

The 2NT bid in Contract Bridge – What Does it Mean?

By Neil H. Timm

There are numerous innovative uses for the bid of 2NT in contract bridge.

If you ask AI the question: what are the uses of the 2NT bid in contract bridge, you may get the following responses: the **conventional meaning of the bid of 2NT** depends on the context of the auction, including whether it is an opening bid, a response to a partner's suit bid, or an overcall of an opponent's action and that **non-standard 2NT bids are all about flexibility**: instead of showing a balanced notrump hand, they let partnerships *ask questions, show raises, or search for fits*.

I will review some commonly used uses of the 2NT bid used by beginners, intermediate and advanced players.

The list is not exhaustive since it excludes many conventions that use it as a forcing inquiry for more information like in Flannery, Mini-Roman, and Weak 2-level bids, etc. or to show a particular hand type when responding to artificial opening bids like the Karosel 2♦* bid, among others.

Group I - Beginning Players

- (1) It is used to show a very strong balanced or semi-balanced opening hand or a weak opening bid with two unknown suits.
- (2) It is used as an artificial overcall bid to show the two lowest unbid (5-4 or 5-5) suits or as a strong “sandwich” bid if 5-5.

Group II - Intermediate Players

- (3) It is used to show a game-forcing hand with trump support or as a 1430/3014 bid to investigate slam when responding to a major suit opening bid.
- (4) It is used as a natural and non-forcing bid, though invitational.

Group III - Advanced Players

- (5) It is used to overcome interference by the opponents after the bid of 1NT, or after a reverse bid, or after a take-out X by the opponents of a weak 2-level bid.
- (6) It is used as a Scrambling bid after the opponents have bid and raised a major or as the Good-Bad bid in competition.

The bid of 2NT, to quote Marty Bergen “HAS MANY FACES” and normally requires some discussion with agreements on whether the bid is forcing, non-forcing, invitational, natural, or artificial!

In this note I briefly review items (1) – (6) above and provide references and links for more detail for interested readers.

Group I - Item (1)

Most pairs in clubs play the 2/1 system with a strong 1NT=15-17HCP and make an opening 2NT bid with 20-21HCP with balanced 4-3-3-3/4-4-3-2/5-3-3-3 or semi-balanced 5-3-3-2/6-3-2-2 hands.

The ACBL defines a hand with at least 20+HCP as a **very strong hand** and not just strong. Restrictions for opening 1NT (a NT opening bid contains no voids, no more than one singleton, which must be an ace, king, or queen, and that does not contain 10 or more cards in two suits are not allowed) do not apply to the very strong opening 2NT bid for pairs playing in games that use the Open and Open+ Convention Charts. An opening 2NT bid may include a hand with a singleton and two 5-card suits or even a void.

See Page 15 on the Open Chart using the Link:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/villages/CONVENTION%20CHARTS%20posted%206-8.pdf>

When responding to the bid of 2NT, your approach may be simple, involved, or complex; however, with 0-3HCP most pairs will pass.

Simple Responses with 4+HCP

4♦/4♥	6-card suit - Announced Texas Transfers
3M	5-card suit - Announce Transfer
3♣	4-card Major - Stayman
3NT	4-10 HCP
4NT	11-12HCP
6NT	13-14HCP

Involved Responses

Added to the above are Puppet Stayman with Minor Suit Stayman (MSS).

Complex Responses

Some replace MSS with 3♠* as transfer to 3NT and some replace Puppet Stayman with Muppet Stayman (Modified Puppet) where * = alert

For bidding sequences using 3♣* as a transfer to 3NT transfer see the pamphlet by Patty Tucker (2012) “Your Bridge to Conventions – Three Spades over a 2NT Opening Bid”.

Group I - Item (2)

A 2NT overcall after an opponent's opening 1-level suit bid is called the Unusual 2NT bid and is an artificial bid that shows a hand with 5-5/5-4 in the lowest two unbid suits depending on the opener's opening bid. Specifically, over 1M it shows the minors and over 1m it shows hearts and the other minor.

