

WINNING BRIDGE CONVENTIONS

CONVENTIONS USEFUL WITH STRONG HANDS

Patty Tucker



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Strong Hands

Strong Hands

Introduction

One of the most common difficulties new players face is in bidding strong hands. 17+ HCP hands occur less than 10% of the time, so new players don't have the opportunity to bid and practice them very often.

In these pages we will be considering not only the technical aspects of the bids but which bid should be chosen to achieve the best result.

An Overview

Standard American bidding uses an opening bid of 2♣ to show one of three hands:

- A balanced hand with 22+ points;
- A suited hand with 21+ points; or
- A one-suited or two-suited hand with 8 ½ to 9 (or more) “playing tricks”.

Other hands opener might have are reasonably strong hands which are not strong enough to open 2♣, but which can be shown by a different opening bid or at opener's rebid:

- A balanced hand with 20-21 HCPs in which case opener will open 2NT; or
- A balanced hand with 18-19 HCPs in which case opener will *rebid* 2NT; or
- A five-card or longer suit and 19 HCPs, in which case opener will *rebid* 3NT; or
- A two-suited (or three suited hand) of 17+ HCPs in which opener's long suit is of lower rank in than his second suit in which case opener will make a "Reverse" at his first rebid; or
- A two-suited (or three suited hand) or 18+ HCPs in which opener's higher ranking suit is longer or equal in length to his second suit in which case opener will make a "Jump Shift" at his first rebid.

In every case opener must think carefully about how the auction might develop, before he makes his opening bid. When you open 2♣ you start your auction a full level higher. Sometimes you run into difficulty describing your hand to your partner or eliciting the information you need in order to make an informed decision as to where you might want to play the contract.

The balanced hands are very straightforward. With Stayman and Jacoby Transfers available you almost never have difficulty getting to the optimum contract

when you open 2NT or when you open 2♣ and rebid 2NT. Also the jump to 2NT showing the 18-19 point hand holds few traps.

Distributional hands are another matter. Two-suited hands are generally easier to describe if you can start at the one level. Three-suited hands are almost impossible to describe if you start the bidding with 2♣.

As we look at each of these strong bids in the following chapters keep these thoughts in mind and think not only of what the opening bid might be, but also what the rebid will be; how you think the auction will develop. These are the questions you should ask yourself:

- What do I need from responder in order to make game?
- Is it likely that an opponent will overcall or double if I open at the one level?
- Am I the first person to bid or is partner a passed hand?
- If I open 2♣ will I be able to easily describe my hand to partner?

2NT Rebid by Opener

2NT Rebid by Opener

A 2NT rebid by opener showing 18-19 HCPs occurs after:

- The opening bid is one of some suit; then
- Responder bids a new suit or NT at the one-level; and then
- Opener's rebid is a bid of 2NT.

This rebid by opener promises 18-19 HCPs (17 if the opening bid was 1♥ or 1♠) and a balanced hand and *if responder bid a major suit, denies four or more cards in responder's suit. 2NT is not forcing and responder may Pass.*

Opener may rebid 3NT with 19 HCPs and a five-card or longer suit if he feels that he will be able to take nine tricks, regardless of the shape and strength of responder's 6-9HCPs hand.

Opener will have a hand which looks something like this:

Hand 1 - ♠QJ2 ♥AQ2 ♦AJ854 ♣A2

18 HCPs, balanced. The opening bid would be 1♦ and opener's rebid (unless responder bid 2♣ or 2NT) would be 2NT.

Hand 2 - ♠AK82 ♥AJ4 ♦A92 ♣K97

19 HCPs, balanced. The opening bid would be 1♣ and opener's rebid (unless responder bid 1♠ or raised to 2♣) would be 2NT.

Hand 3 - ♠K8 ♥AKJ72 ♦AJ4 ♣J87

17 HCPs, five hearts and a balanced hand. The opening bid would be 1♥ and opener's rebid (unless responder bid 2♥) would be 2NT.

In what bidding sequences does a rebid of 2NT not show 18-19 HCPs (or occasionally 17)?

It is not a 2NT rebid showing 18-19 HCPs if responder's first bid was:

- A bid of a new suit at the two-level; or
- A raise of opener's suit to the two-level.

Remember: If responder bids a new suit at the two-level showing 10+ HCPs, a rebid of NT at the minimum level shows a minimum hand (12-14HCPs).

What should responder bid after opener's 2NT rebid?

