



# Keeping Up With Conventions

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## CONVENTIONS FOR NOTRUMP OPENINGS

**W**hen you and your partner sit down to play in a club or tournament game, you're expected to fill out a convention card. This lists all the bidding and defensive agreements of the partnership.

The card is theoretically for the benefit of your opponents. When you sit down to play against another pair, they are likely to be unfamiliar with all the methods you are using. It would be a waste of time to have to explain all your agreements each time you sit down. Most items won't come up during the couple of hands you play against this pair. So . . . the convention card. The opponents can look at it any time if they want to know about your system. They can also ask questions if anything is unclear.

Filling out the card, however, is usually beneficial to your partnership. You have to know exactly what your agreements are and this can lead to some interesting discussions. You might find the partnership is on different wavelengths about some bids. Time to straighten things out.

The standard convention card contains room for all the permitted conventions and this can be intimidating to anyone when starting out at duplicate bridge. Shown below, for example, is just the area for opening notrump bids. Scary, isn't it?

### Don't Panic!

The first thing to realize is that 90% of what's on the card probably doesn't apply to your partnership. You only need to fill in the few agreements you do have; you can ignore everything else.

Once you've done it for the first time, it will be a lot easier in the future. Besides, you can keep the same convention card for future games with the same partner!

Nonetheless, let's walk through this section of the card and answer any questions you might have.

### What Do the Colors Mean?

The card is color-coded. The majority is in black but some parts are in red or blue (grey here).

The items in black indicate "standard" methods which don't require any special notification to the opponents.

The items in red indicate non-standard agreements that require you to alert your opponents if they come up. More on that later.

The items in blue (grey) are somewhere in between. They are fairly standard agreements but you have to announce them to your opponents when they apply.

Let's see how it all works.

### How Do I Show the Range of the 1NT Opening?

The first thing to fill in is your point range for an opening bid of 1NT. A popular range is 15-17 points but you might use 16-18 or play a weak notrump style of 12-14.

Would you open ♠ K J 10  
1NT with this hand? ♥ K 10  
There are only 14 ♦ Q 9 8 7 3  
high-card points but ♣ A J 10  
you can add a point for the five-card suit, or you might upgrade the hand because of the three tens. Although this section doesn't indicate that the range is stated in terms of high-card points, most players assume that is the case. To be on the safe side, you can indicate the range as 14+ to 17, to let the opponents know that you occasionally open 1NT with as few as 14 high-card points when you have "something extra."

1NT	
14+	to 17
_____	to _____

Why are there two lines for the notrump range? Some partnerships vary the range of their 1NT opening according to vulnerability or position at the table. Since that doesn't apply to your partnership, ignore this line.

Notice the range is in blue (grey), indicating you must announce it. When *partner* opens 1NT, you simply state "14 plus to 17." That's it.

### Five-card Major Common?

Would you open ♠ K Q 8  
1NT with this hand? ♥ A J 9 7 5  
If so, check the box ♦ Q J 3  
indicating that the ♣ K 8  
partnership frequently opens 1NT when holding a five-card major suit.

5-card Major common <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS	
1NT _____ to _____	3♣ _____
_____ to _____	3♦ _____
5-card Major common <input type="checkbox"/>	3♥ _____
System on over _____	3♠ _____
2♣ Stayman <input type="checkbox"/> Puppet <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♦ Transfer to ♥ <input type="checkbox"/>	4♦, 4♥ Transfer <input type="checkbox"/>
Forcing Stayman <input type="checkbox"/> Smolen <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♥ Transfer to ♠ <input type="checkbox"/> Lebensohl <input type="checkbox"/> (____ denies)	Conventional NT Openings
2♠ _____	Neg. Double <input type="checkbox"/> : _____
2NT _____	Other: _____
	2NT _____ to _____
	Puppet Stayman <input type="checkbox"/>
	Transfer Responses:
	Jacoby <input type="checkbox"/> Texas <input type="checkbox"/>
	3♠ _____
	3NT _____ to _____

## Stayman Partner?

What would you respond with this hand if partner opens 1NT?

♠	A 8 4 2
♥	K J 7 3
♦	K 7 5
♣	8 4

If the answer is 2♣, the Stayman convention asking if opener has a four-card major suit, then check the appropriate box.