It is used with a weak hand (<10HCP), an intermediate hand (10-15HCP), or a strong hand (16+HCP) and does not require an alert. However, if the artificial bid is restricted to **always** showing the minors, it must be alerted.

It sometimes happens that the opponents have bid two suits and you are in the 4th seat with a strong 5-5 hand with the other two suits; then the bid of 2NT* is a "sandwich" artificial bid and is used to show the other two suit with 16+HCP (1♥ - Pass - 1♠ - 2NT*=5-5 in the minors with 16+HCP). Note, if you are not 5-5 but 5-4 one employs a Hess or Off Shape Cue Bid and if 4-4 with a weaker hand one doubles. If you are not strong and 5-5 in the unbid suit the sandwich 1NT* bid is used and *=alert.

Group II - (3)

Over a major suit (1♥/1♠) opening bid the response if 2NT* is used to show a hand with 4+card support and 13+Fit points (**not just HCP**) and a game-force (GF) bid known as the Jacoby 2NT* Convention.

An often used popular agreed upon set of responses for the 2NT* bid follows and assumes the opponent has passed.

After Jacoby 2NT* - Opener's Responses

Rebids by Opener	Suit Length	FIT points (not just HCP)
3 (new suit) *	Singleton/Void	12+
3 (major suit opened)	5/6+ in major bid	18+
3NT* (5-3-3-2)	balanced	15-17
4 (new suit)	4/5+ card suit	12 to 17
4 (major suit opened)	5-card major	12 to 14

*= Alert

Experts and others may not use thes above bids since there is NO STANDARD set of responses. Most partnerships review and agree on their bidding responses to 2NT*.

Because 2NT* bid is at least game-forcing some may use the bid as a 1430/3014 asking bid at a low level which allows on one to investigate both game and slam. Thus, do not assume that you know the meaning of the alerted 2NT* bid; it may not be Jacoby! And, even if you get the response "its Jacoby" ask for description of their response to the bid.

If the opponents X the major suit opening bid some ignore the X and bid 2NT* to still show 4-card support (Jacoby style) and a XX to show 3-card support (a Jordan Raise). However, after a

X some use 2NT* to show only 3-card with only 10+HCP and the XX shows no-fit. Be Careful and discuss your agreement!

For those who use Bergen Raises BROMAD (Bergen Raise Over Major Double) or REVERSE BROMAD Convention is often used over the X to show 4-card support for the major suit bids and 2-level bids are used to show 3-card support for the major suit.

The bidding scheme playing Reverse Bergen over 1♠ are:

Opener	Opponent	Partner
1♠	X	?
		Bids with 3- card support bid follow.
	2♣*	10-12 Fit points Limit Raise
	2♦*	7-9 Fit points Invitational Raise
	2♠*	0-6 Fit points
		Bids with 4-card support bid follow.
	2NT*	13+ Fit points GF bid
	3♣*	10-12 Fit points Limit Raise
	3♦*	7-9 Fit points Invitational Raise
	3♠*	0-6 Fit points

After 3♣*, the bid of 3♦* becomes an asking bid; partner bids 3♠ with 10-11 Fit points and 4♠ with 12 Fit points.

Many pairs who play “Bergen Raises” say that the bids do not apply over interference. I do not support this approach since if an agreed bid that is part of your convention can be made, it should be bid; it conveys your agreement to partner.

Group II - (4)

In either a competitive or non-competitive auction the bid of 2NT is normally natural and non-forcing although invitational for at least one round (even if it was a jump bid). Subsequent bids may or may not result in game since the bid is invitational.

After a natural bid of 2NT in a competitive auction, is easy to determine if a bid after 2NT bid is forcing after the opponents have bid and not doubled; however, the task is more difficult in a non-competitive auction.

Briefly

In a competitive auction bid made after 2NT invitational follow these rules: (a) any suit previously bid is NF, (b) a bid by an unbid major is forcing, and (c) a bid in an unbid minor is NF.

