

Roadmap: a bidding system

1. Base principles

The system introduced here has been built combining some well-known principles and treatments, summarised in this opening section.

Weak notrump: 1NT with 12-14 points

The purpose of the weak notrump is twofold:

- keep weak balanced hands out of suit opening bids, making those bids stronger: because of the 12-14 notrump, suit opening bids cannot have more than 6-7 losers, and this will encourage partner to bid in competitive auctions;
- open 1NT more often than strong notrump favourites do (about twice as much), with a remarkable preemptive effect on the opponents, that could have a game and must start bidding at the two level.

In order to employ the weak notrump, you have to accept its downside:

- sometimes it preempts the opening side, and makes you lose a better partial contract in a 4.4 or even 5.4 fit in a suit;
- it attracts penalty doubles: hence, you will have to use a rescue mechanism, in order to find a 4.4 fit and play two of a suit instead of 1NT; even so, you will get the occasional -800 every now and then.

Anyway, the benefits of the weak notrump are assumed to outweigh its flaws. Its plus points are so important that *the 1NT opening bid includes 5.3.3.2 hands with a five-card major*.

Balanced hands with 15+ points are now opened in a suit, and described with a notrump rebid.

Five-card majors and four-card diamonds

This method is popular in Italy, and is adopted here. Because of the weak notrump, you could open 1♣ with short clubs only with 15+ points: the length flaw, if any, is compensated by extra strength.

2-over-1 game forcing

This approach is more and more common in five-card major systems, since it greatly helps game and slam bidding. It implies that some invitational hands have to be included in the 1NT response, which becomes one round forcing.

The 2-over-1 principle is valid only when the opening bid is 1♥ or 1♠. Over 1♦, the 2♣ response is one round forcing only, and includes all club hands with invitational strength: this is mainly because you cannot respond 1NT over 1♦ with more than 6-9 points.

Kaplan Inversion

Over a 1♥ opening bid, the meanings of 1♠ and 1NT responses are swapped: 1NT shows spades and is one round forcing, whereas 1♠ caters for all weak and invitational hands that cannot fall into a more specific response. Since 1NT promises five or more spades, 1♠ can conceal as much as four spades.

The reason for this swap is to make the 1NT rebid available for the opener to show a heart-spade two-suiter too weak for a reverse. Over a "normal" forcing notrump, opener would have to introduce a three-card minor or even a doubleton (if 4.5.2.2): with Kaplan Inversion, all rebids show real suits.

Suit rebids

Thanks to the weak notrump, all suit rebids are natural and descriptive: they show unbalanced hands, even at the one level. Moreover, rebidding the opening suit shows *always* a six-card suit.

Since you cannot rebid a five-card suit, some hands with minimum strength require to select the opening bid carefully. Minor 5.4 two-suiters are opened with 1♦ and fall into the 2♣ rebid, whichever the longer suit: if you open 1♣ when you have five clubs, you will be stuck for a rebid over the most likely 1♥ or 1♠ response. An additional option is to open 5.4.2.2 hands with 1NT. 6.4 hands with minors can be opened in the six-card suit anyway, that can be rebid over any response.

At the same way, two-suiters with four hearts and a five-card minor cannot be opened with 1♣ or 1♦ in the long suit: no rebid is available on the 1♠ response. These hands are opened through:

- 1NT if 5.4.2.2, treating them as balanced; with 15+ points but 6 losers, still too weak for a reverse, open 1♣♦ in the minor and rebid 1NT;
- 2♦ if 5.4.3.1, artificial bid showing exactly this kind of hand: a five-card minor, four hearts, and 3.1 remainders.

2NT with 18-20 points

Even the 2NT opening bid is weaker than usual: 18-20 points, instead of 20-21 or 21-23. As with the 1NT opening bid, this choice is intended to have a better definition for the suit opening bids, excluding an awkward type of hand in competitive auctions and making the 2NT rebid available to describe other hands. Moreover, we could say that this "weak two notrump" has the same plus and minus points of the 12-14 1NT: it has a higher frequency, but sometimes will preempt your constructive auctions. Accept the downside and enjoy the benefits when you do not open 2NT.

Competitive bidding

In competitive bidding, this system is a follower of the Robson-Segal approach. The top priority of competitive bidding is supporting partner's suit, opener or overcaller, with a wide range of bids, differentiating the different types of hands and enabling him to raise the bidding at the right level quickly:

- natural raises are always weak, and based on the number of trumps, according to the Law of the Total Tricks;
- a jump in a new suit is a fit-bid: it shows a good suit and a fit for partner's suit, with good distributional values;
- a cue-bid is a strong raise, game invitational or better.

As long as no fit has been discovered, a couple of bids are often used:

- double, very often for takeout;
- 2NT, useful to show different strength ranges (Lebensohl) or to suggest two possible trump suits (Scrambling).

Preemptive bids have greater breadth than usual: non-vulnerable, you can open or overcall with a preemptive bid even with a weaker hand and/or with a shorter suit. Partner has specific tools available to control the bidding and push as high as possible, while taking into account the wide range of the preempt.

Opening bids summary

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| 1♣ | 11-20, unbalanced, 4+ cards; or 15-17, balanced, 2+ cards. |
| 1♦ | 11-20 unbalanced or 15-17 balanced, 4+ cards; includes minimum hands with 4 diamonds and 4-5 clubs, as well as 15-17 balanced hands with 4 diamonds and 4 clubs. |
| 1♥♠ | 11-20 unbalanced or 15-17 balanced, 5+ cards. |
| 1NT | 12-14 balanced, might be a 5.3.3.2 with a five-card major, or a 5.4.2.2 with long minors, or 5.4.2.2 with a five-card minor and four hearts. |
| 2♣ | Strong, artificial and forcing, includes all game hands, 21+ balanced, 4 losers one-suiters (any suit). |
| 2♦ | 11-15, 5.4.3.1, four hearts, a five-card minor. |
| 2NT | 18-20 balanced, might be a 5.3.3.2 with a five-card major. |
| others | Preemptive bids. |

2. Opening 1NT

The suggested responses appear to be more direct and aggressive than transfer-based structures:

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| 2♣ | Stayman, weak or invitational. |
| 2♦ | Stayman, game forcing. |
| 2♥♠ | To play. |
| 2NT | Minor two-suiter, any strength; or diamond one-suiter, weak. |
| 3♦ | Major two-suiter, game try or slam try. |
| 3♣♥♠ | Preemptive, six or more suit. |
| 4♣♦ | Transfer to 4♥♠. |

2♣ response

Stayman, it is used to look for a major fit: responder has a weak unbalanced hand including a four-card major, expected to play better in a suit contract than in 1NT, or a game invitation to be specified later. Opener replies 2♥♠ in his four-card suit, or 2♦ otherwise; further bidding is as follows:

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| 1NT | 2♣ | Weak, both majors. Responder was hoping to pass over 2♥ or 2♠: since no fit has been found, responder signs off in his longer major. |
| 2♦ | 2♥♠ | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | Weak, long clubs and a four-card major. Again, responder was looking for a fit in the major. |
| 2♦ | 3♣ | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | Weak, four hearts and a long minor. |
| 2♠ | 3♣♦ | Same as before. |
| 1NT | 2♣ | Invitational. A raise shows support, a new suit is usually six cards long. |
| 2♥♠ | 3♥♠ | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | Invitational. 2NT does not guarantee any four-card major. |
| 2♥♠ | 2NT | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | If opener can accept the invitation, a rebid of his major suit shows a 5.3.2.2, offering a choice of games. |
| 2♥ | 2NT | |
| 3♥ | | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | 3♦ is invitational: with a weak hand, responder could have passed over 2♦. |
| 2♦ | 3♦ | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | Again, 3♦ is invitational. It cannot be weak with heart misfit: in that case, responder should have four spades, hence could bid 2♠ since a spade fit would still be possible. |
| 2♥ | 3♦ | |
| 1NT | 2♣ | 2♠ over 2♥ shows four spades, but does not limit the hand strength: it can be weak or invitational. |
| 2♥ | 2♠ | |

Over this 2♠, with a spade fit opener can pass when minimum or raise to 3♠ when maximum; with no fit, he will bid 2NT when minimum, 3♣ when maximum. 3♦♥, ostensibly illogic, must show some kind of spade fit: it can be selected, instead of 3♠, with a concentration of values in the bid suit.

2♦ response

Game forcing¹, any shape. Opener replies showing a four-card major or a reasonable five-card minor, or bids 2NT as a last resort; the development is natural, with sequences as below:

1NT 2♦ A raise under the game level is a slam try: with only game strength, responder should raise at game level.
2♥♣ 3♥♣

1NT 2♦ 2NT is a mark-time bid, and asks for further information. In this example, responder is excluding four spades, since he has skipped 2♣.
2♥ 2NT

1NT 2♦ Opener shows his five-card major re-bidding his suit. Now responder has a choice between 3NT and 4♥.
2♥ 2NT
3♥

1NT 2♦ A new suit bid by responder at the three level is usually five cards long, or more.
2♥♣ 3♣♦

1NT 2♦ Here is an exception to the previously stated rule: here 3♣♦ could be a four-card suit, since 2NT is not available.
2NT 3♣♦

1NT 2♦ A jump in a new suit is Splinter: here responder is making a slam try with four hearts and a stiff spade. With long spades, he should bid 2♠ and then 3♠.
2♥ 3♠

1NT 2♦ Splinter. If responder wants to play 4♠, he must bid 3♠ and then 4♠.
3♣ 4♠

1NT 2♦ Alert: when an attempt to play 3NT has gone bad, falling back into an "old" minor at the four level is a limit bid. Here responder's sequence shows long diamonds without any club stopper (otherwise 3NT over 3♥).
2♠ 3♦
3♥ 3♠
4♦

1NT 2♦ Sometimes responder can bid 2NT at the second round with five hearts. In this example, he was looking for a 4.4 diamond fit, with a possible slam in view: since no fit was found in diamond, he shows a five-card heart suit, offering a choice of games.
2♠ 2NT
3♣ 3♥

1NT 2♦ In this last example, responder is suggesting to play in a 4.3 spade fit, most likely because he has no heart stopper. Opener can bid 3NT with the stopper, otherwise accept 4♠ or suggest a different contract.
2♠ 2NT
3♣ 3♠

2♥ and 2♠ responses

Even being to play, they are not absolute signoffs: opener can still say something if he has a fit.

1NT 2♥♠ The raise is preemptive: it shows nothing but a four-card support, usually with a 4.4.3.2.
3♥♠

1NT 2♥♠ At the same way, the jump raise shows a 5.3.3.2.
4♥♠

1NT 2♥♠ A new suit shows a maximum, a fit for partner's suit and values in the bid suit.
3♣♦

1NT 2♥♠ 2NT is a maximum raise too, but with no concentration of values.
2NT

2NT response

It shows a minor two-suiter, with any strength, or a weak diamond one-suiter. Opener is asked to give a preference between 3♣ and 3♦, and now:

1NT 2NT 2NT was aimed to find the better fit at the three level, usually with a 5.5.
3♣♦ pass

1NT 2NT 3♦ over 3♣ shows the weak diamond one-suiter and is a signoff.
3♣ 3♦

1NT 2NT 3♥♠ is ostensibly a try for 3NT, with a stopper in the bid suit. It could turn out to be a slam try, if followed by a cue-bid at the next round.
3♣♦ 3♥♠

1NT 2NT When not able to bid 3NT, opener can fall back into the preferred minor at 4♣♦ (limit) or encourage with the unbid major (artificial). Supporting responder's fragment suggests playing there, with a five-card or good four-card suit.
3♣♦ 3♥♠
4♥♠

1NT 2NT Here responder is showing a limited 5.5, with no major stopper. Opener will leave 3NT with both majors well covered.
3♣♦ 3NT

1NT 2NT A raise to 4♣♦ is limit: it shows an unbalanced hand, typically 6.5, anyway unsuitable for 3NT.
3♣♦ 4♣♦

1NT 2NT Bidding the other minor at the four level is a clear slam try, surely with a 5.5 or a 6.5 hand.
3♣♦ 4♦♣

3♦ response

Game try or slam try with a major 5.5 two-suiter (game hands should be bid via 2♦×3♠×4♥). Opener will usually select one of the majors, even at the four level with a maximum or a good fit: he could even suggest 3NT from a 5.4.2.2 with long minors. Now responder places the contract, or tries for a slam with 4NT or a cue-bid.

¹ In general, "game forcing" should be meant as "forcing until 3NT or 4 of a suit". In some sequences, the auction can die at 4♣ or 4♦: usually, this happens when the minor is agreed at the 3 level and the following bids make it clear that the partnership lacks one of the stoppers in the side suits.

3. Opening one of a suit: opener's sequences

As in every "natural" system, suit opening bids give initially limited information, and need further bidding rounds to complete the hand description, especially after a response at the one level.

Strong sequences

Most of the strong sequences are natural:

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| 1♦
2♥ | 1♠ | A reverse is one round forcing: it promises 4-5 losers in a two-suiter hand, 5.4 or 6.4. |
| 1♥
3♣ | 1♠ | A jump shift is game forcing: it guarantees not more than 4 losers in a two-suiter hand, 5.4 or 6.4 or 5.5. |
| 1♦
3♣ | 1♥♣ | When both minors are involved, the jump shift shows a 5.5 hand, still with 4 losers. |
| 1♣
3♣ | 1♥ | A jump rebid is not forcing: it shows a six-card suit with about 5 losers. |

A jump to 2NT is artificial, being an additional strong bid with an unbalanced hand:

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| 1♣♦
2NT | 1♥♣ | The sequence 1♣♦×2NT shows a minor two-suiter with 4-5 losers, usually 5.4 or 6.4: the opened suit is longer. |
| 1♥♣
2NT | 1♠NT | 1♥♣×2NT has the same value of the ump rebid, but guarantees a four-card minor or three cards in the other major. |

Balanced hands with 15-17 points are identified at once from opener's rebid:

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| 1♦
1NT | 1♥♣ | 1NT shows a 15-17 balanced hand, and does not deny four cards in any skipped suit. It is better to clarify the general nature of the hand and "clean" the other rebids: after 1NT, usually there will be a chance to discover a fit. |
| 1♣
1NT | 1♦♥♣ | After opening 1♣, 1NT does not guarantee four clubs. Over a 1♦♥♣ response opener will have at least three clubs, whereas over 1♦ he could even have a 4.4.3.2 with two clubs only. |
| 1♣
2♦ | 1♥♣ | This specific sequence is artificial: after a 1♣ opening bid and a 1♥♣ response, 2♦ shows a 15-17 balanced hand with four cards in responder's major suit and two or three clubs only. With a fit and real clubs, opener should raise to 3♥♣ (see below). |

Limited sequences

All suit bids at the second round show unbalanced hands:

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| 1♦
2♦ | 1♠ | A suit rebid promises a six-card suit and usually 6 losers, rarely 7. |
| 1♣
1♠ | 1♥ | A new suit describes a two-suiter, or at most a 4.4.4.1, with 5-6 losers, occasionally 7. |
| 1♠
2♦ | 1NT | Even over a forcing notrump, opener's second suit is always at least four cards long. |

A few special cases:

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| 1♦
2♣ | 1♠ | 1♦×2♣ could be a 5.4 as well as a 4.5, and has 6-7 losers: over 1♠, opener could have a 4.4.4.1♠. |
| 1♥
1NT | 1♠ | 1♥×1NT shows a two-suiter with hearts and spades, once again with 6-7 losers. |
| 1♥♣
2♣ | 1♠NT | 1♥♣×2♣ is twofold, showing a "normal" two-suiter with clubs or a 5.3.3.2 with 15-17 points. |

Over 2♣, responder can ask for further definition with 2♦, relay with 8-9 points or more; here opener clarifies his hand:

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| 2♥♣ | Two-suiter with clubs, minimum (6-7 losers). |
| 3♣ | Two-suiter with clubs, maximum (5 losers), game forcing. |
| 2NT | 5.3.3.2, minimum (15-16 points). |
| 3♦ | 5.3.3.2, maximum (16-17 points), game forcing. |

Some third round rebids are specific:

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| 1♠
2♣
2♥ | 1NT
2♦ | In this sequence, 2♥ shows a minimum two-suiter with clubs, and guarantees three hearts. This treatment allows finding a 5.3 heart fit if responder has five hearts. |
| 1♥
2♣
2♠ | 1NT
2♦ | Here opener shows spade tolerance, probably a doubleton honour (1NT promises five or more spades), and a minimum. With three spades, opener would have rebid 2♠ instead of 2♣. |
| 1♥
2♣
3♠ | 1NT
2♦ | This sequence shows a maximum two-suiter with three spades. |

Supporting responder's suit

Raising sequences are relatively common:

1♦ 1♠ The simple raise shows an unbalanced minimum (6-7 losers) with four or possibly three cards (5.4.3.1, even 6.3.3.1).
2♠

1♣ 1♥ The jump raise is stronger (15-17 points or 5 losers), always with four cards.
3♥

1♦ 1♥ The game raise shows 5.4.2.2 specifically, since...
4♥

1♦ 1♥ ... a jump higher than the reverse is Splinter: maximum raise, with a singleton or void in the bid suit.
4♣

1♦ 1♠ Within the three level, you can Splinter with a 5 losers hand.
3♥

The 1NT response over 1♥, showing five or more spades, allows some more flexibility:

1♥ 1NT The single raise can be made with a three-card fit more freely.
2♠

1♥ 1NT Even the jump raise can be made with three cards: with four, it can be a little lighter than usual.
3♠

Over a simple raise to 2♥♠, responder can ask for more details with 2NT, and the bidding continues along the following lines:

1♦ 1♠ Opener bids one of his suits to show a minimum hand: 3♠ confirms four spades, 3♦ only three spades.
2♠ 2NT
3♦♠

1♦ 1♠ A new suit at the three level shows a maximum hand with three spades and values in the bid suit (usually four cards, sometimes a stopper).
2♠ 2NT
3♣♥

1♦ 1♠ 3NT pictures a 6.3.2.2 with three spades and stoppers in the other suits.
2♠ 2NT
3NT

1♦ 1♠ Any bid at the four level confirms four spades in a maximum hand: 4 in the opening suit shows a 6.4, any other suit is a cue-bid.
2♠ 2NT
4♣+

1♦ 1♠ 3♣♦ from responder, instead of 2NT, is limit, showing only four cards in the first suit: it proposes a possible alternative trump suit, in case opener has just a three-card fit.
2♠ 3♣♦

1♣ 1♠ The raise is a classical game invitation, with five cards (probably just five).
2♠ 3♠

1♦ 1♥ Here 2♠ shows 4.4 in the major, one round forcing. Further development as above.
2♥ 2♠

4. Opening one of a suit: responder's sequences

Responder's sequences depend on the rank of his suit compared to opener's suit. For a start, we will assume that opener's second bid does not promise more than a minimum opening.

Responder's suit is higher ranking

When responder's suit is higher ranking than opener's one, he will bid as follows:

1♦ 2♠ An immediate jump shift shows a weak hand, in the region of 3-7 points and/or 8-9 losers, with a suit usually six cards long, occasionally good five.

1♦ 1♠ A normal response followed by a suit rebid at the two level shows a stronger hand, about 8-11 points and/or 7-8 losers, with five or more cards.
2♠ 2♠

1♣ 1♥ A jump rebid at the three level shows a good one-suiter with 12+ points and 6- losers, and is game forcing.
1♠ 3♥

Responder's suit is lower ranking

When responder's suit is lower ranking, his sequences will be as follows:

1♦ 3♣ The jump shift is still weak: about 3-7 points and/or 8-9 losers, six or more cards.

1♠ 1NT 1NT over 1♠, or 1♠ over 1♥, followed by a new suit at the three level is invitational: it shows a six-card suit with 8-11 points and/or 7 losers.
2♥ 3♦

1♠ 1NT This specific sequence is more flexible: it guarantees five hearts, but responder strength is still 5-11 points and/or 7-8, without any narrower limitation.
2♦ 2♥

1♠ 2♦ A new suit 2-over-1 is game forcing. When selecting the response, the principle of "five-card majors and four-card diamonds" is still valid, but when responder rebids his suit he is promising at least six cards.
2♥ 3♦

1♦ 2♣ The 1♦ - 2♣ sequence is an exception to the 2-over-1 principle: 2♣ is just one round forcing, also including club hands of invitational strength. The development, fully described below, includes some artificial bids, but most the sequences follow the standard 2-over-1 bidding guidelines: the club rebid is game forcing with six or more clubs.
2♦ 3♣

Looking for a fit

When responder has no long suit to propose, he will select his bid depending on partnership's strength. In the following examples, responder shows weakness:

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| 1♥ | 1♠ | A preference back to the opening suit shows a minimum response, usually not more than 8-9 points, and a doubleton in the suit (1♠ was Kaplan). |
| 2♦ | 2♥ | |
| 1♣ | 1♥ | Same as before. 2♣ implies three or more clubs, since 1♣×1♠ suggests five or six clubs. |
| 1♠ | 2♣ | |
| 1♣ | 1NT | The 1NT response over 1♣♦ is natural, showing 6-9 points and excluding four cards in any suit available at the one level. Responder could have four cards in opener's suit in a square hand, or could have four diamonds over 1♣. |
| 1♦ | 1NT | Bidding an "impossible" suit shows a stopper and a maximum response (about 8-9 points). |
| 2♣ | 2♥♠ | |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | The 1NT rebid has the same value of the 1NT response: 6-9 points. In this example, responder was looking for a heart fit, maybe with a five-card suit. |
| 1♠ | 1NT | |

Other sequences are game invitational:

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| 1♥ | 1♠ | The 2NT rebid shows about 10-11 points. It implies a stopper in any unbid suit. |
| 2♥ | 2NT | |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | Raising at the three level shows about 9-11 points and 7-8 losers. If opener wants to accept the invitation, he will bid 3NT if possible (heart stopper), or will make a further try with 3♥ (heart half-stopper) or 3♠ (three spades) or will raise to 4♣♦ (maximum unbalanced). |
| 2♣ | 3♣♦ | |
| 1♠ | 1NT | Raising opener's six-card suit is invitational as well. Responder will usually have a doubleton honour: holding a good three-card support, a game raise would be justified. |
| 2♠ | 3♠ | |
| 1♣ | 1♠ | When opener rebids his suit, a third suit at the two level is one round forcing: it could be a real suit, but often shows a stopper and invites to 3NT. The sequence turns out to be game forcing as soon as one of the two partners bid the fourth suit at the three level (see below). |
| 2♣ | 2♥ | |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | |
| 2♦ | 2♠ | |

Here are the sequences in which responder forces to game:

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| 1♥ | 1♠ | A third suit at the three level, a real suit or a stopper, is game forcing. |
| 2♥ | 3♣ | |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | A third suit bid at the three level with a jump shows a strong 5.5 two-suiter. |
| 2♦ | 3♥ | |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | When opener shows a two-suiter, responder's fourth suit is artificial and game forcing. |
| 2♣ | 2♥ | |

The fourth suit asks for further information, or it used to force to game before rebidding or supporting a suit: a direct rebid or support would be invitational only.

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| 1♦ | 1♠ | The deferred raise is forcing: 3♦ at the round before would have been invitational and non forcing. |
| 2♣ | 2♥ | |
| 3♣ | 3♦ | |
| 1♣ | 1♥ | Rebidding the responding suit after the deferred raise establishes trumps and shows that the suit is five cards long: with six, responder could have bid 3♥ at the second round. |
| 1♠ | 2♦ | |
| 2♥ | 3♥ | |
| 1♥ | 1NT | The most typical use of the fourth suit is as stopper asking, as if in this example. |
| 2♦ | 3♣ | |
| 3NT | pass | |
| 1♥ | 1NT | Opener has described a 5.5 red two-suiter: now 4♦ is a natural slam try. |
| 2♦ | 3♣ | |
| 3♦ | 4♦ | |
| 1♣ | 1♠ | Here responder introduces the fourth suit at the third round. It is probably a stopper asking, trying to play 3NT instead of 4♠ in a 5.2 fit. |
| 2♣ | 2♥ | |
| 2♠ | 3♦ | |
| 1♣ | 1♠ | The fourth suit can be used by opener too. In this example, he is showing a maximum hand without any convenient bid: no adequate fit in any major, no diamond stopper for 3NT. |
| 2♣ | 2♥ | |
| 3♦ | | |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | A fourth suit rebid asks for further information. In this example, responder seems not interested in the heart suit: he is probably asking for the club stopper to play 3NT. |
| 1♠ | 2♣ | |
| 2♥ | 3♣ | |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | A jump in the fourth suit, usually within the three level, shows a strong 5.5 two-suiter. Please compare with the previous example. |
| 1♠ | 3♣ | |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | In this example, on the contrary, the jump in the fourth suit is Splinter: spades cannot be trumps, and 2♠ would have been enough to create a game force. Hence, responder is showing a club fit and a singleton or void in spades. |
| 2♣ | 3♠ | |

5. Opening one of a suit: direct raises

Over a major suit, here are the supporting responses:

- 1♥♠ 2♥♠ The simple raise is classical: it promises three trumps and a couple of cover cards, with about 5-9 points.
- 1♥♠ 3♥♠ The jump raise is preemptive, with four trumps at the three level or five trumps at the four level, with 3-7 points and not more than one cover card.
- 1♥♠ 4♥♠
- 1♥♠ 2NT 2NT is one round forcing: it promises four or more trumps, 8+ points and two or more cover cards.
- 1♥♠ 3NT 3NT is equivalent to a game raise, but it is a little stronger: about 6-9 points and a couple of cover cards in an unbalanced hand, usually 5.5 or 6.4.
- 1♥♠ 4♣♦ The double jump shift is Splinter: it promises four or more cards and a singleton or void in the bid suit, usually with 11-14 points and three cover cards.
- 1♥ 3♠
- 1♠ 4♥

Some hands fall back into a deferred raise:

- 1♠ 1NT With three trumps and too weak a hand for a single raise, responder can bid 1NT (or 1♠ over 1♥) and then pretend to give a preference.
- 2♦ 2♠
- 1♠ 1NT 1NT (or 1♠ over 1♥) followed by a deferred raise at the three level is a game invitation with three trumps.
- 2♦ 3♠
- 1♥ 2♦ Stronger hands with three trumps, or four trumps and a good side suit, should be handled via a 2-over-1 response (see below).
- 2♥ 3/4♥

Here are the raises over minor suits:

- 1♣♦ 2♣♦ The simple raise promises 10+ points and four or more trumps: one round forcing, at least a game invitation.
- 1♣♦ 3♣♦ The jump raise is preemptive: it shows about 3-7 points and usually five trumps (or even four over 1♦).
- 1♣♦ 2NT 2NT, once again artificial, shows about 8-9 points and four or five trumps: it is not forcing.
- 1♣♦ 3♥♠ A double jump shift is Splinter on minor suits too, even if rare. It promises about 12-15 points and four or more trumps, often five, and a singleton or void in the bid suit.
- 1♣ 3♦
- 1♦ 4♣

All immediate raises over minor suits deny four-card majors.

1♥♠ - 2♥♠ sequence

Of course, opener can pass or bid game. He can also bid as follows:

- 1♥♠ 2♥♠ The re-raise is preemptive: it shows six cards and a minimum, usually with 7 losers.
- 3♥♠
- 1♥♠ 2♥♠ 2NT is a general game try. When in doubt, responder can bid a suit of his own, under the level of 3 in the trump suit, showing values in the bid suit: opener will place the contract.
- 2NT
- 1♥ 2♥ A new suit is a trial bid, asking for cover cards in the bid suit. Responder will bid game if he expects to cover one or two losers in that suit.
- 2♠

1♥♠ - 2NT sequence

Some of the opener's rebids are artificial:

- 1♥♠ 2NT The trump rebid shows an absolute minimum, 7 losers. Responder will go on with substantial extra values only.
- 3♥♠
- 1♥♠ 2NT The game bid shows a minimum hand and a six-card suit: opener will have about 6 losers.
- 4♥♠
- 1♥♠ 2NT 3♦ shows a "good minimum": 6 losers, some extra points, good shape. Partner will return to trumps with a minimum response, otherwise will make a positive bid with three or more cover cards.
- 3♦
- 1♥♠ 2NT 3♣ is game forcing: it shows 15+ points or 5- losers (but see below for specific rebids).
- 3♣
- 1♥♠ 2NT 3NT shows a six-card suit and 4-5 losers: it could be a one-suiter or a 6.4, with a lower-ranking secondary suit.
- 3NT
- 1♥ 2NT 3♠ shows a 6.4 with hearts and spades, with 4-5 losers.
- 3♠
- 1♥♠ 2NT A new suit at the four level shows a 5.5 two-suiter and 4-5 losers.
- 4♣♦

Over 3♣, game forcing, responder can make a natural and descriptive bid, or ask for further information with 3♦; now opener clarifies as follows:

- 1♥♠ 2NT 3NT shows 15-17 points in a balanced hand.
- 3♣ 3♦
- 3NT
- 1♥♠ 2NT A new suit shows a singleton or void in an unbalanced hand.
- 3♣ 3♦
- 4♣♦
- 1♥♠ 2NT A trump rebid at the three level shows most probably a 5.4.2.2, or maybe a 5.4.3.1 with a singleton honour.
- 3♣ 3♦
- 3♥♠

1♣♦ - 2♣♦ sequence

The forcing raise in a minor denies any four-card major, and it is usually targeted to 3NT. Hence, the following bids are selected from the point count:

1♣♦ 2♣♦ The re-raise shows an absolute minimum, about 11-12 points. Partner can reopen with extra values, bidding a side stopper.
3♣♦

1♣♦ 2♣♦ A new suit implies a full opening bid and a real side suit or a stopper. This sequence becomes game forcing as soon as one of the two players goes beyond 3 of the trump suit, showing extra values.
2♥♠ 2♦
1♦ 3♣

1♣♦ 2♣♦ 2NT shows 15-17 in a balanced hand and is game forcing. It promises both major stoppers, otherwise 2♥♠ in the stopped suit is usually preferable.
2NT

1♣ 2♣ This sequence is artificial: 2♦ shows a strong notrump as well, but with two or three clubs only. Any other rebid, including 2NT, would confirm four or more clubs.
2♦

1♣♦ 2♣♦ Any opener's jump shift at the second round is Splinter, with 4-5 losers.
3♥♠

In the subsequent development, the fourth suit is usually a stopper asking:

1♦ 2♦ 2NT promises all side stoppers, and is forcing to 3♦.
2♥ 2NT

1♦ 2♦ Consequently, here 3♣ shows a club stopper and tends to deny a spade stopper.
2♥ 3♣

1♦ 2♦ Now, 3♠ shows extra values and asks for a half-stopper, Qx or Jxx, to play 3NT: it implies holding the other half-stopper.
2♥ 3♣
3♠

1♦ 2♦ In the same case, 3♥ denies a spade half-stopper and shows a good four-card heart suit, suggesting the heart game in the 4.3 fit should responder have three hearts.
2♥ 3♣
3♥

The stopper-showing sequences can be used, though more rarely, even after the weaker raises:

1♣♦ 2NT A game try promises a strong hand, with not less than 16-17 points. In these sequences a 4♣♦ bid in the trump suit is limit.
3♥♠

1♣♦ 3♣♦ Even rarer, here is the game try over the preemptive raise. The general principles are the same.
3♥♠

6. Opening one of a suit: 2-over-1 responses

The 2-over-1 principle is by now a cornerstone for many natural systems.

