



Blackwood

Whole books have been written on the topic of ace-asking conventions, so the discussion of Easley Blackwood's concept in this column will be brief by comparison. The Blackwood convention, developed early in the history of duplicate bridge, quickly gained popular approval. As many bridge teachers will point out, however, Blackwood may be responsible for more bidding disasters than any other convention developed. Understanding its proper use, therefore, is important for successful duplicate play.

The basic idea behind the Blackwood convention is to determine how many aces partner holds. In certain circumstances, this permits slams to be accurately bid — or avoided. The player who wishes to know how many aces partner holds bids 4NT, usually as part of a constructive auction.

For example:

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4NT	

Responder's 3♠ is a limit (invitational to game) raise. Opener's 4NT is the Blackwood convention, asking responder to indicate how many aces she holds, using the following schedule of responses:

- 5♣ zero or four aces
- 5♦ one ace
- 5♥ two aces
- 5♠ three aces

If responder held this hand ♠A 9 7 6 ♥A 10 3 ♦9 4 ♣K 8 6 3, she would bid 5♥, therefore, to

show two aces.

This sounds simple enough, but there's a catch. It's critical that the 4NT bidder have the right type of hand to ask for aces. First, the Blackwood bidder must have some indication that the partnership's combined values are in the slam range. Second, the 4NT bidder must have a hand that will allow her to proceed intelligently after hearing the response. This means that the asker should not have a hand with two fast losers in one suit, nor should she have a void.

Say you held

♠AKQ1053 ♥6 ♦A92 ♣KQ7, and opened 1♠. If partner responds 3♠ (limit), you have an excellent hand for slam purposes both in strength and in controls (aces and kings, the singleton heart). It would be appropriate to ask for aces with this type of hand. If partner has at least one ace, 6♠ should have a chance. With two aces, you'd be a heavy favorite. But say your hand was this instead:

♠AKQ1053 ♥63 ♦A9 ♣KQ7.

If you asked for aces, and partner showed one, could you confidently bid 6♠? If you did, you might catch partner with something like:

♠9872 ♥Q104 ♦KQ54 ♣A6.

This will be a silly result if (when) the opponents cash the first two heart tricks. Why was Blackwood not useful here? It's because of the worthless doubleton heart in opener's hand. It made 4NT a poor way to try for slam. (A 4♦ cuebid would be better, but that's a story for a different issue.)

Blackwood isn't really helpful

either if you have a void:

♠— ♥KQJ104 ♦AKQ2 ♣KQ103

You open 1♥ and partner bids 3♥ (limit). If you bid 4NT (Blackwood), partner shows one ace. Well, which ace is it? If it's the club ace, slam will be a good shot. If it's the ♥A, partner's club holding will be critical to the slam's success. If he has the ♠A, however, you'll have two losers on top — the ♥A and the ♣A. You don't want to be guessing in situations like these, so it's better not to use Blackwood on these type of hands.

As an extension of the ace-asking idea, opener can ask for the number of kings responder holds by bidding 5NT. The responses:

6♣ zero or four kings

6♦ one king

6♥ two kings

6♠ three kings

Again, there's a catch. 5NT isn't just king-asking, it's a grand-slam probe. Responder is permitted to jump to the seven level with the right type of hand. Most partnerships play, therefore, that asking for kings with 5NT guarantees that the partnership holds all the aces. Don't bid 5NT if (as the Blackwood bidder) you know that your side is missing an ace.

Say you held

♠A 7 6 4 ♥10 2 ♦6 ♣K Q J 6 4 2.

Partner opens 1♥. You bid 1♠ and partner jumps to 3♠, showing a strong hand. You know that you're going to bid at least a game, so you cuebid 4♣ along the way to the spade game. Partner tries 4NT and you show one ace. Partner then bids 5NT. True, you could bid 6♦, showing one king, but that would be lazy on this particular hand. 5NT guaranteed all the aces, so you know that your clubs will likely provide a huge source of tricks. Bid 7♠. Note that you can only do this if it's clear in your partnership that 5NT promises all the aces. Partner's hand could be

♠K Q J 5 ♥A J 8 6 3 ♦A 5 ♣A 8. □



Cappelletti over 1NT

— part 1

In first seat you hold

♠Q 8 ♥A J 8 ♦A K 10 5 ♣K 9 8 6.
You open 1NT and your left-hand opponent intervenes with 2♦ showing the majors. Don't you just hate that?

Bridge players have learned that it pays to compete over opening strong 1NT bids when they hold shapely hands. Generally, it's best to compete with hands containing a long suit or with two-suited hands — usually with 5–5 or even 5–4 distribution — and appropriate values.

The object of the interference is not to get to game, but rather trying to obstruct the opponents and to do so safely. You hate it when they bid over your 1NT — turn the tables and do it to them!

For this to be effective, however, you need a system to define your bids. One of the most popular of these methods is called Cappelletti, a treatment that is also commonly known as Hamilton.

How it works

Double shows a good hand, either a very strong balanced hand or (better) a hand with a running suit that can be used to defeat 1NT.

2♣ shows any one suit.

2♦ shows both majors.

2♥ shows hearts and a minor suit.

2♠ shows spades and a minor suit.

2NT shows both minors.

Three-level bids are natural and preemptive (weak).

Examples

Say your RHO opens 1NT (15–17) and you hold the following hands:

♠A Q 9 5 2 ♥K J 10 4 3 ♦8 6 ♣3
Bid 2♦, showing both majors.

Yes, you only have 10 high-card points, but the shapeliness of this hand makes it more valuable.

♠K J 9 4 3 ♥6 ♦K 7 ♣Q J 10 4 2
Bid 2♠, showing spades and a minor suit.

♠A 7 4 ♥K J 10 7 3 2 ♦8 ♣6 5 3
Bid 2♣ showing a one suiter.

This hand has only 8 HCP and may not be worth much on defense, but it should be quite good on offense. Remember, your aim is to interfere with the opponents' bidding.

♠7 4 ♥K Q J 10 7 4 2 ♦A Q 3 ♣A
Double. Do not bid 2♣ to show a one-suited hand. You are too strong. If you end up defending 1NT doubled, you can lead a heart and expect to take at least six hearts and two aces. If the opponents scramble to safety, you can next bid your hearts and partner will know you have a good hand *and* a good suit.

♠J 10 7 6 5 3 ♥K 9 2 ♦8 4 ♣6 2

Pass. True, you have a six-card spade suit, but this hand is too weak to compete. Do not bid 2♣ to show a one-suited hand.

Full disclosure

When you fill out your convention card, don't simply write "Cappelletti" or (worse) "Capp" on the convention card. Fill in what suits each bid shows on the appropriate line.

For example:

DEFENSE VS NOTRUMP

vs: Strong _____

2♣ one suit _____

2♦ ♥ & ♠ _____

2♥ ♥ & minor _____

2♠ ♠ & minor _____

Dbl: strong or running suit _____

Other 2NT = minors _____

Notice that this defense (Cappelletti) against the opponents' 1NT openings is listed under the heading "vs. Strong," meaning that you play it only when the opponents use a 15–17 (or 16–18) 1NT range. If you play a different system against weak 1NT openings (such as 11–14 or 13–15 HCPs), write it in the adjacent column, and write the word "Weak" on the "vs" line. □

Next month: *How to respond when partner interferes over the opponents' INT opening.*

Get 'em while they're hot

Phyllis Prager, of Sarasota FL, was at a large Florida regional, playing in the Senior Pairs. Wilson Day was directing and made some jovial and charming announcements as the session was getting under way. One of those announcements was that the playing area was "a cell free zone." Will Martzloff of Rochester NY showed his quick wit, calling out, "I'll take two."



Cappelletti over 1NT — part 2

Bridge players like to compete over an opponent's opening strong 1NT bid when they hold a shapely hand. Last month we explored a method to do this called Cappelletti (also called Hamilton). How do we act as responder after partner interferes?

Review of how Cappelletti works

Here is a review of what partner's bids mean when she intervenes. Double shows a good hand, either a very strong balanced hand or (better) a hand with a running suit that can be used to defeat 1NT; 2♣ shows any one suit; 2♦ shows both majors; 2♥ shows hearts and a minor suit; 2♠ shows spades and a minor suit, and 2NT shows both minors.

Responding after partner bids

If partner bids 2♣ showing a one-suited hand, you normally bid 2♦ so partner can name her suit or pass (if she has diamonds). An exception is that you may name your own decent six-card major. If your opponent doubles the 2♣ bid, a redouble by you shows 7 or more high-card points and support for any suit partner wants to name.

If partner bids 2♦ showing hearts and spades, you should bid your longer major suit. If you have a good fit and distribution you may jump in the major. If you bid 2NT, you show the minors and partner should name her longer minor, even

if it is a two-card suit. If you have a fit for one major and 11 or more HCP, bid a forcing 2NT, ostensibly for the minors, but follow up by supporting the major suit.

If partner bids 2♥ or 2♠ showing that major and either minor suit, you should raise the major with a good fit and 8 to 11 points. If you don't like the major but fit both minors, bid 2NT to ask partner which minor suit she holds. When partner names it, you may then pass.

If you have a strong raise for the major, bid 2NT first asking for partner's minor. Over her response, support the major. This shows a stronger hand than a direct raise. Even though the idea is to obstruct the opponents, sometimes you can make game and this allows you to find out. If partner has a minimum 5-5 type hand, she may pass your invitation.

Examples

Take a look at these hands. All start with your left-hand opponent opening a strong 1NT.

Partner bids 2♣. What would you call with

♠K 8 3 ♥Q 7 4 2 ♦Q 10 6 ♣K 5 4?

This one is easy. Bid 2♦, which allows partner to pass or name her suit.

Partner bids 2♣ and you have ♠8 6 2 ♥A Q 10 7 4 3 ♦4 ♣J 10 4.

Bid 2♥. You have a good suit and are willing to play opposite shortness. You've also helped partner if she is on opening lead.

Partner bids 2♣ and you have

♠8 6 2 ♥J 8 7 4 3 2 ♦4 ♣J 10 4.

Bid 2♦. Do not bid 2♥ with a bad suit and a bad hand.

Partner bids 2♣ and your right-hand opponent doubles. What do you call with

♠K 8 3 ♥Q 7 4 2 ♦Q 10 6 ♣K 5 4?

Redouble. This says you have at least 7 HCP and support for your partner's suit. She is invited to compete.

Partner bids 2♠. What would you call with

♠8 4 ♥6 3 ♦K J 8 4 2 ♣K J 4 2?

Bid 2NT, which asks partner to name her better minor. You don't like spades, but you are happy to play in clubs or diamonds.

Partner bids 2♣. What would you call with

♠9 4 ♥K Q J 7 4 ♦J 8 6 ♣K 9 2?

Pass. Partner has at least five spades. It's not advisable to bid 2NT to ask for her minor. Your fit might not be much better and you are raising the bidding to the three level. In any event, you have some help for partner, so pass and hope for the best.

