

## Lesson 3 – Opening Bids - Very Strong Hands

**Review:** So far you have learned that an opening bid of 1 of a suit (1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠) means 12-21 points and an opening bid of 1NT means exactly 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand. Lesson 3 will explain how to bid when you have 22+ pts. For this lesson, you need to learn only two new opening bids: **2♣** or **2NT**.

The opening bid of **2♣** is an **artificial bid** telling your partner that you have **22+ points**. It has nothing to do with the club suit. In fact, you might have no clubs in your hand. **2♣ is a “demand” bid, a forcing bid.** Your partner **MUST** respond unless there is an intervening bid



by opponent! It cannot be emphasized enough that **2♣** must be the **first bid** of the game to have this special meaning.

### Responding to Partner’s Opening Bid of 2♣: (2 choices)

Bridge players may use different bids to respond to a **2♣** opening bid, many of them codes (artificial bids). I recommend the following responses as they are relatively simple to learn: two responses only, both artificial bids (nothing to do with the suit bid).

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**(1) With 3 HCP or more, bid 2♦** which simply means **“Waiting.”** It’s like you are saying, “I’m waiting for you, Partner, to further describe your hand by indicating your best suit. We should have enough points for game in a major or NT.” Both of you should keep bidding until you reach the 3 level, so you can advance slowly in the bidding to describe your hands. Both need to be aware that game may not be attainable in a minor suit (29 points recommended), so if you cannot feel safe in a contract of 3NT (stoppers in all 4 suits) and cannot find an 8-card fit in a major, then you may have to stop bidding at the 3 or 4 level in a minor.

#### Opener’s Rebid after a 2♦ “waiting” response from partner:

Bid **2♥**, **2♠**, **3♣** or **3♦** to show 5 of a suit. Otherwise, use **2NT** to indicate a balanced hand and no 5-card suit. Responder still has a chance to show a 4-card major with the next bid at the 3 level so a fit can be found in a major if Opener has a 4-card major also. Basically, it’s the same as opening the bidding at the 1 level, except that you are starting to identify suits at the 2 level (or 3 level in a minor).

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**(2) With fewer than 3 points, bid 2♥** (another artificial bid) which means a “bust” hand. If playing bridge in a game where Master Points are awarded, this bid requires the use of the “alert” card. When Responder bids 2♥, Opener would immediately say, “Alert” and/or tap the Alert card on the table. At that point, the next opponent to bid could ask what it meant and Opener would say that it means fewer than 3 points. Opener will know that you cannot be depended on for much support. If Opener has the minimum 22 points, the hands may not be strong enough to reach game so a partscore may be the most that can be achieved. If Opener has more than 22 points, game may be there still, even with 3 pts or fewer. Much of this requires judgment. By responding **2♥**, you are saying, “It’s all up to you, Partner. I don’t have much to offer and I probably will not bid again.”

With exactly 3 HCP, you should make a careful decision and use some judgment. For example, with a King, bid 2♦ (waiting). With 3 Jacks (strength is dissipated), consider bidding 2♥. Some books recommend 4+ pts for a 2♦ (waiting) response. Your bidding will not always be perfect.

**Very Important!** If any player opened the bidding and the opponent overcalled 2♣, that bid is describing a good club suit. It is not an artificial bid. Always be alert! In order to have the meaning of a very strong hand, 2♣ must be the first opening bid for that game. (Other players may have passed, but no one has bid yet.)

**2NT:** With **20-21 points** and a balanced hand (no voids, no singletons and no more than one doubleton), open with **2NT**.



### Responding to a 2NT Opening Bid:

"The Easy Way" - Simplified response when not using Stayman or Jacoby:

With fewer than 5 points, pass.

With 5 or more points and a balanced hand, bid **3NT**.

With 5 or more points and a 5-card major, bid the major at the 3 Level.

"StayJac" - Using Stayman and Jacoby:

Both players should be on high alert if using these conventions. All 3-level responses are now "codes," just as the 2-level responses were codes after a 1NT opening bid.

Responder can use Stayman and Jacoby in the same way as after a 1NT opening bid.

However, after a 2NT opening bid, Responder needs only 5 pts to take the partnership to game level in 4 of a major (with an 8-card fit) or 3NT.

Therefore, when using these conventions after opening **2NT**, all of the 3 Level bids by partner are artificial, as follows: **3♣** means Stayman, asking for a 4-card major; **3♦** means transfer to Hearts, **3♥** means transfer to Spades. You and your partner must be very clear on which system you are using (conventions or no conventions).

If you have at least 9 points and a long minor, consider Game in a minor (**5♣** or **5♦**). Judgment and experience is needed when deciding between game in a minor or 3NT when responder has an unbalanced hand. Remember, you can lose only 2 tricks to make a game contract in a minor whereas in 3NT, you need to take just 9 tricks (therefore, can lose 4 tricks), and you could get a higher score in 3NT if it is makeable. On the other hand, it's better to be in a minor suit contract and make it than to be in 3NT and not make it. Responder must also consider transportation to the dummy hand which takes experience and judgment.

### Opener's Rebid with 22+ HCP and a balanced hand:

With **22-24 HCP and a balanced hand**, open **2♣** (forcing) and then rebid **2NT**.

Consider this 2NT rebid as an opening bid — "systems are on" for Stayman and Jacoby.

With **25-27 HCP and a balanced hand**, open **2♣** (forcing) and then rebid **3NT**.

This applies whether responder bids 2♦ or 2♥. With 24 HCP, rebid 3NT if partner responds 2♥, since partner may pass Opener's 2NT rebid and Opener needs only 1 HCP for game.