

# ACBL SAYC SYSTEM BOOKLET

*Revised January 2006*

*Annotated by WAS 1/18/25 v., with the relevant sections of original text highlighted in green in cases where I've commented on specific SAYC treatments.*

## OVERVIEW

The ACBL Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC) was created to be the required system to be used in a Standard Yellow Card event. The object was to provide a simple, modern method that will lead to a good, solid understanding in a partnership when both players have read this booklet.

Because this system was to be used by each pair, the game was free of a wide variety of possibly complex systems. There was no necessity to Alert or ask questions since everyone was playing the same method.

When play began on the Internet, players needing a quick way to establish the method to be used in a relatively casual partnership adopted the SAYC. It is also used by players who meet at the partnership desk a few minutes before the game starts.

Players may still exercise bridge judgment, such as opening a four-card major in third seat. SAYC "normally five-card majors" approach can withstand an occasional deviation.

## CHOICES

While there are no choices in the present day SAYC, except for an SAYC event in which everyone must play the method as written, a pair could use the SAYC as a base and make one or two modifications. If you do make a modification or two in an open game, you should announce that fact to the opponents – if they think you are playing straight SAYC and they know SAYC, they would not know about your modifications.

## GENERAL APPROACH

Normally open five-card majors in all seats.

Open the higher of long suits of equal length: 5–5 or 6–6.

Normally open 1D with 4–4 in the minors.

Normally open 1C with 3–3 in the minors.

Notrump openings show a balanced hand and may be made with a five-card major suit or a five-card minor suit.

1NT = 15–17

2NT = 20–21

3NT = 25–27

Strong conventional 2C opening.

Weak two-bids in diamonds, hearts and spades.

## RESPONSES AND LATER BIDDING AFTER A 15–17 1NT OPENING

2C is “non-forcing” Stayman, meaning that the bidding may stop in two of a suit. Opener rebids 2H with 4–4 in the majors. If responder rebids three of either minor, he shows slam interest and at least a five-card suit.

The Jacoby transfer shows a five-card suit and is used for the majors: 2D is a transfer to hearts, 2H is a transfer to spades. Opener accepts the transfer, though he can jump to the three level with 17 points and four-card support for responder’s major. For example:

1NT — 2D

2H = normal acceptance of the transfer.

3H = 17 points and four-card heart support.

If, after the transfer is accepted, responder bids a new suit, that is natural and game forcing. Possible calls after the accepted transfer are:

1NT — 2H

2S — Pass = content to play 2S.

— 2NT, 3S = invitational. Over 2NT opener may pass or bid 3S with a minimum hand; bid 3NT or 4S with a maximum.

— 3C, 3D, 3H = natural and game forcing.

— 3NT = giving opener a choice between 3NT and 4S.

— 4S = placing the contract, with a six-card or longer suit.

A 2S response requires the 1NT bidder to rebid 3C, which may be passed with a club bust, or responder may rebid 3D with a diamond bust. Example:

1NT — 2S

3C — Pass = club bust

— 3D = diamond bust (notrump opener passes).

**WAS note** – In my experience, not that many people actually play this. Most players are either not doing anything with their minor suit hands over 1NT (or maybe mis-bidding them) or else they’re playing something better. If playing with a new partner, it’s worth looking at a proposed card to see how partner plays 1NT-2S.

Other responses to 1NT:

1NT — 3C, 3D = a six-card or longer suit and invitational to

3NT.

— 3H, 3S = at least a six-card suit and slam interest (otherwise, responder uses a transfer bid).

— 4C = Gerber, asking for aces.

I deleted the rest of the description of the Gerber convention. You can find it in the original document if you want it, but asking for aces after a notrump opening is so rarely the main priority that many good players don’t play Gerber.

## INTERFERENCE AFTER A 1NT OPENING BID

If an opponent **doubles**, all conventional responses are “on.” For example:

1NT — (Double) — 2C = Stayman

1NT — (Double) — 2D = transfer to hearts

If an opponent **bids** over your 1NT opener, conventional responses like Stayman and transfers are “off.” Bids are natural except for a cuebid, which may be used with game forcing strength as a substitute for Stayman.

