

## ▲ Cue Bidding for Slams

### WHAT IS A CUE BID?

A cue bid is a suit bid that doesn't mean you have 4+ cards in the suit. It is an artificial bid. Cue bids can have different meanings depending on the situation in which they occur.

Slam Bidding: Cue bids are used to show Controls:

First round control = an Ace or a void

Second round control = a King or a singleton

Control showing cue bids are commonly used when investigating a major suit slam. (With minor suit fits cue bids are usually used to show stoppers for NT below the 3NT level but can be used to show controls above the 3NT level).

- Any new suit bid after both partner's have agreed a major suit (i.e. both have bid it) at the three level or higher is a cue bid showing first round control (i.e. an Ace or a void) and interest in a slam

### WHEN SHOULD YOU CUE BID?

You would normally start cue bidding when:

- You have an eight or more card fit
- You have a combined loser count of 13 or less
- You need to find specific controls (i.e. when Blackwood won't help)
- You need partner to have additional values/fitting cards, rather than enough 'Aces'.

Cue-bidding between 3 and 4 of the agreed major suit is often safer than using Blackwood, where there is sometimes a danger of going down at the 5 level..

Unlike Blackwood where one partner is in control of the bidding, cue bidding is just an exchange of information. Each partner cue bids their first round controls in ascending order. Bypassing a suit denies a first round control.

When all first round controls have been bid or denied, each partner can cue bid their second round controls (a King or a singleton) in ascending order.

A cue bid shows 2nd round control if:

1. First round control in that suit has already been shown by either partner, OR
2. First round control in that suit has already been denied by the bidder

A bid of the trumps suit says you have no more controls to show, or you have a minimum hand for your original bid and cannot afford to start cue bidding at the next

level. Partner can continue cue bidding if they are strong.

A bid of 4NT in a cue bidding sequence is "Blackwood" asking for 'Aces'.

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## ▲ Finding Stoppers for No Trumps

There are various auctions where we might need to find a stopper for No Trumps

1. Our side has found a fit in a minor suit and has invitational or better values.

We bid a new suit to show a stopper

2. Our side has bid 3 suits

We use 4th Suit Forcing (This is just one use of 4th Suit Forcing)

### 3. The opponents have bid a suit

We bid their suit to ask for a stopper

We'll look specifically at the third situation, where the opponents have bid a suit.

When the opponents have bid a suit, a No Trump bid by us promises a stopper in that suit. Without a stopper we can sometimes cue bid the opponent's suit to ask partner for a stopper, but we have to be careful as there are various auctions where a cue bid of the opponent's suit has a special meaning.

#### Special Meanings Of A Cue Bid Of The Opponent's Suit

##### 1. Directly over an opening bid:

Michaels Cue Bid showing 5-5 in the majors.

##### 2. In response to partner's overcall:

Unassuming Cue Bid asking for more information about the overcall hand.

##### 3. In response to partner's takeout double:

Shows a game forcing hand and asks the doubler to describe their hand.

...and also various situations others depending on our partnership agreements.

#### **When The Cue Bid Of The Opponent's Suit Doesn't Have A Special Meaning.**

Providing the cue bid of the opponent's suit doesn't have a special meaning, a bid of the opponent's suit is a forcing enquiry typically asking about stopper for No Trumps. We just need to be careful that we have enough combined strength to play at the level that partner will need to bid at.

#### Responding To Partner's Stopper Asking Bid:

Bid No Trumps at the lowest level or make another descriptive bid.

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## Splinter Bids

A splinter bid (usually shortened to "splinter") is an unnecessary jump bid in a new suit which shows good trump support and a singleton or void in the bid suit. Its name, "splinter", comes from the fact that it is showing the smallest fragment of the hand.

For example, after an opening bid of 1♥, if responder has 4-card support for hearts, values for game and a singleton or void in some suit (say clubs, for example), he makes a double jump bid in his short suit, i.e. he bids 4♣.

A double jump is unnecessary as a natural bid since 2♣ would be a normal-strength bid and 3♣ would be a game-forcing strong bid. Traditional bidding would say that 4♣ is a pre-emptive bid, but modern thinking is that it is foolish to bid this high with no guarantee of its being a good contract, so these pre-emptive responses are no longer used.

## **When Is a Jump Bid "Unnecessary?"**

We define a jump as unnecessary if it is one level higher than a natural bid that would have been game-forcing. A double jump in a new suit is always unnecessary as a natural bid but sometimes even a single jump bid is not needed naturally and thus becomes a splinter.

For example, after a reverse by opener, such as 1♥, 2♣, 2♠, the auction is already game forcing. Therefore a jump by responder to 4♦ is a splinter, showing 4-card support for spades and a singleton or void in diamonds.

## **Using Splinters**

A splinter is a slam try, since it commits the side to a game.

Responder can make a splinter bid in support of opener's suit as his first response, or in support of opener's second suit as his second response. We have already seen examples of both of these.

Opener can make a splinter bid in support of responder's suit, e.g. 1♥, 1♠, 4♦.

A splinter sets the trump suit and invites the partner to assess the fit of the two hands. The best holding opposite the splinter suit is three or four small cards, since these can be ruffed in the splinter hand. An ace and small cards is not bad either, though not as good as small cards only unless you are aiming for a grand slam, of course. Poor holdings are kings and minor honours opposite the splinter suit. These represent wasted values and are a strong indication that a game contract is the limit. It is even possible, with a holding of K Q 10 x or similar, that 3NT will be the best possible contract, particularly if the trump suit is a minor. A bid of 3NT or game in the trump suit is a sign-off, showing wasted values and no compensating extra strength.

If there are no wasted values, you are effectively playing with a 30 hcp pack. To make a slam, you need to win 12 tricks in the other three suits and 27 to 29 hcp will usually be sufficient for you to do this. When you have no wasted values you tell partner the good news by making a cue bid, or maybe by bidding slam straight away.

## **Agreeing the Splinter Bid method**

Agree the following with your partner:

- "Any jump bid in a new suit that is higher than necessary to be forcing to game agrees partner's last suit as trumps and shows a splinter in the bid suit."
- "We will not play Gerber over suit bids."

This last point is crucial: you cannot play Gerber and splinters. Very few good partnerships use Gerber, because it gets in the way of exploratory bidding and it really isn't very useful anyway. Even over no trump opening bids Gerber is hardly worth its place in your system. My advice is not to use Gerber at all. It is not part of Standard English Modern Acol.

## ▲ Pre-empts

**South**  
**9 8**  
**A Q J 8 6 5 3**  
**6**  
**5 4 2**

South  
West  
North  
East  
3  
3  
Pass  
Pass  
?

We open with a good 3pre-empt and West overcalls 3. Should we bid 4?

No. Most certainly not!

When we open with a pre-empt we 'overbid' our hand (because of the 7 card suit) with the aim of disrupting the opposition as much as possible. We are not generally expecting to make 9 tricks (unless partner comes up with something useful).

West is in the uncomfortable position of having to overcall at the three level. Maybe West can't make 3, which will give us a plus score. Maybe the opponents have missed 4, in which case we don't want to give them a second chance to bid it.

Even if West is making 3(-140 to us), going down 2 tricks doubled in hearts not vulnerable (-300) or even 1 trick doubled vulnerable (-200) will be worse.

Remember, when you pre-empt it is hardly ever right to bid again.

The only time you MUST bid again is when partner responds to the pre-empt with a change of suit, which is forcing. This happen very rarely in practice

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## ▲ Don't pre-empt with a four card major

Don't open the bidding with a pre-empt if your hand contains a four card major *in addition to the pre-empt suit*.

Pre-empting tends to shut up your partner so you may miss out on a major suit fit and even miss a major suit game.

**North**  
**6 2**  
**A 8 7 2**  
**K J T 8 7 6 3**

**South**  
**A T 7 5**  
**K Q 6 5 3**  
**A 9 6 2**

North  
East  
South  
West  
Pass  
Pass  
1  
Pass  
4

If North pre-empts with 3South will have to pass. Although South has opening points it is not enough to change suit after a pre-empt (need 16+).

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### ▲ Stayman

After a 1NT opener a response of 2C is the "Stayman" convention, asking partner to show a four card major suit if he has one. Opener's rebid is then:

- Holding one four card major, bid 2 of that major
- Holding both four majors, bid 2H
- Holding neither major, bid 2D

The responder's rebid is then as follows:

- Partner bid a major I like. Pass or raise that suit
- Partner's response was not what I wanted. Convert to 2 or 3NT, make a weak take-out bid, or jump-bid own strong suit
- Partner gave a negative 2D, but I'm determined to play in a major if possible. Bid 3D is asking for a 3 card major.
- Bidding 3C indicates that the 2C was not intended as Stayman but a real club bid

### **Stayman with a Flat Hand**

When responding to a 1NT opening with a flat hand of any 4333 shape that contains a four card major, it's often best to make a No Trump response rather than using Stayman.

**South**  
 Q 8 7 3  
 K J 7  
 Q 9 8  
 A J 4

North  
 East  
 South  
 West  
 1NT  
 Pass  
 ?

