

Bidding in Contract
Bridge in SAYC-like Systems

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Table of Contents

<i>Introductory Remarks</i>	3
Ranking of Suits and the Bidding	3
High Card Points	3
Distribution Points	3
Contract Levels	4
Point Ranges and Contract Levels	4
<i>Opening Bids</i>	4
Order of Preference	4
<i>Responses from Partner</i>	5
Responses to 1♣/1♦/1♥/1♠	5
Responding with 6 – 9 Points	6
Responding with 10 – 12 Points	6
Responding with 13 – 15 Points	6
Responding with 16+ Points	6
Final Thoughts	7
Responses to 1NT	7
Responding with a Balanced Hand	8
Responding with an Unbalanced Hand	9
Responses to 2♣	11

List of Tables

Table 1: Contract Classifications	4
Table 2: Point Ranges and Contract Levels	4
Table 3: Responses to One of a Suit with a Minimum	6
Table 4: Responses to 1 of a Suit with a Semi-Strong Hand.....	6
Table 5: Meaning of Jump Shifts.....	6

List of Figures

Figure 1: Opening Bids	5
Figure 2: Responses to Suited Openings.....	7
Figure 3 Responses to 1 NT with a Balanced Hand	8

Introductory Remarks

Every deal in Contract Bridge has two parts: the auction and the play of the hand. Regardless of the contract, be it 4♠ or 1 NT, the hand is played out (i.e. a the contract need not be in “game” to play the hand) with the declarer trying to make as many tricks for his side as possible.

Ranking of Suits and the Bidding

The suits are ranked alphabetically and are, in ascending order, thus:



When bidding, one adds no trump suit, or no trump for short, at the *top* of this list. Bids consist of a level and a suit and one must always bid “up the ladder.” That said, a player may bid Pass at any one of his turns. For example, if the last bid was 2♦ then the lowest available bid the player can make (other than Pass) is 2♥, the next lowest is 2♠, then 2 NT, then 3♣, and so on all the way up to 7 NT.

In addition to the bids discussed above players may also double (X) provided the last bid was made by his opponent (i.e. Pass Pass X is not allowed, nor is 1♣ Pass X). If the last bid was double, a player may also redouble (XX) provided the player who doubled is one of his opponents (e.g. 1♣ X XX is allowed but 1♣ X 1♦ XX is not allowed since the double has “been removed” by the diamond bid. A correct sequence would be 1♣ X 1♦ X. Further, 1♣ X Pass XX is not allowed).

High Card Points

High card points (HCP) are used to evaluate the strength of a hand but are not worth anything in terms of the scoring of the hand. HCPs are assigned as follows:

Ace: 4 HCP King: 3 HCP Queen: 2 HCP Jack: 1 HCP Others: 0 HCP.

Distribution Points

Distribution points (DP) may be added to a hand’s HCPs provided the contract is a suit contract (i.e. not no trumps). DPs are assigned as follows:

Doubleton: 1 DP Singleton: 2 DP Void: 3 DP Others: 0 DP.

If you can support partner's suit (e.g. partner open 1♥ and you hold Q-9-3 of hearts) then the values for distribution points are altered to:

Doubleton: 1 DP Singleton: 3 DP Void: 5 DP Others: 0 DP.

Contract Levels

There are four classifications of contract levels. There are scoring bonuses for making contracts within the top three levels.

Level	Minimum	Maximum	Bonus
Part Score	1♣	4♦ (excluding 3NT)	No
Game	3NT, 4♥	5♦	Yes
Small Slam	6♣	6NT	Yes
Grand Slam	7♣	7NT	Yes

Table 1: Contract Classifications

In short, game is 3NT, four of a major, five of a minor. Small slam is all six level contracts. Grand slam is all seven level contracts! Note that 90% of game contracts are played in no trump or the major suits. A part score is any contract below game.

Point Ranges and Contract Levels

Level	Minimum	Maximum
Part Score	13	25
Game	26	32
Small Slam	33	36
Grand Slam	37	-

Table 2: Point Ranges and Contract Levels

Opening Bids

In order to open the bidding a player's hand must contain a minimum of 13 points (combined HCPs and DPs). With 13 points, a player may either pass or open the bidding (at the one of a suit). With 14 or more points, a player must open the bidding.

