

UTRopia

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Bridge Utopia

The Impossible Dream: The Search for the Perfect Bidding System



The madness began in 1957 when Sonny Moyses, then editor of [*The Bridge World*](#), in his own fit of madness, published a three-part article called "American Acol" by a young upstart whose main claim to bridge fame was that he rarely revoked. The madness subsided for a quarter-century, but reappeared in 1981 with the publication in "3-D and the MAFIA Club" of a few novel uses of transfer bids in competitive auctions. Now, nearly another quarter-century later, a few of those 3-D ideas have been adopted by occasional experts trying to compete with the exotic systems employed by teams from Poland, Italy, Norway, Germany, Russia, and elsewhere.

The latest manifestation of the madness began with a simple question. Would there be any advantage in using conditional transfer bids (one of the better 3-D ideas) in response to an opening suit bid at the one-level? Like most bidding theorists, my reaction to such a question was to try out the idea on the hands from the latest "Challenge the Champs" (CTC) series in *The Bridge World*. It is not hard, of course, to obtain a good score in CTC when the same person is bidding both hands, so the good score (94 out of 100) is remarkable mainly because, aside from a keycard-asking convention and splinter bids, **no other supporting conventions were used** -- no limit raises, negative doubles, new minor forcing, support doubles, or other impedimenta associated with modern American bidding.

The encouraging results of the initial test discussed above have prompted further research along these lines with the ultimate goal of producing the elusive "perfect" bidding system that, by my definition, would combine simplicity, flexibility, and accuracy regardless of the systems employed by the opponents.

That research led to the development of a new system, *UTRopia*, to showcase the 5-suit conditional transfer responses, now dubbed *Universal Transfer Responses (UTR)*, used in the initial test referred to above. *UTRopia* corrects the major theoretical deficiencies of modern American bidding while eliminating much of its complexity (such as negative doubles, support doubles, Drury, New Minor Forcing, etc.).

UTRopia combines *UTR* with three new structures resulting from my current research. The following table gives a brief description of each of these structures.

UTRopia Structures	
Universal Transfer Responses (UTR)	Using 5-Suit Conditional Transfer Responses to opening bids as a means of eliminating such gadgets as Drury, New Minor Forcing, 4th Suit Forcing, Negative Doubles, Responsive Doubles, and Support Doubles that clutter up modern American bidding.
The Balanced Heart	A system for showing all 4432, 4333, and 4441 hands with 11-19 HCP.
2-Under Transfer Openings	Using <i>The Balanced Heart</i> to enable all 1-Level Opening Bids to show 5+card suits, thus bringing minor suits to parity with the majors.
Karate	A system for bidding in competition that places primary emphasis on showing two suits at the same time.

UTR

(Universal Transfer Responses)

It's a war out there! Modern bidding has become so intensely competitive that an uncontested auction has become a rarity. Yet modern American bidding has not evolved to keep pace with the added complexity of competitive auctions. Rather than adopting a basic structure designed specifically for competitive auctions, the leading players have chosen to graft additional layers of complexity upon bidding structures designed originally for mainly non-competitive auctions. As a result, the system notes of the leading pairs have expanded, often reaching several hundred pages. This in turn places added pressure on the ACBL's alerting procedure, and makes it virtually impossible for tournament officials to ensure that players have an adequate understanding of their opponents' methods. At best they will be able to understand the meaning of the bids actually made by the opponents, but will have no knowledge of the meaning of the alternative actions rejected by the opponents in favor of the calls actually chosen. It was the availability of such negative inferences that made bridge so popular during its Golden Era when everyone played virtually the same system.

This complexity issue is a challenging area for bidding theorists. I began to grapple with these problems during the reign of the famous Italian Blue Team, and in 1981 published a defensive bidding system called *3-D*. That system defined three different bidding structures, with the choice of structure dependent upon the number of real suits shown by the opposing side at the time of our first competitive action. Then, in the *MAFIA Club* system, published in conjunction with *3-D*, I was able to use much of the *3-D* structure to counter opposing interference, thus avoiding the complexity of the patchwork approach used by the leading players.

The complexity issue has grown even more burdensome in the twenty years since *3D and the MAFIA Club* was published. In those ensuing years, my research has focused mainly on finding various ways in which transfer bids can be applied to improve accuracy and/or reduce complexity. A useful classification scheme for transfer bids is described in the article called *Transfer Taxonomy*, which can be found on the Outer Space page of this website. The present document will propose a complete revision of the modern American 5-card Major response structure by using 5-suit transfers (NT→C, C→D, D→H, H→S, and S→NT). In uncontested auctions, *Transfer Taxonomy* calls this scheme T5C, where the T shows that it's a transfer scheme, the 5 means 5-suit transfers, and the C means that the transfers are conditional (partner is free to accept or reject the transfer depending on his overall strength and his holding in the target suit). A T5A scheme would describe 5-suit absolute transfers, which partner **must** accept. In contested auctions, the notation becomes XT5C, where the X indicates that over opposing intervention, a Double or Redouble is a transfer to the cheapest suit, and the next four bids complete the set of 5-suit transfers. It is possible also to use a notation such as XT5C→3D to indicate that Double is a transfer so long as the intervention is no higher than 3D, but becomes a penalty double at higher levels.

Note: Although *UTR* will be described in terms of a modern American 5-Card Major bidding structure, *UTR* can be used with equal effectiveness in conjunction with any bidding system using mainly natural opening bids, but not, of course, with relay systems or other mainly artificial systems.

The Basic UTR Structure

Introduction

This structure applies after any natural opening bid in a suit (not NT) below the 3-level, provided Opener's LHO passes. It also can be applied after an artificial 2C opening bid provided either:

- (a) Responder has made a negative or waiting (normally 2D or a super-negative 2H) or control-showing or (perish the thought) HCP-showing response, and Opener has rebid in a suit below game.
- (b) Responder can visualize a possible slam and thus chooses not to make a waiting or negative response.

This structure does **not** apply after an opening bid in NT, or after any artificial opening bid that does not specify length in some specific suit. It can, however, be applied after a Weak Two Bid, or an artificial bid such as a Flannery 2D, which specifies 5 hearts and 4 spades, again assuming that Opener's LHO passes.

A similar structure applies in those cases where Opener's LHO does **not** pass. Some relatively minor modifications must be applied in that case. Those modifications will be described in the section that follows the basic rules.

The Basic Rules

(0) This is the ultimate rule. Opener should accept a transfer if he would be content should Responder pass after his acceptance. Thus, non-acceptance of a transfer raise implies extra strength beyond what was shown by his opening bid. Non-acceptance of a transfer to NT implies either an unbalanced hand or extra strength or both, while non-acceptance of a transfer to a new suit implies either a lack of fit for that suit or extra strength or both. Similarly, Responder passes Opener's acceptance of a transfer unless he has additional strength. Rule (0) was the only rule used during the Initial Test. All of the eleven rules below are the logical consequence of this ultimate rule, and are provided here mainly to illustrate how to apply this ultimate rule.