With the 4333 shape we have no ruffing values so better to play for 9 tricks in No Trumps rather than 10 tricks in spades, even if partner has spade support.

### Stayman after a 2NT opening

Use Stayman after a 2NT opening (with 4+ points) and a 1NT overcall (with 7+ points). Don't forget to check for a major suit fit with a hand like South's rather than going straight to 3NT.

**North**  
 J T 4  
 A K 4 3  
 A K  
 A Q 8 2

**South**  
 7 2  
 Q 8 7 2  
 6 5 3  
 K 6 4 3

North  
 East  
 South  
 West  
 2NT  
 Pass  
 3  
 Pass  
 3  
 Pass  
 4

If South bids 3NT without checking for a heart fit first, the defence may take the 5 or 6 tricks with the inevitable lead of a spade and a bad break.

### Weak Hands

♠  
JT987

♥  
Q982

♦  
J5

♣  
98

W  
N  
E  
S

1NT  
P  
2♣  
P  
2♥  
P  
P

You need to have 9 cards in the majors to use Stayman with a weak hand. If partner bids either major you can happily pass.

♠  
JT987

♥  
Q982

♦  
J5

♣  
98

W  
N  
E  
S

1NT  
P  
2♣  
P  
2♦  
P  
2♠

If partner bids 2♦, denying a 4-card major, simply bid your 5-card suit and play there.  
Partner must pass.

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## ▲ Red Suit Transfers

### RESPONDING TO 1NT

The weak notrump comes up an awful lot and therefore you will find yourself responding to it very frequently - this makes it very important that you have an efficient method of responses that allow you to get to the best contract most of the time.

My opinion is that Stayman and Transfers are the best set of conventions to play in response to 1NT - they are not too difficult and yet they are extremely flexible.

A summary of our responses to 1NT is below:

- 2C = STAYMAN
- 2D = TRANSFER to HEARTS
- 2H = TRANSFER to SPADES
- 2S = TRANSFER to a MINOR (see later)
- 2NT = 11-12pts
- 3C/D/H/S = Natural & strong

I will start by looking at how the system of transfers works.

What are Transfers?



A transfer is a bid in a suit ranking below the suit you actually hold - it tells your partner that you hold the suit above. It sounds a very strange idea - after all why don't we just bid the suit we hold - but you will see how it works as you read on.

The transfers that we will be using in response to 1NT will be in the red suits - 2D to show hearts, and 2H to show spades.

Why use Transfers?

There are two basic reasons:

When we are weak we can arrange to have our partner play the hand concealing the stronger hand.

It gives us more flexibility in the bidding - there are many different types of hands that we would like to show after 1NT, and this system helps to show many of them.

When do we use transfers?

A very useful little rhyme is:

Stayman is used for four  
Transfers for five or more

Whenever you hold five or more cards in a major suit, you can use a transfer - however many points you have - you can bid it on zero points and you can bid it on 19 points - hence the flexibility of the system.

Stayman on the other hand is used when you hold four card majors - in an attempt to find a 4-4 fit.

How do transfers work?

In response to a 1NT opening bid

2D SHOWS FIVE or more HEARTS

2H SHOWS FIVE or more SPADES

When the 1NT bidder hears a transfer bid he responds by bidding his partner's suit: e.g. 1NT - 2D - 2H: Responder shows five or more hearts, the opening bidder bids hearts for his partner and now the responder gets a second bid - herein lies the essence of transfers - because the responder gets a second bid he can then describe his hand.

There are three types of hand you can hold:

WEAK - less than 10 points - no chance for game

INVITATIONAL - 10 or 11 points (and the five-card major) - a chance for game

STRONG - 12 or more points (and the five-card major) - sure of a game

## 1 WEAK HANDS

With a weak hand you simply transfer and pass

e.g. 1NT - 2D - 2H - Pass

This is just like the old fashioned Weak take-out, except that in this case the stronger hand is kept hidden.

## 2 INTERMEDIATE HANDS

Transfer and either

5-card major, rebid 2NT

6-card major, rebid 3 of the major

e.g. 1NT - 2D - 2H - 2NT  
or e.g. 1NT - 2H - 2S - 3S

The idea in these sequences is that you are inviting your partner to game in the same way as 1NT-2NT would invite him to game, but with transfers you can show your long major on the way.

### 3 STRONG HANDS

Transfer and either

- (A) 5-card major, balanced - jump to 3NT
- (B) 5-card major with a second suit - bid a new suit.
- (C) 6-card major, jump to 4 of the major

e.g. 1NT - 2D - 2H - 3NT  
or 1NT - 2H - 2S - 3C  
1NT - 2D - 2H - 4H

The idea here is that we show our five-card major and then show our strength, by jumping to game or by changing the suit.

Let us see examples of all this:

Our partner opens 1NT and these are our hands:

S 5 4  
H Q J 10 9 6 5  
D J 2  
C 7 6 3

1NT-2D-2H-Pass

We would have made a simple weak take out, but we are playing transfers, so we bid the suit below our major suit, 2D, our partner obediently bids 2H and then we pass. This leaves the stronger hand concealed since our hand will be the dummy.

S A 7 6  
H Q J 10 9 6  
D J 2  
C K 6 3

1NT-2D-2H-2NT

Once again we start with a transfer bid, 2D showing five or more hearts, our partner bids 2H and now with 11 points we have a chance for game, but don't forget you have already shown your five hearts, so there is no need to bid them again, instead you rebid 2NT to perfectly describe your hand: "Partner I have five hearts and about 11 points."

S Q J 9 8 6 5  
H A K  
D 4 2  
C 7 6 3

1NT-2H-2S-3S

Once again we start with a transfer bid, but this time 2H showing five or more spades, our partner bids our suit, 2S and now with ten points and a six-card suit, there has to

be a chance for game, so you would like to invite your partner. Because you have a six-card suit you should bid spades again to show extra length - 3S. Once again you have given a perfect description of your hand: "Six or more spades and 10 or 11 points."

S A K 6  
H Q J 10 9 6  
D J 2  
C K 6 3

1NT-2D-2H-3NT

You transfer to show your hearts and your partner responds obediently 2H. This time you have the strength for game, so with a balanced hand you should jump to 3NT - remember you have already shown your five hearts! This does take some getting used to - it is always tempting to bid your hearts again, but once you understand that you have shown five already, you will get out of the habit.

S Q J 10 8 6  
H A K  
D 4  
C A 7 6 3 2

1NT-2H-2S-3C

A nice and strong hand, easily shown by bidding a transfer first, to show your five spades and then rebidding in your second suit, clubs - to show a strong and distributional hand with five spades and four or more clubs.

S A K 6  
H Q J 10 9 6 2  
D 4  
C A 6 3

1NT-2D-2H-4H

Finally we have a strong hand with a solid six-card suit - you could respond 4H to 1NT and get the auction over with, but with no tenaces in your hand, you would much prefer the lead to go up to your partner, so let him play the contract - transfer to show your hearts and then jump to game - 4H.

Enough about the responder to 1NT, what does the opening bidder do?

How to respond to Transfers

Now there are various more complicated systems, but mine is very simple. When your partner bids a transfer CLOSE YOUR EYES and BID HIS SUIT - that is to say - it does not matter what you hold in your hand, just simply bid your partner's suit - this is how the system works - by bidding his suit, you allow him to describe his hand on the next round. I really do recommend closing your eyes, because this will stop you from going wrong - the only time that this is difficult is when playing with bidding boxes, but I am sure you will get round it!

That's the easy part, now we have to see what happens when partner has described his hand. As we saw, he could have three types of hand

1) Weak; 2) Invitational; 3) Strong.

On weak hands you will NOT get another chance to speak

On intermediate hands you have two things to decide

Game or NOT game i.e. 12 or 14pts

Play in MAJOR or in notrumps.

With 3 or 4 cards in the major play major, otherwise play in notrumps.

On strong hands - the decision to play in game has already been made

So your decision is about the denomination - MAJOR or NOTRUMPS?

#### EXAMPLES:

S	A 7 6 2	S	5 4
H	8 2	H	Q J 10 9 6 5
D	K Q 5 4	D	J 2
C	A J 5	C	7 6 3

1NT-2D-2H-Pass

You closed your eyes and bid 2H, and by the time you open them the auction is over. If you had been looking at your hand, you would not have been so keen to bid 2H, but of course, trusting your partner is one of the most difficult aspects of bridge!

S	A 7 6 2	S	10 9 3
H	8 2	H	K Q J 6 5
D	K Q 5 4	D	A J 3
C	A J 5	C	10 7

1NT-2D-2H-2NT-3NT

You completed the transfer as required and then your partner rebids 2NT.

You have two decisions to make:

- 1) Game or not? - Yes with 14 points I am maximum.
- 2) Hearts or Notrumps? - Notrumps.

