

Ghestem convention for 2-suited overcalls

a) Overcalling 2-suited hands – some of the drawbacks of Michaels

Example 1

This is your hand and your right-hand opponent (RHO) opens 1S (this was Maurice's first example in his recent talk on Michaels cue bids):

♠ xx
♥ AQTxx
♦ x
♣ AQJxx

You have 13 points and all your points are in hearts and clubs – great for a 2-suited overcall. Using Michaels, you bid 2S to show 5/5 hearts and a minor:

(1S) 2S (Michaels – shows hearts and a minor)

If responder then raises opener to 3S, what can your partner do? If they have hearts, they know you have a fit. But if they only have a minor, what can they do at this high level?

(1S) 2S (3S) ?

Problem: partner does not know what your minor is and the bidding is already very high.

Example 2

This time, your hand is similar, but with spades and hearts swapped:

♠ AQTxx
♥ xx
♦ x
♣ AQJxx

RHO opens 1D. What can you bid to show 5/5 spades and clubs?

(1D) ?

You can't show this particular two-suited shape with Michaels.

But with Ghestem you can!

b) Overcalling 2-suited hands using Ghestem

Example 2 continued

♠	AQTxx	Highest unbid suit
♥	xx	
♦	x	Opp's suit
♣	AQJxx	Lowest unbid suit

You have the highest and lowest unbid suits – the extremes.

To show the extremes using Ghestem, you bid the opponent's suit – i.e. 2D.

(1D) 2D (Ghestem – shows clubs and spades)

Example 3

♠	AQTxx	Highest unbid suit
♥	xx	Opp's suit
♦	x	
♣	AQJxx	Lowest unbid suit

You have the same hand and RHO opens 1H

Again, you have the highest and lowest unbid suits – the extremes

To show that, you bid the opponent's suit – i.e. 2H

(1H) 2H (Ghestem – shows clubs and spades)

Example 4

RHO opens 1S and you have:

♠	xx	Opp's suit
♥	AQTxx	Highest unbid suit
♦	AQJxx	Second highest unbid suit
♣	x	

You have the two higher unbid suits.

To show that, you bid 3C

(1S) 3C (Ghestem – shows hearts and diamonds)

Note that this means that, when you are playing Ghestem, you cannot do a weak jump overcall in clubs after the opponents open diamonds or hearts or spades.

Exception

What if the opps open 1C? This might be either a short club or not.

There are a few variations on Ghestem in this situation. Here is what I play.

(1C) 2C - extremes – i.e. diamonds and spades

(1C) 2NT – two lowest unbid suits - i.e. diamonds and hearts

(1C) 2D – two highest unbid suits – i.e. hearts and spades. This is the only change from the other Ghestem bids. The advantage is that it allows your partner to show a major at the 2-level

c) Ghestem General rules

Ghestem applies after the opponents open 1x. It can be used with any strength hand from about 7 or 8 points. It shows two suits 5+/5+ and your points should be in the two suits, ideally with plenty of tens and nines.

(1x) 2x – extremes (highest suit and lowest suit)

(1x) 3C – two highest suits

(1x) 2NT – two lowest suits (unusual 2NT)

Except:

(1C) 2D – two highest suits – spades and hearts

d) Ghestem Summary

- Ghestem allows you to specify your two 5-card suits – in every situation
- The bidding can get high very quickly – so make sure your suits and shape are good!
- Your non-honour cards ideally should be good (tens/nines/eights are much better than twos and threes)
- If you have 15+ points and make a Ghestem bid, you can raise your partner's bid. Otherwise pass and assume partner has zero points if they were forced to bid
- Partner can jump if they have good support for one of the suits
- It is important to agree the following with partner: Is Ghestem on after interference? Is Ghestem on in the pass-out seat?
- This gadget can take a while to get used to – John Royds has had so many director calls because of mistakes with Ghestem that he calls it “Guess them!”
- You have to accept (and remember!) that you can't do a pre-emptive 3C bid over RHO's 1x opening

Is Ghestem worth it? In my opinion yes, absolutely!

2-way checkback

a) What is checkback?

Checkback is a convention that you can use when your partner opens a suit, you bid another suit, and your partner bids 1NT. The purpose of checkback is to try to find the best contract. For example:

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	?

b) Assumed basic system

The examples here are all based on playing 5-card Majors, strong NT (15-17), with a 1C opening showing at least two clubs. You can also use checkback if you are playing 4-card Majors and weak NT, but the point counts will be different to those in these notes.

c) Why use checkback?

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	?

