

Good hands are not just those with lots of points. Long suits and distribution are just as valuable for taking tricks – after all thirteen spades will take thirteen tricks when spades are trumps and that is only ten points.

Last time we looked at a 2NT opening bid for strong balanced hands. Now consider some other hands where the point count is high, but which are unbalanced – hands where we would be worried about missing game if partner were to pass a one opening. An opening bid of two of a suit is the answer. It is forcing for one round – partner must reply even with no points – so we are able to show strong one or two suited hands. Since we are forcing the bidding up to the three level an opening two bid will have at least eight tricks obviously available plus a bit extra that might give a ninth.

An opening bid of 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ shows:

- a good suit of at least five cards and often more
- a hand where with reasonable breaks we can count 8 and a bit more tricks
- a strong hand with high cards, usually in the 18 to 23 point range

♠ -
 ♥ A Q J 10 9 3 2
 ♦ A K 2
 ♣ Q J 10

One suited hands are opened with a two bid, when we can count at least eight playing tricks. With normal breaks the hearts will play for six tricks, the diamonds for two and the clubs for one. This is a typical 2♥ opener. Rebid 4♥ over 2NT and hope to find a tenth trick from somewhere.

♠ A K Q J 5
 ♥ 2
 ♦ A K Q J
 ♣ 8 6 4

We can see eight tricks in high cards plus the fifth spade makes nine tricks. It has two suits but a 5-4 distribution does not generate so many extra tricks, so we will need more high cards. Here 20 points are enough to open 2♠ and rebid 3♦.

♠ K Q J 10 9
 ♥ A K Q J 7
 ♦ 2
 ♣ 7 3

This hand has only 16 points but 5-5 distribution generates more tricks. With luck it should win four spade and five heart tricks. You would hate to open 1♠ and hear partner pass. Open 2♠ and plan to rebid 3♥. If the small club were a small spade, open 2♠ and rebid 4♥.

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

This hand has 21 points. We need more points with minors, as it is more difficult to assess the best game. Nevertheless, open 2♦ planning to rebid in clubs or raise hearts if partner bids them.

Responses to an opening two bid, for example partner opens 2♥

Pass	Pass is not allowed, as a two bid is forcing for one round.
2NT	A negative bid showing a poor hand, usually less than 8 points though sometimes a bit more with no suitable bid available.
2♠, 3♣, 3♦	A 5-card suit headed by a high honour and 8 or more points. Game force.
3♥	A simple raise of partner's suit is a game force, with one or more controls. Allows room to explore for slam.
3NT	Flat hand with some sort of stop in ♠ ♦ and ♣ and 8-11 points.
4♥	3 or 4 hearts, no aces, no slam interest.
Other bids	Other bids have meanings but are part of more advanced treatments.

My class found two bids easy to follow and the responses clear. At least, I thought so until this hand which was opened 2♦. Barbara responded 2♠ and heard opener rebid 3♣.

♠ K Q J 7 3
 ♥ J 9 3 2
 ♦ J 2
 ♣ J 10

Barbara passed 3♣ because she thought she had shown her hand and had no more to say. But her positive response of 2♠ created a game force. **Following any response apart from 2NT, neither partner can pass till a game call is made.** She should have bid 3NT.

♠ 7 5 3 2
 ♥ J 3
 ♦ Q J 10 5
 ♣ K J 4

John wanted to bid 3♠ with this hand after his partner opened 2♠. Very reasonably, he said that he would have raised 1♠ to 2♠. However, we use 3♠ for a more interesting raise and bid 4♠ on this weaker hand. 4♠ says that the hand has no aces, but it is worth going for game.

♠ 6 3
♥ 10 8 6 4
♦ A 10 5
♣ A 8 5 4

John understood this better when he opened 2♥ and his partner bid 3♥ with this hand. Both hands have eight points but two aces are much more useful than queens and jacks. On this deal the aces plus the spade doubleton were just the cards needed to make a slam.

♠ Q J 5
♥ Q 10 8
♦ 5 4 3
♣ K Q 8 5

Jean heard partner open 2♦. Calling me over, she said she wanted to bid 2NT to show her ten points but I had said that was a negative showing a poor hand. She suggested 3♣, but that usually shows a 5-card suit, so we worked out that 3NT would do nicely. We have the stoppers and we hope partner has lots of diamond tricks.