

Bidding After Your Partner’s Weak Two Bid

Long ago, when the earth was first formed and dinosaurs roamed freely, bridge players used two-level openers to describe strong hands. More recently, weak two bids have become almost universally popular. Most players nowadays employ weak two bids to describe six-card suits and sub-opening values. *Some* use them to describe four- or five-card suits and a total lack of values, but we digress.

When our partner opens with a weak two bid, what are we supposed to do? Many players are familiar with using 2NT as **Ogust** to inquire about partner’s suit and hand quality. Many use 2NT to inquire about a feature in partner’s hand—a side Ace or King perhaps. Is this all there is to responding to a weak two opener?

Here’s a typical section of a convention card dealing with weak two openers:

2♦ 5 to 10 HCP Natural: Weak <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	Ogust NV, Feature Vul 2NT Force <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♥ 5 to 10 HCP Natural: Weak <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	RONF 2NT Force <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♠ 5 to 10 HCP Natural: Weak <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	McCabe 2NT Force <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>

Your ranges may differ, although 5-10 is fairly standard. The system you use for your 2NT response may also vary, but a reasonable method is to use **Ogust** (asking about the quality of opener’s suit/hand) when you’re not vulnerable and **Feature** (asking about side Aces or Kings) when you’re vulnerable. This presupposes that your partner is disciplined with their weak two openings (i.e., they’ll have a good suit and a good hand when vulnerable).

We’ll also assume that you play that all new suit bids by responder are forcing for one round. Many players play that major-suit responses (Hearts and Spades) are forcing, but minor-suit responses (Clubs and Diamonds) are not forcing. That works fine, but talk it over with your partners. If you play that, then you’ll need to alert partner’s minor-suit response (“*Partner’s bid is non-forcing.*”)

Responses to your partner’s weak two opening can be broken down into three parts—when your RHO passes, when your RHO Doubles, and when your RHO overcalls.

Responses to a Weak Two Bid when your RHO Passes

- Pass** You’ll pass when you have no interest in the hand. This means that you have fewer than three-card support for partner, no hope of game or slam, and no suit of your own to bid. You may have values, sometimes opening values, but bidding seems out of the question. You may be passing hoping that your LHO will balance and you can double the opponents for a juicy penalty. Yum.

- Raise** Raising your partner’s suit is mandatory if you have a fit. Often, a simple raise is merely extending the preempt. Partner opens 2♥, and you hold ♠T84 ♥962 ♦J86 ♣T842. Bid 3♥! You have a nine-card fit, so you should be safe at the three level. If you hold ♠6

♥J842 ♦Q432 ♣J973, you should raise to 4♥. Your opponents have a Spade game or slam, and you need to make it difficult for them to find. 5♥ wouldn't be wrong with that hand if you weren't vulnerable.

You'll also raise from time to time if you know that your side has game but nothing more. Hands like this are rare, since you often need to take partner's pulse to see what they're holding. A hand such as ♠AJ42 ♥6 ♦KQ9 ♣KQ984 would certainly be worth a raise to game opposite partner's 2♠ opener. Slam is out of the questions, since partner can't hold two side-suit Aces.

2NT

Bid 2NT to learn more about partner's hand. If you aren't vulnerable, use 2NT as **Ogust**. Partner will describe their hand and their suit as either "good" or "bad." Losing trick count is a reasonable gauge for a good/bad hand—seven losers would be good, eight would be bad. A six-loser hand is too good to open with a weak two bid, and a nine-loser hand is too poor. A good suit should be two of the top three honors or three of the top five, but not QJT. Most players use the following as Ogust responses (all responses are alertable although the 2NT asking bid is not):

3♣—Bad hand, bad suit	3♦—Bad hand, good suit
3♥—Good hand, bad suit	3♠—Good hand, good suit
3NT—Showing precisely AKQxxx in trumps.	

With more and more players opening a weak two preempt with a 5-card suit, some established partnerships have chosen to use 3♣ as "*Partner has a 5-card suit.*" If you choose to do that, 3♦ would then become "*Bad hand, bad suit,*" 3♥ would be "*Good something, bad other thing,*" and 3♠ would be "*Good hand, good suit.*" The ambiguity of the 3♥ response isn't a big issue—you'll tend to make the same bidding decisions regardless of whether partner has a good suit/bad hand or vice versa. Talk this over with your partner.