(1) The next five bids above Opener's bid are 5-suit conditional transfers: NT transfers to clubs, clubs transfers to diamonds, diamonds transfers to hearts, hearts transfers to spades, and spades transfers to NT. There is only one transfer bid permitted in each auction. After a minor suit opening, a 1D or 1H transfer to a major can be based on a 4-card major Q10xx or better. All other transfers to a suit imply a 5-card suit, but do not assure it. If such a transfer is accepted, Responder's rebid of NT at any level denies a 5-card major.

(2) Opener is expected to accept a transfer to a new suit if he has at least 3-card support for that suit, but failure to accept the transfer does not necessarily deny 3-card support. Opener can accept by jumping in the target suit to show substantial excess strength (invitational), or he can bid a new suit (forcing) and show support later. Once Opener declines the transfer, all new suit bids by either partner are forcing until suit agreement or a natural NT bid..

(3) If Opener accepts the transfer without jumping, Responder is free to pass, but can bid again with excess strength. Responder's bid in that case is forcing for one round if it is in a new suit, but is merely invitational if it is in a suit previously bid by either partner. Further new suit bids by Responder are forcing, but new suits by Opener are not, since he has limited his hand by accepting the transfer. After accepting the transfer, Opener's only force is a jump in a new suit.

(4) A transfer to Opener's suit shows 3-card support, but a weak hand with longer support is possible (see below). Opener will normally accept, but with excess strength, he can jump-accept, or bid a new suit (forcing) to invite game. After the transfer raise, any further bid by Responder is a forcing game try.

(5) A transfer to NT initially denies 3-card support for Opener's major, or 4-card support for Opener's minor, but if followed by a jump in Opener's suit, Responder shows a game-forcing balanced hand with 4+ card support. With 4-card support, but lacking the strength for a game force, Responder must make a transfer raise instead of transferring to NT first. Opener is expected to accept (or jump accept) the transfer to NT with a balanced hand (5332, 6322, or 5422 shape, or perhaps 5431 with a singleton A, K, or Q, for a major opening; or 5332, 4432, or 4333 for a minor opening). If unbalanced, Opener can bid a second suit, rebid his suit (with 6331, 6421, or a 6322 hand better suited for play in the major than in NT), or bid a 7-card suit, jumping with substantial excess strength.

(6) If Responder chooses not to make a transfer bid, his bid will be a jump of some sort. A jump to 2NT after a major suit opening is forcing, and will be expected to show something like a balanced 12-14 or 13-15 HCP (depending on whether Opener makes light opening bids). A jump to 4NT on the next round shows a balanced 18-19 HCP. A jump to 3NT shows a balanced 15-17 HCP (or 16-18 if the opening can be light. The same strength requirements can be used after a minor suit opening, but many pairs will prefer the modern treatment in which the 2NT jump shows 11-12 HCP and invites 3NT, while a jump to 3NT shows 13-15 HCP, and a jump to 4NT shows 16-17 HCP.

A single jump in a new suit is a mini-splinter raise, showing a singleton in the new suit, with 11+ HCP and 4+ card support, and denies a good 5+ card side suit that might provide a source of tricks for a slam. A double jump in a new suit shows the same hand with a void in the new suit.

A jump raise of Opener's major to the 3-level or 4-level is weak and preemptive, with the strength depending on vulnerability. Opener will expect a maximum of one defensive trick for this bid.

A jump raise of Opener's minor denies a 4-card major and shows a balanced hand with opening bid strength and 4+ card support. Opener will bid 3NT with stoppers in both majors, or bid a major suit stopper if weak in the other major, or bid the other minor to invite game in his minor, or bid his minor at the 4-level to show a shapely minimum with no real hope for game unless Responder has extra strength.

(7) In an auction already forcing to game, any jump in a new suit by either partner is a splinter, with support for at least one suit previously bid by partner. A double jump in a new suit is Exclusion Keycard, usually showing a void, and asking for controls outside the suit of the jump.

Additional Rules When Opponents Compete

These rules apply when the competitive action is no higher than 2S (i.e., XT5C→2S applies). Above that level, all competitive action by Opener's side is natural, and all doubles are penalty-oriented.

(A) When Opener's LHO Bids Instead of Passing

(8) If LHO Doubles, or makes a non-jump suit bid (even a cue-bid of Opener's suit), a Double or Redouble is a transfer to the next suit (or NT), and the next four bids complete the set of 5 transfer bids. The Redouble of a takeout double frees the bid of Opener's suit at the 2-level, which in the absence of competition would be the last transfer bid. I suggest using this non-transfer raise of Opener's suit as a fairly balanced 3-card limit raise with 9-11 HCP and some defensive potential.

(9) When LHO has shown a suit, Opener should accept a transfer to NT only if holding at least a partial stopper (Qx or Jxx minimum). Opener should accept a transfer to any suit bid naturally (or implied artificially) by his LHO only with a full stopper (Ace or QJx or better). When holding the required stopper, Opener has the option of accepting the transfer so that Responder can become the NT declarer, or of bidding NT himself, depending on which partner is least vulnerable to attack. This rule applies whether

LHO's bid was natural or artificial, so long as his artificial bid specified one or more real suits (e.g., a Michaels Cue-Bid). If LHO's bid was artificial, "LHO's suit" above means his real suit, not the suit that he bid artificially.

(10) After Responder's transfer, as well as in those auctions in which Responder chooses not to transfer, all Doubles by either Opener or Responder are for penalty. With UTR there is no need for Negative Doubles, Responsive Doubles, Support Doubles, etc.

(B) When Opener's RHO Intervenes After Responder's Transfer

(11) If the intervention is a Double, all sequences have the same meaning they would have had in the absence of the double; a Redouble implies acceptance of the target suit with extra strength, but not enough for a jump acceptance. Any other non-jump interference forces Opener one level higher if he wishes to accept the transfer, so acceptance implies a sound opening bid, but perhaps not as strong as a jump acceptance in the absence of competition. After acceptance, new suits by either partner are natural and forcing one round. After non-acceptance, new suits by either partner show non-minimum hands, but are not forcing, and new-suit jumps are forcing to game, as is a cue-bid of the opponent's suit, which implies interest in 3NT. All Doubles are penalty, and guarantee a stopper in the opponent's suit in case partner is interested in 3NT instead of a penalty..

Opener's Strategy After the Transfer

Since these are conditional transfers, Opener will usually accept a transfer to a new suit with 3+ card support, and can accept with a jump (invitational) or a jump to game (to play). Opener *may* accept with a doubleton Q or better if his own suit is weak. Lacking support, Opener will rebid his suit, jumping to the 3-level (to invite), or to game (to play); or Opener will bid a new suit or a non-jump NT (non-forcing), or jump in a new suit (forcing), or jump to 3NT (to play).

If Responder has transferred to Opener's major, Opener will accept the transfer with a minimum and no game aspirations, but can bid a new suit (forcing game try) or 2NT (balanced game try, usually 5332), or jump in a new suit (game force, possible slam try), or jump to game in the major or in NT.