2-over-1 response over a 1♥♠ opening bid

Over a major opening bid, the change of suit 2-over-1 establishes a game force.

1♥♠ 2♣♦ The response shows usually a real suit: 2♥ has at least five cards, 2♦ at least four. 2♣ could be bid with only three clubs, when responder has a 4.3.3.3 with four cards in the other major.
1♠ 2♥

Opener rebids are as follows:

1♠ 2♣ The suit rebid is a time marker. It does not promise, but does not deny, extra length or extra values: it only denies four cards in any available suit at the two level.
2♠

1♥ 2♦ A new suit is always four cards long: 1♥×2♣ does not promise, but does not deny, extra values.
2♠

1♠ 2♥ 2NT promises 15-17 points in a balanced hand, with stoppers in all the side suits. In this example opener has probably only two hearts, otherwise...

1♠ 2♥ ... he would have raised hearts. 3♥ shows three or more hearts, and does not promise nor deny extra values.
3♥

1♥ 2♦ A raise of a minor suit promises some extra values and four or more cards.
3♦

1♠ 2♣ A jump shift is very descriptive. If the second suit is lower ranking than the first, it shows a good 5.5 with good suits and extra values.
3♦

1♥ 2♣ If the second suit is higher-ranking, the jump shift is Splinter: in this case, opener has a strong hand with a club fit and a spade singleton or void.
3♠

1♥ 2♣ At the same way, the jump rebid shows a solid or semisolid suit, at least six cards long, with some extra values.
3♥

1♠ 2♥ The jump raise is useful only over 2♥. It shows a minimum hand, 6-7 losers, but guarantees a good trump fit: typically, three or four cards with a couple of honours. When the trump fit is not so good, it is better to support with 3♥ and then rebid 4♥ at the next round.
4♥

After opener's rebid, it is the moment to take advantage from the bidding space still available:

1♠ 2♠	2♣ 3♣	The deferred raise shows three or more cards. It does not promise a strong hand, but allows opener to show extra values, if any.
1♠ 2♥	2♦ 3♣	A jump raise under the game level is a slam try, with a good four-card support and a strong side suit.
1♠ 2♠	2♣ 4♣	The game raise is very specific: it shows a minimum hand with good trump support, at least two honours. Hence, responder will not have much in the side suits.
1♥ 2♥	2♦ 4♣	Splinters are available: compared to 1♥ - 4♣, responder is showing a good diamond suit and possibly only three hearts.
1♥ 2♥	2♦ 4♦	Even a jump rebid of responding suit (as long as it is a minor!) is a strong raise of opener's suit: it describes a strong 6.4 with two good suits.
1♠ 2♥	2♦ 4♣♦	In this sequence, responder is supporting hearts: with a spade fit, he would bid 3♠.
1♥ 2♦	2♣ 3♦	As usual, raising a minor suit should be taken as an attempt to play 3NT. In this example, responder should not have a spade stopper.
1♥ 2♦	2♣ 4♦	The jump raise to 4♦ is a clear slam try.
1♠ 2♥	2♣ 3♣	Responder's suit rebid promises a good six-card suit.
1♥ 2♥	2♣ 2NT	2NT is a time marker, asking for further information and offering the opener another chance to describe his hand.
1♥ 2♥	2♣ 3NT	A jump to 3NT is quantitative: it shows 15-17 points in a balanced hand. With 12-14 or 18+, responder bids 2NT: if he has 18+, he will reopen any game bid by opener.
1♥ 2♥	2♦ 3♣	A third suit is, as usual, a real suit or a stopper. As his first priority, opener will bid 3NT with a stopper in the fourth suit: responder will reopen with a strong 5.5 two-suiter.
1♠ 2♥	2♣ 3♦	The fourth suit is a last resort: responder hand is not adequate for any other bid, and he is suggesting playing 3NT if opener has a stopper in the fourth suit.

1♦ - 2♣ sequence

2♣ over 1♦ is not game forcing, since it includes all club hands with invitational strength that cannot be covered by other responses. It is one round forcing, and opener will reply:

- 2♦ Five or more diamonds, any strength.
- 2♥ Diamond-heart two-suiter, 15+ points; or 11-14 points with just four diamonds.
- 2♠ Diamond-spade two-suiter, 15+ points.
- 2NT Balanced hand, 15-17 points.
- 3♣ Four or more clubs, 15+ points.
- 3♦ Six solid or semisolid diamonds, 15+ points.
- 3♥♠ Splinter, club fit, 4-5 losers.

A reply of 2♣ or higher is game forcing, and the bidding will continue along the 2-over-1 development. Over 2♦ or 2♥, some sequences are special:

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|--|
| 1♦
2♦ | 2♣
2♥ | 2♥ includes the "normal" club-heart hands with 12+ points and the invitational club hands. |
| 1♦
2♦
2♠ | 2♣
2♥
2NT | Opener is requested to bid 2♣, and now responder's 2NT is limit, with 10-11 points and a balanced hand. |
| 1♦
2♦
2♠ | 2♣
2♥
3♣ | In the same sequence, a club rebid is limit as well, with 8-11 points and a six-card suit. |
| 1♦
2♦
2♠ | 2♣
2♥
3♦ | Over 2♣, 3♦ is game forcing with clubs and hearts: it does not say anything about diamonds, but allows opener to support hearts under the game level when appropriate. |

Responder's rebids other than 2♥ are game forcing, along the 2-over-1 guidelines.

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------|--|
| 1♦
2♥ | 2♣
2♠ | Over opener's 2♥, the continuation is as before: responder will bid 2♠ as a relay, or will establish a game force with another descriptive rebid. |
| 1♦
2♥
2NT | 2♣
2♠ | 2NT shows a minimum 4.4.4.1 with a singleton club and is not forcing. Now responder's 3♣ is a signoff, any other bid is natural and game forcing. |
| 1♦
2♥
3♣ | 2♣
2♠ | 3♣ shows a minimum hand with four diamonds and four or more clubs: 4.4.4.1 or 4.5. It does not establish clubs as trumps: a major fit could still be discovered. |
| 1♦
2♥
3♦ | 2♣
2♠ | As before, 3♦ confirms a strong hand with hearts and is game forcing. |

7. Opening one of a suit: other sequences

This section includes the other sequences starting with an opening of one of a suit.

Opener's reverse

The jump reverse (1♦ - 1♥ - 2♠) is game forcing, whereas 1♣ - 1♥♠ - 2♦ is a special rebid showing a balanced raise with short clubs. The other reverses show a two-suiter, 5.4 or 6.4, with 4-5 losers.

1♦ 1♠ 2NT is negative, showing a minimum response and suggesting stopping in a partial contract if opener has a minimum reverse.

1♦ 1♠ 2♥ 2NT 3♣♦ Over 2NT, opener should not bid beyond his longer suit if he has a minimum (5 losers). After 1♦, he will bid 3♣ with club tolerance, allowing responder to pass with long clubs, or will bid 3♦ with six diamonds and no club tolerance.

1♣ 1♠ 2♥ 2NT 3♣ At his turn, responder can correct: in this case 3♥ shows a heart fit with an absolute minimum.

1♣ 1♠ 2♥ 2NT 3♠ Other bids from opener are natural and establish a game force. Here 3♠ shows three spades, hence a singleton diamond.

Responder's rebids other than 2NT are stronger:

1♣ 1♠ 2♥ 2♠ A rebid of the responding suit is positive and one round forcing, showing five or more cards and at least 7-8 points. Now opener will show a minimum reverse rebidding his longer suit: other bids are game forcing.

1♦ 1♠ 2♥ 3♦♥ A raise in one of the opener's suits is positive and game forcing.

1♣ 1♠ 2♥ 3♠ The jump rebid shows a good six-card suit and is game forcing.

1♦ 1♠ 2♥ 3♣ The fourth suit implies a strong hand but no clear idea about the best contract.

The reverse has a similar development over a 1NT response:

1♣♦ 1NT 2♥♠ The reverse is aimed to suggest playing in the first bid suit, rather than in notrump, since 1NT has excluded any four-card major. If opener is more oriented towards notrump, a natural raise to 2NT could be the best rebid, even with an unbalanced hand.

1♣♦ - 1♥♠ - 2NT sequence

Opener's jump to 2NT shows a minor two-suiter with 4-5 losers, usually with five or more cards in the first bid suit and four in the other minor. Further bids are natural:

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 2NT 3♣♦ A preference into one of opener's suits is limit, with a minimum response.

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 2NT 4♣♦ The jump raise is a slam try. Bidding beyond 3NT, responder suggests a strong and unbalanced hand.

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 2NT 3♥♠ A rebid of the responding suit shows at least five cards and is game forcing. If opener denies fit with 3NT, a further 4♣♦ by responder is forcing.

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 2NT 3♠♥ Finally, the fourth suit is a stopper-asking, aimed to play 3NT.

Balanced hands with 15-17 points

Over the 1NT rebid, responder rebids along the general lines:

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 1NT 2♣♦ A preference in the opening suit is a signoff, probably with an unbalanced hand unsuited for notrump.

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 1NT 2NT A raise to 2NT is invitational, but not forcing.

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 1NT 3♣♦ The deferred jump raise is invitational too: as usual, it should be intended as a try for 3NT.

1♣♦ 1♥♠ 1NT 2♥♠ A rebid of the responding suit is one round forcing, showing five or more cards and 8+ points. Now opener will show a minimum with 2NT or a raise to 3♥♠, a maximum with any other bid, as descriptive as possible.

1♣♦ 1♥ 1NT 2♠ A new suit is one round forcing at the two level, game forcing at the three level. In this example, 2♠ shows four spades but not more than four hearts: with five hearts is better to rebid hearts, intending to support spades should opener bid 2♠.

1♣♦ 1♠ 1NT 2♥ 2NT 3♥ This sequence is limited and shows a minimum 5.5. With a stronger 5.5, the right sequence is 1♣×3♥.

1♦ 1♥ 1NT 2♣ 2♥ 3♣ This sequence is limited too: responder has four hearts and five or six clubs, with a minimum response.

1♣ 1♠ 1NT 2♦ 2♠ 3♥ The fourth suit, as always, is used as a probe for 3NT or, more rarely, to prepare a slam try.

Weak jump shift

The jump shift shows a long suit in a weak hand, about 3-7 points and 9 losers: the suit is usually at least six cards long, but a jump to 2♥♠ can be done with a good five-card suit. Opener will pass with less than a maximum, even in misfit: usually a partial contract is better played in the long suit of the weak hand.

- 1♣♦ 2♥♠ A suit rebid shows a six-card suit with 3♣♦ 4-5 losers.
- 1♥ 3♣ This sequence is similar, and shows a 3♦ 5.5 two-suiter, again with 4-5 losers. Opener is hoping for a fit in his second suit.
- 1♣♦ 2♥♠ A raise of responder's suit is preemptive: opener has a three-card support, 3♥♠ even with a minimum, and tries to prevent opponents to balance.
- 1♣♦ 2♥♠ 2NT is a game try, with a strong hand and a fit in the responder's suit (at least a doubleton honour).

Over 2NT, responder replies:

- 3♣ Maximum, denying a good suit. Opener can still ask with 3♦, and partner rebids his suit with five cards or bids 3NT with a bad six-card suit.
- 3♦ Minimum, fair suit (KJxxxx or better).
- 3♥♠ (rebid) Minimum, bad suit.
- 3NT Maximum, good suit (KQxxxx or AQxxxx).

After responding 2♦, partner will simply reply 3♦ with a minimum, 3SA with KQxxxx or AQxxxx, 3♣ with the other maximum hands.

Passed hand bidding: 2-over-1

When responder is a passed hand, game forcing responses do not exist. A 2-over-1 response over 1♥♠ shows 8-11 points and a five-card or longer suit. Some sequences change their logic:

- pass Opener will bid the value of his hand:
1♥♠ 2♣♦ 2NT and a raise of responder's suit are limit bids, whereas 3NT would be to play.
- pass At the same way, a suit rebid is limit, and suggests a misfit.
1♥♠ 2♣♦
2♥♠
- pass A new suit is one round forcing, but a reverse or a jump shift is game forcing.
1♠ 2♦
3♣
- pass 1♠ - 1NT or 1♥ - 1♠ suggests no good five-card suit: a new suit bid by responder at next round is most probably a stopper.
1♠ 1NT

8. Opening 2♦

This opening bid is very specific: it shows a 5.4.3.1 with 11-15 points and 6-7 losers, with four hearts and a five-card minor. It removes these awkward hands from 1♣ and 1♦ opening bids, making some sequences more clear and manageable.

Here are the responses:

- pass Weak hand with long diamonds.
- 2♥ Signoff with four hearts (or possibly three).
- 2♠ To play if opener has three spades. Otherwise, opener will correct to 2NT with five diamonds, 3♣ with five clubs.
- 2NT Relay, game invitation or better.
- 3♣ To play in opener's long minor. Opener will pass or correct to 3♦.
- 3♦ Slam try, heart fit or a strong suit of his own, willing to play in this suit even opposite a singleton.
- 3♥ Preemptive, weak hand with five hearts.
- 3♠ Splinter: 11-15 points, 6-7 losers, four or more hearts and singleton or void in the bid suit.
- 4♣♦
- 3NT A game bid is to play, without any need for 4♥♠ further information.

2NT response

Over this relay, opener is requested to clarify his distribution:

- 3♣♦ Minimum, five cards in the bid suit.
- 3♥ Maximum, five clubs.
- 3♠ Maximum, five diamonds, three spades.
- 3NT Maximum, five diamonds, singleton spade.

