

TWO CLUB OPENINGS

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How Do We Respond To a 2♣ Opening?

Here are five choices for Responder, opposite a strong 2♣ opening:

2♦ Negative (0-6 HCP)

Say we hold x, Qxxx, Qxxx, QJxx. That's not much of a hand, but it's 7 HCP, too good for a negative. But what's our bid? 3♣ is horribly space-consuming, and it's only a 4-card suit. Now we are at the 3-level, and no worthwhile suits have yet been bid. Let's cross that one off the list.

Step Responses (2♦ is 0-3, 2♥ is 4-6, 2♠ is 7-9, etc.)

Now we hold xxxx, x, KJxxx, xxx. Those 4 HCP dictate a response of 2♥, which may work out badly if Opener has loads of Hearts. Now Responder will be Declarer, when we'd normally prefer the strong hand to be. Let's cross that one off, too.

Controls (2♦ is 0-1, 2♥ is 2, 2♠ is A+K, 2NT is 3K, etc.)

A King counts as one control, and an Ace as two controls. This is useful information, particularly if the auction heads slamwards. But, again, the response may get in Opener's way. For example, we hold xxx, Ax, xxxx, xxxx. That's two controls, so we respond 2♥, and again we may find ourselves playing in Hearts from the wrong side.

2♥ Negative (0-3 HCP)

Here we bid 2♥ immediately to announce our weakness. If we have a suitable hand (7+ HCP and a decent 5-card suit) we make a positive response by bidding our long suit. Otherwise, we bid 2♦ as a waiting bid. As 2♥ is not available naturally, 2NT could be used to show a positive Heart response. 2♥ Negative is not such a bad method, but as before we risk becoming Declarer when Partner has Hearts.

2♦ Waiting

2♣ 2♦ is artificial, a waiting bid.

2♣ 2♦, 2major 3♣ is artificial and weak (0-3 HCP)

2♣ 2♦, 2major, then bidding anything but 3♣ is natural and 4+ HCP

2♣ 2major is positive (7+ HCP) with 5+ in the bid suit.

2♣ 3minor is positive (7+ HCP) with 5+ in the bid suit.

When Responder shows a rotten hand (0-3 or 0-4, depending on your style), here's a good agreement: *These bids also deny an Ace or a King.*

For the purposes of this presentation we'll use the 2♦ Waiting method. We like it because most of the time Responder's first bid will, indeed, be 2♦, and that's the

bid which is least likely to mess up the auction by getting in Opener's way. So, after Partner opens 2♣, how would you respond with these hands?

♠ 9 6 4
♥ K J 6 5 4
♦ K 7 2
♣ 7 5

Some will complain that the suit is not strong enough to respond 2♥. We say "Phooey" to that, but we do suggest that those Hearts are a bare bones minimum for a positive response.

♠ 9 6 4
♥ K 5 4 3 2
♦ A K 2
♣ 7 5

A better hand than previously, but that suit is not good enough, not even by our lax standards. You have to draw the line on suit quality somewhere. Wherever *your* line is, make sure that you and Partner agree. Anyway, for us this hand is a 2♦ (waiting) response.

♠ 9 6 4
♥ 7 5
♦ K 7 2
♣ K J 6 5 4

Same as the first hand but with the Hearts and Clubs switched. Now that the long suit is a minor, we need a better suit. Why? Well, we don't want to preempt the auction to the 3-level without a good reason and ♣KJ654 is not a good reason. Better to lie low unless the Clubs are, let's say, KQxxxx or KQJ10x or better.

♠ Q 2
♥ A Q J 7 6
♦ 7 6 3
♣ 8 4 2

This is a positive response in anyone's book! But suppose you are playing '2♥ Negative' ... now you cannot bid 2♥. You could bid 3♥ to show your good suit and good hand, but that's so space-consuming ... maybe better to use 2NT as the Heart positive.

♠ Q 2
♥ 7 3
♦ J 6 4 3 2
♣ 8 6 4 3

Not much of a hand. Playing 2♦ Waiting, we bid 2♦, and our second bid is 3♣ to show a bad hand. If we play 2♥ Negative, we bid 2♥. The defect here is that Partner may have loads of Hearts, and the wrong hand will be Declarer in 4♥ or 6♥.

♠ 9 6 4
♥ Q J 10 5 3 2
♦ K 8 3
♣ 7

This hand has only 6 HCP. Does that disqualify it from a positive 2♥ response? It's no fun having rules we cannot break once in a while, and surely a robust 6-card major, a side-suit King, and a lovely singleton atone for the point shortage. So 2♥ it is! In fact, this hand has more playing strength than any of those shown above, despite the shortage of HCP.

