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# **Bidding Notes**

*Release 9.1*

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## ABOUT THESE BOOKS

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The books in this series are:

**Bidding Notes** The basics of Standard American and Two Over One, including the core conventions known by all players.

**Advanced Bidding** Conventions and gadgets used for advanced offensive bidding.

**Defensive Bidding** Conventions and gadgets used for advanced defensive bidding

**Imprecise Precision** A strong-club system designed for sub-experts.

## PRELIMINARIES

This book is written for the intermediate bridge player. It covers Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC) and the more advanced Two Over One (2/1). Most intermediate players know the basics of SAYC, and have learned some other conventions. SAYC is the lingua franca for Internet bridge.

2/1 is a change to SAYC in a very limited area involving six opening sequences and the “1N Forcing” convention. However, most players of 2/1 also bring in a set of advanced (optional) conventions, and that combination makes it seem much more complicated. A modern school of thought is that one should learn the basic part of 2/1 from the very beginning.

The American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) issues a convention card called “Standard American Yellow Card” and instructions for using it. Go to <http://acbl.org> and look for it in the convention card section. However, few people play the system as written and it does not cover many aspects of bidding. In cases where the standard is sometimes or often ignored, I’ll try to point that out. Otherwise, the choices presented here are my choices. I will not mention all the possible choices.

The *Resources* (page 77) chapter lists other sources of information. See [pfdubois.com/publish](http://pfdubois.com/publish) for a complete list of the other books in this series.

### 2.1 How to Use This Book

Bridge has three big topics: bidding, declarer play, and defense. An expert friend who has read these bidding notes commented that the defensive part of your notes ought to be as big as the bidding section. Indeed, your side is on defense half of the time. Few of us measure up – for some reason, learning another convention that comes up twice a year is more com-

pellent than the basics of carding that happens on every hand.

While I want to present the major conventions so you will know what your opponents are up to, do not take this as advice to master them, rather than spending equal time on the other two-thirds of bridge.

Here’s a guide to what follows:

- By using the chapters on Notrump Openings, Major Openings, Minor Openings, Other Openings, Slam Bidding, Doubles, and Competitive Bidding, you have my version of Standard American bidding. The chapter on Conventions should be next.
- As you get more advanced, you may wish to learn the “Two Over One Game Force” (2/1) system. This system really has two parts: the two-over-one and 1N-forcing bids and their followups; and a set of conventions almost all Two Over One players play:
  - *Inverted Minors* (page 33),
  - *New Minor Forcing* (page 70),
  - *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 71) , and
  - *Roman Keycard Blackwood* (page 63).

There is no real connection between 2/1 and this set of conventions except that most players of 2/1 also play those conventions.

There is lately, more and more, a feeling that new players should learn Two Over One from the beginning, adding in the conventions just mentioned later. This has considerable merit. You have to learn the standard meanings as well, since they apply when opener is a passed hand or there is interference.



- Finally, the chapter *Resources* (page 77) should be consulted for further reading.

Every book should have an index, and this one does. It frustrates me no end that most bridge books do not. There is also a glossary of bridge terms. In electronic manifestations of this book, there are many operable links in the text.

This book is available as a PDF, as a book for electronic readers, and can be rendered into web pages.

## 2.2 Casual Partners

Even a person with the most dedicated partner plays with someone else once in a while; this is especially true online. Therefore, you have to learn two things: your system, and the system you can count on a stranger to know. For casual face-to-face play, an intermediate pair who agrees on Standard American or 2/1 still needs to fill in some details as they fill out the card.

I like to be in a position to just say, “Let’s play your card”; armed with this book, you’ll know what most of their stuff means already. My philosophy is that this way, at most one person is confused: me.

Many online sites have a definition somewhere of one or more systems that you can expect people to use there – but frankly not many people bother to read them.

If you are learning to play using the robots at Bridge Base Online, be sure to check what the robot thinks bids mean, by mousing over them. The BBO robots decidedly do NOT play SAYC; it is 2/1 with Soloway Jump Shifts and more.

## 2.3 Contributing

I encourage others to help me build a community resource by furnishing corrections and additions. The source for the book is written in “reStructuredText” and uses a system called “Sphinx” to render the book into web pages, e-books and PDF files.

Sphinx is the standard system used to document computer programs written in the popular Python computer language, so it is heavily used, is free, and has the advantage that the source is a simple, readable text file with a very natural markup system. When viewing the documents in a web browser, there is a link that will show you the original markup text for that page. (Tell your browser to use the UTF-8 encoding to see the suit symbols.)

Send corrections by indicating section and nearby content, rather than by page number, as the latter depends on the rendering device.

You can contribute additions such as examples and quizzes for chapters by sending a plain text file. Extra points for using reStructuredText markup. Use Bridge Books in the subject and mail to me at [pdfdubois@gmail.com](mailto:pdfdubois@gmail.com).

## 2.4 Acknowledgments

Thank you to my long-time teacher, Mike Moss, who taught me almost everything I know. I have also received help from teachers and expert players including Howard Schutzman, Oliver Clarke, Alex Martelli, and Jim and Pat Leary; and encouragement from my fellow learners and partners, especially David Silberman, Julia Beatty, Ally White-neck, and Ben Franz.

Some of the sources of my own learning include the web pages at OKBridge, Bridge Base Online, and other online sources, and the dozens of bridge books I own. I list some of my favorites in *Resources* (page 77).

## 2.5 Notation and Nomenclature

LHO means “left hand opponent”, that is, the person bidding and playing after the one we’re talking about, usually you. LHO’s partner is RHO, the “right hand opponent”. The partner of the opening bidder (the “opener”) is called the “responder”. If the opener’s bid is overcalled, that bidder is the “over-

caller” or “intervenor”, and his partner is the “advancer”.

In writing bids, we write a level number from 1 to 7, followed by either a suit symbol or:

- M meaning a major, either hearts or spades
- m meaning a minor, either diamonds or clubs
- W meaning the “other” major after one has been mentioned
- w meaning the “other” minor after one has been mentioned

It might help to remember the W and w if you think of these letters upside down.

Bids by a partnership without interference are separated by dash, as in 1N - 2♥ - 2♠ or just 1N 2♥ 2♠. If a bid is alerted, it is followed by an exclamation point and a suggested explanation, as in

1N - 3♥!(both majors, game force)

where the suggested alert is either in parentheses, or immediately follows, or has just been explained. When opponents intervene, their bids are shown in parentheses, as in

1♦ (2♥) 2♠ - 4♠

which shows a 2♥ overcall of an opening 1♦, followed by a bid of 2♠ by the responder, and the opener going to game with 4♠.

The adjectives “weak”, “competitive”, “invitational” (abbreviated *inv*), and “game-forcing” (abbreviated *gf*), are descriptions of hand strength. We use these descriptions often rather than point counts so that they make sense in varied contexts. We say “Responder is competitive” as a shorthand for, “Responder’s hand has competitive strength”, i.e., good enough to cause trouble but not good enough to invite game.

In showing hand shapes, hyphens (or mere conjunction) show shapes without assuming precise suit order, as in 4-3-3-3 or 4333 meaning a flat hand, the four cards being in an arbitrary suit. Equal signs show an exact spades = hearts = diamonds = clubs count, as in 4=4=4=1, showing a singleton club. Parenthesis show an exact order outside them and

an arbitrary order within, such as (45)22 meaning 4=5=2=2 or 5=4=2=2.

A *good suit* is a 5+ card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5 (but some say not QJT).

Since it is boring to repeatedly have to say “shows four or more spades” and the like, we will say “four spades” to mean this, and “exactly four spades” when we mean that. When we say someone is 5-4 in two suits, we mean either five of the first and four or five of the other, or vice-versa, unless we are explicit about which one is the longer. Note that it is rare to treat a 6-4 hand the same way you would treat a 5-4 hand, so when we say 5-4 we do not mean longer than 5; but when we just say “5 cards” in some suit, it could be longer.

When we speak of a *control bid* we refer to a bid of a side suit to show features in that suit that prevent fast losers. These bids used to be called “cue bids” but the term is easily confused with bids in the opponent’s suit, which are called “cue bids”, so we use the modern term. Control bids are explained in the chapter on *Slam Bidding* (page 63).

“Controls” as a noun usually refers to Aces and Kings. When a number of controls is referred to, we are counting Aces as two and Kings as one, so that “a hand with four controls” would include hands with two Aces, or an Ace and two Kings.

## 2.6 The Captain Concept

The *Captain* of a hand means the partner who becomes in charge of guiding the partnership to a good spot to play. When one player has shown the strength and nature of his hand (generally called limiting his hand, because it refers to having shown limits on the hand’s strength), the other partner becomes Captain. For example, after a no-trump opener, opener’s strength is known to within three points, and the responder is the Captain.

When partner is Captain, go to your cabin, look out the porthole, and enjoy the view. Your partner may go to game or tell you to stop; obey the Captain. Otherwise, just answer his questions or show something new about your hand if his bid was forcing, if you

can. The Captain may put control back into your hands by making an invitational bid.

## 2.7 Is This Forcing?

The key to bidding is understanding passing! The most two common mistakes are:

- Bidding when you should have passed, and
- Passing when you were required to bid.

So, pay great attention in studying to know which bids are forcing to game, forcing for one round, or not forcing. If your partner makes a bid you don't understand, don't just pass. Rethink the sequence so far to see if you've misinterpreted something – not an easy task, as the brain tends to take us down little rat-holes. If still confused do something, something as obvious as possible. Professional Bob Hamman said: when in doubt bid three no-trump.

## HAND EVALUATION

### 3.1 Basic System

We can't have a system of bidding in bridge if we don't have some way of measuring what a hand is worth. Alas, learning how to judge the playing strength of a hand (that is, how many tricks it will take in different circumstances) is the work of a lifetime. Further, this judgement must change with every step of the auction; our KJ75 of spades becomes decidedly less valuable when the opponent to our left bids spades, regardless of the way we calculated the value we gave to it before. The same holding decidedly more valuable when partner shows four spades.

Since we have to have some estimate of strength to even begin to play, we must adopt simple methods that beginners can learn and then refine our methods as we progress.

Most of the methods begin with the point method originally proposed by Work. Each Ace is 4, Kings are 3, Queens are 2, and Jacks are 1. This means a deck has 40 points, and an average hand is 10 points.

If this is all you do, it isn't that bad. We will now describe a number of adjustments that you should make, but on a lot of hands they cancel each other out and the basic count is a pretty good evaluation of the hand. Use the "Rule of 20" that we will describe below and the basic count; if you bid correctly you'll do fine.

The number of points in a hand owing to just to its high cards is called its high-card points, or *HCP*. The number of points in a hand with adjustments for suit lengths or other factors is called simply its *points*. Thus if we say a hand has 10 points, that total may include some adjustments such as adding points for length or deductions for doubleton honors; but if we say a hand has 10 HCP then we mean that many points attributable to honor cards.

Generally Aces are important cards. If you have a hand with an AK in one suit and another Ace somewhere, consider it an opening hand.

We need to correct for badly placed honors. One can subtract one point from stiff Kings or "bad doubletons" (a doubleton which has a Queen or Jack but not the Ace) such as Qx, KJ, and KQ. If partner bids the suit, remove this correction. Subtract one for each singleton K, Q, or J.

Alas, if the Work count is all we do, then we are claiming that these hands all have the same value, 13 HCP:

- ♠AQ7 ♥K54 ♦K32 ♣J432
- ♠AQT ♥KT9 ♦KT9 ♣JT98
- ♠AKQJT987 ♥- ♦KT987 ♣-
- ♠A32 ♥K54 ♦KQJ ♣5432
- ♠QJ ♥QJ ♦QJ2 ♣KJ7654

Clearly we need to account for distribution, intermediate cards such as 10's and 9's, and the way our honors are grouped together or scattered. The third hand will take eight tricks in spades for sure; the last one might well take very few tricks.

The two most popular ways to do this are to add points for length, or to add count for shortness. These days, length is much more popular. There is some logic to this – a long suit is often a plus, but a short suit is only a plus as a ruffing value if our side has found a fit. Thus, to count shortness from the beginning is rather optimistic.

To account for length, add one point for every card in a suit in excess of four. Subtract one point for a flat (4-3-3-3) hand.

A "good" hand for a given point count is one with the honors concentrated and / or touching, and with

more than its expected share of 9's and 10's, with Aces and Kings more than Queens and Jacks.

Open all hands with 13 or more points, or a good 12. (A flat hand with 13 HCP is "good" too.) Generally, 25-26 points between the two partners are sufficient for a game at 3 notrump or 4 of a major suit, and around 29 points for five of a minor.

Another guideline is the "Rule of 20": Add your HCP and the lengths of your longest two suits. If the total is 20 or more, consider opening the hand if you have at least 10 HCP. There are always other considerations to ponder as well, such as seat and vulnerability.

If you get a very distributional hand, such as a 6-5-1-1, be very aggressive – such hands will take a lot of tricks. "Six-five, come alive" is wise advice.

### 3.1.1 Adjusting to the Auction

As the auction continues, revalue your hand. Discount the values in suits bid on your left, and discount bad holdings such as QJ doubleton in suits bid by the opponents. But don't discount such things in suits your partner bids.

"When you and your partner find a fit of at least 8 cards, stop and smell the roses", says my teacher, Mike Moss. It is crucial to take a moment to re-evaluate your hand. There are two parts to this process.

First, add points for shortness. Count 1 for a doubleton, 3 for a singleton, and 5 for a void. (If you are the original opener and have supported partner's suit, you might want to only count a void as one point for each trump you have).

### 3.1.2 Losing Trick Count

Secondly, when a fit has been found, and only then, make a Losing Trick Count, or LTC. A full exposition of LTC is in "The Modern Losing Trick Count", by Ron Klinger. Here is a simplified (albeit less accurate) version.

**Warning:** LTC is used only when you have found an 8-card or longer fit.

In each suit count a loser for each Ace, King, or Queen you do not have, up to the number of cards you hold in that suit. A stiff King is one loser and a doubleton Queen is two losers. The maximum number of losers per suit is the smaller of three and the suit's length.

Add a loser if the hand has no aces. A Queen without another honor is 2.5 losers.

Example: ♠AQ8 ♥Q8 ♦KJ32 ♣AQJ3 has 1 + 2 + 2 + 1 or six losers.

Take your number of losers, add those of your partner's hand, and subtract from 24 to get an estimate of the number of tricks you should take with your agreed-upon trump suit.

Unfortunately you can't say, "Partner, how many losers?", so you have to infer this from the bidding: an opening hand is about 7, a limit raise is 8, a simple raise is 9. A two-club opener is about 4. The hands in-between are 5 or 6.

Thus if you open one spade, and partner raises you to two spades, you want to be in game if you have five losers: 5 + 9 is 14, and 24-14 = 10. If you have six losers, you might want to seek more information with something like a help-suit game try, because you should be safe at the three level.

Use your adjusted point count together with your LTC to decide on game and slam tries. Often the LTC reveals that a hand is better or worse than it first appeared, such as an opening hand with an LTC of six or eight. When in doubt, go on with a known nine-card fit, but hold back with only eight.

Conversely, when you have a misfit, you usually want to stop as soon as you can. However, it is often true that 3N is the right place if you have the points for game. Most of the time you want to be in game if you have the points for it.

One final note: two hands of approximately equal value play better than two hands with much different strengths. In other words, 12 opposite 13 will usually

play better than 20 opposite 5, because you will have less entry problems.

### 3.2 Bergen Method

Marty Bergen has invented a more elaborate method in his book, "Better Slam Bidding". His recent audio lessons have simplified and elaborated the method. While I attempt to summarize the method here, I urge you to consult his lessons as there are many fine points to cover.

The initial "starting points" for Bergen are determined by a five-step process:

1. Calculate the Work Count, or "Formal HCP". The Work Count underestimates Aces and 10s, and overvalues Queens and Jacks ("quacks").
  2. Add 1 for every card over 4 in a suit
  3. Add 1 for each "good" suit, a 4-card suit containing three of the five honors.
  4. Adjust for the following features:
    - -1 for a questionable honor in a short suit, such as a stiff King, or a doubleton honor lacking the Ace. Thus, subtract one for KQ, Qx, Jx, etc.
    - -1 if you have 3 "quacks"; subtract 2 if you have six.
    - -1 if the hand has no Ace.
    - +1 if the hand has three Aces.
    - +1 if 5-5 or better
    - +3 if you have a void – the theory being that you are going to have a fit.
1. Classify the hand as upgradable if it has:
    - 10s, 9s, or 8s – these intermediate cards make a big difference. A normal expectation is one of each.
    - A good shape, such as 5422 or 6331, rather than 5332 or 6322.
    - The honors are in your long suits, or together, rather than in separate suits, or in short suits.

For example, an AK doubleton will not help to set up other tricks compared to AKx, AKxx, or AKxxx.

1. Classify your hand as downgradable if it has a poor shape such as 4333, 5332.
2. When you have a close decision, use the upgradable or downgradable factors to help make the decision.

As the auction proceeds, and a fit is found, adjust your hand as follows.

If you are going to be the dummy, add 1 for each doubleton, 2 for a singleton (but 3 if you have four or more trumps), and add up to five points for a void, but no more than you have trumps).

If you are going to be the declarer,

- Add 2 for a singleton, 4 for a void, and exactly 1 point if you have two or more doubletons. Do not add anything for a single doubleton.
- Add one point for each trump after five.
- Add one point for a side suit with 4+ cards.

If you believe from your own count and that promised by partner that the partnership has 33 or more points, you should explore for slam; below 33, forget it.

Finally, when it becomes clear the hand is a misfit, count formal HCP only.

### 3.3 Examples

Let's look at a comparison of the basic and Bergen models.

- ♠AQ7 ♥K54 ♦K32 ♣J432

This hand has 13HCP - 1 for a flat hand = 12 HCP in either system. The hand has the honors in different suits, which is not a plus.

- ♠AT942 ♥KJ832 ♦ void ♣AKQ

This hand has 19 points, 17 HCP plus 2 for length in the basic system.

In the Bergen system we add 2 for length and 3 for the void and 1 for the 5-5 shape, for a total of 23 points. Clubs has three honors, but it doesn't get the "good suit" bonus because it doesn't have four cards.

- ♠AT942 ♥KQJ4 ♦ void ♣AKT7

This hand has 17 HCP, plus one for length in the basic system. In the Bergen system we add 2 for the 2 "good suits", hearts and clubs, and 3 for the void, for a total of 23 points.

- ♠QJ ♥QJ ♦QJ2 ♣KJ7654

This hand has 13 HCP, minus two for bad doubletons, plus two for the six card suit, or 13 points. In the Bergen system we have seven Queens and Jacks, and no Aces or tens, so our adjustment is -2. The Bergen method would not open this hand 1♣

One cannot emphasize enough the need to revalue continuously as the auction proceeds.

Assuming a fit has been found, the losing trick counts here are 8, 3, 2, and 8, respectively.

For another system, sort of between standard and Bergen in complexity, try Pavlicek Points (<http://www.rpbridge.net/3t00.htm>). And to raise your consciousness, assume the lotus position and try Zar Points (<http://www.bridgeguys.com/pdf/ZarPoints.pdf>).

### 3.4 What Bid To Open

Assuming you have a good 12 point hand or more, what do you open?

First see if you qualify for a no-trump opening. You need 15 to 17 points and a balanced or semi-balanced hand. As we'll see in the chapter on no-trump openings, with 18-19 you bid a suit and then 2N on the second round; with 20-21 you open 2N; with 22 or more, you bid 2♣ and then 2N on the second round.

If you do not qualify for a no-trump opening, you use this order of preference:

1. Your longest suit five cards or longer, or the higher-ranking of two five-card suits.
2. A four-card minor.
3. If exactly 4=3=3=3 or 4=4=2=3, open 1♣.
4. If exactly 4=4=3=2, open 1♦.

If you have two three-card minors you can also open the best one if one is really the suit you want lead, if you agree on this with your partner. If a partner tries to talk you into the 'may be short' club if 4=4=3=2, resist.

Sometimes one strays outside the rules: certain hands cry out to be opened 1N with 14 HCP, or 1♠ with four wonderful spades. Just remember, each such bid erodes your partner's confidence in you and makes him pull in a little the next time. Use your freedom sparsely, a few times a year.

Sometimes there are strategic considerations to consider when choosing an opening bid. See *Reverses* (page 10).

## REVERSES

### 4.1 Reverses by Opener

Sometimes beginners will say they “don’t play reverses”. That is not an option.

A *reverse* by opener is a rebid that meets two tests:

1. Opener’s rebid is in a suit higher than his original suit, AND
2. Opener’s rebid is a level higher than responder’s bid.

A reverse shows about 16/17+ points (including distribution) and an unbalanced hand with more cards in the first suit than in the second. A reverse is absolutely forcing for one round unless opponents interfere, but not forcing to game.

Example:  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 2\heartsuit$ . Hearts is higher than diamonds, and the  $2\heartsuit$  bid is up a level. Opener has more at least as many diamonds as hearts (typically 5-4).

How do we know that?

If opener’s shape were balanced, say  $2=4=4=3$ , they would have opened 1N with 15-17 HCP; they would rebid 2N with 18-19 HCP. So while it is possible that opener has this shape when they open  $1\spadesuit$ , when they bid  $2\heartsuit$  it rules out a 12-14 point balanced hand; hence my suggestion that they usually have five diamonds. A  $1=4=4=4$  is still a possibility.

Why does a reverse show a strong hand? Consider opening a 12 point hand that has five hearts and four clubs. We open it  $1\heartsuit$  and our partner replies  $1\spadesuit$ . Our next bid is  $2\clubsuit$ . Then,

- Suppose partner has  $\spadesuit J8642 \heartsuit 3 \diamondsuit Q86 \clubsuit KT73$ . He can pass.
- Suppose partner has  $\spadesuit J8642 \heartsuit KT \diamondsuit QT86 \clubsuit 86$ . He can bid  $2\heartsuit$ . That shows a minimum

with a preference for hearts over clubs.

But, if we had five clubs and four hearts, and bid  $1\clubsuit - 1\spadesuit - 2\heartsuit$ , with the first hand partner would have to bid  $3\clubsuit$  to show that he preferred clubs to hearts. That would put us at the 3-level with a total of only 18 points between the two hands. We’d like around 23 points to be comfortable at that level. Subtracting six from 23, we see that we need opener to have around 17 to be safe.

In the auction  $1\heartsuit - 2\clubsuit - 2\spadesuit$ , partner has shown at least 10 points, so if responder has to preference to  $3\heartsuit$ , there is no problem – we’re already known to have around 23 points. Therefore, you need not consider this a reverse.

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**Note:** There is no question about this if playing 2/1 game forcing, but this is a matter of agreement in SAYC. I follow Larry Cohen here in feeling this bid need not show extras, for the reason I gave.

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Typically a hand that will reverse will have a five-card suit and a higher four-card suit. When you bid such a hand, you have to open the five-card suit, but on your rebid you cannot show your four-card suit unless you have the values.

For example, with five diamonds and four hearts, if the auction goes  $1\spadesuit - 1\spadesuit - 2\heartsuit$ , opener has reversed. Lacking that many points, opener may have to bid an imperfect 1N or repeat diamonds.

With 4 diamonds and 5 clubs, such as  $\spadesuit 92 \heartsuit Q9 \diamondsuit AQJ5 \clubsuit KQT43$ , we have a similar dilemma but without the risk of hiding a major. If we open this hand  $1\clubsuit$ , and partner answers with a major or notrump, we have a problem. So some people will open this  $1\spadesuit$  instead. Others will bite the bullet, open  $1\clubsuit$ , and rebid  $2\clubsuit$  if they have to, even though that



suggests you might have a six card suit. Expert fashion seems to go up and down with hemlines on this one.

Obviously the quality of the two suits will influence the decision, unless you just always open 1♣.

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**Note:** When you make your opening bid, you'll need to think about what you'll do next depending on what your partner does.

