The unbid suit might not be possible if it is a reverse and opener does not have sufficient strength. For example:

♠ 92
♥ 87
♦ AKT7
♣ KQJT4

After 1♣ - 1M, opener cannot bid 2♦ lacking the 17+ points a reverse would require. So he bids 2♣, knowing partner will usually expect six clubs or more. This is why some choose to open such a hand 1♦, and then rebid 2♣.

With enough to reverse, there would be no problem, just show the second suit.

If responder has bid a major and we have three of them and either a singleton or no other good bid, we can raise. Mike Lawrence gives this example:

♠ 52
♥ QJ9
♦ AJ763
♣ KQ4

After 1♦ - 1♥, he recommends 2♥. "If you bid 1N expect a spade lead and your goose may be well done," Lawrence says. "That diamond suit does not merit a rebid."

Once opener has made a three-card raise, which responder thinks is a four-card raise, opener can bid NT at his next bid, if he gets one, to show this. Playing in a 4-3 fit is not the end of the world.

So, to sum up, with an unbalanced hand, after 1m - 1M the priorities are:

- Raise partner;
- Bid 1♠, forcing unless partner is a passed hand;
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer; or,
- Rebid your suit if you don't have the strength for that;
- Jump-rebid your suit with 15-17 points
- Jump-shift with 18-19+. (Jump-shifts by *opener* are never weak). Game forcing.

With a minimum balanced hand, opener will rebid 1N if he cannot raise or bid 1♠. He doesn't make a three-card

raise, because if responder has invitational or better values and really does have five cards in M, he will checkback with *New Minor Forcing* (page 44).

Important

If opener rebids 1N he promises a *balanced* hand. Never rebid 1N with a singleton or void.

This rule, which I jokingly call the Prime Directive, is so important because of the conclusions partner can draw. For example, suppose responder has six hearts and hears opener rebid 1N. Responder now knows he has an 8- or 9-card heart fit. An opener who is 4=1=4=4 is going to be shocked to hear a 4♥ bid.

The priorities therefore are:

- Raise partner;
- Bid 1♠, forcing if unbalanced;
- Bid 1N with a balanced minimum hand;
- Bid 2N with a balanced 18-19 HCP. This does not deny any major you may skip over:
 - 1♦ - 1♥ - 2N does not deny having four spades
 - 1♦ - 1♠ - 2N does not deny having four hearts

Note: Opener rebidding 2N always shows this strength of 18-19, including the auction 1m - 1N - 2N. Of course, we are denying a fit if responder bid a major, but we're not denying four in the other major.

- Bid 3N with a balanced 20-21 points.

Note

The system we use after *opening a notrump* (page 23) does not apply after we *rebid* 1N and likewise the system *after we *open* 2N* (page 35) does not apply after a 2N *rebid*. Those systems only apply when we open or *overcall* in notrump.

Bypass 1♠?

Is it ever ok to bid 1N rather than 1♠, if your hand is balanced? Experts sometimes do. Gavin Wolpert gives two cases where he would. First, he's 4=3=3=3. Second, he has a hand that is say 4=2=3=4, with say ♦AQJ. After 1♣

- 1♥ he bids 1N thinking that if he bids 1♠, partner won't be able to bid 1N with no diamond stopper. In both cases, Gavin says he is willing to lose the spade suit when his partner is not strong enough to check back, in order to get to a 1N contract when it is right.

The downside is that the opener with four spades will never believe we have a fit. Your partner, like one of my partners, may say they never want this to happen.

The Auction 1♠ - 1♦ - 1N

This auction is special because opener should bid 1N even though they have a four-card major. The reason is that if responder bids a major now, it is game forcing. With a less-than-game-forcing hand, responder would have skipped over 1♦ to bid the major. Remember *Walsh* (page 38)?

So we're basically done unless responder has an invitational or better hand. Responder can bid a suit preference to clubs, bid 2♦ with five of them, or pass; invite with 2N; or bid 3N as appropriate.

The Auctions 1m - 1M - 1N

The auction:

1m - 1♠ - 1N - 2♥

is *drop dead*, one of the surprising exceptions to "a new suit is forcing by an unpassed hand". Also drop dead are 1m - 1M - 1N - 2M.

More of these kinds of auctions are discussed in *New Minor Forcing* (page 44).

The Auction 1♦ - 2♣ Game Forcing

Partner has made a game-forcing bid promising five clubs. We're looking for 3N initially. Notice that responder will only have a four-card major if they have longer clubs. What follows is the scheme suggested by Gavin Wolpert. Opener's rebids are:

- 2♦ shows 5+ diamonds, any strength. Does not deny a four-card major. If partner has one we will hear about it next and can raise it.
- 2♥ or 2♠ shows a 4-card major, denies five diamonds. Because we are in a game-forcing auction, this is not a *reverse*, so does not require extra strength.

- 3♣ shows 3+ clubs. This doesn't settle the question of strain: we still wish we could find 3N rather than 5♣. Time to show stoppers.
- 3♦ shows 6+ diamonds, at most one loser in diamonds, and 16+ HCP.
- 3♥, 3♠ are *splinter* bids, with 4+ clubs.
- 2N is natural, balanced with 12-14 or 18-19 HCP.

Of course, all these are forcing to 3N or 4 of a minor.

Notes:

- The only auction where 2♥ is unbalanced is when opener's hand is 4=4=4=1.
- Opener's splinters show a nine-card fit but do not show extra values. This is also a general principle of 2/1 auctions. We will discuss more of these principles in the section on 2/1 auctions for a major.
- Some may be more comfortable as opener bidding their four-card majors up the line, bidding 2♦ only if they don't have a major and can't support clubs. I think the concern with this is possibly losing a diamond fit. However, this auction is rare and possibly not worth a lot of extra memory work so this is ok.

The Auction 1m - 1N

After 1m - 1N, bidding 2N is 18-19 HCP. You don't deny a four-card major but you know responder hasn't got one. Responder sometimes has a bad 6 HCP so it is best not to jump to 3N. Otherwise, a reverse or jump-shift here is forcing for a round.

Subsequent Bidding

If responder has bid a major, and opener does not have four cards in it, there might still be a 3-5 major fit. Or, there might be a four-four fit in the other major, for example when responder has five spades and four hearts but opener has two spades and four hearts.

Two *expected conventions* (page 4) that solve the problem of detecting such fits are covered in the next chapter, *Basic Checkback* (page 127): New Minor Forcing and Fourth Suit Forcing.

Over a 1N rebid, responder's natural second bid is not forcing. The most commonly misunderstood of these is 1m - 1♠ - 1N - 2♥. This is a new suit by an unpassed hand but it is NOT forcing. If responder now bids 2♠, that's just

agreeing to play spades rather than hearts. The chapter on NMF covers all the non-conventional bids after 1N as well.

When opener is unbalanced, the responder must make sure we get to game if we have the values. If we agree on a minor suit, the usual issue is, do we have stoppers for an NT contract. When there are two unbid suits, bidding one SHOWS a stopper and denies a stopper in the other; while bidding NT shows stoppers in both:

1♣ - 1♦
2♦ - 2♠

shows a spade stopper, and the values for 3N, but no heart stopper. Opener will bid some number of diamonds without a heart stopper, depending on strength.

In case of a straight raise, 1m - 2m, opener bids a new suit at the two level as a *Help Suit Game Try* (page 58). After 1m - 3m, bid stoppers up the line to accept the game try. The first partner who knows we have all three suits stopped bids 3N.

Interference

A minor is so easy to overcall, it happens a lot, so we must be prepared. Responder's bids over the overcall mean what they would have meant, except that the limit raise or better is shown with a *cue bid*. That's a bid of *their* suit, such as 1♣ - (1♥) - 2♥. That has the same meaning as 1♣ - 3♣.

A cue bid at the three level after partner's 1m opener is overcalled is *Western Cue* (page 79), asking partner to bid 3N with a stopper in their suit. A Western Cue bids says, "We have the points for game, partner, but I do not have a stopper. I probably have something to help though."

Worst case is they have a nine-card fit in a major suit. Without two good stoppers 3N will be a very poor contract.

If they double, the bid 2N! becomes an artificial bid showing a limit raise or better (*Jordan 2NT* (page 52)). When you don't have a suitable bid but do have 10+ HCP, you can use a *Going For Blood* (page 70) redouble.

Inverted Minors

Inverted Minors is listed as one of the *expected conventions* (page 4) for a 2/1 player but you can not play it without a lot of harm.

Inverted Minors is off in competition but on by a passed hand.

The convention simply makes a single raise a better hand than a double raise. 1m - 2m! requires:

- 10+ points
- 5+ cards in the minor, or four really good ones if it is diamonds.
- No four card major

The 2m bid must be alerted. It is forcing for one round. In competition, 2m reverts to its standard meaning. If 3m is a jump, as in 1♦ - (1♥) - 3♦, it is weak.

After a strong raise, the partners bid stoppers up-the-line. While some do not look to confirm a stopper in the other minor, we do. The first party that knows we have stoppers bids 2N, or a responder with a game-forcing hand can go directly to 3N. "He who knows, goes", as Marty Bergen says. If 3N or 6m is not possible we will head for 5m. Stopping in 4m is possible but if 3N makes expect a score of 0%.

Some experts prefer to use 3m as a "mixed" raise, showing 7-10 HCP, so that an opener with 18-19 points can bid 3N, but that won't be what your partner means unless they bring it up.

FINDING 5-3 AND 4-4 MAJOR FITS

Suit openings often lead to the following scenario: responder bids a major, and opener rebids 1N or a third suit. Responder has only shown a four-card major, but a responder who has a five-card major would like to ask the opener whether opener has three-card support; and when responder might hold four cards in the other major, he'd also like to know if opener does too.

The *checkback* conventions ask those questions for the responder. Because of the bidding room they consume, they require invitational to game-forcing hands.

Fourth Suit Forcing

Bidding the fourth suit may describe your hand, but it is unlikely to find a fit with partner. For example,

1♦ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥

While it is possible opener has four hearts, it isn't too likely given that he already has at least 8 cards in the minors. Fourth Suit Forcing gives you a way to bid a hand where you need a forcing bid but don't have a natural one. For example, suppose responder has, in the auction 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♣ – ?:

♠KQJ86 ♥– ♦A93 ♣KJT82

With 14 points, responder must drive the auction to game. But alas,

- 2♦ will be passed
- 2♠ could be passed
- 2N could be passed (besides being frightening)
- 3♣ could be passed
- 3♦ could be passed
- 3♠ sets spades as trump, so we'd need six of them
- 3N could be very, very wrong.

But 2♥!(forcing, artificial), called Forth Suit Forcing or FSF, forces the auction to game (or four of a minor). Ev-

eryone can slow down, and responder's next bid will further explain his hand. Note that Fourth Suit Forcing (FSF) almost always implies that the suit responder bid first is five cards long; opener assumes so.

The auction 1♣ – 1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠ is considered natural, not fourth-suit forcing. It is forcing one round as a new suit by an unpassed hand. It isn't a checkback situation since responder didn't bid a major to start with.

The FSF bid says nothing about the fourth suit. You could have a void in it. So if you want to show a real suit, you have to bid it again on your next turn.

FSF Responses

After FSF, opener further describes his hand, and tries to give responder information on two important fronts:

- Opener will show 3-card support.
- Lacking support, show a stopper in the fourth suit if we have one by bidding notrump at a level appropriate to our strength.

Example:

1♦ – 1♠
2♣ – 2♥!(forcing, says nothing about
♥hearts)

Holding 3 spades, we bid 2S. Otherwise, we bid 2N with a heart stopper.

With opener lacking a heart stopper or 3 spades, the auction might go:

1♦ – 1♠
2♣ – 2♥!(gf, says nothing about hearts)
3♣ – 3♦
4♦

Here responder's bid of 3♦ showed a two-suited hand in a way that could not be passed since a game force was in effect. Had the responder had an invitational hand with

spades and diamonds, he would just bid $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 2\clubsuit - 3\spadesuit$.

Opener knows that since he denied a heart stopper, when responder did not bid 3N, game is not possible, so goes on to $4\spadesuit$ to await responder's decision about $5\spadesuit$. Good defenders will know to lead the fourth suit if you try to sneak through in 3N.

Note

Some play FSF as forcing only for one round; ask a new partner and check the appropriate box in the bottom right of your convention card. Not recommended.

FSF In A Game-Forcing Auction

When we are already in a game-forcing auction, there is no need for FSF. In that case Grant and Rodwell in *2 Over 1 Game Force* recommend that a bid of the fourth suit in a 2/1 auction mean either:

- Responder doesn't know what else to bid, or
- Responder has a genuinely two-suited hand.

Responder's next bid will clarify the situation.

New Minor Forcing

When a 1N or 2N rebid has been made over a major suit call by the responder, any bid of an *unbid* minor (hence, a *new* minor) is NMF. It is forcing for one round and is at least invitational. Over 2N it is of course game forcing.

This writeup assumes that an opener holding four spades would bid $1\spadesuit$ rather than 1N over $1\heartsuit$. While I strongly recommend this, when you get to a very advanced level you might not follow this rule. But you should switch to *Two-Way New Minor Forcing* (page 127) at that point, where this is discussed further.

The uses of NMF are (where w stands for the unbid minor):

- $1m - 1\heartsuit - 1N - 2w!(NMF)$

Responder holding five hearts wants to know if we have a 5-3 fit.

- $1m - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2w!(NMF)$

Responder holding five spades and possibly four hearts would like to check for a fit.

- $1\clubsuit/\diamond/\heartsuit - 1M - 2N - 3w!(NMF)$

Responder holding four+ spades and / or four hearts would like to check for a fit. Directly bidding $3\heartsuit$ or $3\spadesuit$ shows a fifth major card but a weak hand.

For more sophisticated schemes, see *TWNMF over 2N* (page 128) or the *Wolff Signoff* (page 154).

Note

In the auction $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit - 1N$, $2\clubsuit$ clubs is NMF; or with partnership agreement use the best minor. In the auction $1\clubsuit - 1\diamond - 1N$, NMF does not apply.

Warning

I think the NMF bid over a 2N jump rebid is one of the hardest conventional bids to recognize at the table.

Responding to New Minor Forcing, in order of priority, opener shows an unbid heart suit, or shows three-card support for responder's major. Failing those, that he bids notrump, rebids his suit, or shows stoppers. While accomplishing this we have game-forcing bids to make when we have a maximum (14 points):

- Shows four of the other major by bidding it. For example, $1\diamond - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!(NMF) - 2\heartsuit$
- Shows three in partner's major and 14 points by jump bidding it. For example, $1\diamond - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!(NMF) - 3\spadesuit$.
- Shows three in partner's major by bidding it. For example, $1\diamond - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!(NMF) - 2\spadesuit$
- With a minimum: - Bid 2N with stoppers in the two unbid suits (Remember, w was bid artificially); or - Rebid your minor.
- With a maximum: (auction is game forcing because responder is invitational+): - Bid 3N with stoppers in the two unbid suits - Bid the unbid suit where you *do* have a stopper, as long as it doesn't show a suit - Jump rebid your minor
- NMF after opener rebids 2N is game forcing.

An example of this last case: The auction goes $1\diamond - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!$, but opener does not have three spades, does not have four hearts, and does not have a stopper in either

of the other suits (clubs and hearts). So opener jump-bids 3♦.

We bid the other major rather than show 3-card support at first. If there is a double 5-3 and 4-4 fit, we want the suit with the 4-4 fit to be trump, hoping to set up the other suit for discards.

Warning

Make sure you and your partner agree on this point. Not everyone does. Assume it with a stranger.

Sometimes it takes longer to tell the story but the story gets told. Compare these continuations after 1♦ – 1♠ – 1N – 2♣!(NMF). The responder has bid spades:

- 2♥(opener has 4 hearts)-2♠(has five spades)-4♠(has 3 spades and accepts invite)
- 2♠(opener has 4 hearts)-3♥(me too, and invitational values)
- 2♠(opener has 4 hearts)-4♥(me too, and game values)
- 2♠(opener has 3 spades, minimum, denies four hearts)
- 3♠(opener has 3 spades, and 14 points, denies four hearts)

When responder does not use NMF:

- 1m - 1M - 1N - 2m is to play;
- 1m - 1M - 1N - 2M is to play with five in the major M;
- 1a - 1♠ - 1N - 2♥ gives opener the choice of pass or 2♠;
- 1m - 1M - 1N - 3w is to play with a long w suit; and
- 1m - 1M - 1N - 3M is invitational with a six-card suit.
- 1m - 1M - 1N - 4M is game with a six-card suit.
- 1m - 1M - 1N - Pass is of course an option, lest we forget.

Note

Gavin Wolpert calls the 2M bid his favorite matchpoint bid, but you'll have to agree with partner. My personal

experience is that it leads to good results. It makes sense. If your partner opened a weak 1N with a range such as 12-14 then responder would transfer to his major and pass. A transfer is made with a weak hand because responders hand will be worth so much more if his five-card suit is trump than by just playing 1N. And of course when partner rebid 1N that was just the kind of hand he has.

Note also how responder with a six-card major is relying on opener not being short in any suit, so that a 6-2 fit at least has been found.

Notes

New Minor forcing is off if the opponents have made an overcall but it is on over a double. The reason is that the cue bid of the opponent's suit is available as a forcing bid after an overcall. Over a double, we don't have that so need the forcing pattern.

Checkback Stayman seems to be almost historical now, but it is an agreement that the "new minor" is always clubs, new or not. 2♦ can then be non-forcing, like 2♥. I have seen it played.

The two-way version of NMF, *Two-Way NMF* (page 127), also known as "Two-Way Checkback Stayman" is, as Marty Bergen titled his lesson on the subject, "Infinitely Better and Easier" than NMF. Few non-experts play it however. This is just one of those historical oddities where everyone got taught the wrong thing solely because it has one less conventional bid in it.

RESPONDING TO MAJOR OPENINGS

If using this chapter as a reference, be sure you've read *Notation and Nomenclature* (page 7) and review *Classifying Your Hand* (page 19) to classify your hand as weak, competitive, invitational, game-going, or slam interest.

If you have support for partner's major, be sure to revalue your hand and do a *losing trick count*. Sometimes HCP aren't the whole story. An 11 HCP hand, especially one with four trump, or a hand with an LTC of 7, may be appropriate for treating as game-going.

We focus on finding eight or more card major fits. There is also an effort to distinguish nine-card fits from eight-card fits, as nine-card fits are much easier to play.

A set of responses called the "standard" responses applies in two cases:

1. If responder is a passed hand, or
2. If there was competition (they doubled or overcalled).

These are also the rules for the older Standard American (SAYC) system. The rules are pretty much what they were for minor openings.

If responder is a passed hand, the opener may have opened light and allowances must be made.

Responding As A Passed Hand

Warning

Before choosing a response, you must revalue your hand in light of partner's bid.

Here are the responses if we are a passed hand and there was no interference.

Weak Hands

If you have fewer than 6 HCP you can pass. But if:

- You have an Ace, three trump, and some shape
- You have four trump and five points

you can make a simple raise. The reason is that if the opponents have half the points, they are going to get into the auction. Make it hard for them.

Do not try to rescue partner if you have a stiff or void in his suit. If you do, he likely will just bid it again. Worst case, you're only at the one level and your partner has five trump.

If you happen to have five or more of your partner's major and shortness, bid 4M. This is, contrary to appearances, a weak bid. We may have only half the deck but we have 10+ trump. If we don't make our contract, at least we kept them from finding their fit. Such a bid is called a *preemptive* raise.

Competitive Hands

If you have six points, you must bid something. Even if you have a void in partner's suit, you must bid something. Your partner could have an unbalanced hand with 21 points.

There are just three possible bids with a competitive hand: 2M, 1♠, and 1N:

- With three or more of your partner's suit M, you make a simple raise to 2M. Support with support! Otherwise,

- Over 1♥, bid 1♠ if you have four spades.
- Bid 1N. This only says you do not any other bid but do have 6(or more) HCP.

With a competitive hand, you can't bid a new suit at the two-level. That requires a hand with 10+ HCP.

Important: 1M - 1N does not say you have a balanced hand. If we made such a requirement, and your partner opens 1♥, suppose we have this hand:

♠K92 ♥2 ♦Q8763 ♣Q952

We would be stuck. Let's see why:

- We absolutely cannot pass with those 7 HCP.
- We can't raise hearts.
- We don't have four spades.
- We don't have enough for a 2-level reply, which rules out 2♦ or 2♣.
- The only bid left is 1N.

Our hand is not balanced, so if 1N had to be balanced, we would have no bid.

Warning

Don't confuse a notrump RESPONSE such as 1♥ - 1N, with a notrump REBID such as 1♦ - 1♥ - 1N. When an opener bids notrump on his second bid it *does* promise a balanced hand.

A competitive hand gets just one bid, unless opener forces another out of you or gives you a choice of parking places. So if your partner bids his suit again, you pass.

"Really?", I hear you ask. "He's rebid 2♥ and I don't have any hearts and you want me to pass?". Yes. No rescuing allowed. As we will see, partner will have 6(or more) hearts, so if you bid three of something expect him to not have many of those and bid 3♥. You may have just bid past the only contract we could make.

Invitational Hands

If your hand is invitational, and you have three or more of your partner's major, bid 2♣!(limit raise, 3 or more trump). This is a conventional bid called *Reverse Drury* (page 49), discussed below. The name Reverse Drury is usually shortened to just "Drury". This raise is called a

limit raise because the bid limits your strength to a narrow range.

If we had an invitational hand but it got better because we have a fit for partner's major, we still just bid Drury. The limit raise is artificial so we'll get another bid. Don't just jump to game. Give partner a chance to admit he opened light. We can bid game on our next bid if he didn't.

For example, Pass - 1♠ - 2♣!(Drury) - 2♠ says "I opened light, stop!".

If you don't have a raise, we're back to the same rules as for minor openings:

- If your partner opened 1♥, bid 1♠ if you have 6(or more) HCP and 4(or more) spades.
- Bid your longest suit. If you have two four-card suits bid the cheapest. If you have two 5(or more) card suits, bid the higher-ranked.
- Bid 2N with a balanced hand and 11 or 12 points. With 10 HCP and no fit, it is probably best to treat the hand as a bad 10 and just bid 1N.
- A new possibility: Bid 3♣ with an invitational hand and 6(or more) clubs.

Note

Only the 2♣! Drury bid is forcing because you are a passed hand. In fact, the whole point of Drury is to give the responder a forcing raise.

Hands That Revalued To Game-Going

If your hand was invitational but you have support for partner's major, you might now have a game-going hand even if you were a passed hand. Fortunately, our instructions for invitational hands are to either bid Drury with no interference or to control-bid their suit with interference. Both of those alternatives will result in our getting another bid, so we can raise to game.

There is also a new choice, the *splinter* bid. A splinter bid is a double-jump in another suit, showing a hand with game-going values and a singleton or void in the bid suit.

- 4♣, 4♦ over 1M,
- 4♥ over 1♠, and
- 3♠ over 1♥.

Since these bids are made before opener's second bid, they are alertable. Splinters can also be used by an opener after a major response, such as 1♦ - 1♥ - 4♣.

Splinters are best described as a raise to game with no interest in slam unless partner has the "magic hand". If partner has no wasted values in the splinter suit, and has some extras, we might be in the magic "30 point deck" situation – we have almost all the points in the other three suits. With no magic hand, opener just bids the game. Otherwise control-bidding or key-card may ensue.

Splinter bids, particularly the 1♥ - 3♠ splinter, have been known to cause people to stare like a deer caught in the headlights. The thought process to use is: 1♠ would be a normal bid, 2♠ would be a jump-shift, so 3♠ is jumping twice, so it is a splinter. Likewise over 1M, 2♣ is the 10+ bid, 3♣ is a jump-shift, so 4♣ is a splinter.

Usually, one does not splinter if the singleton is an Ace.

Reverse Drury

Reverse Drury is one of the *expected conventions* (page 4) for a 2/1 player. Reverse Drury requires partnership agreement.

When 1M is opened in third or fourth seat, it may be light. Reverse Drury lets responder show a limit raise without getting too high by bidding 2♣! as a limit raise rather than 3M. Reverse Drury does not apply over interference.

Note that the natural 2♣ bid is no longer available, so a responder might have to bid 3♣ over 1M to show 10 points with 6(or more) clubs and no support for the major. (Combined with 1♦ - 3♣ meaning the same thing, 3♣ as a response is always invitational and not forcing with 6(or more) clubs).

Opener now reveals his strength:

- 2M Opener's hand was substandard. Responder passes. We're not at 3M, where we would have been without this convention.
- 2♦! (Opener had an honest opener).
- 3M! (Opener has 14 points).

In the original convention, 2♦, 2M, and 3M are the only possible responses. However, we extend the convention somewhat to allow the opener to in effect make a game try. When opener bids a suit other than 2M, opener is making a *help-suit game try* (page 58), and has a full opener. Responder may now bid game or stop at 3M.

Note: the "Reverse" in "Reverse Drury" is historical; when the convention was first suggested, the 2♦ response and the 2M response were swapped.

Add Reverse Drury to your partnership as soon as you feel you both can recognize it. You'll have to regret the times someone misses it. Also played by many is the two-way version, in which 2♣! is a three-card limit raise and 2♦! is a 4(or more)-card limit raise.

Responding As Unpassed Hand Without Interference

Two Over One Game Force

If you are:

- not a passed hand*, and
- there is no interference, and
- your partner opened a *suit other than clubs*, then...

OK, wait, before I tell you, that was the hard part. When you start playing 2/1 you are going to be getting mixed up because you apply these rules in the wrong context. When you see what looks like a 2/1 bid you have to stop and ask "What has happened so far?".

Ready? Here we go again.

If you are *not a passed hand*, and there is *no interference*, and your partner opened a *suit other than clubs*, then a *non-jump* two-level response in a new suit is forcing to game or four of a minor. These bids require an opening hand.

There are six such sequences, all game forcing:

- 1♥ - 2♣
- 1♥ - 2♦
- 1♠ - 2♣
- 1♠ - 2♦
- 1♠ - 2♥ (5(or more))
- 1♦ - 2♣ (5(or more))

The auction 1♦ - 2♣ was treated separately in the chapter on *Responding To Minor Openings* (page 37).

We promise 5(or more) hearts or 4(or more) (rarely, 3) in a minor.

These conditions are necessary but not sufficient to make these bids. See below.

Jump bids like 1♦ – 2♠ are not 2/1 bids.

This system, Two Over One Game Force, slows the auction down on game-going hands. This makes for better slam bidding because neither partner needs to jump just to keep the auction alive. In fact, once the game force is established, the slower you go, the more powerful a hand you are showing. The saying is, “Slow Shows”.

To get the benefits of the 2/1 bids, we have to do something about the invitational hands that used to bid at the 2-level with 10+ points. With no other changes, they would not have a bid and all have to bid 1N.

Hmmm. OK, let’s do that.

- The range of the 1N response becomes 6 to 11 or a bad 12 instead of 6 to 10. We make this bid forcing for one round.
- Opener will *announce* “forcing”. Opener must make another bid. See *1N Forcing* (page 55) for continuations.

Honestly, the 1N forcing part is the hard part. The 2/1 auctions are easy.

Invitational Hands

With an invitational hand and three trump, we bid 1N(forcing) and then bid 3M on our next turn. (These are the hands where we did Drury in when we were a passed hand).

With an invitational hand and 4(or more) trump, we bid 3M immediately.

Without a raise, we bid as in standard.

Game-Going Hands

With a game-going hand and three trump, we basically make a 2/1 bid if we can. The rules are (besides the length and strength requirements):

- Bid 1♠ with 5(or more), or
- With four spades, prefer 1♠ to bidding 2m unless your minor is longer than your spades.

If you do bid 1♠ it is forcing.

With 4(or more) trump and a semi-balanced hand we bid 2N!. 2N is a conventional bid called Jacoby 2NT. It shows a game-forcing raise with 4(or more) trump. See *Jacoby 2NT* (page 51) for continuations.

If the hand is not balanced we also can consider a *splinter bid* (page 48), previously discussed. If the hand is strong enough to have definite slam interest we can make a 2/1 bid or use Jacoby 2NT (such as with a 1=4=4=4 hand).

What follows is further discussion of these eight changes: six 2/1 bids, the forcing 1N bid (*in the next chapter* (page 55)), and the 2N strong raise.

After a 2N! game-forcing raise or 2/1 bids, we must make sure we bid game. Neither party can pass short of it. “Bidding game” is a slight misnomer; you can stop in four of a minor even though that is not a game. However, this phrase is common bridge terminology so we will use it.

No Reverses After 2/1

First and foremost, after a 2/1 bid, there are no reverses:

1♥ – 2♣
2♠

does not show extras, just that we have at least four spades. So, we no longer necessarily bid 1♠ over 1♥. With a game-forcing hand we make a 2/1 bid with our longest suit. We can show the spades later, no longer worried about reversing.

Rare But Necessary

Rarely, you bid 2/1 with as short as 3 cards in a minor. (Remember, 1♠ – 2♥ promises five hearts). Suppose your partner opens 1♠, and your shape is 3=4=2=4 with 13 HCP. You have a dilemma:

- 2♠ shows 6-10 HCP, so you’re too strong for that.
- 3♠ shows 10-12 HCP, and again you’re too strong.
- 4♠ shows 5 trump and a weak hand – again, not appropriate.
- 2♥ is possible only if you have five hearts. You don’t.
- 1N is forcing, but while you can use it with a three-card raise in an emergency, followed by a 4M bid, it really implied at most a bad 12 points. We hate to lie and miss a slam.
- 2N! is *Jacoby 2NT* (page 51) which is game-forcing and promises 4 trump.
- 3N gets to the wrong game. Partner will never guess you have support.

- You don't have a singleton or void so no splinter bid applies.

Therefore, you will bid 2♣; this is forcing because it is a new suit by an unpassed hand. You'll tell partner about the support on your next bid by bidding spades.

Now change your shape to 3=4=3=3. The same logic applies and you'd be bidding a three-card suit. That's ok; it is forcing. You're sure to get another bid.

When You Bid 1♠

After partner opens 1♥, suppose you have game-forcing values but don't have four hearts and do have exactly four spades. Then if you don't have a five-card minor you bid 1♠, forcing. If you bid 2m and later bid spades it promises you had a five-card minor.

If you do bid 1♠ over 1♥ holding five spades, you can if necessary use the *checkback* (page 43) bids we'll learn later with invitational or better values to find a 5-3 fit.

Jacoby 2NT

In response to a major opening, and in the absence of any interference, a bid of 2N is called Jacoby 2NT. It is alerted as a game-forcing raise with four or more trump.

2N can still be used as a limit raise or better if opponents interfere with a double. See *Jordan 2NT* (page 52).

:: rubric::

Responding to Jacoby 2NT

Opener responds to J2NT by revaluing his hand in light of the fit. We call this new value "declarer points". Now:

- With a balanced- or semi-balanced hand, there are three bids available: 3M, 3N, or 4M. The 3N bid can be given a meaning since you've found a major fit.
 - 1M - 2N! - 4M Jumping to game shows 12-15 declarer points, a minimum.
 - 1M - 2N! - 3M 16+ declarer points, but good trumps (2 of the top 3 honors).
 - 1M - 2N! - 3N 16+ declarer points, semi-balanced, but not good trumps.
- With an unbalanced hand,
 - 1M - 2N! - 3♣/♦/W stiff or void in the bid suit. (W = the other major), or

- 1M - 2N! - 4♣/♦/W, showing a good second 5(or more) card suit, strong hand.

You have a choice in the latter case since obviously you have a shortness. Choose the suit bid only with a *good suit*. However, if you have a void, show the void.

After the opener replies to J2N, a non-jump bid in a side suit is a control bid, which are discussed in more detail in the chapter on *slam bidding* (page 95).

When opener shows shortness, responder must examine his holding in that suit. A good holding is paradoxically bad, because those values will likely be wasted in the play. However, no wasted values is the legendary "30-point deck" situation – all your values are working and you have nearly all the honors in the other three suits. Explore for slam.

If you and your partner do not routinely 1N with 15-17 HCP balanced hands that contain a five-card major, then you'd use the 3N response to show such a hand – but that's an inferior way to play.

The Hand And Jacoby 2NT

In *The Hand* (page 11) we met these two hands and evaluated them to around 16 and 15 points each:

West	East
♠K862	♠AQ
♥AKJ95	♥T632
♦T5	♦AKQ6
♣KJ	♣964

If West had been the Dealer, West would open either 1♥ or 1N, as we discussed. Suppose West opens 1♥. East has an opening hand and four hearts so would respond with Jacoby 2NT. West has no shortness to show nor a good five-card side suit, but with extra values bids 3♥:

1♥ 2N! (four-card gf raise)
 3♥ (16+ declarer points, semi-balanced, ↪ good trumps)

East would bid 4♦ to show the diamond control and no club control. West's 4N will reveal two keys without the trump Queen, so missing an Ace and the trump Queen, West will leave it at 5♥.

Responding After Interference

Over an overcall, new suit bids basically show what they would have without the overcall. The 2/1 bids are no longer game forcing, but back to the standard 10+ points and a five-card suit; and they won't be hiding 3-card support. You may not be able to make the bid you wanted to make because it would now be at the two level and you don't have 10 points, or it would require five cards in the suit when you only have four.

We'll learn the details about *negative doubles* (page 68) and other competitive bids later to deal with those situations. Briefly, negative doubles work like this:

- The auction starts 1♥ - (2♣). We had a hand that would have bid 1♠ but we only have four spades so we can't bid 2♠. We make a negative double to tell partner of our distress.
- The auction starts 1♦ - (1♠). Before we were so rudely interrupted we were going to bid 1♥ with our five hearts and 8 HCP. But now, 2♥ would show 10+ points, so we can't bid that. The negative double says, partner, I have 4(or more) hearts but either I'm not strong enough or I don't have five hearts. Don't worry, I have a plan if you bid clubs.

To raise an opening 1M after an overcall,

- Raise to 2M with 5-9 and 3(or more) cards.
- Most hands with Axxx are also worth a raise to 2, especially in spades.
- Cue-bid the overcalled suit to make a limit raise or better.
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter in support of opener's suit.
- A jump raise (e.g. 1M - 2♣ - 3M) is preemptive. Usually you have four trump.
- A jump to 4M shows a weak hand and 5(or more) trump.

Without support, notrump bids deny support and are natural; they show a stopper in the overcalled suit:

- 2N is invitational with a balanced hand, and shows a stopper in their suit.
- 3N bids game, again with stoppers.

In this case, 1♠ (2♣) 3♣ is the limit raise. This lets opener sign off at 3♠ if he does not want to accept the invitation.

To support after a double, simple raises remain the same, but stronger raises use Jordan 2NT, discussed next. A new bid, the redouble, shows 10+ points and denies a four-card raise. This means other 2-level bids are confined to 9 or fewer points.

Examples:

- 1♠ - 3♠ would have meant a limit raise, but 1♠ (2♣) 3♠ is preemptive, 4(or more) spades.
- 1♥ (1♠) 2♠! limit raise+ in hearts
- 1♥ (2♦) 2♥ 5-9, at least three hearts
- 1♥ (2♦) 3♥ weak hand, 4+ hearts
- 1♥ (1♠) 3♥ weak hand, 4+ hearts
- 1♥ (1♠) 4♥ weak hand, 5+ hearts
- 1♥ (X) 2N! Limit raise or better, 3+ hearts. Forcing for one round.
- 1♥ (X) XX 10+ HCP, forcing to 2♥.
- 1♥ (X) 2♣ 5(or more) clubs, < 10 points.
- 1♥ (1♠) 2N Invitational, balanced hand. This bid can be passed.
- 1♥ (2♦) 4♦ is a splinter in support of hearts.
- 1♥ (2♠) presents a quandary because the 3♠ cue-bid would force opener to game. If you have a suitable hand you might be able to make a negative double and come back to 3♥ to compete. A plain 3♥ is invitational. Lacking the strength to bid 3♥, all you can do is pass.

