

Standard English Acol

Full System File

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Standard English System File

Basic System

Acol with a 12-14 1NT, 4 card majors and strong two openers

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Section A: The Uncontested Auction

1 Balanced hands

For our purposes a balanced hand is one that contains no singleton and not more than one doubleton. The possible distributions are 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2, the suits being listed in any order.

Table of bids and rebids

12-14 HCP	Open 1NT
15-16 HCP	Open one of a suit and rebid in no trumps at minimum level
17-18 HCP	Open one of a suit and jump in no trumps on the next round
19 HCP	Open one of a suit and jump to 3NT on the next round
20-22 HCP	Open 2NT
23-24 HCP	Open 2♣ and rebid no trumps at the lowest level
25-26 HCP	Open 2♣ and rebid 3NT
27+ HCP	Open 2♣ and rebid 4NT or bid a suit

1.1 Opening 1NT

With a 5-card major suit in a 5-3-3-2 hand, open one of the major suit. Exceptionally, an otherwise suitable hand with a weak 5-card major may be opened 1NT, but there is no systemic mechanism to uncover it. All other balanced hands in the 12-14 HCP range are opened 1NT.

1.1.1 Responses on balanced hands

0-10 HCP	Pass
11-12 HCP	With no interest in a 4-4 major suit fit bid 2♠, showing a raise to 2NT or a balanced hand with interest in a slam
13-18 HCP	Raise to 3NT; opener must pass
19-20 HCP	Raise to 4NT Opener passes with a minimum, bids 6NT with a maximum
21-22 HCP	Raise to 6NT; opener must pass
23-24 HCP	Raise to 5NT Opener bids 6NT with a minimum; 7NT with a maximum
25+	Raise to 7NT

Alternative action with 18+ HCP using transfers

Bid 2♠ as the first move to investigate a 4-4 fit and to find whether partner is maximum or minimum.

1.1.2 Response of 2♣ (The Stayman convention)

This is used on hands worth at least an invitation to game where responder wishes to investigate a 4-4 fit in a major and on some weaker hands seeking to improve the contract. The weak options are:

- at least 5-4 in the majors
- A diamond suit (usually 5) and support for both majors
- One 4-card major and a longer minor

Over Stayman opener rebids:

- 2♦ no 4-card major
- 2♥ 4 hearts, possibly 4 spades
- 2♠ 4 spades, not 4 hearts

Continuations by responder – weak options

- 1NT - 2♣ - 2 any - pass When the object was to play in any suit but clubs
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥/2♠ 5-card suit, 4 cards in the other major, weak
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2 any - 3♣ At least 6 clubs, weak) imply a
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥/2♠ - 3♦ At least 6 diamonds, weak) 4-card major

Continuations by responder – invitations options

- 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♦ 6+ diamonds, invitational
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2 any – 2NT Invitational, 11-12 HCP, no fit has been found
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥/♠ - 3♥/♠ Invites opener to bid game with a maximum

Continuations by responder – strong options

- 1NT - 2♣ - 2 any – 3NT 13+ HCP, no fit has been found
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥/♠ - 4♥/♠ Opener must pass
- 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥/♠ - 4NT Blackwood, asking for aces; agreeing opener's suit.

1.1.3 Response of 2♦

This is a transfer bid, showing at least 5 hearts. Opener rebids 2♥.

Continuations by responder:

- Pass weak take out with 5+ hearts, 10 HCP or less
- 2NT 5 hearts in a 5-3-3-2 hand (occasionally 5-4-2-2), 11 or a poor 12 HCP. Opener chooses to play in hearts or no trumps and whether to bid game.
- 3NT 5 hearts in a 5-3-3-2 hand, at least 12 HCP. Opener chooses game in hearts or no trumps.
- 3♥ 6 hearts, about 10 HCP. Invites opener to bid 4♥ if suitable.
- 4♥ 6 hearts, 11+ HCP. Opener must pass
- 2♠ 5 hearts, 4 spades, at least 11 HCP. Forcing to at least 2NT. Opener chooses to play in hearts, spades or no trumps and whether to bid game.
- 3♣/3♦ 5 hearts, 4/5 cards in the suit bid. Forcing to at least 3♥. Opener's options are:
- 3♥ minimum, no fit
 - 4♥ a suitable hand for hearts
 - 3NT non-minimum, values in the unbid suits
 - 3 new suit 4 cards in responder's second suit, only two hearts
- A raise of the second suit shows 4+ card support and three hearts.

1.1.3.1 **Transfer Breaks** can be used when opener's hand is so improved by the transfer as to make game a possibility. In this case opener can bid above the transfer suit. 1NT - 2♦ - 3♥ shows a 4-card fit for hearts and asks responder to go to game with a near maximum otherwise pass.

1.1.4 Response of 2♥

A transfer to 2♠, showing at least 5 spades.
Continuations as over a 2♦ response. A no trump rebid by responder shows five spades in an otherwise balanced hand, a spade raise shows 6 cards and a new suit is natural, forcing to at least 3♠.

1.1.5 Response of 2♠ (The *Baron Convention*)

An artificial response showing either:

- A raise to 2NT (11-12 HCP) with no interest in the majors; or
- A balanced hand with at least 18 HCP, usually no 5-card suit, on which slam may be possible in a 4-4 fit.

Opener rebids: 2NT with a minimum 1NT opening
Lowest 4-card or longer suit with a maximum opening

After the rebid responder's options are:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Pass/3NT | No further interest |
| New suit | Cheapest 4-card suit, continuing to investigate a fit |
| Raise | 4-card support for opener's suit, game forcing, no other feature to show |
| Jump in new suit | 4-card support, ace of the bid suit (cue bid) |

1.1.6 Response of 2NT

A transfer to 3♣, showing a long minor suit and no interest in game.
Opener bids 3♣; responder passes with clubs or corrects to 3♦ with diamonds.

