

# The Foundation System

## Notrump Bidding

### Introduction

This chapter treats hands in which Opener holds a balanced hand (4333, 4432, 5332 with a 5-card minor, perhaps occasionally 5422 or 6322 with a 6-card minor or 5332 with a weak 5-card major) of three different strength ranges: 15-17 HCP (1NT opening), 20-21 HCP (2NT opening), or 22+ HCP (2C opening followed by a 2NT rebid by Opener). Other strength ranges are treated in the chapter on *Minor Suit Bidding*: 12-14 HCP (1C or 1D followed by a 1NT rebid by Opener) and 18-19 HCP (1C or 1D followed by a 2NT rebid). A 5-card major is acceptable for the stronger openings (2NT and 2C then 2NT).

These strength ranges are not absolute. A bad 15 HCP can always be downgraded to open 1C or 1D; a bad 18 HCP can be downgraded to open 1NT; and a bad 22 HCP can be opened 2NT. *The Bridge World* magazine maintains a system called Bridge World Standard which is based on the preferences of a panel of experts; their notrump ranges are expressed as a good 15 to a bad 18, and a good 20 to a bad 22. Further discussion of such adjustments will be deferred until the Bidding Practice quizzes in Part II.

### Responses to 1NT

**Note:** Unless otherwise noted in the discussion, these same responses and rebids apply, but obviously one level higher, after a 2NT opening, and also after 2C/P/2any/P/2NT (so long as the 2any response is artificial and does not show any specific suit).

#### 1NT/P/P

This shows a weak hand, with less than 8 HCP and no 5+card major suit.

#### 1NT/P/2C (Stayman)

A 2C response is the Stayman convention, next to Blackwood the most popular bidding convention throughout the world. 2C is purely artificial, saying nothing about Responder's holding in the club suit, but implying that Responder holds at least one 4-card major suit. Opener is requested (actually required, unless there is an intervening bid) to bid a 4-card major suit if he has one (hearts first, if he has both), or to bid 2D if he does not have a 4-card major. Opener's 2D is also artificial, showing nothing about his holding in the diamond suit, except for the minimum 2-card length implied by his original NT opening. The minimum HCP requirement for the 2C response is usually 8 HCP (or a very good 7), but if Responder has a very weak hand with 4450 shape, both majors, and a club void, he may elect to try a 2C response, planning to pass Opener's rebid. In the worst possible case, when Opener has 3325 shape, this could mean playing in a 5-2 diamond fit.

After Opener's 2D rebid, Responder may pass, as noted above, but will usually rebid 2NT with a minimum balanced hand (8 HCP or a bad 9) or 3NT with a good balanced hand (10-14 HCP or a good 9). With a stronger balanced hand (15-17 HCP) he will rebid 4NT. This is natural, not Blackwood, and invites Opener to bid 6NT with more than a

minimum 1NT opening (17 HCP or a good 16). Responder can also rebid 6NT if still stronger, or rebid 4C (Gerber) to ask for aces, planning to reach 6NT unless two aces are missing. Other options for Responder after Opener's 2D response are:

- **2H or 2S**, non-forcing, showing a 5+card suit (with 4 cards in the other major) and 8-9 · HCP. Opener can then pass, bid game in that suit, show 3-card support with a maximum by raising to the 3-level, bid 3NT, or sign off in 2NT. Opener's NT rebids imply a doubleton in Responder's long suit and 3-card support for the other major.
- **3C**, non-forcing, showing a weak hand with a 6+card club suit unsuitable for play in NT, presumably because the suit quality is poor and/or there is no outside entry. Responder might not hold a 4-card major, since this is the only way for Responder to show that a club partscore will be preferable to playing in 1NT.
- **3D**, non-forcing. Responder will have a 4-card major here, since he could have passed.
- **2D** to play in diamonds. This bid invites Opener to bid 3NT with a fitting honor in diamonds, or to pass otherwise.
- **3H or 3S**, forcing, showing a 5+card suit and 4 cards in the other major, requiring Opener to choose between 3NT and game in Responder's long major.
- **4H or 4S**, to play there. Responder will have a 6+card suit and 4 cards in the other major.

