



2ND EDITION

# THE POCKET GUIDE TO BRIDGE CONVENTIONS YOU SHOULD KNOW

BARBARA SEAGRAM & MARC SMITH  
WITH ADDITIONAL MATERIAL BY DAVID BIRD



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## *How To Use This Book*

This book contains a brief summary of twenty-five commonly-played and useful bridge conventions. We therefore recommend that you use it mostly as a quick reference for conventions you have already studied and play. You may also find it provides a helpful introduction to a new convention, either one your opponents are using, or one you are considering adopting yourself. However, for more comprehensive coverage of the ideas behind each convention, and more detail on the nuances, let us refer you to this volume's much lengthier parent, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know, 2nd Edition*.

Here is a brief explanation of some of the technical terms used in the following pages. First, we should distinguish between **natural** bids (an opening 1♥ bid, for example, means hearts), and **conventional** or **artificial** bids, like an opening

2♣ bid, or the Stayman 2♣ response to a 1NT opening, neither of which have anything to do with clubs. In this book, conventional bids are occasionally marked by \*.

We sometimes refer to **shortness** — by that we mean a singleton, doubleton or void in a suit.

Finally, a word about hand evaluation. When we write, for example, 10+ HCP, we mean '10 or more', and the abbreviation **HCP** means high-card points only. When we intend you to count distribution as well, we refer to **points**. When bidding notrump, count only your HCP.

This new and updated edition accompanies the second edition of *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, which reflected changes in popular conventions and agreements over the twenty-five years since the original was published.

*Barbara Seagram, Marc Smith and David Bird*

# 1. BLACKWOOD AND GERBER

## *What Is Blackwood?*

The *Blackwood* convention is a bid of 4NT after trumps have been agreed to ask partner for aces, as a final check to ensure that the partnership does not reach a slam missing two cashable aces.

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
4♠	4NT*

## *When to Use Blackwood*

First, you must be fairly certain that your side has a good chance for 12 tricks. However, do not use Blackwood when:

- You have two quick losers in any suit.
- You have a void. If you are missing too many aces you will not know whether one of the missing aces is in the void suit, even though slam may still be possible.

## *Responding to Blackwood*

You respond to partner's Blackwood 4NT by showing the number of aces you hold as follows:

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

Partner	You	♠ A Q 5 4
1♦	1♥	♥ A J 9 8 3
1♠	4♠	♦ 7
4NT	5♥	♣ J 10 3

You may wonder how you can tell whether partner has 0 or 4 aces. Don't worry — you will be able to tell. If you have no aces and partner responds 5♣ then either you are bidding maniacs or partner has 4!

### *Continuations after Blackwood*

After the response, if the 4NT bidder now bids 5, 6 or 7 of the trump suit, it is a signoff. She has decided where to play the hand based on the number of aces available.

She can also bid 5NT if she is interested in a grand slam. This guarantees that your side has all 4 aces, and asks you about kings. The responses are similar:

6♣	0 or 4 kings.
6♦	1 king.
6♥	2 kings.
6♠	3 kings.

After hearing the response, the 5NT bidder will place the contract:

Partner	You	♠ A 5
1♥	3♥	♥ A J 6 5 4
4NT	5♥	♦ J 5 4 3
5NT	6♣	♣ 7 6
6♥	pass	

### *What if the response gets you too high?*

Suppose that you have agreed a minor suit. You discover that you are missing 2 aces with 4NT Blackwood and you want to sign off in 5NT. You can't just bid it since 5NT would be asking for kings. However, a bid of the cheapest available unbid suit at the five-level asks partner to bid 5NT, which you can pass.

Partner	You	♠ K 10 9
	1♣	♥ K 5
1♥	3♣	♦ K 5
4♣	4NT	♣ A K 10 4 3 2
5♦	5♠	
5NT	pass	

***Is 4NT Always Blackwood?***

4NT is Blackwood unless partner has opened the bidding with notrump or her rebid was notrump.

Partner	You
1NT	4NT

Here 4NT is quantitative. It asks partner to continue to slam with a maximum. It therefore cannot ask for aces.

