

All about the 2NT bid (Standard American is assumed)

A bid of 2NT is usually balanced, showing a specific point range. It is often invitational for partner to bid 3NT, but how many points does it show? 20-21? 11-12? 18-19? 12-14?

In fact all of the above (and a few more) are common – it depends upon the circumstances. Now there are many situations where you can bid 2NT and we will consider the following: -

A. Your side opens the bidding

- 1 A 2NT opening bid.
- 2 A 2NT rebid after opening 2♣
- 3 A 2NT bid after partner's 2♣ opening
- 4 A 2NT bid after 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥/♠
- 5 A 2NT rebid after opening one of a suit
- 6 A 2NT response to partner's 1 level opening
- 7 A 2NT response to partner's 1NT opening

B. The opponents open the bidding

- 8 2NT in response to partner's double
- 9 2NT in response to partner's overcall
- 10 A 2NT overcall over a 2 level opening
- 11 Double followed by 2NT
- 12 2NT overcall in 4th seat

C. Special meanings

In all of the above, 2NT was natural. But 2NT is sometimes used as a conventional bid. These are some of the more common ones and they are all covered in the Conventions link: -

Truscott 2NT: Partner opens 1♥/♠, RHO doubles, what does 2NT by you mean?

Ogust: Partner opens 2♥/♠, what does 2NT by you mean?

UNT: RHO opens 1♣/♦/♥/♠, a 2NT overcall by you is the UNT.

Jacoby 2NT: Partner opens 1♥/♠, 2NT is played as artificial showing ♠ support.

4-way transfers: Partner opens 1NT, 2NT by you is a transfer to ♦'s. This treatment is best left to advanced players, it is covered in the NT bidding book.

Lebensohl: Partner opens 1NT, RHO overcalls 2♣/♦/♥/♠, what does 2NT by you mean?

Lebensohl is perhaps rather complicated and best left to experienced players, it applies in a number of situations and is described in the 'conventions' link.

1 The 2NT opener

A big balanced hand. Traditionally it is 20-22 pts, but these days many players prefer 20-21 with the 22 point hand included in the 2♣ opening.

2 2♣ followed by 2NT

A big balanced hand. Traditionally it is 23-24 pts, but these days many players prefer 22-24.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5	Hand 6
♠ KJ2	♠ KQ	♠ AQ764	♠ AQ76	♠ AQ76	♠ KQ8
♥ KJ7	♥ AQ7	♥ K8	♥ A	♥ K8	♥ AK7
♦ AQ875	♦ AJ	♦ KQ6	♦ KQ96	♦ AK6	♦ AQ
♣ AQ	♣ AJ9653	♣ AQ5	♣ AQ97	♣ AQJ7	♣ AJ965

Hand 1: 2NT. An ideal 2NT opener.

Hand 2: 2NT. A 6 card minor is certainly allowable.

Hand 3: 2NT. And a 5 card major is also allowable.

Hand 4: 2NT. A 2NT opening may work out best with this hand. You do not want to play in 1♣ passed out. Unlike with the 1NT opening, a (high) singleton is allowed with the 2NT opener.

Hand 5: Open 2♣ followed by 2NT.

Hand 6: Open 2♣ followed by 2NT.

Incidentally, in all of these situations where partner has opened 2NT (either directly or via 2♣) then it is best to play Stayman and transfers unless you have a more sophisticated scheme such as Puppet Stayman or Niemeijer. In the UK Baron (often in conjunction with transfers) is quite commonly played. These schemes are fully described in the conventions link.

3 2NT in response to partner's 2♣ opener

When partner opens 2♣ then a negative 2♦ is 0-6 points. Some players have other agreements here, such as 2♦ waiting, or 2♦ as positive with 2♥ as a really bad hand.

With 7+ points you make a 'positive response' and 2NT is defined as a balanced 7-9.

4 **2NT 2nd negative in response to partner's 2♣ opener**

Assuming you play the standard 2♦ negative, then when partner opens 2♣ and you have 6 or less points then you bid 2♦. If partner then bids 2♥ or 2♠ then you can show a really miserable hand with a 2nd negative of 2NT – about 0-3 points. Some players prefer the cheapest bid in a minor to bidding 2NT to show this really poor hand.

So playing standard methods we have: -

Hand 7	Hand 8	With Hand 7 partner has opened 2♣. The correct response is 2NT, showing a balanced 7-9 points. It is game forcing.
♠ K2	♠ J2	
♥ KJ7	♥ 65	With Hand 8 partner again opened 2♣ and so you bid a negative 2♦. Partner then bids 2♥ and your correct reply is 2NT – a second negative, 0-3 points.
♦ 8753	♦ 8752	
♣ J864	♣ 87642	

A 2NT rebid after opening one of a suit.

