



# The opening bid of 1 no trump and responses

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## The opening bid of 1 no trump and responses

- What do I expect if partner opens 1 no trump?
- Responding to 1NT with a balanced hand
- The Stayman Convention
- Transfer Responses
- Jump Responses

# The opening bid of 1 no trump

An opening bid of 1 no trump shows a balanced hand with 12-14 points ***(NB: if you decide to use a strong 1NT opening instead, adjust your responses accordingly)***

We define balanced as

- No singleton or void

- No more than one doubleton

- No 5-card or longer major suit

The hand will usually be 4 3 3 3 or 4 4 3 2 shape

The hand may contain a 5-card minor suit – it will then be 5 3 3 2 shape

# Responding to 1NT with a balanced hand

Since partner also has a balanced hand, this is often a case of simple arithmetic. The combined values needed for a game in no trumps are about 25 points, and for a small slam about 33-34 points. So when responding with a balanced hand:

less than 11 points    Pass

11-12 points            Invite game with a raise to 2NT (*but see later for an alternative*)

12-18 points            Raise immediately to 3NT

19-20 points            Invite slam with a raise to 4NT

21-23 points            Raise to 6NT

But if you decide to raise, don't forget to use Stayman or transfer if appropriate! We shall look at these shortly.



## Responding to 1NT with a balanced hand: examples

♠ A 8 5  
♥ K 7 4  
♦ 10 7 5 4  
♣ Q 6 5

Responder has 9 points, and even if opener is maximum (14 points) the combined values are short of the 25 or so needed for game. Pass.

♠ A 6 4  
♥ K 3 2  
♦ K 10 7 4  
♣ A 9 6

Adding your 14 points to opener's values gives a combined holding of 26-28 points. This is fine for a game, but well short of slam. Bid 3NT.

1NT - pass - ?

♠ A J 5  
♥ 7 4  
♦ K 10 7  
♣ A J 9 3 2

With 13 points and a relatively “flat” hand, a contract of 3NT should be a good bet. Game in clubs requires 11 tricks and therefore more values. Raise to 3NT.

♠ A 9 4  
♥ K 10 2  
♦ J 10 7 4  
♣ K 9 6

With a “good” 11 points, game may be on if opener is better than minimum. Invite him to go on to game if he holds a decent 1NT opening bid by raising to 2NT (not forcing).

♠ A J 5  
♥ A Q J  
♦ K 10 7  
♣ A J 9 3

Holding 20 points, you must think in terms of a slam. This should be fine unless opener is dead minimum. Raise to 4NT, inviting him to bid 6NT unless his opening is minimum.

♠ A 6 2  
♥ Q 10 5 3  
♦ 8 2  
♣ A K 8 4

Although a raise to 3NT would not be bad, there is a better alternative. If opener has 4 hearts, then game in hearts may well be easier than 3NT. We shall find the way to discover if this is the case shortly.

# The Stayman convention

What if responder has a 4-card major and wishes to know if opener also holds 4 cards in the suit, so providing an 8-card trump fit that would make a major suit contract attractive?

How does responder find out if opener has the 4-card fit for his major suit? Why is it so important to find a fit (if it exists)?

When responder has a 4-card major suit and values for game, and the opener also has 4 cards in that major, then the combined 8-card trump fit will usually produce a superior game contract in the major rather than 3NT. Here is an example:

West		East
♠ K 7		♠ A 6 2
♥ K J 9 4	■	♥ Q 10 5 3
♦ A 6 5		♦ 8 2
♣ Q 9 3 2		♣ A K 8 4

West opens 1NT. With a balanced hand and 13 points, we have enough to raise to 3NT. However, a diamond lead may well defeat this contract.

The solution is to be found in the Stayman Convention - the most popular and useful artificial bid of all.

A response of 2♣ to the opening 1NT is nothing to do with clubs. Instead, it is artificial, and asks the 1NT opener if he holds a 4-card major suit.

Opener must reply as follows:

2♠	I have a 4-card spade suit
2♥	I have a 4-card heart suit
2♦	I have no 4-card major suit

Sometimes opener will hold both 4 hearts and 4 spades. The correct response here is 2♥, and most books will say that a reply of 2♠ denies four hearts. In fact it does not matter whether opener, with both majors, replies to the 2♠ enquiry with 2♥ or 2♠, as long as the partnership remember that the 2♠ enquiry initially implies the presence of a 4-card major suit in responder's hand (why would responder ask the question if he has no 4-card major suit himself?). However, it is easiest to play that a response of 2♥ is made holding both majors, with a 2♠ reply showing four spades but denying four hearts.

