

CHECK-BACK CONVENTION

Check-back is a mechanism whereby following a 1NT re-bid from opener, the responder can ask opener to define his no-trump range more accurately and also show additional features to enable the optimum fit to be found (it can also be used after a 2NT rebid in similar fashion).

Check-back evolved from Crowhurst (developed by Eric Crowhurst), which catered for the wide ranging 12–16 1NT rebid, but Check-back is now associated with the more modern 15-17 1NT rebid. The basic principles are the same in either treatment.

(The same principles apply if playing a strong NT, whereby the 1NT rebid is 12-14 points – with the corresponding point adjustments)

(One reason why a 15-17 rebid has become popular is that a 2NT rebid is now 18-19 points and effectively game forcing, and hence dispensing with the awful Acol 19 point 3NT rebid).

Basic Principle

Details differ, but the basis is that following opener's 1NT rebid (15-17 points), a **2♣ bid by responder asks opener to define his hand** in terms of minimum (15, 16 (poor) points), or maximum (16 (good), 17 points).

Responder's points will normally be in the 8+ range and it can also be used on the higher point hands to assess the best game contract, and also to consider slam possibilities opposite an appropriate maximum response from partner.

Opposite any maximum response it is game forcing.

The corollary is that if responder does not use the 2♣ Check-back bid, any alternative bid tends to show weakness – 5-7(poor) points.

Opener's Responses to 2♣ with lower range, i.e. 15 or a poor 16:

With this lower range of points all bids should be BELOW 2NT.

- a. Support responder's suit with 3 card support
(e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠...)
- b. Bid any new suit **below** 2NT
(e.g. 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠...) (this is **not** a reverse from opener)
- c. Re-bid own suit with 5-card suit
(e.g. 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥...)

(a,b,c, should be bid in **sequence of occurrence** if multiple options)

- d. OTHERWISE - if neither (a), (b), nor (c), bid 2♦ - the 'bucket' bid
(e.g. 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦...)
- e. **Forcing to 2NT unless an appropriate fit is found.**

Opener's Responses to 2♣ with upper range, i.e. 17 or a good 16:

With this higher range of points all bids should be 2NT or higher.

- a. Support responder's suit by bidding it at the 3-level (e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠)
- b. With extra length in own suit, rebid suit at 3-level (e.g. 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♥... shows a 5-card suit.
- c. With second suit, bid suit at 3-level (e.g. 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠... shows a 4-card spade suit.
- d. With none of the above, bid 2NT, the strong range bucket bid.

If responder still wishes to force over a minimum response, he should bid 3♣, saying please tell me more partner.

A jump bid by responder shows a six-card suit – forcing.

It's important that if there is a choice of the above options (a-d), the appropriate ones must be **bid in sequence**.

(e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♥ - 3♠ - 3NT - 4♥)... Opener now has 16 or 17 points, and in sequence has shown 5 diamonds, 3 spades, 4 hearts.

(This approach avoids confusion in sequences such as 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠ - 4♦. The 4♦ bidder cannot now be cue-bidding agreeing spades, nor can he be asking opener if he has a five card diamond suit – yes he has, together with four clubs. Responder is just showing diamond support, inviting a cue-bid for a possible slam. Moreover, if responder had bid 4NT instead of 4♦, this would be key-card in clubs)

3. Other issues:

If responder does not use check-back 2♣, and instead bids:

- a. a jump response to the 1NT (including 3♣), usually shows a six card suit 5,6, 7(poor) count. Invitational but not forcing.
- b. any other natural suit at the two-level. This tends to imply a 6-4 distribution, i.e. prepared to play at the three-level in the 6-card suit. With most other distributions, he would be inclined to pass 1NT.
- c. with a 4-3-3-3 hand and 8 pts. responder should bid 2NT rather than 2♣. This asks partner to bid 3NT with a 17-point hand (not 16) – 3NT with a flat-hand opposite flat-hand and 24 points does not usually give a good result – 25 points is better.
- d. don't use checkback just for the sake of it (i.e. don't want to investigate 'shape').