Know what you're playing

If you and your partner agree to play Cappelletti, you may wish to discuss it in more detail.

We are trying to interfere with the opponents. What do we do if they turn the tables and they interfere with us?

Here's an example. Partner bids 2♣ over 1NT and your right-hand opponent bids 2♦. What is a double by you? Does that mean you can set them, or does it ask partner to name her suit? What is 2♥ by you? Is that pass or correct or does it show hearts?

If partner doubles 1NT and I have a weak hand, what should I do?

These are some examples of situations that merit further discussion. □

Next month: DONT — another popular way to interfere.



Fourth-suit forcing

Fourth-suit forcing is the popular term for the idea that a bid by responder of the only unbid suit at his second turn is an artificial force. Most play that it is forcing to game, although some play it is forcing one round only. The bid is made when responder has doubts about strain or level.

Suppose you hold:

♠K 2 ♥A K J 4 2 ♦Q 10 3 ♣8 5 3.

You are South and this is the bidding:

North	South
1♦	1♥
1♠	?

You have enough values for game, yet no bid is suitable. You cannot bid 3NT with three low clubs.

Many players agree that a jump to 3♥ shows a six-card suit and is invitational. If you have that agreement, you cannot rebid 3♥. In other words, you don't have a convenient rebid.

Playing fourth-suit forcing, you should bid 2♣, a conventional waiting bid.

Partner's first obligation is to raise hearts with three-card support. His second obligation is to bid 2NT. You don't promise clubs to bid 2♣ — it is an artificial bid. Your partner needs a club stopper, therefore, to bid notrump. Partner can rebid his second suit to show extra length. In the sample auction, for example, 2♠ would show six or more diamonds and at least five spades. If partner has neither heart support

nor a club stopper, he should rebid his first suit — 2♦ in the previous auction.

Practice hands

Here are some examples to clarify how fourth-suit forcing works.

What do you call holding:

♠K 10 7 ♥A K 8 7 4 ♦J 10 4 ♣A 2?

North	South
1♦	1♥
2♣	?

Answer: This one is easy — bid 2♠. You want to see if your partner has three-card heart support. If not, then you will bid 3NT.

What do you call holding:

♠K 10 7 2 ♥A K 7 4 ♦J 10 4 ♣A 2?

North	South
1♣	1♥
1♠	?

Answer: Bid 4♠. Do not bid 2♦, fourth-suit forcing. You have four-card spade support and values for game — bid it.

What do you call holding:

♠K 10 7 2 ♥A K 8 7 ♦J 10 4 ♣A 2?

North	South
1♦	1♥
2♣	?

Answer: Bid 3NT. Partner does not have four of either major. You have values for game and stoppers in the unbid suit. You don't need to bid fourth-suit forcing. It is used when you aren't sure where to play the contract.

Other matters to discuss

These are related issues to discuss with your partner:

1. Fourth-suit forcing is not used if one partner is previously a passed hand. (Other agreements are possible.)

2. Fourth-suit forcing is not used after a 2/1 response. It is used only when the one player bids one of a suit and the partner responds at the one level.

3. Fourth-suit forcing is not used when opponents intervene in the bidding. You can use the cuebid instead as a forcing probe.

4. A jump in the fourth suit shows a 5–5 hand and is strongly invitational.

Consider this auction:

North	South
1♦	1♥
1♠	3♣

You might hold:

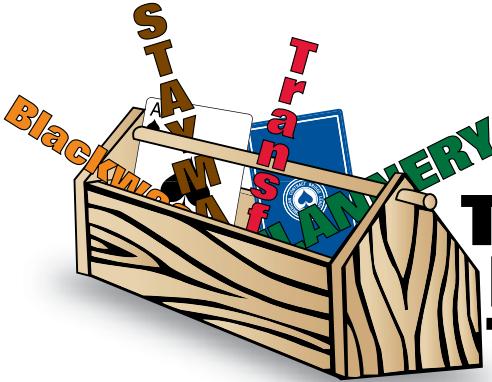
♠5 2 ♥K Q J 4 3 ♦5 ♣A J 10 4 3.

5. One auction merits special discussion:

North	South
1♣	1♦
1♥	?

In this auction, most players treat 1♠ as natural and forcing. A jump to 2♠ denies a four-card spade suit, but promises values for game.

6. Fourth-suit forcing is not used after a reverse or after a 2♣ opener. In these cases, you are in a forcing auction, so the artificial bid is not needed. □



THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

DONT over 1NT

The Cappelletti convention (also called Hamilton) has been discussed as a method to compete over the opponents' opening 1NT. Another popular method, created by Marty Bergen, is called DONT. It's an acronym for Disturb the Opponents' No Trump.

The purpose of DONT is to be able to compete over the opponents' opening 1NT with many hands, yet with some safety. The object of interfering is not necessarily to get to game, but to try and find a fit and, at the same time, make it difficult for the opponents to find their own fit. Two-suited hands are the most common ones that players compete with and at least 5–4 distribution is necessary.

What is the DONT structure?

Double shows any one-suited hand.
2♣ shows clubs and a higher suit.
2♦ shows diamonds and a major.
2♥ shows hearts and spades.
2♠ shows spades.

Since you can get to 2♠ by bidding it directly or by doubling first, most pairs play doubling first is stronger than bidding 2♠ directly.

Responding after partner bids

If partner doubles, you should bid 2♣ with most hands to let partner pass or name her suit. Bids other than 2♣ show a long suit and suggest a playable contract.

Over 2♣ or 2♦, you can pass with three-card support. If you don't have support, bid the next higher

suit to ask partner to pass (if that's the other suit) or to show the second suit by bidding it.

Over 2♥ (majors) you can pass or correct to 2♠ if you prefer that suit.

A raise of partner's suit is only mildly invitational and usually passed.

With a good hand, you can bid 2NT asking the DONT bidder to describe his shape and range. You should discuss this with partner.

If the opponents bid over your partner's conventional DONT call, double or redouble asks partner to name their unknown suit.

Examples

What would you call after a strong 1NT by your opponent holding ♠J 7 ♥A K 8 6 ♦K 7 4 3 2 ♣4 3? 2♦, showing diamonds and a major.

What would you call with ♠J 4 ♥K Q J 6 3 2 ♦A 8 6 ♣10 7? Double, which shows a one-suited hand. Do not bid 2♥, since that shows the majors. Over double, partner can bid 2♣ and you can name your suit.

Take a look at some sample responding hands. All start with your left-hand opponent opening a strong 1NT.

Partner bids 2♣. What would you call with ♠10 8 3 ♥J 3 ♦K 10 7 5 3 ♣Q 10 4?

Pass. You have found a fit. If you had a fourth club, you could raise. You cannot raise with this hand, however, since partner may have only four clubs. Your side has interfered and found a landing spot.

Don't try to improve the contract.

Partner bids 2♦: diamonds and a major. What is your call with

♠Q 10 4 2 ♥A 9 6 4 ♦K 3 2 ♣8 4? 2♥, asking partner to pass or bid 2♠ if that is her second suit. You are sure to have at least a 4–4 fit or even a 5–4 fit in a major, so don't pass 2♦.

Partner doubles, showing a one-suited hand. What would you call with ♠K J 3 2 ♥Q 8 6 3 ♦K J 9 7 ♣5?

2♣, allowing partner to pass or name her suit. While it is true you only have one club and that is likely partner's suit, you have no attractive alternative and the hands could be a misfit. If partner surprises you and bids 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠, you may raise.

Partner bids 2♥ showing the majors. What would you do with ♠A J 10 ♥K 10 7 4 ♦A 7 3 2 ♣8 6?

Bid 2NT, asking partner to further describe her hand. You may have game, but you're not strong enough to bid 4♥ yourself. On the other hand, you are too strong to simply raise to 3♥. You should discuss what rebids by the DONT bidder mean in this situation. One method is for partner to bid 3♣ with a minimum and all other actions are natural with more than a minimum. Obviously, more elaborate agreements are possible.

Partner doubles, showing one suit, and the next hand bids 2♣, Stayman. What do you call with ♠K J 4 ♥A 5 3 2 ♦Q 8 5 ♣J 10 4?

You have support for whatever suit your partner has. Double asking her to bid her suit. It is safe for partner to compete further, so you should invite her to do so.

Other issues

Which is better, Cappelletti or DONT? There are advantages to both. For example, DONT allows you to play 2♣ with either a one-suited or a two-suited hand. On the other hand, when you play DONT, you give up the double showing values since it is used for the one-suited overcall. Some partnerships compromise by playing DONT only over strong 1NT bids and playing Cappelletti over the weak 1NT (11–14 HCP). □



DOPI, ROPI and DEPO

While they may sound like the names of some of the Seven Dwarves, DOPI, ROPI and DEPO are actually conventional treatments designed to combat interference with Blackwood sequences.

DOPI and ROPI are better when the opponents' suit is lower-ranking than yours, while DEPO is better when their suit is higher-ranking.

Some examples will help. Say the auction goes like this, with your side vulnerable:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>
1♠	3♣ ⁽¹⁾	4NT ⁽²⁾	5♣
?			

(1) Preemptive.

(2) Blackwood or Roman Key Card Blackwood.

The opponents are being pests, sacrificing in clubs or just trying to screw up your auction. How do you combat this? Since their suit (clubs) is lower-ranking than your suit (spades), DOPI is in effect. This means you double with zero aces (playing regular Blackwood) or zero key cards (playing RKCB) — that's what the 'DO' part of DOPI means.

Alertable?

Do not Alert DOPI, ROPI or DEPO calls during the auction. In fact, most conventional calls in an ace-asking sequence are not Alertable. The reason is that it can pass unauthorized information to the Alerting side, "waking up" a player who has forgotten that they have agreed to play DOPI, ROPI or DEPO.

After the auction is over, you should explain the meanings of your calls to the opponents before the opening lead is made IF (big if!) your side declares just as you would for any ace-asking sequence.

With one ace/key card you pass, which is what the 'PI' part refers to. To show more aces, bid the next suit available. 5♦, therefore, would show two aces if playing regular Blackwood or two aces without the ♠Q if you're playing RKCB.

In this example, both sides are vulnerable:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>
1♠	3♣	4NT	Dbl
?			

This is similar to the first auction, but here right-hand opponent doubles 4NT instead of bidding 5♣. Some pairs play this way to tell their partners they want to sacrifice or that they want partner to lead his suit (clubs) without actually bidding it — usually because they're vulnerable and they're scared of being doubled.

Since you might just ignore this double and give the regular Blackwood response, it doesn't cost them anything to play this way. You can try to stick it to them, however, by using ROPI. Redouble shows zero aces ('RO'); if partner decides not to bid a slam after finding

out you have zero aces, he might instead decide to take his chances in 4NT redoubled! He could, after all, have the ace of their suit or the protected king or even a tenace such as the ace–queen. The opponents might run to 5♣ which gives you the opportunity to double. Either way, you may well score better trying to nail the opposition.