## How strong do you need to be to use Stayman?

You will perhaps hear players saying that “they wanted to bid Stayman, but they were not strong enough”. So, the question is: how strong must you be to bid Stayman?

Since the response of 2♣ (Stayman) is a question, and in itself promises nothing specific, the only requirement is that the responder should not be embarrassed by any response that opener may make.

Remember that there are only three possible responses to your 2♣ bid: 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠.

Usually responder will hold enough strength to continue with a bid of at least 2NT if the response does not reveal a fit.



## Examples:

1NT - ?

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

Responder has the ideal strength to invite game with 2NT. However, he can invite game via Stayman: if a major fit exists, by raising to 3♥ or 3♠, or bidding 2NT over 2♦

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

Again, the response to 1NT Should be Stayman. This time, responder has values for game, so he raises 2♥ or 2♠ to game in the major, or bids 3NT over a 2♦ response.

However, there are some situations where Stayman can be used on a weak hand. Consider the following hands after partner has opened 1NT:

1NT - ?

♠ J 8  
♥ K 7 5 4 2  
♦ Q 5 3 2  
♣ 6 4

Responder shows his ♥, as his heart suit is likely to be useful as trumps, a normal “weak takeout”. Do not use Stayman here, as a reply of 2♠ would embarrass you!

♠ J 8 4 2  
♥ K 7 5 4 2  
♦ Q 3 2  
♣ 6

This time, a Stayman 2♣ is fine. Over a 2♦ response you can bid 2♥, and you are happy to pass if opener bids 2 of either major. No reply presents a problem.

On occasions responder may be able to pass any response and have reasonable expectations that the contract thus reached is better than if he had passed the opening bid of 1NT, e.g. opener bids 1NT and responder holds

♠ 9 5 3 2  
♥ 7 4 3 2  
♦ 10 9 7 5 4  
♣ void

What if responder bids 2♣ (Stayman)? He can pass a 2♦ reply (so this becomes the contract, just as if he had responded 2♦). He will also pass a 2♥ or 2♠ reply, having found a 4-4 fit which is surely better than passing 1NT.

Remember - you can use Stayman providing nothing can go wrong. Here, no reply will embarrass you.

# Typical Stayman sequences

1NT	2♣	(do you have a major suit?)
2♥ (hearts)	4♥	(good, so do I, plus values for game)
pass		

1NT	2♣	
2♥	2NT	(don't like hearts, pass or bid 3NT)
3NT		(better than minimum)

1NT	2♣	
2♥	2NT	(as above)
4♠		

(maximum, 4 spades as well as 4 hearts, inferring a 4-card spade suit in responder's hand because he used Stayman)

## Quiz on using stayman

Which of the following hands are suitable for using a Stayman 2♣ response to partner's opening bid of 1NT?

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

This is a good hand for Stayman. If opener bids 2♠ you raise to 4♠. Otherwise, you will simply bid 3NT over a 2♦ or 2♥ response to your Stayman enquiry.

♠ A J 8 4  
♥ K 9 8  
♦ 7 5  
♣ K 10 8 7

Again, responder should start with Stayman. This time, he has values to invite game, so he raises 2♠ to 3♠ (invitational) or rebids 2NT over 2♦ or 2♥, inviting 3NT.

1NT - pass - ?

♠ 8  
♥ A J 7 4  
♦ 10 8 7 5  
♣ K 8 6 5

Do not use Stayman on this hand. You are fine if partner obliges by responding 2♥, but you are in trouble if he bids 2♦ or 2♠. If you then bid 2NT it would show about 11 points.

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

This is a time when Stayman can be used with very limited strength. You intend to pass a reply of 2♥ or 2♠, and over 2♦ you bid 2♠, which is still a weakness takeout.

# TRANSFER RESPONSES TO 1NT

## Introduction

The principle of transfer responses is as follows:

- a response of 2♣ is Stayman
- a bid of 2♥ shows a 5-card or longer heart suit
- a bid of 2♠ shows a 5-card or longer spade suit
- a response of 2♦ can now be used in a conventional way
- a response of 2NT is also conventional
- 3-level bids show a strong suit in a hand with slam interest **(but see later for another use)**

We shall examine how this structure works, and the advantages that it provides in responding to the 1NT opening bid.



## The responses of 2♦ and 2♥

The response of 2♥ shows a hand containing at least five hearts. It asks opener to bid 2♥. After this, responder can pass with a limited hand (the equivalent of making a weak takeout bid of 2♥ when using standard responses to 1NT) or bid on with extra values.