In Standard American an opening 1NT is 15-17 points. So we show other ranges (12-14 and 18-19) by opening 1 of a suit and then rebidding either 1NT or 2NT: -

5.1 A 2NT rebid after a 1 level response from partner.

Suppose you open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠. Then a 1NT rebid by you would be 12-14 and so a 2NT rebid is 18-19 points. This 2NT rebid is not strictly forcing but it is very rarely passed (only if partner responded with a real heap, say a 4 or 5 count).

5.2 A 2NT rebid after a 2 level response from partner.

But suppose you open 1♦ and partner responds 2♣ this time. Your cheapest NT bid is 2NT and so we need this to show the balanced 12-14 range. With 18-19 you would have to rebid 3NT.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
♠ KJ2	♠ KJ	♠ K82
♥ KJ7	♥ AJ7	♥ KJ7
♦ AQ87	♦ AJ	♦ Q872
♣ AQ5	♣ AJ9653	♣ AJ5

Hand 1: You open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠. The correct rebid is now 2NT, showing a balanced 18-19 points.

Hand 2: You open 1♣ and partner responds 1♠. The correct rebid is now 2NT, showing a balanced 18-19 points. 3♣ would be incorrect because it is non-forcing and would show a weaker hand (about 15 points).

Hand 3: Hand 3 is not good enough for a 1NT opener and so you open 1♦. If partner responded 1♥ or 1♠ then you would happily bid 1NT. But if partner is inconsiderate enough to respond 2♣ then you have to rebid 2NT. This does not show a big hand. It is partner who has pushed you up to this level and the 2NT bid here shows 12-14 points.

Now suppose that we go back to the first scenario where partner responded 1♠, but this time RHO overcalls with 2♣. What do you do?

You must pass! This time it is not partner who has pushed the bidding up to the two level and a 2NT bid in this scenario would show 18-19 points (perhaps slightly less – but definitely not 12-14).

5.3 A Raise to 2NT when partner responds 1NT

<p>Hand 1</p> <p>♠ AKQ82</p> <p>♥ KJ7</p> <p>♦ 96</p> <p>♣ A976</p>	<p>Hand 1 has the values for a 1NT opening but most players would prefer 1♠ because of the good suit and weak doubleton. So you open 1♠ and partner bids 1NT. This is slightly different from a 1 level suit response. Here it is partner who has limited his hand and 2NT is invitational and since partner is 6-9 then you need a good 16 or 17 points to invite with 2NT. This hand qualifies and I would bid 2NT although the more adventurous may try 3NT.</p>
---	---

Note that this scenario (raising partner's 1NT response to 2NT) is not that common playing Standard American as opener would have opened 1NT with many of the 16-17 point hands. It is much more common playing Acoll, where a 1NT opening is 12-14.

5.4 A 2NT rebid after partner has supported your suit

If you open one of a suit and partner raises your suit to the two level, then why would you want to bid 2NT? And is it natural?

The answer is that it depends upon whether you had opened a major or a minor.

<p>Hand 1</p> <p>♠ KJ72</p> <p>♥ KJ7</p> <p>♦ Q87</p> <p>♣ QJ5</p>	<p>Hand 2</p> <p>♠ AJ72</p> <p>♥ KJ7</p> <p>♦ A74</p> <p>♣ AQ54</p>	<p>You opened these hands with 1♣ and partner supported with 2♣. Now partner's bid is quite explicit, 6-9 points and no 4 card major. What's more, he decided not to bid 1NT and it is quite likely that he has 5♣'s and 6 or 7 points. So without a very good hand you should pass. With Hand 1 you would have bid 1♠ over 1♦/♥. But over partner's 2♣ response you pass. Hand 2 is stronger and you would hope to make 3NT unless partner is very weak, so bid 2NT; invitational to 3NT, it shows about 18-19 points, a hand too strong to open 1NT. Playing a weak No Trump it may be about 16-18.</p>
--	---	---

<p>Hand 3</p> <p>♠ KJ972</p> <p>♥ KJ7</p> <p>♦ KJ</p> <p>♣ KJ5</p>	<p>Hand 4</p> <p>♠ KJ9762</p> <p>♥ QJ7</p> <p>♦ K7</p> <p>♣ AQ</p>	<p>You opened these hands with 1♠ and partner supported with 2♠. Partner's bid is again 6-9 points and he has 3 or 4 card support. With Hand 3 you probably should have opened 1NT, but if your style is not to open 1NT with a 5 card major or you play a weak NT, then bid 2NT (invitational – about 16-17 points) now. Hand 4 also wants to make a try for game. With no specific suit to ask with a help-suit game try, 3♠ is best; it would be a mistake to bid 2NT as partner may pass this with a weak hand with just 3 poor card ♠ support.</p>
--	--	---

