

This series is based on Grant Standard, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of Grant Standard and the corresponding convention card can be found at www.AudreyGrant.com. The site also has Grant Basic, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the Bridge Bulletin and can also be found under 'Articles' at www.AudreyGrant.com.

In Grant Standard, strong hands are opened with an artificial, forcing 2♣ bid. The guideline is:

2♣ OPENING

- 22+ if balanced;
- 9+ tricks if unbalanced.

In the previous article we focused on balanced hands. In this issue we'll consider unbalanced hands.

Strong Unbalanced Hands

The guideline for opening 2♣ with a balanced hand is straightforward ... 22 or more points. With unbalanced hands, it's more of a judgment call.

With a hand that is so strong there might be game even if partner doesn't have enough to respond to a one-level opening—fewer than 6 points—we can open 2♣. This typically means we expect to take at least nine tricks with no help from partner.

♠ A K Q 7 3 2♣. With 24 high-
♥ A K J 9 5 card points plus 2
♦ 3 length points, we
♣ A K expect to make game
 even if partner has no
points at all. If partner has three low
cards in either major suit, we'll have
a fit and should take at least ten
tricks and might even make a slam.

♠ A K Q 9 8 7 3 2♣. There are
♥ A K 10 4 only 16 high-
♦ 5 3 card points plus
♣ — 3 length points,

The 2♣ Opening and Responses – Part II

but we expect to take at least nine tricks with spades as the trump suit. Some might prefer to open 1♠, since the playing strength is based more on distribution than high cards (see Hand #3 in Point of View for further discussion on this type of hand), but we'd certainly be upset if we opened 1♠ and everyone passed!

We should have some defensive strength when we open 2♣. Partner is entitled to expect we can take three or four tricks if the opponents compete and choose the trump suit. So, we shouldn't open 2♣ with a hand like this:

♠ 4 ♥ K Q J 10 9 7 6 5 4 3 2 ♦ 3 ♣ —

We can certainly take ten tricks with hearts as the trump suit, but we can't contribute a single trick on defense if the opponents were to bid a grand slam in spades, diamonds, clubs, or even notrump! We should treat this as a preemptive hand, perhaps opening 4♥ and continuing to bid hearts if the opponents compete.

The opening 2♣ bid is useful, but it does take up a lot of bidding room. We can't show our real suit until the next round and we may have to bid it for the first time at the three level. So, even when we have a lot of high-card points, it may be better to open at the one level rather than with 2♣.

♠ K Q 5 1♦. There are 22
♥ 3 high-card points, but
♦ A Q J 6 4 opening 2♣ with
♣ A K Q J this hand is likely to
 lead to an awkward
continuation. If partner makes the
waiting response of 2♦, we will have
to bid 3♦ to show our suit and we may
struggle to find a suitable resting
place. Better to conserve room by
opening 1♦. If partner passes, we may
not be able to make game anyway.

Opener's Rebid

Most of the time, responder will make the waiting response of 2♦ (see previous article), leaving the maximum room for opener to describe the hand. With an unbalanced hand, opener bids naturally: longest suit first, or higher-ranking of two five-card or six-card suits.

Since the 2♣ bid and 2♦ response have taken up a lot of bidding room, **there's no need for opener to jump on the rebid. Opener's rebid in a suit is forcing.** It's as though opener had opened an old-fashioned strong two-bid in the suit.

WEST	EAST
♠ A K Q 7 2	♠ 3
♥ A K Q 7 2	♥ 9 8 5 3
♦ K Q	♦ 7 5 2
♣ 3	♣ 9 7 6 5 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

After West opens 2♣ and East makes the waiting response of 2♦, West doesn't have to guess which game contract to bid—a jump to 4♠ would land the partnership in the wrong spot. Instead, West rebids 2♠, the higher-ranking of the two five-card suits. This is forcing since West's strength is unlimited. After East's next bid (we'll discuss that in a moment), West shows the second suit and the partnership reaches the best contract.

If responder makes an initial positive response, the partnership is committed to at least the game level and will usually be interested in a slam if a suitable fit can be found.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

With 8 high-card points and a good five-card suit, East makes a positive response of 2♥ over the 2♣ bid. West shows the spade suit and East raises. East doesn't need to jump since the partnership is committed to at least game.

Having found a fit, opener uses the Blackwood convention to check for aces and then bids the slam. West knows partner will have a good heart suit for the positive response, so there should be a way to dispose of the diamond loser. Even if East didn't hold the ♥Q, West could likely establish an extra winner in the heart suit.

Responder's Rebid

Most of the time, the initial response to 2♣ is 2♦, an artificial waiting bid. That leaves plenty of room for opener to bid a suit with an unbalanced hand, but now responder must bid again since opener's rebid is forcing.

At this point, responder needs a way to show a very weak hand. This used to be done by bidding notrump at the cheapest available level. The problem with that approach is that responder would then be declarer if the partnership played in a notrump contract and the strong hand would be exposed as the dummy.

To avoid this, it's become popular to agree **responder's cheapest bid in a minor suit at the three level shows a weak hand**—no ace, no king, and fewer than two queens. This is sometimes referred to as "cheaper minor second negative." That's a bit of a misnomer since the initial 2♦ response is waiting, not negative.

There is no "cheapest minor" available at the three level when opener rebids 3♦, so 3NT has to be used as the weak bid. That avoids getting the partnership beyond 3NT in case that's the last makeable contract. It's a slight flaw in this approach, but something that most players are willing to go along with to avoid more complex methods. The chart at the top of the next column shows all the negative rebids.

RESPONDER'S NEGATIVE REBID	
After responder has made a 2♦ waiting response, the underlined rebid by responder is artificial, showing a very weak hand:	
OPENER	RESPONDER
2♣	2♦
2♥	<u>3♣</u>
OPENER	RESPONDER
2♣	2♦
2♠	<u>3♣</u>
OPENER	RESPONDER
2♣	2♦
3♣	<u>3♦</u>
OPENER	RESPONDER
2♣	2♦
3♦	<u>3NT</u>

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

After the artificial 2♣ opening bid and the artificial 2♦ waiting response, West's 3♣ rebid is the first natural bid, showing clubs. It's forcing, so East has to bid again. With a weak hand, East bids the cheapest available minor at the three level, 3♦, another artificial bid. That allows West to bid 3NT from the best side since both the ♠K and ♦K are protected. Whatever North leads, West has at least nine tricks.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

West opens 2♣ and East doesn't have enough strength or a good enough suit for a positive response. So East makes the waiting response of 2♦. West now shows the spade suit and East can show the heart suit.

West knows East has at least a five-card heart suit and some values since East didn't make the negative rebid of 3♣. West can raise to game. West knows slam is unlikely since East didn't make an initial positive response in hearts. The partnership lands in the best contract.

Opener's Third Bid

After opener's rebid in a suit, the partnership is committed to game unless responder makes a negative rebid. Even if responder makes a negative rebid, any new suit by opener below game is forcing. **The only time responder can pass below game after making a negative rebid is if opener rebids the same suit.**

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♥	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

After West shows the strong two-bid in spades, East makes a negative rebid of 3♣. West's 3♥ bid, a new suit, is forcing, so East gives preference to spades and West bids game. Even opposite East's terrible hand, 4♠ has a good chance. West can trump a heart loser in dummy.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

East makes the waiting response of 2♦ and West bids 2♥, forcing. East makes the artificial negative rebid of 3♣ and West, with a minimum 2♣ opening, simply rebids the major suit. With no semblance of help, East settles for partscore.



In the next issue, we'll look at another option for responder and more sample auctions after 2♣. ♦