2♣ Stayman

This is the first real “convention” encountered in this section. Notice that it’s in black. You don’t have to make any special announcement to the opponents if partner responds 2♣ to your opening 1NT bid. Almost everyone plays Stayman . . . or some variation of it (that’s what some of the red items are for). It’s likely the first convention you learned.

## What If We Want to Use Transfer Bids?

If partner opens 1NT, what would you respond with this hand?

♠	8 5 2
♥	J 9 7 6 4 2
♦	7
♣	J 6 3

If you would bid 2♥ as a signoff bid, telling partner you want to play partscore in hearts, you don’t need to mark anything on the card. That’s a natural response, not a convention.

If you’d pass with this hand, you don’t have to check any boxes but you might want to review your bidding notes! Partner will have a tough time making 1NT opposite this hand.

If you would respond 2♦, asking opener to bid 2♥, you are using Jacoby transfer bids. Since the 2♦ response is artificial, saying nothing about diamonds, you have to indicate this on the card by checking the appropriate boxes for a 2♦ or a 2♥ response (as a transfer to spades).

2♦ Transfer to ♥   
2♥ Transfer to ♠

Jacoby transfer bids are popular among club and tournament players. That’s why this section is in blue (grey) and not red. They are

announceable but not alertable. If you are playing Jacoby transfer bids and partner responds 2♥ to your opening bid of 1NT, you would verbally announce “transfer.” The auction would then continue unless the player on your right wanted a further explanation. It’s quite possible that your opponents have never heard of transfer bids.

## What If the Opponents Interfere Over 1NT?

Suppose you agree to play transfer bids and partner opens 1NT but the player on your right overcalls 2♦, what would you respond with this hand?

♠	8 6
♥	A J 9 8 5 2
♦	8 5
♣	10 9 5

You can no longer bid 2♦ to transfer to hearts but you still want to compete for partscore. The standard approach is to respond 2♥ as a natural bid. In other words, Jacoby transfer bids are “off” when an opponent overcalls and you revert to natural responses. Since this is standard, you don’t have to indicate anything on the convention card.

If you have some other agreement — such as doubling to show hearts — you can mark it on the card but will then have to alert the opponents when it comes up.

What if the player on your right doubles partner’s 1NT opening instead of overcalling? Some partnerships prefer that all conventional agreements are off after any form of interference. The double, however, hasn’t taken up any bidding room, so many partnerships agree to continue using conventions such as Stayman and transfer bids after the double. If that’s your agreement, you can indicate it on the card:

System on over   X  

You could write “Double” or “Dbl” but bridge players like to use shorthand, especially given the limited space available on the card. An “X” indicates double. (It is used the same way when recording a result.)

## How Can I Play in a Minor?

What would you do with this hand if partner opens the bidding 1NT?

♠	2
♥	J 6 5
♦	9 4
♣	Q 9 7 6 5 3 2

This is a good hand to discuss with partner when filling in the convention card. You want to sign off in a minor suit. Because a 2♣ response is Stayman, not a signoff, you need an agreement.

Some partnerships agree to start with 2♣, which opener will assume is Stayman. After opener responds, you rebid 3♣ to say, “I really wanted to play in clubs.” Unfortunately, in other partnerships this sequence is a slam try in clubs. Better get your methods straight!

A popular approach is to use extended Jacoby transfers. A response of 2♠ asks opener to bid 3♣. Responder can then pass with clubs or convert to 3♦ to play partscore in diamonds. If your partnership uses this approach, you have to indicate it on the convention card.

2♠ Transfer to 3♣

In bridge shorthand this might be written as “→ 3C” but you get the idea.

Notice that this area is underlined in red, meaning you have to alert this convention. If partner responds 2♠ to your 1NT opening, you say “Alert.” That tells the opponents that the 2♠ response has a non-standard meaning. You don’t say anything else unless an opponent asks for an explanation. In which case you would say, “It asks me to bid 3♣ which partner can pass or convert to 3♦ to sign off in diamonds.”

## Anything Else?

That’s it unless you have some other specialized responses. A jump to the three level in a suit, whether it is weak, invitational, or forcing, is not conventional provided it actually shows the suit.

You probably want to fill in your range for a 2NT opening, likely 20–21, but your done with this part of the convention card. ♦