If Responder has transferred to NT, Opener will usually accept with a more or less balanced hand (5332, 6322, 5422, 4432, 4333), but with a singleton or void or two unstopped suits, he might choose to rebid his suit (usually 6331 or 7+) or bid a new suit (usually distributional, but might be 5422 or 6322 with the other two suits unstopped).

If Opener declines a transfer to a new suit, bids a third suit, and later supports a suit introduced by Responder, this shows invitational strength, since he would have accepted with a minimum.

Responder's Strategy After the Transfer

Responder is unlimited (unless he is a passed hand), so any new suits are forcing. The transfer raise followed by a new suit is a game try, allowing a stop at the 3-level if Opener is weak. A new-suit transfer followed by a minimum bid of Opener's major is forcing if Opener accepted the transfer, but is merely a preference otherwise. A new-suit transfer followed by a minimum NT bid is invitational if Opener accepted the transfer, but shows a misfit if Opener did not accept. A new-suit transfer followed by a rebid of the suit

shown by the transfer is invitational if Opener accepted the transfer, but is a sign-off (usually with a singleton or void in Opener's major), if Opener did not accept.

If a transfer to NT is accepted, Responder can pass or raise or bid a new suit (or jump in Opener's suit to show the balanced 4-card forcing raise). The new suit shows a semi-solid suit, usually with 6 cards, suggesting game in NT if Opener has one of the three top honors. If the transfer to NT is not accepted, a new suit by Responder denies 2-card support for Opener's major, and is not forcing.

In competitive auctions, if Opener's LHO has bid a suit, a transfer to NT can be made with only a partial stopper (Qx or Jxx or better), since Opener needs a partial stopper to accept. To find a full stopper in Opener's hand, Responder should transfer to the opponent's suit; Opener needs a full stopper to accept, or can bid NT directly depending on which partner should be declarer. This strategy will usually lead to the correct placement of the NT contract, assuming that NT is indeed the correct contract.

When Responder Does Not Transfer (NT Jumps)

2NT - This shows a balanced 13-15 HCP (or 19+ if followed by 4NT). Shape is 4333, 4432, or perhaps 5332 with a weak 5-card suit, and does not deny 4-card support (which will be shown on the next round), but would have 3-card support only if 4333, since 4432 with 3-card support would usually prefer to start with a transfer raise followed by a NT jump, asking Opener to choose between 3NT and game in the major. **Note:** Over a minor opening, the 11-12 HCP range is optional, and 3NT is then 13-15 HCP.

3NT - This shows a balanced 16-18 HCP, usually with 4333 shape, but without 4-card support.

When Responder Does Not Transfer (New Suit Jumps)

New suit jumps start with 2D after 1C, 2H after 1D, 2S after 1H, or with 3C after 1S) - These are splinter raises, showing a singleton with 4-card support and about 11-14 HCP, while tending to deny a useful 5+ card side suit as a potential source of tricks for slam. Note that these are one level lower than traditional splinter raises, so that the double new suit jump (the traditional splinter) can now be used to show 4-card support with a void. Stronger splinter raises (15+ HCP) can be shown by a transfer raise followed by a jump in a new suit with a singleton, or a double jump in a new suit with a void. They are forcing to game with a major suit fit, or to 3NT or the 4-level if the fit is in a minor.

Jump Raises

A jump raise of Opener's major to the 3-, 4-, or 5-level is weak and preemptive. Opener will expect an absolute maximum of 1 1/2 defensive tricks, and should not be disappointed with less if the jump is to game or above.

A jump raise of Opener's minor to the 3-level shows opening bid strength with 4+ card support and no 4-card major. Opener will bid 3NT with both majors stopped, or rebid the other minor to try for game in the original minor, or for slam in the minor or in NT. A rebid of a major at the 3-level by Opener suggests doubt about 3NT, usually because of the lack of a stopper in the major suit not bid.

Bidding Strategy in Later Rounds

Each partner continues to describe his hand until someone figures out where to play the hand and places the contract, either by passing or by making a shutout bid; or until both partners choose to let the opponents play the hand, either doubled or undoubled.. Responder will usually be able to distinguish between 3- and 4-card support by starting with a transfer raise with 3-card support, or by using a splinter bid, or a transfer to NT followed by a jump raise, to show 4-card support, but this is not always possible; so Responder will sometimes feel compelled to use a transfer raise with 4-card support instead of the 3-card support Opener will expect. Opener's bidding follows traditional lines except for the decision about accepting or rejecting a transfer.

Conclusion

That's it! A complete Response Structure capable of handling interference by the opponents, based on one ultimate rule, and described in a less than 6 pages by means of a set of eleven simple rules, all readily derivable at the table from the one ultimate rule, so that learning time is negligible.

The Balanced Heart

Introduction

The popularity of 5-card major bidding systems, at least in this country, implies that experts assign a high priority to early knowledge of the length of the suit Opener chooses to bid first, but only if that suit is a major. No such priority is assigned to opening bids in a minor suit, where a 1C or 1D opening is frequently based on a 4-card suit, or even, especially in the case of 1C, a 3-card suit. This distinction between major- and minor-suit opening bids can be blamed on the scoring system, which requires eleven tricks for a minor-suit game, but only ten tricks for a major-suit game and nine tricks for a notrump game.

Since reaching minor-suit games is a relatively minor objective of a bidding system, this lack of equal treatment is understandable. Yet early clarification of minor-suit length can be of great assistance in reaching other high-priority contracts such as minor suit slams, as well as major suit and notrump games or slams, where early knowledge of a long minor suit can suggest a source of tricks, and thus lead to a game of slam which might otherwise be unbidable.

This article will describe a convention, *The Balanced Heart*, that brings minor suit openings closer to parity with their major-suit brethren, by using a 1H opening bid to describe any hand with no suits longer than 4 cards that is worth opening but is too weak to open at the two-level (via a traditional 2NT or Forcing 2C). Specifically, a 1H opening shows a hand with 11-19 HCP and 4333, 4432, or 4441 shape. This definition immediately poses four questions: (1) Why 1H, rather than 1NT or some other suit bid? (2) How can the convention cope with the wide HCP range, when traditional NT methods are usually limited by ACBL edict to a range of 3 or 4 HCP? (3) Does inclusion of the unbalanced 4441 shape pose any insurmountable problems? And (4) How can a traditional 1H opening bid be shown? The answers to the first three questions will become obvious after the Balanced Heart response structure has been described, but let's tackle the fourth question first.

There are at least two reasonable answers. The simplest is to use a 1NT opening to show a traditional 1H opening. This can work tolerably well, but the loss of two bidding steps by opening 1NT instead of 1H must be considered a disadvantage, since neither a 1S response (with 4+ spades) nor a forcing 1NT response is available. A theoretically better approach recognizes that the 1H opening is two steps under the 1NT bid it replaces, and extends that two-under idea to the other 1-level opening bids. With this approach, 1C shows 5 or more hearts (5+), 1D shows 5+ spades, 1H is the Balanced Heart, 1S shows 5+ clubs, and 1NT shows 5+ diamonds. This approach makes two additional bidding steps available for major suit openings; the corresponding loss of bidding room for minor openings is compensated by the avoidance of the length ambiguity that plagues the traditional 3+ card minor suit openings, where the opening shows 3-5 cards unless the suit is rebid to show 6+. No matter which approach is used, the main advantage of the Balanced Heart is to guarantee that all minimum-level suit opening bids, minors as well as majors, guarantee a 5+ card suit, thus making it easier to count winners when making critical partscore vs game vs slam decisions.