Jordan 2NT

If the opener's LHO makes a takeout double of a major, 2N! shows a limit raise or better with four trump.

1M - (X) - 2N!(four-card limit raise or better)

This bid is called Jordan 2NT (who popularized it in America) or Truscott 2NT (who invented it in 1954) or Dormer 2NT (who popularized it in Europe).

This bid shows four trump as in Jacoby 2NT; with 3 card support, one makes a "going for blood" redouble (page 70).

However, my recommended partnership agreement for intermediates is to make a Jordan 2N bid with 3-card support also – the redouble sequences are rather difficult. Jordan over the takeout double gets the support message in early

so partner can revalue their hand, and prevents a low-level bid from the opponents.

One of the competitive principles we use is that jumps in competition are weak. A notable exception is replying to your partner's takeout double. Until we get to all that, just note that a bid of 3M here is a preemptive four-card raise.

Side note for more advanced players: There is a nasty case when the opponents make a preemptive bid. Imagine your partner opens 1♥ and your RHO bids 2♠. Ugh. If we only have an invitational hand, the cue bid of 3♠ would force us to 4♥. We're left with a guess, or possibly a double hoping partner bids 3 of a minor which you can then correct to 3♥. But technically that is a negative double showing both minors, so it risks partner doing something else like 3N or 4m.

By partnership agreement, you can make 2N a limit raise in this case. I call this *Jordan All The Time* (page 111) (strictly my own name for it, as I've never seen another). Some experts even play 2N as a four-card raise over any interference.

Discussion

The most frequent responder error after a major opening is to raise to game because you have an opening hand with support. That's understandable; you do need to reach game for sure. But the problem is you may be underestimating the opener's hand and missing a slam.

Say partner has opened 1♥ in first seat, and you have ♠AJ5 ♥KQ8 ♦72 ♣AT983.

You have a dilemma. Your hand revalues to about 16 points – one for the doubleton and one for the extra club. You cannot bid:

- 1♠ – you'd be lying, because you do not have four spades
- 1N – forcing, but lies about your values.
- 2♥ or 3♥ – too small, not forcing so partner might pass
- 4♥ – too big, this is a shutout showing a weak hand and five trumps.

The just-right Goldilocks response is 2♣; your next bid will be hearts. Note that you could bid 1N(forcing) with a minimal hand with three hearts, bidding 4♥ next. However, with the extras in this hand, 2♣ is right.

Note what happens if the bidding goes 1♥ - 4♥. Opener holding ♠K9 ♥AJT742 ♦AK9 ♣K2 is going to think that the partnership has at most 25 points and is not going to explore for a slam that actually has excellent chances.

With some hands, such as ♠AJ5 ♥KQ83 ♦972 ♣AT9, you might even be bidding a three-card suit. That's ok; your bid is forcing and you'll be able to clarify on your next bid. This is also an object lesson on why a new suit by an unpassed hand is forcing; sometimes responder must make something up to keep the bidding going. Don't be tempted to pass 2♣ because you have bid with a minimal opener and have clubs. It is, however, important not to bid 2♥ over 1♠ unless you have five of them.

Note that if you are a passed hand, your hand might have just become game forcing due to the fit. Still, you don't just bid 4♥ right away. You bid 2♣!(reverse Drury), showing a limit raise. If partner then bids 2♥, you can then raise to 4♥, telling your story beautifully – I had a near-opening hand, but now that you bid hearts, I have enough for game with my distribution.

What's My Limit Raise?

To avoid confusion in the heat of battle, realize this: in any situation there is one and only one bid that shows a limit raise (or better). First, stop and revalue your hand in light of the fit, and then choose your raise. This chart shows what to do to make a limit raise:

Table 1: Major Suit Limit Raises

	Unpassed Hand	Passed Hand
No competi- tion	3M	2♣!(reverse Drury)
They doubled	2N!(Jordan) or XX	2N!(Jordan) or XX
They over- called	cue bid	cue bid

The bids that show at least a limit raise are artificial (rows two and three); this ensures that you will get to bid again, in case you have a game-forcing hand. (Even if a passed hand, your hand may have gotten better). Unless you decide to allow Jordan to show a three-card raise, XX is used – it does not show a 3-card raise at first, so you do that later.

So, ask yourself, “What’s my limit raise?”. If you get that right, everything else will be easy.

There is a problem when they make a weak overcall, in that your cue bid might force to game but you do not have the requisite values. One difficult case is 1♥ (2♠); at this point a cue bid of 3♠ forces us to 4♥. Experts here may have an agreement that 2N is a four-card limit raise, but you’d have to have a very firm agreement with a partner to play that.

Absent any agreement 3♥ here is just a good competitive hand – you’re saying you think we can make that even if partner is an opener. With a minimal competitive hand you just pass or consider a negative double.

A cue bid that is forcing to game is still appropriate sometimes:

- 1♥ (2♠) 4♥ is a weak hand with five hearts
- 1♥ (2♠) 3♠ is a game force showing an opening hand or better.

Summary of Responses To 1M

Table 2: Responses to 1M Opener

Strength	Competitive	Invitational	Game Force
Have Support	2M	3M	J2NT, 2/1, Splinters
BPH	2M	2♣ Drury	4M
No Support	1♠ or 1N(f)	1♠, 1N(f)	1♠ or 2/1
BPH	1N	2x or 2N	N/A

Notes:

- BPH = By Passed Hand
- Weak hands below six HCP just pass, or bid 4M if they have five trump and shortness.
- 1N(f) is forcing by an unpassed hand. Announced.
- Bidding a new suit at the two level must be 5(or more) hearts or 4(or more) in a minor (rarely 3 when 3=3=(43)).
- Jacoby 2NT shows four trump; with just three, force to game first with a 2/1 bid.

1N FORCING AND 2/1

Opener's Rebid

Opener's second bid is called his "rebid". This chapter discusses opener's rebid, in particular when 1N is forcing or a 2/1 game forcing bid has occurred.

Bidding a *control* is covered later in *Control Bidding* (page 95), but in simplest terms think "bidding my Aces and voids up the line".

After A Major Raise

If we have opened 1M, and hear a simple raise from partner, we pass unless we see the possibility for 4M to make. There is no bonus for bidding 3M, so going past 2M means we think we might have around 26 points between us. We can either bid 4M immediately, which ends the auction; or we can pass; or we can ask partner's opinion by making a game try.

I recommend playing *Help Suit Game Tries* (page 58). Natural game tries are also fine – bid a second suit below trump and let partner tell you if they have a hand near the top of their bid or which can help with that second suit, by bidding game, or declining with 3M.

After a limit raise, opener generally passes, bids 4M, or starts exploring for slam by bidding a *control*.

After a preemptive raise to 4M, opener passes nearly always. Remember, 4M means five trump and a weak hand, not a strong hand.

In all cases opener can explore for slam with a *control bid*, *splinter*, *Blackwood* (page 93) or *Roman Keycard Blackwood* (page 93).

After One Heart - One Spade

The 1♠ response is not limited and therefore opener must bid. Be aware that 1♠ does not deny 3 hearts; responder's next bid of 3♥ or 4♥ shows 3-card support.

- With four spades, we usually bid 2♠. This is not forcing. Bidding 2♠ has debatable requirements. I

like it to show four spades or three spades and an outside singleton or void. Experts may bid 2♠ regardless with three spades.

- With four spades and 15-17 points bid 3♠. With more bid 4♠ or a *splinter*.

Lacking spade support:

- 1N shows a minimum opener and a balanced hand.
- 2♥ shows a minimum opener (12-14) and 6(or more) hearts.
- 2N shows 18-19 balanced.
- 2m shows a second suit and a hand not suitable to bid at the 3 level or to reverse.
- 3♥ is invitational and shows 6(or more) hearts (15-17).
- 4♥ shows 19+ and 6(or more) hearts.

After 1N Forcing

The 1N response to 1M is forcing unless there was interference or responder is a passed hand. Note that 1N does not promise a balanced hand, and in particular responder might not have any cards in M. If 1N is not forcing, passing becomes an additional option. When 1N is forcing its range is 6 to a bad 12.

Opener's rebid over a forcing 1N response is as follows.

- 2M shows 12-15, and a 6(or more) card suit, not forcing.
- 3M rebid shows 15-17, and a 6(or more) card suit, not forcing.
- Any reverse is 17+, natural, forcing one round.
- 2N 18-19 HCP, balanced, not forcing opposite a real minimum. Does not deny a major that it skipped over.
- A jump shift is 19+, usually natural, game forcing.

- If none of the above applies, bid the longest side suit up the line, but always rebid hearts when holding 4(or more) hearts and five spades.

The last rule can mean bidding a short minor suit. For example, after 1♠ - 1N(forcing),

♠KQJT7 ♥KJT ♦A83 ♣74

opener has to bid 2♦; and after 1♥ - 1N(forcing),

♠AQJT ♥KJT85 ♦Q4 ♣74

opener has to bid 2♣. Neither hand may rebid the major, which requires 6(or more) cards. The second hand does not have enough points for reversing into spades. The 1N bid denied four spades anyway.

Since 2♣ or 2♦ can be two or three cards, responder wishing to sign off should make a preference back to the major with two card support, even with four card support in the minor.

Because you can bid a short suit, rebidding your original suit shows 6(or more) cards. This is the same as after a 2/1 bid. Note that some opponents might be playing the older “Hardy” style where it can be only five cards after a 2/1 bid; see below.

How Short Is That Minor?

Responder must be very careful to remember that opener may be rebidding a 3-card diamond or club suit, or even a two-card club suit with a 4=5=2=2 shape. But how likely is this?

With 3-3 in the minors opener will bid clubs, so the bid of 2♣ is more likely short than 2♦. With a 5=4=x=x hand, opener will open spades and rebid hearts, but with 4=5=x=x, and not enough points to reverse into spades, opener must bid a short minor. Therefore the minor is more likely to be short after an opening 1♥ than after an opening 1♠.

- 1♥ - 1N - 2♣ is the most likely to be short;
- 1♥ - 1N - 2♦ and
- 1♠ - 1N - 2♣ are less likely to be short; and
- 1♠ - 1N - 2♦ is least likely to be short.

Responder can be comfortable passing the minor with five in the suit. Responder should prefer back to the major with a doubleton otherwise.

The entire probability of having to bid a short minor is lowered by always opening 1N with a five-card major.

Responder Continues

Note that responder’s 1N forcing bid limited his hand to a maximum of 12 points.

If opener has rebid his major, e.g. 1♠ - 1N(forcing) - 2♠, then responder’s bids are:

- pass with 6-9 HCP
- raise with 10-12 support points, and 2 or 3 trumps; this is not forcing
- 2N is 10-12 HCP, fewer than two trump, not forcing. This bid does not promise stops or a NT shape.
- 3 of a new suit, 10-12, very good 6(or more) card suit, invitational.

If opener has rebid a minor,

- pass with 6-9 HCP, usually 5(or more) in the minor, fewer than 2 of the opener’s major
- bid 2M with 6-10 HCP, exactly 2 of opener’s major, not forcing.
- A new suit at the two level is 6-9 HCP, usually 5+ in bid suit, 2 of the major, not forcing.
- 2N is 10-12 HCP, fewer than 2 of the major, not forcing. Does not promise stops or NT shape.
- Jump shift is 10-12, very good 6(or more) card suit, not forcing.
- Jump raise the major to 3M with 10-12 points, 3 trumps.
- Raise the minor is 10-12 points, usually 5(or more) in the suit.
- Sometimes responder jumps to game with a hand that got better when opener rebid. For example, 1♠ - 1N(forcing) - 2♥ - 4♥.

After a jump shift by opener, e.g. 1♠ - 1N(forcing) - 3♣,

- responder usually prefers back to opener’s major with 2 card support, or bids 3N with stoppers, even when holding good four card support in the minor. (We are in a game-forcing option, so we can conserve bidding space while showing the 2-card support.)
- With 3 card support in the major and 10-12 support, responder jumps to game in the major.

The auction $1\spadesuit - 1N! - (2\diamondsuit \text{ or } 2\heartsuit) - 3\clubsuit$ is to play, although with a specially suitable hand opener may make another call.

With a flattish 13-15, but relatively weak holdings in the 4-card suit(s), 1N(forcing) followed by 3N is sometimes appropriate to avoid partner getting too excited.

After A 2/1 Response

Once we have made a 2/1 game-forcing bid, if the opponents interfere we either will bid game or double them for penalty. In such a situation if one partner passes the other is forced to double or bid on.

Important

There are two styles of Two Over One. You are forced to choose whether:

- (A) Rebidding 2M promises a six-card suit; or,
- (B) Rebidding at the three-level promises extras.

(A) and (B) cannot both be true. Consider a $5=2=2=4$ opener with 12 HCP. Say he opens $1\spadesuit$ and hears responder say $2\diamondsuit$. He has neither six spades nor enough points to bid $3\clubsuit$.

I'm going to teach what at the moment is the trend, (A). When I first started to write this book twenty years ago, it was decidedly (B), as popularized by Hardy. There are also divisions about whether $1\diamondsuit - 2\clubsuit$ is a game-force; Lawrence, for example, says no. But this book will say yes.

The opener's rebids after the game-forcing bid are:

- Supporting responder's hearts shows at least three hearts (because responder promised five). Not raising hearts denies support.
- Rebid four cards in the other major when 5-4 in the majors. Remember, reverses are off, so $1\heartsuit - 2\clubsuit - 2\spadesuit$ shows five hearts and four spades, but not extra values.
- Supporting responder's minor shows at least four cards or perhaps three strong ones. 2N is a option, see below. A jump-shift to the four level is a splinter in support of responder, such as $1\spadesuit - 2\heartsuit - 4\clubsuit!$ (club shortness in support of hearts).

- A new suit at the two level is natural, 4 cards, any strength.
- A new suit at the 3 level shows either extra length in the new suit or extra strength in the opener's hand.
- A simple rebid of opener's major shows 12-14 HCP and a six-card suit.
- A jump rebid to 3M shows extra values and a 6-card solid suit. This sets trumps. Responder's new suit bids are control bids. E.g., $1\spadesuit - 2\diamondsuit - 3\spadesuit - 4\diamondsuit$; $4\diamondsuit$ here is a control bid in diamonds, denying a control in clubs.
- 2N shows 12-14 or 18-19 balanced. Opener does not promise stoppers in unbid suits. With 18-19 make a quantitative raise if responder signs off in 3N. Responder assumes 12-14 initially.

Opener always shows a five-card second suit. Opener shows a four-card suit except when he holds a minimal hand and the second suit would have to be bid at the three level. Example:

$1\heartsuit$ $2\diamondsuit$
 $3\clubsuit$

This shows at least five clubs or it shows around 15 HCP. Lacking either of those, say a hand like $\spadesuit 54 \heartsuit AK985 \diamondsuit Kx \clubsuit KT82$, opener should bid 2N.

Responder Raises

A principle of 2/1 is "slow shows", also called the *principle of fast arrival*. The stronger your hand, the slower you go. Arriving at game quickly in a game forcing auction says you've shown your values already. For example:

$1\spadesuit - 2\clubsuit$
 $2\spadesuit - 4\spadesuit$

Responder has raised opener to game directly. This shows minimal values for game. But slow shows:

$1\spadesuit - 2\clubsuit$
 $2N - 3\spadesuit$ or

$1\spadesuit - 2\clubsuit$
 $2\spadesuit - 3\spadesuit$

Responder has raised spades slowly. He has extras and has at least mild slam interest. In both cases responder has just

three spades, as he would have bid Jacoby 2N on his first bid otherwise. Opener should now bid controls.

Fast arrival should apply only in situations where opener is a minimum, having rebid 2N or catchall rebid of his suit. If opener could be stronger, we don't want to use up space by jumping; so when we do jump, as in 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4♠, it is to paint a picture of our hand has having two suits with our values concentrated in the suits and denying outside controls (A/K/singleton/void). Specifically:

If opener has bid 2 of a lower-ranking suit, responder has 3 raises available for opener's first suit. Fast arrival does not apply because opener is unlimited. For example:

- 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 2♠ (no extras)
- 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 3♠ (slam interest)
- 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4♠ (picture bid) Two-suited, values concentrated in the suits, no outside controls.

No Fit To Opener's First Suit

When no fit is established, responder's second bid is as follows:

- Raise opener's second suit
- 2N shows 12-14 or 18-19 balanced, stoppers in unbid suits. Opener assumes 12-14 initially.
- A jump to 3N shows 15-17, stoppers, could be unbalanced.
- Repeating responder's suit is natural, 5/6+ cards.
- A new suit is natural, 4+ cards.
- A jump in a new suit shows a singleton or void in that suit and support for opener's last bid major suit. Thus:

- 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♠ – 4♦!
- 1♠ – 2♣ – 2N – 4♦!
- 1♠ – 2♣ – 3♣ – 4♦!

All show a *splinter* in diamonds in support of spades.

Normally responder does not jump in a 2/1 auction when there is no fit. Auctions where both hands are around 16 HCP have difficulty bidding slams. The 3N bid is reserved for this case and should be used sparingly.

Help Suit Game Tries

After a major trump suit is agreed upon at the two-level, any bid between that and three of the trump suit is a "Help-Suit Game Tries" (HSGT). This bid is not alertable.

Partner accepts the invitation to game by bidding game. Partner declines the invitation by bidding three of the major.

The standard is that the help-suit bidder shows 3 cards or more in the suit. If you and your partner agree, you could reduce this to 2 cards; in that case the bid is alertable ("could be just two cards").

Partner should bid game if he has "help" in the suit bid and is not near minimum. "Help" is defined as any one of:

- An Ace, King, stiff, or void
- Five cards in the suit
- A maximum
- With no help, and a near maximum, partner may bid a suit below three of the major to show "help" in that suit, but no help in the suit mentioned.

With a minimum, partner just pretends he has no help.

It is very important that the responder just answers the question asked, and not try to second guess the opener's holding. Opener with more than one suit of concern below trump may ask about the lowest, relying on partner to show help in another suit if the decision for game is not clear-cut.

Example: After 1♠ – 2♠, opener bids 3♦ asking for help in diamonds.

If responder has ♠KJ75 ♥93 ♦K832 ♣J74 he bids 4♠ since he has 8 points and the King of diamonds. If the ♦K and ♣7 are interchanged, he bids 3♠. However, if the ♦K is instead in hearts, he could bid 3♥ to indicate help in hearts but none in diamonds. Without the ♣J, at 7 points he would be near a minimum and should probably sign off at 3♠ even holding the ♦K. Change the hand to ♠KQ65 ♥93 ♦Q832 ♣Q74 and at 9 points responder should bid game.

If agreement at 2♠ is reached through some sequence such as 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♠, a responder's bid of 3♣ would again be a help-suit game try.

So what meaning then should we give to 1M - 2M - 3M? The simple interpretation is that this invites partner to bid game if on the top of his 2M bid. However, one can also

play it, and I do, as a sort of trump-suit game try – asking partner for help in the trump suit, perhaps holding a hand with the strength mostly outside the trump suit. Experts tend to play this as just obstructive.

i Note

There are a plethora of other kinds of game tries. The new suit can mean a natural second suit, a short suit, a long suit, a short suit or a long suit, and then there's *Kokish Game Tries* (page 110). HSBT are the most frequent.

THE STRONG TWO CLUB OPENER

What Hands Do We Open Two Clubs?

An opening bid of two clubs is the strongest possible opening bid, showing 22 or more points if the hand is balanced. If the hand is not balanced, but rather has a long solid major suit, you can open it two clubs if it has at least 8 ½ tricks in it and at least 16-18 HCP. It is too misleading to partner to open a weaker hand with two clubs no matter how shapely. For a minor you'd want to have more like 9 ½ - 10 tricks.

You also need at least 4 quick-tricks. Here's how you count quick-tricks, up to 2 per suit:

- AK = 2 quick tricks
- A = 1 quick trick
- KQ = 1 quick trick
- AQ = 1 1/2 quick tricks
- Kx = 1/2 quick trick

A typical opening bid has two quick-tricks.

There are many two-suited hands which you should not open 2♣. 2♣ uses up a lot of bidding room and makes it hard to show both suits. However, if your strength is above 22 HCP, you pretty much have no choice.

The responses are:

- 2♦ is purely artificial, indicating that none of the other following bids apply. Responder really tells you nothing about his hand when he bids 2♦, except that he probably does not have 8 HCP and a good five-card major. People call this 2♦ “waiting”.

If you have a very bad hand you bid 2♦ first and on your second bid bid 3♣, called the “second negative” or “double negative”. If opener has rebid 3♦ so that you cannot bid 3♣, bid 3♥ as “artificial, double negative”. Be sure partner knows this. (I am obliged to explain double negative; it is standard. I hate this

method. Some feel it is better not to have a second negative at all.)

- 2♥, 2♠ show at least 8 HCP and a *good* five card suit. Game forcing.
- 3♣, 3♦ show at least 8 HCP and a *good* six card suit. Game forcing.

Be very reluctant to bid 3♦; sometimes you need to show your club suit immediately with 3♣ because to do so on your second bid would show a weak hand. Knowing that your second bid may have to be 3♦ is a reason to resist bidding 2♣. Gavin Wolpert calls 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♦ “the worst auction in bridge”.

- 2N should not be bid. Traditional teaching is that 2N shows 8 HCP and a balanced hand, but it is not a good idea. Just bid 2♦. After that make sure you get to game. I'd write it on your convention card: Never 2N.

Opener rebids 2N with a balanced 22-24, 3N with 25-27, and so on.

Note

When opener rebids 2N after opening 2♣ the auction proceeds exactly as if he had opened 2N, except that his hand is stronger.

Warning

A 2♦ reply is not alerted or announced any more, no matter what it means. Do not assume you know. If you're not going to bid, ask after the auction is over.

It should be noted that while responder may pass a 2N rebid with a bad hand, all the suit bids by opener are unlimited and completely forcing. Holding:

♠234 ♥234 ♦2345 ♣234

and hearing partner rebid 2♠, you must bid. Bid 4♠ and pray. Unfortunately 3♠ is setting trump and suggesting slam.

Alternate schemes for responding to 2♣ are described in *Advanced Responses To Two Club Openers* (page 123).

Interference

If your 2♣ opener is interfered with by the opener's LHO, responder's actions are quite unintuitive:

- Pass is forcing and shows values (no alert is required);
- Double shows a weak hand.

To interfere with your opponent's 2♣ opener, the simplest idea is *Mathe* (page 151): double shows both majors and 2N is *Unusual 2N* (page 78).

No Need For Opening 3N

The standard SAYC meaning of a 3N opener is a 25-27 point hand, but this bid is redundant. You can open 2♣ first and then bid 3N to show that. Therefore you might agree to use a 3N opening for something else, such as *Gambling 3N Opening* (page 65).

It doesn't happen a lot, but the 4N rebid means 28-30, etc. If you open 2♣ and the auction goes 2♣ - 2♦ - 4N, your partner will stare at you like a deer caught in the headlights. You aren't asking for keycards in diamonds, of course; that was an artificial suit.

Stayman and transfers would be on if 3N is the strong, balanced opener.

PREEMPTIVE OPENING BIDS

If using this chapter as a reference, be sure you've read *Notation and Nomenclature* (page 7) and review *Classifying Your Hand* (page 19) to classify your hand as weak, competitive, invitational, game-going, or slam interest.

A *preemptive* bid, or *preempt* for short, is one designed to make the opponents miserable even though you have a poor hand, by using up the room they have to maneuver. The opening preempts are those bids above 2♣.

Warning

Be aware that many pairs play 2♦ to mean minimal three-suited openers or other hand types; this must be alerted. See *Two Diamonds Conventions* (page 107).

Two-Level Preempts

Opening bids (or jump overcalls if playing *Weak Jump Shifts* (page 91)) of 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ are weak bids, showing a six card suit with 5-10 points, with 10 being rare. (Since 2♣ is the strong opening, 3♣ preempts with six very good clubs are common.)

Warning

ACBL regulations are complicated. They depend on the level of the competition. You should read them. Be aware that some people have much different ranges than 5-10. They don't have to alert them in most cases. You can ask or check their cards.

The meanings of these bids has changed over time. Originally these two-bids were strong bids. However, the frequency of hands strong enough to open at the two level was small, and the difficulties the weak-two bids cause to the opponents is large, so the strong two bids were all incorporated into the 2♣ bid, and the 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ bids became weak.

But how weak? That too has evolved.

In third seat it is generally agreed that almost anything goes – your partner could not open, and it is very likely their hand. Interfering with their auction becomes paramount. In third seat it is often advisable to open at the two level with a six-card suit if you have even up to 14 HCP.

In fourth seat you do not preempt, you pass if you can't make a one-level opening. With a six-card suit and a minimal opening hand, you can open at the two-level.

The following styles apply in 1st and 2nd seats.

The Traditional Style

In what we might call the traditional style, still taught and played by many but now giving way to lighter styles, the rules were this:

- If we are vulnerable, the suit must be a good one, that is, two of the top three honors or three of the top five, not counting QJT.
- Not vulnerable, the bid promises at least a Queen and a six-card suit.
- Usually one does not preempt in a minor with a four-card major, or even a good three-card major.
- Some times you preempt at the two-level with a bad seven-card suit.

The most common error is not preempting with too little, but with too much.

The philosophy behind these rules emphasized a combination of competing to the right contract if it is our hand besides interfering with their auction. Hence the concern that preempting with a four-card major might be missing a major-suit fit.

The Light Style

Expert opinion has swung to these bids being lighter. While a combination of suit quality and hand strength is relevant when vulnerable, the emphasis is on interference. The honor requirements are abandoned. This makes it

harder on one's partner to choose a response but the odds are that it is their hand rather than ours.

Far from being an inhibition, having a four-card major is viewed as a plus. If the opponents want to get into the auction they are more likely to be bidding a minor at the three-level, or getting into a contract in a major with a poor trump split.

Marc Smith says he routinely opens two of a major in first seat with nothing but a decent five-card suit.

Do note the appropriate ACBL regulations: you have to state a range on your card, and it is not entirely free to bid outside it.

Responses

A raise from the two level to the three level is purely preemptive and relies on the idea that a nine card fit is relatively safe at the three level. It does not require a lot of points, but it does require three trump. It puts tremendous pressure on the opponents.

Excepting a raise, other bids by responder are forcing. This is referred to as "Raise Only Non Forcing (RONF)". The 2N bid is a conventional bid that asks the opener to bid a suit in which he holds an outside Ace or King, or else to rebid his suit. Knowing that the opener has an outside entry may permit responder to go to game. This 2N bid is called "feature-asking". There are other schemes for 2N, chiefly one called *Ogust* (page 65).

Generally a bid other than a raise is going to show a hand of 16 points or so. You must have a tolerance for opener to simply rebid his suit. He could quite well have nothing else to say. Do not bid just to get your partner out of a 6-0 or 6-1 split.

One test used to decide whether to raise a 2M preempt to the four level is the "Rule of 17": add the HCP to the number of trumps held, and go to game if the total is 17 or more. It is best to use your brain, however, and imagine how the particular cards you hold will play opposite your partner's. This is a situation in which it is nice to be confident partner followed the rules about suit quality.

If the opponents overcall our preemptive bid, a double is for penalty. It is not takeout. Other bids retain their same meanings.

Competing

If you preempt, you never bid again unless forced to bid. If your partner raises you, he isn't inviting you to go on with a decent preemptive hand. It is quite a psychological test when you preempt with a hand that is, or almost is, too good for a preempt. Your partner raises and guilt sinks in. Don't do it. He won't trust you in the future and won't raise when he should.

To compete against a preempt, see *Competing Over Preempts* (page 79).

Three-Level Preempts

Three-level opening bids are similar to two-level preempts, except they show a seven card suit or six good clubs. To compete over such a preempt requires more than a minimum opening hand.

An advanced idea for pursuing slam after partner preempts is *Preempt Keycard* (page 133).

Four-Level Preempts

Four-level opening bids are preemptive, showing usually an 8-card suit or better. The bid is not strong, and partner must be cautious about going on. Other than that the treatment is similar to the three-level preempt.

See *Bidding Distributional Hands* (page 89) for more thoughts.

See *Competing Over Preempts* (page 79) and other topics in *Competing After A Suit Opening* (page 77) for how to counter your opponents' preempts.

Bidding in Passout Seat

There are no preempts in *passout seat*. 2♣ is still strong. But 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ show a six card suit, 12-15.

There is no standard meaning for the three-level bids. An easy idea that I like is:

- Three level bids are 16-19 with 6(or more) cards.

To bid this way is to say that you would have rebid this whatever the response to 1x; you are just making both bids at once.

If this situation does not apply, then you may "borrow a King" – that is, bid as if you had 3 more points than you

do. Partner in responding should bid as if he had three fewer points than he really has. In particular this means that with more than about 14 points you should double and bid again.

However, a good guideline is not to open “light” (that is, on a “borrow”) if you do not have at least one four-card major. A player who could not open a major may be able to overcall, and their side will end up with a major contract and a small part-score when you could have held them to zero by passing the hand out. Having something in spades in particular is an important consideration.

Use the “rule of 15”: number of HCP + number of spades must be 15 or more to open “light”.

failures if you and your partner are not on the same precise wavelength.

Ogust

Ogust (pronounced somewhat like August) is an alternative set of responses to a 2N inquiry after partner opens a weak two. After 2x - 2N!(hand inquiry):

- 3♣ Opener has a bad suit and a bad hand (towards the 5 end rather than the 10)
- 3♦ Opener has a good suit but a bad hand.
- 3♥ Opener has a bad suit but a good hand.
- 3♠ Opener has a good suit and a good hand.

The purpose of asking is usually to see if 3N will work.

Gambling 3N

Since one can open 2♣ and rebid 3N with a balanced 25-27 point hand, there is no need to open 3N to show this kind of hand. The (non-standard) Gambling 3N convention uses this bid to show a hand with ALL of these properties:

- A solid minor with at least 7 cards.
- No four-card major
- No Ace or King outside the long minor

These restrictions are to talk you out of missing a slam and to help partner precisely visualize his chances for a 3N contract. If partner does think 3N will make, he passes. That means he has stoppers in the other suits, because he is under no illusions that you can help. If not, he bids 4♣ and you correct to diamonds if necessary.

This bid does not come up very often of course, but neither does the one it replaces. It will lead to rather spectacular

DOUBLES

We now begin the study of what to do when the opponents compete with us. While we have seen glimpses of this in individual situations, most competition does not follow a simple pattern. So buckle up.

Negative doubles and takeout doubles are really crucial parts of competitive bidding. Even though they are so basic, there are a frightening number of players who do not use them correctly. Study this chapter carefully and return often.

The phrase *takeout double* is used to describe a bid that asks partner to bid rather than pass. By contrast a *penalty double*, also called a *business double*, means a double made with the intent to make the opponents play the doubled contract, planning to set them. In between is a *cooperative double*, which wags call “Partner Do Something”.

Back in the Whist era, a double meant “double stakes” on the hand. When they said, “business double”, they meant real cash. However, especially at low levels, the opportunities for successful penalty doubles are rare. So, a large number of different doubles have become part of the game.

Any double can of course be “left in” by passing, converting it to penalty, and any double can be taken out. But, most of the time you should respect your partner’s intent. Your judgment must be used. For example, in responding to a penalty double, the weaker you are (relative to what your partner should expect in that situation), the more likely you should *pull* the double.

We will cover here:

- *Takeout Doubles* (page 67),
- *Going For Blood Redouble* (page 70) of their takeout double,
- *Negative Doubles* (page 68), which require
- *Reopening Doubles* (page 72), to protect a partner who passed because they bid his suit; and
- *SOS Redoubles* (page 72) to save us when we need saving.

- *Lead-Directing Doubles* (page 72) are doubles meant to suggest a lead to partner when you expect he will be the opening leader.
- *Equal-Level Conversion Doubles* (page 68) are takeout doubles that have an off-shape with diamonds but without enough clubs.
- *Lightner Doubles* (page 73) of final game and slam contracts ask partner for an unusual lead.

The chapter *Special Doubles* (page 99) covers even more kinds of doubles than the ones in this chapter.

Takeout Doubles

When opponents open a suit, an immediate double is for takeout up to a chosen limit, say four hearts. To say that “double is takeout through 4♥” means that (4♥) X is for takeout, while (4♠) X is penalty-oriented. The standard limit is 2♠. Other popular limits are 3♠, 4♦, 4♥, and 4♠. Modern practice favors at least a 3♠ limit.

A takeout double shows one of three kinds of hands:

- A normal takeout double:
 - A hand you would open,
 - At least three cards in each unbid suit, and
 - Ideally, at most a doubleton in their suit.
- A one-suited hand or a balanced hand too strong (18+) to overcall. (Recall that the range for an overcall is 8-17).

The day you don’t follow these rules you’ll get an auction like (1♠) X (Pass) 3♣ and notice too late that you only have two clubs or you’re at the three level with 10 points and your partner doesn’t have any points at all.

For a normal takeout double, you can also add points for shortness in their suit in evaluating your hand. You’re planning on being the dummy so you’re adding “dummy points” because you’re very likely going to have a fit. Thus, an 11

point hand with a singleton in their suit is enough for a takeout double.

The reason you make a takeout double is usually that you don't have a five-card suit to bid. This means that if your side ends up declaring, you don't have a source of tricks, so you're going to need some strength to make it.

If you have a five-card minor suit and a four-card unbid major suit, and you qualify for a takeout double, prefer the takeout double. But if you have a five-card major you will bid that.

Taking out a 1M opener, it is sometimes ok that you don't have four cards in the other major, but remember partner will think you do. For example (1♠) X with ♠42 ♥KT3 ♦AK93 ♣K953; you don't have four spades. It will not be shocking if partner with 9 points and four spades bids 3♥. Some partners will feel strongly that you promise four in the unbid major.

Sometimes you're in fourth seat and they have bid two suits at the one level, your partner passing. You can still make a takeout double but you need four cards in each of the unbid suits rather than three.

Equal-Level Conversion Doubles (ELCD)

ELCD is a convention that widens the range of hands that can make takeout doubles over one of a major. Most good players use this convention. Be sure to agree with your partner on it. On an ACBL convention card you check the box under Special Doubles that says "Min Offshape T/O".

Suppose they open a major, say a heart, and you have ♠KQ82 ♥92 ♦AQ962 ♣Q7.

Without ELCD, you cannot double here to try to show your four spades. You'd have to just bid 2♦ and risk losing the spade suit.

ELCD says that you can double here and then bid diamonds if your partner bids clubs, to show 4 of the other major and 5+ diamonds but *no extra strength*.

The downside is that with an 18-point hand with diamonds, you can no longer bid diamonds over clubs because partner won't think you have the big hand. You'd have to bid 3♦.

Responding To A Takeout Double

Note that in a *balancing* situation, such as (1♠) P (Pass) X, the balancer has "borrowed a King" and partner should subtract 3 points in choosing a response.

Although there is the possibility that your partner has a big hand, your initial response is to the normal takeout double.

You must (almost) always bid if RHO passes.

To respond in a suit, respond in a four-card major in preference to a minor, even if your minor is five cards. How high you bid shows your strength:

- With zero to about 8 points, bid your best suit as cheaply as possible. Put emphasis on responding in the major partner has promised if choices are otherwise equal.

Remember you can't pass. In fact, the worse your hand is, the more you have to bid.

- With a decent 9 - 11, you *must* jump-bid your suit.
- With 12+, you can bid game with a five-card major; otherwise, *cue* bid their suit. A cue-bid is asking partner to show four-card suits up the line.

