

## CHECK-BACK CONVENTION

Check-back is a mechanism whereby following a 1NT re-bid from opener, the responder can ask opener to define his no-trump range more accurately and also show additional features to enable the optimum fit to be found (it can also be used after a 2NT rebid in similar fashion).

Check-back evolved from Crowhurst (developed by Eric Crowhurst), which catered for the wide ranging 12–16 1NT rebid, but Check-back is now associated with the more modern 15–17 1NT rebid. The basic principles are the same in either treatment.

(The same principles apply if playing a strong NT, whereby the 1NT rebid is 12-14 points – with the corresponding point adjustments)

(One reason why a 15-17 rebid has become popular is that a 2NT rebid is now 18-19 points and effectively game forcing, and hence dispensing with the awful Acol 19 point 3NT rebid).

### Mechanism

Details differ, but the basis is that following opener's 1NT rebid (15-17 points), a 2♣ bid by responder asks opener to define his hand in terms of minimum (15, 16(poor) points), or maximum (16(good), 17 points).

Responder's points will normally be in the 8+ range (maybe good 7 points with experience), and it can also be used on the higher point hands to assess the best game contract, and also to consider slam possibilities opposite an appropriate maximum response from partner.

**Opposite any maximum response it is game forcing.**

The corollary is that if responder does not use the 2♣ Check-back bid, any alternative bid tends to show weakness (some partnerships may treat this differently) – 5-7(poor) points.

Opener's Responses to 2♣:

1. Lower range (15, 16(poor) points) –
  - a. Support responder's suit with 3 card support  
(e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠...)
  - b. Bid any new suit **below** 2NT  
(e.g. 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠...) (this is **not** a reverse from opener)
  - c. Re-bid own suit with 5-card suit (with 5 card majors, good 5, or 6 card suit)  
(e.g. 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥...)

(a,b,c, should be bid in **sequence of occurrence** if multiple options)

- d. OTHERWISE - if neither (a), (b), nor (c), bid 2♦ - the 'basket' bid  
(e.g. 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦...)
  - e. **Forcing to 2NT unless an appropriate fit is found.**

2. Upper range (16(good), 17 points)

- a. Support responder's suit by bidding it at the 3-level. (e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠)

- b. With extra length in own suit, re-bid suit at 3-level  
(e.g. 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♥... shows a 5-card suit or 6-card if playing 5-card majors)
- c. With second suit, bid suit at 3-level  
(e.g. 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠... shows a 4-card spade suit)
- d. With none of the above, bid 2NT – the strong-range ‘basket’ bid.

If responder still wishes to force over a minimum response, he should bid 3♣, saying please tell me more partner.

A jump bid by responder shows a six-card suit – forcing.

It's important that if there is a choice of the above options (a-d), the appropriate ones must be **bid in sequence**.

(e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♥ - 3♠ - 3NT - 4♥)... Opener now has 16 or 17 points, and in sequence has shown 5 diamonds, 3 spades, 4 hearts.

(This approach avoids confusion in sequences such as 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♣ - 4♦. The 4♦ bidder cannot now be cue-bidding agreeing spades, nor can he be asking opener if he has a five card diamond suit – yes he has, together with four clubs. Responder is just showing diamond support, inviting a cue-bid for a possible slam. Moreover, if responder had bid 4NT instead of 4♦, this would be key-card in clubs)

### 3. Other issues:

If responder does not use check-back 2♣, and instead bids:

- a. a jump response to the 1NT (including 3♣), usually shows a six card suit 5,6, 7(poor) count. Invitational but not forcing.
- b. any other natural suit at the two-level. This tends to imply a 6-4 distribution, i.e. prepared to play at the three-level in the 6-card suit. With most other distributions, he would be inclined to pass 1NT.
- c. with a 4-3-3-3 hand and 8 pts. responder should bid 2NT rather than 2♣. This asks partner to bid 3NT with a 17-point hand (not 16) – 3NT with a flat-hand opposite flat-hand and 24 points does not usually give a good result – 25 points is better. (I personally also use it on a 5-3-3-2 shape).
- d. don't use checkback just for the sake of it (i.e. don't want to investigate 'shape').

