

WINNING BRIDGE CONVENTIONS

# COMPETITIVE BIDDING

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# Competitive Bidding

## Introduction

The majority of the conventions and bidding theory in this book concern how to bid weak hands with long suits and/or good fits.

- Weak Two Bids are opening hands with good six cards suits,
- Preemptive Bids are opening hands with good 7+ card suits or overcalls with 6+ card suits,
- Unusual 2NT, the Michaels Cuebid and Sandwich NT overcalls are weak two-suited (5+/5+) hands,
- A portion of Cuebidding in Competition covers weak hands with fits of 9+ cards, and
- Good/Bad 2NT, Unusual vs. Unusual and Cuebidding in Competition are focused on the methods that can be used to combat the problems created by the opponent's interference in your bidding.

In this book our decisions on responding to weak competitive bids will be based on determining “how many tricks can we take if our long suit is trumps” **not** “how many points do we have”? We'll then take that information and develop a strategy that will help us

decide how high to bid in the auction based on the vulnerability and scoring.

Understanding how to count tricks (not points) and how the scoring and vulnerability work are vital to your success in competitive auctions. We will look at these concepts in detail in the following pages but here is a brief explanation.

### **How to count tricks (not points).**

Learning how to count tricks (not points) is an acquired skill. From the bidding alone, you have to imagine what cards your partner's hand contains and the distribution of his/her hand. That information has to be extrapolated to what the opponents' hands might look like and their likely contract and result.

A quick example:

Let's imagine that your partner opens a Pre-emptive bid of 3♥ showing seven hearts, two of the top three honors and no high honor in another suit.

I would envision that partner's hand looked something like this:

♠4 ♥AQ98752 ♦942 ♣52

My hand is:

♠75 ♥K64 ♦AK6 ♣87643

I wouldn't know exactly what partner held in real life but if partner's hand is what I envision, what suppositions could I make? I would think that:

- The opponents have a good spade fit;
- The opponents have about 24 points;
- The opponents will be short in hearts (in fact I know that one of the opponents has one or zero hearts);
- The opponents have only two or three losers between their two hands if spades are trumps; and
- Our partnership has nine tricks if hearts are trumps.

Even if the opponents have not bid as yet, all of those suppositions would lead me to expect that they will bid. That they will bid spades. That they can make and will bid a game in spades. These same suppositions would bring me to the conclusion that I should try and take the bid away from our opponents, ***regardless of the number of high card points my partner and I hold.*** At the very least I should attempt to make it difficult for the opponents to describe their hands to each other by bidding to a high level quickly

and deprive them of levels of bidding they could use to communicate.

## **Scoring and Vulnerability**

As you become more knowledgeable in your bridge experience you will learn the concept of being either Vulnerable or Not Vulnerable and the concept of a Penalty Double.

Let's call the opponents North/South and you and your partner will be designated East/West.

If North/South is Not Vulnerable their reward for bidding game is 300 points added to their trick score. Therefore, bidding 4♥ and making 4 would be worth a score of 420 points.

If East/West are Not Vulnerable and take the bid away from North/South and go down, North/South would get 50 points for each trick they set East/West undoubled.

It's not hard to work out that it is to East/West's advantage to take the bid away from North/South. To make things a little more fair (and interesting) the concept of a Penalty Double was introduced. If East/West takes the bid away from North/South and North/South say "Double" then East/West's penalty is larger. Down one trick would be 100 points, down



two tricks is 300 points, down three tricks is 500 points, down four tricks is 800 points, etc. etc.

If a side is Vulnerable the reward for making game is 500 points added to your trick score. The penalty for going down is 100 points for each trick you are set. If doubled, down one is 200 points, down two is 500 points, down three is 800 points etc. etc.

Here is a brief example of the profit or loss of competitive bidding at the game level. If your opponents bid and make a game they score a bonus of:

- **Vulnerable 500 points; or**
- **Non-Vulnerable 300 points.**

If you bid higher than the opponents' game, they double you for penalty and you go down the opponents will get:

<b>Number of Tricks Set</b>	<b>Vulnerable Doubled</b>	<b>Non-Vulnerable Doubled</b>
-1	200	100
-2	500	300
-3	800	500
-4	1100	800

As you see, if your partnership is Vulnerable you should be much more cautious trying to take the auction away from the opponents when you expect you will be going down, than if your partnership is Non-Vulnerable. Even though the opponents sometimes forget to double, always base your decision expecting to be doubled.

