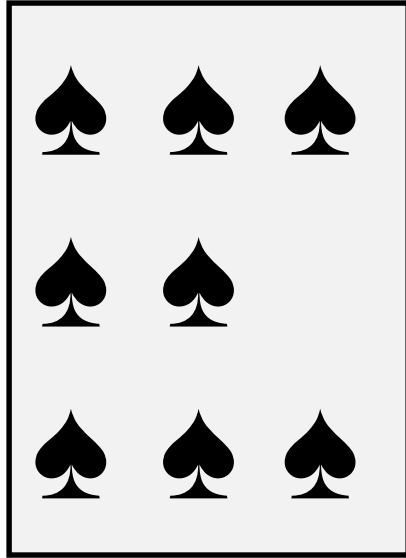


**Play as much as you can**

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand”.

- *Confucius*



**eight**

Strong 2♣ opening  
Negative 2♦ response  
Weak two bids  
2NT opening bid

**Opening at the two-level**

## Opening bids at the two-level

An opening bid of 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ shows 13-21 points, while 1NT shows 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand. You can also open the bidding at the two-level (2♣, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, or 2NT).

### Strong two club opening bid

A 2♣ opening bid is a conventional (artificial) bid, does not promise clubs and is forcing partner to respond. I am not comfortable assigning a HCP value to an opening 2♣ bid, but generally it shows 22+ HCP. You could have considerably less if holding a distributional hand. A 2♣ opening bid is also referred to as a demand bid. It forces a response from partner.



### At the table

Consider your opening bid with each of the following three hands.

1)	2)	3)
♠ AKJ2	♠ 7	♠ A
♥ AKQ10763	♥ AKQ108	♥ AK2
♦ 4	♦ KQJ8	♦ AKQJ832
♣ 6	♣ AQ6	♣ A8

- Hand 1**    **Open 2♣.** Even though you only have 17 HCP, I hope your instincts can 'appreciate' the strength of this monster. You can practically make a game in hearts in your own hand.
- Hand 2**    **Open 2♣.** With 21 HCP and great shape, you want to force the auction. If you were to open 1♥ and partner passed, an anxious feeling would cascade over you in anticipation of what partner has. If partner has as little as one ace or even the ♣K, you will probably have missed a game.
- Hand 3**    **Open 2♣.** With two losers this hand is bigger than huge! If partner has the ♥Q or two small hearts, you can make 6♣.

A strong 2♣ opening bid is forcing to game, with one exception: If opener's second bid is 2NT (showing 22-24 points), responder is allowed to pass with an absolutely bust hand. Otherwise, the auction is forced to the game level.

## Responses to a strong 2♣

Because an opening bid of 2♣ is a forcing bid, responder must conjure up a response regardless of how poor the hand is. The most common response to a 2♣ opening bid is the '2♦ negative'.

### 2♦ negative response

A 2♦ response to a 2♣ opening bid is also artificial. It says nothing about diamonds and shows 0-6 points. It is a great way for responder to tell the 2♣ opener (who is roaring and ready to go) that while the opener obviously has a great hand, you unfortunately hold a weak hand.

If you do have 7+ points, you are in possession of what is referred to as a 'positive response'.

### At the table

Consider your response to a 2♣ opening bid with the following?

1)	2)	3)
♠ 432	♠ 82	♠ 3
♥ 432	♥ Q10854	♥ K762
♦ 432	♦ 8432	♦ 9832
♣ 5432	♣ J6	♣ 8653

With all three hands respond 2♦ and give partner the bad news that you hold a dog. Hand one is the worst hand in the history of the game but yet you still have to respond.

### Structure of responses

2♦	0-6 points and any distribution.
2♥/2♠ or 3♣/3♦	5+ card suit and 7+ points.
2NT	7-9 HCP, balanced hand.
3NT	10-12 HCP, balanced hand.

## At the table

Consider your response to a 2♣ opening bid with the following.

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ J82	♠ A92	♠ 83	♠ 643
♥ J42	♥ Q87	♥ AKJ32	♥ Q8754
♦ AKJ987	♦ 1098	♦ Q2	♦ 987
♣ 2	♣ Q943	♣ 9854	♣ 94

**Hand 1**      **Bid 3♦.** Shows you have 5+ diamonds and 7+ points. Note: you had to jump to 3♦, as 2♦ is an artificial response to 2♣.



