



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 1

By popular demand, the *Bridge Bulletin* will re-run the 24-part *Conventional Wisdom* series. *Conventional Wisdom* is also available online at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html.

Filling out a convention card with a partner is part of the fun of playing duplicate bridge. Whether you prefer a simple approach or a system with lots of bells and whistles, the convention card is a great way to keep you and your partner on the same wavelength.

Many clubs require both members of a partnership to have completed convention cards available as a courtesy to the opponents. Your convention card allows other players to get an overview of your methods at a glance.

NAMES: One of the easiest ways to create a pleasant playing environment — and to make new friends — is to introduce yourself and your partner to opponents you haven't met. In the excitement of playing the game, however, we sometimes forget our social obligations. Or sometimes we forget the names of players we've previously met! In either case, the space for players' names on the convention card is one of the easiest ways to allow everyone to associate a name with a face.

GENERAL APPROACH: Do you and your partner play Standard American? Two-over-one game forcing? Precision? Maybe you even prefer "Goren," "Schenken" or "Four-card majors" as the best way to describe your methods. Whatever your system, the GENERAL APPROACH space allows your opponents to see the shorthand description of it here.



Tip: To help remember your ACBL player number, write it next to your name on the convention card.

NAMES _____	
GENERAL APPROACH	
Two Over One: Game Forcing <input type="checkbox"/> Game Forcing Except When Suit Rebid <input type="checkbox"/>	
VERY LIGHT: Openings <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd Hand <input type="checkbox"/> Overcalls <input type="checkbox"/> Preempts <input type="checkbox"/>	
FORCING OPENING: 1♣ <input type="checkbox"/> 2♣ <input type="checkbox"/> Natural 2 Bids <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> _____	

VERY LIGHT: Although many players will occasionally open or preempt with a light, shapely hand, the boxes under the VERY LIGHT category are designed for partnerships who agree to use aggressive, light bidding as

a matter of course, not just every now and then. If you and your partner agree to regularly open hands that most players wouldn't, it's legal to do so, but the opponents have a right to know about it, too. Check the "Openings" box. If you and your partner think that preempting 3♣ is okay with ♠9 2 ♥10 ♦8 6 2 ♣Q 8 7 6 5 4 3, check the "Preempt" box.

Two Over One: How do you and your partner treat auctions that begin with a two-over-one sequence? For example:

Opener	Responder
1♥	2♣

Is this forcing to game? Forcing for just one round? If the auction begins 1♥-2♣; 2♦-3♣, may opener pass? Some partnerships allow the bidding to stop at 2NT or when responder simply rebids his suit. Others treat two-over-one sequences as 100% game-forcing. Check the box that best describes your approach.

FORCING OPENING: What's your systemic "big bid"? Do you play strong two-bids? Or do you use the popular 2♣? Maybe 1♣ is the strong bid in your system (Precision, for example). Check the appropriate box on this line.

**A
L
E
R
T**

If you use 1♣ as your strong system bid, you must Alert the opponents. (If you or your partner open a strong, artificial 1♣, say "Alert" to warn them about the unusual meaning. If they want to know more about your methods, they'll ask.) Notice that this box is in RED. Items in RED on the convention card require an Alert.

Rule The ACBL General Convention Chart doesn't allow partnerships to agree to open one-level bids with fewer than 8 high-card points. The bottom range for a 1NT opening is 10 HCP if you want to use conventions with it. Preempts, of course, are weaker by nature, but a preemptive style that is regularly very weak should be indicated on the convention card. Also, if you check any of those boxes, you must tell each of your opponents in advance of play.



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 2

The 24-part Conventional Wisdom series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html



Notice that “1NT” and the lines for the notrump ranges are in **BLUE**. All items in **BLUE** on the convention card require players to describe the meaning of the bid with a word or short phrase. In the case of notrump opening ranges, simply state the numerical range. For example, if your partner opens 1NT and your agreed-upon range is (say) 13–15 HCP, you should verbally Announce “Thirteen to fifteen,” so the opponents will also know the range without having to look at your convention card.

