

Opener Bids NT: How the Bidding Should Continue

Jacoby Transfer Convention

Rationale (Why): (a) The strong hand should play the contract, (b) look for 5-3 major suit fit or retreat from NT to a long suit with a weak hand.

1. **Strong hand should play last to trick 1.** Good for 1 extra trick about half the time.
2. **Strong hand should remain hidden**, so that defenders cannot see the weaknesses in the strong hand.

Mechanics (How):

1. Responder (weaker hand) bids the suit directly below their long suit.
2. Opener (strong hand) bids the next suit above, landing in the right place.

Examples:

1. **1NT-2D; 2H:** Responder bids 2D as a request to opener to bid 2H. Opener bids 2H as requested. Transfer to a major with a 5+ card suit.
2. **1NT-2H; 2S:** Responder bids 2H as a request to opener to bid 2S. Opener bids 2S as requested. Transfer to a major with a 5+ card suit.
3. **1NT-2S; 3C:** Responder bids 2S as a request to opener to bid 3C. Opener bids 3C as requested. You should only transfer to a minor with a 6+ card suit and 0-7 HCP.
4. **1NT-3C; 3D:** Responder bids 3C as a request to opener to bid 3D. Opener bids 3D as requested. You should only transfer to a minor with a 6+ card suit and 0-7 HCP.

Stayman Convention

Rationale (Why): Look for a 4-4 major suit fit.

Mechanics (How):

1. **Responder bids 2C.**
Saying: I have a 4 card major.
Asking: Do you have one?
Hoping: We have 4-4 in the same major.
2. **Opener bids 2D with no major, or bids 4 card majors up the line.**
Responder is captain and will steer the ship from here.

Examples:

1. **1NT-2C; 2D:** Responder with a 4 card major bids 2C. Opener does not have a 4 card major, so bids 2D. This is how opener denies having a 4 card major.
2. **1NT-2C; 2H:** Responder with a 4 card major bids 2C. Opener has 4 hearts. Opener might also have 4 spades.
3. **1NT-2C; 2S:** Responder with a 4 card major bids 2C. Opener has 4 spades; does not have 4 hearts.

Opening No Trump & Responding to NT Openings

Opener Bids 1NT: 15-17 HCP balanced (no singleton, no 2 doubletons) & no 5-card major.

- OK to open 1NT with a 6 card minor. (NT scores better than a minor.)
- Acceptable to open 1NT with a 5 card major & no second suit.

Responder is captain. Responder knows opener's point count almost exactly and takes charge. Responder has only two decisions to make:

1) How high?: Do we belong in Part Score? In Game? In Slam?

- 0-7 points: Pass or transfer to a suit and then pass.
- 8-9 points: Make an "invitation". Bid 2NT or 3H or 3S.
- 10-15 points: Bid game, 3NT or 4H or 4S, once you know the best spot.
- 16+ points: See **Responder's NT Bidding Ladder** below.

2) Suit or NT? With a combined 8+card major, play in the major. If not, play in NT.

Responder should consider the following options in the following order.

1. **With a 6+ card major:** Transfer to the major. Then pass (0-7), bid 3 of the major (8-9) or bid 4 of the major (10-15) based on your point count. (Opener has 2+ cards in every suit.)
2. **With a 5 card major:** Transfer to the major suit. Then pass (0-7), bid 2NT (8-9) or bid 3NT (10-15) according to point count. Opener will revert to the major with 3 card support. Note: with 0 points opposite 15, it is safer to play in a 5-2 major suit fit than in 1NT. The weaker you are, the more important it is to transfer. Even with 0 points, just do it.
3. **With a 4 card major and 8+ points:** Bid 2C, Stayman. If a 4-4 major suit fit is found, bid 3 of the major suit (8-9) or 4 of the major suit (10-15) according to your point count. If no 4-4 major suit fit is found, bid 2NT (8-9) or 3NT (10-15). You need at least a combined 23 points since you commit your side to at least 2NT or 3 of a major.
4. **With a 6+ card minor and 0-7 points:** Transfer to the minor suit and then pass. Even with 0 points, just do it. With 8+ points, it is better to play in No Trump than in the minor.
5. **With none of the above:** Pass (0-7), bid 2NT (8-9) or 3NT (10-15) based on point count.

Responder is Captain:

- Opener only follows orders, answers questions, and accepts/declines invitations to game.
- **15 or bad 16 HCP:** Decline the invitation to game. Stop at 2NT or 3 of a major.
- **17 or good 16:** Accept an invitation; bid game (3NT or 4 of a major).
- **Good 16:** Many 10's & 9's or a 5 card suit. **Bad 16:** Few 10's & 9's; many small cards.
- **Opener can correct NT to a major** if opener knows about a 5-3 or 4-4 major suit fit.

The Unspoken 4-4 Spade Fit: When opener has both 4 hearts and 4 spades:

- **1NT-2C; 2H-3NT:** Opener with both majors bids the lower one, hearts.
- **What next?** Responder has a 4 card major and it is not hearts. It must be spades. **Opener knows there must be a 4-4 spade fit. So opener should bid 4S.**
- Same applies after 1NT-2C; 2H-2NT (responder 8-9). Opener should correct 2NT to 3S.

Other Opening Bids for Strong Balanced Hands:

- **1 in a suit followed by 2NT:** 18-19 HCP balanced (no singleton, no 2 doubletons). Responder needs only 7 points for game (18+7=25).
- **2NT:** 20-21 HCP balanced (no singleton, no 2 doubletons).
 - Might have a 5 card major if no other way to show the strength.
 - Stayman & transfers apply. Responder needs only 5 points for game (20+5=25).
- **Responder is captain:** (Responder knows opener's point count almost exactly.)

