



# Play & Learn

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## Avoid guesswork after weak two-bids

A strong responder can bid game opposite a weak-two opening provided he is sure of the right game. So how do we handle responding hands that are strong enough for game but unsure of the best contract, or hands that would like to invite game? Fortunately, weak two-bids leave your side room for exploration. Responder can avoid guessing by choosing one of two forcing bids – 2NT or a new suit below game.

Let's look at an example where partner opens 2♥ and you hold:

♠A K 8 6 ♥8 4 ♦A 7 5 ♣A 9 6 4.

With four top tricks, you can make game if partner has a maximum weak two-bid that can provide six tricks, but a partscore is high enough if partner's hand is a minimum and provides only five tricks. By partnership agreement, responder can use 2NT as a forcing bid to ask opener for more information. On your convention card, check the *2NT Force* box under your 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ opening bids. After this forcing 2NT response, opener rebids as follows:

**1.** A minimum weak-two opener (about 5 to an average 8 HCP) simply rebids the six-card suit at the three level. This *does not* show extra length. Opener would rebid 3♥ with these two minimums:

♠7 5 2 ♥K Q J 9 7 5 ♦9 3 ♣7 5

or

♠5 2 ♥Q J 10 9 6 5 ♦6 3 ♣K 7 5.

**2.** A maximum weak-two opener (a good 8 HCP or more) rebids a new suit containing a *feature* (a likely trick or entry). Aces and protected kings are considered features. Queens are a little iffy, but you can treat Q–J–x–x or even Q–J–x as a feature. You might even bid a suit containing Q–x–x when you have a very good hand, but be aware that queens are far from sure entries. It's wise to have partnership agreements on what is considered a feature.

Here are two maximums that must show a feature. Holding:

♠5 2 ♥A Q 10 9 7 5 ♦K 3 ♣7 5 3,

rebid 3♦. You have 9 HCP and the ♦K as a possible entry.

You can rebid 3♣ holding:

♠5 2 ♥A Q J 10 9 5 ♦8 6 ♣Q J 7.

**3.** With a maximum but no outside feature, opener rebids 3NT. This rebid describes a solid suit and doesn't come up very often. Rebid 3NT holding:

♠5 2 ♥A K Q 10 9 5 ♦8 6 3 ♣7 5.

The invitational responding hand at the beginning of the column would pass a 3♥ minimum rebid, but would bid 4♥ over any other rebid (with the possible exception of opener's 3NT rebid, where the extra 10 points for taking the same 10 tricks in notrump could give you a top.)

Holding:

♠J 2 ♥K Q 9 7 5 2 ♦A 9 6 ♣A K,

how would you feel about responding 2NT to partner's weak 2♦ opening? Wouldn't you prefer to look for a heart fit? You can if your partnership agrees to play that over a preempt *an unpassed responder's bid of a new suit below game is forcing for one round*.

Because opener seldom has a side four-card major, a new suit response shows at least five, and often six, cards.

Over your 2♥ response to 2♦, opener can raise hearts with any three hearts, or even honor doubleton. Without heart support, partner rebids 3♦ with a minimum, and makes a more encouraging bid with a maximum (often showing a feature, as he would have over a 2NT response.) If partner rebids diamonds, you would pass, expecting to lose at least two spades and a heart. If partner shows a spade feature, you could bid 3NT, hoping to win six diamonds, two clubs and a major-suit trick.

These responses are fairly standard, but there are alternative approaches. Don't make partner guess what you mean. Discuss your partnership methods over weak-two openings. Decide whether the same agreements apply after partner makes a preemptive jump overcall to the two level, or after an opponent overcalls or doubles partner's weak-two opening. ■