

Responding to Partner's Opening Bid with 2NT

An example auction including this bid would be:

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2NT	

North is showing 10-12 points and no support for spades. This is something I see quite often following opening bids in other suits as a way of showing points. This document describes the impact of this bid and explores other options that can be more effective.

The first question to consider is “what will partner do next?”

With a balanced hand and more than 14 points partner will bid 3NT or very occasionally explore a slam. With an unbalanced hand and six spades South will rebid their spades. It will be uncomfortable if South is at the bottom of the range for their opening bid (say 12 or 13 points) as they will need to bid 3♠ when they would prefer to be in 2♠.

So a 3♠ bid is weak but this causes another problem. If South is stronger and thinks that game is possible there is no bid available to give North the choice between 3NT and 4♠. So South will need to guess which one is best. South doesn't know how many spades North has - it could be none, 1, 2 or 3. North doesn't know how many spades South has (it could be only 4) and if South bids 3NT there is little chance they will bid 4♠ even with, say, three spades.

South may want to show a second suit but that means bidding it at the three level and a new suit at the three level is forcing to game so they will need 16+ points for that bid. With fewer points they will need to hope their second suit is useful in no-trumps.

So the most likely contracts are 2NT or 3NT. Next most likely are 3♠ or 4♠ if South thinks it will make even with a void in the North hand. I hope you have noticed my use of “guess” and “hope” in this description of the options - it is all very problematic. The reason for this is that the 2NT bid has taken away all the bidding space.

North may have some alternative bids:

2♣	Shows 4+ clubs and 10+ points
2♦	Shows 4+ diamonds and 10+ points - denies 4 clubs
2♥	Shows 5+ hearts and 10+ points - doesn't say anything about the minors as it is more important to allow South to support hearts with only three in the suit

Any of these are preferable as they will give South the option to bid again at the 2 level and will also give South more information about the hand held by North.

If South opens with a suit that is lower ranked than spades and you can bid a suit at the one level you should do that in preference to bidding 2NT.

You have probably guessed that my view is that the 2NT response should be used only as a last resort. There is one hand pattern where you have no alternative. Partner opens 1♠ and you have three spades, four hearts, three diamonds and three clubs. You cannot bid hearts at the two level because you don't have five of them, so you have to bid 2NT. In all other hands and auctions there is an alternative and you should only bid 2NT if you want to play in no-trumps - not just to show points.