Responses of 3♥ or higher are game forcing. Further bidding is natural:

- 2♦ 2NT Over opener's minimum hands, a heart preference is limit.
3♣♦ 3♥
- 2♦ 2NT 3♠ is game forcing, with five or more cards. Opener will bid 3NT with a singleton spade, otherwise will raise or make a cue-bid.
3♣♦ 3♠
- 2♦ 2NT Here responder is most probably showing a strong 5.5 in the black suits.
3♦ 3♠
3NT 4♣ Trump is established in clubs, since opener has denied a spade fit.
- 2♦ 2NT 3♦ is natural and forcing. Opener will bid 3NT with a spade stopper, otherwise 3♥ with good hearts and 3♠ with a half stopper in spades: 4♣♦ shows a more suit-oriented hand.
3♠ 3♦

- 2♦ 2NT Supporting opener's minor suit is a
3♥ 4♣ natural slam try. Opener will reply
4NT or raise to game to discourage the
slam try, or will cue-bid with a slam-
oriented hand.
- 2♦ 2NT Similarly, 4♣♦ is natural and forcing if
3NT 4♣ opener has shown three cards in the
suit.
- 2♦ 2NT In this sequence opener might have
3♥ 4♦ three diamonds: 4♦ is natural and
forcing. Once again, 4NT by opener is
negative, a cue-bid is positive.
- 2♦ 2NT Here 4♣ cannot be natural, since ope-
3♠ 4♣ ner has a singleton club. It should be a
slam try in spades, with five or more
cards: spades will be trumps, since
opener has three of them.
- 2♦ 2NT A game bid in a major is to play.
3♠ 4♥♠

3♦ response

This response is a slam try: responder has a heart fit, or a very strong suit of his own that will play even opposite a singleton. Opener is requested to bid 3♥, and responder will continue as follows:

- 3♠ Spade one-suiter.
3NT Heart fit.
4♣♦ Minor one-suiter.

Further bidding is natural:

- 2♦ 3♦ When responder shows a heart fit, o-
3♥ 3NT pener's return in the suit is negative.
4♥ Should he want to encourage, he will
cue-bid.
- 2♦ 3♦ Over a spade one-suiter, 3NT suggests
3♥ 3♠ a spade singleton and values in the
3NT side suits. 4♠ would show fit and a
minimum, whereas a new suit would
be a cue-bid.
- 2♦ 3♦ Over a minor one-suiter, 4NT is nega-
3♥ 4♣♦ tive, suggesting a singleton and soft
4NT values in the side suits.
- 2♦ 3♦ A raise to 5♣♦ is mildly encouraging:
3♥ 4♣♦ opener has a reasonable hand for a
5♣♦ suit contract, but not strong enough
for...
- 2♦ 3♦ ... a cue-bid. Opener does not need a
3♥ 4♣ special fit to encourage, since re-
4♦ sponder suit will be solid or semisolid:
he can cue-bid with a singleton sup-
port, if he has good top cards.

9. Opening 2NT

It shows 18-20 points and a balanced shape, including 5.3.3.2 hands with a five-card major.

Here are the responses:

- 3♣ Relay, looking for a major fit; includes club
one-suiters, as well as two-suiters with five
spades and four hearts; game forcing.
- 3♦ Game hand or better with long diamonds, or
weak hand with a long major suit.
- 3♥♠ Natural, five or more cards, game forcing.
- 4♣♦ Transfer to 4♥♠

3♣ response

This response is usually a relay, asking for major suits' holdings, but also includes unbalanced hands with long clubs, or with five spades and four hearts. Opener replies:

- 3♦ One or both four-card majors
3♥ No four-card major
3♠ Five spades
3NT Five hearts

The bidding continues along these guidelines:

- 2NT 3♣ 3NT by responder is always to play: no
... 3NT fit has been discovered.
- 2NT 3♣ Over 3♦, responder proposes his four-
3♦ 3♥♠ card major. Opener will raise or cue-
bid with a fit, otherwise will bid 3NT.
- 2NT 3♣ 4♦ is artificial: it shows both four-card
3♦ 4♦ majors and offers a choice of trumps.
- 2NT 3♣ When opener denies any four-card ma-
3♥ 3♠ jor, responder is able to show the
hand with five spades and four hearts
below 3NT. This is the reason why the
meanings of 3♥ and 3NT replies have
been swapped compared to the com-
mon practice.
- 2NT 3♣ When opener shows a five-card major,
3♠ 4♥ responder's rebid in the other major is
useless as a natural bid: hence, it is
better used as an artificial slam try
with a fit in opener's long major.
Compare with a simple raise to 4♥♠,
which would be a signoff.
- 2NT 3♣ Over any opener's reply, a 4♣ rebid
... 4♣ by responder is a natural slam try,
with five or more clubs.
- 2NT 3♣ 4♣ is a natural slam try even after an
3♦ 3♥♠ unsuccessful attempt to play in a ma-
3NT 4♣ jor suit.

- 2NT 3♣ 4♦ is usually a natural slam try too
3♥ 4♦ (but see the exception over 3♦, where
it shows both four-card majors). It al-
ways implies an unsupported four-card
major: otherwise, the first response
should be 3♦ (see below).
- 2NT 3♣ Over a natural slam try in a minor,
3♠ 4♣♦ 4NT by opener is natural and negative,
4NT denying a good fit in responder's suit
and suggesting soft values in the side
suits.
- 2NT 3♣ In the same sequence, opener can also
3♥ 4♣ reject the slam try by proposing his
4♦ own five-card suit, or rebidding a very
good five-card major suit.
- 2NT 3♣ To encourage the slam try, opener will
3NT 4♣♦ use an odd bid, which cannot logically
4♠ propose a trump suit. In this example,
4♠ shows a good fit in partner's suit,
whereas 4♥ would be natural.
- 2NT 3♣ When 4♥♠ is not a raise of any ope-
3♦♥ 4♥♠ ner's suit, it is an artificial slam try
with four clubs (4♥) or four diamonds
(4♠), most probably with a balanced
hand. Opener will reject the slam try
with 4NT, or will encourage bidding
responder's real suit.

3♥♠ response

A response in a major is natural and game forcing, with five or more cards. Subsequent bidding is natural as well:

- 2NT 3♥ As usual, opener will deny any fit with
3♠ 3NT, or will promise it with a raise or
a cue-bid. 3♠ over 3♥ is natural and
shows four spades, in case responder
has four cards as well.
- 2NT 3♥♠ A rebid of responding suit is a mild
3NT 4♥♠ slam invitation, though not forcing,
with a six-card suit. With a game lim-
ited hand, responder would bid 4♥♠ at
the first round, or 4♣♦ to let opener
play the hand.
- 2NT 3♠ This sequence pictures a 5.5 two-
3NT 4♥ suiter with both majors. Responder
has no ambitions beyond game, and is
just offering a choice of trumps: with
a slam perspective, he would start
with 3♣ and rebid 3♠.
- 2NT 3♥♠ Here responder is making a slam try in
3NT 4♣♦ a second suit. Opener discourages
with 4NT or a preference in the first
responder's suit, encourages with 5♣♦
(the other minor is stronger): he could
also propose a good five-card suit at
the four level.

3♦ response

This response is twofold: it allows to play a partial contract in a long major suit, or to play a good hand with diamonds. Opener is requested to bid 3♥, and here follows the development:

- 2NT 3♦ Responder's pass shows a weak hand
3♥ pass with long hearts, with preference for
playing 3♥ instead of 2NT.
- 2NT 3♦ 3♠ is equivalent to pass, but with long
3♥ 3♠ spades instead of hearts.
- 2NT 3♦ 3NT shows a good hand with both mi-
3♥ 3NT nors, usually 5.5. It is not forcing, but
opener can bid 4♣♦ as a slam try with
the right hand. 5♣♦ shows a suit ori-
ented hand, but minimum strength.
- 2NT 3♦ 4♣ shows a good minor two-suiter, at
3♥ 4♣ least 5.5, and is a clear slam invita-
tion. Opener encourages with 4♦ (a-
greeing on diamonds) or 4♥♠ (on
clubs), or rejects the invitation with
4NT or 5♣♦. In this sequence re-
sponder is not interested to any five-
card major in opener's hand, hence
4♥♠ cannot be natural.
- 2NT 3♦ 4♦ describes a slam try with six or mo-
3♥ 4♦ re diamonds. Opener rejects with
4NT, or proposes a good five-card ma-
jor with 4♥♠, or encourages with 5♣.
5♦ is a mild acceptance, not forcing:
it is not entirely negative, as over the
strong two-suiter, since it is assumed
that 4NT will be always playable by a
one-suiter opposite a strong balanced
hand.

Opener is not absolutely forced to bid 3♥:

- 2NT 3♦ 3♠ shows a maximum hand and a heart
3♠ fit: opener does not want to be left in
3♥ if partner has the heart hand.
Should this be the case, responder will
be forced to bid 4♥. If he has spades
instead, he will pass 3♠: with a minor
oriented hand, he will bid as seen be-
fore.
- 2NT 3♦ Similarly, 3NT shows a maximum hand
3NT with a good fit in both majors. Once
again, responder is forced to bid his
own major suit, if any, at the game
level.
- 2NT 3♦ When opener has a good fit in spades
3♥ 3♠ but not in hearts, he contents with
4♠ 3♥: should responder have the spade
hand, opener will not miss the chance
to raise that suit at game level.

10. Opening 2♣

Strong, artificial and forcing: it includes all unbalanced hands with 3- losers or balanced with 21+ points, but also includes single suiters with 4 losers.

The development is artificial, in order to make the most of the reduced bidding space available. The response will be selected among three bids only:

- 2♦ Waiting positive, promises at least 4-5 points and one cover card; game forcing.
- 2♥ Double negative, showing a very weak hand without any cover card.
- 2♠ Any good six-card suit (KQxxxx or better), not denying extra values aside.

2♦ response

This positive response promises at least the values for game, but could also conceal substantial extras: its main purpose is to let the opener describe his hand taking advantage of the maximum bidding space available. Opener replies:

- 2♥ Five or more hearts, *or balanced hand*; responder is requested to bid 2♠, and opener will clarify with:
 - 2NT Balanced hand: further bidding is as over the 2NT opening bid.
 - 3♣♣ Two-suiter, hearts and the bid suit.
 - 3♥ Heart one-suiter.
 - 3NT 5.3.3.2, five hearts, 24-26 points.
- 2♠ Five or more spades; responder can relay with 2NT, and opener will bid:
 - 3♣♥ Two-suiter, secondary suit.
 - 3♠ One-suiter.
 - 3NT 5.3.3.2, 24-26 points.
- 2NT Five or more *diamonds*; responder can relay with 3♣ as a relay, and opener will bid:
 - 3♦ One-suiter.
 - 3♥♠ Two-suiter, secondary suit.
 - 3NT Two-suiter, secondary clubs, minimum hand.
 - 4♣ Two-suiter, secondary clubs, extra values.
- 3♣ Five or more clubs, two-suiter; responder can relay with 3♦, and opener will bid:
 - 3♥♠ Secondary suit.
 - 3NT Secondary diamonds, minimum hand.
 - 4♣ Secondary diamonds, extra values.
- 3♦ Six or more *clubs*.
- 3♥♠ Solid or semisolid suit, establishing trumps
- 4♣♠ and asking for side controls.

There is no specific sequence for the rare 4.4.4.1 hands: should such a hand occur, it should be treated as a two-suiter, selecting the best sequence according to the texture of four-card suits.

After these artificial sequences, further bidding is relatively natural:

2♣ 2♦ For a start, responder is not absolutely forced to relay. Over 2♣, for example, he can simply raise to 3♠ with three or more spades, or make a Splinter jump.

2♣ 2♦
2♠ 4♣♠

2♣ 2♦ In the same sequence, a jump raise at the game level shows a minimum response (only one cover card) and adequate support.

2♠ 4♠

2♣ 2♦ When appropriate, responder can also introduce a five-card suit of his own within the three level.

2NT 3♥

2♣ 2♦ A minor suit raise at the four level (3♦ shows a club one-suiter) are always positive and encouraging.

3♦ 4♣

2♣ 2♦ After a 2♦ response, any new suit bid by responder at the four level cannot be natural (a suit good enough for that sequence calls for a 2♠ response): it always shows support in the opener's suit, and should be interpreted as a cue-bid when there are multiple bids available at that level.

2♠ 2NT
3♠ 4♥

2♣ 2♦ In this sequence, 4♣ and 4♦ are both available to support opener's suits. Logically, 4♣ agrees on hearts and 4♦ on spades: both show extra values (two cover cards); otherwise, responder would bid 4♥ or 4♠.

2♥ 2♠
3♠ 4♣♠

2♣ 2♦ 2♠ over 2♥ is the only mandatory relay. After opener's rebid, responder can raise or introduce his own five-card suit, as in this example.

2♥ 2♠
3♦ 3♠

2♣ 2♦ Those sequences in which opener bids beyond 3NT to show a minor two-suiter are virtually slam forcing: opener has extra values, probably just 2 losers, and responder should have at least one cover card. In these cases, 4♦ agrees on diamonds, 4♥♠ on clubs (not necessarily with a control in the bid major).

2NT 3♠
4♣

2♣ 2♦ When bidding after 2NT, showing a strong balanced hand, both players should take into account that opener's strength is unlimited. Hence, when opener has 24-25 or more points and no forcing bid available (in this example, with no spade support), he can jump in notrump as a slam invitation, natural and not forcing.

2♥ 2♠
2NT 3♠
3♦ 3♠
4NT

2♣ - 2♦ - 3♥♠/4♣♦ sequence

Opener's jump rebid shows a solid or semisolid suit, establishes trumps and starts a sequence of asking bids to locate aces and kings held by responder.

Over the jump, responder replies:

trumps	No ace, at most one king.
NT	No ace, two or more kings.
side suit	ace in the suit, no other ace.
jump in a side suit	Two aces, one in the bid suit and the other in the next ranking one.
jump in notrump	Two alternate aces (clubs-hearts or diamond-spade).

Once received the reply, opener signs off in his suit or bids a side suit as a king-asking: now responder returns in the trump suit without that king, otherwise makes the most descriptive bid available, and this implies holding the requested king.

2♣ 2♦ In this example, responder shows two kings without any ace (3NT): then, 4♥ clarifies that the kings are in clubs and in hearts. Without the club king, he should bid 4♣; holding the diamond king, he would bid 4♦.

2♣ 2♦ Here responder has promised both major aces: now 5♠ asks to bid 7♣ with the spade king.

2♥ response

This response is a "double negative": responder has a very weak hand, with not even one cover card (at most one queen). Further bidding is mostly natural, with a single noticeable exception:

2♠	Any one-suiter with 4 losers. Responder relays with 2NT and opener will bid his suit, not forcing: here partner could raise with a fit.
2NT	21-23 points, balanced hand. Further bidding as over the 2NT opening bid.
3♣♦♥♠	Natural, five or more cards, game forcing. Responder could bid a suit of his own at the three level, even with only four cards, but usually he will raise or bid 3NT.
3NT	24-26 points, balanced hand (4.3.3.3 or 4.4.3.2 only). Responder will usually pass, but could try to introduce a suit of his own at the four level.
4♥♠	To play.

2♠ response

Positive response, suggests playing in a good suit held by the responder, not less than KQxxxx, or even a solid suit.

Over 2♠, opener can bid his own longer suit, usually at least six cards long: more often, he will relay with 2NT to learn more about partner's suit. Over 2NT, responder will bid:

3♣♦♥♠ Six cards in the bid suit, with two top honours.

