



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 17

Available online at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html

Direct: A direct 1NT overcall occurs when you bid directly over an opponent's opening one-level bid. For example:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♥	1NT

Write the range of your 1NT overcall in the spaces provided.

Systems on: When you overcall 1NT and LHO passes, do you still play Stayman and transfers? If so, check this box to indicate that the methods you play after a 1NT opening apply after an overcall as well.

Conv: If your 1NT overcall is conventional showing either an unbalanced hand, a single suit or a general takeout, write a brief description on the line provided and Alert the opponents.

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All items in **RED** on the convention card must be Alerted and explained upon request.

NOTRUMP OVERCALLS If right-hand opponent opens one of a suit and you overcall 1NT, what does 1NT show? Most pairs define a 1NT overcall as showing the same type of hand as an opening strong 1NT bid, *i.e.*, a balanced hand with 15–17 high-card points. Many players increase the overcall range slightly to 16–18 HCP to provide extra protection since the overcall is somewhat dangerous — the opponents have already opened the bidding and left-hand opponent will know you're outgunned if he or she holds most of the remaining high cards. Another way to think about it is this: you're more likely to be doubled for penalty after a 1NT overcall than after a 1NT opening bid, so having extra values may be wise.

NOTRUMP OVERCALLS

Direct: _____ to _____ Systems on

Conv. _____

Balancing: _____ to _____

Jump to 2NT: Minors 2 Lowest

Conv. _____

Balancing: A balancing 1NT bid occurs when you bid 1NT in the balancing or pass-out seat. For example:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♦	Pass	Pass	1NT

The range for this 1NT call is typically less than the range of a direct 1NT bid. Many players define a balancing 1NT bid as showing a balanced hand in the 12–15 HCP range. There are many variations possible, however, and some partnerships even go so far as to have slightly different ranges depending on whether the opening bid is a minor or a major.

NOTE: You should discuss with your partner whether your normal 1NT systems are "on" in this situation. (Do you still play Stayman and transfers, for example?)

Jump to 2NT: Many players have agreed that a 2NT jump overcall of an opponent's opening one-level bid is the so-called "unusual" 2NT showing a two-suited hand. The two suits are frequently the minors. For example:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♥	2NT

After a major-suit opening by an opponent, 2NT promises a hand with a 5–5 or longer pattern in clubs and diamonds. You may even have this agreement if the opponent opens one of a minor.

If your 2NT jump overcall always shows the minors regardless of what suit the opponents open, check the Minors box.

Some pairs, however, prefer to define 1♣–(2NT) or 1♦–(2NT) as showing hearts and the

other minor, while 1♥–(2NT) or 1♠–(2NT) shows the minors. If you play this way, check the 2 Lowest box (since 2NT promises the two lowest unbid suits).

NOTE: A 2NT overcall of a two-level opening is not "unusual" or two-suited. For example:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		2♥ (weak)	2NT

Since 2NT is not a jump, in this sequence it merely shows a strong 1NT (15–18 HCP, balanced).

Conv: If your 2NT jump overcall shows something other than the hand types described above, write a brief description on the line provided and Alert the opponents.



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 18



Defense versus 1NT Openings

There was a time when anyone who opened 1NT could expect to have a nice, quiet, non-competitive auction. Those days are gone, because many players have learned that allowing the opponents to have a nice, quiet, non-competitive auction after a 1NT opening makes matters too easy for the opening side. With a shapely hand and adequate values, therefore, many players are jumping into the bidding not only to describe their own hand, but to throw a monkeywrench into the opponents' methods such as Stayman and transfers. There are many ways to compete after a 1NT opening. It's possible to play that all two-level actions are natural, or you can assign much more complicated meanings to 2♣, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ and, of course, double. The purpose of this discussion is not to suggest a particular method, but rather outline the proper way to mark your convention card regardless of what your methods may be.

Vs:

The "Defense Vs. Notrump" section of the convention card is arranged in two columns. This is to accommodate pairs who employ different methods depending upon factors such as whether the opponents are using a strong or a weak 1NT opening or to distinguish between direct overcalls and balancing actions.