Sometimes the best suit you have is unfortunately their suit. To reply in no-trump you must have values; with a weaker hand you must pick a suit. For a no-trump response, you'll usually have four of their suit.

- 1N requires 7/8-10 HCP and a stopper in their suit.
- 2N requires 1.5 stoppers in their suit and 11-12 points; and
- 3N requires 13 or more HCP and 1.5 stoppers in their suit.

An example of the *cue* bid is:

(1♦) X (P) ?

We hold ♠QJT5 ♥KQT4 ♦72 ♣AJ5. What do we bid?

We know partner is at least 4-3 in the majors but rather than guess which one, we can *cue* bid 2♦ to ask partner if he really has four hearts. Which ever major he bids, we bid that game.

When partner makes a takeout double, but RHO bids, you are no longer "on the hook" and do not have to bid. If you do, you're showing values.

You can pass a takeout double converting it to penalty, but be careful – the quality as well as the number of your trumps matter. You need points and at least five good cards in their suit. A trump lead is usually right – we have more points than they do so they can only make it by ruffing.

Are You Cheap?

How do I say this? Are you cheap? Do you clip coupons and look for bargains? Did your mother make getting a good deal the goal of your life?

If so, you may be subject to Cheapness in Bridge. Besides constantly complaining about card fees, I mean. Cheapness seems to show up most strongly in responding to takeout doubles. Cheapness refuses to jump-bid in reply, concluding that it is a “waste” or that “we might get too high”. After all, they opened, this thinking goes, so we couldn’t possibly have a game. When once we jump, and end up being too high, which will of course happen, an even more steely resolve toward Cheapness sets in.

You must tell partner the truth. Your side might have a game, or you might have enough to prevent the opponents from coming back in to the auction. Did you ever open a hand with 10 HCP using the rule of 20? Maybe they did! You and your partner may have 30 HCP between you! And if you’re cheap, I suspect you’re playing your lowest card on defense rather than signaling, you just can’t bear to unblock, and you never underlead a King. To be a good player, you must resist Cheapness.

Doubling With A Strong Hand

With a very powerful hand you can double and then bid again, and need not have the shapes we just described. However, you need to know what you will do if partner gets enthusiastic. For example, over one heart you double with 18 points but no spades at all. Partner may respond 3♠ or even 4♠. It won’t happen every day but it will happen. You’re going to need a plan. A cue bid is a way to show you have a good hand, but if you do it immediately it is Michaels.

If your partner makes a takeout double and then bids again (including another double or redouble), you must mentally cancel your expectations of his hand shape if he hasn’t raised your suit; he has just told you his suit or that he’s balanced, and that he has the requisite points. The notion that he has support for the other suits is now null and void.

Rebids By The Doubler

Consider (1♠) X (P) 2♥; (Pass). It’s our bid again. What we have to do is to use the information we’ve been given:

- Our partner has decided on hearts
- He has 0-8 points

Say we have four hearts. We do our arithmetic. How much would we need to have to make a game? Something like 17 or 18 points, and that’s if they are on the top of their bid. Unless we were making the strong takeout double, we have to pass.

If they have jumped, then we know they have 9-11 points. So we could bid game with 16 points, or invite with a good 14. It is important to realize that even a simple raise, such as:

(1♣)	X	(P)	1♥
(P)			2♥

shows 17-18 points. Our partner can decide to bid game if they had 7 or 8 points, knowing this. Likewise if we had jumped to 3♥ we’re showing 19-21. Remember, the takeout doubler has already counted shortness points. More than that, bid 4♥.

We use the same logic if our RHO has also bid (usually raising his partner). We use the level we are going to have to go to and our partner’s range, and do the math.

When They Make A Takeout Double

After partner opens one of a suit, and RHO makes a takeout double, we basically respond the same way as if the double had never happened. If playing 2/1, the forcing 1N and 2/1 bids are off, so replies are standard bids. However there are two special bids to show a 10+ point hand.

- A bid of 2N is a four-card limit raise of partner’s major suit. (*Jordan* (page 52).)
- A redouble shows 10+ points; it denies four cards in partner’s suit. If we have three-card support for a major we’ll show that later. We make this bid with some interest in penalizing the opponents. Gavin Wolpert calls this redouble the *Going For Blood Redouble* (page 70). Details below.
- Sometimes with a six-card suit we will bid it rather than redouble, but most hands with 10+ HCP will redouble.
- Replying one of a suit is forcing for one round.
- Replying two of a suit is not forcing. The idea is that we could have redoubled with 10+ points, or raised partner, so the two-level bid is at most 9 HCP. We don’t have a game opposite a normal opening hand.
- Raising partner to the three level is a weak, preemptive bid.

Note

I recommend intermediates play Jordan as requiring only three-card support since the redouble auctions are challenging.

When partner has chosen a suit where we don't have four cards, we usually just pass. Only if we have a big hand do we bid again. We don't bid notrump.

Going For Blood Redouble

After 1s (X) XX, the auction is forcing to two of opener's suit. Our side has the majority of the points and if they don't have a fit, they are in trouble. Gavin Wolpert calls this "Going For Blood".

You can make this redouble even if you are a passed hand. Let's suppose the doubler's partner bids his best suit. Notice that he doesn't have many points, because the opener and the doubler each have shown an opening hand, and we have 10+.

Note

The doubler's partner may pass if he has no preference among the unbid suits. For example, after 1♦ (X) XX, an advancer with weak hand and a shape (34)=2=4 does not want to decide among the two major suits, fearing partner might end up in a 6-card rather than a 7- or 8-card fit. The takeout doubler will pick his best. The ideas in the following discussion remain the same after that.

1♥ (X) XX 2♦
?

The idea here is that one of us might have a penalty double. If the opener does not, he will pass to give responder a chance to double. To double for penalty, it is important to have four trumps. We don't want to be doubling if they have a nine-card fit.

If opener bids he is letting them off the hook. However, if the opener has a six card suit with minimal values and no interest in penalizing the opponents, he can rebid the suit. With a better hand, he can pass first and pull partner's double to show a better hand. With a still-better hand, say 15+ HCP, opener might jump-rebid to 3♥.

1♥ (X) XX 2♦
P P 2♥

With an invitational hand, responder can bid two of a major with three-card support. Note that we have been able to show a 3-card limit raise at the two-level. The take-out double raises the threat of a 4-1 trump break, so staying low is important.

Otherwise, remember that we are in an auction that is forcing to two of opener's suit, or notrump.

1♥ (X) XX 1♠
P (P) ??

The redouble made the auction forcing to two of opener's suit, so you cannot pass. The opener cannot double 1♠ for penalty so is giving us a chance. Now is the chance to show opener if you have a penalty double. Generally you will want four trump to do this. Otherwise you make a natural bid.

Note that a bid like 2♣ here is forcing – we have not yet reached 2♥. Bids like that can help us sort out the best place to play.

1♠ (X) XX (2♥)
P P ?

We cannot pass. We have promised partner we would compete to 2♠. With a hand like xx Jxx AQxx KJxx we can just bid 2♠.

These auctions are a little trickier in matchpoints, where setting them might not be enough. Pay attention to the vulnerability.

When we do leave in a penalty double, lead a trump even if it is uncomfortable. We have the majority of the points and if they don't have a fit they are in trouble unless they can make their trumps separately.

I highly recommend Wolpert's lessons on this subject. These auctions are difficult for everyone. That's why I recommend using Jordan 2NT for a three-card raise until you are very experienced.

When you are on the other side of it, after (1♥) X (XX), your partner has shown support for the other suits. If you have no clear preference you can pass, saying to your partner, we're in trouble, I don't have a clear direction, you choose. A redouble by our side is an SOS.

Takeout Double Over A Preempt

To make a takeout double of a preemptive opener requires the right shape and the right number of points. Whatever you do, you won't always be right.

Generally, use ESP - Expect Seven Points. That's a conservative estimate of how many your partner will have, on average. So over two spades, to be safe at the three level you need about 23 - 7 or 16 points. Cheat it a little and call it a good opening hand. To bid over a three-level preempt you want to be have a great 17 or more, if your chosen takeout level is that high.

Why ESP? Given that a two-level preempt might average 8 points, if you have 14, that leaves 18 for the other two partners; that is, around 9 for your partner; expect 7 and you won't be disappointed.

When they open a weak two and partner doubles, you answer in more or less the same way as a takeout double. Generally, if you have about the expected number of points, you will not jump in your reply; with more you will. Because you may jump on good news, woe be the doubler who did not have the right shape, because surely you will have the "wrong" suit.

To reply in no-trump you would be wise to have two stoppers.

There is a dilemma when your suit is lower-ranking than the preempt suit. Consider:

(2♠) X (Pass)

Suppose you have a weak hand with six diamonds. Then you want to bid 3♦ and have your partner pass. However, if you have the same diamonds but a game-forcing hand, you want to bid 3♦ as game forcing.

Since one bid can't have two meanings, you must agree what a 3♦ bid will mean. Because of the relative frequency, the only choice is the weaker meaning.

The *Lebensohl* (page 101) convention solves this problem, but is quite difficult for most intermediates. A simplified version is given in that chapter to meet this need.

Responding To A Double Of A Preempt

Suppose LHO has opened with a preemptive bid and your partner has made a takeout double, and RHO has passed, such as (2♥) - X - (P) - ?. You have one of these two hands:

• (A) ♠83 ♥98 ♦KJT864 ♣97

• (B) ♠KQ ♥87 ♦AQJ964 ♣Q7

Clearly, (A) wants to end up at 3♦, because the hand is not worth anything except in diamonds. (B) must look for a game.

So which of these two hands is shown by bidding 3♦? Absent some agreement, 3♦ has to show hand (A). But (B) is one of many hands that want to go to game unsettled as to notrump stoppers or a suit agreement. As things stand, in standard bidding, we must resort to things like cue bids or just taking chances.

Make this simple agreement with your partner: a response of 2N!(relay) asks partner to bid 3♣!(forced). You are showing a long suit. This may or may not be a weak hand. Then 2N!(relay) - 3♣!(forced) - 3♦(to play) shows (A), while an immediate 3♦ is a game force with a hand like (B).

Note that the natural meaning of 2N is lost.

When you are an advanced player learn *Lebensohl* (page 101), the full version of this relay system.

Negative doubles

A negative double is a double after we open a suit and they overcall with a bid up to our negative double limit. The standard limit is 2♠ although you can use 3♠, 4♦, 4♥, or 4♠, by partnership agreement. As with takeout doubles, modern practice favors at least a 3♠ limit. It helps reduce confusion if you make the negative and takeout double limit the same.

Agreeing to "negative doubles through 2♠" means that 1♥ (2♠) X is negative but 1♠ (3♣) X is penalty-oriented.

Generally the focus is on finding a fit to your major suit. However, you also need to be prepared for your partner to bid the other unbid suit.

Point-wise, a negative double at the one level requires six points. At the two or three level this rises to 8 to 10 points. If vulnerable, these requirements edge upwards a couple of points.

More importantly, to make a negative double, you have to have the right shape:

- The auction 1♣ (1♦) X promises 4-4 in the majors. You can bid 1♥ or 1♠ instead with 4 cards, so there is no reason to double when 4-3, and if you have a five card suit(s) you bid the (higher-ranking) five card suit.

- The auction 1♣/♦ (1♥) X promises exactly 4 spades; with more you bid the suit.
- The auction 1♣/♦ (1♠) X promises exactly 4 hearts; with more you bid the suit.
- The auction 1♥ (1♠) X promises one minor and a decent rebid. For example:

1♥ (1♠)	X	(P)
2♣ (P)	2♥	

Here responder has a diamond suit and two hearts, and can stand to go back to hearts if opener cannot support his diamonds.

- A negative double of a bid at the two level promises at least one unbid major and a rebid. It does not promise both unbid suits.

At the two level, you sometimes want to show a five card major but do not have the requisite 10 points. You can use a negative double. For example, after 1♠ (2♦), holding ♠64 ♥KQ954 ♦KT54 ♣98, you do not have enough points to bid 2♥, but you do have enough for a negative double.

If you have the requisite points, bid a five-card suit directly rather than make a negative double. Example: 1♦ (1♥) 1♠ shows five or more spades, and 1♦ (1♥) X shows exactly four spades. But 1♦ (1♠) X is simply at least four hearts, but could be more, because 2♥ would have required 10 points, not merely the five hearts.

If opener has a trump stack he could consider passing, especially non-vulnerable vs. vulnerable. However, the negative double is of unlimited strength so use caution.

Reopening With A Double

Part of negative doubles is protecting your partner after you open and there is an overcall. What if your partner only has the suit they just bid? He cannot double for penalty – a double would be negative.

Warning

As responder, doubling because you have a juicy holding in the overcalled suit is a very common error. In horror you realize partner cannot pass it, because you just made a negative double!

Here is a hand where responder cannot double after 1♦ (1♠):

♠KQ983 ♥A32 ♦87 ♣J84

The correct solution is to pass, and for the opener to know that if the overcall is passed around to him, and he is short in the overcalled suit, to reopen with a double. This allows the responder to pass again and make it a penalty double. For example, in this case the bidding might go:

1♦ (1♠)	P	(P)
X	(P)	P

converting to a penalty double. Responder without such a holding bids his four card suits up the line.

Opener has some discretion here; if he opened light, for example, or his partner was a passed hand, he need not double.

Suppose you open 1N, and LHO bids a suit, say 2♠. If the next two players pass, a double by opener is also a takeout double.

By contrast, if LHO and partner pass, and RHO bids a suit, a double is penalty-oriented. The difference is in the position of the overcaller; one is over you, while you are over the other. Of course, penalty-oriented doubles give partner a choice, so depending on the strength of his hand and vulnerability he may wish to escape to his best suit. The paradox is that the weaker he is, the more urgent it is for him not to pass.

SOS Redoubles

If they double our opening suit bid and try to pass it out, a redouble is a takeout. Partner should bid their best suit. The reasoning is, especially at matchpoints, if you could make a doubled contract it is likely a top already – there is no point trying for a higher score with a redouble, so this bid is available as distress call. This is also called an *SOS Redouble*.

Contrast this with the *going for blood case* (page 70) where we open, the next player doubles, and the responder redoubles. This shows 10+ points and suggests no fit. The opponents may be in severe trouble.

Lead-Directing Doubles

They are bidding away and you are going to end up on defense. Wouldn't it be nice to tell your partner what to lead? Sometimes you can!

Principle: Any double of an artificial bid is lead-directing.

Example: Your LHO opens 1N, and your RHO bids 2♥, announced as a transfer to spades. If you want hearts lead, double the artificial 2♥. Naturally, you do this at your own peril – the opponents may leave your double in if they have hearts. So do have a good shape or some strength to go with your heart suit. The lower the level of their bid, the more careful you must be.

In fact, failure to double for the lead may cause your partner to infer that you may not want a heart lead.

A very important opportunity for a lead-directing double is when opponents are making artificial replies to Ace-asking bids. If the reply is the suit you want led, you double to tell partner about this.

Lightner Doubles

When your partner doubles their slam contract, this demands an “unusual” lead from you; if nothing else presents itself from the bidding or your hand, lead the suit the dummy bid first. Generally, you double a slam because you believe you will set it if and only if you get this lead. Since you will get a good score just by setting it, and a really horrible score if you double it and are wrong, you usually only double a slam for the lead when you believe that the lead will make all the difference. Of course, if you have an Ace to lead against 7NT, be my guest.

When your partner doubles the opponents’ final suit contract less than a slam, this is also a Lightner double. A double after they land in 3N usually means you have a great long major and want it led.

Warning

Rookie error, but I do it all the time: I’m so proud of my good suit that when my RHO bids it artificially, I double for the lead, only to discover afterwards that it is my lead. Oh well, at least I reminded myself what to lead, but I also told the declarer.

Is That Penalty?

When your partner doubles in the middle of a competitive auction it is difficult to understand what it means some times. We’re here to help.

First, think whether the double has an agreed meaning. Don’t forget any of the *Special Doubles* (page 99) you might have agreed to play. Check these:

- A double of a 1N opener is penalty unless you have a different agreement.
- A double of a 1N **overcall** is penalty. Responder has 10+ points. A little math tells you advancer has nothing.
- A double of a 2N opener or a 2♣ opener shows a hand two-suited in the majors.
- A double of an artificial bid (Stayman, a transfer, etc.) is lead-directing.
- If your partner was forced to bid and doubled, it is for penalty.
- The double of an overcall of a preemptive opener is penalty.
- When we have established a fit, doubling is penalty.
- When your partner preempts and they overcall, doubling is penalty.

When the advancer bids, such as 1♦ (1♥) [banana] (2♥), opener’s double on his second bid shows 16+ points. When the number of points the “banana” promised is 10+, the auction is game forcing. Examples:

- 1♦ (1♥) 2♣ (2♥) X – 16+ points, game forcing, 2♣ promised 10+ points.
- 1♦ (1♥) X (2♥) X – 16+ points, *not* game forcing because the negative double only promised 6 HCP.

This principle applies also when the “banana” was a Pass, but the opener needs support for the unbid suits and enough points / shape to compete to the three-level. Lacking these, opener may have to pass.

Remember that **any** double can be passed to “convert” it to penalty. If you’re wrong, it’s on you. Any penalty double can be *pulled*, and again if you’re wrong it is on you. Long-term partnership trust is more important than being right on one hand.

Example:

1♠	(X)	XX	(2♥)
P	(P)	X	

Their double is takeout, the redouble shows 10+ points forcing to 2♠. The responder was forced to bid over 2♥,

so his double is for penalty. That isn't to say opener will leave it there, but he can.

But:

1♦	(X)	XX	(2♥)
P	(P)	X	

This time the auction is not forcing because we are above two of the opening suit. So responder's double shows extra values and is game forcing. (Logic: we already knew responder had at least 10 points, so if he is showing even more than that we have game values. Lacking a hand with clear direction, he doubles to ask partner to further describe their hand.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING

Methods of dealing with competition are woven throughout the other bidding topics. This chapter contains some general principles to guide you. The following two chapters contain some particulars on competing in suits and in notrump.

In an established partnership, you can develop a style – be it aggressive, conservative, insane cowboy, you name it. It is important to realize that it isn't so much that a given style is right or wrong, but that you bid as a partnership knowing what that style is. If you overcall very lightly, for example, your partner must be more conservative with replies to those overcalls.

- Do not bid your same values twice.

For example, you open 1♥, LHO overcalls 1♠, your partner bids 2♥, and RHO raises to 2♠. Do you now compete to 3♥?

Ask yourself, “Do I have something more to tell my partner?” If your hand was an ordinary 13 point opening hand, you have shown those values already. Pass. Only go on if you have something extra, such as more points or more trump.

If LHO now passes, your partner can use the same principal – he has promised you six points and three hearts, but if he really has nine points or has four hearts, then he hasn't told you everything, so he can consider bidding 3♥ or doubling 2♠.

Another way to look at this is that thirteen plus nine should be about right for the three level, all the more so with four trumps. Vulnerable, with only three trumps, a double might get you to the dreaded -200.

- Another guideline is the “Law of Total Tricks”, which says that with a fit, the total number of tricks available in the hand is the sum of the lengths of the trump holdings. For example, in a competitive auction where they have shown an 8 card spade fit and we have a 9 card heart fit, there are 17 Tricks available. So if they can make 8 tricks in spades, we will be able to make 9 Tricks in hearts.

In particular just remember that with a nine-card fit you're not going to get too burned at the three level.

- Never preempt over a preempt. For example, they open 2♥ and you have six or seven spades to the KJ and another King. Pass. You must not bid 2♠ or 3♠. Your partner will consider those to be strong bids. This situation is also an exception to the saying that jumps in competition are weak. You aren't weak or you wouldn't bid. 2♠ over 2♥ shows a good opening hand with spades, but 3♠ shows a stronger hand.
- A passed hand is not always a poor hand. If your partner passed after LHO opened, it may be that he did not have enough to overcall. It may also be that he did have enough, but didn't have a good enough suit, or his suit is the one LHO bid. That's completely different from your partner passing in the first seat. It helps to say in your mind, “Partner has a hand that could not bid over that opener.” That's not the same at all as “Partner has less than an opener.” We'll see this at work in the section on reopening with a double.
- Realize when you are “off the hook”. Your partner makes a takeout double, but your RHO bids over it. Or, your partner makes an *Unusual 2N* (page 78) bid but RHO intervenes. You're off the hook! You do not have to bid unless you have a worthwhile thing to say. When you do make such a “free” bid, your partner will infer that you have some reason to bid; when you bid because you have to, he cannot make such an inference. To bid, you will be short in their suit and shapely.
- Don't be cheap. If your partner makes a takeout double, and you bid the lowest thing you can, you're saying you don't have 8 good points. Just because it is a competitive auction doesn't mean to always go low.
- Competing with balanced hands (e.g. 5332) but no fit is never as good as it looks. Lean toward defending.

- If you have no defensive values, lean toward competing with something positive like an extra trump.
- Extreme shapes call for extreme measures.

Read Marty Bergen's famous book, *Points Schmoints*. If you have a double fit, or you have a 6 - 5 hand, get really aggressive. "Six-Five, Come Alive" they say.

- To *balance* (page 84) is to bid in the *passout seat*. As a simple guideline, bid as though you had one more King in your hand, and your partner in reply will bid as though he had one fewer. At matchpoints, if your opponents are attempting to pass out two of a major, try very hard to balance. Be sure to balance properly and you'll be a valued partner.
- If partner balances, but the opponents "take the push" by going one higher, we don't double and we don't raise. For example:

(1♥)	P	(2♥)	P
(P)	X	(P)	2♠
(3♥)			

The balancing double here borrowed a King in strength from partner. Neither of us should now bid 3♠ or double for penalty. The balance did its job. They might go down one now being a level too high. If they don't, we weren't likely to make 3♠.

- Do not "sacrifice" against a part-score. Very rarely sacrifice vulnerable. Be hesitant about sacrificing at the five-level; if you are vulnerable you'd be better off if you almost never did it.
- When you and partner have bid and raised a major suit, bidding another suit is NEVER done to try to find a better fit. I call this the Church of We Agreed – we agreed, so I am not suggesting we look elsewhere. I'm saying something else – asking for help in that suit, or showing a control, or asking for a control, for example.
- When you and partner have agreed on a minor suit, bids below 3N *show* stoppers. Bidding NT shows stoppers in all the unbid suits. If at some point there is only one suit where you have not found stoppers, bidding that suit *asks* partner to bid NT if he has a stopper in that suit.
- It is usually the person who is short in their agreed suit that needs to do some competing if appropriate.

- If they agree a suit after your partner's overcall, for you to proceed to the three level in another suit is to agree with your partner's suit. For example, (1♥) 1♠ (2♥) 3♣ – you can't be looking for a fit at the three level when your partner might only have 8 points, so this bid shows spade support and a good club suit. This extra information helps partner decide how high to go.
- Look for a reason to bid, not a reason to pass, but don't bid without a reason. We are never "just competing". This is admittedly tougher to judge in matchpoints.

COMPETING AFTER A SUIT OPENING

This chapter discusses the basic tools of competition, and some special situations.

Overcalls

An overcall is a bid after the opponents have opened. This chapter discusses doing so when the opponents opened a suit and we make the lowest available bid in our own strain. The range for an overcall is 8-17 points. An overcall is above all a request for your partner to lead your suit, so the first requirement is a suit you want led. On the bottom end, a one-level overcall can be much more relaxed than a two-level overcall.

With 18 or more points, you usually double first. If you don't double first, partner will assume you have 8-17 and may pass your overcall despite having enough for game opposite your strong holding. Your partner will think it is a *takeout* double at first. This "power double" is discussed in *Takeout Doubles* (page 67).

To make an overcall in a dangerous case such as a two-level overcall, especially vulnerable, you need a good hand and a good suit. For less dangerous cases, you need one or the other. In both cases, you should welcome the suit being led if your partner becomes the opening leader.

One case that requires special caution is overcalling a minor at the two level. Your reward is not high while your risk is high, especially vulnerable. It is really best to have a good six-card suit, and 10+ HCP.

You can overcall 1N with 15-18 HCP and a stopper (preferably more) in their suit. If they have preempted with a 2-level suit bid, overcalling it 2N means about the same thing but you really would like two stoppers, such as AJx.

With more points and the same kind of hand, you cannot bid 2N, because it is a conventional bid called *Unusual Two Notrump* (page 78). You double first.

You can overcall with a very strong four-card suit at the one level, and a maximum strength. Your partner may not

like it but sometimes it is right. It should be a good lead-directing bid.

Mike Lawrence's "Complete Book of Overcalls" has a complete discussion. He emphasizes understanding the safety of various overcalls. For example, after an auction that begins (1♣)-P-(2♣), bidding is strongly encouraged, because RHO does not have diamonds, hearts, or spades, and has limited values; whereas after (1♥)-P-(2♥), clubs and diamonds are not safe – either opponent may have them. (The first example assumes they are not playing *Inverted Minors* (page 42).)

When you are in fourth seat, you can overcall, but if passing would end the auction, see *Balancing* (page 84). If they have both bid you need a very good suit, probably six cards, and very good values. This is called a 'live auction'. For all you know the opener has a strong hand and was about to bid again. This situation is dangerous.

Responding To Partner's Overcall

Responding to an overcall as the advancer:

- Recognize in choosing a response that partner's range is 8-17 HCP because he did not double. You should have a lot of information already about points around the table.
- There is no standard as to when an overcall is forcing, but the usual agreement is that an overcall at the one level is forcing but a two-level overcall is not. Of course if the responder then bids you're off the hook.
- Resist rescuing when you are short in partner's suit.
- A bid of a new suit is forcing by an unpassed hand and denies a fit for the overcall.
- A simple raise is competitive.
- A jump raise is preemptive.
- A *cue* bid of opener's suit is a raise. Generally, we are safe at the level of the number of trump we have together.

RHO might bid, most frequently to raise the opener. See *Responsive Doubles* (page 99), in which a double shows the unbid suits.

Your partner needs to learn you can be trusted. Avoid these errors:

- Overcalling when you should really pass.
- Passing when you really should bid.
- Overcalling with a suit you don't want led.
- Not leading the overcaller's suit when you can.

A very advanced approach to responding to an overcall is *Transfer Advances* (page 147).

Weak Jump Overcalls

A jump overcall such as (1♥) 2♠ is essentially an opening weak two or three bid. A good suit is needed. As with a preempt, after you make this bid you should almost never bid again.

Some times you have a hand that could have opened with a weak preempt but you did not for some reason, such as having an outside four-card major in first or second seat. If you passed at first you can bid later once it becomes clear your partner is not being preempted by your bid.

By the way, your partner should respond to this as if you opened a weak two-bid. In particular, 2N should be whatever it would be for you (feature ask, for example) had they just opened 2x.

Michaels Cue Bid

A cue bid of an opening suit bid shows a distributional hand with 5-5 or better shape, with the suits being both majors when the opponents bid a minor, and the unbid major and a minor if the opponents bid a major. For example:

- (1♥) 2♥ shows five spades and five of an unknown minor.
- (1♦) 2♦ shows 5-5 in the majors.

Advancer can bid 2N! asking for the minor. Except in unusual circumstances, advancer must choose between partner's two suits. Bidding the fourth suit is only done with a preemptive hand and a good long suit.

The Michaels bid does not promise anything more than a prudent overcall but is unlimited.

Without partnership agreement, (1x) P (1y) 2x is not Michaels but natural; this is especially possible after the opponents open 1♣ or 1♦.

Note

Cue bids are in general not alertable – in fact, 1♣ - (2♣) is only alerted if it is *natural*. However, it is not necessarily Michaels either. If opponents make such a bid, be sure to ask what they mean by it, if only at the end of the auction. This is one case when silence does not mean standard.

Some partners agree to use Michaels only with minimal or maximum hands – see *Minimax* (page 79).

Over a 2M preempt, with a strong two-suited hand you can show the other major and a minor all at once using *Leaping Michaels* (page 80).

A question arises when the Michaels bid shows a major and an unknown suit, and the responder makes a bid, but advancer has no support for the major. E.g., (1♥) 2♥ (3♦) ?. Typically responder's 3♦ bid shows a weak hand with diamonds, if opponents are playing unusual vs. unusual, but many intermediate pairs will lack agreements. With values but lacking spade support here, and ideally holding at least two diamonds, advancer should double, asking for the second suit or conversion of the double to penalty.

Without values, of course, you are off the hook and can pass.

An advanced agreement is that the 2N reply asking for the second suit shows a good hand, while 3♣ asks for the second suit intending to pass. A bid like 3♣ is called a "pass or correct" bid; the Michaels bidder will pass if his second suit is clubs.

Unusual 2NT

Unusual 2NT is a direct or balancing 2N bid after a 1-level opening. It shows a hand of unstated strength that is at least 5-5 in the lowest two unbid suits. Advancer should choose the best of these two suits, except in remarkable circumstances.

Unusual 2NT is not alertable. Some partners agree to use Unusual 2NT only with weak or strong hands, see *Minimax* (page 79).

It is also possible to recognize other "impossible" no-trump

bids as unusual. For example,

(1♣) P (1♠) 2N

would show 5-5 in the red suits. Logically, nobody has a big enough hand to bid no-trump at the two level here. 2N specifically shows the 5-5 shape, while a double would be takeout but presumably not that good a shape.

Another possible agreement: if they preempt four of something, 4N is unusual notrump, asking advancer to pick his best of the two lowest unbid suits. Double's meaning depends on your agreed takeout double limit. Some play 4N as a two-suited takeout.

Minimax Style

Minimax is an optional style of bidding Michaels and Unusual 2N. If you are playing minimax style, it means you use these bids only with a maximum or a minimum; with a medium hand you bid the higher-ranked suit, hoping to show the other later.

When playing minimax, advancer will assume the weaker hand until his partner bids again to show the good hand.

The minimum would be an adequate overcall but less than an opener, while a maximum would be more than 15 points.

Minimax allows more certainty in responses to two-suited bids, at the price of not being able to make those bids as often.

Western Cue

When we are in a contested auction a (usually) three-level cue-bid of the opponent's suit denies a stopper in their suit(s) and asks partner to bid 3N if they have a stopper. For example:

1♦ (1♥) 1♠ (P)

2♣ (P) 3♥!(asking for heart stopper)

Responder is asking opener to bid 3N if he has a stopper in hearts. Quite often the Western Cue bidder has some help in their, such as a half-stopper, but does not feel secure bidding 3N on their own.

Competing Over Preempts

Preemptive bids work. They suck up bidding room and you are limited in ways to enter the auction. Once you see how annoying there are, you'll know to preempt more.

Are you weak or just competitive? Pass, even if you also have a big long suit. You never preempt over a preempt.

Competing Over Two-Level Preempts

Doubling is for takeout but can also be a very strong hand. The higher-ranking their suit, the more likely you're pushing us to the 3-level so the better your hand needs to be.

For example, you can agree a double of 2♠ is takeout but a double of 3♠ is penalty. I believe the "standard" limit is 2♠ from SAYC but most good pairs play it higher, some even to 4♠. Double can also show a hand too strong to just overcall, around 17/18 or more points.

Overcalling requires a good 5(or more) card suit as well as an opening hand or close to it. If you can bid it at the two-level you are much safer than at the three level. Your partner is going to feel pressure to raise with support. If you bid a minor it is likely that 3N is under consideration. Also, be extremely careful if partner is a passed hand – your game potential is low if all you have is a basic opener.

You can overcall in notrump but you probably want two stoppers unless you can see where your tricks are coming from.

Bidding their suit is *Michaels* (page 78).

Very important to know: if they preempt and then the advancer doubles our bid, that double is for penalty, not takeout. For example:

(2♥) 2♠ (X)

is penalty, not takeout for the minors.

Deciding Factors

When it is a close call between acting or passing, factors to consider are:

- How many cards do you hold in their suit? Three is terrible. The partner who is short (2, 1, or 0) in their suit has the burden to overcall or balance. With 4(or more) in their suit, you can consider notrump if you have 15-18 points, with two stoppers likely, or plan to defend.

- Are we vulnerable?
- To what level are we bidding?
- If we are considering an overcall, what is our suit's quality?
- The more balanced your hand, the less likely you should compete.

Responding after (2x) X (P)

It is really not possible to have a coherent scheme for responding to the double of a weak two bid unless you use *Lebensohl After Doubles Of Weak Two Bids* (page 104). For example, after (2♠) X (P), suppose you have one of these two hands:

- ♠xx ♥KJx ♦987654 ♣94
- ♠xx ♥Kxx ♦KQJ765 ♣94

With the first hand, you really need to bid 3♦ and have your partner pass it. With the second hand, you want to invite your partner to go on knowing you have a good diamond suit, but you don't have enough to force to game. The one bid of 3♦ has to mean one or the other. So if you don't use this form of the Lebensohl convention, you're stuck with it meaning a weak hand.

When you have a game forcing hand you can bid their suit (3♠ in this case) as a game forcing bid, hoping partner can help you decide on 3N, 4♥, or 5m depending on your hand and his. Again, Lebensohl can help.

When you have a suit that is above the preempt, such as hearts over a diamond preempt, you have a two-level bid available to show weakness and can use the three-level bids to show invitational responses (8-11 HCP).

Of course, you can also convert the double to penalty with the correct hand but since you are under the long suit this is rare.

Responding After Higher Levels

They will often reinforce a preempt to the 3- or 4-level. Suppose partner doubles but they raise. A *Responsive Double* (page 99) will show partner it is our hand, 10+ points and an unclear direction. Be aggressive in competing at the three-level if you can. When they go to the 4-level, it is even more important to compete if you have values. They might be bidding game or they might be sacrificing.

It is useful to play 4N to mean, "two places to play". This

bid lets you disambiguate two bids of five of the other major as in Lebensohl:

- (2♠) X (4♠) 5♥ is a good hand with heart support. It is a slam try. 5N! instead would be "Pick-a-slam"
- (2♠) X (4♠) 4N! says you have either a modest hand with heart support or both minors. After the doubler bids his best minor, 5♥ is to play.

Leaping Michaels

Leaping Michaels is an advanced bid. You really have to have an agreement on this one.

Over a 2M preempt, a bid of four of a minor by agreement shows 5(or more) of the other major, and 5(or more) of the minor, with a strong hand of course, since you are on the four-level. This is considered a bid of the major with additional information as to strength and the minor suit. So for example, a reply of 4N by advancer would be key-card for the major, and bidding another suit would show a control with slam interest. Sometimes Leaping Michaels uncovers a nice double-fit and a slam.

Over 3M preempts, you can also agree to Non-Leaping Michaels, with a bid of 4m showing the same thing.

Leaping Michaels applies in all these situations:

- (2M) - ?
- (1M) - P - (2M) - ?
- (3M) - ? (if playing non-Leaping Michaels)
- (1M) - P - (3M) - ? (if playing non-Leaping Michaels)

Examples:

- (2♥) 4♣ shows five spades and five clubs.
- (1♥) P (2♥) 4♣ shows five spades and five clubs.
- (2♥) 4♣ (P) 4N is keycard for spades.
- (1♥) - P - (3♥) - 4♦ shows five spades and five diamonds.

COMPETING WITH THEIR 1N

The main thing is not to just sit there and say nothing whenever an opponent opens 1N. Your opponents are driving a highly-tuned sports car when they get their 1N system going. They are going to get to the right place unless you bother them.

The reason that there are all these conventions I'm about to mention is that the main thing you need is a good shape. 5332 and 4333 hands need not apply. Usually the single-suited bids are a good five or six cards and the other two-suited bids are 5-4 at least; generally, 5-4 instead of 5-5 requires a stronger hand. Some systems will tolerate 4-4 in the majors only, plus good strength. Suit texture and length matter more than HCP.

By partnership agreement you can play these in only the direct seat or also play them in fourth seat; but in fourth seat you need great shape or extra strength because the 1N bidder is behind you.

