

LEBENSÖHL

The primary use of Lebensöhl is in responding to partner's 1NT bid following an intervention from the opposition (there are other uses e.g. responding to take out doubles of weak 2's etc).

(All point ranges assume a weak 1NT opening. For strong 1NT and for 1NT overcalls, adjust the points accordingly).

There are three types of hand that you wish to describe:

- competitive – 5/6 card suit 6 - 9 points (really weak hands should have a 6-card suit). Upper end of point range vulnerable.
- invitational – 10 - 11 points
- strong 12+ points

(Point counts are indicative, dependent upon suit quality).

If the overcalled suit is of lower rank than your suit, Lebensöhl enables you to define all three types of hand. If it is higher ranking, you now lose the 'invitational' option and have to decide whether it's weak or strong (a rough split would be 6 - 10pts, 11+pts dependent upon suit length and hand quality). I would recommend learning Lebensöhl in two stages – learn the basic version (Stage 1 – which deals with 5+ card suited hands), and then progress to handling Stayman type hands (Stage 2 – intermediate/strong hands containing 4 card majors).

(The details assume a natural overcall by the opposition, but the same applies when they use Landy/Astro etc., bearing in mind that you should bid as if they had merely overcalled with their anchor suit – only relevant in Stage 2).

Stage 1. (after intervening bid over partner's 1NT opening bid or overcall)

Pass Natural.

Double 10 - 11 points (at Stage 1 this may contain a 4-card major) – just point showing, but partner can convert to penalty with a suitable hand (by passing). (Some players use this as pure penalty – less flexible)

New Suit At 2 Level Competitive – weak, non-forcing 6 - 9 points, 5-card suit (e.g. 1NT – (2♦) - 2♥)

New Suit At 3 Level **Forcing** in suit or NTs. (e.g. 1NT – (2♦) - 3♠, or 1NT – (2♠) - 3♥)

2NT Relay bid – partner **must** respond 3♣

Responder can pass (weakish and with clubs) or bid suit at three level.

If **below** the rank of the overcall this is non-forcing (i.e. you didn't have the opportunity of bidding the suit at the two level). e.g. 1NT – (2♥) - 2NT – (pass) - 3♣ - (pass) – 3♦ (which will be passed by partner).

If **above** the rank of the overcall (i.e. you did have the opportunity of bidding the suit at the two level), this is invitational (5+ cards, 10 – 11 pts.).

If the opposition's overcall was in a high ranking suit, you lose the invitational bid (e.g. 1NT – 2♥). If you have diamonds, you have to categorise either as weak (2NT followed by 3♦) or strong (direct 3♦).

3NT 12+ pts – balanced (this bid is refined in Stage 2). At this stage don't worry about stops in the opponent's suit.

Stage 2. (Staymanic – looking for a 4-4 major fit).

Variations exist in the definition of 'stops' in the opponent's suit, but my preferred version is: FADS – Fast Arrival **Denies** Stop :

Cue Bid Staymanic, with at least one four card major (12+ points), forcing, but **denies a stop** in overcall suit (e.g. 1NT – (2♥) - 3♥ - shows four spades but **without** a heart stop) – forcing to game.

If you have the above but **with** a stop in the opponent's suit, you first bid 2NT, and over partner's 3♣ you then cue-bid the opponent's suit (e.g. 1NT – (2♥) – 2NT – 3♣ - 3♥, shows four spades **with** a heart stop).

3NT Denies a four card major. Values for game but **denies a stop** in the suit overcalled (e.g. 1NT - 2♥ - 3NT – denies four spades and denies a stop in hearts).

If declarer also doesn't have a stop, he can still elect to gamble on a pass, but more likely to bid his better minor (the Lebensohl bidder doesn't have the other major, so probably has the minors). This would be game forcing.

If you have the above but **with** a stop in the opponent's suit, you first bid 2NT, and over partner's 3♣ you then bid 3NT – i.e. you don't have a 4-card major, but you do have a stop in their suit (e.g. 1NT – (2♥) – 2NT – 3♣ - 3NT denies four spades, but has a heart stop).

When the opposition overcall with an artificial 2 level overcall, as above, but treat as if the overcaller has actually bid his anchor suit.

Examples:

1NT – (2♠)	1NT – (2♠)	1NT – (2♥)	1NT – (2♥)	1NT – (2♥)	1NT – (2♥)	
a) ♠ A852	b) ♠ AK6	c) ♠ J73	d) ♠ A852	e) ♠ A74	f) ♠ A65	g) ♠ Q6
♥ Q7	♥ 85	♥ A84	♥ Q65	♥ 876	♥ 83	♥ 983
♦ QJ32	♦ Q9765	♦ A82	♦ KJ107	♦ K3	♦ K74	♦ K74
♣ A6	♣ AJ8	♣ KJ65	♣ K3	♣ AQJ73	♣ AK1084	♣ AK1084
♠ 6	♠ 3	♠ KQ1085	♠ KQ107	♠ KQ85	♠ KJ2	♠ K109742
♥ J108642	♥ KQ1043	♥ 52	♥ 82	♥ A4	♥ 62	♥ 62
♦ K754	♦ AJ2	♦ K96	♦ A96	♦ 9842	♦ AQ53	♦ AQ5
♣ K3	♣ K742	♣ Q73	♣ A652	♣ K92	♣ J752	♣ J7

- a) 1NT – (2♠) - 2NT – 3♣ - 3♥. South wants to compete in hearts over 2♠ in a non-forcing way, so goes via 2NT.
- b) 1NT – (2♠) - 3♥ - 3NT. South has enough values for game and tries for hearts, so bids directly at the three level. North having a spade stop and a maximum prefers the no-trump game.
- c) 1NT – (2♥) - 2NT – 3♣ - 3♠ - end. South has the opportunity to show his invitational hand (didn't bid 2♠, with spades higher ranking than hearts), so goes through Lebensohl. North passes with a poor 13pts.
- d) Stage 1 - 1NT – (2♥) – 3NT. Don't worry about the non-stop in hearts. The better contract of 4♠ can only be reached when familiar with Stage 2.
 Stage 2 - 1NT – (2♥) - 3♥ - 4♠. South has four of the other major (♠s), and doesn't have a stop in hearts, so cue bids hearts directly. North also with four spades bids game.
- e) Stage 1 - 1NT – (2♥) – dbl – 3♣ - 3NT. After North's 3♣ max with clubs and no heart stop, South with the heart stop can bid 3NT)
 Stage 2 - 1NT – (2♥) - 2NT – (pass) - 3♣ - (pass) - 3♥ - (pass) - 3NT. South shows his four spades and a heart stop by going through 2NT and then cue bidding the overcalled suit. North can reasonably now bid 3NT. The minimum holding for this bid (12 points).
- f) 1NT – (2♥) – dbl - 3♣ - 4♣ - 5♣ without the heart stop South is content to stay in clubs. Just worth 5♣.
- g) 1NT – (2♥) – 4♠. Worth the game with the doubleton heart. (With three small hearts, probably better to first bid 2NT, and over 3♣, bid 3♥, leaving the choice to partner - pass, 3NT, 4♥).

(Note: if the overcalled suit is clubs, and you have a game force hand with a major, you cannot differentiate between having and not-having a stop in clubs, so you have to make the direct 3♣ cue bid in both cases).