The key to handling the wide HCP range is the use of a 1S response to 1H as a relay, asking Opener to clarify his strength. Opener rebids 1NT with 11-14 HCP, or rebids 2NT with 18-19 HCP. With the 15-17 HCP range, Opener begins the search for a major-suit or NT game by responding in a suit at the two-level, using a structure that might be termed Reverse Stayman, since the search is initiated by Opener rather than by Responder. With the 4441 shape in all three strength ranges, Opener initially treats his hand as balanced with a small doubleton in his short suit, and hopes to show his singleton later. With that background, we can proceed to a description of the response structure.

Responses to the Balanced Heart Opening

P – Shows a weak hand with 0-5 HCP and at least 4 hearts. This is harder to penalize than the alternative weak response of 1NT (see below).

1S – This is the key bid, a relay showing 6+ HCP and asking Opener to describe his strength.

1NT -- Shows a weak balanced hand with 0-5 HCP. With a weak 4441 or a weak doubleton, Opener will bid the suit below his shortage to begin a scramble. If 1NT is doubled, Opener passes with 15-19 HCP; Responder then passes to play there, Redoubles with 3+ clubs, starting a scramble, or bids a 5+ card suit. With 11-14 HCP Opener Redoubles with 3+ clubs, starting a scramble, or bids his cheapest 4-card suit. In scramble mode, both partners keep bidding until a 43 or better fit is found.

2C, 2D, 2H & 2S – These are weak unconditional transfers (to D, H, S & C) with 0-5 HCP.

2NT – This shows 15+ HCP and is absolutely game-forcing, with slam potential opposite 15+, and perhaps even opposite some good-fitting weaker openings. In response to 2NT, Opener has two options:

(a) He can use the Reverse Stayman structure (see below) at the 3-level regardless of strength, planning to take aggressive action later with 15+ HCP.

(b) With any 4441 shape, he can bid the suit below his singleton at the 4-level. Thus 4C shows 1 diamond, 4D shows 1 heart, 4H shows 1 spade, and 4S shows 1 club.

Note: All hands with potential game interest must start with either the 1S range ask or the 2NT response (unless strong enough to force to game with no slam interest)..

Opener's Rebids after the 1S Relay

1NT – This shows 11-14 HCP with any 4333, 4432, or 4441 shape. With less than game-forcing strength, (6-12 HCP) Responder can pass, bid 2C to ask Opener to bid 4-card suits up the line, or bid 2D, 2H, 2S, or 2NT as weak unconditional transfers to 2H, 2S, 3C, or 3D. These bids all deny game interest. Stronger hands (13+ HCP) use the traditional Stayman/Jacoby structure, but at the 3-level; they are game-forcing, and any later new-suit bid by Responder is forcing and shows slam interest.

2C, 2D, 2H, & 2S (Reverse Stayman) – These all show 15-17 HCP and deny a 5+ card suit.

2C – Asks Responder for a 4-card major. Responder bids 2D with 4 hearts, 2H with 4 spades, 2S with no 4-card major, or 2NT with both. Other options for Responder are 3C = Mini-Gerber with Roman (0 or 3/1 or 4/2) responses, 3D to show 5+ hearts, 3H to show 5+ spades, or 3S to show a slam try with 44 or better in the minors. Note that this 2C rebid covers the 4441 shape, which will always include a 4-card major.

2D – Denies a 4-card major. Shows 4333 shape with 3 cards in each major. Responder can then bid 2H, 2S, or 2NT as weak sign-offs, 3C as Mini-Gerber, 3D or 3H as Jacoby transfers, or 3S as a slam try with 44 or better in the minors.

2H & 2S – Denies a 4-card major. 2H shows 2344 shape with 2 spades, while 2S shows 3244 with 2 hearts. Now 2NT by Responder is a signoff with 6-8 HCP, 3NT is to play, 4NT is invitational, and 4C is Gerber with Roman responses. Any suit bid here by Responder is an unconditional 4-suit transfer (S→C, C→D, D→H, H→S). Once Opener accepts, the cheapest bid by Responder is then Roman KeyCard for that suit, with 0314 responses. Any other non-jump rebid by Responder is natural and forcing to game.

2NT – This shows 18-19 HCP with any 4333, 4432, or 4441 shape. The traditional Stayman/Jacoby structure applies here. **3C** is Stayman; **3D & 3H** are Jacoby Transfers, **3S** is Minor Suit Stayman, asking for a 4-card minor; 3NT is to play; **4C** is Roman Gerber as defined above; **4D & 4H** are Texas Transfers; **4S** is artificial, showing an unspecified 6+ card suit headed by the AKQ, to which 5C is a length ask, with step responses showing in order 6, 7, and 8 cards in the suit; and **4NT** is invitational with a balanced hand, allowing Opener to pass with minimal slam interest, or to bid 4-card suits up the line in hopes of finding a 44 fit for slam.

3C, 3D, 3H & 3S – These responses occur rarely, but show 18-19 HCP with 4441 shape and the singleton in the suit above the suit bid (or in clubs if 3S is bid). Responder can then use a bid of Opener's singleton as Roman Gerber, asking for aces.

Handling Defensive Interference Over the 1H Opening

Over Interference by Opener's LHO – Over any 3-level interference, a Double by Responder is for penalty. At the 1- and 2-level, Responder's Double replaces the 1S relay, but now shows 10+ HCP instead of 6+ . Then a minimum NT bid by Opener (or a pass of a call by RHO) shows the weak hand, a NT jump show the strong hand, and a suit bid shows the 15-17 hand (using the Reverse Stayman structure if a 2C bid is still available; otherwise, any new suit bid is natural, and a cue-bid show both majors, with Responder transferring to confirm a 44 fit). Any Double by Opener is for penalty, and denies the 12-14 HCP hand.

Over Interference by Opener's RHO – A pass by Opener shows the weak hand, a Double shows the strong hand, and a minimum NT bid, or a suit bid, shows the 15-17 HCP hand, with traditional Stayman/Jacoby in action after the NT bid. If a 2C bid is available, the Reverse Stayman structure applies; otherwise all suit bids are natural, showing 4-card suits up the line.

When Opponents Intervene Over Opener's 1NT Rebid

1NT/Dbl/? – **Redouble by Responder** shows at least game invitational strength. It is our hand. We'll double the opponents or play game if possible, and otherwise play a partscore. They won't play an undoubled contract. **An Immediate Suit Bid** by Responder shows a 5+ card suit, and Opener will usually pass. **Pass** by Responder denies a 5+ card suit, and asks Opener to bid a 3+ card club suit or to Redouble (SOS), after which both players will bid 4-card suits up the line until a 43 or 44 fit is found.