If the opponents intervene over a conventional response, bids carry the same meaning as if there were no intervention. A bid says, “I’m bidding voluntarily, so I have a real fit with you.”

1NT — (Pass) — 2D — (Double)

2H = Real fit for hearts — pass with only two hearts

## RESPONSES TO A 2NT OR A 3NT OPENING

Stayman and Jacoby transfers for the majors are used.

2NT — 3C = Stayman.

— 3D, 3H = Jacoby transfers to hearts and spades, respectively.

— 4C = Gerber (ace asking).

— 4NT = Invites a slam in notrump.

3NT — 4C = Stayman.

— 4D, 4H = Jacoby transfers to hearts and spades, respectively.

## RESPONSES AND LATER BIDDING AFTER A 1H OR A 1S OPENING

1H and 1S openings show a five-card or longer suit. Responses:

1H — 1S = at least four spades, 6 or more points. Tends to deny a heart fit.

— 1NT = 6–9 points, denies four spades or three hearts. NOT forcing.

— 2C, 2D = 10 points or more, promises at least four of the suit.

— 2H = three-card or longer heart support; 6–10 dummy points.

(They’re using responses to 1H as the example here, but they never tell you what 1S-2H would mean. It has same strength requirements as the above 2/1 bids (bids where you bid at the 2-level in a suit that ranks lower than opener’s) but requires 5 hearts. If you map out all the possible responder hand types, you’ll see that you might need to respond 1S-2C with only 3 sometimes, but you’ll be going back to spades with your next bid so it’s OK.)

— 2NT = Game-forcing raise (Jacoby 2NT), 13+ dummy points. Asks opener to show a short suit to help responder evaluate slam prospects. (see \* **below** – I deleted the rest of the description of Jacoby)

As they advance, most players play 1M-2NT as a game forcing 4+ card raise. The most common version is called Jacoby 2NT (not to be confused with a Jacoby transfer). Until you’re sure you’ve gotten all the details, you can tell people you have some idea what Jacoby 2NT is but haven’t really learned it yet.

Until you have learned Jacoby 2NT or some similar method, when you have support with game forcing values for partner’s major suit, you can start with a new suit (it might have to be a 3 card minor) and then support partner vigorously.

— 2S, 3C, 3D = strong jump shifts. Invites a slam.

- 3H = limit raise (10–11 dummy points with three or more hearts).
- 3NT = 15–17 HCP, balanced hand with two-card support for partner.
- 4H = usually five+ hearts, a singleton or void, and fewer than 10 HCP.

Opener's rebids are natural and standard.

Note that the direct jump to the 4-level in opener's major suit shows 5 card support but *\*not\** a lot of high card points. The purpose of this is to prevent the opponents from being able to get involved in the auction.

Rebids with a minimum hand (13–15 points): Rebidding

notrump at the lowest available level;

Raising responder's suit at the lowest level (may have good three-card support);

Rebidding a new suit at the one level or rebidding a new suit at the two level that is lower ranking than the opening suit (not reversing); Rebidding opener's suit at the lowest level.

Rebids with a medium hand (16–18 points):

Jump raise of responder's suit or jump rebid of opener's suit;

Reverse in a new suit, *i.e.*, bid a new suit at the two level which is higher ranking than the opening suit;

Non-reverse bid in a new suit (this has the wide range of 13–18 points).

With a maximum hand (19–21 or 22 points) opener must make a very strong rebid:

Jump in notrump;

Double jump raise of responder's suit or double jump rebid of opener's suit;

Jump shift in a new suit.

## SUBSEQUENT BIDDING BY RESPONDER

If responder has bid a suit at the one level, he next determines whether he wishes to sign off in a partscore, invite game, sign off in game, or force to game and get more information about opener's hand.

Bids available for a sign-off in partscore: Pass, 1NT, 2 of a previously bid suit.

1H — 1S

2C — Pass, 2H, 2S = 6–9 points, sign-off in partscore.

Bids available for inviting game: 2NT, 3 of a previously bid suit:

1H — 1S

2C — 2NT, 3D, 3H, 3S = 10–11 points, inviting game.