**Note:** The 3H and 3S bids above make Responder the declarer, when it is usually more desirable to make the 1NT Opener the declarer. The Smolen convention, which is not part of the Foundation System, solves this problem by reversing the meaning of the 3H and 3S rebids. When playing Smolen, 3H shows 5+spades and 4 hearts, while 3S shows 5+ hearts and 4S. This allows Opener to become declarer when he holds a 3-card fit for Responder's 5+card major.

When Opener responds 2H or 2S, Responder's NT rebids are similar to those described above, but of course deny holding 4-cards in Opener's major. Responder may also pass with a weak hand if content to play in Opener's major. Responder's 3C and 3D rebids now both show weak hands with a 6+card suit unsuitable for play in NT, since passing a 2D response to show the weak diamond hand is no longer an option. If Responder's rebid is 3 of the other major, this guarantees a 4+card fit for Opener's major and is at least a mild slam try; Opener will cue-bid if he is willing to cooperate in the slam search.

### **1NT/P/2D & 1NT/P/2H (Jacoby Transfers)**

There is absolutely no minimum HCP requirement for these bids. A **2D** response is forcing, shows a 5+card heart suit, and requests Opener to bid 2H; while a **2H** response is forcing, shows a 5+card spade suit, and requests Opener to bid 2S.

It is possible, but rarely wise, for Opener to “super-accept” by rebidding 3H over 2D or by rebidding 3S over 2H. This shows 4-card support with a good 17 HCP, but is not part of the Foundation System, since Responder will make another bid after simple acceptance if he has the 7+HCP needed to make game opposite a maximum 1NT opening bid, so failing to super-accept will rarely lead to a missed game.

After Opener accepts the transfer, Responder has several options:

- **Pass**, if content to play there, with any weak hand of about 0-7 HCP.
- **2S** shows a 5-card spade suit, and thus a 6+card heart suit, since with only a 4-card spade suit with longer hearts, Responder would have chosen a Stayman sequence. Since 65 hands are rare, an alternative meaning for the 2S rebid is suggested below.

**1NT/P/2D/P/2H/P/2S (Kokish).** This is an artificial game force and slam try, alertable, shows nothing about Responder’s spade holding, and temporarily cancels the meaning of the transfer to hearts. Opener is required to rebid 2NT, and Responder will then make a descriptive rebid. Should that rebid be 3C or 3D, it shows a slam try with a good 6+card holding in that suit. Should that rebid be 3H, it shows a slam try with a solid 6+card suit (AKQxxx or better in **any** suit: C, D, H, or S. If partner can’t tell which suit it is, he didn’t have a 1NT opening.). Should that rebid be 3S, 4C or 4D, it shows a slam try with a void in that suit and a good 6+card heart suit.

- **2NT** shows invitational strength (8-9 HCP) with a 5-card major and a balanced hand (5332 or 5422). Opener can pass, bid 3NT with a maximum and usually only 2-card support, bid 3 of the major with a minimum and 3-card support, or bid 4 of the major with a maximum and 3-card support.
- **3 of the Major** shows invitational strength (7-8 HCP) with a 6+card suit. Opener can pass, raise to game in the major, or (rarely, usually only at matchpoints) bid 3NT.
- **3NT** shows a balanced hand with a 5-card major (5332 or 5422) with about 10-14 HCP and no interest in a slam. Opener will either pass, or correct to 4 of the major if he has 3+card support.
- **4 of the Major** shows a 6+ card suit with about 10-14 HCP and no interest in slam. Opener must pass.
- **New Suit at the 3-Level.** This is forcing to game, and shows an unbalanced hand with a 4+card suit, and therefore a singleton or void in one of the other two suits (5431, 6421, 5440, or 6430 are typical shapes). Opener will cue-bid one of the other two suits with slam interest, or bid 3NT with the other two suits well stopped, or bid 4 of the major to play there, or raise Responder’s new suit with 4+card support. If Responder later bids one of the unbid suits, it is a slam try with a void in that suit.
- **New Suit at the 4-Level.** This is forcing to game, and shows slam interest with an unbalanced hand, a singleton or void in that suit, and (usually) a 6+card suit. Opener will bid game in the major with no slam interest, or cue-bid, or bid 4NT (Roman Key Card Blackwood) with slam interest.