1NT/Any Non-Jump Bid/? – **Double** by an unpassed Responder is for penalty, but Opener may remove the Double with a singleton. A passed hand Double by Responder is negative, with 0-2 cards in their suit, hoping for a plus in a partscore. Thus, **Pass** by Responder suggests strongly that we should stay out of the auction, although a later penalty double at the 3-level is a possibility. **Any Non-Jump Suit Bid** by Responder shows a 5+ card suit with game-invitational strength; Opener will raise with 3-card support and a maximum. **Any Jump in a New Suit** by Responder shows a 6+ card suit and is preemptive. Any **NT Bid** by Responder is natural; Opener will usually pass (since no Double by Responder), but is permitted to try 3NT with a maximum. A **Cue-Bid** by Responder asks Opener to bid 3NT with a stopper in their suit. A **Jump Cue-Bid** by an unpassed Responder (very rare) is a slam try with a monster hand.

1NT/Any Jump Bid/? – All bids are natural. A Double is for penalty, and a new suit shows 5+ cards there; Opener will frequently pass, but can raise with 3+ card support and a maximum, or raise preemptively with 4-card support and a minimum.

When Opponents Intervene After the Response to Opener's 1NT Rebid

The Response was a 2C bid (denying a 5+ card suit) – Opener doubles with a maximum, or passes with a minimum.

The Response was a 2-Level Transfer – Opener doubles with 1- or 2-card support and a maximum, passes with 1- or 2-card support and a minimum, bids NT with 3-card support, and raises with 4-card support.

The Response was a 3-level Game Force – Opener bids 3NT or game in Responder's suit, and Doubles if unable to bid game or if expecting a penalty worth more than game.

Defense Against the Balanced Heart

In the Direct Seat – Traditional methods such as DONT or Cappelletti should suffice. Opener could be strong, of course, but if so Responder may well be correspondingly weak. And of course, waiting one round until Opener's strength is clarified is often a good tactic. A lead-directing double of 1H is always possible.

In the Fourth Seat – Traditional methods here are fraught with danger because of Opener's possible strength; waiting until Opener clarifies his strength is usually the best tactic. With distribution, being weak rather than strong could be an advantage, since then partner will be likely to have some strength sitting over Opener. A lead-directing double of the 1S relay is always possible.

Alerting Requirements

- (1) The 1H opening must be alerted, and explained as showing 11-19 HCP and denying a 5+ card suit.
- (2) The 1S response must be alerted as an artificial relay requesting strength clarification, and Opener's rebid must then be alerted, with appropriate explanations when asked.
- (3) All other responses must be alerted. The 2-level transfer responses require an alert rather than an announcement, since the failure to use the 1S relay denies 6+ HCP.
- (4) All Reverse Stayman rebids by Opener require an alert and appropriate explanations.
- (5) In general, natural bids by either partner showing a 4-card suit require an alert only if they show a specific HCP range or show a singleton in the next suit.
- (6) Natural bids by Opener showing a 3-card suit must be alerted and explained.
- (7) Natural bids by Responder showing a 5+ card suit should be alerted if Opener has previously denied holding 4 cards in that suit.

The Balanced Heart in Action

Naturally, the most common Balanced Heart openings will be of the weak 11-14 HCP variety. When Responder is also weak (0-5 HCP), no game is likely even if the opening is strong, so the emphasis is on scrambling to a safe spot and avoiding a penalty greater than the value of the opponents' potential part-score, game, or slam. We'll show a variety of sample auctions in order to illustrate the response structure, starting first with those auctions that do not begin with the 1S relay because Responder has 0-5 HCP.

Example 1 (EW Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ K3	♠ 1065	1H	P
♥ Q93	♥ J1086		
♦ A953	♦ 874		
♣ A1052	♣ K97		

This is probably our best spot, and NS are probably cold for at least 120 or 140 in spades or NT.

Example 2 (None Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ K964	♠ 1075	1H	1NT (0-5 balanced)
♥ J632	♥ A109	P	
♦ KQ	♦ 1072		
♣ A106	♣ 8743		

This is about as bad as it gets. Probably down 3, and the NS limit may be 2NT or 3D.

Example 3 (None Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ K1063	♠ Q874	1H	1NT (0-5 balanced)
♥ Q862	♥ J10	2C (4414)	2S
♦ J	♦ 9864	P	
♣ AK93	♣ 1062		

West corrects to 2C because of his singleton D. Probably down with good defense, but NS have a partscore in diamonds or in NT.

Example 4 (None Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ AQ82	♠ J43	1H	2C (0-5, T→2D)
♥ 963	♥ 1052	2D	P
♦ QJ8	♦ K109432		
♣ AK5	♣ 10		

Makes 2 or 3, while NS can make something between 2C and 4C.

Example 5 (Both Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ J63	♠ 1074	1H	2S (0-5, T→3C)
♥ Q73	♥ KJ4	3C	P
♦ A54	♦ --		
♣ KQ93	♣ 10876542		

East transfers to 3C, which makes or goes down 1, while NS can make 4 or 5 diamonds.

The Weak Notrump

By now, I'm weary of all those poor hands East has been holding. Let's give him enough for a 1S relay response, and first show a few examples of a Weak 1NT rebid by West. Ultimately, we'll finish by giving West a few of the stronger 15-17 or 18-19 HCP hands.

Example 6 (EW Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ K73	♠ 62	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ AK103	♥ J4	1NT (11-14)	P
♦ K104	♦ 9874		
♣ 854	♣ AKJ76		

East is happy to pass 1NT, but will run to 2C if doubled.

Example 7 (Both Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ AJ85	♠ Q10	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ 106	♥ AJ742	1NT (11-14)	3C (GF Stayman)
♦ A743	♦ --	3S (4S)	4C (5+ C)
♣ KQ9	♣ AJ19865	4D	4H (5H, since West denied 4H)
		6C	P

East bids clubs, then bids hearts after West denied 4 hearts, thus showing 65, and West goes to slam because of his good clubs and two side aces. Starting with a 3D transfer would make it hard to find 6C.

Example 8 (None Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ A963	♠ 84	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ QJ107	♥ 5	1NT (11-14)	3NT
♦ K874	♦ QJ5	P	
♣ Q	♣ AKJ9643		

With a likely 7 club tricks and a possible entry in diamonds, East just gambles on the NT game. A spade lead could beat it, but a red suit lead is more likely.

Example 9 (EW Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ KQ10	♠ A8	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ QJ10	♥ A64	1NT (11-14)	3S (MSS, game-forcing)
♦ K975	♦ A632	4D	6D
♣ K105	♣ AQ98	P	

With all 4 aces, East tried for a minor suit 44 slam, and chose the Minor Suit Stayman route. He got there but. the slam needs 32 trumps and a heart finesse because West's hand is so bad despite its 14 HCP.