**Hand 2**      **Bid 2NT.** You have 8 HCP and a balanced hand. 2NT is a positive response to a 2♣ opening bid and clarifies your hand nicely.

**Hand 3**      **Bid 2♥.** With 7+ points and a five-card suit, make a positive response to partner's 2♣ opening bid.

**Hand 4**      **Bid 2♦.** Bid your hearts with your next bid if still relevant. 2♦ lets partner know right away that you have a negative response.

## Second bid by the two club opener

Assuming responder bid 2♦ as they usually do:

2NT	22-24 points, balanced. (Responder can pass.)
2♥/♠ 3♣/♦	5+ card suit. Still forcing to game.
3NT	25-27 points, balanced hand.

### 2♦ negative (or waiting)

A 2♦ response to a 2♣ opening bid is a 'negative response' promising 0-6 points. Experienced players like to extend the meaning of 2♦ to include a 'waiting bid'. Responder could have a positive response (7+) but prefer to respond 2♦ anyway. Going slowly allows the big hand room to describe it at the lowest level. Once the opener has described the hand with a suit bid or with no trump (balanced hand), the responder is now in a better position to make an informed decision. For now, you can leave 2♦ as 'negative'.

## Weak twos and pre-emptive bids

Now that you know how to open the power-house hands, you have freed up 2♦/♥/♠ for a more frequent holding, a weak hand. If you have a six-card suit (not clubs) and 6-9 points you can open the bidding with a 'weak two' bid. Consider each of the following:

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ KQJ984	♠ 87	♠ 3	♠ 76
♥ 83	♥ AJ10984	♥ 842	♥ J3
♦ 43	♦ Q43	♦ AQ9432	♦ 854
♣ Q95	♣ 98	♣ 1095	♣ AKJ873

- Hand 1**      **Open 2♠.** You are weak (6-9) and have a good six-card suit. 2♠ describes this hand nicely.
- Hand 2**      **Open 2♥.** Again, you get to show your 6-9 HCP and six-card heart suit in one bid, with a 'weak two' bid.
- Hand 3**      **Open 2♦.** An opening bid of 2♦ is not as effective as 2♠ in keeping the opponents out of the auction but it is still descriptive, showing 6-9 HCP and six-card diamond suit.
- Hand 4**      **Pass.** You cannot open 2♣ with this hand as a 2♣ opening bid is reserved for strong hands.

### Pre-emptive bids

1. A opening jump bid in any of the four suits at the three-level or higher is a pre-emptive bid. It is like a 'weak two' bid, with 6-9, only with a longer suit. A three-level pre-empt promises a seven-card suit and a four-level pre-empt promises an eight-card suit.
2. An overcall is also pre-emptive when it is a jump bid in a new suit.  
1) (1♣) - 3♦.      2) (1♦) - 3♠.      The 3♦ overcall and the 3♠ overcall are both pre-emptive bids, showing a seven-card suit and 6-9 points.
3. If the pre-emptive suit is a major, you generally do not have support for the other major.
4. If in a minor suit - you do not have support for either major suit.
5. 'Length not strength'. A pre-emptive bid has the length to justify the suit bid, but not the strength of an opening hand.

## Opening the bidding 2NT

An opening bid of 2NT is similar to an opening bid of 1NT, but stronger. A 2NT opening bid shows 20-21 HCP and a balanced hand. Again, responder is in charge because she knows a lot about opener's hand while opener knows nothing of responder's hand. For example:

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ KJ4	♠ A932	♠ K3	♠ A83
♥ AQ	♥ KJ8	♥ AKJ32	♥ KJ7
♦ KQ932	♦ KQJ8	♦ AJ2	♦ AKJ74
♣ AJ9	♣ AK	♣ AJ8	♣ AJ

Each of these hands is an example of a 2NT opener. The only hand which may raise an eyebrow is the third hand where you hold a five-card heart suit. It is not recommended that you open 1NT with a five-card major, however, it is deemed okay to do so when opening 2NT. It is thought that the importance of revealing a balanced hand with 20-21 outweighs the need to show the five-card major. I need so little to make game. If I do open 1♥ - I am afraid partner will pass (I don't need much for game)!