S	A 7	S	10 9 3
H	10 8 2	H	K Q J 6 5
D	K Q 5 4	D	A J 3
C	A J 5 2	C	10 7

1NT-2D-2H-2NT-4H

Same start as before, but this time our answer to the two questions is different:

- 1) With 14 points I have enough for game;
- 2) With 3-card heart support I will play in the major.

Remember to make both decisions - it is all too easy to decide on game and bid 3NT, or just to decide on hearts and bid 3H - you must of course jump to 4H.

S	A 7	S	10 9 3
H	10 8 2	H	K Q J 6 5
D	Q J 5 4	D	A K 3
C	A J 5 2	C	10 7

1NT-2D-2H-3NT-4H

This time the transfer bidder jumps to 3NT - be careful not to pass without thinking - why has partner bid a transfer? To show us his five-card major - therefore we need to

ask ourselves whether we want to play in his major (hearts) or notrumps. With three card support and a doubleton, there is no doubt that you should play in hearts - 4H.

S	Q J 6 2	S	10 3
H	8 2	H	K Q J 7 6 5
D	K Q 5 4	D	A 8 3
C	A 8 5	C	10 7

1NT-2D-2H-3H-Pass

This time responder rebids 3H. With just twelve points, there is no chance for game - now it is tempting to look at your hearts and rebid 3NT thinking you do not want to play in hearts, but with you partner's promised six-card suit you do have a fit and thus you should stick to hearts, below game - that is PASS.

The most important thing to remember whenever you use a convention is to make a plan - otherwise you might find yourself in deep water later on. And finally don't forget that little rhyme:

Stayman is used for four  
Transfers for five or more

We will come across a few exceptions as we move on to Stayman and the 2S response.

STAYMAN

(1) WHAT is Stayman?

It is a conventional response of 2C to a 1NT opening bid - it asks the opening bidder whether he holds a four-card major.

The responses to 2C are   2D   no 4-card major  
These are the only        2H   4 hearts  
three responses         2S   4 spades but NOT 4 hearts

(2) WHY use Stayman?

To locate a 4-4 fit in a major suit - Acol's structure is based around the idea that whenever we have an eight-card fit in a major we would like to play in it - thus it is important to try to find a fit even after a 1NT opening.

(3) WHEN to use Stayman?

After a 1NT opening bid, when you have at least one four-card major and

(a) you have 11 or more points  
or (b) you are weak but can cope with any response.

Stayman was designed with option (a) in mind and this is the aspect we will focus on to begin with, however we will look at its secondary use later.

Remember, as with any convention you must always make a PLAN before you use it. There are two basic types of hands that fit into type (a):

INVITATIONAL HANDS (11-12 points) - game might or might not be on.

STRONG HANDS (13+ points) - game should be on.

So let us make a plan with these two types of hand:

INVITATIONAL HANDS (11-12)

Our plan will be to try to find a fit in a major suit and then invite our partner to game, so we bid Stayman, and over the response we bid halfway to game either in an agreed major or in notrumps:

e.g. 1NT-2C-2D-2NT or 1NT-2C-2H-3H

Both these sequences invite the opener to bid game.

STRONG HANDS (13+)

Our plan will be to try to find a fit in a major suit and then jump to game, so we bid Stayman, and over the response we bid game, either in an agreed major or notrumps.

e.g. 1NT-2C-2D-3NT or 1NT-2C-2H-4H

EXAMPLES: Responding to 1NT

S 10 6  
H K Q 8 2  
D K Q 9 6  
C J 10 4

In response to 1NT you have four hearts and 11 points, so you can use Stayman (2C). Let us see what happens over each response:

1NT-2C

2D - we have not found a fit so we rebid 2NT suggesting the chance of game in notrumps - it is the same as responding 2NT directly.

2H - we have found a fit so we rebid 3H suggesting the chance of game in hearts.

2S - we have not found a fit so we rebid 2NT - just as in case (a)

S K Q 8 2  
H A 3  
D K Q 9 6  
C J 10 4

Responding to 1NT, you have plenty of points and so can be sure of game, but with a four-card major, perhaps 4S might be better than 3NT, so you should start by using Stayman.

Once again we will see how we might bid over each response.

1NT-2C

2D - we have not found a fit so we rebid 3NT - the best game.

2H - we might have a fit (partner has not denied 4 spades) but we should rebid 3NT.

Our partner will know we have four spades because we used Stayman and denied four hearts by not supporting them. (We will clarify this below.)

2S - we have found a fit so we rebid 4S - the best game.

How do you respond to Stayman?

The responses are straight forward as shown above - there are only three possible responses and when you have both majors you should respond 2 H. However when it comes to your rebid there are two things to bear in mind:

a rebid of 2NT or raise to 3-of-a-major invite game - so you need to decide whether to go for game - 12 points - no; 14 points - yes.

If you have both majors then the final contract should either be in spades or hearts.

Let us see the hands above in complete auctions:

S	A 3 2	S	10 6
H	A J 5 4	H	K Q 8 2
D	8 2	D	K Q 9 6
C	K Q 5 2	C	J 10 4

1NT 2C  
2H 3H  
4H End

You open 1NT and then respond 2H to East's Stayman enquiry. Then over 3H, you accept the invitation (14 points) by bidding game.

S	A 9 4 3	S	K Q 8 2
H	K 7 5 4	H	A 3
D	8 2	D	K Q 9 6
C	K Q 5	C	J 10 4

1NT 2C  
2H 3NT  
4S End

This hand is the tricky one to get right. You open 1NT and when your partner bids Stayman you respond 2H, but should remember that when you hold both majors in response to Stayman you should always end the auction in either hearts or spades. So when your partner rebids 3NT (he does not have a fit for hearts) you must convert this to 4S. You should ask yourself 'Why has my partner used Stayman?' - The answer is because he has at least one four-card major - if it is not hearts then it must be spades.

S	K Q 7 6	S	A J 9 4
H	A J 8	H	K 2
D	7 6	D	8 4 2
C	K 4 3 2	C	A 9 7 6

1NT 2C  
2H 3H  
4H End

S	K Q 7 6	S	A J 9 4
H	A J 8	H	K 2
D	7 6 3	D	8 4 2
C	K 4 3	C	A 9 7 6

1NT 2C  
2H 3H  
End

These two hands show opening hands with 13 points - so that judging whether to bid game is not so easy; however remembering the losing trick count will help you. An opening 1NT will generally have 7 or 8 losers. With 8 losers you should pass 3H and with 7 losers raise to game. When judging in notrumps you should look for tens and nines to bolster your evaluation.

#### STAYMAN on WEAK HANDS

With 11 or more points you can use Stayman because you will always have a place to go when you do not find a fit - 2NT or 3NT. However on weaker hands you do not have this luxury.

Take:

S K Q 8 2  
H Q 9 6 3  
D 9 6  
C 8 7 4

It is tempting to use Stayman but what would you do over a 2D response?  
You are stuck and thus you should PASS a 1NT opening.

You must be able to cope with all three responses.

There are two types of weak hand that can use Stayman in this way:

- (a) Hands with two four-card majors and at least four diamonds
- (b) Hands with a four-card and a five-card major

(a) S Q 7 8 2  
H Q 9 6 3  
D J 9 6 5 3  
C -

If you have long enough diamonds that you can reasonably pass the 2D response then you can use Stayman. On this hand 2C is a good response to 1NT - you will pass whatever your partner bids.

(b) S K 9 8 7 2  
H Q 9 6 3  
D 9  
C 8 7 4

On this hand you can also use Stayman. You can pass a major suit response and over 2D you can rebid 2S. This enables you the chance to find the best fit.

It is worth noting - after Stayman, a rebid below 2NT shows a weak hand and should be passed.

#### HANDS WITH BOTH MAJORS

We have heard the very useful ditty:

Stayman is used for four  
Transfers for five or more.

But what do we do with length in both majors:

- With weak hands as we saw above, you can use Stayman.



- With invitational hands there are ways to show two majors, but this is more complicated and a matter for partnership agreement. I would recommend leaving these ideas aside, but one method is to use Stayman and with no fit found, jump in your longer major:

1NT-2C-2D-3S

S K Q 8 7 2  
H A Q 6 3  
D 9  
C 8 7 4

- However with STRONG hands it easy - Transfer and then show your second suit. Note that if you have two five-card majors it is best to transfer to spades and then rebid in hearts, twice if necessary.

S K 4      S A 9 8 6 3  
H A J 8    H K Q 9 5 2  
D Q 8 7 6   D 2  
C K 4 3 2   C A 9

1NT 2H  
2S 3H  
3NT 4H  
End

West opens 1NT and East wants to bid game and wants to play in one of his majors (partner is sure to have three card support for one of them) He starts by showing the higher suit with a transfer 2H, and then rebids the hearts, bidding them a second time over 3NT - sure that his partner will choose the best major suit game.

#### THE 2S RESPONSE

As mentioned above the 2S response to 1NT is redundant (we now use 2H to show spades). There are an enormous variety of uses for this bid, the choice of definition being very much up to. Perhaps when you are used to the system of transfers you will play a more complicated variety or when you are just starting you need not use it at all, but I prefer to use it relatively simply. The way I see it is this - what have we lost by playing Stayman and Transfers?

