**One No Trump Opening and Responses**

An opening bid of one no trump (1NT) is a LIMITED bid.

Beginners are normally taught that it shows:

1. 12-14 points
2. A Balanced hand, no singleton, and only one doubleton.
3. Denies a 5 card major

After a 1NT opening bid responder is in charge of the bidding, he/she will normally make the decisions. Sometimes responder will consult with opener regarding the final decision.

# Examples of a 1NT opening

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Hand 1  | Hand 2  | Hand 3  | Hand 4  | Hand 5  |
| Kx  | QTxx  | AKxx  | KTx  | xxx  |
| QJx  | Kx  | Qxxx  | Qx  | AJx  |
| AQJxx  | AJxx  | JTx  | AJx  | AKxxx  |
| xxx  | Qxx  | QT9  | QTx  | xx  |

Note 1

Playing in a club the partner of the 1NT opener should ***announce*** the strength of the opening bid. In this case “12 to 14”

Note 2

Not all players play that an opening bid of 1NT shows 12-14 points.

Some players play 10-12 points (mini no trump), others 12-14 or 13-15 points (weak no trump), others 15-17 or 1618 points (strong no trump).

Most players in English clubs play 12-14. If you play a stronger 1NT opener that may mean that you often play in a different contract to the rest of the room, and find yourself collecting tops and bottoms on hand where the field will be scoring average. (This is not a recommendation for you not to play strong no trumps, just to let you know how it may affect your results)

For the purposes of this document we will assume a 12-14 no trump. If you play a different no trump range just adjust the requirements for the responses, to cater for your own range.

Note 3

Not all players are as rigid in their shape requirements for a 1NT opening, some will open 1NT with a five card major (hearts or spades), some will open with a six card minor (clubs or diamonds).

At club level more people are including 5 card majors in their no trump openers as the years roll by.

In the wider world some players will open 1NT with two doubletons, and just a few will do it with a singleton (probably a singleton honour). In the latter case the bid should be ***announced*** as “12-14 (whatever), may contain a singleton”.

# Responding to a One No Trump Opening Bid

Responder has to make the following decisions:

1. Do we play in a part score, a game or a slam? Normally we need a combined total of 25-26 points to play in a game (3NT, 4H, or 4S). A few more to play in 5C or 5D. To make a slam in no trump we need a combined total of 33 points.
2. Do we play in no trumps or a suit? With two balanced hands it is normally better to play in no trumps. To play in a suit we normally need a minimum of eight trumps between the two hands. With a 5 card suit responder may decide to look for a 5-3 (better) trump fit, with a 6 card suit, responder knows that there is at least a 6-2 fit available. Sometimes the responder may look for a 4-4 fit in a major (using the Stayman convention)

Often responder will be able to make the final decision for the partnership, ie act as Captain. Occasionally he/she will need to consult with opener for more information.