For example, if the opponents open a 15–17 1NT, you and your partner might agree to play a system in which double shows a hand containing an unspecified long suit. Against a weak notrump opening (anything in the 10–14 HCP range), however, you might have agreed to play double as penalty or as showing values. The two columns allow you to describe your methods in both situations.

Alternatively, some pairs distinguish between a direct overcall, *e.g.*,

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1NT	2♥		

and a balancing (or pass-out) action, *e.g.*,

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
		1NT	Pass

Pass	2♥		
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If the meaning for 2♥ is different in these two cases, the two-column format allows you to describe both.

ALERT

If your defense to a 1NT opening by the opponents is anything other than natural, Alert and explain upon request.



DEFENSE VS NOTRUMP	
Vs:	_____
2♣	_____
2♦	_____
2♥	_____
2♠	_____
Dbt:	_____
Other	_____

2♣, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, Dbt

For each of these calls, write a brief description of what each means. If 2♣ is natural showing clubs, write "clubs" or "natural" in the blank provided. If 2♣ instead shows, say, clubs and hearts, write "clubs and hearts" (or the suit symbols, "♣ + ♥") in the blank. Do this for each of the calls, unless they are all natural in which case you may write "Natural" across the entire section.

Note: If you play a convention such as Cappelletti, DONT, Hello, Brozel or any other of the popular treatments, do not simply write the name of the convention across this section. It's not the job of your opponents to be familiar with your convention. Furthermore, the opponents may want to find out what your methods are by glancing at your convention card rather than by asking you. As a courtesy to the opponents, and in the interests of full disclosure, describe each call on the line provided.

Other

If there are other bids that are part of your conventional defense to 1NT (*e.g.*, What does 2NT mean? What about three-level bids?), describe them here and Alert them when they occur.

Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card – part 19

Over Opponent's Takeout Double: Many pairs agree to change the meanings of certain bids by responder if an opponent makes a takeout double. You should discuss with your partner what effect (if any) an opponent's takeout double has in a typical auction.

New Suit Forcing: When responder makes a "one-over-one" response in an auction where the opponents are silent, *e.g.*,

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass

opener is required to bid again. This concept is a cornerstone of contract bridge bidding, and it is so fundamental that the overwhelming majority of players extend this idea even to auctions in which the opponents make a takeout double. Therefore, in the auction

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♣	Dbl	1♥	Pass

most play that opener must make a rebid. Another way to put it would be this: over an opponent's takeout double, a one-level response is forcing. If your partnership has this agreement, check the "1 level" box.

A two-over-one response, however, is different. For example, in the sequence

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♠	Pass	2♣	

most play that 2♣ shows invitational or better values. Change the auction slightly to this,

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♠	Dbl	2♣	

and you may be one of the many pairs who have agreed to define 2♣ as non-forcing — opener may pass. Responder's hand could be something such as ♠9 ♥873 ♦1054 ♣KQJ762. The reason for this difference is right-hand opponent's takeout double, typically promising opening values and support for the other suits. Since the chance of your side reaching game is diminished, many pairs believe that it makes more sense to define some of responder's actions as weaker than they would be in a non-competitive setting.

Jump Shift: Without interference, your partnership may agree to play jump shifts (*e.g.*, 1♣ by partner – 2♥ by you) in any number of ways: very strong, intermediate or weak.

When the opponents intervene with a takeout double, however, many partnerships alter the meanings of their jump shifts. The popular choice is to treat a jump shift after a takeout double as weak. The reason for this is practical: if partner has an opening hand and RHO has an opening hand, it's almost impossible for responder to have a hand that's good enough to qualify for a strong jump shift. It's much more common for responder to have a weak hand with a long suit, making the weak jump shift a more useful option.

Therefore, in an auction such as

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♦	Dbl	2♠	

your partnership should decide whether 2♠ is forcing, invitational or weak and check the appropriate box.