The weak take-outs in clubs and diamonds - that is pretty much it. Hence I use the TWO SPADE response to one notrump to show the equivalent of a hand that would have made a weak take-out in a minor. That is, a weak hand with a long minor.

There is one difference though - I only make a weak take-out into a minor on a weak six-card suit. The reason for this is that you will be playing at the three-level, and if you are weak, then a five-card suit is not enough. Also take into account that notrumps scores more than the minors and thus given that you will be two-levels higher, it is often worth leaving the contract in one notrump.

How does this bid work?

Very similarly to the other transfers. Over the 2S response the 1NT opener simply closes his eyes and bids the next step up - 2NT. Now the responder can bid his minor. It is as simple as that:

S	Q J 4 2	S	8 6 3
H	A 9 8 3	H	7 5
D	K 6	D	Q J 9 8 7 5 2
C	A 4 3	C	9

1NT 2S  
 2NT 3D  
 End

East can see that his hand is likely to be worthless in 1NT but in diamonds he might even make five tricks, so he wants to make a weak take-out to diamonds but remember 2D would show hearts so that is no good. Use the 2S response, this forces your partner to rebid 2NT and allows you to bid your minor - 3D. In 1NT you might only make three tricks, whereas in 3D you might well make nine.

The most important thing about responding to 1NT is to understand your system - it is going to come up so often that you will need to know it well - having said that - it is worth putting a little work in to learn the system I have outlined, because the flexibility it gives will reward you in the long run.

A couple of extra little pointers to finish:

- (1) When RHO overcalls (or doubles) 1NT then your systems are SWITCHED OFF; that is all your bids are NATURAL again.
- (2) I advise using red suit transfers and Stayman over 1NT and 2NT openings (including strong balanced hands that open 2D: 2D-2H-2NT).
- (3) You should also use the same system in response to a 1NT overcall.

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## Overcalls

### Overcalls

When you've been playing bridge for a while, it's very tempting to experiment with new conventions, but it's actually much more valuable to ensure that you're playing a simple system properly, and giving **accurate and useful information** to your partner. Familiarity breeds contempt, and players often forget the principles on which the bidding rules they were taught were based, so it's a good idea to refresh your memory occasionally.

### Suit Overcalls

When the opponents have opened the bidding, it's usually only worth competing if you are (a) very strong, or (b) have a **good quality** long suit, or both. The sort of flat hand on which you would have opened a (12-14) 1NT is often **better suited to defence**.

A simple suit overcall doesn't require very many points, but it **promises a good quality suit of at least 5 cards**. If you're considering whether or not to overcall, always ask yourself "if my partner ends up on opening lead, do I want him to lead this suit?" If you overcall on J10976 and your partner dutifully leads that suit, declarer may be able to cash AKQ and discard a loser in another suit in where your side holds the top cards. Without your overcall, partner may well choose a much better lead.

### Measuring 'Quality'

To get a rough idea of the quality of a suit, you add the number of cards in the suit to the number of honours in the suit, only counting a Jack as an honour if you have a higher honour as well.

For example, **AK875** is quality **7** (5 cards with 2 honours), **AKJ763** is quality **9**, but **J10976** is only quality **5**.

A simple suit overcall requires:

- At the one-level: 8-16 HCP (High Card Points) and a 5+ card suit of quality at least 7
- At the two-level: 10-16 HCP and a 5+ card suit of quality at least 8

But note:

- i. Do **not** overcall at the two-level if you **can** overcall at the one-level unless your hand meets all the criteria for a jump overcall.
- ii. With 17+ HCP, double first and show your suit on the next round. That tells partner that you doubled because you were **too strong to overcall**.

### Jump overcalls

There are three main types of jump overcalls:

- i. **weak** (approx. 5-10 HCP)
- ii. **intermediate** (approx. 11-16)
- iii. **strong** (approx. 15-18)

It's important to agree with your partner which type you are going to play!

But... **All jump overcalls promise at least 6 cards in the suit.**

**Weak, Intermediate or Strong?**

How do you decide which type of jump overcalls to play? Very few people choose strong ones, because that type of hand occurs so rarely, so the choice is really between intermediate and weak.

Standard English Acol uses intermediate jump overcalls, so that's what most of you will have learnt, and there's a lot to be said in their favour. They're fairly safe, because you only jump when you have a reasonable number of points, and they give your partner a lot of information in one go:

You would have opened the bidding if the opponents hadn't got in first.

You have a **good quality** suit of **at least 6 cards**.

You have no more than 16 HCP.

This should help partner to decide whether or not it's worth bidding on.

However, if you enjoy pre-empting – taking a gamble and being a nuisance to the opponents, then weak jump overcalls might be the thing for you. They're risky – you could end up getting doubled for penalties- so you need to keep an eye on the vulnerability to ensure that your "sacrifice" doesn't turn into a debacle! You also need to be fairly skilled in your card play, enjoy the challenge of trying to squeeze an extra trick out of very unpromising material, and be able to shrug off the occasional disastrous result! People who play weak-two openings often choose to play weak-jump-overcalls as well, because they show their partner the same type of hand – a 6 card suit with no more than 10 points and virtually all those points in that suit – and they're an integral part of Standard American.

**...and possibly learn something new**

When your partner makes a simple overcall at the one level, he could have as few as 8 HCP or as many as 16.

If you have **10+ points** and support for partner's suit, or very good all round strength with stops in the opponent's suit and are thinking of No Trumps, you might have a chance of game if he's at the upper end, so it's useful to have a way of asking him how strong he is. You can do this by **bidding the opponent's suit**, e.g. (1♥) – 1♠ – (Pass) – 2♥\*

\*This is called an **Unassuming Cue Bid (UCB)**. It asks your partner to tell you how strong his overcall is. (It's called 'unassuming' because it doesn't say whether or not you've got any cards in that suit)

If he's a minimum overcaller (8-11 HCP) he simply rebids his suit at the **lowest possible level** and you pass unless you're very strong.

If he's stronger (12-16) he bids anything else which tells you something useful about his hand, e.g. he rebids his suit with a jump to show at least 6 cards, bids another suit in which he has good cards, or even bids No Trumps if he has good stops in the opponent's suit. This will help you to decide how to bid on.

### Responding to partner's overcall

When you can support partner's suit it's often a good idea to be aggressive in your bidding to make things difficult for the opponents, particularly if they are vulnerable and you are not. If you **use a UCB whenever you have real game-going support**, you can use direct raises of partner's suit as pre-emptive. With a weak hand and several cards in his suit, raise to the 'level of the fit'. If the bidding goes (1♥) 1♠ (2♥) ?? you know your partner must have at least 5 spades, so if you have four you have a 9-card fit- raise to 3♠; if you have five, you have a 10-card fit- raise to 4♠. This may stop the opponents making a 4♥ contract. [With six spades (11-card fit) it's probably wiser to raise to 4♠ rather than 5♠ though!]. Partner won't get excited and start looking for slams as he'll know you're weak because you didn't use a UCB.

If you cannot support partner's suit it's usually best to pass his overcall. You should only suggest a suit of your own if it's likely to be superior to his – e.g. if he overcalls in a minor and you have AKQxx of a major. You may have a singleton in his suit, but he may well have a void in yours!

The most important thing is- when responding to your partner's overcall, use **common sense! THINK** what he has told you with his bid.

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### Doubles

In the early days of bridge, "double" always meant that you expected to get the opponents' contract down. Later on it was realized that it's rarely worth doubling a low level suit contract for penalties, because if you're strong enough to take enough tricks to get the opponents down with their suit as trumps, you've probably got a better-scoring contract of your own. Nowadays, doubles of low level suit bids are normally played for takeout, asking partner to choose a suit.

Penalty Doubles:

1. Doubles of genuine No Trump bids are always for penalties (but it makes sense to play a double of the "dustbin" 1NT response as for takeout.)

2. If your side doubles an opponent's opening bid of 1NT and they try to escape into a suit, further doubles are also for penalties.
3. Apart from opening bids, doubles of suit bids higher than 2♠\* are for penalties.

### Takeout Doubles:

1. Doubles of opening suit bids at any level are for takeout.
  2. Apart from (2) above, doubles of all suit bids up to and including 2♠\* are for takeout.
- \* Some partnerships agree to play takeout doubles up to 3♠

### Responding to a Takeout Double

A classic takeout double of an opponent's opening suit bid shows opening points, shortage in the opponent's suit, and willingness to play in any unbid suit, e.g. (1♦) – X suggests your partner has opening points and is happy to play in clubs, hearts or spades.

### With no intervening bid:

If there is no intervening bid, you **MUST REPLY** even if you have no points at all. Your partner has said he has no defence to the opponents' suit, so the last thing he wants is for them to be left in it doubled! The only time you would pass a takeout double would be when you had something like AKQxx in the opponent's suit. Even then, look at the vulnerability to see whether you'd be better to pass and convert the double to penalties, or to bid No Trumps.