- **4NT.** If Responder jumps to 4NT immediately after Opener accepts the transfer, this is not any form of Blackwood. It shows a balanced hand with slam invitational values. Opener can pass, bid 6NT, or bid 5 or 6 of Responder's major. To ask for aces or keycards, Responder must bid a new suit first and then bid 4NT.

A useful alternative is to reverse the above meanings for new suit bids at the 3- and 4-level. With this reversed approach, a new suit at the 3-level shows a singleton or void, while a new suit at the 4-level shows a second 5-card suit and is a slam try. This is especially useful with the common 5431 shape, since it permits Opener to stop in 3NT when he has a double stopper in Responder's short suit, and to seek a minor suit game or partscore with 2-card support for Responder's major and a poor holding in Responder's short suit. I recommend this alternative to all my students, but it is not part of the Foundation System.

### **1NT/P/2S (Minor Suit Stayman)**

This asks Opener to bid a 4+card minor if he has one (3C if he has both), or to bid 2NT with no 4+card minor. Responder will usually hold a weak hand with two 5+card minors and will be planning to pass Opener's minor suit rebid, or to bid 3C over Opener's 2NT rebid, asking Opener to bid a 3-card minor (his better minor if he is 33). Occasionally, Responder will have a different type of hand with two 4+card minor suits and slam invitational strength for his 2S response. With 44 in the minors, he would need about 14-17 HCP to choose this approach; with less he would settle for raising to 3NT, while with more he would be thinking of 6NT (See the 4C and 4NT responses below). With 55 in the minors, he could try 2S with a bit less high-card strength, planning to stop at 5 in a minor if there is no slam (and hoping that 3NT will fail in that case). In any case, if Opener shows a 4+card minor, any major suit rebid by Responder shows a singleton, and a jump rebid in a major shows a void.

### **1NT/P/2NT (Invitational to 3NT)**

This shows a balanced hand with no 4+card major and about 8-9 HCP. Opener will pass with a minimum, or raise to 3NT with a maximum.

### **1NT/P/3C & 1NT/P/ 3D (Invitational to 3NT)**

These responses show a 6+card suit headed by 2 of the top 3 honors with no outside ace or king and no more than one outside queen. Opener is requested to bid 3NT if he holds a fitting honor (A, K, or Q) in that suit and to pass otherwise. Stronger hands with suits of that quality will respond 3NT to play, or will be making a minor suit slam try via either an immediate 2S response, or the 2S rebid after a transfer to hearts, as discussed under Jacoby Transfers.

### **1NT/P/3H & 1NT/P/ 3S (55 Weak/Strong)**

There is no commonly accepted meaning for these responses. Some people play these as a game force/slam try with a 6+card suit. Our Jacoby Transfer structure can handle that sort of hand quite well, so we will use 3H and 3S to show hands with 55 in the majors; **3H** will show a weak hand with no game aspirations, asking Opener to choose between

3H and 3S; while **3S** will show a slam try, asking Opener to cue-bid a minor suit if his hand is suitable for slam. **Note:** When Responder is 55 in the majors and wants to play game in a major but has no interest in slam, he will start with a transfer to 2S, and then rebid 4H, asking Opener to choose between 4H and 4S.

### **1NT/P/3NT (To Play)**

This shows a hand which wants to play in 3NT, and has no interest in slam, or in any other game. For balanced hands, the HCP requirement is about 10-14; the lower limit can be reduced somewhat with a useful 5+card minor.

### **1NT/P/4C (Gerber)**

Most slam tries start with a descriptive bid and elicit Opener's opinion about which slam to play or whether to stay out of slam. Occasionally, Responder will know immediately, without further input from Opener, that he wants to be in slam unless two aces are missing. This is the time to trot out Gerber. The **4C** response guarantees first or second round control of every suit (ace, king, or singleton), denies a void, and asks Opener how many aces he holds. Opener responds 4D with 0 or 4 aces, 4H with one ace, 4S with two aces, or 4NT with three aces, and Responder then chooses the final contract. If Opener's response confirms that no aces are missing, Responder can rebid 5C to ask for kings, using the same response structure, and perhaps reach a higher-scoring 6NT or a grand slam.