3NT Solid suit, at least six cards long.

Further bidding over suit replies is natural. Over 3NT, opener has two relays available:

4♣ Asks for the suit length: responder clarifies with step replies (4♦=6, 4♥=7, etc.).

4♦ Asks for the actual suit: opener was not able to locate it (almost impossible). Responder just bids his suit.

Some special case:

2♣ 2♠ A raise of responder's suit under the game level is forcing and asks for a cue-bid: opener is aiming to discover additional controls, even short suits, in responder's hand.

2♣ 2♠ Over a major suit, the game raise is not forcing: suggests 21-23 balanced, that has usually 4 losers. Responder can reopen with extra values.

2♣ 2♠ When opener decides to bid his own suit instead of relaying, responder can jump shift to show his long suit *and* a fit for opener's suit in just one bid.

2♣ 2♠ The natural raise, instead, specifies that responder's suit is lower ranking than opener's one: in this example, responder has good clubs or diamonds. This trick allows saving bidding space and avoids burning the four level completely: the opener can still bid 4NT if appropriate.

2♣ 2♠ Of course, responder can bid his own suit without a jump, implying no fit for opener's suit.

2♣ 2♠ Bidding 3NT over opener's suit still shows a solid suit, but implies no fit for opener's suit. After this, 4♣ and 4♦ are relays, as explained before.

11. Slam bidding

RKCB

4NT is RKCB only when a suit has been explicitly agreed upon: that is, bid and raised (with a natural raise or an artificial bid, such as 2NT or Splinter), or established by an opening bid at the four level. In any other case, 4NT is normal Blackwood.

Bidding RKCB (or Blackwood) implies clear slam prospects, and tends to deny side suits with two losers (cue-bids work better in that case). Hence, usually RKCB is used by responder, who is in a better position to assess partnership strength: as an exception, opener will preferably use RKCB after a 2♣ opening bid.

Over 4NT, partner shows the number of held key-cards (the four aces and the trump king):

- 5♣ Zero or three key-cards.
- 5♦ One or four key-cards.
- 5♥ Two key-cards.
- 5♠ Two key-cards and the trump queen (or trump extra length).

The first reply will often be enough to place the contract. If this is not the case, 4NT can be followed by further asking bids:

- 1♥ 2NT Over 5♣♦, usually the 4NT bidder will
 - 4♣ 4NT be able to distinguish between 0 and 3
 - 5♣ 5♦ key-cards, or between 1 and 4. If he
- needs to know about the trump queen, he can relay with the 1st step (not counting the trump suit), and partner will bid:

- trumps, denying the queen;
- 5NT or a side king, promising the queen.

- 1♠ 2♦ 5NT after 4NT is a general Grand Slam
 - 2♠ 4♣ try, guaranteeing all the key-cards on
 - 4♦ 4NT our side. Partner will bid 6 of the
 - 5♠ 5NT trump suit as a negative reply, or
- jump to 7 with useful extra values: when in doubt, he will bid a king under the trump suit.

- 2♣ 2♦ A new suit (under 6 of the trump suit)
 - 3♣ 3♦ is a specific Grand Slam try, asking for
 - 3NT 4♦ extra values in the bid suit. Here
 - 4NT 5♦ opener has shown a club-diamond
 - 5♥ 5♠ two-suiter with 3 losers: after agreeing
 - 6♣ on diamonds, responder has shown
- one key-card, the trump queen and the spade king. Now opener asks for extra values in clubs (possibly the singleton): the spade king appears not to be a cover card.

- 1♠ 4♣ In this case, it is the opener to ask,
 - 4NT 5♥ after a very specific and limited re-
 - 6♦ sponse. Received the information of
- two key cards, 6♦ puts 7♠ in the picture and asks for the diamond king.

Blackwood

4NT is normal Blackwood when there is no trump suit established. Usually there are two cases:

- there is no eight-card fit, and notrump seems to be the best strain;
- the 4NT bidder has a long strong suit, but has no mean to bid that suit creating a game force: the typical case occurs over an opening of three of a suit, when responder has a suit of his own.

In such cases, normal Blackwood works better than RKCB, since a king can never be taken as an ace.

Here are the replies to Blackwood:

- 5♣ Zero or three aces.
- 5♦ One or four aces.
- 5♥ Two aces with the same colour or rank.
- 5♠ Two aces with different colour and rank.

After the reply, the 4NT bidder places the contract or bids 5NT as a king asking, with similar replies.

- 3♠ 4NT This sequence is especially awkward
 - 5♦ 6♥ for RKCB. Responder might well not be
- interested in the spade king; with normal Blackwood, he knows for sure that opener has one ace, and can bid his slam safely.

Natural 4NT

There are two cases, well defined, in which 4NT is natural instead of asking:

- 2NT 4NT A raise in notrump is a natural slam
 - 1NT 2♦ invitation. It usually describes a
 - 2♠ 3♥ square hand: in the first example, re-
 - 3NT 4NT sponder has a 4.3.3.3, in the second
- one a 5.3.3.2. Opener will pass with a minimum; with extra values, he will bid 6NT at once, or will propose a four-card suit at the five level or a six-card one at the six level.

- 2NT 3♣ Over a slam try in a minor, 4NT is na-
 - 3♦ 4♣ tural and negative, suggesting playing
 - 4NT there. The classic case is after a 2NT
 - 1♦ 3♥ opening bid, as in the first example.
 - 3NT 4♦ The same principle will apply in the
 - 4NT second example, where opener's hand
- is well limited from the 3NT bid.

"Pick a Slam" 5NT

There are sequences in which the partnership obviously has enough strength for a slam, but there is no trump suit clearly established. In those cases, bidding 5NT asks partner to select the strain.

1♦ 1♠ 3♦ promises six cards, 3♠ just five.
3♦ 3♠ When opener denies three spades with
3NT 5NT 3NT, responder could be in trouble if he has six spades, a diamond doubleton and a slam-going hand. 5NT offers a choice between 6♦ and 6♣: opener will choose depending on the diamond suit quality and the degree of fit in spades.

1♥ 2♣ This sequence is quite unclear, but
2♦ 2♠ the partnership seems to lack a spade
3♣ 3♦ stopper. Opener should have five good
3♥ 5NT hearts and three clubs: on the other hand, responder should have a 5.3.3.2 with five clubs and a heart doubleton. 5NT asks opener to select the trump suit, based on the high cards location.

Trump raises

Two classic slam tries are included in the system: the raise to 5major and the Grand Slam Force.

1NT 2♦ The natural raise to 5♥♠ in the trump
2♥ 2NT suit is slam invitational, but implies a
3♥ 5♥ weak trump fit: partner can bid slam only with two of the three top honours in the trump suit. In this example, where opener has shown a 5.3.3.2 with five hearts, responder should have a good hand with plenty of controls in the side suits and three small trumps.

1♥ 2♦ If the trump suit is clearly established,
4♦ 4♠ 5NT is the rare but effective Grand
5NT Slam Force. Partner is asked to bid seven with two of the three top honours. When clubs are not trumps, partner can also bid 6♣ holding the ace or the king only: this way, sometimes a Grand Slam will be bid with ten trumps headed by ace-king.

Cue-bids

When a trump suit has been agreed upon, a side suit bid at the four level (or 3♠ when hearts are trumps) is a cue-bid, and is used as a slam probe:

- to show extra values, inviting partner to do the same;
- to check if all side suits are under control.

Cue-bids work very differently from RKCB or Blackwood. The player who bids 4NT takes the control of the auction, and will be able to place the contract depending on the number of key-cards held by

partner. On the contrary, cue-bidding is a cooperative approach, where both partners have to express their own opinions and exercise their better judgment.

This system adopts the Italian cue-bidding style: a cue-bid shows first- or second-round control, allowing to quickly expose any side suit with two losers.

Cue-bidding sequences are usually based on logic, rather than partnership agreements:

1♠ 2♦ 3♠ is game forcing: hence, 4♠ by
2♠ 3♠ opener would be the most negative
4♣ bid. 4♣ is logically positive and encouraging, showing the club ace or king or singleton or void.

1♠ 2♦ When partner bids trumps in reply to
2♠ 3♠ the first cue-bid, he has a negative
4♣ 4♠ feeling about slam. In this example, responder will likely have a balanced minimum: his 3♠ was just offering a choice of games between 3NT and 4♠.

1♠ 2♦ If responder wants to cooperate, he
2♠ 3♠ replies with another cue-bid, promising
4♣ 4♦ the control in the bid suit. With 4♦, responder suggests not to be able to take control with 4NT, maybe because he lacks a control in hearts.

1♠ 2NT Here 3♠ is not forcing: partner could
3♠ 4♦ pass or raise to game, but chooses 4♦ instead, showing a very strong hand with the diamond control but no club control. If neither opener has clubs under control, he must signoff in 4♠.

1♠ 2NT With 4♥, opener promises both heart
3♠ 4♦ and club controls. After 3♠, showing
4♥ an absolute minimum, 4♥ shows logically that all his high cards are useful. Now responder can bid 4NT or jump straight to slam.

1NT 2♦ When a player skips a cue-bid and
2♠ 3♠ then makes it at a later stage, he is
4♦ 4♥ showing the queen in the suit. In this
5♣ example responder has shown a strong hand, probably balanced (otherwise he could have made a Splinter jump over 2♠), with both heart and club controls: now 5♣ shows positive values with the club queen, that could help partner to run clubs should he have a long suit.

2♣ 2♦ Sometimes the trump raise can act as
2♠ 3♠ a cue-bid. In this example, opener has
4♣ 4♦ cue-bid 4♣ and then bid game, denying
4♠ 5♠ a heart control. Then 5♠ by responder, natural slam invitation with bad trumps, must necessarily show a heart control.

1♠ 4♣ A cue-bid in a short suit (after the Splinter jump) tends to show a void. In this sequence partner has a good trump support, a diamond control (denied by opener) and probably a club void. The singleton ace is less likely: a Splinter is designed to upgrade the high cards in the side suits and downgrade those in the Splinter suit, and the singleton ace does not downgrade partner's holding in the suit.

1♠ 2♦ Here 3♠ by opener shows a solid or semi-solid suit: now 4♥ by responder cannot suggest a possible trump suit, and should be taken as a cue-bid, probably without any club control (otherwise responder would likely be able to bid 4NT). 5♣ by opener shows almost certainly both first- and second-round controls in clubs, since every bid but 4♠ would imply a club control. Now the most expected bid is 5NT, to check for trump top cards: it is almost impossible for opener to have additional useful values.

12. Suit overcalls and raises in competition

Suit overcalls

Overcalling style could be defined as "classical":

- an overcall at the one level promises a good suit, usually with five or more cards, occasionally a very good four, with a minimum of 9-10 points and up to 17-18 points and/or 5 losers; if partner is not a passed hand, the overcall is generally constructive, otherwise it could just suggest a lead or a defence;
- an overcall at the two level is stronger: if partner is not a passed hand, it shows an opening hand with a six-card suit, up to 4-5 losers; otherwise could be a weaker, tactical move;
- a jump overcall is weak and preemptive, usually excluding defensive values (see below);
- over a preemptive opening bid, a jump overcall is not weak: it shows a good hand with 4-5 losers and a six-card suit;
- over a strong opening bid, like a strong 1♣ or 2♣, even non-jump overcalls are weak, around 7-11 points: with stronger hands, it usually pays to pass.

Raises in competitive bidding

When both partnerships are bidding, raises follow the same principles, whichever the opening side. The reasoning behind this is as following:

- when a partnership has a fit, the other will likely have a fit as well; the more unbalanced the hands, the more both sides will be able to bid their respective suits at a high level;
- in such cases, it is essential to differentiate supporting bids, expressing not only the fit but also the type of values held, distributional versus defensive, conveying the most useful information and enabling partner to decide when to bid and when to double or pass;
- it is also important trying to discover a double fit, that would greatly increase the offensive potential of the partnership;
- this information should be given quickly, in order to make our partnership bid its own contract while opponents are still looking for their bidding limit.

Consequently, we adopt multiple raises, able to express both the fit and the hand type in one bid:

- 1♥ (1♠) 2♥

The single raise promises three trumps and one or two cover cards: it could be weaker than the single raise had opponent passed.

- 1♦ (1♥) 2♦

Alert: even the single raise in a minor is weak, whereas it would be forcing in a constructive sequence.

(1♣) 1♠ (2♦) 3♠

The jump raise is weak and preemptive: it guarantees four trumps and at most one cover card. All jump raises are mostly based on the trump length, and do not promise any defensive value: in the same example, a 4♠ bid would be weak too, but with five trumps.

- 1♠ (2♦) 4♣

In any competitive sequence, a jump in a new suit is always a fit bid (*the only exception being a jump to 4♥♣, to play*). It guarantees four or more cards in partner's suit, length and strength in the bid suit and adequate offensive values for the level of the bid: it does not promise a lot of high cards, but nonetheless is stronger than the preemptive jump raise (here 4♠). It is definitely not a slam try: it is rather a descriptive bid, aimed to help partner to assess the combined offensive potential in case opponents bid more.

- 1♣ (1♥) 2♠

Jump bids have a similar meaning even at lower levels. Here 2♠ shows five or more spades and four or more clubs, and is somehow more constructive than the previous 4♣: it surely promises some defence, and offers spade as an alternative trump suit. 3♠ would have less high cards, but a more unbalanced shape (probably a 5.5 hand).

- 1♠ (2♦) 4♦

As a rule, Splinters do not exist in competitive sequences. The only exception is a jump in the opponent's suit (over 3 of partner's suit), promising a good fit, a singleton or void in the bid suit and some high cards in the side suits. Hence, this bid guarantees some defensive values.

(1♦) 1♥ (2♦) 3♦

The cue-bid is a fit bid as well: it promises at least four trumps (rarely three), with high card values. It is game invitational or better, and suggests partner to consider doubling opponents when appropriate.

- 1♠ (2♠*) 3♥

A cue-bid is obviously a bid of opponent's real suit: assuming that 2♠ is a Michaels cue-bid, promising hearts and a minor, 3♥ is a cue-bid, promising a spade fit and good high card values.

- 1♥ (double) 2NT

When opponents have not bid any real suit, and therefore we have no cue-bid available, 2NT works as a strong raise. The most common case is over opponent's double: the same principle applies, more rarely, when opponent overcalls with 1NT.

(pass) 1♥ (2♣) 2NT/3♣

When both the cue-bid and 2NT are available, both of them show a fit in partner's suit, with game invitational values or better, and are so defined:

- the cue-bid shows a "pure" hand, with aces and kings, surely with four or more trumps;
- 2NT describes an "impure" hand, including also soft cards and maybe just a three-card fit.

This difference could be crucial to evaluate partnership's defensive potential.

(1♦) 1♠ (pass) 2♦/3♦

When the right hand opponent has not bid, the cue-bid at the two level does not necessarily show a fit: it is rather a generic force, asking for another descriptive bid. In this example two cue-bids are available: then 3♦ guarantees a fit and is game invitational or stronger, whereas 2♦ is a generic force with a good hand but still no trump suit established.