In a non-completive auction bids made after 2NT invitational follow these rules: (a) new suit are forcing except if the first bid was 1NT or when we have bid another suit twice (except after a reverse), (b) a return to partner's suit is forcing if we had opened the bidding, but non-forcing if partner opened, (c) a rebid of a major is forcing if we had also bid another suit.

Numerous examples of bidding sequences and rules for bids made after 2NT are provided by Marty Bergen (1986), "Better Bidding with Bergen - Volume Two", pp. 124 -130.

Group III- (5)

Interference after 1NT – Natural Bids

When the opponents interfere (make a natural 2-level bid) over partner's 1NT bid, the bid of 2NT* becomes an artificial bid (aka Lebensohl) to cope with the interference bid made by the opponents.

When the bid by the opponents is natural, 2NT* is an artificial bid that asks opener to bid 3♣* and opener bids: (a) Pass with a weak hand and clubs, (b) bid a new suit below the rank of the overcall suit bid, or (c) make an invitational new suit bid above the rank of the overcall suit.

However if the bid of 2NT* is not made, partners bid are defined: (1) a 2-level suit bid is to play, (2) a 3-level suit bid is forcing to game, (3) an immediate cue bid is Stayman, (4) a direct jump to 3NT* denies a stopper, (4) 2NT* followed by cue-bid (over 3♣*) is Stayman and shows a stopper asking partner to bid a 4-card major or 3NT, (5) 2NT* followed by 3NT (over 3♣*) shows a stopper.

A X of the 2-level bid may be played as penalty or to show cards by partnership agreement – don't let them play at the two level and a XX show a good hand.

Interference after 1NT – Artificial

If both suits are known then the cheaper cue bid is game invitational and the higher cue bid one forces game and all Lebensohl rules apply.

If only one suit is known the cue bid becomes forcing Stayman and Lebensohl rules apply. If there are no known suit (e.g., a X), Stayman is on and all Lebensohl rules apply.

Generally, cue-bids are Stayman and delayed cue bids after 2NT* and the 3♣* relay bid show stoppers.

After a Reverse

The 2NT* bid is artificial and forces 3♣* to show a weak hand and to sign-off; however, if opener denies the relay, partner normally has very good hand. Any bid other than 2NT* is natural, constructive and game-forcing.

After a take-out X of a Weak two Bid

Responder's 2NT* bid again forces 3♣* and a non-jump suit bid to the 3-level is constructive with values and invitational.

Numerous examples and bidding sequences are provided by Ron Anderson (1987), "The Lebensohl Convention in Contract Bridge", pp. 107.

Group III- (6)

Scrambling 2NT

After the Opponents have Bid and Raised a Suit (OBAR), a common convention used by many is called the OBAR Convention when you are 4-4 in two of the other three suits excluding the bid suit with at least 6-9HCP, you do not want the opponents to compete at the 2-level and allow them to obtain at part score.

Instead, you may make a lead directing 2-level bid or a balancing X but may wind up in a 4-3 fit. To perhaps reduce this risk of a 4-3, one bids 2NT* as Scrambling 2NT which asks partner to select a 4-card suit and with two 4-card suits, to bid them up-the-line. The 2NT* bid is of course not used with a 5-card suit since with good values and 10+HCP one may make a 3-level bid.

A illustrate, suppose the bidding goes: 1♠ - Pass - 2♠ - X; pass - ? and you hold the following hand: ♠Kxx ♥Kxxx ♦Qxxx ♣xx.

If you were to bid hearts or diamonds you could wind up in a 4-3 fit; instead, one bids 2NT* to maximize the chance of a 4-4 heart or 4-4 diamond fit. If partner were to hold ♠xx ♥Qxxx ♦Axx ♣QJxx and bids 3♣ you may bid 3♦ to deny 4-clubs so that partner may bid 3♥.

More generally whenever the opponents have bid and raised a major and partner has doubled (e.g., takeout, penalty, responsive, negative, balancing, cooperative/optional, anti-lead directing) the Scrambling 2NT* bid may be used.