Rule The Announcement rule applies even to the common 15–17 1NT range.

1NT These spaces allow you and your partner to state your point range for an opening 1NT bid. If your 1NT shows 15 to 17 high-card points, write “15” on the top left line and “17” on the top right line. Why are there two sets of lines? It’s because some partnerships have a variable notrump range, which means that the range for their opening 1NT bids may change depending on which seat they open 1NT or what the vulnerability is. Most pairs, however, use just a single range.

NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS			
1NT	to _____	3♣	_____
_____	to _____	3♦	_____
_____	to _____	3♥	_____
_____	to _____	3♠	_____
5-card Major common	<input type="checkbox"/>	4♦, 4♥	Transfer <input type="checkbox"/>
System on over	_____	Smolen	<input type="checkbox"/>
2♣ Stayman	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jabensohl	(____) denies <input type="checkbox"/>
2♦ Transfer to ♥	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neg. Double	<input type="checkbox"/>
2♥ Forcing Stayman	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	_____
2♥ Transfer to ♠	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2♠	_____		
2NT	_____		

5-card Major common Some partnerships like to open 1NT on most balanced hands in the appropriate high-card range even if they contain a five-card major. If you and your partner play this way, check the box.

2♦ and 2♥ Most duplicate players use the 2♦ and 2♥ responses to 1NT as Jacoby transfers, promising five or more cards in the next higher suit, *i.e.*, 2♦ promises five or more hearts and 2♥ promises five or more spades. Opener is expected to accept the transfer by bidding the indicated suit at his next turn. If you use transfer responses to 1NT, check the appropriate **BLUE** boxes.

Both the 2♦ and 2♥ transfers require an Announcement. So if you open 1NT and partner bids 2♥, say “Transfer.” Note that there is also a “Forcing Stayman” option in **RED** under 2♦. Some pairs like to play “two-way” Stayman, meaning that 2♣ is used as Stayman with invitational hands, while 2♦ is used as Stayman with game-forcing hands. Check the **RED** box and Alert if you use this approach.



2♣ Most players use a 2♣ response to a 1NT opening as Stayman, asking opener if he has a four-card major. Check the black box if you and your partner play this. A few players prefer a variation called “Puppet Stayman,” which asks opener if he has a four- or five-card major. Check the red box if you use this method, and remember that it requires an Alert, as does anything else in **RED** on the convention card.

2♠ and 2NT While it is possible to treat these responses as natural, it’s popular to assign conventional meanings to these responses. They might be used to show length in one or both minor suits. For example, some pairs like to play that 2♠ shows clubs (similar to a transfer), while 2NT shows diamonds. There are many variations you may agree to play with your partner, and these spaces allow you to briefly describe your methods. Note that the lines are in **RED**; an Alert is required if the meanings are not natural.

System on over interference

Occasionally the opponents will interfere when your side opens 1NT. When this happens, you and your partner may agree to ignore their bidding and play your system as if they had not acted. This approach is called “system on.” For example, many players like their system to be “on” if the opponents double since the double takes up no bidding room. This means that Stayman and Jacoby

transfers (see below) would still be “on” so that the conventional message of responder’s 2♣, 2♦ and 2♥ bids would be unchanged.

Other players, however, think it’s too confusing to play systems on if the opponents interfere, so their bids revert to natural meanings. This approach is called “system off.” If you play system on, use the space provided to say which calls by the opponents (such as double and/or 2♣) allow you to still play Stayman, transfers or other conventional calls.