If vulnerable, use 2NT as **Feature** asking. Partner will bid a side suit King or Ace. With no side feature, partner will repeat their suit. Just as with Ogust, a response of 3NT shows AKQxxx and nothing on the side (if there were a side Ace or King, partner would have an opening hand). All responses to 2NT, whether Ogust or feature asking, are alertable. Once you know more about partner's hand, you can make a better determination of whether you should be in a part-score contract, game, or slam.

New Suit

Partner bids 2♠, and you hold ♠7 ♥KJT8753 ♦A7 ♣AKJ. Bid 3♥. This is forcing, and partner will raise you holding two or three Hearts. If partner bids 3♠, denying two Hearts, you might consider playing there.

If you're able to bid a major at the two level after partner's opener, use the following structure for opener's rebids:

- Raise to three holding three (or more) of responder's suit
- Bid 2NT holding two of responder's suit
- Bid a side suit Ace or King holding a singleton or void in responder's suit
- Bid 3NT with AKQxxx in trumps
- Repeat your own suit with all other holdings

3NT This is to play. A 3NT response is rare, but there are certainly hands that warrant it. Bid 3NT holding ♠5 ♥K4 ♦AKQJT87 ♣A5 after partner's 2♠ opening.

4♣ Bidding 4♣ over partner's 2-level (and 3-level) preempt is used by expert partnerships to immediately ask for keycards in partner's suit (**Poor Man's Blackwood**). Since opener can't have three or more keycards, the response pattern is different:

4♦ (1 st Step)	0 keycards
4♥ (2 nd Step)	1 keycard <i>without</i> the trump Queen
4♠ (3 rd Step)	1 keycard <i>with</i> the trump Queen
4NT (4 th Step)	2 keycards <i>without</i> the trump Queen
5♣ (5 th Step)	2 keycards <i>with</i> the trump Queen

If partner's preemptive opener was 3♣, 4♦ becomes Poor Man's Blackwood, since 4♣ is needed to further the preempt.

If you play Poor Man's Blackwood, make sure you alert responder's 4♣ bid and add the convention to your card under SLAM CONVENTIONS.

SLAM CONVENTIONS Gerber■: 4NT: Blackwood□ RKC□ 1430■
5NT asks for specific Kings, DOPI/ROPI use 1430 steps, Minorwood, Kickback for Majors,
Italian control bids (control bids show 1st or 2nd round control), Poor Man's Blackwood, Exclusion
vs Interference: DOPI■ DEPO□ Level: _____ ROPI■

Responses to a Weak Two Bid when your RHO Doubles

Pass Just as you did when your RHO passed, you'll pass when you have nothing to say. You may also pass with a big hand with a singleton or void in partner's suit. When the opponents enter the auction, you can double them. What fun!

Raise Raises tend to be noise bids. With favorable vulnerability, raise to whatever level is likely to do the most damage to your opponent's auction. A raise to game is a sign off—partner is not allowed to bid again.

Redouble This advertises one of two types of hands—either a strong or invitational hand with support for partner, or a game-forcing hand with a suit of your own. Assuming your LHO bids, partner can show a feature (or bid 2NT with some control in the opponent's suit) or rebid their suit holding a minimum hand. Partner should *not* jump to game, since redouble doesn't guarantee a fit for their suit.

2NT Use 2NT with a weak hand that wants to play in a suit at the three level. 2NT is alertable and asks partner to bid 3♣ (Lebensohl). You will either pass 3♣ or correct to your suit. Picture holding ♠K43 ♥- ♦JT4 ♣QJ98543 at favorable vulnerability after partner's 2♥ opener and your RHO's double.

