

# Keeping Up With Conventions

## Strong Two Bids

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In this set of articles we continue to look at how to fill out the standard convention card that lists all the partnership bidding and defensive carding agreements. Each partner should have a completed card for club and tournament events. Filling out the card with partner before the game begins will give you confidence that you're both on the same wavelength.

The card is color-coded:

1. Items in **black** indicate the "standard" methods which don't require any special notification to the opponents.
2. Items in **red** indicate non-standard agreements that require you to alert the opponents.
3. Items in **blue** are somewhere in between. They are fairly standard agreements but you have to announce them to the opponents when they apply.

Previous issues covered notrump, major suit, and minor suit opening bids and responses. These articles can be found by visiting our website at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com).

Now we move on to opening bids at the two level and responses. We'll start with strong two-bids and deal with weak two-bids next issue. Here is what this area on the convention card looks like:

### Strong Two Bids

What would you open with this hand? If the answer is 2♥, you are playing old-fashioned strong two-bids. If that's the case, you would fill out the area beside 2♥ something like this:

you are playing old-fashioned strong two-bids. If that's the case, you would fill out the area beside 2♥ something like this:

2♥ 22 to + HCP  
Natural  Conv.

This indicates that the 2♥ opening bid is a natural, forcing bid, showing about 22 or more (+) high-card points. Mark the other two-bids in a similar fashion.

### Artificial Forcing 2♣

The popular modern style, however, is to open all very strong hands with an artificial 2♣ bid. This frees up the opening bids of 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ for other uses . . . typically as weak two-bids. So, the above hand would be opened with an artificial 2♣, planning to describe the distribution with the rebid.

The artificial forcing 2♣ opening is used for both strong balanced hands and strong unbalanced hands.

### Strong Balanced Hands

The partnership's bidding style determines how balanced hands of various strength ranges are to be described. A common approach is to open 1NT with 15-17 points,

2NT with 20-21, and 2♣ with 22 or more. This allows the partnership to describe any balanced hand within a two or three-point range:

RANGE	BIDDING APPROACH
12-14	Open one-of-a-suit, planning to rebid notrump.
15-17	Open 1NT.
18-19	Open one-of-a-suit, planning to jump in notrump.
20-21	Open 2NT.
22-24	Open 2♣, planning to rebid 2NT.
25-27	Open 2♣, planning to rebid 3NT

Although high-card points (HCP) are the main criteria for valuing balanced hands, adding an extra point for a five-card suit or upgrading the hand when it has lots of 10's and 9's is common practice. This hand, for example, ♠ K Q 10 has only 21 high-card points but most seasoned players would open 2♣, planning to rebid 2NT to show a balanced hand of 22-24 points.

### Strong Unbalanced Hands

Charles Goren's original strength requirement for a strong two-bid was at least 21 high-card points with a six-card or longer suit, 23 with two five-card suits, and 25 with only one five-card suit. The real criteria, however, is playing tricks. If you have a hand within one trick of game, you don't want to open at the one level and have partner pass with a stray king or queen.

For example, ♠ A K J 9 7 5 2 this hand has only 16 high-card points but most players would open 2♣.

	DESCRIBE	RESPONSES/REBIDS
2♣	_____ to _____ HCP Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> 2♦ Resp: Neg <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting <input type="checkbox"/>	
2♦	_____ to _____ HCP Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♥	_____ to _____ HCP Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♠	_____ to _____ HCP Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>

You can probably make ten tricks even if partner has no points at all, so you don't want to open 1♠ and hear everyone pass. The alternative is to open 4♠, but then you might miss a slam if partner has an ace and one of the queens you need.

On the other side of the coin, you don't always open with 2♣ just because you have 22 or more high-card points. This ♠ A Q J 5 hand has 23 high-card points but is a poor candidate for an opening 2♣. The hand isn't balanced enough for a notrump rebid and, with no five-card or longer suit, isn't suitable for a strong two-bid in a suit. Many players would open 1♦ or 1♣, hoping to hear a bid from partner but willing to play there if partner can't scrape up a response.