Example 10 (Both Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ J653	♠ KQ107	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ AKQ7	♥ 53	1NT (11-14)	3C (GF Stayman)
♦ J6	♦ Q95	3H (4H, 1-4 S)	3S
♣ K63	♣ AQ75	4S	P

West showed 4 hearts, then raised to 4S when East showed 4S.

Example 11 (EW Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ AK107	♠ Q853	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ 1076	♥ Q3	1NT (11-14)	3C (GF Stayman)
♦ QJ9	♦ AK10864	3S (4S)	4S
♣ A76	♣ Q	P	

East plans to bid 3NT unless West shows spades, but is pleasantly surprised.

The Strong Notrump Jump

Enough of the Weak Notrump! Let's move on to the strong variety, and then finish up with some examples of the 15-17 HCP version, where the response uses the Reverse Stayman structure.

Example 12 (EW Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ AQJ4	♠ 1096	1H	1S (relsy)
♥ AQ64	♥ K7	2NT (18-19)	P
♦ KQ	♦ 7532		
♣ 975	♣ K432		

East's weak spot cards deter him from trying for 3NT.

Example 13 (EW Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ K103	♠ A42	1H	1S (relay)
♥ A4	♥ Q1095	2NT (18-19)	3C (Stayman)
♦ AK75	♦ QJ94	3D	3NT
♣ KJ109	♣ Q7	P	

West's 3D denied 4 hearts, and East is not strong enough to try for 6D, even though it could make on a good day.

Example 14 (Both Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ QJ92	♠ AK7	1H	1S (relay)
♥ KQ3	♥ 87	2NT (18-19)	3NT
♦ AK2	♦ J1094	P	
♣ A104	♣ QJ62		

An easy one. Note that we've right-sided this contract vis-à-vis the standard auction of 1C/2N/3N. This helps compensate for the occasional wrong-siding of spade contracts after the 1S response.

Example 15 (NS Vulnerable)		West	East
♠ Q93	♠ 1072	1H	1S (relay)
♥ Q3	♥ AK	2NT (18-19)	3NT
♦ AKQ9	♦ J107542	P	
♣ AQ84	♣ 103		

We want to be there even though a spade lead *might* defeat it.

Example 16 (NS Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ 4	♠ KQ3	1H	1S (relay)
♥ A953	♥ K104	3H (18-19, 1444)	3S
♦ AJ43	♦ KQ1097	4H (3 aces)	6D
♣ AKQ8	♣ 96		

Instead of 2NT, West jumps in the suit below his singleton. East asks for aces with 3S and West shows 3, so he assumes that West's remaining 6 HCP will be enough for slam.

The 15-17 HCP Version

At last we reach the key issue. Can the Reverse Stayman structure hold its own against the traditional Stayman/Jacoby structure? Let's find out!

Example 17 (NS Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ A107	♠ 83	1H	1S (relay)
♥ AQ85	♥ 1093	2C (15-17, M?)	3NT (no major)
♦ KQ103	♦ 975	P	
♣ Q7	♣ AKJ53		

3NT tends to show clubs (since 3C is Mini-Gerber and 3D would show diamonds). 3NT makes easily on any non-spade lead, and has good chances even with a spade lead (44 spades, or split aces).

Example 18 (EW Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ A654	♠ 32	1H	1S (relay)
♥ K	♥ AJ7532	2C (15-17, M?)	2D (T→2H, 4+ H)
♦ A1064	♦ QJ5	2NT	3H (5+ H, probably 6)
♣ KQ62	♣ J4	P	

With no interest in spades or NT, East transfers to hearts and then rebids them, so West subsides.

Example 19 (Both Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ AJ9	♠ Q753	1H	1S (relay)
♥ KQ96	♥ 8743	2C (15-17, M?)	2D (T→2H, 4+ H)
♦ KQ76	♦ 98	2H	P
♣ 83	♣ A75		

East could raise to 3H with 8+ HCP, or to 4H with 10+ HCP, so West has no need to bid beyond 2H.

Example 20 (None Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ AJ	♠ K10985	1H	1S (relay)
♥ AQ97	♥ KJ104	2C (15-17, M?)	2NT (4+ H & 4+ S)
♦ QJ8	♦ 107	3H	3S (5+ S, forcing)
♣ K1085	♣ Q7	4H	P

East shows both majors first, then a 5th spade with a non-minimum, and West places the contract.

Example 21 (Both Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ AQ107	♠ 986	1H	1S (relay)
♥ Q973	♥ J2	2C (15-17, M?)	P
♦ J8	♦ K6		
♣ AK8	♣ Q95432		

West might frown when he hears East's Pass, but the frown will turn to smiles when he sees the dummy. Clubs is best even if Opener has a singleton club.

Example 22 (NS Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ AQ6	♠ J	1H	1S (relay)
♥ KJ10	♥ Q952	2D (15-17, 3343 or 3334)	P
♦ A72	♦ K109543		
♣ J972	♣ 85		

West shows 4333 with no 4-card major, and East knows he can pass safely without missing a game.

Example 23 (EW Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ K87	♠ AJ942	1H	1S (relay)
♥ AJ2	♥ 94	2D (see #22)	2S (5+ S, min)
♦ A73	♦ J96	P	
♣ KQ109	♣ 632		

Since East could jump to 3S to invite game, West is free to pass despite his maximum 17 HCP.

Example 24 (Both Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ KJ	♠ 82	1H	1S (relay)
♥ KQJ	♥ 92	2H (15-17, 2344)	3C (T→3D)
♦ A954	♦ KJ1072	3D	P
♣ K1053	♣ A872		

West showed 2344. East transferred to diamonds, and settled for a partscore that's hard to reach after a 15-17 1NT opening. 3NT needs a good guess in diamonds, as well as a favorable lead.

The Strong Response (15+ HCP)

Finally, we'll show a few examples in which Responder chooses not to use the 1S relay in order to suggest immediately the possibility of a slam if Opener is not minimum.

Example 25 (None Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ K1093	♠ Q64	1H	2NT (15+)
♥ J10	♥ AQ2	3C (any M?)	3S (no major)
♦ AK107	♦ Q4	3NT	P
♣ K82	♣ AJ764		

East showed 15+ . West showed interest in a major. East's 3S denied one, and West signed off in 3NT. With nothing extra, East subsided.

Example 26 (NS Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ QJ96	♠ AK72	1H	2NT (15+)
♥ AK6	♥ Q10	3C (any M?)	3H (4+S)
♦ J643	♦ AQ109	4S (4S, < 15)	4NT (RKC)
♣ K4	♣ AQ2	5D (1KC)	5H (Q ask)
		6S	P

East shows 15+ with 4 spades. With just a Weak NT, West signs off in 4S, but East persists with RKC, and bids the slam after West shows 1KC and the trump Q, but the better 6NT is missed.

Example 27 (Both Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ KQ	♠ A542	1H	2NT (15+)
♥ K43	♥ A8	3H (2344)	4C (T→4D)
♦ J954	♦ AKQ732	4D	4H (RKC)
♣ AK107	♣ 4	4NT (1KC)	5NT (all KC)
		7D	P

After West shows 2344 shape, East transfers to diamonds, uses RKC, and confirms holding all the keycards, and West bids the grand on the basis of his 3 side kings, but misses the optimum 7NT, since East might hold only 5D, so a S ruff might be needed.