If you are very weak (0-7 points), bid your longest suit at the lowest possible level (preferring a 4 card major at the 1 level to a 5 card minor at the 2 level).

With 8+ points you know your side has the balance of the points (partner has said he has at least 12, and  $12+8 = 20 =$  half the points in the pack), so jump a level to tell partner the good news. If you have a good major suit and 12+ points, jump straight to game.

If your only 4 card suit is the opponents' suit, do not bid NT unless you have at least 2 good stops in that suit. It may be necessary to bid a 3 card suit instead:

For example after (1♥) - X - (P), with

♠ A54

♥ 7652

♦ KQ3

♣ Q98

Bid 1♠, the 3 card suit you can show with the cheapest bid.

### **After an intervening bid:**

The intervening bid cancels the double, so you can choose whether or not to reply. Bid as if your partner had made an opening bid in your longest suit (preferring a 4 card major to a longer minor).

For example the bidding goes (1♦) – X – (1♥) - ??.

If you have 4 spades, pretend your partner opened 1♠, and bid accordingly:

- With 0-5 points, PASS
- With 6-9 points, bid spades at the lowest possible level, in this case 1♠
- With 10+ points, jump in spades

N.B. When both opponents are bidding, your partner has doubled, and you have enough points to make a free reply, it's unlikely that either side has the 25 HCP normally needed for game! However, game might still be on with very distributional hands so, when you work out your points, count extra for shortages in other suits, or use the Losing Trick Count to help you to decide what to reply.

### **Responsive doubles:**

When partner doubles, and you have equal length in a major and a minor, it's usually best to opt for the major. With both majors, or both minors, it's more difficult to choose, but if your RHO raises his partner's suit, a responsive double can help:

After (1♣) – X – (2♣) or (1♦) – X – (2♦), double by you says you have both majors, and can't decide which is best to bid. It asks the original doubler to choose.

Similarly, after (1♥) – X – (2♥) or (1♠) – X – (2♠), double by you suggests you do not have the unbid major, but you do have both minors and are not sure which to choose.

### **Doubles on Strength not Shape:**

The normal upper limit for a suit overcall is 16 HCP. If the opponents open the bidding and you have 17+ points you should double first and bid your long suit on the next round. Your partner will respond as if you have done a classic takeout double. When you reject his suit and bid your own it tells him that you doubled because you were too strong to overcall.

It follows that when you double on fewer than 17 HCP, you must be prepared to accept whichever suit your partner chooses!

## ▲ Negative Double

The old-style traditional action over the opposition's intervening overcall is to double for penalty, based on a useful holding in the over-called suit. However this situation is fairly rare and also the penalty exacted is usually insufficient.

A better method is to use the double as a take-out – the so called 'Negative Double' (sometimes referred to as a 'Sputnik Double' – it was invented in 1957!). This has far more frequency and is much more effective.

(Note – there are a number of styles in the use of Negative Doubles. The style presented below is the easiest practical approach, but not necessarily the best approach – this can be more complicated. The emphasis is on showing the unbid major. This is very much a bid where it important to develop a 'feel' for the situation).

Example (simple)

♠ 1072  
♥ AJ94  
♦ Q765  
♣ 95

after 1♣ - (1♠); playing traditional methods this is almost impossible to bid (you either pass or fudge a 1NT bid). But playing Negative Doubles, you merely double to show the other suits (but the emphasis is on the major).

The detailed requirements are:

Responder's Action

General – to double you require 7+ points (if doubling at the two-level, I personally like to have 9+ points).

1. At the one-level, if the overcall does not prevent you from making the bid that you would normally make – then:
  - a. With a five card major, bid the major
  - b. With a four card major, in principle, prefer a double (exceptions 4,5 below)
2. If the overcall prevents you from making the bid you would otherwise have made, and you have a five+ card major, you can only bid at the two-level with 9+ points (e.g. 1♦ - 1♠(overcall) - 2♥).
3. If the overcall prevents you from making the bid you would otherwise have made, then with four of the other major and sufficient points - DOUBLE (7+ points if you are at the one-level; 9+ points at the two-level). The ideal take-out situation is to have two four-card unbid suits – and partner will bid on this basis. However, without the four-card minor you can correct later.
4. With 4-4 in the majors, after a sequence 1♣ - 1♦ (overcall), it is best to double rather than bid 1♥ (which is what you would do without the 1♦ overcall).



5. A 1NT bid (7-9 points) should contain a partial stop in the overcalled suit. (With 5-6 points, pass, and if partner re-opens with a double, you then bid 1NT).
6. After 1♥ - 1♠ (overcall) – a double must show 4-4 in the minors and 7+ points.
7. If playing a strong 2NT (e.g. Jacoby), this should still apply over the overcall, so with a balanced 10-11 points – double (see 18).
8. Otherwise pass (even with a hand which you may wish to double the overcall for penalties).

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## ▲ The Losing Trick Count

### THE LOSING TRICK COUNT (LTC)

This is a method of hand-evaluation that assesses the trick-taking potential of two hands combined, especially in a suit contract. It is best used only when you have a fit in a suit, which you would like to play with as trumps - you should have at least eight trumps between the two hands. Usually this fit will be in a major, because on many occasions when we have a fit in a minor suit we prefer to play in a notrump contract, however if you are sure you want to play in a minor suit, you can use it then too.

You might think you do not need another method of evaluation, and that is quite true, but surely the more methods you have the better the judgement of a hand you can make.

The LTC should not be used by itself, it has to be in conjunction with the standard point counting system (Milton Work Count). If used sensibly the LTC is an invaluable tool for the aspiring bridge player.

The basic LTC works like this - Once a FIT has been found you:

1. Count your losers
2. Add your partner's losers
3. Subtract from 18

The result given will give the expected number of tricks available with the fit suit as trumps.

Let's start by learning to count our losers - there are three basic rules:

- (a) Only the first three cards in any suit can be losers.
- (b) Only the ace, king and queen are winners.
- (c) 'Droppable Honours' count as losers - (i.e. a singleton K or a doubleton Q).

Here are some examples: note that this is the essence of the LTC so it is important that you understand how to count losers. Try the examples and make sure you follow the reasoning.

S 543  
H 54  
D 5432  
C 5432

This hand looks easy - surely there are 13 losers! No, not in our system - remember, only the first three cards of any suit count. So there are three losers in spades, two in hearts and only three in diamonds and three in clubs - the fourth card in each of the last two suits does not count as a loser - thus the answer is 11 LOSERS

S AK4  
H J54  
D KQ54  
C 654

Adding a few high cards, will obviously change things, but remember, we only count the first three cards in any suit. In spades we have one loser (Ace and king count as winners). In hearts we have three losers (Jack is not a winner). In diamonds, remember that the D 4 does not count (the fourth card in the suit), so there is just one loser in diamonds (king and queen count as winners), and three losers in clubs.

TOTAL = 8 LOSERS

S AK43  
H Q  
D KQ543  
C 654

Changing the shape a little more will also change things. Remember neither the S 3 nor the D 43 will count, because they are in long suits. Only counting the first three cards - we have one loser in spades, one in hearts (the queen will fall under a higher honour and so counts as a loser (rule 3)), one in diamonds and three in clubs - 6 LOSERS

S AK5432  
H Void  
D KQ432  
C 43

Even more shape. This time the S 432 do not count nor do the D 32. This means that the only losers on this hand are S 5, D 4 and C 43 - 4 LOSERS

S AK4  
H AK4  
D AK54  
C AK4

Now this hand is a little bit stronger in high card points! However it has the same number of losers - 4 - one in each suit.

These last two hands demonstrate the two important factors determining the number of losers in a hand - POINTS and SHAPE. The more unbalanced a hand the less the number of losers and the more points in a hand the less the number of losers.

Although the 28-point hand appears a lot stronger for a notrump contract, in a suit contract (say spades) the two hands are of similar strength. Remember we only count losers when we have a fit, so our partner with spades too, might be able to ruff some

diamonds and be able to establish that suit making our hand look to be worth 8 or 9 tricks - perhaps even more than the obvious 8 top tricks of the hand below. This is the power of the losing trick count, it is able to evaluate the long suits, the shortages and the high card points and give you one simple answer. We will see how to use it as we go on.

Unfortunately before we go any further we do have to add one more thing to the counting of losers:

Compare these two hands

S	Q432	S	A432
H	Q432	H	A432
D	Q432	D	A432
C	2	C	2

Both of these hands have just 7 losers, but there is distinct difference between the two. Clearly the queen is being over-valued - to counter-balance this the Queen is often counted as HALF a loser. So the two hands above are worth  $8\frac{1}{2}$  & 7 LOSERS respectively.

However when the QUEEN combines with an honour it is a lot stronger and is worth a full winner. So S KQ43 would count one loser and H QJ43 would count 2 losers whilst D Q432 would count  $2\frac{1}{2}$ .

SO the FOURTH and final rule with regard to counting losers is:

(d) The QUEEN counts HALF except when combination with Ace, King or Jack.