Order of Preference

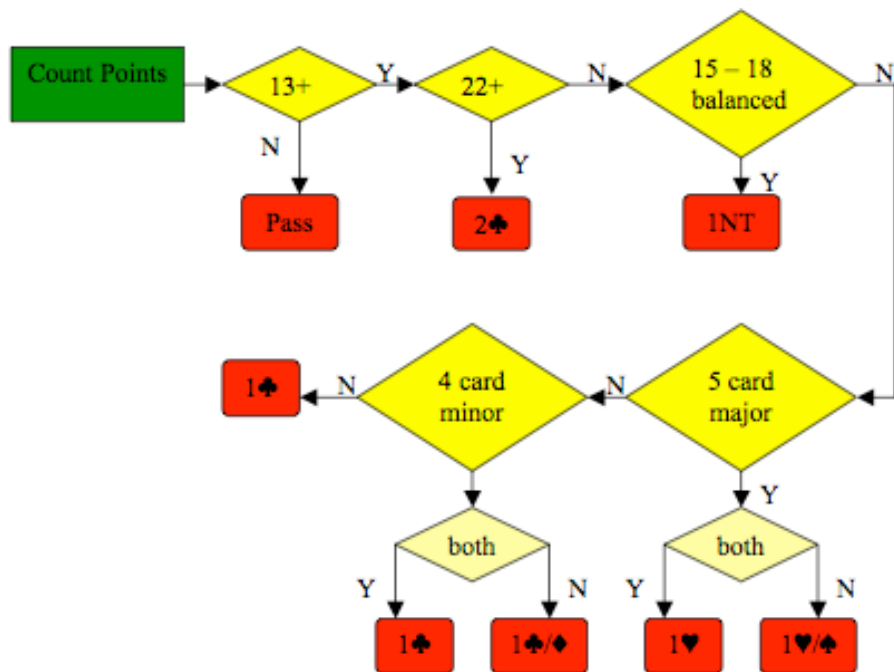


Figure 1: Opening Bids

When you get your hand first determine how many points it is worth. After establishing this number you should bid according to the Figure 1.

Note that the artificial 2♣ forcing bid is used for all hands with 22 or more points. After partner responds, with a balanced hand worth 22 – 24 HCP re-bid 2NT. While a re-bid of 3NT can be used to show a balanced 25 – 27 count, we recommend the Acol or Gambling 3NT (see the Conventions Section).

Responses from Partner

It is unwise to enter the auction with fewer the six points. That said, we proceed now in more detail.

Responses to 1♣/1♦/1♥/1♠

Responses to these openings can be broken down into three categories based on the value of responder's hand. Note that we recommend one Pass with fewer than six points. Note that all tables shows bids in descending order. Thus, in Table 3, two of partner's suit is preferred to one of a new suit.

Responding with 6 – 9 Points

Bid	Explanation
Single Raise	Shows support for partner's suit (limit response).
One of a New Suit	Shows a new suit. Denies support for partner's suit.
1NT	Shows 6 – 9 points, denies support for partner's suit, and denies a biddable suit at the one level (i.e. 1♦ - 1NT denies four card diamond support and denies a biddable (4 card) heart or spade suit.)

Table 3: Responses to One of a Suit with a Minimum

Responding with 10 – 12 Points

Here, game is likely, but not certain. With 10 – 12 points you basically need to stall. Bid your strongest suit. Do *not* make a single raise or partner's suit and do *not* bid 1NT. Wait for partner to re-bid to determine the strength of his hand.

Responding with 13 – 15 Points

Bid	Explanation
Double Raise (e.g. 1♠ - 3♠)	Shows support of partner's suit.
2NT	Shows a balanced hand with stoppers in the other three suits. Denies support of partner's suit.
New Suit at Lowest Level (e.g. 1♥ - 2♦)	Shows an unbalanced hand that cannot support partner's suit. Force partner to game with your re-bid.

