After a response at the one level, opener’s rebid of two notrump usually shows a balanced hand of about 19 high card points: a hand between a strong 1NT and a strong 2NT opening. Using standard methods, responder’s only weak action over opener’s strong 2NT rebid is to pass, and everything else is forcing. You can do better.

**Why Bother?**

In the *Walsh style*, responder always bypasses a diamond suit when holding a four card major, unless strong enough to force to game. Playing this way, you would respond 1♣ to partner’s 1♣ opening with:

♠K873 ♦7 ♠Q9752 ♠82

If opener rebids 2NT, you would like to sign off in 3♦, likely a much better contract. Similarly, if you do not have a weak jump shift available, you might respond 1♣ to partner’s 1♣ opening bid

♠KT8743 ♦72 ♠953 ♠82

The chance of making 2NT is slim, and you would like to offer 3♣ as a better final contract.

Pairs who respond “up the line” to 1♣ and who play weak jump shifts may still want to sign off in a suit, but it won’t happen as often. On the same auction, you would want opener to choose between playing 3♦ and 3♣:

♠KT874 ♦Q97 ♠53 ♠82

Finally, standard bidding does not distinguish between responder’s 4=4 and 4=5 forcing major hands. New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman can help with that (but not with signoffs).

**Issues for Responses to Opener’s Strong 2NT Rebid**

**Playability:** The partnership must be able to remember and employ the system, without undue effort. This must be the most important criterion, as you will have many sessions of bridge without a strong 2NT rebid.

**Artificial bids:** If you can remember them, artificial bids can help to describe more hands.

**Variation:** Under what conditions, if any, may opener do otherwise than instructed by responder?

**Strength:** Can responder handle signoff, game-forcing and slam auctions?

**Distributions:** Can responder handle these distributions?
- Majors: 4=4, 4=5, 5=4, 5=5, one-suiter
- Minors: 5=5, one-suiter
- 5-4-3-1 shapes

**Suit quality:** For game or slam purposes, is the quality of a suit or support good or bad?

**Related bidding methods:** Point range? Does responder bypass diamonds? Can opener hold a 4-card major?

**Auctions:** To what auctions does the system apply? These are the ten possibilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Suit Response (1)</th>
<th>Major Suit Response (5)</th>
<th>1NT Response (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1♣ – 1♦; 2NT</td>
<td>1♣/1♦/1♥ – 1♥/1♣; 2NT</td>
<td>1♣/1♦/1♥/1♣ – 1NT; 2NT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Systems
With the issues in mind, let's look at some systems of responses to opener's strong 2NT rebid.

**Standard:** In “standard” methods, jumps to game are natural signoffs, 4♣ is Gerber, and all other 3-level bids are natural and forcing. These meanings apply, if you have not agreed something else.

**New Minor Forcing:** Responder’s bid of three of an unbid minor is artificial and forcing, usually a major suit checkout. Without further agreement, all other bids are standard.

**Checkpoint Stayman:** Responder’s bid of 3♣ is a major suit checkout. Without further agreement, all other bids are standard. This leaves the 3♦ response available to be natural or artificial.

**Flint:** Named after Jeremy Flint, this may be the original non-standard approach permitting signoff. Responder’s 3♦ is a puppet to 3♣ for signoff in a major suit.

**Flint 3♣:** This modification of Flint is now the essence of “Wolff Signoff with Checkback”. Responder’s 3♣ is a puppet to 3♦ for signoff. 3♦ is a major suit checkback.

**Stoplight:** In the late 70s, Marvin French published this method of signing off. Similar to Flint 3♣, this bid says “stop, I’m light.” In addition to a 3♦ major suit checkback, 3♥ and 3♠ are artificial, showing forward-going club and diamond hands, respectively. Jumps to game show slam interest – go through 3♣ to deny slam interest. This is a complex but powerful system that also works over opener’s 1NT rebid.

**Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated:** 3♠ forces 3♦ for signoff, but if responder does not sign off, 3♣ becomes natural.

**Transfers (Bowles, Chen):** “3♣/3♥/3♦ are transfers, showing 4 cards if it’s a new suit, 5 cards if it’s responder’s suit, 3 cards if it’s opener’s suit. 3♣ shows a good hand with clubs. Four-level bids in new suits or opener’s suit are auto-splitners. Transfers to a new, lower suit, to responder’s first suit, or to opener’s suit might be weak. … Any further move by responder after a transfer is game forcing.” Andy Bowles describes this system in detail, especially conditions for opener to break the transfer. Mark Chen’s system is similar.

**Wolff Signoff (original):** The original version created by Bobby Wolff is described in *Aces Scientific* (1978). 3♣ requests opener to show 3-card support for responder’s major, or otherwise bid 3♦ to permit a signoff. If responder does not sign off, clubs becomes natural. In order to show a 4=4 major suit hand, you need to remember a bidding trick: after 1♠ – 1♦ – 2NT, an immediate 3♣ shows 4=5; bidding 3♣ first shows 4=4. Other than the 3♠ bid, all the other responses are standard. Lex DeGroot updates this system.