So before we move on let us try two more examples, remembering all four rules:

S	KQ6
H	AQ543
D	Q43
C	63

Spades - one loser (queen with king so full winner)

Hearts - one loser (queen with ace so full winner) and we only count first three cards.

Diamonds - two and a half losers (queen by herself)

Clubs - two losers

TOTAL  $6\frac{1}{2}$  LOSERS

S	Q543
H	QJ32
D	A87
C	Q2

Spades - two and a half losers (queen by herself) and we only count first three cards.

Hearts - two losers (queen with jack so full winner, but the Jack is never a winner itself) Diamonds - two losers

Clubs - two losers (don't forget rule 3 - the queen will drop under the ace-king and so is a loser)

TOTAL  $8\frac{1}{2}$  LOSERS

The last hand is probably the most difficult you are likely to come across, so if you got it right well done - if you did not get it right, try to make sure you understand why. Once you have mastered counting your losers you are halfway to mastering the losing trick count.

Let us refer back to the Basic LTC

1. Count your losers
2. Add your partner's losers
3. Subtract from 18

We have done 1, but how on earth do we do 2?

This is rather like assessing the number of points partner has. When our partner opens the bidding (at the one-level) he has a minimum of 12pts, and a minimum responding hand has 6pts - these are values you have to remember. It is similar with losers - you have to remember the values for a minimum opening hand and a minimum responding hand.

MINIMUM Opening hand = 7 losers      MINIMUM Responding hand = 9 losers

And rather like in the point count system we assume our partner has the minimum.

E.g. When your partner opens 1NT (12-14 points) and you have 11 points you do not jump to 3NT, because he might have just 12 points. You assume he has the minimum and thus bid 2NT - if he does have 14 points he can then bid on.

The losing trick count works in the same way - we always assume our partner has a minimum hand unless he tells us differently.

That is all there is to PART 2! All that leaves is the subtraction sum - taking away from 18.

Why do we subtract from 18? Because it gives us the right answer! But for those who would prefer to know a little more... The maximum number of losers between two hands is 24 (not 26 because you have to have one four-card suit in each hand) - if you take away from 24 you get the number of tricks you can make (for example: ten). If you can make ten tricks how many do you have to bid? Six less, i.e. four, hence we subtract from (24-6) 18 to get the number we should bid.

Don't worry about why because you do not need to know. What you do need to know is that the Losing Trick Count is an excellent form of hand evaluation and is well worth learning. You are probably getting a little bogged down, for there is a lot of information to take in.

However, we will continue by introducing a lot of examples and by going through them slowly, I hope you will see how the Losing Trick Count works and how useful it can be.

West	East
S K432	S A876
H AK432	H 65
D K32	D AQ76
C 2	C 876
1H 1S	
?	

The auction starts simply - you only count losers when you have a fit, so there is no need to count losers to start with, but when East bids 1S, West knows that they have a fit and should thus count his losers: 2 in spades, 1 in hearts, 2 in diamonds and one in clubs = 6 losers.

How many losers has partner got?

Don't look!

You should assume he has the minimum for a responder - 9

Adding your losers, 6 to partner's loser's, 9 = 15

Then subtracting from 18-15 = 3

-> Bid three spades.

Now your partner can do the same. He counts up his losers:

2 in spades, 2 in hearts, 1 in diamonds and three in clubs = 8 losers.

How many losers has partner got?

Minimum opening hand = 7, but hold on a moment, your partner has not got a minimum opening hand because he bid 3S rather than 2S - so he must have a better hand, i.e. 6 losers

Adding your losers, 8 to partner's loser's, 6 = 14

Then subtracting from 18-14 = 4

-> Bid four spades.

Now that was a whole lot of work - but bear in mind that we did do the calculations for two people, thus doubling the workload.

However there is an easy way - rather than doing all of this work, you can actually simply compare your hand to its minimum.

So the auction would go like this

(repeated for convenience)

West	East
S K432	S A876
H AK432	H 65
D K32	D AQ76
C 2	C 876
1H 1S	
?	

After East's 1S response, West knows they have a spade fit and can count his losers - he counts six losers. Now all West has to do is compare his hand to its minimum:

"As opener my minimum hand is SEVEN losers, with that I would respond 2S, but I am one better, so I bid one more 3S."

Then the responder (East) does the same, but of course he compares his hand to his minimum which is NINE losers for a responding hand. With nine losers he would of course pass 3S, but with 8 losers (one better) he bids one more 4S.

Now that is a lot easier - no long calculations, just simply comparing your hand to its minimum - all you have to remember is whether you are the opener (minimum 7 losers) or responder (minimum 9 losers) and that is not so difficult is it.

You can actually put it in table form:

RESPONDER'S TABLE (with support for 1S opening):

Minimum =	9 losers	minimum	2S
	8 losers	intermediate	3S
	7 losers	strong	4S*

\* it can be important to differentiate between 'strong' and 'distributional' hands with 7 losers. To see this, have a look at these two hands replying to 1S:

S J10432	S A876
H Void	H K5

D A109832     D AQ76  
C 32            C 876

Both have seven losers, but surely they should not be bid in the same way?  
Hand 1 bids 4S - the direct raise showing a distributional hand - whenever you have weak hand with support raise the suit straight away to the level suggested by the LTC.

Hand 2 bids 2D - taking advantage of the fact that our partner has to make another bid, and after he makes his second bid, you plan to jump to game, therefore having delayed your raise to game by one round - hence the name DELAYED GAME RAISE.

OPENER'S TABLE (with support for responder's suit (1D-1H) :

Minimum = 7 losers    minimum raise    2H  
              6 losers    intermediate        3H  
              5 losers    strong                4H

I am sure you are still very confused but do not be worried.

Here come plenty of examples that will allow you to follow exactly how it all works:

S AKQ32     S 7654  
H A532     H K84  
D 643     D 7  
C 4        C A8532  
  
1S     3S  
4S     End

A nice succinct auction. West opens 1S and with a fit right away East counts his losers à 8 losers - one better than minimum, so rather than 2S, he bids one more, 3S. Now West counts his losers à 6 losers. He, of course, as opener, compares to seven losers. He is also one better than his minimum, so he bids one more - 4S.

A great auction - the LTC has evaluated the worth of the singleton diamond - all that is need to make the contract is to take two diamond ruffs.

S KQ43     S A10762  
H 4        H 976  
D 62     D K43  
C AK8765    C 42  
  
1C     1S  
4S     End

This time we have two natural bids: 1C and 1S before West counts his losers - just five! With 7 losers he would bid 2S, with six, he would 3S, but with five he should bid 4S! It looks a bid odd, but whenever you start to doubt the LTC, have a look at the strength of your long suits and if they are good then trust the system - here there is no doubt that your suits are first rate and thus you should jump to game! That is not the end of the auction, East might have further ambitions, so he counts his losers. Nine losers and this is of course a minimum hand, so East happily passes. What a great game on just 19 points. The beauty of it is that the LTC predicted what would happen. If clubs break 3-2 you can establish the suit by ruffing one club and thus C 765 will be winners.

S K432     S AQ765  
H AK       H 65

D AK854    D 32  
 C 32        C AK54

1D    1S  
 4S    ?

One of the things that most club players struggle with is when to bid on to slam and this is something that the LTC can help with enormously. Take a look at this hand for example: after 1D-1S West counts his losers and finds five. Similarly to the previous hand he should jump straight to game - 4S. However as suggested, this is not the end of the auction. East counts his losers - six. Now remember he is the responding hand, so he compares to a minimum of nine losers. So: with 9 he would pass, with 8 he would contemplate 5S, with 7 he would think of 6S and with 6 he should be dreaming of 7S!

Yes, what the LTC is saying is that there is a great chance of slam, but do not forget, that you can only make these tricks if you are in control (have the aces and kings). After all you could have S AKQJ10987 in one hand and H AKQJ10987 in the other - that is worth sixteen tricks - but if both hands have a doubleton club, then your opponents could take the first two tricks! That is an extreme example, but it points out that it is important to check for aces/controls if you are going for a slam, rather than blindly following the LTC. This hand is not ideal for Blackwood with its two small doubletons, but the important thing to note is that the LTC says there is a chance that a Grand Slam might be on, so your really should bid on over 4S - however you do it. If you do use Blackwood, you will find all the aces and all the kings in place so 7S is the place to be! Note that 7NT would not make - just eleven tricks.

What about other fits: 5-3, 6-2 etc.? The LTC works similarly:

S 3            S QJ654  
 H AK432      H 987  
 D 432        D A5  
 C AQJ2      C K83

1H    1S  
 2C    3H  
 4H    End

West's rebid of 2C is standard Acol and therefore shows five cards in the first bid suit. Hence East knows that there is an eight-card fit and he uses LTC. He holds an 8-loser hand and so rebids one level above the lowest level - not 2H but 3H. Opener holds 6 losers, and can therefore go for game.