The same is true if you pass to show one ace/key card ('PI'). At matchpoints especially, you might decide to go for the top in 4NT (by your side) doubled or 5♣ (by them) doubled.

What if their suit is higher than yours? Say the auction is this, with your side vulnerable:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>
1♦	2♠	4NT	5♠
?			

Since their suit is higher-ranking, DEPO is better. Double shows an even number of aces ('DE'), pass shows an odd number ('PO'). If you didn't play DEPO, you would either be forced to guess whether to bid a slam which might not make or to double them when slam is cold. By doubling or passing, you get to stay on the five level, tell your partner how many aces you have and preserve the option of either bidding a slam or smacking the opponents.

Although the opportunity to use these treatments is rare, checking these boxes on your convention card may dissuade your opponents from interfering in your ace-asking auctions. □

What if we play 1430?

Some pairs prefer a variation of Roman Key Card Blackwood in which the 5♣ response shows one or four key cards and the 5♦ response shows zero or three. Pairs who play this way may prefer to play DIPO (double with one ace, pass with zero) and RIPO instead of DOPI and ROPI in order to keep their responses consistent.



Jacoby 2NT

One of Oswald Jacoby's best gifts to bridge was the idea of using 2NT as a conventional forcing raise in response to a one-of-a-major opening bid. Using Jacoby 2NT works like this:

Opener	Responder
1♥ or 1♠	2NT

Responder's 2NT bid shows a game-forcing hand with four-card (or longer) support in the major. Why is it advantageous to use this method? Consider all of the major-suit raises available in standard methods. This table provides an outline:

Opener	Responder	Meaning
1♠	2♠	Single raise: typically three-card support and 6–9 HCP
1♠	3♠	Limit (invitational) raise: four-card support and 10–12 HCP
1♠	4♠	Preemptive raise: weak with five-card support

Note that similar meanings apply after a 1♥ opening and raise.

Looking at this table, it's clear that something is missing — the game-forcing raise. Jacoby 2NT takes care of this problem and does it at a low-enough level to allow the partnership to exchange further information in case slam is in the picture.

How opener proceeds after a Jacoby 2NT response

After the 2NT response, opener may now continue describing his hand using the following set of conventional responses:

- A three-level rebid in a new suit shows a singleton or void in that suit.

For example:

Opener	Responder
1♥	2NT
3♣	

Opener's 3♣ rebid shows a singleton or void in clubs. This may help responder visualize a possible slam.

- A four-level response in a new suit shows a good-quality five-card suit. If, for example, opener held ♠A Q 10 5 3 ♥6 ♦K Q J 7 4 ♣Q 8, the auction would be 1♠–2NT; 4♦. Yes, you do have a singleton heart and you could rebid 3♥ to show it, but telling partner about the nice diamonds is more important, so 4♦ is the better rebid.
- Jumping to four of the agreed major shows a minimum opening

bid without shortness or slam interest. In the auction 1♥–2NT; 4♥, opener might have something like ♠7 4 ♥A Q J 6 2 ♦K 9 5 ♣K 9 2.

- A 3NT rebid shows a sound opening (14 or 15 HCP) without shortness. Note that some matchpoint players consider this passable.
- Rebidding three of the major shows slam interest and typically denies shortness. With a hand such as ♠A 2 ♥A K Q 6 5 3 ♦J 5 ♣A 8 3, open 1♥. After a Jacoby 2NT response, rebid 3♥ to show a strong hand without shortness.

This action usually requires a good 16 or more high-card points (HCP).

Example auction:

West	♠ A 7 6 5 2 ♥ 9 ♦ K J 2 ♣ K Q 7 3
------	--

East	♠ K Q 8 4 ♥ 10 7 2 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ A 10 2
------	--

West	1♠ 3♥ ⁽²⁾
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East	2NT ⁽¹⁾ 6♠ (!)
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Pass

(1) Jacoby 2NT, game-forcing major-suit raise.

(2) Heart shortness.

East's final bid is not very scientific — a grand slam might be missed if opener had a heart void instead of a singleton, or 6♠ might be too much if opener has a singleton heart honor such as the king — but it will be on target much of the time. When opener reveals the heart shortness, responder knows that opener's values will be in useful places, so the slam should have a good play.

Important points to remember

The Jacoby 2NT response is game forcing and promises four-card support. With only three-card support, responder makes another call first and then raises partner's major at the his next turn. For example, holding

♠K 6 4 ♥A 3 ♦K Q 10 7 3 ♣Q 10 6, respond 2♦ if partner opens 1♠. Don't use Jacoby 2NT, since partner will think you have four spades. This can be significant, so be sure you paint an accurate picture of your support length.

Also, many players prefer to use Jacoby 2NT with hands that do not have shortness (singletons or voids). This helps opener evaluate his hand better. Not every partnership has this agreement, so it's important to discuss this point with your partner.

Variations

The above description of Jacoby 2NT is one that many partnerships employ, but you should be aware that there are many other variations on the market. This description should be taken as a starting point for new partnerships. *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge* has some good suggestions for alternative structures. □

Jacoby transfers

Jacoby transfers are a very popular treatment, and with good reason. They're easy to play, and they help describe common types of hand patterns in response to a 1NT opening.

For the purposes of this article, we will assume that 1NT is strong (15 to 17 high-card points), but Jacoby transfers may be used with other notrump ranges as well.

After a 1NT opening, responder may use a Jacoby transfer to describe a hand with a five-card or longer major. The method is simple: responder bids the suit one rank below the actual major suit he holds. Opener then accepts this "transfer" by bidding the next higher suit at her turn. For example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1NT	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
2♥ ⁽²⁾	

(1) "I have at least five hearts. Please bid 2♥ for now and I'll tell you more on my next turn."

(2) "Okay."

or

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1NT	2♥ ⁽¹⁾
2♠ ⁽²⁾	

(1) "I have at least five spades. Please bid 2♠."

(2) "I hear and obey."

What's the point of doing this? First, the strong hand becomes declarer. The opening lead comes into her hand. Without transfers, the strong hand could become dummy, allowing the defenders to see where most of your side's assets are located. Second, the transfer gives responder another chance to speak. After opener accepts the transfer, responder may then pass, invite game, show another suit or jump to game. The transfer provides an extra "step" in the auction.

How does responder know which of these actions to take? It depends on the strength and shape of responder's hand. Keeping in mind that game-level contracts generally require a combined total of 25 HCP,



this table provides a general guideline:

Responder's HCPs	Goal	Recommended action
0-7	Partscore only	Transfer then Pass
8-9	Invite game	Transfer then bid 2NT (with a five-card major) or three of the major (with a six-card suit)
10 or more	Force to game	Transfer then bid a new suit (forcing) or 3NT (with a five-card major) or four of the major (with a six-card suit)

♠K Q 6 5 3 ♥5 ♦A J 7 2 ♣Q 9 4.

You have 12 points, and after partner's 1NT opening you want to be in game.

But which one? Start by transferring to spades. After partner accepts, bid 3♦. The

bid of new suit is forcing to game after a transfer, and it also shows an unbalanced hand. This allows opener to return to spades with a fit (three or more), or bid 3NT with values in the unbid suits (clubs and hearts) or even bid 5♦ with a fit in that suit.

Holding

♠A 10 ♥A Q 10 5 3 ♦K 5 2 ♣9 8 6, you have plenty of strength (13 HCP) to be in game, so the only question is this: 3NT or 4♥? Let partner decide. Here's how. Begin with a transfer of 2♦, and after partner accepts with 2♥, jump to 3NT. This tells partner to choose between the notrump game and the heart game. Opener will usually prefer 3NT with only a doubleton heart, but will usually bid 4♥ with three or more hearts. □

Here are some examples:

Partner opens 1NT and you hold ♠Q J 9 7 6 ♥Q 10 2 ♦6 5 4 ♣7 4.

You have 5 HCP and partner has at most 17. This is only 22 total, not enough for game. So you should start by transferring to your five-card spade suit by bidding 2♦. After partner accepts the transfer, you pass.

If your hand is

♠A 8 4 ♥K J 9 8 2 ♦7 2 ♣J 9 3 the situation is different. You have 9 HCP, enough to invite game. Begin with a transfer to hearts by bidding 2♦, and bid 2NT after partner accepts. This tells partner you have exactly five hearts, a balanced hand and invitational values.

Opener then has these options: pass to show a minimum 1NT hand (15 HCP) and only two hearts; bid 3♥ to show a minimum and three or more hearts; bid 3NT to show a maximum with only two hearts; bid 4♥ to show a maximum with three or more hearts.

Since both hands are so well-defined, the partnership usually arrives in the right contract.

Try this:

What's in a name?

The Jacoby transfer was developed by the great Oswald Jacoby, whose profile appears on page 43.



Michaels Cuebid

The Michaels cuebid — brain-child of the late Mike Michaels — allows a player to describe a two-suited hand in one bid in competitive auctions. It is typically reserved for hands with a 5-5 (or longer) pattern.

When a player bids a suit which has originally been called by the opponents, that player has made a cuebid. A Michaels cuebid is almost always used in the direct position, *i.e.*, immediately after an opponent has made her bid. For example if your right-hand opponent opened 1♣ and you bid 2♣, your 2♣ call would be a cuebid. Further, if you and your partner agree to play Michaels cuebids, your 2♣ call would have a specific meaning.

Major two-suiters

Let's say you hold a hand with two five-card majors such as

♠A K Q 4 3 ♥A K J 6 2 ♦6 ♣J 7
or

♠K Q 6 4 3 ♥J 10 7 6 4 ♦A 4 ♣8.

If your RHO opens 1♣, the Michaels cuebid allows you to describe these hands nicely. Bid 2♣ with either to tell your partner you have a major two-suiter. If your opponent had opened 1♦ instead, you would have bid 2♦ to give the same message.

Playing Michaels cuebids, the auctions

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♣	2♣		

and

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♦	2♦		

show a major two-suiter. Put another way, a direct cuebid of an opponent's opening bid of one-of-a-minor shows the majors, 5-5 or longer.

An important question, however, is how strong a hand does the Michaels cuebid promise? This is a matter of partnership style, but many expert partnerships prefer that Michaels be used to show either a weak hand (say, 6 to 11 points) or a strong hand (a good 16 or more high-card points). Hands with intermediate strength should simply overcall at the one level, with the hope that the second suit can be shown later in the auction. Why do this? It's to give partner some indication of our strength and involve him in the decision process as to how high we compete.

Major-minor two-suiters

Michaels can also be used to show certain major-minor two-suiters after an enemy 1♥ or 1♠ opening. The auctions

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♥	2♥		

and

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♠	2♠		

show five or more cards in the other major and an unspecified five-card minor. The strength requirements are the same as for minor-suit cuebids.

After a 1♥ opening, bid 2♥ with

♠A Q 7 6 5 ♥8 ♦K J 10 7 3 ♣10 4.

This tells partner you have five spades and a five-card minor. What if partner doesn't have a fit for spades and wants to know what your minor is? He bids 2NT (conventional) to say, "Bid your minor." You can then bid 3♦.