After opener rebids in a suit, a new suit by responder is forcing. If the new suit is the fourth suit, the bid may be artificial/conventional.

1H — 1S

2C — 2D = one-round force, could be conventional.

For now, don't worry about this "conventional" meaning of bidding the fourth suit, but if partner is bidding two suits and you have the other two suits, you're usually going to be better off playing in one of partner's suits or notrump rather than hoping to find a fit in the fourth suit.

However, after a 1NT rebid by opener, bids of a new suit at the next higher level are non-forcing.

1H — 1S

1NT — 2C, 2D = non-forcing. Responder must jump shift to 3C or 3D to force game.

Second-round forcing bids following a 1NT rebid by opener: a reverse or jump shift into a new suit is a game force.

1C — 1H

1NT — 2S or 3D = game force.

Bids available for signing off in game.

3NT, 4H, 4S, 5C, 5D.

If responder initially bids a new suit at the two level, the same rules apply EXCEPT that a subsequent jump raise of opener's first suit to the THREE LEVEL is game forcing — responder should make a limit raise directly over the opening with 10–11 points and at least three-card support:

1S — 2C

2H — 2NT, 3C, 3H = invitation to game (10–11 points).

— 2S = preference, not forcing. Responder has 11–12 points and a doubleton spade.

— 3D = game force, could be conventional.

— 3S = game force.

NOTE: Responder promises to bid again if he responded with a new suit at the two level unless opener's rebid is at the game level. This applies when responder is an unpassed hand.

1S — 2C

2D = forcing one round. Responder can limit his hand by bidding 2S, 2NT, 3C, or 3D at this point. He should not pass, since opener could have 18 points (just short of a jump shift rebid).

## RESPONSES TO A 1C OR A 1D OPENING

A 1D opener suggests a four-card or longer suit, since 1C is preferred on hands where a three-card minor suit must be opened. The exception is a hand with 4–4–3–2 shape: four spades, four hearts, three diamonds, and two clubs, which is opened 1D.

Responses and later bidding generally follow the ideas set down in the previous section. Bidding at the one level is up-the-line in principle. Responder needs more support to raise (four to raise 1D; five to raise 1C, though one fewer will do in a pinch in a competitive sequence). Responses of 2NT and 3NT are standard:

1C — 2NT = 13–15, game

forcing

— 3NT = 16–18

There is no forcing minor-suit raise.

## A 2C OPENING, RESPONSES, AND LATER BIDDING

A 2C opening shows at least 22+ points, or the playing equivalent. Responses:

2C — 2D = conventional, could be “waiting” with a good hand not suited to a positive response.

— 2H, 2S, 3C, 3D = natural and game forcing. At least a five-card suit and 8 points.

— 2NT = a balanced 8 HCP.

If opener rebids 2NT after a 2D response (showing 22–24 points), the same responses are used as over a 2NT opening:

2C — 2D

2NT — 3C = Stayman.

— 3D, 3H = Jacoby transfers to hearts and spades, respectively.

— 4C = Gerber.

— 4NT = inviting a slam in notrump.

If opener rebids a suit over a 2<sup>nd</sup> response, the bidding is forcing to 3 of opener’s major or 4 of opener’s minor.

2C — 2D

2H — 2S

3H = not forcing.

### **SEQUENCE AFTER A WEAK TWO-BID OF 2D, 2H OR 2S**

A weak two-bid shows a six-card suit of reasonable quality and 5–11 HCP. On rare occasions it may be a very good five-card suit. It is possible to open a weak two with a poor seven-card suit (not good enough to open with at the three level). Responses:

A 2NT response is forcing, showing game interest. (This applies also if the opponents intervene with a double or a bid.) Opener rebids his suit with a minimum weak two (5–8 points). With a maximum hand opener bids another suit to show a “feature” (ace or king in that suit); lacking a feature, he raises to 3NT and lets responder place the contract.

Any raise of opener’s suit is to play and could be preemptive (weak). A 3NT response is also to play.

“RONF” on the card means “Raise Only Non-Force.” A new-suit response is forcing one round and shows at least a five-card suit. Opener should raise a major suit response with a three-card fit, or perhaps with a doubleton honor.