## Responses to a 2NT opening bid

<b>0-4 Points</b>	Pass
<b>5-10 Points</b>	You have the values for game. 3NT is a dead bid. 3♥ / ♠ are live bids, letting opener set the contract.
<b>11-12 Points</b>	Bid 4NT inviting opener to bid 6NT with a maximum opening hand of 21.
<b>13-16 Points</b>	Simple addition reveals the values for small slam. (20-21) + (13-16) = 33 -37 HCP
<b>17+ Points</b>	You know you have the values for a Grand Slam.

### Stayman revisited

You can bid Stayman in response to a 2NT opening bid. 3♣ is Stayman, asking opener if she has a four-card major. Opener responds: 3♦ = denies a four-card major, 3♥ = four-card heart suit. 3♠ = four-card spade suit.

## At the table

Consider your opening bid with each of the following hands.

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ AQ9875	♠ K2	♠ 3	♠ 86
♥ 83	♥ AQ9	♥ AKQ42	♥ A3
♦ 43	♦ KQ43	♦ AQJ32	♦ KJ9854
♣ Q95	♣ AK98	♣ A5	♣ 983

**Hand 1**      **Bid 2♠.** Ideal hand for a 'weak two' bid. You have a good six-card suit and 6-9 points. 2♠ encroaches on the opponent's space to communicate, while describing your hand clearly to partner.

**Hand 2**      **Bid 2NT.** With 21 HCP and a balanced hand, 2NT says it all. Partner should have a good idea what to do now.

**Hand 3**      **Bid 2♣.** This hand is strong enough to force the auction. If partner has as little as the ♥J53, ten tricks in a 4♥ contract has promising possibilities.

**Hand 4**      **Bid 2♦.** Another hand where a 'weak two' bid reveals your hand. "Partner I have a six-card suit and 6-9 points."

## A conversation indeed

Bidding is a conversation and the more competent you and partner are at exchanging information regarding the strength and distribution of your hands, the more often you will end in the correct contracts.

Take a look at the following simple auction. The main point is that **E** understands what the 2NT opening bid from **W** means. This knowledge allows **E** to make a big bid (3NT) with a little hand (7 HCP).

<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>
♠ AQ8	♠ K92
♥ KQJ3	♥ 1075
♦ A8	♦ KJ95
♣ AJ103	♣ 842

**West:** 2NT "I have 20-21 points and a balanced hand.

**East:** 3NT "We only need 26 points for game and my 7 HCP with your 20-21 HCP means we have the combined strength to contract for game.

figure 8:1

## Card play technique

### Count your winners


♠ A43		♠ 108
♥ 65		♥ Q842
♦ J876		♦ 9543
♣ KQJ10		♣ 943
♠ QJ965		♠ 108
♥ J97		♥ Q842
♦ Q102		♦ 9543
♣ A2		♣ 943
		♠ K72
		♥ AK103
		♦ AK
		♣ 8765

figure 8:2

In figure 8:2, S is in 3NT and W leads the ♠Q (top of a broken sequence). In a no-trump contract, you **count your winners**. The plan in no trump goes like this:

Q: How many tricks do I need? A: 9

Q: How many sure tricks do I have? A: 6  
(2 spades, 2 hearts and 2 diamonds)

Q: How many tricks elude me? A: 3

When you know you do not have enough sure tricks to make your contract, leave the sure tricks alone, and go about establishing the elusive tricks now. In the case of this hand, the club suit offers those elusive tricks. So, win the ♠A and knock out the ♣A. You will get your six sure tricks plus the three club tricks for a total of nine. 3NT making for a score of +400.

### Count your losers


♠ A543		♠ 108
♥ 965		♥ QJ8
♦ AK6		♦ J543
♣ 1087		♣ 9432
♠ 96		♠ 108
♥ K1074		♥ QJ8
♦ 10987		♦ J543
♣ KQJ		♣ 9432
		♠ KQJ72
		♥ A32
		♦ Q2
		♣ A65

figure 8:3

In figure 8:3, S is in a contract of 4♠. W leads the ♣K (top of a sequence). In a suit contract, you **count your losers**.

The plan in a suit contract goes like this:

Q: How many losers can I afford? A: 3

Q: How many losers do I have? A: 4

Q: Can I get rid of excess losers? A: Yes

When you have excess losers, there are three ways to get rid of them.