***What Is Gerber?***

If you want to ask for aces and partner has bid or rebid notrump then you can use the Gerber convention — a direct jump to 4♣.

Partner	You
1NT	4♣*

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
2NT	4♣*

The responses to Gerber follow the same principle as the responses to Blackwood.

- 4♦ 0 or 4 aces
- 4♥ 1 ace
- 4♠ 2 aces
- 4NT 3 aces

After the response, a 5♣ bid asks for kings.



## 2. JACOBY & TEXAS TRANSFERS

### *What Are Jacoby Transfers?*

After an opening 1NT, any contract reached will usually play better if the strong hand is declarer.

*Jacoby transfers* use the bids of 2♦ and 2♥ to ask the 1NT opener to bid the next suit up, hearts or spades.

Partner	You
1NT	2♦*
2♥	

Partner	You
1NT	2♥*
2♠	

When you bid 2♦ to transfer to hearts, the bid shows absolutely nothing about diamonds but it

does promise at least five hearts. Similarly, a 2♥ bid shows at least five spades but says nothing about hearts.

### *When to Use Jacoby Transfers*

You can use a Jacoby transfer in response to a 1NT opening with:

- A five-card or longer major.
- Any strength at all (0-25 points).

Even with a weak hand you should transfer to a 5+ card major suit since the hand will usually play better in the suit contract.

With stronger hands and a five-card or longer major you still start with a transfer, which will let partner know about the major, but then you bid again.

### After the Transfer

Suppose partner opens 1NT and you bid 2♦, a transfer to hearts. With one rare exception (see p. 11), partner has no option but to bid 2♥ since you could have any hand at all. After the transfer, you continue to bid the hand naturally. First, if you have a weak hand (0-7 points), just pass.

With 8 or more points, and only a five-card major, you now bid notrump. With three-card support for your major, partner will go back to the major suit.

#### 8-9 points

Partner	You	♠ 10 2
1NT	2♦	♥ K Q J 3 2
2♥	2NT	♦ Q 3 2
		♣ 9 7 2

With 3+ hearts, partner will choose to play in the major, now bidding 3♥ with a minimum or

4♥ with a maximum. With no fit, opener passes (min.) or bids 3NT (max.).

#### 10+ points

Partner	You	♠ A K Q 5 2
1NT	2♥	♥ 6 3 2
2♠	3NT	♦ K 3
		♣ 9 7 6

Partner now bids game in the major with a fit (3+), and otherwise passes.

#### 16-17 points

Partner	You	♠ A K Q 5 2
1NT	2♥	♥ A J 2
2♠	4NT	♦ K 3
		♣ 9 7 6

This bid is quantitative, not ace-asking. With a fit, partner bids either 5♠ (min.) or 6♠ (max.). She can now count shortness points. Without a fit, partner passes or bids 6NT.

**18-19 points**

With slam values, rebid 5NT. *This is forcing!*

Partner	You	♠ A K Q 5 2
1NT	2♥	♥ A 5 2
2♠	5NT	♦ K 3
		♣ K 7 6

Partner must bid 6♠ or 6NT.

**With a six-card major**

With 6-7 HCP and a six-card major, invite by raising the major to the three-level.

Partner	You	♠ A 3
1NT	2♦	♥ Q 9 8 7 4 3
2♥	3♥	♦ J 7 6
		♣ 3 2

Partner can pass or bid 4♥.

With a strong distributional hand, bid a new suit after the transfer. This is forcing to game. Playing transfers you can show both suits and still stop in 3NT if that is the right spot.

Partner	You	♠ A 3
1NT	2♦	♥ Q 9 8 7 4
2♥	3♣	♦ 3
		♣ K Q 9 5 2

If you have only game-going values (10-14), you should be 5-5 or better when you bid a second suit. Otherwise 3NT or 4 of your five-card major is likely to be the best spot.

With slam interest (15+) you can be 5-4 with a five-card major and a second four-card suit.

