

2-Under Transfer Openings

Introduction

The structure of bridge poses a paradox. The scoring system places such a premium on major suit and notrump games, needing 10 and 9 tricks respectively, relative to 11-trick minor suit games, that all modern systems are designed with minor suit games as a target of last resort. Yet, since the cheapest available opening bids are minor suit bids, more bidding space is available for exploring minor suit contracts than for major suit contracts. There is no logical reason to accept this bidding restriction. This document provides a simple solution to this paradox by using transfer bids. Specifically, each opening bid at the 1-level is a “2-under” transfer showing the suit two steps above it on the bidding scale, or in the case of a 1H opening, denying any suits of 5 or more cards. Thus a 1C opening shows hearts; a 1D opening shows spades; a 1H opening shows NT; a 1S opening shows clubs; and a 1NT opening shows diamonds. This approach works especially well when using *Universal Transfer Responses* (UTR) to the opening bid. UTR in this context often saves a full level of bidding when compared with standard bidding methods.

In addition, since all opening bids are forcing, there is no absolute need for a forcing-to-game 2C opening bid. This leaves the entire 2-level available for descriptive opening bids. If you’ve often yearned for a Weak 2C opening, here is your chance to try it out. However, eliminating the forcing 2C opening bid places too great a burden on the 1-level openings, so our approach here will be to limit the 1-level openings to a range of 11-19 HCP, while perhaps allowing highly distributional openings as weak as 9+ HCP. We’ll use a 2D opening, instead of the traditional 2C opening, for 22+ HCP balanced hands, or distributional hands with a minimum of 18 HCP and a Losing Trick Count (LTC) of 4 or less, and use a multi-purpose 2C opening to show a weak 2-bid in a major or an intermediate strength (13-16 HCP) 2-suiter.

Meanwhile, let’s describe our approach to a 2-Under Transfer System. Since UTR can handle the complete response structure, including all competitive intervention by the opponents (which can add hundreds of pages to the description of any of the currently popular systems), all that is needed for a reasonably complete system description is a listing of the requirements for each opening bid, plus a description of how to handle any special cases requiring a non-UTR structure.

For those unfamiliar with UTR, the fully-annotated sample auctions provided later will make it easier to comprehend how the simplicity of the UTR approach precludes the necessity of using negative doubles, support doubles, new minor forcing, and the other similar crutches that have been grafted onto modern American bidding in hopes of coping with its deficiencies. But first, here’s a quick description of the system.

Opening Bid Requirements

1C – 5+ hearts, 11-19 HCP, and a Losing Trick Count (LTC) of 5-7.

1D – 5+ spades, 11-19 HCP, and a LTC = 5-7.

1H – 11-19 HCP with 4333, 4432, or 4441 shape (no 5+ card suit). See *The Balanced Heart* for the response structure. It has details of the three sub-systems covering HCP ranges of 11-14, 15-17, and 18-19.

1S – 5+ clubs, 11-19 HCP, and a LTC = 5-7.

1NT – 5+ diamonds, 11+ HCP, and a LTC = 5-7.

2C — A multi-purpose opening, showing either a weak 2-bid in a major or any two 5+ card suits with 13-16 HCP. Responder will usually bid 2D to request clarification; any other bid is forcing to game opposite a weak 2-bid and a slam try opposite the 2-suiter. Over the 2D response, Opener will rebid his major with the weak 2-bid, or bid the cheaper of his two suits with the 2-suiter, or rebid 2NT to show that one of his two suits is solid (AKQxx or better). Over 2NT, Responder bids the cheapest suit for which he has 3+ card support. Subsequent bidding is natural.

2D — 22+ HCP with a balanced (4333 or 4432) or semi-balanced (5332) hand, **or** 18+ HCP with an unbalanced hand, at least 8 winners, and a LTC of 4 or less. The negative response is 2H, which denies holding an ace, a king and a queen, or three queens. A 2S response shows at least one of those three high-card holdings and is forcing to game, but denies slam interest opposite a balanced 2D opening. Responses of 2NT, 3C, 3D, 3H, and 3S are 5-suit conditional transfers with slam interest showing a 5+ card suit (Q10xxx or J10xxxx or better) or (in the case of the 3S→3NT transfer) denying such a suit.

2H and 2S – These show strong 2-suiters with 17+ HCP, two 5+ card suits (including the suit opened) and a LTC of 5 or less. Responder can bid 2NT to request Opener's second suit, or can bid the cheapest suit for which he has 3+ card support. Subsequent bidding in natural.

2NT – This shows 20-21 HCP with a balanced hand (4333, 4432, or 4441)

All Higher Bids (3C through 4S) -- Preemptive. Responder will usually pass, raise, or bid 3NT. Any response in a new suit by an unpassed hand is a possible slam try, asking for 3-card support. With such support, Opener should bid a new suit to show a singleton, jumping with a void, or raise the new suit with no short side suit. Lacking support, Opener should merely rebid his own long suit.