1.1.7 Responses of 3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠

Natural, 5+ cards, slam interest

Opener rebids:

- 3NT with no fit and no interest in a slam
- A new 4-card suit at the three level
- Raise with support
- A new suit at the 4-level, a cue bid showing a good fit in responder's suit

1.2 Balanced hands of 15 – 19 HCP

Open one of a suit and rebid no trumps. A 5-card major is no bar to a rebid in no trumps.

With 15-16 HCP rebid no trumps at the lowest level

With 17-18 HCP make a jump rebid in notrumps

With 19 HCP jump to 3NT even if the response was at the one level

1.2.1 Responder's continuations after opener rebids in no trumps

A return to two of opener's suit after a 1NT rebid is weak

Three of opener's suit is forcing. If this is a major suit, responder will have three-card support; if a minor it may well be only four cards

A minimum rebid in responder's suit is weak, usually six cards

A jump to three of responder's suit over 1NT is invitational with a 6-card suit

A new suit at the two-level is natural and weak

A new suit at the three-level is natural, forcing. Exceptionally this may be a 3-card suit, looking for opener to show 3-card support for responder's first suit.

1.3 Opening 2NT

Open 2NT on all balanced hands of 20-22 HCP. A 5-card major is acceptable. 2NT may also be the best choice on some slightly unbalanced hands (including a hand with a singleton ace)

1.3.1 Responses to 2NT

As usual, responder will first consider whether the partnership has the 25 HCP needed for game in no trumps or a major suit. 5 HCP in responder's hand are enough; with only four look for some extra feature like a 5-card suit or good intermediate cards (tens and nines), otherwise pass.

1.3.2 Responses on balanced hands

0-3/4 HCP	Pass
4/5-10 HCP	Raise to 3NT; opener must pass
11-12 HCP	Investigate a slam via a response of 3♠
13-14 HCP	Bid a slam, either raising directly to 6NT (opener must pass) or first investigate a fit via 3♠
15-16 HCP	Bid 3♠, then 6NT if opener is minimum or 7NT if maximum
17+ HCP	Raise immediately to 7NT

1.3.3 Response of 3♣ (Stayman)

Shows values for game and an interest in a 4-4 major suit fit. Opener rebids:

3♦	no 4-card major
3♥	4 hearts, possibly 4 spades
3♠	4 spades, not 4 hearts

Continuations by responder

After 2NT-3♣-3♦ responder continues:

3♥/3♠	5-card suit, implies 4 of the other major
3NT	no further interest, implies an unbid 4-card major
4NT	Blackwood, agreeing opener's suit
4♣/4♦	Natural, usually five card, slam interest, implies a 4-card major

1.3.4 Response of 3♦

A transfer bid, showing at least five hearts. Opener rebids 3♥.

Continuations by responder

New suit	Natural, forcing
3NT	5 hearts, otherwise fairly balanced, inviting opener to choose between 3NT and 4♥
4♥	To play
4NT	Invitational, 5 hearts, about 11-12 HCP

1.3.4.1 Transfer breaks may be used if opener's hand is so improved by the transfer as to make game likely opposite six small hearts and a worthless hand. 2NT - 3♦ - 4♥.

1.3.5 Response of 3♥

Transfer to 3♠, showing at least 5 spades.
Continuations as over 2NT - 3♦

1.3.6 Response of 3♠ - *Baron convention*

This is the first move on any fairly balanced hand with slam interest (a good 10+ HCP), to find out if opener is maximum or minimum and if there is a 4-4 fit.

Opener rebids:

3NT with a minimum opening
Lowest 4-card or longer suit with a maximum

Responder may:

Pass 3NT with no further interest in a slam.
Bid the cheapest 4-card or longer suit; opener continues to show 4-card suits but 4NT by either partner is natural and may be passed.

1.3.7 Response of 4♣/4♦

Natural, forcing 6-card or longer suit, slam interest. Opener rebids:

New suit	Cue bid, showing the ace of that suit and support for responder
4NT	Natural, no support and no slam interest

1.3.8 Response of 4♥/4♠

Natural, 6-card or longer suit, slam interest but not forcing. Opener rebids:

Pass	No slam interest
New suit	Cue bid, showing the ace of that suit and support for responder
4NT	Blackwood, asking for aces

1.3.9 Response of 4NT

Blackwood, asking for aces. Typically responder will have a long suit, plenty of tricks as long as there are not two quick losers. After the reply (see §2.8.2), responder selects the final contract. Since invitational hands are bid via the Baron 3♠, this bid is not needed as a natural invitational raise.

1.4 Opening 2♣

This is the strongest bid in the Acol system, showing 23+ HCP or a game forcing hand. See section 2.9 for actions after 2♣ with unbalanced hands.

1.4.1 Responses to 2♣

Make a *negative response* of 2♦ if your hand contains *neither*,
8 HCP or more
An ace and a king
A 5-card suit headed by at least AQ

Otherwise

With a balanced hand of 8+ HCP, respond 2NT

With a weak 5-card suit in an otherwise balanced hand 2NT is the best choice

With a 5-card suit, respond in that suit

With a solid (no loser) 6-card or longer suit, make a jump response in that suit

1.4.2 Opener's rebid with a balanced hand

23-24 HCP rebid 2NT

25-26 HCP rebid 3NT

27+ HCP rebid 4NT or temporise with a suit bid

The 2♣ opening does not necessarily show a balanced hand. With an unbalanced hand rebid in a suit.

1.4.3 Responder's action after 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT

This is the only rebid that responder may pass below game level. With just a couple of points responder should go for game, choosing from the same options as over a 2NT opening. Consider a slam when the partnership may have 33 HCP or compensating distribution.

