

RESPONDING TO STRONG 2NT OPENING

There are many various systems in responding to partner's strong 2NT opening bid. Most of these revolve around some form of 5-card Stayman, since the criteria for opening a 2NT do not exclude a 5-card major to the same extent as a 1NT opening (although many pairs are now freely opening 1NT with a five card major, with the necessity for then playing 2♣ 5-card Stayman).

For those of you who don't have a comprehensive system of responses, the following notes could well form a suitable basis: for those who do have a defined system I have introduced some concepts which can readily be extracted, and incorporated into your system (e.g. transfer breaks).

(Throughout the following notes, in order to clearly distinguish the actions of the opener and the responder, these will be shown as different colours – **Opener**, **Responder**)

We shall assume that the 2NT can originate from any strong opening bid, a common approach being:

2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT: 20-21 pts.
2NT: 22-23 pts.
2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT: 24+ pts.

Partnerships do play other ranges, but the principles remain the same, with responder taking into account the different point ranges.

In addition, a strong overcall of 2NT (16-19 pts.), typically against a weak-two or multi-2♦ opening, can also be considered in the same context, but with responder allowing for the fewer points.

(note that a 2NT rebid after a genuine suit opening should not be considered in the same context).

MAJOR SUIT TRANSFERS (i.e. 2NT – 3♦/3♥):

In the basic approach, this is similar to responding to a 1NT opening, i.e. after **opener completes the transfer - (3♥/3♠)**

- **'pass' with insufficient combined points for game**
- **bid 3NT with game values and a 5-card suit**
- **raise to 4♥/4♠ with 6-card suit** (if opener has a singleton, it should be the ace)

A useful 'extra' is to include a possible **'transfer break'** into opener's responses, and pairs should consider the following approach (if 2NT covers three or more points, only 'break' on the maximum):

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- a) If opener **has** 3+cards with **two honours in the transfer suit**, a bid of an **alternative suit is a cue bid**, usually the ace (but some partnerships also allow the king – avoid, until more experienced). The simplest approach is then **for responder to bid 4NT** to investigate a slam (again with more experience he could also **cue-bid**), or **sign-off in 4♥/4♠** (however this does wrong-side the contract).
- b) If opener **doesn't have** good ♥/♠ support, but **does have 5-cards in the other major**, he should **bid 3NT**. This enables an possible alternative 5-3 fit to be found

Responder then:

- **'passes' with a poor hand and without 3-card support for opener's 'other' 5-card major**
- **RE-TRANSFERS to his own original major with 6-card suit (e.g. 2NT, 3♥, 3NT, 4♥, 4♠)**
- **RE-TRANSFERS to opener's 'other' 5-card major with 3-card support (e.g. 2NT, 3♥, 3NT, 4♦, 4♥)**

(The re-transfer is not strictly necessary, but is included to ensure that the stronger hand declares).

If responder has 5/5 in the majors, he should **first transfer to spades**, and then **bid 4♥** (for 5/4 in the majors use Stayman - see below).