The general style used in 2♦ Waiting auctions should be clear by now. Responder's first bid is 2♦ unless she has a really good reason to show one of her own suits. Added to that, majors are shown more freely than minors.

What if the Opponents Interfere?

We open 2♣ and our left-hand opponent bids some suit or other. What are we, as Responder, supposed to do now? Here's a good treatment:

- Double is weak (less than 4 HCP).
- Bidding something is natural and positive (say 7+ HCP), and shows 5+ cards in the suit. As previously, the suit should be at least half-decent.
- Pass shows at least a few values (because no Double), but no suit worth bidding.

Let's not forget that an opening 2♣ bid creates a force. Either we declare the hand, or else the opponents will play in a doubled contract.

Suppose Partner opens 2♣ and our RHO doubles. Now the prescription is to redouble with a rotten hand, or pass with a few values, or bid something with 7+ and a half-decent suit.

Opening 2♣ when No Trumpish

Let's say that: A 2NT opening shows 20-21 HCP
 2♣ followed by a 2NT rebid shows 22-24 HCP
 2♣ followed by a 3NT rebid shows 25-26 HCP

When we get into 27+ HCP territory, things are harder to handle. Fortunately, such hands occur only rarely so most pairs just wing it. There is a convention for huge balanced hands, called Kokish ... google it if you are feeling adventurous.

How do you open these hands?

Hand A	Hand B
♠ K 4	♠ K 4
♥ A J 10	♥ A K 10 7 6
♦ A K 10 7 6	♦ A J 10
♣ A Q 10	♣ A Q 10

Only 21 HCP in Hand A, but also a good 5-card suit and three 'working' Tens. Yes, that's right, all three of those Tens can be used to develop tricks in their suit. We'd upgrade this to the 22-24 range, so we'd open 2♣ and rebid 2NT. Thereafter, the regular 2NT system would be on.

And Hand B? Same hand, with the red suits switched. It still looks extremely No Trumpish, but then again do we really want to abandon our 5-card major? Maybe, maybe not. On this one you may wish you were playing Puppet Stayman. That's another googling opportunity for the intrepid.

Stayman and Transfers are on, and 2♣ 2♦, 2NT can be passed.

Is 2♣ Forcing to Game?

We just saw that 2♣ 2♦, 2NT can be passed. And so can transfer auctions, such as 2♣ 2♦, 2NT 3♥, 3♠.

But suppose that the auction starts 2♣ 2♦, 2♥ or 2♣ 2♦, 2♠. Are these auctions forcing to game? It's partnership choice. Playing them as game-forcing is the easy-to-remember and accident-proof option, and there is a lot to be said for that.

But most experts play them as not-quite-forcing-to-game, in which case you and Partner have the chore of agreeing on the auctions that qualify. Going for simplicity we suggest that **only** 2♣ 2♦, 2♥ 3♣, 3♥ and 2♣ 2♦, 2♠ 3♣, 3♠ are passable ... all other major suit auctions lead to game. 2♦ in those auctions was waiting, and 3♣ was negative (less than 4 HCP).

Suppose you hold: ♠764, ♥6, ♦Q643, ♣86532. The auction starts as follows: 2♣ 2♦, 2♠ 3♣, 3♠. Your 3♣ rebid said 0-3, and you have agreed with Partner that 3♠ is not forcing. But that does not mean you *have* to pass! That Heart shortness and the trump fit could well be worth two tricks, and that should be plenty for Partner to make his game.

Major Suit Auctions

Here are two basic facts of life:

- Major suit 2♣ auctions work like a well-oiled machine
- Minor suit 2♣ auctions not so much.

Let's emphasize that second point: *2♣ auctions often work badly when Opener is planning to bid his long minor at his second turn.*

We'll get to those pesky minor suit auctions later. However, let's start with four well-oiled major suit examples:

Hand C

♠ A 10 8
♥ A K Q J 10 8 6
♦ A 8 4
♣ ---

Hand D

♠ ---
♥ K Q J 9 6 2
♦ K Q
♣ A K Q J 3

Hand E

♠ K 10
♥ K Q J 9 5
♦ A K J
♣ A J 9

Hand F

♠ A K 10
♥ A K Q J 10 8 6
♦ A Q J
♣ ---

- Hand C has 9 cashing tricks which is not enough to make game without a little help from Partner. But we'd open 2♣ anyway, with the option of getting out in 3♥ if Partner is completely broke.
- In Hand D Opener needs no help from Partner, she has game in her own hand. An easy 2♣ opening.

