

Problems Solved: Jacoby Transfer and Stayman

When Partner opens 1NT, a quick look gives you a first plan.

- 1) 5+ card Major? Use Transfer: Bid **2D** or **2H**.
- 2) 4-card Major? Use Stayman: Bid **2C**.
- 3) Neither? Using “Rule of 16” **PASS** or bid **3NT**.

“Rule of 16” says that with 8-9 HCP, also factor in one point for every card 8 or above. If you come up with 16, bid 3NT; if not, pass. Later lesson: Minor Suit Transfers.

Think of Transfer and Stayman as Pilot-to-Navigator dialogues to indicate “WHERE?” and “HOW HIGH?” Without interference by opponents, it is merely mathematical and logical, practically a sure thing to get your partnership to the optimal contract.

After Transfer—with Opener’s job simply to complete the Transfer to **2H** or **2S**—Responder easily makes and conveys the “WHERE?” and “HOW HIGH?” decisions...

- 1) Responder SIGNS OFF **Pass** for Part-Score with less than 8 points.
- 2) ...or Responder INVITES with **2NT** with 8-9 points and only 5 in the Major, allowing Opener to make final decision of “WHERE?” and “HOW HIGH?”:
 - a) Opener passes with Min. and only 2-card support.
 - b) Opener corrects to 3H/S with Min. and 3-card support.
 - c) Opener corrects to 3NT with Max. and only 2-card support.
 - d) Opener corrects to 4H/S with Max. and 3+ support.
- 3) ...or Responder JUMPS to 3NT with 10+ points and Opener passes or corrects to 4H/S with 3+ support
- 4) ..or Responder INVITES with **3H/S** with 8-9 points and 6+ in the Major, allowing Opener to pass with Min. or bid 4H/S with Max.
- 5) ...or Responder JUMPS to 4H/S with 6+ in suit and 10+ points.

With Stayman, the bidding continuations are a bit more complex because Responder has already shown 8+ points by bidding **2C**. Knowing for sure, therefore, that they have at least 23 points and perhaps a good chance for Game, the partners **must** (and can usually feel secure in doing so) continue bidding at least once after Opener’s possible rebids of:

- 1) **2D** by Opener (no 4-card major)
 - a) 2NT by Responder shows 8-9 points (Inv.)
 - b) 3NT by Responder shows 10-15 points (Game)
- 2) **2H/S** by Opener showing, yes, a 4-card major
 - a) 3H/S by Responder agrees to Opener’s 4-card Major (only 8-9 points, Inv.)
 - b) 4H/S by Responder agrees to Opener’s 4-card Major (10-15 points, Game)
 - c) 2NT by Responder shows the other major (only 8-9 points, Inv.)
 - d) 3NT by Responder shows the other major (10-15 points, Game)

With Jacoby Transfer and Stayman, there are no gaps in the “WHERE?” logic of finding an 8-card or better Major Suit Fit, also no gaps in the “HOW HIGH?” logic of whether you have enough points to reach Game (usually 25 points).

Although Transfer was originated to find Major Suit Contracts, it can also be used with 6+ Card Minors, converting weak HCP into a much stronger trump hand while providing transportation between Declarer and Dummy. Because the Transfer takes the partnership to the 3-Level, it is not advisable to Transfer to a Minor with fewer than 6 trump.

Note: many partnerships agree **not** to open 1NT with a 5-Card Major, but other partnerships do, particularly those playing Puppet Stayman (later lesson).

Statistics:

15-17 HCP 1NT Opening bid occurs 1 in 21 deals (about 5%).

If you have 5 in a suit, probability of 8-Card Fit is 54%.

If you have 4 in a suit, probability of 8-Card Fit is 34%.

♠♥ *Intuition Bridge v. Logic Bridge* ♠♣

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“So,” one of my bridge students finally got the nerve to ask me, “you don’t leave any room for intuition?”

“I try not to. I prefer logic.”

“Logic always? Based on?”

“Simple math. Adding up to 8, adding up to 25, to 33. Probabilities.”

Plenty of bridge players enjoy an entire lifetime of playing bridge by intuition, splashing about happily on a moonless midnight in a huge lake, never quite knowing where the shorelines are.

“I have less than six points, I pass; I have more than six points, I bid,” was the way another bridge player put it to me. “It’s fun.”

“Well, but you do also have a partner.”

“Oh, yeah, I like to change partners after every rubber.”

And this was no joke.

Rubber v. Duplicate Bridge

When you play Rubber Bridge (“Social”, “Party”, “Kitchen Bridge”) you do play with lots of different partners. A well-versed player knows to adapt to the new partner.

My first question when I get together with a new partner: “Do you play Stayman and Transfers?”

If the answer is no, I understand immediately that for the duration of this partnership I will be playing moonless Intuition Bridge and, yes, it can indeed be great fun.

If the answer is yes, however, I understand that there will be several other questions to ask now, with pure luck left adrift in the canoe:

“How do you play a double raise of a major, 1H-3H or 1S-3S? Forcing, invitational or weak?”

“Limit Raise.”

Okay, I tell myself, a fairly modern partner, not playing the older double raise showing 13+ but also not playing it pre-emptively, 0-6. This partner plays it 10-12 points, invitational. “And how much trump support are you showing me?”

“At least three.”

So, still room for intuition. I myself prefer to play the 1S-3S or 1H-3H double raise as showing 4+ trump support but weak, thereby hopefully pre-empting opponents who might well have higher HCP but who lack our Major Suit distributional strength.

In fact, so valuable do I deem 4+ trump support that I have a simple 4-bid scheme for Responder to show it: the strongest, 12+ HCP being the shortest jump, **2NT**, and from there up-the-line jumps; **3C** to show

next strongest 10-12 HCP; **3D** to show next weaker 6-10 HCP; and **3H/S** to show weakest 0-6 HCP.

Simple, effective, mathematical and logical in principle, but a mouthful to say, and so I do not bother my new partner with such a mouthful but instead go along with his/her system, responding merely, “10-12, Limit Raise, gotcha. You play Weak Twos? (nod yes) And with the strong 2C, which response do you prefer? (accept answer) And do you want to play Blackwood or Roman Key Card 3014 or 1430?”

With these short questions and answers I am ready to play bridge, and I feel I have a good understanding of how this partner and I will proceed together, either splashingly in the shallow waters by the shore or perhaps taking some longer strokes together into the deeper waters out into the middle of the lake. All of it is good fun.

Without Transfers and Stayman

Let’s get back to that “No” answer to my first question... “Do you play Stayman and Transfers?”

I do not believe that I *ever* see at Duplicate Bridge games *any* partners who do not play Transfers and Stayman. Not so at Party Bridge games.

Since many of my students have only Party Bridge experience where—very often!—they are playing opposite people who resist playing conventions of any kind, I decided I should bone up on what other teachers teach. I consulted Audrey Grant’s standard, ***Bridge Basics 1: An Introduction***.

Here is a fair summary of her 34-page Chapter Two, “Notrump Opening Bids and Responses”:

SIGN-OFF PART-SCORE

PASS — 0-7 points without 5+ trump
2D 2H 2S — 0-7 with 5+ trump (omits **2C**, only a footnote mention of Stayman, no details)

SIGN-OFF GAME

3N — 10-15 points without 5+ major
4H, 4S — 10-15 points with 6+ major

INVITATIONAL

2NT — 8-9 points (omits mention of 5- or 6- Card Majors)

FORCING

3H 3S — 10-15 with 5 trump (Opener **must** rebid either 3N or 4H/S)

PROBLEMS: For Audrey Grant to omit—in her questions of “HOW HIGH?” and “WHERE?”—what you should consider doing when you have 8-9 points plus a 5-Card or even 6-Card Major is to leave you with a big hole in your bidding. Her only advice to Responder when you have an invitational hand of 8-9 points is to bid 2NT. She gives no advice at all as to what to do with 4-Card Majors.

As you consider these omissions, understand that experts consider it nearly always optimal to play in a Major Suit Contract when you have an 8+ card FIT between partners, nearly always advisable to play in NT when you do not. (Of course, failing both of these, it is sometimes necessary to opt for a Minor Suit Contract.)