

## The structure of the bidding

Bridge is a pragmatic game where there are fashions in the bidding. In the very early days of the game it was argued that an opening bid of one of a suit was permissible with a better than average hand. Two of a suit showed a better hand and three of a suit showed an even better hand still. The introduction of approach forcing squashed this view of the game but the idea persists in American strong twos and Acol Twos. Then weak twos came into fashion, and now two suited weak twos are common, often as weak as 5-9 points and 5-4 or better in the suits. Even weak 4-4 two bids are achieving success particularly when they can be wheeled out against unsuspecting opponents at a moment's notice

The requirements for responses at the two level have changed over the years. The pioneers of Acol poked fun at the "super scientists" of Baron. The proud boast of Acol was "part score bid and made in both rooms". Fast in and fast out was their dictum. They were the light skirmishers, whereas Baron were the heavy armour who usually reached game once they had lumbered into motion. In original Acol a response at the two level could be made on seven or eight points. The consequence of this was that opener who bid one of a major had to leap off to the three level if he had a good suit and an Ace more than an opening bid. This did not make for accurate bidding. It was probably Blue Club that introduced the idea of a two level response being forcing to two no trump. This created more bidding space because 1S 2C 2S was forcing. Some players go further down the same road, defining a two level response as game forcing. The claim is that this provides a greater vocabulary of bidding sequences and hence greater accuracy in the game and slam zone.

In the first days of Acol the opening bid of 1NT was weak non vul and strong vulnerable. Vulnerable against not, to open a weak no trump and be doubled for two or three off, by no means an unusual occurrence, was theoretically unsound. However the criterion of any bid in the modern tournament game is not whether the theory is sound. Instead is it more successful in the long run than any alternative treatment? The great advantage of the weak no trump was that it solved the problem of rebidding a minimum flat hand, and it created problems for the opponents. Then all sorts of defences against the weak no trump were invented which, arguably, were more successful than the no trump itself. Now the strong no trump is played more frequently than its weak counterpart

Four card suits used to be standard for bids at the one level. The Blue Club reinforced this principle. A responding hand which was worth only one bid would prefer a four card spade suit to a five card club suit. A minimum opening bid with four spades and five clubs could not open one club since that was an artificial bid, and was obliged to open 1S. But the idea was embraced with enthusiasm rather than reluctance. After 1C (strong) 1D (weak) although he did not have to, opener would nearly always choose to rebid a four card spade suit in preference to a five card club suit. Precision, originally intended to be a simpler form of a strong club system than Blue, threw out the semi positive response of 1H, and introduced five card majors. Many two club players followed the trend of opening five card major suits. A discussion of the relative merits of four and five card majors would be endless. There is so much to be said in favour of either. The choice is an article of faith

Opening bids have become skimpier over the years. Culbertson demanded three quick tricks for an opening bid. Acol set a gold standard which in principle has lasted to the present day, thirteen points with a four card suit, twelve with a five card suit, and eleven with a six card suit. It is essential to get into the bidding as often as possible and the current trend in top class tournament bridge is to open as light as one dares

What is successful is more important than the technically sound. Having said that it would be foolish to build a bidding system which did not take account of sound theory and the realities of the situation. More than 50% of computer dealt hands have their point counts divided within the range of 17-23 between the two partnerships. It would be wrong to define this as the part score zone. For if the points are divided 20-20 and each side has a ten card major fit this is a potential double game swing. A proper definition would be, instead of the "part score zone", the competitive zone. Within this range it is in both sides' interests to compete. An average weak two will have about eight points

with a reasonable six card suit usually with two of the top four honours. If the remainder of the deck is dealt out, on average partner will receive two cards in the suit and about eleven points, precisely the hand where 2S is the directed contract. With an eight card major fit it is desirable to get to the two level as quickly as possible anywhere within the competitive zone. Either 2S makes or shows a profit in going down. The same applies to a 5-3 fit and even more so to a 4-4 fit where there is the flexibility of taking ruffs in either hand. In favour of opening strong twos it might be argued that they take the pressure off other parts of the system. This is a valid point but few if any would argue that strong twos are better than weak twos in their own right. The word few is included because there will always those who argue along the unspoken lines of "We do it because we do it, so it must be good, and we have some wonderfully complicated continuations"

Another point arising from strong twos is illustrated by the following hand

AK10843	7
7	KQ10943
AK7	954
AQ8	1073

A game contract on these cards is about as good as it deserves to be on a twenty-five count with no eight card fit. But 4H is infinitely preferable to 4S. The reason is obvious. Played in responder's best suit partner's wealth of high cards will pull their full weight. If the strong hand decrees that the contract should be played in its own suit, partner's scant values may be totally worthless. Whenever possible the weak hand should be allowed to choose trumps

There is an even more forceful reason for allowing a weak hand to bid its suits. In the competitive zone it is impossible to compete effectively unless the weak hand as well as the strong hand is allowed to bid its suits. If over 1S partner has to respond 1NT on a eight count with either a six card club suit or a six card heart suit perhaps this gives an advantage in the game and the slam zone but on the contested part score hand it is hopeless

## The patchwork of opening bids

Opening bids are part of a patchwork quilt where the individual pieces are measured and trimmed to fit together as a harmonious whole. Here is the recommended scheme of our version of A strong club system

1C	-	16+ points
1D	-	11-15 points, 4+ diamonds
1H	-	11-15 points, 4+hearts
1S	-	11-15 points, 4+spades
1NT	-	13-15 points, flat
2C	-	Single-suited, 6+clubs 11-15 points
2D	-	6-10 points, 6+cards in one of the majors
2H	-	9-15 points, 5-5 or better in hearts and another suit
2S	-	9-15 points, 5-5 or better in spades and a minor
2NT	-	9-15 points 5-5 or better in the minors

Higher bids are traditional

1D being natural is a strong part of a one club system 1H and 1S are 4+ cards, an arbitrary choice in preference to 5+cards. 1NT has an overlap with one of a suit. This allows good hand evaluation.

In some strong club systems an opening bid of 2C covers two types of hands, a single suited six card club suit, or a five card club suit and a four card major. An average responding hand will be a nine count with two clubs and four cards in one of the majors. With that hand responder stands an excellent chance of doing the wrong thing whatever he does

A weak two in diamonds does not strike fear into the hearts of the enemy. A Multi releases 2H and 2S for some other purpose

## 2H and 2S

KQ1075

-

104

K108654

This is a "constructive two suiter" An opening bid in terms of losers. All tournament players will know what to do on this hand if the opponents open one of a red suit, but it is not safe to open the bidding. This hand will be delighted to contest the auction but must allow the opponents to open the bidding first.

If they choose not to and partner passes a hand such as

A96

A1076

876

Q32

With the red suits either way round, the hand has to be passed out. The Mad Hatters Tea Party was more logical than this. An average opening bid has seven losers and the eight count above has only five losers if there is a fit, yet there is no sensible way of opening the bidding Furthermore three bids are needed in a traditional system to describe a 5-5 hand. The chances of both partner and opponents allowing three bids are negligible.

KQ1075

5

A4

AJ865

This fourteen count seems to be an entirely different proposition to the eight count above. It is only different as far as the opponents are concerned and that is their problem. Partner is expected to bid exactly the same way regardless of which hand opener holds

## The opening bid of 1D

With the exception of 2D, responses are on traditional lines. It is normal to show a four card major in preference to bidding no trumps, but with a hand such as

AQ

J763

972

Q983

1NT is a more intelligent response than 1H. With an extra Queen 2NT is the best response, and with an extra Ace 3NT is the sensible bid. Playing a two club system which has a wide variety of hands covered by a one bid, responses of 2NT and 3NT are thought to be crude lunges. This does not apply to a one club system. Both 2NT and 3NT are very practical bids. The only restriction on their use should be that in reply to one of a major, both 2NT and 3NT should have three card support for partner's major. Then he does not face a problem with a 5431 hand

## The response of 2D

This guarantees four card diamond support, is forcing, and shows at least the values for a sound raise to 3D, (an immediate 3D would be pre-emptive and does not invite 3NT). There is no upper limit 2D might be the first step towards investigating the possibility of a grand slam. This response of 2D is forcing to 3D or 2NT

1D     2D  
 ?

The rebids of 2NT and 3D are sign offs. If there is a 4-4 diamond fit it might be a shrewd manoeuvre to play in 2NT rather than the more obvious 3D contract. To play in 2NT is a shared decision; responder could pull 2NT to 3D to play. 2NT denies the ability to bid 3NT.

The bids of 2H, 2S and 3C are open to interpretation. They are not suits. If responder were interested in a 4-4 major fit he would have put a toe on 1H or 1S on the first round. To see the best treatment study the following hand:-

AQ7  
 1085  
 AQ96  
 KJ7

Suppose opener has an unbalanced hand with a singleton or void. It would be vital to know where that singleton is. If it is in hearts, the opponents have ten points to take one trick and it becomes a thirty point pack. Even if partner only has a twelve count the opponents have two points to take another trick, and 6D will be a very good contract. But if the singleton is in a black suit 3NT is quite enough. These rebids of 2H, 2S, and 3C should show shortages

## Splinter bids

The object of a splinter is to tell partner to devalue all honours other than the Ace in that suit, holdings such as KQx and QJx are worth less than face value. Splinters should be incorporated into the bidding wherever possible. Any unnecessary jump is defined as a splinter. When tournament players have a hand which is between a raise to the two or the three level, they bid three. A hand worth three and a half bids four. Stretching a two and a half bid to three is good sense when it can be done by means of a splinter. 1H 1S 3D and 1S 3C are defined as raises to the two and a half or three level with a shortage in that suit. (1H 2S is not a splinter it is a weak two). The great advantage is that partner will make an enlightened decision as to whether or not to bid game. One of a major three of a minor is also defined as a game try splinter.

K8	Q1073	K8
AQJ65	K1074	AQJ65
Q104	K932	852
852	7	KJ8

The eight count in the middle is minimum for a game try of 3C. With the hand on the left there is a play for game, perhaps more than one is entitled to expect with a combined twenty count. With the hand on the right, two points stronger, game is very poor. The critical feature is the perfect fit in clubs or four points wasted.

These hands can be used to formulate some rules on cue bidding. The eight count is a rock bottom minimum for a game try. Tens and nines in the long suits are useful fillers and may often be brought into the play. Without them this hand is not worth a game try. The twelve count with good trumps and nothing devalued is definitely worth game, notice that if responder has a jack more than his eight count, game is extremely good. Conversely the fourteen count with four points devalued has hardly any play for game

### Slam splinters

The results of splinters can be spectacular. In the extreme case with four small cards opposite a void there will be a lay down grand on a combined thirty count, and there will be excellent small slams on combined point counts normally insufficient for game. A slam of this type, a combined twenty-one count, was board 15 in the B G B Simultaneous Pairs of January 2001.

North-South Game, Dealer South

♠ Q J 2	♠ A 10 9 7 6	
♥ 10	♥ K J 5 3	
♦ A K Q 6	♦ J 9 7 5	
♣ K Q 8 7 2	♣ -	
		♠ 4 3
		♥ 7 6
		♦ 10 8 4 3 2
		♣ J 10 4 3
	♠ K 8 5	
	♥ A Q 9 8 4 2	
	♦ -	
	♣ A 9 6 5	

The top for North South was 7H redoubled. It can be seen that it makes on the marked diamond spade squeeze. More of general interest is the contract of 6H, which is virtually unbeatable on any lie of the cards. Out of the two thousand and thirty-six pairs in the country playing in the competition, fifty-eight bid the slam, which is seven percent of those who played the North-South cards. This might be understandable if it was necessary to be playing an unusual system in order to find the slam. This is by no means the case, if there is such a thing as a universal bid; it is an opening bid of 1H on the South hand, followed by an almost equally universal double on the West hand. Then there will be variation, both in hand evaluation, and in system agreements. According to the losing count, the North hand is worth a raise to the four level, and even opposite an unsuitable minimum hand there must be some sort of play for game. As for system agreements, if North had a club suit, he could bid 2C, which could be defined either as forcing or non forcing, a forcing 2C bid could redouble first and bid clubs on the next round. Therefore both 3C and 4C are unnecessary jumps, and either or both could, and should, be splinters. Once North has shown primary heart support and a club shortage it is difficult to see how South could stay out of a slam. In this country we do not understand splinters, perhaps others do but we don't. For, make no mistake, hands with trump fits and outside singletons occur once a week not once a year.

## The slam try splinter

In a two club system, leading authorities consider the slam try splinter, a jump to the four level, to be a limit bid showing 11-14 points. A hand stronger than that must find an alternative development. Obviously it is not practical in any bidding sequence for both opener and responder to have wide range bids, and the splinter in a two club system must be the same sort of limited precautionary raise as a SKEB raise. In a one club system opener has a narrow range bid, so responder can have a hand ranging from a mild slam try as a precautionary measure, in case partner has a maximum and there is a perfect fit, to a hand which would consider a grand slam try in its own right

## The residual point count

The residual point count is what opener has left when all minor honours in the splinter suit have been discounted

AQ96	AJ76
K8	QJ8
AQ65	107
654	KQ54

When partner splinters in clubs the hand on the left is a residual fifteen count, on the right an eight count

8-9 points is sub minimum	10-11 points is minimum
12-13 points is maximum	and 14-15 points is super maximum

The adjusted total is the sum of the residual count and responder's point count. An adjusted total of twenty-eight points gives a good slam. With x opposite xxx the opponents have ten points in that suit to take one trick and a further two points in the remaining suits to try to take another trick, With x opposite Axx the opponents have six points wasted and a further six points in the other suits with which to take two tricks, typically two kings and the slam will be on one of two finesses, or an Ace and a Queen where it may well be necessary to finesse for the Queen.

Responder has a wide range of possible hands and will control the auction, opener must show where his hand lies in the scale of values. A/ With a sub minimum opener returns to the trump suit at the four level and if partner continues to cue bid he signs off again at the five level B/ with a minimum hand opener signs off at the four level and returns a cue bid at the five level. C/ with a maximum opener returns the cue bid at the four level, passes responder's sign off, or signs off himself at the four level. D/ with a supermax opener continues cue bidding until a slam is reached or bids the slam directly. In a splinter sequence controls are irrelevant in the same way as controls have no bearing on a no trump slam. In both cases what is required is fillers in the shape of Queens, Jacks and also tens, for there can be a lay down slam with a control missing and a no chance slam with all the controls. The bid of 4NT is a rolling cue bid, an essential part of the cue bidding process showing extra values but nothing convenient to cue

If an adjusted total of twenty-eight is required for slam and opener is going to accept with a residual count of 14-15, responder must have fourteen or more points for a slam try. A very good trump fit will have a critical bearing on the success of the slam. With an excellent fit twenty-seven points may well give a good play for twelve tricks, and conversely with a poor fit twenty-eight may not be enough. For example with a trump fit of Axxx opposite Qxxx a hand can have every other point in the pack, and with the combined count of thirty-six a slam is against the odds. It may be possible to avoid some weak trump fits, by establishing the expected strength of the trump suit. Let

Hxx be the expected strength of the player who first bids the suit and H10xx the average support where H is one of the top three honours. If either player is considerably worse or considerably better than expectations he should add or deduct a point. Opener's suit of AQJxx is worth an additional point and responder's suit of 10xxx should forfeit a point. In this case the points would balance out but a suit of Kxxx opposite Jxxx will both deduct a point and hopefully a no play slam could be avoided.

