

# Bridge Bidding Systems after Opener Rebids 2NT

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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 ♦Q97532 ♣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 on

♠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 ♥Q972 ♦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 Rebids

**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:

Minor Suit Response (1)	Major Suit Response (5)	1NT Response (4)
1♣ – 1♦; 2NT	1♣/1♦/1♥ – 1♥/1♠; 2NT	1♣/1♦/1♥/1♠ – 1NT; 2NT

## 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 checkback. Without further agreement, all other bids are standard.

**Checkback Stayman:** Responder's bid of 3♣ is a major suit checkback. 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-splinters. 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

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

**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 Spotlight. 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.

<b>Optional Basic Rebids after 3♣; 3♦</b>	<b>Optional Advanced Rebids after 3♣; 3♦</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Invite slam in clubs:</i> Responder's 3NT is a mild slam try in clubs.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sign off in clubs:</i> 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?)
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sign off in clubs:</i> Responder's 4♣ shows a bad hand with a long, bad suit.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Four-level force:</i> 4♣, 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, if not responder's first suit, shows shape and is forcing to 4NT. (4♣ should be most likely.)
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Four-level force:</i> 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, if not responder's first suit, shows shape and is forcing to 4NT.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Responses to the four-level force:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Opener's 4NT is natural, discouraging slam.</li> <li>▪ Opener's bid of responder's first suit is a true preference, sets trump, and is forcing to 5.</li> <li>▪ Opener's bid of 5♣ [or 4♦] asks for keycards in responder's second suit.</li> <li>▪ Opener's other bids are natural, with some defect for slam or notrump purposes.</li> </ul>	

- *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 handles the 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.

	<b>Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Checkback: 1m – 1M; 2NT</b> ( <i>one of many competing, hard to remember schemes</i> )
<b>3♣</b>	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.
<b>3♦</b>	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3NT &amp; 4NT natural, with the other major</li> <li>• 4♣ &amp; 4♦ are cue bids confirming a major suit fit</li> </ul>
<b>3♥</b>	Natural, forcing: a strong 6-card suit with slam interest if hearts is original major; otherwise 5=5 majors, at least game forcing.
<b>3♠</b>	Natural, forcing: a strong 6-card suit with slam interest if spades is the original major; otherwise 4=6 majors, at least game forcing.
<b>3NT</b>	Natural, to play
<b>4♣</b>	Natural slam try, good suit or support.
<b>4♦</b>	Natural slam try, good suit or support.
<b>4♥</b>	Natural, to play in responder's suit. Otherwise, a splinter in support of responder's suit.
<b>4♠</b>	Natural, to play in responder's suit. Otherwise, a splinter in support of responder's suit.
<b>4NT</b>	Natural, quantitative.
<b>5♣</b>	Gerber for Aces
	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, unbid suits at the 4-level are cue bids.

## References

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