**Wolff Signoff with 3♣ Raise:** This recommended variant of Wolff is easily described as “3♣ is a puppet to 3♦ for signoff, 4-4 forcing, or slam try. 3♦ is an artificial raise of opener’s minor.” This system was attributed to George Rosenkranz on the web. In order to distinguish 4=4 from 4=5 in the majors, you need the trick described for “Wolff Signoff (original)” – often omitted from the simple description – for 4-4 forcing. See page 4.

**Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Checkback:** This variant is a rediscovery and expansion of Flint 3♣. The systems described by Max Hardy and Marshall Miles differ, and lots more ideas are online. Remembering this system proved difficult. On page 5, I offer a version that we tried. After 1m - 1M; 2NT - 3♣; 3♦, options for 3OM include: [1] natural, 3♥ weak, 3♠ =4-4; [2] natural, exactly 4 cards, [3] natural, 5-5; [4] artificial slam try in other minor.

**Note on Wolff methods:** If you play Walsh style, as I prefer, definitely require opener to bid 3♦ over a Wolff 3♣, in case responder wants to pass. When responding “up the line” to 1♣, you may choose to permit (or require) opener to show 3-card support for responder’s major. However, never permit opener to answer an unbid major over 3♣, except possibly with 3=4 majors, to assure reaching a desirable contract at the 3-level.
## Comparison of Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responder's hands (●=full, ○=partial)</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>New Minor Forcing</th>
<th>Checkback</th>
<th>Stayman</th>
<th>Flint</th>
<th>Stoplight</th>
<th>Kaplan-Sheinwold</th>
<th>Transfers</th>
<th>Wolff (original)</th>
<th>Wolff with 3d Raise</th>
<th>Wolff with 3d Checkback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>weak long suit other than clubs</td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak 5=4 or 5=5 majors</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>strong 4=4 majors</td>
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<tr>
<td>strong 5=4 majors</td>
<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>strong 4=5 majors</td>
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<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>strong 5=5 majors</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>strong 6=4 majors</td>
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<td>strong 4=6 majors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-level slam try in opener's minor</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong 5-4-3-1 hands</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ways to 4 of responder's major</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Weak long suit other than clubs:** This measures the ability of responder to force a signoff in the suit of his choice at the 3-level. This is a key feature for those playing Walsh style, where a weak response in a major suit could conceal a 6-card diamond suit.

**Strong 4=4 majors:** Only a checkback bid (or a bidding trick that you have to memorize) will distinguish between 4=4 and 4=5 (four spades and five hearts) in the majors.

**Strong 5=5 majors:** Only a checkback bid (with natural/transfer majors) will distinguish between 5=4 and 5=5 in the majors at the 3-level. This could be important: opener might not have three cards in either major. The direct bid of 3♥ (after a 1♠ response) should promise five or more hearts – otherwise use the checkback bid.

**3-level slam try in opener's minor:** Only a few systems offer a forcing slam try in either opener’s club or diamond suit at the 3-level. Some systems offer a non-forcing slam try at 3NT, after some artificial bid.

**Strong 5-4-3-1 hands:** A transfer to a second suit can be followed by a bid in the 3-card fragment, as a slam try. However, transfers do not appear as good for some other distributions.

**Ways to 4 of responder's major:** In all these systems, responder may jump to game in the major, usually a signoff. The only other way to get there in standard bidding is to make a natural, forcing bid at the 3-level, and the equivalent again exists in all systems except Stoplight. A 3♣ signoff, followed by a leap to game, can be used to make a slam try, possibly with a broken suit, helping to clarify the direct 3-level force. A checkback bid adds another way, and further clarifies the direct 3-level force. More ways are better, but more complicated.
Recommended: Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Raise

The initial response was one of a suit, and opener rebids 2NT:

- 3♣ requires opener to bid 3♦, so responder may:
  - Sign off: Responder may pass 3♦, sign off in his major, or offer a choice of major suit part scores at 3♦ (having previously bid spades). Opener may elect to convert any signoff to game with a big fit.
  - Force, 4-4: Responder’s reverse to 3♦ or 3♠ shows a forcing 4-4 hand – a key bidding trick: 1m – 1♦; 2NT – 3♣; 3♦ – 3♠ is forcing with 4-4 majors. 1♠ – 1♦; 2NT – 3♣; 3♦ – 3♠/3♣ shows a strong hand with four cards in diamonds and the bid suit, possibly 4-4-4-1.
  - Invite slam, 6+: 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠ promises 6+ cards, if responder’s first suit. Opener may pass, bid 4NT to ask for key cards, or cue bid.

Optional Basic Rebands after 3♣; 3♦

- Invite slam in clubs: Responder’s 3NT is a mild slam try in clubs.
- Sign off in clubs: Responder’s 4♣ shows a bad hand with a long, bad suit.
- Four-level force: 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, if not responder’s first suit, shows shape and is forcing to 4NT.
- Responses to the four-level force:
  - Opener’s 4NT is natural, discouraging slam.
  - Opener’s bid of responder’s first suit is a true preference, sets trump, and is forcing to 5.
  - Opener’s bid of 5♣ [or 4♦] asks for keycards in responder’s second suit.
  - Opener’s other bids are natural, with some defect for slam or notrump purposes.