Important point:

Don't tell your story twice

Your RHO opens 1♦ and you hold

♠K Q 6 4 3 ♥J 10 7 6 4 ♦A 4 ♣8.

You bid 2♦ (Michaels) and LHO passes. Partner bids 2♠ and RHO bids 3♣. What now?

When you bid 2♦, you told partner that your hand was 5-5 in the majors and that you had a limited hand (6 to 11 points) or a very good hand (16-plus points). Since you have the weaker range, and partner has already chosen the suit and level he prefers, you should pass. Partner already knows what you have — don't compete to 3♠! Partner might have been forced to bid 2♠ with a hand such as

♠10 7 ♥8 6 ♦Q 8 7 6 ♣K 10 9 3 2.

He won't like your 3♠ bid (and you won't like the result).

Let's change your hand to this:

♠A K Q 4 3 ♥A K J 6 2 ♦6 ♣J 7.

After a 1♦ opening by RHO, you bid 2♦. LHO passes and partner bids 2♥. RHO bids 3♣. Should you bid again? Yes. This time you have a very good hand and could make game if partner has as little as Q-x-x in hearts. Many players would simply jump to 4♥. Remember, however, that you should only make another bid if your hand has extra values or is very unusual. For example, holding

♠K J 8 7 4 3 ♥A Q 10 9 5 2 ♦— ♣8,

this hand could easily produce a major-suit game opposite mild support from partner. After this auction

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♣	2♣	Pass	2♠
3♣			?

bid 4♠. With this 6-6 freak, high-card points are irrelevant. Just bid the game. The opponents may well bid more, but the point is that you should bid again after the Michaels cuebid when your distribution is wild or when you have a very strong hand. □



Negative double

One of the most commonly used treatments in modern bidding is the negative double. The negative double is an extremely broad topic, far beyond the scope of a single article to describe fully, but following are some important points.

In its simplest form, the negative double's objective is to express values and length in the unbid suits — particularly the unbid major(s) — in a competitive auction. For example:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	1♠	Dbl	

Defining East's double as penalty is impractical: a "business" double of a one-level overcall occurs too rarely to worry about. It's much more common to have moderate values and a heart suit after the auction begins in this manner, so most players use the double to show a hand such as:

♠J 8 ♥Q 9 7 4 ♦Q 8 5 4 ♣K 4 2 or perhaps:

♠Q 5 3 ♥K J 8 7 4 ♦9 6 ♣Q 10 5 or even:

♠A 3 ♥A Q 8 5 ♦K 5 2 ♣J 7 6 3.

The negative double is vital because it alerts opener to the possibility of a heart fit. The double can also be used, however, to show spades in an auction such as:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	1♥	Dbl	

Most players in North America use this sequence to show exactly four spades. With five or more spades, East could simply bid 1♠.

How much strength does a nega-

tive double promise? It depends. The suggested minimum strength for a negative double that would force partner to bid at the one level is typically 6 points. In the second auction, East could double on as little as:

♠K J 7 5 ♥10 3 ♦9 8 4 ♣Q 9 7 2.
(With a good fit for partner's first suit, some players would do it on even less.)

If the double would force partner to bid at the two level (as in the first auction), 8 points is a good minimum. To force partner to the three level — in an auction such as:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	2♥	Dbl	

— East should have at least 10 high-card points. The higher you force partner to bid, the more you should have.

As opener, partner's negative double can help you choose your rebid. Say you hold:

♠A 7 ♥Q J 6 3 ♦8 7 6 ♣A Q 6 2.

After opening 1♣, left-hand opponent overcalls 1♠ and partner doubles (negative). This strongly suggests at least four hearts and appropriate values. If RHO passes, you have an easy 2♥ rebid. (Note that this does not promise extra values; you're just "raising" partner's hearts.)

Using the negative double, what would this auction mean?

<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>
1♠	2♦	2♥	

If you had doubled, the double would have shown exactly four hearts. The 2♥ bid, therefore shows five or more. There is also a

strength inference involved. Whereas a two-level negative double could show as few as 8 HCP as described above, a direct two-level bid such as your 2♥ shows at least the same number of number of points required for a two-over-one response in "standard" bidding — 10 HCP. (Note that some players would treat 2♥ as a game force, so their two-level bids would promise even more — an opening hand.) An easy way to remember this is to consider what you need to bid 2♥ if North had not interfered. Most systems require a minimum of 10 points to make a new-suit two-level response.

This is a big help to opener, because it immediately tells him something about your strength and heart length. For example, say you held:

♠K 7 ♥A 9 4 ♦K Q J 8 2 ♣10 8 2.

You open 1♦, LHO overcalls 1♠ and partner bids 2♥. What do we know about partner's hand? She has at least five hearts (a negative double would have promised only four) and at least 10 HCP, making the raise to 3♥ a standout.

The negative double lets you tackle problem hands such as this:

♠K Q 10 9 6 5 ♥J 5 ♦Q 9 8 ♣5 2.

Partner opens 1♥ and RHO overcalls 2♣. You can't bid 2♠ directly. That would show a good hand — at least 10 HCP. You can, however, make a negative double. If partner bids 2♦, you will bid 2♠. Partner will know that you have a relatively weak hand with a long spade suit, because you doubled first.

Special case

In the auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	1♦	Dbl	

East's double should show both majors. What happens, however, if East is dealt a hand such as:

♠A J 9 5 ♥Q 8 ♦Q 10 6 2 ♣9 8 7?

In this case, East should bid 1♠. Ordinarily, a direct bid shows a five-card or longer suit, but in this auction (a 1♣ opening and a 1♦ overcall), a 1♥ or 1♠ response may be made on a four-card suit. The negative double should be reserved for a hand with both majors. □



New Minor Forcing

After opener rebids 1NT, responder often finds it useful to make a low-level forcing bid. Frequently this is done to see if opener has three-card support for responder's suit.

Suppose as responder you hold ♠Q 7 6 ♥AJ 10 6 3 ♦K 7 5 ♣J 10.

Consider your bid when the auction proceeds as follows:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
1NT	?

Playing standard, you would have no good bid. You have the strength to rebid 2NT, but you would like to show your five-card heart suit. Rebidding hearts, however, should show a six-card suit and a non-forcing hand. Therefore, you may choose to raise 1NT to 2NT. The problem with this bid is that if opener has a minimum, he would have to pass and you may have a 5–3 heart fit. In fact, 2♥ may be the best contract if partner is minimum.

The most popular method is to use the unbid minor suit as responder's forcing call, hence the name new minor forcing. In the example above, responder could bid 2♦. This promises at least invitational values and is a one-round force.

How does it work?

Suppose, you have:

♠K Q 10 7 4 ♥J 4 2 ♦K 7 5 ♣Q 10, and the auction is:

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♣
1NT	?

You should use new minor forcing, which in this case is 2♣.

How should partner respond?

Partner's first obligation is to support your major (spades in this case). His second obligation is to show the strength of his hand. This is a scheme used by many:

2♦ = denies three spades or four hearts, minimum

2♥ = shows four hearts, may be minimum or maximum

2♠ = shows three-card spade support, minimum

2NT = denies four hearts or three spades, maximum

3♦ = denies four hearts or three spades, maximum and shows five diamonds

3♠ = shows three-card spade support, maximum

Following up

What are the continuations by responder? If partner shows a maximum, you are committed to game. Remember you promise at least invitational values to use new minor forcing.

If partner shows a minimum, any two-level bid by you can be passed. If you held the first example hand shown above,

♠Q 7 6 ♥AJ 10 6 3 ♦K 7 5 ♣J 10, the auction should be this:

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
1NT	2♣
2♦	2NT
Pass	

You know partner has a minimum, no heart fit, so you would rebid 2NT and he can pass. But if instead, you held,

♠6 ♥A J 10 6 3 ♦K 7 5 ♣Q J 10 3, you may choose to rebid 2♥ to play. You know the opponents have nine or more spades (partner does not have four spades since he didn't rebid 1♠) so 2NT may not be safe. Therefore, you can play 2♥ in a 5–2 fit.

If you rebid at the three level, however, it's forcing. Suppose you hold

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
1NT	2♣
2♦	?

In this case, you want to force to game and also investigate slam. Bid 3♦, natural. If you use new minor forcing, then rebid at the three level, it creates a force.

Holding both majors

Sometimes you are interested in both majors. Suppose you hold this hand,

♠A Q 6 4 3 ♥K Q 8 6 3 ♦7 ♣K 2 and the bidding is:

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♦	?

You should bid 3♥. Remember, if you rebid at the two level after partner shows a minimum, partner can pass. You have to rebid at the three level to force.

The devil is in the details

The above is only a brief introduction to the topic. Here are some other items you and your partner may wish to discuss.

After forcing bids (by responder) at the three level, what do follow-ups mean? Should new minor forcing apply after this auction?

1♥	1♠
1NT	?

What if one of the opponents intervenes — does new minor forcing still apply?



Overcalls — part 1

The term overcall refers to any bid by your side after an opponent has opened the bidding. Overcalls occur frequently, making them an important topic to discuss with your partners. Many new players have misconceptions about overcalls, however. Following are some guidelines on how to approach this topic.

Why overcall?

Overcalling offers several advantages. Bidding your suit interferes with the opponents' exchange of information. Often it locates a fit and partner can continue the obstruction. Even if your suit doesn't fit partner, he is now invited into the bidding to name his suit if he has an appropriate hand. Even if partner can't respond after you overcall, he has a better idea of what to lead if your side defends.

Factors to consider

Some points to consider before making an overcall are your: (1) suit length, (2) suit strength, (3) general hand strength, (4) vulnerability and (5) level.

An overcall at the one level is usually based on a five-card (or longer) suit and doesn't promise or deny an opening hand in high-card strength. After a 1♣ opening, most players would overcall 1♠ holding:

♦A Q 10 7 4 ♦8 6 3 ♦K 7 3 ♣5 3.

You only have 9 HCP, but the suit is strong enough to qualify.

Suppose your suit is not as strong.

With

♦J 7 6 5 4 ♦8 6 ♦A K 3 ♣6 5 3, most players would pass. Your suit is weak and you only have 8 HCP.

What about this hand:

♦J 7 5 ♦K J 9 5 4 ♦K J 4 3 ♣7 ?

Most players would overcall 1♥ at the one level. With the ♦9, your suit is strong enough. You have support for spades or diamonds if partner introduces either of those suits. If you defend, partner will be better placed. This is an example of a suit that is safe to overcall at the one level, but would be dangerous to bid at the two level after, for example, a 1♠ bid by RHO.

A myth

Many players have the mistaken idea that an overcall always shows less than an opening bid. These same players thus double with an opening hand, even if they do not have support for all three unbid suits. Most good players do not subscribe to this thinking, however, and overcall with fairly good hands as well as those that are less than opening strength.