After opener's 1NT rebid, responder knows that opener:

- Has four or more diamonds
- Has 12-14 points
- Has a balanced hand
- Does not have four spades
- Could have four hearts

Responder is now in the "driving seat". They have already told partner they have at least four spades and that they have at least 5 or 6 points. Now they get a chance to give partner more details in order to help the partnership **find the best contract**.

d) Responder's second bid – the checkback bid

Responder could have any of the following types of hands:

- Weak
- Invitational to game
- Game forcing

The category the hand falls into is based on points but also shape – so you must use judgement.

The 2-way checkback system uses the following bids based on responder's hand:

Responder's hand	2-way Checkback bid
Weak	Pass or 2M
Invitational to game (at best)	2C asking opener to bid 2D
Game forcing	2D "real" checkback

So, responder makes a decision on the value of their hand and makes one of the bids above.

e) Responder with a weak hand

Example 1

♠ Kxxxx
♥ Qxx
♦ xxx
♣ Jx

Responder is weak with 5-10 points, but has five spades and a doubleton

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	2S or pass
(pass)	

Responder has to make a decision here – to pass or to bid 2S.

If responder bids 2S, opener MUST PASS. This is because responder has other bids (2C or 2D) to show a better hand so 2S shows weakness.

Example 2

♠ Kxxxx
♥ Qxxx
♦ xx
♣ Jx

Responder is weak with 5-10 points, but has five spades and four hearts and two doubletons.

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	2H – shows five spades and four hearts and a weak hand
?	

Opener now chooses to pass 2H or to bid 2S.

Conclusion: If you are the opener and have rebid 1NT and your partner does not bid 2C and does not bid 2D, you know they are weak.

f) Responder with an invitational hand

Example 3

♠ KQxxx
♥ Qxx
♦ Kxx
♣ Jx

Responder is invitational with 11 points, five spades

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	2C (invitational hand – asks p to bid 2D)
2D	2S (invitational with five spades)
?	

Now opener has to decide what is their best bid:

- **Pass** with 12 points and three spades
- **2NT** with 12 points two spades
- **3NT** with 14 points two spades – accepts invitation
- **4S** with 14 points three spades – accepts invitation
- **3S** with 13 points three spades – leave it up to partner to make final choice.

Note that if opener had opened 1C, the bidding would continue in the same way:

Opener	Responder
1C	1S
1NT	2C (invitational hand – asks p to bid 2D)
2D	2S (invitational with five spades)
?	

Opener and responder must be on high alert for checkback! 2C by responder has nothing to do with clubs and asks opener to bid 2D.

g) Responder with weak hand and four or more diamonds

The 2C bid by responder is not always invitational – it may be a way to stop in a 2D contract.

Example 4

♠	Kxxx
♥	xxx
♦	Qxxx
♣	Jx

Responder is weak with 6 points, four spades and four diamonds.

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	2C (invitational hand – asks p to bid 2D)
2D	pass

Opener has at least four diamonds and does not have four spades, so 2D is probably the best contract.

h) Responder with a game-forcing hand

Example 5

♠ KQxxx
♥ AQxx
♦ Kx
♣ Jx

Responder has 15 points, and therefore is game-forcing. The partnership needs to figure out what the contract should be – 3NT or 4H or 4S or slam?

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	2D (game-forcing checkback)
?	

Responder's 2D bid shows a game-forcing hand.

Opener's responses will be one of the following:

- **Pass** – Opener cannot pass!!
- **2H** – Opener has four hearts
- **2S** – Opener has three spades (this denies four hearts)
- **2NT** – Opener doesn't have either four hearts or three spades

Then responder bids game – or goes on to explore slam

Note that here opener knows they are going to game, and they must not jump to game. They must wait to hear responder's next bid.

Example 6

♠ KQxxx
♥ AQx
♦ Kxx
♣ Jx

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
1NT	2D (game-forcing checkback)
2H	2S (shows five spades and denies four hearts)
?	

Here opener knows responder does not have four hearts but has five spades. Opener bids game – and responder may go on to explore slam.

i) 2-way checkback after a 2NT rebid

You can also play 2-way checkback if opener re-bids 2NT – make sure to discuss with partner in advance.

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
2NT	checkback is on!

j) Summary of 2-way checkback

- This is a very structured way for responder to tell opener what kind of hand they have.
- Responder is in the “driving seat”
- It enables the partnership to try to find the correct contract.
- Both players need to be awake after opener rebids 1NT!!
- This is also called xy checkback
- See Pete Hollands’ YouTube video on 2 way checkback – it is excellent, very detailed with lots and lots of examples https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_RD8ycgRT8&t=898s