- Hand E is not so strong in terms of playing tricks, probably no more than 7 or 8. Even so, it does have 22 HCP. 2♣ followed by a Heart bid is not terrible, but 2♣ followed by 2NT is our choice.
- Hand F is another no-brainer. The auction can start 2♣ 2♦, 3♥. That jump to 3♥ sets the trump suit, after which Opener hopes that Responder can show the ♦K via some cue-bidding. Finding out about the ♠Q will be more difficult!

So, there you have it. Four big major suit hands, four 2♣ openers, and four well-oiled auctions.

Minor Suit Auctions

Suppose the bidding starts: 2♣ 2♦, 3♦, where 2♦ was a waiting bid. Let's summarize the story so far:

- The bidding is at the 3-level already, and only one suit has been bid naturally.
- Responder's hand remains a complete mystery, it could be any strength and any distribution.
- Responder is likely to have a rebid problem, maybe holding Jxx, Jxx, xx, Qxxxx. Now it's a guess what to do next.

The fact of the matter is that 2♦ Waiting does not work well in minor suit auctions. The solution is simple enough. Avoid those auctions whenever it is practical.

Now let's see what happens when we change those major suit hands to minor suit hands, by switching the red suits.

Hand G	Hand H	Hand I	Hand J
♠ A 10 8	♠ ---	♠ K 10	♠ A K 10
♥ A 8 4	♥ K Q	♥ A K J	♥ A Q J
♦ A K Q J 10 8 6	♦ K Q J 9 6 2	♦ K Q J 9 5	♦ A K Q J 10 8 6
♣ ---	♣ A K Q J 3	♣ A J 9	♣ ---

- Hand G has 9 playing tricks, just like C. But we would not dream of opening this one with 2♣. A 1♦ opening is unlikely to get passed out, because we have too much shape and too few points for that to happen.
- Barring bad breaks, Hand H has game in her own hand. Eager as we are to avoid opening 2♣ with a minor suit hand, dare we open 1♦ and risk playing there? We say "Yes!" It probably *won't* get passed out, we have so much distribution and so few Spades that surely somebody will save our bacon and bid something. If we open 2♣ we'll find ourselves in an awful auction such: 2♣ 2♦, 3♦ 3♠, 4♣ etc. Who knows what Partner has for that 3♠ bid? And can Partner really expect us to have 5 solid Clubs

when we introduce them at the 4-level? By comparison, how nice it would be if the auction started 1♦ 1♠, 3♣. Here, three suits have been bid naturally, a game force is on, and everything is hunky-dory.

- On Hand I, we actually would open 2♣, even though it is a minor suit hand. But, of course, we have no intention of bidding those Diamonds, our rebid will be 2NT.
- Hand J has 24 HCP. That's a lot. With only 16 HCP in the other three hands, if we open 1♦ there is an increased chance that we actually will play it there. So reluctantly we open 2♣ and rebid 3♦.

So there we have it! 2♣ 2♦, 2♠ usually works well, and should probably happen about ten times more frequently than 2♣ 2♦, 3♦, which often works badly.

Hand G Revisited

♠ A 10 8, ♥ A 8 4, ♦ A K Q J 10 8 6, ♣ --

You cleverly avoid opening 2♣ with this. Instead you open 1♦ and Partner bids 1♠. What next? You cannot bid 2NT or 3NT with a void in the unbid Clubs ... and 3♦ would be a gross underbid. Raising Partner to 4♠ is a possibility, but that could work out badly if she has a weak 4-card Spade suit. Therefore the best bid here is a reverse of 2♥. This is supposed to be a 4-card suit, so it's a small lie, but at least it's a forcing lie. The 2♥ reverse is forcing for one round.

Similarly, if it starts 1♦ 1♥, Opener does best to rebid 2♠ (game-forcing).

Five Takeaways

- In response to a 2♣ opening, consider using the 2♦ Waiting method. If you don't care for that, use 2♥ as an immediate negative.
- Have you and your Partner agreed on what to do when the opponents interfere over your 2♣ opening?
- Are you and your Partner on the same page when it comes to your No Trump ranges in 2♣ auctions?
- After a 2♣ opening, can your auction stop in three of Opener's major?
- Remember to open 2♣ with a minor suit hand as rarely as you dare.