

Lesson 1 – 2 Over 1 for Beginners (abbreviated 2/1)

Topic: Opening 1 of a Suit with 2/1 Responses and 1NT “Forcing”

Why learn the 2/1 bidding system?

First, because many people believe that the 2/1 system is an improvement over Standard American and, second, because you might be playing against players who are using the 2/1 system and it is to your advantage to understand it.

What is 2/1?

When Opener bids 1 of a suit and Responder bids 2 of a different suit in the first round (without jumping a level), this is called 2/1.

This means that Responder has opening points as well (13+). Game is forcing in a major (4♥ or 4♠) or 3NT. This does not mean that Game is guaranteed in a minor, however. Game in a minor (5♣ or 5♦) usually requires 29+ pts, but distribution is always a factor to be considered.

Game Force is abbreviated GF.

What is the advantage of using 2/1 bidding?

The sooner that message of Game Force can be communicated to your partner, the better.

Requirements for a “2/1 GF” response:

These are the requirements to use a 2/1 GF bid by Responder:

1. Opener must be in 1st or 2nd seat.*
2. Responder must have 13+ points.
3. The opening bid is 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠. (If Opener bids 1♣, 2/1 GF does not apply.)
4. There cannot be an opening bid or intervening bid by opponent (except a “double”).

*To explain: The dealer is in 1st seat. The next player to bid is in 2nd seat. Seat 3 could be a weak opening so a 2/1 GF bid does not apply. Seat 4 is not totally reliable to respond with a 2/1 bid as other considerations are made when opening in 4th seat. An overcall by your partner over a bid by opponent could be weak. So, to use a 2/1 bid meaning GF, the opening bid must have been made by your partner in 1st or 2nd seat – no exceptions to that!

If this is too confusing for you, then you may want to reconsider trying to learn 2/1. If you can handle this so far, then please continue!

Note: I always teach my beginners using Standard American rules as I find that “2/1” rules are more complicated. Beginners can get discouraged easily.

There are only six 2/1 Game Forcing bids:

Note: Responder's bid is showing 13+ points and 4 of the suit bid, except for one situation (1♠ opening with 2♥ response promises 5 or more hearts).

1♦ (Opener) > 2♣ by Responder
(1♥ or 1♠ response over 1♦ is not GF)

1♥ (Opener) > 2♣ or 2♦ by Responder
(1♠ is not GF)

1♠ (Opener) > 2♣ or 2♦ or 2♥ (5+ hearts required) by Responder

Important to note:

1♣ (Opening Bid) — it is not possible to show GF after this as any other suit can be bid at the 1 level still. A change of suit in the first round is forcing and does not limit the Responder's point count.

Once a 2/1 response is made, both partners know that bidding should not stop until game is reached in a major or 3NT, so bidding can be slow.

Remember that game is not always reachable in a minor (and is not promised) with a 2/1 bid. It may be best to stop bidding before reaching 5♣ or 5♦ when a 3NT game contract does not appear to be safe (no stoppers in one or more suits), and yet having a minimum 8-card fit in a minor suit.

Once you decide to use 2/1 Game Forcing bids, you must have an alternative to respond with 6-12 points.

So, hand in hand with this bid, comes the **1NT "Forcing"** bid.

Requirements for 1NT Forcing by Responder:

1. Opener bid 1♠ or 1♥ (1 of a major) in 1st or 2nd seat.
2. Responder has 6-12 points.
3. Opener must immediately say "Forcing" or "Forcing for one round" so that opponents know this is what it means.
4. With 10-12 pts and 3-card support for Opener's major suit, Responder bids 1NT (forcing) and bids 3♠ or 3♥ in the next round.

Note: After a minor suit opening bid, 1NT is not forcing. Bidding a 1NT response after a minor suit opening denies a 4-card major and limits the hand to 6-9 pts, which is the same meaning as Standard American rules. Opener can pass.

Since Opener has 5 of a major when he opens 1♠ or 1♥, his usual response to partner's 1NT Forcing bid is to bid his 4-card suit next. If Opener has 6 of a major, he should bid the major again at the 2 level. There are many other bids after this that can mean different things. This lesson is meant to be simple for beginners.

After 1NT Forcing by Responder, sometimes opener must bid his 5-card major suit again, even though he has just 5 in that major. Responder must be aware of that.

So, without learning any more bids and to keep it simple, use the knowledge that a 2/1 bid is Game Forcing and a 1NT Forcing bid is showing 6-12 points. After that, use your judgement and try to get to the best possible contract.

An intervening bid by opponent means that these responding bids do not have the same meaning any more. Bid as you would normally, taking into account what your partner's bid meant and what the opponent's bid meant. If your partner opened in 1st or 2nd seat and you also have opening points, you have the majority of points in the deck, so you should be fighting hard for that contract. If the opponent bids anything in between, it could be just an overcall and they are attempting to compete for the contract.

An intervening double can be ignored and bidding can proceed according to 2/1 or whatever bidding system you are using. However, that is not to say that you should not pay attention to the double and what information the opponent is giving you by doubling. This knowledge can help considerably when playing out the hand.