

SIMPLE LEBENSOHL

The Lebensohl Convention has been in use as long as I have been playing bridge (1969), and has been largely ignored by all but the top players, as they are scared of it. Full Lebensohl is quite daunting, and a wrong move can see you in a hopeless contract. However, if you apply the main principles of the convention to your partnership, you will see how effective it can be.

This convention is used when our side opens 1NT and the next player (LH opponent) comes into the auction.

Our responder's bid of 2NT is artificial and alertable. It says nothing about notrump. It requests the 1NT opener bid 3♣ (no matter what he has). After that, responder can pass if he wants to play in 3♣. If he bids some other suit at the three-level, that is also to play. Here are some examples:

S W N E
1NT 2♠ 2NT* Pass
3♣ Pass 3♦

*alertable "puppet" to 3♣

S W N E
1NT 2♠ 2NT* Pass
3♣ Pass 3♥

*alertable "puppet" to 3♣

In both auctions, North is placing the contract. He might have KJ10876 in the suit and no other points.

If he wants to force his partner to bid again, he bids directly as here:

S W N E
1NT 2♠ 3♦

What is the purpose of this convention? It is so the partner of the 1NT bidder can make a normal forcing three-level bid (game forcing, actually), but also have the ability to sign off on the three-level. He uses the 2NT puppet to 3♣ to sign off. He bids directly at the three-level to force.

A new suit at the two-level is not forcing. So 1NT (2♦) 2♥ is to play.

That's the easy part. There are other parts to learn. The responder can use a cuebid. He can bid the suit which was overcalled. For example:

1NT (2♥) 3♥

Not only that, he can cuebid it after using the 2NT puppet:

1NT (2♥) 2NT Pass
3♣ (Pass) 3♥

Both of those 3♥ bids should be used as Stayman. Why have two ways to send the same message? I'll answer in a moment.

First, I want you to realise that there are also two ways to raise to 3NT! Yes. There is no way any more to play in 2NT (since it is artificial), but the responder can bid 3NT as in 1NT (2♠) 3NT. But, he can also bid that 3NT the delayed way as in:

1NT (2♠) 2NT Pass
3♣ (Pass) 3NT

So, if you're with me, there are two ways to cuebid and two ways to bid 3NT. We use "FADS" to make the distinction. This stands for "Fast Always Denies Stopper." What does "Fast" mean? It means you bid directly--not going through the 2NT puppet. "Slow" (going through 2NT) would show a stopper. The stopper refers to their suit. So, you have four things you can do in this arena once they overcall:

- 1) Raise directly to 3NT to deny a stopper and to show no interest in finding a major-suit fit.
- 2) Raise slowly to 3NT (via 2NT) to show a stopper in their suit and no interest in finding a major-suit fit.
- 3) Cuebid directly to deny a stopper but to ask for a 4-card major.
- 4) Cuebid slowly (via 2NT) to show a stopper and ask for a 4-card major.

So, with:

♠ AQ43 ♥ K3 ♦ 765 ♣ J1065, if partner opens 1NT and they overcall 2♥, you can bid 2NT (forcing 3♣) and then bid 3♥ as Stayman (with a heart stopper). If your ♥K were in diamonds, you would bid 3♥ directly as Stayman. If you took away the king completely, you would make a negative double.

With:

♠ AQ2 ♥ K54 ♦ Q106 ♣ 7642, if partner opens 1NT and they overcall 2♥, you would bid 2NT (forcing 3♣) and then bid 3NT to say you want to play in 3NT and have their suit stopped. If ♥K were in diamonds, you would bid a direct 3NT to deny a stopper.

This takes study, practice, and a partner on the same page.

Note: If they overcall 2♣, you just ignore it (so if you bid 2NT after their 2♣ overcall, you should treat the auction as if it went 1NT PASS 2NT -- however you play it).

Example 1:

	♠ 7		
	♥ K J 10 9 8 2		
	♦ 10 7 6		
	♣ 9 7 4		
	♠ A J 10 8 6 2		♠ 5 4 3
	♥ A 7		♥ 6 4 3
	♦ A 5		♦ J 4 3 2
	♣ J 5 3		♣ A 10 2
	♠ K Q 9		
	♥ Q 5		
	♦ K Q 9 8		
	♣ K Q 8 6		
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♠	2NT*	Pass	1NT
Pass	3♥	All Pass	3♣*

North bids a non-forcing 3♥, by using the Lebensohl 2NT transfer bid. South must not disobey partner's orders. 3♥ makes nine tricks, eight tricks is the limit in spades, and 3NT NS would be four down on ♠J lead.

Example 2:

	♠ A 10 7		
	♥ A Q J 10 8 4		
	♦ 8 6 4		
	♣ 5		
	♠ K Q 8		♠ J 9 3
	♥ 7 3		♥ 6
	♦ A 10 3		♦ K Q J 5
	♣ A K J 9 8		♣ Q 10 7 6 3
	♠ 6 5 4 2		
	♥ K 9 5 2		
	♦ 9 7 2		
	♣ 4 3		
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	2♥	3NT*	Pass
4♣	Pass	5♣	All Pass

North bids a natural 2♥, and East shows the values for game, by jumping to the most logical game. This is an example of FADS, denying a stopper, so West wisely retreats to 4♣, which

East raises to game. Note that if East had four spades and similar values he would bid 3♥ (direct cuebid) to deny a heart stopper but show a four-card major.

Example 3:

	♠ 9 8 6 2 ♥ A J 10 ♦ K Q 10 ♣ K Q 9		
♠ K Q 10 5 ♥ 7 2 ♦ 6 5 4 2 ♣ 8 6 4	♠ A ♥ K Q 9 8 6 5 3 ♦ J 8 ♣ 7 5 3	♠ J 7 4 3 ♥ 4 ♦ A 9 7 3 ♣ A J 10 2	
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1NT 3NT	2♥ All Pass	3♥*

South shows no heart stopper, but shows a major, with game-going values. Despite the 4-4 spade fit, North wisely decides to choose 3NT, with the double heart stopper. 4♠ is in dire trouble.

Example 4:

	♠ A 2 ♥ Q J 6 4 ♦ K 6 4 2 ♣ 6 3 2		
♠ 10 9 7 6 5 4 3 ♥ 9 5 2 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ ---	♠ K Q 8 ♥ 7 3 ♦ A 10 8 3 ♣ A Q 9 8	♠ J ♥ A K 10 8 ♦ 9 7 ♣ K J 10 7 5 4	
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♥* 3♠	Dbl All Pass	1NT 2♠	2♣* 3♥

Ignoring the 2♣ bid (DONT, clubs and a higher suit), West transfers the declaration into the strong hand with 2♥. North doubles, figuring it is probably South's second suit, and a partscore battle ensues. The limit for NS is nine tricks in hearts, while EW can actually make 10 tricks in spades, but are unlikely to reach it (NS do well to bow out at the three-level). Note that East accepting the transfer (by not passing when 2♠ is doubled) makes West revalue her hand – a 10-card fit is very strong.