Numerous examples of bidding sequences and rules for Scrambling 2NT* are provided by Marty Bergen (1986), "Better Bidding with Bergen - Volume Two", pp. 130 -136.

One may want to read an on-line blog by Tommy Sorberg - October 8, 2010:
<https://tommybridgeblog.blogspot.com/2010/10/scrambling-two-no-trump.html>

or on Robert S. Todd Adventures in Bridge site - December 9, 2024
<https://www.advinbridge.com/this-week-in-bridge/555>

Good-Bad 2NT

The Good-Bad 2NT* bid is used in competitive auctions where both sides have either bid or made a non-penalty X. The 2NT* bidder has about 12-17HCP so that it is no longer natural with 18+HCP.

To motivate the convention, we consider a simple bidding example

N	S	E	W
1♦	1♥	X	2♥
?			

Without 4-spades (after the negative-double) and a strong hand with 5+diamonds and 15-17HCP North would bid 3♦ and with a weak (bad) hand and 12-14HCP one would make an artificial 2NT* bid which ask partner to bid 3♣ (aka Lebensohl) so partner may next bid 3♦. What if you were 5-5 in diamonds and clubs? If strong you may bid 3♣ and if weak again bid 2NT* and over the relay pass or bid 3♦ depending on the strength of the two suits.

The bid may also be used in the following auction.

N	S	E	W
1♦	1♠	2♥	2♠
2NT*			

What about the following forcing 1NT auction?

1♥	Pass	1NT*	2♠
?			

Here the opener may bid a new suit at the 3-level to show a 15-17HCP hand and with less (12-14HCP) and a least 4-cards in a second suit bid Good-Bad 2NT* as invitation. And after 3♣, a bid of 3♦ shows a two suited 5-4 hand (hearts and diamonds).

The Convention is used whenever the opponents have found a fit below the bid of 2NT.

Numerous examples of bidding sequences and rules for Good-Bad 2NT* are again provided by Marty Bergen (1986), “Better Bidding with Bergen - Volume Two”, pp. 112 -124.

Marc Smith has very nice paper on the “Many Faces” of 2NT* in competition.

<https://bridge-tips.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2NT-in-Competition-Marc-Smith.pdf>

For a recent 2015 discussion of the merits of the convention by bridge experts may be found on Bridge Winners following the link.

<https://bridgewinners.com/article/view/the-good-bad-2nt/>

For a series of e-books on Bridge Winners that review 25 Conventions serious bridge players should know, follow the link below.

<https://bridgewinners.com/store/author/marc-smith/S>

Summary of Bids from Bridge Hands

Good Bad 2 Notrump - An artificial bid of **2 Notrump**, typically when both sides are competing in a lively auction and partner has a limited hand with no interest in game. Most commonly, the rebidder makes a raise of a previously bid suit or a new suit at the 3 level to show a stronger action than a **2N** overcall above the Right Hand opponent two-level bid.

	Bidding	Good Response	Bad Response
1.	1H - (P) - 2H - (2S); ?	1H - (P) - 2H - (2S); 3C/D/H	1H - (P) - 2H - (2S); 2N
2.	1H - (1S) - 2C - (2S); ?	1H - (1S) - 2C - (2S); 3C/D/H	1H - (1S) - 2C - (2S); 2N
3.	1C - (1D) - X - (2D); ?	1C - (1D) - X - (2D); 2H/S/3C	1C - (1D) - X - (2D); 2N
4.	(1H) - X - (2H) - ?	(1H) - X - (2H) - 2S/3C/3D	(1H) - X - (2H) - 2N
5.	1D- (P) - 1H - (2S); ?	1D- (P) - 1H - (2S); 3C/D/H	1D- (P) - 1H - (2S); 2N

Note that in the first 3 examples the **Good Bad** bid is made by the opening rebidder. The 4th example is an exception - since opponents have Bid And Raises (OBAR), the advancer's bid is "Good Bad" rather than balancing with a natural Notrump bid. Example 5 is played as "Good Bad" by many who play the system - for others the bid is natural showing stoppers.