Using 5C to ask for kings is the most popular approach, but means that the partnership cannot play in 5C when Opener's response reveals that two aces are missing. The alternative is to use the cheapest bid, after Opener's response to Gerber, to ask for kings. This is theoretically best, but has not been included in the Foundation System since it requires prior partnership agreement, and Gerber sequences are too rare to justify worrying about such niceties.

### **1NT/P/4D (Undefined)**

There is no **4D** response in the Foundation System.

### **1NT/P 4H & 1NT/P/4S (To Play)**

The **4H** and **4S** responses indicate a desire to play in that contract, with no slam aspirations. Opener must pass. Responder obviously could have used a Jacoby Transfer and then raised to game to make Opener the declarer, so if he chooses the direct 4H or 4S response he is either a hand hog or else has some sort of a freakish hand where it is desirable to conceal his distribution from the opponents to make the defense more difficult. Frequently this means an undisclosed void.

### **Texas Transfers**

An alternative to the direct 4H and 4S responses is to use transfers at the 4-level as well as the 2-level. Thus **4D** is a transfer to 4H, and **4H** is a transfer to 4S. This shows no slam interest, and thus implies that the 2-level Jacoby Transfer followed by a raise to game shows at least a mild interest in slam. Texas transfers are fairly popular and work well, but are disaster-prone if you ever forget whether you are playing them or not. If partner responds 4H, you should bid 4S if playing Texas, but pass if not. If you can't remember your agreement, you're in big trouble. My advice would be to bid 4S; if you bid it in tempo, partner will be able to correct to 5H, while if you pass you will be playing in the wrong suit. This disaster potential is the main reason Texas Transfers are not part of the Foundation System.

### **1NT/P/4NT (Invitational)**

This is not any form of Blackwood, since a Gerber 4C is available to ask for aces. A **4NT** response shows a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP with no 4+card major, and invites Opener to bid 6NT with a maximum or to pass with a minimum. Opener will accept with 17 HCP, pass with 15, and with 16 will accept if he likes his hand.

### **1NT/P/5C & 1NT/P/5D (To Play)**

These are quite rare. A **5C** or **5D** response is to play, typically with something like an 8-card suit and a weak hand with no slam aspirations.

### **1NT/P/5H & 1NT/P/5S (Slam Invitational)**

A **5H** or **5S** response is to play, but invites slam if Opener has the ace of king of that suit. A typical hand would be S QJ1098xxx H Ax D Ax C A.

### **1NT/P/5NT (For History Buffs)**

Since the early Culbertson days, a **5NT** response has been forcing to 6NT and invites Opener to bid 7NT with a maximum. I've been playing this game for 50 years and have never encountered a 5NT response. There are usually other ways to accomplish this.

### **1NT/P/6any & 1NT/P/7any (To Play)**

These are absolute signoffs. If Responder wanted any input from Opener, he would have chosen a slower approach.

## **Responses to 2NT**

This section applies not only to the 2NT Opening, but also to sequences following a Forcing 2C Opening when Opener's first rebid has been 2NT and Responder has not yet shown a suit. In general, the 1NT response structure already described can be applied over 2NT, except that all 2-level responses must be made at the 3-level. These 2-Level opening bids are often made when holding a 5-card major with 5332 shape. That, plus

the loss of one bidding level means that a few modifications must be made. Those modifications are described below.

### **2NT/P/3C (Puppet Stayman)**

Since Opener will often have a 5-card major, our **3C** response now asks whether Opener has either a 4-card major or a 5-card major. This is called Puppet Stayman for etymological reasons which are beyond the scope of this book. (Translation: I haven't a clue; 3C is not a puppet, as that term is commonly used in bridge literature.) If Opener has a 5-card major, he is expected to bid it in response to 3C. With no 5-card major, Opener should rebid 3D if he has a 4-card major (or both), and should rebid 3NT with no 4-card major (thus showing no more than 3 cards in each major).

If Opener shows a 5-card major, Responder can raise to game in the major with 3+card support, bid 3NT (presumably with less than 3-card support, or perhaps with 3-card support, 4-cards in the other major, and 4333 shape), bid 4NT (not forcing, to invite 6NT), bid 4C as Roman Keycard Gerber agreeing Opener's major, or bid a new suit as a cue-bid to agree Opener's major and invite slam.

