



Weak Two Bids and Responses

I'M SURE you all play Weak Two bids rather than strong two bids already. What! You don't? I really think you should . . .

- Weak two bids are far more frequent than strong two bids.
- They are much more troublesome for the opponents.
- Strong two bids never seem to work that well anyway!
- Weak two bids are great fun to play!

There are two mainstream systems people use:

- Benjy, or Reverse Benjy, Acol. These were introduced by Albert Benjamin (a redoubtable Scot who lived well into his 90s). Benjy goes like this:
 - 2♣ = 8 playing tricks (unspecified suit) or 21-22 balanced
 - 2♦ = Game force (or 23-24 balanced)
 - 2♥ = Weak two opener (six-cards in length)
 - 2♠ = Weak two opener (six-cards in length)
 - 2NT = 19-20 balanced
 In Reverse Benjy:
 - 2♣ = Game force (or 23-24 balanced)
 - 2♦ = 8 playing tricks (unspecified suit) or 21-22 balanced
 - 2♥ = Weak two opener (six-cards in length)
 - 2♠ = Weak two opener (six-cards in length)
 - 2NT = 19-20 balanced
- Weak Two bids in diamonds, hearts and spades. **This is my preferred option**, I must say. It just gives you more opportunity for pre-emption and I have always felt that the coded element of Benjy doesn't work well at all in uncontested auctions – let alone if the opponents interfere. I also do not recommend any system which forces a balanced 19 count to open 2NT; it works so much better to open one of a suit and rebid 2NT (18-19).

Pre-empting Style

Partnerships should agree various principles for pre-empting, whether at the two level or higher. Good partnerships decide on all sorts of parameters to factor in – here are a few to think over:

- The vulnerability (be more cautious when vulnerable etc.)
- Position at the table (1st seat = aggressive, 2nd seat = sound, 3rd seat = fairly random)
- Whether a side four-card major is acceptable or not.
- Whether you can open a Weak Two with A-K-Q-x-x-x (my preference is definitely *not to do so* – partner can never judge accurately).

Responding in a New Suit to a Weak Two

I like to recommend that in response to any Weak Two the bid of a new suit is *constructive* but not forcing. Generally opener can raise if suitable, or occasionally rebid a semi-solid suit if maximum. To create a force, either jump or start with 2NT.

Raising the Weak Two Suit

2♦ – 3♦, 2♥ – 3♥ and 2♠ – 3♠ are all essentially 'barrage bids' i.e. pre-emptive. It is *so important* to raise straight away to the three level to make life difficult for the opponents, rather than lamely passing, allowing them to find their fit and then bidding on the next round.

The *level of the fit* tells us roughly that with:

- 8 trumps – bid to the two level
- 9 trumps – bid to the three level
- 10 trumps – bid to the four level (or higher!)

This gives an indication of whether to raise or even how far to raise on the first

round (you can of course factor in other considerations such as vulnerability and obviously the quality of your hand!)

So holding:

♠	3 2
♥	K 8 6
♦	A 8 7 2
♣	K 9 4 3

If partner opens 2♥, it is vital to raise to 3♥ on the first round. This is not (*repeat, not*) invitational to game, it is purely raising the stakes before the opponents have had a chance to establish their own fit and values.

Responding to a 2♦ Opener

Since 3NT is often the desirable final destination the responses are geared accordingly:

New suit = constructive, non-forcing, as discussed (typically a six-card suit with 10-14 HCP)

Jump in new suit = natural and game-forcing

2NT = relay. The normal requirement for this is about 15 HCP (sometimes less with a nice fit). The relay asks for *features*. A feature is defined as a possible stopper for 3NT, i.e. A, K-x, Q-x-x, J-x-x-x etc. as opposed to a control or singleton etc. The responses are:

- New suit = feature
- 3♦ = minimum
- 3NT = maximum with a good suit (two of the top three honours)

Raising to 3♦ is essentially pre-emptive (usually three-card support to conform to the *level of the fit* and anything between 8 and 14 HCP). This bid is purely and simply trying to throw a spanner in the opponents' works and does not therefore need to be defined too closely other than it normally has fewer than 14 or 15 HCP.