- New Suit** Many players bid a new suit after RHO's double to show a fit for partner's suit and ask for a lead in the suit bid (**McCabe**). You might hold ♠943 ♥7643 ♦KQJT ♣K4, and if you don't end up buying the contract in 3♥ or 4♥, you'd like your partner to lead a Diamond. Bid 3♦ (alertable). Partner, knowing you have a fit for them, will rebid 3♥. A jump to game in a new suit is natural and to play.
- 3NT** Again, 3NT bids are rare in any auction that begins with a weak two bid, and even rarer when the opponents are bidding. A hand similar to the one shown earlier is required.
- 4♣/4♦** A jump to the four level in a minor shows strong support for partner and length and tricks in the suit bid. Bid 4♣ holding ♠743 ♥QJ82 ♦4 ♣AQJ98 after partner's 2♥ opener. Both sides likely have a double fit, and you need to bid as descriptively as you can before the biddings gets too high.

Responses to a Weak Two Bid when your RHO Overcalls

- Pass** Pass when you have nothing to say.
- Raise** Raise your partner to the appropriate level when you have a fit. This can't be emphasized enough. When you don't raise partner's suit, you don't have support. Points are almost irrelevant. Raise to a level that makes the opponents hate you (they may already hate you, but you can make them hate you even more).
- Double** Doubles by responder after the opponent's overcall are for penalty. Partner opens 2♠, your RHO overcalls 3♣, and you hold ♠3 ♥AT765 ♦AQ95 ♣QT4. Double with enthusiasm—a hefty penalty awaits. Do *not* double if you have a fit with partner. Your fit lowers the number of tricks you can take on defense. Shortness in partner's suit is a strong plus.
- 2NT** 2NT retains the same meaning as it did when the opponents were silent. It is *not* natural. If you thought you could make 2NT and had the opponent's suit sufficiently stopped, you'd double. It is also not Lebensohl, since new suits are non-forcing after the opponent's interfere.
- New Suit** Occasionally you'll hold a strong hand with a suit of your own without much defense. Partner opens 2♠, RHO overcalls 3♣, and you hold ♠T ♥AQJ9854 ♦KQ42 ♣7. Bid 3♥. This is non-forcing—if you had a hand that wanted to go to game, you'd probably double or simply bid game yourself.
- 3NT** Again, picture the same hand as shown earlier.
- 4♣/4♦** A jump to the four level in a minor shows the same thing it did when your RHO doubled—good support and a source of tricks.

An eye on vulnerability is critical when making bidding decisions after partner's weak two opener. Partner is going to bid again only if you make them, so any sizeable penalty is going to be on your head. Be aggressive when you're at favorable vulnerability, and be cautious at unfavorable. Good luck!

Quiz:

Your partner opens 2♥ and your RHO passes. What do you bid with the following hands?

1. ♠Q95 ♥J43 ♦KJ654 ♣J3 _____
2. ♠AKT983 ♥2 ♦A4 ♣KJT4 _____
3. ♠AQ9 ♥62 ♦KQJ3 ♣9842 _____
4. ♠5 ♥JT842 ♦QJT842 ♣3 _____
5. ♠KJ6 ♥QT32 ♦AQJ74 ♣4 _____
6. ♠AK3 ♥KJ97 ♦2 ♣KQJ98 _____

Your partner opens 2♠ and your RHO doubles. What do you bid with the following hands?

7. ♠AQ42 ♥T93 ♦7 ♣KQJT8 _____
8. ♠T ♥842 ♦A ♣QJT98763 _____
9. ♠854 ♥KT ♦K985 ♣6432 _____
10. ♠852 ♥QJ3 ♦AQ9 ♣T432 _____
11. ♠J754 ♥AJ3 ♦K ♣Q8532 _____

Answers:

1. 3♥—Extending the preempt, 2. 2♠—Bidding a strong suit of your own, 3. Pass—While you have values, your hand's not good enough to explore for game, 4. 5♥—Bid to the level of your total trump, since the opponents can easily make 4♠ and possibly more, 5. 4♥—Game is likely opposite any hand that partner might choose to open with 2♥, 6. 4♣—Your hand is slamish, and all you care about is how many keycards partner has, 7. 4♣—Showing a strong fit in Spades and a good second suit. 4♣ is not a keycard ask when there's competition, 8. 2NT—A Lebensohl-like relay to 3♣, which you'll happily pass, 9. 3♠—Extending the preempt, 10. 3♦—Showing 3-card support for Spades and asking for a Diamond lead, 11. 4♠—Again, extending the preempt to the level of your total trump.