1. finesse    2. trump    3. discard.

With no finesse available and nothing to trump, you will have to discard a loser. Note how dummy has the ♦AK6 and South has the ♦Q2. Play the ♦Q (high card from the short side first). On the third round of diamonds you can throw away a loser.



## Department of defence

### Deciding which suit to lead

Knowing which card to lead from certain combinations is fine, in and of itself, but the decision about which suit to actually lead is the tough part.

You hold: ♠ A97 ♥ 3 ♦ Q108653 ♣ KQ3

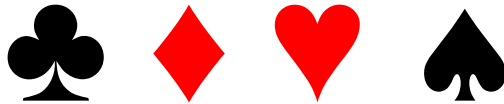
Consider your lead against the following contracts:

- 1) **3NT** Lead the ♦6. Fourth best from your longest and strongest. You hope to establish your diamonds
- 2) **6NT** Lead the ♣K. The ♠A is one defensive trick. By promoting the ♣Q into a second trick, 6NT will be defeated.
- 3) **4♠** Lead the ♥3. By short suiting your hand in hearts, you may be in position to trump a heart later in the hand.

The main point with the above three examples is that the choice of lead is different each time, even though the hand is the same. What influenced the choice of lead was the final contract.

1. Always review the bidding before deciding on which suit to lead.
2. Against a no-trump contract leading your longest suit is a good choice as you may be able to establish your length into winners.
3. Against a suit contract, leading a singleton offers possibilities. By short suiting yourself, you are in a position to trump that suit later.
4. Leading a suit with a sequence can trap the opponent's honor cards while promoting your lesser honor cards.
5. Did partner bid a suit? That may be a good choice (partner will like you).
6. Leading an un-bid suit. If the opponents bid three of four suits, leading the un-bid suit certainly seems attractive.
7. Know technically the right card to lead, then review the auction before deciding which suit to lead.

Your opening lead is influenced by the cards you hold and by the auction that unfolds. Use the former in deciding the card and the latter in deciding the suit.



### Summary

- You can open the bidding at the **two-level** or higher.
- An opening bid of 2♣ shows a **strong** hand of 22+ points. You could have less than 22+ if your hand is distributional.
- A 2♦ response to a 2♣ opening bid is **negative**, (0-6 HCP)
- An opening bid of 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ is a **weak two** showing a six-card suit and 6-9 HCP.
- An opening bid of **2NT** shows 20-21 points, and a balanced hand.
- An opening bid at the three-level or higher is a **pre-emptive bid** showing a weak hand (6-9ish) and a long suit. At the three-level you show a seven-card suit. At the four-level you show an eight-card suit. The higher, the longer your suit.
- In a no-trump contract **count your winners**.
- In a suit contract **count your losers**.
- **Review the auction** before you make your opening lead.

### Nearly Normal Norman

Do not be afraid to make a pre-emptive bid with a weak hand. The length in your suit compensates for the lack of HCP. The damage you inflict on the opponent's ability to communicate is usually worth the risks involved.



### Nearly Normal Norman

“When partner bids, listen carefully to what she is saying. Amazingly, a lot of players do not listen”.

- *anonymous*

## Exercises - chapter eight

**A.** You open 2♣ and partner responds 2♦. It is your bid.

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ AQ983	♠ AK3	♠ KQ6	♠ A
♥ AK	♥ AK5	♥ AQJ4	♥ K109875
♦ K4	♦ KJ763	♦ 3	♦ AKQ103
♣ AK72	♣ A5	♣ KQJ102	♣ A

**B.** Your partner opened the bidding 2NT. It is your bid.

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ A94	♠ A1095	♠ 1098763	♠ 984
♥ J109	♥ AQ94	♥ A6	♥ Q76
♦ 108752	♦ 94	♦ Q754	♦ 1032
♣ 109	♣ 942	♣ 2	♣ J875

**C.** What is your opening bid with each of the following hands?

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ AQ6742	♠ 93	♠ 82	♠ Q3
♥ 3	♥ 32	♥ KJ98765	♥ 32
♦ 102	♦ KQJ98743	♦ 74	♦ KQ9873
♣ J1098	♣ 4	♣ K4	♣ 872