Example 28 (None Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ Q92	♠ AKJ7	1H	2NT (15+)
♥ AQ108	♥ 54	3C (any M?)	3H (4+S)
♦ J104	♦ AK9	3NT (11-14)	4NT
♣ K102	♣ AJ75	P	

With 20 HCP, East tries for 6S, but settles for an invitational 4NT when West denies interest. With only 12 HCP and 4333, West has an easy pass.

Example 29 (NS Vulnerable)

		West	East
♠ AJ82	♠ Q10	1H	2NT (15+)
♥ J1095	♥ A84	3C (any M?)	3S (no major)
♦ Q63	♦ AJ102	3NT	P
♣ A6	♣ KJ104		

Another easy one. East shows 15+ and West asks for a major. East denies a major and West signs off in 3NT. East has nothing extra and passes.

Critique – The Good and the Bad

Let's examine the bad side first. To begin with, most spade contracts are wrong-sided when Opener should be declarer, but that can be a minor problem, and sometimes an advantage, for the majority of cases in which Opener is weak. In addition, opening 1H instead of 1NT makes it slightly easier for the opponents to compete (via a 1S or 1NT overcall). This slight loss of the preemptive value of a 1NT opening is partially compensated by the fact that such early intervention carries the risk that Opener holds one of the stronger hand types rather than a weak NT. Finally, adding the 4441 shape to the hand pattern mix can be troublesome, but most of the time the singleton can be shown if necessary (for instance the jump to the 4-level by a 17-18 HCP opener to show a singleton in the next higher suit), and in any case 4441 hands occur only about 3 percent of the time.

On the good side, the main advantage of the Balanced Heart comes on those hands where it is not used, since all other one-level opening bids show at least a 5-card suit, thus bestowing the admitted advantage of a 5-card major structure upon minor suit openings as well. In addition, the limitation to three hand patterns (4333, 4432, and 4441) adds greater precision to some sequences, when compared with the traditional Stayman/Jacoby structure (which must allow for Opener's 5-card minor). Most notable in this regard are the ability of an Opening Bidder with 15-17 HCP to show 3343 or 3334 shape with a 2D rebid, or to show 2344 or 3244 shape with a 2H or 2S rebid.

In the long run, however, the increasing competitiveness of modern bidding means that the true worth of any bidding innovation can only be seen after extensive testing at the table. This document has provided only a few suggestions in this competitive bidding arena, which is an obvious target for my ongoing research as I continue to seek the elusive *Bridge Utopia*.

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.

Karate

Introduction

Karate is a system for bidding in competition, based on some of the pioneering ideas in my 1981 book, *3D and the MAFIA Club*. *3D* proposed for the first time the use of 3 different defensive bidding systems, depending on the number of specific suits previously shown by the opponents. *Karate* can be used no matter which side has opened the bidding, and is based on two distinct bidding structures designed on the premise that there is a distinct advantage in being able to show two different suits with a single bid.

The key concept is to have a firm agreement with partner about which suits are available as potential trump suits. This, in turn, depends upon agreeing upon whether all four suits are available or whether a suit should be treated as unavailable because it has been specifically shown by the opponents. Each partnership must be in agreement about when an opponent's suit has been specifically shown. For instance, should a 1C opening bid in Standard American or 2/1 be treated as showing a suit or a non-suit? In this document, the Default Agreement will be that in order for an opponent's suit to be treated as having been shown specifically it must be at least a 5+ card suit, and thus not a candidate trump suit for our side. We will use the term semi-suit to describe any suit bid naturally by an opponent that could be shorter than a 5-card suit. Such semi-suits of only 2-4 cards can thus be considered potential trump suits for both sides. Other private agreements can be easily accommodated by *Karate*. For example, *3D* suggested treating a 1C opening on 3+ cards as not shown specifically, but treating a 1D opening (that is made only rarely with 3 cards) as having been shown specifically.

The dominant theme in *Karate* is that showing two suits with a single bid is likely to be more effective than traditional methods that show only one suit (overcalls and jump overcalls) or three suits (takeout doubles) or no suits (a 1NT overcall). Showing two suits when no suit has been yet ruled out as a potential trump suit requires using six different bids to show all possible two-suit combinations (CD, CH, CS, DH, DS, HS). With only four possible suit bids available without jumping, we can include Double (or Redouble) to handle a fifth combination and aNT overcall for the sixth combination. We'll call this system **Hex** (short for hexagon, a six-sided figure). When the opponents have shown one specific suit, and thus ruled it out as a potential trump suit for our side, only three bids are needed to show the three possible combinations of potential trump suits. We'll call that system **Tri** (short for triangle). Both partners must be in firm agreement concerning which structure to apply, depending on the length of the opponent's suit

The Tri Structure

In *Karate*, as in *3D*, any non-jump bid in a new suit shows that suit and the next higher unbid suit. Thus, over a 1H opening, 1S shows spades and clubs, 2C shows clubs and diamonds, and 2D shows diamonds and spades. Two biddable four-card suits (Q10xx or better) are permissible, so long as overall strength is adequate, and of course extra length can at least partially compensate for lack of defensive strength. The overall HCP requirement depends on vulnerability and the ratio of offensive to defensive strength (the OD Ratio). These non-jump bids are not forcing, so with strong game interest a traditional takeout double must be used in order to be assured of an opportunity for a second bid. A jump overcall shows a one-suited hand, denying Qxx or xxxx support for another suit, again with the HCP requirement depending on vulnerability and the OD Ratio. A 1NT overcall shows a balanced 15+ to 17+ HCP with a stopper, and ideally a second stopper (or at least Axx, to permit a holdup). A takeout double can be used for any hand

with a good reason to compete that is not suitable for either a two-suited overcall, a jump overcall, or a NT overcall. In addition to very strong 2-suited hands, this would typically include either the usual 4441, 4432, 5332, or 5431 shapes, or perhaps a 5-card suit with Qxx or xxxx support for another suit, but with no second 4-card suit as strong as Q10xx. The takeout double response structure will be described later. This leaves the cue-bid so far unused. I suggest that it be used to show a double stopper plus two of the three unbid suits (a hand that would have been a sound Standard American takeout double of a different suit). In 3D this bid was called the 2+2 Q.

The Hex Structure

This structure covers all six two-suit combinations. Each non-jump suit bid denies that suit and shows the next two suits. Double and a NT overcall show the two non-touching suit combinations (C+H and D+S), with NT showing the combination that includes Opener's semi-suit. Again, suit jumps show a 6+ card suit without a second biddable (Q10xx) side suit. Since our structure assumes that their bid is a semi-suit, a "cue" bid is merely a bid in one of the two suits we wish to deny.