Table 4: Responses to 1 of a Suit with a Semi-Strong Hand

Responding with 16+ Points

With a 16 count, you want to investigate slam. Remember, a double raise is *not* allowed nor is 2NT. With a balanced hand and stoppers in all the un-bid suits, bid 3NT. Otherwise, try a jump-shift. Note the following:

Sequence	Meaning
1♠ - 3♣ - 3♦/♥ - 3♠	Shows support for partner suit. Club suit must be treated as a <i>side</i> suit (could be 3—card suit headed by ace).
1♠ - 3♣ - 3♦/♥/♠ - 4♣	Denies support for partner's suit. Clubs is responders preferred suit (hand should be 18+)

Table 5: Meaning of Jump Shifts

Final Thoughts

Note that while some bids imply precise point ranges (1♠ - 2♠ or 1♠ - 3♠) while others are unlimited (1♥ - 1♠). The unlimited bids are shaded blue in Figure 2 while the bids specific to a given point range are in black. When bids are ambiguous, responder must clarify his original bid with his next bid.

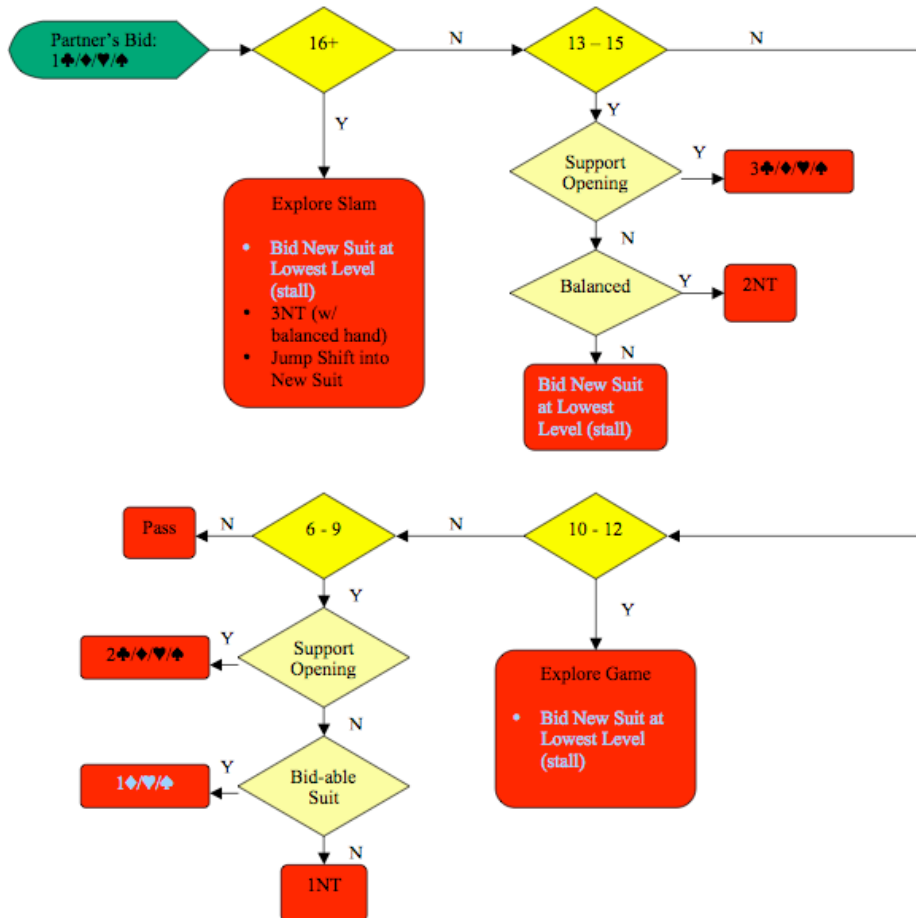


Figure 2: Responses to Suited Openings

Responses to 1NT

We recommend the use of the Stayman convention as well as Jacoby Transfer bids. We leave the 2♠ as unspecified and keep 2NT as a natural invite to game in no trump. Note that these bids can be used in other ways (e.g. minor suit transfers) but we leave them alone in this discussion.

Responding with a Balanced Hand

With a balanced hand, sometimes one chooses to use responses that are oft used for unbalanced hands—a Jacoby 2♦ bid for example¹. In this section we limit our discussion to bids that *require* a balanced hand.

If responder wishes to remain in a no trump contract, he should respond as follows (recall 1NT = 15 – 18 HCP).

