

Responding at the two level

It is amazing how the smallest details can cause the most heated discussions. One such topic is how many high card points are needed to make a change of suit response at the two level.

We know that when partner opens the bidding with a one level bid, the range of strength is between 12 and 19 points. We also know that we should respond to that opening bid with six points, just in case partner has 19 and we have the magic 25 points between the two hands – enough to bid to game. A response at the one level is very wide ranging – from 6 to 16 or more points – it is just the first move in an auction to be held about what should be the final contract.

To respond at the two level we need nine points rather than six, as a minimum, since we take the bidding a level higher. For example:

1♥ 1♠ The opening bidder is able to show their 15-16 points at the one level
1NT

1♥ 2♣ In this auction the opener is forced to rebid TWO No Trumps to show the same 15-16 points. No problem, the 2♣ bidder has at least 9 points, so we won't be too high.
2NT

Let's test how well we know the system. Partner opens 1♥. What should we respond?
2♣. Nine points, only a 4-card suit but one that is worth bidding. A minimum two level response. I asked my students what they would bid and two said 1NT. This would not be wrong, as 1NT shows 6-9 points, but this hand is just a touch too good.

♠ K Q 2
♥ 5 4
♦ 9 5 4 2
♣ K J 10 9

Now you are very clearly worth a 2♣ response, bid your 4-card suits 'up-the-line' in response. With 15 points, you are going to bid to game, but there is no need to rush things. Listen to partner's rebid before you decide the final contract. If it's just 2♥, you can bid 3NT now. But every now and then partner will make a stronger bid and you can go to slam.

♠ K Q 2
♥ 5 4
♦ A Q 4 2
♣ K J 10 9

1♠. You have the values to bid at the two level and your longest suit is clubs, but you should respond 1♠. As responder, it is your duty to make sure that your side does not lose the spade suit. If you bid 2♣ and partner rebids 2♥, you will have to pass. You do not have a good enough hand to continue the auction by bidding 2♠.

♠ K 10 9 2
♥ 5 4
♦ Q 5
♣ K Q 7 5 3

2♣. With 14 points your hand is good enough to drive the partnership to game. Respond 2♣. If partner just rebids 2♥, you can bid a forcing 2♠. If partner still keeps bidding hearts you will have to raise to 4♥. Or maybe partner stops the diamonds and can bid no trumps.

♠ A K 10 9
♥ 5 4
♦ Q 5
♣ K Q 7 5 3

2♣. This hand may only be 8 points but it contains a good suit which will take tricks in no trumps. If partner rebids 2♥, you have three trumps in support. Bidding at the two level will not get your side into trouble.

♠ 2
♥ 5 4 3
♦ 6 5 4 2
♣ A K J 10 2

1NT. Looks nearly the same hand doesn't it? But here 1NT is a better response. You don't want to hear 2♥ from partner, though you would be delighted with 2♣ or 2♦. So don't push the bidding higher with a misfit hand.

♠ 5 4 3
♥ 2
♦ 6 5 4 2
♣ A K J 10 2

Here is something to try, that will test whether you have got two level responses straight. Get out a pack of cards. Make up deals where the following auctions would occur:

i) 1♠ 2♦ ii) 1♠ 2♦ iii) 1♠ 2♦ iv) 1♠ 2♦
2♠ 3♠ 2♠ 3NT 2♠ 3♣ 2♠ pass
4♠ pass pass 3NT

Give the hands to your favourite partner and ask 'How would you bid these hands'. Hopefully partner will give the answers written above, but if they don't it will be a good time to find out why.

KEN - BIT IN A BOX IF YOU HAVE ROOM

Why Nine?

How on earth did we decide on the figure of nine for a two level response? Well, if you divide the 40 points in the pack by the 13 tricks, you get THREE. So it takes about three high card points to win a trick. When we respond at the two level, we take the bidding one trick higher, so we should have about one trick more i.e. three points extra.