# Responses to One No Trump opener

## A simple responding structure

When people first start to play they may be taught a simple response structure:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Opener  | Responder  | Meaning  |
| 1NT   |   | ?  |  |
|   |   | Pass  | No ambition, we play this hand in no trumps, there is no possibility of game. This is  |
|    |   |   | my final decision.  |
|   |   | 2C/2D/2H/2S  | I do not wish to play in no trumps and there is no possibility of game, do not bid  |
|    |   |   | again! I have a long suit and want to play here.  |
|   |   | 2NT  | I want to play in no trumps, I cannot be certain that we have enough points for  |
|   |   |   | game. (I have only 12 points or a good eleven). With only 12 points you must  |
|    |   |   | pass. With a maximum (14) or a good 13 points, please bid game (3NT)  |
|   |   |   | As practical tip I (Brian Keable) do not recommend that beginners respond 2NT’s as a  |
|   |   |   | game try with an ordinary 11 point hand, hoping that their partner has 14 points.  |
|   |   |   | Better to miss the occasional game than play in 2NT or 3NT and go off. One way to  |
|   |   |   | get a good result is not to push for thin games when playing pairs, ensuing that play  |
|    |   |   | in a safe 1NT (probably making) while the “better” players push on to 2NT or 3NT.  |
|   |   | 3C/3D  | Our side has enough points for game. I have a long minor suit (at least six, and I am  |
|   |   |   | uncertain whether or not to play in 3NT or 5 (or 6) of my minor. Please keep bidding  |
|    |   |   | until we reach game.  |
|   |   | 3H/3S  | I know we have enough points for game, and I have a 5 card major. I wish to play in  |
|   |   |   | the major suit if you have 3 or 4 of my suit. Please tell me how many trumps you  |
|   |   |   | have. Bid 3NT with only 2 of my suit support my suit with 3 or 4 cards.  |
|   |   |   | Note with 5 spades and 5 hearts and the values for game, bid 3S over 1NT, if partner  |
|   |   |   | bids 3NT denying 3 or more spades, rebid 4H, you should then find a 5-3 heart fit.  |
|   |   |   |   |
|    |   | 3NT  | I know we have enough points for game (25 plus). Please pass  |
|   |   | 4H/4S  | I know we have enough points for game, and I have a six card (or a longer suit). So  |
|    |   |   | we have at least 8 trumps. Please pass. I am the captain!  |
|   |   | 4NT  | I want to play in no trumps, we may have enough for slam 6NT, but only if you are  |
|    |   |   | maximum. Pass with 12 or 13 points, otherwise bid 6NT with a maximum (14)  |
|   |   | 5C/5D  | I have a seven card suit (or longer) and want to play in this contract. Please pass. I  |
|    |   |   | can probably make game, but only in my suit.  |
|   |   | 6NT  | our partnership has a combined minimum of 33 points, and I want you to play for a  |
|   |   |   | slam. Please pass. Good luck.  |

The above responding structure is nice and simple, but not particularly effective. Bidding 2C as a weak takeout just tells the opponents that they have some points and make it easier for them to get into the bidding with their major suits.

It is much better to play a 2C response as the Stayman convention, to try to find 4-4 major suit fits.

# Stayman Convention

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Opener  | Responder  | Meaning  |
| 1NT  |   | 2C  |   | Do you have a four card major, please tell me.  |
|   |   |   |   | I would like to know if you have a four card heart or spade suit.  |
|   |   |   |   | If you have I may be able to find a good contract with a 4-4 major suit fit. Please tell  |
|   |   |   |   | me about your major (heart/spade) holdings  |
|   |   |   |   | (Please just answer the question. I promise that I will take care of things whatever  |
|    |   |   |   | answer you give!)  |
|   |   |   |   | 2C says do you have a 4 card major?  |
|   |   |   |   | You must reply (as follows):  |

2D No 4 card major

2H Yes I have 4 hearts (may also have 4 spades) 2S Yes I have 4 spades but not 4 hearts.

Normally the responder will be looking for a 4-4 major fit, except when he wishes to stop in 3 clubs with a weak hand. Note 4:

In a club Stayman 2C bids (in response to a 1NT opening bid only) should be ***announced***: “Stayman”

There is a cost to using Stayman you tell the opponents more about your hands. You do not have to use Stayman all the time, only when you feel it is going to be more valuable to do so. In addition you cannot play in 2Clubs when you have a weak hand with long clubs. That type of hand can be catered for by rebidding 3C after partner replies to Stayman. i.e.

1NT 2C

2D/2H/2S

 3C I’m cancelling my Stayman bid, I have long clubs and wish to play for nine tricks in clubs rather than 7 tricks in no trumps. Not all players play 3C here as weak, you need to have an ***agreement*** with partner.

# When to use Stayman

Stayman should normally only be used if responder can handle any of the three possible responses from the opener.

## Invitational Hands

With the values for an invitational bid of 2NT plus a four card major, use Stayman to explore the possibility of a 4-4 major fit. If partner bids your four card major, invite him/her to bid game by raising to the major to the three level, otherwise respond 2NT. Say partner has shown 4 hearts and you now bid 2NT, he knows that you have a four card spade suit (why bid Stayman if you had no interest in finding a 4-4 major fit).

## Game Hands

With game values and a four card major use Stayman to explore the possibility of a 4-4 major fit

Optional Uses

## Weak Hands

With a weak hand 54 or 45 (or 55)in the majors, use Stayman, if partner bids a major pass, otherwise convert to two of your long major. This orders opener to pass, not everyone plays this style (known as Garbage Stayman) but as you get more experienced and have regular partners it can be very useful.