(1♣) 1♥ (1♠) 2♣/2♠

When opponents have bid two suits, we have two cue-bids available. In these cases, the lower cue-bid is the "normal" cue-bid (see previous example),

whereas the higher cue-bid promises a four-card fit and a couple of cover cards: in this example, 2♣ shows a hand too strong for the preemptive raise (3♥) but too weak for the game invitation (3♠). This is usually called a "mixed raise".

New suit in competition

In competitive sequences, a change of suit is usually natural, one round forcing at the one level, not forcing at the two level or higher. In some cases, it is actually a fit bid:

- (1♦) - 1♠ - (3♦) pass
3♥

3♥ cannot be a real suit: with a long and strong heart suit, you could have opened 2♥ or 3♥. Then, 3♥ should logically show a spade fit and a heart suit, or maybe just a concentration of values.

(1♥) 2♣ (2♠) 3♥

When only one suit is available, it can be bid only with a fit for partner's suit. A hand with a heart suit but no spade fit can be described by the take-out double (see below).

(1♣) 2♥ (2♠) 3♦

Over a partner's preemptive bid, it does not pay suggesting an alternative trump suit. In this example, 3♦ is not natural, but shows a heart fit and diamond values (and maybe length). It does not promise many high cards: for that matter, opponents seem to be stronger than we are.

- 1♠ (double) 2♣

Here we have the same concept in the extreme case. If responder has a club suit and no spade fit, he could pass (if weak) or redouble (if strong), and will likely have a chance to introduce clubs later, even if at the three level. It is more important to be able to bid a hand with three spades but too strong for a simple 2♠: if we have a fit, opponents will too, and the auction will go quickly at a high level. It is preferable to use a new suit at the two level as a fit bid, stronger than 2♠. When we have no reasonable side suit, we will underbid with 2♠: but it will be a rare case.

- 1♥ (double) 1♠/1NT

A change of suit at the one level over the double will maintain their usual meaning, and will be one round forcing. Over 1♥ doubled Kaplan Inversion is on: 1NT shows five spades, 1♠ is a generic relay.

- (2♣) 1♠ (double) redouble
pass (pass) 2♠

A deferred raise is rare: it shows not more than three trumps, maybe a doubleton honour, a relatively balanced shape and consistent strength with previous bids. Here the redouble shows 10+ points, and then 2♠ shows a minimum redouble with a fit.

After a fit has been found

In a competitive sequence, when our partnership has found a fit, all available bids give additional information and are aimed to help partner to decide how to proceed. Here are the rules:

- a new suit is lead directing if partner will be on lead and opponents seem to be stronger: in this case, such a bid does not invite to compete beyond the first available bid in our trump suit;
- on the contrary, a new suit is descriptive if partner will not have to lead, or the strength is evenly divided: if so, such a bid shows strength and length in the bid suit and invites partner to compete further over opponents' bid;
- after a lead directing bid, a double shows extra offence, inviting partner to compete further; after a descriptive bid, a double is for penalty;
- a pass over an opponent's bid is forcing if our side is stronger, or if partner's previous bid has forced to a level still to be reached: in this case, bidding trumps is the weakest action.

Some examples:

(1♠)	2♥	(3♠)	4♦
(4♠)	pass	(pass)	double

Assuming that 3♠ is invitational, opponents should be stronger: hence, 4♦ is lead directing. Then, double suggests offensive values and offers the possibility to compete to 5♥ or to pass for penalty.

(1♠)	2♥	(3♠)	4♦
(4♠)	pass	(pass)	double

In the same sequence, if 3♠ is preemptive as we play it, 4♦ is descriptive: our side appears to be stronger. Then, double is for penalty: partner has already rejected the invitation to compete over 4♠.

-	1♠	(3♣)	4♦
(5♣)	pass	(pass)	double

This double is for penalty too. 4♦ was clearly descriptive, since partner will not be on lead: the bid cannot be misinterpreted.

-	-	-	1♠
(2NT)	3♠	(4♣)	4♥

2NT shows both minors (see below). 4♥ is descriptive: partner will not have to lead.

-	1♠	(2♣)	3♠
(4♣)	4♦	(pass)	4♥

Here 4♦ is ostensibly lead directing, after the preemptive 3♠. Now, 4♥ is an encouraging bid, saying nothing about clubs but stating "partner, if your 4♦ was descriptive, I am ready to accept your invitation to compete over 5♣". 4♥ cannot be descriptive in itself, since you would have bid 3♥ on the previous round: it's just a way to take advantage of the bidding space available.

-	-	-	1♥
(1♠)	2♥	(2♠)	3♠
(4♠)	pass	(pass)	double

3♠ by opener is clearly a strong bid, stating that our side is stronger. Hence, responder's pass on 4♠ is forcing, suggesting a doubt whether to double or compete further: opener expresses his opinion.

-	-	-	1♥
(1♠)	2♥	(2♠)	4♥
(4♠)	pass	(pass)	double

If opener bids 4♥ at the second round, he is not asking partner's opinion: hence, his double at next round is for penalty.

-	-	-	1♠
(double)	3♣	(3♦)	pass

3♣ by responder shows good clubs and a spade fit, forcing to 3♠. Since 3♦ is still below 3♠, opener's pass is forcing and shows extras, inviting partner to 4♠. 3♠ would be weak and not encouraging.

-	-	-	1♥
(1♠)	3♦	(double)	pass

Same as before. Whichever the meaning of double, opener's pass is an invitation to 4♥. With an unsuited hand, opener would content with 3♥, the level to which the partnership has committed.

-	-	(1♥)	2♠
(3♣)	3♦	(3♥)	pass

This hand seems to belong to opponents. 2♠ is weak and 3♦ is a fit bid, committing out partnership to 3♠. Overcaller's pass is an invitation to save at 4♠ in the most likely case in which opponents bid 4♥.

(1♦)	1♠	(double)	redouble
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Special case: the redouble at one level is Rosenkranz, showing two or three cards in the overcalled suit, including one of the top three honours. In this sequence, 2♠ would show three small spades.

13. Preemptive bids

In this area of competitive bidding, the rules to be followed are the same, over a weak opening bid as well as a preemptive overcall. A jump bid is always weak (if not defined otherwise), but has a wider range than usual preempts:

- the upper limit is a "typical" preempt, about 7-9 points and a one suited hand with:
 - a six-card suit, if bid at the two level;
 - a seven-card suit, if bid at the three level;
 - an eight-card suit, if bid at the four level;
- the lower limit is as little as 4-5 points, with one card less than the standard length and less shape constraints: preemptor could have a four-card major aside; a 2♥♠ jump can conceal a 5.5 two-suiter; and so on.

How light the opening bid might be, it's a choice based on vulnerability and tactics:

- when vulnerable and with partner not a passed hand, the preempt tends to be close to the upper limit and include a good suit, possibly with just one card less than the standard length;
- when non-vulnerable (especially against vulnerable opponents) and facing a passed hand, preempts can be bid more freely, ranging from the classic hand to a very weaker one.

This style is targeted to make life difficult for opponents as often as possible... provided that the partnership is able to control of the bidding and avoid to bid over the limit. Let's see how.

Raising the preempt

A preempt is based on the assumption that opponents are stronger and the bid suit is the best possible trump for the preempting side. When the opponents' bidding confirms this assumption, the top priority is supporting the preempting suit.

- 3♣ (double) 4♣

A natural raise is to play: partner is requested to pass, whichever hand he has, even when the preempt could be wide-ranging.

- 3♣ (double) 3NT
(1♦) 3♣ (3♥) 3NT

Over 3♣♦, if partner bids 3NT instead of raising, this shows a fit for partner's suit and invites to save at the five level if partner has a "typical" and maximum hand. This treatment allows the partnership to handle the wide range of the initial preempt.

- 3♣ (3♠) 3NT
(double) pass (pass) 4♣

Here, with just one overcall, 3NT could be to play. Opener assumes it is, but when responder bids 4♣ he clearly shows support and suggests saving.

- 2♥ (double) 3♥
(1♦) 2♠ (3♥) 3♠

A similar structure applies to 2♥♠. The direct raise is to play, whereas...

- 2♠ (double) 2NT

... 2NT is equivalent to a 3♠ raise, but at the same time invites to 4♠ if partner has a classic weak two.

- - - pass
(pass) 2♠ (3♥) double

The same meaning is attached to the double when opponents are stronger. After the initial pass, double invites opener to a 4♠ save if he has the right hand. Double would be for penalties if the doubler would have not been a passed hand.

(1♣) 2♠ (3♦) double

If 3♦ is forcing, we can assume that opponents are stronger: hence, double invites to save, even if the doubler is not a passed hand.

(1♣) 2♥ (2♠) 3♦

Since we have assumed that our best fit is in the preempting suit, a new suit should be taken as a fit bid. In this sequence, 3♦ shows a diamond side suit and suggests partner to save when opponents bid their contract.

- 2♥ (2♠) 4♦

A jump shift is a fit bid, as over normal competitive sequences. 4♦ shows a heart fit and a diamond suit: opener is invited to save at 5♥ should opponents bid 4♠.

(1♦) 3♥ (double) 4♣

Over a preempt at the three level, the change of suit has the same meaning: fit and suggestion to save. In this sequence, opponents could find a spade fit: in this case, over 4♠ by opener, the overcaller will have to choose between pass and 5♥, and the 4♣ bid will help him to decide at the best.

(1♠) 4♣ (double) 4♦

At the four level, the change of suit should be taken as lead directing, or as useful information for the defensive play. 4♦ commits the partnership to as high as 5♣: it is unlikely for the 4♦ bidder to push more than that. Much more likely, the overcaller is asked to lead diamonds against a 5♥ or 5♠ contract.

Potentially competitive sequences

If the second hand opponent passes over a preemptive opening bid, responder should expect the other opponent to enter the bidding. Once again, the top priority is to compete effectively: constructive bidding, and possibly slam bidding, is considered less important, even though taken into account anyway.

- 2♠ (pass) 3♠

A natural raise is to play, and does not encourage partner to bid on.

- 2♥ (pass) 3♣

- 3♦ (pass) 3♠

A change of suit is twofold: it could be a fit-bid, as if the right hand opponent would not have passed, but could also be bid with a strong unbalanced hand without any fit for the opening suit. If now the other opponent bids, opener takes the response as a fit bid and bids accordingly; if the opponent passes, opener will return in his own suit showing minimum and/or a misfit, or will find another bid to encourage (even a third suit, as value-showing).

- 2♣ (pass) 4♣

A jump shift is always a fit bid, with adequate values for the four level. It is not a slam try: it is a hint for opener, should the opponent enter the bidding.

- 3♣♦ (pass) 3♦♥

The first step over 3♣♦ is artificial: it could be a twofold change of suit, as seen above, or a generic try for 3NT, hoping that the preempting suit is good. In this second case, it implies some support in the opening suit, to help running it, and stoppers aside. If opponent passes, opener will reply:

- 3♣: good suit (top priority);
- 4♣♦ (suit rebid): bad suit, minimum, misfit in responder's suit (in case it's a real suit);
- 3NT: bad suit, maximum, misfit in responder's suit (in case it's a real suit);
- 3♥ or 4♣ (intermediate step): bad suit, maximum, fit in responder's suit.

- 3♣ (pass) 3♦
(3♣) double

Over a bid by right hand opponent, opener's double shows fit in responder's suit, if real: partner will know what to do.

- 3♦ (pass) 3♥
(3♣) pass (pass) double

This is the opposite case. Opener has denied a heart fit; therefore, responder's second round double shows the "other" hand, that is the 3NT trial. Here responder guarantees a stopper in opponent's suit.

Penalty double

After a preemptive bid, assumed to establish the best trump suit on our side, a double is for penalty when opponents are not stronger (in which case, as seen before, the double acts as competitive raise):

- 3♣ (3♣) double

This is the typical case. Nothing suggests that opponents are stronger, and since 3♣ establishes our best trump suit, searching for another strain does not make sense: hence, double is for penalty.

(1♦) 3♥ (4♦) double

This case is not so different. 3♥ establishes hearts as trumps and shows a limited hand: therefore, double is for penalty.

(1♣) 3♥ (3♠) double

Even here, assuming that 3♠ is not forcing with long spades, the double should be taken for penalty.

Redouble

Over a preempt, redouble is handled as over the one of a suit bids: it shows strength and misfit, asking partner to double any opponents' bid if possible.

2♥♠ - 2NT sequence

This sequence is, at least initially, constructive only. 2NT guarantees fit or tolerance in the opening suit, and is game invitational or better. Opener replies:

3♣ Five cards in the opening suit, maximum; now 3♦ is a game forcing relay, and here:
 3♥♠ Nothing to add
 3♠♥ (other major) 5.4 major two-suiter
 3NT Good suit
 4♣♦♥ 5.5 two-suiter in the bid suits

3♦ Minimum, good six-card suit.

3♥♠ (suit rebid) Minimum, five-card suit or bad six-card suit.

3♥ (after 2♠) Minimum, 5.4 two-suiter.

3NT Maximum, good six-card suit.

other (over 3 of the trump suit) Maximum, not a great six-card suit, values in the bid suit.

The opening suit is assumed as trumps, hence a new suit is a cue-bid. As an exception, a 3♥♠ rebid in the other major over 3♣ (five-card opening suit) is natural and forcing with a five-card suit.

Game bids

In a non-competitive sequence, a game bid over a preemptive opening is to play, even if it is not a raise.

3♣♦ 3NT This is the typical case: 3NT is to play if the opponent passes the opening preempt.

3♣♦ 4♥♠ 4♥♠ is also to play, had opponent passed or not. It is never a fit bid, with or without jumping.

Opening 3NT or four of a suit

Opening 3NT shows seven cards in clubs or diamonds, and about 7 playing tricks. Partner passes if he is happy with 3NT, or proposes 4♥♠ to play; if he wants to play in opener's suit, he bids a minor as "pass or correct":

4♣ To play opposite clubs; otherwise opener will correct to 4♦.

4♦ To play opposite diamonds; otherwise opener will correct to 5♣, but could also cue-bid a major when appropriate.

5♣♦ Pass or correct.

4NT Blackwood: next bid in a minor, whichever the level, is again "pass or correct".

Opening 4♥ or 4♠ promises a seven-card suit and about 7 playing tricks. With 8 playing tricks, we will open 4♣ with hearts, 4♦ with spades: partner will signoff in opener's long suit, or will bid next step to transfer back the suit bid to the opener and let him play the hand, or to prepare a slam try.

Overcalling with a solid suit

When overcaller has a solid minor suit, at least seven cards long, he can select one of two artificial overcalls:

- - (1♠) 3NT

Overcalling 3NT promises a solid minor suit and a stopper in the opening suit. Partner will leave 3NT with useful, even soft, values; otherwise, bids as opposite the 3NT opening bid (see above).

- - (1♥) 3♥

The jump cue-bid shows the same type of hand, a minor solid one-suiter, but denies a stopper in the opening suit. Partner signs off in 3NT with that stopper and possibly something else, otherwise falls back into "pass or correct" responses as before.

14. Other overcalls

1NT overcall

Classical, promising 15-17 points and a balanced hand with a stopper in the opening suit: 5.3.3.2 hands with a five-card major are included.