A key difference between Hex and Tri lies in the forcing nature of a non-jump overcall in a new suit. In Tri, such a bid is descriptive but non-forcing, since the bid is made in one of the two suits actually held. In Hex such a bid is forcing, since it denies the suit bid and shows the next two suits (always touching suits, since spades and clubs are considered touching). In Tri, a takeout double can always be used to ensure a response from partner, but in Hex there is no takeout double, so it was necessary to depart from the Tri structure in order to ensure that the overcaller has a chance to make a second bid when he holds a strong hand.

A problem can arise in Hex when you hold a very strong hand with only one biddable suit. A typical example would be a 4333 hand with 18-20 HCP. The best approach in such a case is to show the 4-card suit and the better of the two suits it touches, and then to follow up on the next round with a jump to the appropriate level in NT or in your 4-card suit.

Responding to a Takeout Double (only available in Tri)

All suit bids are 5-suit conditional transfers. Doubler will accept the transfer to a new suit with Qxx or better; jump acceptance is permissible with sufficient extra strength (about an ace above a minimum). If he declines the transfer, a NT bid shows 18-20 HCP (too strong for a 1NT overcall), a new suit shows a 5+ card suit with weak 3-4 card support for the 4th suit, and a jump in a new suit shows a strong hand with a 6+ card suit. A transfer to NT shows a partial stopper, so Doubler will accept only if he holds at least a partial stopper himself. A transfer to Opener's suit asks Doubler for a full stopper. Holding such, Opener can accept the transfer if he feels partner should be declarer in NT, or can bid NT at the appropriate level to become declarer himself.

Responding to a 2-Suit Overcall

The UTR Structure applies. All non-jump responses by Advancer are 5-suit conditional transfers. See the full description in the UTR.PDF. document.

In Hex a non-jump bid in Opener's suit is natural, and the meaning of a jump "cue" in Opener's semi-suit depends on whether partner has shown that suit or not. If the suit is one of partner's two suits, the jump

cue is an absolute transfer to 3NT; if not, it asks partner to bid 3NT with a full stopper, and a transfer to NT shows only a partial stopper; bidding 3NT directly shows a full stopper..

Using *Karate* in Various Situations

When *Karate* was developed, the intent was to use it only when the opponents open the bidding. It can also be used effectively after we open the bidding, but each partnership must decide whether to do so or not. Possible cases are listed in the table below, but if you choose not to use *Karate* when your side opens the bidding, only the first two rows of the table are pertinent.

Situation	System
They Open with a Semi-Suit (e.g., SA 1C/?	Hex
They Open with a 5+ Card Suit (e.g., SA 1H/?	Tri
We Open, They Double or Bid 1NT	Hex
We Open, They Overcall at 1- or 2-Level	Tri

Karate In Action

Here are a few example hands, so you can get a feel for the way *Karate* works. Assume that the opponents are playing Standard American, and you have agreed to treat their 1C or 1D openings as semi-suits.

(1) ♠9 ♥AKJ107 ♦1032 ♣Q1054 1D/? This is a **Hex** Double, showing hearts and clubs. Partner holds ♠AQ872 ♥63 ♦K6 ♣9732 and will bid 1NT→2C.

(2) ♠AQ1087 ♥87543 ♦-- ♣AK5 1D/? This is a **Hex** 2C bid, showing both majors, but over a Weak 2D opening it would be a **Tri** Double. Partner holds ♠J62 ♥K1062 ♦A6 ♣7642 and will bid 2D → 2H, with 4H as the ultimate destination, since both partners have extra strength.

(3) ♠3 ♥Q1065 ♦KQ10532 ♣K2 1S/P/1NT/? This is a **Tri** 2D bid, showing the red suits. Partner holds ♠KJ965 ♥A983 ♦6 ♣1083 and will bid 2H.

(4) ♠A10654 ♥7 ♦KQ107 ♣QJ10 1C/? This is a **Hex** Double to show D+S. Partner holds ♠KJ98 ♥A1096 ♦842 ♣98 and will bid 2S, and then compete up to 3S if necessary.

(5) ♠J2 ♥83 ♦Q8 ♣AQJ9632 1S/? This is a **Tri** 3C bid. Partner holds ♠4 ♥KQ1054 ♦97654 ♣104 and will not be tempted to pursue a red-suit contract.

(6) ♠AK65 ♥J5 ♦K642 ♣J76 1H/? This is about a minimum for a **Tri** 1S bid, showing S+D. Partner holds ♠104 ♥872 ♦AQ98 ♣K932 and will bid 3D. A takeout double would be acceptable, and would be the normal action with Qxx in clubs.

(7) ♠72 ♥AJ10643 ♦A4 ♣K95 2S/? This is a **Tri** Double. If partner bids 3C→3D you will bid 3H and he'll know you have club support. Actually he holds ♠KQ3 ♥Q98 ♦1087 ♣Q742 and will bid 2NT→3C, which may not make, but if doubled you can retreat to 3H.

(8) ♠AK932 ♥QJ94 ♦1063 ♣9 1C/? This is a **Hex** 1D bid, showing H+S. Partner holds ♠764 ♥1082 ♦AQ82 ♣AQ8 and will probably bid 1NT.

- (9) ♠AQ872 ♥A43 ♦A ♣KQ42 2D/? This is a **Tri** Double. If Partner bids 3D→3H you will bid 3S to encourage him to show a black suit, and support hearts if he does not. Partner holds ♠K9 ♥1092 ♦9753 ♣10986 and will bid 2N→3C, and 130 in clubs is your limit.
- (10) ♠KJ10985 ♥9 ♦K5 ♣K1084 2D/? This is a **Tri** 2H bid showing S+ C. Partner holds ♠A6 ♥AKJ10643 ♦64 ♣52 and will bid and probably make 4H.
- (11) ♠A ♥AQJ10 ♦AJ6 ♣A10954 1C/? This is a **Hex** 1NT bid, showing clubs and hearts. Partner holds ♠1075 ♥965 ♦Q1094 ♣732 and will probably pass. Your 1NT may have preempted them out of their 9-card spade fit.
- (12) ♠AK4 ♥AK8 ♦A942 ♣765 1C/? This is awkward with no takeout double available in **Hex**. Double showing D+S is the system bid, but passing now in hopes of competing or making a penalty double later could be the winning action. Partner holds ♠109653 ♥J106 ♦QJ73 ♣J and Opener is void in spades, so the pass would have worked well.
- (13) ♠K10943 ♥A65 ♦QJ42 ♣4 1H/? This is a **Tri** 2D bid. Partner holds ♠AQ65 ♥7 ♦K10865 ♣843 and will bid 4S before the opponents discover that they also have a double 9-card fit.
- (14) ♠KQJ4 ♥QJ10 ♦A94 ♣AK10 1C/? Another awkward hand for Hex. Possible approaches are Double showing D+S, or 1D showing H+S, or 1NT showing S+ C. We can rule out 1NT since partner is likely to pass with a game available. Double seems safer than 1D, since it's better to lie about length in a minor than in a major. Still, showing hearts could make it easier to locate the HK or HA and thus reach a close slam. Partner holds ♠A9764 ♥K975 ♦4 ♣J65 so in this case all roads lead to the good slam, but 1D makes the auction easier than Double.