With a weak hand and a six plus card club suit, use Stayman, pass if partner bids a major suit in which you may also have 4 cards. Otherwise convert to 3C telling partner to PASS. Again not every uses this method to make a weak takeout in clubs, make you and your partner/s are on the same wavelength

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stayman**  | **Opener bids 2D**  |
| Opener  | Responder  |
| 1NT  |   | 2C  |
| 2D  |   | No four card major.  |
|   |   | Pass  | I do not wish to play in no trumps and there is no possibility of game, do not bid  |
|   |   |   | again! I have 5 diamonds and want to play here. My shape is probably 4S4H5D0C  |
|   |   | 2H  | Please pass. I have 5 hearts and 4+ spades, this should be better than playing no  |
|   |   |   | trumps  |
|   |   | 2S  | Please pass, I have 5 spades and 4 hearts, this should be better than 1NT  |
|   |   | 2NT  | Now that I know you don’t have a four card major, I want to play in no trumps, I  |
|   |   |   | cannot be certain that we have enough for game. (I have only 12 points or good  |
|   |   |   | eleven). With only 12 points you must pass. With a maximum (14) or a good 13  |
|   |   |   | points, please bid game (3NT). I used Stayman first because I have at least one four  |
|   |   |   | card major.  |
|   |   | 3C  | STOP please. I used Stayman only to get out of no trumps and play in clubs I have at  |
|    |   |   | least six clubs. Hope this will be better than no trumps.  |
|   |   | 3H/3S  | I know we have enough points for game, and I have a 5 card major. I wish to play in  |
|   |   |   | the major suit if you have 3 or 4 of my suit. Please tell me how many trumps you  |
|   |   |   | have. Bid 3NT with only 2 cards in my suit; support my suit with 3 or 4 cards.  |
|   |   |   | (I used Stayman first because I also have 4 cards in the other major.)  |
|   |   | 3NT  | I know we have enough points for game (25 plus). Please pass  |
|   |   |   | (I used Stayman first because I have a least one four card major.)  |

# Stayman Opener bids 2H

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Opener  | Responder  |  |
| 1NT  |   | 2C  |  |  |
| 2H   |   | Pass  |   | To play, we have found a 4-4 fit in hearts.  |
|    |   | 2S  |   |   |
|   |   | 2NT  |   | I want to play in no trumps, I cannot be certain that we have enough for game. (I  |
|   |   |   |   | have only 12 points or good eleven). With only 12 points you must pass. With a  |
|   |   |   |   | maximum (14) or a good 13 points, please bid game (3NT). I used Stayman because I  |
|   |   |   |   | also have 4 spades. If you have 4 spades, please convert to 3S with a minimum hand  |
|    |   |   |   | or 4S with a maximum hand as appropriate.  |
|   |   | 3C  |   | STOP please. I used Stayman only to get out of no trumps and play in clubs I have at  |
|    |   |   |   | least six clubs. Hope this will be better than no trumps.  |
|   |   | 3H  |   | Invitational, We have found a 4-4 heart fit; I have 12 points, not quite enough for  |
|    |   |   |   | game, if you are minimum PASS, please bid 4H if non minimum.  |
|   |   | 3NT  |   | I know we have enough points for game (25 plus).  |
|   |   |   |   | (I used Stayman because I was looking for a 4-4 fit in spades, if you have 4 spades  |
|   |   |   |   | you may convert to 4S.)  |
|   |   | 4H  |   | I know we have enough points for game, and we have found a 4-4 fit in hearts.  |

# Stayman Opener bids 2S

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1NT  |   | 2C  |  |  |
| 2S  |   | Pass  |   | To play.  |
|   |   | 2NT  |   | I want to play in no trumps, I cannot be certain that we have enough for game. (I  |
|   |   |   |   | have only 12 points or good eleven). With only 12 points you must pass. With a  |
|   |   |   |   | maximum (14) or a good 13 points, please bid game (3NT)  |
|    |   |   |   | (I used Stayman because I was looking for a4-4 fit in hearts)  |
|   |   | 3C  |   | STOP please. I used Stayman only to get out of no trumps. I have six clubs (and  |
|   |   |   |   | possibly four hearts), so I want to play in 3clubs now. Hope this will be better than  |
|    |   |   |   | no trumps.  |
|    |   | 3S  |   | invitational, we have a 4-4 fit in spades, please bid 4S you are non minimum.  |
|   |   | 3NT  |   | I know we have enough points for game (25 plus). Please pass  |
|    |   |   |   | I used Stayman because I also have 4 hearts.  |
|   |   | 4S  |   | I know we have enough points for game, and I know now that we have 4-4 fit in  |
|   |   |   |   | spades. Please pass. I am the captain!  |