Similarly, a response of 2♠ shows a hand with at least five spades and asks partner to bid 2♠. This can be passed (which is equivalent to 1NT - 2♠ when not using transfers) or responder may bid on.

These responses of 2♥ and 2♠ are known as *red suit transfers*

**Note: if opponents double the 1NT opening or bid a suit, transfers are abandoned and suit bids become natural.**



## Continuing the bidding after 1NT - 2♦ - 2♥

When responder has made the transfer response of 2♥ and opener has dutifully bid 2♥, responder may continue as follows:

- Pass                    showing a weak takeout to 2♥ (0 points +)
- Bid of a new suit      natural, forcing for 1 round  
(e.g. 2♠, 3♠, 3♣)      (opener cannot pass)
- 3♥                      a 6-card or longer heart suit, invitational  
***(but see later for a different use)***
- 4♥                      a 6-card or longer heart suit, sign-off

In addition, responder may now bid no trumps. This would show a balanced hand, bearing in mind that responder, by using the transfer response, has already shown a 5-card major suit.

So, after **1NT - 2♦ - 2♥** responder may bid:

- 2NT (a) exactly five hearts, otherwise a balanced hand
- (b) 11-12 points, inviting game

Opener may now:

pass or bid 3♥ (declining the game invitation)

raise to 3NT or bid 4♥ with enough to go on to game

Similarly, after **1NT - 2♦ - 2♥** responder may bid:

3NT showing a five card heart suit in a balanced hand and enough points for game, e.g. 13+ points

Opener may now choose between 3NT (by passing) when he holds only two hearts and a game of 4♥ with three or four card support for partner's 5-card suit.

Note that, since the 3NT bid by responder is not forcing, he must bid more strongly if he wishes to show a 5-card heart suit, a balanced hand and also slam ambitions.

## Bidding hands that are a problem without transfers

Using standard (non-transfer) responses to 1NT, there are a number of hand types that present a problem. Consider the following hand:

♠ 8 7  
♥ A Q 6 4 3  
♦ K 7 4  
♣ Q 10 8

We saw that responder may invite game with a sequence using Stayman (bidding 2♣ then 3♥ as an invitation). However, if opener is minimum with only two hearts, a 2NT contract would be preferable to passing 3♥

Now we may show this hand by bidding 1NT - 2♥ and after the 2♥ bid by opener, we bid 2NT. When opener is minimum, he may pass with no liking for hearts.

Here is another example of how the transfer style of responses may help us to avoid an awkward situation:

♠ 8 7  
♥ A K 6 4 3  
♦ 8 7  
♣ A K J 7

Using standard methods, a forcing response of 3♥ is made, but if opener bids 3NT, do we bid on? There may be a slam in clubs, but it may be that 3NT is our best spot. The 3♥ consumes too much bidding space.

Now we may show this hand by bidding 1NT - 2♥ and after the 2♥ bid by opener, we bid 3♣. This shows 5 (or more) hearts, 4 (or more) clubs and is forcing. We have described our hand well, and opener may now bid on according to his hand: 3♥ (minimum), 3NT with no fit for hearts, or 4♥ with three or four cards in hearts (maximum).

## Examples of using transfer responses

Responding to West's opening bid of 1NT:

♠ Q 9 8 7 5  
♥ 7 5 2  
♦ J 10 8  
♣ 7 4

East responds 2♥ and passes the 2♠ reply. This has the advantage that the opening lead comes round to partner's stronger hand, which may help to protect his holdings in a particular suit.

♠ 8 7  
♥ A Q 7 5 2  
♦ 8 7 2  
♣ A K 4

East bids 2♦ and then bids 3NT over West's 2♥ reply. This shows exactly five hearts in a balanced hand and enough values for game. With ♣J rather than ♣K, East would bid 2NT (invitational) on his second bid.

♠ 8 7  
 ♥ A Q 8 7 5 2  
 ♦ A 8 7  
 ♣ 7 4

East responds 2♥ and passes the 2♥ reply. This has the advantage that the opening lead comes round to partner's stronger hand, which may help to protect his holdings in a particular suit.

♠ A J 8 7  
 ♥ K 10 8 7 2  
 ♦ K 7  
 ♣ 7 4

East bids 2♥ and over the 2♥ reply he continues with 2♠. This invites West to bid the best game holding a maximum, and with a minimum to bid 2NT, 3♥ or 3♠ which responder may pass.

