



# Standard American Yellow Card

I have had many enquiries from readers asking about the Standard American system of bidding. I am assuming that readers want to know about the most common basic bidding methods used in American tournaments today. These are summarised in the convention card used in many American events and on the Internet, known as the 'Standard American Yellow Card' (SAYC).

In the outline that follows, **text in red** highlights the main differences between SAYC and Acol.

## General approach

- Five-card majors (chunky four-card-major openings are allowed facing a passed partner)
- Open the higher of long suits of equal length
- Open 1♦ with 4-4 in the minors

## BRIDGEBATS



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- Open 1♣ with 3-3 in the minors
- 1NT = 15-17, 2NT = 20-21, 3NT = 25-27
- Strong artificial 2♣ opening
- Weak two-bids in diamonds, hearts and spades

## Bidding after a 1NT opening

Most of the methods used are familiar to British readers. 2♣ is Stayman, but 2♣ followed by three of a minor is natural and forcing, showing slam interest with at least five cards in the minor.

2♦ and 2♥ are transfers to hearts and spades respectively. The transfer is usually 'broken', by a jump to 3♥ or 3♠, with 17 points and four-card support. A transfer followed by a new suit is forcing to game.

A 2♠ response is the way to play in three of a minor with a weak hand. Opener rebids 3♣ and responder either passes or converts to 3♦.

Three-level responses in a minor are invitational with six-card suits. Three-level responses in a major are natural slam tries.

A 4♣ response is Gerber (as it is over any 1NT or 2NT bid, including a 1NT or 2NT rebid). In response 4♦ = 0 or 4, 4♥ = 1 etc. After the response, 5♣ asks for kings with responses along the same lines.

After intervention with a double, all bids described above remain the same, while after an intervening bid all bids become natural, with a cue-bid being game-forcing Stayman.

## Bidding after a 2NT (or 3NT) opening

3♣ (or 4♣) is Stayman. 3♦/3♥ (4♦/4♥) are transfers. 4♣ over 2NT is Gerber.

## Bidding after a 1♥/1♠ opening

A 1♠ response to 1♥ is natural, as we would play.

A 1NT response shows 6-10 points and is non-forcing (over 1♥ it denies four spades). Because of the five-card major, it denies three-card support. The reason the 1NT response can be slightly stronger than we play is because you need to be a little stronger to bid at the two level, and that is because opener is likely to rebid 2NT with a balanced 12-14 points. A two-level response in a new suit shows 11+ points.

A direct simple raise shows 6-10 points with three-card or longer support (if 10 points were held this would be with only three-card support). Jump support is a limit raise, as we play it, but because of the five-card major may have only three-card support. A jump to game shows at least four trumps, usually a singleton or void, and fewer than 10 HCP

A jump in a new suit is a force, as we play it.

The only response that may be unfamiliar to British readers is the 2NT response which is game-forcing with at least four-card support. Over this, opener should show a singleton (or void) by bidding it, otherwise show range by bidding game with a minimum hand, 3NT with a medium hand (15-17) and three of the trump suit with a maximum hand (18+).

Opener's rebids are standard, much as we would play.

On the second round, a simple new suit bid by responder is forcing for one round (except after a 1NT rebid), while a responder's reverse (e.g. 1♥ - 2♦ - 2♥ - 2♠) is forcing to game.

One agreement unfamiliar to British readers is that jump preference after a two-level response (e.g. 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♠) is forcing. This follows on from the five-card major start, for with 10-11 points and three-card support a jump raise would be made on the first round.

Also, the two-level response, being a little stronger than the standard British

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equivalent, promises another bid, so sequences such as 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♦, or 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♠ are forcing for one round. But, given that responder should have an 11-count, he would presumably want to bid anyway.

### Bidding after a 1♣/1♦ opening

The only time a 1♦ opening will be made on a three-card suit is with a 4-4-3-2 distribution, therefore the sequence 1♦ – 1♥/1♠ – 1NT guarantees four diamonds. In general, bidding is as above. More trumps are needed to raise minors than majors (four to raise 1♦, and five to raise 1♣, though one less trump will do in competition). Responses of 2NT and 3NT are game-forcing and balanced, 2NT showing 13–15 and 3NT 16–17. There is no forcing minor-suit raise.

### Bidding after a 2♣ opening

Responses other than 2♦ are natural, showing five-card suits and 8 or more points. 2♦ is either a negative or a waiting bid with fair values unsuitable for a positive response.

After a 2NT rebid (22–24), the bidding is as over an opening 2NT.

After a 2♦ negative, the bidding is only forcing to three of opener's major or four of his minor. A sequence such as 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♥ – 2♠ – 3♥ is non-forcing. But any new suits bid by opener are forcing for one round.

### Bidding after a weak two bid

Weak two bids show a six-card suit of reasonable quality and 5–11 points. They may occasionally be made on a very good five-card suit, or indeed on a poor seven-card suit unsuitable for opening at the three level.

All responses other than raises are forcing (they call this 'RONF': Raise Only Non Force). A 2NT response is forcing, showing game interest and implying some sort of fit for opener. Opener should rebid his suit with a minimum, show a high-card feature (ace or king) with a maximum, or with

a maximum without a high-card feature raise to 3NT and let responder place the contract.

### Slam bidding

Standard Blackwood is used, with a subsequent 5NT asking for kings. A jump to 5NT is a grand slam force, in response to which a bid of seven of the trump suit shows two top honours and a bid of six denies two top honours.

### Defensive bidding

Overcalls show 8–16 points (double and then bid the long suit with a stronger hand). The only forcing response to an overcall is a cue-bid of opener's suit; in response to this the overcaller rebids his suit with a minimum and makes some other bid with extra values.

A 1NT overcall shows 15–18 points and a balanced hand. In response to this 2♣ is Stayman, but all other responses are natural. A 1NT overcall in the balancing position shows 10–15.

Jump overcalls are weak, showing hands that would have opened at that level and vulnerability.

A jump overcall of 2NT shows 5-5 in the lower two unbid suits. A cue-bid when the opponents have bid only one suit is Michaels (when they have bid two suits both cue-bids are natural).

Doubles are for take-out over all opening bids below game. A below-game jump response to a take-out double is non-forcing. The only forcing

response to a take-out double is a cue-bid.

### Competitive bidding

Negative doubles are used against overcalls up to and including 2♠ and these promise four cards (at least) in any unbid major. Otherwise bids show what they would have shown without the intervention, i.e. a bid at the two level shows 11+ points and a five-card suit. Cue-bidding RHO's suit (e.g. 1♠ – 2♣ – 3♣) shows the values for game without clear direction for the moment (and is often used to show a game-forcing raise).

After an opposing take-out double, a simple bid at the one level is forcing, as without the double, but a new suit at the two level is non-forcing, showing 6–10 points. 2NT is a limit raise, while jump raises are pre-emptive. A jump in a new suit is pre-emptive, like a weak two or three opening. Redouble shows a hand of 10 or more points.

So there you have it. In truth, much of it is the same as we play over here – gone are the days of game-forcing jump raises. Many of the differences stem from the strong no-trump five-card major base. By opening 1NT in this country it means we do not have to deal with balanced hands in the 12–14 range when we open something else, in the US it is the 15–17 balanced hands that are eliminated from other sequences. Any of you who are thinking of playing on the internet may find this useful. My experience is that if I am playing with a stranger I would rather play his system than have him trying to play mine!

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