S 1043        S AK952  
 H AK432      H 8  
 D A10932     D 764  
 C -            C J765

1H    1S  
 2D    2S  
 3S    4S

When East rebids spades we have found our fit and we can count are losers - 6 losers so we can raise one level (partner might still have 9 losers). But East actually has just 8 losers and so can raise to game. This is a relatively extreme example, but you can

see how it can work. Having said that you can also see that some of the contracts you might reach, may not be so straight-forward to play!

It takes some getting used to, but it really is a very useful tool but please make sure it is just a tool and not a be all and end all!!

For an example of where it might go wrong try:

S K9876	S QJ102
H K4	H 32
D K654	D QJ872
C K3	C 42
1S	3S
4S	End

Following the LTC blindly, East counts eight losers and so responds 3S and West counts six losers and bids on to game. We might go down in 2S let alone 4S! Notice the difference between 4 Aces and 4 Kings!

There are many little tips that can be used with the LTC and one is:  
“Beware an aceless hand!”

You should always take half a loser off if your hand does not have an ace.

In fact in the extreme case that you hold neither a king nor an ace (as with East) you should take a whole loser off.

Another tip is that a queen in your partner’s suit counts full value - this is because it is much more likely to be well supported.

I am sure there are endless other tips that could be added, but the important thing is just to try it. Persevere with the system for a month or two - if you still can’t grasp it, or you still find your results not improving then give up, but I would be surprised if you don’t find that you will be one of those pairs that is able to put ‘4S made’ on the traveller whilst most are filling in ‘2S+2’ or getting to slams when the traveller is filled with ‘4S+2’s.

You do need to give it some time, though, because whenever you try something new it will take time to stick.

*Last updated : 17th Mar 2014 10:53 GMT*

## Weak Two Openings

### **Weak Twos in the Major Suits**

Weak Twos have become very popular at club level - they are the equivalent of a pre-empt at the two-level rather than the three-level. Two important things to note before we start our journey into Benjaminised Acoll are:

You have to agree that you are playing weak twos with your partner - if you do so, then you need to show Strong Twos in a different way, as we shall see.

Secondly the rest of your system, (one-level and three-level openings), remains the same - you still open a weak three with 5-9 pts and a seven-card suit for instance.



## BENJAMINISED ACOL (Acol with WEAK TWOS)

The system of Weak and Strong Twos described below was the invention of Albert BENJAMIN hence the title Benjaminised Acol.

This is our new system

2C	'ACOL TWO' in ANY SUIT	
2D	23+ OR GAME FORCE (ACOL 2C)	
2H	6-10pts	6 card heart suit
2S	6-10pts	6 card spade suit

## WEAK TWOS

So our 2H and 2S are weak pre-emptive bids - let us start our discussion of weak twos by stating how many points they show and what kind of suit.

(1) High card point strength - 6-10 - the higher limit is obvious because with 11 pts and a six card suit we have enough strength to open - the lower range can be stretched down to five if all the points are in the long suit (with a little extra inner strength) - KQ10943 & AJ10943 are worth opening even with no points aside.

## (2) STRENGTH of SUIT

It is important to have a certain amount of strength in your suit - do not open a weak two if your suit is horrible - you are simply mis-describing your hand.

Below I give an outline of how strong your suit should be, but these are only as a guideline - as you get used to playing this system you will be able to decide how strong or weak you want to play your suits.

You should have:      TWO of the TOP FOUR honours  
                                         OR THREE of the TOP SIX cards

AK9876, KQJ765, AJ10543, QJ10543 are excellent suits

KJ7654, A109432, QJ8765, J109765 would just qualify

Q76543, J107432 would NOT qualify

A107654, K108765 would be borderline

Note that when you are non-vulnerable you can be more flexible.

## RESPONDING TO WEAK TWOS

The most common response to a weak two is PASS.

Remember that weak twos are pre-emptive bids, so to respond to them you need a similar strength to that required to respond to a weak three:

Without support you need at least 16 points to make a strong response.

With support however, you can sometimes respond with nothing.

There are three different types of response other than PASS

(1) The main strong option over a weak two is TWO NOTRUMPS which is a conventional response that will ask the opening bidder to accurately describe his hand.

(2) A change of suit response is VERY UNUSUAL and is usually made with a very strong hand that does not want to play in the opened suit - a change of suit is FORCING for one round showing at least a good five-card suit. This is very similar to a change of suit response to a three-level pre-empt. It is a very rare response and I will not discuss it further here.

(3) Finally a raise of the weak two is WEAK & PRE-EMPTIVE not invitational - this is important - it simply extends the pre-empt and as the example hands show this can make life very difficult for you opponents.

As suggested above the 2NT response to a weak two is STRONG & CONVENTIONAL - it usually shows 16+ points and it asks opener to describe his hand - the opening bidder responds according to the table below describing the strength of his suit and the number of points he holds.

2H-2NT      Over the forcing 2NT the responses are as follows:

	Weak Two Suit	High Card Points
3C	WEAK	WEAK
3D	STRONG	WEAK
3H	WEAK	STRONG
3S	STRONG	STRONG

They are not quite as difficult as at first might seem:

With a very bad hand you bid the lowest response, 3C and with a very good hand you bid the highest, 3S. To remember the two responses in between, I usually think like this: 'the higher you bid the more points you need' and thus 3D shows good suit, but bad points, whilst 3H the higher bid, shows the good points, but bad suit.

There is one other possible response to 2NT- 3NT which would show specifically AKQxxx in the major suit.

This does seem a bit convoluted but what it means is that you can bid very accurately over a weak two, which is why the system is so popular - unlike over a weak three opening from your partner when you often have to guess the final contract, over a weak two we can have an educated auction and more often than not, reach the best final contract.

### *How do we know when a suit is strong?*

This is very simple: a suit is strong if and only if you hold 2 of the TOP 3 Honours.

So KQ6543 counts as a strong suit

Whilst AJ10987 counts as a weak suit

The reason for this is that it is so important to know about the top three trump honours, because if we have an eight card fit and hold all the top honours we can be pretty hopeful of six tricks in the suit.

### *What about points?*

STRONG = 9 OR 10 pts      WEAK = 6 OR 7 pts

With 8 points you have to judge whether it is 'GOOD' or 'BAD'

For example:

S	K Q 10 7 6 5	S	J 10 9 5 4
H	Q 7 5	H	A K 7
D	J 6	D	8 6 5
C	7 6	C	4

GOOD SUIT  
 BAD POINTS  
 3D

BAD SUIT  
 GOOD POINTS  
 3H

You open 2S on both of these hands and your partner responds 2NT, what do you respond?

Well the question about the suit is simple - HAND 1 is Strong and Hand 2 is weak, but what about the POINTS. Both have eight points so you need to judge whether they are strong or weak.

On Hand 1 we are going to say we have a strong suit, so take a look outside the suit and see if you think it merits good points?

Certainly not - a meagre jack and queen in isolation - so respond 3D

Hand 2 in contrast - has two certain tricks outside its 'bad' suit, as well as holding S 109 to bolster the suit - hence this is worth a Strong response and would bid 3H.

Our first example shows how accurate the bidding can be:

S	K Q J 10 9 7	S	A 2
H	8 7 6	H	A 3 2
D	7 6	D	A 9 8 3 2
C	6 4	C	A 10 3

2S	2NT
3D	3NT

West has a good hand for a weak two. East has a lovely hand and thus inquires with the 2NT bid. West describes his hand - GOOD SUIT, WEAK POINTS - hence 3D. Now clever East can count 9 tricks because with his S A and West's promised S KQ there are six spade tricks to go with his three other aces; so he bids 3NT, rather than 3S or the forlorn 4S.

These next two hands show how the 2NT response is usually used:

	S Q109873	S J2
HAND	H J76	H AK2
X	D K6	D AQJ32
	C 64	C Q83

2S	2NT
3C	3S

	S KQ10983	S J2
HAND	H J76	H AK2
Y	D K6	D AQJ32
	C 64	C Q83

2S	2NT
3S	4S

In these two examples, the responding hand is the same: it is strong, but cannot be sure of game. Bidding 2NT asks the weak two bidder to describe his hand.

Hand X West has: WEAK suit & WEAK points à 3C

Hand Y West has: GOOD suit & GOOD points à 3S

East uses these responses to stay out of game on hand X, but to bid onto game on hand Y. As you can see the only difference between the two West hands is the S K so on set X there are four simple losers - S AK, C AK, whereas on set Y there are just the three losers- S A, C AK.

Basically by finding out how strong your partner is, you can decide whether game is on, hence you do not need the 3S response to be invitational, which leads us on to the next example.

Let us now look at the idea of raising the weak two - EXTENDING THE PRE-EMPT

This is a very important aspect of weak-twos and greatly increases the disruption they can cause. If your partner opens a weak two and you have a weak hand with support you can be pretty sure that your opponents will have a game on and should thus make life as difficult as possible for them.