(1♥) 1NT (pass) 2♣♦

Facing a 1NT overcall, a new suit at a minimum level is to play: 2♣ and 2♦ are not Stayman, as over the 1NT opening bid

(1♥) 1NT (pass) 3♣♦

A jump shift is weak, but shows a respectable suit anyway: the overcaller can try 3NT if he has a fitting honour, hoping to cash six tricks in the suit.

(1♦) 1NT (pass) 2♦

The cue-bid implies interest for unbid major suits, and is usually game invitational or better. In this example, the cue-bidder has four hearts or four spades, or possibly both.

(1♥) 1NT (pass) 2♥
(pass) 2♠ (pass) 3♣♦

If the cue-bid is followed by a new suit, this cancels the previous message and shows a five-card or longer suit. This sequence is game forcing.

(1♠) 1NT (pass) 2NT

2NT asks for a preference in the minor suits, and usually implies a 5.5 two-suiter. In this example, it is logical to expect at least a game invitation, since both 2♣ and 2♦ are available as weak takeouts.

(1♠) 1NT (2♠) 2NT

Here 2NT could be just competitive with both five-card minors.

Unusual Notrump

There are many cases in which 2NT is illogic in its natural meaning: in such cases, 2NT has the purpose to show an unbalanced hand with the two lowest ranking suits (usually both minors, or the other minor and hearts over an opponent's bid in a minor).

- - (1♥) 2NT

The most well known case is the 2NT overcall over a suit opening, showing a 5.5 two-suiter in the lowest ranking suits. This overcall is weak or strong: the overcaller will accept partner's preference when weak, or will raise with 3-4 losers. 2NT should not include normal opening hands, since with those hands the overcaller will not be able to decide what to do over partner's preference.

(1♥) 2NT (pass) 4♣♦

According to general rules, the jump preference is preemptive and not encouraging.

(1♥) pass (2♦) 2NT

Another case is bidding 2NT after two bids from opponents. Here 2NT shows a 5.5 or 6.5 in the two unbid suits, spades and clubs. It should be a very unbalanced hand, since opponents appear to be quite strong.

(1♦) pass (1♠) 1NT

When both opponents are bidding, even 1NT can be unusual: here it shows a 5.5 two-suiter with hearts and clubs. In the same sequence, 2NT would be more preemptive.

- - - pass
(pass) pass (1♥) 1NT

After passing, 1NT is unusual even after one bid from opponents. Here it shows 5.5 in the minors.

- - (1♠) 2♣
(2♠) pass (pass) 2NT

Another sequence in which 2NT is unusual: showing a strong balanced hand makes no sense when both opponents have bid and partner has passed. Therefore, 2NT is competitive, showing a minor two-suiter with six clubs and four diamonds.

- - (1♠) 2♦
(2♠) pass (pass) 2NT/3♣

Same theme. 2NT shows six diamonds and four clubs, whereas 3♣ describes a 5.5 unsuited to overcalling 2NT: too strong for a preempt, too weak to bid game without any help from partner.

- - - 1♣
(1♥) pass (2♥) 2NT

Another illogic 2NT: balanced hands with 18+ points are not included in the 1♣ bid. Hence, 2NT suggests a minor two-suiter with six clubs and four diamonds.

- - - 1♦
 (1♥) pass (4♥) 4NT

A notrump bid can be unusual at the four level too: here opener is showing a strong hand with 6.4 in the minors.

- 1♥ (pass) pass
 (1♠) double (2♠) 2NT

Even in this final example, 2NT cannot be natural neither a heart raise, after passing at the round before: over the competitive double by opener, suggesting length or tolerance in both minors, 2NT offers a choice between 3♣ and 3♦.

Cue-bids

Bidding the opponent's suit promises a 5.5 two-suiter: one of the suits is the highest-ranking one; the other is undefined at the moment. Specifically:

- over a 1♥♠ opening bid, a 2♥♠ cue-bid shows the other major and an undefined minor;
- over a 1♣♦ opening bid, a 2♣♦ cue-bid shows spades and one of the other unbid suits.

This overcall is wide ranging: it promises at least an overcalling strength and is unlimited.

(1♦) 2♦ (pass) 2♣/3♠

Over a cue-bid, raising the anchor suit is always to play. In this example 3♠ promises nothing but four trumps, and is not encouraging.

(1♠) 2♠ (pass) 3♣

When partner proposes one of the other suits, it is a "pass or correct" bid. In this example, overcaller will pass if his second suit is clubs, otherwise will correct to 3♦. With substantial extras, the cue-bidder can make a further move:

(1♠) 2♠ (pass) 3♣
 (pass) 3♠

Usually, a second cue-bid shows a strong hand with a fit in the suit that partner has proposed: any other bid (except 4♣) implies diamond as the second suit.

(1♦) 2♦ (pass) 2NT
 (pass) 3♣♥

Should he want to make a game try, partner relays with 2NT. Here the cue-bidder will simply show his second suit with a minimum, otherwise...

(1♦) 2♦ (pass) 2NT
 (pass) 3♦♠

... he will show extra values jumping in the second suit (usually with a 6.5) or making an "odd" bid at the three level: here a second cue-bid implies the higher-ranking suit (hearts), the anchor suit implies the lower ranking one (clubs).

(1♣) 2♣ (3♣) pass
 (pass) 3♥

It is understood that any action by the cue-bidder over partner's pass implies extra values. Here 3♥ shows the second suit and asks partner for a preference.

(1♥) 2♥ (3♥) pass
 (pass) 4♣

A similar action at the four level implies a very strong hand with 3-4 losers.

15. The takeout double

The takeout double is the most flexible bid in competitive sequences. Usually its purpose is to ask partner for a preference in the unbid suits, and implies offering two or maybe three suits: to this extent, doubling is very different from bidding a suit, usually offering just one possible trump suit. In other rare cases, the double can be used to prepare a strong bid in a long suit, thus showing a hand too strong for a simple overcall.

When the takeout double is used

There are many cases, but the logic behind is always the same:

- - (1♥) double

The most common case is the double over an opening bid of one of a suit. This double promises initially 11+ points with a fit or a tolerance in all the three unbid suits. With minimum strength, the doubler will often have the perfect shape: 4.4.4.1 with a singleton in the opening suit, or a 4.4.3.2 or a 5.4.3.1, whereas with stronger hands he could have a less typical shape. Specifically, the double could include the one-suiters with 4- losers, too strong for a normal suit overcall.

- - (2/3/4♠) double

A double is for takeout also over a preemptive opening bid. Compared with the previous case, this double should be a little stronger (13-14 or more), but is more flexible about shape: the double will include every hand without a six-card suit to overcall.

(1♦) pass (1♠) double

The double works the same way even after two bids from opponents: in this example, the doubler is showing at least four cards in both unbid suits and enough strength to compete at the two level, once again 11+ points.

(1♥) pass (2♥) double

This double is for takeout too, with the same requirements of the double over a 2♥ opening bid. It would be the same over a preemptive raise to 3/4♥.

- 1♣ (1♠) double

In the responding position after an overcall, the double is for takeout and implies both unbid suits. Here it tends to guarantee four hearts, almost surely four diamonds (or a club tolerance, to fall back into that suit) and at least 8-9 points, with no upper limit. The doubler could also have a strong hand with a long heart or diamond suit, too strong for a non-forcing 2♦♥: in this case, he will introduce his long suit after opener's rebid.

- 1♦ (3♥) double

No difference over a preemptive overcall. The double asks partner to keep the bidding alive, selecting the best bid available: it suggests four spades.

(1♥) 1♠ (2♥) double

Moving to the fourth seat, this double is for takeout and implies length in both minors, with enough values to compete at the three level.

(1♥) double (2♥) double

This double is for takeout too: in principle, it offers a choice between the minors. With four spades and enough values to compete, 2♠ would be the most appropriate bid.

(1♦) 1♠ (2♥) double

Only one suit is available here (clubs): so, what is this double? Still for takeout: it promises long clubs, five or six cards, and suggests a spade tolerance, maybe a doubleton. In this sequence, 3♣ would be a fit bid, with a club suit and a spade fit.

- - - 1♦
(1♠) pass (2♠) double

The opener's double at the second round is competitive, showing extra values, enough for the three level, and inviting partner to bid.

- - - 1♦
(1♠) 2♣ (2♠) double

Here 2♣ by partner has denied four hearts. Anyway, the double is still for takeout, suggesting diamond extra length and a club tolerance. Partner is invited to select a minor.

- - (1♥) 1♠
(2♥) pass (pass) double

Another case, this time after an overcall. Doubling after 1♠ shows extra values and length in both minors, typically a 5.4.3.1 with a heart singleton.

- - (1♠) 2♣
(2♠) pass (pass) double

Same as before: having not bid 2NT, the doubler is suggesting four hearts, from a 6.4 or a 5.4.3.1.

- - (1♥) pass
(1♠) pass (2♠) double

Another takeout double, this time deferred. It implies length in the minors and asks partner for a preference, but also suggests defensive values and is willing to accept a penalty pass: with a purely offensive hand, it would have been better to bid 2NT, even better at the previous round.

Responding to a takeout double at the one level

Our sequences are mostly standard here:

(1♥) double (pass) 1♠

Doubler's partner must bid, even with a Yarborough (unless passing with super trumps and nowhere else to go). Responding at the minimum level shows the preferred suit with a weak hand, up to 7-8 points.

(1♦) double (pass) 2♠

The jump preference is invitational: about 8-11 points and 8 losers. Four cards are enough for a jump in a major suit, whereas five cards are needed to jump in a minor: the advancer should expect at least three cards in the preferred suit.

(1♠) double (1NT) 2♣

After a bid by the opponent, the advancer can pass with nothing. 2♣ shows about 4-7 points and a fair suit: 3♣ is still available with a better hand.

(1♣) double (pass) 1NT/2NT

A notrump advance is natural and constructive, promising a stopper in the opponent's suit and the same strength of the response to the opening bid: 1NT shows 6-9 points, a jump to 2NT shows 10-11.

(1♥) double (pass) 2♥

A cue-bid promises enough strength for a jump preference (8-11 points) with two equivalent suits, or a game-going hand. In this example, 2♥ offers initially a choice between 3♣ and 3♦: should advancer have spades, he would prefer jumping to 2♠.

(1♥) double (pass) 2♥
(pass) 3♣ (pass) 3♠

In the same sequence, if doubler selects a minor and partner changes suit, cancels the previous message and shows a game-going hand with five or more cards in the bid suit.

(1♦) double (pass) 2♦

This sequence, similar to the previous one, shows initially 8-11 points with four hearts and four spades. A change of suit over doubler's preference to 2♥♠ is natural and game forcing.

(1♦) double (pass) 1♥
(pass) 2♥/3♥

Over partner's preference, a raise by doubler shows extra values, about 15-17 points, and confirms a fit. A jump raise shows 18-20 points. A game raise (here 4♥) is acceptable with a very strong hand, but usually it is better to handle strong hands via a cue-bid.

(1♣) double (pass) 1♠
(pass) 2♥

2♥ after the double shows a strong hand with long hearts and 8-9 playing tricks, too strong for a 1♥ overcall at the first round.

(1♠) double (pass) 2♣
(pass) 2♦

This change of suit, unlike the previous example, is not a jump over the opening bid: double then 2♦ arrives at the same level of a 2♦ overcall. Therefore, 2♦ does not show a strong hand: the doubler has probably four hearts and five or six diamonds, and was looking for a heart fit before introducing his long suit. If he actually has a strong diamond one-suiter with about 9 playing tricks, he has to bid 3♦, which is a jump over the opening bid.

(1♠) double (pass) 2♣♦
(pass) 2♥

This sequence is in between the two previous cases. 2♥ is not a jump over 1♠, hence it does not show a strong hand. At the same time, implies misfit for partner's preferred suit and four cards in the other minor, probably with just five hearts (with six, a 2♥ overcall at the first round would have been correct). Since partner is forced at the three level if he prefers playing in the other minor, the doubler's sequence guarantees something more than a minimum: about 14-17 points and 5-6 losers.

(1♥) double (pass) 1♠
(pass) 1NT

A double followed by a notrump bid over partner's minimum preference is stronger than a notrump overcall: it shows a balanced hand as well, with a stopper in the opening suit. Since 1NT shows 15-17 points, double-then-1NT promises 18-20: doubling then jumping to 2NT would promise 21-23.

(1♦) double (pass) 1♠
(pass) 2♦

A cue-bid after doubling shows a strong hand, usually 4 losers or less: it does not promise, but does not deny, a fit for partner's suit. Partner will rebid his suit with an absolute minimum; otherwise will look for a descriptive bid.

(1♣) double (pass) 2♠
(pass) 3♣

A cue-bid over a positive bid by partner is game forcing and shows some doubts about the final contract. In this example, the doubler should have at most three spades, without a stopper in the opening suit: partner will look for a constructive bid, rebidding his suit with five cards or proposing an alternative strain.

Responding to a takeout double at the two level

By "double at the two level" we mean a sequence in which the bidding is at 2 of some suit when it is the turn of doubler's partner.

(2♥) double (pass) 2♠

A minimum preference at the two level is still very weak (0-7 points).

(1♥) double (2♥) 2♠

Here passing is available, so 2♠ promises at least some values (4-7 points).

(1♠) double (2♠) 3♦

A preference at the three level, even without a jump, shows 8-11 points and is invitational.

(2♥) double (pass) 2NT

2NT is Lebensohl, showing a weak hand without any suit that could be bid at the two level. It typically requests doubler to bid 3♣, in order to signoff in the preferred suit:

(2♥) double (pass) 2NT
(pass) 3♣ (pass) pass/3♦

With a club preference, advancer will pass over 3♣: with a diamond preference, he will signoff in 3♦.

(2♥) double (pass) 2NT
(pass) 3♦

Should doubler refuse to bid 3♣, he is making an "anticipate correction": in this example he is showing a very strong hand (18+ points), with five or six diamonds and probably four spades.

(2♠) double (pass) 3♠

A cue-bid is game forcing and guarantees four cards in the unbid major (or one of the two, if both are available). It denies a stopper in the opening suit, otherwise...

(2♠) double (pass) 2NT
(pass) 3♣ (pass) 3♠

... it has to be preceded by Lebensohl 2NT. In this sequence, advancer is offering a choice of games between 3NT and 4♥.

(2♠)	double	(pass)	2NT
(pass)	3♣	(pass)	3NT

2NT-then-3NT proposes the game in notrump, but denies a stopper in the opponent's suit. The doubler can leave 3NT with a stopper, or start bidding four-card suits.

(1♣)	double	(2♣)	2NT
------	--------	------	-----

When opponents have clubs, Lebensohl does not apply: here 2NT is natural and invitational.

Lead directing doubles

Here are the cases in which double should be taken as lead directing:

(1NT)	pass	(2♣)	double
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Very common: doubling an artificial bid suggests partner to lead in the doubled suit. In this example, doubling Stayman asks for a club suit.

(1NT)	pass	(2♦♥)	double
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(1NT)	pass	(4♣♦)	double
-------	------	-------	--------

(1♥)	pass	(4♣)	double
------	------	------	--------

The same applies to transfers and Splinters, whichever the level.

(1NT)	pass	(2♥)	double
(2♠)	pass	(pass)	double

After doubling 2♥ for a heart lead, double at next round shows a "normal" 2♥ overcall. Now partner will decide if support hearts or make a penalty pass.