1.4.4 Responder's action after 2♣ - 2♦ - 3NT

Pass Poor hand with no further interest

4♣ is Stayman, any other bid is natural

After Stayman, 4NT by responder is natural non-forcing

1.4.5 Continuations after a positive response

A slam is highly likely so opener will rebid 2NT on all balanced hands, leaving room to investigate a fit. A useful understanding is that all sequences are forcing to at least 4NT.

Over the 2NT rebid all continuations by responder are natural.

2 Unbalanced hands

This includes all other hands not covered in Section 1 but also includes 5-3-3-2 hands with a 5-card major and 12-14 HCP not suitable for a 1NT opening.

2.1 Opening bids of one of a suit

Choice of suit to open (if not suitable for 1NT)

- With two suits of unequal length, open the longer.
- With two suits of equal length, with exactly 4 hearts and 4 spades open 1♥, otherwise open the higher ranking suit.
- With 4-4-4-1 shape and a red singleton heart open the suit below the singleton (i.e. singleton heart open 1♦, singleton diamond open 1♣)
- With 4-4-4-1 shape and a black singleton open the middle of the three suits (i.e. singleton spade open 1♦, singleton club open 1♥)

Is the hand worth an opening bid?

- Any hand with at least 12 HCP may be opened
- With 9-11 HCP, use the rule of 20. Add the number of cards in your longest two suits to your HCP. If the total is 20 or more, open the bidding.
- With borderline hands, take into account the quality of the suits, intermediate cards and whether you have a convenient *rebid* over any response. Examples:

♠ A Q 9 8 2
♥ K J 10 4 3
♦ 5
♣ 9 6

10 HCP + 10 cards = 20
Open 1♠

♠ Q 2
♥ A J 6 4
♦ 8 3
♣ K 9 5 3 2

10 HCP + 9 cards = 19
Pass

2.1.1 Upper limit

The normal range for a one of suit opening is 12-19 HCP but distributional considerations may make a hand with more points unsuitable for a stronger opening.

Example:

♠ A K 7 5
♥ 6
♦ A Q 9 6
♣ A K J 3

is unsuitable for a 2NT opening and cannot be opened with a strong 2-bid, so 1♦ is the best answer. If partner cannot bid over 1♦ it is unlikely you have missed game, but jump to game over any response.

2.2 Raising the opening bid

2.2.1 Support partner's opening bid in a major suit whenever you have 4+ cards in that suit

With support for a minor suit, bid a major suit of your own first. To raise past 3NT in a minor you should have a very distributional hand; otherwise you will investigate a no trump contract.

Take into account shortages in other suits as well as points when raising. With enough trumps, a singleton is like an extra king and a void is as good as an extra ace. A doubleton is a marginal extra asset.

Taking distributional values into account for major suit raises:

- With 6-9 HCP raise to the two-level
- With 10-12 HCP raise to the three-level
- A raise to the four-level is often based on a very good fit and distribution, aiming to shut out opponents as much as bidding a making game.

A raise to two of partner's major may be the best choice with only three trumps. To raise to the three-level or higher you must have at least four trumps.

2.2.2 Splinter raises

Over 1♠, bids of 4♣, 4♦ and 4♥ show 4-card support, game values (11-15 HCP) and a singleton or void in the suit bid.

Over 1♥, the splinters are 3♠, 4♣ and 4♦.

2.2.3 Boring raises

Hands worth a raise to game because of their point count, say 13-16 HCP, but which have no interesting distributional features (shortages or long suits) can go through 3NT. The loss of a natural 3NT response should be noted.

2.2.4 Very good raises

Hands with 4-card support and 16+ HCP should make a jump shift response before supporting opener's suit (see §2.3.2).

2.3 Responding in a new suit

A response at the one-level promises at least 6 HCP, at the two-level at least 9 HCP. There is no upper limit. Opener must bid again (unless, exceptionally, responder has already passed). Simple new suit responses show 4+ cards except 1♠ - 2♥ which guarantees a 5-card heart suit.

2.3.1 Choice of suit

With two 5-card or longer suits, bid the higher ranking as you intend to show both suits in the most economical way. With two 4-card suits, bid the cheaper, i.e. the one which takes up least bidding space. If partner declines an opportunity to bid your other 4-card suit, you can safely ignore it and rebid in no trumps.

With suits of unequal length, bid the longer first unless the hand is too weak to respond at the two-level. Show a 4-card major at the one-level in preference to a longer minor at the two-level if you do not intend to bid again over opener's minimum rebid.

2.3.2 A jump shift response in a new suit

This shows at least 16 HCP (perhaps a little less with a very good suit or an excellent fit). A jump is used on only three hand types:

- A powerful single suited hand
- A very good fit for opener
- A hand of 16+ HCP that can bid no trumps on the next round

2.4 Responding in no trumps

A response in no trumps is a *limit bid*, describing the hand within a defined range of HCP. The ranges are:

1NT	6 – 9 HCP
2NT	11 – 12 HCP

Avoid an immediate response of 2NT unless the hand is completely suitable, balanced and with stoppers in all the unbid suits.

A 1NT response may be something of a 'dustbin' bid when there is no other appropriate response, e.g. weak unbalanced hands not suitable for a response at the 2-level.

Always prefer to respond in a major suit at the one-level if you can.

In between 10 HCP hands are described by a change of suit in the first instance.

