

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.

One level opening bids cover a wide range of strength...up to about 21 points. They are not forcing, however. Responder can pass with fewer than 6 points since the partnership is unlikely to have enough combined strength for game. With a hand so strong that game is likely even if responder has fewer than 6 points, opener needs a forcing opening, one that responder won't pass.

At one time, such hands were opened at the two level with a *strong two-bid* but the modern style is to use opening bids of 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ as weak two-bids. All strong hands are opened with an artificial, forcing 2♣. The Grant Standard guideline is:

2♣ OPENING

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

This article will focus on handling strong balanced hands, but first we need to consider what responder does when partner opens 2♣.

The 2♦ Response

There are many possible schemes for responding to 2♣, but the most popular...and straightforward...is to use 2♦ as an artificial waiting response. This leaves the maximum room for opener to describe the strong hand. Responder's strength and distribution can be shown later in the auction.

The 2♣ Opening and Responses

About 80% of the time, responder bids 2♦ and awaits developments.

Suppose partner opens 2♣ and we have this hand. We can't pass since 2♣ is forcing. Instead we respond 2♦, waiting to hear what partner has to say next.

Even with enough strength that a slam is likely, it's usually best to start with a 2♦ response. We'll tell partner about the strength of our hand as the auction progresses.

Positive Responses

We don't have to respond 2♦ when partner opens 2♣. We can choose to make a positive response.

POSITIVE RESPONSE TO 2♣

- With about 8 or more points:
- 2♥, 2♠, 3♣, or 3♦ shows a good five-card or longer suit.
 - 2NT shows a balanced hand with mostly queens and jacks.

A positive response commits the partnership to at least game and shows interest in reaching slam. A positive response in a suit shows a "good" five-card suit—typically two of the top three honors—or a reasonable six-card or longer suit—typically two of the top four honors.

With this hand we can respond 2♠. Our spades are likely to be of value even if partner's suit is hearts.

Although this hand has 10 high-card points, we'd respond 2♦, waiting. Our suit isn't good enough to make a positive response by jumping to 3♦.

With this hand we could make a positive response of 2NT. This response takes up bidding room, so most partnerships reserve it for balanced hands of about 8-12 points with no more than one ace or king. With aces and kings, it's usually best to bid 2♦ and wait to hear what partner has to say.

Opening Balanced Hands

Strong balanced hands of 22 or more points are opened 2♣. The plan is to rebid notrump at an appropriate level: 2NT with 22-24 points; 3NT with 25-27 points; 4NT with 28-30 points... and so on (if we are ever so fortunate). In addition, we use an opening bid of 2NT to show 20-21 points.

This gives us a way to describe a balanced hand of any strength:

BALANCED HANDS

- 12-14 Open one of a suit, planning to rebid notrump at the cheapest level.
- 15-17 Open 1NT.
- 18-19 Open one of a suit, planning to rebid notrump jumping a level.
- 20-21 Open 2NT.
- 22-24 Open 2♣, planning to rebid 2NT.
- 25-27 Open 2♣, planning to rebid 3NT.
- 28-30 Open 2♣, planning to rebid 4NT.

2NT. With a balanced hand of 20 points, we open 2NT. **The 2NT opening is not forcing.** Responder can pass with no interest in reaching game.

2♣. With 22 high-card points, start with 2♣. This is forcing. If partner responds 2♦, rebid 2NT, showing a balanced hand of 22-24 points. **The 2NT rebid is not forcing.**

As with opening 1NT bids, it's usually best to describe this type of hand as balanced, even with a five-card major. If we were to rebid 2♥, we'd be showing a strong *unbalanced* hand with five or more hearts.

♠ A Q 2♣. This hand has
♥ A K 9 24 high-card points
♦ A K Q 10 7 but we can add 1
♣ Q 10 6 point for the five-card suit. We plan to jump to 3NT over the expected 2♦ response.

The Auction After 2NT

If partner opens 2NT or opens 2♣ and rebids 2NT after a 2♦ response, we can use similar methods to those after a 1NT opening bid:

RESPONSES AFTER 2NT AND 2♣-2♦-2NT	
3♣	Stayman
3♦	Transfer to hearts
3♥	Transfer to spades
3NT	To play in game
4♣	Gerber (ace asking)
4NT	Invitational to slam
6NT	To play in slam

We can assign meanings to other responses, such as 3♠, but that's outside the scope of Grant Standard. We have enough for now to handle most hands.

For example, consider how the auction might go if these are the combined East-West hands:

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

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

With 22 high-card points, West starts with 2♣ and rebids 2NT after the 2♦ waiting response. East has only 4 high-card points but that should be enough for game when West has at least 22. With a four-card major suit, East uses the Stayman convention, 3♣. West shows a four-card spade suit and East raises to game.

4♠ is an excellent contract; West has only one spade loser, one heart loser, and one club loser. 3NT would be a poor contract. The defenders can establish enough heart tricks to defeat the contract.

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

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

With 21 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit, West treats the hand as a balanced 22-24 points, opening 2♣ and rebidding 2NT over the 2♦ waiting response. With a five-card heart suit, East starts by transferring to the major suit. West simply accepts the transfer; West doesn't try to show the spade suit.

With only five hearts, East gives partner a choice of games by bidding 3NT. With only a doubleton heart, West passes. 3NT is a good contract. Declarer can promote four spade tricks and two clubs to go with the three sure winners in diamonds. 4♥ would have four quick losers.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2NT	Pass	3♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

With a balanced hand and 20 high-card points, West opens 2NT. East has no points but the hand should play better with spades as the trump suit. East bids 3♥ to transfer opener to spades. After West dutifully bids 3♠, East passes, leaving the partnership in partscore.

In 3♠, West will have to lose at least two spade tricks and two club tricks, and may lose more. However, at least this contract has a chance. For example, declarer can eventually get to the East hand by trumping a heart to try the diamond finesse. A contract of 2NT by West would have no chance.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2NT	Pass	4NT	Pass
6NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

With a balanced hand and 24 high-card points, West opens 2♣. East doesn't have a good enough suit to make a positive response of 3♣. Instead East makes a waiting bid of 2♦. West completes the description of the hand with a 2NT rebid. East has 9 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit. East knows the partnership has a total of about 32-34 points.

To invite slam, East raises to 4NT. This isn't the Blackwood convention since no suit has been agreed. It is a *quantitative* raise. With a maximum, West accepts the invitation and the excellent slam is reached. West can promote two spade tricks to go with the two heart tricks, three diamond tricks, and five club tricks.

The Auction After 3NT

When opener starts with 2♣ and jumps to 3NT over a 2♦ response, there isn't much room left to explore for the best game. Still, the partnership should have some agreement about what happens next. A reasonable approach is to use similar methods to those after a 2NT. So, 4♣ is Stayman (probably more useful than Gerber), 4♦ and 4♥ are transfers, and 4NT is an invitational raise.

It's even more challenging if opener rebids 4NT. Fortunately...or unfortunately...such hands are rare. So most partnerships don't have any conventional agreements.

After a Positive Response

If responder makes a positive response after the 2♣ opening, the auction tends to develop naturally. There's no need for Stayman or transfer bids.



In the next issue, we'll look at how the partnership handles unbalanced hands after a 2♣ opening.