Optional Advanced Rebands after 3♣; 3♦

- Sign off in clubs: Responder’s 3NT shows a bad hand with a long, bad club suit. Opener may pass to convert to game, perhaps with ♣AKx. (Can you remember this?)
- Four-level force: 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, if not responder’s first suit, shows shape and is forcing to 4NT. (4♠ should be most likely.)

- Slam try in opener’s suit: 3♦ is an artificial slam try. After a minor suit opening, any subsequent bid of four of the other minor (not opener’s) is Crosswood, asking for keycards.
- Gerber: 4♠ asks for aces
- Roman Keycard Gerber: 4♠ asks for keycards in responder’s suit

Everything else is based on standard. Over opener’s 2NT:

- Force in a major: 3♥ or 3♠ is natural and forcing, 5+ cards if the original suit, and at least 5-4 if bidding a new suit. Bidding both majors and then removing 3NT to the second major is a non-forcing slam try with at least 5-5 (jump to 4♥ over 2NT with a weaker hand). If 3♥ or 3♠ is a reverse after a 1♥ response, 4♠ would be Crosswood by either partner, since diamonds have been provisionally raised.
- Slam in notrump: 4NT is natural and invitational. A direct 5NT is natural and forcing, inviting a grand slam.
- Jump to game: 3NT/4♥/4♠/5♠/5♦ are to play, but may be converted to responder’s first suit.

The initial response was 1NT: Play standard on this auction (all bids forcing), with one exception:

- Responder’s bid of opener’s major suit is weak, suggesting that opener pass. This is the handle case where responder has bid 1NT with a bad supporting hand.

Interference: With interference before the 2NT bid, Wolff Signoff should remain in effect when opener’s 2NT rebid is natural and still shows about 19 HCP in a balanced hand.

With interference at 2NT or higher, Wolff is off:

- If 2NT is doubled, redouble is strong (likely balanced) and doubles are penalty. All responder’s non-reverse 3-level bids are to play, including 3♠. Responder’s reverse promises at least 4=5 and is forcing.
- If the opponents bid a suit over 2NT, bad hands pass, and bids are forcing. Responder’s 3NT does not promise a stopper. Responder’s double shows a stopper and may be converted for penalty or to 3NT.

Convention Card Description: The Lee Edwards “ACBL Editor” will fit this on one line, on the bottom of the card:

1x-1y-2NT: 4♣ =RKG y; 3♦=raise of x (slam); 3♠ ->3♦ for signoff/4-4 force/slam; other std.
### Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Checkback: 1m – 1M; 2NT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3♣</td>
<td>Puppet to 3♦ for signoff or slam try. After 3♦: 3♦ or 3♣ is to play (may correct 3♦ to 3♣); 3NT is a mild slam try in opener's minor; 4♦/4♦ is a natural slam try with a broken 5-card or longer suit; 4♦/4♠ is a natural slam try with a broken suit or weak support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3♦</td>
<td>Major suit checkback, promises either 5 cards in original major or 4 in the other, or both, possibly 6=4. opener bids 4-card major with both. Responder’s next bid:  - 3NT &amp; 4NT natural, with the other major  - 4♠ &amp; 4♦ are cue bids confirming a major suit fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3♥</td>
<td>Natural, forcing: a strong 6-card suit with slam interest if hearts is original major; otherwise 5=5 majors, at least game forcing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3♠</td>
<td>Natural, forcing: a strong 6-card suit with slam interest if spades is the original major; otherwise 4=6 majors, at least game forcing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3NT</td>
<td>Natural, to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4♣</td>
<td>Natural slam try, good suit or support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4♦</td>
<td>Natural slam try, good suit or support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4♥</td>
<td>Natural, to play in responder’s suit. Otherwise, a splinter in support of responder’s suit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4♠</td>
<td>Natural, to play in responder’s suit. Otherwise, a splinter in support of responder’s suit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4NT</td>
<td>Natural, quantitative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5♣</td>
<td>Gerber for Aces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The minimum for a “strong” suit or support is defined as two of the top three honors. If an 8-card or longer fit (major or minor) is known to both partners, 4NT is RKC; otherwise quantitative. If 4NT is RKC, the unbid suit below 4NT may be an attempt to sign off in 4NT. Otherwise, unbids suits at the 4-level are cue bids.

### References

1. *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century*, Max Hardy, pp. 89-93, “The Wolff Signoff” and “Major Suit Checkbacks”.
11. rec.games.bridge newsroup, especially: Response by Andy Bowles (1997/01/11) to “Transfer responses to notrump rebid?”
14. Discussions with Gary Schwartz – this is our plan.

Selected, more recent references on Wolff – many conflicting opinions: