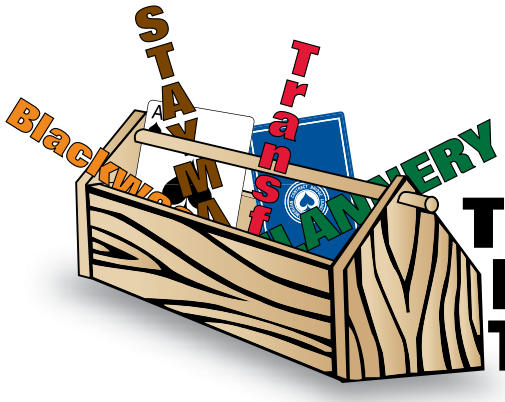


## Weak can be strong

A master builder has many tools available in his toolkit. Some are for specialized situations and seldom needed. Other tools are frequently used. A weak two-bid is an example of the second type.

A weak two-bid serves two important purposes. It can be constructive and it can be obstructive. By making a weak two-bid, you are describing your hand to help partner. This helps partner decide how high to bid and what suit to compete in. It can also help partner know what to lead if you defend.

A second purpose of a weak two is to interfere with the opponents' bidding. Most pairs can bid to a reasonable contract if left to their own devices. But what if you bid in front of them? What if you not only bid, but the bid is at the two level? This can present awkward problems, even for experts, which may leave your opponents guessing.

**Suit length and quality**

A typical weak two-bid features a six-card suit. The quality of the suit depends on position and vulnerability.

In first and second seat vulnerable, it makes sense to play that the two-bid shows a good suit. ♠A Q 10 7 4 3 ♥8 7 ♦Q 10 3 ♣4 2 would be a classic example of a weak 2♠ bid. A hand such as ♠8 7 ♥K Q 9 6 4 2 ♦7 6 ♣Q 10 2 is another example of a hand that would qualify as an opening two-bid (2♥).

These two have something in common: suit quality. Each includes a suit with two of the top three honors. Is this an absolute requirement or can you loosen up a little? This is a style issue about which you and your partner should agree.

Many good players would open 2♥ with ♠7 3 ♥K J 10 7 6 4 ♦K 10 3 ♣9 8 even vulnerable. Their reasoning is that the rewards (getting in the bidding and suggesting a lead) outweigh the risks (misleading partner or being doubled and penalized).

Another borderline hand would be ♠10 4 ♥A J 10 8 6 4 ♦K 10 3 ♣9 8.

While it's true you don't have two of the top three honors, the ♥10 8 give texture to the suit and thus add a measure of safety. Since you hold three of the top five, many partnerships would agree that 2♥ is acceptable with this holding. Your partner may not agree and so you should discuss it. The other cases where you hold three of the top five are suits headed by K–J–10 or Q–J–10.

If not vulnerable or if in third seat, a weaker suit may qualify. What are some examples?

Suppose in first seat, not vulnerable, you hold ♠A J 7 6 3 2 ♥4 2 ♦K 10 ♣8 7 4.

Many pairs would open 2♠. Similarly, most partnerships would feel that a hand such as ♠Q 5 3 ♥5 ♦K J 8 7 6 3 ♣8 5 3 would be a good weak 2♦ bid if not vulnerable.

In each of these examples, you hold two of the top four honors. The players who open a weak two-bid with either of these feel that passing is too conservative.

**Why is suit quality important?**

Suppose you hold ♠J 9 6 4 3 2 ♥8 3 ♦K 2 ♣Q J 3. in first seat and open 2♠. Let's say the opponents bid to 4♥ and partner is on lead with the ♠K 5. What do you think she will lead? What kind of a result do you expect?

Your partner opens 2♥ and you hold: ♠A 5 ♥A K ♦K Q 6 ♣A K Q 7 5 3.

You check on aces, find out you are missing one, so settle for 6♥. You might be disappointed when the opponents cash the ♦A and later you lose a heart trick because partner's hand was: ♠K J 2 ♥J 9 6 4 3 2 ♦10 5 4 ♣8.

**The rest of the story**

What should the rest of the weak two bidder's hand look like?

A common high-card point range is 5 to 10, although similar ranges are acceptable as well.

It is okay to open 2♠ or 2♥ holding a side four-card suit, provided that suit is a minor. Here is an example: ♠K J 10 7 4 3 ♥7 3 ♦Q J 7 5 ♣10.

Make the hand slightly different. With ♠K J 10 7 4 3 ♥Q J 7 5 ♦7 3 ♣10 you should pass. Your side could have game in 4♥, but by bidding 2♠ you may have effectively preempted your own partner.

**How can partner know?**

Not vulnerable, you may open 2♥ with this, ♠8 7 ♥K Q 10 7 4 3 ♦8 7 6 ♣5 3.

This hand has 5 to 10 HCP and a good suit — a classic weak two.

What about this hand? ♠8 7 ♥K Q 10 7 4 3 ♦K J 6 ♣5 3

This is also a hand you'd want to open with a weak two. It has 5 to 10 HCP and a good suit.

Notice the difference though. The second hand has the ♦K J instead of low cards and therefore is much stronger. How is partner supposed to know on which end of the 5 to 10 HCP range your hand falls? Next month we'll examine methods that allow partner to inquire about the weak two-bidder's hand. ❐