

Basic Principles of the 2/1 Bidding SYSTEM

By Neil H. Timm

The 2/1 bidding System may be called the forcing-to-game bidding system. Why?

When partner opens in the first or second seat 1♦/1♥/1♠ and the next player passes, and you respond at the 2-level with a new suit - your response is FORCING TO GAME as played by 99% of the current day bridge players.

CAUTION a few may still play the Mike Lawrence 2/1 style where the 2♣ response to 1♦ is played as only forcing for 1-round.

The Game Forcing (GF) bids follow (new suit has lower rank than the first suit)

1♦-2♣ 1♥-2♣ 1♥-2♦ 1♠-2♣ 1♠-2♦ 1♠-2♥

Some Simple Rules

Opening bids requires 12+pts where 1♥ or 1♠ a 5-card suit and 1♦ requires a 3/4-card suit.

Responder bids require 13+pts for the 2/1 minor suit with 4+cards and 5-cards for 2♥.

The 2/1 GF is OFF in the 3rd or 4th seat (partner has passed) and if the Right Hand-Opponent (RHO) bids or doubles.

The above principle form the basis for the 2/1 system.

The Next Significant Decision regarding 2/1 are 1NT bids and simple 2-level responses.

1♣ -1NT 1♦ -1NT 1♥ -1NT 1♠ -1NT

1♣ -2♣ 1♦ -2♦ 1♥ -2♥ 1♠ -2♠

What are the next questions?

Is 1NT forcing or non-forcing over the major suit bids?

Is the 1NT range the same over the minor bids of 1♣ and 1♦?

Are simple 2-level bids raises over a minor GF or Invitational bids?

Are simple 2-level raises over a major constructive or non-constructive?

AGREEMENTS to these questions MUST be Agreed upon when playing the 2/1 System because views are different among those who play the 2/1 SYSTEM!

Do not simply ask are: (1) Do you play 1NT forcing or non-forcing, (2) Do you play inverted minors? and (3) Do you play constructive raises?

Many may respond with I play 1NT=6-9HCP over a minor 1NT as Forcing over a major with Inverted Minors as invitational and I do not play constructive raises.

Other may say that they play 1NT as non-Forcing, that they play Criss Cross and the 1NT bids vary varies for the minor suit bids e.g., 8-10HCP over 1♣, but 6-9HCP over 1♦, or I play constructive raises.

Oh-My! What does all this mean? Before I address these Questions there are some basic principles when responding playing the 2/1 5-card major System.

- (1) a hand with less than 6 points should be passed.
- (2) supporting partner's suit (at any level), or bidding no-trump, have known **limits** and opener is **may or may not be forced** to make another bid.
- (3) a change of suit by partner requires 10+ points and opener **must bid again**.
- (4) given a choice of bidding a four-card suit at the 2-level or a five-card suit at the 2-level, bid the four-card suit with 6–12 points, but bid the five-card suit with 13+ points.
- (5) Any bid of a new suit by responder is forcing for one round or game by agreement.

There are two basic versions of Inverted: “Inverted Minors” and “Criss Cross Inverted”

Inverted Minors (with no 4-card major and no interference)

1♣-2♣*/1♦-2♦*	10+HCP with 4/5-card minor Invitational Bid
1♣-3♣*/1♦-3♦*	<10HCP with 4/5-card minor
1♣/1♦-1NT	6-9HCP with 4/5-card minor

Criss Cross Inverted Minors (with no 4-card major and no interference)

1♣-2♣*/1♦-2♦*	13+HCP Game Force with 4/5-card minor
1♣-2♦*/1♦-3♣*	10-12HCP 4/5-card Club/Diamond Invitational raise
1♣-1NT	8-10HCP with 4/5-card minor
1♦-1NT	6-9HCP with 4/5-card minor

Note that the 1NT bidding range depends on the meaning of the inverted bids and we are using the asterisk (*) to show that the responses must be alerted.

Caution – When opening one of a minor you often find that the opponents interfere with a X or make a 1-level overcall bid. When this occurs, **MOST PLAY THAT INVERTED BIDS ARE OFF.**

However, some may play the **Flip Flop Convention over the X or 1-level Bid.** For more on this follow the link:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Inverte%20Minors.pdf>

Why the difference in the 1NT response to the minor suit opening bid? The 8-10HCP range allows on to use the bid of 1♦* to show 6-9HCP, allowing the strong hand to play the contract. Because it may be artificial <4-diamonds it must be alerted.

We next address responding 1♥/1♠ with 3+card support and the range for to 1NT bid.

Option 1 with 1NT Forcing and 7-12 points (Max Hardy or Marty Bergen)

1♠ Over 1♥ denies 3-spades and shows 6+ points

2♥/2♠ 6+ points

1NT* 7-12 and Forcing 1-round

With a minimum 6-9 after the 1NT, Opener bids longer Minor or 2♣ waiting

Responder may next bids 3M=10-12 invitational

Option 2 with 1NT Forcing 7-12 points (Karen Walker or Audrey Grant & Eric Rodwell)

1♠ Over 1♥ denies 3-spades and shows 6+ points

2♥/2♠ 8-10 points - constructive raise (1NT range restricted – likely 6-9/10)

1NT* 7-12 and Forcing 1-round (Likely range 11-12 with 1NT bid over major)

With a minimum 6-9 after 1NT Opener bids longer Minor or 2♣ waiting

Responder may next bid 3M=10-12 invitational

Option 3 with 1NT Semi- Forcing and 7-12 points (Larry Cohen Standard)

1♠ Over 1♥ denies 3-spades and shows 6+ points

2♥/2♠ 6+ points

1NT Announced as semi-Forcing

With a balanced minimum 11-12 do not bid 2/3-card minor, PASS

Some advocate 1NT* as Forcing over 1♥, but Semi-Forcing Over 1♠

Link to Larry Cohen LC Standard as of (2026)

<https://bridgewinners.com/article/series/lc-standard/>

Option 4 with 1NT is non-Forcing

1♠ Over 1♥ denies 3-spades and shows 6+ points

2♥/2♠ 6-9 points with 3+card support

3♥3♠ 10-12 points with 3+card support

1NT 6-9HCP and denies 3-card support

2♣/2♦ 13+ GF 2/1 bid

Most pairs tend to play options 1 or 2; however, more are now playing option 3. Almost all have given up on option 4 (a carry-over from Standard American).

Overview of 2/1 by Karen Walker

<https://kwbridge.com/2over1.htm>

Review of the weakness of the 2/1 Bidding System by Karen Walker (2014)

<https://kwbridge.com/21improve.htm>

On-line books and references for the 2/1 Bidding System

https://www.bridgebum.com/two_over_one.php