The vulnerability strategy involved in competitive decisions follows a general thought called the “Rule of 2 and 3”. The basic meaning is that if your side is Vulnerable you should not bid to a level where you expect to go down more than two tricks, and if Not-Vulnerable you should not bid to a level where you expect to go down more than three tricks.

You are not going to get all these decisions right. You are going to make mistakes. You are going to go set 1100 points ...or more! However, as you play and practice more and more you will improve and you will find that pre-emptive bids and correct competitive decisions will do wonders to improve your score. Just be patient with your learning curve and you’ll do fine.

## **Weak Two Bids**

## Weak Two Bids

Weak Two Bids (Weak Two) are opening bids that fall outside the normal parameters which are used for one-level opening bids. Weak Two opening bids are used to describe hands with a good, long suit and little defensive value. In general these are considered “defensive bids”. Bids designed to prohibit your opponents from describing their hands easily to each other.

A Weak Two can be an opening bid of 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠. An opening bid of 2♣ is **not** a Weak Two. We reserve 2♣ to show 21+ high card points (HCPs) hands or the equivalent in trick taking ability.

A Weak Two is always an opening bid which shows:

- A six-card suit;
- A good suit (generally two of the top three honors or three of the top five);
- 5-10 HCPs;
- Usually will not contain a four-card major; and
- Usually will not contain a void.

Some examples of a Weak Two Bid:

1) ♠AK9854 ♥82 ♦3 ♣Q642

Six good spades and 9 HCPs.

2) ♠54 ♥AKJ982 ♦J73 ♣42

Six good hearts and 9 HCPs.

3) ♠4 ♥82 ♦AQ9742 ♣Q642

Six good diamonds and 8 HCPs.

4) ♠AJ10984 ♥82 ♦32 ♣K42

Six good spades and 8 HCPs.

After opening a Weak Two, opener will not bid a second time unless forced to bid by responder. Responder's two forcing bids (a new suit and 2NT) are discussed later.

While responder and opener might occasionally have strong enough hands or good enough fits to make a game, these bids are primarily defensive bids. As such, responder will concentrate on the strategic value of his hand. Responder will be considering:

- How many trumps do we have?;
- What is partner's distribution?;
- How many tricks can we take if our long suit is trumps?;
- How many HCPs do we have between our two hands?;

- How many HCPs do the opponents hold?;
- What is the opponent's distribution?;
- How many tricks can we take if our long suit is not trumps?;
- Can the opponents make a game?; and
- What is the vulnerability?.

In some cases, responder will decide to take the contract away from your opponents even though he expects his contract will be defeated; knowing that the amount of points the opponents will score for setting him will be less than the points they would have scored if they had taken the contract for themselves. This is called a “sacrifice”.

While some rules will be described in responding to your partner's bid, never forget that the focus will be about taking tricks, not counting points. A discussion of how to count tricks follows after responder's bidding structure.

***NOTE: A Weak Two opening bid is not made by a fourth seat opener.*** If the first three players pass and you are in fourth seat an opening suit bid at the two level shows an ‘intermediate’ hand. An opening bid of 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ would show a six-card suit, 11-15 HCPs and a willingness to consider game (expecting to make the contract) if responder has one or two tricks and a fit.

The hand might look like this:

♠AKQ854 ♥82 ♦3 ♣KQ42

Six very good spades, a second good suit, 14 HCPs. If responder has three spades and an Ace in any suit, the possibility for game is very good, even though we might not have 25-26 points between our two hands.

### **Responder's Bids**

As opposed to responding to one level opening bids, HCPs **are not** the most relevant consideration in responding to a Weak Two. Many of responder's bids will be strategic. **Responder must always consider the vulnerability in his decision** but, in general, responder will:

- Pass with any hand that does not contain at least at two-card fit containing at least one honor;
- Raise to the three-level with any balanced hand with a three-card fit;
- Raise to the four level with any three-card fit containing a singleton or void; and
- Raise to the four-level with any four-card fit.

On the rare occasion responder has a good hand (16+ HCPs) **and** a fit with opener:

- If the opening bid was 2♥ or 2♠, the most likely game will be in four of partner's major suit; or

- If the opening bid was 2♦, the most likely game will be in 3NT.

Generally, responder should not expect that he and partner could make a game unless he has a fit with opener's suit and can count enough tricks to make game.

On hands that responder is considering game but feels more information would be helpful in making his decision, responder has two forcing bids available. They are:

- A new suit; and
- A bid of 2NT.