Responding to 2♥ and 2♠ Openers

In my own preferred methods, most of the details from the 2♦ opener hold, but the responses to the relay of 2NT change: now, since usually the desired finishing spot is in the major opened, we show *shortages* in response to the relay. So, after a 2NT enquiry:

New suit	= singleton/void, non-minimum
Return to major	= minimum (usually no shortage to show conveniently, i.e. below the major)
3NT	= maximum, no shortage but good suit (2 of top 3 honours)
Four of major	= maximum, no shortage, not such good suit-quality

In common with methods such as splinters, the key to this easy-to-play, efficient system is to understand which holdings facing shortage are either good or bad:

Good holdings: A-x-x, x-x-x, x-x-x-x, i.e. no wasted points and length (more ruffing potential) are good.

Bad holdings: K-Q-x, K-J-x, x, i.e. wasted points are very poor – as is of course duplicated shortage (if partner and you both have a singleton in the same suit, that is bad news!).

Dealing with Intervention after You Have Opened with a Weak Two Bid

All bids, wherever possible, retain their original meaning. Doubles after intervention are always *penalties* and not negative, the same as after higher pre-empts.

If the opponents overcall at the two level:

Double	= penalties
2NT	= relay
New suit	= constructive and non-forcing as before
Supporting at the three level	= still pre-emptive as before

If the opponents overcall at the three level:

Double	= penalties
New suit (below partner's)	= constructive and non-forcing as before
New suit (above partner's)	= forcing
Supporting	= competitive

If the opponents double:

Redouble	= strong hand, usually seeking to penalise
New suit	= constructive and non-forcing
2NT	= still a relay
Supporting at the three level	= pre-emptive

Example

Here is an example of how well the system works: the key point I am trying to get across is that this method is so much better than others because rather than just trying to describe overall strength and suit-quality, it zooms in on using good judgment to reach excellent contracts *when the cards fit well*. Clearly if you have the values for game, **do not use the relay simply for practice** as so many seem to do – just bid game! Only use the 2NT relay if there is uncertainty over whether to bid game (or sometimes slam!).

You hold the following hand:

♠ A J 7
♥ J 8 6
♦ A 8 7 2
♣ K Q 6

If partner opens 2♥, then rather than using some other method to get useless information, let's see how our relay works.

Hand A	Hand B
♠ 8 6	♠ 8 6
♥ A Q 10 7 5 2	♥ A Q 10 7 5 2
♦ 3	♦ J 9 6 3
♣ J 9 7 5	♣ 3

If partner has Hand A, he will respond 3♦ to your 2NT relay to show shortage, making game an excellent proposition. But if partner has Hand B, he will advertise club shortage with 3♣, making game decidedly against the odds. Please note that other relay systems such as Ogust (which ask about points and suit-quality) would treat these hands as the same, whether the shortage was in clubs or diamonds.

Finally, an integral part of adopting the ethos of playing Weak Two openers is to play Weak Jump Overcalls as well. They put great pressure on the opponents and give a partnership plenty of scope to gain confidence and experience in having a regular opportunity to judge when to use them.

Do try these methods, they are easy to learn, simple to use and deliver great results! □

CLUB PLAYER'S BIDDING QUIZ

ON each of the following problems, you are West. What should you bid with each hand on the given auction?

Julian Pottage gives his answers on page 54.

Hand 1 ♠ A ♥ J 2 ♦ A K 9 8 7 4 ♣ 10 6 4 3	W	N	E	S
				1NT 3♣
	?			

Hand 2 ♠ K 8 7 6 ♥ K 8 7 5 ♦ Q 9 2 ♣ Q J	W	N	E	S
		1♦		Dble Pass
	?			

Hand 3 ♠ A K Q 8 ♥ 6 5 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ K 8 7	W	N	E	S
	1♣	Pass	2♣	Pass
	?			

Hand 4 ♠ Q J ♥ Q J 10 7 5 ♦ K 10 8 5 ♣ A 2	W	N	E	S
	1♥	Pass	1♣	Pass
	?			

Hand 5 ♠ J 9 5 ♥ K J 10 7 6 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ 8 4	W	N	E	S
	2♣	1♣	1♣	1NT
	?	3♣	Pass	Pass

Hand 6 ♠ 6 ♥ A Q 8 6 ♦ J 10 9 5 ♣ Q 8 6 5	W	N	E	S
			1♦	2♣
	?			