a)	♠ KJ2 ♥ A7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ AKJ93	b)	♠ KJ2 ♥ A7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ AKJ93	c)	♠ AK ♥ J74 ♦ AQ4 ♣ AQJ93	d)	♠ K2 ♥ AJ7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ AKJ93	e)	♠ AKJ93 ♥ A7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2
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♠ 874 ♥ 109653 ♦ J65 ♣ 74	♠ 874 ♥ K9653 ♦ J65 ♣ 74	♠ 874 ♥ K9653 ♦ J65 ♣ 74	♠ 874 ♥ K98653 ♦ J6 ♣ 74	♠ 874 ♥ K9653 ♦ J65 ♣ 74
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f)	♠ AKJ9 ♥ AJ7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ K72	g)	♠ AKJ9 ♥ AJ7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ K72	h)	♠ AKJ93 ♥ A7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2	i)	♠ AKJ93 ♥ A7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2	j)	♠ AKJ93 ♥ A7 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2
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♠ 874 ♥ KQ653 ♦ J65 ♣ 84	♠ 874 ♥ KQ653 ♦ J65 ♣ A3	♠ 87 ♥ K98653 ♦ J6 ♣ 974	♠ 87 ♥ K9653 ♦ J6 ♣ 9874	♠ Q74 ♥ Q98653 ♦ J6 ♣ 74
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- a) 2NT – 3♦ – 3♥ - pass .
- b) 2NT – 3♦ - 3♥ - 3NT - pass Responder is worth another bid, but with only 5-hearts chooses 3NT.
- c) 2NT – 3♦ – 3♥ – 3NT - 4♥ ... whereas opener with three hearts converts to 4♥ (don't cue bid initially with such poor hearts).
- d) 2NT – 3♦ – 4♣ – 4♥ Opener with good hearts cue-bids. Responder bids 4♥ with a 6-card suit.
- e) 2NT – 3♦ – 3NT – 4♥ – 4♠ 3NT denies heart support, but shows a 5-card spade suit. Responder wants to **support spades, so must re-transfer via 4♥**.
- f) 2NT – 3♦ – 3♠ - 4♥ 3♠ is a cue-bid, but responder isn't interested in a slam so signs off in 4♥.
- g) 2NT – 3♦ – 3♠ - 4NT ...6♥ ... whereas, responder is now interested in a slam (a better approach with more experience is for responder to also cue bid his ♣A).
- h) 2NT – 3♦ – 3NT – 4♦ – 4♥ Opener's 3NT denies heart support, but shows a 5-card spade suit. Responder is not interested in spades, so now shows his **6-card heart suit via a re-transfer of 4♦**.
- i) 2NT – 3♦ – 3NT – pass Opener's 3NT denies heart support, but shows a 5-card spade suit. No 8-card major fit, so responder passes.
- j) 2NT – 3♦ – 3NT – 4♥ – 4♠ Opener's 3NT denies heart support, but shows a 5-card spade suit. Responder has a choice of playing in a poor 6/2 heart fit, or a probable good 5/3 spade fit. If choosing spades, **he must re-transfer via 4♥**.

5-CARD PUPPET STAYMAN (non-promissory 3♦)

Responder uses the 3♣ bid if:

- he has a hand containing a four card major – and would prefer to play in the 4-4 major fit if it exists (e.g. ♠K74 ♥Q832 ♦98 ♣J764 – worried about the poor diamonds).
- he has a hand containing at least one good three card major and would prefer to play in a 5-3 major fit if one exists (e.g. ♠K74 ♥Q83 ♦98 ♣J7642 – worried about the poor diamonds).
- he has hand with 5-spades and 4-hearts, and wants to play in hearts with a 4-4 fit, or spades with a 5-3 fit (e.g. ♠KJ764 ♥Q832 ♦98 ♣64) (he cannot transfer to spades and then bid hearts – this would show 5/5 – see ‘Transfers’ above)
- (Otherwise he bypasses 3♣, and bids 3NT directly)

The basic method is:

Responder’s 3♣ primarily asks opener for either 4- or 5-card majors, and then the 2NT opener rebids:

3♦ - no 5-card major (but MAY have a 4-card major)

Responder (i.e. the original Stayman bidder) then bids:

3♥ - denies four hearts (does not necessarily show 4-spades)

opener bids 3♠ (with 4-spades) or 3NT (without)

responder raises 3♠ to 4♠ with 4-spades, or bids 3NT without

3♠ - denies four spades, but shows four hearts.

opener bids 3NT or 4♥

3NT – shows 4/4 both majors, or 5-spades/4-hearts

opener passes (3NT), or bids 4♥, or bids 4♠ (he won’t otherwise hold 3-spades)

4♣/4♦ (forcing) – shows 6-clubs and a 4-card major

opener bids 5♣/5♦ with support

bids 4♥/4♠ with 4-card

otherwise bids 4NT to play

3♥ - 5-card heart suit

3♠ - 5-card spade suit

3NT - neither 4- nor 5-card major, BUT HAS 3-SPADES

(this is the reason that 3♦ is non-promissory).