Another feature to have an important bearing on the adjusted total is a void. Responder will repeat cue to confirm a void. If opener has xxx in the suit his assets rocket but if he has Axx he was counting full value for the Ace but now its value has plunged

### The Gap Between

If a game try splinter shows 8-11 points, and a slam try splinter must have a minimum point count of fourteen, there is a gap in between, with a nominal point count of 11-14. The solution is simple. The game going splinter makes its jump to the three level but pushes to game even if partner signs off. The three level splinter should be defined as "either a game try, or a game going hand with little or no slam interest" These point count limits are no more than a shorthand notation, and are not a substitute for judgement. A hand such as:-

A 10 9 7 6  
 ♥ K J 5 3  
 ♦ J 9 7 5  
 ♣ -

is best advised to splinter to 3C over partner's opening bid of 1H, but push to game in spite of a possible sign off from partner. With a good suit, good trumps and a void it is too pessimistic to stay out of game once partner has opened 1H. Conversely it would be too optimistic to make a slam try of 4C on a hand such as this. Partner will be accepting on a lot of hands that offer scarcely any play for twelve tricks.

### The Sequence 1S 3H

If the slam try splinter in response to 1S is a bid of 4H, opener has only two options, a sign off or a slam try above game. With a residual point count ranging from eight to fifteen, this is not ideal. That is why the splinter to 3H is defined as either a game or slam try. The level of the cue bidding will show which

1D    2D  
 2H    2S

This a splinter sequence. 2H shows a shortage, the bid of 2S cannot logically be natural, so it must be conventional. Conventional bids ought to be designed to find out what the player needs to know and in that sense they are logical and more easily remembered than a completely arbitrary set of responses. Opener's bid of 2H has shown an 11-15 bid with either a singleton or a void. 2S is a next suit up relay asking for further clarification on the scale of minimum points and a singleton, max and a singleton, min and a void, max and a void.

## Roman Blackwood

Standard Roman Blackwood is

4NT	?		
	5C	-	1 or 4 of the five key cards which include the King of trumps
	5D	-	0 or 3
	5H	-	2 without the Queen of trumps
	5S	-	2 with the Queen of trumps

A second enquiry would want to find out about the Queen of trumps if it is not known and outside Kings, preferably finding out which Kings. So the next suit up excluding a sign off asks for the Queen of trumps and outside Kings. The archetypal example will be

	4H	4NT	5C	5D?	
5H	-				no Queen of trumps
6H	-				Queen of trumps but no outside King
5S, 6C, 6D	-				Queen of trumps and that King
5NT	-				Queen of trumps and two outside Kings
7H	-				not likely, but the Queen of trumps and all three Kings

4H 4NT 5D?

It is impossible that 4NT bidder cannot tell whether the response shows zero or three key cards. He knows. It is quite possible that he wanted one, or perhaps even two key cards for the slam and is now no longer interested when partner has none. 5H would be a sign off. On the occasions that responder has three there will be a slam on; partner could not possibly have wanted four for a slam. If 4NT bidder continues with another enquiry the only logical explanation is that he knows about the three key cards and wants one other card for a grand, either the Queen of trumps or a specific King

An agreement exists whereby if responder shows 0 or 3 key cards 4NT bidder should sign off in case it was zero and responder would then continue if it was in fact three. This implies that hands can exist where 4NT cannot tell if responder has zero or three. Is this possible? Is it possible to construct a hand where an enquiry for controls is justified, and yet it is possible for partner to have nought or three. After a certain amount of jiggling, this hand is interesting. Partner opens a five card spade suit and 11-15 points and responder holds.

KQ3  
AJ1064  
3  
AQJ3

This is most certainly worth a control enquiry. If partner has the missing three controls there is a good slam and if he has the King of clubs as well there is a grand. Can partner open the bidding with no key cards at all? This is a seventeen count and partner has shown at least 11-12 There could be 11-12 points missing, and although astronomically improbable it is not impossible that those missing 11-12 points are precisely the missing controls. When 5D shows no controls there cannot be a slam, when it shows three controls there must be at least a small slam. To define 4H 4NT 5D(3) 5H as forcing when partner is looking at three controls and sign off when he has none is quite playable

4S 4NT 5D?

No problems at all, by definition 5S would be sign off, leaving 5H as a relay

4S 4NT 5D(3) 5H ?



A small slam is certain and a grand is not impossible. If 4NT bidder could not visualise a grand he would have signed off in 6S. Therefore the relay of 5H is a grand slam try. It is looking for either the Queen of trumps or a specific King, one only since two subsidiary cards are precluded by the bidding, Therefore

	4S	4NT	5D(3)	5H	?
		6S	-		no additional card of value
		6C, 6D, 6H	-		that King
Leaving		5NT	-		the Queen of trumps

Exactly the same schedule could apply when the trump suit is hearts provided 5H is agreed as forcing. But 5H does not sound as if it is forcing and will partner remember that in three years time. The greatest strength of a simple system is that there is little if any memory strain and no conventional agreements, with the possible exception of Stayman which most people can remember anyway. Once the EBU invited a top American pair over to take part in a prestigious pairs tournament and only when they arrived were they told that they could only play Blackwood and Stayman.

The following is a schedule which is not at all accident prone

	4H	4NT	5D(3)	5S(relay)	?	(5H would have been a sign off)
		6H	-			nothing extra
		6C, 6D	-			that King
		5NT	-			the only bid left which has to cover the Queen of trump or the King of spades.

This would appear to be a drawback and a forcing 5H could avoid the problem if so desired

When the response shows two controls either with or without the Queen of trumps, the next relay and its responses are much simpler and ask for specific Kings

	4S	4NT	5S(2with)	5NT	?
		6S	-		no Kings
		6C,6D,6H	-		that King
		7S	-		two Kings (If No trump bidder is missing three Kings and needs two specific Kings for the grand he has no right to be asking.

When the trump suit is hearts there is no way of showing the King of spades this might be critical once every fifty years or so. But it would be another fifty years before the opponents could do any better in the other room

### Blackwood after a minor

Blackwood after a minor is quite useless. Four of a minor must start the enquiries. If four of a minor is forcing it is Blackwood, if it is invitational four of the other minor would be the control ask. For ease of memory 4m(controls) must shadow 4NT and must, if at all possible, be what it sounds like

4D (Blackwood)		?
	4H	- 1 or 4
	4S	- 0 or 3
	4NT	- 2 without
	5C	- 2 with

Playing pairs there is no such thing as a contract of five of a minor because 3NT+1 outscores 5D. This, along with several other anomalies, could easily be cured by scored minor suits as thirty for the first trick and twenty for each subsequent, But we are concerned, not with what ought to be, but what is, and ideally it should be possible to ask for key cards and stop in 4NT. The second relay is not 4NT or 5D unless partner has shown three of the six key cards

#### Second relay

4D(controls in diamonds)	4H (one)	?	
4S -	second relay		
4NT,5D -	sign offs		
4D	4H	4S	?
	4NT,5D	-	sign offs, nothing extra
	6D	-	Queen of trumps but no Kings
	5C,5H,5S	-	Queen of trumps and that King
	5NT	-	Queen of trumps and two Kings
	7D	-	the Euro Jackpot all four cards that partner wants

### Transfers and relays

The chief advantage of transfers and relays is that they double the range of expression in the bidding, in fact more than double. A response of 2NT can mean whatever it is chosen to mean, but can have two extra meanings if it is preceded by a transfer to hearts or spades. The forcing no trump in response to one of a major, though technically neither a transfer nor a relay, has the same advantages. Transfers to 1NT, being so universal, have become part of the group consciousness. The group consciousness of swallows enables them to migrate to South Africa when they have never been there before. The group consciousness of bridge players allows them to migrate to the local bridge club when they have been there many times before. The general adulation for transfers over 1NT should not be embraced blindly. Many players, even very good players, continue to transfer when a no trump has been doubled. Another unseen disadvantage occurs when responder only intends to make bid. Not only is there then no advantage in transferring, it is even helpful for the opponents. When responder makes a weakness take out of 2S fourth hand can define double as he will, penalties of 1NT, penalties of 2S, or take out of 2S, any one of those meanings, whichever he prefers, but only one. If responder bids 2H as a transfer to 2S fourth hand has all three descriptions at his disposal. Double means a double of 1NT, pass and double on the next round is penalties of 2S, and bidding 2S over 2H is take out of spades. Another facet of the bridge players' group consciousness is doubling conventional bids, blissfully unaware that it helps the opponents in the bidding and the play, they have a warm inner feeling of satisfaction when partner leads the suit. If fourth hand doubles a transfer to spades to show hearts, when opener has four hearts and not much in spades he will redouble. Then when doubler's partner has nothing, this would provide an excellent opportunity for the player to reconsider his attitude towards doubling conventional bids. We do it because we do it and have done so for the last fifty years is the logic behind much accepted wisdom.

1C    Pass    1S    Dble

Double is for take out of course it is, has been for the last fifty years and will be for the next fifty. Double gives opener several optional rebids, pass, and redouble, 1NT, 2C and 3C. If instead of double fourth hand bids 2C, from his side's point of view it has exactly the same effect, the lowest available contract is still two of a red suit. But rather than opener's options being increased they have been decreased. Many years ago Terence Reese and Boris Schapiro lost a Gold Cup match by a single figure margin having suffered an adverse slam swing in the penultimate set. The bidding was

1C	Pass	1S	2C
3C	Pass	3NT	all pass

The 2C bid was on King to five hearts and King to four diamonds. Not unnaturally they did not bid on this hand in the other room and the auction was

1C	Pass	1S	Pass
3C	pass	4C	etc, etc. 6C

## Bidding a passed hand

Presented with a new convention players will often say "Oh! I can't be bothered with that, my method works perfectly well" This is an acceptable attitude if the proposal does not fit with their other agreements. The comment is not logical if the conclusion is supposed to be that their method is just as good as anything else, for the simple reason that all alternative treatments judged on their own merit, as they deserve to be, cannot be of equal merit. Take an extreme example. Two over one forcing to game is a method that works perfectly well, otherwise there would not be any good players using it, A hand worth a bid over 1S but not worth a game force must respond 1NT. If partner has passed it is possible to continue to use the same method, rather than construct a plan B. Responses of two of a suit do not exist, but to claim that this is just as good as anything else is presumptuous. This argument seems to verge on the unrealistic, surely no-one can go on playing two over one as game forcing by a passed hand. Not so, some do. What is more a large number of one club players, probably the majority, do more or less exactly the same thing. A two level response by a passed hand is still forcing to 2NT, with the effect that partner is only allowed to take an intelligent part in the proceedings if he has precisely an eleven count. Other conventions by a passed hand are SNAP and Drury. One variation of SNAP defines 1NT as a game try and two of a suit as freewheeling asking partner to pass when in doubt. Drury uses 2C not to show a club suit but to show primary support for partner's major and ask him "Were you telling me what you have got or were you telling me porkies?" A valuable adjunct to Drury is Drurywood. Players who use Italian style cue bidding always have the option of using Blackwood instead. Cue bidding is so superior that Blackwood does not get used from year's end to the next. There is a danger that the responses will be forgotten. Drurywood consists of the next suit up after the Blackwood response asking "Were you telling me the truth, or have you forgotten the system?"

If partner has passed and neither of the opponents are bidding it is a virtual certainty that the hand lies in the competitive zone, namely that the points are divided no more unevenly than 17-23. Within that zone it is in both side's interests to compete, and the points total is far less important than the strength of the trump fit. The most common unbalanced hand pattern is 5431 Suppose third or fourth hand opens 1S and partner holds AQxxxx in one of the other suits. If that does not qualify for a two level response the player has to bid 1NT. If the six card suit is opposite the singleton the total hand pattern is quite likely to be 7766 and at least one side will be able to make nothing at the two level. However if the six card fit is opposite partner's four card suit, someone has a contract at the four level. If the two partners cannot tell whether they should be at the two level or the four level after two rounds of bidding this is not the cutting edge of technology. In our proposed method we argue that a response at the two level by a passed hand is a weakness take out, perhaps as weak as A10xxxx and nothing else, and partner should pass unless he can be sure of something better. Partner can see something much better on:-

4	AK9865
964	A2
754	9
A98762	K543

Against 6C opponents will lead a heart or lead a diamond and then switch to a heart. If clubs are 2-1, and spades are 4-2 the slam makes by ruffing out the spades. Give the two of clubs to the opponents in exchange for the ten of clubs and the slam does not make on a 4-2 spade break. Illustrative hands can be painstakingly concocted to prove that the sun goes run the moon. This one proves that the two of trumps is more important than the ten

### Transfers in response to an overcall

These can be an interesting development in bidding, in fact they were hailed as "probably the greatest advance in bidding in the last few decades" Wherever transfers occur there will be an advantage provided the transfer bidder is worth two bids. It is unlikely that "advancer" (the partner of the overcaller) is worth two bids if he has already passed certainly not unless overcalls are very solid. For these overcalls to gain, dealer must bid, second hand must overcall, third hand must pass and advancer must have the material for two bids. When all of these conditions obtain transfers are invaluable

### Transfers in response to 1H,1S and 2C

Reese in his book "The Acol system today" gives this hand

A/     AQ1052  
       Q84  
       K865  
       J

and advocates passing if partner responds 1NT to 1S. This bid would meet with expert approval, but many players of more modest aspiration would regard a rebid of 2D as standard. The modern tendency is to respond 1NT to 1S with any other six card suit headed by two top honours and not much else. Notice the difference in trick taking ability according as responder has clubs hearts or diamonds. Change the hand slightly to

B/     AQ1052  
       KJ65  
       QJ7  
       4

Now with a sound opening bid and a heart suit there is a much stronger case for pulling responder's 1NT to 2H. There is still an enormous trick taking potential depending on which six card minor partner has. Theory has it that responder could bid a six card minor at the three level after the sequence 1S 1NT 2H or he could give false preference to 2S. If he bids his six card club suit at the three level the total hand pattern is probably 7766 where neither side wants to win the contract and he is at the three level. If his suit is diamonds, a contract of 3D would be a nine card fit with ruffing values in the short trump hand.

If responder has passed it is good theory to let him bid a six card suit without the normal values for a response at the two level as long as the bid comes with a sticker attached to the effect that responder is trying to improve the contact. If responder bids 2C with that agreement with hand B opener should let him get on with it, for as we have already shown, on a misfit it is best to let the weak hand choose trumps. It is desirable to be able to bid that way, but of course responder can only have that option if he has already passed. Playing transfers responder has that option whether he has passed or not

1S would be a universal bid on hand B and over 2C 2H would be a universal rebid. This is not the case with transfers, they are counter instinctive. The golden rule is that opener breaks the transfer if he likes partner's suit and completes the transfer if he does not. This chimes with a agreement that some have after 1NT 2D(hearts). Opener completes the transfer if he is not very keen on hearts but bids 3H, or a second four card suit if he has four card heart support. So the rebid on hand B above over 1NT(transfer to clubs) is not 2H it is 2C. Is there a danger of missing a heart fit? No it is responder's duty to find the fit. He cannot play in 2H anymore than the traditional player can but he can play in 3H or 4H. He would only pass the rebid of 2C if he had a weakness take out , a hand only worth one bid. If he has the values for a second bid he will bid 2H on the second round. Bidding after a transfer is a different mindset. Opener's first duty in to indicate his suitability in responder's suit. This is a scale of responses after

1S            1NT  
?