In Standard English Acrol a 3NT response is used to show a balanced raise to game in partner's suit, i.e. 13-15 HCP and 4-card support. Check with a new partner whether this is part of your system. If not, the bid may be used as a natural limit response in no trumps, i.e. 13-15 HCP without a fit. (see §2.2.3)

2.5 Opener's Second Bid

Opener has two main considerations on the second round:

- To distinguish between balanced and unbalanced hands
- To describe the strength of the hand

A balanced hand will always rebid in no trumps (unless you can support responder's suit). So to bid two suits guarantees five cards in the first, except for the rare 4-4-4-1 hands, which can usually be discounted by the actual suits bid.

- Hands up to 14 points are weak
- Hands of 17 -19 are strong
- Hands of 15 -16 are initially treated as weak, unless they contain good distribution or strong support for responder's suit.

2.5.1 Opener's options on a limited unbalanced hand (in order of preference)

- To support partner with four cards (occasionally three)
- To bid a new suit, showing at least four cards
- To rebid his first suit

2.5.2 With a strong unbalanced hand there are four types of bid

- A jump in your first suit, showing a strong 6-card suit and around 16 HCP, encouraging but not forcing after a response at the one level; with an even stronger hand you can jump to game
- Jump support for partner – 4-card support and the equivalent of around 16 HCP, taking distribution into account. Encouraging but not forcing; again, you can bid game with a better hand still
- A jump in a new suit – the strongest option – at least a 4-card suit, about 18 HCP, forcing to game
- A reverse bid in a new suit, 17+ HCP or compensating distribution, forcing for one round at least

2.5.3 A reverse bid is one that would require responder to go to the three-level to give preference to opener's first suit. An alternative definition is to imagine a barrier at two of opener's first suit; opener reverses by bidding above the barrier.

After a reverse by opener at the two-level the following rebids by responder are not forcing:

- Minimum preference for opener's first suit
- A minimum rebid in responder's own suit
- A minimum rebid in no trumps

All other bids are forcing to game. A reverse at the three-level is forcing to game.

2.6 Responder's second bid

When opener's hand is well defined on the second round, for example by a bid in no trumps, a raise or a rebid in the first suit, responder will usually know what to do. Has the partnership values for game? Have you an 8-card fit in a major suit? Just occasionally you may need to consult further, e.g. responder holds:

♠ A Q 9 6 5	Opener	Responder
♥ K 8 7	1♥	1♠
♦ Q 3 2	1NT	3♥
♣ 9 4		

Opener has shown 15-16 HCP but may have four or five hearts and two or three spades. 3♥ is forcing and invites opener to bid 4♥, 3NT or 3♠.

2.6.1 When opener has bid a new suit on the second round there are more options. Opener will not be balanced and the first suit will be at least five cards, except for the rare 4-4-4-1 hands, which can often be ruled out by the order in which the suits have been bid.

1♣	1♦	1♥	1♠
1♠	shows five clubs	2♣	shows five hearts

With 4-1-4-4 open 1♦

With 1-4-4-4 open 1♥

With 4-4-1-4 open 1♣ rebid 1♥

With 4-4-4-1 open 1♥ rebid 2♦ (or 2NT)

Having bid two suits, opener's distribution could still be anything from a relatively flat 5-4-2-2 to a very shapely hand. Opener's range is also wide, from 12 HCP (or even less) to at least 16. So it's up to responder to define his hand.

2.6.2 Responder's options after opener rebids are:

- Pass – a rare choice – minimum hand, 3 or 4 cards in opener's second suit, shortage in the first suit
- Raise the second suit – a fair hand with 4-card support
- Rebid responder's own suit – usually 6 cards, no support for partner
- Bid no trumps – stoppers in the unbid suit, shows point count
- Return to opener's first suit
- Bid the fourth suit

2.6.3 Preference for opener's first Suit will often be the best choice. 3-card support is quite adequate for a known 5-card suit. Even a doubleton is acceptable with no other suitable alternative, or to give opener another chance (known as 'false preference').

2.6.4 Bidding the fourth suit

When the partnership has bid three suits a bid of the fourth suit is forcing and artificial, asking partner for more information. The only exception is the auction 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ which shows four spades (still forcing). In this instance 2♠ would be the artificial 'fourth suit forcing' (4SF).

2.6.5 After the fourth suit at the two-level, the following rebids by opener are not forcing:

- A minimum rebid in opener's first suit
- A minimum rebid of no trumps
- Simple preference for responder's suit (often only doubleton support)

Other rebids are forcing to game. Fourth suit at the three-level is forcing to game. These guidelines are similar to bidding after a reverse. It follows that to use fourth suit at the two-level you need at least 11 HCP and at the three-level, 12 or so. Avoid 4SF if you can make a natural descriptive bid.

If responder bids on over opener's minimum rebid, the partnership is forced to game.

2.7 Trial bids

When a suit has been agreed, a trial bid is a bid of a new suit inviting partner to bid game with a suitable hand. The most common use is when your major suit has been raised to the two-level. For example, after the uncontested auction 1♠ - 2♠, 3♣ would be a *long suit trial bid* asking responder to re-evaluate his hand in the light of his club holding. 3♣ shows potential losers in clubs, typically 3 or 4 cards headed by not more than one high honour. To bid game responder should have a useful holding in the trial bid suit, either honour cards or a shortage.

After a minor suit is supported 3NT is often the most likely game. A trial bid shows a stopper in the suit bid. For example 1♦ - 3♦ - 3♠ shows a spade stopper and concern about hearts.

2.8 Slam bidding

2.8.1 The most straightforward way of bidding a slam is by sheer weight of high cards. If both hands are balanced you need about 33 HCP to make 6NT, 37 for 7NT. When one partner has bid no trumps a further bid of 4NT is invitational, asking partner to bid 6NT with a maximum hand for his previous bidding. For example:

1♥	2♣	3NT shows 17-19 HCP, 4NT shows 14-15 HCP
3NT	4NT	Opener will bid on to slam with a maximum hand

2.8.2 In other circumstances a bid of 4NT is *Blackwood Convention*, which asks partner to show how many aces he holds. The responses are:

5♣	0 or 4 aces	5♦	1 ace
5♥	2 aces	5♠	3 aces

If the 4NT bidder follows up with 5NT, it confirms that the partnership has all four aces and asks for kings on the same scale. After 5NT either partner may bid a grand slam if there appear to be sufficient tricks.