OVER OPP'S T/O DOUBLE

New Suit Forcing: 1 level 2 level

Jump Shift: Forcing Inv. Weak

Redouble implies no fit

2NT Over Limit+ Limit Weak
 Majors

Redouble implies no fit: In an auction that begins

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1X	Dbl	Rdbl	

the redouble typically announces that your side has the balance of power. It usually promises at least 10 high-card points, and it invites partner to penalize the opponents if they run to one his long suits.

There are exceptions worth discussing, however. One of the most important ones is when responder has a fit for opener's suit, especially a major. For example, if partner opens 1♠ and RHO doubles, what do you call, holding

♠QJ32 ♥A7 ♦983 ♣KJ86? You have 11 HCP, but although you have the strength to redouble, it's better to tell partner about the spade fit. (See next month's column for how to handle this type of hand.)

Many pairs also avoid redoubling when responder has a good suit of his own. For example, in the auction

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♣	Dbl	?	

if you held ♠8 ♥AKQ86 ♦K543 ♣954 it's better to bid 1♥ than to redouble, since the LHO may preempt in spades. It's better to get your suit in now. That means that many experienced players will reserve redouble for hands which lack a fit for partner's suit and lack a good suit of its own. If redouble implies no fit, check the box.



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 20

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2NT

Could you bid an invitational 2NT instead of redoubling? Sure, but you give up on the chance of nailing the opponents — one of the great joys of the game! Besides, 2NT has better conventional uses since it allows you to describe a difficult class of hands: those in the invitational or better range with a fit for partner's suit.

Say your hand is this:

♠A94 ♥QJ83 ♦109 ♣KJ62.

Partner opens 1♥ and RHO doubles. What do you do? You can't bid 2♥ since that shows 6–9 points and (typically) three-card support. What about 3♥? You could agree to play this as invitational, but many pairs prefer to define the jump raise as preemptive, *i.e.*, a hand with four-card support in the 6–9 range. 4♥ would be wrong, too, since that shows a weak hand with five-card or longer support. So what's left?

This is where a conventional 2NT comes in handy. Many pairs play that 2NT shows an invitational hand or better with a four-card or longer fit for partner's suit. Partner, knowing that you have a limit raise, can judge what to do next. This treatment is commonly referred to as Jordan or Truscott.

If you play that 2NT in this sequence shows a limit (invitational) or better hand, check the appropriate box. If you play that it shows limit values only, check that box instead.



How do you show an invitational raise of partner's major-suit opening when you have exactly three-card support? A popular approach is to redouble, then jump to three of partner's suit on the next round. This is why the redouble box in this section says that it "implies" no fit.

Over Opponent's Takeout Double

In the last issue, we examined why many pairs play that a redouble after an opponent's takeout double shows 10 or more points and typically denies a fit for opener's suit. For example, when the auction begins:

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♥	Dbl	Redbl	

you might have a hand such as this:

♠KQ75 ♥9 ♦A862 ♣Q875.

The lack of a fit for partner makes the redouble attractive. Your side (probably) doesn't have a good fit. The opponents have the same problem, but since they're outgunned in terms of high-card strength, you should redouble to alert partner to your intentions, namely to double the opponents, even at a low level.

OVER OPP'S T/O DOUBLE

New Suit Forcing: 1 level 2 level

Jump Shift: Forcing Inv. Weak

Redouble implies no fit

2NT Over Limit+ Limit Weak

Majors

Minors

Other _____

Majors, Minors

While many pairs play that 1♥ or 1♠–(Dbl)–2NT shows a limit (or limit-plus) raise, some pairs change their approach when the opening bid is one of a minor. When the auction begins 1♣ or 1♦–(Dbl)–2NT, some players like to define this as showing a weak (preemptive) raise. How do they show an invitational hand with a fit (five or more cards)? They bid three of partner's suit. Since this approach is the opposite of what they do over a major-suit opening, it is commonly called "flip-flop."

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Note that all of these treatments are in RED and are Alertable. Explain these agreements upon request.