The responder to an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT must **never** rebid a five-card suit after first making a transfer. A rebid of the major guarantees a six-card or longer major.

**Super-accepting**

There is only one exception to accepting the transfer at the cheapest level (e.g. 1NT-2♦-2♥). If you have a terrific hand for hearts you can 'super-accept'. Super-accept by jumping in partner's major with:

- four trumps
- a maximum (17 HCP)
- shortness (not 4-3-3-3)

Partner	You	♠ A Q 2
	1NT	♥ K J 10 3
2♦	3♥	♦ K 2
		♣ A 9 7 6

Your hand is worth more than 17 points in hearts when you count the diamond shortness.

**What are Texas Transfers?**

*Texas transfers* are for hands where you know you want to play in a major suit at least at the game level. A Texas transfer is a response of 4♦ or 4♥ over a 1NT or 2NT opening, asking opener to bid the next suit up.

Partner	You
1NT	4♦*

When you bid 4♦ to transfer to hearts, the bid shows absolutely nothing about diamonds but it does promise at least six hearts.

Partner	You
1NT	4♥*

Similarly this 4♥ bid promises at least six spades but says nothing about hearts.

### *When to Use Texas Transfers*

Responder can use a Texas transfer in response to a 1NT opening with:

- A six-card or longer major.
- A hand with at least enough strength to play in game (8+ HCP).

Partner	You	♠ A Q 9 6 3 2
1NT	4♥	♥ 2
		♦ Q 10 7 6
		♣ 5 4

### *Responding to a Texas Transfer*

Partner has no choice, she must complete the transfer and bid the next suit up at the four-level.

Partner	You
1NT	4♦
4♥ (forced)	

Partner	You
1NT	4♥
4♠ (forced)	

### *After Opener Completes the Transfer*

With just a game-going hand responder passes, but with slam interest responder can now bid 4NT (Blackwood, p. 5).

Partner	You
1NT	4♦
4♥	4NT

Since you have set hearts as trumps, 4NT is no longer quantitative, but is ace-asking.

## 3. STAYMAN

### What Is Stayman?

*Stayman* is a bid of 2♣ used in response to a 1NT opening to check for majors. Generally, hands with a 4-4 major-suit fit will play better in 4 of a major than in 3NT.

Partner	You
1NT	2♣*

The 2♣ bid says nothing about clubs. It asks partner to bid a four-card major if she has one. There are three possible responses:

- 2♦ No four-card major.
- 2♥ 4+ hearts; may also have four spades.
- 2♠ Shows 4+ spades; denies four hearts.

### When to Use Stayman

Your hand should meet the following requirements to justify using Stayman:

- Invitational or better (8+ HCP).
- At least one four-card major suit.
- A short suit.

Partner	You	♠	K J 5 4
1NT	2♣	♥	6 3 2
		♦	A 9 8 2
		♣	4 3

When you have a short suit it is usually safer to play in a trump contract than in notrump.

Partner	You	♠	K J 5 4
1NT	2NT	♥	J 6 2
		♦	A 9 8
		♣	7 4 3

With no shortness, invite game in notrump.

*The two exceptions where you may use Stayman with a weak hand*

Partner	You	♠	5 4
1NT	2♣	♥	6 4
2♥	3♣	♦	10 7
pass		♣	K J 8 6 5 4 3

This shows a weak hand with long clubs (if you are playing Jacoby transfers, you can also use 2♣ Stayman and then rebid 3♦ to show a weak hand with long diamonds). Also, if you happen to have a four-card major along with your minor suit, and partner bids it, you can happily pass.

Partner	You	♠	J 5 4 3
1NT	2♣	♥	Q 6 4 2
2♦	pass	♦	Q J 9 8 2
		♣	—

In this example partner responds with 2♦ but you intended to pass any bid by her.

**Responding to Stayman**

*If opener bids responder's major*

Once a fit is found, responder can re-evaluate her hand by counting dummy points (count shortness as 5 for a void, 3 for a singleton and 1 for a doubleton) and then decide on whether to bid game in the major or just invite.