Responder then bids 4♥ with 4-hearts/5-spades,

which opener must convert to 4♠ (he has already denied hearts), or ‘pass’.

k) ♠ AKJ93
♥ A7
♦ AQ4
♣ KJ2

l) ♠ AJ2
♥ A7
♦ AQ4
♣ KQJ93

m) ♠ AQ
♥ AJ72
♦ AQ4
♣ KJ94

n) ♠ AQ
♥ AJ7
♦ AQ84
♣ KJ94

o) ♠ AQ
♥ AJ72
♦ AQ4
♣ KJ94

♠ 874
♥ 109
♦ KJ65
♣ 9764

♠ K9874
♥ Q653
♦ J6
♣ 82

♠ K98
♥ Q653
♦ J865
♣ 82

♠ K98
♥ Q653
♦ J865
♣ 82

♠ K9864
♥ Q653
♦ J86
♣ 82

p)	♠ AQ ♥ AJ7 ♦ AQ64 ♣ KJ94	q)	♠ AKJ9 ♥ A73 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2	r)	♠ AKJ9 ♥ A73 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2	s)	♠ AK ♥ A73 ♦ AQJ64 ♣ KJ2	t)	♠ AK ♥ A7642 ♦ AQ3 ♣ KJ2
	♠ K983 ♥ Q653 ♦ J86 ♣ 82		♠ 87 ♥ KQ6 ♦ J765 ♣ 9873		♠ 8764 ♥ KQ6 ♦ J5 ♣ 9873		♠ 8764 ♥ KQ6 ♦ J6 ♣ 9874		♠ 8765 ♥ J8 ♦ KQ6 ♣ 9874

- k) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♠ – 4♠ Responder has poor majors, but tries for a 5-3 spade fit.
- l) 2NT – 3♣ – 3NT – 4♠ To show 5♠/4♥, responder bids 3♣. Opener, without a 4-card major, but with 3-spades, bids 3NT.
- m) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♠ – 4♥ Opener's 3♦ only shows that he may have a 4-card major. Responder's 3♠ denies 4-spades, but shows 4-hearts.
- n) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♠ – 3NT ...whereas opener doesn't have 4-hearts, so settles in 3NT
- o) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3NT – 4♥ Responder's 3NT shows both majors (5-4).
- p) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3NT – pass Responder's 3NT shows both majors (4-4).
- q) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♥ – 3♠ – 3NT
 Responder is worried about the small doubleton spade, so bids 3♣. Opener's 3♦ only shows that he may have a 4-card major. Responder denies 4-hearts. Opener shows 4-spades.
- r) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♥ – 3♠ – 4♠
 Responder is interested in a possible major fit, and now the spade fit is found.
- s) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♥ – 3NT Opener doesn't have a 4-card major, but has to bid 3♦ (no 3-card spade suit). Responder denies 4-hearts, and opener without 4-spades, bids 3NT.
- t) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♥ – 3♠ – 3NT Responder shows 5-hearts, but no major fit.
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|----|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| u) | ♠ AQ83
♥ AJ7
♦ AQ4
♣ KJ9 | v) | ♠ AQ
♥ AJ72
♦ AQ4
♣ KJ94 | w) | ♠ AQ3
♥ AJ7
♦ AQ42
♣ KJ2 | x) | ♠ AQ
♥ AK73
♦ 94
♣ AKJ964 |
| | ♠ K96
♥ 9653
♦ 8
♣ A108732 | | ♠ K96
♥ 9653
♦ 8
♣ A108732 | | ♠ K986
♥ 965
♦ 8
♣ A108732 | | ♠ K986
♥ 965
♦ A108732
♣ 8 |
- u) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♠ – 3NT – 4♣ – 5♣
 Responder tries for a major fit. Opener's 3♦ shows that he may have a 4-card major. Responder's 3♠ shows hearts. No major fit, but a club fit is found

- v) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♠ – 4♥ ...whereas heart fit found – no need to show the clubs.
- w) 2NT – 3♣ – 3NT – 4♣ – 5♣ Opener's 3NT shows 3-spades, but no major fit found, and responder shows 6♣-4M.
- x) 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3♥ – 3NT – 4♦ – 4NT ...whereas no major nor diamond fit – 4NT to play