Responses to 1-Level Opening Bids (Except 1H)

The UTR Structure applies. A transfer raise requires 3+ card support. Splinter raises work a little differently than UTR with natural opening bids. Thus, a single jump in any suit including Opener's real suit is a splinter showing a singleton along with opening bid strength (and 4+ card support, except when the jump is in Opener's real suit, when the bid implies a takeout double of Opener's real suit), while a double jump is a splinter raise showing a void with similar implications. Double and triple jumps in Opener's real suit are preemptive. With defensive strength, such jumps should be preceded by a transfer to a new suit, so that Opener can properly evaluate defensive prospects when faced with a crucial 5-level decision.

Responses to 2NT Opening Bid

3C = one or both 4-card majors. Opener rebids 3D with 1 major (and Responder bids 3NT with both or bids the major he does not hold) or Opener rebids 3NT with both. Over Opener's 3NT rebid, Responder bids 4C with both or 4D with hearts or 4H with spades). Instead of rebidding 3D or 3NT, Opener may rebid 3H, 3S, 4C, or 4D to show 4441 with a singleton in the suit above the suit he has bid.

3D or 3H = Jacoby Transfers; while 4D or 4H = Texas Transfers

3S = Minor Suit Stayman, asking for a 4-card minor. Opener bids 3NT with neither, 4C with clubs, 4D with diamonds, or any other bid with both.

4C = Gerber, with 0314 responses.

Feedback KeyCard (FBKC)

Roman KeyCard has essentially replaced Blackwood as the preferred means of ensuring that a slam is not bid when holding two quick losers. FBKC, the version I recommend for use as a supplement to cue-bidding in slam-zone auctions, was first described in *3D and the MAFIA Club*. It differs from Roman KeyCard in two small but significant ways:

(a) A bid of 4C or 4D is the asking bid if that suit has been previously agreed, or if the 4-level bid shows agreement with a suit previously shown by partner. Sometimes the logic of the auction dictates that such a bid is merely a natural invitational bid. In this case Responder is free to pass, but if he chooses to accept the invitation he should make the appropriate keycard-showing response. This approach leaves all new-suit bids at the 4-level available for cue-bidding when that approach seems preferable to asking for keycards. When a major suit or notrump slam is the target, FBKC retains the traditional 4NT as the keycard query. The traditional 0314 Roman KeyCard response structure applies. The first step shows 0 or 3 keycards; the second step shows 1 or 4 keycard; the third step shows 2 (or 5) keycards without the queen of the agreed suit; and the fourth step shows 2 keycards plus the queen of the agreed suit. Obviously, the 1430 response structure popularized by Eddie Kantar could be substituted by agreement.

(b) After a discouraging keycard response, the Asker can sign off by making the cheapest possible bid in the agreed suit, or may sign off in 4NT if a minor suit has been agreed. When the keycard response shows that one and only one keycard is missing, the Asker is often able to bid the slam, but if unable to do so, the Asker has the option of making the cheapest non-sign-off bid. This is the bid used by traditional RKC to ask for the trump queen. Instead, FBKC uses the cheapest available non-signoff bid to **feed back** to partner the information that one keycard is missing and to ask partner to make the slam decision. Frequently, the reason Asker is uncertain about slam is because the trump queen may be missing. In such cases FBKC's response structure becomes identical with RKC. But sometimes Asker's indecision has another cause. Perhaps he can't count enough winners, or perhaps a king or queen is missing in a side suit that is needed as a source of tricks. In such cases, Responder's participation in the decision process is vital.

When no keycards are missing, Asker can also **feed back** that information to Responder by making any other non-sign-off bid (not the cheapest). Such a bid usually shows the cheapest side king and denies holding any side suit king that was bypassed. Responder can then sign off in the small slam, bid the grand slam himself, or bid the cheapest available side suit king in hopes that Asker can then bid the grand slam.

Defense Against 2-Under Transfer Openings

Double is best used to show a takeout double of Opener's real suit, with all other bids having their obvious meaning. Thus, over a 1D opening (5+ spades), 1H shows hearts, 1S shows hearts and a minor (Michaels), 1NT shows 15-17 HCP balanced, 2C shows clubs, 2D shows diamonds, suit jumps are preemptive 1-suiters, and 2NT shows the minors.

An alternative is to use a variation of the **Tri** structure. Here, over 1D, 1H shows hearts and clubs, 2C shows clubs and diamonds, and 2D shows diamonds and hearts, while higher suit bids show 1-suiters, with strength depending on vulnerability. This leaves Double, 1S and 1NT undefined. The simplest scheme uses Double as a takeout double of spades, with 1S and 1NT both showing 15-17 HCP balanced, with 1S denying a full spade stopper and 1NT guaranteeing a full stopper, thus enabling proper placement of a NT contract. An alternative scheme uses the 1S cue-bid as a weak distributional takeout double, Double as a full-strength takeout double of spades, and 1NT as 15-17 HCP balanced with a full stopper.