-	-	-	1♠
(2♣)	pass	(2♠)	pass
(2NT)	pass	(3NT)	double

Doubling a game contract after an opening bid or an overcall invites partner not to lead in the previously bid suit. In this example, opener will typically have a bad spade suit and four good cards in a red suit: which of the two, it is the partner to guess.

-	-	(1♥)	pass
(2♣)	pass	(3♣)	pass
(3♠)	pass	(4♣)	pass
(6♣)	pass	(pass)	double

Doubling a slam contract (not a save) is Lightner: the partner is requested to make an unusual lead. In this example, the normal lead seems to be diamonds, the unbid suit: the double asks for a major suit instead, probably because the doubler has a void and is hoping for a first round ruff.

-	-	-	2♥
(2♠)	pass	(3♥)	double
(3♠)	pass	(4♠)	pass
(4NT)	pass	(5♦)	double

This is a strange auction, with two doubles by a weak opener. Doubling 3♥ says "Don't lead a heart", whereas doubling 5♦ says "Lead a diamond". Opener will probably have a fair heart suit and a good diamond holding, like AQ. Now opponents cannot bid slam anymore, not even in notrump.

Redouble

Here we follow the common style: redoubling shows a good hand with no fit for partner's suit. It is aimed to double for penalty any opponents' contract.

-	1♥	(double)	redouble
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This is the typical case. Responder is showing 10-11 points or more, with at most two hearts, with strength in at least two suits. Opener is invited to double next bid by opponents with four cards in that suit, otherwise to pass and let the redoubler in control of the bidding.

-	1♥	(double)	redouble
(1♠)	2♣	(pass)	3♣

With an unbalanced hand, opener could decide not to double and bid his hand instead. Here he implies a weak heart-club two-suiter, probably a 5.5: now 3♣ by redoubler is natural and invitational (2♣ would be stronger, again with a club fit).

-	1♥	(double)	redouble
(1♠)	double	(pass)	2♦

Responder can also redouble to prepare a forcing bid with a suit of his own. 2♦ over the double would be competitive and not forcing, whereas redouble-then-2♦ is game forcing with five or more diamonds.

(1♥)	2♦	(double)	redouble
------	----	----------	----------

Over an overcall at the two level or higher, redoubling implies length and strength in both unbid suits (here spades and clubs). Overall strength should be divided more or less evenly between the two sides.

Penalty double

As a rule, double is for takeout when we have not yet found a fit (even though partner could pass for penalty, with the right hand). Double is instead for penalty when we have found our fit and partner's hand is limited, or when it is a deferred double.

(1♥)	double	(pass)	2♠
(3♥)	pass	(pass)	double

First double suggests spades, and the following pass limits the doubler's hand: hence, doubling 3♥ is for penalty.

(1♦) 3♥ (3♠) double

This case is not that different. 3♥ establish hearts as trumps and show a limited hand: double is for penalty.

- 1♦ (1♥) pass
(1NT) pass (2♥) double

Just one example of a deferred double: after passing over 1♥, doubling cannot be for takeout, so it has to be for penalty.

16. Other sequences when opponents open the bidding

Balancing

Balancing bids over 1suit - pass - pass are as follows:

- double, 1NT and non-jump suit bids have the same meanings as in direct position, *but with 3-4 points less*; same development also, but partner must have 3-4 points more for his own positive bids;
- jumps are positive: 2NT shows 18-20 points with a balanced hand, whereas a jump suit bid shows a good six-card suit with 5-6 losers;
- the cue-bid shows a strong unbalanced hand, one or two-suiter, with 4- losers; since in this position partner will tend to apply a penalty pass over the double, a cue-bid will include all hands unsuited for the penalty pass, and will be forcing until suit agreement;

Balancing bids in the other cases are natural: as the only exception, a notrump bid is "unusual", asking for a preference in the unbid suits.

Some examples:

- (1♥) pass
(pass) double (pass) 2♠

Here 2♠ shows opening strength but a bad spade suit, not adequate for a 1♠ overcall. The doubler will assume about 11-14 points with four cards.

(1♠) pass (2♠) pass
(pass) double (pass) 2NT

2NT is not natural: it just asks partner to select a trump suit. In these balancing sequences, we are not interested in game invitations, since we are just competing for a partial contract: we just want to find a fit, and play there at the lowest possible level. If advancer had a five-card suit, he should have bid 3♣♦♥: having no long suit, he bids 2NT, ready to pass over doubler's preference...

(1♠) pass (2♠) pass
(pass) double (pass) 2NT
(pass) 3♣ (pass) 3♦

... well, not always. Over doubler's 3♣, 3♦ offers a choice between the red suits. It should be noted that the balancing double implies at least two four-card or longer suits, otherwise a balancing suit bid would have been better.

Defence over 1NT opening bid

Over 1NT, we use an artificial defence, in second seat as well as in fourth seat:

double Two-suiter, spades and another suit (spades are usually shorter).

2♣♦ Two-suiter, hearts and the bid suit (hearts are usually shorter).

2NT Minor two-suiter, or any very strong 5.5 two-suiter with 3-4 losers.

others Natural.

The strength of two-suiters depends on the notrump range. Over a strong notrump the overcalls can be relatively weak, for defensive purposes, especially if not vulnerable; over a weak or a mini notrump, the two suited overcalls usually show opening hands. Further bidding is natural, with some special cases:

(1NT) double (pass) 2♦

Every suit bid except 2♠ is of the "pass or correct" type. In this case, advancer is ready to play 2♦ if doubler has spades and diamonds, but...

(1NT) double (pass) 2♦
(pass) 2♠ (pass) 3♣

... he must be prepared to play 3♣ if doubler's second suit is clubs: so 2♦ shows at least four clubs.

(1NT) double (pass) 2NT
(pass) 3♦ (pass) 3♠

Should advancer want to make a game try, he can relay with 2NT. In this sequence 3♦ shows the second suit, and 3♠ is limit.

(1NT) 2♠ (pass) 2NT

Further bidding after suit overcalls are along the guidelines already introduced. Having no cue-bid available, advancer forces with 2NT: this bid implies almost surely a fit for overcaller's suit, and is game invitational or better.

- (1NT) 2NT
(pass) 3♦ (pass) 3♥

2NT can conceal a minor two-suiter or any strong two-suiter. Initially, advancer assumes to face a minor two-suiter and gives his preference. If overcaller introduces a new suit, he is clearly showing a strong hand. 3♥ is forcing to suit agreement.

Defence over strong artificial bids

Over a forcing and artificial 1♣ or 2♣, showing a strong hand but no specific suit, the common approach seems to be adequate:

- with a good hand it's better to pass, balancing later if opponents stop bidding at a low level and there is a chance for a fit on our side;
- suit overcalls are natural, with jumps being preemptive; non vulnerable overcalls can be more aggressive than over a normal suit opening bid;
- doubling shows length in both majors, whereas a notrump overcalls shows both minors; partner will give a jump preference with some shape.

Defence over Multi 2♦

Overcalling a Multi 2♦ assumes that 2♦ actually conceals a weak hand with a long major (if opener has some strong hand, usually it does not happen to overcall). The suggested defence is "Multi-over-Multi", trying to put the ambiguity back against opponents. In direct position over 2♦:

- double Good hand (13-14 points or more) and a long major suit: here partner can double responder's 2♥♣ for takeout, allowing partner to pass for penalty if he has the same suit held by opener.
- 3♣♦ Natural: a good six-card suit and about 9-13 points.
- 2♥♣ Artificial: good six cards in clubs (2♥) or diamonds (2♣), at least 13-14 points. Advancer returns in overcaller's suit, or makes another bid to encourage.
- 2NT Natural, 16-19 points, balanced hand.
- 3NT Natural, 20-22 points, balanced hand.

Just a couple of examples:

(2♦) double (2♥) double

Here is the major plus point of Multi-over-Multi. Over 2♥, partner's double is good for everything: if opener will pass holding hearts, doubler can also pass with hearts, otherwise will introduce his spades, or maybe bid 3♣♦ holding this suit *and spades too*.

- - (2♦) 3♣

Being able to overcall in a minor with a relatively weak hand, sometimes we could confuse opponents: if opener's partner has a long major suit, he will assume that opener has the other major and will bid conservatively, when they could have an exceptional fit.

In fourth seat, overcalls are more standard: double is for takeout, overcalls are natural.

17. Other sequences when we open the bidding

More about Lebensohl 2NT

In constructive sequences in which opener can double for takeout, 2NT shows a minimum unbalanced hand, making other bids at the three level available for game invitational hands.

-	-	-	1♦
(pass)	1♠	(2♥)	2NT
(pass)	3♣	(pass)	pass/3♦

In this example, 2NT shows an unbalanced hand, diamond one-suiter or minor two-suiter, and is competitive only. In the same sequence, doubling would be for takeout, showing some extra values without a spade fit, possibly a strong notrump. On the other hand:

-	-	-	1♦
(pass)	1♠	(2♥)	3♣♦

A direct bid at the three level is natural and shows extra values, usually 4-5 losers.

-	-	-	1♥
(pass)	2♣	(2♠)	2NT

Alert: here 2NT is natural with a spade stopper. No bid can be "competitive" in a game forcing sequence.

-	1♣	(pass)	1♥
(1♠)	2♣	(2♠)	2NT
(pass)	3♣	(pass)	passo/3♥

Even responder can use Lebensohl at the second round. Here the takeout double is available: therefore, 2NT is competitive (in clubs or hearts, next bid will tell), whereas an immediate 3♣♥ would be game invitational.

We open 2♣, they overcall

When opponents overcall our strong bid, we give up our artificial responses; partner will bid:

pass As the 2♦ response: semi-positive or better, without any good suit. Here opener will bid his long suit, or will double for takeout: bidding the opponent's suit is natural, not a cue-bid (as a defence against the psyches).

double As the 2♥ response: double negative. Opener can pass for penalties; otherwise will make his most descriptive bid.

suit Natural, good suit at least five cards long.

SA Natural, a few values concentrated in the overcalled suit.

If opponents double 2♣, we ignore the double and apply our normal responses.

We open 1NT, they double

Playing weak notrump, it is crucial to have a good rescue mechanism to activate over opponents' double. When the second hand doubles, responder bids:

pass	Nothing to say for the moment: usually implies four clubs, and maybe another four-card suit.
redouble	Natural and positive, should not have a very unbalanced hand.
2♥♠	Natural, to play, usually with a five-card suit.
2♦	Usually natural to play, but could also conceal a hand with at least 4.4 in the majors.
2♣	Usually natural to play, but could also conceal a hand with four diamond and a four-card major.
2NT	Artificial and game forcing, unbalanced hand, usually 5.5, does not want to risk playing 1NT redoubled.
3♣♦♥♠	Natural and preemptive.
4♣♦	Transfer for 4♥♠, as without the double.

Some examples:

-	1NT	(double)	pass
(pass)	2♦		

When opener has a five-card suit, he can bid it over partner's pass.

-	1NT	(double)	pass
(pass)	redouble	(pass)	2♣
(double)	redouble	(pass)	2♥

Opener's redouble asks for the lower four-card suit: further redouble asks for the other suit.

-	1NT	(double)	pass
(pass)	redouble	(pass)	pass!

Responder can also pass with about 8-9 points, being too weak to redouble but too strong to save: in such case, he has the license to pass the redouble and try for game (provided that opponents will allow us to play 1NT redoubled).

-	1NT	(double)	2♣
(double)	pass	(pass)	redouble
(pass)	2♥	(pass)	2♠

Assuming that the double over 2♣ is for penalty, responder's redouble describes a 4.4 with diamonds and a major (with long clubs, he had left the double). In this example, opener could say 2♦ to play there: 2♥ offers instead the choice between 2♥ and 2♠.

-	1NT	(double)	2♦
(double)	pass	(pass)	redouble
(pass)	2♥		

At the same way, 2♦-then-redouble shows 4.4 in both majors and offers a choice between 2♥ and 2♠.

-	1NT	(double)	2♠
(pass)	3♠		

If partner shows a five-card suit, opener can give a preemptive raise or...

-	1NT	(double)	2♠
(pass)	3♦		

... bid a side suit, lead directing or for defensive play, guaranteeing a fit and enough offence for the three level: in this example, 3♦ promises four spades.

-	1NT	(double)	redouble
(2♥)	double		

Redoubling works as over suit opening bids: it is positive with defensive values, aiming to double opponents in their contract. Opener will double the advancer's preference, otherwise will pass and leave redoubler in control. It is very unlikely for the redoubler to have a long suit: giving the limited nature of the 1NT opening bid, with a strong one-suiter it is usually better jumping to game.

-	1NT	(double)	redouble
(2♠)	pass	(pass)	2NT

In any redoubling sequence, pass is forcing at the two level: passing over 2♠, opener is simply denying four spades. Redoubler has the option to double for penalty, or make another bid: in this example, 2NT cannot be natural (he would have doubled instead), but has to be unusual, offering a choice between the two minors.

-	1NT	(double)	2NT
(pass)	3♦	(pass)	3♠
(pass)	3NT	(pass)	4♥

2NT shows a strong unbalanced hand: further bidding is natural. In this example, responder is showing a major two-suiter, almost surely a 5.5 hand.

Over a fourth seat double, opener will tend to pass, allowing partner to stand the double. Otherwise, partner will:

- bid his five-card suit; this bid can be "fake" if followed by a redouble, as we have seen before: 2♣ could be a 4.4 with diamonds a major, whereas 2♦ could be a 4.4 with both majors;
- redouble, to show a 4.4 with clubs and another suit.

We open 1NT, they overcall

When opponents overcall our weak notrump, we bid following the usual guidelines:

- suit Natural and competitive: jumps are weak and preemptive.
- double Takeout, implies interest for unbid major suits. At the next round, a change of suit is forcing, a cue-bid is stopper asking.
- 2NT Unusual, competitive or strong, shows interest for unbid lowest suits.
- cuebid Strong unbalanced hand, usually a 5.5 two-suiter including the highest-ranking suit.

A few examples:

- 1NT (2♥) 3♣

A competitive bid at the three level shows about 8-11 points and a good six-card suit. *In this case, we do not use Lebensohl*, even though this convention was invented for this specific sequence.

- 1NT (2♥) double
(3♥) 3♠ (pass) 4♠

Partner's double implies four spades or a strong hand; otherwise, 2NT should have been better. Therefore, opener can bid 3♠ with four spades, allowing partner for a game raise.

- 1NT (2♠) 2NT
(pass) 3♦ (pass) 3♠

The cue-bid after 2NT is obviously a stopper asking. Should opener lack a spade stopper, he will fall back into diamonds.

- 1NT (2♦) 2NT
(pass) 4♥ (pass) pass

Bidding 2NT with hearts and clubs, responder is showing a good hand, game invitational or better: otherwise, he would prefer bidding a competitive 2♥. Based on this valuable clue, opener can afford to bid game having a good hand and a heart fit.

- 1NT (2♠) 3♠
(pass) 3NT (pass) 4♦

Over responder's strong two-suiter, opener can suggest 3NT holding a good stopper in overcalled suit and no fit for partner's implied suit (here, hearts). Now partner can pass, or bid his second suit with some extras, or a very unbalanced hand.