

Hamilton Bridge Centre

Bidding Strong Hands

Finally, you have a good hand. What now?



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What Is A "Good" Hand?

For the purpose of this article, there are two types of good hands:

1. Hands with 22+ high card points.
2. Hands with at least 9 playing tricks.

Everyone knows how to count points, so I won't bother with an example of the first type. The second type would be a hand something like this:

Example 1

♠ A K Q 10 8 7 2
 ♥ A 6
 ♦ K Q 3
 ♣ 7

This hand is worth 9 tricks in a spade contract. You expect to take seven spade tricks, the ace of hearts, and one diamond.

Opening A Strong Hand

Open either type of strong hand with 2♣. This is an "artificial" bid that specifically shows a strong hand with 22+ points or 9 playing tricks. It says nothing about the club suit.

Your opening bid of 2♣ is absolutely forcing. Your partner must respond; how to respond is the next topic.

Responding To A 2♣ Opening Bid

The advice presented here is what the majority of players use. There are other systems for responding to a 2♣ opening bid, but they're best left to more experienced players to experiment with.

Most of the time, your responding bid will be 2♦ (there is one exception, which we'll get to shortly). Again, this is an "artificial" bid that says nothing about your point count or your distribution. It's referred to as "2♦ waiting". All of the following hands would respond 2♦:

Example 2

♠ 8 6 3 2
 ♥ 7 6 3
 ♦ 9 7 4
 ♣ 5 3 2

This is about the worst hand you can have. Still, a 2♣ opening is forcing, so you have to bid.

Example 3

♠ Q 6 3 2
 ♥ Q 6 3
 ♦ 9 7 4
 ♣ 5 3 2

This is a little better. Still, respond 2♦.

Example 4

♠ A 10 3 2
 ♥ K 9 3
 ♦ 9 7 4
 ♣ 5 3 2

You have a good hand for your partner. Still, start with 2♦.

Example 5

♠ A 9
 ♥ 7
 ♦ J 10 9 8 4 3 2
 ♣ 5 3 2

Having long diamonds is accidental. Respond 2♦ only.

Example 6

♠ 9 8 4 3 2
 ♥ 10 7 3
 ♦ A 9
 ♣ 5 3 2

Avoid the temptation to bid spades; your hand isn't good enough. Respond 2♦ only.

When do you respond with something other than 2♦? Only when you have a five card (or longer) suit that contains at least two of the top three honours (ie, at least two of the ace, king, or queen), and at least 8 high card points. In this case, you respond in your suit (2♥, 2♠, 3♣, or 3♦). Here are two examples:

Example 7

♠ K Q 9 4 2
 ♥ 10 7 3
 ♦ 8 6
 ♣ 5 3 2

Your spade suit is good enough to respond 2♠, but your hand isn't strong enough. Respond 2♦, then bid the spades on your next turn.

Example 8

♠ K Q 9 4 2
 ♥ A 7 3
 ♦ 8 6
 ♣ 5 3 2

Your spade suit is good enough to respond 2♠, and your hand is now strong enough.

Example 9

♠ A 4
 ♥ 10 7 3
 ♦ 5 3
 ♣ K Q 10 8 7 4

The good club suit and nine points makes this hand worth a 3♣ response. If you only had five clubs to the king and queen, a 2♦ response ("waiting") might be better. This applies to minor suits only; with major suits (like Example 8), always show the major.

Opener's Rebid With 22+ Points

With 22+ high card points, opener will bid notrump (with a balanced hand) or a suit (with a hand unsuitable for notrump).

With balanced hands, a bid of 2 NT shows 22 to 24 points, while a bid of 3 NT shows 25 to 27 points. A suit bid generally promises five or more cards in the suit, but doesn't show a point range (only that it's 22+).

Responding To Opener's Second Bid

If opener has bid notrump, responder adds his points to the minimum that opener has shown, and raises the notrump bid accordingly. To make 3 NT, the combined point count should be at least 26 (25 if your partner plays the hands well). To make 6 NT, you need 32 points. To make 7 NT, you need 37. Use 4♣ (Gerber) to check for aces and kings if you are thinking about slam. If you don't have enough points to raise partner's notrump bid, then pass.

If partner has bid 2 NT, and you have at least one four card major, you can bid 3♣ (Stayman) to check for a major suit fit, and you can use Jacoby transfer bids (3♦ as a transfer to hearts, or 3♥ as a transfer to spades). For Stayman, you must have enough points for game or slam (at least 4 for game, or 10 for slam). If partner has a four card major, play the game or slam in the major suit; otherwise, play in notrump. Stayman and transfers do not apply over any higher notrump bid.

If opener has bid a suit, then responder must bid again regardless of point count (or lack thereof).

- With a weak hand (less than 4 points) and no support for partner's suit, rebid 3♣ (unless partner has bid clubs, in which case bid 3♦, or partner has bid diamonds, in which case bid 3 NT). Again, this bid says nothing about your suit, only that you have a horrible hand. If opener rebids his suit you are allowed to pass; otherwise, you must bid again.
- If you have a weak hand (less than 4 points) with support for partner's suit, jump to game in partner's suit.
- If you have a good hand (4+ points) with no support for partner's suit, bid a suit of your own. The strength of your suit doesn't matter; if you had two of the top three honours, you would have bid your suit immediately over 2♣, so partner will know your suit is not that good. This rebid is forcing to game. Avoid bidding notrump (notrump should be bid by the stronger hand).
- If you have a good hand (4+ points) with support for partner's suit, make a single raise (combined points should be 26 for a major suit game, 29 for a minor suit game).

Example 10

♠ 8 6
♥ 7 6 3
♦ 9 7 4 2
♣ 9 5 3 2

After the initial 2♣/2♦ sequence, your partner bids 2♠. You don't have spade support (you need at least 3), so you bid 3♣ to show a bad hand. If partner rebids 3♠ you are allowed to pass. If partner bids a new suit, you have to bid something (but not notrump). If partner bids diamonds, raise them. If partner bids hearts, go back to spades.

Example 11

♠ 8 6 4
♥ 7 6
♦ 9 7 4 2
♣ 9 5 3 2

Assume the same auction as the previous example. Now, you have a weak hand with three card spade support, so jump to 4♠. This jump to game warns partner that although you have spade support, you also have a weak hand.

Example 12

♠ Q 6 4
♥ 7 6
♦ A 7 4 2
♣ 8 5 3 2

Assume the same auction as the previous example. Now, you have three card spade support with a good hand, so bid 3♠ only. This provides an extra level of bidding space to investigate slam possibilities.

Example 13

♠ 9 6
♥ 7 6
♦ A J 7 4 2
♣ 9 5 3

Assume the same auction as the previous example. Now, you have a good hand without spade support. Bid 3♦. You can't bid diamonds the first time because you don't have two of the top three honours.

Opener's Rebid With 9 Tricks

These are hands that open 2♣ based on offensive strength, rather than high card points. Therefore, opener's rebid is simple: bid game in the long suit.

Example 14

♠ A K Q 10 8 7 2
♥ A 6
♦ K Q 3
♣ 7

This is the hand from Example 1. Open 2♣, and over partner's usual 2♦ (waiting) response, bid 4♠. If partner makes a positive response in clubs your hand doesn't improve, so bid 4♠ anyway. If partner makes a positive response in diamonds or hearts, you should be thinking about slam. Use Blackwood and proceed accordingly.