Summary of opener's 2NT rebid: -

1♦ - 1♥ - 2NT	is 18-19
1♦ - 2♣ - 2NT	is 12-14
1♦ - 1NT - 2NT	is 16-18
1♦ - 2♦ - 2NT	is 18-19
1♥ - 1NT - 2NT	is 16-18
1♥ - 2♥ - 2NT	is 16-17

A 2NT response to partner's 1 level opening

When partner opens the bidding then a 2NT response is a natural, non-forcing bid. It is 11-12 points. And what's more, it has the same meaning if it is made at the first opportunity or later. In SAYC the direct 2NT over a 1♣/♦ opening has a different (stronger) point range, but most players play that 2NT is always 11-12. Note that it is unnecessary to use the SAYC variation if you play inverted minors. The 2NT bid denies a 4 card major. Note that over a 1♥/♠ opening many play 2NT as conventional (the Jacoby 2NT).

Hand 1	Hand 2	Partner opens 1♣. Hand 1 is a classic 2NT response – a balanced 12 points with no 4 card major.
♠ K82	♠ K82	But Hand 2 is different – it contains a 4 card major and the correct response is 1♥. No problem. If partner then bids 1♠, 1NT or even 2♥ then 2NT shows this balanced 11-12 point hand with a 4 card ♥ suit.
♥ KJ7	♥ KJ74	
♦ Q876	♦ Q87	
♣ QJ5	♣ QJ5	
Hand 3	Hand 4	This time Partner opens 1♠, what do you do? If you do not play Jacoby 2NT then 2NT still shows a balanced 11-12 count and so is the correct bid with Hand 3.
♠ 82	♠ 82	But Hand 4 is different – it contains a 4 card ♥ suit. Now one cannot bid 2♥ because that promises a 5 card suit.
♥ KJ7	♥ KJ74	The correct response with Hand 4 is 2♣. If partner then bids 2♥ you are happy (support with 3♥) and if partner bids 2♦ or 2♠
♦ Q876	♦ Q87	(so denying a 4 card ♥ suit) you can now bid 2NT – showing a balanced 11-12 points. If partner were to rebid 2NT (12-14) then you raise to 3NT with this hand.
♣ KQJ5	♣ KQJ5	
Hand 5	With Hand 5 partner opens 1♣ and you bid 1♠. Partner then bids 2♠, what do you do? You want to invite game and 3♠ is not wrong. But 2NT is a far better bid with this flat hand.	
♠ J874	It may just be that partner has only 3 card ♠ support and was fixed for a good bid (♠A106 ♥AQ97 ♦76 ♣K1095). 3NT is a better contract than 4♠.	
♥ K82		
♦ KQ5		
♣ QJ87		
Hand 6	And you may have both majors. With Hand 6 partner opens 1♦ and you bid 1♥. Suppose that partner then bids 1NT or 2♣, what do you bid?	
♠ KQ82	You cannot bid 2♠ as that would be a forcing reverse.	
♥ KQ82	But no problem, partner has denied a ♠ suit and so you have no need to mention yours. Simply bid 2NT.	
♦ 87		
♣ J95		

A 2NT response to partner's 1NT opening.

Nothing could be simpler. Partner is 15-17 and 2NT is invitational. Thus it is 8-9 points. But it does, of course, deny a 4 (or 5) card major. No problem, if you have a 4 (or 5) card major then you bid Stayman (or transfer) and then bid 2NT. So try all of these hands, partner opens 1NT (15-17).

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5	Hand 6
♠ KJ2	♠ KJ2	♠ KJ92	♠ KJ92	♠ KJ972	♠ KJ972
♥ Q97	♥ Q97	♥ Q7	♥ Q753	♥ Q75	♥ 75
♦ Q753	♦ Q10753	♦ Q753	♦ Q7	♦ Q7	♦ 75
♣ J72	♣ 72	♣ 1072	♣ 1072	♣ 863	♣ A962

Hand 1: Bid 2NT. A classic hand.

Hand 2: Bid 2NT. Don't bother to mention minor suits (you can't anyway) and don't worry about weak doubletons.

Hand 3: Here you have a 4 card major, so bid 2♣, Stayman. If partner bids 2♦ or 2♥ you bid 2NT, promising 8-9 points. Do not make the mistake of bidding 2♠. If partner bid 2♦ then he has no interest in your major suit and if partner bid 2♥ then knows that you must have 4 ♠'s if you bid 2NT. If partner bids 2♠ then you obviously raise to 3♠.

Hand 4: And it's much the same with both majors. Bid Stayman and raise a major suit response and bid 2NT over 2♦.

Hand 5: This time we have a 5 card major. So transfer and then bid 2NT.

Hand 6: And a tricky one to finish with. Obviously you transfer (so 1NT - 2♥ - 2♠ - ?) but what then? You would like to complete the picture by bidding 3♣ but you cannot as that is game forcing and you are a point shy. There's no real option but to bid 2NT after transferring.