With no fit for responder’s suit, opener rebids:

With a minimum weak two-bid (5–8 points), rebid the suit at the lowest level.

With a maximum weak two-bid, name a new suit or bid notrump.

### **OPENING PREEMPTS**

Opposite an unpassed partner, an opening 3 or 4-level call in a suit tends toward sound at equal or unfavorable vulnerability. Vulnerable against not, you should be within two tricks of your bid (*i.e.* with likely distribution of the remaining cards in your suit). When the vulnerability is equal, you should be within three tricks of your bid. At favorable vulnerability, the preempt tends to be lighter, so you should be within four tricks of your bid.

## SLAM BIDDING

Blackwood 4NT is used to ask for aces. Responses show the number of aces by steps. 5NT is then used to ask for kings; 5NT guarantees that the partnership holds all four aces.

—	— —	—	— —
—	— 4NT	—	— 4NT
5C	= 0 or 4 aces	5x	— 5NT
5D	= 1 ace	6C	= 0 or 4 kings
5H	= 2 aces	6D	= 1 king
5S	= 3 aces	6H	= 2 kings
		6S	= 3 kings

I deleted comments here about another slam bidding convention you won't play for now, if ever.

## DEFENSIVE BIDDING

Overcalls show 8–16 points (double and bid the long suit with a stronger hand). The only forcing response is a cuebid of opener's suit, asking the overcaller about the quality of his overcall:

- (1D) — 1S — (Pass) — 2D
- (Pass) — 2S = minimum overcall.
- other = extra strength (11 or 12 points minimum).

Until you learn to use this "cuebid," you can just jump raise your partner when your partner overcalls and you have support and a good hand.

A 1NT overcall shows 15–18 points and a balanced hand (preferably a stopper in opener's suit). No conventional responses are used by the responder to the 1NT overcall except 2C, which is Stayman.

Alternatively, you can just agree to bid the same as if partner had opened 1NT.

A jump overcall of 2NT shows at least 5–5 in the lowest two unbid suits.

This is called the "unusual notrump." You will very rarely have a hand that's strong enough that it would want to bid 2NT naturally, so this is a convention to let you show two other suits at the same time. You'll be fine not playing it right away.

Jump overcalls are preemptive, showing the same value as an opening bid at the same level:

- (1D) — 2S = a hand that would open a weak two-bid in spades.
- 3C = a hand that would open 3C.

A cuebid overcall when the opponents have bid two suits is natural in either suit.

A cuebid overcall when the opponents have bid only one suit is a Michaels cuebid, showing a 5–5 two-suiter (or more distributional). If the opening is in a minor suit, the cuebid shows the majors; if the opening is in a major, the cuebid shows the other major and an unspecified minor.

- (1D) — 2D = at least 5–5 in the majors, 8 points or more.
- (1S) — 2S = at least 5–5 in hearts and a minor; 10 points or more.

Responder may bid 2NT over a major suit cuebid to ask for partner's minor.

(1H) — 2H — (Pass) — 2NT (asks for the minor).

(Pass) — 3C = club suit.

— 3D = diamond suit.

**“Michaels” is another convention to let you show two other suits at the same time. You'll also be fine not playing this right away.**

A reopening bid means much the same as a direct seat bid, though it can be lighter at the minimum end. A reopening 1NT after an opponent has opened shows 10–15 points. This is a wide range, but there will not usually be a game on for you.

A double is for takeout over an opening partscore bid (4D or lower); penalty over opening game bids (4H or higher). A below-game jump response to a takeout double is invitational. To force, responder cuebids opener's suit.

Versus an opening preempt, an overcall in a suit or notrump is natural; a cuebid is Michaels.

## COMPETITIVE BIDDING

There is almost an endless variety of possible sequences, so it pays to have simple guidelines to prevent bidding misunderstandings.

Bids mean the same things they meant without the intervening bid. Still, it is sometimes necessary to pick a bid that would normally have been a second choice without the overcall:

1D — (Pass) — 1S — (2C)

2S with S J 4 3 H A 8 7 5 D A Q J 4 C J 3 (rebid 1NT if RHO has passed)

Cuebidding right-hand opponent's suit shows values for game without clear direction for the moment. This is often used to show a game-forcing raise: 1S — (2C) — 3C = game force; usually a raise.