**8-9 points**

Partner	You	♠ A 10 5 4
1NT	2♣	♥ K J 3 2
2♥	3♥	♦ 10 2
		♣ 9 7 6

With an invitational hand, raise the major. Partner will pass (min.) or bid game (max.). The above auction shows 8-9 points.

**10+ points**

Partner	You	♠ A Q 5 4
1NT	2♣	♥ A J 3 2
2♠	4♠	♦ 10
		♣ 9 7 6 2

With a game-going hand, you bid game in the major once you find a fit.

**If opener bids 2♦, denying a major**

If you used Stayman with one or two four-card majors hoping to find a major-suit fit, then with that no longer possible you should next bid notrump at the appropriate level.

- With an invitational hand bid 2NT.
- With a game-going hand bid 3NT.

However, if you have a five-card major then you can bid that now. Since partner has denied a major this bid shows exactly a five-card suit and four cards in the other major. With only one five-card major, you would have transferred to the major.

The Stayman bidder never at any point in the auction bids a four-card suit. Never!



**8-9 points**

Partner	You	♠ A 10 5 4 3
1NT	2♣	♥ K J 3 2
2♦	2♠	♦ 10 2
		♣ 9 7

With a fit, partner will play in the five-card major. With a minimum she will pass and with a maximum she will bid game in the major. With no fit, opener will bid 2NT or 3NT.

**10+ points**

Partner	You	♠ A Q 5 4
1NT	2♣	♥ A J 6 3 2
2♦	3♥	♦ 10
		♣ 9 7 6

With game-going values, jump in your major. Now, with a fit partner will raise to game in the major, and without a fit for your major she will bid 3NT.

**If opener bids the 'other' major**

When you have four hearts and partner bids 2♠, no fit is possible, since with both majors opener bids hearts. However, if you have spades and partner responds 2♥ to Stayman, a 4-4 spade fit is still possible. For now, you bid notrump at the appropriate level:

- 2NT shows an invitational hand.
- 3NT shows game-going values.

You	Partner	♠ A J 10 9
	1NT	♥ Q 8 6 5
2♣	2♥	♦ A 3 2
3NT	?	♣ A 2

With this hand, partner should bid 4♠ now. She knows that you would not use Stayman without a major and, since you obviously don't have hearts, you must have spades.

# 4. TAKEOUT DOUBLES

## What Is a Takeout Double?

When the opponents have opened the bidding, you can use a double to enter the auction with a good hand but no particularly strong suit. This is called a **takeout double** because you expect partner to 'take out' the double and suggest a place to play the hand, in either an unbid suit or notrump.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♣	dbl*

## When to Use a Takeout Double

The most common hand for a takeout double:

- An opening bid or better (13 points or more).

- Adequate trump support (Jxx or better) for *all* of the unbid suits.
- Shortness in the opponent's suit.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♥	dbl
♠ K J 9 8	♥ 9	♦ A J 7 2	♣ A 10 4 3

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♥	pass
♠ 9 8	♥ K 9 3	♦ A Q 7 2	♣ A 10 4 3

You cannot make a takeout double on this hand, which lacks adequate support for spades.



Since its publication in 1999, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* has sold more than 400,000 copies in six languages. Winner of the American Bridge Teachers' Association Book of the Year, it has become a much-valued learning tool and reference for everyone from social players to those regularly playing at their local bridge club.

The new 2022 edition has been thoroughly updated, while retaining the approach and features that made the original so popular. Every convention in the book has been carefully revised to reflect the way it is used in the modern game. Three chapters (Landy, Grand Slam Force and Ogust responses to Weak Twos) were dropped completely in favor of Bergen Raises and the DONT and Meckwell defenses to 1NT.

This new edition of *The Pocket Guide to Bridge Conventions*, a handy summary of its parent, has been updated in similar fashion, to reflect the changes in *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*.

**BARBARA SEAGRAM** (Canada) is one of North America's top bridge teachers. *Barbara's Bridge Tips* (MPP) was named Book of the Year in 2021 by the American Bridge Teachers' Association.

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