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 3

The 24-part *Conventional Wisdom* series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html

3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ Ask a dozen pairs what meanings they assign to these bids and you're likely to get a dozen different answers. There are many popular treatments, so it's important that you discuss with your partner what these bids mean in your partnership. Many pairs play 3♣ and 3♦ as natural, but be certain you understand what strength these bids promise. Some pairs like to play these as weak; they're a sign-off. Others prefer to treat them as invitational to 3NT promising a decent six-card suit. And others prefer to use them as strong and slam-going. If you play any of these treatments, no Alert is required. If, however, you'd prefer to use any of these bids to show, say, a two-suited hand (many pairs use 3♥ and 3♠ to show both majors) or maybe a three-suited hand (with shortness in the suit bid), that's okay too, as long as you write a brief explanation on the convention card and Alert the treatment. Note that these lines are in **RED**, requiring an Alert.

4♦, 4♥ Transfer

Many partnerships use 4♦ and 4♥ as transfers to 4♥ and 4♠, respectively. This popular treatment is known as a Texas transfer. After partner opens 1NT, you may show a long major suit (with appropriate values) at the four level by bidding the suit one rank below the one you actually hold. Partner will accept the transfer by bidding your "real" suit.



If you play this method, you must Announce "Transfer" to the opponents when partner responds 4♦ or 4♥ to your 1NT opening. The **BLUE** box indicates a bid that must be described to the opponents by an Announcement.

NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS	
1NT to _____	3♣ _____
_____ to _____	3♦ _____
5-card Major common <input type="checkbox"/>	3♥ _____
System on over _____	3♠ _____
2♣ Stayman <input type="checkbox"/> Puppet _____	_____
2♦ Transfer to ♥ <input type="checkbox"/>	4♦, 4♥ Transfer <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ Forcing Stayman <input type="checkbox"/>	Smolen <input type="checkbox"/>
2♥ Transfer to ♠ <input type="checkbox"/>	Lebensohl <input type="checkbox"/> (____ denies)
2♠ _____	Neg. Double <input type="checkbox"/> : _____
2NT _____	Other: _____

Negative Double Say partner opens 1NT, right-hand opponent bids 2♥ and you double. Many pairs play this as a good old-fashioned penalty double, but some like to play it as a negative double, promising values and length in the other suits, especially the major(s). If you prefer the latter approach, check the box.

Smolen Experienced pairs use Smolen to help them describe a hand with a 5-4 or 4-5 pattern in the majors after partner's 1NT opening. Smolen also helps keep the strong hand as declarer if a fit is found. Say the auction begins

Partner	You
1NT	2♣
2♦	?

After your 2♣ Stayman inquiry, partner has denied holding a four-card major. If you hold game-forcing values with five spades and four hearts, you know your side doesn't have an eight-card heart fit, but you might still have a 5-3 spade fit. How to show this kind of hand? Playing Smolen, you may now jump to the three level in your shorter major (hearts) to tell partner about your pattern. Partner can then decide between 3NT and 4♠. If you have four spades and five hearts, you would jump to 3♠ instead. Smolen requires an Alert after the three-level jump.



Lebensohl When the opponents intervene over your side's 1NT opening, it can be difficult to describe your hands accurately. For example, what does 3♣ mean in this auction?

You	Opponent	Partner	Opponent
1NT	2♥	3♣	

2♥ is natural. Is 3♣ forcing? Or is it to play? Both ways are reasonable, but you must have an agreement. To help differentiate between forcing and non-forcing actions by responder, many pairs use lebensohl. It works like this: Direct three-level actions (as in the given auction) are forcing, but with weak hands, responder bids 2NT (Alertable) first. This conventional bid commands opener to bid 3♣ so that responder can pass (with clubs) or bid another suit (such as diamonds) to show a weak hand with a long suit. Another nice part of lebensohl is that it allows you to tell partner whether you have a stopper in the enemy suit. Many lebensohl enthusiasts use this type of sequence to deny a stopper:

You	Opponent	Partner	Opponent
1NT	2♥	3NT	

Partner's 3NT call says, "I have enough strength to be in game, but I don't have a stopper." To show a stopper, partner bids 2NT first, forcing you to bid 3♣, and then bids 3NT:

You	Opponent	Partner	Opponent
1NT	2♥	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3NT	

Since the "faster" auction denies a stopper, many pairs write the word "Fast" in the blank next to "denies" on the card. This treatment requires an Alert.





Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 4

The 24-part Conventional Wisdom series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html



Puppet Stayman Many pairs use a 3♣ response to a 2NT opening as Stayman, asking if opener has a four-card major. A popular variation is to play puppet Stayman, wherein the 3♣ response asks if opener has a four- or five-card major. The advantage to this method is that it allows opener to open 2NT even if the hand contains a five-card major without worrying about missing a possible 5–3 major-suit trump fit.

ALERT

If you play puppet Stayman, check the **RED** box and Alert the opponents.

2NT Most pairs use a 2NT opening to describe a strong balanced hand. Popular high-card point ranges include 20–21, 20–22 or even 22–24. Write your ranges in the lines provided. Note that these lines are in black, so no Announcement is necessary.

3♠ Since most pairs use Stayman and transfers, the 3♠ response to 2NT is often left without a meaning. Indeed, many pairs agree simply not to assign a meaning to 3♠ at all! Others, however, use a 3♠ response to show some sort of hand with length in one or both minors.

ALERT

If your 3♠ response is not natural, write a brief description on the **RED** lines provided and Alert the opponents.

NT OPENING BIDS	
3♣ _____	2NT _____ to _____
3♦ _____	Puppet Stayman <input type="checkbox"/>
3♥ _____	Transfer Responses:
3♠ _____	Jacoby <input type="checkbox"/> Texas <input type="checkbox"/>
4♦, 4♥ Transfer <input type="checkbox"/>	3♠ _____
Smolen <input type="checkbox"/>	3NT _____ to _____
Lebensohl <input type="checkbox"/> (_____ denies)	Conventional NT Openings
Neg. Double <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Other: _____	_____

Transfer Responses: After a 2NT opening showing a strong balanced hand, many pairs allow responder to show a long major with a transfer response. Responder bids the suit below the one he actually holds, and opener accepts the transfer by bidding the next higher suit.

Jacoby After a 2NT opening, Jacoby transfers are made at the three level.

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♦
3♥	

Responder's 3♦ bid promises five or more hearts, and asks opener to accept the Jacoby transfer by bidding the next highest suit, 3♥. The auction proceeds from there. Similarly, a 3♥ response to 2NT would be a Jacoby transfer to 3♠.

Texas After a 2NT opening, Texas transfers are made at the four level.

Opener	Responder
2NT	4♦
4♥	

When responder uses a Texas transfer, he promises at least six cards in the major. To transfer to spades, responder would bid 4♥, asking opener to accept the Texas transfer by bidding 4♠. After the transfer is accepted, responder may pass or continue bidding depending on the strength of his hand.

Conventional NT Openings These lines are used to describe methods that are rare or unusual. An Alert is required for any treatment described in this space. Pairs who use a 2NT opening to show a weak two-suited hand, typically the minors, should describe this treatment here. Some pairs like to use 3NT to show a long, running minor suit, possibly with other values in different suits. This approach is popularly called "Gambling Notrump," since opener is gambling he can take nine tricks in 3NT before the opponents can defeat him.

3NT Many pairs agree to play an opening bid of 3NT as showing a super-strong balanced hand, such as 24 or more HCP. Common ranges are 24–26 or 25–27. If you play this way, write your range in the spaces provided. No Announcement is necessary.

ALERT

If you play any conventional responses to a 3NT opening (such as transfers) use the **RED** line for a brief description, and Alert the opponents.

ALERT

If you play this method, write a short description on the **RED** line provided and Alert the opponents.



Note that the transfer boxes are in **BLUE**. If you play Jacoby or Texas transfers, check the **BLUE** box(es) and Announce "Transfer" if your partner uses a transfer response to your 2NT opening.