Suppose you hold:

♦A K J 6 3 ♦K 2 ♦K 10 3 ♣5 3 and hear your right-hand opponent open 1♣. You should overcall 1♠. Yes, you have an opening hand, but 1♠ does not deny that. If you double and partner responds 1♥, you will now bid 1♠ and that shows a stronger hand. Doubling and bidding your own suit typically shows 18 or more HCP.

Questions and answers

Suppose your right-hand opponent opens 1♣ and you hold these hands. Would you overcall?

Example #1

♦Q 7 3 ♦K Q 6 5 3 ♦7 6 3 ♣K 2

Answer: Bid 1♥. You have a fairly good five-card suit and a smattering of values. If partner

can't raise you, at least he will have a better idea of what to do on defense. Beside guiding the opening lead, he is more likely to figure out your distribution if you overcall.

Example #2

♦K Q 3 ♦10 7 6 5 3 ♦A 6 3 ♣5 2

Answer: You should pass. You have a bad suit and only 9 HCP. If you pass, perhaps partner can act and then you'll have a better idea how to proceed.

Example #3

♦K Q 3 ♦J 7 6 5 3 ♦A 6 3 ♣K 2

Answer: This one is a toss-up. Some players would overcall 1♥, even with a bad suit. You have 12 HCP and a well-placed ♣K. Purists would pass, however, because of the suit quality. You and your partner should decide which camp you are in. Are the advantages of getting in the bidding worth the downside of bidding a bad suit? The most important thing is that the two of you are on the same wavelength.

Example #4

♦K Q 3 ♦A K 7 6 5 ♦A 6 3 ♣4 2

Answer: Bid 1♥. Yes, you have a good hand. Yes, you have secondary support for spades and diamonds. If you double, however, and partner bids 1♠, you will want to bid 2♥, and that shows a stronger hand than this one. Doubling and bidding your own suit should be reserved for a powerhouse.

Example #5

♦K 4 3 ♦A 4 ♦K Q J 9 6 ♣7 4 2

Answer: Bid 1♦ — this is a classic overcall. Even though you have 13 HCP, do not double. Remember the myth discussed above. You have only two cards in the heart suit and a double promises better support than that. Your diamond suit is strong. Go ahead and bid it.

Overcalling at the two level and how to respond to overcalls will be covered next month. Stay tuned. □



The 24-part Bidding Toolkit series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/commonlyusedconventions.html.

Overcalls – part 2

Overcalls at the one-level were discussed last month. An overcall interferes with your opponents' bidding, invites partner into the auction and helps your partner on defense.

Responding with support

Your partner overcalls and you have at least three-card support — how should you proceed? Raising partner is the first priority. Here are some guidelines:

1. Make a simple raise with 6 to 10 support points. Support points refer to high-card points plus points added for distribution.
2. With 11-plus support points, cuebid the suit the opponent opened.
3. With 4 to 6 support points and four or more trumps, make a preemptive jump raise.

Example #1:

Suppose you hold:

♠K 5 2 ♥10 6 5 ♦A 10 4 2 ♣J 4 3

and it's your turn to bid:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

You have support for partner, so bid 2♠. It's true that you have diamonds stopped, but don't bid 1NT. It's more important to show partner your support.

Example #2:

You hold:

♠K 6 4 2 ♥K 10 6 ♦A 9 4 2 ♣4 3,

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

Bid 2♦. You have 10 HCP plus one point for your doubleton club. Your 11 support points is a limit raise.

Example #3:

Suppose your hand is stronger:

♠K 7 4 2 ♥A K 4 ♦A 4 ♣J 4 3 2.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

Again cuebid 2♦. This promises a limit raise, but may be better.

Example #4:

What if you have good support, but you are weak? You hold:

♠K 10 4 2 ♥4 2 ♦10 4 ♣Q 7 5 4 2.

Bid 3♠. This is preemptive and weak. You have the requisite four trumps. Your hand is weak in terms of HCP (and defense), but you have distributional values. The 3♠ bid sends that message to partner, and obstructs the opponents.

Rebidding after overcalling

After you overcall, partner should let you know if he has support. Your overcall may be based on a wide range in terms of strength. After a cuebid, therefore, you have to tell partner how strong you are. If you are strong enough to make game opposite a limit raise, you should bid it. If you have a weak overcall (less than an opening bid), you should repeat your suit. If you have a hand that is in between, you should make a bid in a new suit, one that may be only three cards long.

Here are some examples. In each case, the bidding has proceeded:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♣	1♠	
Pass	2♣	Pass	?

Example #1:

♠A Q 10 4 3 ♥4 3 ♦K 8 4 ♣10 5 3.

Rebid 2♠. Your hand is too weak to make game if partner has only

limit-raise strength. If he has enough to make game opposite this hand, he will bid again.

Example #2:

♠A Q 10 4 3 ♥7 3 ♦A K 4 ♣K J 10.

Rebid 4♠. Partner has a limit raise (or better) so you accept his invitation.

Example #3:

♠A Q 10 4 3 ♥5 3 ♦A 8 4 ♣K 10 4

Rebid 2♦. The message this sends to partner is that you do not have enough to go directly to game as in example #2, but you do not have a weak overcall as in example #1. If partner has a minimum limit raise, he can sign off in 2♠ and you can pass. If partner has more than invitational values, he can bid 4♠. Notice that you only have a three-card diamond suit. This will often be the case. You have a known spade fit, so you are not trying to play diamonds.

Responses when you don't have support

Often you will not have support for partner after he overcalls. If you have a stopper in the opponent's suit, you can bid notrump with 7 to 10 (or 11) HCP. If you have a good suit of your own, you can bid it.

Here are two examples. In both cases the auction has proceeded:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	1♠	Pass	?

Example #1:

♠J 3 ♥K J 4 3 ♦K 10 3 ♣J 10 8 4.

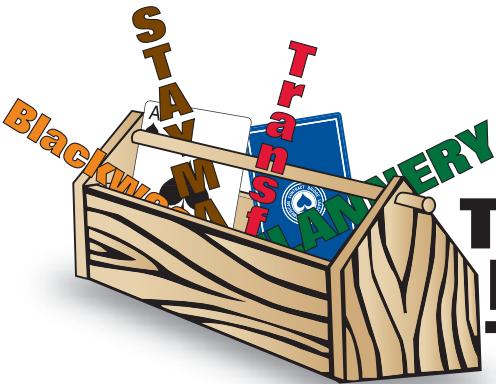
Bid 1NT. You have enough strength to act, and you have a stopper and a balanced hand.

Example #2:

♠8 3 ♥K Q 3 ♦J 3 ♣K Q 9 8 4 2.

Bid 2♣. You have 11 HCP and a good suit.

In both examples, if you pass 1♠, you may miss game if partner has a good overcall. If partner rebids spades, you can pass. You have shown your hand. □



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THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

Puppet Stayman

Puppet Stayman is a specialized version of regular Stayman that is popularly used in response to a 2NT opening bid.

Beginning an auction with 2NT has pluses and minuses. In the plus column, opener gets to convey her strength (for the purpose of this column, we'll define 2NT as showing 20 to 21 high-card points) and relative shape, which is, of course, balanced. On the minus side, 2NT is unwieldy because it takes up a lot of bidding space. Also, many of the hands that are candidates for 2NT openings will contain a five-card major. If you open 2NT on a hand that has five hearts or five spades, wouldn't it be easy to miss a 5–3 major-suit fit? This is why many pairs use puppet Stayman, a bidding tool designed to diagnose such a fit.

Here's how it works: After a 2NT opening (the opponents are silent), a 3♣ response promises at least game-going values and asks opener if she has a four- or five-card major. With five hearts, opener rebids 3♥. With five spades, she rebids 3♠. If opener has four hearts or four spades (or both), she rebids 3♦. With no four- or five-card major-

suit holding, opener rebids 3NT.

The responses to 3♣ Puppet Stayman are Alertable.

After a 3♦ response

When opener rebids 3♦, saying that she has at least one four-card major, responder still isn't sure which major opener holds — or if opener has both majors. If responder has only one four-card major, he tells opener about it by bidding the *other* major at the three level. So with four hearts, responder rebids 3♠; with four spades, responder rebids 3♥. This seems backward. Why do this? If opener has a fit for responder's major, it allows her to bid it at the four level, ensuring that the strong hand declares. For example:

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♣ ⁽¹⁾
3♦ ⁽²⁾	3♠ ⁽³⁾
4♥ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass

- (1) Puppet Stayman: do you have a four- or five-card major?
- (2) I have at least one four-card major.
- (3) I have four hearts.
- (4) Me too. Let's play 4♥ instead of 3NT.

Notice that the strong hand bid hearts first and will declare the contract.

What if opener's major doesn't fit responder's? Opener rebids 3NT.

Finally, what if responder has both four-card majors? Responder rebids 4♦ over 3♦ to command opener to choose.

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♣ ⁽¹⁾
3♦ ⁽²⁾	4♦ ⁽³⁾
4♠ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass

- (1) Puppet Stayman: do you have a four- or five-card major?
- (2) I have at least one four-card major.
- (3) I have four hearts and four spades. Choose a major-suit game.
- (4) I have four spades.

After a 3♥ or 3♠ response

When opener shows a five-card major, responder can usually place the contract (unless he has slam ambitions). With a three-card or longer fit for opener's major, responder will usually bid four of that major to end the auction. If responder doesn't have a fit for that major, he rebids 3NT.

There is a catch, however. As responder, you have to get into the habit of asking about opener's major-suit holdings even when you have only three cards in hearts or spades — remember that opener might have five. For example:

♠Q 6 4 ♥8 7 ♦A 9 4 2 ♣Q 5 3 2.

If partner opens 2NT it seems automatic to bid 3NT, but playing puppet Stayman you should bid 3♣ first. If opener shows a five-card spade suit (3♠), you'll happily bid 4♠. If not, you'll sign off in 3NT.

After a 3NT response

3NT will frequently end the auction. Responder will continue only if he has unusual length in the majors. With hands that contain a 6–4 pattern in the majors, for example, responder may start with 3♣ to find out if opener has a major-suit fit. When opener says no, responder may then transfer into the six-card major at the four level. This one is easy to forget, so be sure to discuss it! □

Did you know?

- Playing puppet Stayman, you can still play Jacoby and Texas transfers over a 2NT opening. The treatments are compatible.



THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

Responsive doubles

Suppose you hold this hand:
♠Q 10 6 3 2 **♥K Q 10 7 4** **♦6 4** **♣6**
 and it is your bid in the following auction:

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		
1♣	1♦	2♣	?

You and partner may very well have a fit in one of your majors, but you are not strong enough to bid 2♥ or 2♠ (and bidding either one would be a complete guess). Raising partner with a weak doubleton is not appealing. In other words, you'd like to act, but have no convenient bid. Fortunately, there is a tool you can add to your toolkit that helps.

What and why

A responsive double is a (takeout) double by responder after the opponents have bid and immediately raised a suit and partner has acted either by overcalling or doubling. When the opponents have bid and raised a suit, it is more likely that the double would be useful as takeout rather than as penalty. For partnerships used to playing negative doubles, the responsive double convention is not much different. It is simple and effective, and the chances to use it occur frequently. It is popular among tournament players.