RESPONDER'S 3♠ BID (slam interest - minors)

If **responder bids 3♠** over **opener's 2NT**, he is showing at least 5/4 in the minors. **Opener can support with a 4-card minor, otherwise he signs off in 3NT.**

However after opener's 3NT **sign-off, responder can further bid:**

- 4♣ – 6/4 - clubs/diamonds
- 4♦ - 6/4 - diamonds/clubs
- 4♥ – 5/5 minors

In all cases, opener can still reject the slam invite by **bidding 4♠**, responder will **relay to 4NT**. To accept the 6-card invite, opener can **bid 4NT - Blackwood** (if RKCB opposite 4♥ (5/5 minors), anchor on clubs)

y)	♠ AQ83 ♥ AKJ7 ♦ A4 ♣ QJ9	z)	♠ AQ ♥ AKJ2 ♦ A94 ♣ K963	aa)	♠ AQ3 ♥ AJ75 ♦ AQ4 ♣ KJ2	bb)	♠ AQ4 ♥ AKJ53 ♦ K62 ♣ A5	cc)	♠ AQ4 ♥ AKJ53 ♦ A97 ♣ Q5
	♠ K9 ♥ 96 ♦ QJ862 ♣ A874		♠ 98 ♥ 96 ♦ QJ862 ♣ AQJ4		♠ 9 ♥ Q6 ♦ KJ10873 ♣ Q843		♠ 9 ♥ Q6 ♦ Q843 ♣ KJ10873		♠ 98 ♥ 6 ♦ KQ843 ♣ KJ873

- y) 2NT – 3♠ – 3NT Opener's minors are not quite good enough for a slam
- z) 2NT – 3♠ – 4♣ – 4NT ...6♣ Opener accepts the invite with 4♣ (6♣ is better than 6NT).
- aa) 2NT – 3♠ - 3NT – 4♦ - 4NT...6♦
Responder shows 6-diamonds/4-clubs. 4NT Blackwood from opener
- bb) 2NT – 3♠ - 3NT – 4♣ - 4♠ - 4NT
Responder shows 6-clubs/4-diamonds. Opener is still not interested, so 4♠ relay to 4NT
- cc) 2NT – 3♠ - 3NT – 4♥ – 4NT ... 6♦
4♥ shows 5/5. Opener is now interested in a diamond slam, but if playing RKCB anchors on clubs, and corrects later.

4-LEVEL BIDS – SLAM INVITE

4♣, 4♦, 4♥, 4♠ – these are all strong good 6-card suit, forcing bids.

Opener can cue bid or bid 4NT according to methods (for the minors, if playing Minorwood, the 4♣/4♦ bid itself is the Minorwood bid)

4NT – Blackwood ace ask

PROBLEM HAND

We have considered how to show a game going 4-4 major or 5-spades/4-hearts hand: – 2NT – 3♣ – 3♦ – 3NT, but what if responder now wants to invite a slam.

Responder with the 5♠/4♥ has no problem since opener would have bid 3NT over 3♣ (showing 3-spades and denying 4-hearts) – responder could now progress with Blackwood (RKCB – anchor on spades)

However responder with 4-4 knows there isn't a major fit, so with say an 11 pt. hand (opposite 20-21) he should pass. With a good 12 point hand he can bid 4NT – ordinary Blackwood.

SYSTEM OUTLINE (i.e. what you would possibly include on a system card)

3♣ – 5-Card Puppet Stayman (non-promissory 3♦). Opener can only bid 3NT with 3-spades;
2NT - 3♣ – 3♦ – 3NT shows both majors.

3♦/3♥ – transfers. Break into 3NT with 5-'other major' and no support for responder,
and then responder re-transfers.

3♠ – both minors +5/+4 mild slam try, then: 3NT sign-off or 4♣/4♦ if slam possibilities.

3NT – to play.

4♣/4♦/4♥/4♠ – slam invite.

4NT – Blackwood.