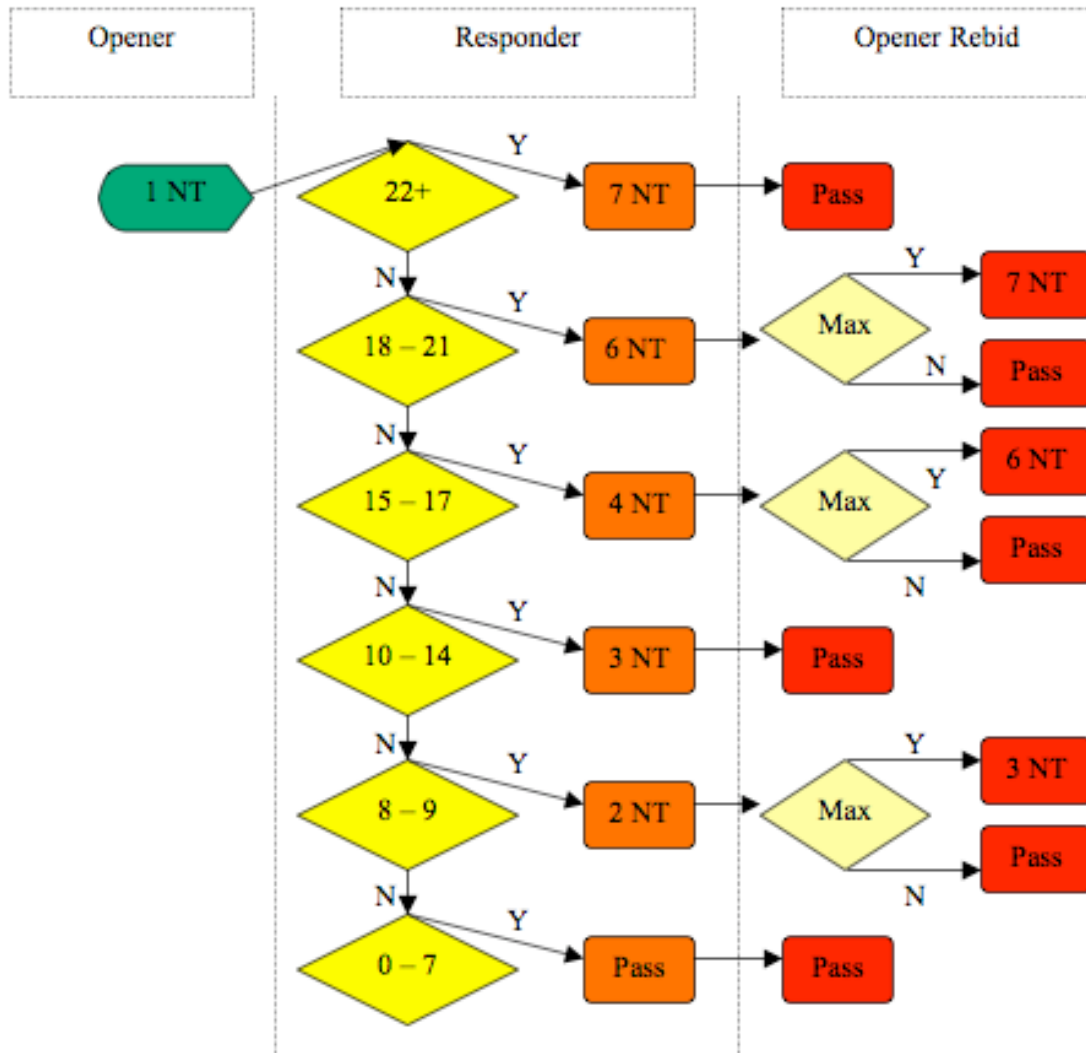


Figure 3 Responses to 1 NT with a Balanced Hand

¹ Perhaps responder finds a hand with 4-3-3-3 shape (i.e. balanced), 18 HCP (i.e. strong), and A-Q-J-T of hearts. With an eight-card heart fit, the partnership may do better in 6♥ than 6 NT.

Notice that some bids, although not most, require opener to make a rebid. His rebid is dictated *only* by his HCP. A maximum hand is one with 17 – 18 HCP while a minimum hand is one with 15 – 16 HCP.

Responding with an Unbalanced Hand

Stayman Convention (1NT - 2♣)

During the auction, finding an eight-card fit must be a primary goal of any constructive partnership. When partner opens 1 NT you have a great deal of information at your disposal, but partner’s strong / long suit (should it exist) is not yet available. With a hand ill-suited (no pun) for a no trump contract, the faster the partnership find an *eight or more card fit* the better—doubly so with weak responses (6-9 HCPs)! Further motivation for Stayman can be found in any reputable bridge book, instead, we focus on its execution.