When and how

Some general guidelines are needed. How high do you play responsive doubles? In what situations do they apply? What strength do you need?

Most partnerships play the responsive double only after the same suit has been bid and raised.

Consider this example:

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		
1♣	Dbl	2♣	?

This is a classic auction for a responsive double. Normally you would have at least 4-4 in the majors and a minimum of 6 or 7 high-card points.

Contrast the above with this example:

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		
1♣	Dbl	1♠	?

A double would not be responsive since the same suit was not bid and raised. In this case, a double would promise spades, either five of them or a good four-card suit. If you hold hearts and diamonds and enough HCP to act, you can simply bid 2♥ (and bid diamonds the next time if you choose to).

Some partnerships play responsive doubles through whatever level they play negative doubles. If that level is 3♠, then they also play responsive doubles through 3♠. This consistency makes it easier to remember.

The strength you need to respond depends on the level of the raise. If the suit bid and raised is to the two level, you can make a responsive double with 6 to 8 HCP. If the suit bid and raised is to the three level, you should have at least 9 HCP.

Double trouble, some examples

Assume you've agreed to play responsive doubles through 3♠. What would you do with each of these hands and the auction given?

Example #1

♠J 8 6 3 **♥K J 4 3** **♦8 3** **♣Q 10 3**

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		

1♦	Dbl	2♦	?
-----------	------------	-----------	----------

Answer: This one is easy. Make a responsive double. You have too many points to pass, and your support for both majors should convince you to act. You don't care which suit partner bids and you can show your hand in one call.

Example #2

♠ K 5 **♥Q J 8 6 3** **♦8 3** **♣10 3**
 and the action is the same:

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		

1♦	Dbl	2♦	?
-----------	------------	-----------	----------

Answer: Bid 2♥. Do not make a responsive double. That will mislead partner. Double says you have support for both majors. Suppose you double and the opening bidder rebids 3♦. Partner may bid 3♠, expecting you to have more length than a doubleton.

Example #3

♠ J 8 6 3 **♥K J 4 3** **♦8 3** **♣Q 10 3**
 and the auction is:

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		

1♦	Dbl	3♦	?
-----------	------------	-----------	----------

Answer: This hand is the same as example #1 above, but in this case you have to pass. You have the proper distribution for a responsive double, but your hand is too weak to compete at the three level. If you double and partner has enough strength for you to make a three-level contract, he may very well bid game, perhaps down one. Pass and hope partner can double a second time.

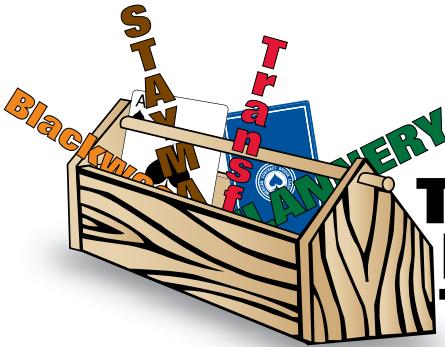
Example #4

♠Q 4 **♥8** **♦K Q 7 4 3** **♣A J 8 5 3**
 and the auction is:

West	North	East	South
<i>Partner</i>	<i>You</i>		

2♥	2♠	3♥	?
-----------	-----------	-----------	----------

Answer: Double. This hand shows why the responsive double convention was invented. You want to compete, but are not sure which suit to bid. If partner doesn't have support for either of your suits, you can stand for him to retreat to his suit. Even though the opponents started with a weak two-bid, you can still use the convention. □



THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

Roman Key Card Blackwood

Blackwood, the ace-asking convention, was developed early in the history of contract bridge as an aid to slam bidding. Despite its frequent misuse, it became a popular treatment because of its inherent simplicity. A bid of 4NT (in most constructive auctions) asks partner to reveal how many aces he holds using the following set of responses: 5♣ shows zero or four aces, 5♦ shows one, 5♥ shows two and 5♠ promises three. Easy.

Even when used properly, however, there's a problem that Blackwood fails to address, namely, the strength of the combined trump holding. Consider this situation:

Partner	You
♠ A 7 4	♠ K Q
♥ J 8 6 3	♥ A 7 4 2
♦ 10	♦ A K 8 5
♣ A K J 6 2	♣ Q 9 8

Partner opens 1♣. You have an 18-count, but you decide to take it slowly by responding with a calm 1♦. Partner rebids 1♥.

Your hand is improving in value as the auction proceeds. If you are a Blackwood enthusiast, it wouldn't be unreasonable to bid 4NT at this point. After partner's 5♥ response (two aces), it would likewise be reasonable to bid 6♥. Your trump holding, however, will be a disappointment to partner. Barring the unlikely occurrence of the doubleton ♥K Q in a defender's hand, declarer will lose two trump tricks.

This example is just one of many

cases where not only is the number of aces held by the partnership a key to making a slam, but also the quality of the trumps.

Enter Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB). This approach is "Roman" because it's a variation of an ace-asking scheme developed by the Italian Blue Team. The phrase "Key Card" refers to the way in which this method improves on traditional Blackwood by counting the four aces and the king of the agreed trump suit as "key" cards — a total of five. Additionally, this method allows the partnership to check on the queen of the agreed suit.

Playing RKCB, the responses to the key-card asking bid of 4NT are:

- 5♣ zero or three key cards
- 5♦ one or four key cards
- 5♥ two or five key cards without the queen
- 5♠ two or five key cards with the queen

If the partnership is missing two (or more!) key cards, slam should be avoided. If the partnership is missing a key card and the queen of the agreed suit, slam is iffy unless the combined trump holding is 10 cards or longer.

On the example hand, therefore, partner would respond to your 4NT call with 5♥, showing two key cards, but without the ♥Q. You would then know that your side is missing either (1) a black ace and the ♥Q or (2) the ♥K and the ♥Q. Either way, slam would be a bad

idea. You should pass 5♥.

What about situations where partner's response is 5♣ or 5♦, but you still want to know about the queen of the agreed suit? In RKCB, the "asker" bids the cheapest suit after partner's response to ask if he holds the queen. Responder says "no" by bidding five of the agreed suit.

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠ ⁽¹⁾
4NT ⁽²⁾	5♦ ⁽³⁾
5♥ ⁽⁴⁾	5♠ ⁽⁵⁾
Pass	

(1) Limit raise.

(2) RKCB.

(3) One or four key cards. Responder made only a limit raise, so it must be one.

(4) "Do you have the ♠Q?"

(5) "No."

Responder says "yes" by bidding six of the agreed suit. In the above auction, therefore, responder could reply to the queen-asking bid of 5♥ with 6♠ if he held the ♠Q.

If responder has the trump queen and a side king, however, he can show both. (This can sometimes help the partnership bid a grand slam.)

Opener	Responder
1♠	3♠
4NT ⁽¹⁾	5♦ ⁽²⁾
5♥ ⁽³⁾	6♣ ⁽⁴⁾
7♠ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass

(1) RKCB.

(2) One key card.

(3) "Do you have the ♠Q?"

(4) "Yes, and I have the ♣K, too."

(5) "Just what I needed!" □

The 24-part Bidding Toolkit series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/commonlyusedconventions.html.



Smolen

Many players use Jacoby transfers in response to an opening 1NT bid from partner. It allows responder to show a five-card or longer major, while allowing the strong hand – the 1NT opener – to declare, assuming the opponents are not in the auction.

Allowing the strong hand to declare is important. The 1NT bidder frequently holds combinations of honors (called *tenaces* in bridge lingo) that are worth more tricks if the defenders lead *into* them than if the defenders lead *through* them. For example, if you hold the ♠A Q, you'd like your left-hand opponent to lead a heart for you, but not your RHO.

Game-forcing hands that are 5–4 in the majors (five spades and four hearts or vice versa), however, are difficult to describe in response to a strong (15–17 HCP) 1NT opening. Transfers are a problem in this situation because they risk making responder – the weak hand – declarer. Say you hold:

♠A K 6 5 3 ♥K 8 7 4 ♦8 7 3 ♣4.

Partner opens 1NT. You respond 2♥, a Jacoby transfer to spades, and partner dutifully bids 2♠. You have enough strength to force to game, and you have a four-card suit you haven't mentioned yet, so you bid it: 3♥. Partner raises you to 4♥.

This is a perfectly good auction, but there is a risk. You are the declarer in this case, not partner. Suppose these

are the combined hands:

♠ Q 8
♥ A 9 6 2
♦ K 5 4
♣ A Q 10 7

♠ A K 6 5 3
♥ K 8 7 4
♦ 8 7 3
♣ 4

If LHO leads the ♦Q, you're in big trouble. The ace will be over the king, and you'll likely lose three diamond tricks and a trump trick for down one.

The problem is that partner's ♦K was vulnerable to attack. If partner declared, however, he'd likely make the contract since the ♦K would be protected.

Is there a way to avoid this problem? The Smolen convention, named for the late expert Mike Smolen, helps address this situation. It works like this: instead of using transfers for hands that are 5–4 in the majors, it uses Stayman (2♣). After partner's 1NT opening, you bid 2♣. If partner pleasantly surprises you by bidding a major, you'll simply jump to four of that major, and partner will declare. But what if partner doesn't have a four-card major? He'll respond to your Stayman inquiry with 2♦. Now what? Could you still have a 5–3 major-suit fit? Is there a way to find out?

This is where Smolen helps. You now jump to the three-level of your *shorter* major. This Alertable call tells partner that you have four cards in that major and five in the other. With the previous example hand, you'd jump to 3♥. This jump after opener's 2♦ rebid would tell partner that you have four hearts and five spades. With three-card spade support, he would bid 3♠, and you could raise to 4♠ or cuebid if you were interested in slam. Without a three-card spade fit, partner would simply sign off in 3NT. Either way, partner – the 1NT opener – declares.

Example auctions:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♣ ⁽¹⁾
2♦ ⁽²⁾	3♠ ⁽³⁾
4♥ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass

(1) Stayman: do you have a four-card major?

(2) No.

(3) Smolen: I have five hearts and four spades.

(4) I have three hearts and prefer this to 3NT.

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♣ ⁽¹⁾
2♦ ⁽²⁾	3♥ ⁽³⁾
3NT ⁽⁴⁾	Pass

(1) Four-card major?

(2) No.

(3) Five spades, four hearts.

(4) I don't have a fit for spades. □



Splinter raises

The splinter bid is a useful addition to any pairs' bidding arsenal. It is a specialized type of raise that sometimes allows a partnership to bid a game or slam that might otherwise be missed.

A splinter raise is an unusual jump that shows four-card or longer support for the last bid suit, game-going values and shortness (a singleton or void) in the suit in which the jump occurred. For example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♥	4♣

Responder shows at least four hearts, opening values (approximately; more on this later) and club shortness.

