

Lebensohl

Lebensohl is a conventional method that may be used to address many different bidding problems. It always involves the use of an artificial 2NT.

Lebensohl after our 1NT opening

Assume that your partner has opened the bidding with 1NT (15 to 17 HCP) and RHO has interfered with a natural bid of 2♠. How would you bid with the following holdings?

- #1 ♠75 ♥KJ10753 ♦975 ♣J2
- #2 ♠75 ♥Q10753 ♦AQ75 ♣K2
- #3 ♠75 ♥A107 ♦KJ75 ♣K1072
- #4 ♠A75 ♥A107 ♦J975 ♣Q102
- #5 ♠A75 ♥K1075 ♦A9 ♣10872
- #6 ♠75 ♥K1075 ♦AQ9 ♣Q1072

With the first hand we would like to be able to compete to (play in) 3♥ (no interest in game).
With hand #2 we would like to bid a forcing 3♥, ending up in 3NT or 4♥.

On hands #3 and #4 we are probably headed to 3NT. However, wouldn't it be nice to know on hand #3 if opener had a spade stopper? Using standard bidding methods, we would have to just bid 3NT and hope that opener had a stopper.

On hands #5 and #6 we could cue-bid 3♠ as Stayman asking opener to bid a 4-card heart suit. However, what if on hand #6 opener does not have 4 hearts? Wouldn't we again like to inform partner if we have or don't have spades stopped?

There is a solution to these problems--it is the lebensohl convention. Yes, it is technically spelled with a small "l" as nobody wanted to use their name for the convention.

The above hands illustrate the inadequacy of standard bidding methods in coping with these competitive situations. Lebensohl offers us a solution. However, as with all artificial conventional bids, there is a price to pay.

We use an immediate 2NT response over the opponent's 2-level overcalls to initiate lebensohl. Accordingly, we must forego 2NT as an invitational bid in competition. A small price to pay if all the aforementioned problems can be satisfactorily resolved. The 2NT call is alertable.

Using the same bidding situation (partner has opened 1NT and RHO has interfered with a natural overcall of 2♠), let's see how the convention works:

*A new suit by Responder at the 3 level is natural and forcing. (also NF on the 2 level).
If you as Responder merely wish to compete on the 3-level, you bid 2NT which is a forcing relay for partner to bid 3♣. You may then either bid your suit to sign off or pass if clubs is your suit.*

Lebensohl (continued)

In example hand 1, we would bid 2NT forcing opener to bid 3♣. Opener must 100% bid 3♣ (artificial and alertable). We would then bid our competitive 3♥ (sign-off).

With example hand #2 we bid an immediate 3♥ (same as your current standard bidding methods) which informs partner that we have game-forcing values with at least 5 hearts.

By using the 2NT forcing relay bid we have solved the problem of how to differentiate between a competitive response and a game-forcing response.

Now let's take a look at the next problem as illustrated with hand #3. Using standard bidding methods, as we mentioned earlier, we would just bid directly to 3NT and hope that Opener has a spade stopper. Now, however, we have another way of arriving at 3NT. We can first bid a forcing 2NT and after Opener obediently rebids 3♣, we now bid 3NT.

In other words, we now have two ways of arriving at 3NT. Accordingly, we use one way to show adequate values for 3NT but *without* a spade stopper and the other approach to show adequate values *with* a spade stopper.

Although there is no universal rule, most experts employ the fast approach (Responder directly bids to 3NT) to deny a stopper. Using the "slow" approach to arrive at 3 NT (Responder first bids 2NT and after Opener's 3♣, Responder now rebids 3NT); this delayed approach is used to show a stopper. It may be easier to remember this concept in slogan form: "Slow Shows! Direct Denies!" Or FADS ("Fast Always Denies Stopper").

Thus, with hand #3, since we do not have a stopper in spades, we would bid directly (Direct Denies) to 3NT. With hand #4, we have a spade stopper and therefore we take the slow route to get to 3NT (2NT relay to 3♣, then 3NT).

Stayman

After the opponents make an overcall of our 1NT, the standard method of bidding Stayman is to use a cue-bid.

With enough for game and 4 cards in a major, we can use Stayman and also show partner whether or not we have a stopper in the opponent's suit.

Just as we now have two ways of bidding to 3NT, *we have two ways of cue-bidding (Stayman).*

Let's examine hands #5 and #6. In both instances we wish to cue-bid (Stayman).

Here is how it works:

Lebensohl (continued)

Opener	Opponent	Responder	Opponent
1NT	2♠	2NT	Pass
3♣ (forced)	Pass	<u>3♠</u>	

or

1NT	2♠	<u>3♠</u>
-----	----	-----------

The two sequences show how we can either go through a relay (“slow”) and then cue-bid (Stayman with a stopper) or just (“fast”) cue-bid directly (Stayman without a stopper).

When employing lebensohl we again have a choice. We can use one method of cue-bidding to show a stopper and the other method to deny a stopper. For the sake of continuity, we would go the slow route with hand #5 (Slow Shows!) and with hand #6 we would cue-bid directly (Direct Denies!).

Summary: New suit bids by responder are NF on 2-level, forcing (to game) on 3-level.

A 2NT response is an artificial “relay,” forcing opener to bid 3♣. Then, responder can pass with clubs, bid a new suit (natural, NF), cue-bid (Stayman with a stopper). Direct cuebid is Stayman without a stopper and direct 3NT is no stopper.

Lebensohl after partner’s 1NT overcall

You may also use lebensohl when your partner has overcalled a strong 1NT and RHO has bid. Just ignore LHO’s opening bid and respond as if partner opened the bidding with 1NT and RHO was the only interference bidder.

Lebensohl after Weak-2 Bids

This is a completely different convention and outside the scope of this lesson.

Practice

What is your response to 1NT after a natural 2♥ overcall with: 1NT (2♥) ??

- 1) ♠KJ876 ♥54 ♦32 ♣Q1087 _____
- 2) ♠KJ976 ♥54 ♦32 ♣AQJ6 _____
- 3) ♠54 ♥32 ♦654 ♣KQ10876 _____
- 4) ♠54 ♥3 ♦AQJ ♣AK87652 _____
- 5) ♠J52 ♥K2 ♦K762 ♣AQ76 _____
- 6) ♠Q876 ♥K2 ♦KQ2 ♣10872 _____
- 7) ♠Q876 ♥32 ♦KQ2 ♣A982 _____
- 8) ♠32 ♥K32 ♦J1097652 ♣2 _____

Answers:

(1) 2♥ (2) 3♥ (3) 2N (4) 3♣ (5) 2N (6) 2N (7) 3♦ (8) 2N