We assume here for the moment it is a 15-17 1N opener. See below for comments about dealing with weaker notrump openings.

(1N) - 2N is always "unusual 2N" showing 5-5 in the minors. No cheating on length here!

The two most popular conventions are called D.O.N.T. (Disturbing the Opponent's No Trump) and Cappelletti, also known as Hamilton. Each of these has an advanced version meant to make it usable in more cases. Cappelletti has the advantage of preserving a penalty-double; D.O.N.T. allows one to interfere more often; each convention will be better on some hands and worse on the other.

Natural

You can just bid naturally over 1N; a double will show a hand as good as the one your 1N bidder has. You'll want a decent six-card suit, or a great five-card suit, and around 10 points to overcall. Vulnerability matters.

What if you are the partner of someone who overcalls a 1N opener and you do not like their suit, not one little bit?

Do you rescue them? Probably not. If he doesn't like your suit he may go back to his.

D.O.N.T.

D.O.N.T stands for Disturbing Opponents' No Trump, and is another idea from the fertile mind of Marty Bergen. The emphasis is on getting in there even if, on rare occasion, we miss a game.

The one-suited bids require at least a good five-card suit, and 8 – 10 points or better. Be aggressive only with good suits, good shape. The two-suited bids require at least 5-4 in either order.

- X! A hand with one long suit.
- Response: 2♣! Forced; then the doubler passes or corrects.
- 2♣! Clubs and a higher suit
- 2♦! Diamonds and a higher suit
- 2♥ Shows long hearts and spades
- 2♠ Shows long spades; it is a weaker hand than doubling and correcting to spades
- 2N Shows both minors 5-5

In response to 2♣ and 2♦, pass unless you have shortness, or bid the next higher suit, or on rare occasion, a good long suit of your own.

Example: Suppose the bidding goes (1N) 2♦!(Diamonds and a higher suit)

- With ♠KQ86 ♥Q8 ♦98 ♣98764 you would bid 2♥, because your hearts and spades are better than your diamonds.
- With ♠K ♥KQ865 ♦98 ♣98764 you would pass 2♦. You'd like to bid hearts but you don't want to land in a five-card spade fit.
- With ♠KQJ9852 ♥6 ♦98 ♣984 you just bid 2♠, which is to play.

A slightly more advanced version of D.O.N.T. is *Meckwell* (page 137).

I've heard people remark that "Even Bergen doesn't play D.O.N.T. anymore". It is true that he's been known to play *Meckwell* (page 137), but D.O.N.T. is easier to learn and I recommend it at first.

Cappelletti (Hamilton)

In this scheme, which is perhaps the most common non-natural set of responses to a 1N opener, the double is left as penalty-oriented, at the cost of requiring us to go to the three level to show clubs. Against a weak 1N opener, this is the most popular scheme. *Intervenor* bids:

- X penalty-oriented (a hand equal or better to the one shown by the opener)
- 2♣!(long unknown suit). This is a *relay*, completely artificial.

With a good six-card club suit, advancer may pass. Or, advancer bids 2♦!(relay), then intervenor will pass or correct to 2♥, 2♠, or 3♣.

- 2♦!(hearts and spades)

Advancer normally bids his best major, pass or correct.

- 2♥(hearts and a minor) or 2♠(spades and a minor)

Advancer bids 2N to ask for the minor.

- 2N(5-5 in the minors) is Unusual 2N.

The two suited bids are nominally 5-5, but depending on strength and vulnerability, can be made with a good 5-4. Advancer can depart from the relay by preemptively bidding their own suit – this must be a really good suit, and it should not happen very often.

As usual, if the opponents bid again, the next bidder on our side is "off the hook".

A slightly more advanced version of Cappelletti is *Modified Cappelletti* (page 137).

Against A Weak 1N

The "common wisdom" is that Cappelletti is better against a weak 1N, but the truth is perhaps not so simple. Anyone playing a weak 1N will have a sophisticated set of agreements called a *runout*, meant to get them out of notrump

into a suit fit, where it won't be so easy to set them by much, and the hoped-for profits may not materialize.

It is probably better for an intermediate to play just one of these systems well against any type of notrump, than to play different ones depending on circumstances. The edge you get from any convention is small; and the loss from a mixup is big. The real solution in my opinion is to lower one's standards, for example bidding with two good four-card suits or a five-card "long" suit. And yes, you may end up in trouble, just as can happen against the strong version.

Against a weak 1N, note the partner of the 1N opener is more likely to have a good hand than when a strong 1N is opened.

GENERAL DEFENSE TO TWO-SUITED BIDS

We can use the following defense to whatever two-suited overcall our opponents make over our one-level opening. The following method is called the “lower-lower” version of “Unusual vs. Unusual”.

The name comes from the Unusual 2N convention; in that convention a jump overcall of 2N has an unusual meaning – rather than showing a strong hand, it shows the lower two unbid suits. What is unusual about this general defense to that and other two-suited overcalls is that with certain hands we bid one or the other of the suits they have implied holding; such a bid is called an implied cue bid.

Be aware that when an opponent makes a two-suited overcall, if we do have a fit, the trump break may be poor. Length in your partner’s suit is important. Be conservative with only an 8-card fit. The same factors face your opponents, so your eagerness to defend should be correspondingly higher.

If we do double their final contract, lead a trump.

Their Two Suits are Known

If they make an overcall that shows two **specific** suits (not one suit and an unknown second suit), there are two possible cue bids available, and two other suits.

- Call the two suits implied by their bid “theirs” and the other two “ours”.
- Among their two suits, the suit of theirs which would be cheapest to bid next is called the “lower” suit and the other one the “higher” suit. Usually but not always the “lower” is the lower-ranked suit.

We set up a correspondence between the implied cue bids and our two suits:

- A cue bid of the lower of their suits shows length in the lower of our two suits.
- A cue bid of the higher of their suits shows length in the higher of our two suits.

When you have support for partner’s suit:

- A simple raise of partner shows trump support and a competitive 7-10 support points.
- The implied cue bid corresponding to partner’s suit is a limit raise or better.
- A raise to game in partner’s suit is, as usual, long trumps and good playing strength with less than limit raise values.
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter, slam try in partner’s suit.

When you do not have support for partner:

- A free bid of the “other” suit is competitive and non-forcing. Typically this hand might look like a weak two opener in the other suit, 7-10 points.
- The cue bid of the “other” suit shows 5+ cards and game-forcing values.
- A double shows you have a penalty double of at least one of their suits, and another bid. Typically this is 10+ points. Assuming advancer bids, partner should usually pass to give you the option of making a penalty double.
- 3N is to play, showing stoppers in both their suits.

Pass if you cannot make one of these bids.

Opener’s rebids are generally natural. A cue bid of one of their suits shows a stopper in that suit and denies one in the other suit.

Example

They open 1♦.

Only One Suit Is Known

If the second suit is not known, such as a 1♥ (2♥) Michaels bid, things are more complicated.

- The one available cue bid is a limit raise or better in partner’s suit. Example: 1♥ (2♥) 2♠ = limit raise+

in hearts.

- A raise to the 3-level is a constructive raise (7-10 points). Larry Cohen recommends that this shows 3-card support for a major, or 4-card support for a minor. Non-forcing. A jump raise to the 4-level is weak and preemptive, showing 4+ card support. Non-forcing.
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter and a slam try. 1♥ (2♥) 3♠ = short spades, support, slam try.
- A no-trump response is used to show 10+ HCP points without support, with stoppers in the other three suits.
- A double shows you have a penalty double of one of their suits, the known one or one of the others, typically 7+ HCP, often a balanced hand.
- All other bids are not forcing.
- Pass can be just waiting but it is usually weak.

The meaning of the responder's rebids after an initial double and pass by opener are as follows. Example:

1♥	2♥	X	2♠
P	P	?	

- Double is for penalty
- New suit is 5+ cards, game forcing.
- 3N is game strength with a stopper.
- Bidding overcaller's suit is *Western Cue* (page 79), forcing to game and denying a stopper in the suit and asking partner to bid 3N if he holds one.

In an auction like:

1♥	2♥	X	2N!
P	3♦	?	

we now know both suits. Bidding 3♠ is *Western Cue* showing a stopper in spades but denying one in diamonds. Double is for penalty.

Summary for Defending Unusual 2N

The implicit cue-bid of the suit corresponding to partner's suit is limit raise or better; of the "4th suit", game forcing. Actually bidding partner's suit is just competitive, and the "4th suit" is a preemptive bid.

Example: 1♥ (2N). "Our suits" are hearts and spades, theirs are clubs and diamonds. The lowest of theirs, clubs, corresponds to the lowest of ours, hearts.

- X shows a penalty double of at least one of the minors
- 3♥ (partner's major) is a competitive raise
- 3♠ (the other major) is a preemptive bid
- 3♣ is limit raise or better for hearts
- 3♦ is a game force with spades

Example: 1♣ (2N). "Our" suits are clubs and spades, theirs are diamonds and hearts. the lowest of theirs, diamonds, corresponds to the lowest of ours, clubs.

- X shows a penalty double of diamonds or hearts or both
- 3♣ is a competitive raise of clubs
- 3♠ is a preemptive bid
- 3♦ is a limit raise or better of clubs
- 3♥ is a GF bid of spades

BALANCING

Mike Lawrence has a wonderful book about balancing, “All About Balancing”. Learning to balance is very important, especially at matchpoints.

Balancing refers to making a bid when passing would end the auction. The situations vary as to whether one or both opponents have bid, which suit they bid (or notrump), and the shape of your own hand. The key point is that how many HCP you have is not as important as it usually is, because in these situations your partner and you may have half the points or nearly so.

Balancing In Fourth Seat

Your LHO opens a suit, and after two passes, it is up to you. The opener’s partner has nothing, but your partner may have a variety of hands. He has a hand that could not overcall but he could even have a good opening hand that had no suitable bid.

As a general rule, you bid as if you had 3 more points in your hand (called “borrowing a King from partner”) and when partner replies, he will reply as if he had 3 points fewer.

To balance with 1N you should have 12 - 15 HCP and definitely a stopper in opener’s suit. Above 15 HCP you usually double first, in the same way that you would double rather than make a direct overcall if you had 18 HCP.

For example, after LHO opens 1♥ and it is passed to you, holding:

♠ KQ82 ♥92 ♦KQ96 ♣J72

you can double because you have at least three cards in the other suits and could open the hand easily if it had another King. Your partner with 10 HCP would NOT jump in reply, as he would if you were directly after the opener, because he owes you that King.

But, with:

♠ KQ82 ♥92 ♦KQ962 ♣J7

you cannot double, because you really won’t like it when partner bids clubs. You have a five card suit so you can bid 2♦. (There is a convention called *Equal Level Conversion Doubles* (page 68), designed for exactly this situation, but it is a partnership agreement and requires experience to recognize).

With:

♠ KQT82 ♥9 ♦KQ96 ♣J72

on the other hand, bid 1♠; it is important to show that five-card spade suit. If you make a takeout double, you’re denying five cards in an unbid major.

With partnership agreement, 2 of the opener’s suit is Michaels. 2N is Unusual 2N, showing the lowest two unbid suits, perhaps only 5-4 in the suits if you have some decent points. Two-suited bids allow you to get in there more often, but require more experience.

Balancing after (1N) P (P)

You have to be more careful than when overcalling 1N because the big hand is to your left. We play our chosen defense to 1N in *passout seat* as well as direct seat; ask your partner about doing this or just bidding natural suits.

Balancing When Both Opponents Have Bid

Balancing in auctions in which both opponents have limited their hand so that their side appears to have roughly half the deck, say 18 - 22 HCP, is important. Consider these auctions:

(1M) P (2M) P – they stop at 2M
(P) ?

(1m) P (1N) P – they stop after a 1N response
(P) ?

(1m) P (1y) P – they stop after a 1N rebid
(1N) P (P) ?

Balancing in passout seat has been previously *covered* (page 85). It differs from these situations in that the opener has not limited his hand as much. Likewise, an opening bid of 1N that is passed out can leave your side with as few as 15-16 HCP. By contrast, the auctions above indicate a deck that is more evenly divided with a tentative contract that will often make.

The 1M - 2M auction is especially important. If your opponents have a major fit and have made no effort to go to game, then the deck is about evenly divided. Both sides have 18-22 HCP. If you pass, you will usually get a very poor score, especially at matchpoints. It is worth considerable risk to compete. They have a fit, so we have a fit. Let's find it.

If they have stopped with a suit preference, that's different: 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥ does not show that the opponents have an 8-card heart fit, just that responder prefers hearts to clubs. He might have something like ♠KT83 ♥98 ♦KJT32 ♣92. This means your side might not have a fit either, so bidding over them is more dangerous.

The third auction tells you your side has about half the points, so again you try to get into the auction, but it is more difficult.

If your opponents have 18-22 HCP, then you and your partner have 18 - 22 HCP. Therefore **YOUR HCP ARE RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT**. Whatever you do not have, your partner does have. Your shape and suit quality **ARE** important. The more flexible you are, the better. A one-suited balance is the least flexible and the most dangerous.

Be liberal about balancing in matchpoints. You likely have a bad board if you pass. If you turn that bad board into a top once in a while, it will more than overcome losing a little more a few times.

At IMPs, be more discrete when vulnerable as there is no gain if you go down one. Always have a perfect distribution for your action.

Besides competing, learning to balance helps your partnership avoid competing in ways that are more likely to get you into trouble, such as ill-judged takeout doubles, two-level suit overcalls in live auctions, and overcalling weak four-card suits. Partner can pass such hands if they can trust you to balance.

What Is The Goal?

Getting them to bid one more is the goal. Getting the contract isn't.

If they "take the push" and bid one more, you stand an extra chance of setting them that you otherwise did not have. And after all, if they are in three hearts making three, they get the same score as if they are in two hearts making three.

If they do bid one more, we pass. Our work is done. No more bidding. No penalty doubles.

Always try to balance and respond as flexibly as possible. Convince your opponents that you have found a fit and they may bid on.

How Do I Balance?

Your distribution is the key to your choice of balancing action, and to responding when your partner balances. Agreeing on a convention for two-suited bids is important.

We will discuss some specific auctions below. However, there are some general guidelines:

- Double only with at least three cards in all the unbid suits.
- Bid a one-suited hand (5+ cards at the one- or two-level, 6+ cards at the three-level), in any of the auctions, if the suit is good.

Balancing When They Stop At Two

Your opponents have bid 1M - 2M, passed to you in balancing seat. If you pass, odds are that you're getting a bad board, especially in matchpoints or non-vul at IMPs. Do something! But what?

- Double is for takeout, with three-card or longer support for all unbid suits. Partner should bid their best suit. But, by partnership agreement, it is good to be more flexible if you can. Partner with two four-card or longer suits can reply 2N! (two places to play), and we then bid up-the-line until a fit is found.
- Balancing with 2N! shows two places to play; this will be four-card support for two unbid suits. Partners bid up the line to find the fit.
- After 1m - 2m (not inverted), or 1m - 1N - 2m, double shows three or more in both majors, although 4-4 or better is preferable.

Balancing A Notrump

The auctions:

(1m) -P- (1N) -P- (P) -?

(1m) -P- (1y) -P- (1N) -P- (P) -?

are opportunities to balance. They have opened a minor and stopped at 1N.

After 1♦ - 1N, the responder has clubs of some sort, and after 1♣ - 1N, the responder may have by-passed four diamonds. Be aware.

It is unlikely you want double to be penalty so treat a double as takeout for the suit they mentioned.

Again: the goal is to get them to bid again. Act confidently. When they fall for it, quit. Glare at your partner if your partner doesn't quit too.

DEALING WITH DISTRIBUTIONAL HANDS

Having learned the basic bidding rules, you'll be confronted with hands that just do not seem to fit. Often these are hands that are *distributional*, that is, they have one or two long suits. For example, you might pick up a hand that is 1=1=8=3, or 1=1=5=6. These hands can be difficult because they have a longer suit that is of lower rank than the upper suit, or because they are often worth more than their HCP would suggest – and then suddenly you find a misfit with your partner and the value drops sharply.

Hands With One Long Suit

Here are a few examples and how you might approach them. Let's say you are in first chair and pick up this hand:

• ♠5 ♥6 ♦AKQ98752 ♣932

We could imagine opening this 3♦, 4♦, or even 5♦, trying to keep the opponents out of the auction. However, there is another person you are keeping out of the auction, your partner. This hand will take 8 tricks all by itself. It just takes very little to make a game and not that much to make a slam. In short, the hand is just worth a lot more than 9 HCP. Open this a diamond, and keep making minimal diamond replies, and let your partner participate.

This is the kind of hand that the convention Gambling 3NT was designed to handle. However, change it to ♦AKJT9852 and it won't qualify for Gambling even if you're playing that convention.

You don't need to panic that 1♦ will pass out. If your partner has fewer than six points, your opponents have 25 and probably a spade or heart fit. They are not going to pass. Worst case, you end up with a diamond part-score.

With a really poor 8-card suit and little outside, you can consider treating it as a seven-card holding and open 3♦.

Remember that if you are in fourth seat, bids other than 1♦ are NOT weak. Still, if you would open the hand you can open it 2♦, which says you have a hand that would open one of a suit and then rebid it at the two level. (At least, that's the way I play it; not everybody does).

The *Namyats* (page 154) convention is designed to help you distinguish between opening 4♥ or 4♠ as a preempt or with a better hand with an 8-card suit. As a side effect it has a 3N opening to show a minor preempt. However, you give up the 4m preempts.

When your partner is a passed hand, things change. Pre-empting then does not risk making a game as much.

Two-Suited Hands

Two-suited hands are not hard to bid except in two cases. If the longer suit is the lower-ranked one, and you are not strong enough to reverse, it is a problem. For example, you have a 13 point hand with four diamonds and five clubs. If you open a club, and your partner responds with a major, what do you do next? You can't bid diamonds, you are not strong enough.

If the longer suit is higher-ranked than the shorter, you just bid normally. Of course if you are strong you have to do something like jump to be sure your partner will not pass. But that typically is a jump-shift and takes 19 HCP.

The second difficult case is that you have a strong two-suited hand and are tempted to open 2♣. It can be quite difficult to show both suits before getting too high. Especially with both minors, the auction 2♣ - 2♦ - 3m gets you to a very awkward place. So, opening 2♣ with say 22 HCP is not required. If your partner really has nothing and passes your opening bid, you probably are not missing a game anyway. But certainly with hands even better than that, you have to open 2♣.

With shapes like 1=1=5=6 and 2=2=4=5, you have the option with a minimal hand to open the diamond suit. This "distorts" your shape; you will never convince your partner of your true shape after that. But for an intermediate player, opening the 4=5 hand that way is taught by many teachers, so that you can rebid clubs. Rebidding clubs without six of them is generally to be avoided. If you open clubs and rebid diamonds twice your partner will know you are 5=6 in the minors. Likewise with other 6=5

hands where the six is lower-ranked than the five.

Six-Four Hands

When six-four, you of course open the six, and with a minimal opener you have to rebid the six if it is lower-ranking. Otherwise, you have a choice: bid the six twice and then the four, or the six, then the four, then the six. The latter has the advantage of showing your partner both suits, and more of your cards, earlier and is recommended for good hands as long as you watch out for the rule on reverses.

If it really bothers you to bid minimal hands with four spades and five hearts, look into the 2♦ *Flannery* (page 107) convention.

ALL ABOUT JUMP-SHIFTS

A *jump-shift* is a jump bid of a new suit. For example 1♥ - 3♣ is a jump-shift because a bid of 3♣ is a jump over 1♥. In understanding the meaning of such a bid we must recognize the situation. Specifically,

- Is the bid by the opener or the responder? All jump-shifts by opener are strong.
- If by responder, has responder previously passed or not?
- Has there been competition?
- Does the bid have another meaning already?

Weak Jump-Shifts

If there has been competition between the opener and the responder, a jump shift is preemptive. It is also possible to agree that any jump shift that has no other meaning is weak, even without competition (“Weak Jump-Shifts”). In the body of this book, we assume that weak jump-shifts not in competition is our agreement. If it isn’t a strong bid, it must be alerted.

For example:

- 1♣ - (1♦) - 2♥ shows a hand with weak values, not interest in game, with six hearts. No alert is required.
- 1♥ - (X) - 3♣ shows a hand with weak values, not interested in game, with 6(or more) clubs. No alert is required.
- (1♣) - P - (1♥) - 2♠ is preemptive, 6(or more) spades. No alert required.
- If 1♣ - 2♠ is preemptive, alert it.
- If 1♥ - 3♣ is preemptive, alert it.

A jump-shift could also be a conventional bid, such as a Bergen raise, or the special cases such as 1♦ - 3♣ where it is invitational. Another alternative is to play *fit-showing jumps* (page 142). Those are great but a little tricky.

Now let’s consider the auction with no interference.

Strong Jump-Shifts

A jump-shift shows, in standard bidding, a 19+ HCP hand. Since slam is in the air, the bidder is not worried about getting too high, he’s worried about getting in an awkward situation where partner might pass.

For example, after a 1♠ opener, responder 19+ HCP with 3 spades, and five decent diamonds, cannot bid Jacoby 2N, cannot bid any number of spades without risking a pass, and should not just fly into 6♠ for fear of being too high or too low. After bidding 2♦, which as a new suit is at least is forcing, say opener bids 3♦. Now what?

Unless it is forcing in your system, 3♠ might look like suit preference. Even in Two Over One, 3♠ shows some slam interest but there are a lot of hands that could pose a problem if opener replies 4♠. For example:

Kxx xx AKQJx AQx

Asking for Aces with a worthless doubleton won’t resolve the heart situation. Opener could hold hands as different as:

AJxxx KJ xxx KJx or
AQJxx Ax xxxx Kx

Using a strong jump-shift, 1♥ - 3♦ - 3N - 4♠ leaves the decision to go on to the opener, where it should be, because it is the opener’s hand that is most unknown. In the case of the second hand, knowing there are the points for slam, and partner has show a decent five card diamond suit, spade support, and 19+ HCP, the opener can proceed beyond 4♠ with some confidence.

When the responder is a passed hand, the strong jump-shift shows that the hand has now gotten better so that we should be close to game. The weak version attempts to stop the auction at a low spot.

That’s the old-fashioned Goren jump-shift. However, you

don't often have such a powerhouse. Most of the time when you do, 2/1 bids can get you where you want to go. Thus the utility of the jump-shift came into question.

Good players remain divided on the issue: weak? strong? or something else? It is up to you and your partner.

Some jump shifts, by the way, are a little hard to spot, particularly 1♥ - 2♠. Feel sorry for your partner when he goofs.

See *Soloway Jump-Shifts* (page 141) for a strong but not so strong alternative.

SLAM BIDDING

Bidding a slam (six or seven level) is one of the most thrilling (and scary) things in bridge. I'd say the most common error, especially at a club, is trying to get to a skinny slam. Most people aren't going to do that, so if you do, you're going to get a top or a bottom. And matchpoints is all about hitting it straight down the fairway on the bidding, and winning with cardplay and defense.

Blackwood

Blackwood is one of the oldest conventions, and has now been supplanted for suit slams by the *Roman Keycard* (page 93) version. The same cautions discussed below for RKC also apply to plain Blackwood.

Attention

Blackwood and RKC are tools for avoiding bad slams, not for finding slams.

Be sure that any answer is acceptable, that you can still stop safely if you cannot bid slam. You can and must bid a six-level slam if you use Blackwood and then find you are off one Ace.

A bid of 4N, when it is not quantitative, asks how many Aces partner has. The responses are:

- 5♣ for 0 or 4 Aces,
- 5♦ for 1 Ace,
- 5♥ for 2 Aces,
- 5♠ for 3 Aces.

Following this, if our side has all four Aces, a bid of 5N asks how many Kings partner has, using the same scheme.

For example:

1♠ – 2♥
3♥ – 4N (Blackwood)

(continues on next page)

(continued from previous page)

5♥(2 Aces) – 5N(Kings?)
5♦(1 King)

Be sure you've agreed to a suit before concluding partner's 4N is Blackwood rather than quantitative.

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC)

Warning

Before bidding RKC be sure you are able to tolerate any of its replies. Be sure you're going to bid the slam if only off one keycard. Off one keycard and the Queen of trump, do not bid the slam.

In a suit auction, 4N is almost always Roman Keycard Blackwood. If you are a beginner you can play basic Blackwood but you should learn RKC early on.

The responses are based on their being five *keycards*, which are the four Aces and the King of trump. If a trump suit has not been agreed to, 4N implicitly agrees (at least for the purposes of responding) to the last bid suit. So, for example, 1♥ – 1♠ – 4N is RKC for spades. The bidder in some circumstances may be intending to end up in some other (higher) suit or notrump but for now responder answers as if the last bid suit is trump, which it very likely is.

Responses to RKC

1. 5♣ One keycard or four keycards
2. 5♦ Zero keycards or three keycards
3. 5♥ Two or five keycards without the trump Queen
4. 5♠ Two or five keycards with the trump Queen.

Also bid 5♠ with two or five keycards and enough trump to guarantee a 10 card fit, even if you do not have the Queen.

Responding with a (Useful) Void

- 5N Shows zero or two keycards and a useful void.
- 6 of any suit below the trump suit shows 1 or 3 keycards with a useful void in the bid suit.
- 6 of the trump suit shows 1 or 3 controls and a useful void in a higher suit.

A void is not useful in a suit your partner bid.

The bids shown are the “1430” response. Switch the meanings of 5♣ and 5♦ and it is the “3014” responses. I use 3014 because 1430 won’t work for clubs: 4N - 5♦ means zero and is already past 5♣.

RKC is a tool for avoiding bad slams, not exploring for one. The person who bids it must be prepared for any of the answers.

When 4N is NOT Ace-Asking

A bid of 4N is not always RKC or Blackwood. Here are the exceptions:

- A direct jump to 4N over 1N or 2N, or after a 2N rebid following a 2♣ opener, is quantitative..
- After a 1N opener and transfer to a major, 4N is quantitative.
- After 1N - 2♣ - 2M, 4N is quantitative. Responder can instead first bid 3W! (the other major) to agree on opener’s suit and show extras. Opener will bid a control and then 4N is Ace-asking.
- After a 1x opener, a direct 4N is plain Blackwood. Responder has a self-sufficient trump suit and just needs to ask for aces.

Many pairs play various conventions in which RKC is invoked with some other bid. See *Redwood* (page 132) for example.

When Not To Bid RKC

It is generally useless to bid RKC if you are missing two keycards and have a worthless doubleton (worse than Kx or Ax). The problem is that you learn nothing if partner replies, “One keycard”. You may or may not have two fast losers. In general it is necessary to think ahead and make sure you can take yes for an answer. Learning partner has two keycards but you don’t want to be in a club slam is an unpleasant experience.

When hearts are trump, if partner has two keycards and the trump queen, he will bid 5♠; will you be too high?

When diamonds are trump, if partner has two keys and that isn’t enough, you’re in trouble.

When clubs are trump, playing 1430, if you aren’t going to be able to say yes to zero or three keys, do not bid RKC.

When clubs are trump, playing 0314, if you aren’t going to be able to say yes to one key, do not bid RKC.

The purpose of RKC is to keep you out of bad slams, not to find chancy ones. Use control-bidding to find a custom-fit slam; then you might be able to bid RKC knowing you can interpret the answer correctly.

What To Do After A 14 or 03 Response

After your partner answers 14 or 03, and if you need it to be the higher number, bid five of trumps. If your partner has 4 or 3 respectively, they bid the slam.

The Queen Ask

If the next suit above the RKC response is below trumps, it is possible to bid that suit to ask for the trump Queen. Responder bids 5 of the trump suit to deny the trump queen, or else bids six of an outside suit below trumps in which he has a King, or 5N to show no outside King below trumps. Bidding six of trumps shows an outside King in a suit above trumps.

Asking For Kings

Asking for Kings promises that the partners hold all five keycards. To ask for Kings, the RKC bidder bids 5N. Responder bids the number of Kings *not counting the trump King*, using 6♣ is none, 6♦ is 1, and so on.

An alternate by agreement, called “Specific Kings”, is to show your lowest King by bidding that suit if it is below trump. If it is impossible to show a king because it is above 6 of your trump suit. you should either make an impossible bid (e.g., show a king you have denied earlier in the auction) or just bid 6 of your suit.

Responder has the right to just bid the grand slam if he can tell he has “the right stuff”.

Dealing With Interference

Rarely, your Ace-asking bid may be interfered with. If the opponents overcall 4N in a suit, you can use a convention called DOPI, which stands for “double zero, pass one”. That allows you to give these more negative bids cheaply. In both cases the first available suit becomes your corresponding next higher-level response. It is easiest to be consistent. For example, playing RKC 1430, with diamonds as trump, after 4N - (5♥),

- Double is one or 4 keycards;
- Pass is zero or 3 keycards;
- 5♠ is two keycards, no Q♦;
- 4N is two keycards with the Q♦, or a known 10 diamonds.

Similarly, after a 4N - (X), ROPI stands for “redouble zero, pass one”.

Note that when the opponent doubles your response to an Ace-asking bid, such as 4N - (pass) - 5♦ - (X), this is normally lead-directing, not penalty, because it is a double of an artificial bid.

Gerber

When no suit has been agreed upon, and we have bid notrump, 4♣ is the Gerber Convention, asking for Aces. This is true even if the bidder has bid clubs. The replies are:

- 4♦ No Aces or Four Aces
- 4♥ One Ace
- 4♠ Two Aces
- 4N Three Aces

Note

The standard is that 4♣ is Gerber only when it is a jump over 1N or 2N. You and your partner might agree on other circumstances. Insane people have been known to play “Always Gerber”.

A good agreement for “Is that Gerber?” is to ask if 4N is Ace- or Keycard-asking. If it is not, then 4♣ is Gerber. If it is, 4♣ is not Gerber. There is no point to having two bids that mean almost the same thing.

Control Bidding

Control bids are slam tries, bid for the purpose of understanding where the partnership may have issues preventing a slam or RKC bid. For purposes of this discussion, we assume that a major suit has been agreed trump in a game-forcing auction. While control bids can be used with minors and with Two Over One, you will have to agree on what three-level bids show controls. In a minor one is more often looking for 3N.

A control bid, formerly called a cue bid when referring to slam tries, is a bid that shows the ability to prevent two fast losers in a suit, such as holding an Ace or a void. Most control bids are at the four level or higher. Control-bids are not jump bids. That piece of knowledge helps you avoid confusing splinters and control-bids.

- Aces and voids are called first-round controls.
- Kings and singletons are second-round controls.

The standard method of bidding controls is to only bid first round controls, unless we are already known to possess a first round control in that suit, in which case bidding the suit shows a second round control. (See *Italian Control Bidding* (page 131) for a better method in which control bids show first- or second-round controls).

- The first control bid in a side suit shows a first round control (Ace or void) in the suit bid, and *denies a control in any bypassed suit*. Controls are bid up the line, in other words.
- If your partner skips over a suit or suits, continuing to control-bid promises a control in the skipped suit(s).

Nothing stops you from cue bidding below the game level and then asking for Aces. For example, 1♥ - 3♥ - 4♦ - 4N. Here, the 4♦ bid showed a first-round control in diamonds and denied holding one in clubs. 4N is RKC, but the bidder is aware of the possible issue in clubs. Instead of 4N, a bid of 5♣ would show that control and deny one in spades. Indeed, suppose responder had xx in diamonds. Normally he could not bid 4N – but knowing diamonds are not going to produce two fast losers, 4N may become possible.

:: rubric::

Slam In The Hand?

Recall this important admonition: Blackwood and RKC are tools for avoiding bad slams, not for finding them. Previously we met *The Hand* (page 11) and learned how to start to bid when East or West was Dealer.

West	East
♠K862	♠AQ
♥AKJ95	♥T632
♦T5	♦AKQ6
♣KJ	♣964

We saw that the correct auction with East the Dealer, using the bids for a 5-4 in the major reply, is:

West	East
--	1N
2♣	2♥
3♠!	4♦

where West made a power raise and East then showed a diamond control but not a club control. Since East opened 1N, that can't be shortness so East has the A♦ but not the A♣.

Note that West has a worthless doubleton diamond and without the 4♦ bid could not ask for keycards. If West asked and East had as much as two with the Queen, we'd have all but one keycard and bid 6♥. But if the two were the A♠ and the A♣ we might have two diamond losers.

As it is, if we ask with 4N, the reply is 5♥, two without the Queen. We are missing an Ace and the Queen of trump. That's too much – if we are missing just one keycard but have the Queen of trump, that's a 6♥ bid. As it is, we just pass 5♥. The 1N system did its job very well, this is not a good slam, about 25%. This hand is a perfect example of this admonition:

If West had been the dealer, after 1♥ - 2N! - 3N! - 4♦(control), we would get to the same place.

CONVENTIONS

The word “convention” in bridge refers to a bid, or a series of bids, which have an artificial meaning; that is, the bid does not mean what it would literally appear to mean.

You should know that when a convention giveth, it taketh away something else. For example, bidding Stayman 2♣ in response to partner’s 1N opener makes it easier to find major suit fits. But, you cannot ever play 2♣ as a contract after partner opens 1N. In this case the tradeoff is worth it.

Burn This Chapter

An expert pair came to our bridge club after a layoff of 30 years. During that layoff a great deal of the bidding that we discuss in this book was invented. They used very few conventional bids. They were, of course, doomed, right?

Strange thing is, they won the first week. And the second. And most of the weeks since then. Their discussions after a board are more often about defense, not bidding. They have since caught up on bidding methods, but they don’t have the same intense focus on them that the rest of us seem to have. When shown these notes, they remarked that our notes on defense should be as big as our notes on bidding.

There are books about defense, but they must be outnumbered 20 to 1 or more. Defense is hard work; conventions are fun and some people seem to think they are getting an “edge” using them and are as excited to add a new one as someone going to a Black Friday sale.

Every time you and your partner have a misunderstanding using a convention, you will likely get a bottom board. The advantage you get from the convention may be at most a few percentage points, in a situation that doesn’t come up very often. If you blow that convention just once, it may take a year of correct usages to get back to break even. Many of the conventions simply do not occur very often, so it can’t be a big loss not to use them.

Be sure to have a good experience base before adding conventions – nothing can erode your partnership and your own confidence faster than a lot of blown conventional

calls. Only play conventions you are both solid on. Do not play a convention someone offers to teach you in the last few minutes before a game.

Almost the worst thing to do is learn a convention’s opening bids but be unclear on the followups. Learn the whole convention or don’t play it. And your partner has to have done the same.

Note

Better work on your defense first! You’re on defense half the time!

The Core Conventions

I’m not an expert, and I’m sure experts value things differently than I do. But for what it is worth, here’s my opinion on what conventions you need to know.

- These have been assumed to be part of the 2/1 system:
- *Jacoby 2NT* (page 51),
- *Gerber* (page 95) (at least as jump bids over 1N or 2N);
- *Blackwood* (page 93),
- *Stayman* (page 25),
- *Major Transfers* (page 26) (a.k.a. Jacoby transfers),
- *Minor Relay* (page 28),
- *Negative Doubles* (page 68),
- *Michaels* (page 78),
- *Unusual 2NT* (page 78).
- *Help Suit Game Tries* (page 58),
- *Reverse Drury* (page 49), and
- *Western Cue* (page 79).

Also part of the *expected conventions for 2/1* (page 4) are:

- *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 43), and
- *New Minor Forcing* (page 44), as well as
- *Inverted Minors* (page 42), and
- *Roman Keycard Blackwood* (page 93).

Note

New Minor Forcing (NMF) and Fourth Suit Forcing (4SF) should be learned together, as they are very similar.