2C        -        No liking for clubs but could have as much as four card club suit in a minimum flat hand with 4-4 in the black suits 12-13 if responder has a hand which will pass 2C, no game has been missed

2NT       -        four card club support 14-15 points. In the Blue Club a response of 2C over 1S guaranteed eleven points and was forcing to 2NT. In theory 1S 2C 3C was not forcing but since opener could have 12-15 points to pass could be a trap. One solution was to rebid 3NT instead of 3C with 14-15 points but that was not ideal when responder did not have clubs and was planning a responder's reverse. 1S 2C 2NT was not a solution, that said nothing about clubs it was a flat minimum sign off

3C        -        a losing count raise to 4C if partner has eleven points. The obvious advantages that partner will pass if he has not got eleven points rather than climbing up to four of a minor which is seldom a sensible contract and should probably be treated as forcing whenever possible

3D,3H,3S       -        All jumps are splinters unless defined to the contrary. It would be rare for opener to have the playing strength to produce such a bid. Normally the bid of 3C will have a singleton and do justice to the hand although it does not specify the shortage

2D, 2H        -        These are specialist bids. Clearly they have some club support to force partner to the three level when he could have A10xxxx in clubs and not much else. They have exactly the same type of hand as B above, three card support for partner's minor, five cards in the opening major and four cards in the second bid suit. So the response guarantees a shortage in the fourth suit, usually a singleton , but could be a void with an extra card in one of the three suits shown.

1S        1NT

2D        ?        -        any continuation means exactly what it sounds like, 2S, 3C, and 3NT are to play. 3D (responder could have passed 2D) is invitational as is 3S (although responder might have been better advised to have taken the decision himself whether to bid 2S or 4S) The only forcing continuation is 2H (the unbid suit). Clearly this cannot be a normal fourth suit enquiry responder knows his partner's hand already. What he does not know is whether partner is 12-13 or 14-15 and whether the shortage is a singleton or a void. That is what responder will want to know so opener replies in four steps 1/ minimum with a singleton 2/ maximum with a singleton 3/ minimum with a void 4/ maximum with a void (the "S"utton"V"alence convention, singletons before voids)

Returning to

1S        1NT  
?

2S - a six card suit. Effectively 2S overrules partner and says "my suit is just as good as yours"  
3S - six spades and four clubs, a hand which has enormous potential and is not as uncommon as 3D,3H,3S

This schedule is typical of the philosophy of the system, lateral thinking coupled with a refusal to accept traditional theory, a vastly increased number of possible sequences at the players' disposal and a consequent ability to define a hand within far closer limits. To the serious tournament player this could be an Aladdin's cave of untold wealth ; to the "natural" player of more modest ambition it could be a nightmare. One thing is certain, an increased vocabulary of bidding gives scope for expert hand evaluation. Consider this hand

J107  
K107  
986  
KQ43

In our system partner opens 1S and we bid 1NT to which partner is expected to bid 2C and the follow up of 2S shows 4+ clubs and three spades with a point count of 9-11, perhaps not the distribution but the values for Acol jump preference, with the advantage that using non forcing jump preference risks a failing contract at the three level when opener cannot find the fourth, whereas we stay safely at the two level. However partner does not rebid 2C he rebids 2H, showing five spades four hearts and three clubs, probably to an honour (xxx in clubs is nothing to be proud of). Originally we had planned to show the values for a nine trick contract, now the hand has improved enormously with the King ten in partner's side suit and nothing wasted in the diamond suit. Maybe the combined count is only 21-22 but this must be worth a game, and the bid is 4S. Change partner's rebid to 2D and now the King of hearts faces a singleton, and responder signs off in 2S. Opener has described his hand and is not expected to continue. We refrain from the unfair argument of giving an illustrative hand. The meaning of the bids is described in detail and the reader is left to judge the validity of the argument for himself

The bidding of a hand such as the one above would start, in a traditional system, 1S 1NT (forcing with five card majors and non forcing with four card majors) 2H. There is a sound theory of bidding that with a broken six card minor 3NT will come in if the suit runs but 2NT will not make if the suit does not run , so there is no point in being in 2NT. Some modern tournament players appear to apply the same principle to three of a major. If three is going off, one might just as well go two off in four. We hope that our system is accurate enough so that we do not have to embrace that philosophy. Game may or may not be reached with four or five card majors, but in neither system will that be an enlightened decision , that depends on the fit in the minors.

### The 5-3 major fit

A suit rebid over a transfer announces a six card suit. Four and five card majors both start by bidding the same way. With primary support of four cards for partner's major the response is always to start by transferring to partner's suit, so that 1S 2H guarantees four card support and any range of values from a game try to a grand slam try. When there is a 5-3 major fit it is responder's responsibility to catch up.

This is the schedule

1S ?

2S - either four card support, pre-emptive with no game interest, or 7-9 points with three spades to an honour and probably an outside ruffing value.

Transfer to another suit and correct to 2S - 9-11 points, three card spade support. A 4-3 fit here may well be an excellent contract which other pairs cannot find. 2NT from partner would, most decidedly not be a rescue, it is a serious game try.

Transfer to another suit and jump to 3S - 12+points forcing

It is a fundamental principle of a good bidding system that slam tries are made below game. Three or four natural bids and then the old Black is what beginners start with

1S 1NT  
2C 3S

Opener rebids 3NT with a four card spade suit and either 4S or an advance cue with five spades. A good bidding system will make its slam tries below the level of game. And the advance cue or the failure to do so should guide responder in the critical decision whether or not to risk the five level with a control enquiry. Three or four natural bids and the old Black is a starting point for beginners. It is worth noting here that there is some mathematical substantiation for the happy go lucky attitude of "we may be going one off so we may as well go two off" A player who is considering using Blackwood will expect a game to be certain and ought to expect the slam to be 50% or better. To risk a 100% game for a 50% slam is an either/or proposition. But suppose that a player uses Blackwood and finds an Ace missing. The beginner will sign off after an agonising pause and his partner might not have the experience to realise that it is out of order to bid the slam. In fact the five level contract may only be a 75% proposition, and risking a 75% game to bid a 50% slam is an excellent gamble.

### The cost of the transfer

The cost of transfers to an opening bid of 1NT is the natural weak take out to 2D, no great loss to the system. The cost of the transfers in response to one of a major is the loss of the natural bid of 1NT, not an exorbitant cost since many players play a forcing 1NT response anyway. nevertheless it is a cost which should be weighed in advance

A/	8	B/	85	C/	85	D/	8
	AQ2		A75		Q1087		Q976
	9865		QJ95		K53		K976
	Q!0652		K864		KJ54		A762

These are the types of hand where the course of action is not clear

A/ The question here is 2C likely to be a better contract than 1S. The odds must be fairly evenly balanced. What is more important is not the decision itself as whether the decision is taken after wriggling and consulting the ceiling, or passing as though without a care in the world. Opponents will often protect unless warned not to. It is useful to have a rule of thumb to pull with 8-10 points and 1345 shape unless the suit is very weak

B/ This ten count will pose a problem in many systems. More of this later but on balance make two bids with this hand

C/ with a nine count the odds swing towards passing

D/ An even more difficult decision, with three four card suits there is a better chance of a fit. Perhaps pass is best in the long run. Do it smoothly and the opponents may well protect and they are welcome to it. In fact it might even be worth doubling two of a minor. It is no disaster if it

makes, and on a good day the double might bring in 500. Terence Reese said that if the opponents never make a doubled contract against you, you are not doubling often enough

### Responder makes two bids

The archetypal sequence will be 1S 1NT 2C 2D  
Responder shows two four card suits or better and the values for 2NT or better, 2D cannot be passed Opener's rebids are

- 3C - nothing better to do
- 3D - natural non forcing
- 2NT - natural denies the ability to bid 3NT
- 2S - arguable whether or not this should be treated as forcing. If opener cannot bear the thought of 2S being passed there is nothing to stop him bidding 3S. In practice if responder passes 2S that will be quite sufficient
- 2H - This is the forcing bid which is indeed required. It is not a blind man's bluff bid saying he does not know where to go. He is junior hand and it is his duty to describe his hand. His partner asks the questions and he gives the answers. The bid of 2H has a very specific meaning, it is game acceptance opposite the values partner has announced, and can visualise a game in two or more denominations. Diamonds, spades and no trumps are all a possibility. The hand almost certainly has the Ace of hearts, neither the King of hearts nor the Queen is a brilliant card and to insist on game with two or three small hearts (he cannot have a singleton heart) is ridiculously optimistic. A hand such as

AQ1087  
A95  
KJ107  
8

would be ideal

Again this schedule of responses is typical of the system, a wealth of sequences available, and their meanings are self explanatory once the general principle is understood.

1S	1NT
2C	3C
?	

What does 3C mean ? Is it forcing or invitational? 1S 3C is not a game force with a club suit, it is a splinter. There is no way to force to game with a club suit unless 3C here is forcing. If responder has a hand where he would like it to be invitational he must bid 2S or 2NT on the second round

A problem from play will illustrate the next principle of bidding. Playing a standard two club system with four card majors.

KJ864	
Q64	
AJ10	
A8	
1S	2D
2S	3H
?	

Which is better 3NT or 4D? At the table the choice was 3NT and responder passed



In the other room they were playing a one club system with transfers. The bidding started

	1S	2C
	2D	2H
Already responder has passed the same information and saved a complete round of bidding. The bidding continued	3C	3D
	4D	4NT
	5H	6D
	Pass	
Responder held		AQ7
		KJ85
		KQ8532
		4

With the natural system the opening bid started off by being 11-19 points. After two rounds of bidding it fell to opener to take the critical decision. With transfers the opening bid was 11-15 points and opener took the critical decision after three rounds of bidding. Is it any surprise who took the winning decision?

The next hand from a pairs tournament shows good hand evaluation by both players

KQ942	J8
KQ7	52
Q6	K8752
732	AKJ8
1S	1NT
2C	2D
2S	Pass

To show 5-4 in diamonds and clubs either in a natural system or with transfers takes the bidding to the three level and is effectively game forcing. The hand is not suitable to bid this way. The diamonds need better support than Hxx and the hand does not have game going values. It shows good judgement to bid the hand as 4-4 in the minors with the values for 2NT. Over 2D opener has the choice of 2S or 2NT. With AQ of hearts instead of KQ the bid is definitely 2NT. As it is if partner passes 2S that is probably the limit of the hand. 2S made was the only plus score on the sheet. Even if the partnership can stop in 2NT, 2S is a better contract. It nearly always will be when there is a 5-2 fit. Many players go wrong over an invitational three of a suit, they pass with a minimum hand and a three card fit and bid 3NT with a minimum and doubleton support. This is entirely the wrong way round

Again from a pairs tournament a hand which is instructive in another way

AQJ2	765
Q94	K1065
Q843	AKJ7
J6	Q8
1S	2C
2D	2H

3D

Pass

Declarer was disappointed not to find the Jack of hearts and went one down. However this proved to be a complete top since 3NT was universal, going at least two down. Traditionally no trump bidding is a fingers a toes job, 1NT 3NT and let them find a lead is often better than a complicated and revealing Crowhurst sequence. Bidding suits leads to better judgement, Qx in the unbid suit is worth nothing. Sometimes there is poetic justice.

### Opener has hearts or responder has diamonds

There is no essential difference to the schedule above. Only one sequence requires clarification

1H	1NT
2S	

Is opener showing 4432 or 4513?

The flatter hand is far less powerful, and a potential spade fit will not be lost, for if responder is worth two bids he will bid 2S on the second round with a four card spade suit. If he is not worth two bids 2C may be high enough. So 2S is showing 4513 and falls in line with all the other sequences

### Responder has hearts

When responder bids a four card minor he does not usually visualise an eleven trick contract, it is a means of developing the bidding. Hearts are always bid with the serious intent of playing there and it is generally agreed that to bid hearts at two level shows five. This has repercussions with transfers. Primary trump support is either three or four hearts. Breaking the transfer to two of a minor shows secondary support an outside singleton and four cards in opener's second suit 1S 1NT 2D shows 5143 specifically 1S 2D 3C shows primary heart support and a shortage in the unbid suit It might be bid on any of the following hand patterns 5413 ; 5314 or 4315. It really does not matter which, if there is a heart fit that is where the hand will be played and the critical feature is the diamond shortage. With that proviso opener's rebids shadow those after the transfer to a minor

1S	2D
?	
2H	- no particular liking for hearts. An unpromising minimum hand might contain three hearts
2S	- six card spade suit
2NT	- sound raise to 3H in a traditional system
3H	-- raise to 4H in a traditional system, no outside singleton, probably 5422, but AKJxx / AQx /xxx / xx does not require much to make game
3C/3D	- shortage in the other minor
3S	- six spades and four hearts, enormous slam potential

1S	2D
2H	3H

What is the meaning of 3H? When responder's suit is a minor the raise is defined as forcing, for two reasons. It is a long way to go to an eleven trick contract so an invitation to game in clubs is going to be unusual, and an invitation to game in spades or no trumps can be shown by the bids of 2S and 2NT. The situation is not quite the same when responder has hearts. An invitational 3H bid is a live possibility, and it is not impossible to manufacture a forcing bid.

1S 2D 2H 3C is certainly forcing and could well be a suit. It might also be a fragment looking for rebiddable spades, preference to hearts or no trumps.

In bidding competitions there are often hands which are well nigh impossible to bid by standard methods. The secret then is to find one of the least bad alternatives. This was a hand in a bidding competition some time ago.

AK8732	4
K9	QJ1085
A76	KQ1053
75	J2

It is easy to see that 4H is the directed contract, but reaching it is another matter. In our system we start

1S	2D
2S	?

Admittedly responder has a six loser hand, but the losing count only applies when there is a fit and there does not appear to be one. A bid of 3D is too aggressive certainly if a new suit at the three level is game forcing. But should it be? If 3D is defined as a one round force, opener's continuations of 3H and 3S deny the ability to bid 4H or 4S. On the occasions when responder is interested in a slam three of a major or four of a major will be a valuable guide as to whether he should Blackwood or sign off. These sort of distinctions in the early rounds of the bidding are usually more important than Blackwood itself. Perhaps even more important is that responder can make a second bid on a hand such as this if that bid is a game try rather than a game force. If responder dares to bid 3D opener ought to be bidding 4H.

How does this idea of a new suit at the three level apply to allied sequences

1NT	2D (transfer)
2H	3D

It seems desirable that opener should bid 4H if he can and responder can pass 3H if he sees fit to do so.