**A new suit** is forcing for one round and is most often used when the Weak Two opening bid was 2♦ and responder has a major suit. To choose the option of bidding a new suit responder would have a hand that holds something like this:

- 1) ♠AKQ84 ♥2 ♦Q63 ♣A642  
Five very good spades and 9 HCPs.
- 2) ♠54 ♥AKJ982 ♦J73 ♣42  
Six good hearts and 9 HCPs.
- 3) ♠AJ10984 ♥82 ♦32 ♣K42  
Six good spades and 8 HCPs.



If opener has three card support or two-card support and one of the top three honors for responder's suit; opener will raise one level regardless of his high card point strength. ***Remember, after having opened a Weak Two, opener's strength is already established.***

If opener cannot support responder's suit he will:

- Rebid to his six-card suit at the lowest level; or
- Bid a second four-card suit if he has one.

**Remember, bidding a new suit forces the Weak Two opener to bid again. If you do not have a fit for opener's original suit, bidding a new suit may commit you to a level where you are unable to make a contract.**

A bid of 2NT (called a "feature bid") says nothing about the distribution of responder's hand, it simply asks opener a question – Do you have an Ace or King outside of your long suit? This bid is usually used when responder has a fit with partner and a relatively strong hand but is still not sure if game is likely. Responder's hand might look

something like this after opener has bid a weak 2♥ bid:

4) ♠A84 ♥K432 ♦63 ♣AQ42

Responder can envision that their partnership probably has six heart tricks, one spade trick and one (or two) club tricks for a total of 8-9 tricks. If opener has the ♣K, responder can count 10 tricks and will bid game in hearts. If opener has the ♠K, responder can count 9 tricks and if the club finesse works 10 tricks, therefore, opener will bid game in hearts. If opener shows either the ♦A or ♦K, opener can count 8, 9 or 10 tricks depending on whether opener has the ace or king of diamonds and whether or not the club finesse works and will not bid game as it is unlikely to make.

Opener's response to the 2NT bid is easy:

- If opener has an Ace or King outside of his suit, opener will bid the suit that contains that card at the three level; and
- If opener does not have an Ace or King outside of his suit, opener will return to his six-card suit at the lowest level.

Responder will use the information elicited by each of these bids to place the contract at the appropriate level in the appropriate contract.

### **How to count tricks (not points).**

Learning how to count tricks (not points) is an acquired skill. From the bidding alone, you have to imagine what cards your partner's hand contains and the distribution of his/her hand. That information has to be extrapolated to what the opponents' hands might look like and their likely contract and result.

A quick example:

Let's imagine that your partner opens a Weak Two bid of 2♥ showing six hearts with a good suit.

I would envision that partner's hand looked something like this:

♠42 ♥AQ9872 ♦942 ♣52

My hand is:

♠7 ♥K643 ♦AK6 ♣87643

I wouldn't know exactly what partner held in real life but if partner's hand is what I envision, what suppositions could I make? I would think that:

- The opponents have a good spade fit;
- The opponents have about 24 points;
- The opponents will be short in hearts (in fact I know that one of the opponents has one or zero hearts);
- The opponents have only two or three losers between their two hands if spades are trumps; , and
- Our partnership has nine tricks if hearts are trumps (six hearts, two diamonds and trumping one spade in the hand that holds four hearts).

Even if the opponents have not bid as yet, all of those suppositions would lead me to expect that they will bid. That they will bid spades. That they can and make and will bid a game in spades. These same suppositions would bring me to the conclusion that I should try and take the bid away from our opponents, ***regardless of the number of high card points my partner and I hold.***

***I should bid 4♥ in an attempt to win the auction for my side. If the opponents bid 4♠, I should consider the vulnerability to decide whether or not bidding 5♥ would be an acceptable sacrifice.***

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# THE WINNING BRIDGE CONVENTIONS SERIES

## Competitive Bidding

Bridge students quickly discover that ‘basic bidding’ will only get them so far. To improve it is necessary to master a certain number of bidding conventions, and be prepared both to play them and to play against them. Each of the books in this series covers a number of useful conventions, explaining them carefully along with numerous examples and quizzes to help the reader understand what is being learned.

Included in this book: Weak Two Bids, Preemptive Bidding, Michaels Cuebid, Unusual 2NT, Sandwich NT, Unusual vs. Unusual, Cuebidding in Competitive Auctions and Good/Bad 2NT.



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