Opener's NT Bidding Ladder:

12-14 points: Open 1 of a suit, then bid 1NT.

15-17 points: Open 1NT.

18-19 points: Open 1 of a suit, then bid 2NT.

20-21 points: Open 2NT.

22-23 points: Open 2C (monster hand), then bid 2NT.

24-25 points: Open 2C (monster hand), then bid 3NT.

26+ points: Open 3NT.

Stayman and transfers are used after the 15-17, 20-21 and 22-23 hands. Responder has already shown their suit after the 12-14 and 18-19 hands, so responder continues to bid suits or bid NT naturally in these cases. Transfers (but not Stayman) can be used after the 24-25 and 26+ hands.

Responder's NT Bidding Ladder: (for a responder without a 4+ card major)

0-7 points: (combined 15-24) Pass

8-9 points: (combined 23-25) Bid 2NT, invitational.

10-15 points: (combined 25-32) Bid 3NT.

16-17 points: (combined 31-34) Bid 4NT invitation to 6NT.

18-19 points: (combined 33-36) Bid 6NT.

20-21 points: (combined 35-38) Bid 5NT. Guarantees 6NT is OK, invites 7NT.

22+ points: (combined 37-39) Bid 7NT.

Examples:

1. **1NT-Pass:** Responder has 0-7 points, no 5 card major, no 6 card minor.
2. **1NT-2NT; Pass:** Responder has 8-9, no 4+ card major. Minimum opener passes.
3. **1NT-2NT; 3NT:** Responder has 8-9, no 4+ card major. Maximum opener bids game.
4. **1NT-3NT:** Responder has 10+, no 4+ card major, bids 3NT. Opener should not bid again.
5. **1D-1H; 2NT-3NT:** Opener's 1D followed by 2NT shows an 18-19 HCP balanced hand. Responder with 7-15 points and 4 hearts bids 3NT. (With only 6 points, pass. With 7+ points and 6+ hearts, bid 4H. Show exactly 5 hearts by bidding a 2nd suit.)
6. **2NT-3NT:** Opener has 20-21. Responder with 5+ points, no 4+ card major, bids 3NT.
7. **1NT-2D; 2H-Pass:** Responder with 0-7 points & 5+ hearts transfers opener into hearts and then passes.

8. **1NT-2H; 2S-3S; Pass:** Responder with 8-9 points & 6+ spades transfers opener into spades and then bids 3S to invite opener to the spade game.
9. **1NT-2D; 2H-3NT; Pass:** Responder with 10+ points & exactly 5 hearts transfers into hearts and then bids 3NT. Opener passes with 0-2 hearts. (Would bid 4H with 3+ hearts.)
10. **1NT-2S; 3C-Pass:** Responder with 0-7 points & 6+ clubs transfers to clubs and passes.
11. **1NT-3C; 3D-Pass:** Responder with 0-7 points & 6+ diamonds transfers to diamonds and then passes
12. **1NT-2C; 2S-3NT:** Responder with 10+ points bids 2C to explore for a 4-4 major suit fit. Opener denies 4 hearts and shows 4 spades. Responder has hearts, not spades. So responder bids the 3NT game.
13. **1NT-2C; 2H-3NT; 4S:** Responder with 10+ points bids 2C to explore for a 4-4 major suit fit. Opener with 4 hearts and 4 spades bids hearts. Responder has spades, not hearts. So responder bids the 3NT game. Opener knows responder has a 4 card major, and it is not hearts. It must be spades. Opener corrects to 4S to play in the 4-4 spade fit.
14. **1NT-2C; 2H-3H; Pass:** Responder with 8-9 points & 4 card major bids 2C. Opener shows 4 hearts. This fits with responder's 4 hearts. Responder with 8-9 points can only invite, bids 3H. A minimum opener passes this.
15. **1NT-2C; 2D-2NT; Pass:** Responder with 8-9 points & a 4 card major bids 2C. Opener's 2D denies a 4 card major. Responder invites with 2NT. A minimum opener passes.
16. **1NT-2C; 2D-2NT; 3NT:** Responder with 8-9 points & a 4 card major bids 2C. Opener's 2D denies a 4 card major. Responder invites with 2NT. Maximum opener bids 3NT.
17. **1NT-2C; 2D-2H; Pass:** Responder with 4S & 5H bids 2C so that a 4-4 spade fit will not be missed. Opener's 2D denies a 4 card major. Responder's 2H bid in this sequence shows an invitational 8-9 points with 5 hearts. Minimum opener passes with 3 hearts. (Minimum opener would bid 2NT with only 2 hearts. Maximum opener would bid 4H or 3NT.)
18. **2NT-3H; 3S-4S:** Responder with a 6-card suit transfers opener into spades. Responder with 5+ points can "see" 25+ in the partnership, bids the spade game.
19. **1NT-4NT-6NT:** Responder with 16-17 points invites opener to 6NT. Maximum opener accepts the slam invitation. (Minimum opener would pass 4NT.)
20. **1NT-5NT-7NT:** Responder with 20-21 points invites opener to 7NT. Maximum opener accepts the grand slam invitation. (Minimum opener would bid 6NT.)

Things revolve around the 25, 33 and 37 points needed for game, small slam and grand slam. It is not really necessary to "memorize" all of this. Just remember that a combined 8+ card major is preferable to NT and that responder adds up the combined points to see how high we belong.