### The transfer to partner's suit

1S 2H

With the exception of splinter bids which will be discussed later, all hands with primary spade support from game tries to grand slam tries will start with a transfer. Effectively this incorporates all of the slam going gimmickry of other systems with the added advantage that partner's hand becomes strictly limited at the two level. Opener starts by being 12-15 and rebids 2S with a minimum hand within that range. This is not only the first step in slam investigation but also ensures that a game try does not abort at the three level

K1085  
62  
Q1053  
K107

When partner opens 1S this responding hand is a problem. It is too good for 2S and not good enough for 3S. Duplicate players as a race tend to overbid and many would stretch to bid 3S. Take away the tens and it is only a 2S bid. This is the minimum requirement for a response of 2H, a hand worth two and a half spades, in terms of point count a good eight to a poor ten, the sort of hand where the overbid of 3S seems more attractive than the underbid of 2S. Whenever partner is minimum 3S goes one down, "it's only a part score". Such profligacy is typical of the tournament game.

The following sequence shows how the sequences work

1S	2H
3C (a)	3D (b)
3S (c)	4C (d)
4D (e)	?

(a) - Showing a side suit, with at least the values to make a game try. Opener's hand may be worth a bid of 4S opposite a responding hand worth two and a half spades, but kangaroo leaps are most unhelpful if partner is interested in a slam.

(b) - Not a minimum hand, which would have bid 3S which opener could have passed if he wanted to. The bid shows diamond values or a diamond suit, the strength is unlimited.

(c) - This expresses the limit of the hand, not prepared to insist on a game when partner has an eight count

(d) - A pass of 3S would have been possible although unlikely in view of the 3D bid, 4S would have been terminal. 4C is a definite slam try, a cue bid which demands a return cue bid. Playing Italian style cue bidding this could be first or second round control, but not a singleton or void which would have splintered.

(e) - Owning up to a diamond control

Opener's hand on the sequence above is very closely defined, a six loser hand with a side suit of clubs and a diamond control. A typical example would be :-

```
A J 9 6 2
A 8
K 8
Q 9 5 4
```

The black suits could be the other way round, but probably not 4-4. 4432 hands are not usually worth more than a rebid of 2S. Only good trumps, good intermediates and a fifteen count would justify breaking the transfer on a flat hand. Compare this sequence to a Swiss heave to four of a minor which, not so long ago, was the cutting edge of technology

Until responder produces the bid of 4C his hand could be quite weak. In fact he could have the hand above quoted as a minimum 2H response

A J 9 6 2	K 10 8 5
A 7	6 2
K 8	Q 10 5 3
Q 9 3 2	K 10 7

1S	2H
3C	3D
3S	?

There is no excuse for bidding 4S. This is an IMP game, defined as any optimistic contract which might have been a lot better. The hand is not worth game. Admittedly responder fits the clubs, but that was why he found the 3D bid, which was questionable anyway.

1S	2H
3H	3S (a)
4S (b)	Pass

- (a) - Minimum or not improved by the heart bid
- (b) - The values to have bid 4S over 2H

Opener will have a five loser hand such as

A 9 7 4 3 2  
 A Q 10 3  
 K 8  
 3

This hand is worth game and on the second round of bidding opener had the option of showing the side suit in hearts or he could have splintered with a bid of 4C, whichever he thought the more the more important feature to show if partner was slam minded.

A third sequence

1S	2H
2S	3C (a)
3S (b)	4S (c)
Pass	

- (a) - minimum
- (b) - A side suit and at least a game try, may be much more
- (c) - very minimum, nothing extra at all.
- (d) - "Oh, alright then" By bidding game in spite of partner's continued sign offs it is clear that 3C was a serious slam try. The slam tries have been made below game level as they should be. A deal to fit the bidding would be

K 9 7 6	A J 8 5
K Q 10	A 5
A J 9	Q 2
7 6 5	A Q 10 9 3

This is the sort of hand where team mates come back and say "It was a good slam , we were desperately unlucky that both the club honours were offside" They seem to forget that it was not so desperate when they found the trumps 3-2 with the Queen inside.

There are other aspects of this hand worth studying. Blackwood does not help at all, it finds two key cards and partner could have

K1076  
 K76  
 A965  
 K7

In the sequence above this alternative hand is right to bid 2S on the second round, but having declared a minimum hand he is enormous on the third round when partner shows a club suit, and must bid 3D.

The ten of trumps is more important than Blackwood on this hand. These are the success rates for different contacts with and without the ten of trumps.

	Without the ten	With the ten
7S	8%	12%
6S	33%	50%
5S	56%	87%
4S	92%	99%

These figures reinforce a point made previously

Having reached the five level the slam is justified, it is only a 56% game which is being risked for a 33% slam

These percentages are calculated simply on three finesses and a break. Expert dummy play can bend the percentages but cannot escape them. In 5S without the ten of trumps declarer can improve on 56% by finessing the ten of clubs, and if this draws the King, he can safely play the trumps

Another transfer sequence

1S	2H
2S	3S (a)
4S	Pass

(a) - High card raise to 3S, with no particular suit that requires help  
Notice the phrasing "no particular suit that requires help"

J1076  
AKQ2  
J5  
984

It would be an error of judgement to bid 3H on this hand. Partner should judge by any additional values anywhere in the hand, not on the heart fit. Notice also that 3S is a serious game try since opener has already announced a minimum and with a thin 3S bid responder could have passed

### The Shape Ask

Another weapon in responder's armoury is a shape ask

1S	2H
2S	2NT!

Since 2NT will find opener's shape but not his strength, it is a slam try, not a game try. Opener's continuations are

3C, 3D	-	second suits
3H	-	also a second suit, but the hand must be 54 because 4-4 opens 1H, and probably 5422, since a 5431 hand might well have bid 3H on the second round
3S	-	five spades with no other four card suit
3NT	-	precisely 4333. If responder is also 4333 the hand must be played in 3NT, not 4S. This will be the one exception to 2NT being a slam try

4C,4D,4H - splinters. Opener might have made this rebid on the second round but this would require a hand worth game over a two and a half spade response

Q976	or	Q9762
KJ7		KJ7
8		8
AQ876		AQ87

Neither of these hands is really worth anything more than 2S over a response of 2H

## Splinters

There will be several possible treatments for any idle sequence. Splinter bids should take preference over any other claim. It is very common to have a trump fit and an outside shortage. Often the only means of conveying the glad tidings to partner is by means of a splinter, and the results can be spectacular. In the extreme case with four small cards opposite a void there will be a lay down grand on a combined thirty count, and there will be excellent small slams on combined point counts normally insufficient for game. A slam of this type, a combined twenty-one count, was board 15 in the B G B Simultaneous Pairs of January 2001.

North-South Game, Dealer South

	♠ A 10 9 7 6	
	♥ K J 5 3	
	♦ J 9 7 5	
	♣ -	
♠ Q J 2		♠ 4 3
♥ 10		♥ 7 6
♦ A K Q 6		♦ 10 8 4 3 2
♣ K Q 8 7 2		♣ J 10 4 3
	♠ K 8 5	
	♥ A Q 9 8 4 2	
	♦ -	
	♣ A 9 6 5	

The top for North South was 7H redoubled. It can be seen that it makes on the marked diamond spade squeeze. More of general interest is the contract of 6H, which is virtually unbeatable on any lie of the cards. Out of the two thousand and thirty-six pairs in the country playing in the competition, fifty-eight bid the slam. Less than three percent of the duplicate players in the country had the mechanism to find a lay down slam. This might be understandable if it was necessary to be playing an unusual system in order to find the slam. This is by no means the case, if there is such a thing as a universal bid, it is an opening bid of 1H on the South hand, followed by an almost equally universal double on the West hand. Then there will be variation, both in hand evaluation, and in system agreements. According to the losing count, the North hand is worth a raise to the four level, and even opposite an unsuitable minimum hand there must be some sort of play for game. As for system agreements, if North had a club suit, he could bid 2C, which could be defined either as forcing or non forcing, a forcing 2C bid could redouble first and bid clubs on the next round. Therefore both 3C and 4C are unnecessary jumps, and either or both could, and should, be splinters. Once North has shown primary heart support and a club shortage it is difficult to see how South could stay out of a slam. It is a comment on the traditional British arithmetic approach to bidding

that players cannot bid this sort of slam. "Your points plus my points" is not good enough. For, make no mistake, hands with trump fits and outside singletons occur once a week not once a year.

To play both 3C and 4C as splinters could be regarded as a waste of resources, because it is possible to define 3C as either a game or slam try. However there is an advantage in having both as splinters.

### The Game Try Splinter

A game try splinter will be three of a minor over one of a major. The sequence 1H 2S should be reserved for a weak two in spades. With a game try in hearts and a singleton spade, common sense dictates a bid of 3H, if the opponents are going to compete with 3S, they cannot be prevented from doing so., but there is no sense in offering them an easy way into the auction with a no cost double of 2S, when they would not have been prepared to bid at the three level. The game try splinter will normally contain 8-11 points. With good trumps, or a void, a seven count would be good enough

♠ K 8	♠ Q 10 7 2
♥ A Q 8 6 5	♥ K 9 7 4
♦ Q J 9	♦ K 8 3 2
♣ 9 7 2	♣ 8

West has a minimum opening bid of 1H. East has a hand pattern which is always assessed optimistically by the losing count. The apparent answer of seven losers is not accurate because the Queen is not balanced by an Ace, and the hand is not worth more than three hearts anyway. Even that is something of an exaggeration, on a simple common sense evaluation the hand is a poor raise to the three level. Players usually work on the principle that a hand that is worth a raise to two and a half of partner's suit should stretch to three. Certainly this is a sound principle if it can be a splinter raise, because after a splinter partner will make the right decision about bidding game. In this case when the splinter is in clubs opener bids game on his minimum hand and it turns out to be a good game on a combined twenty count. Reverse the minors and game is a poor proposition.

### The Slam Try Splinter

In a two club system, leading authorities consider the slam try splinter, a jump to the four level, to be a limit bid showing 11-14 points. A hand stronger than that must find an alternative development. Obviously it is not practical in any bidding sequence for both opener and responder to have wide range bids, and the splinter in a two club system must be the same sort of limited precautionary raise as a SKEB raise. In a one club system opener has a narrow range bid, so responder can have a hand ranging from a mild slam try as a precautionary measure, in case partner has a maximum and there is a perfect fit, to a hand which would consider a grand slam try in its own right

At the bottom end of the range eleven points is not enough, for the simple reason that opener is limited to a fifteen count, and he is expected to accept the slam try with a maximum and a good fit. A good fit consists of a respectable trump suit, and nothing wasted in the splinter suit. The perfect fit is no honour at all in the splinter suit, in which case the opponents have ten points to take one trick opposite the supposed singleton; or else no honour other than the Ace, where the opponents have six points whose value is neutralised. In both cases a combined twenty-eight count makes the slam a fair proposition with a good trump fit, and that entails responder holding at least thirteen points. Needless to say the quality of the trump support, and the possession of a void will affect this minimum point requirement.



## The Gap Between

If a game try splinter shows 7-11 points, and a slam try splinter must have a minimum point count of thirteen, there is a gap in between, with a nominal point count of 11-13. The solution is simple. The game going splinter, makes its jump to the three level but pushes to game even if partner signs off. The three level splinter should be defined as "either a game try, or a game going hand with little or no slam interest" These point count limits are no more than a shorthand notation, and are not a substitute for judgement. A hand such as:-

♠ A 10 9 7 6  
♥ K J 5 3  
♦ J 9 7 5  
♣ -

is best advised to splinter to 3C over partner's opening bid of 1H, but push to game in spite of a possible sign off from partner. With a good suit, good trumps and a void it is too pessimistic to stay out of game once partner has opened 1H. Conversely it would be too optimistic to make a slam try of 4C on a hand such as this. Partner will be accepting on a lot of hands that offer scarcely any play for twelve tricks.

## The Residual Point Count

It is bad technique to a splinter on a singleton Ace or a singleton King. If opener has K Q x opposite a singleton he must assume that these are the wrong cards, of little value, yet if it transpires that the singleton is the singleton Ace, the King and Queen are two certain tricks. Similarly if responder splinters on a singleton King, opener will misvalue a holding such as Q J x.

Any honour card other than the Ace must be discounted opposite a splinter. Residual point count is what is left. The perfect fit is three or four small cards opposite a small singleton or void; the near perfect fit is Ace to three or Ace to four opposite the splinter. The reason for describing the Ace as a near perfect fit is that responder may have a void, in which case the Ace is not worth its usual value.

If opener started life with 11-15 points, he will finish with a residual point count of 8-15, a very wide range, but the system can cope. Opener knows that partner has at least thirteen points, but is unlimited. The announced thirteen plus the residual point count give the total holding out of a thirty point pack.

1/	♠ A J 9 7 6	2/	♠ K Q 3 2	3/	♠ A K 8 7 6 5
	♥ K Q 7		♥ K 9 6		♥ A 8
	♦ A 8 7		♦ 8 6 3		♦ 7 6 2
	♣ J 7		♣ K Q 7		♣ A 3

1/ a/ The splinter comes in clubs. It would be better to have three clubs and two diamonds, but the extra trump and the residual fourteen count mean that the slam should be accepted. We continue to cue bid until a small slam is reached, hoping that partner will repeat cue in clubs showing a void in which case a grand is a distinct possibility.

b/ The splinter comes in diamonds. With a residual point count of fifteen we will cue to a small slam.

c/ The splinter is in hearts. This leaves a residual ten count and opener should sign off.

### The Sequence 1S 3H

If the slam try splinter in response to 1S is a bid of 4H, opener has only two options, a sign off or a slam try above game. With a residual point count ranging from seven to fifteen, this is not ideal. That is why the splinter to 3H is defined as either a game or slam try. The level of the cue bidding will show which

In contrast if the splinter is in a minor, opener has four options:-

An immediate sign off,

A return cue at the four level with the intention of passing four of the agreed suit,

A return cue, intending to proceed beyond game even if partner returns to four of the agreed suit, but not going beyond the five level,

Fourthly, to return the cue at the four level and continue bidding to a slam.

2/ a/ The splinter is in clubs. This is awful. A residual eight count.

b/ The splinter is in diamonds. Suddenly this is an entirely different story. We still have a flat thirteen count, but we have five high cards which are all vital, even if partner has his minimum thirteen count there is a combined minimum of twenty-six out of a thirty point pack. Return the cue bid and try above game in spite of a sign off. Do not go beyond the five level, because if partner is minimum there could be two Aces missing as on the hand below:-

♠ A J 10 7 5  
♥ A Q J 7  
♦ 10  
♣ J 10 8

c/ The splinter is in hearts. A residual ten count. Horrid

3/ This is a truly enormous hand whichever suit partner chooses to splinter in.

Responder must not stop bidding short of a slam

The next hand is from play

♠ A 9 7 6 4	♠ Q 5 3 2
♥ 7	♥ A Q 9 4
♦ K 8 3	♦ A J 7 4
♣ A K J 2	♣ 8

1S	4C (a)
4D (b)	4H (c)
4S (d)	Pass (e)

(a) - A minimum for a 4C bid

(b) - The King and Jack of clubs should be elsewhere, but within the possible residual count of 7-15 this eleven count is slightly above average, worth a return cue bid

- (c) - Does not increase the level of the bidding, and so does not promise any more values than were already promised by 4C.
- (d) - Nothing to spare
- (e) - Nothing to spare

In the other room the players also had the opportunity to appreciate the duplication in clubs, but did not heed the warning

1S	3NT (a)
4C (b)	4D (c)
4NT (d)	5S (e)
6S	Pass

- (a) - SKEB raise 13-15 points with a singleton
- (b) - Which singleton?
- (c) - Clubs
- (d) - Roman key card Blackwood
- (e) - Two Aces and the Queen of trumps

Another even worse example of duplication is:-

K9432	Q765
A987	K5
-	AK64
AJ105	Q62

With these two hands, a contract of 4S is quite high enough, 5S could fail.. Note the effect of moving East's cards into different places as below

K9432	AQ65
A987	K5
-	9764
AJ105	KQ6

With the same high cards in different suits 7S is a good contract even on a trump lead.

Knowing partner's strength is insufficient for slam bidding. Where that strength lies is critical, and that is the object of splinters

### The opening bid of 1NT

In theory any no trump bid ought to be confined to a range of three points, and if it is possible a range of two points only is preferable. A opening bid of 2NT showing 20-22 points can be improved by the use of Benjamin Twos where a rebid of 2NT shows 19-20. A rebid of 1NT showing 12-16 is common. Perhaps there is nothing better to do in those systems than rebid 1NT with some twelve counts and some sixteen counts, but one would have to be awfully partisan to claim that a no trump range of five points was desirable in its own right. The Blue Club 1NT showing 13-17 points had some fiendishly impressive continuations. But that was not the issue, more important was whether responder should continue or not , and he could be wrong either way on an average responding hand.

Opening a weak no trump is largely a tactical problem. It depends on the vulnerability, the position at the table and the alternative possibilities. To open a flat thirteen count 1D third in hand not vul against vul is rather a stupid bid. This invites an overcall of one of a major and a bad result when opponents find a major suit fit at the two level. Equally it is short sighted to open 1NT third in hand vul against not when 1S on a four card suit is an alternative. The bid of 1S directs a lead, wins the contract if partner can raise, does not risk a stinging penalty, and has the same pre-emptive effect as an opening bid of 1NT. Beginners do what they do because that is what it says on the card ; the expert is only too pleased to have the option of making the bid which he thinks is sensible in the circumstances

The opening bid of 1NT shows 13-15 points and some twelve counts. The responses of 2D,2H,2S and 2NT are transfers to hearts, spades, clubs and diamonds. The cost of these transfers is negligible, a weakness take out into diamonds. It may have been Marx/Sharples who first devised these transfers, they must have been revolutionary when they were first devised

The response of 2C is Stayman and promises a four card major. 3C,3D, and 3S are single suited hands with slam interest (not 3H). Baron is incorporated by using the sequence

1NT    2D    2H    2S

This bid of 2S is one of two hand types, either a value raise to 2NT with no four card major worth showing, or a slam try looking for a four card fit. Opener bids 2NT on a minimum hand or bids his four card suits up the line with a maximum, then responder either passes 2NT or bids his four card suits up the line. This sequence is one of the reasons why we do not break transfers. A hand which would have bid this way without the agreement of Baron would be five hearts and four spades.

1NT    2C    2D    3H                    shows 5-4 invitational

A 5-4 forcing response bids 1NT    3H                    and partner is expected to bid a four card spade suit. This fits in with the basic principles of cue bidding that cue bidding starts above the level of 3NT unless hearts are unequivocally agreed as trumps

1NT    2H    2S    3D                    There are three other sequences like this where responder transfers to a major and then bids a minor. First it must be decided whether this is a one round force or a game force. Perhaps against the weight of general opinion we take the view that it is only a one round force. Opener should bid 4S if he can, 3S denies the ability to bid 4S and can be passed on a minimum hand. Secondly the bid of 3D may or may not be a genuine attempt to play an eleven trick contract. It could be a no trump probe or looking for spade preference. It might even be a three card suit. In any case opener only raises to 4D if he has both four card diamond support and three card heart support, so that 4H is safe if partner was not seriously interested in a diamond game or slam. Opener agrees the minor by a cipher below the level of 3NT. Hence opener's continuations are :-

- 3H    -    cipher showing four diamonds and two hearts
- 3S    -    denies the ability to bid 4S, might be a doubleton spade in a minimum hand, a 5-2 major fit will play better than 3NT on a combined 24 /25 count when there is no fit
- 3NT   -    to play
- 4C    -    cipher showing excellent hand in support of spades
- 4D    -    four diamonds and three spades
- 4H    -    accepts game but denies the ability to cipher with 4C

## Bidding a minor

1NT    3C

Responder does not bid 3C if he does not want to be raised to 4C with trump support and a top hand. With no trump support (xx being the worst scenario) opener bids 3NT. When opener is unsure whether or not to raise to 4C or bid 3NT he should temporise with stops in the outside suits up the line. The value of such action is exaggerated but occasionally it may be possible to identify a singleton opposite no stop

1NT    3C  
3NT    ?

4C    -    still interested in a club slam

4D    -    controls in clubs.

These are the continuations but in practice responder has probably already found out all the relevant information available

The sequence above has similarities to

1S    1NT  
2C    3C  
3NT

The essential difference is that in this sequence opener could have a singleton club, and responder must have a better hand to continue with 4C and should respect a second sign off of 4NT

Also on the theme of bidding a minor is 1NT 2NT (transfer to 3D) If opener completes the transfer when he likes diamonds and bids 3C when he does not this serves two purposes if responder is 5-5 in the minors he will pass either 3C or 3D, and if he has a decision between 3D and 3NT it will help to know if the suit is more likely to run

## 1NT is doubled

There are various escape mechanisms, some involving a compulsory redouble by opener, they all have their merit but perhaps the best way of escaping 1NT is not opening 1NT in the first place. Vulnerable with an empty flat twelve count, pass, 1D, 1H and 1S should all be considered. When 1NT is doubled by second hand it is a mistake to continue to play transfers, The bid of 2C is needed as a weakness take out as is 2D, and either can be bid and redoubled for takeout. This is simple and obvious, without any memory work. Anything undoubled is better than a doubled contract. When third hand knows that a double is coming from fourth hand transferring to a four card major can escape retribution. The opponents are understandably less keen to double two of a major than two of a minor, and don't always have the right mechanism in place to extract a penalty. When a responding hand is worth one bid only transfers are a positive disadvantage. After 1NT 2H (weakness take out) fourth hand can double for takeout or values or penalties whichever he pleases but it can only have one meaning without his partner making a mistake. After 1NT 2D(transfer) fourth hand can have all three meanings, double is values, 2H is take out and pass and double on the next round is penalties

## The rebid of 1NT

We can do better than the standard version of Crowhurst for three reasons. We do not need to bid on a nine count in case partner has sixteen only to find he has twelve. We do not have the complication of 1C 1M 1NT being natural. Thirdly slams depend on suitable cards and

good trumps, 3NT depends on point count. We do not want to direct slam tries through 2C, 2C is specifically a game try.

These are articles of faith

A/ we do not want to subside in 2NT if we could play a 5-2 major fit, or a 4-3 major fit with a ruff in the short hand

B/ We do not want to be in 3NT with 25 and no eight card fit

C/ When it is not possible to judge whether four of a major or 3NT is better on a 5-3 major fit we will prefer the major

D/ We will go for a 25 point game if there is a possibility of a 5-3 major fit

There is always the danger that a new agreement will be a strain on the memory and easily forgotten. This should not apply here

After a 1NT rebid there is a choice of a direct 2NT or a 2C enquiry. Since 2C leaves open the possibility of playing 2M, it is the weaker bid. 2NT shows 12 points 2C shows 10-11 points. A good ten count should bid, a poor ten count should pass. Features of a good ten count after the bidding 1H 1S 1NT are a five card spade suit, three card heart support, intermediates, and top cards such as two Aces or an Ace and two Kings

1H 1S 1NT 2C ?

2D	-	12-13 not five hearts or three spades
2H	-	12-13 five hearts
2S	-	12-13 three spades but not five hearts
2NT	-	14 points
3C	-	15 points

Opener's continuations are then

3C	-	game acceptance bid 3NT or investigate at the three level
2NT	-	pass, bid 3NT or investigate at the three level
2S	-	Pass unless spades is a weak four card suit
2H	-	Pass or try 2S on a five card suit
2D	-	Try 2H or 2S on the way to 2NT

1D 1M 1NT 2C ?

Basically the same with the exception that 2D offers a playable contract on a five card suit.

1D 1S 1NT ?

3 suit	-	forcing (a bid of 3D would only show three cards)
2D	-	to play
2H	-	suggestion to play there
2S	-	six cards invitational

Slam tries do not go via Crowborough. This is a summary of slam going interest

1H 1S 1NT ?

3C,3D	-	second suits may have slam interest
3H	-	three card support, forcing,
3S	-	forcing, 5+ cards

1H 1S 1NT 3H ?

- 3S - looking for a trump suit, three spades but not five hearts
- 3NT - Not five hearts or three spades
- 4m - Advance cue, five hearts
- 4H - Five hearts, weak hand

1H 1S 1NT 3S ?

Bid 3NT, raise to 4S or make an advance cue

## The opening bid of 2C

In a one club system, there is always a problem as to what to do with an opening bid with five cards in clubs and four in a major. The Precision solution is to open 2C. In Blue the solution is to open the four card major. It seldom matters which way round opener is whether it is five hearts and four clubs or vice versa. When there are game going values the five card major will come to light. In a part score decision such as 1H 1S 2C ? where it is a question of passing or correcting to 2H there is an inference that opener has four hearts and five clubs, because the other way round he might well have chosen to rebid 1NT, responder should give preference with 3-3, and pass with 2-2. It is highly unlikely to matter. On a 6-4 hand with six clubs and a four card major, there is a choice between opening 1H and ignoring the sixth club or opening 2C which is defined as a single suited hand with six clubs, and losing the fourth card in the major. The decision will be influenced by the relative strengths of the two suits. When Precision can open 1D to show any number of diamonds from one to seven, and some variants of Acol can open 1C to show 11-19 points and 2-7 clubs. It does not seem much of a distortion to bid a six card club suit as if it was five

In Blue when responder held a five card major in response to 2C, he had to decide immediately whether or not he had a game going hand. 2H was 7-11 and non forcing, 3H was game forcing. Needless to say transfers give greater scope for judgement

Responder does not rescue his partner from a six card suit, to respond at all supposes game interest. Since opener is limited to fifteen points, a response shows eight or more points. When partner responds 2D opener's duty is to show his suitability in support of hearts, Responder only promises five cards in the major, and if opener has a singleton or void in his partner's suit he will retreat to the safety of his six card club suit, or bid 2NT if he is maximum. To complete the transfer shows tolerance for partner's major, a doubleton, or perhaps a trebleton in a poor hand. A better than minimum hand with trump support of Hxx should bid 3H and a maximum with excellent trump support of Hx should bid game. Also there are two specialist bids which show primary trump support and an outside shortage. To fall in line with the other transfers opener rebids the fragment showing a shortage in the unbid suit. A typical hand will be 3316 which rebids 2S to show a diamond shortage. In schematic form for ease of reference.

2C	2D
?	
	2H - tolerance for hearts 11-13 points
	3C - no tolerance for hearts 11-13 points
	2NT - either no tolerance or at best a doubleton heart 14-15 points
	3H - better than minimum, primary trump support, no outside shortage
	4H - maximum . excellent trump support, no outside shortage
	2S - primary heart support, diamond shortage
	3D - primary heart support, spade shortage

2C	2H
?	As above

2C	2S		
?		3C,2NT -	no liking for diamonds
		3D -	primary diamond support
		3H, 3S -	primary diamond support shortage in the other major
2C	?		
		3C,4C,2NT -	natural

Sputnik is freely used when the opponents overcall one of a suit. It is needed when opener has a wide variety of point counts and hand patterns. When opponents overcall 1NT, double is for penalties, because partner's hand is closely defined. Similarly 2C is closely defined and double is for penalties. A common agreement on Sputnik is to the level of 2S. As a matter of principle the wider opener's hand definition the higher Sputnik must extend.

### The opening 2D bid

The Multi 2D bid has fallen out of fashion. It is flawed. Unless responder has about a fifteen count he must bid 2H to allow opener to describe his various hands. A simple overcall deprives responder of his 2H relay and opener is floundering like a stranded fish. So the defence to Multi should be to double 2D on any sound opening bid and make light hearted natural overcalls. The Multi bidders will have little idea of what is going on, and face problems of their own creation

A second shortcoming of Multi is that responder cannot continue the pre-emption for fear of partner holding a strong hand. For that reason many players have settled on the simplicity of three weak twos.

A weak two in diamonds is not the cutting edge of technology. Whenever there are two Sundays in the week responder will be dealt four diamonds, and can treat himself to a bid of 4D. Fourth hand's defence to that is to double for partner's major and then have a look at his hand.

The best use of the bid of 2D is \*\*\*\*\*. This shows a weak two in one of the majors. Responder will continue the pre-emption on TNT principles. With one or two hearts the bid is 2H. With three hearts and one or two spades, the bid is 2S. With three in each major the bid is 3H. With four hearts and three spades, the bid is 3S. With four cards in each major the bid is 4D. All of these bids (2S, 3H, 3S, and 4D) are TNT raises to the full value of the hand, they show anything from about six to fourteen, depending on commonsense and vulnerability. Partner is not expected to get excited because he has an extra Queen or King. If responder had wanted to know that he would have bid 2NT.

There is little doubt over the best use of the opening bid of 2D in its own right. In addition \*\*\*\*\* has a huge bonus, it releases the bids of 2H and 2S for alternative interpretation.

One of the advantages of weak twos is that partner can make a T.N.T (Total Number of Tricks) raise based on the number of cards he holds in the suit, a raise to the three level on three cards and the four level on four. These contracts either expect to make or show a profit in the attempt, because someone can make a contract at that level. The responses to Multi must be geared to gain the same benefit as weak twos with the additional advantage that after a sequence such as

2D (Pass) 3S ?

fourth hand must decide whether or not to come in without knowing what suit they hold.



The game try is 2NT in response to 2D, the responses are geared to always putting the known hand on the table, and accepting game if the Multi bid is in the top half of the range

2D	2NT		
?			
	3C	-	minimum with hearts
	3D	-	minimum with spades
	3H	-	maximum with SPADES
	3S	-	maximum with HEARTS

With a singleton in one of the majors responder will need something like a sixteen count to bid 2NT, with more major suit cards less points are required

2D	2S
?	

This may be a game try but it does not have to be. Responder is only saying that he will play in 2S if that is partner's suit or in 3H, perhaps more if partner has hearts. If responder has a genuine game try in hearts he needs to know the strength of the weak two. So the rebids are

2D	2S		
?			
	Pass	-	weak two in spades
	3C	-	minimum weak two in hearts
	3D	-	maximum weak two in hearts

Responder corrects to hearts, either three or four according to how serious his bid was, and again the known hand goes down on the table

2D	4D
----	----

This shows 4-4 in the majors and asks partner to bid his major. Hence 2D 4H is to play. After the responses of 3H and 3S it is Multi principles, (pass or correct) opener has no problems. The problems are reserved for the opponents. There are no specific point counts, the principles of pre-emption apply, two off doubled is too many vul against not, but not against vul three off is a good result.

If second hand, doubles or bids three of a minor the same scheme of responses still applies, and also over 2NT, with appropriate caution

### The opening bids of 2H and 2S

KQ976  
-  
KJ10653  
72

This is an opening bid of 2S. Any player who thinks he can open 1D and rebid spades twice is living in cloud cuckoo land. There are three people at the table who won't let him do it. In reality what is going to happen is that there will be some vigorous bidding and partner will take a hideous high level decision. The hand has no real defence against 7H

A10875  
Q9  
AKJ54  
7

This is also an opening bid of 2S. The opening two bid shows an opening bid measured in terms of losers, normally five, but it could be six or four.. The hand has defence against 4H if partner has anything at all. Whether or not the opening bidder has defence to their contract is a problem which can be safely left to the opponents, partner is expected to react in the same way. With a spade fit and two valuable cards he is expected to bid 4S, and the opponents can judge whether or not to come in at the five level.. Lucky players are those who find their fits before the opponents and bid them to their full value straightaway. Unlucky players open wide range bids of one of a minor and face horrible problems after the opponents intervene and find their fit first.

Dealer opens the bidding and third hand holds

6  
KJ954  
KJ87  
QJ2

If the opening bid was 1NT, this is beginners' delight. An eleven count is a eleven count and we know what to do with eleven counts. Similar principles apply if the opening bid is 1S. If the opening is 3S this is not so merry, on a bad day this will be doubled for 500 with nothing on for them. A similar sort of thing will happen to a weak two in spades. If the opening bid is a Multi we can bid a cheerful 2S and hope that they have no agreed defence. When partner opens a constructive two in spades that is still a pre-empt and again this is not the sort of hand that we want to hold, but we run to 3C partner passes and hopefully 3C has some play. No action at the bridge table carries a guarantee of success, and if partner has a fifteen count with some help in the red suits we have probably done the wrong thing. However this is improbable, it is far more likely that the minor honours in the red suits are waste paper and we shall be breathing heavily to make more than eight tricks in diamonds.

The issues involved in replying to a constructive two are :-

- 1/ Minor honours, Kings, Queens and Jacks, outside partner's suits are of unpredictable value, most likely to be of little use at all
- 2/ Vulnerability and type of scoring affect responder's decision, just as they would for any other pre-empt.
- 3/ Whether or not opponents have passed may be critical

A765  
Q95  
J75  
987

After 2S (Pass) ? this is either a 3S or 4S bid according to vulnerability and the prevailing wind. (Partner is known to have a minor, not hearts) But after (Pass) 2S (Pass) there is a stronger case for passing

2NT is at least a game try in response to a two bid. Partner on average will hold a five loser hand. The fit, if there is one, will often be in a minor, so responder should contribute two

valuable cards and some plus values These plus values could consist of an outside King, a Jack in one of partner's suit, or an extra trump which is always useful. Rebidding over a 2NT response opener will show his second suit and whether he is maximum or minimum. So 2H 2NT? Opener bids three of a minor or four of a minor. Responder may well pass three of a minor, but is unlikely to make a game try, find a maximum and then pass the hand out in 4m. Responder may be making a game try in partner's major, and will be happy to convert four of a minor to partner's major, and over three of a minor will invite with three of the major. When opener has hearts and spades this is a special case. It is desirable that opener should show whether he is min or max. But 2H 2NT 4S is not very clever if responder was making a game try in hearts. There is a simple solution. 3H is an idle rebid, it could show minimum with spades and 3S would be maximum with spades.

After opener has made his rebid partner ciphers in the two unbid suits for controls if he is interested in a slam.

2H	2NT	2S	2NT
3C	?	4D	?
3D for controls in clubs		4H for controls in diamonds	
3S for controls in hearts		4NT for controls in spades	

The lowest idle bid is for the lower ranking suit. These bids are idle, there is no way of playing in a suit other than one of partner's except for an immediate of the other major over the opening bid.

Since the system is geared to play in one of the five cards suits, a hand such as

K6543  
KJ6  
AQJ76  
-

which could play very well in hearts, should open 1S not 2S

If responder has less than game try values he bids as in Multi. With the Multi 2D bid if responder skips the 2H response and bids 2S this means he is interested in at least 3H, but no more than 2S. Exactly the same principles apply to the opening 2H and 2S bids

2H 2S This is an unconditional sign off if opener has spades, if he has a minor he must bid it at minimum level. The response could be as weak as

J75  
42  
Q876  
K942

Possibly it is wrong to disturb 2H, but on balance partner's other suit will be better

2H	3C	A sign off in clubs, a game try in the bypassed suit of spades
2H	3D	A sign off in diamonds, a game try in spades and in clubs.

A/	AJ86	B/	AJ86	C/	AJ862
	7		7		7
	Q75		Q75		K7
	J9542		KJ954		KJ954

These hands are chosen to show a hand worth 3C, 4C, and 5C when partner opens 2H and has a second suit of clubs. An aggressive player might decide to bid more strongly, that is his prerogative.

A/ A mistake to sign off in 2S, if partner has a maximum in the majors there should be a play for game. A bid of 3C here would be sign off in clubs, a game try in spades and partner corrects to diamonds if that is his second suit

B/ Sign off in diamonds a game try in either of the black suits. Opener passes 3D or bids 3S,4S,4C,or 5C. This may appear complicated but once the principles are understood it is very simple

C/ Mercifully we cannot chart our way into no trumps which would be a stupid contract when partner has the red suits as is to be expected. Inexperienced players drilled in point count might be surprised to learn that this is a sign off in 3D. Again partner will choose between Pass,3S.4S, 4C, and 5C. This time however if opener signs off in 4C responder will find the fifth

Delving deep into the realm of fancy here is a problem for a Christmas bridge quiz :-

Devise a bidding system and an illustrative hand to show how the sequence 2H 3D 5C 6C can lead to a good contract.

The competition could be thrown open to the galaxy, we would still win hands down with:-

AJ862  
7  
A7  
KJ954

Almost any opening hand which would accept an invitation in clubs would do

### The opening bid of 2NT

Many authorities speak disparagingly of a 2NT overcall, it has certainly lost the initiative once the opponents have opened one of a major. A 2NT overcall before they have opened is a better proposition. A weak 5-9 pre-empt stands very little chance of winning the contract and any bid which does not win the contract risks giving away valuable information in the play of the hand. A genuine opening bid stands a greater chance of winning the contract or finding a profitable sacrifice 2NT shows the same values as 2H and 2S. There must be an invitational bid in the minors and a forcing bid. A relay does the job

2NT	?	
3C/3D	-	to play
4C/4D	-	invitational
3H	-	impose 3S, and then 4C and 4D ask for controls

### The opening bid of 1C

Control responses, natural positives or point count responses to a strong club are an article of faith, much as four and five card majors. They all have their merits. Control responses gain most of their advantage in conjunction with Italian style cue bidding, but cue bidding takes about twenty years to learn. Natural positives came about as a simplification of the control responses and semi-positive of the Blue Club, since then the Precision style one club systems have become the most popular by far, and almost certainly they are the most sophisticated on the market. Over the last forty years or so we have played all three. We have come to prefer point count for three reasons

1/ A negative response of 0-7 is too wide for comfort. When it matters we distinguish between 0-4 and 5-6

2/ To create a game force with eight points opposite sixteen before anything is known about the suits and the fit, is premature.

3/ A high priority for us is simplicity and ease of memory work. Point count is perhaps the easiest approach

	1C	?		
		1D	-	0-6 points
		1H	-	7-8 points
		1S	-	9+ points
Golden negatives		1NT	-	5-6 points 4-4 or better in the majors
		2 suit	-	5-6 points, six card suit headed by an honour
Special positives		2NT thru 3H	-	transfers to the next suit up, 9+ points, six card suit with three of the top five honours

After the point response at the one level the next suit up rebid by opener is strong and conventional

1C 1D 1H 1H shows 20+ points and asks partner to define 0-4 or 5-6 points. 1S shows 0-4, two of a suit is natural with 5-6. 2C is either flat or natural, so as to avoid no trumps being played by the wrong hand. The rebids of 1S thru' 2H are natural, non forcing, and show 16-19 points

1C 1H 1S 1S shows 18+ points and creates a game force. 1NT thru' 2S are freewheeling showing 16-17 points. Responder bids on with a fit or prospect of finding one

1C 1S 1NT 1NT shows 19+ points and asks partner to define his point count on the scale of 2C - 9-11 2D - 11-13 2H - 13-15 2S - 15-17  
2S is tagged on the end, but it never happens any more than 1C 2NT did in Blue

There is a two point range for strong no trump hands

1C	1D	1H	1S	1NT	20-21 points
1C	1D	2NT			22-23 points
1C	1D	1H	1S	2NT	24-25 points

The strong, conventional rebids of 1H and 1S over 1D and 1H are always made when the requirements are present, 1NT over 1S is not obligatory. If opener has a minor suit he does not want to start his natural bidding at the three level. The first natural bid at the three level on a strong hand is strictly for the birds. Our system is arranged so that it never happens. The sequence 1C 2C 3C was not uncommon in Blue Club and it was horrible. The upshot is that 1C 1S 2M or 2NT shows 16-18 and responder controls the auction, whereas 1C 1S 2m is unlimited

In Blue 1C two of a major was a negative with a six card suit. The idea was excellent but the definition was so restrictive that it never happened. 1C two of any suit shows 5-6 points and a six card suit headed by an honour. The average two club player may never have encountered the situation, but the fact is that if the strong club has the average 16-19 points with 5431 distribution and a singleton in partner's suit, that is where the hand should be played, in partner's suit. On a good day opener will have four card support and four of a major or 3NT will make on a 21-22 count day.

The golden negative of 1NT solves problems before they happen. If the 5-6 count with both majors were to bid 1D Opener's rebids would be 1H 20+ points; 1S 16-19, natural, usually five spades; 1NT 16-19, flat; 2C/2D 16-19 5+ cards

With a hand which would have rebid

1H	-	he has just found out exactly what he would have wanted to know
1S	-	he will bid the appropriate number of spades
1NT	-	he will pass without a major, or bid the major at the appropriate level

2C/2D - with a 5/6 card minor he will bid it. A hand which is always difficult to bid is a 5/6 card minor and a four card major. That hand rebids the minor. Is partner then expected to put a toe on a four card major, only to find partner with a 16 count and no major? The response of 1NT solves the problem.

There are two other advantages which are not immediately apparent

- 1/ with a hand such as
- |       |
|-------|
| AJ7   |
| 3     |
| AK75  |
| KJ543 |

Opener has the option of rebidding 2S instead of 2C

2/ Without the 1NT golden negative when the bidding is 1C 1D 1NT responder may be tempted to bid 2C(Stayman) in case there is a major fit. Partner usually turns up with a sixteen count and either no major or the wrong major, and the partnership has climbed up to 2NT on a 21-22 count and no fit. If Stayman is not needed 2C can be Gladiator(0-4) imposing 2D which is passed or corrected to two of a major. An immediate bid of two of a major is another golden negative showing a good five card major and 5-6 points

1C two of a suit

Even with a singleton let partner get on with it. A change of suit would be natural and forcing

Special positives

2NT, 3C, 3D, 3H show a six card suit with three, or more, of the top five honours and 9+ points. Opener's instinctive reaction with a minimum hand and a singleton in partner's suit is to bid 3NT. This is wrong. Four of a major will be a better contract. When both hands are minimum and opener has a singleton in the six card suit, played in no trumps declarer knocks out one of the opponents' guards in the six card suit and then needs two entries to dummy, one to knock out the other guard, and then another to get there to cash the winners. The hand won't have two outside entries, the suit won't come in and 3NT will not make

6	KJ10854
KJ52	A74
AK8	J75
KQ876	2

This is a gruesome game. With a combined twenty-five count and a total hand pattern of 7766 game always will be gruesome. Notice however that 4S has some play whereas 3NT requires a minor miracle, or more probably, several major ones.

To bid game in partner's major is sign off as is 3NT when partner has a minor. To bid partner's suit at the three level is a range ask and partner replies in steps 9-11, 11-13, 13-15. It can happen that opener is not interested in a slam but responder is good enough to take over the running. Opener should keep control with 19+ points or 20 with no fit and will sign off in game with 16-18 points. When responder is strong enough to proceed opposite 16-18 points he can continue with a control ask. This is similar to the sequence 1C 1S where opener passes control of the auction to partner by making a natural bid on 16-18 points, but with 19+ asks for range.

### The opponents intervene over 1C

Our preferred overcalls of a strong club are a strong club

1C	?		
	Dble	-	hearts
	1D	-	spades

1H,1S,1NT - two suiters (COR) colour, odd rank  
 Two of a suit - that suit or take out of that suit

Double of 1C and the overcall of 1D both give the opponents extra bidding space, and are only made in the hope that partner can pre-empt in the major. Responder should use the extra space to define his negative, that is the information that opener is most likely to want. So

1C	(Dble)	?		
		Pass	-	0-4 points
		1D	-	5-6 points
1C	(1D)	?		
		Pass	-	0-4 points
		Dble	-	5-6 points

Continuations by opener are all natural and non forcing, and the bidding is freewheeling. A jump would be a one round force or better.

1C	(1H)	?		
		Dble	-	7-8 points
		1S	-	9+ points

When the overcall is 1S or higher, the easiest solution is to revert to Precision style responses where pass shows 0-7 and a bid is game forcing' Pass is also the bid with a penalty double and partner is expected to reopen with a double.

1C	(1S)	?		
		Dble	-	a flat positive, if the contract is no trumps it will never be worse played by the strong hand

### R.H.O bids

There are different defences to a strong club, sometimes a spade bid will be natural or it may be conventional. We make no distinction, our course of action is always the same. Pre-emptive bids can always cause awkward decisions, simple overcalls should only be damaging if they create a misunderstanding

1C	(1D)	Dble	(1S)	1C	(no)	1D	(1S)
----	------	------	------	----	------	----	------

From our point of view these sequences are the same, partner has shown a negative ( 5-6 or 0-6) and R.H.O. has bid 1S, which may or may not show spades. We would like to continue as we would have done without the intervention, and we can. The opponents are not going to be allowed to play at the one level undoubled, so pass is forcing. This does not presume that the hand belongs to us, it only assumes that it is in our interests to play two of a suit rather than defend 1S. There is also an assumption that we will not gear our bidding to try and penalise opponents at the one level, it is more important to bid our own cards. Without the intervention we would bid 1H to show 20+ points and any other bid would be 16-19. Since pass is forcing, it can show 20+ and all bids are limited. Double would be take out or might be the sensible bid on a flat hand which does not want to bid 1NT, which would almost certainly play better from the other side of the table. 1NT ought to show a four card spade suit, the bid of 1S may well be artificial. And with four spades the contract for us is more likely to be 1NT. If partner has already specified 5-6 points pass is going to be game forcing. When partner's negative is 0-6 he is asked to specify whether he is 0-4 or 5-6. His cheapest bid will be 0-4 and any other bid will be natural and game forcing. The "cheapest bid" will be pass if L.H.O. bids or double of 1S if it is passed to him.

When R.H.O.'s bid is at the two level or 1NT, opener only rebids if he wants to. Of course he hopes that partner will have enough to come back in, but it would be silly to rebid a poor 16-17 count only to find partner with 2-3 points and no fit. A balanced 16-17 has already shown its

hand and there is no point in doubling 1NT, double shows a flat hand and 20+ points. Double of R.H.O.'s two level bid will be for takeout, bids will be limited and natural. With 20+ points opener would double and then bid his suit.

R.H.O.'s intervention is most effective when the response to 1C is 1D. Over a 1H or 1S response an overcall does not do much harm as long as it does not create misunderstandings.

1C (Pass) 1H (1S)

Opponents will always bid 1S if they can, it might be nuisance, it might indicate a lead. It is almost certainly natural. How should opener bid? What would pass mean? Without the intervention the cheapest rebid would be strong and conventional. It still could be. Pass is the cheapest bid and it could be game forcing, leaving other actions to 16-17. This is consistent with common sense since if the partnership has not got game values they need to bid their suits as soon as possible. Second hand cannot be prevented from raising to 2S or 3S, but if we are going to look for a part score or for a game after he has finished hogging the bidding it is better to know that we think we have game values. If pass is forcing double and 1S is natural as it probably is, double is take out and shows 16-17. It should not be defined as penalties. Whenever the opponents make the first natural bid, double for takeout is more useful than double for penalties. Pass shows game going values, and a bid on 16-17 continues to apply at the two level.

1C (Pass) 1S (bid)

Again pass should be the strong conventional bid, a slam try asking for range. Partner bids in steps just as he would over a 1NT rebid. If the opponent bids two of a suit on KQ10xxx, and his partner has nothing much of any value we could have a grand on. We must know what we are doing. Natural bids will show 16-18 in the majors but may be stronger in the minors.

No matter how carefully sequences are studied and defined, there will always be the occasion where a player has hand X and can see that a bid of Y cabbages will show the hand very neatly, but sadly partner thinks that Y cabbages shows something else. Take for example

1C (strong)	Pass	1S (9+)	2S (weak)
Pass (range?)	4S	?	

Is it not too late to do as partner asked and show range or is better to try and make a sensible bid of five or six of something, or should the hand pass for partner to decide, or should he double with no clear cut course of action. The only thing to be certain of is that the partnership is unlikely to have discussed the situation in advance. These situations will occur in spite of the best laid plans of mice and men.

There are three realities

- 1/ Think what partner is most likely to want to know
- 2/ Make sure the bid is in accordance with the mathematics of the situation
- 3/ Follow what will be the least expensive option if partner is not on the same wave

length

Another ambiguous situation might be 1C Pass 1M double. Fourth hand might think he is getting a free double to indicate a lead. Opener should redouble with the suit. One of the major redoubled with an overtrick will not be free.

For more than ten years there was an unwritten rule in the Blue Club. Bid the next suit up if you have lost the plot and hope partner knows what is going on. It is a great tribute to the potential of the Blue Club that it never occurred to us to switch to Acol in spite of all the elephant traps strewn along the way.

### Canape in the majors

After a game forcing two of a minor, four, five and six card majors are bid up the line. That means that with six spades and four hearts the bid is 2H, and the bid of 2S would deny four hearts. It seems weird but it works.



	1C	1S	2C(a)	2H	2NT(b)	3S(c)	?		
(a)	-		game forcing						
(b)	-		denies four hearts or four spades						
(c)	-		since partner has denied four spades this must show 5+ spades						
	1C	1H	1S(a)	1NT	2D	2H	2NT	3H(b)	?
(a)	-		artificial, game forcing						
(b)	-		5+ hearts may or may not have four spades						
	1C	1D	1H(a)	2C(b)	2D	2S(c)	2NT	3H(d)	?
(a)	-		20+ points						
(b)	-		5-6 points accepts game						
(c)	-		4+ spades denies four hearts						
(d)	-		suddenly found hearts after all, this shows 5-5 in the majors						

## A voyage of discovery

All one club systems are vulnerable to frivolous interference. To prevent this is simplicity itself. An opening pass by first or second in hand is either a strong club or a negative response to a strong club. The opponents cannot risk making controlled psyches because they need to bid their own cards when the pass is weak. This convention is not allowed by the E.B.U. but it can be played in bridge clubs at the discretion of the committee, and experience shows that there is no objection to playing it. Opponents do not need to do anything special. They can ignore it and get on with bidding their own cards, which, in our view, is what they should be doing anyway.

Any one club system can become a VFP (Variable Forcing Pass) system at the flick of a switch. All opening bids from 1D upwards by dealer or second hand are as in the agreed one club system. Pass first or second in hand is either a strong club or a negative response to a strong club. In response to this forcing pass 1C shows either a strong club or a negative response to a strong club. All other bids show game going hands opposite a strong club, normally 8-15 points. In the simplest possible version 1D, 1H, 1S, 1NT, and 2C are all natural positives. 2D, 2H, 2S and 2NT are available to interpretation but they should all cover the range of 8-15 points, and will follow the agreements of the basic system.

When dealer passes with a weak hand he passes the positive response and the hand is played in partner's suit at minimum level unless opponents decide to compete. If partner has responded 1C, opener, who is either weak or strong, will show his hand, 1D being weak and all other rebids are exactly as if the bidding had been 1C 1D ? instead of the actual Pass 1C ?

Two weak hands together never happen, opponents will always have opened the bidding. If they decided to trap pass and did find two weak hands the bidding would be Pass Pass 1C Pass 1D Pass Pass and the opponent would have to emerge from the bushes and see if they could get 800 out of everything at the one level. Two strong hands do happen very occasionally. This is what will happen Pass 1C 1S ? the 1C bidder was strong and now to his surprise partner is also announcing a strong hand. He must jump to 2NT or three of a suit. The sequence is virtually slam forcing.

Acol is so well known that there is a tendency to think it is simple. It is not. It is unbelievably complicated to the uninitiated. Bids are defined as sign-off, encouraging, invitational, forcing, and forcing to game. Each bid has its approved range of points. Forget any of this and a silly contract is the probable result. Little wonder that beginners have to attend two or three courses of evening classes before they can play a competent game. In comparison VFP is simplicity itself. Third hand

bids show 8-15 points and are all natural. They are either passed out or partner's response is game forcing.

V.F.P. is described as a voyage of discovery, because however simple it is to start it is a living organism which has a life of its own. Shake the kaleidoscope and different patterns emerge. The sort of thing that happens is that an 8-15 no trump third in hand gets doubled, which is of course the lot of all weak no trumps and mini no trumps sooner or later. If this is too painful for the conservatively minded there is always a solution at hand. 2D could be the positive in diamonds as it would be in a normal 1C system. 1D could be the flat positive which leaves open the possibility of playing the hand in 1D, 1H, or 1S when partner is weak. 1NT can be left idle or can cover some other type of hand. Yet another possibility is to define 1D as flat 8-13 and 1NT as 14-16, leaving the strong club as sixteen plus points or seventeen plus flat. Two club experts know all there is to know about their system and spend the rest of their lives demonstrating their prowess. V.F.P. players never stop learning.

There are two other advantages to V.F.P. First there is a huge reservoir of possible sequences available for interpretation. In a traditional system Pass 1H 1S 1NT means exactly the same as 1H 1S 1NT. It is entirely different in V.F.P. The vocabulary of bidding is automatically doubled

The second advantage is not immediately obvious and it appears to be a disadvantage at first sight. A hand not catered for as dealer is a hand in the range of 7/8 to 11/12 points. This hand opens 1C. A study of tournament bridge shows the over-riding desire to get into the bidding even at the cost of partner getting too optimistic. The opening bid of 1C is a passport to entry without any danger. Between 20-25% of computer dealt hands will be opened 1C by a VFP pair playing against a traditional system.

Responses to 1C are common sense. 1D is a game force and shows a strong club opener. Everything else is non-forcing and the bidding is freewheeling, raising with a fit and changing the suit with a hope of improving the contract. Responses of 1H, and 1S are four card suits. 1NT, so easily doubled for penalties, should have fair values. Two of a minor is constructive on a good suit. Two of a major is a weak two, but it does not have to be a specified point count, it carries the message "do not raise without a fit" and may be a sound opening bid but also a hand as weak as the vulnerability permits.

Since there is so much prejudice against a strong pass, it must be emphasized that it causes no inconvenience to the opponents. Unlike some systems and conventions which are specifically designed to make things awkward for the opponents, our opponents can ignore VFP, they ignore the pass which might be strong, because if they are thinking of bidding the pass is almost certainly weak, and if we open 1C they can ignore that too, doubling if they would have bid 1C or making their normal if RHO had passed. Over many years of playing V.F.P. at the local club no-one has ever complained

### Our version of V.F.P

After twenty odd years of experimentation, refinement and simplification our preferred version of V.F.P. does not bear much resemblance to the original simple schedule. Simplicity is still a high priority, a sophisticated accident-prone system is not as good as a straightforward system which is easy to remember.

Natural responses, control response and point count responses are all possible. Over the years point count has proved to be best, it is simple, economical of space, and adaptable.

Third hand "responses" are dual purpose bids. They have to be not only responses to a strong club but also opening bids in their own right. Two weak hands together has never occurred, presumably if it were dealt the opponents would take over the bidding. Two strong hands together has occurred two or three times in twenty years. The corollary of this is that with a minimum positive response third in hand partner is almost certain to be strong, and with a

maximum positive partner is equally likely to be weak. There must never be any suggestion that a player is acting differently because he thinks that his partner is either weak or strong. The bids must be defined exactly and followed religiously. But having said that there will always be borderline hands where there is more than one bid to be considered. To allow point count and hand pattern to override good hand evaluation is the province of the beginner. Take this hand in third position

97652  
K4  
A  
Q8764

Three bids are possible, 1D, 1H, and 2S

- 1D - shows 9-15 points flattish and game forcing
- 1H - is semi-positive, a game try but not a game force, shows 7-9 points
- 2S - 5-5 or better with spades and a minor 8-15 points.

Perhaps this hand illustrates the desire of the expert player to be able to exercise his judgement rather than having his bid dictated to him. The statistical backdrop to the decision is that partner is more likely to be strong than weak, this may or may not affect the decision. Our preferences would be in the following order

3/ - least acceptable, 2S. Admittedly this might not do well if it gets doubled and partner is weak, but the real objection is that partner is more likely to be strong and the effect of a 2S bid is to virtually dictate that the hand will be played in one of opener's suits. As an opening bid in its own right which is one of the functions of the third hand bid, 2S is a poor effort

2/ - 1D. Yes the hand has nine points and one is entitled to force to game with a nine count. A hand with its top cards in its long suits is a better hand than the same hand with top cards in its short suits. There may well be a spade fit but it is bound to be a weak one, game will not make opposite a minimum strong hand.

3/ - 1H. Clearly the best bid. It is always possible to add to what has already been said, but never possible to subtract from it. We are not worried about 1H being passed out and being in a silly contract because partner is more likely to be strong

The point count responses are 1C, 1D, and 1H. 1C is 0-6 or 16+, 1D is 9-15, and 1H is 7-9. The reason for 1D being stronger than 1H is that with 12-15 points, the probability is that partner is weak and the points are fairly evenly divided. Under those circumstances if we are going to be allowed to play the hand, we do not want to concede 200/300 in some silly contract. Opener's rebids of 1H and 1S are reserved for weak hands and we can play in all three suits at the one level. We consider a semi-positive game try essential for two reasons. To commit a hand to game with eight points opposite sixteen without knowing anything about the fit or misfit is premature. Also the negative of 0-7 points is too wide for comfort. In fact we distinguish between 0-4 and 5-6 points when we think it matters. The responses of 1S and 1NT are both golden negatives showing 5-6 points

To open 1NT third in hand on 5-6 points and 4-4 or better in the majors appears crazy. There is lateral thinking involved but it is supremely logical. With 5-6 points third or fourth in hand partner is strong. If we bid 1C on this hand partner's possible rebids will be

1H - have you got 0-4 or 5-6 points?

1S - have you got spade support?

1NT - 16-19 flat, and if that happens do we continue with a Stayman

enquiry only to find the most likely answer that partner is minimum with no major, precisely the hand where he would have passed and let us play in 1NT instead of playing 2NT on 21-22 points. If we do not use Stayman we can have Gladiator and this gives another golden negative. After Pass 1NT, 2C commands 2D which is passed or corrected to two of a major. This bidding shows 0-4 points

and does not invite a continuation, whereas Pass 1C 1D 1NT 2M or Pass 1C 1NT 2M shows a good five card suit and 5-6 points. A mild game try without going beyond the two level 2C,2D - five or six of the minor, but has he got a four card major tucked away? Do we disturb two of a minor just in case?

2H - no problem for us but it might have been a problem for him with a 5332 hand and weak hearts which might well have been better off in 1NT.

It is easy to see that this golden negative of 1NT solves all these problems before they happen. This sort of convention only arises after considerable experience of the system and is one of the delights of the game

A second golden negative is 1S. In the Blue Club 1C 2M was a negative showing "a six card suit with two honours but in the Zone of 1D ; at best KJxxxx" it was not clear why AJxxxx or KQxxxx was too good, but the definition was so restrictive that it never happened anyway. The idea was excellent. For us Pass 1S shows any six card suit headed by an honour and 5-6 points, A10xxxx would almost certainly stretch a point, for surely this is as good as Qxxxx and a Queen and Jack outside. 1NT asks partner for the suit and as mentioned previously, when in doubt the strong hand should let partner play the contract.

Responses at the two level are opening bids in their own right. With a flat hand players do not really want to compete too strongly against the balance of the points (hence 1D third in hand shows a weak no trump) But a six card suit or a 5-5 two suiter is a different proposition altogether. First or second in hand the definition of two level bids is tailored exactly to the players' choice. The third hand two bids are exactly the same. 2H,2S and 2NT are two suiters in the range of 8-15 points just the same as dealer's bids With a hand in the middle of the range such as

AQ1064  
54  
9  
KQ953

one is delighted to be able to open 2S whether partner has not yet bid or whether he is likely to have 0-6 points

When dealer is weak and partner is strong which is the other interpretation of Pass 1C. Dealer bids as though the sequence had been 1C 1D ? which is of course exactly the same situation. To include the specialised negatives in dealer's rebids is to have an inbuilt ambiguity After the bidding Pass 1C 1NT, though unlikely, each hand could have a flat seventeen count and the hand would be passed out in 1NT because each player would think his partner was negative. The solution is that 1NT by dealer is not a negative, it shows a flat 16-19 and there is no ambiguity. Similarly Pass 1C 1S is 16-19 with spades.

### Countering interference

Left to our own devices we will distinguish between six types of hand 0-4, 5-6, 7-9, 9-15, 16-19 and 20+ This will no longer be possible when the opponents consume some of the bidding space. There must be no misunderstandings

A/ Pass (bid) ?  
B/ (Pass) Pass (bid) ?  
C/ Pass (Pass) 1C (bid) ?  
D/ Pass (Pass) 1H (bid) ?

These are the four situations to be dealt with. Formulating the problem is halfway to finding the solution

A/ Pass (bid) ? The opponent's bid is bound to be genuine. If he has an opening bid and we have near opening values, partner cannot be strong. We do not want to contest

this auction. So if we do bid in this situation we have a hand good enough to compete even though we know that partner is limited to six points. And if we do compete, it is on the understanding that partner should join in with 5-6 points. If dealer is strong, second hand will not usually hold an opening bid. If and when it does happen, second hand's opening bid runs round to dealer who reopens. A simple suit bid shows 16-19 points. A double might be take out or if the doubler continues with a suit of his own this is 20+ points

Pass 1S Pass Pass  
2H

Pass 1S Pass Pass  
Dble Pass 2C Pass  
2H

The sequence on the right is the stronger of the two

B/ (Pass) Pass (bid) ? The simplest course of action here is to do the same thing regardless of whether the bid is a natural opening bid or a controlled psyche. Unfortunately it makes a great deal of difference to us how strong the bid is. We are entitled to know whether the bid is genuine or a controlled psyche, since the scenario is totally different and we must act differently. When the bid is genuine, it is the same situation as A/ We compete on the intrinsic value of our own hand in the knowledge that partner is weak. There is no necessity to compete, because if partner is strong he will reopen. When the bid is frivolous the situation changes completely. Neither dealer nor third hand has an opening bid and if we only have eleven points, it is a racing certainty that partner is strong. We know he is going to reopen, and when he does how do we distinguish between our actual eleven count and a possible five count?

1B/ Pass Pass 1S The bid is not alerted. It is natural, and also an opening bid, although of course it may be shaded in this position. The procedure is exactly as in A/

2B/ Pass Pass 1S The bid denies opening values. Partner will be strong when fourth hand has a ten count or less. If fourth hand has as much as a fifteen count it becomes more probable that partner is weak. The simplest scheme of bids which tells partner what he needs to know is that pass is weak or strong and bids show 8-15 points. This may be simplest but it is not best, a positive of 8-19 is better There is no semi-positive, pass is 0-7. 1S by them will not necessarily show spades, so 2C thru' 2S are natural and double is flat, that is simplest and cannot be misunderstood. The advantage is that if partner is weak he passes a natural positive, and hopefully that is a sensible contract

C/ Pass (Pass) 1C (bid) In this situation it does not much matter what the opponent's bid means. We know that one of us is weak and one is strong. Two strong hands is not a viable possibility in view of the opponent having enough to urge his partner to continue the barrage. It is a racing certainty that If our hand is weak, partner is strong, and vice versa. One weak and one strong hand will occur nine hundred and ninety nine times out of a thousand. Successful tournament players are always aggressive and constantly take liberties in the bidding. They are quite happy to do something technically unsound as long as it is successful far more often than not. If we build a system which caters for the thousandth hand, all the other everyday hands will suffer. The system must score heavily in the long run

1C/ Pass Pass 1C bid ? dealer is weak

It would be easy just to pass and let partner reopen. This is pathetic, he knows we are weak, and he does not have to reopen. We should help him decide

Pass = 0-4 Double = 5-6 (flattish) 1NT = 5-6 (majors) 2 suit = 5-6 six cards

Notice that the six card suit does not bid 1S, which would be the normal negative. The six card suit is shown straightaway in case there is a pre-emptive raise

This is a recent hand from match play

North-South Game, dealer South

		Q6 A93 KQ84 AJ52		
	J4 KQ104 J975 K73		A10982 J7 A6 Q1084	
		K753 8652 1032 94		
	W	N	E	S
	Pass	1C (0-6 or 16+)	1S	Pass
	Pass	Dble	Pass	Pass (0-6)
	Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
Lead	Jack of spades	+300 to East-West		
	Pass	1D	1S	Pass
	1NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
Lead	two of clubs	+120 to East-West		

This is not a dramatic hand and is no disaster, but good players cannot afford to let 5 IMPs trickle away on everyday hands as a result of bad technique. The last thing that South wants is for his partner to compete, and arguably North should not be competing anyway with this wasted spade holding, but he thought he had to. The solution is for dealer to realise that partner knows he is weak, and should define his weak hand so that partner can judge whether to reopen on minimum

The weak hand with a six card suit should bid his suit at the two level, but what if it would have to be bid at the three level? A parallel situation is 1NT (2S) 3m We go to a lot of trouble to define our Lebensohl or Reverse Lebensohl so that we can compete without being misunderstood. A strong no trump or a strong club is a reservoir of points and the issues involved are the same. A suit at the three level on a suit as weak as Hxxxxx is speculative, but when it occurs that is what it means

2C/ Pass Pass 1C bid dealer is strong

The opponents are not going to be allowed to play at the one level undoubled, so pass is forcing. All other bids will show 16-19 points and subsequent bidding is freewheeling. If the bid of 1C is doubled, redouble and 1D are 16-19 with clubs and diamonds, this saves the worry of missing a major fit. One of a major will often be conventional so double should show the suit

If the opponent's bid is at the two level, or 1NT, pass is no longer forcing. The bid will nearly always be natural, so double is for take out

D/ Pass Pass 1H bid dealer may be weak or strong

Pass must show a weak hand. The cheapest bid is double, so that shows a game force, and any other bid is 16-17. If 1H is doubled pass is still weak, we are not in trouble until the double is passed for penalties, then and only then must partner consider running. Redouble is the cheapest bid and is game forcing

(Pass) Pass (bid) ?

This appears to give us more problems than any other intervention because second hand is weak or strong and fourth hand is weak, or strong, or intermediate. If the bid is not alerted and therefore presumed to be genuine, fourth hand's action can be the same as over pass (bid) ? namely a bid is on a hand which is worth contesting on its own intrinsic merit and with a suitable minimum partner is invited to compete.

The difficulty comes when the third hand bid is some sort of controlled psyche which denies opening bid values. Fourth hand might have the following problems, and if it were possible he would like to distinguish between

- A/ 0-4
- B/ 5-6
- C/ 7-9
- D/ 8-13 I know you are strong and this is my positive response to a strong club
- E/ 13-16 I don't know whether you are weak or strong, and I am trying to make a bid which won't be too silly if you are either weak or strong, please let me know what you are
- F/ 16-19 I am making the bid which I would make after the bidding 1C 1D ? because I know you are weak. I am not really interested in game but I have no intention of selling out to the opponents if you have anything at all
- G/ 19+ I am interested in game even though I know you have a negative

The problem seems insuperable, but as is often the case it is a question of seeing the wood for the trees. All sorts of treatments suggest themselves. But there is one simple robust treatment which goes to the heart of the matter. Hands can be classified into three types

- A/ Unless you are better than a minimum strong club I cannot visualise game
- B/ Either there is a game or no game according to whether you are weak or strong.
- C/ There may be a game on even though you are weak

Hands automatically define their own limits A/ 0-8 B/ 8-19 C/ 19+

Thereafter the problem is simplicity itself. It is impossible that you should not wish to compete if neither of the opponents have an opening bid, therefore pass is forcing and shows either 0-8 or 20+ and 8-19 makes a natural bid, doubling with a flat hand. Incredibly simple!

Of course all the continuations must be analysed with a fine toothed comb, to search for elephant traps. Fortunately, as it happens, there is nothing which cannot be solved easily. The beauty of natural positives is that partner either passes or makes a game forcing bid. There are some exceptions. When fourth hand has made a bid showing 8-19 and partner was weak, he should be allowed to make the following contributions

1/ If partner has bid 1M over 1m , a single raise to two of partner's major is weak. A change of suit or 1NT is game forcing

2/ If partner has bid 1NT, 2C should be Gladiator, two of anything else over 1NT would be game forcing (2NT over 1NT would be game forcing flat and partner can bid 3C Stayman)

3/ If partner has doubled one of a major a weak had must be allowed to pull to 1NT

4/ A weak hand can A/ bid a major at the one level, or B/double their major at the one level, (it might not be a genuine suit)

A/	Pass	Pass	1C	1H
	Pass	1S		
B/	Pass	Pass	1D	Dble
	1H	Dble		

The idea of being able to bid a major at the one level on a weak hand is parallel to the situation

Pass                  Pass                  1D                  Pass  
1H

Where the issue is to find the best contract when the points are evenly divided

Any other action apart from these four would be game forcing. For example change of suit or 1NT is game forcing.

If the standard procedure on a flat positive is to double, 1NT is open to interpretation. Their object in overcalling 1C and 1D is to look for a 4-4 major fit. We must play them at the same game, double of a minor is flat with interest in the majors, 1NT has no interest in the majors it shuts them out.

After a weak two in hearts, standard defence uses the following

3H - Bid 3NT with a heart stop  
3S - A better hand than 2S. This, for us, would be a hand that can make game in spades opposite a fit and 5-6 points, something in the region of 17-20  
3NT - To play, could be a long minor  
4C,4D - "Jumping Michaels" 5-5 with that suit and spades  
4NT -- minors

A bid not used is 2NT, this should be natural 20-22 points

There is no reason not to use these bids in addition to the obvious minimum suit bids and double on a flat hand

It must always be clear whether second hand is weak or strong. Ambiguity could arise after a weak two is doubled, 3C could be a run out or a game force. Fortunately there is an easy solution, namely a variant of Lebensohl. 2NT is always a weak hand commanding 3C which might be corrected to another suit.

973  
K64  
7543  
J75  
Pass                  Pass                  2S                  Dble  
Pass                  ?

This is as bad as it gets, bid 2NT and pass 3C, anything undoubled is better than allowing the opponents to make 2S doubled

K1076  
86  
10872  
753

At first sight it would seem wise to do the same thing on this hand. This is silly. The bid at the bridge table which carries a guarantee of success does not exist. A pass here carries a risk, but it is by far the best option. The less you have the more partner has, and they have an absolute maximum of 22 points provided 2S denies opening values. Partner has promised a doubleton spade, so they are in a 6-1 fit and if partner is as good as Ax or Qx, they have three trump losers, and even if partner has xx in spades they still have two trump losers. The worst scenario is that partner has a fifteen count. Even then why should they make 2S doubled?

Summary



After a normal 1C opener

1C	(dble)	?	
		Pass	- 0-4
		1D	- 5-6
		1H	- 7-9
		1S	- 9+
1C	(1D)	?	
		Pass	- 0-4
		Dble	- 5-6
1C	(1H)	?	
		Pass	- 0-6
		Dble	- 7-9
		1S	- 9+
1C	(1S or higher)	?	
		Pass	- 0-8
		Bid	- 8+
1C	(Pass)	1D	(1H, 1S)
?		Pass	- 20+
		Dble	- 16-19 either take out or flat
		Suit	- 16-19
1C	(Pass)	1D	(1NT)
?		Pass	- not forcing
		Dble	- 20+
		Suit	- 16-19
1C	(Pass)	1D	(two suit) ?
		Pass	- not forcing
		Dble	- take out, can be 20+
		Suit	- natural, 16-19

VFP Second hand bids

Pass (bid) ?

If second hand has an opening bid and third hand is thinking of bidding, dealer must be weak. Third hand should bid only on a hand which is worth competing even though partner is weak. If dealer has a maximum negative he should join the auction

VFP Fourth hand bids

Pass (pass) 1C (bid) ?  
 As far as possible sequences relate to existing agreements

Dealer assumes that partner knows that he is weak or strong and defines his hand according to normal principles.

Dealer is weak

Over double, pass and 1D show 0-4 and 5-6 points : over any other bid pass and dble show 0-4 and 5-6. Dealer's rebid of 1NT shows 4-4 or better in the majors, 5-6 points : two of a suit (or three of a suit) shows a six card suit and 5-6 points (the suit must be shown straightaway)

Dealer is strong

The situation is exactly parallel to 1C (16+) Pass 1D(0-6) (bid) see above

VFP Third hand bids

(Pass) Pass (bid)

If the bid is genuine, the situation is exactly the same a "second hand bids" see above

If the bid is a controlled psyche the situation is different.

Pass - 0-8 or 20+  
 Suit bid - 8-19 5+card

Double- 8-19 flat

1NT - 8-19 over their bid of 1m this is flat and denies interest in the majors (double would show interest in the majors) Over their bid of 1M (not necessarily a suit) 1NT is flat and shows four cards in "their suit"

Pass Pass 1NT Dble  
 2 suit ?

Dble is for penalties, they may be in trouble

Pass Pass 2suit Dble  
 Pass 2NT

2NT is a weak run out commanding 3C

VFP v Legal system

It is a simple task to switch from VFP to a legal 1C system. It is interesting to compare their relative merits, emphasising at the same time the differences between the two.

The overwhelming advantage of VFP is the opening bid of 1C showing 7-11 points. It is a passport to enter the auction on 20% - 25% of hands where the hand would otherwise pass. In the modern tournament game there are no glittering prizes for passing too frequently, and there is a tendency to open flat eleven counts with a five card suit or empty twelve counts. These are not sound opening bids and such bids inhibit partner in bidding thin games or doubling the opponents. When these sub minimum opening bids can be opened with a bid of 1C there is less incentive to devalue the requirements for a traditional opening bid

The difference between VFP and a legal club system is the response to a strong club or a strong pass. The responses to the strong club are

1D - 0-6 points  
 1H - 7-8 points  
 1S - 9+ points  
 1NT -- 5-6 points 4-4 or better in the majors

Two bids      5-6 points six card suit

The point count responses to a strong pass are

1C - 0-6 or 16+  
 1D - 9-15  
 1H - 7-8 points

Two level bids are tailored to be desirable bids regardless of whether partner is weak or strong

2C - six clubs, 9-15 points  
 2D - a six card major, 9-15 points  
 2H, 2S, 2NT two suiters, 9-15 points

The bids of 1S and 1NT are available for interpretation, 1NT is as above and 1S is the six card suit with 5-6 points

Playing a legal club system, these two levels bids must start with a response of 1S and hope there is enough bidding space to describe the hand which was described with one bid in VFP

Dealing with interference will have its differences when there is a strong club or a strong pass. When the bidding is Pass Pass 1C 2S it does not much matter whether the bid of 1C is strong or VFP, the bid of 2S is inconvenient because it reduces the options in the bidding and the sequence is bound to be less sophisticated. However it is possible to exaggerate the inconvenience, the damage is only vital if there is a bidding misunderstanding.

Over dealer's strong club there will be interference ; over dealer's strong pass there will be no frivolous bidding. Second in hand's strong club will ,again, invite frivolous bidding; but after a pass second in hand which may be strong, most players will prefer to bid their own cards, but if the third hand bid is defined as a controlled psyche, a simple counter is for fourth hand to pass on 0-8 or 19+ and bid on 8-19.

It is the sequences

Pass	Pass	1C(strong)	?
1C(strong)	Pass	1D	?
Pass	Pass	1C(VFP)	?

where all defenders will compete.

In the sequence

Pass	Pass	1C	?
------	------	----	---

VFP is far better placed than string club. With a strong club dealer could be 0-6, 7-8 or 9-11 and must try if possible to show which he has, whereas in VFP dealer is known to be 0-6 when third hand is strong, and can show the strength of his negative - pass with 0-4, double with 5-6 and show a golden negative with 1NT or two of a suit.