Lots of sequences can be built around Stayman, increasing your bidding vocabulary. As you progress you may wish to

extend your knowledge and agreements with your partners.

# Examples of Responders Hands and Bidding

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Hand 5  |  |
| KQxx  | Try 2C Stayman, if partner shows 4  |
| KQx  | spades, raise to 3S Invitational  |
| Qxxx xx  Hand 6  | Otherwise bid 2NT invitational  |
| AJxxx  | Enough for game. Bid 3S to ask  |
| KQx  | partner if he/she has 3 card spade  |
| Kxx xx   | support.  |
| Hand 7  | Enough for game use Stayman first, if  |
| KQxx  | partner shows 4 hearts or 4 spades  |
| AKxxx  | raise to game. Over 2D bid 3H forcing  |
| Qx xx  Hand 8  | showing 5 hearts  |
| xxxx  | Awful hand, no trumps will be  |
| KQx  | terrible, try Stayman. If partner bids  |
| x  | spades pass.  |
| xxxxxx  | Otherwise bid 3C, telling partner to  |
|   | stop! Hope for the best.  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Qxx  | Pass 1NT, no game on, and no  |
| Kx Jxxxx Kxx  Hand 2  | guarantee that 2D will be better.  |
| JTxxxx  | Bid 2S to play, 1NT will be awful, 2S  |
| Kx xx xxx  Hand 3  | may be better. May hinder opponents  |
| JTxxx  | Try Stayman 2C, no trumps will be  |
| Kxxx  | awful. If partner bids 2D, convert to  |
| xx  | 2S. If opener bids 2H or 2S pass but  |
| xx   | with more optimism  |
| Hand 4  | Try 2NT inviting partner to bid game  |

Hand 1

with a maximum

KQx

KQx

QTxx

xxx

# Red Suit Transfers

If a response of 2C is a waste of time when used to show a weak hand, so to a lesser extent is to use 2D or even 2H or 2S just to show weak hands.

Many duplicate players play red suit transfers (2D and 2H) in response to 1NT

1NT 2D Asks (tells) partner to bid 2H promises nothing more at that point than a five card heart suit 2H Doing as I’m told.

1NT 2H Asks (tells) partner to bid 2S promises nothing more at that point than a five card spade suit 2S Doing as I’m told.

Note5

In a club, Red suit transfers should be announced ***announced***: “Hearts” or “Spades” as appropriate.

# Breaking the transfer

Most of the time if responder makes a red suit transfer, opener should just obey and complete the transfer, but with exceptional hands, including 4 cards in the major suit he/she may break the transfer by jumping one level higher.

1NT 2D

3H Opener might have something like Ax, Qxxx, Axxx, Axx (3H would be alerted)

**What are the advantages of playing RED SUIT transfers?**

1. If responder is weak, the stronger hand plays the hand in two of a major and is concealed from the opponents gaze.
2. Transfers provide many more useful sequences than weak takeout bids of diamonds or hearts.
3. Frees up the 2S response to mean something other than spades

There is of course a small disadvantage, you can never play in two diamonds by making a direct bid, and you may provide the opponents with an easy way of getting into the auction, as they can now use double to show some interest in bidding.

Let us look at the extra sequences that are available when one plays red suit transfers:

1NT 2D Shows 5+ hearts

2H ?

