

Hamilton Bridge Centre

Responding To Reverses

A structured approach to showing your hand.



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Introduction

Before you continue with this article, it is essential that you and your partner have both read and understood the article on [reverses](#).

This article relies heavily on material presented by Root and Pavlicek in their excellent book, "Modern Bridge Conventions". The book title in this case is a bit of a misnomer, because a reverse is **not** a convention; it's an integral part of Standard American bidding. Still, their recommendations are the best I've seen for a topic that mystifies a lot of people (including some experienced players).

Like most of the articles in this series, you and your partner have to be on the same wavelength. This is particularly important when responding to reverses, because mutual understanding of the bids is critical to avoiding disaster, especially when responder has a weak hand.

Reverses After A One Level Suit Response

After a one-level suit response, a reverse is forcing for one round. Responder must make a second bid.

Here's an example of a reverse by opener after a response at the one level:

Example 1

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	??	

Since North has reversed, **South must bid again**.

North's reverse shows 16 to 18 points. Therefore, South's second bid must tell North whether the hand belongs in a part score or in game. South should settle for a part score when holding 6 to 7 points, but insist on game holding 8 points or more. Keep in mind that **South makes the decision** on whether to settle for a part score or a game. North should not overrule South's decision.

Responder's Second Bid (Part Score Hands)

Responder has a "part score hand" when he holds 6 or 7 points. His second bid not only describes this minimum point count, but also tells something about his distribution.

There are two bids, and two bids only, that show a minimum hand (6 or 7 points). The first bid is 2 NT, and the second is a rebid of the original suit. Which one do you choose?

- If you responded originally in a four-card suit, your second bid is 2 NT. **This is a strictly artificial bid, and must be alerted by**

your partner. It does not mean you want to play notrump; it simply means you've responded on a four card suit with a weak hand.

- If you responded originally in a five-card (or longer) suit, your second bid is a rebid of your suit. **This bid must also be alerted, because it shows a weak hand.**

Let's look at two example hands for the auction shown in Example 1:

Example 1 (Repeated)

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	??	

Hand 1
 ♠ A 10 7 3
 ♥ Q 10 3
 ♦ 10 8 6 4
 ♣ 8 3

Hand 2
 ♠ A 10 9 7 3
 ♥ Q 10 3
 ♦ 8 6 4
 ♣ 8 3

In Hand 1, your original response was in a four-card suit. Therefore, your second bid is 2 NT, showing four spades and a 6 or 7 point hand.

In Hand 2, your original response was in a five-card suit, Therefore, your second bid is 2♠, showing five spades and a 6 or 7 point hand.

How Does Opener Continue?

Once you have shown a "part score hand" using one of the above bids, opener will sign off in what he believes to be the best part score. Let's look at some examples.

Example 2

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2 NT	Pass
??			

In Example 2, responder has shown a weak hand (6 or 7 points) with a four-card spade suit. Opener has only one "sign off" bid: 3 of his original suit (in this case, 3♦). Responder may pass this bid, or correct to 3 of opener's second suit (in this case, 3♥). This correction is not forcing. These are the only two actions responder can take.

Let's look at some example hands for responder after the following auction:

Example 3

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3♦	Pass	??	

Hand 1 ♠ A 10 7 3 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ 10 8 6 4 ♣ 8 3	Hand 2 ♠ A 10 7 3 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ 8 6 4 ♣ 9 8 3	Hand 3 ♠ A 10 7 3 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ 10 8 ♣ 9 8 7 3	Hand 4 ♠ A 10 7 3 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ 10 ♣ 9 8 7 6 3
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For Hand 1 and Hand 2, 3♦ looks like the best spot; responder should pass. Hand 3 is a judgment call: 3♥ is probably a better spot (and will score higher in matchpoints if it makes). With Hand 4, 3♥ is the only sensible choice.

Now, let's consider opener's action when responder has rebid his suit.

Example 4

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
??			

In Example 4, responder has shown a weak hand (6 or 7 points) with a five-card spade suit. Opener now has three "sign off" bids available: pass, 2 NT, or 3 of his original suit (in this case, 3♦). Let's look at some example hands for opener relative to Example 4:

Hand 1 ♠ Q 10 3 ♥ A K 4 3 ♦ A K 8 7 6 ♣ 6	Hand 2 ♠ 10 3 ♥ A Q 8 6 ♦ A K 10 5 4 ♣ K J 8	Hand 3 ♠ 10 3 ♥ A K J 3 ♦ A K Q 7 4 ♣ 8 6	Hand 4 ♠ 10 ♥ A K J 3 ♦ A K Q 7 4 ♣ 8 6 3
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With Hand 1, pass is the best option. Opener knows that the partnership has an eight-card spade fit, and opener's red suit honour cards will be quite helpful. Also, opener's club singleton provides some ruffing value.

With Hand 2, 2 NT is best. This bid promises a stopper in the unbid suit (clubs), and shows a doubleton in responder's suit (spades). This bid is a suggestion only; responder may bid again. Responder should return to his original suit (spades) holding six of them, or raise one of opener's suits with appropriate support (three cards in opener's first suit, three or four cards in opener's second suit).