The negative double is used through 2S, promising four cards (at least) in an unbid major. Bidding a major at the two level or higher shows 11 or more points and a five card or longer suit.

1C — (1D) — Double = 4–4 or better in the majors.

1D — (1H) — Double = exactly four spades (1S promises five).

1D — (1S) — Double = four hearts and 6+ points or five hearts and 5–10 points.

**Once you're familiar with takeout doubles and a few basic conventions such as Stayman, Jacoby transfers and Blackwood, negative doubles are a good next convention to add.**

If RHO makes a takeout double:

1D — (Double) — 1H, 1S = forcing, point count not limited.

— 2C = non-forcing (6–10 points, usually a six-card suit).

— 2NT = limit raise (at least 10 points) or better.

— Redouble = 10 points or more, but it is better to make a more descriptive bid of 1H, 1S, or 2NT with the appropriate hand.

— 3D = preemptive, good trump support but fewer than 10 points.



This section introduces a few new concepts, and it's fine not to start doing the fancy parts right away. When the opponents double, we can redouble (the blue card with XX on it) to show a good hand that doesn't have a fit for partner, so that lets us do things like use 2NT to show a good raise and jump raise when we actually don't have a good hand but have a fit and want to get in the opponents' way.

A responder's jump shift after a double is to play:

1D — (Double) — 2H, 2S, 3C = six-plus card suit, like a weak two-bid or preemptive three-bid.

A redouble can have one of three meanings:

To play if:

Your side is at the four level or higher:

4S — (Double) — Redouble = Penalty;

The opponents double a conventional bid:

1NT — (Pass) — 2D — (Double)

Redouble = Penalty, good diamond suit;

A good hand if their double is for takeout:

1S — (Double) — Redouble = 10+ points;

SOS, requesting a different suit, if your side is doubled for penalty in a trump suit at the three level or lower:

1D — (Pass) — Pass — (Double)

Pass — (Pass) — Redouble = SOS, responder can support at least two of the unbid suits.

You're probably not going to use redouble very much right away, but just like double, it can have different meanings in different contexts. "To play" is the one that means you really want to play that contract redoubled. If you make a doubled contract, you get some extra bonuses. If you make a redoubled contract, they're even bigger.

**Unless otherwise noted elsewhere, any bid or double by an opponent cancels a convention intended for non-competitive sequences.** Examples: 1H — (2S)

— 2NT = natural (12–14 HCP).

2C — (Double) — 2D = natural and positive.

If the opponents use a convention (such as Michaels or the unusual notrump), you can double to show at least 10 points, or you can cuebid one of their shown suits to force to game.

1S — (2S) — 3H = game force.

— Double = at least 10 points, probably balanced.

## DEFENSIVE LEADS AND SIGNALS

Defensive signals when following suit or discarding are "high encourages, low discourages." And "High-low is an even number, low-high is odd when count is given."

Leads are fourth best. From three low cards against a suit contract lead low; against a notrump contract lead high. From four cards or longer lead fourth best. The one systemic exception is leading from a suit of four or more cards without an honor. In this instance lead the second highest card.

Leads are hard. The best players in the world give up a trick on about 20% of their leads. Leading from xxx or xxxx against a suit contract is even harder than most leads, but especially without the expert's toolkit of other signals that will later clarify the opening leader's holdings. I have recently been recommending that developing players lead top from xxx against suit contracts as well as against notrump. (This is part of a lead structure that some call BOSTON – Bottom of Something, Top of

Nothing.) Its virtue is clarifying whether the opening leader is likely to hold one or more high cards in the suit. The downside is that opening leader's partner will not readily be able to distinguish that lead from an xx lead and may not know whether to continue the suit and give opening leader a ruff, for instance. As I say, leads are hard. As you get more tools for subsequent signaling and as you and your partner develop greater skills for reasoning out the location of the hidden cards, those tools and skills will allow you to look at opening lead questions and conventions at least a little bit differently.

Leads are top of touching honors and top from an interior sequence. Against suits, the ace is led from A K x.