 Pass Weak takeout

 2S Game try or better with five hearts and four spades. Forcing to 2NT, 3H or 3S

 2NT Invitational raise to 2NT with 5 hearts (probably 5332 shape)

 3C game try (or better) with five+ hearts and four or more clubs. Forcing to 3H

 3D Game try (or better) with five+ hearts and four or more diamonds. Forcing to 3H

 3H Game try, shows six hearts and invitational values

 3S Good suits, six hearts and five spades forcing to game, mild slam try

 3NT Raise to 3NT with five hearts, opener may convert to 4H with three or more hearts

 4C/4D Good suits five plus hearts and five plus of the minor. Forcing to game, mild slam try

 4H to play, game values, six card heart suit

Similarly

1NT 2H Shows 5+ spades

2S ?

 Pass Weak takeout

 2NT Invitational raise to 2NT with 5 spades (probably 5332 shape)

 3C Game try (or better) with five spades and four or more clubs. Forcing to 3S

 3D Game try (or better) with five spades and four or more diamonds. Forcing to 3S

 3H Game try (or better) with five spades and four or more hearts forcing to 3S

 3S Game try shows six spades and invitational values

 3NT Raise to 3NT with five spades, opener may convert to 4S with three or more spades 4C/4D Good suits five plus spades and five plus of the minor. Forcing to game, mild slam try 4H Good suits, five plus spades, five plus hearts game values, mild slam try.

 4S to play game values, six card spade suit

So let us have a look at a possible overall response structure playing Stayman and Red Suit transfers:

1NT ?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  2C  | Stayman  |
|  2D  | Transfer to Hearts  |
|  2H  | Transfer to Spades  |
|  2S  | “spare bid”. See below for suggestions on how to use.  |
|  2NT  | Invitational  |
|  3C  | slam try in clubs  |
|  3D  | slam try in diamonds  |
|  3H  | slam try in hearts  |
|  3S  | slam try in spades  |
|  3NT  | to play  |
|  4C  | “spare bid  |
|  4D  | “spare bid”  |
|  4H  | to play  |
|  4S  | to play  |
|  4NT  | Invitational  |

# Optional bids

You may want to utilise the spare bids, some suggestions are provided below, but most players survive initially without using them. No hurry to go down that route.

1NT 2S some players use this bid to show five five in the minors.

1NT 2S others use this as Game Try/Slam Try

 Responder uses 2S as a Game Try (with 12 points) and as a Slam Try with 18+ points

1NT 2S

2NT I am minimum and not accepting a game invitation.

3X I am not minimum, and I am showing a good four card suit. If you are only interested in game, bid 3NT, but we may be able to find a good 4-4 trump fit if you are interested in a slam 3NT I am non minimum but have no decent 4 card suit.

If you play 1NT 2S as a game try/slam try, then a 2NT response can be used to show 55 in the minors weak or strong

1NT 2S and others play as a transfer to clubs

1NT 2NT and also play as a transfer to diamonds

All the above responses would require ***Alerts*** (not announcements).

1NT 4C Gerber Aces partner for Aces

4D 0 Aces if playing strong no trump 4D shows 0 or 4 Aces

4H 1 Ace

4S 2 Aces

4NT 3Aces

1NT 4D could be used to show a major two suiter.

The bids above are not alerted (nor announced), we do not alert bids higher than 3NT.

Note 6:

I (Brian Keable) do not recommend that you play the following method taught by some teachers. 1NT 2S Shows a raise to 2NT with 11 points

1NT 2NT Shows a raise to 2NT with 12 points

Don’t try for game with ordinary flat 11 point hands you will often be too high in 2NT

Don’t be worried at pairs if you miss the occasional thin game. Concentrate on making your part scores rather than push for thin games.

Note 7:

Some partnerships play 4 suit transfers rather than just simple red suit transfers

1NT 2S Transfer to clubs

1NT 2NT Transfer to diamonds

Or

1NT 3C Transfer to diamonds

Note if you play 2NT as a transfer bid, you have to use another to make an invitational raise to 2NT. Some players do this via Stayman which then does not promise a four card major.

# Partnership Agreements

If you play regularly with the same partner /s you get better results if you have agreements about what your bids mean. If you decide to play Stayman (you should) and Red Suit transfers (you should) try to make sure you are both on the same wavelength with regard to the meaning of your bids

You don’t have to be too complicated in your approach. Initially keep things simple and only add agreements if you can both remember them and you feel comfortable playing them. If in doubt just play **KISS** (**K**eep **I**t ***S***imple **S**ister)