If Opener shows a 4-card major by rebidding 2D, Responder will usually hold at least one 4-card major. If he has just one 4-card major, he bids 3 of the other major (Responder's 3H rebid shows 4 spades, while a 3S rebid shows 4 hearts). If Opener's 4-card major is the one Responder has shown (not the one Responder has bid), Opener can bid game in his major and become declarer in their 44 fit. If Opener has the wrong 4-card major, he can bid 3NT to play there. If Responder has both 4-card majors, he can show this by bidding a minor suit over 3D, usually choosing his longer minor, or his better minor if they are of equal length, after which Opener will select a major. Of course, Responder can also rebid 3NT over Opener's 3D rebid. This shows that Responder's 3C was merely exploring for a 53 major suit fit as an alternative to 3NT and did not contain a 4-card major.

If Opener rebids 3NT, denying a 4- or 5-card major, Responder will usually pass. Other bids have the following meanings:

- 4C is Gerber, to try for 6NT unless two aces are missing.
- 4D is a minor-suit slam try.
- 4H is to play, presumably with 5+hearts and 4 spades.
- 4S is to play, presumably with 5+spades and 4 hearts.
- 4NT is non-forcing and invitational to 6NT
- 5NT is forcing to 6NT and invites 7NT

### **2NT/P/3D & 2NT/P/ 3H (Jacoby Transfers)**

These responses mimic the Jacoby Transfer structure after a 1NT opening, except that all bids are one level higher. Exception: Hands with 55 in the majors will transfer to spades, and then rebid:

- 4H to ask Opener to choose between 4H and 4S
- 5H to ask Opener to choose among 5H, 5S, 6H, and 6S
- 6H to ask Opener to choose between 6H and 6S

Except for the sequences listed above, any new suit bid after a transfer is a slam try, and shows a 4+card suit, usually with a singleton in one of the two unbid suits. Slam tries with a void will usually transfer and then jump in the void suit.

The Kokish transfer to hearts followed by a 3S rebid is still available to show a slam try with a long minor suit, any long solid suit, or a long heart suit with a void. A transfer to spades, followed by a jump in a new suit, shows a slam try with a long spade suit and a void in the new suit. This is again not part of the Foundation System.

### **2NT/P/3S (Minor Suit Stayman)**

This mimics the 1NT structure, with all bids one level higher.

### **2NT/P/3NT (To Play)**

This still denies a 4-card major, and shows no interest in any other contract.

### **2NT/P/Higher Responses**

These mimic the 1NT structure exactly. **4C** is Gerber; **4D** does not exist; **4H** and **4S** are to play, with a desire to conceal Responder's distribution; **4NT** is invitational; **5C** and **5D** are to play, with no slam interest; **5H** and **5S** invite slam with a good fit (but now since Opener has a stronger hand, he needs two of the top three honors to accept, or perhaps Axxx); and **5NT** forces to 6NT and invites 7NT.

Texas Transfers are still a useful option here, but are not part of the Foundation System. If used, a Jacoby Transfer followed by a raise to game is still a mild slam try.

## **When Opponents Intervene**

If Opener's left-hand opponent (LHO) intervenes over his 1NT Opening, the primary counter-measure is the **lebensohl** convention, usually spelled without a capital L to avoid any confusion with Ken Lebensold, an east coast expert who was originally thought (erroneously) to have been its inventor. The lebensohl convention will be described later; it can only be applied when LHO's bid has shown at least one specific suit at the 2-level. For all situations where lebensohl does not apply, the following rules apply:

### **LHO Doubles**

The double usually shows either a penalty double or some sort of alertable distributional hand. If it's a penalty double, Responder can pass, if willing to play there, or can



Redouble to seek the cheapest playable contract, asking Opener to bid his cheapest 3-card suit unless RHO bids. If the double shows a specific suit, lebensohl applies. If the double shows an unspecified distributional hand, Redouble show at least game invitational strength; the opponents will not be allowed to play the hand undoubled. If not strong enough to Redouble, or so strong that a game or slam is likely to score better than doubling the opponents, the standard NT response structure is available: 2C is Stayman, 2D and 2H are transfers, 2S is minor suit Stayman, etc.