♠ K 8  
 ♥ A Q 8 7 5  
 ♦ K 7  
 ♣ Q 9 7 4

East responds 2♥. After opener's 2♥ reply, responder should realise that, with points in all suits, a no trump contract is the likely alternative to game in hearts, so should now bid 3NT rather than 3♣ (forcing).



♠ K 7 3  
 ♥ A Q 8 7 5  
 ♦ 7  
 ♣ A Q 7 4

This time, East bids 2♦ (transfer) and then 3♣ (forcing). If opener now bids 3♥ to show a minimum, East may bid 3♠. This cannot be a suit (East would have preferred 2♠ over 2♥) helping West to judge the best contract.

♠ 8 7  
 ♥ A Q 8 7 2  
 ♦ Q 7  
 ♣ Q J 7 4

East bids 2♦ and over the 2♥ reply he continues with 2NT, as he is not strong enough for a bid of 3♣. He has shown a balanced invitational hand with a five card heart suit – a good description.

♠ 9 8  
 ♥ A Q 8 7 5  
 ♦ 8 7  
 ♣ A J 10 9

East responds 2♦ and this time may continue with 3♣ (forcing). This may seem excessive but is in fact safe. This is because if opener is minimum he will now bid 3♥ and East can pass.



## Opener's continuation after a red suit transfer

Often responder, after the transfer and opener's reply, may make a bid that decides the final contract. However, he may choose a continuation that asks opener's opinion. For example:

West	East
1NT	2♦
2♥	2NT

This is invitational, so opener has two questions to answer:

- Should I accept the game invitation or settle for a part-score?
- Is hearts or no trumps the correct denomination?

The bidding starts:

West	East
1NT	2♦
2♥	2NT
?	

♠ K J 7  
♥ 7 2  
♦ A Q 7 3  
♣ K 6 4 2

West passes 2NT. With only two hearts he prefers this to a heart contract, and with a poor 13 point hand he is not worth a game. If he had 14 points, or even some good intermediate cards, he would raise to 3NT.

♠ A J 8  
♥ K 7 5  
♦ A Q 4 2  
♣ 7 4 3

West jumps to 4♥. His hand is maximum, so he accepts the invitation, and he has 3-card support for partner's 5-card heart suit. If West had only 12 points, or a poor 13 points, he would bid just 3♥.

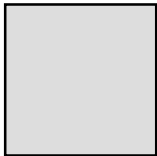
## Super-accepts: breaking the transfer *(optional)*

When responder makes a red suit transfer, opener's hand may be so improved by the knowledge that his partner has a 5-card major suit that he wishes to show some enthusiasm. He would like to make a bid other than simply the normal reply to show how suitable his hand appears to be.

There are various ways to do this, but the simplest is to jump in the major to show a "super-accept". Responder may then reconsider if he wishes to bid on.

Of course, if responder was intending to pass the expected (i.e. non-jump) reply with a hand wishing to make a weakness takeout, then the partnership may find itself too high.

Here is an example of this method:

West		East
♠ 7 6		♠ 10 9 8
♥ K Q 4 3		♥ A J 10 9 6 5
♦ A 10 8 4		♦ J 9
♣ A 5 4		♣ K 2

West	East
1NT	2♦
?	

West	East
1NT	2♦
3♥	4♥
pass	

West's hand is so suitable when partner shows a 5-card heart suit that he "breaks" the transfer by jumping to 3♥. East was going to pass a normal reply of 2♥, but now he reassesses his hand and bids on to the good game in hearts.

## The 2♠ response to 1NT

Using red suit transfers, a natural response of 2♠ is no longer needed. It is therefore available to be used in a conventional (artificial) sense. It shows

EITHER        a value raise to 2NT, 11-12 points, no 4-card major (else responder would use Stayman)

OR              18+ points with slam ambitions, searching for a 4-4 fit (including the minor suits)

Opener replies 2NT with a minimum hand (and responder, with the first type will pass, but with the strong type will, of course, bid on). With a maximum, opener shows his lowest 4-card suit. With the strong type of hand, responder may now move forward, looking for a possible fit for slam purposes.

## The 2♠ response in action

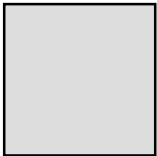
West opens 1NT, and East holds:

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

East bids 2♠. If West shows a minimum with a rebid of 2NT, East will pass. However, if West has a maximum and bids a suit, East will simply bid 3NT. This shows West which type of 2♠ bid East had.

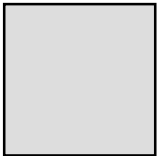
♠ K Q 5 4  
♥ A 8  
♦ K Q 10 8  
♣ A 7 4

East again bids 2♠. If West shows a minimum by bidding 2NT, East will content himself with 3NT. But if West shows a maximum by bidding a suit, East will bid on, raising or bidding his own suits.