How can you tell which jumps are splinters? They're usually defined as any new-suit response higher than a jump raise. That means that after a 1♥ opening, 3♠, 4♣ and 4♦ are all splinter raises, each showing a different singleton or void. After a 1♠ opening, 4♣, 4♦ and 4♥ are all splinter bids.

Why are these bids useful? Let's look at an example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ AK 6 5 4	♠ Q 10 9 8 7
♥ K Q 6	♥ A 5 4 2
♦ 8 6 2	♦ 5
♣ A 6	♣ K Q J

After opener begins with 1♠, responder bids 4♦. From opener's point of view, this is good news. She knows that her partner has at most one diamond, making it safe to explore for slam. Why? Opener doesn't have to worry about the three low diamonds in her hand.

Whether opener uses Blackwood

or cuebids, 6♠ is easy to reach and almost certain to succeed. Notice that the partnership has a combined total of only 28 points, far less than the textbook 33 points suggested for bidding a small slam.

If responder had splintered in a different suit (hearts, for example) opener should take a more pessimistic view of things and settle for game only.

How strong does responder need to be to make a splinter bid? Partnerships may, of course, define them as they please, but many players have found that restricting responder to 13 to 15 points (which includes distribution) makes it easier for opener to know what to do. With a weaker hand, other types of raises are available to responder. The same is true for stronger hands.

Opener may make a splinter bid as well. Here's an example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A J 6 5	♠ K Q 7 4 3
♥ 9	♥ 8 7 6
♦ K Q J 4	♦ 9 3 2
♣ A Q 10 2	♣ J 4

After 1♦ by opener, responder bids 1♠. Opener then jumps to 4♥, a splinter bid. What does it mean when opener uses this type of jump? It shows a fit for responder's suit (at least four cards), an excellent hand (remember, responder could have a minimum hand, as in the example) and shortness in the bid suit.

Responder will retreat to 4♣ after the 4♥ splinter, but will be pleased when he sees the dummy. With only 22 combined HCP, the spade game

is a virtual lock, and 11 tricks are possible if the club finesse works.

Note that if splinters weren't being used on this deal, opener might have rebid 3♠. Responder, with such a weak hand, would certainly have passed, and the good game would have been missed.

Can you use splinters after a 1♣ or a 1♦ opening? Yes, as long as you discuss this with partner. After a 1♣ opening, 3♦, 3♥ and 3♠ would all be splinter bids. If opener starts with 1♦, 3♥, 3♠ and 4♣ would be splinters.

There are other applications for splinters in different auctions. Consider this:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♣	1♥
2♥	3♠

Since the partnership has already agreed on hearts, should 3♠ be a natural bid? Many partnerships believe that it should not. Instead, they treat it as a splinter raise, showing game-forcing values and spade shortness.

Remember, you must discuss this treatment with partner. It's important to specify the strength of splinter raises as well as whether they can be used in other constructive auctions such as the last example. □

Did you know?

ACBL Hall of Famer Dorothy Truscott (formerly Hayden) is credited with popularizing splinter raises in the early Sixties.



Stayman

Stayman is the granddaddy of bridge conventions. It is arguably the most popular of any conventional treatment because it is simple, effective and flexible enough to be used with just about any system you care to play.

Stayman is used by responder to discover a possible major-suit fit after an opening bid of 1NT. This is important because an eight-card (or longer) trump fit is usually safer and will produce more tricks than the play in notrump. So in this auction

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1NT	2♣

responder's 2♣ is Stayman, a conventional inquiry that says nothing about clubs. It simply asks the opener to reveal whether he holds a four-card major. If he does, he bids it. For example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1NT	2♣ ⁽¹⁾
2♥ ⁽²⁾	

- (1) "Do you have a four-card major?"
(2) "Yes, I have four hearts."

If opener doesn't have a four-card major, he bids 2♦.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1NT	2♣ ⁽¹⁾
2♦ ⁽²⁾	

- (1) "Do you have a four-card major?"
(2) "No."

What happens when opener has both four-card majors? Most pairs agree to bid the lower-ranking suit, hearts, first.

It's that easy! There are some caveats, however. After a strong 1NT opening, responder must gauge the combined assets of the partnership. Since game-level contracts generally require a minimum of 25 HCPs,

responder adds his points to those of opener's to determine how high the partnership should be. This table shows the general guideline when responder holds a four-card major:

Responder's HCPs	Goal	Recommended action
0-7	Partscore only	Pass
8-9	Invite game	Stayman followed by 2NT or raising partner's major to the three level with a fit
10 or more	Force to game	Stayman followed by 3NT or raising partner's major to game with a fit

Stayman is typically used with hands that have invitational or better strength. If you and your partner play strong notrumps (15 to 17 HCP or 16 to 18), responder should have at least 8 HCP to use Stayman (with one exception we'll discuss at the end). This deal shows why this is recommended:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A J 6 4	♠ Q 2
♥ K Q 3	♥ J 10 5 4
♦ A 10 4	♦ K Q 9 7
♣ Q 10 8	♣ J 9 7

Opener begins with 1NT. Responder wants to know if opener has four hearts, so he bids 2♣, Stayman. Opener replies 2♠ to show four spades. Since this pair has agreed that opener would show hearts first if he had them, responder knows that opener doesn't have four hearts.

Now what? Since no major-suit fit exists, and since both hands are balanced, it's probably best to play in notrump. Responder, with 9 HCP, may now bid 2NT which sends this message: "Partner, I held four cards in the other major, and I have invitational strength." Opener may now

pass with a minimum or bid 3NT with a maximum.

If you play Stayman, the meaning of this auction is important to know:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1NT	2♣
2♥	3NT
?	

Responder is promising game-going values since he jumped to 3NT after the 2♥ rebid. But what else is he showing? Note that responder didn't jump to 3NT on his first turn — he wanted to know if opener held a four-card major. After opener showed hearts, however, responder bid 3NT. By inference, this means that responder must have four spades. If opener also holds four spades, he may correct 3NT to 4♠

to play in the 4-4 major-suit fit.

There is one special case where you may use Stayman with a poor hand. It happens when

you have a three-suited hand that is very short in clubs, such as

♠ 8 7 5 3 ♥ Q 8 4 3 ♦ J 9 8 2 ♣ 5.

Partner will probably not be happy playing in 1NT. The club shortness is worrisome. So when partner opens 1NT, you respond 2♣, Stayman. Your plan is to pass whatever partner bids. If he shows a four-card major, great! Even if he denies a four-card major with 2♦, however, you'll still pass and hope that partner has three or more diamonds. That contract will usually fare better than 1NT.

Did you know?

The Stayman convention was not invented by Sam Stayman! It was actually invented in the U.S. by George Rapée. Stayman, however, published an article about the 2♣ bid in June of 1945 in *The Bridge World*, and his name became associated with the convention.

In Britain, J.C.H. Marx devised a similar 2♣ convention in 1939, but publication of his idea was delayed by World War II.



Responding to a takeout double

The use of a low-level double is a request to partner to bid an unbid suit. The most common instance is after a one-level bid by an opponent. The double normally indicates a hand worth an opening bid with at least three-card support for all unbid suits.

Knowing the proper responses after partner doubles is crucial. You should look first to play in one of the major suits. The second choice is notrump. If either of these is not a good option, then you should play in a minor suit.

Suppose the bidding is:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	Dbl	Pass	?

Partner is asking you to bid. How do you respond?

1. Make a minimum suit response with 0–8 high-card points. Suppose you hold this hand and the bidding has proceeded as above (all the following examples presume left-hand opponent opened 1♦ and partner doubled and RHO passes):

♠K 10 4 3 ♦Q 4 ♣10 4 3 ♣J 7 6 4

With this hand, you should respond 1♠. You are lucky to have a useful hand, but you are not strong enough to do more than bid at the one level. Notice that you would also have to bid 1♠ with:

♠A 10 8 4 3 ♦Q 4 ♣10 4 3 ♣J 7 6 4.

Bidding 1♠ doesn't promise values since partner forced you to bid.

2. Bid 1NT with a relatively balanced hand and 7–10 HCP. Here is an example:

♠K 10 3 ♦Q 4 ♣Q 10 4 3 ♣J 7 5 4.

Although 7–10 HCP is recommended here, the exact strength is a matter of style, and expert opinions vary. The conservative view is to use the bid for 7–10 or 8–10, but others recommend 6–9 or even 5–10. As with many bidding situations, this is something you and your partner should discuss.

3. Make a jump response in your suit with 9–11 HCP, or a good 8 HCP and some distribution. Suppose you hold:

♠K 10 3 ♦Q J 7 4 3 ♣10 4 3 ♣A 3.

You should not bid 1♦ — you are too strong. You should jump to 2♦, a bid that is invitation. Partner can pass if he has a minimum takeout double. If he has 13 points and you have 10, that's not enough for game. If he has extra, he can bid again.

4. Bid 2NT with 11 to 12 HCP and at least one stopper in the opponent's suit. With this hand:

♠A 3 ♦J 5 3 ♣K Q 10 4 ♣J 10 7 4, you should bid 2NT. The hand is too strong for 1NT and you don't have a four-card or longer major. Try to play notrump instead of a minor suit when you have a hand this strong. 2NT shows your strength and approximate pattern and allows partner to make a good decision.

5. Cuebid the opponent's suit with 12 or more HCP. If you and partner both have opening bid values, you

probably have game. You send this message to partner with a cuebid. Suppose you have:

♠A 6 ♦Q 5 3 ♣K Q 7 4 ♣J 10 5 3.

Should you play game in 3NT or 4♦? If partner has a four-card heart suit, you would want to play 4♦. If partner only has three-card heart support, then you want to play 3NT. Since you are not sure, cuebid 2♦. If partner rebids 2♦, you can raise to 4♦. If partner bids something else, you can bid 3NT.

6. Jump to the three-level with a long suit with good playing strength, but less than game values. You hold:

♠K J 10 8 7 4 ♦9 5 4 ♣Q 10 9 4.

Bid 3♠. Your hand has too much potential for a simple 1♠ bid, but doesn't qualify for a 2♠ bid with only 6 HCP. Bidding one more than a single jump shows you have a long suit and some useful points. Partner can evaluate his hand to decide whether to continue to 4♠.

Here are some more examples. In each case, suppose your LHO opens 1♣ and partner doubles.

Example #1:

♠A 8 5 3 ♦K Q 3 ♣9 4 3 2 ♣7 4 3?

Answer: Bid 1♦. Yes, your suit is weak, but you are forced to bid and it's the only four-card suit you have.

Example #2:

♠A 8 4 ♦Q 8 4 3 ♣10 8 3 ♣A K 4 3.

Answer: Bid 2♦. It's true your hearts are only four cards long and not very strong, but bidding 1♦ does not show the strength of your hand. Partner usually has four-card heart support, so jump to 2♦ and hope for the best.

Example #3:

♠A 10 7 ♦K 8 3 ♣K Q J 10 7 ♣9 7 5.

