

Play & Learn



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Responder takes a preference

We've seen that a minimum opener has constraints on his bidding. So does a minimum responder. After a one-level suit opening bid, we're all familiar with the restrictions on responder's first bid when holding a minimum hand of 6 to 10 points (some say 6 to 9). Responder has only three choices: bid a new suit on the one level; raise opener's suit to the two level; or bid 1NT.

Responder may bid more than once, even when holding a minimum hand. If opener rebids in any suit at or below two of his first suit, a minimum, responder's options change very little. Provided there is room, responder still has three choices:

- ♣ Bid a new suit on the one level.
- ♣ Bid an old (previously bid) suit on the two level.
- ♣ Bid 1NT.

Following these guidelines allows a minimum opener and a minimum responder to stop at a safe, low level below 2NT.

Let's try following these bidding guidelines in some examples. You are East, the responder, after the auction has proceeded:

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
1♥	1♠
2♣	?

Consider what you know about opener's hand (West). Opener could have anywhere from a dead-minimum up to an unbalanced 18 points. Playing five-card majors, opener has shown five hearts and four clubs. Opener's second suit is assumed to be only four cards in length unless he rebids it. Now choose your rebid with each hand below:

1. ♠K962 ♥73 ♦A9652 ♣64
2. ♠K9542 ♥J ♦Q762 ♣1052
3. ♠KJ9742 ♥2 ♦Q942 ♣72
4. ♠A1073 ♥103 ♦KJ97 ♣K64

Answers:

1. You cannot rebid 2♦. You couldn't afford to bid diamonds at your first turn and a new suit on the two level still shows more than a minimum hand because you have not yet limited your strength. The same is true for a 2NT rebid even though you do have the remaining suit stopped. While opener's 2♣ bid is not forcing, it would be foolish to pass and play in a 4-2 "fit" when you have a better place to play. Where? In your 5-2 heart fit. Take a preference to 2♥. If opener has a medium hand, he will make a move toward game. Sure, we strive to find an eight-card fit, but the bridge gods don't always deal you one. When they don't, settle for the least bad fit unless you have game aspirations.

2. Factors discussed on hand No. 1 still apply. This time your best op-

tion is to pass 2♣, playing in what you know to be at least a seven-card fit. No other suit is known to have as many cards between the two hands.

3. I will make you happy and suggest that you rebid your major. 2♠ tends to show six spades or, at worst, five very good spades.

4. With 11 high-card points, you are not a minimum responder. You don't have to abide by those annoying restrictive guidelines. Rebid 2NT to invite game.

Here's another hand:

♠KQ75 ♥K76 ♦853 ♣876.

What rebid would you make in this auction?

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
1♦	1♠
2♣	?

Because you have a minimum responding hand and opener's second suit was below two of his first suit, you must follow the guidelines we already discussed. How do you picture opener's distribution? Clubs, his second suit should be at least four-card length. Yet partner opened 1♦. He has to have at least four diamonds or he would have opened 1♣, his longer minor. When opener rebids in a new suit on the two level, he shows an unbalanced hand. Generally an unbalanced opener shows his longer suit first. If either minor is longer, it will probably be diamonds, and you should take a preference back to 2♦.

You did well to listen to partner's bids. A surprisingly helpful amount of information is available to those who listen. □