When your partner opens the bidding with a strong 2, you know they have at least 5 cards in the suit opened and at least 8 playing tricks in their hand. Your first step is to announce your partner’s bid as “strong and forcing”.

The bid is forcing for one round – you have to respond and can not pass however pathetic your hand. This gives your partner a chance to show you a second suit.

If your hand is weak there is a conventional response of 2NT (which partner should ‘alert’).

All other replies are natural, positive and game-forcing. They show a hand with one of the following holdings.

A POSITIVE RESPONSE SHOWS:

- An ace and a king. The ace and the king don’t have to be in the same suit. The king must not be a singleton.
- A 5-card or longer suit headed by at least the ace and the queen
- 8+ HCPs where at least one high card is an ace or a king.

So you see that although the negative response of 2NT is often explained as “less than 8HCPs”, there is some “stretch” in this. You might actually have 8 or 9 HCPs but if they are all in queens and jacks you would still give the negative response of 2NT. Similarly, you wouldn’t give the negative response if you had an ace and a king even though that only amounts to 7HCPs.

An opening bid of two of a suit always shows at least 5 cards in the suit – so you only need 3 cards for the partnership to have an 8-card fit. If you have 3 cards in partner’s suit but do not have the requirements for a positive response, you will first respond with 2NT (alertable) and then you will raise partner’s suit.

If you have 3 cards in partner’s suit and you have the requirements for a positive response, a single raise shows a stronger hand than a raise straight to game. This may sound slightly mad but the extract overleaf from Really Easy Modern Acol explains it for us.

Without 3-card support but with a balanced hand containing 8-11HCPs, jump (display stop card) straight to 3NTs.
responding to two of a suit

Opening bids of two of a suit are forcing for one round to enable opener to show a second suit if he has one.

The negative response is 2NT. All other replies are natural, positive and forcing to game and show either:

- 8+ HCP, where at least one high card is an ace or a king
- An ace and a king
- A 5-card or longer suit headed by at least the A Q.

An opening bid of two of a suit is always at least five cards, so it is correct to raise with 3-card support, particularly if opener bids a major.

Raising partner’s suit is a positive response and hence game forcing. It sounds paradoxical but a single raise is more encouraging than an immediate raise to game. A single raise conserves bidding room, so that the partnership, having found a fit, can exchange information to investigate a slam. A raise straight to game is wasteful of bidding space and so suggests that the person making it thinks a slam unlikely.

A slam needs high cards, good trumps and first round controls — so the defence cannot take a couple of quick tricks. A raise straight to game says that responder has trump support and some strength but no first round controls. If opener wishes to bid a slam, he will have to provide all the controls needed.

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

Raise partner’s 2♥ opening bid to 4♥. Game is very likely but that is the limit of your ambitions when you have no first round controls or high trumps.

A single raise is constructive and unlimited and leaves open at least the possibility of a slam. With similar strength to the last hand but with a first round control, reply 3♥ to partner’s opening 2♥.