### **LHO Makes an Artificial Suit Bid at the 2-Level**

If LHO's bid shows a specific suit (usually but not necessarily the one he has bid), lebensohl applies, whether or not LHO has implied holding a second suit. If LHO's bid shows one or more unspecified suits (for example, 2C showing an unspecified one-suiter), Double shows at least game invitational strength; the opponents will not be allowed to play the hand undoubled.

### **LHO Makes a Natural Bid at the 2-Level or 3-Level**

If at the 2-level, this is the classic situation where lebensohl applies. At either level, Double by Responder shows game-forcing strength; the opponents will not be allowed to play undoubled. If Responder passes, a reopening takeout double by Opener shows a maximum with xx or Ax in LHO's suit (i. e., no wasted high-card strength in LHO's suit).

### **LHO Passes, But RHO Doubles Responder's Bid**

If Responder's bid was a transfer, Opener accepts the transfer with 3+card support, or passes with 2-card support. If Opener Redoubles, he shows a maximum with a strong holding in the suit doubled (at least AQx, but something like KJ10x would be ideal). If Responder's bid was artificial (usually 2C or 2S), Redouble has the same meaning. If Responder's bid was natural, Redouble shows 3+card support.

### **LHO Passes, But RHO Bids Over Responder's Bid**

Double is for penalty, with at least 3 cards in RHO's suit, usually 4. Any other rebid by Opener is natural.

## **The lebensohl Convention**

This convention applies when Opener's LHO has shown at least one specific suit and the auction has not reached the 2NT level. In this situation, Responder has several options:

- **2NT.** Opener is required to rebid 3C. Responder has one of four hand-types:
  - (1) A weak one-suiter in a suit which could not be bid at the 2-level. He will pass 3C, or bid his suit, if it is not clubs. Opener must pass.
  - (2) A one-suiter in a suit which could have been bid at the 2-level. He will bid his suit, showing game invitational strength.

- (3) A balanced hand with game-forcing strength (9+ HCP), no 4-card major, and a stopper in their suit. He will bid 3NT, and Opener must pass.
  - (4) Game-forcing strength, 4 cards in an unbid major, and a stopper in their suit. He will cue-bid their suit, and Opener will bid a 4-card major if he has one (hearts if he has both) or bid 3NT.
- **New Suit at 2-Level (if available).** This shows a weak one-suiter. Opener must pass.
  - **New Suit at 3-Level.** This is forcing to game in that suit or in NT. Inviting game in that suit is only available (lebensohl type 2) if the suit could have been bid at the 2-level.
  - **Cue-Bid Their Suit.** This shows game forcing strength (9+ HCP), at least one 4-card major, and **denies** a stopper in their suit. Opener will bid a 4-card major if he has one (hearts first if he has both), or, else bid 3NT if he has a stopper in their suit. If lacking both a 4-card major and a stopper in their suit, Opener will bid 4-card suits up the line in search of a suitable stopping place, since neither partner has a stopper in the opponent's suit.
  - **3NT.** This denies an unbid 4-card major, and also **denies** a stopper in their suit, while showing game-forcing strength. If Opener has a stopper in their suit, he must pass; otherwise, he should bid a 5-card minor or his cheapest 4-card minor, and Responder will choose whether to play a minor-suit game or partscore.

**Note:** Both the cue-bid and 3NT show a stopper in the opponent's suit if preceded by a lebensohl 2NT, while these bids deny a stopper if made immediately over the overcall without an intervening 2NT bid. The mnemonic "Slow Shows" makes this easy to remember. The **slow** route (via 2NT) **shows** a stopper; the **fast** route (bypassing 2NT) **denies** a stopper.

While not a part of the usual definition of lebensohl, the following options after Opener's 3C rebid may prove useful, and all guarantee a stopper in their suit, but are not part of the Foundation System. Do not use them without prior partnership discussion.

\* **4C** is Gerber

\* **4D** and **4H** are Texas Transfers

\* **4S** is Minor Suit Stayman, asking for a 4-card minor.