Most partnerships that use the artificial 2♣ opening for all strong hands will fill out the appropriate area something like this:

2♣	22 to +	HCP
	Strong <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>

This indicates the opening 2♣ bid is strong and shows about 22 or more points. It is assumed to be artificial and forcing but it doesn't require an alert since it falls under the umbrella of "standard" practice. In fact, if you use a 2♣ opening to actually show clubs ... as a natural opening bid or as a weak two-bid ... that is alertable!

As you've seen, the 22+ high-card points is more of a guideline than a fact, so some partnerships prefer to leave the range blank ... simply indicating that the bid is strong and leaving the exact strength to the judgment of the opening bidder.

### Negative or Waiting?

If partner opens 2♣ ♠ 9 8 4 3 and the next player ♥ 5 2 passes, what do you ♦ 8 7 4 respond with this hand? ♣ J 9 6 3

Since you can't pass the forcing 2♣ opening, you must bid something. At one time, the "negative" response to a strong two-bid was 2NT, but that has two disadvantages.

It uses up a lot of bidding room when opener still hasn't described the hand and, if the partnership does play the contract in notrump, it will be played by the weak hand with all the partnership assets face up on the table.

So, common practice is to respond an artificial 2♦ with this hand, leaving room for opener to bid 2♥ or 2♠ to show a strong two-bid in a major suit or 2NT to show a balanced hand of 22-24 points. It is this factor that makes the artificial 2♣ opening so effective. No bidding room is lost when opener has a strong two-bid in a major or a strong balanced hand and the other opening bids at the two level are freed up for other uses. Only if opener has a strong bid in a minor suit and has to rebid 3♣ or 3♦ is an extra bidding level used to describe the hand.

Since a 2♦ response wastes the minimum space, most partnerships use this bid for all hands that don't qualify for an immediate "positive" response. For example, this ♠ J 9 8 5 hand contains 9 high-card points but isn't ♦ Q 9 6 2 balanced and doesn't ♣ A Q 7 2 have a five-card suit, so it falls into the 2♦ category. This popular approach is referred to as 2♦ "waiting" ... waiting to see what opener has to say. The card is filled out this way:

2♦	22 to +	HCP
	Strong <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
2♦ Resp:	Neg <input type="checkbox"/>	Waiting <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The 2♦ response isn't alertable whether it is negative or waiting.

### What's Positive?

The partnership needs to agree on what responder needs to bid something other than 2♦. A popular agreement is that with about 8 or more high-card points, responder can show a "good" five-card suit ... two of the top three honors ... or any six-card or longer suit. If responder's suit is diamonds, responder will have to jump to 3♦, since 2♦ would be artificial. With 8 or more points and a balanced hand, responder can bid 2NT. Any positive response commits the partnership to game.

### Other Responses

There are many variations on responding to 2♣. Some use 2♥ as the negative response, keeping 2♦ as waiting but showing enough to commit the partnership to game. Others prefer to use "step" responses to show the range of points held. Some like to show the number of "controls" ... aces and kings ... held by responder.

These methods can be described in the area under "RESPONSES/REBIDS" and are alertable.

### Second Negative

Suppose you are using ♠ 9 8 4 the popular 2♦ waiting ♥ 5 2 approach and you have ♦ 8 7 4 2 this hand. Partner opens ♣ 8 6 5 3 2♣ and you dutifully respond 2♦. If partner rebids 2NT, you can pass since partner has at most 24 points. But what if partner rebids 2♥. Can you pass?

Although some players do pass in this situation, it is not standard practice. Opener's 2♥ rebid shows a strong two-bid ... five or more hearts and unlimited strength. Opener might have ten or more tricks with no help from you.

The standard way to show a real negative at this point is to bid 2NT but that might get the hand played from the weak side if partner raises. A popular approach is to use 3♣ as a "second negative" to show a really weak hand and 3♦ if opener rebids 3♣. This is referred to as "cheaper minor second negative" and might be written on the card in this manner ... using typical bridge shorthand:

RESPONSES/REBIDS	
	3C/D = 2nd neg.

If opener rebids 3♦, you would have to bid 3NT with a weak hand. Once you've made a second negative, most partnerships allow responder to pass if opener simply rebids the same suit. If opener bids a new suit, however, responder has to bid again. 