	S 10	NS GAME
	H QJ976	
	D J87	
	C A1074	
S AK7642	S 853	
H 543	H 2	
D 92	D KQ6543	
C 63	C J82	
Svv QJ9		
H AK108		

D A 10  
C K Q 9 5

2S 3S

West starts with 2S and North passes. East is very weak, but he has great support for spades and good distribution. Now is the time to bid 3S - pre-emptive - this makes South's life a misery! South could double for take-out, but this will take his side beyond 3NT, so he might try 3NT instead - this will not be a disaster because it will make at least 11 tricks, but +660 is not very good compared with +1430 for 6H!

Had you passed the 2S opening then North and South have much more room to explore and if South starts with a double and hears North jump to 4H they may well reach 6H.

You might ask about the risks about such bidding. Well on this hand the vulnerability was in our favour and this always makes quite a difference. However more significant is the size of your fit and your distribution. Whenever you have a big fit with a little distribution you will find you can make an amazing number of tricks relative to your strength. Just 13 points, but seven easy tricks.

On the hand above East might even have risked a 4S bid straight away again leaving South in a pickle - even if doubled this will only give away 500 points - less than the 600+ available for any game, let alone a slam.

Basically you can raise the pre-empt on any hand with reasonable support and some distribution - try not to consider raising on flat hands, because you will contribute very little to the play - whereas with a singleton as above - you are sure of making extra tricks, where there will be none in defence.

*Last updated: 16th Mar 2014 17:36 GMT*

## ▲ Second Hand Plays Low

SECOND HAND plays LOW (Hand 2)

When you are the second player to play to a trick you should generally play a small card:

the reason for this guideline is that your partner has still to play on the trick. The opposite

is true when you are the third or fourth person to play - in these situations you may

need  
to play high because your partner has already played.  
Exceptions to 'second hand plays low' are rare - with a doubleton (two cards), you might need to play a high card because otherwise your high card will fall on the next round. However, the most common exception is when declarer has led a high card - this gives you the opportunity to use your high card to kill his high card thereby fulfilling its ambition:  
this is dealt with on hands 3-5 and the subject is called 'covering honours'.

*Last updated: 19th Mar 2014 17:00 GMT*

### ▲ Never lead away from an Ace

NEVER LEAD AWAY FROM an ACE against a SUIT CONTRACT

All rules have their exceptions but this has very few. The first and most basic reason for not risking underleading an ace against a suit contract is that someone might have a singleton, so that if you lead small, then your ace will not get a chance to win a trick. However you should try to avoid leading an ace unless you also hold the king - this is because an ace's job is to kill another high card. A further reason for sticking to this rule is because it helps your partner to play in third position - your partner can always assume that declarer and not you holds the Ace. - this makes quite a difference to his play at trick one.

*Last updated : 19th Mar 2014 17:08 GMT*

### ▲ New Suit above the Barrier

When making an opener's rebid, only bid a new suit 'Above the Barrier' when you have 16+ points.

**South**  
**K 8 7 5**  
**A Q 7 6 2**  
**K 8 2**  
**3**

South  
West  
North  
East  
1  
Pass

2  
Pass  
2

It may be tempting to rebid 2 but this is a new suit above the barrier and shows a much stronger hand.

The reason you need 16+ to bid a new suit above the barrier is that if partner has to give preference to your first suit the bidding will end up at the three level and you may not have enough strength for nine tricks.

*Last updated: 27th Mar 2014 09:57 GMT*

## Forth Suit Forcing

**Fourth suit forcing is a bridge convention and it is used to help decide the best contract. It is a bid used by the responder if they have 11+ points and is used if:**

- Three suits have already been bid (hence the name)
- You don't have a fit (8+ cards in a suit) with your partner
- You DON'T have a stopper in the remaining (4<sup>th</sup>) suit.

At this stage (3 suits already bid) a bid of the fourth suit doesn't mean that you hold good cards in the suit and want to bid it. It is a conventional bid which means "I don't have a stopper in this suit, what else do you have?"

If the declarer's answer is "yes, I do have a stopper in that fourth suit" then they can bid No Trumps.

Here is an example to help explain:

### Example

Responder holds: Spades K J 8 5 2, Hearts 7 4 3, Diamonds A 6, Clubs A Q 7

Opener bid 1D, responder bid 1S. Opener rebid 2C.

This hand has enough points for a NT bid, but doesn't have a stopper in hearts. Three of the four suits have now been bid, so if responder bids the remaining suit (hearts in this case) the bid is asking the opener if they stopper in that suit. If they do, they bid NT. If they don't have a stopper in hearts they must make another bid. As the name implies, the bid of the fourth suit is a forcing bid and the opener must bid again.

Remember that 4th Suit Forcing should only be used if you have 11+ points. You can use 4th suit forcing at the 3 level if you have 13+ points as you know you and partner have at least 25 points (partner held the 12 points or the equivalent to open) and are looking bid for game.



## **Openers Rebids**

### **With stopper in fourth suit**

**If the opener has a stopper in the fourth suit but just a minimum opening hand (12 -13 points) then s/he should bid 2NT**

**If the opener has a stopper AND 14+ points then s/he can bid 3NT as they know there are enough for game. (14 + partner's minimum of 11)**

### **Without Stopper in Fourth Suit**

**If the opener has extra length in either their first or second bid suits they should rebid them. A rebid of the first suit would show 6 cards and a rebid of the second suit would show 5 cards.**

**With 3 card for responder's original suit and minimum points, bid two of the responder's suit.**

**With 3 card support in responder's original suit AND 13+ then make a jump bid.**

**The main aim of answering a 4th Suit Forcing bid is tell your partner something that they don't already know, if possible.**

**Here are a few examples:**

#### **Example 1**

**Opener has Spades – 6, Hearts – K 5 2, Diamonds, A Q 9 5 3, Clubs K 10 7 3.**

**Opener bid 1D, Responder bid 1S, Opener rebid 2C, Responder bid 2 H. The 4th suit forcing bid by responder shows 11+ points**

**Opener has a stopper in hearts but only minimum points (12), so bids 2 NT. Responder can rebid 3NT with 13+ points.**

#### **Example 2**

**Opener has Spades – 8, Hearts – K 9 4, Diamonds – A Q J 7 3, Clubs K Q 6 5. The bidding went as before in example 1. But this time opener holds 15 points and so can go straight to 3NT**

#### **Example 3**

**Opener has Spades – J 6 3, Hearts – 8, Diamonds – A Q J 7 3, Clubs – K Q 9 4. Bidding as before. Opener doesn't have a stopper in hearts but can rebid 2S to show 3 cards in spades. It's possible responder might hold 5 spades. They already know opener doesn't have four, otherwise opener would have supported their first bid of 1S.**

## ▲ The Rule of 20

The Rule of 20 is used only when **opening the bidding**. Is used to test whether hands with **less than 12 points** are suitable for opening.

Add up your High Card Points (HCP) and add the length of your two longest suits. If the total is 20 or more then you can open the bidding.

**Hand 1**  
A K 7 6 4  
6 5 2  
A 9 8 3  
7

Hand 1 has 11 HCPs. The lengths of the two longest suits are five and four. This makes a total of 20, so the hand is suitable for opening.

**Hand 2**  
8 4  
A K 7 6 4  
Q J 8 3 2  
7

Hand 2 has only 10 HCPs but has two 5 card suits. It passes the Rule of 20. We open 1.

**Hand 3**  
K J 8  
A 5  
9 7 2  
Q J 8 3 2

Hand 3 does not pass the Rule of 20.

*Last updated : 30th Mar 2014 16:42 BST*

## ▲ Landy

### 2-suited Overcalls, Landy over 1NT

Isn't it annoying when you have an opening hand but the opponents open with a weak 1NT?

Your normal options mean that you need to overcall at the 2-level with a 6-card suit, or a good 5-4, and a strong hand. But what if you have an opening hand with two good 4-card Majors? Is there anything you can do?

Enter "Landy", a bid of 2♣.

If you use Landy, here's what the various overcalls mean after 1NT

- Double = for penalties
- 2♣ = Landy, below
- 2♦/♥/♠ = natural suit overcall of a 1NT
- 3♣ = natural club overcall

Here's what 2♣ promises to your partner:

- HCP in the Majors
- two 5-card Majors, *or*
- two good 4-card Majors
- 6 losers (so, a good opening hand, compared with the normal 7-loser opening hand)
- 7 losers if not vulnerable
- I DO NOT HAVE CLUBS!

## Response. You *have to* reply unless you have 7 clubs

That's because your partner probably has almost no Clubs at all. In other respects, respond as if your partner had opened with 1 of a Major (7 losers). Use point count and Losing Trick Count to assess how high to bid.

Since you don't know which Major is longer, you simply reply with your longest if there's a 3-card fit (2 level) or 4-card (3+ level). If they are the same length, reply in 2♦ to ask overcaller to say which Major he prefers.

Other responses

- If you are strong (13+ HCP) but no 4-card Major, reply 2NT
- If you have 10-12 HCP, reply 2♦

Obviously, partner does not know which reply of 2♦ that you mean, so will reply with his longest Major, allowing you to find the best fit, and either pass or rebid 2NT if you have 10-12 HCP.

<http://www.bridgewebs.com/badgworth/news.html>