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When you open a suit and partner makes a negative double, can your response be a reverse? For example, 1♣ - (1♠) - X - 2♦. Cohen suggests no. Technically, your partner promised hearts and diamonds and you're just choosing. Partner shouldn't be wanting to preference back to clubs.

Note also that a jump rebid in a new suit like 1♦ - 1♠ - 3♥ is a jump shift, showing a huge (a good 18 to 21) hand.

### 4.1.1 Responding To Opener's Reverse

If opener has reversed, as responder you must bid unless your RHO takes you off the hook by interfering. If you have already shown 10+ points of course the auction is now game forcing and you can just bid naturally. If you have a good 8 or more, you'll want to get to game.

So the problem is what to do with a minimal hand. If you bid opener's first suit, it is a simple preference with a minimal hand. If you repeat your own major suit, you're showing five cards and a minimum.

2N!(relay) is a conventional bid telling your partner that you may have a minimal hand. It asks opener to rebid his first suit; then you will pass or correct to your suit. This convention is called Ingberman 2N or Lebensohl Over Reverses. Your partner should say "alert" (which is why I used the exclamation point).

Any bid other than a suit preference or 2N is game forcing.

Recommended reading: Downey and Pomer's book "Standard Bidding With SAYC" has a long section on reverses with a lot of examples.

## 4.2 Reverses By Responder

When responder reverses, it is just a game-forcing natural bid. For example, 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♠ - 3♦ is a game-forcing reverse, since diamonds are a higher suit than clubs. Again, the same principal is at work; an opener who wanted to prefer clubs is now forced up a level compared to bidding diamonds first and clubs second.

Note that 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ does not count as a reverse; we're not up a level. To show the bigger hand responder will have to bid 2♠, not 1♠.

Sometimes a responder reverse is the fourth suit bid and therefore unlikely to find a fit with partner, so most play it as a conventional bid that is one-round or game-forcing but not showing that suit, asking partner to bid notrump with a stopper in the fourth suit. See *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 71).

## OPENING NOTRUMP

When do you open a hand in notrump? The hand must have:

- A HCP strength in a specific range:
  - 15-17 to open 1N
  - 20-21 to open 2N
  - 25-27 to open 3N
- A shape that is *balanced*, 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2. Note that that means no voids, no singletons, and at most one doubleton.

You notice that you could have a hand with the right shape but wrong strength. You'll handle 12-14 point hands with no five-card major by opening a minor and bidding notrump on the second round. For 18-19 point hands with no five-card major, you'll open a minor, and jump in notrump on the second round. And for stronger hands, you'll start with 2♣, the strong opening.

Conversely, there are hands that have the right number of points but with the points scattered among all the suits. As you get more experience, you may find some hands you want to open in notrump despite not being really balanced. These so-called *semi-balanced* hands have two doubletons.

- A 5-4-2-2 hand, as long as one of the doubletons is Kx or better.
- A 6-3-2-2 hand if the long suit is a good minor and both doubletons are Kx or better.

When you open in notrump, you have told your partner your strength within 3 points, and that you have a balanced shape. This means your partner is actually best placed to decide where you are going, because he knows his own hand and a lot about yours, while you know nothing of his yet. For now at least, he's the *Captain*.

The responder is going to reply using an extremely well-defined structure, the "system", which has a high probability of getting you to a good contract. This system is so useful that we try to use it whenever we can:

1. After we open 1N;
2. After we make a notrump overcall of the opponent's opening suit bid;
3. After we open a strong 2♣ and rebid notrump.
4. When we open 2N or higher in no-trump.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to explaining the "system".

### 5.1 How To Choose A Response To 1N

There is a lot of "system" to learn, but the rewards are great. Assume your partner has opened 1N – we'll modify things a bit later for those other three cases.

You, as responder, should:

- Classify the strength of your hand (weak, competitive, invitational, game forcing, or slam interest). Opposite a 15-17 1N bid, 8 or 9 HCP is invitational, while with 10 HCP you must force to game – you can't make a bid that opener can pass short of game.
- See if you have a four-card, five-card, or longer major(s). These are each treated differently. We also have special rules when 5-4 in the majors.
- In hands with no majors, note if the hand has a six-card minor. Do not try to show a five-card minor.

Generally, a hand whose principal feature is a long minor wants to be in 3N if it is strong enough, unless it is a strong hand that might want to be in a minor slam. This is especially true playing matchpoints.

### 5.1.1 Responding With No Major Suit Or Long Minor

In responding to your partner's 1N opener, if you determine that there is nothing of interest in your hand, meaning no major suit or long minor, your actions are determined by your point count alone:

- With a hand less than 8 HCP, pass.
- With an invitational hand (8-9 HCP) bid 2N.
- With a game-going hand (10-15 HCP), bid 3N.
- With a slam invitational hand (16+-17 HCP) bid 4N.

4N is a *quantitative* raise. Responder has enough for 6N if the opener is on the top of his bid, a good 16 or 17. Subtracting from 33, we see that this means responder has 16 or 17. If responder is SURE that the partnership has 33 points, this bid is not appropriate. The only responses to this bid are pass or 6N.

There are times a bid of 4N is asking your partner about Aces, but not here. A bid of 4N is also *quantitative* after 2N or 3N openers, or after the opener rebids 1N after a suit opening, or bids 2N after a strong 2♣ opening.

- With 18-19 HCP, bid 6N.
- With 20-21 HCP, grand slam force with 5N. The opener should reply 6N or 7N.
- With 22 or more HCP, give your partner a thrill with a bid of 7N.

You can ask for Aces with 4♣ (*Gerber* (page 65)) in lieu of the direct slam bids, if you are worried about having fast losers in a suit.

### 5.1.2 Responding With A Major Suit Or Long Minor

When your hand does have a major suit or a six-card minor suit, you'll begin with one of the techniques discussed later in this chapter (*Stayman* (page 13), *transfers to majors* (page 15), or *Minor Relay* (page 17)). These all force your partner to reply in a certain way.

After he replies, if you bid 4N when it is your next turn, that's *quantitative*, not Ace-asking. If he bid a suit because you made him do it, it doesn't mean you have agreed on a suit. You may have found a fit but he doesn't know about it yet.

Principal: Whenever 4N is *quantitative*, 4♣ (*Gerber* (page 65)) is Ace-asking.

With no other agreement, responses of 4♦, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, 5♦ are natural, to play, with at least a six-card suit; but see *Texas Transfers* (page 17) as an option for getting to 4♥ or 4♠.

We'll now start digging into those special cases where responder has a four-card or longer major, or a six-card or longer minor.

## 5.2 Stayman Convention

After a 1N opener, 2♣ is an artificial bid called *Stayman*, asking the opener to say if he does or does not have a four (or five) card major. There are two circumstances in which you can bid 2♣:

1. You have a four card major, your hand is not *flat*, and it has at least invitational values.
2. You have a weak hand with a stiff or void in clubs, and intend to pass whatever response you get. Ideally you have a shape like 4=4=5=0 or 4=4=4=1.

If you have a four card major and a longer minor, and you are at least invitational, use Stayman.

The goal of Stayman is to discover if we have a major fit, and at the same time to decide if we have a game or not. We first answer the question about the fit, and then the question about the game.

Note that there are *optional* conventions, explained below, for bidding:

- *weak hands 4-4 in the majors that cannot pass any reply* (page 14).
- *hands that are 5-4 in the majors* (page 16).

**Note:** 2♣ is not alerted, because it has become common practice.

### 1. Opener Reveals His Major Holdings

After 1N - 2♣, opener *must* choose one of three bids: 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠.

- 2♦ no four-card major.
- 2♥ 4+ hearts, and maybe 4 spades.
- 2♠ 4+ spades, but denies 4 hearts.

**Warning:** Opener must bid 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠, never anything else. Note that if opener has four hearts and four spades, he bids 2♥. 2N is not a choice!

### 2. Responder Indicates Strength and Fit

- If responder has bid Stayman with that weak hand short in clubs, he passes. Otherwise he indicates whether a fit has been found, and whether his hand is invitational only, or actually game forcing, or has slam interest.
- If a fit has been found, responder tells opener the good news: he raises the major suit to the 3-level to invite game, or the four level to play. Isn't this a simple game?

What if responder has a very powerful hand, and a fit is found? Bidding game will rule out slam. We need a "power raise" bid, showing a hand with slam interest while at the same time confirming the fit. The solution is a partnership agreement, namely to use three of the other major (3W) to show a power raise

(usually 18+ HCP). It is a game force, of course.

For example: 1N - 2♣ - 2♠ - 3♥!(power raise). Now opener should start cue bidding.

- Responder bids no-trump to show no fit; how many notrump shows responder's strength:
  - 2N no fit, with an invitational hand.
  - 3N no fit, but enough points for game.
  - Three level bids in a new suit are game forcing and may show interest in a minor slam.
  - 4N is a *quantitative raise* (page 13) denying a fit.
  - 4♣ is plain Gerber.

Note that having checked for a fit, you have not agreed to a suit yet. So, a sequence like 1N - 2♣ - 2♠ - 4N is still a *quantitative* raise; and 4♣ instead is still asking for Aces with *Gerber* (page 65) and agreeing to the suit.

### 3. Opener's Third Bid

If opener has both majors he first bids 2♥. If responder bids 2N in reply, then there is no heart fit, but there is a spade fit. Opener should bid spades at the three-level to decline the invitation, and at the four-level to accept it. If responder has bid 3N, opener can switch to 4♠.

### 5.2.1 Garbage Stayman

The term "Garbage Stayman" is often mistakenly used. A standard part of Stayman is that you can bid 2♣ with a weak hand having a club shortage and four-card or better support in the other suits. You're willing to pass any reply, including 2♦. Your hand may be garbage, but you're not bidding Garbage Stayman.

Garbage Stayman refers to an agreement about bidding weak hands that are 4-4 or better in the majors. The idea is that you can bid Stayman even if you are not willing to pass a 2♦ reply. Playing Garbage

Stayman, you now rebid 2♥!(weak, 4-4 in majors) and opener passes or corrects to 2♠.

The sequence that changes is:

1N - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥!(weak hand 4-4)

I recommend playing Garbage Stayman.

### 5.3 Major Transfers

So much for hands with four card majors – but what if you have a five-card major? You may have a fit if opener has three in your suit.

Rather than bid our major suit in response to 1N, we bid the suit below it, so that the strong hand then bids the suit first and becomes the declarer if we have a fit in that suit. This is called a *transfer*, also known as a Jacoby transfer. Opener announces “transfer”. This is worth about three-fourths of a trick on average compared to letting the responder be the declarer. That’s huge!

- 1N – 2♦ is a transfer to hearts.
  - 2♥ Opener completes (“accepts”) the transfer. Opener might have two, so no fit has been found yet.
  - 3♥ Opener has 4+ hearts and a maximum 1N bid (*super-accept*)
- 1N – 2♥ is a transfer to spades.
  - 2♠ completes the transfer.
  - 3♠ Opener has 4+ spades and a maximum 1N bid (*super-accept*).

Unlike Stayman, your strength is not an issue. A poor hand containing one five-card or longer major, even if it has zero points, must transfer to that suit, since responder’s hand will be worth something with that suit as trumps and little or nothing otherwise.

Note that the weaker your hand is, the more important it is to transfer – to make something out of nothing. Transfer to spades even if your spade holding is ♠65432. Or, not to put too fine a point on it, *especially* if your spade holding is ♠65432.

**Warning:** Opener must remember that responder has not promised anything yet except five cards in the target suit – not even ONE high-card point.

If you ever find yourself arguing to yourself that your partner *probably* has some points because he transferred, you’ve fallen in love with your hand again, and you know these affairs end badly.

After a transfer to 2M is accepted, responder bids:

- Pass with less than invitational values.
- 2N invitational
  - Opener can pass, bid 3N, or bid 3M or 4M with 3-card support.
- 3m a second suit, absolutely game forcing, usually with at least mild slam interest.
- 3M invitational, 6+ cards in the major. Now we have an 8-card fit for sure. Opener must revalue his hand, but he may then choose to pass.
- 3N to play, opener can correct to 4M with 3 trumps.
- 4M to play, 6+ cards in the major.
- 4♣ Gerber
- 4N *quantitative*.

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**Note:** Bidding 4N after a major transfer is perilous with unknown partners. The standard says 4N is quantitative. Less experienced players sometimes think it is Ace-asking by mistake. It isn’t; no agreement on a suit has occurred.

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After a super accept, the responder decides on whether to pass or bid game or try for slam. He knows a great deal about opener’s hand.

What about transferring to one major and then bidding the other? That has to be 5-5 or better in the majors since with 5-4 we start with Stayman. We discuss those sequences in the *three-level replies* (page 18) section later in this chapter.

### 5.3.1 When the transfer is doubled or overcalled

A double of an artificial bid is lead-directing. So, opener's RHO may double to show that he wants a lead of the (artificial) suit that responder just bid. Opener must take advantage to tell responder if he has three or more of responder's suit.

In my experience a decided minority of intermediates know the correct bids here.

Let T be the suit of the transfer bid, and let M be the target suit of the transfer. For example, in 1N - 2♦(transfer), T is diamonds, M is hearts.

After 1N - 2T (X):

- Pass: Opener has 2 cards in M. M is not agreed trump. 4N next is quantitative. Subsequently, if the next player passes, a XX by responder transfers again to M.
- 2M: Agrees M as trump, shows 3+ cards in M. 4N next is Ace-asking.
- 3M: Agrees M as trump, shows 4+ cards in M, and a maximum opener. 4N next is Ace-asking.
- XX: Opener has the transfer suit, willing to play in 2T redoubled. Opener should have a positively scary holding in T.

An overcall of the transfer leaves the opener in a bit of a bind because the act of transferring in itself only shows a five card suit; responder could have zero points. So, opener only bids with a great holding in the overcalled suit, or holding a maximum.

Thus after 1N - 2T (2Z):

- Pass: waiting to hear from pd. Partner can double to show points.
- X: penalty oriented, a great Z suit.
- Completing the transfer shows a maximum with four-card support.

The responder is still *Captain*, and we're waiting to hear his opinion.

### 5.3.2 Interference before transfers

We'll talk about auctions like 1N (2♠) later. But one thing to know right now is that you don't just transfer on the three level, as in 1N (2♠) 3♦ – not a transfer to hearts. I know, you have a friend that plays it that way. Get a new friend.

## 5.4 When Responder Is 5-4 In The Majors

If you have five in one major and exactly four in the other, some special bids are available. You should not add these to your repertoire until you are very comfortable with both transfers and Stayman.

Alas, this subject is affected by a great many other possible choices. Do we play *Garbage Stayman* (page 14)? Do we play an alternative to the standard *Minor Relay* (page 17) called "4-way transfers"? Do we play an advanced convention called Smolen?

Since I recommend *Garbage Stayman*, let's assume we're playing that, and the standard *Minor Relay*. Here is one scheme to try to find either a 4-4 or 5-3 fit:

- If your hand is weak a simple approach is to always transfer to the five-card suit and pass. This gives your partner no chance to go wrong. But use judgement: with a terrible five-card suit you might try *Garbage Stayman*.
- If your hand has five spades and four hearts, invitational or better, bid 2♣ Stayman, and then:
  - If opener shows a major, just raise it. Example: 1N - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♥ invitational; 1N - 2♣ - 2♥ - 4♥ with a game-forcing hand.
  - If opener answered 2♦, you may still have a 5-3 fit. Bid 2♠ to invite; 3♠ to force to game. See note below.
- If your hand has four spades and five hearts, invitational or better, a similar scheme does not work.

The problem arises after 1N - 2♣ - 2♦, because to bid 2♥ is Garbage Stayman; opener might pass. And you can't bid 3♥ if you do not have a game-forcing hand; you're already too high for an invitational hand if partner doesn't have hearts.

- So, with an invitational hand 4=5 in the majors, you have to transfer to hearts and then bid 2♠.
- With a game-forcing hand, use Stayman and if opener bids 2♦, bid 3♥. See note below.

Partners must be on their toes not to pass the game-forcing bids.

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**Note:** The Smolen convention refers to game-forcing hands with 5-4 in the majors; you start with Stayman, and if opener replies 2♦, you bid the 4-card suit at the three level instead of the five-card suit. This allows opener to declare if he has 3 cards in your five-card major. However this convention is both rare and dangerous, since you may easily forget the meaning and assume the opposite case.

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Note that if 5-5 in the majors, you may be playing one of the 1N - 3x bids as showing such hands. See *Three Level Suit Responses* (page 18). If not, transfer to spades, then bid hearts, and if you can, bid hearts again.

## 5.5 Texas Transfers

Texas Transfers are not standard, but are very common. You must be sure you agree on this with your partner. Check the box on your convention cards.

If you have a six-card major and a minimum game forcing hand, you can use a Texas Transfer:

- 1N - 4♦ transfer to hearts (6+, GF)
- 1N - 4♥ transfer to spades (6+, GF)

Texas Transfers are on over interference. The name Texas for Americans implies "big": big hats, big toast, big meat, big transfers.

You don't use Texas if:

- you have an invitational hand; instead you would transfer and then raise to 3M.
- you have slam interest; instead transfer and then bid 4M. This sequence shows you must have a six-card suit because you are willing to play 4M even if opener has only two trump. But, you didn't get to 4M fast with Texas – so the motto, "slow shows" applies; you must have extras. If you make a 3-level bid of a new suit after a transfer it is game forcing, so that is sometimes an alternative.

## 5.6 Minor Relay

The 2♠!(long minor) response to 1N forces opener to bid 3♣!(forced), which responder can pass or correct to 3♦, to play.

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**Note:** Many people call 2♠ a "minor suit transfer", but that is incorrect. Technically, a transfer is a bid asking partner to bid a suit that you hold for certain; a *relay* is asking partner to bid a certain suit (usually but not always the next strain up) but that suit isn't necessarily the suit you have; you are going to reveal that later.

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Opener alerts 2♠, and partner should alert the 3♣ reply because the opener doesn't necessarily have clubs. Since it is an alert, not an announcement, you do not say "relay to clubs" unless asked.

The Minor Relay is not for five-card minors, and not for invitational or better hands. Minor relays are to be used only in the case of 6 card suits, and usually only with weak hands. A long suit is very powerful opposite a 1N opener, so weak means really weak, not sort-of weak.

### 5.6.1 Minor Slam Tries

A minor relay can be used as the start of a slam try in a minor. You must have a belief that a minor slam is likely, because otherwise 3N is your goal.

- 1N - 2♠! - 3♣! - 3♥! slam try in clubs.
- 1N - 2♠! - 3♣! - 3♠! slam try in diamonds.

You would never be bidding a major after a Minor Relay, because you would have used a transfer to that major in the first place. Therefore, these bids are clearly artificial. The lower bid (hearts) corresponds to a slam try in the lower minor (clubs), and the higher bid (spades) to the higher minor (diamonds).

## 5.7 Three-Level Suit Responses

The standard is that 3-level bids show 6+ cards in the suit, with invitational values.

However, many people play other schemes, such as:

- 3-level bids are for showing two-suited hands.
  - 1N - 3♣! 5-5 minors, invitational
  - 1N - 3♦! 5-5 minors, game forcing
  - 1N - 3♥! 5-5 majors, invitational
  - 1N - 3♠! 5-5 majors, game forcing
- 1N - 3♣ or 3♦ are invitational six-card suits, but 1N - 3♥! or 3♠! show a stiff or void in the bid suit, 5-4 or better in the minors, and slam interest.
- 3♣! is game-forcing Puppet Stayman, an advanced version of Stayman.

Why have so many choices developed here? It is because there are other ways to show a six-carded suit with some values.

- There is no real need for 3♥ or 3♠ to be invitational showing six cards; you can show that hand by transferring and then bidding 3 or 4 of the major.
- You can distinguish a game-going six card major from one with slam interest by playing Texas transfers, in which case the transfer-and-then-bid-game sequence shows slam interest.

Playing standard, if you have 5-5 in the majors, do this:

- With a sub-invitational hand, transfer to your best suit and then pass.
- With an invitational hand, transfer to hearts and then bid 2♠.
- With a game-forcing hand transfer to spades and then bid 4♥.
- With slam interest, transfer to spades and then bid 3♥.

Be advised, a casual intermediate partner may not know these sequences.

## 5.8 Bidding Six-Card Minors

It is worth repeating: when your partner opens 1N and you have a five-card minor suit, just ignore it in deciding your initial response. A minor suit is only mentioned if it is at least six cards. A six-card suit opposite a 1N opener is usually quite powerful, so do not be too quick to call your hand weak; a lot depends on the texture of the suit.

We have the *Minor Relay* (page 17) if our hand is weak. If our hand is invitational, what we do depends on what choice we made about the 3-level suit responses. If we have an invitational one-suited 3m bid, there is no problem. If we do not, we can use Stayman, even without a four-card major:

1N - 2♣ - 2x - 3♣!/♦! (may not have a four-card major)

If for some reason you don't play Minor Relay, you can use this sequence for the weak hands. That's the standard, actually, but it is so unusual in practice that I had to look it up.

## 5.9 Recommended Structure for Intermediates

Given all these choices, here is what I recommend until you have enough experience to decide:

- Play the major transfers and Texas transfers.



- With a weak hand and a six card minor, use a *Minor Relay* (page 17) (1N - 2♠!(relay to 3♣ pass or correct)).
- With an invitational hand in a minor, use 1N - 3m. See *Three-Level Suit Responses* (page 18).
- With a game-going hand with a minor, use Stayman followed by 3m.
- With slam interest in a minor, a tricky part of Minor Relay is using 1N - 2♠! followed by 3♥!(clubs, slam interest) or 3♠!(diamonds, slam interest).

Your basic decision is whether to go past 3N; once you do, you're going to really hope you can bid the slam because 5m is usually a bad outcome (especially in matchpoints) if 3N is making. So this technique has the virtue of letting opener call it off with 3N or 5m depending on his hand; or he can cue-bid or ask for Aces.

- Use 3♥ as 5-5 in the majors, invitational
- Use 3♠ as 5-5 in the majors, game-forcing

More advanced:

- Use 1N - 3♣! as Puppet Stayman when you have a 3 card major. and a game-going hand.
- To invite in clubs, bid 2♣ and then 3♣.
- Use 3♦! as a game-forcing 5-5 in the minors.

**Warning:** A great many players, some with considerable experience, are misinformed about sequences like 1N - 2♣ - 2M - 4N and 1N - 2T(transfer) - 2M - 4N. These are all quantitative. Direct skeptics to any good book on 2/1. After Stayman use 3 of the other major as a power raise; after transfers bid at the 3 level, which is game forcing, to give opener a chance to agree to your suit.

## BALANCED OPENINGS ABOVE 1N

If you have 18 or more points, do not open 1N, even if your partner is a passed hand. It isn't going to take much to get you to game, so you don't want to lie about your strength by limiting it to 17 HCP.

### 6.1 Between 1N and 2N

- With a balanced 18-19 points, no good five-card major, open a minor suit and then rebid 2N. This does not deny any major that has been skipped over. For example,
  - 1♦ – 1♥ – 2N shows 18-19 balanced but does not deny holding four spades. The convention *New Minor Forcing* (page 70) helps sort out whether the 1♥ bidder here has four or five hearts. It is worth learning.
  - Opening one of a suit and then rebidding 1N when partner passes shows 18-19 points. After the 1N bid, the bids that follow are natural, not the “systems on” bids.

For example, suppose opener has an 18 point balanced hand with the Ace of Spades, and responder has a 5 point hand with diamonds such as:

♠98 ♥J42 ♦KJT93 ♣974

The bidding begins:

1♣ (1♠) P (P)  
1N (P) 2♦

Systems are off. The bid of 2♦ would be to play, not a transfer to hearts.

### 6.2 Opening 2N

- A 2N opener shows a balanced hand with 20-21 points. It may contain a five card major. A reply of 3♣ is Stayman, 3♦! / 3♥! are transfers, and 3♠ is a Minor Relay (unless you agree on something else).
- With 22-24 points, a balanced 2♣ opener rebids 2N; respond to that 2N bid *exactly* as if the opener had opened 2N except that he has 1-3 more points. So, for example, 2♣ - 2♦(waiting bid) - 2N - 3♦ is a transfer to hearts.