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

West	East
1NT	2♠ <sup>1</sup>
3♣ <sup>2</sup>	3♥ <sup>3</sup>
4♥ <sup>4</sup>	4NT <sup>5</sup>
5♥ <sup>6</sup>	6♥
pass	

- <sup>1</sup> East is looking for a slam and tries to locate a 4-4 suit fit
- <sup>2</sup> Showing a maximum and a 4-card club suit
- <sup>3</sup> Four diamonds and slam interest
- <sup>4</sup> Confirming the 4-4 diamond fit
- <sup>5</sup> Blackwood, checking that two aces are not missing
- <sup>6</sup> Two aces

♠ A 7		♠ K Q 5 4
♥ Q 10 9		♥ A 8
♦ A 9 8 4		♦ K Q 10 8
♣ Q 9 8 6		♣ A 7 2

West	East
1NT	2♠ <sup>1</sup>
2NT <sup>2</sup>	3♠ <sup>3</sup>
3NT <sup>4</sup>	pass

- <sup>1</sup> East has slam interest if opener is maximum
- <sup>2</sup> West's 2NT rebid shows a minimum hand
- <sup>3</sup> East is no longer thinking of a slam. However, he bids 3♠ in case opener has a spade fit.
- <sup>4</sup> No fit for spades



## The 2NT response to 1NT

Since the invitational raise to 2NT can now be made via the response of 2♠ (sometimes called a **Baron 2♠ response**) the immediate bid of 2NT can be put to better use.

The response of 2NT tells opener to bid 3♣. Note: opener may not “break” this transfer. It shows a weak hand with a long minor suit that simply wants to play in the suit at the 3-level (**but see later for a further use with a strong hand**). After opener bids 3♣, responder passes or bids 3♥.

♠ 10 9 7 6

♥ K Q J 9

♦ Q 4

♣ A 5 4



♠ 8

♥ 3 2

♦ J 10 9 6 5 3 2

♣ Q J 2

West

East

1NT

2NT

3♣

3♥

pass

# Responding to 1NT with Invitational or Strong Unbalanced Hands

*What follows lays out some options for bidding good unbalanced hands – you should discuss with your regular partner which methods you choose.*

With a good hand containing a major suit of 6+ cards, you have two options:

- (i) jump in the suit directly, eg 1NT–3♥;
- (ii) transfer to the suit and then repeat it, eg 1NT–2♦–2♥–3♥.

You should use one of these to show a game invitational hand with 6+ ♥, and the other to show a slam try with 6+ ♥. Which you should choose is a matter to discuss with your partner; my personal preference is to use the direct jump as invitational, and the repeat of the transfer suit as a slam try.

With a hand containing a minor suit of 6+ cards, most players use a jump bid to show a hand that is invitational to 3NT: thus 1NT–3♣ or 3♦ means “I have a good 6 card minor with about 10-11 points – please bid 3NT if you are maximum and have some help in my minor, otherwise pass”

So how can we show a slam try in a minor? We can use an extension of the 2NT transfer bid as follows:

- (i) 1NT – 2NT – 3♣ - pass = a weak hand with long ♣
- (ii) 1NT – 2NT – 3♣ - 3♦ = a weak hand with long ♦
- (iii) 1NT – 2NT – 3♣ - 3♥ = a strong hand with long ♣
- (iv) 1NT – 2NT – 3♣ - 3♠ = a strong hand with long ♦
- (v) 1NT – 2NT – 3♣ - 3NT = a strong hand with both minors

These methods cover all possible cases where you have an unbalanced hand containing a minor suit.

# The Gerber Convention

Very rarely, all you might want to know is how many aces the 1NT opener has; how do you do this? You cannot bid 4NT (Blackwood), because this is *quantitative* (asking partner to pass or bid 6NT with a maximum).

This is one of the few cases where the 4♣ Gerber ace asking convention can be used **(NB; the wider use of Gerber as a general ace asking bid is NOT recommended)**. Opener shows the number of aces that he holds by bidding up the line, ie

4♦ with no aces

4♥ with one ace

4♠ with two aces, etc

## Some further matters to discuss with your partner

- \* How do you deal with a penalty double by the opponents?
- \* How do you deal with a natural suit overcall by the opponents?
- \* How do you deal with an artificial overcall by the opponents?



The End!

Thanks to you all for coming along!

And Good Luck in your Bridge