Only use Blackwood when you are certain the response will tell you what you want to know. In particular, if you have two losers in an unbid suit and partner's response to Blackwood confirms there is one ace missing, you do not know whether partner can cover your second loser in the side suit. Blackwood hasn't given you the answer, so you shouldn't have used it in the first place.

2.8.3 Another approach is by *cue bidding*. Once a suit is agreed, a bid in a new suit which commits the partnership to game shows a *control*, in other words an ace, void, king or singleton – a holding that will prevent the opponents from winning quick tricks in that suit. For example 1♥ - 3♥ - 4♣ is a cue bid, showing a control in clubs.

2.8.4 Use the following guidelines when cue bidding:

- Show *first round* controls – aces and voids – before second round controls
- Shortage controls – voids and singletons – are as valuable as aces and kings in preventing the opponents from winning early tricks, but you need enough trumps to ruff partner's losers and enough tricks from other sources
- In particular it is unwise as your *first* cue bid to show a shortage in a suit bid by partner
- With a choice of cue bids prefer the *cheapest*; for example 1♥ - 3♥ - 4♦ would tend to deny a first round control in spades or clubs

2.9 Strong opening bids

2.9.1 Hands of at least 23 HCP or which expect to make a game opposite a worthless dummy are opened 2♣. Strong balanced hands and responses to the opening 2♣ opening are covered in §1.4.

2.9.2 A 2♣ opening is forcing to game unless opener rebids 2NT (23-24 HCP). So with an unbalanced hand you develop the auction naturally, confident that responder cannot pass. A jump rebid in a suit promises a solid, no loser suit.

2.9.3 Opening bids of 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ show at least eight certain tricks and a hand that would be concerned about missing game if partner were to pass an opening bid of one. The bid is forcing for one round. A useful guide is Rule of 23 or more.

2.9.4 Weak responses to a strong two opener

Since a strong 2 bid is forcing for one round, partner must reply.

2NT negative, less than 8 HCP, not as much as an ace and a king, not as much as a 5-card suit headed by at least AQ

Other responses are natural, positive and forcing to game:

Single raise forcing, 3+ card support, at least one ace or good trumps

Double raise denies an ace but shows trump support and a couple of useful features, such as a king or a singleton. With a weaker hand, start with 2NT and show the support later.

2.9.5 Strong responses to a strong two opener

With 8+ points, bid a 5-card suit or, very rarely, a strong 4-card suit or, with a balanced hand of about 8-11 HCP you can respond 3NT provided you have some stoppers in all the suits, other than partner's.

It is better to bid 2NT with a slightly stronger hand if no suitable bid is available than jump to 3NT on nine or so points without stoppers.

After a negative response of 2NT opener may bid a new suit, again forcing for one round. A return to opener's first suit is not forcing, so responder should bid game with any helpful looking cards. A positive response is game forcing.

2.10 Pre-emptive opening bids

2.10.1 A pre-emptive bid is one that skips two or more levels of bidding. It is usually made on the first round of bidding, usually with an opening bid at the three, four or five level. Its purpose is to take away the opponents' bidding space and force them to guess at an uncomfortably high level.

Since a pre-empt attempts to steal the opponents' contract or to make it harder for them to reach their best spot, it follows that your hand must be much better in playing strength than in defence. So you need:

- A long, strong suit, normally at least seven cards
- Few defensive tricks – certainly fewer than two aces
- No side 4-card major suit (because of the risk of missing a major contract)
- Specifically a 3NT opening shows a solid minor of 7+ cards with no more than a queen outside

2.10.2 You want to bid as high as you dare without the risk of a large penalty. A good rule of thumb is to expect to go down no more than three tricks in your contract if you are not vulnerable and no more than two tricks if vulnerable., with a worthless dummy opposite. This is known as the *Rule of 500*, meaning that if you were doubled you would lose no more than 500 points.

To assess how many tricks your long suit is worth, imagine that partner has a singleton and the opposing cards divide normally.

2.10.3 Responding to a pre-empt

A raise may be made as a further pre-empt or in the expectation of making game, bearing in mind that only trumps and top cards in side suits are likely to be valuable (e.g. an ace will make a trick) – outside queens and jacks are generally useless. Shortage in the pre-empter's suit is no bar to raising as you can count on a good suit.

You should only try 3NT if:

- You can see the tricks in your own hand, or
- You have a fit for partner and can guard all the other suits.

A new suit by responder is natural and forcing; it should be at least a strong 6-card suit so the opener needs little to support it.

Section B : Dealing with Intervention

1 Takeout doubles of overcalls of partner's opening bid

1.1 Basic principles

Doubles of all suit bids up to the level of 2♠ are for takeout. When partner opens with a suit bid and the next player overcalls at the one or two-level, a double is for takeout and implies support for the other two unbid suits. In practice, you can be flexible in its use if you can control the auction later.

1.2 To double you need much the same strength as you would for a natural call, depending on the level at which partner is going to have to bid. If partner still has a bid available at the one-level, as little as a suitable 6 HCP will do. If the bidding is likely to reach the two-level you need at least 8 HCP and to go to three level at least 10 HCP and so on. There is no upper limit.