With Hand 3 or Hand 4, 3♦ is probably best. Opener does not have a stopper in the unbid suit (clubs), and does not have support for responder's suit (spades). Responder should now pass, correct to 3♥, or rebid his original suit (spades) holding six of them.

Responder's Second Bid (Game Hands)

Responder has a "game hand" after opener's reverse when holding 8 or more points.

There are two bids responder **cannot make** after a one-level response with a good hand (8 or more points): either of the weakness signals from the previous section. Specifically, responder cannot bid 2 NT or rebid his suit. So what does responder do to show a good hand after a one level response? Let's consider the auction in Example 1 again:

Example 1 (Repeated)

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	??	

1. **Raise one of opener's suits.**

An immediate raise of one of opener's suits promises an eight-card fit and at least 8 points.

2. **Bid 3 NT.**

This promises a stopper in the unbid suit but denies adequate support for either of opener's suits.

3. **Bid the fourth suit.**

This shows game-forcing values but no obvious rebid. Essentially, it's a "waiting" bid asking for opener to further describe his hand. It's useful to play that it **denies** a stopper in the fourth suit; with a stopper in the fourth suit, responder should bid 3 NT if that looks like the right game.

Reverses After A 1 NT Response

When opener reverses after an initial 1 NT response (which shows 6 to 9 points), responder's second bid must distinguish between "part score hands" (6 to 7 points) and "game hands" (8 to 9 points).

Example 5

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 ♦	Pass	1 NT	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	??	

Part Score Hands

Responder chooses from the following bids to show a "part score hand" (6 to 7 points):

1. **2 NT**

Unlike before, when responder started with one of a suit, this 2 NT bid is **natural**. It is a discouraging bid that denies adequate support for either of partner's suits. Responder will hold a hand something like this:

♠ Q 10 8
 ♥ 8 4 3
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ A 10 6 5 4

If opener bids again over the 2 NT rebid, opener is showing more extreme distribution (generally six cards in the first suit and five cards in the second). Responder should reevaluate his hand and decide whether an additional bid is warranted. Holding the above hand, responder should raise a 3 ♥ rebid to 4 ♥, since opener is showing extra distributional values and you now have adequate heart support.

2. **Preference to opener's first suit**

When opener reverses in his second suit, responder may return to opener's first suit with adequate support. This just shows a preference for that suit; it is **not forcing**. Responder will hold a hand something like this:

♠ Q 10 8
 ♥ 8 4
 ♦ 6 4 3
 ♣ A 10 6 5 4

Holding this hand, responder should rebid 3 ♦.

Game Hands

Responder chooses from the following bids to show a "game hand" (8 to 9 points):

Example 5 (Repeated)

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 ♦	Pass	1 NT	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	??	

1. **3 NT**

Pretty obvious; you've bid game. Partner should pass. You must hold at least one stopper in the unbid suit.

2. **A raise of opener's second suit**

This promises three-card support only. This bid is forcing to game. You can't hold four-card heart support, otherwise you would have responded 1 ♥ on your first turn, instead of 1 NT.

3. **A new suit**

This is natural if it's a minor suit, but shows a stopper only if it's a major (if you had a real major suit to bid, you would have shown it on your first turn).

Reverses After A Two Level Suit Response

This section is fairly short for two reasons:

1. It doesn't happen often. When opener reverses, responder rarely has ten points or more.
2. All reverses after a two level suit response are forcing to game. Therefore, there are no "artificial" bids needed to show weak hands.

After a two-level suit response, **responder is in charge of the auction**. Opener has limited his hand regarding strength (16 to 18 points) and distribution (normally five cards in the first suit, and four in the second). Therefore, it is responder's responsibility to decide which game is best, or to investigate slam possibilities. Let's look at some sample hands after the following auction:

Example 6

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 ♦	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	??	

Hand 1
 ♠ K 10 3
 ♥ J 4 3
 ♦ 7 6
 ♣ A Q 10 4 3

Hand 2
 ♠ J 3
 ♥ K J 8 6
 ♦ 10 5
 ♣ A Q 10 8 4

Hand 3
 ♠ A 10
 ♥ K J 9 3
 ♦ 7 4
 ♣ A K J 8 4

With Hand 1, South bids 3 NT. This promises a stopper in the fourth suit (spades), denies adequate support for either of North's suits, and also denies interest in a slam.

With Hand 2, South bids 4 ♥. This promises adequate support for opener's suit, and denies interest in a slam. South made his first response in clubs rather than hearts because this hand is worth two voluntary bids. If South had a weaker hand (less than 10 points), he should have initially responded 1 ♥ instead of 2 ♣.

With Hand 3, South can envision a possible slam. South should start by bidding 3 ♥ to confirm the trump suit. This shows a better hand than the jump to 4 ♥ in Hand 2. As a rule of thumb, the better your hand, the slower the auction should go. North now knows that South has heart support with slam interest.



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