After a 2NT rebid, responder will make his most natural bid. In general, any bid other than Pass indicates that the partnership will bid game in some suit or NT. If responder does not pass and does not bid game then:

- A new suit by responder is forcing and shows 4+ cards in that suit;
- A NT bid at any level is natural;
- A bid of **opener's** original suit shows support (which would indicate that responder had 10+ points and needed to make a temporizing bid at his original turn to bid); and
- A rebid of **responder's** original suit is natural, showing 5+ cards, and forcing.

Additional Notes

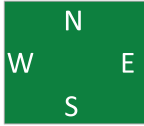
With modern bidding styles some players prefer to play a convention named Wolff Sign Off which allows them to bid after a 2NT rebid with less than game forcing values. This convention is easily found on-line, in the [ACBL Bridge Encyclopedia](#) and in many books concerning conventions.

If you play Strong Jump Shifts by responder to the opening bid, consider playing a rebid of responder's suit at the three-level as non-forcing ("to play").

2NT

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

	♠ 8 7 5		
	♥ J 7		
	♦ K 9 6 4		
	♣ Q 9 3 2		
♠ Q J 6		♠ K 10 9 2	
♥ 8 6 2		♥ K 9 3	
♦ A 10 7 2		♦ 8 5	
♣ K 7 4		♣ J 10 8 6	
	♠ A 4 3		
	♥ A Q 10 5 4		
	♦ Q J 3		
	♣ A 5		

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 N
Pass	Pass	Pass	

1♥ = 12+ HCPs and 5+ hearts.

1NT = 6-10 HCPs, less than three hearts and less than four spades.

2NT = 17-19 HCPs and a balanced hand. **Remember, when the opening bid was a major suit, opener may have only 17 HCPs when they rebid 2NT.**


Pass = I do not believe we have the values to play game.

2NT

Board 2

East Deals

N-S Vul

	♠ K Q 6 5 3		
	♥ Q		
	♦ Q J 5		
	♣ Q 9 4 2		
♠ 10 7 2		♠ J 9 4	
♥ 8 6 5 4 2		♥ K J 3	
♦ 8 3		♦ 10 9 6 4	
♣ A 7 5		♣ 10 6 3	
	♠ A 8		
	♥ A 10 9 7		
	♦ A K 7 2		
	♣ K J 8		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	3 N
Pass	Pass	Pass	

1♦ = 12+ HCPs and 3+ diamonds.

1♠ = 6+ points and 4+ spades.

2NT = 18-19 HCPs and a balanced hand.

3♠ = I have five spades and the values to play game opposite your 18-19 HCPs.


3NT = I do not have three spades, I believe we should play game in NT.

2NT

Board 3

South Deals

E-W Vul

	♠ J 10 8 5		
	♥ A 10 4 3		
	♦ K 2		
	♣ Q 8 2		
♠ A 3 2			♠ K 7 4
♥ Q 6 5			♥ J 9 8
♦ J 10 9 8 4			♦ 7 6 3
♣ 9 7			♣ J 10 6 4
	♠ Q 9 6		
	♥ K 7 2		
	♦ A Q 5		
	♣ A K 5 3		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♣
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 N	All pass	

1 ♣ = 12+ HCPs and 3+ clubs.

1 ♥ = 6+ HCPs and 4+ hearts.

2NT = 18-19 HCPs and a balanced hand.

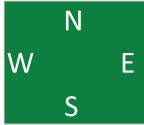
3NT = I have the values for game opposite your 18-19 HCPs and am uninterested in attempting slam.

2NT

Board 4

West Deals

Both Vul

	♠ Q J 9 5 2		
	♥ Q 10		
	♦ 7		
	♣ K 10 9 8 5		
♠ 10 6 4		♠ 8 3	
♥ J 3		♥ K 8 7 5	
♦ A 10 9 8 5		♦ Q J 3 2	
♣ Q 7 2		♣ J 6 3	
	♠ A K 7		
	♥ A 9 6 4 2		
	♦ K 6 4		
	♣ A 4		

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

1 ♥ = 12+ HCPs and 5+ hearts.

1 ♠ = 6+ HCPs and 4+ spades.

2NT = 17-19 HCPs and a balanced hand. **Remember, when the opening bid was a major suit, opener may have only 17 HCPs when they rebid 2NT.**

3 ♣ = 4+ clubs and an unbalanced hand with the values for game opposite opener's 18-19 HCPs. **Typically a new suit is used to keep the auction open when you haven't yet decided either 'how high' or 'where' the contract should be played.**

3 ♠ = 3+ spades. **When responder bids a new suit to keep the auction open, opener will try to find something about their hand that responder is unaware of and something that might be of interest to responder, like three-card support for responder's major suit.**

4 ♠ = Great. Let's play game in spades.