1.3 It's important that a double should promise four cards in an unbid major suit – that is what you most want partner to bid. So, for example:

1♣ - 1♠ - dble	Promises four hearts
1♦ - 1♥ - dble	Promises four spades
1♣ - 1♥ - 1♠	Shows five spades (as double would show four)
1♣ - 1♦ - dble	Shows four cards in both majors

1.4 Opener's rebid after responder's double

This is quite straightforward and very similar to responding to any other takeout double. Just imagine that partner had made a minimum response in an unbid suit. For example, if the bidding has started 1♦ - 1♠ - double – pass, you simply bid as if partner had responded 1♥. If considering a raise, partner should always remember that he has in effect already bid the suit.

1.5 When responder is strong in the opponents' suit

For example, partner opens 1♠, right hand opponent overcalls 2♣, and you have a hand that would have doubled 2♣ for penalties. As double would be for takeout you must pass and hope that partner can reopen with a takeout double, which you will pass for penalties. It follows that partner should always *protect* your possible penalty double, even with a minimum opening bid, unless he has such length in the opponent's suit (at least 3 cards) that it is highly unlikely that you could have such a hand.

2 Action over opponents' takeout double

2.1 With no support for opener and a limited hand

You no longer need to strain to bid something on a mediocre hand, just to give partner another chance. The double means that partner gets another chance anyway. So with a minimum responding hand you may pass, rather than bid a poor suit or 1NT. Your choices are:

- Pass With up to 6 HCP and no good suit
- 1NT Balanced hand, 7-9 HCP
- New suit With 6+ HCP and a reasonable suit at the one-level; 9+ HCP at the two-level

2.2 With at least 10 HCP and fewer than four cards in opener's suit

The options are:

- Bid a new suit, natural and forcing – just as if there had been no intervention
- With good defence and no outstanding playing strength, redouble. A redouble tells opener that the doubler may have misjudged and seeks opener's co-operation in penalizing the opponents.

2.2.1 After a redouble all further doubles by the redoubling side are for penalties. As opener, do not bid in front of the redoubler unless your hand is weak and unsuitable for defence. With a reasonable opening bid pass first and take action later if it appears that opponents have found a safe resting place. Except when opener has shown a minimum distributional hand, the redoubler promises to bid again.

2.2 With support for partner

The more cards you have in the partnership in one suit, the more likely it is that opponents have a fit also. (If your side have a 9-card fit, it is mathematically certain that opponents have at least an 8-card fit in another suit). So both sides may be able to make a high level contract and you want to make it harder for the opponents to find theirs. That means you should shade your raises a little.

Watch for the vulnerability and be prepared to raise to the three or four level if not vulnerable. You can raise to the two-level with 3-card support and a bit of shape.

With a genuine raise to three or more of opener's suit, you bid 2NT, which has no meaning in a natural sense, since you would redouble. Other strong raises, for example splinter bids, keep their usual meaning.

3 Action over intervention of our 1NT opening

3.1 Opponents make a natural overcall

As after a suit opening a double is for takeout. However, many players who learnt the game some time ago will expect it to be for penalties, on the grounds that the 1NT opening bid is already well defined. Make sure you and your partner agree!

If the opponents overcall your partner's 1NT at the three-level a double is still for takeout. The overcaller will have a good suit so any penalty would be small. You need to check on 4-4 major suit fits and whether opener has a guard in their suit.

3.2 Opponents make a conventional overcall

For example, an opponent's overcall of 2♣ might show both majors (*Landy*) or maybe hearts and another (*Aspro*). Now a double shows general strength (about 10+ HCP). Either partner may now double for penalties. If they promise an *anchor suit*, as in *Aspro*, you can use that suit as a general takeout bid.

3.3 Opponents make a penalty double of 1NT

All suit bids by responder, including jump bids, are natural and weak. Pass suggests there is no better resting place; redouble is strong, hoping to make 1NT redoubled or to double opponents for penalties if they bid on.

4 Action over artificial two-suited overcalls

4.1 When opponents overcall with a two-suited bid (like *Michaels Cue Bid* or *unusual no trump*) it is important to show a fit for partner if you have one. You can stretch your bids a little. A double will usually show interest in penalising your opponent, with good defence to at least one of their suits. A new suit is natural and forcing.

4.2 Use their suits to help you to describe other hand types, as follows:

- When both their suits are known a bid of the lower ranking suit shows the unbid suit and a partial fit for partner
- A bid of the higher ranking suit shows a sound raise to three of partner's suit
- When only one of their suits is known a bid of that suit shows a sound raise

Section C: Defensive Bidding

1 Suit Overcalls

- 1.1** When opponents open with a suit bid, an overcall in another suit shows at least 7 HCP and a respectable 5-card suit with at least two honours. If your suit is lower ranking than opponents' the overcall would be at the two-level, then you need 10+ HCP and a very good five or reasonable 6-card suit.

On borderline hands be guided by the Klinger suit quality test. Add the number of cards in your suit to the number of honours, counting the jack or ten only if supporting a higher honour. If the answer is 7, you may bid for a seven trick contract, if 8, consider an eight trick contract, and so on.

With more than about 16 HCP there is usually a better bid than an overcall.

1.2 Responding to an overcall

- 1.2.1** Supporting partner is very straightforward. As the overcaller should have a good suit there is no need to strain to find an alternative place to play. You can raise the overcall whenever you have 3-card support, even with very few HCP. A double or triple raise is mainly pre-emptive.

- 1.2.2** **With a genuine interest in game** bid the opponents' suit, known as an *unassuming cue bid* (UCB). With a minimum overcall partner repeats his suit at minimum level, with a better hand he shows some other feature.

- 1.2.3** **To bid no trumps in response to an overcall** you need a little more than in response to an opening bid, as the overcaller may be weaker, and a good guard in the opponents' suit. A 1NT response shows about 9-12 HCP and a 2NT response 13-14 HCP.