Note that some more advanced players play a direct 2NT over partner's 1NT opening as a transfer to ♦'s. This is when playing 4-way transfers and it is fully described in the NT bidding book.

2NT in response to partner's double

This is similar to responding to an opening bid – its 11-12 points and denies an unbid major. But there is one more important factor – you must have (at least) one stop in the suit bid. Partner is usually short in the suit bid and so you need good cover.

Hand 1	Hand 2	
♠ K82	♠ KJ74	Here LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles: -
♥ KJ7	♥ K82	With Hand 1 you bid 2NT.
♦ Q876	♦ Q87	But Hand 2 has a 4 card ♠ suit and so you should jump to 2♠.
♣ QJ5	♣ QJ5	

2NT in response to partner's overcall

This is obviously balanced and must contain a stop(s) in the suit opened. The high card points requirement depend upon whether the overcall was at the one or two level. Obviously vulnerability is also a factor as is the soundness of partner's overcalls. Partner's one level overcall may be very weak (as low as 7 points) but a 2 level overcall should be about opening strength. Now when partner opens the bidding we often need 1NT as a general 'courtesy' bid; when partner overcalls this is no longer necessary and a general structure for NT bids after partner's overcall is: -

Partner's overcall is at the 1 level:

1NT = 10-12
 2NT = 13-14
 3NT = 15+

Partner's overcall is at the 2 level:

2NT = 11-12
 3NT = 13+

Hand 1

Hand 2

Here LHO opens 1♥ and partner overcalls (a) 1♠ or (b) 2♣.

♠ K8

♠ K8

(a) With Hand 1 you bid 1NT

♥ KJ92

♥ KJ92

(b) With Hand 1 you bid 2NT

♦ Q876

♦ A876

(a) With Hand 2 you bid 2NT

♣ Q52

♣ QJ5

(b) With Hand 2 you bid 3NT

This is a rough guide and vulnerability and the soundness of your partnership's overcalls may affect your decision.

A 2NT overcall over a 2 level opening

When the opposition open a weak two then a 2NT overcall has a similar meaning to a 1NT overcall over a 1 level opening. I.e. 15-18 points and a stop(s) in the suit bid.

Hand 1

Hand 2

Here RHO opens 2♥. 2NT is the best bid with both of these hands.

♠ KJ8

♠ KJ8

♥ KJ9

♥ KJ92

♦ AQ76

♦ AQJ76

♣ QJ2

♣ J

Note that even with that singleton ♣ I would still recommend a 2NT overcall with Hand 2. Unlike a NT opening, a NT overcall guarantees a stop in the suit bid but may have a singleton somewhere (usually not a major).

Double followed by 2NT

In olden says a direct 2NT overcall was a hand that was too good for a 1NT overcall. The 1NT overcall is 15-18 and so 2NT was 19-21 ish. But this type of very strong hand does not occur that frequently when the opponents have opened the bidding and the best way to describe this very strong balanced hand is to double and then bid NT.

Hand 1 With Hand 1 RHO has opened 1♠. The hand is too good for a 1NT overcall and so we double. Suppose partner then bids 2♣; we then bid 2NT - showing 19-21 points and a couple of stops in the suit bid (♠'s).

♠ KJ8 19-21 points and a couple of stops in the suit bid (♠'s).

♥ KJ9 And this approach (rather than the old one of bidding 2NT directly) has its advantages. Suppose that RHO had opened 1♣; then we again double with this Hand 1. Suppose partner bids 1♦/♥/♠ then we bid 1NT. This again shows a hand that was too strong to overcall 1NT and we are at a lower level which may be crucial if partner is totally bust. Note that if we do jump to 2NT after a 1-level response to our double, then this shows a very big hand, say 22+.

♦ AQ76

♣ AQJ

A 2NT overcall in 4th seat

Bidding in the 4th seat (pass-out seat) is totally different from the direct seat and there have been whole books written about the subject (but not by me – that is one area that I have not written about)

Anyway, since we can always pass with a poor hand any bid is constructive – there is no such thing as a pre-empt in 4th seat. So we no longer need 2NT as the UNT and it is natural. Also, since opener has just opened at the one level and RHO has passed (so presumably 5 or less points) partner must have some points. Indeed, he may have up to about 14 points but had no suitable bid over the opening. So it is our duty to bid in 4th seat if possible and the structure for bidding NT in the pass-out seat is: -

1♣/♦/♥/♠	pass	pass	1NT	=	11-14 pts
1♣/♦/♥/♠	pass	pass	dbl, followed by a NT bid	=	15-17 pts
1♣/♦/♥/♠	pass	pass	2NT	=	18-19 pts

This is fairly arbitrary and different partnerships have different ranges.