2NT

Board 5

North Deals

N-S Vul

<p>♠ K 9 7 3 ♥ Q 6 3 ♦ J 10 6 2 ♣ 10 3</p>	<p>♠ J 8 6 ♥ K 10 8 7 ♦ Q 7 5 ♣ 9 7 5</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	<p>♠ Q 10 4 ♥ J 9 4 2 ♦ A 8 4 3 ♣ Q 8</p>
	<p>♠ A 5 2 ♥ A 5 ♦ K 9 ♣ A K J 6 4 2</p>		

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1 ♣
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	3 N
All pass			

1 ♣ = 12+ HCPs and 3+ clubs.

1 ♥ = 6+ HCPs and 4+ hearts.

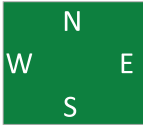
3NT = 19 HCPs, semi-balanced (no singletons or voids) and a source of tricks. **Remember that when opener has 19 HCPs and a long, good suit that he believes might provide a source of tricks, opener is allowed to jump to 3NT instead of 2NT if he believes that game in NT can be played.**

2NT

Board 6

East Deals

E-W Vul

	♠ K J 10 5 4		
	♥ Q J 10 9		
	♦ J 3		
	♣ 8 2		
♠ A 6	♠ 9 8 3		
♥ 7 6 4	♥ 8 5		
♦ A 8 5	♦ Q 10 9 7 6 4		
♣ J 10 9 7 6	♣ K 3		
	♠ Q 7 2		
	♥ A K 3 2		
	♦ K 2		
	♣ A Q 5 4		

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 ♣
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

1 ♣ = 12+ HCPs and 3+ clubs.

1 ♠ = 6+ HCPs and 4+ spades.

2NT = 18-19 HCPs and a balanced hand.

3 ♥ = 4+ hearts, 5+ spades and the values for game opposite South's 2NT rebid.

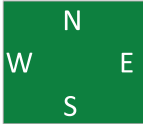
4 ♥ = I have four hearts.

2NT

Board 7

South Deals

Both Vul

	♠ J 4 2		
	♥ Q 9 7		
	♦ J 4 3		
	♣ Q 9 7 3		
♠ A Q 8 3		♠ 10 9 7	
♥ 10 8 4		♥ A 6 5 3	
♦ 10 5		♦ K 9 8 2	
♣ K 10 8 6		♣ 5 4	
	♠ K 6 5		
	♥ K J 2		
	♦ A Q 7 6		
	♣ A J 2		

West	North	East	South
			1 ♦
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 N
Pass	Pass	Pass	

1♦ = 12+ HCPs and 3+ diamonds.

1NT = 6-10 HCPs, less than four hearts, less than four spades and usually a balanced hand. **Remember, the only time North will have an unbalanced hand in this auction is when he holds 5+ clubs with less than 10 HCPs.**

2NT = 18-19 HCPs and a balanced hand.

Pass = I don't think we can make game in NT.

2NT

Board 8

West Deals

None Vul

<p>♠ Q 7 3 2 ♥ K 8 4 ♦ A J 5 ♣ 10 7 2</p>	<p>♠ K 5 4 ♥ Q J 9 ♦ Q 10 9 2 ♣ 9 8 5</p>	<div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	<p>♠ 10 9 ♥ 7 6 5 3 ♦ 8 7 6 4 ♣ Q J 4</p>
	<p>♠ A J 8 6 ♥ A 10 2 ♦ K 3 ♣ A K 6 3</p>		

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1 ♣
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 N	Pass	Pass
Pass			

1♣ = 12+ HCPs and 3+ clubs.

1NT = 6-10 HCPs, less than four hearts, less than four spades and a balanced hand. **Remember, North will never have an unbalanced hand in this auction because he would have always been able to bid a four-card suit at the one level or raise clubs.**

2NT = 18-19 HCPs and balanced.

3NT = I think we can make game in NT.

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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: Strong Hands, Reverses, Jump Shifts, 2NT Rebids by Opener, Strong 2♣ and 2♦ Waiting, Cuebidding Controls, Gerber, Blackwood and Practice Hands.



PATTY TUCKER (Dunwoody, Georgia) is an ABTA Master Bridge Teacher and co-founder of Whirlwind Bridge and Atlanta Junior Bridge. Her success at the bridge table culminated in her victory in the 2000 Baldwin Flight A North American Open Pairs with long-time bridge partner Kevin Collins. Patty and Kevin were married in 2006.