The *uninterrupted* sequence 1 NT - 2♣ is unambiguously Stayman. Partner² is asking you to bid a four card major. Partner promises *at least* one four-card major. Partner may show up with four hearts and five spades, or five hearts and five spades but must never show up with three hearts and three spades. Responses are thus.

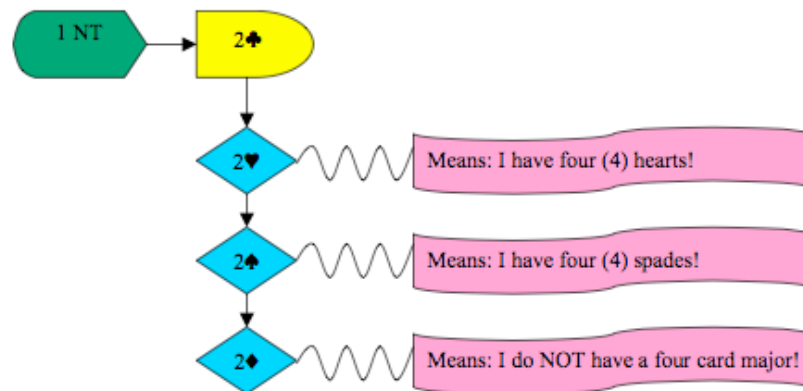


Figure 4 The Stayman Convention (Step 1)

Notice the *order* of the bids in Figure 4, they are very important. When partner bids Stayman, he expects you will respond, as appropriate *and* in the order as above. To clarify: if partner bids 2♣, you ask yourself, “Do I have 2♥?” (if you do, bid 2♥), if not, you ask, “Do I have 2♠?” (if you do, bid 2♠), and if not, your simply bid 2♦ to deny a four card major. As 2♦ is an artificial bid (i.e. implies nothing about partners diamond

² Assume that you have opened 1 NT and partner has bid Stayman.

holding) it must *never* be passed out³. There is one more thing worth noting before we move on. Due to the specific order of responses, we have a corollary of sorts :

*A bid of 2♥ does not deny a four card spade suit,
but a bid of 2♠ absolutely denies a four card heart suit.*

This implies partner could have bid 2♥ with an awful heart suit and an amazing four—card spade suit. The so-called “zero-th order” Stayman ends there, but the true convention is much richer, and thus, we proceed.

We must now consider rebids by the Stayman bidder⁴. There are many directions that can be taken because there is not upper-limit on the Stayman bid (and the only lower limit is 6 HCP, the minimum to make any response with). As such, we do are best to identify our hand to partner as quickly and “cheaply” (i.e. at the lowest level) as possible.

Rebid	Meaning
Two of a Major	Implies 8 - 9 HCPs, five cards in the <i>bid</i> major and four cards in the <i>other</i> major.
2 NT	Implies 8 - 9 HCPs and is invitational to game in no trump. By inference, the four card major held is in the <i>unbid</i> suit.
Three of a Minor	Implies no fewer than 10 HCPs and at least a five cars suit. This should be taken as game forcing and even a slam try.
Three of Unbid Major	Implies no fewer than 10 HCPs and four cards in the bid major. This should be taken as game forcing.
Raise to Three of a Major	Shows 8 - 9 HCPs and is an invitation to game. If partner responds with 3 NT, correct to 4 of the bid major as needed.
3 NT	To play.
4 CS	Unambiguously Gerber.
Four of a Major	To play.
4 NT	<i>Quantitative</i> invitation to 6 NT.
Five of a Minor	Splinter bid to explore for slam.
Five of a Major	See Voluntary Bid of Five of a Major convention.
5 NT	Raise to 6 NT with a minimum and 7 NT with a maximum.
6 NT	To play.

Figure 5 Rebids by Stayman Bidder

³ With every rule comes the exception: with an absolute bust hand and 4-1-4-4 (maybe 4-0-4-5) shape (i.e. a diamond singleton / splinter)

⁴ Now assume partner has opened 1 NT and you have bid Stayman.

Jacoby Transfer Bids (1NT - 2♦/2♥)

Responses to the Strong 2♣