

Opening 2♣; Tips for Responder and Opener

- As a review, in both standard American and 2/1, 2♣ is strong, artificial and forcing. It is used to show hands that have 22 or more high card points when balanced. Unbalanced hands can have fewer high card points but must have great defense and fear that a one level bid might get passed out.

♠ AKQT9742 ♥ A7 ♦ T ♣ A8

- The above hand only has 17 high card points, but every bridge player playing SA should open it 2♣ as the hand will make game in spades on its own 98% or so of the time.
- Here are the three biggest mistakes that I think bridge players make after a 2♣ opener
 1. The 2♣ opener falls in love with his or her hand too much (#1 by far!).
 2. Responder does not appreciate the value of what is normally a weak hand.
 3. The 2♣ opener opens the "wrong" type of hand with that opening (more later).

♠ AK7	♠ 8652
♥ AQ83	♥ 9742
♦ A	♦ Q832
♣ KQ987	♣ A

At my table, the auction went:

2♣ - 2♦* (*2♦ = game forcing in this system)
3♣ - 3♥
4NT - 5♦** (** 1 ace)
5NT - 6♣*** (***) 0 kings
6♥

Opener was guilty of falling in love with his hand as the trumps were not good enough to make 6♥. The West hand is an incredibly good hand compared to the average hand you'll pick up, but is a minimum in the context of having opened 2♣. Can you suggest what opener might have done differently? Could responder have done better as well?

- 2♣ auctions are often not easy because starting at 2♣ preempts the auction significantly.

The best hands to open 2♣ are:

- 22-24 HCP, balanced (open 2♣, rebid 2NT)
- One suited with spades (open 2♣, rebid 2♠)
- One suited with hearts (open 2♣, rebid 2♥)

Hands where opening 2♣ is OK

- 25-27 HCP, balanced (open 2♣, rebid 3NT)
 - Please note that these hands MUST be opened 2♣ and bid this way. I say that it is only OK because the auction gets so high so quickly and responder's options are limited.
- Two suited with hearts & spades (open 2♣, rebid 2♠ over 2♦, and then bid hearts)
- One suited with clubs (open 2♣, rebid 3♣)

Hands where opening 2♣ is usually awkward:

- Hands with 4-4-4-1 shape
 - There usually isn't enough room to show all three suits. Consider rebidding no-trump with these hands (especially if the singleton is an ace or king).
- Major/minor two suiters
- One suited with diamonds (the wrong hand usually plays it)
- Minor two suiters (the absolute worst!)

The awkward hands should be opened at the one level if at all possible. Opener should then:

1. Jump shift – 19+ HCP, forcing to game opposite a response (1♠-1NT; 3♣)

♠ AKJ72	♠ T
♥ AK	♥ 873
♦ 5	♦ Q98742
♣ AQT82	♣ KJ4

If you open 2♣ as West, opener probably won't get to bid the club suit.
(2♣-2♦; 2♠; 3♦ -- ??)

2. Reverse – 16+ HCP (but can be quite a bit better).

3. With one suited minors, utilize the jump to 3NT over a one level response.

- ♠ AK3
- ♥ 9
- ♦ AKQT862
- ♣ KJ

I'd open 1♦ and plan to jump to 3NT to show the above hand. Note that this does not show a balanced hand but implies long running diamonds, stoppers in the other suits, and a 19+ HCP hand. The hand is too good to rebid 3♦ after 1♦ as it is willing to force to game after a response, and jump shifting into spades or clubs doesn't make sense.

Showing a negative hand as responder

- It is a very common occurrence to have an awful hand when partner opens 2♣. Even with 0 points and 0 trumps, you must bid again after partner opens 2♣, you bid 2♦ and partner bids 2 of a major. It is helpful to have an agreement to show a bust hand.
 - A bust hand is a hand that definitely has **no aces or kings**. It also has no more than one queen. A queen and a jack can be called a bust; a queen and two jacks is borderline.
- Here are four ways to show a bust over 2♣-2♦; 2♥ or 2♠:
 1. Old fashioned standard American – responder shows a bust over 2 of a major with 2NT
 - a. This method has fallen out of favor because 3NT might be a good place to play from the strong side. If responder is declaring and has announced no aces or kings, life gets pretty easy for the defense!
 - b.
 2. Responder bids the cheaper minor to show a bust
 - a. 2♣-2♦; 2M-3♣ = bust, nothing about clubs
 - b. 2♣-2♦; 3♣-3♦ = bust, nothing about diamonds
 - c. 2♣-2♦; 3♦ is awkward yet again. Some pairs playing this method say 3♥ is a bust; others say responder can't show a bust on this auction.
 3. Responder shows a bust right away with 2♥. In this structure:
 - a. 2♣-2♦ == game forcing
 - b. 2♣-2♥ == bust (0-3 HCP, no aces or kings)
 - c. 2♣-2NT == artificial positive response in hearts (5+ card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors)
 4. Responder shows controls up the line (A = 2 controls, K = 1 control)
 - a. 2♣-2♦ == 0 or 1 controls (no aces, at most one king, all busts).
 - b. 2♣-2♥ == 2 or 3 controls (1 ace, 1 AK, 2 K, or 3 K).
- Opener can usually set the contract after partner shows a bust; slam becomes rare

Showing a bust after Interference

- No matter which way you choose to show bust hands with no interference, it is best to have an agreement on how to show bust hands after interference
 - People will enter these auctions with appropriate hands. Even though you have announced a great hand, preempts can be very effective since you haven't yet described your shape after opening 2♣
 - This is another reason why 2 suited hands often are best opened at the 1 level. If you get preempted after opening 2♣, you'll be hard pressed to show both suits
- I recommend using **double** as responder to show a bust if the direct seat bids a suit over 2♣ (opener can pass with a balanced hand)
- I recommend using **redouble** as responder to show a bust if the direct seat doubles (opener can pass with a balanced hand) . X will usually show clubs.
- After opening 2♣, **you can never pass out the opponents undoubled!**
 - Either we play the contract or we double them no matter how bad responder's hand is.

Ways to improve your bidding accuracy after opening 2♣

- After 2♣-2♦, a jump to 3 of a major shows a solid suit that will almost always play for 0 losers opposite a void. This suit must be six cards or longer. Example suits:
 - AKQJxx (or better)
 - AKQxxxx (or better)
 - AKJxxxxx (or better)
- This means that 2♣-2♦; 2♥ or 2♠ is usually a good six card suit that is not solid
 - AKJxxx, AQTxxx, KQJTxx, etc.
- Balanced hands with five card majors usually bid 2NT rather than 2 of a major
 - Experts play puppet stayman as responder to ask about a 5 card major
- Balanced hands with six card minors should consider rebidding 2 or 3NT rather than the minor unless the hand or suit is really outstanding!
 - Game auctions tend to be much better, although you may miss a few minor suit slams
- Use fast arrival after 2♣-2♦; 2♥ or 2♠:
- A raise to 3 of a major shows at least 6 HCP, at least 3 cards in the major, and at least one ace or king. This hand might be useful in a slam.
 - Opener should cuebid his or her cheapest ace after 3 of a major.
 - It is almost always better to use the 4 level for cuebids prior to blackwood!
- A direct raise to 4 of a major shows at least 3 trumps, no outside aces or kings and a hand that looks very poor for slam