And doubtless by the time you have learned all that, you'll have incorporated:

- *Texas Transfers* (page 28), and
- A defense to 1N openings; the easiest to learn is *Disturbing The Opponent's Notrump (D.O.N.T.)* (page 81). The other most popular defense is *Cap-pelletti* (page 82), which you should know as well, if only because so many opponents will play it.

Other 1N defenses are in the chapter *Advanced Notrump Defenses* (page 137).

Improving Your 1N Structure

Three conventions that use the *puppet* concept are:

- *Five-Card Stayman* (page 115) (1N - 3♣!),
- *Smolen* (page 30) (1N - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3M), and
- *Puppet Stayman* (page 152).

Of these, Five-Card Stayman is the best improvement to the basic 1N system that you can make, and adding it does not affect the rest of your structure.

Note

Puppet Stayman (page 152) over 2N and Five-Card Stayman over 1N are very similar and some prefer to just play them the same. The latter is superior at concealing the opener's four-card holdings.

You can expert-level the rest of your 1N system with four-way transfers and improved 1N - 3M splinters in the chapter *Advanced One Notrump Structure* (page 115).

More Advanced Concepts

The most important thing to learn as an advanced player is *Lebensohl* (page 101), for dealing with interference to our 1N, when partner doubles a 2-level preempt, and when partner reverses.

You will have learned basic control-bidding but should get to *Italian Control Bidding* (page 131) and consider other ideas in *Advanced Slam Bidding* (page 131).

Two-Way New Minor Forcing, a.k.a. Two-Way Check-back Stayman is actually better than New Minor Forcing and arguably easier to play. But, you have to learn NMF anyway because it has become the de-facto standard for 2/1 players.

Many conventions have more advanced variations or alternatives, as explained in later chapters. Included are an expanded discussion of Bergen Raises and popular defenses to 1N openers, advanced runouts, etc.

Some books on conventions are listed in the Resources chapter.

SPECIAL DOUBLES

These three special doubles have their own area on your convention card. Be sure to mark it appropriately. You have to decide at what level the double stops being conventional and turns to penalty. The usual agreement is conventional through 2♠.

Support Doubles and Redoubles

Some times opponents interfere after the responder has shown a new suit, and the opener does not know if this is a four-card or five-card suit. Support Doubles give us a way to show exactly 3 card support. If RHO makes a takeout double, we can use Redouble for the same purpose. For example:

- 1♦ (P) 1♥ (1♠) X Shows 3 hearts exactly.
- 1♣ (P) 1♠ (2♦) X Shows 3 spades exactly.
- 1♣ (P) 1♠ (X) XX Shows 3 spades exactly.

These doubles used to be alertable but no longer are.

With four or more in partner's suit, opener raises.

Attention

Only the opener can make a support double. When you first start to play support doubles, you will see them behind every tree. Realizing that only the opener makes this bid helped me sort them out.

Responsive Doubles

When partner makes a takeout double of an opener and RHO raises his partner, a double shows scattered values with at least 6 points and interest in locating a fit.

- If the opponents are bidding a minor suit, a responsive double asks partner to pick a major suit. We know partner has at least 4-3 in the majors so with equally good majors ourselves we want partner to choose.

- If the opponents are bidding a major suit, a responsive double requests partner to choose a minor suit, because if we had the other major we would bid it as partner has promised it with his takeout double.

Warning

If the opponents bid two *different* suits, a double is not a responsive double. The opponents have to have *raised*.

Examples

- (1♠) X (2♠) X! Has both minors, partner to choose.
- (1♦) X (2♦) X! Has both majors, partner to choose.

Maximal Doubles

If interventor overcalls our major, partner makes a simple raise, and the advancer raises his partner, the opener has a dilemma if their suit is one below our suit. For example, 1♠ - (2♥) - 2♠ - (3♥) - ? or 1♥ - (2♦) - 2♥ - (3♦) - ?.

If opener now bids 3M, is he inviting or just competing? A “maximal double” means that we agree opener doubles to show the invitational hand, while just bidding the suit to compete.

Note that if we cue-bid here there is no room to stop in 3M. If their suit was not the one just under ours (or “the maximal suit”) we’d have room to bid the suit below ours as a convention to invite.

LEBENSOKHL

The Lebensohl idea is perhaps the key idea of advanced bidding. This idea is applicable in a wide variety of competitive situations, but we begin by learning it as a way of dealing with interference over a 1N opener. It can also be used after partner doubles a 2-level preempt or when opponents interfere over a 2♣ opener, or after an opener's reverse, and in other competitive situations. We cover the other situations later.

What these seemingly different situations have in common is that a bidder has to differentiate different hand types but is running out of room to do so at a reasonable level. While frequently the word Lebensohl is used to refer to a bid of 2N relaying to 3♣, that's really a misuse. Rather, 2N as a relay to 3♣ is the signature bid of an idea.

A variant, Transfer Lebensohl, is becoming popular among experts. A lesson on it is available from Gavin Wolpert at wolpertbridge.com.

There never was a player named Lebensohl, and Kenneth Lebensold, who got the credit at one time, denies having created it. So arguably the convention should be spelled lebensohl.

Lebensohl After We Open 1N

Since life will usually be easy for us after we open 1N, opponents are motivated to interfere. That uses up the room we need to decide our *strain* and level. Lebensohl gives up one natural reply in order to effectively double the remaining bidding space.

Suppose we open 1N and this is overcalled. Of course, if responder is weak they need do nothing. But what if responder is competitive or better?

For example, suppose responder has a good 5(or more) card suit and enough values that he wishes to compete for a part-score or a game. Consider this bidding sequence:

1N (2♥) 3♣

Imagine responder has one of these two hands:

1. ♠xxx ♥xx ♦Jx ♣KQxxxx
2. ♠AQx ♥xx ♦Jx ♣KQxxxx

With (1), responder would like to have the contract be 3♣. With (2), responder would like to force to game, probably 3N or 5♣, depending on opener's heart holding.

The one bid 3♣ cannot mean both kinds of hands. It is ambiguous. How do we come up with a way to express these different hands?

We will use 2N, called the Lebensohl 2N. It is an artificial bid and is alerted as a *relay* to 3♣. It is called a relay rather than a transfer because the bidder is not promising he has clubs.

After we bid 2N!(relay), partner must bid 3♣. Then we can make a three-level bid. So there are two ways, for example, to bid 3♦ over 1N (2♥):

1. Bid 2N!(relay) and after opener bids 3♣, bid 3♦, or;
2. Bid 3♦ right away.

So we can use (1) for hand 1, and (2) for hand 2. We have "disambiguated" the 3♦ bid.

Bidding immediately over their overcall is called a "fast" bid; going through the relay first is the "slow" bid.

The reason people feel Lebensohl is complicated is that bids have different meanings depending on what suit we have and what suit was overcalled.

Over Two-Level Overcalls

When Lebensohl Is Off

If the intervenor makes a bid showing two definite suits, we don't use Lebensohl. See *Artificial Overcalls* (page 104), below.

If the overcall was in clubs, or intervenor doubled, Lebensohl is off. Systems are on. Systems on means we use our normal bids, as if they had not bid. Double is Stayman, 2♦ is a transfer to hearts, and so on.

This is also true when they make an artificial 2♣ bid or an artificial double promising one long suit.

If they doubled for penalty, it is a *runout* (page 32) situation.

Over Artificial Bids Showing One Definite Suit

When the intervenor has made a bid that shows one definite suit and an unknown second suit, we ignore the second suit for the moment and proceed as if they had bid the known suit. For example, a Cappelletti 2♥ bid shows “hearts and a minor”. We’ll react as if it was just hearts. A D.O.N.T. bid of 2♦ shows “diamonds and a major”. We’ll react as if it was just diamonds.

Examples:

- 1N (2♣! long suit) system is on, double is Stayman;
- 1N (2♣ natural) system is on, double is Stayman;
- 1N (2♣! clubs and spades) use two-suited defense, not Lebensohl;
- 1N (2♣! clubs and a higher) treat as a club bid, so system is on;
- 1N (2♦! diamonds and a higher) treat as Lebensohl for diamonds;
- 1N (2♣! a minor or both majors) system is on, double is Stayman;
- 1N (2♥! hearts and a minor) treat as Lebensohl for hearts;
- 1N (X) use our runout system
- 1N (X! long suit) system is on, redouble is Stayman.

Over 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠

Over their two-level overcall of 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ (or a bid showing that suit and another unknown suit):

- A two-level suit bid is non-forcing (“to play”).
- A three-level suit bid is game-forcing (fast bid).
- A bid of 2N!(relay to 3♣) forces opener to bid 3♣. Now responder:
 - Can pass with a weak hand with long clubs;
 - Bid a suit of lower rank than the overcall as a signoff (slow bid); or

- Bid a suit of a higher rank than the overcall as invitational.

Note that a direct three-level bid might be a jump (e.g. 1N - (2♥) - 3♠) but it isn’t weak because if you were weak you could have just passed.

Further, if responder has a game-forcing hand he can show other hand types besides a suit of his own:

- An immediate bid of 3N over the overcall denies an unbid four-card major and denies a stopper.
- A “slow” 3N bid denies an unbid four-card major and shows a stopper.

One can also still make normal bids at the four-level.

- 4♣ is Gerber.
- 4♦! and 4♥! are Texas Transfers to hearts and spades, showing six card suits and values for game only. With a strong hand and a six-card major game-force at the three level first.
- 4♠! (rare) invites opener to pick a minor game.
- 4N is invitational to 6N and of course promises a stopper.

The sharp-eyed reader will have noticed that there is no way to invite in notrump (we gave it up for the Lebensohl 2N), and there is no way to invite in a suit of lower-rank than the overcall. When responder has a higher-ranked suit he has three ways to bid it, e.g.:

- 2S – to play
- 2N relay then 3S – invitational
- 3S – game-forcing

But when the responder’s suit is lower-ranked, the 2-level bid does not exist, so the relay has to mean the “to play” bid and we just don’t have an invitational bid.

Stayman

In standard bidding, without Lebensohl, a cue bid of the overcalled suit is Stayman. For example, 1N (2♦) 3♦ is Stayman. Obviously you need a game-forcing hand.

There is a twist to the normal Stayman pattern, however. Suppose opener replies spades but you have four hearts and not four spades. Can you now bid 3N without a stopper in their suit? If opener had neither major, can he bid 3N without a stopper? It’s ambiguous. Sounds like a job for Lebensohl:

- An “fast” *cue bid* is Stayman and denies a stopper in their suit.
- A “slow” *cue bid* is Stayman and shows a stopper. (“Slow shows”).

After this the Stayman dance is modified in obvious ways. For example, in these auctions, opener without a four-card major will have to bid:

- 3N if he has no unbid four-card major and either has a diamond stopper or was promised one by responder, or
- 4♣ to show responder that we lack a major fit or a diamond stopper.

Double

So what does double mean in a Lebensohl situation? E.g., 1N (2♥) X?

It is standard to play X as penalty-oriented. (This was the recommendation in Eric Rodwell’s 2005 pamphlet, *Lebensohl*.)

A newer approach is to play a double as a negative double. The hope is to be able to find fits with invitational hands, which are not sufficiently strong for the Stayman cue bids.

Warning

You must be clear with your partner which version of double you are playing

Examples

Five-card suit:

- 1N (2♦) 2♥ is to play
- 1N (2♦) 2N! - 3♣! - 3♥ is invitational
- 1N (2♦) 3♥ is game-forcing.
- 1N (2♥) 2N! - 3♦ is to play
- 1N (2♥) 3♦ is game-forcing; there is no way to invite in diamonds.
- 1N (2♣) 2♦ is a transfer to hearts. (Lebensohl is off for clubs!)

Balanced hand, without a four-card major:

- 1N (2♦) 2N! - 3♣ - 3N is to play, diamonds are stopped – slow shows.

- 1N (2♦) 3N wants to play 3N but does not have a diamond stopper. Opener will pass if he has one, or start suggesting suits up the line.

For the Stayman cases:

- 1N (2♦) X is negative, probably with only an invitational hand.
- 1N (2♦) 3♦ is Stayman without a stopper, and
- 1N (2♦) 2N! - 3♣ - 3♦ is Stayman with a stopper.

Note

Do not call the 2N bid by itself “Lebensohl”. Lebensohl is the entire system described in this chapter. The 2N bid is its signature, but it isn’t the only thing to know.

When They Get Tricky, We Get Even

Rarely you will encounter defenses that show two indefinite choices, such as *Suction* (page 138) or *CRASH* (page 139). Against such choices double should show values as the opponents will often get too high sorting out their choices. I suggest otherwise passing and waiting until they have selected a suit, and then bid Lebensohl against that.

Three-level Overcalls

Over three-level overcalls, we obviously cannot use the Lebensohl 2N bid. A suggestion:

- A double is for takeout, showing support for the other three suits.
- Bids at the three level are natural, one-round forcing, and
- 3N, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, and 5♦ are to play. I suggest 3N promises a stopper.
- A cue bid is Stayman, or may show slam interest lacking a four-card major:
 - 1N (3♦) 4♦ – 4♥ – 4N (to play)
 - 1N (3♦) 4♦ – 4N(no major) - Pass
 - 1N (3♦) 4♦ – 4? – 5♣ (slam interest in clubs)

Two-Suited Overcalls

If their overcall shows two definite suits, Lebensohl is off. I like to use the spirit of the *General Defense To Two-Suited Bids* (page 83), letting the invisible cue bids show a game-forcing bid of responder's suit using the lower-lower concept, and letting double show a penalty double of one of their suits. Bidding one of "our" two suits naturally is to play if we can bid it at the 2-level.

When we speak of the overcalled suit or suits, we mean the ones their bid *showed*, not the artificial one actually bid. E.g. a Cappelletti 2♦ meaning "both majors" makes the two major suits "theirs" and diamonds is one of "ours".

Doubling says you have a penalty double in at least one of their suits.

Rodwell in *Lebensohl* (See *Resources* (page 163)) has a more complicated scheme.

Lebensohl After Doubles Of Weak Two Bids

When an opponent opens a weak two bid, and our partner doubles it, he usually shows a decent opening hand with shortness in their suit. The double is presumed to be for takeout but it could be a strong hand. For other bids see *Competing Over Preempts* (page 79). Assuming for the moment that the responder passes, we must classify our hand into weak, positive response, or game-forcing.

Eric Rodwell suggested in his Lebensohl pamphlet that the borders of the "positive response" be 6-10 points. Gavin Wolpert says 8-11 points.

Consider an auction that begins (2♥) X (P) ? where the advancer holds a hand with six diamonds. Absent some agreement, advancer with a hand that is:

- Weak – wants to bid diamonds and have partner pass
- Positive – wants to bid diamonds and hope partner bids again

A bid of 3♦ cannot tell two different stories. Once again, the Lebensohl concept solves the problem. If you do not play this convention you'll have to let the 3-level bids be weak.

Lebensohl Over Weak Twos

If the suit that we want to bid, y, is of lower rank than the preempt, we are going to have to bid it at the three level. Going through 2N!(relay) Lebensohl shows the weaker hands.

- 2N! is a relay to 3♣, pass or correct.
- Immediate 3-level bids are positive responses.

When the suit we want to bid, y, is higher-ranked than the preempt suit, we have three bids available.

- An immediate 2y shows the weak hand.
- 2N! followed by 3y shows a positive response with 4 cards in y.
- An immediate 3y shows a positive response with 5(or more) cards in y.

For example:

- 2♥ X P 2♠ = weak hand
- 2♥ X P 3♠ = positive with five spades
- 2♥ X P 2N!; P 3♣! P 3♠ positive with four spades

The relay does not have to be accepted if the doubler had a strong hand. This is called "breaking" the relay.

This meaning of 3y is current "expert standard" according to Wolpert. If you are new to Lebensohl it isn't going to kill you to just use the direct 3-level bid for any positive response for consistency with the other case.

Game Forcing Hands

What if we want to force to game but, allowing for the fact that partner may not have four of an unbid major, can we do better than just bidding 4M and hoping? Our only other tool is to bid their suit.

For example, over 2♥ X P, suppose we have a game forcing hand with ♠AQx. We aren't sure where we belong, be it 4♠, 3N, or perhaps 5m. Again, we use the 2N relay to double the language available:

- The direct "fast" cue bid shows we do not have four of the other major but are forcing to game.
- The "slow" 2N relay before the cue bid shows 4(or more) cards of the other major and forcing to game but no stopper.
- 2N relay and then 3N also shows 4 cards in the other major but with a stopper, offering a choice of games.

Again, if you are new to this, it isn't going to kill you to cue bid to show the game force or just bid 4 of the other major when you don't have a stopper. A seven-card fit won't be the end of the world.

Notes

There is one more scenario that should be considered Lebensohl:

(1x) X (2x) ?

where x is not clubs. This is similar to (2x) X (P) ? Thus, play 2N here as the Lebensohl relay. A double is a *responsive* (page 99).

Be careful not to just count points when distinguishing a positive vs. a game-forcing reply. If you have five cards in your major, especially, you might want to upgrade.

You can make also play Better Minor Lebensohl in this scenario. Statistically it pays, but requires you to remember it and gives up differentiating weak and positive hands with clubs.

After the 2N!(relay) bid, the person responding to it bids their better minor suit rather than always bidding clubs. This has the advantage of finding a better minor suit fit when the 2N bidder has both minors. Obviously in the case of holding a hand with long diamonds, you just correct to diamonds or hearts over 3♣, but you can't correct 3♦ to clubs so you just can't bid the relay. The direct 3♣ response to the double has to be assumed to be weak.

When They Overcall Our Two Club Opener

The auction 2♣ (2♥) is similar to 1N (2♥). We have the same dilemma of wanting to compete but not wanting to confuse partner as to our hand strength. Lebensohl can be used in these situations. If opponents play 2♣ (X) as showing the majors we would treat that as a two-suited bid in hearts and spades.

Lebensohl Over Reverses

Imagine this headache: partner opens 1♣, you bid 1♠ with a minimal four-card holding, and partner reverses with 2♥. This is forcing for one round. What to do? If you had five spades you could just bid 2♠. But let's say you don't, but

you do prefer clubs or have five diamonds you by-passed in order to show your four-card major.

If you just bid 3♣ as a preference, that's ok – until the next time when you have a better hand and can't bid 3♣ because the partnership has decided it is to play. Hmm. This sounds familiar – it is the same ambiguity as 1N (2♥) 3♣ – what does it mean? And the dilemma has the same solution – Lebensohl.

So, for example, a direct bid of 3♣ over a 2♥ reverse is game-forcing. A “slow” trip to 3♣ via 2N, lets you pass and stop there.

Simplified Lebensohl

If you do not feel comfortable with full Lebensohl, use this simpler version of it. It covers most responder hand types.

The opposition has bid a suit 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ over our 1N opener.

- Double is penalty-oriented with at least two cards in their suit.
- Two-level suit bids are to play
- Three-level suit bids are game forcing
- 2N! is a relay to 3♣!(forced), pass or correct. If responder corrects to a suit he could have bid at the two-level, it is invitational; otherwise, to play.
- 3N is to play with a stopper.
- A cue bid is game-forcing Stayman. Opener should show a major if he has one.

When you've been bitten enough times by the holes in the simplification, you can learn the rest of it.

You can get super-simplified by just remembering the 2-level is to play, and 2N is a relay to 3♣, pass or correct. Ordinary bridge logic should kick in from there.

Good - Bad 2N

This Lebensohl variant is explained most fully in Larry Cohen's “To Bid Or Not To Bid” and in Marty Bergen's “Better Bidding With Bergen”.

In a competitive auction, it is your turn to bid and RHO has just bid 2x, whether as a raise of his partner or a new suit, after your partner doubled or made an overcall. For example, let's suppose the auction went (1♥) - 1♠ - (2♥).

Suppose you have a good diamond suit but no spade support. Then what does your 3♦ bid show? Most of the time of course you're just trying to compete but other times you have extras and partner may wish to go higher knowing that.

Enter the Good - Bad 2N, created by Larry Cohen in his book "To Bid Or Not To Bid". Whenever we are in a competitive suit auction and our RHO has made a 2-level bid, 2N! is a relay to 3♣, pass or correct. Bidding directly on the three level shows extras.

Take for example this auction:

(1♠) 2♦ (2♠) ?

Without an agreement, a 3♦ bid here is hard to read. With Good - Bad 2N, 3♦ might be a good four-card diamond suit with 9 points, while 2N!(relay) - 3♣!(forced) - 3♦ might be only six points and partner will know not to compete further.

This convention also applies when you opened:

1♥(you) (2♠) Pass (2♠)

If you have a two-suiter in hearts and diamonds, you want to distinguish 3♦ giving partner a choice vs. 3♦ showing something like an 18-point 5-5 hand.

You must draw inferences when partner does not use the relay when he could have.

With some experience, you can use the Good - Bad distinction in many other competitive auctions. According to "Better Bidding With Bergen", it is important that this convention be off in situations such as:

- where 2N is clearly Unusual 2N
- when either side has opened 1N
- when the opponents opened a strong 1♣!.
- when the opponents have made a penalty double
- when we have already found a fit
- when we are already in a game-forcing auction.

TWO DIAMONDS CONVENTIONS

The weak 2♦ opener doesn't get much respect these days – the chances that you'll end up playing it are not that great, since either opponent with a good holding in a major suit is able to get in relatively cheaply. Therefore, the bid has been co-opted to handle various other problems, particularly awkwardly-shaped hands.

Note that Precision has its own two-diamond opener showing a 4441 hand, 11-15 HCP with a stiff diamond. There are many other two-diamond bids. Some of them are strong.

Warning

When you hear a 2♦! opener alerted, you have no idea what it means. Ask if you need to know.

The so-called Multi-2♦ is a particular headache – it is not allowed in most ACBL tournaments, but you can encounter it online.

It is also worth saying that if an opening 2♦ isn't strong or Flannery or a three-suited hand of some sort, or you see any other bid that seems to mean too many things at once, you might want to call the director to inquire about it. Twice I've caught people playing an illegal convention this way.

Flannery 2♦

The Flannery 2♦!(5 hearts, four spades, 11 to 15 HCP) opener covers a hand with five hearts and four spades and values insufficient to reverse on the second bid. Obviously, you lose the ability to make a weak 2♦ opener.

If you open 1♥ then responder will assume you do not hold four spades, and in particular 1♥ - 1♠ shows five spades.

The responses are:

- Pass can be made with a six card diamond suit and fewer than 10 HCP.

- 2♥ and 2♠ are to play.
- 3♥ and 3♠ are invitational.
- 4♥ and 4♠ are to play.
- 3N is to play.
- 2N! inquires about opener's minor suits. The bid is one-round forcing. Responses are:
 - 3♣ shows a 4=5=1=3 shape.
 - 3♦ shows a 4=5=3=1 shape.
 - 3♥ shows a 4=5=2=2 shape, minimum.
 - 3♠ shows a 4=5=2=2 shape, maximum.
 - 3N shows a 4=5=2=2 shape, both minors stopped.
 - 4♣ shows a 4=5=0=4 shape.
 - 4♦ shows a 4=5=4=0 shape.

A sequence such as 2♦!-2N!-3♦!-3M would be invitational, not forcing.

There are also these special responses:

- 3♣ shows at least six clubs, to play.
- 3♦ shows at least six diamonds, invitational
- 4♣ and 4♦ are transfers to 4♥ and 4♠ respectively.

These transfers are the power raises, giving responder a chance to start slam bidding. Opener will complete the transfer with a minimum, or bid the intermediate suit with a maximum. These bids are made with slam interest, with responder able to bid RKC with 4N next.

Note: some partnerships allow Flannery on a 4=6 shape as well.

Mini-Roman

A mini-Roman 2♦ opener is a 4441 or 4405 hand, 10-15 HCP. The most frequent agreement seems to be that the bid promises 4 spades – the 1=4=4=4 hand being handled by opening a diamond; but that is not universal.

Lacking invitational values, the responder will suggest a place to play, bidding up-the-line; only rarely will responder pass with a long diamond suit.

With invitational values or better, responder bids 2N! asking opener to bid his short suit. This is forcing; responder next places the contract in game or makes an invitational bid in a suit.

The mini-Roman is part of a family of Roman 2♦ bids which chiefly differ as to strength. A Precision player's 2♦ opener means explicitly a diamond shortage but NOT a 4=4=1=4 shape necessarily.

In third or fourth seat you can open mini-Roman with as few as 8 HCP in an ACBL open game.

A responder bid of 2N! shows a strong hand, and inquires about the opener's shape.

Defending against such systems, it is important to discuss beforehand what 3♦ means and what double means (penalty, or takeout, or lead-directing?). Generally a double of an artificial bid would be lead-directing unless you agree otherwise.

The “could be short” meaning “as few as two” announcement of a 2♦ bid is your warning to check their card. Some Precision pairs do not even promise two diamonds, and they should alert that not just announce it.

Multi Two Diamonds, a two diamond opener showing a preempt in an unknown major, is now legal in ACBL Open+ Chart Events (typically, 2-session Regionals and NABCs). You may encounter it, or its full monster sister that might also be a strong 4441 or NT hand, online or in other jurisdictions.

Mexican Two Diamonds

Named after its author, George Rosenkranz of Mexico, opening 2♦ shows a balanced 17 to 19 HCP. Responder bids:

- Pass with a weak hand but five+ diamonds
- 2♥! shows fewer than 7 HCP so opener places the contract, usually at 2N.
- Otherwise responder relays with 2♠! to 2N, and systems are on, including Texas transfers. Game forcing.

Most often this convention is played with a weak notrump system.

Much more complicated versions exist. Be sure to ask for an explanation if on defense.

Other Meanings

2♦ openers were strong in the days of Goren, but that was superseded by the use of 2♣ as the sole strong opener.

If you are facing a pair playing a strong 1♣ system, such as Precision, a 2♦ opening will be either an intermediate (11-15 HCP) bid short in diamonds with no four-card major, or it can be a strong bid.

ADVANCED MAJOR AUCTIONS

This chapter highlights advanced treatments of major openings and their related conventions, and the case of opener raising responder's major.

Two-Way Reverse Drury

Two-way Reverse Drury is a partnership modification of *Reverse Drury* (page 49). In Reverse Drury, we bid 2♣! as a passed hand to show a limit raise or better of opener's major. In Two-Way, we bid 2♦! to show a limit raise with 4(or more) trump, and 2♣! to show a limit raise with exactly three card support.

Bergen Raises

Bergen Raises emphasize distinguishing three-card from 4(or more)-card limit raises. A four-card raise has a great deal more potential for game than a three-card raise. Also, we get a *mixed raise* and a *preemptive raise*.

With 4(or more) cards,

- 1M - 2M 6-10 HCP with 3 cards in M; or a good five points, particularly Axxx in trumps.
- 1M - 3M! 2-6 preemptive, 4(or more)-card raise
- 1M - 3♣! 7-9 constructive (mixed) 4(or more)-card raise. Opener can bid an artificial 3♦ as a game try, asking responder to bid game with a maximum.
- 1M - 3♦! 10-11 limit 4(or more)-card raise
- 1M - 1N forcing may have 10-12 and 3 trump.
- 1M - 2N! 13+ game forcing 4(or more)-card raise. (Jacoby 2N)

If responder has 3 trumps and 10-12 points, he bids 3M the next chance he gets.

The following part is optional: a bid of 3 of the other major shows game-forcing values, four trump, and a singleton or void somewhere. If opener rebids the next available step, responder shows the suit by making step rebids:

- 1♥ - 3♠!(gf raise, stiff or void somewhere) - 3N!(asking where)

Responses are 4♣! clubs, 4♦ diamonds, 4♥ hearts

- 1♠ - 3♥!(gf raise, stiff or void somewhere) - 3N!(asking where)

Responses are 3N! clubs, 4♣ diamonds, 4♦ hearts

Note the collision here with the normal splinter or jump shift meaning.

Bergen raises are off:

- if responder is a passed hand;
- if there is an overcall or double

Rationale: If there is a double, 2N! is a Jordan raise so you wouldn't need 3♦ for this. After an overcall, you have cue bids. See also *Jordan All The Time* (page 111).

Reverse Bergen interchanges the meanings of 3♣ and 3♦.

Constructive Raises

Constructive raises require 8 to 10 HCP and four card support for the raise to 2M. With only a good 5 to 7 HCP, or 3 cards, we bid 1N forcing for one round, (or 1♠ over 1♥), and then sign off with 2M on our next bid.

The idea is to prevent partner from making a game try unless we might say yes. In return for safer and more appropriate game tries, we cannot stop at 1N by the responder. Therefore, constructive raises are least disruptive when used only when 1N is already forcing, such as in 2/1 by unpassed hands. Or, you have to play 1N as "semi-forcing", announce it, and have your opponents laugh and ask, "What does that mean?". (Larry Cohen says it means, "Forcing"!)

If you want to explore this further, see *Advanced Major Structures* (page 113).

Fit-Showing Jumps

A fit-showing jump (or fit-jump) is a bid that shows both a limit raise for partner and a *good* 5(or more)-card second suit. It is used in competitive situations instead of other interpretations of a jump-shift. It can be used either by the responder or by an advancer whose partner has bid. The competition can be a takeout-double or a suit bid.

The raise is usually 4(or more) cards for a major, and 5(or more) for a minor. A three-card raise of a major is ok if it contains a top honor.

Since it isn't strictly for major raises, our explanation is in the chapter *Advanced Jump-Shifts* (page 142).

Kokish Game Tries

After an auction beginning 1M - 2M, Kokish game tries are an alternative to Help Suit Game Tries, combining that with the ability to show shortness instead. The first step up is an inquiry, while other suits show shortness.

After 1♥ - 2♥:

- 2♠! asks in what suit responder would accept a game try; 2N by responder meaning spades. Responder just bids 3♥ if there isn't one.
- 3♣! / 3♦! / 2N!(spades) is a game try that shows shortness.
- 3♥ is a game try needing trump honors.

After 1♠ - 2♠, the idea is the same:

- 2N! asks in what suit responder would accept a game try.
- 3♣! / 3♦! / 3♥! is a game try showing shortness.
- 3♠ is a game try needing trump honors.

In responding to a bid showing shortness, the responder should judge based on his values and whether or not any of them are wasted opposite the short suit.

Variation: always use 2N! as the inquiry bid.

Raising Responder's Major

When opener opens a minor, and responder shows a major, when can opener raise that suit?

Usually one wants four cards in the major, because the responder has only shown four. However, sometimes opener

will raise on three cards to an honor, provided he has a stiff or void. For example, holding ♠K32 ♥8 ♦KJ83 ♣AQ965 we will open 1♣. If partner replies 1♠, we can raise to 2♠ rather than rebid our five-card club suit. Especially at matchpoints, we'd hate to find out later that responder had five spades. And in this case, we don't have enough to reverse into diamonds.

However, how should responder proceed to make a game try? Is there a way to know more about that raise? Eric Rodwell developed a game try convention for this situation, which simplified is called Spiral. It is a spiritual cousin of Ogust.

There are different versions, of course, but here is one for us mortals.

After hearing 1m - 1M - 2M, responder can bid 2N! to ask about the nature of opener's raise. The next steps represent:

1. 3 card raise, minimal (11-13)
2. 3 card raise, maximal (14-15)
3. 4 card raise, minimal
4. 4 card raise, maximal

These bids are all alertable, of course.

In addition, bids at the four level below trump are splinters with four-card support, any strength. With more than 15, opener should bid game.

In our example, the bidding would go 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♠ - 2N!(inquiry); 3♣!(min, 3 spades). This allows responder to stop at 3♠ if needed.

Had the suit been hearts, the auction would start 1♣ - 1♥ - 2♥ - 2N!.

Variation: over hearts, use 2♠ as the inquiry.

Another System After J2NT

The standard scheme of responses to Jacoby 2N (1M - 2N!(4 trump, opening hand)) has problems. When either opener or responder make a jump to game, showing no slam interest, their partner with extras is stuck – it may be right to go on, or it may be bad, and it is most often just a guess. Another complaint is that the standard answers gives away shape information even when it turns out nobody has slam interest at all.

For the “standard expert idea” see Larry Cohen’s web pages. Here is a simpler version of the same idea for established intermediate to advanced partnerships:

Consider an extra King or so as “extras”, or a hand with great playing strength.

After 1M - 2N!(game forcing, 4+ card support), opener bids:

- 3♣!(minimal opener) to show a minimal hand. Any other bid shows extras.
- 3♦! extras without shortness
- 3♥! extras with club shortness
- 3♠! extras with diamond shortness
- 3N! extras with shortness in the “other major”
- 4M shows the worst imaginable opener, always 5332.
- Other four-level suit bids show a great second five-card suit. These bids tend to not show extra HCP, just the great shape.

After a reply showing extras responder should cue-bid if above minimum.

If the opener does not have extras, the responder may have extras and still have slam interest. After 1M - 2N! - 3♣!, responder can bid 3♦! to inquire about shortness, and the same 3♥!, 3♠!, and 3N! responses show shortness. With no shortness, opener cue bids at the 4-level below game if possible.

The shortness bids are easy to remember, since they are “steps up the line” through the two minors to the other major.

Note: Since a 5332 with 15-17 HCP would be opened 1N, the 3♦! reply to 2N! is usually 5422, or it is 18+ HCP.

Serious 3NT

If we have agreement on a 8-card or better major fit at the three level, there are three bids available to continue to game: bid game, bid 3N as an artificial bid, or make a control-showing bid.

With the Serious 3NT convention, 3NT is a serious slam try, while the control-showing bid is mild interest in slam, and just bidding game shows no slam interest. But it isn’t a simple agreement, because when is 3N just to play?

See Larry Cohen’s discussion at www.larryco.com for his thoughts on this expert-level convention. Of course, bridge players being bridge players, there is also Non-Serious 3N.

Jordan All The Time

Recall that Jordan 2N is a 4(or more)-card limit+ raise of partner’s major over RHO’s takeout double. Knowing that a raise shows four cards rather than three helps find game, it is very effective. With only three-card support, we re-double and show the support later.

When the interference is a suit, the standard way to show a limit raise is to cue bid. There are two problems with this:

- It doesn’t differentiate between three- and 4(or more)- card raises.
- A limit raise sometimes isn’t possible, as in 1♥ (2♠) ?, where a bid of 3♠ would require game-forcing strength.

So by partnership agreement we change the meaning of a 2N bid here to be the same as Jordan. That’s why I call it Jordan All The Time, although that’s just my name. As with any convention, we give up something, in this case the natural invitation with a stopper in RHO’s suit.

Assigning A Meaning To 1M - 3N

You might have noticed that the bid 1M - 3N does not exist. It would just be wasteful. You have 2/1 bids to force to game more slowly. There are several conventional meanings for this bid:

1. 1M - 3N shows exactly 3 card support, and a balanced hand, with minimal game-forcing values. The opener is to choose to play game in 3N or 4M. Of course, this now gets awkward for the opener if they have a strong hand. 4N next is keycard (because you have a agreed a suit).
2. 1M - 3N shows four card support with a void somewhere. It is a kind of a mysterious super-splinter.
3. 1M - 3N is part of a “two-tiered splinter” scheme, showing hands where the responder has a game-forcing hand but it is only so because of the splinter.

ADVANCED MAJOR RAISE STRUCTURES

The standard 2/1 structure for raising partner's opening bid of one of a major M is, assuming no interference from opener's LHO:

- 2M is 6 to a bad 10 with at least three trumps. At the most extreme it might be just an Ace with four trumps.
- 1N(forcing) followed by 3M is a limit raise with three or more trumps.
- 3M is a limit raise with four trump.
- 4M is a preemptive raise with five or more trumps.
- 2N! is a game-forcing raise with four trumps.
- 3m! is an invitational raise with 6(or more) cards in the minor.

In the case of responding by a passed hand, the 2N bid is off the table and 2♣ (Drury) becomes the limit raise, with 3M becoming a preemptive four-card raise.

There are a couple of weaknesses in this approach. Most importantly, the range of the 2M bid is too wide. This may induce opener to make a game try and end up in a 3M contract that cannot make when the 2M bid was on its lower end. Similarly, the 3M bid with only three trump is one more than is "safe" under the Law of Total Tricks.

As almost a separate issue, making 1N forcing prevents us from stopping in 1N, which may be the best contract; but not using 1N forcing makes us use 3M as a limit raise with only three trump.

There are as many alternate structures available as stars in the sky. We have seen Bergen Raises as a way to show constructive and limit raises with four trump. (A constructive raise is a raise with a range of more like 8-10 than 6-10). One is still left with the three-card limit raise problem.

A Sample Alternative Structure

Here is an example structure by Gavin Wolpert. He has a course "Master Series Major Suit Structure" you should take if you intend to adopt this approach as it includes details and follow ons. When judging some other major raise structure, knowing the arguments about this one may help.

Note

These changes are for auctions where the responder is not a passed hand, and except where mentioned, there is no interference.

Summary

The approach features distinguishing 3- vs. 4-card raises, and a non-forcing 1N:

- 2M is 8-10 dummy points with at least three trumps.
- 3M is 8-10 dummy points with 4(or more) trump.
- 4M is a preemptive raise with five or more trumps.
- 2N! is a game-forcing raise with four trumps.
- 1N followed by 3M is a limit raise with three or more trumps.
- 3♦! is a limit-raise with 4(or more) trumps.
- 3♣! is an invitational raise with 6(or more) clubs.

1N not forcing

We make 1N not forcing, also called semi-forcing. This means 1N can be passed with a minimal opening balanced or semi-balanced hand. This approach lets you open 1M with as few as 11 HCP. It also solves the Flannery hand – you just open 1♥ and pass a 1N response. We reply 1N if we have support but not enough for the constructive 2M. Yes, sometimes you miss a 5-3 fit below game, but sometimes that's a better score anyway. Or not.

Constructive Raises

A constructive 2M raise is 8-10 dummy points with three trump. The advantages are on both ends of the range – not only do we prevent over-excitement on the low end, we make it less urgent to make a limit raise with 10 points. Making a limit raise with three trump in a balanced hand worth 10 points is frequently wrong.

The trade-off is we have to use 1N as a bid for the 6-7 point hands. This 1N is forcing. As usual, judgment must be used on 7-8 point hands.

Playing help-suit or natural game tries after a constructive raise is your choice.

When we have 4(or more) trump, we bid 3M, also showing a range of 8-10 dummy points. This is called a “mixed raise”. We give up the preemptive four-card raise in favor of this one since mixed raises help opener judge whether or not to bid the game. Nine-card fits are incredibly more likely to make game than eight-card fits.

The 3M bid can be right with less than 8 HCP when you have a five- or six-card second suit.

Limit Raises

Using constructive raises, we go through 1N for 3-card limit raises. If partner has a minimal balanced opener and passes the 1N, missing a 5-3 fit is not crucial.

If opener rebids 2M over our 1N, showing six trump, responder should jump to game. Bidding 3M would only promise two trump. If opener jump-shifts, jumping to game shows a three-card limit raise; slow shows.

For four-card limit raises, we use the artificial 3♦ Bergen raise. However, we keep 3♣ with its standard meaning of a six-card invitational bid. The advantage of this approach is not just retaining the original meaning. The opponents are unable to double the 3♣ Bergen mixed-raise bid and so have to commit to the four-level to bid over 3M. Any opener bid over 3♣ is forcing. We don't try to improve the part-score.

To distinguish 3- vs. 4- card limit raises in competition, see *Jordan All The Time* (page 111).

ADVANCED ONE NOTRUMP STRUCTURE

What follows is a description of a complete system for the 1N suite of bids. Bids we keep from the standard methods include Jacoby Transfers, Texas Transfers, Stayman, and Garbage Stayman. Add Smolen if you do not play that already.

To this we add 1N - 3♣!(Five-card Stayman), new meanings for 1N - 3♦ / 3♥ / 3♠, and an expert version of Four-Way Transfers. Note that the Four-Way Transfers presented here preserve the property that 2♣ Stayman guarantees a four-card major.

Recall this terminology:

- A bid is called a *puppet* if it is a bid of a major suit that actually shows the other major suit. The motivation is to get the other hand to declare.
- A *transfer* bid asks partner to bid a suit that you definitely hold, while a *relay* bid asks partner to bid a suit that you may or may not hold. Transfers can be “completed” by bidding the requested suit, or “broken” by doing something else. Relays are usually completed, while different kinds of transfers may or may not be broken.

The following topics are in the recommended order for adding them to your agreements. Five-card Stayman should be learned first as it helps us open 1N with a five-card major without missing a 5-3 major fit.

1N - 3♣ Five-Card Stayman

The bid 1N - 3♣!(five-card major?) is a game forcing bid. Opener replies 3♥ or 3♠ if he has a five-card major. Otherwise he bids 3♦!(no five-card major). Then responder continues:

- 3N with no four-card major; or,
- Puppets his major (bids the short major).

Opener now places the contract in 3N, 4M, or makes a control bid in support of M.

Use regular Stayman if you are 4-4 in the majors, are 4-5 in the majors, or don't have a game-forcing hand:

- When 4-4, we need the room provided by regular Stayman to sort out the possibility of a fit in one of the two majors.
- When 4-5 we have Smolen to find the 3-5 fit.

Note

I find it easiest to agree that 3♣ promises an exactly three-card major.

That requirement helps me remember that I do not use it when 4-4, 4-1, or 4-5. It is logical, too, that I'm doing it because I seek a five-card major, hence the name Five-Card Stayman.

The 1N - 3M! splinter bids (below) should be used with this bid, so that in the system taken a whole one only bids 1N - 3♣! when 3-2, 3-3, or 3-4 in the majors.

One benefit of using 3♣ is that in the sequence 1N - 3♣! - 3♦!(no 5M) - 3N, the defense does not know if the opener has a four-card major or not, only that the responder did not have one. Compare to 1N - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3N. So while you can get this minor benefit using 3♣ when 4-2, it makes it harder to remember the rules, while knowing responder has a three-card major often helps opener decide that notrump is comfortable when a fit is not found.

This convention ensures opener can open 1N with a five-card major with no fear of missing a major suit game. Since 1N has a narrow range, bidding over a 1N opener is much more precise than opening 1M with its huge 12-21 range.

Hands that are predominantly both minor suits should prefer to use one of the three-level bids described in the next section if they have the right shape.

A weak or invitational hand with six clubs is handled in *Four-Way Transfers* (page 116).

Some refer to this bid as Puppet Stayman, but strictly

speaking that is a different convention over a 2N opener. Puppet Stayman came first and has the “puppet” maneuver in common with this convention, hence the naming problem. But our 3♦ reply here does not show or deny a four-card major.

the ordinary minor relay with strangers, unless they answer the question “Four-way with range ask?” with something better than a blank stare.

Three-Level Replies To 1N

Assuming we play 1N - 3♣ as Five-Card Stayman, game forcing, here is my recommended structure for the remaining bids at the three-level. These are all game forcing. See *Four-Way Transfers* (page 116) for handling weak or invitational hands.

After 1N, with a game forcing hand,

- 3♣ is Five-Card Stayman
- 3♦ is a five-five or better hand in the minors.
- 3♥ is a “splinter” showing exactly 3 spades and 1 heart, with (54) in the minors. Alert this as “3=1=(54)”
- 3♠ is a “splinter” showing exactly 1 spade and 3 hearts. Alert this as “1=3=(54)”

The notation (54) means 4=5 or 5=4.

The three minor suit bids alert opener to the dangers of playing 3N without stoppers in the major suits. The splinter bids also show us any 5-3 major fit that is available. Opener can bid 3N if possible or bid his best minor. The question of whether or not to go to 5m is up to the responder since opener’s range is defined. Just avoiding a 3N that others will be going down in may be a good result.

Four-Way Transfers

Four-way transfers are an excellent 1N structure enhancement. This version, in which 2♠ is “range ask or clubs”, lets us guarantee that 2♣ Stayman promises a four-card major as before, eliminating the awkward “may or may not contain a four-card major” alert of the 2N responder rebid when using the more common spades -> clubs and 2N -> diamonds method.

Warning

You cannot pick up a casual partner and just say “Four-way transfers?”. There are too many versions of it. Play

Derivation

We start with the basic idea and we will evolve it into our agreements. First step is that instead of using 2♠ to transfer to a weak six-card minor, we use two bids for those hands:

- 2♠ transfers to 3♣ (not the final definition!)
- 2N transfers to 3♦

Now agree that opener, instead of completing the transfer regardless, only completes it with a hand that would accept an invite to 3N; perhaps a 16-17 point hand or holding Qxx or better in the target minor. He bids the suit “in between” to show neither:

- 1N - 2♠!(♣s) - 2N!(min hand)
- 1N - 2♠!(♣s) - 3♣!(max hand)

and:

- 1N - 2N!(♦s) - 3♣!(min hand)
- 1N - 2N!(♦s) - 3♦!(max hand)

We realize we have no way to just make an invitational bid in notrump, because 1N - 2N doesn’t mean that any more. No problem! We change the alerts!

- 1N - 2♠!(range ask or ♣s) - 2N!(min hand)
- 1N - 2♠!(range ask or ♣s) - 3♣!(max hand)

Now we bid 1N - 2♠!(range ask or ♣s) with any hand that we would have before plus any hand that would be a traditional 2N invitation lacking a four-card major.

The opener views the 2♠ bid as asking, “Would you accept a 3N invite?” and bids 2N if the answer is no, and 3♣ if the answer is yes. After he says no, responder can pass or bid 3♣. After he says yes, responder can pass or bid on.

After an affirmative bid by opener of 3♣ or 3♦, respectively, responder should bid a stiff or void in a suit if they have one, on their way to 3N. This says,

“We have the values for 3N, but I have the long minor, and I’m worried they are going to lead this shortness I have. Please bid 3N, or bid 4m if you can’t handle my short suit.”

And finally, what Gavin Wolpert calls “Free Cheddar” - a solution to the weak 5-5 in the minors hand:

- 1N - 2N!(♦s) - 3♣(min) - Pass (!)
- 1N - 2N!(♦s) - 3♦(max) - Pass (!)

Note how the responder is the Captain throughout.

Summary of Four-Way Transfers

In addition to the two major transfers, we have two minor transfers; for clubs.

- 1N - 2♠!(range ask or ♣s) - 2N!(min hand) - Pass to play 2N - 3♣ to play 3♣
- 1N - 2♠!(range ask or ♣s) - 3♣!(max hand) - Pass to play 3♣ - 3N to play, no stiff or void - 3♦!, 3♥!, 3♠! splinter concern for 3N

and for diamonds:

- 1N - 2N!(♦s) - 3♣!(min hand) - 3♦ to play. - Pass to play 3♣ when 5-5 in minors.
- 1N - 2N!(♦s) - 3♦!(max hand) - Pass to play 3♦ - 3N to play, no stiff or void in a major - 3M! splinter concern for 3N

It is best to add this agreement: after a positive reply, a bid by responder to the suit above the minor at the four level is now RKC. Examples:

- 1N - 2♠!(range ask or ♣s) 3♣(max) - 4♦!(RKC for clubs)
- 1N - 2N!(♦s) 3♦(max) - 4♥!(RKC for diamonds)

Advanced Super-Accepts

In the section on *major (Jacoby) transfers* (page 26), we discussed the *super-accept* in which opener jumped to three of the major to show a maximum 17 HCP and four-card support for the major M. In recent years, following a belief in the law of total tricks, advanced players have been making the 3M reply with a minimal hand rather than a maximum (but still four trump). Then other bids between 2M and 3M become superaccept conveying additional information about the opener’s “weak doubleton”, one with no Ace or King.

Showing the weak doubleton is an early-warning idea for slam. The responder can avoid asking for Aces if we have two fast losers. In any case responder is the Captain and should proceed directly to 4M with no slam interest.

Scheme 1: Weak Doubleton

1N-2♦:

- 2♥ = Normal Accept with 2 or 3 Hearts
- 2♠ = Maximum with 4 Hearts and a weak doubleton in Spades
- 2N = Maximum with 4 Hearts without any weak doubleton
- 3♣ = Maximum with 4 Hearts and a weak doubleton in Clubs
- 3♦ = Maximum with 4 Hearts and a weak doubleton in Diamonds
- 3♥ = Minimum with 4 Hearts

1N-2♥:

- 2♠ = Normal Accept with 2 or 3 Spades
- 2N = Maximum with 4 Spades without any weak doubleton
- 3♣ = Maximum with 4 Spades and a weak doubleton in Clubs
- 3♦ = Maximum with 4 Spades and a weak doubleton in Diamonds
- 3♥ = Maximum with 4 Spades and a weak doubleton in Hearts
- 3♠ = Minimum with 4 Spades

Responder can then re-transfer with a bid of one less than 4M and then initiate slam bidding if desired. More complicated agreements are common in expert pairs.

A few have tried to play instead with the suit bids showing Aces rather than weak doubletons.

Scheme 2: Weak Doubleton Somewhere

Others worry showing the doubletons can give away the show and shrink the super-accepts to:

1N-2D:

- 2H = Normal Accept with < 4 Hearts
- 2S = Maximum with 4 Hearts and some Weak Doubleton
- 2N = Maximum with 4 Hearts without any Weak Doubleton
- 3H = Minimum with 4 Hearts

1N-2H:

- 2S = Normal Accept with < 4 Spades
- 2N = Maximum with 4 Spades without any Weak Doubleton
- 3C = Maximum with 4 Spades and some Weak Doubleton
- 3S = Minimum with 4 Spades

Responder can bid the next step to ask for the suit of the doubleton. Opener replies using *LMH steps* – lower, middle, high. For example:

```
1N - 2♦(♥s) - 2♠!(super-accept, some↵  
↵weak doubleton) 2N!(which?)
```

Then 3♣ = clubs, 3♦ = diamonds, 3♥ = spades. In spades it goes:

```
1N - 2♥(♠s) - 2N!(super-accept, some↵  
↵weak doubleton) 3♣!(which?)
```

Then 3♦ = clubs, 3♥ = diamonds, 3♠ = hearts.

If you play with the robots on BBO, I think they use this scheme.

ADVANCED 2N AUCTIONS

When partner opens 2N, or opens 2♣ and rebids 2N, we need to handle a variety of hand types, from weak to slam hands, and those with two suits; we have very little room in which to do it. I cannot recommend too highly Gavin Wolpert's video lesson on this topic. I also mention the teaching of Marc Smith.

Advanced players can be more nuanced about which hands they open 2N. Sometimes you have a choice of opening one of a suit and then reversing, or opening 2N, or opening 2♣ planning to rebid 2N. The decisive point may be whether or not your suits are better if led into or not. Having the "big hand declare" is not an ironclad rule. And, a 21 point hand with a five-card suit may be "too big". Imagine how the auction and play may go before choosing.

Minor suits tend to gravitate towards NT contracts. Gavin Wolpert gives this example of a hand too strong to open 1♣ and rebid 3♣:

♠K3
♥AQ2
♦Q3
♣AKJ632

Wolpert suggests opening this 2N and then deal with it. On the other hand, a six card minor hand can be too strong for opening 2N. Wolpert suggests a range of 17+ to 19 to open 2N with a six card minor.

We've discussed the basic *responses in 2N auctions* (page 35).

- 3♣ is Stayman
- 3♦ and 3♥ are transfers
- 3♠ is *Minor Suit Stayman* (page 36).

The simplest scheme for the four-level is:

- 4♣ is Gerber.
- 4♦ and 4♥ are Texas transfers.

However, we will see alternatives for those below.

Stayman

Bidding Stayman promises a four-card major. Stayman auctions are normal, including responder bidding the "other major" as a power raise if opener bids a suit. Thus, the possibly confusing 2N - 3♣ - 3♠ - 4♥! is a slam try raise of spades.

After 2N - 3♣ - 3♦, bidding 3 of a major is a *Smolen* (page 30) puppet showing four in the major and five of the other major, leaving opener to agree to a 3-5 fit or to bid 3N. A responder with a six-card major can correct to 4M. Again, Puppet Stayman is an alternative, but you can't do both Puppet and Smolen.

Continuing without a fit is rather natural. To continue past 3N should be seeking a minor slam. With such a hand, a four-card major and a six-card minor, we can bid 4m next after finding no fit with our four-card major.

With the auction 2N - 3♣ - 3♥, there is still a possible spade fit. Responder can bid similarly to when his hand is 5-5 as covered *below* (page 120).

- When responder has shown spades and clubs, and opener has interest:
 - 4♦ is a flag bid showing a good hand with four spades.
 - 4♥ is a flag bid showing a good hand for clubs.
 - 4♠, 4N, and 5♣ are to play.
- When responder has shown spades and diamonds, and opener has interest:
 - 4♥ is a flag bid showing a good hand with four spades.
 - 5♣ is a flag bid showing a good hand for diamonds.
 - 4♠, 4N, and 5♦ are to play.

You can also treat the case of four hearts and a minor the same way as the 5-5 case below, remembering that there is no possibility of a major fit after 2N - 3♣ - 3♦ or 3♠.

Optional Improvement

If we Stayman with four of a major and six of a minor, when opener denies our major it leaves room for the following experts-only maneuver by Wolpert.

After 2N - 3♣ - 3♦ or 3♠, a slammish responder with four hearts and a six-card club suit bids 4♣. Then Opener bids:

- 4♦ keycard for clubs
- 4♥ control in diamonds (“impossible major”, no heart fit)
- 4♠ control in spades
- 4N to play
- 5♣ to play

Likewise, for hearts and diamonds, after 2N - 3♣ - 3♦ or 3♠:

- 4♥ is keycard for diamonds
- 4♠ is a control in hearts
- 4N is to play
- 5♣ is a flag bid showing a good hand for diamonds
- 5♦ is to play.

With four spades instead, after a 3♦ reply to Stayman, we likewise can use one-over keycard with spades showing a control in the keycard suit and other bids showing controls or being to play.

Responses With 5-5 Hands

There are six possible combinations of suits for a responder if holding a two-suited hand. With both majors we absolutely want to end up in a major. With a major and a minor, we want to end up in the major as a first priority. With both minors, we only want to play in one of them if a slam is likely.

In all cases getting to five of a minor may be inferior to playing 3N.

Both Majors

With 5-5 in the majors, and a hand only interested in game, transfer to 3♠ and then bid 4♥. Opener bids his longest major; or usually spades if his majors are the same length, in order to make the strong hand declare.

To show at least mild slam interest, transfer to 3♥ and then bid 3♠. Then opener bids:

- 3N shows 2-2 in the majors and is to play.
- 4♣ is a flag bid showing a good hand for hearts.
- 4♦ is a flag bid showing a good hand for spades.
- 4♥ shows a “bad” hand with a heart fit.
- 4♠ shows a “bad” hand with a spade fit.

A “bad” hand is one that has wasted values in the form of minor suit kings and queens.

In choosing between two equal majors, opener might take into account whether he has minor suit values that need protection from the lead and choose which hand should be the declarer.

Suppose opener has opened 2N and shown a good hand for a given major, in response to responder showing slam interest with a flag bid. Responder may still sign off at 4M; the message to the opener is that they should bid slam only with a perfect hand for the situation.

This sequence is in the same spirit as transferring to a major over 1N and then bidding it at the four level – the idea being that since you could have done a Texas transfer, going “slow” is a mild slam try.

A Major And A Minor

With a five-card major and a four-card or longer minor, we begin with transferring to the major. We must be very careful about going beyond 3N. Therefore our second bid might be 3N. Because of this, after a transfer and a bid of 3N, an opener with a 3-card or better fit for the responder’s major must correct to 4M, even with a perfectly flat hand. This situation is different than such an auction over 1N, where the responder has room to show the second suit without passing 3N.

If the responder bids his minor at the 4-level then, such as 2N - 3♣ - 3♠ - 4♣, he has a hand at least 5-4 with very good values in the two suits. It doesn’t promise five of the second suit; it might be point-rich. Then:

- Bidding one of the two suits is to play with a fit, and
- Bidding 4N is to play with no fit.
- Bidding the cheapest other suit shows a good hand for the major, and

- Bidding the more expensive other suit shows a good hand for the minor.

Just to be clear here are the specifics, but the above principles should obviate the need to memorize:

- When responder has shown spades and clubs, and opener has interest:
 - 4♦ is a flag bid showing a good hand for spades.
 - 4♥ is a flag bid showing a good hand for clubs.
 - 4♠, 4N, and 5♣ are to play.
- When responder has shown spades and diamonds, and opener has interest:
 - 4♥ is a flag bid showing a good hand for spades.
 - 5♣ is a flag bid showing a good hand for diamonds.
 - 4♠, 4N, and 5♦ are to play.
- When responder has shown hearts and clubs, and opener has interest:
 - 4♦ is a flag bid showing a good hand for hearts.
 - 4♠ is a flag bid showing a good hand for clubs.
 - 4♥, 4N, and 5♣ are to play.
- When responder has shown hearts and diamonds, and opener has interest:
 - 4♠ is a flag bid showing a good hand for hearts.
 - 5♣ is a flag bid showing a good hand for diamonds.
 - 4♥, 4N, and 5♦ are to play.

Note that the 5-5 in the majors responses were really the same pattern with the obvious correspondence for the flag bids being cheapest (clubs) for the cheapest major, hearts, and expensive (diamonds) for the more expensive major, spades.

Responding With One Or Both Minors

It is nice to be able to deal with minor-oriented hands with slam potential. With just one minor but no slam interest it is better just to try 3N. With two, we have 3♠ as *Minor*

Suit Stayman (page 36) which covers both trying for game in a minor or with slam interest. Wolpert says, “You have to be seriously slammish to try for a minor slam.”

Two-Up Transfers

Marc Smith teaches different bids from 4♣ to 4♠, using “2-up” transfers. This is definitely an improvement without getting very complicated:

- 4♣ mild slam try or better in hearts
- 4♦ mild slam try or better in spades
- 4♥ mild slam try or better in clubs
- 4♠ mild slam try or better in diamonds

After the 2-up transfers to the majors, we are always going to play in the indicated major. Opener can indicate slam interest by bidding the “in-between”, or complete the transfer with no slam interest. Responder can bid the game over the in-between to show mild interest only. Control bidding or keycard ensues to make a slam attempt. (Kickback 4♠ for hearts is a possible agreement here.)

After 2N-4♥ (clubs) and 2N-4♠ (diamonds):

- 4NT always says ‘don’t like’. This can be passed.
- 5m says I have a fit but an unsuitable hand for slam.
- The spare bid (4♠ over 4♥ or 5♣ over 4♠) says I have a good hand for slam.

Responder can then bid 5m to show only a mild slam try, or jump to slam.

There is so little room that control-bidding to find a grand slam needs further discussion. This may be too much for all but the most expert partnerships.

Minor Slam Tries

The following is from Wolpert, and is more difficult than Smith’s idea.

With minor suit slam interest, bid 2N - 3♠! as a relay to 3N. Responder then bids the “other minor” or a short major to show both minors. Note the puppet.

After 2N - 3♠! - 3N!:

- 4♣ = six+ diamonds, slam try.
- 4♦ = six+ clubs, slam try.
- 4♥ = both minors, heart splinter.

- 4♠ = both minors, spade splinter.
- 4N = quantitative, both minors.

Warning

After 2N - 3♠!, 4N is never keycard, it is a sign-off.

You can see that the 4M bids cannot be natural, since you would have transferred to one of them first. They are like the 1N - 3M splinters.

When Partner Shows One Minor

After responder bids the other minor with 4w, opener can bid the next step to show a poor hand for slam in responder's minor ("reject"). Otherwise, opener bids key-card responses using the steps commencing with the second step. Use whatever version of keycard you usually use. This procedure is called "optional keycard".

Due to a lack of room, for clubs opener should "reject" with two keycards without the Q saving the 5♣ bid to mean "Two with the Queen". Thus playing 1430:

- After 2N - 3♠!(relay) - 3N - 4♦!(clubs),
 - With a poor hand for a diamond slam, or two keycards without the Q, opener bids 4♥;
 - With one or four keycards, opener bids 4♠;
 - With zero or three keycards, opener bids 4N;
 - With two keycards and the Q♣, opener bids 5♣.
- After 2N - 3♠!(relay) - 3N - 4♣!(diamonds),
 - With a poor hand for a diamond slam, opener bids 4♦;
 - With one or four keycards, opener bids 4♥;
 - With zero or three keycards, opener bids 4♠;
 - With two keycards but no Q♦, opener bids 4N;
 - With two keycards and the Q♦, opener bids 5♣.

Of course, the usual understanding applies: if opener knows we have 10 trumps, he may treat that hand as "with the Q".

If Opener rejects the slam try, responder usually goes back to 4N to play. However, responder can bid the next step to ask for keycards anyway.

When Partner Has Both Minors

If responder has both minors, they generally just bid 3N. The only reason to deal with the complications and uncertainty of a slam try in this situation is if the need is clear-cut. Do not make aggressive tries for slam.

To try for slam with both minors, relay 3♠ to 3N and then bid the short major. Note the similarity to the situation over 1N openings.

Opener's 4N, 5♣, or 5♦ are then to play, or opener may just bid a minor slam.

A small gadget: when the shortness is in hearts, 2N - 3♠ - 3N - 4♥!(0 or 1 hearts, 5-5 minors), then a 4♠ bid shows opener's slam interest, and responder bids 4N. Opener now shows the suit of interest. Responder has to decide about the slam.

ADVANCED RESPONSES TO TWO CLUB OPENERS

When partner opens a strong 2♣ and your hand looks like a vast wasteland, the standard 2♦ (waiting) approach really wastes an opportunity to say so and requires a possibly vague second bid. Likewise, if your hand is really good but has no good five-card suit, you also can't say that until later. These two conventions do a better job on one or both of these fronts.

Another system is "steps", a system in which responder shows his point count in steps of three HCP starting with 2♦!(0-3), 2♥(4-6), etc. This is not an advanced convention, it is a mistake.

Two Hearts Bust Response to Two Clubs

With partnership agreement, the responses to 2♣ become:

- 2♥! shows a bad ("bust") hand, with no Ace or King and not even two Queens.
- The other bids remain the same
- 2♦ is now game forcing.
- I think the original idea was that 2N! is available to show what 2♥ used to show, 8+ HCP and good hearts. I'm allergic to 2N responses to 2♣, and since 2♦ is now a game force and systems will be on over 2N, I don't see the need for it. If someone offers to play 2♥ Bust with you, best discuss.

If the opener rebids 2N over 2♥!, the responder may pass. Systems are on, so 3♦! still asks opener to bid 3♥.

If the opener rebids 2N over any other response it cannot be passed. Systems are on.

After any suit rebid over 2♥!, the responder must bid again.

Parrish Relay

The Parrish convention applies after a Two Hearts Bust response. It provides a way for opener to bid a suit and have it be non-forcing, thus stopping below game.

The Parrish Relay is a bid of 2♠!(relay) over 2♣ - 2♥!(bust), forcing responder to bid 2N. Opener's next bid is now not forcing. Note that any concern about wrong-siding notrump is not correct, because if Opener is willing to play in notrump they don't use the relay.

By contrast, after 2♥!, suit bids other than the relay are forcing. So:

2♣ - 2♥!(bust)
2N is not forcing
3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ are forcing

but

2♣ - 2♥!(bust)
2♠!(relay) - 2N!(forced)
3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ are not forcing

Kokish

Kokish applies after a 2♦ response to 2♣, whether it means waiting or negative.

A rebid of 2♥! means a hand that has five hearts, and possibly another suit; or a strong notrump hand. Responder relays with 2♠!, then opener rebids hearts, another suit, or in notrump. All of these are forcing.

Another suit shows five hearts and at least four of the suit bid. Rebidding hearts shows six hearts. Notrump shows a 25+ notrump hand.

In both cases, systems are on if notrump is rebid, and we are in a game forcing auction.

The point is that an opener with 25+ or more points does not have to jump in notrump but can use the Kokish 2H

bid first so that a subsequent 2N is forcing. Also, it helps in showing two-suited very strong hands, which are often awkward to show after 2♣ openers.

Control Responses To Two Clubs

By partnership agreement, responder shows Aces and Kings. Counting A=2 and K=1,

- 2♦! = (negative) zero or one (that is, no Aces, perhaps one King)
- 2♥! = two (one Ace or two Kings)
- 2♠! = exactly one Ace and one King
- 2N! = three Kings
- 3♣! = 4 points, 3♦! = 5 points, etc.

After 2♣ – 2♦! – 2N, responder can pass. Systems are on. If opener rebids a suit, however, responder must bid again. After 2♣ – 2♦, opener can jump to 3N if willing to be in that contract opposite a wasteland.

Continuations After Positive Responses

After any positive response to 2♣, we are in a game-forcing auction. Opener with a balanced hand should bid 2N, and systems are on. Opener should not jump in no-trump immediately – give partner a chance to transfer or bid Puppet Stayman first. Since we're in a game-forcing auction, no need to rush.

After opener's rebid in a suit, responder should raise if possible; or show a good five-card suit, or bid no-trump.

The usual techniques are in play after opener bids a suit and responder raises. The problem cases arise when responder does not have support. If responder shows a suit it should be a good suit or a good four-card suit with extra points interested in slam somewhere. Otherwise a fast-arrival 3N shows no particular extras besides the control-card count already given.

Using Control Responses, the responder should generally not be pushing to explore for slam; the opener will likely already know if it is possible or not. 5N pick-a-slam should be remembered when you believe we have the points and controls but haven't found a suit.

Using 4N as RKC is not often useful with this convention. Rather, if opener rebids 4N, it is asking for the suit of the lowest control held by responder. Next, opener may bid

the next step up to ask for the next lowest control, although this is rare.

Smith's 2♦ Waiting System

Marc Smith uses the following system which has Kokish but no second negative. The range of the 2N opener is expanded to 20-22.

After 2♣ FG or 23-24 balanced:

- 2♦ waiting:
 - 2♥ Kokish, FG or 25+ Balanced
 - * 2♠ most hands, all balanced hands, hands with majors, good hands
 - ^ 2N 25+ Balanced; systems on, 3N next 25-27, 4N 29-31, ... ^ 3m or 3♠ second suit with hearts
 - ^ 3♥ 6+ hearts, not solid hearts with 9 tricks) ^ 3N solid hearts exactly 9 tricks
 - * 2N 5/5 minors and weak, no slam interest opposite a balanced 25.
 - ^ 3m slam interest, sets suit ^ 3♥ 6+ hearts, invites a raise with a doubleton ^ 3♠ fewer than 2 hearts
 - * 2♠ natural FG
 - * 2N 23-24 NF, systems on
 - 3♣ 6+ clubs, may or may not have a four-card major.
 - * 3♦ Stayman; 3M reply or 4♦ natural
 - * 3M five card suit – W or 4♦ agrees major.
 - 3♦ 6+ diamonds with no 4-card major
 - 3M 4 card major and 5+ ♦.
 - **3N shows a solid minor and exactly 9 tricks. Opener may have an unstopped suit.**
 - Responder may remove to 5♣ pass or correct, or 4♣ with slam interest in opener's minor.
- 2M positive values (8+ HCP) with a good 5-card suit. Forcing to 4M or 4N. Note that 3N by opener is forcing.

- 3m positive values (8+ HCP) with a good 6-card suit. Forcing to 4N or 5m. Note that 3N by opener is forcing.

ADVANCED CHECKBACK

The Checkback Family is New Minor Forcing (NMF), Fourth Suit Forcing, and XYZ. NMF has a variant, Two-Way New Minor Forcing (TWNMF). The first two conventions were covered previously; TWNMF is described in detail in this chapter.

Two-way New Minor Forcing (TWNMF), also called Two-Way Checkback Stayman, distinguishes invitational vs. game-forcing hands by using both 2♣ and 2♦ as artificial and is close to universally used amongst experts instead of NMF.

XYZ extends the idea of TWNMF to the case of the opener's rebid being 1♠, and is so-named because the auction has begun 1x - 1y - 1z. Since it is identical to TWNMF if "z" is no-trump, the two conventions are played together. In this approach, it is still possible to have a fourth-suit auction such as 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♦!

In another chapter we show an idea of Marc Smith like TWNMF for the case of the 2N rebid. See *TWNMF over 2N* (page 128).

Two-Way New Minor Forcing

Two-way New Minor Forcing (TWNMF), also called Two-Way Checkback Stayman, applies after a 1N rebid by opener after responder bids a major. Responder distinguishes invitational vs. game-forcing hands with his first rebid.

Note

Some also play TWNMF after auctions that begin 1♣ - 1♦; I do not, to avoid confusion with the Walsh style. Likewise, some do not play it after 1♥ - 1♠ - 1N.

TWNMF is off by a passed hand. TWNMF is off after interference.

After 1m 1M 1N, 2M is to play showing 5 cards; playing in even a 2-5 fit is usually better than playing in 1N. After

1m - 1♥ - 1N a bid of 2♠ shows a hand 4-4 in the majors with minimal values.

Checkback: Invitational Hands

We bid 2♣!(artificial) with invitational hands containing five of our major or four of the other major. Opener must rebid 2♦!(forced). The bid can be explained as "invitational with five of our major or four of the other major, or a weak hand with diamonds".

After 1m - 1M - 1N, a weak hand with five cards in M should rebid 2M, to play.

Then, in the case of 1m - 1♠ - 1N - 2♣!(artificial) - 2♦!(forced), responder bids:

- Pass - signoff in 2♦.
- 2♥- Invitational with 5 spades and 4 hearts.
- 2♠- Mildly invitational with 5+ spades.
- 2NT - Invitational, with 4-card support for opener's minor. This allows opener to sign off in 3 of the minor if he wishes.
- 3♣- Invitational with 4 spades and clubs.
- 3♦- Invitational with 4 spades and diamonds.
- 3♥- Invitational with 5-5 in the majors.
- 3♠- Invitational with 6 spades.

If responder's suit had been hearts, make the corresponding changes:

- Pass - signoff in 2♦.
- 2♥- Mildly invitational with 5+ hearts
- 2♠- Invitational with 5 hearts and four spades
- 2NT- Invitational with four-card support for opener's minor.
- 3♣- Invitational with 4 hearts and clubs
- 3♦- Invitational with 4 hearts and diamonds

- 3♥ - Invitational with 6 hearts

If responder does not have support for opener's minor, and no interest in pursuing a major fit, he raises 1N to 2N and does not use TWNMF. In the sequences above, the 3m bids show either support for the 1m opener or a decent suit and invitational values.

Checkback: Game-Forcing Hands

The responses for 2♦! are easier; we are not stopping short of game and use a slow-shows approach to slam. Opener should not jump. Priorities for opener remain as in NMF:

- With four of the other major, bid 2W
- With 3-card support for M, opener should bid 2M. However, with a flat hand and the points mostly not in M, consider 2N.

Two-Suited Minimal Hands

If you have a minimal hand and bypassed a five-card diamond suit to bid a four-card major, you can bid the 2♣!(relay) and pass the obligatory 2♦!(forced).

With 5 or more in M, bid 2M to drop dead. With five spades and four hearts, bid 2H showing your shape; opener can pass or correct. It should do better than 1N.

Finally, we have the problem of a weak hand with clubs. A bid of 3♣ after the 1N rebid is minimal and to play. (With a better hand we'd go through the 2♣ or 2♦ bids first and then bid 3♣).

Responder Jump-Rebids

After the 1N rebid, a direct bid of 3M shows a slammish hand with a good suit. We could go through 2♦! first if we were just game-forcing. A jump to 3♦, such as 1♦ - 1♥ - 1N - 3♦ is slammish in diamonds. But a jump to 3♣ is weak, as noted above.

Optionally, you can make 3♣ a slam try too and show the weak hand in clubs by bidding:

```
1N 2N!(relay to 3♣)
3♣!(forced) Pass
```

This is possible since a plain balanced invite begins with the 2♣ relay so the direct 2N is an unused bid. The problem is that the 2N bid may be error-prone. So I prefer having 1m - 1M - 1N - 2N just be natural too and lose the 3♣ slam-try bid.

XYZ

XYZ is a convention that applies when the first three bids are on the one level, and responder has an invitational or better hand. The name comes from writing this as 1X - 1Y - 1Z.

Essentially we extend the ideas of TWNMF to these additional auctions.

Research XYZ with a partner after having plenty of TWNMF experience.

TWNMF over 2N

In the section on *New Minor Forcing* (page 44), we saw that in auctions where the opener rebids 2N to show an 18-19 balanced hand, 1m - 1M - 2N, that a bid of 3w!, the other minor, is an artificial bid asking if opener has three-card support of M.

A convention responding 3♣ as a relay to 3♦ to signoff weak hands is the Wolff Signoff. Details are widely available on bridge sites.

A different version with the same signature bid has been suggested by Marc Smith. You could call it a variant of the Wolff Signoff or TWNMF over 2N:

- 3♣! is a mandatory relay to 3♦; see below for examples. This is a *Lebensohl-like* (page 101) relay to show various weak hands.
- 3♦! is the Stayman-like NMF bid.
- 3♥! is a slam try in x. It sets x as trump.
- 3♠! is a slam try in M. It sets M as trump.

The 3♣ puppet to 3♦ is used for a number of weak hand types:

- After 1♣-1♠-2N - holding a hand like Jxxxx/xx/QJxxx/x intending to pass partner's forced 3♦.
- After 1♥-1♠-2NT - Jxxx/x/KJxxxx/xx same
- After 1x-1♠-2NT - Q109xxx/x/Qxx/xxx intending to sign off in 3♠
- After 1m-1♠-2N - Qxxxx/Kxxxx/xx/x intending to bid 3♥ to offer a choice of 3♥/3♠
- After 1♦-1♠-2N - Jxxx/x/xx/KJxxxx responder bids 3N over 3♦ showing weak with long clubs - opener can pass or convert to 4♣

The 3♦ is looking for major fits:

- After 1♣-1♦-2N-3♦ holding something like Kxxx/Qxxx/Axxx/x perhaps - might also have only one major.

If opener bids 3♥ and responder continues with 3♠, that says I wasn't interested in your hearts but I have four spades. This sequence probably has slam interest as 3NT would also suggest four spades but no interest beyond game.

- After 1m-1♥-2N-3♦ - responder may have any hand with five hearts, just looking to find a 5-3 fit.

Responder might also have 4-4 in majors. If opener shows 3♥, he can continue with 3♠/3N as above.

- 1m-1♠-2N-3♦ - responder could have any hand looking for a 5-3 spade fit, or 5-4 in majors looking for 4-4 hearts or 5-3 spades.

After the 1x-1M-2N-3♥/♠ slam tries, responder has set trumps and opener should make control bids.

ADVANCED SLAM BIDDING

Slam bidding, especially in the minors, is really hard. This chapter arms you for battle.

Italian Control Bidding

In the Italian style, a control bid shows a first- *or* second-round control. A second-round control can be shown without a first-control having been shown in that suit. These rules are applied to interpret the bids:

- A control bid is a slam try after trump agreement in a major. It promises first- or second-round control. (Again, over minors or in 2/1 these bids also possible but agreement is needed.)
- A control bid is a non-jump bid in a game-forcing auction. Thus 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♦ is not a control bid because we are not yet in a game forcing auction. But 1♦ - 1♥ - 3♥ - 3♠! is a control bid because bidding on is game forcing and we have suit agreement.
- A control bid that skips a suit(s) denies a control in that suit. So 1♦ - 1♥ - 3♥ - 4♣ shows a club control and denies a spade control.
- As long as slam is possible, always show a control bid below the game level. Likewise, don't control bid if partner has a limited hand and slam is not possible.
- A control bid in a 5+ card side suit promises the Ace or King. For example, 1♠ - 2N! - 4♦ - 4♥ (control) - 5♦ shows the Ace or King of diamonds. Opener's suit must be a good suit or he would have bid his shortness, so being able to show possession of the Ace or King is important.
- Once you show a short suit, control-bid that suit only with a void, not a singleton Ace. An example would be a Jacoby 2N auction, with opener rebidding a stiff or void, such as 1♠ - 2N! - 3♦! (stiff or void) - 4♣ (control) - 4♦; this shows opener has a void in diamonds.
- A control bid at the five level promises first round control, because 4N is no longer available.

Bergen gives this example of a five-level control bid:

West	East
♠JT752	♠AK643
♥AK982	♥Q64
♦A4	♦87
♣2	♣AJT

The bidding is:

1♠ - 2N!
4♥ - 5♣ (not 4N here)
5♦ - 7♠

The 4♥ bid shows a five-card suit with two of the top three honors. Therefore East knows West has the AK in hearts. East makes the control-bid in clubs to give West a chance to show the Ace of diamonds; for West to immediately bid 4N would be wrong because of the worthless doubleton in diamonds. After knowing all suits are stopped, and foreseeing setting up the hearts for a diamond discard, East can see the tricks for the 26 HCP grand slam. We don't promise this will happen to you, but it shows the power of the method.

Note that quite often preliminary control bids below the level of game allow us to bid 4N where we otherwise could not, or to avoid getting to the five level when we don't belong here.

Bergen's *Better Slam Bidding* and its workbook has excellent examples.

Last Train

A modification to control bidding, "Last Train" (named after the Monkee's hit, "Last Train to Clarksville", is an agreement that once trump has been established, bidding the last strain before game says, "I have no more controls that I can show you below game, but if you have extras, I do have interest in slam." This agreement of course does not show or deny a control in the bid suit.

For example, after 1♠ - 3♠ - 4♣ (control), 4♥ would deny a control in diamonds but show a hand that has slam interest but is not good enough to bid past 4♠ on its own. It says nothing about a control in hearts.

The bid of course shows a control in any suit partner skipped over. For example, 1♠ - 3♠ - 4♦ - 4♥ shows a control in clubs but not necessarily in hearts.

The point of Last Train is to allow classifying your hand as having slam interest, possible slam interest, or no slam interest by continuing past game, bidding Last Train, or just bidding game.

Five Notrump Pick-A-Slam

When we have not agreed on a suit but you determine that the partnership has the points to be in slam, a jump bid of 5N is a great alternative to just shooting out 6N. It is much, much easier to make 12 tricks in a suit, even a seven-card fit, than it is in no-trump.

In response, partner can suggest a suit to play in or bid 6N.

In particular, after an auction ending in a quantitative 4N, bidding 5N is Pick-a-slam:

```
(2♥) 2N (P) 4N
(P) 5N(Pick A Slam)
```

Bergen’s *Better Slam Bidding* and its workbook has excellent examples.

Redwood

Redwood is superior to *Minorwood* (page 133).

Redwood, or One-Over Keycard, is a *Roman Keycard* (page 93) bid for the minors, that leaves more room for responses. The bid one over an agreed minor suit at the four level asks for keycards in that minor: 4♦ for clubs, 4♥ for diamonds. The replies are 3014:

Table 1: Replies To Redwood

Step	Clubs (4♦)	Diamonds (4♥)
1st	4♥ = 0 or 3	4♠ = 0 or 3
2nd	4♠ = 1 or 4	4N = 1 or 4
3rd	4N = 2 no Q	5♣ = 2 or Q
4th	5♣ = 2 + Q	5♣ = 2 + Q

After a 1st or 2nd step replay, bidding the next step asks

about the trump Queen. After any reply the bid of one over the trump suit asks for Kings. You should use the number of Kings or the cheapest specific King, whatever you do for ordinary RKC.

When there is no explicit agreement, the one-over bid is not RKC if it could be something else. For example, 1♦ - 2♣ - 4♦ is not RKC for clubs. In particular, if 4♥ could be natural, it is not RKC for diamonds. In that case, the two-over bid of 4♠ is the RKC bid; but you must check to be sure you have enough room for any feasible reply.

Playing Redwood, 4N is never RKC.

Examples:

```
1♦ - 2♦(inverted or not) - 4♥!(RKC for
↪diamonds) - 4N!(one or four)
1♠ - 2♦ - 4♥!(RKC for diamonds);↪
↪implicit agreement
1♣ - 2♣ - 4♦!(RKC for clubs) - 4♠ - 4N↪
↪to play
1♣ - 2♣ - 4N quantitative
```

Three Spades Kickback

..index::

single:Kickback pair:Kickback;for hearts
pair:convention;Kickback

The One-Over Keycard idea can be also used for hearts: a bid of 3♠ after an agreement on hearts is RKC. All responses are just one lower than normal. Kickback is off if either partner has bid spades naturally or bid Jacoby 2N; in the latter case the responses to J2NT take precedence.

These are kickback:

- 1♣ - 1♥ - 3♥ - 3♠!(Kickback)
- 1♥ - 2N! - 3♦!(shortness) - 3♠!(Kickback)

but not:

- 1♠ - 2♥ - 3♥ - 3♠(natural)
- 1♥ - 2N! - 3♠!(shortness)

Full Kickback

Redwood plus Three Spades Kickback, with 4N for spades, is Kickback.

You can extend the agreement to cover more kinds of auctions, and cases of implicit agreement on the suit, but it

can get complicated. For one full treatment see *Kickback: Slam Bidding at Bridge* by Robert Munger, Master Point Press.

Example:

```
3♥ - 4♠! (Preempt Keycard)
4♥ (one keycard) - Pass
```

We see that you should be willing to go to 5♥ if partner has one with the Queen or better. A more accurate way to say this scale is 0 - 1 - 1.5 - 2 - 2.5.

Exclusion Blackwood

“I can’t believe I am writing this article. I wouldn’t recommend this convention to anyone other than a full-time expert with a full-time regular partner. Still, it is a sexy convention and I get asked about it all the time.” – Larry Cohen

Exclusion Blackwood is a way of asking for the number of Aces partner has except for the one in a certain suit where the asker has a void. After an agreement on a trump suit, a jump to one above what would be a splinter in a side suit asks for Aces outside that suit. This is a jump to the five-level except when 3♠ would be a splinter; in that case 4♠ is Exclusion. You’re asking how many Aces partner has not counting the one in the suit you jumped to.

Example:

```
1♣ - 2♣! (inverted)
5♦!
```

Here 2♦ would be natural, 3♦ a jump-shift, and 4♦ a splinter in support of clubs. So 5♦ is Exclusion Blackwood and shows opener has a diamond void. The reply is based on the number of Aces not counting the Ace of Diamonds. So the reply 5♠ says “1”.

With that expert regular partner you have, you might talk RKC or other response scales.

Preempt Keycard

When partner makes a three-level preempt, a bid of 4♣ over a 3M preempt, or 4♦ over a 3♣ preempt, is Preempt Keycard. The point of the convention is to ask for keycards but being able to stop in game. To make this work there is a special response set called 0-1-1-2-2, which means:

- First step no keycards
- Second step one keycard
- Third step one keycard with the Queen
- Fourth step two keycards without the Queen
- Fifth step two keycards with the Queen

Minorwood

For a better alternative, see *Redwood* (page 132). I include this because it is widely played.

An optional convention to use with inverted minors is “Minorwood”, a jump to four of the minor after a two of a minor response. This becomes Roman Keycard Blackwood for the minor. For example,

- 1♣ - 2♣! - 4♣! (asks for keycards)
- 1♣ - 2♣! - 2♥ - 4♣! (asks for keycards)

but not in a non-jump sequence such as 1♣ - 2♣! - 2♥ - 3♦ - 4♣ in which the players simply discover they lack a spade stopper and decide to play in clubs.

Except in the difference of RKC-asking bid, the convention proceeds as with Redwood, the replies by steps.

ADVANCED TWO-SUITED BIDS

There are many systems of two-suited competitive bids. We learned about Unusual 2N and Michaels Cue Bid already. There are also the myriad two-suited bids for interfering with a 1NT opener. The defense to any such bid is explained in the *General Defense To Two-Suited Bids* (page 83).

Some two-suited bids show only one of the two suits at first and promise the existence of another, so the defense has slightly different approaches for those.

Here are other two-suited overcalls. There are still more approaches out there.

Sandwich 1N

After (1x) - P - (1y), a double is for takeout and shows the other two suits; the suits are at least 5-4 and you have an opening hand.

The Sandwich 1N convention is a bid of 1N rather than double, showing the other two suits but less than an opening hand:

(1x) - P - (1y) - 1N!(other two suits, fewer than 12 HCP)

Additional Michaels 2N Replies

After you make a Michaels Cue Bid, say (1♥) 2♥ (P), 2N by your partner asks for your minor suit. By partner agreement, you can have additional responses:

- Bidding your minor shows no extras
- Bidding 3♥ shows your minor is clubs, with a good hand.
- Bidding 3♠ shows your minor is diamonds, with a good hand.

This may prove useful even if partner intends to agree with your major but has a strong hand.

Extended Michaels

Extended Michaels changes the meaning of the Michaels cue bid over a minor, promising spades and another suit (which could be hearts, but no longer is definitely hearts).

Note that 2♣ over the opponents 1♣ is not alerted (in general, cue bids are not alerted) but must be alerted if their 1♣ was announced as “could be short” and your cue bid is not natural. I recommend always playing the cue bid as Michaels. You can bid 3♣ if you really mean clubs.

As before, 2N asks for the other suit. However, it is also possible to bid the cheapest of the possible other suits as “pass or correct”. Therefore, 2N can be reserved to show constructive values, or to start game tries, using “pass or correct” with weak hands.

Here’s an example. (1♦) 2♦ shows spades and either hearts or clubs. So:

- (1♦) 2♦ - 2♥ I do not like spades. I have 3 hearts. If hearts isn’t your other suit, bid your minor.
- (1♦) 2♦ - 2N!(Asks for the other suit, constructive)

Asking for the other suit with 2N and then going back to spades is a game try:

- (1♣) 2♣ - 2N - 3♦ - 3♠ is a game try in spades.

“Super” pass and correct bids can be made if a fit is certain and the hand is weak, as preemptive:

- (1♣) 2♣ - 3♦!(support for diamonds and hearts, weak)

Using Extended Michaels and U2NT together, we cover all the bases:

RHO	You	Bid
1♣	♦&♥	2N (two lowest unbid)
1♣	♦&♠	2♣ (spades and another)
1♣	♥&♠	2♣ (spades and another)
1♦	♣&♥	2N (two lowest unbid)

(continues on next page)

(continued from previous page)

1♦	♣&♠	2♦ (spades and another)
1♦	♥&♠	2♦ (spades and another)
1♥	♣&♦	2N (two lowest unbid)
1♥	♣&♠	2♥ (spades and another)
1♥	♦&♠	2♥ (spades and another)
1♠	♣&♦	2N (two lowest unbid)
1♠	♣&♥	2♠ (hearts and another)
1♠	♦&♥	2♠ (hearts and another)

Top and Bottom Cue Bid

Top and Bottom is another replacement for Michael's Cue Bid. The cue bid shows the highest and lowest unbid suits. For example, 1♥ - (2♥) shows spades and clubs. Knowing both suits right away can be helpful, but you can't use it as often.

However, most users of Top and Bottom use it as part of a constellation of conventions following Hardy:

- Using the cue bid when the lower suit is at least 5+ cards, and the upper suit 4+ cards, or equal length but substantially weaker. Otherwise one overcalls the upper suit of 5+ cards.
- Adding "Bottom and Bottom": (1♦) - 3♣! shows 5+ clubs, 4+ hearts, and (1♣) - 2♦! shows 5+ diamonds and 4+ hearts. Hardy later changed his approach so that (1♣) - 2♥! shows this hand. Others suggest 2N!.
- Adding Equal Level Conversion takeout doubles. If one doubles and then rebids at the same level as the response, it does not show extras. This allows takeout doubles that are 4-5 in the top unbid suits.

After a Top and Bottom Cue Bid, if advancer bids his own suit it is a self-sufficient suit with a desire to play there. If after advancer bids, bidding or raising the upper suit shows a strong hand.

ADVANCED NOTRUMP DEFENSES

This section explains some more defenses after your opponents open or overcall 1N. Some can also be used in balancing a passing-out 1N.

Two-suited hands are often more powerful than their HCP count alone would indicate. We've already learned the basic Unusual 2N and Michael's Cuebid. For interfering with their 1N opening, we have Cappelletti and D.O.N.T. .

In all these methods, the two-suited bids promise at least 5-4 in the suits. Vulnerability should be considered. Any bid which may force to the three level requires extra points or shape, comparatively.

In case you want to get creative and invent your own, a note on ACBL regulations:

- X or 2♣ can show 0 specified suits. In that sense they are privileged. It is ok if 2♣ shows an unspecified suit or 2♣ shows clubs and a higher suit or X shows an unspecified suit.
- 2♦ can show "a one-suited hand with an unspecified major suit", or any specific suit with an unknown or known companion such as "both majors" or "diamonds and a higher suit."
- Other bids must show at least one definite suit. E.g., 2♥ can be hearts and a minor, or hearts and a four card minor, but not any major and a minor.

When our 1N opener is doubled for penalty, some variation on the 1N defense you've chosen can be an easy to remember *Runout*. See in particular *Advanced Runouts* (page 143).

Landy

Landy is simple: 2♣ shows both majors, at least 5-4. According to the Bridge Guys website, Landy can claim to be the very first conventional method. Many variations have evolved with respect to the replies by advancer, but for a simple agreement, the advancer just chooses his best major, or (rarely) bids a minor suit with very poor majors but

a good long minor. *Woolsey* (page 138) below is an up-gunned Landy.

Meckwell

Meckwell is a modification of D.O.N.T. in which the doubler works harder in order to make 2♥ and 2♠ natural. After opponents open 1N, either in direct seat, or after two passes by partnership agreement,

- X! Long minor or both majors

Response: 2♣!(relay); then the doubler passes, corrects to 2♦, or bids 2♥ to show both majors.

- 2♣! Clubs and a major suit
- 2♦! Diamonds and a major suit
- 2♥ Shows long hearts
- 2♠ Shows long spades
- 2N Shows both minors

You may enjoy combining Meckwell with the *Meckwell Escapes* (page 143) runout.

Modified Cappelletti

In this modified or "modern" Cappelletti, the 2♣ bid works harder in order to make 2♥ and 2♠ natural. After opponents open 1N, either in direct seat, or after two passes by partnership agreement,

- X Equal hand, penalty-oriented
- 2♣! Diamonds or, a minor and a major.

Advancer bids 2♦!(relay), and intervenor then passes or bids his major. Advancer can then ask for the minor with 2N! (good hand) or 3♣! (pass or correct).

- 2♦! Both majors
- 2♥ Shows long hearts

- 2♠ Shows long spades
- 2N Shows both minors
- 3♣ Long clubs

Bloomen

Bloomen is related to Cappelletti. All 2-level suit bids are natural long suits. A double is a relay to 2♣, and then intervenor bids one of the Capp two-suited bids: 2♦ for both majors, or 2M for a major and a minor. As usual, 2N asks for the minor. Doubling and then bidding a suit at the three level is a strong six-carder, while bidding directly at the three level a normal preempt.

Woolsey

Woolsey is sometimes called Multi-Landy. After a 1N opening or overcall:

- X Shows an equal hand, penalty-oriented
- 2♣! Shows both majors, as in Landy.
- 2♦! Shows a single-suited hand in an unspecified major suit. Advancer relays with 2♥!(forced), pass or correct.
- 2♥! Shows long hearts and an unspecified four-card minor. 2N asks for the minor.
- 2♠! Shows long spades and an unspecified four-card minor. 2N asks for the minor.
- 2N Shows both minors.

Defenses to Woolsey

How should you defend against the Woolsey 2♦?

Experts concede that Woolsey is difficult to defend against, which is why there was resistance to allowing it before 2015. At the club level most players will survive pretty well with stolen bids and common sense.

One problem here is that you don't have a Stayman bid unless you agree to use 3♣.

Responder can always pass first, of course, and see what their major is. Passing first and then bidding should be stronger than immediate action. A second double should be penalty oriented.

More sophisticated defenses are based on *Lebensohl* (page 101).

Mohan

Mohan is designed to compete against weak 1N openers. It is recommended over a 1N opener showing an upper range of 14 or fewer HCP. Two suited bids can be 5-4. We lower our standards because it is as important to be finding our own games as to interfere with theirs.

The bids are:

- X shows an equal hand and is penalty oriented.
- 2♣ shows the majors; if partner does not have a preference, he bids 2♦ to let intervenor pick.
- 2♦ is a transfer to hearts, which must be accepted if responder passes.
- 2♥ is a transfer to spades, which must be accepted if responder passes.
- 2♠ shows hearts and a minor suit.
- 2N shows spades and a minor suit.
- Three of a minor is natural and constructive.
- Three of a major is preemptive.

Note why the three of a major is preemptive. The person holding this hand could have transferred to his suit and then raised to get to the same place. Not needing two bids with the same meaning, the "slow" bid of 3M is the strong one, an idea similar to *Lebensohl* (page 101).

Suction

Warning

This defense is not permitted in ACBL tournaments below the Open chart level.

Suction is quite popular against strong 1♣ or strong 2♣ as well. Just make the obvious modifications.

A suit bid denies that suit and shows either the next suit up or the two suits above that. So:

- X shows an equal hand
- 2♣ shows long diamonds or hearts and spades
- 2♦ shows long hearts or spades and clubs
- 2♥ shows long spades or clubs and diamonds
- 2♠ shows long clubs or diamonds and hearts

- 2N shows clubs and diamonds

Note that for these bids, the two suits in the alternative are “touching”.

If responder passes, advancer always bids the next strain; if the intervenor has that suit he passes, otherwise bids the next suit up, pass or correct. For example:

```
(1N) 2♣!(diamonds or the majors) (P) ↪
↪2♦!(required)
(P) 2♥!(the majors, pass or correct)
```

There remain two more bids to include the non-touching combinations:

- 3♣ shows the rounded suits, clubs and hearts
- 3♦ shows the pointed suits, diamonds and spades

Some do not include these latter bids. You can end up in four of a minor, which would be pretty alarming unless you have values and they are all in those suits.

As usual, advancer is off the hook if responder bids. The defense can treat the 2-level bids as a natural overcall of the possible long suit. Or you can wait until they clarify their suit and then play Lebensohl with double being values.

CRASH

Warning

This defense is not permitted in ACBL tournaments below the Open chart level.

CRASH stands for Color RAnk SHape, using different bids to show two suits of the same color, or rank (minors or majors), or shape (pointed or round), along with other natural bids. It can be used over a strong club opener as well.

The basic idea is that three steps are used to show two-suited hands:

- X: shows two suits of the same Color (red/black)
- 2♣: shows two suits of the same Rank (major/minor)
- 2♦: shows two suits of the same Shape (round/pointed)
- 2♥: natural

- 2♠: natural

That would leave 2N as both minors as usual.

Another version is to keep X as showing values / penalty, so that we have:

- X: penalty-oriented
- 2♣: shows two suits of the same Color (red/black)
- 2♦: shows two suits of the same Rank (major/minor)
- 2♥: natural
- 2♠: natural
- 2N: shows two suits of the same Shape (round/pointed)

Over a strong 1♣, X = color, 1♦ = Rank, and 1N = shape is usual.

Advancer will assume that the two suited bids show length in the advancer's short suits and bid the best of those. Interventor can correct if this is wrong.

Dealing with the artificial bids showing two indefinite suits is difficult.

Marc Smith suggests that responder “double and keep on doubling” if they have values. After all, CRASH's obvious defect is that they get to the three-level quite often. You can play all other bids natural.

Another approach is for Responder to wait until after advancer bids and have Lebensohl on when it gets back to them.

ADVANCED JUMP-SHIFTS

Soloway Jump-Shifts

When your partner opens a suit and you have a hand that wants to invite slam, and which features a good suit with or without support for opener's suit, it is sometimes very difficult to avoid getting in a situation in which your partner can pass the bid you need to show the nature of your hand.

The Soloway jump-shift (SJS) is meant to make it easier to explore for slam without getting too high, leaving other techniques for the really powerful hands where forcing bids will be safe.

The SJS shows one of these types of hands:

1. A strong (17+) hand with one long, strong suit containing at least two of the top three honors.
2. A balanced slam-invitational hand (17- bad 19) with a good suit. After the jump-shift, you'll bid 3N to show the balanced hand.
3. A slam-try or better hand (16+) with a good suit and length in opener's suit. After the jump-shift, then show the support on your next bid.
4. An intermediate hand (13-16) with a long *solid* major suit and good controls. You'll bid your suit at the four level on your second turn. Don't make the bid with two quick losers in an unbid suit. (Perhaps you might omit this one until you have more experience. I know my partner got confused the first time I used it. The temptation is to assume that juicy jump-shift is one of the stronger hands.)

Note

The SJS commits us to play in one of three strains: opener's suit, our suit, or no-trump!

When in doubt, the SJS is best for hands where you need to describe your hand to the opener and let partner make the decision about slam, rather than where you need to know about the opener. You need a good suit, slam-try strength,

and a good rebid (such as raising partner).

If you think about that idea, you'll also see when *not* to make the jump-shift:

- A two- or three-suited hand (unless one is the opener's and yours is good).
- A one-suited hand with a bad suit.
- A very strong balanced hand.

In these cases, you are not able to narrow down the choice of trump suit or no-trump in time if you use up too much bidding room with a jump-shift. Karen Walker gives this example for a very strong hand that came up at a sectional:

♠AKQ84 ♥A98 ♦A8 ♣A54

The use of a traditional jump-shift resulted in the auction 1♦ - 2♠ - 3♥. Responder was now stuck: 3N isn't strong enough, and could be passed. You can't rebid spades or raise diamonds or hearts, and you don't know if diamonds or hearts are running. Change one of the Aces to a 10 or J and the 3N rebid would describe your hand perfectly.

After the SJS, the opener rebids. The main points to remember are that responder has at least a good five-card suit, is making a slam invite, does not have a good 19 points, and could have as few as 13-16. He doesn't have a second suit unless it is your suit – so you don't show another four-card suit but rather tell partner where your honors are.

- A raise of responder's suit promises one of the top three honors and at least doubleton support; that is, Qx or better. A failure to raise responder's suit denies such support.
- A rebid of your suit shows extra length with good honor strength. If you have length in responder's suit but no honor, you can come back to it next time.
- A new suit shows concentrated honors but not necessarily length. (Remember, we are NOT going to play in that suit – it's yours, mine, or no-trump.)

- Notrump rebids show balance minimums with stoppers in both unbid suits. Walker shows this instructive case: Suppose opener holds ♠8 ♥KJ64 ♦KQ75 ♣AT3 after 1♦ - 2♠! (Soloway). Shouldn't opener bid 3♥? No – because responder does not have a heart suit! Partner will not have a second suit unless it is yours. For this hand, you respond 2N - nothing extra in your suit, no Qx or better in spades, minimal points.

Finally, it is time for responder to make his second bid:

- 2N or 3N is the 17- bad 19 balanced hand with a strong five-card suit.
- The jump to four of your major suit jump-shift is the intermediate (13-16) hand with a long solid suit and good controls.
- A simple rebid of your suit is a long, solid suit with more HCP.
- Raising opener's suit shows 4+ if it is a minor, 3+ for a major, and tends to deny an outside singleton; the latter because:
- A new suit is a splinter in support of partner.
- Now or later, RKC is for the jump-shift suit unless you've raised the opener before it.

- 3♦, 3♥ are fit-showing jumps.
- 4♣ / 4♦ / 4♥ are splinters.

But if the overcall was 2♥, there is no room for both the splinter and the fit-jump, so 4♣ / 4♦ are splinters.

You can also use fit-showing jumps as a passed hand.

A great writeup of this method is in *25 More Bridge Conventions You Should Know*.

Opener in responding must remember he's just been raised! Consider the bid virtually forcing. What counts are your holdings in the two suits that have been mentioned, not so much HCP per se.

Simplified Approach

To avoid the confusion about fit jump vs. splinter, one can play by a simpler rule: any jump-shift in a contested auction is a fit-showing jump. The only splinter is in the opponent's suit. That means that the normal "splinter" bid in an outside suit is available to show extra strength. For example, after 1♠ (2♣), 4♦ shows spade support with a hand with good diamonds that forces to game.

Fit-Showing Jumps

A fit-showing jump (or fit-jump) is a bid that shows both a limit raise for partner and a *good* 5(or more)-card second suit. It is used in competitive situations instead of other interpretations of a jump-shift. It can be used either by the responder or by an advancer whose partner has bid. The competition can be a takeout-double or a suit bid.

The raise is usually 4(or more) cards for a major, and 5(or more) for a minor. A three-card raise of a major is ok if it contains a top honor.

The purpose of the bid is to help the opener evaluate his hand and determine how high to compete. A double-fit is a notoriously good thing.

When there is room for both a splinter and a fit-jump, the lower one is the fit-jump. When there isn't room for both, the jump is a splinter. (You and your partner could agree on it always being the fit-jump).

For example, after 1♠ (2♣):

- 3♣ is a limit raise or better.

ADVANCED RUNOUTS

Introduction to Runouts

When partner opens 1N and your RHO doubles for penalty, and you have a weak hand, you want to help partner out of playing 1NX with power on his right. Almost any suit fit is going to be an improvement. This problem occurs more often with a Weak NT opening, but it can happen even with a strong one.

An agreement about how to get out of this dilemma is called a “runout”.

The standard runout is that double asks opener to bid his best minor. That lets you pass or correct to some 5-card suit that you have. The problem is that this is not cooperative and applies to only a fraction of the hands you might have.

This chapter shows you some better runouts. The goal is to find some 7+ card or better fit. Naturally, all of the schemes have a problem when responder’s hand is 4333. A responder who is 4333 can decide that the four-carder is a five-carder, or that one of the 3-card suits is his other four-carder.

Marc Smith teaches that you should not play any runout at all! He feels that 1NX is “often your best contract” and doesn’t want to play a system that forces the opener to bid.

Use The Runout Over Conventional Doubles?

If the opponent’s double does not show strength, but rather is something like D.O.N.T.’s double showing a single-suited hand, you have two choices:

- Ignore it – systems are “on”.
- Play your runout regardless of what kind of double it is.

The case for playing the runout is that opener’s RHO might be strong and pass. Also, if it is responder who has some points, and the runout has Pass as forcing, it keeps things going.

For intermediate players, there is a more practical reason, especially when playing the weak 1N: the opponents will frequently be confused about what the double means, so that the explanation you get may be wrong. I’ve heard:

- “I thought we were playing natural over weak notrump!” – It isn’t on their card, of course.
- “We switch to Cappelletti over a weak notrump.” – But the doubler forgot and is still playing D.O.N.T.
- “That was for takeout, partner!”

Or explanations when we inquire:

- “I have no idea.” – at least he’s honest.
- “I presume it is penalty.” – and half the time he’s right.

You can call the director after you discover misinformation, but you need to show you were damaged by the misinformation to get relief, and that is hard to think out at the table, and hard for the director.

Meckwell Escapes

Meckwell Escapes are similar to the Meckwell bids over interference with our 1N opener. A great combination is to play *Meckwell* (page 137) and Meckwell Escapes. Naturally, you have to strain sometimes to find an escape so all the usual shape constraints are relaxed.

I understand that as Meckwell themselves play it, the escape interchanges the redouble and the pass:

- Pass!(forcing, shows either clubs, diamonds, or both majors).

Opener bids 2♣!(forced).

Next, responder passes or bids 2♦ with 5(or more) cards in the minor, or 2♥! shows 4-4 majors or better.

- XX! is natural, not forcing. You think we can make 1N.

However, interchanging Pass and Redouble is not at all necessary. Having 1NX be a possible contract may be an advantage when playing a strong NT. It certainly is less confusing.

The rest of Meckwell is unchanged in the escape:

- 2♣ promises clubs and a higher suit.
- 2♦ promises diamonds and a higher suit.
- 2♥ and 2♠ are natural 4(or more)-card suits.
- Texas transfers are on.

The Handy Runout

Handy Runout is named for Howard Schutzman and Andy Stark, who developed it with encouragement from Ally Whiteneck. It works properly only when the 1N opener does not have two doubletons. Over a strong 1N you can probably afford to fudge this requirement because the strength will help you if you land in a bad fit.

Direct Seat Doubles

After 1N (X), responder bids:

- Pass! – shows near-invitational or better values and a willingness to play 1N doubled.
- Redouble! – Shows a five card suit; opener bids 2♣!(relay), pass or correct.
- 2x!(pass or correct) – denies a five-card suit, shows lowest 4-card suit, beginning a relay until a 7 card fit is found.
- 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠: Preemptive, usually a seven card suit.
- 3NT to play.
- 4♦, 4♥: Texas Transfer.

Worst case: you have a bad, flat hand. Bid the 4 card suit and hope.

Examples, assuming responder is not 4333:

- After 1N (X) - Pass! - 2♣, suppose responder is 2434 or 4432. He will bid 2♥. If opener has a heart doubleton, he must have at least three in all the other suits because he does not have two doubletons. Therefore he can bid 3♠, and if that is not responder's "other suit", responder can end the auction at 3♣.

- 1N - (X) - 2♦!, responder shows diamonds and a higher suit. If opener has only a doubleton in diamonds he will bid 2♥. Otherwise he passes. If hearts is not responder's second suit he bids his second suit, knowing opener must have three of them.

After the redouble, if RHO bids a suit, opener is off the hook if he wants to be.

If they bid after responder's pass, we will not let them play undoubled in any contract fewer than two spades. A pass is therefore forcing partner to double or bid on.

The first double by a partner who must bid due to a forcing pass, is for takeout. Example:

```
1N (X) P! 2♦
P! (P) X
```

shows diamond shortness and at least 3 card support for the other suits. The takeout double does not show extras. But:

```
1N (X) P! (2♣)
X (2♦) X
```

This second double is penalty.

If in a forcing auction, we bid a suit or 2N, it is not forcing. It is constructive and shows 10-12 HCP. If you bid a suit at the three level or cue bid the opponent's suit, it is forcing.

Fourth Seat Doubles

When RHO doubles after two passes, we know responder is not invitational since he passed, but he could have up to near-invitational values.

After 1N - (P) - P - (X), opener:

- Opener should bid a five card suit if they have one. Otherwise opener should pass and let responder bid if LHO is silent.
- Responder should bid a five card suit or redouble to start the relay, or pass if willing to sit for the double.
- If LHO bids, you are now back in your 1N overcall treatment, such as *Lebensohl* (page 101).

Guoba

Thanks to David Sterling for this explanation.

A redouble starts a relay to show a 5-card suit. An immediate suit bid shows non-touching four-card suits, the suit bid

and one higher. Or, responder can pass and show touching suits on his next turn, or pass a redouble for penalty.

Direct Seat Doubles

After 1N (X), responder bids:

- Pass!(not necessarily for penalty)

Opener must redouble or bid a five-card minor. If the redouble comes back to responder, he bids:

- Pass. If they bid all doubles are for penalty.
- 2♣! shows clubs and diamonds;
- 2♦! shows diamonds and hearts;
- 2♥! shows hearts and spades.

- 2♣ shows clubs and a major.

Opener passes with 3+ clubs, bids 2♦ with four diamonds, or 2♥ with four hearts. Responder passes with 3 in the suit bid by opener, or bids his other suit.

- 2♦ shows diamonds and spades. Over 2♦ opener passes with more diamonds than spades, otherwise bids 2♠. With equal length he can bid either one.
- Redouble forces 2♣, and responder can pass or correct to a 5-card suit.

Fourth Seat Doubles

After 1N - (P) - P - (X), opener:

- Redoubles to show a five-card minor. Responder relays to 2♣ or bids 2♦ to show 5 diamonds and not 3 clubs.
- Passes to show non-touching suits. Responder passes to play, bids 2♣ with 3+ clubs, or 2♦ otherwise. Opener bids 2♦ over 2♣ with diamonds and spades, otherwise passes. Responder can correct the 2♦ to spades.
- Bids 2♣, 2♦, or 2♥ with touching suits. Responder will choose.
- Opener passes with a flat hand. Responder passes or bids his best suit.

Escape From Moscow, or D.O.N.T.

Escape from Moscow wins the prize for best name. It is one of a family of D.O.N.T.-like runouts.

Descriptions of this convention differ, but the one that seems most understandable to me is that Redouble is a relay to 2♣, pass or correct showing a five-card suit. Otherwise suit bids are D.O.N.T, with 2♣, 2♦, 2♥ showing the bid suit and a higher, 4-4 at least; and 2♠ shows five spades (or maybe you're 4=3=3=3?). Like D.O.N.T., you can decide that Redouble followed by 2♠ is stronger.

An original Pass is to play, hoping to make it. I would assume we wouldn't let them play undoubled below 2♠.

ADVANCED TRANSFERS

Transfers and Relays Expand Our Advanced Superaccepts Language

Transfers are usually introduced to new players by learning Jacoby Transfers after partner opens 1N. Transfers can be explained in terms of “right-siding” the hand, i.e., having the strong hand be declarer and thus hidden, and more likely to gain on the opening lead. While that is all true, it isn’t the key reason for transfers. The key reason is that it expands our bidding language allowing us to distinguish more hand types.

See the chapter on *Lebensohl* (page 101) for an example of expanding hand types using a *relay*.

Note

A transfer or relay lets you make a forcing bid with a non-forcing hand.

Suppose you are not playing Jacoby Transfers. After partner opens 1N, suppose you have a weak hand with five hearts. You want to bid 2♥ but have it be to play. With a stronger hand, you don’t know if we belong in hearts, 2N, 3N, or maybe a different suit. But if you have to bid 3♥ either it is forcing or it isn’t, it shows five or it shows six, and you’ve used up all the room we need to decide.

But the transfer to hearts is magic. Opener bids 2♥ and it is YOUR turn, not his. Now you can bid 2N, for example, with partner already knowing you have five or more hearts. You can bid 3♣ as a game force. You can bid 3♥ to invite with six hearts. You can bid 3N and get possibly corrected to 4♥.

For some transfer-based conventions, accepting the transfer or not is a choice. In others you must accept it. When the choice is available, it allows the opener to describe his hand more.

The remainder of this chapter shows some advanced uses of the transfer idea.

Advanced Superaccepts

In standard bidding, we “superaccept” partner’s Jacoby Transfer with a maximum 1N hand with four of partner’s major M by bidding 3M rather than 2M.

A more refined scheme is this:

- 3M shows a maximum hand with four trump but no doubleton (i.e., hand is 4333).
- 3x shows a maximum hand with four trump and a doubleton in x.

Transfer Advances

Transfer Advances (aka Rubens Advances) is a different way of responding to partner’s overcalls in a major. E.g., (1♣)-1♥-(P)-?. Recall that in this context a bid of 2m is not forcing nor is 2♥. We can do more using Transfer Advances.

There are as many versions of this convention as there are people who play it. See remarks below.

In one version of Transfer Advances, bids from 1N to just below a 2-level raise are transfers to the next higher suit:

- 1♠ is natural and forcing as usual.
- 1N! shows clubs;
- 1♣! shows diamonds;
- 1♦! shows hearts; if that’s our partner’s suit, it is a good heart raise.
- 1♥! shows spades; if that’s our partner’s suit, it is a good spade raise.

There are 3 different reasons to make such a transfer:

- You want to bid a weak long suit drop dead.
- You have three card support for your partner’s overcalled suit but want a different suit led if the opponents win the auction.

- You want to make the next bid be forcing to game in a new suit or highly invitational in the overcalled suit.

After the transfer bid, 99% of the time overcaller completes the transfer. Any following bids are natural.

If advancer's next bid is overcaller's suit, it is to play but with a lead-direction to the suit we transferred to:

```
(1♣) - 1♥ - (P) - 1N! (clubs)
(P ) - 2♣ - (P) - 2♥
```

We have three card support but the bid is to play with a club lead wanted if they declare.

Transfer to the overcalled suit is by contrast a good raise.

(1♣)-1♥-(P)-2♦!(hearts) (P)-2♥-(P)- ?

At this point overcaller can bid hearts at an appropriate level or a game try in another suit.

You can also bid a second suit:

```
(1♣) - 1♥ - (P) - 1N! (clubs)
(P ) - 2♣ - (P) - 2♦
```

showing diamonds but longer clubs.

Other Versions

Some do not like giving up a natural 1N bid. In that case you can use 2♣/2♦/2♥/2♠ as the transfers to the next higher suit, spades showing clubs.

The idea can be extended to cover the case where responder raises 1♣ to 2♣ by agreeing double is the transfer to diamonds.

I recommend research before a partnership agrees to this. Most people don't do normal advances right, so get that down first. This convention is strictly for adventurous, experienced partnerships.

Transfers After 1M (X)

We can play transfer responses to doubles of our partner's major. We can distinguish three-card from 4(or more)-card raises, show our own weak suit, etc. There is a real cost: a 1N response is not available as a final contract, so we need to have a plan for that case.

After 1M (X), some bids remain the same:

- 1♠ is 5(or more) spades, forcing. Especially if two-suited, make this bid rather than a transfer to the other one.
- 2M is a minimal three-card raise (but definitely minimal, unlike the standard bid)
- 3M is a minimal 4(or more)- card raise
- 2N is Jordan, a 4(or more)- card raise, limit+.
- XX is as usual (10+ HCP).

The bids from 1N! up to (M-1)! are transfers to the next higher suit.

Transferring to M is a good three-card raise, more than a raise to 2M but enough for redouble or Jordan.

Transferring to another suit shows either:

- A 5(or more)-card suit, with three-card support. You bid 2M next; or,
- A weak hand with a 6(or more)-card suit. You pass next.

After a transfer, Opener should assume that partner is transferring to his own suit and bid exactly as we would if partner bid his own suit non forcing:

- Opener normally accepts the transfer with most hands.
- Opener breaks the transfer:
 - With his own single-suited hand opener can re-bid his suit.
 - With his own 2-suited hand, opener can rebid his second suit.
 - With support for partner's shown suit, opener can raise by jumping (superaccepting) in the suit.

Note that accepting the transfer is not a raise, it just shows none of the other hand types.

Optionally 1♠ (X) 3♥! and 1♥ (X) 3♦! are mixed four-card raises.

The use of 1N as a transfer leaves us with no bid with a hand that would have bid 1N in standard? In this case, pass, and bid later if possible.

If none of the bids above apply, pass.

To summarize, the direct raise is minimal, 3 cards; the jump raise is preemptive; the transfer-raise is lead-

directing and your next bid shows your values. If you don't want to try to remember the three-level mixed raise bids, just use 3M.

INTERESTING GADGETS

This chapter describes a variety of interesting conventions you might see, or wish to adopt. Many of these “gadgets” outside the standard ones have one or more variants. If something here sparks your interest, you should do further research.

Warning

Many of these ideas are incompatible with each other

The Sandwich Notrump

After (1x) - P - (1y), a double is for takeout and shows the other two suits; the suits are at least 5-4 and you have an opening hand.

The Sandwich 1N convention is a bid of 1N rather than double, showing the other two suits but less than an opening hand:

(1x) - P - (1y) - 1N!(other two suits, less than opening hand)

Mathe Defense To A Big Club

After a strong 1♣ opener, Mathe is the simplest commonly-used defense. In the simplest version, double is the majors, 1N is the minors, and suits are natural. A slight improvement is:

- Double shows the majors
- 1♦ is a transfer to hearts
- 1♥ is a transfer to spades
- 1N shows the minors
- 2♣ shows clubs
- 2♦ shows diamonds

The added transfers force the big hand to lead.

Some also use this defense over a standard strong 2♣ opening.

Lead-directing Raise Over Partner's Preempt

When partner opens a weak two-level bid, you generally want to raise to the three level if you have three-card support and a few values, in order to be as obstructive as possible. This is called reinforcing the preempt.

However, it often happens that the auction goes something like:

2♥ - (3♦) - 3♥(you) - 3N

Now your partner is on lead and unless he has a great suit he's leading into stoppers. Meantime you're sitting there with the Ace of spades. If only partner knew to lead spades so you could return a heart.

We change the agreement about what a new suit by you means; it shows a lead-directing raise. Partner is authorized to correct to 3♥ for you if necessary. So in this case you bid 2♠!(heart raise, lead-directing). You also might do this for example if you had three hearts and ♠KQ52. 2N remains feature-asking but can also be used to keep the bidding open for your next bid when you really do have a good hand.

You can optionally vary this system as follows:

Over interference of a double or a two-level bid after our two-level preempt:

- Double (redouble) is a runout. Opener bids the next suit up, pass or correct.
- 2N! is *Ogust* (page 65).
- New suits are a lead-directing raise, not forcing.

You may wish to research the “McCabe Adjunct” for more variations.

Puppet Stayman

Over 2N or 2♣ followed by 2N, bid 3♣!(asking for a four- or five-card major) if you have a 3-card or 4-card major. Puppet Stayman is game forcing because, lacking a major, the opener will reply 3N. The 3♣ bid need not be alerted, but the responses must be alerted.

Responses are:

- 3♦!(No five card major, one or two 4 card majors)
 - 3♥! Responder has four SPADES <– major you do NOT have!
 - 3♠! Responder has four HEARTS <– major you do NOT have!
 - 3N! Responder does not have a four card major
 - 4♦! Responder has both 4 card majors. Opener has choice of games.
- 3M!(five cards)
 - Responder normally chooses between 3N or 4M.
 - Responder with slam interest and 3+ card fit in M can bid the other major as a power raise of M.
 - 4♣ is natural with long clubs.
 - 4♦ is natural with long diamonds.
 - 4N is quantitative (M is not agreed as our suit)
 - Suit bids at the five level are splinters.
- 3N!(Opener has no four or five card majors)

The name “Puppet” comes from the 3♥ and 3♠ rebids after a 3♦ response, in which the responder bids the major he DOESN’T have, so that the strong hand becomes the declarer. He’s pulling the opener’s strings.

The point of this structure is that the strong hand declares all the hands with a major fit, whether 5-3, 4-4, or 3-5.

Five-card Stayman is an easier and better alternative to playing 1N - 3♣ as Puppet Stayman but it isn’t a big deal to play Puppet over both 1N - 3♣ and 2N - 3♣ to reduce your memory load.

Choosing Puppet Stayman over 2N means you cannot play *Smolen* (page 30) over 2N because the sequence 2N - 3♣ -

3♦ cannot mean two things at the same time. But you can and should play Five-Card Stayman and Smolen over 1N.

Modern Super Accept

After a transfer to a major, accepting the transfer shows fewer than four trump. With four trump:

- Jump accepting shows a minimal hand with four trump.
- 2N shows a maximum hand but no weak doubleton.
- All the suit bids between 2M and 3M show a maximum hand with four trump and a doubleton in the bid suit.

Examples:

```
1N    2♦
3♣
```

Opener has four hearts, maximum hand, xx_ in clubs.

```
1N    2♦
2N
```

Opener has four hearts, maximum hand, no_ worthless doubleton

Responder can re-transfer using the transfer suit at a minimal level, e.g.:

```
1N    2♦
3♦    4♦
```

Opener has four hearts, a maximum, and xx in diamonds; responder asks opener to bid 4♥.

Showing Both Majors in Stayman

Having 4-4 majors and a maximal 1N opener, opener bids 3♣ as a response to Stayman. Responder then transfers to their suit (or best suit).

1N 2♣ 3♣!(max, 4-4 majors) 3♦!(transfer) 3♥

1N 2♣ 3♣!(max, 4-4 majors) 3♥!(transfer) 3♠

After this, responder can pass, bid the game, or explore for slam as appropriate.

What you're giving up is that Stayman with a weak hand short is no longer available.

South African Texas

South African Texas is similar to Texas: 4♣ transfers to 4♥, 4♦ transfers to 4♠. This leaves 4♥ and 4♠ as natural and to play. Why have two ways to end up in the same place? Responder can choose to be the declarer if he has the kind of hand that would be better having the lead come into it in the side suits.

Muppet Stayman

Muppet Stayman is a modification of Puppet Stayman apparently introduced by the Italian pair Augustin Madala-Noberto Bocchi. Muppet Stayman interchanges the 3♥ and 3N responses so that 5-3 fits can be found in either major.

2N - 3♣ (or 1N - 3♣ by partnership agreement):

- 3♦! (Opener has no five card major, has one or more 4 card majors)
 - 3♥! Responder has four SPADES <– major you do NOT have!
 - 3♠! Responder has four HEARTS <– major you do NOT have!
 - 3N! Responder does not have a four card major
 - 4♦! Responder has BOTH 4 card majors. Opener has choice of games.
- 3♥! Opener has no four or five card major. Responder can now bid 3♠ if he has five spades and 3 or 4 hearts, or 3N otherwise. (See below for an alternative.)
- 3♠! Opener has five spades.
- 3N! Opener has five hearts.

Note that if responder has five spades and 2 or fewer hearts he will transfer rather than use Stayman; so by reversing the meanings of 3♥ and 3N, we are leaving open the chance to find an 8-card fit in hearts or spades.

Option: After a 3♥ response, you can again “puppet” by having 3♠! relay to 3N while 3N! shows five spades.

Minor Suit Stayman

1N - 2♠! (minor suit Stayman) shows 4-4 or better in the minors and at least invitational values. It denies a four-card major.

2N - 3♠! (minor suit Stayman) can also be played with game-forcing values.

Sons Of Texas

Playing Texas Transfers opens up some other possibilities. Here are two of them.

1. Delayed Texas Transfers

As an additional option if playing Texas Transfers, delayed Texas offers a way to show hands that are 6-4 in the majors.

Bidding 2♣ first, then 4♦ or 4♥ over a 2♦ response, is called “delayed Texas”. It explicitly shows six of the suit to which you transfer, and four of the other suit.

- 1N 2♣ 2♦ 4♥! – six spades, four hearts. Opener with 2 spades and 4 hearts should pass. Otherwise bid 4♠.
- 1N 2♣ 2♦ 4♦! – four spades, six hearts. Opener with 2 hearts and four spades should bid 4♠. Otherwise, bid 4♥.

Note

This convention is incompatible with the advanced 2N structure.

1. Four Spades Quantitative Minors

Playing Texas Transfers, the sequence 1N - 4♠ has no meaning. With partnership agreement, this means a hand that has the points for a quantitative raise to 4N, but is 5-4 or better in the minors. Opener can choose between 4N or 5m or 6m.

Specific Ace Ask 4N

With a very strong hand, sometimes you need to know not how many Aces partner has but whether they have a certain one, in order to bid slam. The Specific Ace Ask 4N, also called the ACOL 4N, is an opening bid of 4N. The responses are:

- 5♣ shows no Aces
- 5♦ shows the Ace of diamonds
- 5♥ shows the Ace of hearts
- 5♠ shows the Ace of spades
- 6♣ shows the Ace of clubs
- 5N shows two Aces

Opener places the contract.

Montreal Relays

This was invented by someone who went crazy trying to tell if responder has four or five of his major over a 1♣ opening. Responder does not bid a four-card major; instead, he bids an artificial 1♦. Responses of 1♥ or 1♠ show five card suits. A responder with 5 hearts and 5 spades bids 1♥.

A response of 1♦ shows enough values to respond but is otherwise artificial. Opener's rebids after 1♣ - 1♦!(artificial, no five-card major):

- 1♥ promises 4 hearts, does not deny 4 spades
- 1♠ promises 4 spades, denies 4 hearts
- 1N denies a four-card major, denies six clubs
- 2♣ shows six clubs
- 2N is 17-18 balanced (as usual).
- 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ are normal reverses.

Some play this convention with additional 3-level splinter conventions. It is off in competition.

Namyats

Namyats is Stayman spelled backwards. Apparently this amazing fact is supposed to help you remember what it means. Doesn't work for me, but maybe it does for you. Samuel Stayman didn't invent either Stayman or Namyats!

An opening bid of 4♣ is a strong hand with an 8-card heart suit. Likewise, 4♦ is a strong hand in spades. This leaves opening the majors at the 4-level as weak bids with no slam interest. Generally the distinction is that you use Namyats with a hand with no more than five losers.

If the responder wishes the opener to become the declarer, or has slam interest, he can temporize with the intervening suit, e.g.

- 4♦!(transfer to 4♠) - 4♥!(transfer to 4♠).

To accept the Namyats transfer is a sign-off.

An opening bid of 3N! shows a hand that would have preempted in 4♣ or 4♦; partner usually bids 4♣! pass or correct.

There are more complicated agreements about follow-ups, but that's the basics.

Wolff Signoff

After the auction starts 1m - 1M - 2N, opener is showing 18-19 points. As we have seen, *New Minor Forcing* (page 44) is available to optimists looking to get to the right game. Wolff is for pessimists, who are worried about signing off when they don't have the values for game. It lets you make that 1M bid a little lighter.

With Wolff, 3♣!(Wolff relay to 3♦) allows responder to place the contract. Full descriptions are available on bridge sites. However, consider instead Marc Smith's version of it, which I call *TWNFM over 2N* (page 128).

Response Swapping Over Black Overcalls

When we open a suit and the opponents make an overcall a black suit, up to and including 3♣, we switch the meanings of the other two suit bids in response (i.e. they become transfers to one another).

For example, after 1♦ (2♠), a bid of 3♥ would normally mean a good hand with hearts while a bid of 3♣ would be a good hand with clubs. By swapping meanings, we mean 3♥ shows clubs while 3♣ shows hearts.

This gives us the usual benefit of transfers: two ways to show a suit. For example, with a preemptive hand with hearts we could bid 3♣ and then pass opener's 3♥ reply, but with a better hand we can make another bid, such as showing support for opener along with our hearts.

Another example:

```
1♠ (2♣) 2♦!(hearts) (P)
2♥ (P) 2♠
```

holding Qxx KQxxx xxx xx, but passing 2♥ with x JT9xxx Kxx xxx.

More elaborate versions can be played, but this is the simplest. Remember, it does not apply above 3♣.

GLOSSARY

ACBL

The American Contract Bridge League (acbl.org) issues the rules that govern most tournament play in North America.

advancer

The partner of the *overcaller*.

alert

To give a required notification to the opponents. The need for an alert is shown by an exclamation point following the bid. If the opponents ask what the bid means, the proper explanation is shown following the exclamation point.

announce

To say aloud certain explanations, such as notrump ranges.

attitude

When signaling on defense, refers to showing if you want a suit continued or not.

balanced

A hand with an even distribution of suit lengths, 5-3-3-2, 4-4-3-2, or 4-3-3-3. Usually the term includes the *semi-balanced* hands also. Otherwise put, a hand with no singleton or void and at most two doubletons.

balancing

To make a bid in *passout seat* when your partner has passed. For example, (1♥) - P - (P) - 1♠ and (1♥) - P - (2♥) - P; (P) 2♠ are balancing bids.

bid

A bid is a *call* other than a Pass, including double or redouble.

business double

A synonym for *penalty double*

bust

A hand with very few points; no Aces or Kings, and at most one Queen.

call

A call is a person's choice of contribution to the auc-

tion when it is their turn. A call could be Pass. A *bid* is a call that is not a Pass.

Captain

Refers to the partner who knows the other's strength and shape within sufficient limits that he must decide the correct path to the final contract, after possibly gathering more information. Later, switches of leadership may occur, but generally the Captain is in charge.

checkback

A convention that asks if opener has three-card support for our major or four cards in the other major. See *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 43), *New Minor Forcing* (page 44), and *Two Way New Minor Forcing* (page 127).

competitive

A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, strong enough to bid but not strong enough for bidding game.

control bid

control bidding control

A bid showing an Ace or void; or in the Italian system, first or second round control of that suit. See *Control Bidding* (page 95).

controls

Refers to the number of control points in a hand, counting an Ace as 2 and a King as 1. Also refers to a certain advanced system for responding to a 2♣ opener.

convention

A bid which changes the standard meaning of that bid to serve another purpose, together with its followups.

cooperative double

A double that is nominally for takeout but which seeks partner's opinion on the best action to take.

count

When signaling on defense, refers to showing the

current number of cards held in a suit.

cue bid

cue

A bid of a suit already bid by the opponents. In slam bidding, a cue bid is also an older synonym for *control bid*.

current count

When signaling on defense, refers to showing the number of cards in a suit that one holds at the moment, as opposed to originally.

doubleton

A suit of exactly two cards. Called *worthless* or *weak* if it does not contain an Ace or King.

drop dead

A bid that partner must pass.

Drury

A convention played after a major opening in third or fourth seat when the responder is a passed hand, to show a *limit raise* or better. Reverse Drury and Two-Way Reverse Drury are two variants; the original version is almost never played today.

fast arrival

A jump bid to reach game when a slower yet forcing bid was available. It means a hand with no independent interest in slam. Usually in the context of a 2/1 auction.

fast denies

The opposite of *slow shows*.

fit

A fit in a given suit is when we find our side has eight or more cards in it. See also *Moysian Fit*.

flag bid

An artificial bid that shows one of two different suits. An example is after a 1N - 2♠ minor relay convention, opener bids 3♣. If responder then bids 3 of a major it is a flag bid, 3♥ showing a slam try in clubs and 3♠ a slam try in diamonds.

flat

A flat hand is one with a shape of 4333. The most frequent shapes are 5332, 4432, and 4333. These hands are called balanced. They often take fewer tricks than you hope.

gadgets

A gadget is a convention that is usually applicable in

a small niche bidding situation, or which is considered a minor tweak on another convention. Gadgets are often inappropriate for intermediates or casual partnerships.

game forcing

A hand, or bid indicating a hand, strong enough to require bidding that leads to a game or four of a minor suit. Abbreviated “gf”.

game try

A game try is a bid suggesting that we are close to game if partner has a suitable hand, and asks partner to decide or to show interest but not enough to bid game by themselves. There are several systems for doing this, the most popular being *help-suit* game tries.

Garbage Stayman

An optional convention used with Stayman to show weak hands 5-4 or 5-5 in the majors. Responder bids 2♥! after a 2♦ response to Stayman, asking opener to pass or correct to spades.

Gerber

A bid of 4 clubs that asks responder how many Aces he holds.

gf

An abbreviation of *game forcing*.

good suit

good

A good suit is one with 2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5, but not QJT, and usually five or more cards.

grand

Short for *grand slam*.

HCP

High-card points. See Hand Evaluation.

help-suit

A help-suit game try is a *game try* asking partner to bid game if they have help in the suit bid or a near-maximal holding for their bid. Help is defined as an Ace, King, singleton, void, or five cards in the suit.

intervenor

Another word for *overcaller*.

inv

An abbreviation of *invitational*.

invitational

A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, within 2 points of being game forcing. Abbreviated *INV*.

jump-shift

A bid of a new suit (a shift) one level higher than it needs to be (a jump).

Law of Total Tricks

A guideline used to help determine how high to bid in a competitive auction. With a trump fit of 8 cards or more, and the *HCP* fairly evenly divided, the number of tricks the partnership can expect to win is approximately the total number of trump held by the partners.

lead-directing

A bid made for the purpose of asking for a certain suit on opening lead. Any double of an artificial bid is usually lead-directing.

leave it in

To pass partner's *takeout double*.

Lebensohl

An advanced convention for disambiguating strengths of responder's hand especially after an overcall of a 1N opener.

level

The number of tricks in excess of six that a bid contracts for. For a bid of 3♥ the level is 3 and the *strain* is hearts.

LHO

Left hand opponent; the player to the left of the player

Lightner

A kind of double of a final contract that asks for an unusual lead, often dummy's first bid suit. See *Lightner Double* (page 73).

limit raise

An invitational-strength raise, so called because the raise limits the player's strength for partner.

LMH steps

In some advanced conventions, the next three steps show the corresponding three suits not including a suit (such as trump) that would not have the desired property (such as shortness) in a low - middle - high order.

Losing Trick Count

A way to estimate of how many tricks we'll take,

once we've agreed on a fit. From a book by Ron Klinger.

major

Spades or hearts; frequently abbreviated *M*.

Meckwell

The partnership of Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell, and the name of their convention for interfering over 1N openers.

minimax

A style of making two-suited bids, in which the bid is not used for intermediate hands.

minor

Diamonds or clubs; frequently abbreviated *m*.

Minorwood

An ace-asking bid of four of the minor, played with inverted minors.

misfit

A pair of hands with no fit.

mixed raise

A raise that is better than minimal, but not enough for a limit raise.

Moysian Fit

Having exactly seven cards in a suit between the partner's hands. This is not treated as "having a fit".

negative double

A double that shows strength in unbid suits is called a negative double. The most common example is partner opens a suit and is overcalled in another suit; then a double by responder is a negative double.

overcaller

The player that overcalled; the partner of the *advancer*. We also call him the *intervenor*.

pass or correct

A bid intended to either be passed or corrected to another suit. See *Minor Relay* for an example.

passout seat

A bidder about to make the third consecutive pass, ending the auction. After an opening bid and two passes, to bid in passout seat is called *balancing*.

penalty double

A double made with the intent of having partner pass, to collect penalties.

points

The total value of both *HCP* and distributional factors.

power double

A takeout double that is a very strong hand rather than a normal opening hand. It might not have support for the unbid suits.

preempt

(Noun) preemptive bid

preemptive

Describes a bid intended to interfere in the opponents auction, usually by opening or jumping in a long suit.

pull

To pull a double means to bid over partner's *penalty double*.

puppet

A bid that forces partner to bid the opposite major, used to make the larger hand declare a contract. See *Smolen* (page 30) for example.

quantitative

A bid that invites partner to bid slam if on the top of his known range. In conversation, often abbreviated as *quant*.

rank

A card's rank is the symbol on it, such as 2, 3, ..., King. The rank of a suit is its position in the sequence (from lowest to highest) ♣, ♦, ♥, ♠. *rattlesnake* Describes a hand with a 4441 shape (or 5440, if the five-card suit is a minor).

relay

A bid which requires partner to bid a certain suit, but does not imply possession of that suit by the bidder. Compare to *transfer*.

responder

The partner of the opener

responsive double

An advanced convention used to compete after partner makes a takeout double.

reverse

(1) a bid in a suit higher than the suit you first bid, showing a stronger hand than you've shown so far; or (2) an adjective applied to the name of a convention indicating a variant in which two of the bids are interchanged, as in Reverse Bergen or Reverse Drury.

RHO

Right hand opponent; the player to the right of the player

right-side

A bidding maneuver designed to have the stronger hand be the declarer.

Rubensohl

A *transfer* version of *Lebensohl*. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Rule of

Add your HCP and the lengths of your longest two suits. If that number is 20 or more your hand is said to satisfy the "Rule of 20". The Rule of 17 and The Rule of 19 are also used in ACBL convention charts. You may see Rule of 21 or Rule of 22 in books; those are the Rule of 20 with additional requirements.

Rule of 17

A guideline used to help determine whether or not to raise a preemptive major bid by partner to game. The rule says to add your *HCP* and number of trumps, and bid game if the total is 17 or more.

Rule of 20

A hand is said to satisfy the Rule of 20 if its number of high card points plus the sum of the lengths of its two longest suits adds up to 20 or more.

runout

A method of escaping from a penalty double, such as a double of a 1N opener.

Sandwich 1N

After opponents have bid 1x - 1y, a 1N conventional bid to show the other two suits with a sub-opening hand.

seat

Your position with respect to the Dealer or the opener. For example, the Dealer is in first seat, and his partner is in third seat.

semi-balanced

A hand with a 5-4-2-2 or 6-3-2-2 shape, the longest being a minor.

semi-forcing

A bid that is forcing but passable by a hand with an utter minimum. See *oxymoron*. Usually refers to making 1M - 1N semi-forcing rather than forcing.

short

A suit is *short* if it contains 2 or fewer cards.

singleton

A suit containing just one card.

slamish

A hand, or a bid showing a hand, that possibly but not definitively might contribute to a slam.

slow shows

This expression is used when there are two bids that denote the same *strain*, one immediate and one through a slower mechanism; the slower of the two shows a hand that is the stronger or possesses a stopper.

Smolen

An artificial convention to show the five-card suit in a five-four hand.

SOS redouble

A redouble in the passout seat after an opening bid has been doubled for takeout or for balancing.

splinter

A triple-jump bid showing a stiff or a void in the suit bid and agreeing to partner's last-bid suit as trump. Examples are 1♠ - 4♥!, 1♥ - 4♣!, and the tricky one, 1♥ - 3♠!.

Stayman

The Stayman Convention is classically a bid of the lowest number of clubs after a notrump opening; it inquires about the opener's major suit holdings. The term is also used to refer other bids with the same purpose.

stiff

Slang for *singleton*.

strain

Strain is a word used to avoid saying the wordy "suit or notrump". Used in phrases such as "What strain should we play in?" or "the next higher strain".

super-accept

A jump agreement in response to a major *transfer*.

support double

An advanced convention used to show exactly 3-card support for responder's suit.

takeout

A bid (most often a double) is said to be "for takeout" if partner is expected to bid rather than pass.

takeout double

A double that asks partner to bid, usually with an emphasis on getting partner to reveal an unbid major suit.

tenace

A holding that includes two cards separated by one missing one, such as AQ or KJ. Such a holding is strong if behind the missing card, but weak if the stronger card(s) are behind it. The missing card is said to be *onside* if ahead of the tenace, and *off-side* otherwise.

thirteen

The most important number in bridge.

transfer

A bid which requests partner to bid a certain suit which is held by the bidder; the intent is usually to cause partner to be the declarer if that suit is trump. Usually the suit bid is one denomination belows than the suit requested, known as the *target suit*.

If partner bids the target suit as requested it is called *accepting* the transfer. If he bids it but one level higher than necessary it is called a *super-accept*; and if he bids something else it is called *breaking* the transfer.

Compare to *relay*.

Two Over One

2/1

An advanced version of Standard American, "Two Over One Game Force", is so-named for the signature non-jump bid of two of a new suit over partner's opening one-level bid in a suit.

UDA

Short for "upside down attitude, right-side up count". A low card is encouraging or from an even number.

UDCA

Short for "upside-down count and upside-down attitude" card signals. A low card is encouraging or from an odd number.

underlead

To lead a small card from a suit containing an honor; for example to lead the 5 from K985.

unpassed hand

A hand that has not yet had a chance to bid, or did have a chance but did not pass.

void

A suit containing no cards.

W

W is our notation for the “other” major in an auction where a major M has been bid.

w

w is our notation for the “other” minor in an auction where the a minor m has been bid.

Walsh

The style, taught in this book, where a less-than-game-forcing hand will bypass a diamond suit when replying to a 1♣ opener in favor of showing a four-card major.

weak

A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, too weak for any but obstructive action.

X

Double

XX

Redouble

yarborough

A hand containing no honors; a real *bust*.

RESOURCES

Books

1. *Standard Bidding With SAYC*, by Ned Downey and Ellen Pomer, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, 2005. This really seems to be the only printed book devoted to this purpose, beyond a little handout you can get from ACBL.
2. *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know (Second Edition)*, by Barbara Seagram and Marc Smith; with additional material by David Bird. Masterpoint Press, Toronto, 2022, and
3. *25 More Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, by Barbara Seagram and David Bird, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, are wonderfully expository with reviews and quizzes. All of the “25” series books have taught me something. One of them is on Two Over One.
4. *2 Over 1 Game Force*, by Audrey Grant and Eric Rodwell, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY. 2009. I do not care for the 2/1 books by Hardy (on literary, not bridge, grounds).
5. *Points Schmoints!*, by Marty Bergen, Bergen Press, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, 1994.
6. *Slam Bidding Made Easier*, by Marty Bergen, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, 2008. A workbook is also available. This book contains the alternative hand evaluation method that Bergen devised in full detail, also with great details about control bidding and useful slam conventions.
7. *Lebensohl*, by Eric Rodwell. Devyn Press, Louisville, KY, 2005.
8. *The Weak No-trump: How to Play It, How to Play Against It*, by Andy Stark.
9. *Eddie Kantar Teaches Modern Bridge Defense*, by Eddie Kantar, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, 1999. This part centers on leading, card play and signalling.
10. *Eddie Kantar Teaches Advanced Bridge Defense*, by Eddie Kantar, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, ISBN 1-894154-03-7, 1999. This part centers on strategy, counting, and technique.
11. *Killing Defense At Bridge*, by Hugh Kelsey, Faber and Company, 1966; new editions by Cassel & Co, 1992, 1997. When I have asked expert players, many of them mention this book as the one that opened their eyes. It has a sequel, *More Killing Defense*.
12. *Opening Leads*, by Mike Lawrence, C & T Bridge Supplies, Los Alamitas, CA, 1966. This is so comprehensive it is a challenge but well worth it. My scores improved sharply after I read it. Many of Lawrence’s other writings on specialized topics, including balancing and overcalls, are similarly difficult and worthwhile.
13. *Eddie Kantar Teaches Topics in Declarer Play at Bridge*, by Eddie Kantar, Master Point Press, Toronto, 2002. There are many older such books, including ones by Dorothy Hayden Truscott and William S. Root, each of which is worth reading.
14. *Card Play Technique, or, The Art Of Being Lucky*, by Victor Mollo and Nico Gardener. B. T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1955.
15. *The Play of the Hand At Bridge*, by Louis H. Watson. I first read this at age 12, when I had nobody to play with. I probably picked it out because it was one of the biggest books in our little public branch library. First published in 1934, nowadays one reads the modernized version by Sam Fry, Jr. written in 1958. It remains one of the best.
16. *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, 7th Edition, Brent Manley ed., published by the American Contract Bridge League, Horn Lake, MS, 2011. Everything you ever wanted to know – and the section on how to play card combinations is to be frequently consulted after you fail in that department.

Online

1. Larry Cohen (<https://www.larryco.com>), Robert Barrington (<https://www.learnbridge.com>), and Gavin Wolpert (<https://wolpertbridge.com>) have articles, videos and lessons. YouTube has great content including Rob, Gavin, and Pete Hollands.

Of particular note are some very excellent lessons at the Wolpert site that are taught by Hazel Wolpert, Gavin's mother, called The Basics With Hazel. It really pays to have the fundamentals down cold.

2. Marty Bergen (<http://martybergen.com>) has audio-visual courses in addition to books and pamphlets.
3. Rob Barrington and Gavin Wolpert have produced years of free "Wednesday Morning Tournament" episodes on Barrington's YouTube channel "Bridge Lesson". Each episode is a very careful collaboration on 8 hands.
4. Online bridge sites are booming. You can play with robots or humans or a combination of the two. There is a mechanism, different on each site, for knowing what the robots believe a bid means. Some sites are:
 - BridgeBase Online (BBO) at online.bridgebase.com is the largest site for playing bridge, including ACBL tournaments. The Beginner and Intermediate Lounge (BIL) and the Intermediate and Advanced Club (IAC) are groups that use BBO for instruction.
 - OKBridge,
 - IntoBridge,
 - Swan Bridge, and
 - Real Bridge.

These sites are in a state of constant improvement and competition so I won't describe them in this static medium.

5. Bridge Winners (<https://bridgewinners.com>) is the premier bridge news and discussion site.
6. The American Contract Bridge League (<https://acbl.org>) has a monthly bridge magazine that is worth the membership fee by itself. They can help you find a club or tournament, learn how to fill out your convention card, and explain the bridge laws.

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