With game-going values and a four card or longer major, responder bids 3♣, Stayman. Responses are analogous to regular Stayman. This insures finding a fit with four card major, if he has one. Other bids at the 3-level or 4-level are transfers except 4♣, which is Gerber. 4N is quantitative, asking opener to bid 6N if at the top of his bid.

Consider learning Puppet Stayman to find fits to opener's five-card majors.

### 6.3 Opening 3N and Higher

The standard meaning of a 3N opener is a 25-27 point hand, but this bid is redundant, because we can open 2♣ first and then bid 3N. Therefore it is better to use a 3N opening for something else. For one idea, see *Gambling 3N Opening* (page 37).

Stayman and transfers would be on if 3N is the strong, balanced opener.

## 6.4 Summary Charts

These charts are for the standard 15-17 HCP 1N opener.

Table 1: Balanced Openings

HCP	Bid	Systems On
15-17	1N	Yes
18-19	1m then 2N	NMF
20-21	2N	Yes
22-24	2C then 2N	Yes
25-27	2C then 3N	Yes
28-30	2C then 4N	Yes

**Note:** Using the 2♣ opener first, 3N and 4N can be used for other things. In the absence of an agreement, though, 3N is 25-27 and 4N is 28-30.

### 6.4.1 Summary of Notrump Raises

The point ranges given here are for a 15-17 1N bid. Over a weak 1N or a 2N opener, make the corresponding adjustment. All these responses deny a four card major and show a balanced hand.

- 1N - 2N invitational, 8-9 points
- 1N - 3N to play, 10-15 points
- 1N - 4♣ Gerber, asking for aces.
- 1N - 4N quantitative; this shows a balanced hand with a good 16-17 points. Opener bids 6N with a good 16 or 17. Note that 33 points is often not enough for 6N, without a source of tricks.
- 1N - 6N to play, 18-19
- 1N - 5N asks for 6N or 7N, 20-21.
- 1N - 7N to play 22+

### 6.4.2 Summary of Responses to 1N

The columns are the responder's strength; the rows are his hand shape. In the cells, two bids separated by

a plus sign mean, first bid is the reply to 1N, second bid is your next bid. A "+ invite" or "+game" means to make the appropriate invitational bid depending on opener's rebid.

Slam bids often depend on exactly what you are playing such as Texas Transfers, etc. So we just show the first bid and then a question mark.

T means *transfer* (page 15) to the long(er) major M. R is *Minor Relay* (page 17).

Table 2: Standard Responses to 1N Opener

Shape / Strength	Weak 0-7	Invitational 8-9	Game 10-15	Slam? 16+
Balanced	Pass	2N	3N	4- >7N
4-card major	Pass	2♣ + invite	2♣ + game	2♣ first
5-card major	T + pass	T + 2N	T + 3N	T + ?
5-4 majors M=5 carder*	T + pass	2♣ then 2M or raise	2♣ then 3M or game	2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠
4441 or 4450	2♣ + pass	2♣ + invite	2♣ + game	2♣ + ?
6-card major	T + pass	T + 3M	T + 4M	T + ?
w/Texas	T + pass	T + 3M	Texas	T + 4M
6-4 majors	T + pass	T + 3M	T + 4M	T + ?
6+ minor	R	3m	2♣ then 3m	R + 3♥ / 3♠

(\* ) This line changes if 2♥ is Garbage Stayman

## 6.5 Dealing With Interference Over 1N

The no-trump structure is highly evolved and generally gets you to the right place – so much so, that your opponents will be anxious to get in your way so that

you can't use it. Ron Klinger lamented, "Nobody leaves anyone alone any more." In a later *section* (page 46) we'll learn some of these evil schemes; meantime, here are the basics of how to deal with interference after you've opened 1N.

### 6.5.1 Systems On, Stolen Bids

The standard treatment is that all bids are natural.

The more popular system is called "stolen bids".

- 1N (2a) X! means the same as if responder had bid the overcalled suit, up to 2♠. In other words, a double means, "He stole my bid!". In particular a double of (2♣) is Stayman.
- Any bid above the overcall has an unchanged meaning. However, bidding NT promises a stopper in the overcalled suit. Example: 1N (2♦) 2♥!(transfer to spades).
- The three level bids don't have their special meanings; if a jump, it is a weak bid in the suit, such as 1N - (2♦) - 3♥(preemptive, hearts).

### 6.5.2 Run For Your Life

You also need a system, called a "runout", when your 1N opener gets doubled for penalty. You've played 1N with a *yarborough* dummy before? You don't want to go there. Here's the simplest way out.

After 1N (X) or 1N (Pass) Pass (X) Pass (Pass), responder has the following choices:

- Pass if you are willing to play 1N doubled (typically a balanced hand with at least competitive values).
- XX is a relay to clubs, pass or correct. If responder is weak, we'll be better off in any suit fit. If opener has just two clubs he could bid diamonds instead; assuming he did not open with two doubletons, he has at least three of each of the other suits.

If their double does not show strength, but rather is something like the DONT X for a single-suited hand, responder with a strong hand may pass and wait for

the suit to be shown, or just bid normally. Generally delayed action, when you could have taken immediate action, shows strength.

There is also a school of thought that says to play your runout even if the double is conventional; if responder's hand is not strong, the other opponent's may be. This is especially tenable with the more elaborate runout schemes.

If responder initially passes, and they bid a suit or suits, responder's double is penalty-oriented.

### 6.5.3 Unusual 2N interference

1N (2N) is a very effective bid showing 5-5 in the minors. Against it, use the *General Defense to Two-Suited Bids* (page 50).

As the defender, you do not bid (1N) - 2N to show you have a notrump opener too – you double for penalty. That's why 2N is free to have a special meaning.

### 6.5.4 Three-Level Interference

- 1N (3a) 3N to play, suit stopped
- 1N (3a) 4M to play
- 1N (3a) X takeout double or penalty, partnership agreement.
- 1N (3a) 3y is game forcing

## MAJOR OPENINGS

To open in a major, you must have opening strength and at least five cards in the major. If you have five hearts and five spades, open one spade. If you have five hearts and four spades, open one heart, even if you have ♠AKQJ ♥65432.

Our motto: “It’s not how good, it’s how many.” The primary driver in choosing an opening bid is suit length, rather than suit quality.

The system is quite different when we open in third seat and slightly different again in fourth (passout) seat, and different again if there is interference.

For the moment, assume that your partner opened one of a major M, your RHO passed, and it is your bid as an unpassed hand.

### 7.1 The Big Picture

The possible range of the opener’s hand is huge, 12-21 points. That is the big weakness of standard bidding. As a responder, the key is to know whether your hand is weak, intermediate, game-going, or has slam-interest, and to constantly re-evaluate it as the auction proceeds.

#### 7.1.1 Bust Hands

To reply at all, you need in theory to have 6 HCP. If you have four trump with 5 points or an Ace, it is probably worth giving partner a simple raise. Otherwise you just have to pass. (But see also *weak jump shifts* (page 61).) Do not try to rescue partner if you have a stiff or void in his suit. If you do, he may just bid it again; and besides, your LHO will probably balance in some way. Worst case, you’re only at the one level and your partner has five trump.

#### 7.1.2 Under 10 Points

If you have 6 HCP, you must bid. Even if you have a void in partner’s suit, you must bid. Your partner could have an unbalanced hand with 21 points. So, what do you bid?

- With 6 to a bad 10 HCP and three of your partner’s suit, you make a simple raise to 2M.
- Over 1♥, bid 1♠ if you have four spades. (Forcing)
- Otherwise bid 1N. This shows 6 to a bad 10 HCP and says you do not have 3-card support for partner’s suit (and in the case of 1♥-1N, you don’t have four spades).

Important: 1M - 1N does not say you have a balanced hand. If we made such a requirement, and your partner opens 1♥, suppose we have this hand:

♠K92 ♥2 ♦Q8763 ♣952

We would be stuck. Let’s see why:

- We absolutely cannot pass with those 7 HCP.
- We can’t raise hearts.
- We don’t have four spades, so 1♠ is out.
- We don’t have 10 points, which rules out 2♦ or 2♣.
- The only bid left is 1N.

Our hand is not balanced, so if 1N had to be balanced, we would have no bid.

Don’t confuse a notrump RESPONSE such as 1♥ - 1N, with a notrump REBID such as 1x - 1y - 1N. When an opener bids notrump on his second bid it *does* promise a balanced hand. The responder who bids 1N on his first bid does not.

On this kind of hand, you get essentially one bid. So if your partner bids hearts again, you pass.

### 7.1.3 Invitational Hands

If you have support for partner's major, be sure to revalue your hand and do a losing trick count. Sometimes points aren't the whole story. A 12 point hand, especially one with four trump, or a hand with an LTC of 7, may be appropriate for bidding game.

- If you have 3+ trump, and 10-12 points, bid 3M.
- Over 1♥, bid 1♠ if you have four spades but not 3 hearts. (Forcing)
- With 10 or more HCP you can bid a new suit on the two-level.
- 2N! is not available because it is a special convention we discuss below, unless you're a passed hand.

### 7.1.4 Game-Going Hands

You must make sure we bid game. You must not make a bid your partner can pass.

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**Note:** "Bidding game" is a misnomer; you can stop in four of a minor even though that is not a game. However, this phrase is common bridge terminology so we will use it.

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One thing you'll have on your side is that if responder bids a new suit, and has never passed, it is 100% forcing. That means sometimes you bid suits as short as 3 cards.

Suppose, for example, your partner opens 1♠, and your shape is 3=4=2=4 with 13 HCP. You have a dilemma:

- 2♠ shows 6-9 HCP, so you're too strong for that.
- 3♠ shows 10-12 HCP, and again you're too strong.

- 4♠ shows 5 trump and a weak hand – again, not appropriate.
- 2♥ is possible only if you have five hearts. You don't.
- 1N could be passed.
- 2N! is a conventional bid called *Jacoby 2N* (page 25) that is game-forcing and promises 4 trump. And if you are not playing that convention, 2N is just invitational.
- 3N gets to the wrong game. Partner will never guess you have support.

Therefore, you will bid 2♣; this is forcing because it is a new suit by an unpassed hand. You'll tell partner about the support on your next bid by bidding 4♠.

Had your shape been 3=4=3=3 you'd be bidding a three-card suit. That's ok, it is forcing. You're sure to get another bid.

### 7.1.5 Big Hands

With a really big hand a new bid becomes available, the jump-shift. That's a jump bid of a new suit. In standard bidding you're showing 19+ HCP. We'll cover that later. You can always decide to bid such a hand by continuing to make bids that cannot be passed as you explore for slam.

That's the view from high altitude – now for some details.

## 7.2 Replying When You Have Support

If you have 3 trump or more, you have a fit. It is time to revalue the hand and make a losing trick count. This will help you decide whether to treat your hand as a minimal raise, an invitational raise, or as a game forcing hand. The invitational raise, typically a good 10 to 12 points, is also called a "limit raise" because it sets limits on your strength to a narrow range.

For most of what follows it doesn't matter if the responder is a passed hand or not. For the moment, as-

sume the opener was in first or second seat and there is no interference; we'll cover the differences later.

The most frequent error is to immediately bid 4M over 1M with an opening hand; 4M is actually a weak bid.

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**Note:** You may be tempted to bid 4M with an opening hand because you do not want to risk missing game, but actually, you risk missing a slam. There is no danger of missing game if you simply make a forcing bid.

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The raises after a 1M opener are:

- 1M - 2M shows 5-9, 3+ trump. Not forcing.
- 1M - 3M shows 10-12, 3+ trump (limit raise). Not forcing.
- 1M - 4M is weak, 5 trump, with a ruffing value.
- 1M - 2N!(opening hand with 4 trump). This bid is called *Jacoby 2N* (page 25). Responses are discussed below. If you choose not to play *Jacoby 2N*, 2N means an invitational balanced hand with two cards in M and is not forcing.
- 1♥ - 3♠, 4♣, or 4♦; or 1♠ - 4♣, 4♦, 4♥ are *splinter* bids. It is a game forcing raise, shows a stiff or void in the bid suit, 4+ trump, 13-16 support points and suggests some slam interest.

Holding a 10+ point hand where none of the available raises is appropriate:

- 1♥ - 1♠ is forcing! Do not *ever* pass it even if you opened light.
- 1M - 2♣/2♦/2♥ is forcing. 2♥ promises five hearts; the minors only four.

Both of these embody a general principal: the bid of a new suit by an unpassed hand is unconditionally forcing. Sometimes a responder needs a forcing bid. For example, if you have the opening hand with 3 trump but do not have the required four trump for *Jacoby 2N*, you need to bid something forcing and then 4M.

If your partner has opened one heart and you have invitational or better values, 3 hearts, and four or more decent spades, you can bid 1♠ and later bid 3♥. Note that with sub-invitational values you should just raise to 2♥. The reason is that you are not strong enough to bid 3♥, and 2♥ would appear to be just a simple preference, as in 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥, and would only show two hearts.

The motive in bidding 1♠ in this case is to possibly discover a 4-4 spade fit. If we have both a 4-4 spade fit and a 5-3 heart fit, we want to play in the 4-4 fit where we can probably use the long hearts for discards.

## 7.2.1 *Jacoby* and *Jordan 2N*

In response to a major opening, and in the absence of any interference, a bid of 2N is called *Jacoby 2N* (J2NT):

- 2N!(game-forcing raise with four trump)

shows a hand you would have opened and 4 trump. By definition then, responder is not a passed hand. As you gain experience see *When Not To Bid J2NT* (page 29) for some guidelines on when not to use this bid.

### Responding to J2NT

Opener responds to J2NT by revaluing his hand in light of the fit. Then with a balanced hand,

- 1M - 2N! - 4M Less than 15 declarer points
- 1M - 2N! - 3N 15-17 declarer points, balanced
- 1M - 2N! - 3M 18+ declarer points.

Note the theme – the slower your go, the more you have. This is often termed, “slow shows”. With a big hand, go as slow as you can but no slower; you must never make a bid your partner can pass short of game.

With an unbalanced hand,

- 1M - 2N! - 3♣/♦/♥/♠ stiff or void in bid suit.

- 1M - 2N! - 4a, a very good second 5-card suit, and no more than 13 HCP.

Note the “slow shows” nature of the balanced bids. If you have a choice between showing a second five card suit or a stiff, show the second suit if it is a good suit and you are at a minimum. However, if you have a void, show the void.

After the opener replies to J2N, a non-jump bid in a side suit is a control bid, which are discussed in more detail in the chapter on *slam bidding* (page 65).

### Jordan 2NT

If the opener’s RHO makes a takeout double, 2N! shows a limit raise or better:

1M - (X) - 2N!(limit raise or better)

This bid is called Jordon 2NT (who popularized it in America) or Truscott 2NT (who invented it in 1954) or Dormer 2NT (who popularized it in Europe).

Standardly, this shows four trump as in Jacoby 2NT; with 3 card support, one redoubles and then raises. My recommended partnership agreement is to make a Jordan 2N bid with 3 card support also – this avoids confusion with the “redouble implies no fit” concept for bidding over takeout doubles, gets the support message in early so partner can revalue their hand, and prevents a low-level response by the advancer.

Note that in line with the “all jumps in competition are weak” concept, a bid of 3M here is a preemptive four-card raise.

## 7.3 Replying When You Have No Support

Sigh. Partner opened a major but you have 2 or less of his suit.

After 1M:

- 1♥ - 1♠ shows 4+ spades, unlimited. If you have 4 spades do not skip over them to bid a minor or 1N.

- 1M - 1N shows 6-10. Responding 1N shows 6-10 points and denies support for M (and denies spades if M is hearts), but does not promise any specific shape or stoppers. (Over an intervening overcall, it does promise a stopper in their suit.) Opener rebids after the 1N bid can almost all be passed. They are:

- 2m shows at least 3 in the minor.
- 2N 18-19 balanced.
- 2M normally six cards, up to 15.
- 3M 16-18.
- 4M 19+. To play.
- Jump shift by opener, 19+. Forcing for one round.

- 1M - 2N is not available in this case! It’s Jacoby 2N.
- 1M - 3N is 13-15 balanced, denies 3M.
- 1M - 2♣/♦/♥/♠, promises 10+ points, 4 cards, but 2♥ promises 5 cards; forcing. Although opener must bid again, opener’s reply may not be forcing on responder.
- A jump shift by responder (bidding a new suit while jumping a level) is a strong bid, showing slam values (19 or more).

For standard bidders a jump-shift is somewhat useful; for those playing Two Over One it is less so, because they have other ways to explore slam. Such strong hands occur very infrequently, so some play that a jump shift is preemptive, in which case it must be alerted.

When competition is involved, a jump shift is assumed to be weak and is not alertable. See the chapter *All About Jump-Shifts* (page 61).

An advanced type of strong jump shifts, Soloway Jump Shifts, named after the late Paul Soloway, are discussed in *Advanced Bidding*.



## 7.4 Responding As A Passed Hand

When you are a passed hand, Jacoby 2N no longer applies, and 3M is a preemptive bid showing a weak hand and four trump. The limit raise is done by bidding 2♣!, Reverse Drury. To bid 2N shows a balanced, invitational hand with 2 card support.

### 7.4.1 Reverse Drury

When 1M is opened in third or fourth seat, it may be light. Reverse Drury is a convention that by partnership agreement lets responder show a limit raise without getting too high by bidding 2♣! as a limit raise rather than 3M.

Some people do not like Reverse Drury because they miss it all the time; you must be conscious of your seat position. If you don't want to play it, you will have to use 3M as a limit raise and go down some times if partner opened light in third or fourth seat.

When responder is a passed hand, and there is no competition, 2♣! is the limit raise, while 3M! would be weak and preemptive. The responses are:

- 2M: Opener's hand was substandard. Responder passes unless he has extras.
- 2♦!(Opener had an honest opener).
- 3M!(Opener has 14 points).

In the usual convention, 2♦, 2M, and 3M are the only possible responses. However, we extend the convention somewhat to allow the opener to in effect make a game try. When opener bids a suit other than 2♦!, opener is further describing his hand, and has a full opener. Responder may now bid game or stop at 3M.

Note that the 2♣ bid is no longer available, so a responder might have to bid 3♣ over 1M to show 10 points with a club suit and no support for the major.

Note: the word "reverse" is historical; when the convention was first developed, the 2♦ response and the 2M response were swapped.

A variation, Two-Way Reverse Drury, is described in *Advanced Bidding*.

Add Reverse Drury to your partnership as soon as you feel you both can recognize it with a high degree of reliability.

## 7.5 Bidding After A Raise

Any raise agrees trump. Opener should revalue his hand, adding declarer points.

After a limit raise, the decision to bid game, or to make a slam try, is up to the opener. Any bids at the 4 level under trump show controls. For example, 1♥ – 3♥ – 4♣ is game forcing and shows first round control in clubs, and some slam interest. If you had no interest in slam, you would just bid 4♥ without giving away the extra information.

After a single raise, opener will pass with less than 16 points. If opener is not strong enough to bid game (19+ support points) he may wish to make another bid to explore for game.

### 7.5.1 Help Suit Game Try

After a major trump suit is agreed upon at the two level, any bid between that and three of the trump suit is a "Help-Suit Game Try". This bid is not alertable.

Partner accepts the invitation to game by bidding game. Partner declines the invitation by bidding three of the major.

The standard is that the help-suit bidder shows 3 cards or more in the suit. If you and your partner agree, you could reduce this to 2 cards; in that case the bid is alertable ("could be just two cards").

Partner should bid game if he has "help" in the suit bid and is not near minimum. "Help" is defined as any one of:

- An Ace, King, stiff, or void
- Five cards in the suit
- A maximum
- With no help, and a near maximum, partner may bid a suit below three of the major to show

“help” in that suit, but no help in the suit mentioned.

With a minimum, partner just pretends he has no help.

It is very important that the responder to the help-suit game try just answer the question asked, and not try to second guess the opener’s holding. Opener with more than one suit of concern below trump may ask about the lowest, relying on partner to show help in another suit if the decision for game is not clear-cut.

Example: After 1♠ – 2♠, opener bids 3♦ asking for help in diamonds.

If responder has ♠KJ75 ♥93 ♦K832 ♣J74 he bids 4♠ since he has 8 points and the King of diamonds. If the ♦K and ♣7 are interchanged, he bids 3♠. However, if the ♦K is instead in hearts, he could bid 3♥ to indicate help in hearts but none in diamonds. Without the ♣J, at 7 points he would be near a minimum and should probably sign off at 3♠ even holding the ♦K. Change the hand to ♠KQ65 ♥93 ♦Q832 ♣Q74 and at 9 points responder should bid game.

If agreement at 2♠ is reached through some sequence such as 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♠, an opener’s bid of 3♣ would again be a help-suit game try.

So what meaning then should we give to 1M - 2M - 3M? The simple interpretation is that this invites partner to bid game if on the top of his 2M bid. However, one can also play it, and I do, as a sort of trump-suit game try – asking partner for help in the trump suit, perhaps holding a hand with the strength mostly outside the trump suit.

## 7.6 After 1♥ Openings

If responder has not passed or raised, opener must bid again.

The 1♠ response is not limited and therefore opener must bid. Be aware that 1♠ does not deny 3 hearts; with invitational or better values responder’s next bid of 3♥ or 4♥ shows 3-card support.

- 1N shows a minimum opener and a balanced hand.

- 2♥ shows a minimum opener and six hearts.
- 2N shows 18-19 balanced.
- 2m shows a second suit and a hand not suitable to bid at the 3 level or to reverse.
- 3♥ is invitational and shows six hearts.
- 4♥ shows 19+.
- Raising spades requires 4 trump or 3 trump with an outside singleton or void. The latter is not ideal but the raise can be made if no more suitable bid is available.

### 7.6.1 After 1♥ - 1N

If opener bids another suit at the 2 level, responder should pass or preference back to hearts, depending on which suit is better.

If opener bids hearts at the 3 level it is invitational. A new suit at the 3 level is forcing.

2♠ is an “impossible” bid, since responder has denied four spades. It shows 19+ points, four spades, and more hearts than spades.

A bid of 2N shows 18-19 balanced.

### 7.6.2 After 1♠ – 1N

The responder has not denied having hearts, but has shown less than 10 points. If opener bids another suit at the 2 level, responder should pass or preference back to spades, depending on which suit is better.

If opener bids spades at the 3 level it is invitational. A new suit at the 3 level is forcing.

A bid of 2N shows 18-19 balanced.

## MORE ABOUT MAJOR OPENINGS

### 8.1 Too Good To Raise

The most frequent error beginners make after a major opening is to raise to game because they have an opening hand. That's understandable; you do need to reach game for sure. But the problem is you may be underestimating the opener's hand and missing a slam.

Say partner has opened 1♥ in first seat, and you have ♠AJ5 ♥KQ8 ♦72 ♣AT983.

You have a dilemma. You cannot bid:

- 1♠ – you'd be lying, because you do not have four spades
- 1N – too small, not forcing so partner might pass.
- 3♥ – too small, not forcing so partner might pass
- 4♥ – too big, this is a shutout showing a weak hand and five trumps.

The just-right Goldilocks response is 2♣; your next bid will be 4♥. Note that playing *Two Over One* (page 37), you could bid 1N(forcing) with a minimal hand with three hearts, bidding 4♥ next. However, with the extras in this hand, 2♣ is right.

Note what happens if the bidding goes 1♥ - 4♥. Opener holding ♠K9 ♥AJT742 ♦AK9 ♣K2 is going to think that the partnership has at most 25 points and is not going to explore for a slam that actually has excellent chances.

With some hands, such as ♠AJ5 ♥KQ83 ♦97 ♣AT92, you might even be bidding a four-card suit. That's ok; your bid is a new suit, so it is forcing and you'll be able to clarify on your next bid. This is also an object lesson on why a new suit by an un-

forced hand is forcing; sometimes responder must make something up to keep the bidding going. Don't be tempted to pass 2♣ because you have bid with a minimal opener and have clubs. It is, however, important not to bid 2♥ over 1♠ unless you have five of them.

Note that if you are a passed hand, your hand might have just become game forcing due to the fit. Still, you don't just bid 4♥ right away. You bid 2♣!(reverse Drury), showing a limit raise. If partner then bids 2♥, you can then raise to 4♥, telling your story beautifully – I had a near-opening hand, but now that you bid hearts, I have enough for game with my distribution.

### 8.2 When Not To Bid J2NT

J2NT is not always appropriate even with an opening hand. Here are some situations where you do not bid J2NT. In all these situations do not bid 4M either!

- You only have three trump.
- You have a stiff or a void and 13-16 points; use a *splinter* bid.
- You have a hand that you would not have opened but which has upgraded to be game forcing due to distribution. Do you have a *splinter* bid? If not:
  - If playing two over one, a forcing 1N followed by a jump to 4M is often appropriate.
  - If 1N is not forcing, find another bid, even 2m with a three card minor. Just do something forcing! Then bid game on your second bid.

In general, J2NT is not a bid that is merely trying to get to game; that's a given. The strength of the bid is in searching for slam.

### 8.3 Interference Over Major Openings

Over an overcall, new suit bids show what they would have without the overcall – but you may not be able to make the bid you wanted to make because it would now be at the two level and you don't have 10 points. When this happens consider whether a *negative double* (page 55) is appropriate. A negative double shows 4 cards in the unbid major(s), or, after 1♥ (1♠), at least one minor.

To support after an overcall,

- Raise to 2 with 5-9 and 3+ cards.
- Most hands with Axxx are also worth a raise to 2, especially in spades.
- Cue-bid the overcalled suit to make a limit raise or better.
- A jump cue bid is a power raise with four trump, equivalent to J2NT.
- A jump raise is preemptive in nature.
- A jump to 4 of the major shows a weak hand and 5+ trump.
- 2N becomes an invitational bid with a balanced hand.

Thus, 1♠ – 3♠ would have meant a limit raise, but 1♠ (2♣) 3♠ shows a weak hand with at least four trump. Having nine trump between the hands should be relatively safe at the three level.

In this case, 1♠ (2♣) 3♣ is the limit raise. This lets opener sign off at 3♠ if he does not want to accept the invitation.

Examples:

- 1♥ (1♠) 2♠! limit raise+ in hearts
- 1♥ (2♦) 2♥ 5-9, at least three hearts
- 1♥ (2♦) 3♥ weak hand, 4+ hearts

- 1♥ (1♠) 3♥ weak hand, 4+ hearts
- 1♥ (1♠) 4♥ weak hand, 5+ hearts
- 1♥ ( X) 2N! Limit raise or better, 3+ hearts. Forcing for one round.
- 1♥ (1♠) 2N Invitational, balanced hand. This bid can be passed.
- 1♥ (2♦) 4♦ is an opening hand with four hearts, game forcing.
- 1♥ (2♠) presents a quandary because the 3♠ cue-bid would force opener to game. If you have a suitable hand you might be able to make a negative double and come back to 3♥ to compete. A plain 3♥ is invitational. Lacking the strength to bid 3♥, all you can do is pass; opener with extras should reopen with a double or new suit or, if single-suited, bid 3♥.

### 8.4 What's My Limit Raise?

To avoid confusion in the heat of battle, realize this: in any situation that there is one and only one bid that shows a limit raise (or better). First, stop and revalue your hand in light of the fit, and then choose your raise. This chart shows what to do to make a limit raise:

Table 1: Major Suit Limit Raises

	Unpassed Hand	Passed Hand
No competition	3M	2♣!(reverse Drury)
They doubled	2N!(Jordan)	2N!(Jordan)
They overcalled	cue bid	cue bid

The bids that show at least a limit raise are artificial (rows two and three); this ensures that you will get to bid again, in case you have a game-forcing hand. (Even if a passed hand, your hand may have gotten better).

So, ask yourself, "What's my limit raise?". If you get that right, everything else will be easy.

There is a problem when they make a high-level overcall, in that your cue bid might force to game when you do not have the requisite values. The most frequent case is  $1\heartsuit$  ( $2\spadesuit$ ); at this point  $3\spadesuit$  might as well be  $4\heartsuit$ . If you can't decide, double and if necessary bid hearts later. Or you can bid  $3\heartsuit$  and let partner decide if he has enough extra to bid game.

A cue bid that is forcing to game is still appropriate some times:

- $1\heartsuit$  ( $2\spadesuit$ )  $4\heartsuit$  is a weak hand with five hearts
- $1\heartsuit$  ( $2\spadesuit$ )  $3\spadesuit$  is a game force showing an opening hand or better.

## 8.5 Note on Two Over One

In *Two Over One* (page 37), a response of  $1M - 1N!$  by an unpassed hand is forcing, showing 6-12. Therefore:

- $1M - 3M$  is a limit raise with 4 trump (unless using *Bergen* (page 31)).
- $1M - 1N!$ (forcing) and later rebidding  $3M$ , is a limit raise with 3 or more trump.

Playing Two Over One requires extensive knowledge of opener and responder rebids after a two level raise and after a forcing  $1N$ . Two Over One has a chapter of its own. For now, we mention this much to understand opponents who use this system.

## 8.6 Opening in 4th Seat

In fourth seat it makes no sense to preempt. Therefore we can use an opening bid at the two level to show a hand that would have opened  $1M$  and then rebid  $2M$  no matter what the responder bid:

$2M$  a single-suited major with 12-14/15 points.

The idea is to keep the opponents out of the auction. Opening at the 3 level likewise is a hand that would have been rebid at the three level. Opening  $4M$  is a very strong hand, unlike it would be in any other seat.

## 8.7 Bergen Raises

Bergen Raises are an option; many people do not play them because of the difficulty of recognizing them, or thinking something is Bergen when it isn't. Do not try them until you are experienced in the standard raise structure. Here are the basic ideas so you won't get confused when the opponents play it.

The emphasis is on distinguishing three-card from four-card limit raises. A four card raise has a great deal more potential for game than a three-card raise.

With 4+ cards,

- $1M - 2M$  6-10 HCP with 3 cards in M; or a good five, particularly Axxx in trumps.
- $1M - 3M!$  2-6 preemptive, 4 card raise
- $1M - 3\clubsuit!$  7-10 constructive 4 card raise
- $1M - 3\diamond!$  10-12 limit 4 card raise
- $1M - 1N$  forcing is forcing for one round, may have 10-12 and 3 trump.
- $1M - 2N!$  13+ game forcing 4-card raise. (Jacoby  $2N$ )
- $1M - 3N$  12-15 points, 3 spades, very balanced.

If responder has 3 trumps and 10-12 points, he bids  $3M$  the next chance he gets. Reverse Bergen interchanges the club and diamond meanings.

See *Advanced Bidding* for additional optional features.

### 8.7.1 When Is It Not Bergen?

Bergen raises are off:

- if responder is a passed hand;
- if there is an overcall or double

Rationale: If there is a double,  $2N!$  is a *Jordan raise* (page 26) so you wouldn't need  $3\diamond$  for this. After an overcall, you have cue bids. As a passed hand you have *Reverse Drury* (page 27).

## MINOR OPENINGS

Opening one of a minor is different than opening one of a major. We don't necessarily have a five-card suit – we could even have a three-card suit.

We are still hoping to find a fit for a major, if possible, but more often our game goal is 3NT. If we are sure a suit is unstopped and we don't discover it soon enough, we may stop at 4 of a minor or press on to 5 of a minor.

In a possible slam exploration, the point at which we go past 3N is a point of no return, and we should be thinking of the alternative to 3N as 6 of our minor. Especially in matchpoints, five of a minor when 3N is making is a recipe for a bottom score.

### 9.1 Responses To One Of A Minor

The minimum points to respond are the same as for the major, 6 HCP. Response with 6+ HCP is mandatory.

Responder with a five card major always bids that suit, and bids spades if 5-5 in the majors. Otherwise we bid four-card suits up the line.

The suit responses at the one level are unlimited by an unpassed hand. Opener must not pass them. Many players will bid a major with five good points such as having an ace or a KQ in a long suit.

Responses to 1m with a minimum hand, 6 points to a bad 10:

- 1♦ Four card or longer diamond suit, 6+ points
- 1♥ Four card or longer heart suit, 6+ points
- 1♠ Four card or longer spade suit, 6+ points
- 2m Six to nine points, usually 5+ cards in m.

- 1N Six to ten points, any shape.

With 10+ points:

- 2♣ over 1♦: Ten plus points, usually denies a four-card major.
- 3m is a limit raise, almost always 5+ cards. If there is a game it is going to be 3N so next we will bid stoppers up the line.
- 2N Balanced hand, 10-12 HCP
- 3N Balanced hand, 13-15 HCP

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**Note:** The original Standard American has higher ranges for the 2N and 3N bids, but few people play these now.

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The standard is that a jump shift response shows a 19+ point hand. Many find it more useful to make these bids weak, on the grounds that weak hands are more frequent. So a response like 1♣ - 2♠ is 19 or more HCP with five or more spades; or it is less than seven HCP with six or more spades, by agreement, and should be alerted.

Absent values for a strong jump shift, there is no standard game-forcing minor raise. To force to game, responder has to keep making bids that cannot be passed, which in practice means bidding new suits or going past 3N.

The *inverted minors* (page 33) convention solves this problem.

### 9.2 Interference

The same ideas hold as with major raises – bids above the overcall mean what they would have

meant, except that the limit raise or better is shown with a cue bid. If playing *Inverted Minors* (page 33), the two-level bid is now a simple raise, not a strong raise.

A cue bid at the three level after partner's 1m opener is overcalled is *Western Cue* (page 72), asking partner to bid 3N with a stopper in their suit. You're saying, we have the points for game, partner, but I do not have a stopper. I probably have something to help though.

### 9.3 Opener's Rebid

If responder has bid a major and we have four of them, or three of them and either a singleton or no other good bid, we can raise. Mike Lawrence gives this example:

♠	52
♥	QJ9
♦	AJ763
♣	KQ4

After 1♦ - 1♥, he recommends 2♥. If you bid 1N expect a spade lead and your goose may be well done. That diamond suit does not merit a rebid.

If the bidding has gone 1m - 1♥, and we cannot support hearts, but we have four spades, we must bid 1♠. Do not skip over 1♠ when you have four; responder could have four hearts and four spades.

It takes 17+ HCP to raise partner's suit to the 3 level. With more than that, you will be headed for game, but if you can show shortness on the way, you may wish to show slam interest by splintering. For example, 1♦ - 1♠ - 4♣ would show support for spades and shortness in clubs, with slam interest.

Otherwise, an opener with a balanced hand and 12-14 points will rebid 1N over responder's one of a suit bid. With 18-19 he can rebid 2N. Note that the 2N rebid does not deny any major you may skip over.

- 1♦ - 1♥ - 2N does not deny having four spades
- 1♦ - 1♠ - 2N does not deny having four hearts

The *New Minor Forcing* (page 70) convention helps

find 3-5 and 4-4 fits in such situations. The no-trump opener system is not used.

With an unbalanced hand opener can show a second suit, but to go to the 3 level requires extras, perhaps 15+ points, and a reverse requires 17+. Rebidding one's minor, or the other minor, at the 2 level shows a minimum opener and a real suit.

A jump-shift, such as 1♣ - 1s - 3♥, is a powerful hand, 19+, with good suits. This is rare. This forces to game since we have at least 19 + 6 = 25 points. With four spades you would just jump to 4♠.

Is opener's rebid of 1♠ forcing (for example, 1♣ - 1♥ - 1♠)? Not in the standard, but many believe you should play it as forcing. The pros and cons are complicated.

### 9.4 Subsequent Bidding

If the opener has rebid 1N over responder's major, a responder with a five card major has a problem. The opener has denied having four of the major, but may have three. With invitational or better values, responder can use *New Minor Forcing* (page 70) to look for a fit. The responder can also rebid his major, showing minimal values and five+ cards.

### 9.5 Inverted Minors

The inverted minors convention reverses the meanings of the raises of a minor, so that the single raise is strong and the double raise is weak (preemptive). Inverted Minors require partnership agreement.

The requirements to raise from 1m to 2m!(inverted) are:

- 10+ points
- 5+ cards in the minor, or four really good ones if it is diamonds.
- No four card major

The 2m bid must be alerted. It is forcing for one round. In competition, 2m reverts to its standard meaning.

After a strong raise, the partners bid stoppers up-the-line. While some do not look to confirm a club stopper when diamonds are the suit, we do. The first party that knows we have stoppers bids 2N, or a responder with a game-forcing hand can go directly to 3N. “He who knows, goes”, as Marty Bergen says. If 3N or 6m is not possible we will head for 4m or 5m.

The 1m – 3m!(preemptive) raise becomes weak, typically less than 7 points, with 5+ trump. The idea is to shut out the opponents. In competition it has the same meaning, because you have a cue bid available as a limit raise.

Inverted minors can be freely added to standard bidding without ill consequence. I include this convention here many of the people you play against will be using inverted minors.



## OTHER OPENINGS

So far we've covered all the opening bids at the one level. Now we're off for the deep woods. Got your sword?

### 10.1 The Strong Two Club Opener

An opening bid of two clubs is the strongest possible opening bid, showing 22 or more points if the hand is balanced. If the hand is not balanced, but rather has a long solid major suit, you can open it two clubs if it has at least 8 ½ tricks in it and at least 16-18 HCP. It is too misleading to partner to open a weaker hand with two clubs. For a minor you'd want to have more like 9 ½ - 10 tricks.

You also need at least 4 quick-tricks. Here's how you count quick-tricks, up to 2 per suit:

- AK = 2 quick tricks
- A = 1 quick trick
- KQ = 1 quick trick
- AQ = 1 1/2 quick tricks
- Kx = 1/2 quick trick

A typical opening bid has two quick-tricks.

There are many two-suited hands with which you should not open 2♣. 2♣ uses up a lot of bidding room and makes it hard to show both suits. Bergen gives these examples:

- ♠AKxxx ♥KQ ♦3 ♣KQJxx has 4 quick-tricks. But looking ahead, after 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠, suppose partner bids a red suit. You cannot show the clubs without going to the four level.
- ♠AKxxx ♥KQJxx ♦3 ♣KQ has the same strength but it is ok to open 2♣ because you can get the hearts in at the 3 level.

The standard responses are:

- 2♦ is called "waiting" and is purely artificial, indicating that none of the other situations apply. ACBL rules now say no meaning of 2♦ is alertable or announceable.

Responder really tells you nothing about his hand when he bids 2♦, except that he probably does not have 8 HCP and a good five-card major.

If you have a very bad hand you bid 2♦ first and on your second bid bid 3♣, called the "second negative" or "double negative". If opener has rebid 3♦ so that you cannot bid 3♣, bid 3♥ as "artificial, double negative". Be sure partner knows this.

- 2♥, 2♠ show at least 8 HCP and a *good* five card suit. Game forcing.
- 3♣, 3♦ show at least 8 HCP and a *good* six card suit. Game forcing.

Be very reluctant to bid 3♦; sometimes you need to show your club suit immediately with 3♣ because to do so on your second bid would show a weak hand.

- 2N should not be bid. Traditional teaching is that 2N shows 8 HCP and a balanced hand, but it is not a good idea according to Bergen. Just bid 2♦.

Opener rebids 2N with a balanced 22-24, 3N with 25-27, and so on.

When opener does make a notrump rebid over a 2♦ response, all the strong 1N systems are "on". For example:

2♣ - 2♦ - 2N - 3♥
-------------------

is a transfer to spades. Think of the  $2\clubsuit - 2\diamond - 2N$  sequence as opening  $2\frac{1}{2}$  NT.

Transfers and Stayman are *not* on after suit replies.

It should be noted that while responder may pass a 2N rebid with a bad hand, all the suit bids by opener are unlimited and completely forcing. Holding:

$\spadesuit 234$ $\heartsuit 234$ $\diamond 2345$ $\clubsuit 234$
---

and hearing partner rebid  $2\spadesuit$ , you must bid. A responder with a bust (defined as no Ace, no King, less than 4 points) shows this with a second bid of  $3\clubsuit$ , or  $3\heartsuit$  if necessary.

For example,  $2\clubsuit - 2\diamond$ (waiting) -  $2\heartsuit - 3\clubsuit$ !(second negative) uses the tempo of the forcing  $2\heartsuit$  bid to tell opener the bad news.

Alternate schemes for responding to  $2\clubsuit$  are described in *Advanced Bidding*.

## 10.2 Preemptive Opening Bids

A *preemptive* bid is one designed to make the opponents miserable even though you have a poor hand, by using up the room they have to maneuver. The opening preempts are those above  $2\clubsuit$ . Be aware that many pairs play  $2\diamond$  to mean minimal three-suited openers or other hand types; this must be alerted.

### 10.2.1 Two-Level Preempts

Opening bids (or jump overcalls) of  $2\diamond$ ,  $2\heartsuit$ , and  $2\spadesuit$  are weak bids, showing a six card suit with 5-10 points, with 10 being rare. If we are vulnerable, the suit must be a good one, that is, two of the top three honors or three of the top five, including at least one of the top three. Not vulnerable, the bid promises at least a Queen and a six-card suit.

In first or second seat, the hand should not contain an outside four-card major, or even a good three-card major holding.

Opinion differs here. There are many very good players who preempt with less than these requirements. However sticking to the requirements has

some positive payoffs in finding 3N games and in playing defense when they bid over it.

These bids have an entirely different meaning in fourth seat. There is no reason to preempt in fourth seat. A two-level bid in fourth seat shows a hand that would have opened at the one level and then rebid the suit at the two level, typically six cards and 12-14 points. Likewise, higher bids show progressively more powerful hands.

### Responses

A raise from the two level to the three level is purely preemptive and relies on the idea that a nine card fit is relatively safe at the three level. It does not require a lot of points, but it does require three trump.

Excepting a raise, other bids by responder are forcing. The 2N bid is a conventional bid that asks the opener to bid a suit in which he holds an outside Ace or King, or else to rebid his suit. Knowing that the opener has an outside entry may permit responder to go to game. This 2N bid is called “feature-asking”. There are other schemes for 2N but they must be alerted.

Generally a bid other than a raise is going to show a hand of 16 points or so. Also, be prepared for opener to simply rebid his suit. He could quite well have nothing else to say.

One test used to decide whether to raise a 2M preempt to the four level is the “Rule of 17”: add the HCP to the number of trumps held, and go to game if the total is 17 or more. It is best to use your brain, however, and imagine how the particular cards you hold will play opposite your partner’s. This is a situation in which it is nice to be confident partner followed the rules about suit quality.

### 10.2.2 Three-Level Preempts

Three-level opening bids are similar to two-level preempts, except they show a seven card suit or six good clubs. To compete over such a preempt requires more than a minimum opening hand.

Three-level openings in fourth seat are not preemptive. They show a hand that would open at the one level and rebid at the three level, typically a six card suit and 17-19 points.

### 10.2.3 Four-Level Preempts

Four-level opening bids are preemptive, showing usually an 8-card suit or better. The bid is not strong, and partner must be cautious about going on. Other than that the treatment is similar to the three-level preempt.

Again, in 4th seat this is a powerful bid, showing 20 points or more. If it really is so great a hand that you are afraid of being left short of game by a partner with almost nothing, it is likely a candidate for a 2♣ opener.

## 10.3 Gambling 3N

Since one can open 2♣ and rebid 3N with a balanced 25-27 point hand, there is no need to open 3N to show this kind of hand. The (non-standard) Gambling 3N convention uses this bid to show a hand with ALL of these properties:

- A solid minor with at least 7 cards.
- No four-card major
- No Ace or King outside the long minor

These restrictions are to talk you out of missing a slam and to help partner precisely visualize his chances for a 3N contract. If partner does think 3N will make, he passes. That means he has stoppers in the other suits, because he is under no illusions that you can help. If not, he bids 4♣ and you correct to diamonds if necessary.

This bid does not come up very often of course, but neither does the one it replaces. It will lead to rather spectacular failures if you and your partner are not on the same precise wavelength.

## TWO OVER ONE GAME FORCE

Two Over One Game Force (2/1) is a system that allows you to slow the auction down on game-going hands. This makes for better slam bidding because neither partner needs to jump just to keep the auction alive. In fact, once the game force is established, the slower you go, the more powerful a hand you are showing.

When a person says they play 2/1, they are usually referring to not just the two main components, *Two Over One* (page 40) and *1N Forcing* (page 39), but also:

- *Inverted Minors* (page 33),
- *New Minor Forcing* (page 70), and
- *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 71).

Many partnerships also include *weak jump shifts* (page 61), because the strong jump shifts are less needed if one can make a game-force at the two-level.

This chapter explains just the two main components. The other conventions are actually best learned first, so that you are comfortable with the other pieces before adding these last two ideas.

The two ideas, “Two Over One” and “1N Forcing”, are actually one big idea. Once in a while you’ll run into people who play “1N Forcing” by itself, but this doesn’t make much sense. Certainly, “Two Over One” without “1N Forcing” is impossible. So we treat the two ideas together.

### 11.1 When Are These Bids Forcing?

When we open a major in first or second seat, and the opponent passes, an unpassed responder’s bid of

1N is forcing one round, and the bids 2♣, 2♦, and 2♥ are game-forcing.

When we open one diamond in first or second seat, 2♣ is game-forcing. 1N is not forcing.

If responder is a passed hand, or there is any interference between the opener and the responder, standard bidding rules apply.

Interference after a 1N forcing bid takes opener “off the hook” and he may pass. An overcall after a game-forcing two-level bid does not cancel the game force.

“Game-forcing” means forcing to 3N or the 4 level. The partnership is not committed to five of a minor; if 3N is not biddable, we may stop in four of a minor. Once the game force is established, if one partner passes an interfering bid, the other must either double or bid on.

### 11.2 How Two Over One and 1N Forcing Combine

In standard bidding, a responder can raise an opening bid of 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠ to the two level with 10 or more points and a suitable suit. When responder is an unpassed hand, we are going to change that, so that these bids are game forcing, thus requiring around 13 points. This leaves a gap: what is responder to do with 10-12 HCP hands if he has no one-level response? He can no longer bid a suit at the two level.

The answer has to be separated into cases: bids over one of a major, and bids over one diamond.

1. Over a major, the responder will bid 1♠ or 1N with such hands, forcing for one round. Most bids of 1N will still mean what they used to mean, a hand of 6 to a bad 10 points with

no suitable one-level suit bid. However, some bids of 1N will be the stronger type of hand. It will be the responder's second bid which shows which is the case. The opener acts as if the bid was 6-10 until proven otherwise, except that he cannot pass.

The 1N response to a major can also be used when responder holds a 3-card limit raise. Responder will jump in the major on his next bid to show this. In this way, opener knows that a normal limit raise (whether 3M or using Bergen raises) is a four card raise.

- Over 1♦, lacking a major, but having limit raise values, the situation is simple: if responder has 4 or more diamonds, bid a limit raise in diamonds. (2♦!, the inverted minor limit raise, if playing that). Lacking that, responder has 4 or more clubs but lacks the values to force game with 2♣, so responder bids 2N. The 1N bid is used only for 6-10 point hands, and is not forcing.

The next two sections give the details on our two new bids.

## 11.3 1N Forcing

Since a two-level bid is now game forcing, any hand with 10-12 points that you would want to bid at the two level is a problem, since it is too strong for a standard 1N bid and too weak for a game-forcing bid. While most bids of 1N forcing are going to show the standard 1N bid hand, some will be the stronger type.

If partner opened a major and we have a four card raise, we will of course do that at an appropriate level.

When responder bids 1N, opener announces "forcing".

### 11.3.1 Opener's rebids after 1N Forcing

The opener has opened 1M and responder has responded 1N(forcing). Next, opener's rebid is as follows.

- Simple rebid shows 12-15, and a **six** card suit, not forcing.
- Jump rebid shows 17+, a very good **six** card suit, not forcing.
- Any reverse is 17+, natural, forcing one round.
- 2N 18-19 HCP, balanced, not forcing.
- A jump shift is 19+, usually natural, game forcing.
- If none of the above applies, bid the longest side suit up the line, but always rebid hearts when holding four hearts and five spades.

The last rule can mean bidding a short minor suit. For example, after 1♠ - 1N(forcing),

♠KQJT7 ♥KJT ♦A83 ♣74

has to bid 2♦; and after 1♥ - 1N(forcing),

♠AQJT ♥KJT85 ♦Q4 ♣74

has to bid 2♣!(Could be short). Neither hand may rebid the major, which requires six cards. The second hand does not have enough points for reversing into spades. The 1N bid denied four spades.

Since 2♣ or 2♦ can be two or three cards, responder wishing to sign off should make a preference back to the major with two card support, even with four card support in the minor.

Because you can bid a short suit, rebidding your original suit shows six cards. This is in contrast to your rebid after a two over one bid, in which it does not show six cards.

### 11.3.2 How Short Is That Minor?

Responder must be very careful to remember that opener may be rebidding a 3-card diamond or club suit, or even a two-card club suit with a 4=5=2=2 shape. But how likely is this?

With 3-3 in the minors opener will bid clubs, so the bid of 2♣ is more likely short than 2♦. With a 5=4=x=x hand, opener will open spades and rebid hearts, but with 4=5=x=x, and not enough points to reverse into spades, opener must bid a short minor.

Therefore the minor is more likely to be short after an opening  $1\heartsuit$  than after an opening  $1\spadesuit$ .

- $1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit$  is the most likely to be short;
- $1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\diamond$  and
- $1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit$  are less likely to be short; and
- $1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\diamond$  is least likely to be short.

Responder can be comfortable passing the minor with five in the suit. Responder should prefer back to the major with a doubleton otherwise.

The entire probability of having to bid a short minor is lowered by always opening 1N with a five-card major.

### 11.3.3 Responder's Second Bid

Note that responder's first bid limited his hand to a maximum of 12 points.

If opener has rebid his major, e.g.  $1\spadesuit - 1N(\text{forcing}) - 2\spadesuit$ , then responder's bids are:

- pass with 6-9 HCP
- raise with 10-12 support points, and 2 or 3 trumps; this is not forcing
- 2N 10-12 HCP, less than two trump, not forcing. This bid does not promise stops or a NT shape.
- 3 of a new suit, 10-12, very good 6+ suit, invitational.

If opener has rebid a minor,

- pass with 6-9 HCP, usually 5+ in the minor, less than 2 of the opener's major
- bid 2M with 6-10 HCP, exactly 2 of opener's major, not forcing.
- A new suit at the two level is 6-9 HCP, usually 5+ in bid suit, 2 of the major, not forcing.
- 2N is 10-12 HCP, fewer than 3 of the major, not forcing. Does not promise stops or NT shape.

- Jump shift is 10-12, very good 6+ card suit, not forcing.
- Jump raise the major to 3M is 10-12 points, 3 trumps.
- Raise the minor is 10-12 points, usually 5+ in the suit.
- Sometimes responder jumps to game with a hand that got better when opener rebid. For example,  $1\spadesuit - 1N(\text{forcing}) - 2\heartsuit - 4\heartsuit$ .

After a jump shift by opener, e.g.  $1\spadesuit - 1N(\text{forcing}) - 3\clubsuit$ ,

- responder usually prefers back to opener's major with 2 card support, or bids 3N with stoppers, even when holding good four card support in the minor. (We are in a game-forcing option, so we can conserve bidding space while showing the 2-card support.)
- With 3 card support in the major and 10-12 support, responder jumps to game in the major.

The auction  $1\spadesuit - 1N! - (2\diamond \text{ or } 2\heartsuit) - 3\clubsuit$  is to play, although with a specially suitable hand opener may make another call.

With a flattish 13-15, but relatively weak holdings in the 4-card suit(s),  $1N(\text{forcing})$  followed by 3N is sometimes appropriate to avoid partner getting too excited.

## 11.4 Two Over One Game Force

If you are *not a passed hand*, and there is *no interference*, and your partner opened a *suit other than clubs*, then...

OK, wait, before I tell you, that was the hard part. When you start playing 2/1 you are going to be getting mixed up because you apply these rules in the wrong context. When you see what looks like a 2/1 bid you have to stop and ask "What has happened so far?".

Ready? Here we go again.

If you are *not a passed hand*, and there is *no interference*, and your partner opened a *suit other than*

clubs, then a two-level response in a new suit is forcing to game or four of a minor. There are six possible sequences:

- 1♦-2♣
- 1♥-2♣ or 2♦
- 1♠-2♣, 2♦, or 2♥

All of these sequences show four card or longer suits with the exception of 1♠ – 2♥, which shows five hearts. Jump bids like 1♦ – 2♠ are not 2/1 bids.

Along with 2/1 we must play *IN Forcing* (page 39). This means that:

- As a passed hand, or if there is competition, everything is standard.
- Over a 1♣ opening, everything (including 1N) is standard.
- Over a 1♦ opening, 2♣ is game forcing, 3♣ is invitational, and everything else (including 1N) is standard.
- The game-forcing response of 2♣ or 2♦ can be as little as three cards, such as when responder is 3=4=3=3, in order to be sure 1♠ – 2♥ is five cards.
- 1♥ – 2♣/♦ does not deny spades.
- 1M – 2♣/♦/♥ does not deny 3-card support for M. A direct raise, on the other hand, promises four trump.
- You do not always make a two-over-one bid with game-forcing values. Other choices include Jacoby 2N, inverted minors over 1♦, and bids of 1♥ or 1♠ when available.

### 11.4.1 Variations in Two Over One

While there is little variation in how 1N forcing is played (some play it as forcing or “semi-forcing” by a passed hand), there are considerable other variations amongst Two Over One players:

- Since 1♦ did not promise five cards, and a response of 2♣ denies the majors, some do not

play this as forcing to game if responder bids 3♣.

- Some play that jump shifts by responder are weak, others various shades of strong.

### 11.4.2 When Do You Bypass A Major?

After a 1♥ opener, holding four spades, do you always bid 1♠? No. With game-forcing values and a five-card minor as well as four spades, bid the five-card minor at the 2 level to force to game. To make this work, we agree that a 2♠ rebid by the opener is not a reverse. Thus, if we have a 4-4 spade fit, we will find it. However, do not skip over a five card major suit.

If you do bid 1♠ over 1♥ holding five spades, opener may rebid 1N or 2N. If they do, you can use *New Minor Forcing* (page 70) with invitational or better values to find a 5-3 fit.

Many people have trouble recognizing NMF in auctions with a 2N rebid:

1♦ 1♠  
2N 3♣!(New Minor Forcing)

When you do decide to respond 1♠ with game-forcing values, it is ok; just be sure that your subsequent bids cannot be passed. *NMF* (page 70) and *Fourth-Suit Forcing* (page 71) are important tools here.

### 11.4.3 Opener’s Rebids After 1M - 2x

Once we have made a 2/1 game-forcing bid, if the opponents interfere we either will bid game or double them for penalty. In such a situation if one partner passes the other is forced to double or bid on.

The opener’s rebids after the game-forcing bid are:

- Simple rebid of 2M is the catch-all bid if nothing else is available. It does not promise extra length or extra strength.
- Jump rebid to 3M shows extra values and a 6-card solid suit. This sets trumps. Responder’s new suit bids are control bids. E.g., 1♠ – 2♦ –

3♠ – 4♦; 4♦ here is a control bid in diamonds, denying a control in clubs.

- New suit at the two level is natural, 4 cards, any strength. Note that the new suit can be higher-ranking without showing extra values, i.e. reverses are off. So, for example, 1♥ – 2♣ – 2♠ shows five hearts and four spades, but not extra values.
- New suit at the 3 level but not a jump: natural, 4+ cards, extra values (15+). This bid will necessarily be in a minor suit. If you don't have extras, bid 2N if balanced / semi-balanced with stoppers, or rebid your major (catchall).
- Jump shift to the 3 level is a strong 5-5 with most of the strength in the suits.
- Jump shift to the 4 level is a splinter in support of responder.
- 2N shows 12-14 or 18-19 balanced, stoppers in unbid suits. With 18-19 make a slam try if responder signs off to show the bigger hand. Responder assumes 12-14 initially.
- 3N is 15-17 balanced (only possible if you had decided to open a balanced hand in a five-card major.)
- 1♠ – 2♥ – 3♥ shows 3 card support, any strength. Not raising hearts denies 3-card heart support. Denies a hand that can splinter or jump raise.
- Single raise of minor shows extra values, 4 card or good 3-card support. Without extra values bid 2N or catchall rebid of your suit.
- Jump raise shows most points concentrated in the two suits, denies a first- or second-round control in the other suits.

Here is how I remember that rebidding my suit does not require six cards: We are going to game; we are in no hurry; all I'm doing right now is showing something else about my hand, and if I have nothing else to say, I just repeat myself. I won't get stuck in a bad fit because partner isn't going to pass.

Another principle of 2/1 is "slow shows", also called the *principle of fast arrival*. The stronger your hand,

the slower you go. Arriving at game quickly says you've shown your values already. For example:

1♠ – 2♣ – 2♠ – 4♠

Responder has raised opener to game directly. This shows minimal values for game.

1♠ – 2♣ – 2N – 3♠ or 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♠ – 3♠

Responder has raised spades slowly. He has extras and has slam interest. In both cases responder likely has just three spades, as he would have bid Jacoby 2N on his first bid otherwise. Opener should now bid controls.

Fast arrival should apply only in situations where opener is a minimum, having rebid 2N or the catchall rebid of his suit. If opener could be stronger, we don't want to use up space by jumping; so when we do jump, as in 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4♠, it is to paint a picture of our hand has having two suits with our values concentrated in the suits and denying outside controls (A/K/singleton/void).

#### 11.4.4 Responder's Rebids

- 2N shows 12-14 or 18-19 balanced, stoppers in unbid suits. With 18-19 make a slam try if opener signs off to show the bigger hand. Opener assumes 12-14 initially.
- A jump to 3N shows 15-17, stoppers, could be unbalanced if no fit.
- Rebid responder's suit shows natural, 5/6+ cards. The game force is still on.
- New suit is natural, 4+ cards. However if a fit has been established this is a control-bid.
- If opener has bid 2 of a lower-ranking suit, responder has 3 raises available for opener's first suit. Fast arrival does not apply because opener is unlimited. For example:

– 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 2♠ (no extras)

– 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 3♠ (slam interest)



- 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4♠ (picture bid) Two-suited, values concentrated in the suits, no outside controls.
- A jump in a new suit shows a singleton or void in that suit and support for opener's last bid major suit. Thus:
  - 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♠ – 4♦!
  - 1♠ – 2♣ – 2N – 4♦!
  - 1♠ – 2♣ – 3♣ – 4♦!

All show a splinter in diamonds in support of spades.

#### 11.4.5 The auctions that start 1♦ – 2♣

This auction is different because our goal is likely 3N. Opener's rebids are:

- 2♦ (catchall) shows 5 diamonds, any strength, does not deny a four-card major.
- 2N shows 12-14, balanced, stoppers, does not deny a four-card major.
- 3N shows 18-19 balanced, stoppers
- 2♥ or 2♠ shows a 4-card major, denies five cards unless suit is rebid on next round to show a 5-6 hand. Does not promise extra strength.

## COMPETITIVE BIDDING

Methods of dealing with competition are woven throughout the other bidding topics. This chapter contains notes on an assortment of special topics.

In an established partnership, you can develop a style – be it aggressive, conservative, insane cowboy, you name it. It is important to realize that it isn't so much that a given style is right or wrong, but that you bid as a partnership knowing what that style is. If you overcall very lightly, for example, your partner must be more conservative with replies to those overcalls.

### 12.1 General Principles

Here are general principles to guide you:

1. Do not bid your same values twice.

For example, you open 1♥, LHO overcalls 1♠, your partner bids 2♥, and RHO raises to 2♠. Do you now compete to 3♥?

Ask yourself, “Do I have something more to tell my partner?” If your hand was an ordinary 13 point opening hand, you have shown those values already. Pass. Only go on if you have extras.

If LHO now passes, your partner can use the same principal – he has promised you six points, but if he really has nine, then he hasn't told you everything, so it is ok to bid 3♥.

Another way to look at this is that thirteen plus nine should be about right for the three level, all the more so with four trumps. Vulnerable, with only three trumps, you'd have to get into the particulars of your holdings.

2. Another guideline is the “Law of Total Tricks”, which says that with a fit, we are prob-

ably going to be able to take about as many tricks as we have trump. That's an oversimplification of the idea, but suffice it to say that with 4 trump in support of a major opener, you're not going to get too burned at the three level (9 trump, so 9 tricks).

3. Extreme shapes call for extreme measures. Read Marty Bergen's famous book, “Points Schmoints”. If you have a double fit, or you have a 6 - 5 hand, get really aggressive. “Six-Five, Come Alive” they say.
4. To “balance” is to bid in the *passout seat*, such as when your LHO opens followed by two passes. As a simple guideline, bid as though you had one more King in your hand, and your partner in reply will bid as though he had one less. More on balancing in *Balancing* (page 57).
5. A passed hand is not always a poor hand. If your partner passed after LHO opened, it may be that he did not have enough to overcall. It may also be that he did have enough, but didn't have a long enough suit, or his suit is the one LHO bid. That's completely different from your partner passing in the first seat. It helps to say in your mind, “Partner has a hand that could not bid over that opener. ” That's not the same at all as “Partner has less than an opener.” We'll see this at work in the section on reopening with a double.
6. Realize when you are “off the hook”. Your partner makes a takeout double, but your RHO bids over it. Or, your partner makes an Unusual 2N bid but RHO intervenes. You're off the hook! You do not have to bid unless you have a worthwhile thing to say. When you do make such a “free” bid, your partner will

infer that you have something; when you bid because you have to, he cannot make such an inference.

7. Don't be cheap. If your partner makes a take-out double, and you bid the lowest thing you can, you're saying you don't have 8 good points. Just because it is a competitive auction doesn't mean to hide your values.

## 12.2 When They Overcall 1N

When we open a suit, and there is a direct overcall of 1N, responder doubles with any hand holding 10 or more points. This is penalty oriented. The partner of the 1N bidder will have virtually no points. Any suit bid shows less than 10 points and is competitive.

After 1x - (1N) - X, don't let them play anything below 2♠ undoubled. For example 1x - (1N) - X - (2♥) - P - (P), responder must double again or bid.

## 12.3 Overcalls

The range for an overcall is 8-16 points. People tend to remember the 8 and forget the 16. The first rule to remember is that if you have 17 or more points, you must double first and then bid again. Your partner will think it is a takeout double at first, but when you bid again partner must cancel his expectations as to your shape. If you don't double first, partner will assume you have 8-16 and may pass your overcall despite having enough for game opposite your strong holding. There is one exception to this rule, which is that with a big two-suited hand an overcall, or Michael's, or Unusual 2N, may work better than a double.

On the bottom end, a one-level overcall can be much more relaxed than a two-level overcall. An overcall is above all a request for your partner to lead your suit, so the first requirement is a suit you want led.

Classify your hand as to whether it is a good hand (near or above opening values), and has a good suit. For a more dangerous case such as a two-level overcall, especially vulnerable, you need a good hand and

a good suit. For less dangerous cases, you need one or the other. In both cases, you should want the suit led if your partner becomes the opening leader.

Mike Lawrence's "Complete Book of Overcalls" has a complete discussion. He emphasizes understanding the safety of various overcalls. For example, after an auction that begins (1♣)-P-(2♣), bidding is strongly encouraged, because RHO does not have diamonds, hearts, or spades, and has limited values; whereas after (1♥) - P - (2♥), clubs and diamonds are not safe - either opponent may have them.

Responding to an overcall, a bid of a new suit is not forcing, but shows some values.

## 12.4 Weak Jump Overcalls

A jump overcall such as (1♥) 2♠ is essentially like an opening weak two or three bid. A good suit is needed. As with a preempt, after you make this bid you should almost never bid again.

Some times you have a hand that could have opened with a weak preempt but you did not for some reason, such as having an outside four-card major in first or second seat. If you passed at first you can bid later once it becomes clear your partner is not being preempted by your bid.

## 12.5 Michaels Cue Bid

An immediate or balancing cue bid of a suit opener is shows a distributional hand with 5-5 or better shape, with the suits being both majors when the opponents bid a minor, and the unbid major and a minor if the opponents bid a major.

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**Note:** Cue bids are in general not alertable - in fact, 1♣ - (2♣) is only alerted if it is *natural*. However, it is not necessarily Michaels either. If opponents make such a bid, and you are considering a bid, be sure to ask what they mean by it. This is one case when silence does not mean standard.

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Advancer can bid 2N! asking for the minor. Except in unusual circumstances, advancer must choose between partner's two suits.

The Michaels bid does not show anything more than a prudent overcall but is unlimited.

Without partnership agreement, (1x) P (1y) 2x is not Michaels but natural; this is especially possible after 1♣ or 1♦. Over hearts or spades it is pretty clear this should be Michaels.

Over an opening 2♠, a bid of 3♠ should be *Western Cue* (page 72), asking partner to bid 3N with a spade stopper. There isn't enough room for Michaels.

Some partners agree to use Michaels only with minimal or maximum hands – see *Minimax* (page 46).

A question arises when the Michaels bid shows a major and an unknown suit, and the responder makes a bid, but advancer has no support for the major. E.g., (1♥) 2♥ (3♦) ?. Typically responder's 3♦ bid shows a weak hand with diamonds, if opponents are playing unusual vs. unusual, but many intermediate pairs will lack agreements. With values but lacking spade support here, and ideally holding at least two diamonds, advancer should double, asking for the second suit or a penalty pass.

Without values, of course, you are off the hook and can pass.

## 12.6 Unusual 2N

Unusual 2N is a direct or balancing 2N bid after a 1-level opening. It shows a hand of unstated strength that is at least 5-5 in the lowest two unbid suits. Advancer should choose the best of these two suits, except in remarkable circumstances.

Unusual 2N is not alertable. Some partners agree to use Unusual 2N only with weak or strong hands, see *Minimax* (page 46).

It is also possible to recognize other “impossible” no-trump bids as unusual. For example,

(1♣) - (1♠) 2N

would show 5-5 in the red suits. Logically, nobody has a big enough hand to bid no-trump at the two level here. 2N specifically shows the 5-5 shape, while a double would be takeout but presumably not that good a shape.

Another possible agreement: if they preempt four of something, 4N is unusual notrump, asking advancer to pick his best of the two lowest unbid suits. Double is takeout through four hearts or four spades. Others play 4N as a two-suited takeout.

## 12.7 Minimax Style

Minimax is an optional style of bidding Michaels and Unusual 2N. If you are playing minimax, it means you use these bids only with a maximum or a minimum; with a medium hand you bid the higher-ranked suit, hoping to show the other later.

When playing minimax, advancer will assume the weaker hand until his partner bids again to show the good hand.

The minimum would be an adequate overcall but less than an opener, while a maximum would be more than 15 points.

Minimax allows more certainty in responses to two-suited bids, at the price of not being able to make those bids as often.

## 12.8 Competing With Their 1N

The main thing is not to just sit there and say nothing whenever an opponent opens 1N. Your opponents are driving a highly-tuned sports car when they get their 1N thing going. They are going to get to the right place unless you bother them.

The reason that there are all these conventions I'm about to mention is that the main thing you need is a good shape. 5332 and 4333 hands need not apply. Usually the single-suited bids are a good five or six cards and the other two-suited bids are 5-4 at least; generally, 5-4 instead of 5-5 requires a stronger hand. Suit texture and length matter more than HCP.

By partnership agreement you can play these in only the direct seat or also play them in fourth seat; but in fourth seat you need great shape or extra strength because the 1N bidder is behind you.

We assume here for the moment it is a 15-17 1N opener. See below for comments about dealing with weaker notrump openings.

(1N) - 2N is always “unusual 2N” showing 5-5 in the minors.

The two most popular conventions are called D.O.N.T. (Disturbing the Opponent’s No Trump) and Cappelletti, also known as Hamilton. Each of these has an advanced version meant to make it usable in more cases. Cappelletti has the advantage of preserving a penalty-double; D.O.N.T. allows one to interfere more often; each convention will be better on some hands and worse on the other.

### 12.8.1 Natural

You can just bid naturally over 1N; a double will show a hand as good as the one your 1N bidder has. You’ll want a decent six-card suit, or a great five-card suit, and around 10 points.

What if you are the partner of someone who overcalls a 1N opener and you do not like their suit, not one little bit? Do you rescue them? Probably not. If he doesn’t like your suit he may go back to his.

### 12.8.2 D.O.N.T.

D.O.N.T stands for Disturbing Opponents’ No Trump, and is another idea from the fertile mind of Marty Bergen. The emphasis is on getting in there even if, on rare occasion, we miss a game.

The one-suited bids require at least a good five-card suit, and 8 – 10 points or better. Be aggressive only with good suits, good shape. The two-suited bids require at least 5-4 in either order.

- X! A hand with one long suit.
- Response: 2♣! Forced; then the doubler passes or corrects.

- 2♣! Clubs and a higher suit
- 2♦! Diamonds and a higher suit
- 2♥ Shows long hearts and spades
- 2♠ Shows long spades; it is a weaker hand than doubling and correcting to spades
- 2N Shows both minors 5-5

In response to 2♣ and 2♦, pass unless you have shortness, or bid the next higher suit, or on rare occasion, a good long suit of your own.

Example: Suppose the bidding goes (1N) 2♦!(Diamonds and a higher suit)

- With ♠KQ86 ♥Q8 ♦98 ♣98764 you would bid 2♥, because your hearts and spades are better than your diamonds.
- With ♠K ♥KQ865 ♦98 ♣98764 you would pass 2♦. You’d like to bid hearts but you don’t want to land in a five-card spade fit.
- With ♠KQJ9852 ♥6 ♦98 ♣984 you just bid 2♠, which is to play.

### 12.8.3 Cappelletti (Hamilton)

In this scheme, which is perhaps the most common non-natural set of responses to a 1N opener, the double is left as penalty-oriented, at the cost of requiring us to go to the three level to show clubs. Against a weak 1N opener, this is the most popular scheme. *intervenor* bids:

- X penalty-oriented (an equal or better hand to the one shown by the opener)
- 2♣!(long unknown suit)  
With a good six-card club suit, advancer may pass. Or, advancer bids 2♦!(relay to clubs), pass or correct to 2♥, 2♠, or 3♣.
- 2♦!(hearts and spades)  
Advancer normally bids his best major, pass or correct.
- 2♥(hearts and a minor) or 2♠(spades and a minor)

Advancer bids 2N to ask for the minor.

- 2N(5-5 in the minors) is Unusual 2N.

The two suited bids are nominally 5-5, but depending on strength and vulnerability, can be made with a good 5-4. Advancer can depart from the relay by bidding their own suit – this must be a really good suit, and it should not happen very often.

Once you are comfortable with Cappelletti, you might wish to visit <http://www.bridgeguys.com/Conventions/Cappelletti.html> to see a more elaborate discussion.

### 12.8.4 Against A Weak 1N

The “common wisdom” is that Cappelletti is better against a weak 1N, but the truth is perhaps not so simple. Anyone playing a weak 1N will have a sophisticated set of agreements called a “runout”, meant to get them out of notrump into a suit fit, where it won’t be so easy to set them by much, and the hoped-for profits may not materialize. The real solution is to lower one’s standards, for example bidding with two good four-card suits or a five-card “long” suit. And yes, you may end up in trouble, just as can happen against the strong version.

It is probably better for an intermediate to play just one of these systems well against any type of notrump, than to play different ones depending on circumstances. The edge you get from any convention is small; and the loss from a mixup is big.

Be careful, however, against a weak 1N; the partner of the 1N opener is more likely to have a good hand than when a strong 1N is opened.

## 12.9 Competing After They Bid Two Suits

After (1x) - P - (1y), a double is for takeout and shows the other two suits; the suits are at least 5-4 and you have an opening hand.

The Sandwich 1N convention is a bid of 1N rather than double, showing the other two suits but less than

an opening hand:

(1x) - P - (1y) - 1N!(other two suits, less than opener)

## 12.10 Bidding in Passout Seat

There are no preempts in *passout seat*. 2♣ is still strong. But 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ show a six card suit, 12-15. Three level bids are 16-19. Four level bids are 20+. To open Nx is to say that you would have rebid this whatever the response to 1x; you are just making both bids at once.

If this situation does not apply, then you may “borrow a King” – that is, bid as if you had 3 more points than you do. Partner in responding should bid as if he had three less than he really has. In particular this means that with more than about 14 points you should double and bid again.

However, a good guideline is not to open “light” (that is, on a “borrow”) if you do not have at least one four-card major. A player who could not open a major may be able to overcall, and their side will end up with a major contract and a small part-score when you could have held them to zero by passing the hand out. Having something in spades in particular is an important consideration.

Use the “rule of 15”: number of HCP + number of spades must be 15 or more to open “light”.

## 12.11 Difficult Competitive Issues

There are some situations where natural bidding does not have a good solution. Here are two, that have much the same solution.

### 12.11.1 Responding To A Double Of A Preempt

Suppose LHO has opened with a preemptive bid and your partner has made a takeout double, and RHO

has passed, such as (2♥) - X - (P) - ?. You have one of these two hands:

- (A) ♠83 ♥98 ♦KJT864 ♣97
- (B) ♠KQ ♥87 ♦AQJ964 ♣Q7

Clearly, (A) wants to end up at 3♦, because the hand is not worth anything except in diamonds. (B) must look for a game.

So which of these two hands is shown by bidding 3♦? Absent some agreement, 3♦ has to show hand (A). But (B) is one of many hands that want to go to game unsettled as to notrump stoppers or a suit agreement. As things stand, in standard bidding, we must resort to things like cue bids or just taking chances.

Make this simple agreement: a response of 2N!(relay) asks partner to bid 3♣!(forced). This may or may not be a weak hand. Then 2N!(relay) - 3♣!(forced) - 3♦(to play) shows (A), while an immediate 3♦ is a game force with a hand like (B).

You could additionally agree that 2N!(relay) - 3♣!(forced) - 3N shows a stopper, while an immediate 3N denies a stopper; in that case, if partner does not have a stopper either, he should bid four-card suits up the line to find a place to play.

### 12.11.2 Responding To Partner's Reverse

Suppose partner reverses: 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♥. This is forcing, so you have to bid. Again, consider these two hands:

- (C) ♠KT9832 ♥K98 ♦T86 ♣9
- (D) ♠KQJ984 ♥K95 ♦T63 ♣A6

Hand (C) had to bid, with six points. But now what would it mean to bid 2♠? And if that means something like (A), what bid should be made with hand (D) so that we get to some game? Again, it seems like 2♠ had better mean a weak hand, and an offer to play there. And with (B), we get to start guessing.

Our 2N! agreement to the rescue again: 2N!(relay) - 3♣(forced) - 2♠(to play) shows (C), while a direct 2♠ is forcing a round and shows 5+ spades. After the

relay, bidding one of partner's two suits is showing a suit preference with a weak hand.

In this context 2N! is called Ingberman. If the opener has extra values they may choose to break the relay.

The full solution is covered in *Defensive Bidding* in conjunction with the Lebensohl defense to interference over our 1N opener. However, you can play the 2N! relay discussed in the above two cases without playing full Lebensohl. A related convention is "Good-Bad 2N", in that same chapter.

## GENERAL DEFENSE TO TWO-SUITED OVERCALLS

We can use the following defense to whatever two-suited overcall our opponents make over our one-of-a-suit opening. The following method is called the “lower-lower” version of “Unusual vs. Unusual”.

The name comes from the Unusual 2N convention; in that convention a jump overcall of 2N has an unusual meaning – rather than showing a strong hand, it shows the lower two unbid suits. What is unusual about this general defense to that and other two-suited overcalls is that with certain hands we bid one or the other of the suits they have implied holding; such a bid is called an implied cue bid.

Be aware that when an opponent makes a two-suited overcall, if we do have a fit, the trump break may be poor. Length in your partner’s suit is important. Be conservative with only an 8-card fit. The same factors face your opponents, so your eagerness to defend should be correspondingly higher.

If we do double their final contract, lead a trump.

### 13.1 Their Two Suits are Known

If they make an overcall that shows two **specific** suits (not one suit and an unknown second suit), there are two possible cue bids available, and two other suits.

- Call the two suits implied by their bid “theirs” and the other two “ours”.
- Among their two suits, the suit of theirs which would be cheapest to bid next is called the “lower” suit and the other one the “higher” suit. Usually but not always the “lower” is the lower-ranked suit.

We set up a correspondence between the implied cue bids and our two suits:

- A cue bid of the lower of their suits shows length in the lower of our two suits.
- A cue bid of the higher of their suits shows length in the higher of our two suits.

When you have support for partner’s suit:

- A simple raise of partner shows trump support and 7-10 support points.
- The implied cue bid corresponding to partner’s suit is a limit raise or better.
- A raise to game in partner’s suit is, as usual, long trumps and good playing strength with less than limit raise values.
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter, slam try in partner’s suit.

When you do not have support for partner:

- A free bid of the “other” suit is competitive and non-forcing. Typically this hand might look like a weak two opener in the other suit, 7-10 points.
- The cue bid of the “other” suit shows 5+ cards and game-forcing values.
- A double shows you have a penalty double of at least one of their suits, and another bid. Typically this is 9-10+ points. Assuming advancer bids, partner should usually pass to give you the option of making a penalty double.
- 3N is to play, showing stoppers in both their suits.

Pass if you cannot make one of these bids.

Opener’s rebids are generally natural. A cue bid of one of their suits asks for a stopper in that suit and implies one in the other suit.



## 13.2 Only One Suit Is Known

If the second suit is not known, such as a 1♥ (2♥) Michaels bid, things are more complicated.

- The one available cue bid is a limit raise or better in partner's suit. Example: 1♥ (2♥) 2♠ = limit raise+ in hearts.
- A raise to the 3-level is a constructive raise (7-10 points). Larry Cohen recommends that this shows 3-card support for a major, or 4-card support for a minor. Non-forcing. A jump raise to the 4-level is weak and preemptive, showing 4+ card support. Non-forcing.
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter and a slam try. 1♥ (2♥) 3♠ = short spades, support, slam try.
- A no-trump response is used to show 10+ HCP points without support, with stoppers in the other three suits.
- A double shows you have a penalty double of one of their suits, the known one or one of the others, typically 7+ HCP, often a balanced hand.
- All other bids are not forcing.
- Pass can be just waiting but it is usually weak.

The meaning of the responder's rebids after an initial double and pass by opener are as follows. Example:

1♥	2♥	X	2♠
P	P	?	

- Double is for penalty
- New suit is 5+ cards, game forcing.
- 3N is game strength with a stopper.
- Bidding overcaller's suit is Western cue, forcing to game and denying a stopper in the suit and asking partner to bid 3N if he holds one.

In an auction like:

1♥	2♥	X	2N!
P	3♦	?	

we now know both suits. Bidding 3♠ is Western Cue showing a stopper in spades but denying one in diamonds. Double is for penalty.

## 13.3 Summary for Defending Unusual 2N

Recall the general principles:

The implicit cue-bid of partner's suit is limit raise or better; of the "4th suit", game forcing. Actually bidding partner's suit is just competitive. Actually bidding the "4th suit" is a preemptive bid.

The auctions 1M (2N) and 1N (2N) are Unusual showing two known suits, clubs and diamonds. Applying the General Defense we therefore have:

- X shows a penalty double of at least one of the minors
- 3M is a competitive raise
- 3W (the other major) is a preemptive bid
- 3♣ is bid of hearts
- 3♦ is a bid of spades

When the auction was 1♣ (2N) showing diamonds and hearts:

- X shows a penalty double of diamonds or hearts or both
- 3♣ is a competitive raise
- 3♠ is a preemptive bid
- 3♦ is a limit raise or better of clubs
- 3♥ is a GF bid of spades

When the auction was 1♦ (2N) showing clubs and hearts:

- X shows a penalty double of clubs or hearts or both
- 3♦ is a competitive raise
- 3♠ is a preemptive bid
- 3♣ is a limit raise or better of diamonds

- 3♥ is a GF bid of spades

## ALL ABOUT DOUBLES

Doubles are used both offensively and defensively.

The phrase *takeout double* is used to describe a bid that requires partner to bid rather than pass. By contrast a *penalty double*, also called a *business double*, means a double made with the intent to make the opponents play the doubled contract, planning to set them. In between is a *cooperative double*, mildly suggestive of takeout.

Any double can of course be “left in” by passing, converting it to penalty, and any double can be taken out. But, most of the time you should respect your partner’s intent.

Your judgment must be used. For example, in responding to a penalty double, the weaker you are (relative to what your partner should expect in that situation), the more likely you should *pull* the double.

There are many advanced uses of the red card. See “Support Doubles And Redoubles” and “Responsive Doubles” in *Advanced Bidding* for example.

### 14.1 Takeout Doubles

When opponents open a suit, an immediate double is for takeout up to a chosen limit, say four hearts. To say that “double is takeout through 4♥” means that (4♥) X is for takeout, while (4♠) X is penalty-oriented. The standard limit is 2♠. Other popular limits are 3♠, 4♦, 4♥, and 4♠. Modern practice favors at least a 3♠ limit.

A takeout double shows an opening hand, short in their suit, with support for all the other suits. However, it is also used for two sorts of special strong hands, with the doubler bidding again on his next turn. To be precise, a takeout double shows:

- A strong one-suited hand (16+ with a six card suit, 19+ with a five card suit); OR
- A balanced hand too strong (19+) to overcall 1N or lacking stoppers; OR
- A normal takeout double: - A hand you would open - At most a doubleton in their suit - At least Jxx in the unbid suits - Usually cards in the unbid major, or at least 4-3 if both are unbid.

The day you don’t follow these rules you’ll get an auction like (1♠) X (Pass) 3♣ and notice too late that you only have two clubs or you’re at the three level with 10 points and your partner doesn’t have any at all.

A takeout double of a two-level bid shows a good solid opener, say 14-15 points, and the takeout double of a three-level bid requires 16+ points.

In competition, your partner’s double is takeout if:

- They bid a suit below game and below our takeout double limit; AND
- Our side has only passed up to now

#### 14.1.1 Responding To A Takeout Double

Note that in a balancing situation, such as (1♠) P (Pass) X, the balancer has “borrowed a King” and partner should subtract 3 points in choosing a response.

If RHO bids, you are no longer “on the hook” and do not have to bid. Otherwise, you usually reserve a pass for a big trump stack and some significant strength, especially at the one level. Remember, RHO may have passed because he knew you had to bid, not because he’s completely broke.

Although there is the possibility that your partner has a big hand, your initial response is to the normal takeout double.

To respond in a suit:

- With zero to about 8 points, bid your best suit as cheaply as possible. Put emphasis on responding in the major partner has promised if choices are otherwise equal.
- With a decent 9 - 11, you must jump-bid your suit.
- With 12+, you can bid game with a five-card major; otherwise, cue bid their suit.

You may count distributional values for suit bids – in effect, partner already bid the suit and you are supporting it.

You can pass a takeout double converting it to penalty, but be careful – the quality as well as the number of your trumps matter. Your partner should lead a trump if he has one.

To reply in no-trump you must have values; with a weaker hand pick a suit. For a no-trump response, you'll usually have four of their suit and not have a four card major.

- 1N requires 8-10 HCP and a stopper in their suit.
- 2N requires 1.5 stoppers in their suit and 11-12 points; and
- 3N requires 13 or more HCP and 1.5 stoppers in their suit.

### Are You Cheap?

How do I say this? Are you cheap? Do you clip coupons and look for bargains? Did your mother make getting a good deal the goal of your life?

If so, you may be subject to Cheapness in Bridge. Besides constantly complaining about card fees, I mean. Cheapness seems to show up most strongly in responding to takeout doubles. Cheapness refuses to jump-bid in reply, concluding that it is a “waste” or that “we might get too high”. After all, they opened,

this thinking goes, so we couldn't possibly have a game. When we jump, and end up being too high, which will of course happen, an even more steely resolve toward Cheapness sets in.

You must tell partner the truth. Your side might have a game, or you might have enough to prevent opener from coming back in to the auction. Did you ever open a hand with 10 HCP using the rule of 20? Maybe they did! You and your partner may have 30 HCP between you! And by the way, Cheapness, I suspect you're playing your lowest card on defense rather than signaling, you just can't bear to unblock, and you never underlead a King. To be a good player, you must resist the Cheapness.

### 14.1.2 Doubling With A Strong Hand

With a very powerful hand you can double and then bid again, and need not have the shapes we just described. However, you need to know what you will do if partner gets enthusiastic. For example, over one heart you double with 18 points but no spades at all. Partner may respond 3♠ or even 4♠. It won't happen every day but it will happen. You're going to need a plan. A cue bid is a way to show you have a good hand, but if you do it immediately it is Michaels.

If your partner makes a takeout double and then bids again (including another double or redouble), you must mentally cancel your expectations of his hand shape; he has just told you his suit or that he's balanced, and that he has the requisite points. The notion that he has support for the other suits is now null and void.

### 14.1.3 Rebids By The Doubler

Unless advancer jumps, the intervenor (the person making the takeout double) may not bid again unless they have 17 or more points. Raising partner's suit also requires 17 or more support points.

Why? Consider (1♠) X (P) 2♥; (Pass).

Advancer may have NO points at all and has at most 8 points. To raise to 3♥ with any safety requires a big hand, and there is no point in taking the risk unless

the total number of points between the hands may be in reach of game.

After (1♠) X (P) 3♥; (Pass) the advancer has shown 9-11 HCP, so it would still take extras to raise to game.

## 14.2 When They Make A Takeout Double

After partner opens one of a suit, and RHO makes a takeout double, we basically respond the same way as if the double had never happened. If playing 2/1, the forcing 1N and 2/1 bids are off, so replies are standard bids. However there are two special bids to show a 10+ point hand.

- A bid of 2N is a limit raise of partner's major suit. (*Jordan* (page 26))
- A redouble shows 10+ points and usually the inability to raise partner's suit.

Note that raising partner to the three level is a weak, preemptive bid now, not the limit raise.

### 14.2.1 Doubling A Preemptive Opener

To make a takeout double of a preemptive opener requires the right shape and the right number of points. Whatever you do, you won't always be right.

Generally, use ESP - Expect Seven Points. That's a conservative estimate of how many your partner will have, on average. So over two spades, to be safe at the three level you need about 23 - 7 or 16 points. Cheat it a little and call it a good opening hand. To bid over a three-level preempt you want to be closer to 17 or more.

Why ESP? Given that a preempt might average 8 points, if you have 16-18, that leaves 14-16 for the other two partners; that is, around 7-8 for your partner.

When they open a weak two and partner doubles, you answer in more or less the same way as a takeout double. Generally, if you have about the expected number of points, you will not jump in your reply;

with many more you will. Because you may jump on good news, woe be the doubler who did not have the right shape, because surely you will have the "wrong" suit.

To reply in no-trump you would be wise to have two stoppers.

There is a dilemma when your suit is lower-ranking than the preempt suit. Consider:

(2♠) X (Pass)

Suppose you have a weak hand with six diamonds. Then you want to bid 3♦ and have your partner pass. However, if you have the same diamonds but a game-forcing hand, you want to bid 3♦ as game forcing.

Since one bid can't have two meanings, you must agree what a 3♦ bid will mean. Because of the relative frequency, the only choice is the weaker meaning.

The Lebensohl and Rubensohl conventions described in *Advanced Bidding* solve this problem, but are quite difficult for most people. A simplified version is given in *Imprecise Precision*.

## 14.3 Negative doubles

A negative double is a double after we open a suit and they overcall with a bid up to our negative double limit. The standard limit is 2♠ although you can use 3♠, 4♦, 4♥, or 4♠, by partnership agreement. As with takeout doubles, modern practice favors at least a 3♠ limit. It helps reduce confusion if you make the negative and takeout double limit the same.

Agreeing to "negative doubles through 2♠" means that 1♥ (2♠) X is negative but 1♠ (3♣) X is penalty-oriented.

Generally the focus is on finding a fit to your major suit. However, you also need to be prepared for your partner to bid the other unbid suit.

Point-wise, a negative double at the one level requires six points. At the two or three level this rises to 8 to 10 points. If vulnerable, these requirements edge upwards a couple of points.

More importantly, to make a negative double, you have to have the right shape:

- The auction 1♣ (1♦) X promises 4-4 in the majors. You can bid 1♥ or 1♠ instead with 4 cards, so there is no reason to double when 4-3, and if you have a five card suit(s) you bid the (higher-ranking) five card suit.
- The auction 1♣/♦ (1♥) X promises exactly 4 spades; with more you bid the suit.
- The auction 1♣/♦ (1♠) X promises exactly 4 hearts; with more you bid the suit.
- The auction 1♥ (1♠) X promises one minor and a decent rebid. For example:

1♥ (1♠)	X	(P)
2♣ (P )	2♥	

Here responder has a diamond suit and two hearts, and can stand to go back to hearts if opener cannot support his diamonds.

- A negative double of a bid at the two level promises at least one unbid major and a rebid. It does not promise both unbid suits.

At the two level, you sometimes want to show a five card major but do not have the requisite 10 points. You can use a negative double. For example, after 1♠ (2♦), holding ♠64 ♥KQ954 ♦KT54 ♣98, you do not have enough points to bid 2♥, but you do have enough for a negative double.

If you have the requisite points, bid a five-card suit directly rather than make a negative double. Example: 1♦ (1♥) 1♠ shows five or more spades, and 1♦ (1♥) X shows exactly four spades. But 1♦ (1♠) X is simply at least four hearts, but could be more, because 2♥ would have required 10 points, not merely the five hearts.

If opener has a trump stack he could consider passing, especially non-vulnerable vs. vulnerable. However, the negative double is of unlimited strength so use caution.

### 14.3.1 Reopening With A Double

Part of negative doubles is protecting your partner after you open and there is an overcall. What if your partner only has the suit they just bid? He cannot double for penalty – a double would be negative.

**Warning:** As responder, doubling because you have a juicy holding in the overcalled suit is a very common error. Your partner cannot pass it, because you just made a negative double!

Here is a hand where responder cannot double after 1♦ (1♠):

♠KQ983 ♥A32 ♦87 ♣J84

The correct solution is to pass, and for the opener to know that if the overcall is passed around to him, and he is short in the overcalled suit, to reopen with a double. This allows the responder to pass again and make it a penalty double. For example, in this case the bidding might go:

1♦ (1♠) P (P)  
X (P) P

converting to a penalty double. Responder without such a holding bids his four card suits up the line.

Opener has some discretion here; if he opened light, for example, and his partner was a passed hand, he need not double.

### 14.3.2 Reopening Doubles After Notrump Openings

Suppose you open 1N, and LHO bids a suit, say 2♠. If the next two players pass, a double here is takeout.

By contrast, if LHO and partner pass, and RHO bids a suit, a double is penalty-oriented. The difference is in the position of the overcaller; one is over you, while you are over the other. Of course, penalty-oriented doubles give partner a choice, so depending on the strength of his hand and vulnerability he may wish to escape to his best suit. The paradox is that the weaker you are, the more urgent it is not to pass.

## 14.4 SOS Redoubles

If they double our opening bid and try to pass it out, a redouble is a takeout. Partner should bid their best suit. The reasoning is, especially at matchpoints, if you could make a doubled contract it is likely a top already – there is no point trying for a higher score with a redouble, so this bid is available as distress call. This is also called an *SOS Redouble*.

Contrast this with the case that we open, the next player doubles, and the responder redoubles. This shows 10+ points and suggests no fit. The opponents may be in severe trouble.

## 14.5 Runouts

After partner opens 1N and RHO doubles for penalty, if we have a very weak hand our side may be in trouble. If we have a five-card major of course we will transfer to it, but if not, what can we do?

A redouble asks partner to bid 2♣!(relay), which we will pass or correct to diamonds. Opener must then pass. At the worst we'll be in a six-card fit.

Again, the logic is that if we can make 1N doubled, it is already likely a top score. Therefore, redouble can't be to make the score better.

There are fancier runouts than this one, but this one is easy to remember.

## 14.6 Lead-Directing Doubles

They are bidding away and you are going to end up on defense. Wouldn't it be nice to tell your partner what to lead? Sometimes you can!

Principle: Any double of an artificial bid is lead-directing.

Example: Your LHO opens 1N, and your RHO bids 2♥, announced as a transfer to spades. If you want hearts lead, double the artificial 2♥. Naturally, you do this at your own peril – the opponents may leave your double in if they have hearts. So do have a good

shape or some strength to go with your heart suit. The lower the level of their bid, the more careful you must be.

In fact, failure to double for the lead may cause your partner to infer that you may not want a heart lead.

A very important opportunity for a lead-directing double is when opponents are making artificial replies to Ace-asking bids. If the reply is the suit you want led, you double to tell partner about this.

When your partner doubles their slam contract, this demands an "unusual" lead from you; if nothing else presents itself from the bidding, lead the suit the dummy bid first. Generally, you double a slam because you believe you will set it if and only if you get this lead. Since you will get a good score just by setting it, and a really horrible score if you double it and are wrong, you usually only double a slam for the lead. Of course, if you have an Ace to lead against 7NT, be my guest.

When your partner doubles their final contract less than a slam, a trump lead is expected, although you might refrain if it would cost you a natural trick.

## 14.7 Equal-Level Conversion Doubles

This convention (ELCD) widens the range of hands that can make takeout doubles over one of a major. Most experts use this convention, according to Larry Cohen. Be sure to agree with your partner on it.

Suppose they open a major, say a heart, and you have ♠KQ82 ♥92 ♦AQ962 ♣Q7.

Without ELCD, you cannot double here to try to show your four spades. You'd have to just bid 2♦ and risk losing the spade suit.

ELCD says that you can double here and then bid diamonds if your partner bids clubs, to show 4 of the other major and 5+ diamonds.

The downside is that with an 18-point hand with diamonds, you can no longer bid diamonds over clubs because partner won't think you have the big hand.

## BALANCING

Mike Lawrence has a wonderful book about balancing, “All About Balancing”. Learning to balance is very important, especially at matchpoints.

Balancing refers to making a bid when passing would end the auction. The situations vary as to whether one or both opponents have bid, which suit they bid (or notrump), and the shape of your own hand. The key point is that how many HCP you have is not as important as it usually is, because in these situations your partner and you may have half the points or nearly so.

### 15.1 Balancing In Fourth Seat

Your LHO opens a suit, and after two passes, it is up to you. The opener’s partner has nothing, but your partner may have a variety of hands. He has a hand that could not overcall but he could even have a good opening hand that had no suitable bid.

As a general rule, you bid as if you had 3 more points in your hand (called “borrowing a King from partner”) and when partner replies, he will reply as if he had 3 points less.

To balance with 1N you should have 11/12 - 14 HCP and definitely a stopper in opener’s suit. Above 14 actual HCP you usually double first, in the same way that you would double rather than make a direct overcall if you had 17 HCP.

For example, after LHO opens 1♥ and it is passed to you, holding:

♠ KQ82 ♥92 ♦KQ96 ♣J72

you can double because you have at least three cards in the other suits and could open the hand easily if it had another King. Your partner with 10 HCP would

NOT jump in reply, as he would if you were directly after the opener, because he owes you that King.

But, with:

♠ KQ82 ♥92 ♦KQ962 ♣J7

you cannot double, because you really won’t like it when partner bids clubs. You have a five card suit so you can bid 2♦. (There is a convention called *Equal Level Conversion Doubles* (page 57), designed for exactly this situation, but it is a partnership agreement and requires experience to recognize).

With:

♠ KQT82 ♥9 ♦KQ96 ♣J72

on the other hand, bid 1♠; it is important to show that five-card spade suit. If you make a takeout double, you’re denying five cards in an unbid major.

With partnership agreement, 2 of the opener’s suit is Michaels. 2N is Unusual 2N, showing the lowest two unbid suits, perhaps only 5-4 in the suits if you have some decent points. Two-suited bids allow you to get in there more often, but require more experience.

#### 15.1.1 Balancing after (1N) P (P)

You have to be more careful than when overcalling 1N because the big hand is to your left. We play our chosen defense to 1N in *passout seat* as well as direct seat; ask your partner about doing this or just bidding natural suits.



## 15.2 Balancing When Both Opponents Have Bid

Balancing in auctions in which both opponents have limited their hand so that their side appears to have roughly half the deck, say 18 - 22 HCP, is important. Consider these auctions:

(1M) P (2M) P – they stop at 2M  
(P) ?

(1m) P (1N) P – they stop after a 1N response  
(P) ?

(1m) P (1y) P – they stop after a 1N rebid  
(1N) P (P) ?

Balancing in passout seat has been previously *covered* (page 58). It differs from these situations in that the opener has not limited his hand as much. Likewise, an opening bid of 1N that is passed out can leave your side with as few as 15-16 HCP. By contrast, the auctions above indicate a deck that is more evenly divided with a tentative contract that will often make.

The 1M - 2M auction is especially important. If your opponents have a major fit and have made no effort to go to game, then the deck is about evenly divided. If you pass, you will usually get a very poor score, especially at matchpoints. It is worth considerable risk to compete. They have a fit, so we have a fit. Let's find it.

If they have stopped with a suit preference, that's different: 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥ does not show that the opponents have an 8-card heart fit, just that responder prefers hearts to clubs. He might have something like ♠KT83 ♥98 ♦KJT32 ♣92. This means your side might not have a fit either, so bidding over them is much more dangerous.

The third auction tells you your side has about half the points, so again you try to get into the auction, but it is more difficult.

Balance when:

- Opponents have found an eight card fit and stop at the 2-level.
- Opponents attempt to play 1N after a one-of-a-minor opening.
- You are in the passout seat and not-vulnerable at IMPS or at any vulnerability at matchpoints.
- You are vulnerable at IMPS and have perfect distribution.

Your opponents have 18-22 HCP, so you and your partner have 18 - 22 HCP. Therefore YOUR HCP ARE RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT. Whatever you do not have, your partner does have. Your shape and suit quality ARE important. The more flexible you are, the better. A one-suited balance is the least flexible and the most dangerous.

Be liberal about balancing in matchpoints. You likely have a bad board if you pass. If you turn that bad board into a top once in a while, it will more than overcome losing a little more a few times.

At IMPs, be more discrete when vulnerable as there is no gain if you go down one. Always have a perfect distribution for your action.

Besides competing, learning to balance helps your partnership avoid competing in ways that are more likely to get you into trouble, such as ill-judged take-out doubles, two-level suit overcalls in live auctions, and overcalling weak four-card suits. Partner can pass such hands if they can trust you to balance.

## 15.3 What Is The Goal?

Getting them to bid one more is the goal. Getting the contract isn't. At one more, you stand an extra chance of setting them that you otherwise did not have. And after all, if they are in three hearts making three, they get the same score as if they are in two hearts making three.

If they do bid one more, we pass. Our work is done. No more bidding. No penalty doubles.

Always try to balance and respond as flexibly as possible. Convince your opponents that you have found an eight-card fit too and they may bid on.

## 15.4 How Do I Balance?

Your distribution is the key to your choice of balancing action, and to responding when your partner balances. Agreeing on a convention for two-suited bids is important.

We will discuss some specific auctions below. However, there are some general guidelines:

- Double only with at least three cards in all the unbid suits.
- Bid a one-suited hand (5+ cards at the one- or two-level, 6+ cards at the three-level), in any of the auctions, if the suit is good.

## 15.5 Balancing When They Stop At Two

Your opponents have bid 1M - 2M, passed to you in balancing seat. If you pass, odds are that you're getting a bad board, especially in matchpoints or non-vul at IMPs. Do something! But what?

- Double is for takeout, with three-card or longer support for all unbid suits. Partner should bid their best suit. But, by partnership agreement, it is good to be more flexible if you can. Partner with two four-card or longer suits can reply 2N! (two places to play), and we then bid up-the-line until a fit is found.
- Balancing with 2N! shows two places to play; this will be four-card support for two unbid suits. Partners bid up the line to find the fit.

Special exception: After they bid 1♥ - 2♥, 2N! shows both minors, while 2♠ shows four spades. If you had five good spades you would have overcalled at the one-level. In response to 2♠, partner can bid 2N!(minors) with fewer than three spades and both minors; bid your best suit if you are one-suited in a minor.

- After 1m - 2m (not inverted), or 1m - 1N - 2m, double shows three or more in both majors, although 4-4 or better is preferable.

## 15.6 Balancing A Dead Notrump

The auctions:

(1m)-P-(1N)-P-(P)-?

(1m)-P-(1y)-P-(1N)-P-(P)-?

are called "dead notrumps". They have opened a minor and stopped at 1N.

After 1♦ - 1N, the responder has clubs of some sort, and after 1♣ - 1N, the responder may have by-passed four diamonds. Be aware.

There are other ideas but an easy method is to use your existing 1N interference scheme but require only four-card or better suits for the two-suited bids.

It is unlikely you want double to be penalty so a member of the D.O.N.T. family is attractive. Here's the "Meckwell" version (see *Advanced Bidding* for Meckwell).

- 2♣ shows clubs and a higher suit (4+ each)
- 2♦ shows diamonds and a higher suit (4+ each)
- 2♥ and 2♠ are natural one-suited hands (5+ cards)
- Double shows a long (5+) "other" minor, or both majors (4+ each). Partner will bid the "other" minor w, but with both majors the balancer will bid 2♥.

For example, (1♦)-P-(1N)-P-(P)-X!(clubs or both majors). Partner bids 2♣. Balancer with clubs passes, but with both majors bids 2♥, pass or correct.

In response to a two-suited balance, you almost always bid the best suit amongst those offered.

Again: the goal is to get them to bid again. Act confidently. When they fall for it, quit.

## ALL ABOUT JUMP-SHIFTS

A *jump-shift* is a jump bid of a new suit. For example 1♥ - 3♣ is a jump-shift because a bid of 3♣ is a jump over 1♥. In understanding the meaning of such a bid we must recognize the situation. Specifically,

- Is the bid by the opener or the responder?
- If by responder, has responder previously passed or not?
- Has there been competition?
- Does the bid have a conventional meaning?

Let us deal with the competitive case first. If there has been competition between the opener and the responder, a jump shift is preemptive. It is also possible to agree that any jump shift that has no other conventional meaning is weak, even without competition (“Weak Jump Shifts”).

For example:

1. 1♣ - (1♦) - 2♥ shows a hand with weak values, not interest in game, with six hearts. No alert is required.
2. 1♥ - (X) - 3♣ shows a hand with weak values, not interested in game, with six clubs. No alert is required.
3. 1♣ - 2♠ is normally a strong bid, but by agreement can be preemptive. If preemptive, alert it.
4. 1♥ - 3♣ is normally a strong bid, but by agreement can be preemptive. It could also be a conventional bid such as a Bergen raise. If it isn’t strong, it must be alerted.

Now let’s consider the auction with no interference.

### 16.1 Strong Jump-Shifts

A jump-shift shows, in standard bidding, a 19+ HCP hand. Since slam is in the air, the bidder is not worried about getting too high, he’s worried about getting in an awkward situation where partner might pass.

For example, after a 1♠ opener, responder 19+ HCP with 3 spades, and five decent diamonds, cannot bid Jacoby 2N, cannot bid any number of spades without risking a pass, and should not just fly into 6♠ for fear of being too high or too low. After bidding 2♦, which as a new suit is at least is forcing, say opener bids 3♦. Now what?

Unless it is forcing in your system, 3♠ might look like suit preference. Even in Two Over One, 3♠ shows some slam interest but there are a lot of hands that could pose a problem if opener replies 4♠. For example:

Kxx xx AKQJx AQx
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Asking for Aces with a worthless doubleton won’t resolve the heart situation. Opener could hold hands as different as:

AJxxx KJ xxx KJx or  
AQJxx Ax xxxx Kx

Using a strong jump-shift, 1♥ - 3♦ - 3N - 4♠ leaves the decision to go on to the opener, where it should be, because it is the opener’s hand that is most unknown. In the second hand, knowing there are the points for slam, and partner has show a decent five card diamond suit, spade support, and 19+ HCP, the opener can proceed beyond 4♠ with some confidence.

When the responder is a passed hand, the strong

jump-shift shows that the hand has now gotten better so that we should be close to game. The weak version attempts to stop the auction at a low spot.

That's the old-fashioned Goren jump-shift. However, you don't often have such a powerhouse. Most of the time when you do, forcing bids can get you where you want to go, especially if you play Two Over One. Thus the utility of the bid came into question.

Good players remain divided on the issue: weak? strong? or something else? It is up to you and your partner.

Some jump shifts, by the way, are a little hard to spot, particularly  $1\heartsuit - 2\spadesuit$ . Feel sorry for your partner when he goofs.

See *Advanced Bidding* for Soloway Jump-Shifts, which is what I prefer.

## SLAM BIDDING

### 17.1 Blackwood

Blackwood is one of the oldest conventions, and has now been supplanted by the *Roman Keycard* (page 63) version. The same cautions discussed below for RKC also apply to plain Blackwood. It is a tool for avoiding bad slams, not for finding slams.

A bid of 4N, when it is not quantitative, asks how many Aces partner has. The responses are 5♣ for none or 4, 5♦ for one, 5♥ for two, 5♠ for three. Following this, if our side has all four Aces, a bid of 5N asks how many Kings partner has, using the same scheme.

For example:

1♠ - 2♥  
3♥ - 4N (Blackwood)  
5♥(2 aces) - 6♥ (missing an Ace, stop at six)

### 17.2 Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC)

In a suit auction, 4N is almost always Roman Keycard Blackwood, which has largely supplanted plain Blackwood. If you are a beginner you can play basic Blackwood but you should learn RKC early on.

The responses are based on their being five *keycards*, which are the four Aces and the King of trump. If trump has not been agreed to, 4N implicitly agrees (at least for the purposes of responding) to the last bid suit. So, for example, 1♥ - 1♠ - 4N is RKC for spades. The bidder in some circumstances may be intending to end up in some other (higher) suit or notrump but for now responder answers as if the last bid suit is trump, which it very likely is.

Responses (1430) are:

- 5♣ One keycard or four keycards
- 5♦ Zero keycards or three keycards
- 5♥ Two or five keycards but no trump Queen
- 5♠ Two or five keycards and the trump Queen.

This can also be bid with two or five keycards and enough trump to guarantee a 10 card fit, even if you do not have the Queen.

- 5N Shows zero or two keycards and a useful void.
- 6 of any suit below the trump suit shows 1 or 3 keycards with a useful void in the bid suit.
- 6 of the trump suit shows 1 or 3 controls and a useful void in a higher suit.

A void is not useful in a suit your partner bid.

The bids shown are the “1430” response. Switch the meanings of 5♣ and 5♦ and it is the “0314” response. Both schemes have their merits but 1430 allows the important “Queen ask” more often when it might matter.

#### 17.2.1 When 4N is NOT Ace-Asking

A bid of 4N is not always RKC or Blackwood. Here are the exceptions:

- A direct jump to 4N over 1N or 2N, or after a 2N rebid following a 2♣ opener, is quantitative..
- After a 1N opener and transfer to a major, 4N is quantitative.

- After a 1x opener, a direct 4N is plain Blackwood. Responder has a self-sufficient trump suit and just needs to ask for aces.

Many pairs play various conventions in which RKC is invoked with some other bid. Most notably, some pairs agree that after an opening of 1m – 2m!(strong), a later jump by either partner to 4m is RKC for m. (Minorwood)

### 17.2.2 When Not To Bid RKC

It is generally useless to bid RKC if you are missing two keycards and have a worthless doubleton (less than Kx or Ax). The problem is that you learn nothing if partner replies, “One keycard”. You may or may not have two fast losers. In general it is necessary to think ahead and make sure you can take yes for an answer. Learning partner has two keycards but you don’t want to be in a club slam is an unpleasant experience.

When hearts are trump, if partner has two keycards and the trump queen, he will bid 5♠; will you be too high?

When diamonds are trump, if partner has two keys and that isn’t enough, you’re in trouble.

When clubs are trump, playing 1430, if you aren’t going to be able to say yes to zero or three keys, do not bid RKC.

When clubs are trump, playing 0314, if you aren’t going to be able to say yes to one key, do not bid RKC.

The purpose of RKC is to keep you out of bad slams, not to find chancy ones. Use control-bidding to find a custom-fit slam.

### 17.2.3 What To Do After A 14 or 03 Response

After your partner answers 14 or 03, and if you need it to be the higher number, bid five of trumps. If your partner has 4 or 3 respectively, they bid the slam.

### 17.2.4 The Queen Ask

If the next suit above the RKC response is below trumps, it is possible to bid that suit to ask for the trump Queen. Responder bids 5 of the trump suit to deny the trump queen, or else bids six of an outside suit below trumps in which he has a King, or 5N to show no outside King below trumps. Bidding six of trumps shows an outside King in a suit above trumps.

### 17.2.5 Asking For Kings

Asking for Kings promises that the partners hold all five keycards. To ask for Kings, the RKC bidder bids 5N. Responder bids the number of Kings *not counting the trump King*, using 6♣ is none, 6♦ is 1, and so on.

An alternate by agreement, called “Specific Kings”, is to show your lowest King by bidding that suit if it is below trump. If it is impossible to show a king because it is above 6 of your trump suit. you should either make an impossible bid (e.g., show a king you have denied earlier in the auction) or just bid 6 of your suit.

Responder has the right to just bid the grand slam if he can tell he has “the right stuff”.

Both the Queen Ask and the King Ask responses have variations so make sure you and your partner agree, or just stick to the basics or ordinary Blackwood.

### 17.2.6 Dealing With Interference

Rarely, your Ace-asking bid may be interfered with. If the opponents overcall 4N in a suit, you can use a convention called DOPI, which stands for “double zero, pass one”. That allows you to give these more negative bids cheaply. In both cases the first available suit becomes your corresponding next higher-level response. It is easiest to be consistent. For example, playing RKC 1430, with diamonds as trump, after 4N - (5♥),

- Double is one or 4 keycards;
- Pass is zero or 3 keycards;

- 5♠ is two keycards, no Q♦;
- 4N is two keycards with the Q♦, or a known 10 diamonds.

Similarly, after a 4N - (X), ROPI stands for “redouble zero, pass one”.

Note that when the opponent doubles your response to an Ace-asking bid, such as 4N - (pass) - 5♦ - (X), this is normally lead-directing, not penalty, because it is a double of an artificial bid.

## 17.3 Gerber

When no suit has been agreed upon, we have bid notrump, and *at least one partner has not limited his hand*, 4♣ is the Gerber Convention, asking for Aces. This is true even if the bidder has bid clubs. The replies are:

- 4♦ No Aces or Four Aces
- 4♥ One Ace
- 4♠ Two Aces
- 4N Three Aces

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**Note:** Playing with strangers, know that the standard is that 4♣ is Gerber only when it is a jump over 1N or 2N.

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Another good test for “Is that Gerber?” is to ask if 4N is Blackwood / RKC. If it is not, then 4♣ is Gerber. If it is, 4♣ is not Gerber. There is no point to having two bids that mean almost the same thing.

After a 1N opener is transferred to a major and responder bids 4N it is quantitative.

## 17.4 Control Bidding

Control bids are slam tries, bid for the purpose of understanding where the partnership may have issues preventing a slam or RKC bid. For purposes of this discussion, we assume that a major suit has been

agreed trump in a game-forcing auction. While control bids can be used with minors and with Two Over One, you will have to agree on what three-level bids show controls. In a minor one is more often looking for 3N.

A control bid, formerly called a cue bid when referring to slam tries, is a bid that shows the ability to prevent two fast losers in a suit, such as holding an Ace or a void. Most control bids are at the four level or higher. Control-bids are not jump bids. That piece of knowledge helps you avoid confusing splinters and control-bids.

- Aces and voids are called first-round controls.
- Kings and singletons are second-round controls.

The standard method of bidding controls is to only bid first round controls, unless we are already known to possess a first round control in that suit, in which case bidding the suit shows a second round control. (See “Italian Control Bidding” in the next session for a more sophisticated alternative).

- The first control bid in a side suit shows a first round control (Ace or void) in the suit bid, and *denies a control in any bypassed suit*. Controls are bid up the line, in other words.
- If your partner skips over a suit or suits, continuing to control-bid promises a control in the skipped suit(s).

Nothing stops you from cue bidding below the game level and then asking for Aces. For example, 1♥ - 3♥ - 4♦ - 4N. Here, the 4♦ bid showed a first-round control in diamonds and denied holding one in clubs. 4N is RKC, but the bidder is aware of the possible issue in clubs. Instead of 4N, a bid of 5♣ would show that control and deny one in spades. Indeed, suppose responder had xx in diamonds. Normally he could not bid 4N – but knowing diamonds are not going to produce two fast losers, 4N may become possible.

### 17.4.1 Italian Control Bidding

In the Italian style, a control bid shows a first- *or* second-round control. A second-round control can

be shown without a first-control having been shown in that suit. These rules are applied to interpret the bids:

- A control bid is a slam try after trump agreement in a major. It promises first- or second-round control. (Again, over minors or in 2/1 these bids are possible but agreement is needed.)
- A control bid is a non-jump bid in a game-forcing auction with an agreed trump suit. Thus 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♦ is not a control bid because we are not yet in a game forcing auction. But 1♦ - 1♥ - 3♥ - 3♠! is a control bid because bidding on is game forcing and we have suit agreement.
- A control bid that skips a suit(s) denies a control in that suit. So 1♦ - 1♥ - 3♥ - 4♣ shows a club control and denies a spade control.
- As long as slam is possible, always show a control bid below the game level. Likewise, don't control bid if partner has a limited hand and slam is not possible.
- A control bid in a 5+ card side suit promises the Ace or King. For example, 1♠ - 2N! - 4♦ - 4♥ (control) - 5♦ shows the Ace or King of diamonds. Opener's suit must be a good suit or he would have bid his shortness, so being able to show possession of the Ace or King is important.
- Once you show a short suit, control-bid that suit only with a void, not a singleton Ace. An example would be a Jacoby 2N auction, with opener rebidding a stiff or void, such as 1♠ - 2N! - 3♦! (stiff or void) - 4♣ (control) - 4♦; this shows opener has a void in diamonds.
- A control bid at the five level promises first round control, because 4N is no longer available.

Bergen gives this example of a five-level control bid:

West East

♠JT752 ♠AK643  
 ♥AK982 ♥Q64  
 ♦A4 ♦87  
 ♣2 ♣AJT

The bidding is:

1♠ - 2N!  
 4♥ - 5♣ (not 4N here)  
 5♦ - 7♠

The 4♥ bid shows a five-card suit with two of the top three honors. Therefore East knows West has the AK in hearts. East makes the control-bid in clubs to give West a chance to show the Ace of diamonds; for West to immediately bid 4N would be wrong because of the worthless doubleton in diamonds. After knowing all suits are stopped, and foreseeing setting up the hearts for a diamond discard, East can see the tricks for the 26 HCP grand slam. We don't promise this will happen to you, but it shows the power of the method.

Note that quite often preliminary control bids below the level of game allow us to bid 4N where we otherwise could not, or to avoid getting to the five level when we don't belong there.

Bergen's "Better Slam Bidding" and its workbook has excellent examples.

## 17.5 Serious 3N

When we have agreed to a major at the three level, and we are in a game-forcing auction, a bid of 3N shows serious interest in slam, and asks partner to start control-bidding. A failure to bid 3N shows no interest in slam, but a control bid shows mild interest in case partner has extras.

This convention is explained in more detail in Fred Gitelman's article "Improving 2/1" at [www.bridgeguys.com/pdf/GitelmanImprove21.pdf](http://www.bridgeguys.com/pdf/GitelmanImprove21.pdf)



## 17.6 Five Notrump Pick-a-slam

When we have not agreed on a suit but you determine that the partnership has the points to be in slam, a jump bid of 5N is a great alternative to just shooting out 6N. It is much, much easier to make 12 tricks in a suit, even a seven-card fit, than it is in no-trump.

In response, partner can suggest a suit to play in or bid 6N.

## CONVENTIONS

The word “convention” in bridge refers to a bid, or a series of bids, which have an artificial meaning; that is, the bid does not mean what it would literally appear to mean.

You should know that when a convention giveth, it taketh away something else. For example, bidding Stayman 2♣ in response to partner’s 1N opener makes it easier to find major suit fits. But, you cannot ever play 2♣ as a contract after partner opens 1N. In this case the tradeoff is worth it. That isn’t always true.

### 18.1 Burn This Chapter

An expert pair came to our bridge club after a layoff of 30 years. During that layoff a great deal of the bidding that we discuss in this book was invented. They used very few conventional bids. They were, of course, doomed, right?

Strange thing is, they won the first week. And the second. And most of the weeks since then. Their discussions after a board are more often about defense, not bidding. They have since caught up on bidding methods, but they don’t have the same intense focus on them that the rest of us seem to have. When shown these notes, they remarked that our notes on defense should be as big as our notes on bidding.

There are books about defense, but they must be outnumbered 20 to 1 or more. Defense is hard work; conventions are fun and some people seem to think they are getting an “edge” using them and are as excited to add a new one as someone going to a Black Friday sale.

Every time you and your partner have a misunderstanding using a convention, you will likely get a

bottom board. The advantage you get from the convention may be at most a few percentage points, in a situation that doesn’t come up very often. If you blow that convention just once, it may take a year of correct usages to get back to break even. Many of the conventions simply do not occur very often, so it can’t be a big loss not to use them.

Be sure to have a good experience base before adding conventions – nothing can erode your partnership and your own confidence faster than a lot of blown conventional calls. Only play conventions you are both solid on. Do not play a convention someone offers to teach you in the last few minutes before a game.

Almost the worst thing to do is learn a convention’s opening bids but be unclear on some of the followups. Learn the whole convention or don’t play it. And your partner has to have done the same.

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**Note:** Better work on your defense first! You’re on defense half the time!

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### 18.2 What Should I Learn First?

I’m not an expert, and I’m sure experts value things differently than I do. But for what it is worth, here’s my opinion.

- Mandatory to know:
  - *Jacoby and Jordan 2NT* (page 25),
  - *Gerber* (page 65),
  - *Blackwood* (page 63),
  - *Stayman* (page 13),

- *Major Transfers* (page 15) (a.k.a. Jacoby transfers),
- *Minor Relay* (page 17),
- *Negative Doubles* (page 55),
- *Michaels* (page 45), and
- *Unusual 2NT* (page 46).
- *Help Suit Game Tries* (page 27), and
- Worthwhile:
  - *Texas Transfers* (page 17),
  - *Reverse Drury* (page 27),
  - *Western Cue* (page 72),
  - *Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC)* (page 63).
  - *D.O.N.T.* (page 47).
- More difficult but important:
  - *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 71), and
  - *New Minor Forcing* (page 70)
  - Puppet Staymand (see *Advanced Bidding*)
- Advanced:
  - *Inverted Minors* (page 33).
  - *Two Over One Game Force* (page 37).
  - Four-way transfers (see *Advanced Bidding*)
  - Lebensohl (see *Defensive Bidding*)

Other conventions mentioned in these notes and *Advanced Bidding* are strictly options – with one exception. Two-Way NMF, also called 2-Way Checkback Stayman, is actually better than New Minor Forcing and arguably easier to play. But, you have to learn NMF because it has become the de-facto standard for 2/1 players. TWNMF is covered in *Advanced Bidding*.

**Note:** New Minor Forcing (NMF) and Fourth Suit Forcing (4SF) should be learned together, as they are

very similar.

## 18.3 Where To Find Conventions Described

The two-suited bids *Michaels* (page 45), and *Unusual 2NT* (page 46) are described in the chapter on competitive bidding.

Conventions that apply to notrump openers and overcalls are described in the *Opening a Strong Notrump* (page 11) chapter and include *Texas Transfers* (page 17), *Gerber* (page 65), *Stayman* (page 13), *Major Transfers* (page 15), and *Minor Relay* (page 17).

*D.O.N.T.* is a defense to their 1N opener discussed at *D.O.N.T.* (page 47).

Conventions that apply to major suit raises only are described in the *Major Openings* (page 23) chapter, and include *Reverse Drury* (page 27), *Jacoby 2N* (page 25), *Help Suit Game Tries* (page 27), and *Bergen Raises* (page 31).

The Minor Suit Opener chapter includes information on *Inverted Minors* (page 33).

Conventions related to slam bidding are described in the *Slam Bidding* (page 63) chapter.

The *Two Over One System* (page 37) has its own chapter. As explained there, it is not legitimate to play the 1N Forcing convention by itself; it has to go with Two Over One. When people say they play Two Over One, they are commonly going to be playing New Minor Forcing and Inverted Raises, plus all the above Mandatory and Worthwhile conventions mentioned above.

Many conventions have more advanced variations or alternatives, as explained in two other books in this series: *Advanced Bidding* for offensive conventions, and *Defensive Bidding* for defensive one. Included are an expanded discussion of Bergen Raises and popular defenses to 1N openers.

*New Minor Forcing* (page 70) and *Fourth Suit Forcing* (page 71) are explained below.

Some books on conventions are listed in the Resources chapter.

## 18.4 About Alerts

An alert is a procedure required when someone makes a bid that does not show the “expected length or strength” that it appears to mean. Such bids are shown in my books with an exclamation mark after them.

Some bids that would appear to need an alert do not because they have become so common that they are no longer “unexpected” meanings. In some cases the ACBL has decided the alert is helping the offense by reminding partner of the special meaning more than it is helping the defense. The most famous of these is Stayman: 1N - 2♣ would seem to require an alert because it does not show clubs. But by now, “everybody” knows that.

It is better to alert if you aren’t sure. Opponents will help you learn when it is not necessary.

Say “Alert” and show the Alert card, promptly, when your partner makes an alertable bid. Do NOT explain the bid unless asked. When asked, give the explanation. Tell what the bid means (“a limit raise”) rather than the convention name (“Reverse Drury”)

It is unfair to your opponents not to give a clear explanation. If you aren’t sure, say what you’re going to believe about it without any hemming and hawing. If you’re wrong, you’re wrong.

If you realize some time later in the auction that you failed to alert partner’s bid, call the director immediately. If the auction is over, call the director immediately if your side is declaring, but wait until the end of play if you are on defense.

If your partner explains your bid incorrectly, or failed to alert, you have to tell the opponents that, but only at the right time:

- If your side declares, call the director at the end of the auction.
- If you are on defense, do it after the hand is over – to do it earlier is to help your own side’s

defense and not allowed.

You do have to volunteer this information. You might say to the opponents, for example, “There was a failure to alert my 2N bid. It showed a game-forcing spade raise”; or, “My partner’s explanation of my 2N bid was not correct. We do not play it that way over an overcall.”

If your partner explains your agreement correctly but you didn’t bid it that way, you need not say anything. An upset opponent may call the Director or press you about it, and your answer is, “My partner explained our agreement correctly.”

If you deviate from your agreement frequently, it creates an illegal implicit understanding; if you forget now and then, or very rarely do something odd because you want to, it is ok. The test is that your partner should be no more likely to guess that you’re not following the agreement than your opponents are.

Read the ACBL’s Alert Pamphlet, Alert Chart, and Alert Procedures documents for more information.

Some advice: when an opponent alerts a bid, or makes a bid you do not understand, it is good strategy not to ask for an explanation until the end of the auction or at some point when it might affect your bid. You’re only helping them remember or discover a misunderstanding. They aren’t supposed to profit from the latter but they often do and directors have a horrible time with such cases. I call this, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, because a consequence of asking is telling their partner, not just you. When you do ask, ask the partner of the person who made the bid.

If on defense, and your partner has the opening lead, you should wait until he places his lead on the table face down and says, “Questions, partner?” My favorite answer is, of course, “Why are you leading? It isn’t your lead.” That’s why he puts it face down, to save face if he’s leading out of turn.

## 18.5 New Minor Forcing

When a 1N or 2N rebid has been made over a major suit call by the responder, any bid of an *unbid* minor

(hence, a *new* minor) is NMF. It is forcing for one round and is at least invitational. Over 2N it is of course game forcing.

NMF is usually made holding five cards in a major that has been bid at the one level, hoping for a 5-3 fit in the suit. It also can be bid holding four cards in the “other major”.

Here are examples:

- $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!$ (NMF)

Responder holding five hearts wants to know if we have a 5-3 fit. Note opener does not have four spades in this auction, so NMF would not be used to find a spade fit.

- $1\clubsuit - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\heartsuit!$ (NMF)

Responder holding five spades and possibly four hearts would again like to check for a fit. Responder bypassed  $1\heartsuit$  originally, so he either does not have four hearts or he bypassed them because he had five spades.

- $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit - 2N - 3\clubsuit!$ (NMF)

Responder holding five spades would like to check for a fit.

Responding to New Minor Forcing, in order of priority, responder bids:

- Show four of the other major by bidding it. For example,  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!$ (NMF) -  $2\heartsuit$
- Show three in partner’s major and a maximum (14 points) by jump bidding it. For example,  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!$ (NMF) -  $3\heartsuit$
- Show three in partner’s major but no maximum by bidding it. For example,  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!$ (NMF) -  $2\heartsuit$ .
- Repeat your minor to show no fit and a minimum.
- Bid 2N to show no fit but a maximum.

Note that we bid the other major rather than show 3-card support at first. If there is a double 5-3 and 4-4 fit, we want the suit with the 4-4 to be trump, hoping to set up the other for discards as a side suit.

Sometimes it takes longer to tell the story but the story gets told. Compare these continuations after  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 1N - 2\clubsuit!$ (NMF). The responder has bid spades:

- $2\heartsuit$ (opener has 4 hearts)- $3\spadesuit$ (has five spades)- $4\spadesuit$ (has 3 spades and accepts invite)
- $2\spadesuit$ (opener has 4 hearts)- $4\heartsuit$ (me too, plus extras)
- $2\spadesuit$ (opener has 3 spades, minimum, denies four hearts)
- $3\spadesuit$ (opener has 3 spades, and 14 points, denies four hearts)

When no fit is found:

- $1\clubsuit - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\heartsuit!$ (NMF) -  $3\clubsuit$ (no 3 spades or 4 hearts, minimum)
- $1\clubsuit - 1\spadesuit - 1N - 2\heartsuit!$ (NMF) -  $2N$ (no 3 spades or 4 hearts, maximum)

When opener shows a maximum, it is game forcing, because responder invited by bidding NMF.

NMF is important enough to have its own box on the convention card, in the lower right. It is one of a class of bids that are generically referred to as “checkback” bids, and those bids share generally the kinds of responses that NMF uses. Compare NMF with Fourth Suit Forcing, for example.

NMF has a variant, two-way NMF, described in *Advanced Bidding*.

## 18.6 Fourth Suit Forcing

Bidding the fourth suit may describe your hand, but is unlikely to find a fit with partner. For example,

$1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 2\clubsuit - 2\heartsuit$

While it is possible opener has four hearts, it isn’t too likely given that he already has at least 8 cards in the minors. Fourth Suit Forcing gives you a way to bid a hand where you need a forcing bid but don’t have a natural one. For example, suppose responder has, in the auction  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit - 2\clubsuit - ?$ :

$\spadesuit KQJ86 \heartsuit - \diamond A93 \clubsuit KJT82$

With 14 points, responder must drive the auction to game. But alas,

- 2♦ will be passed
- 2♠ could be passed
- 2N could be passed (besides being frightening)
- 3♣ could be passed
- 3♦ could be passed
- 3♠ sets spades as trump, so we'd need six of them
- 3N could be very, very wrong.

But 2♥!(forcing, says nothing about hearts) forces the auction to game (or four of a minor). Everyone can slow down, and responder's next bid will further explain his hand. Note that Fourth Suit Forcing (FSF) almost always implies that the suit responder bid first is five cards long; opener assumes so.

The auction 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ is natural, not fourth-suit forcing. You must bid 2♠!(forcing) instead to force to game in this case.

The fourth-suit forcing bid says nothing about the fourth suit. You could have a void in it. So if you want to show a real suit, you have to bid it again on your next turn.

Some play FSF as forcing only for one round; ask a new partner and check the appropriate box in the bottom right of your convention card.

### 18.6.1 Opener's Rebid

After FSF, opener further describes his hand, and tries to give responder information on two important fronts:

- As with New Minor Forcing opener will try to show 3-card support.
- Lacking support, we want to show a stopper in the fourth suit if we have one by bidding notrump at a level appropriate to our strength.

Example:

- 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥!(forcing, says nothing about hearts) Holding 3 spades, we bid 2S. Otherwise, we bid 2N with a heart stopper.

With opener lacking a heart stopper or 3 spades, the auction might go:

1♦ - 1♠  
 2♣ - 2♥!(forcing, says nothing about hearts)  
 3♣ - 3♦  
 4♦

Here responder's bid of 3♦ showed a two-suited hand in a way that could not be passed since a game force was in effect. Had the responder had an invitational hand with spades and diamonds, he would just bid 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 3♦.

Opener knows that since he denied a heart stopper, when responder did not bid 3N, that game is not possible, so goes on to 4♦ to await responder's decision about 5♦. Good defenders will know to lead the fourth suit if you try to sneak through in 3N.

## 18.7 Western Cue

When we are in a contested auction a (usually) three-level cue-bid of the opponent's suit denies a stopper in their suit(s) and asks partner to bid notrump to show a stopper in the suit bid by the opponents. For example:

1♦ (1♥) 1♠ - 2♣ - 3♥!(asking for heart stopper)

Responder is asking opener to bid 3N if he has a stopper in hearts. Unless responder has quite a few extra points, he'll generally have some help in hearts.

Generally, Western Cuebids are made at the three level while a two-level cuebid is usually a limit raise or better.

Over 1♠ or 2♠, a bid of 3♠ should be Western Cue, asking partner to bid 3N with a spade stopper. There isn't enough room for Michaels over 2♠.

## GLOSSARY

Conventions and concepts described as “advanced” are in the *Advanced Bidding* notes.

**2/1** Stands for the advanced system Two Over One Game Force, or the signature meaning of a non-jump bid of two of a new suit over partner’s one bid in a suit.

**advancer** The partner of the *overcaller*.

**alert** To give a required notification to the opponents. The need for an alert is shown by an exclamation point following the bid. If the opponents ask what the bid means, the proper explanation is shown following the exclamation point.

**announce** To say aloud certain explanations, such as notrump ranges.

**attitude** When signaling on defense, refers to showing if you want a suit continued or not.

**balanced** A hand with an even distribution of suit lengths, 5-3-3-2, 4-4-3-2, or 4-3-3-3.

**balancing** To make a bid in *passout seat* when your partner has passed. For example, (1♥) - P - (P) - 1♠ and (1♥) - P - (2♥) - P; (P) 2♠ are balancing bids.

**business double** A synonym for *penalty double*

**bust** A hand with very few points; no Aces or Kings, and at most one Queen.

**Captain** Refers to the partner who knows the other’s strength and shape within sufficient limits that he must decide the correct path to the final contract, after possibly gathering more information. Later, switches of leadership may occur, but generally the Captain is in charge.

**competitive** A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, strong enough to bid but not strong enough for

bidding game.

**control bid** A bid showing an Ace or void; or in the Italian system, first or second round control of that suit.

**controls** Refers to the number of control points in a hand, counting an Ace as 2 and a King as 1. Also refers to a certain advanced system for responding to a 2♣ opener.

**convention** A bid which changes the standard meaning of that bid to serve another purpose, together with its followups.

**cooperative double** A double that is nominally for takeout but which seeks partner’s opinion on the best action to take.

**count** When signaling on defense, refers to showing number of cards in a suit.

**cue bid** A bid of a suit already bid by the opponents. Cue bid is also an older term for *control bid*.

**current count** When signaling on defense, refers to showing the number of cards in a suit that one holds at the moment, as opposed to originally.

**doubleton** A suit of exactly two cards. Called *worthless* if it does not contain an Ace or King.

**Drury** A convention played after a major opening in third or fourth seat when the responder is a passed hand, to show a limit raise or better. Reverse Drury and Two-Way Reverse Drury are two variants; the original version is almost never played today.

**flat** A flat hand is one with a shape of 4333.

**gadgets** A gadget is a convention that is usually applicable in a small niche bidding situation, or which is considered a minor tweak on another

convention. Gadgets are often inappropriate for intermediates or casual partnerships.

**game forcing** A hand, or bid indicating a hand, strong enough to require bidding that leads to a game or four of a minor suit. Abbreviated “gf”.

**Garbage Stayman** An optional convention used with Stayman to show weak hands 5-4 or 5-5 in the majors. Responder bids 2♥! after a 2♦ response to Stayman, asking opener to pass or correct to spades.

**Gerber** A bid of 4 clubs that asks responder how many Aces he holds.

**gf** An abbreviation of *game forcing*.

**good suit** A “good suit” is one with 2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5, but not QJ10, and usually five or more cards.

**grand** Short for *grand slam*.

**HCP** High-card points. See Hand Evaluation.

**intervenor** Another word for *overcaller*.

**inv** An abbreviation of *invitational*.

**invitational** A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, within 2 points of being game forcing. Abbreviated INV.

**jump-shift** A bid of a new suit (a shift) one level higher than it needs to be (a jump).

**Law of Total Tricks** A guideline used to help determine how high to bid in a competitive auction. With a trump fit of 8 cards or more, and the *HCP* fairly evenly divided, the number of tricks the partnership can expect to win is approximately the total number of trump held by the partners.

**leave it in** To pass partner’s *takeout double*.

**Lebensohl** An advanced convention for distinguishing strengths of responder’s hand in difficult circumstances, especially after an overcall of a 1N opener.

**LHO** Left hand opponent; the player to the left of the player

**major** Spades or hearts; frequently abbreviated M.

**minimax** A style of making two-suited bids, in which the bid is not used for intermediate hands.

**minor** Diamonds or clubs; frequently abbreviated M.

**Minorwood** An ace-asking bid of four of the minor, played with inverted minors.

**negative double** A double that shows strength in unbid suits is called a negative double. The most common example is partner opens a suit and is overcalled in another suit; then a double by responder is a negative double.

**overcaller** The player that overcalled; the partner of the *advancer*. We also call him the *intervenor*.

**pass or correct** A bid intended to either be passed or corrected to another suit. See Minor Relay for an example.

**passout seat** A bidder about to make the third consecutive pass, ending the auction. After an opening bid and two passes, to bid in passout seat is called *balancing*.

**penalty double** A double made with the intent of having partner pass, to collect penalties.

**preempt** Short for *preemptive* bid.

**preemptive** Describes a bid intended to interfere in the opponents auction, usually by or opening or jumping in a long suit.

**pull** To pull a double means to bid over partner’s *penalty double*.

**quantitative** A bid that invites partner to bid slam if on the top of his known range. In conversation, often abbreviated as *quant*.

**rattlesnake** Describes a hand with a 4441 shape (or 5440, if the five-card suit is a minor).

**relay** A bid which requires partner to bid a certain suit, but does not imply possession of that suit by the bidder. Compare to *transfer*.

**responder** The partner of the opener



**responsive double** An advanced convention used to compete after partner makes a takeout double.

**reverse** (1) a bid in a suit higher than the suit you first bid, showing a stronger hand than you've shown so far; or (2) an adjective applied to the name of a convention indicating a variant in which two of the bids are interchanged, as in Reverse Bergen or Reverse Drury.

**RHO** Right hand opponent; the player to the right of the player

**Rubensohl** A *transfer* version of *Lebensohl*. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

**Rule of 17** A guideline used to help determine whether or not to raise a preemptive major bid by partner to game. The rule says to add your *HCP* and number of trumps, and bid game if the total is 17 or more.

**Rule of 20** A hand is said to satisfy the Rule of 20 if its number of high card points plus the sum of the lengths of its two longest suits adds up to 20 or more.

**runout** A method of escaping from a penalty double, such as a double of a

**Sandwich 1N** After opponents have bid 1x - 1y, a 1N conventional bid to show the other two suits with a sub-opening hand.

**semi-balanced** A hand with a 5-4-2-2 or 6-3-2-2 shape, the longest being a minor.

**short** A suit is *short* if it contains 2 or fewer cards.

**singleton** A suit containing just one card.

**slamish** A hand, or a bid showing a hand, that possibly but not definitively might contribute to a slam.

**SOS redouble** A redouble in the passout seat after an opening bid has been doubled for takeout or for balancing.

**splinter** A triple-jump bid showing a stiff or a void in the suit bid and agreeing to partner's last-bid suit as trump. Examples are 1♠ - 4♥!, 1♥ - 4♣!, and the tricky one, 1♥ - 3♠!.

**Stayman** The Stayman Convention is classically a bid of the lowest number of clubs after a notrump opening; it inquires about the opener's major suit holdings. The term is also used to refer other bids with the same purpose.

**stiff** Slang for *singleton*.

**super-accept** A jump agreement in response to a *transfer*.

**support double** An advanced convention used to show exactly 3-card support for responder's suit.

**takeout double** A double that asks partner to bid, usually with an emphasis on getting partner to reveal an unbid major suit.

**tenace** A holding that includes two cards separated by one missing one, such as AQ or KJ. Such a holding is strong if behind the missing card, but weak if the stronger card(s) are behind it. The missing card is said to be *onside* if ahead of the tenace, and *offside* otherwise.

**thirteen** The most important number in bridge.

**transfer** A bid which requests partner to bid a certain suit which is held by the bidder; the intent is usually to cause partner to be the declarer if that suit is trump. Usually the suit bid is one denomination less than the suit requested, known as the *target suit*.

If partner bids the target suit as requested it is called *accepting* the transfer. If he bids it but one level higher than necessary it is called a *super-accept*; and if he bids something else it is called *breaking* the transfer.

Compare to *relay*.

**Two Over One** An advanced version of Standard American. Also written 2/1.

**UDA** Short for "upside down attitude, right-side up count". A low card is encouraging or from an even number.

**UDCA** Short for "upside-down count and upside-down attitude" card signals. A low card is encouraging or from an odd number.

**underlead** To lead a small card from a suit containing an honor; for example to lead the 5 from K985.

**unpassed hand** A hand that has not yet had a chance to bid, or did have a chance but did not pass.

**void** A suit containing no cards.

**W** W is our notation for the “other” major in an auction where a major M has been bid.

**w** w is our notation for the “other” minor in an auction where the a minor m has been bid.

**weak** A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, too weak for any but obstructive action.

**X** Double

**XX** Redouble

**yarborough** A hand containing no honors; a real *bust*.

## RESOURCES

Here are the sources I have found most useful on each topic.

### 20.1 Books

1. *My Advanced Bidding and Defensive Bidding* are complements to these notes, and should be available in the same place you found them.
2. *Standard Bidding With SAYC*, by Ned Downey and Ellen Pomer, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, 2005. This really seems to be the only printed book devoted to this purpose, beyond a little handout you can get from ACBL.
3. *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, by Barbara Seagram and Marc Smith, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, 1999; and *25 More Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, by Barbara Seagram and Marc Smith, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, are wonderfully expository with reviews and quizzes. All of the “25” series books have taught me something. One of them is on Two Over One.
4. *2 Over 1 Game Force*, by Audrey Grant and Eric Rodwell, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY, 2009. I do not care for the 2/1 books by Hardy (on literary, not bridge, grounds).
5. *Points Schmoints!*, by Marty Bergen, Bergen Press, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, 1994.
6. *Slam Bidding Made Easier*, by Marty Bergen, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, 2008. A workbook is also available. This book contains the alternative hand evaluation method that Bergen devised in full detail, also with great details about control bidding and useful slam conventions.
7. *The Weak No-trump: How to Play It, How to Play Against It*, by Andy Stark.
8. *Eddie Kantar Teaches Modern Bridge Defense*, by Eddie Kantar, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, 1999. This part centers on leading, card play and signalling.
9. *Eddie Kantar Teaches Advanced Bridge Defense*, by Eddie Kantar, Masterpoint Press, Toronto, ISBN 1-894154-03-7, 1999. This part centers on strategy, counting, and technique.
10. *Opening Leads*, by Mike Lawrence, C & T Bridge Supplies, Los Alamitas, CA, 1966. This is so comprehensive it is a challenge but well worth it. My scores improved sharply after I read it. Many of Lawrence’s other writings on specialized topics, including balancing and overcalls, are similarly difficult and worthwhile.
11. *Eddie Kantar Teaches Topics in Declarer Play at Bridge*, by Eddie Kantar, Master Point Press, Toronto, 2002. There are many older such books, including ones by Dorothy Hayden Truscott and William S. Root, each of which is worth reading.
12. *Card Play Technique, or, The Art Of Being Lucky*, by Victor Mollo and Nico Gardener. B. T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1955.
13. *The Play of the Hand At Bridge*, by Louis H. Watson. I first read this at age 12, when I had nobody to play with. I probably picked it out because it was one of the biggest books in our little public branch library. First published in 1934, nowadays one reads the modernized version by Sam Fry, Jr. written in 1958. It remains one of the best.

14. *Precision Today*, Second Edition, by David Berkowitz and Brent Manley, DBM Publications, Memphis, TN, 2010 explains one of the “strong club” systems, which many experts play. As of August 2020, it appears to be out of print. It is worth at least having some idea of such systems and how to defend against them. Unfortunately the book refuses to take a stand on many choices, leaving things uncertain. My version eliminating the choices is given in *Im-precise Precision*.
15. *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, 7th Edition, Brent Manley ed., published by the American Contract Bridge League, Horn Lake, MS, 2011. Everything you ever wanted to know – and the section on how to play card combinations is to be frequently consulted after you fail in that department.

see your points, look up convention charts, what the convention card means, find a club or tournament. There is a really great series of explanations about how to fill out your convention card.

## 20.3 Software

There are now many software courses and robot players available. Visual learners may find these more effective than books.

Marty Bergen ([martybergen.com](http://martybergen.com)) has audio-visual courses in addition to books and pamphlets.

## 20.2 Online

1. *Larry Cohen* <<http://larryco.com>> and *Bridge Bums* <<http://bridgebums.com>> are my go-to web sites.
2. The *Fifth Chair Foundation* <[www.fifthchair.org](http://www.fifthchair.org)>, has a wonderful *archive* <<http://www.fifthchair.org/archive>>. Two of the documents, *SAYC OKBridge Style*, by Anna Marsh et. al., and *Two Over One OKBridge Style - Clarified*, by Anna Marsh et. al., are pretty complete both as to system and many basic conventions.
3. *BBO* <<http://bridgebase.com>> is home to massive amounts of material both directly and at the associated clubs such as the Beginner and Intermediate Lounge (BIL) and the Intermediate and Advanced Club (IAC). You can practice playing with three robots there, and mousing over the bids tells you what they will mean to the robots; but the robot plays Two Over One and a rather odd set of conventions. There are many other things there, including official ACBL games.
4. *ACBL.org* <<http://acbl.org>> – be a member,

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