**Examples:** (where the sequences differ between 4 and 5 card majors, these are indicated).

((a) – (g) North has a ‘weak’ 1NT rebid)

a) ♠ A72 ♥ KJ532 ♦ A86 ♣ K4	b) ♠ A7 ♥ KQ9832 ♦ A86 ♣ Q43	c) ♠ A743 ♥ K5 ♦ AQ864 ♣ Q4	d) ♠ A7 ♥ J7642 ♦ AK5 ♣ K104	e) ♠ A7 ♥ J7642 ♦ AK5 ♣ K104
♠ KJ843 ♥ 64 ♦ K97 ♣ J63	♠ K9843 ♥ 64 ♦ Q97 ♣ K62	♠ K985 ♥ AJ64 ♦ 92 ♣ 985	♠ Q9843 ♥ K9 ♦ 964 ♣ QJ8	♠ Q109843 ♥ K9 ♦ 964 ♣ QJ
f) ♠ A72 ♥ KJ532 ♦ A86 ♣ K4	g) ♠ A7 ♥ J7642 ♦ AK5 ♣ K103			
♠ KJ843 ♥ 64 ♦ K97 ♣ A63	♠ Q109843 ♥ K9 ♦ 964 ♣ AJ			

- a) 5-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - **pass**. North shows a minimum and 3-card support for partner. If South had only four spades he would bid 2NT which North would pass. He could bid 2♥ with a good 5-card or 6-card suit.  
4-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2♠ - **pass** North shows a minimum and also his 5-card heart suit, before supporting partner's spades.
- b) 5-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - **pass**. North shows a minimum and a probable 6-card heart suit – fit found, so South can pass below 2NT.
- c) 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - **pass**. South correctly bids his 4-card hearts before the spades. North shows a minimum and four spades. With the fit, South passes (having had a limit bid from North, he can stop below 2NT).
- d) 5-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT – **pass** By bidding 2♦ (alertable), North shows his minimum and also denies any useful feature (neither good hearts nor three spades). No point in South repeating his five-card spade suit, he knows North doesn't have support having by-passed 2♠.  
4-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 2NT – **pass** North shows a minimum with five hearts. South now repeats his spade suit (North hasn't denied three spades).

- e) 5-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠ – **pass** North shows his minimum and denies any useful feature. South now repeats his six-card suit which North now passes (North knows that it would be pointless South re-bidding his 5-card suit).  
4-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 2NT - 3♠ – **pass** Unlike the situation with 5-card majors, North doesn't know that South has a six-card suit because he himself has not denied a 3-card spade suit. With his spade holding, South prefers spades to a no-trump contract.
- f) 4-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♣ - 3♠ - 4♠ **pass** Similar to (a), but now responder wants to force even after a minimum response from opener. He bids 3♣, asking partner to give more information about his shape.  
(If playing 5-card majors, North would have supported spades (2♠) over 2♣ – South now bidding the game).
- g) 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♠ - 4♠ Similar to (e), but with more points South jump-bids to show his 6-card suit, requesting partner to bid either 3NT or 4♠.

((h) – (q) North has a 'strong' 1NT rebid)

h) ♠ 76 ♥ K853 ♦ AK852 ♣ AK  ♠ Q10985 ♥ AQ64 ♦ 97 ♣ 83	i) ♠ J76 ♥ A9 ♦ AKJ106 ♣ A86  ♠ Q10985 ♥ K864 ♦ 97 ♣ K3	j) ♠ 10752 ♥ AK ♦ AQ862 ♣ A2  ♠ AJ98 ♥ Q864 ♦ K1097 ♣ 8	k) ♠ 10752 ♥ AK ♦ AQ862 ♣ A4  ♠ AKJ8 ♥ Q864 ♦ K1097 ♣ 8	l) ♠ J76 ♥ A9 ♦ AKJ106 ♣ A86  ♠ 109854 ♥ K864 ♦ Q3 ♣ K3
m) ♠ A72 ♥ AQ532 ♦ A86 ♣ K4  ♠ K9843 ♥ 64 ♦ K97 ♣ Q63	n) ♠ 764 ♥ AK5 ♦ AQ862 ♣ A2  ♠ AJ98 ♥ Q864 ♦ K1097 ♣ 8	o) ♠ 86 ♥ AQ532 ♦ AK75 ♣ A9  ♠ K9754 ♥ K6 ♦ Q9643 ♣ 6	p) ♠ K2 ♥ AK1093 ♦ AK8 ♣ 864  ♠ A984 ♥ QJ ♦ J107 ♣ 9752	q) ♠ K75 ♥ AK5 ♦ K643 ♣ K104  ♠ AJ984 ♥ Q764 ♦ A7 ♣ A5