Answer: Bid 2♦. You don't have a four-card major to bid. You don't have a club stopper. That leaves bidding diamonds. Jumping to 2♦ promises diamonds and 9–11 (or a good 8) points, which is a good description of your hand. □



Texas Transfers

Many fans of Jacoby transfers play Texas transfers as well. The treatments are similar, but there are some important differences.

After a 1NT opening by partner, the Texas transfer may be used to describe a hand with a six-card or longer major suit with appropriate values. When playing a suit contract, it's desirable for the partnership to have a trump fit of at least eight cards. When partner opens 1NT, she promises at least two cards in each suit, so when you have six cards in a major suit, you usually know right away which suit you want to be the trump suit.

Playing Texas transfers, responder jumps to 4♦ or 4♥ asking opener to bid the next higher suit (4♥ or 4♠, respectively). This allows the stronger hand to become declarer. For example:

Opener	Responder
1NT	4♦ ⁽¹⁾
4♥ ⁽²⁾	

(1) I have at least six hearts. Please bid 4♥.

(2) Okay.

or

Opener	Responder
1NT	4♥ ⁽¹⁾
4♠ ⁽²⁾	

(1) I have long spades. Please bid 4♠.

(2) I'll be declarer.

What kinds of hands are appropriate for the use of the Texas transfer? Some examples:

♠A 7 ♥K Q 10 9 5 4 ♦9 8 4 2 ♣6

Bid 4♦, a Texas transfer to 4♥, after partner opens 1NT (strong, 15 to 17 high-card points). (Note that opener must Announce "transfer" to the opponents when responder employs this method.)

♠A Q 10 7 6 5 ♥8 ♦K 9 3 ♣J 5 2

Bid 4♥, a transfer to 4♠, after partner's 1NT opening.

♠A K J 5 4 3 2 ♥A 7 ♦K Q 2 ♣9

Bid 4♥, a transfer to 4♠, after partner's 1NT opening. This hand is so strong that you will continue toward slam after partner accepts the transfer.

Be careful not to use the Texas transfer on a hand that is too weak. For example, you hold

♠J 10 9 6 5 3 ♥Q 6 5 ♦7 4 ♣10 5.

Using the Texas transfer after partner's 1NT opening would be far too aggressive. This hand doesn't have enough strength to force the partnership to game. It would be better to simply use the Jacoby transfer (2♥), asking partner to bid 2♠, which you will pass.

Speaking of Jacoby transfers, a question that sometimes comes up is this: why play both Jacoby and Texas transfers?

Consider these two auctions:

Opener	Responder
1NT	4♥ ⁽¹⁾
4♠ ⁽²⁾	

(1) Texas transfer.
and

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♥ ⁽¹⁾
2♠	4♠

(1) Jacoby transfer.

In both cases, the partnership gets to the same contract. In both cases, responder promises a six-card (or longer) spade suit. Does this mean that the Texas transfer is unnecessary or redundant? No. These two auctions show different types of responding hands.

In the first case, responder transferred at the game level and passed after partner accepted the transfer. Responder wants to be in game, but has no slam interest. Responder says, "Partner, we belong in 4♠, but no higher." (If responder had a really strong hand with spades such as this

♠A K J 5 4 3 2 ♥A 7 ♦K Q 2 ♣9,

he could transfer and then use Blackwood or make some other slam try to let opener know about the strength of the hand.)

In the second auction, however, responder forced to game in a two-step fashion, using the Jacoby transfer instead of the Texas transfer. Why?

Experienced players typically use this sequence to show a hand with slam interest, but not enough to insist on slam by itself. Something like this:

♠K Q 8 7 4 2 ♥K Q ♦A J 5 ♣10 6

If partner has a maximum for her 1NT opening, slam will have a reasonable play. With a minimum, it's probably better to stay in 4♠. Bidding the hand in this manner allows opener to contribute her opinion as to whether the partnership belongs in game only or slam. Two heads are better than one. □

Don't forget! If you use Texas transfers, the sequence 1NT-4♥ is a transfer to spades, not to play. Forgetting agreements is common when learning new conventions, especially if the conventional bid sounds natural, as in the case of 1NT-4♥. If partner "forgets" that your 4♥ bid is a transfer, don't worry — it's happened to plenty of others before and will happen to plenty of others after!



The 24-part Bidding Toolkit series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/commonlyusedconventions.html.

Unusual vs. unusual

When your partner opens one of a major and your right-hand opponent jumps to 2NT, showing the minors, you will often face a tough competitive bidding problem. You need to define your hand before your second opponent continues the preemption. One defense against two-suited overcalls is called unusual vs. unusual.

How does it work?

There are different variations — this is one of them.

1. Bid 3♣ with a limit raise or better in hearts.
2. Bid 3♦ with a limit raise or better in spades.
3. Raise partner's major with 7–10 support points.
4. Bid three of the other major with a hand similar to a good weak two-bid — this is natural and constructive but non-forcing.
5. Double with a hand that is worth a redouble of a takeout double. This says that you can double at least one of their suits for penalty and promises another bid.

What do these bids mean?

When you show a limit raise for partner, you should have at least three-card support. When you show limit-raise values (or better) in the other major, you should have at least a five-card suit.

There is an easy way to remember which cuebid is for which major. The lower cuebid is for the lower major (in this case, cuebid clubs for hearts) and the higher cuebid is for the higher major (cuebid diamonds for spades).

A single raise in opener's suit is equivalent to a normal single raise. Responder needs no extra high-card values, but he should be careful of raising with three low trumps; the 2NT overcall increases the chances that trumps will split badly for your side.

Responder should avoid doubling 2NT unless he seeks to penalize the opponents. Because of the danger of further preemption, if responder has offensive features, he should begin to describe his hand using one of the other calls.

When does it apply?

These methods can be used any time an opponent's bid shows two known suits. Suppose this is the auction:

<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>
1♣	2♣	?

If the 2♣ is a Michaels cuebid, showing both majors, you can bid as described above. You would cuebid 2♥ to show a limit raise (or better) in clubs and 2♠ to describe a hand with limit-raise values (or better) in diamonds. The lower cuebid shows the lower minor suit and the higher cuebid shows the higher. A 2♦ bid would be constructive, but less than a limit raise, and, therefore, non-forcing.

Now suppose the auction is:

<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>
1♥	2♥	?

and 2♥ shows spades and a minor. Since you can't be sure which minor RHO has, you cannot use the unusual vs. unusual methods. A 3♣ or 3♦ bid, therefore, would be natural and forcing.

Understanding through examples

Here are some sample hands. In each case, suppose your partner opens 1♠ and your RHO overcalls 2NT for the minors.

What do you call holding:

♠Q 7 4 3 ♥A 10 7 3 ♦J 4 2 ♣9 6?

Answer: Bid 3♣. Yes, your hand is weak and the ♦J is probably worthless. But you have four trumps and your ace is in hearts, a likely second suit for opener. Support partner before the opponents raise the level.

What do you bid holding:

♠A Q 4 3 ♥A 10 7 3 ♦J 4 2 ♣9 6?

Answer: Bid 3♦. This shows a limit raise or better in spades.

What do you bid holding:

♠A 3 ♥K Q J 7 4 2 ♦A 4 2 ♣7 5?

Answer: Bid 3♣. This promises limit-raise values or better in hearts.

What do you bid holding:

♠10 3 ♥K Q 10 7 4 2 ♦8 4 2 ♣K 5?

Answer: Bid 3♥. You have a good six-card suit and the upper end of a weak-two bid. You have described your hand and partner can decide how to proceed.

What do you bid holding:

♠7 4 ♥Q 4 2 ♦A J 4 3 ♣K J 7 4?

Answer: Double. You have defense against both of their suits and are short in partner's spade suit. You intend to double the minor suit that your LHO bids.

What do you bid holding:

♠J 3 ♥A 8 4 2 ♦K 8 4 ♣9 8 5 3?

Answer: Pass. You have a smattering of high-card points, but you have no bid that describes this hand. □



THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

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. □



Weak can be strong — part 2

The weak two-bid is typically a six-card suit in the 5–11 high-card point range. It has two purposes — constructive and obstructive.

By making a weak two-bid, you are describing your hand (constructive). This gives partner information to help him 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 (obstructive). Because you are making them come in at a higher level, the weak two-bid can present awkward problems that may leave them guessing.

How can partner know?

Not vulnerable, you may open 2♥ with this,

♦A Q J 10 7 4 3 ♦J 7 6 ♣5 3.

This hand is in range (6 HCP) with a good suit — a classic weak two.

What about this hand?

♦A Q J 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 9 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 11 HCP range your hand falls? There are several methods that address this.

2NT: Show a feature

Responder's 2NT bid may be used to ask opener about "side" features.

You show a feature when you have more than a minimum but rebid your suit with a minimum. With the first hand above, in response to 2NT you would bid 3♥, "I have a minimum."

With the second hand above, you would bid 3♦ after the 2NT inquiry. This says you like your hand and you have a feature in diamonds. A feature is a high card, not shortness.

Here's an example. You open 2♠ with:

♦A Q J 7 4 3 ♥ 8 7 ♦6 3 ♣K 5 3.

Your partner inquires with 2NT. You should rebid 3♣. You have the top of your bid and you have a feature (the ♣K) to show.

Now consider this hand:

♦Q J 7 4 3 2 ♥ 8 7 ♦6 3 ♣K 5 3.

Over the 2NT inquiry, you should rebid 3♠. Do not rebid 3♣. Yes, you have a feature, but to show it, you should have more than a minimum.

3NT says you have a solid suit that you can run in 3NT. An example is:

♦A Q J 10 7 4 3 ♦7 4 ♣7 4 3.

2NT: Ogust

After the 2NT bid, the weak two-bidder responds as follows:

3♣ = minimum strength, poor suit

3♦ = minimum strength, good suit

3♥ = maximum strength, poor suit

3♠ = maximum strength, good suit

3NT = solid suit.

What is defined as a good suit? Having two of the top three honors

would qualify. ♥A Q 10 7 4 3 would be a good suit. ♥Q J 7 5 4 3 would be a bad suit (in the context of a weak two-bid). You and your partner should discuss hands that fall in between and decide how to answer in response to the 2NT inquiry.

2NT: "Easy" Ogust

One problem with Ogust is that sometimes it is hard to define what is a good suit or a good hand. Some hands fall in between. A third method is simple and helps with this issue — you respond by saying how well you like your hand, on a scale of one to four, without reference to suit quality.

3♣ = a minimum

3♦ = more than a minimum

3♥ = your hand is a 3 on a scale of 1 to 4

3♠ = maximum

3NT = a solid suit

When you show a feature over 2NT, as described above, you often make the defense easier. Easy Ogust keeps the opponents in the dark regarding where your side strength is.

Here's an example. You open 2♦ with:

♦A Q J 10 7 4 3 ♣J 10 8.

Over the 2NT ask, playing "Easy" Ogust you can rebid 3♠. You are at the top of your bid. If partner bids game, the opponents may make a favorable lead for your side, since you didn't tell them anything about your hand other than the fact that you like it.

There are other methods of responding to weak two-bids, but these are three of the common ones. □