- 1.2.4** **To bid a new suit opposite an overcall** you need a good suit – six cards or five very good ones; the bid is encouraging but not forcing, so partner may leave you to play in your suit. At the one-level you should have around 8-15 HCP to bid a new suit, at the two-level 10-15 HCP.

1.3 Jump overcalls

- 1.3.1** A jump to one higher level than necessary (e.g. 1♥-2♠) shows a strong 6-card suit and around 12-16 HCP (an *intermediate jump overcall*). In practice that usually means you can expect to take about six or seven tricks even with nothing useful in dummy. At the three level (e.g. 1♥ - 3♣), especially when vulnerable, the suit should be very sound (a seventh card would be an asset).

1.3.2 When responding to a jump overcall, bear in mind that the overcaller's hand will be about an ace better than a minimum opening bid in terms of playing strength and that the suit will need little support. A response in a new suit is natural and forcing. 3NT is quite a likely choice opposite a jump in a minor suit.

1.3.3 If you are even stronger than a jump overcall, start with a takeout double and then, over partner's response, bid your suit. You will have about eight tricks in your own hand, similar to a minimum Acol two opening bid. (§2.9.3)

1.4 Pre-emptive overcalls

1.4.1 A double jump in a new suit (1♣-3♠ or 1♥-4♦) shows exactly the same sort of hand as a pre-emptive opening bid, a very good 7-card or longer suit but little else. If doubled, you would expect to go down no more than 500 points, even if partner has nothing.

2 Overcalling a suit opening with 1NT

2.1 A 1NT overcall shows a balanced hand of 16-18 points, including some strength (ideally two stoppers) in the opponent's suit.

2.2 Responding to a 1NT overcall

Bid exactly as in response to an opening bid of 1NT, but taking into account the fact that partner will have about 4 HCP more. So, use Stayman and transfers just the same. Some bids, such as transferring into the enemy suit, may seem superfluous, but a consistent style is easy to remember and reduces the risk of an accident.

2.3 **In the fourth seat** (the *protective position*) 1NT shows 12-14 and not necessarily a stopper in the opponents' suit.

3 Takeout doubles

3.1 Requirements for a take-out double:

- A hand on which you would have opened the bidding. In theory there is no upper limit.
- Tolerance for any suit partner may bid – ideally at least three cards (apart from the opponents' suit, of course).

Occasionally you may be stuck with a good hand with only a doubleton in one unbid suit. You should certainly have support for any unbid major suit, because partner will often respond in a major if at all possible. With support for all suits prefer a double to an overcall on a poor suit.

3.2 Double on most hands of upwards of 17 HCP. For example, with 17+ HCP and a decent suit, double first and then bid your suit over partner's response. Balanced hands of 19+ HCP also start with a double.

3.3 Responses to takeout doubles

You must respond to a takeout double unless you are exceptionally strong in the opponents' suit. Partner will usually lead a trump, to prevent declarer making ruffs with small trumps, so yours must be really good.

With up to 8 HCP bid your best suit at minimum level. With about 8-11 HCP jump in your suit. A good guideline is to imagine partner had opened the bidding in your suit; if you would have considered giving jump support you should make a jump bid now.

With a choice of suits, prefer to show a major.

To bid no trumps you need much the same strength as in response to an opening bid; be sure to have good values in the opponents' suit, the one in which partner will be short.

With the values to at least invite game and no obvious choice, bid the opponents' suit. This is *forcing to suit agreement*, in other words neither partner may pass until a fit has been founded.

Table of responses to partner's double of 1♦:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| • 1♥, 1♠, 2♣ | 0-8 HCP, at least a 4-card suit |
| • 2♥, 2♠, 3♣ | 8-11 HCP, at least a 4-card suit |
| • 1NT | 6-9 HCP, stoppers in diamonds |
| • 2NT | 10-12 HCP, stoppers in diamonds |
| • 3NT | 13-15 HCP, stoppers in diamonds |
| • 2♦ | 10+ HCP, no obvious bid |

The responses are similar after opening in other suits.

4 Protective bidding

If your left hand opponent's opening bid has been followed by two passes, you may overcall or double on weaker hands than sitting over the opening bidder, as partner is marked with some values. In response to a protective bid, assume partner has already bid about 3 HCP of your hand (known as the *transferred king* principle).

5 Defence to opponents' opening 1NT

- 5.1 A double of 1NT is for penalties**, showing 16 HCP or more if the hand is balanced, a little less if you have a very promising lead.

The doubler's partner has an easy decision. Most of the time you will simply pass. Only with a very shapely hand will you remove the double. A new suit at the two-level is very weak, at the three-level not forcing but highly encouraging.

If opener's partner rescues into a suit any further doubles are also for penalties. Six or more HCP and four trumps headed by an honour are quite adequate.

5.2 Suit overcalls of 1NT

Use the same criteria when deciding whether the suit is good enough to overcall an opening 1NT, as you would for deciding on a two-level overcall of an opening suit bid – at least 10 HCP and preferably a 6-card suit. A jump overcall shows a seven or very good 6-card suit and about seven tricks in your own hand.

- 5.3** With at least four cards in each major and enough to overcall, bid 2♣ (*Landy convention*).

With a limited hand responder shows his better major or, with equal length, bids 2♦, inviting the overcaller to choose between the majors. With a good fit responder may jump 3♥, 3♠, 4♥ or 4♠.