- h) 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♥ - 4♥ By jumping in diamonds (i.e. bidding above 2NT), North shows a maximum and a five card diamond suit (in sequence, rather than the 4-card heart suit). South shows his hearts, and North bids the heart game.
- i) 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♥ - 3♠ - 4♠ Similar to (f), North knows partner must be 5-4 in the majors (with 4-4 he would have bid hearts first), but can now support

with the 3-card spade suit. With better spades he may well bid 4♠ rather than 3♠. (In this hand, 3♠ is preferred showing a poor three card suit. South's spades are just about good enough to prefer 4♠ to 3NT. With say ♠109875, probably prefer 3NT).

- j) 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♠ - 4♠      South correctly bids his 4-card heart suit before his 4-card spade suit, and then North initially responds with 3♦ (he hasn't shown a 5-card suit with his opening bid). The spade game is still reached.
- k) 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♠ - 4♠....6♠      Similar to (j), but with the extra points, South can reach the spade slam.
- l) 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♥ - 3♠ - 3NT/4♠      Despite the poor 5-3 spade fit, South may prefer 3NT – personal choice.
- m) 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♥ - 3♠ - 4♠      ...playing 4-card majors.
- n) 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♠ - 3NT ...6♦      North correctly bids his diamond feature (5 cards), enabling the diamond slam to be bid.
- o) 5-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♠ - 3NT - 5♦      No major fit found, but South correctly chooses the minor fit instead of 3NT.  
4-card majors: 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♦ - 3♠ - 3NT - 5♦      North bids his diamonds before repeating hearts. If South had three hearts he would now bid 3♥ (he can't have 4 – he didn't support first round) before repeating his spades, but not in this case. He correctly converts partner's 3NT to 5♦).
- p) 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♥ - 4♥      An awkward hand, but playing 5-card majors, North bids 3♥ with only a five card suit. It's a good 5-card suit, and South even if he is aware of that possibility (including when playing 4-card majors) should still bid the heart game with his good doubleton.
- q) 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 3♠ - 4NT ..... 6♠      South uses 2♣ check-back to investigate slam possibilities. When supports spades, the correct slam can be bid.

((r) – (v) South has insufficient points for a check-back 2♣ bid).

r) ♠ AJ ♥ 873 ♦ K54 ♣ AK1084	s) ♠ AJ ♥ Q73 ♦ K54 ♣ AK1084	t) ♠ AJ6 ♥ 83 ♦ KQ4 ♣ AK1084	u) ♠ AJ63 ♥ 85 ♦ K5 ♣ AK1084	v) ♠ AQ63 ♥ J3 ♦ AK5 ♣ Q973
♠ K82 ♥ K109642 ♦ 1076 ♣ 63	♠ K82 ♥ K10962 ♦ 1076 ♣ 63	♠ Q854 ♥ KJ9642 ♦ 9 ♣ 963	♠ Q854 ♥ KJ9642 ♦ 9 ♣ 63	♠ 108 ♥ Q764 ♦ 9 ♣ KJ8654

- r) 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 3♥ - **pass**      South hasn't used a check-back 3♣ with 6 points, so the jump bid in hearts is invitational. North declines.
- s) 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 3♥ - 4♥      ....whereas, North with his extra useful 2 points accepts.
- t) 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♠ - 2NT/**pass**      South's 2♠ bid is not strong (he hasn't used check-back) – shows 6, 7(poor) points. North either passes (preferred) or bids 2NT.
- u) 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 2♠ - 3♠ - 4♠/**pass**      ....whereas with reasonable 4-card support and a singleton he's worth a single raise. Playing teams, South should probably raise to four, but be content with three at pairs. If North had a maximum (or good 16) (e.g. ♦A instead of ♦K), he would raise to 4♠ himself.
- v) 1♣ - 1♥ - 1NT - 3♣ - **pass**      South hasn't used check-back so he bids a weak 3♣ (6-card suit). (Even playing a short club opening, I would probably still bid 3♣ given the quality of the club suit)

AFH