6 Defence to pre-emptive opening bids

- 6.1** A pre-empt effectively deprives your side of space to investigate your best contract. Because you are forced to bid at the three or four-level, you need to be a little stronger than over an opening bid of one. But because the pre-emptor will be weak, and short in the other suits, partner is more likely to have some useful cards. As a general guide you may:

- Overcall on a 6-card suit or a very good 5-card suit and values for an opening bid.
- Make a takeout double on any hand worth an opening bid and support for the other suits – you may not always have the ideal shape, but support for an unbid major suit is important.
- Bid 3NT on a hand you would have overcalled 1NT over an opening bid of one (3NT may be the best choice on stronger hands and on some other hands which might make lots of tricks).

It follows that with values spare, say about 8 playing tricks, you should take the strain off partner and bid game yourself if you can.

- 6.2** After a four-level or higher pre-empt the same principles apply. A double is still for takeout, but partner is more likely to leave it in without a long suit to bid. A double of 4♥ should always have some support for spades, as 4♠ is your most likely game contract.

7 The unusual no trump and Michaels cue bids

- 7.1** When opponents open with a suit bid we use a 2NT overcall and a cue bid in their suit to show a pronounced two suited hand (at least 5-5) and around 8-15 HCP.

Over a minor suit opening:

- An overcall of two of their minor shows both majors
- An overcall of 2NT shows the two lower ranking suits

Over a major suit opening:

- Two of their majors shows the other major and one of the minors
- 2NT shows the minors

You should make some allowances for vulnerability. Obviously a sixth card in either of your suits would boost the playing strength and compensate for a couple of points.

Most important is that both suits should be sound, with at least two honours and reasonable intermediate cards (tens, nines, etc). Good suits provide a measure of safety in the event of a misfit and enable partner to bid up aggressively, confident that the suits can withstand any bad breaks.

- 7.2** When your left hand opponent's opening bid is followed by two passes it's usual to dispense with the unusual no trump, as otherwise the range of balanced hands to cover by a double would be too great. 2NT shows a balanced hand of about 19-21 HCP. Michaels still applies.

7.3 Responses to UNT and Michaels

Without any great fit in either suit responder will simply show preference for one or other suit at minimum level (with equal length give preference at the cheaper level is relevant). Remember that when partner has shown 5-card suits, three cards in support are ample; sometimes you have to settle for only two. With good support for either suit responder can be more aggressive.

In one type of sequence (1♠ - 2♠ or 1♥ - 2♥) you don't know partner's second suit. A response of 2NT asks the overcaller to show the minor. You would do this on a hand with no liking for partner's major and some support for either minor or, occasionally, with three cards in the major and some interest in game if the hands fit well.

A response in a suit not known to be partner's is natural and non-forcing, with a very long suit. As the overcaller's hand is already well defined he is not expected to disturb this.

8 Other uses of doubles

- 8.1** The general principle is that doubles of natural suit bids are for takeout up to the level of 2♠. Partnerships may agree to use takeout doubles at a higher level.
- 8.2** Partner makes a takeout double and opponents raise, for example 1♥-dbl-2♥-dbl. Known as a responsive double this invites the doubler to choose a suit.
- 8.3** A double of a suit bid in a competitive auction shows at least two possible resting places, either in an unbid suit or in partner's suit. For example 1♣-1♥-2♦-dbl shows a spade suit and tolerance for hearts.
- 8.4** A double of a conventional bid, for example of Stayman or a transfer bid, shows strength in the suit bid. A bid of opponents' implied suit is for takeout. After 1NT-pass-2♥ (transfer to 1♠)
- Double shows a heart suit and values to overcall
 - 2♠ is a takeout double of spades
- 8.5** A double of a freely bid slam, known as a lightner double, tells partner you have an unexpected feature, such as a void, and asks partner not to make the obvious lead.
- 8.6** Similarly, a double of a freely bid 3NT when your side has not bid shows a strong suit and asks partner to try to find it.

Section D: Defensive Carding Methods

1 Opening leads

1.1 Table of standard opening leads

Type of holding	Example(s)	Lead against a no trump contract	Lead against a suit contract
Sequence of three or more honours	K Q J 4 Q J 10 7	K Q	K Q
Two honours then a gap to a third card	K Q 10 9 J 10 8 6 5	K J	K J
Four or more cards headed by two honours in sequence	K Q 7 6 3 Q J 5 4	6 4 (fourth highest)	K Q
Three cards headed by two honours in sequence	J 10 7	J	J
An internal sequence of two or more honours	K J 10 8 4	J	J
A broken suit of four or more cards with at least one honour	Q 10 7 5 2	5(fourth highest)	5
Three cards to an honour	K 7 3	3(lowest)	3
Three or more small cards	9 7 5 8 6 3 2	7 6 (second highest)	7 6
A doubleton	J 6 6 4	J 6 (top card)	J 6
A suit headed by AK	A K 8 5 2	5 (fourth highest)	A
AK doubleton	A K	Avoid this lead	K
A strong suit headed by AKJ	A K J 9 6	K	A

1.2 When leading a suit bid by partner choose the normal card.

2 Signals

- 2.1 When following suit and you have two or more cards in sequence.**
Where you need to play one of the sequence, play the lowest card of the sequence. For example, partner leads a low card, dummy plays low and you hold Q J 2 – play the jack. If you hold K Q J play the 10.
- 2.2 On partner's lead,** when not attempting to influence a trick, play a high card to encourage a continuation of that suit and a low card to discourage.
- 2.3 On declarer's lead,** if you wish to give any information at all, play a high card to show an even number of cards in the suit and a low card to show an odd number.
- 2.4 Suit preference signals.** In obvious circumstances, for example when giving partner a ruff, or when it is clear that you cannot want a continuation of the suit led, a high card asks for the higher ranking other suit (excluding trumps) and a low card asks for the lower ranking suit.

3 Discards

- 3.1** As with signals, a discard of a high card shows interest in that suit, a low card lack of interest.

Acknowledgments:

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