

## 7 Response Systems When Partner Opens With a "Strong 2C" Opening Bridge Bid

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Most Partnerships play a "2C" opening bid as "artificial" and "strong", indicating between **22** and **24** points. Some Partnerships *alternatively* require no more than 4-5 losing Tricks, but possibly *fewer* than 22 HCPs, and/or that the number of "**Quick Tricks**" is equal to or greater than the number of losing Tricks. Bidding "2C" requires that the Partnership MUST bid at least to the 2NT level. Partnerships often play one of **7** systems<sup>2</sup> to handle further bids after the 2C opening.

### Critically Important Imperative

It is *critically important* that Responder MUST not Pass Opener's opening 2C bid, for 2 equally critical reasons. **First**, the Partnership holds at least **22** points, or at least ~8.5 "Sure Tricks", and should set some part-score or game-level "makeable" contract based on fit, possibly involving a 2NT contract. **Second**, because the 2C opening is "artificial," and the Opener

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, [https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA\\_1\\_24.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf), Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

<sup>2</sup> Neil H. Timm offers a thorough review of the various 2C response conventions in his web posting, "**Are You Using the Best 2♣ Convention?**":

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/odbcmyl/Responding%20to%202.pdf>

Timm also covers another convention, "**Landow**", proposed by Irwin S. Landow in his 2009 book, Win Bridge Tournaments with Innovative Slam Bidding. Timm is a Landow advocate but the "**Landow**" convention is the exact opposite of "**2D Waiting**" in that "**Landow**" is very complicated.

may hold few, or even 0 Clubs, it can be quite disastrous to leave your (soon to be Former) Partner in a non-makeable 2C contract, especially when several *easily* makeable contracts are readily available.

**Going down +**

**Other Pairs Sitting Your Direction Making Contracts =  
A "Bottom" 0 Board for You**

## 1. Standard Responses

1. With 0-7 HCP's Responder bids the "artificial" bid "2D!"<sup>3</sup> which is sometimes called "Responder's **FIRST** Negative Response." Then if Opener bids 2H or 2S, if Responder has 0-4 HCP's, Responder bids 2NT!, which is sometimes referred to as "Responder's **SECOND** Negative Response."
2. With 5-7 HCP's Responder bids ANYTHING except 2NT!, and Opener then becomes the "Captain" and determines where the contract will be made, and a game bid is expected.
3. With 8-9 HCP's Responder bids may initiate exploration of number of Aces, or with a 5 card Suit bid 3C, 3D, 3H, or 3S.

## 2. "2D" Waiting"

In this system Responder **MUST** bid an "artificial" "2D" bid called "2D Waiting." Opener then bids Opener's long/strong Suit, and the bidding proceeds based on fit. This system almost **ALWAYS** advantageously puts the contract in the Opener's (strong) hand, thus "right-siding" the contract. "Wrong-siding" a contract usually costs the Partnership 1 Trick.

The "2D Waiting System" is the most commonly-used 2C response system. The biggest *advantages* of the "2D Waiting System" are that the system is simple and guarantees that the Opener has an opportunity to later bid and show his "long" Suit. The biggest *disadvantage* of "2D Waiting System" is that the Responder is making a bid that communicates *zero* information to the Opener.

## 3. Jacoby Step Responses

Here Responder shows point count in a series of "artificial" bids as follows: (1) 2D!: 0-3, (2) 2H!: 4-6, (3) 2S!: 7-9, (4) 2NT!: 10-12, *et cetera*. Every one of these response bids **MUST** be Alerted ("!") because each of these bids does not have the usual

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<sup>3</sup> "!" = "Alert!".

meaning. This system has the distinct disadvantage that in a slam-going situation the contract may be placed in the "weak" hand ("wrong-siding" a contract usually results in a loss of 1 Trick) and may expose the strong hand as dummy.

#### 4. Danish "Control" Step Responses

In this system Responder shows Opener how many "control" cards (Aces and/or "protected" Kings) the Responder has, with an Ace equaling 2 Control Points, and a "protected" King equaling 1 Control Point, as follows:

1. **2D!**: 0 Control Points or 1 Control Point (1 King)
2. **2H!**: 2 Control Points (1 Ace or 2 Kings)
3. **2S!**: 3 Control Points
4. **2NT!**: exactly only 3 Kings
5. **3C!**: 4 Control Points, *et cetera*.

Again, these "artificial" bids MUST be Alerted ("!").

#### 5. Roth<sup>4</sup> Response System

Alvin Roth together with his Partner Tobias Stone began developing this 2C response system beginning about 1939 and popularized the system during the 1950s. In an article published by Albert H. Morehead in the New York Times on June 28, 1953, "BRIDGE: A NEW SYSTEM; the Roth-Stone Method of Bidding Becomes Subject of Widespread Controversy", Morehead notes that the system "has become or at least is becoming the most controversial subject the game has known since Ely Culbertson and the Four Aces team engaged in battles of bidding theory back in 1934." Many advanced players even advocated banning the system. Later, Alvin L. Roth proposed his 2C response convention in Chapter 7 of his 1991 book, Picture Bidding.

1. **2D!**: "Artificial," **game-forcing**, positive response showing 6-8 HCPs (A,K, or K,K,Q, or Q,Q,Q).
2. **2H!**: "Artificial," **negative** response showing 0-5 HCPs, and no Ace or King (i.e., a "bust" hand). This 2H! response bid is not a transfer to Hearts bid and merely describes the Responder's hand to allow Opener to then make a more informed 2<sup>nd</sup> bid.

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<sup>4</sup> The citation issued to **Alvin Leon Roth** (1914-2007) upon being admitted into the **ACBL Hall of Fame** described him as "a player who fell in love with 'the beauty of bidding' [and] is generally considered [to be] the premier bidding theorist of his bridge generation."

3. **2S**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Spades with at least **2** Spade Honors.<sup>5</sup>
4. **2NT**: "Natural," positive response that shows a balanced hand with **8-10** HCPs involving mostly Queens and Jacks.
5. **3C**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Clubs with at least **2** Club Honors.
6. **3D**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Diamonds with at least **2** Diamond Honors.
7. **3H**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Hearts with at least **2** Heart Honors.

## 6. "Modified" Roth Response System

Along the way modifications to the Roth **2C** response system were proposed. The most noteworthy of these involved changing the meaning of the **2NT** bid by Responder to instead show (1) **5** Hearts and (2) **2** Heart Honors. Advocates for this system suggest that the modification saves "bidding space" to better allow the Opener to reveal his "long" Suit and for Partners to further explore "fit".

1. **2D!**: "Artificial," **game-forcing**, positive response showing **6-8** HCPs (A,K, or K,K,Q, or Q,Q,Q) but no 5-card Suit holding Honors.
2. **2H!**: "Artificial," **negative** response showing **0-5** HCPs, and no Ace or King (i.e., a "bust" hand). This bid must be alerted. This **2H!** response bid is not a transfer to Hearts bid and merely describes the Responder's hand to allow Opener to then make a more informed 2<sup>nd</sup> bid.
3. **2S**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Spades with at least **2** Spade Honors.
4. **2NT!**: "Artificial," positive response that shows **5+** Hearts and at least **2** Heart Honors.
5. **3C**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Clubs with at least **2** Club Honors.
6. **3D**: "Natural", positive response showing at least **5** Diamonds with at least **2** Diamond Honors.

## 7. "Shapley-Thompson" Modified Roth 2C Response System

The "Shapley-Thompson" modification of the Roth **2C** response system creates 2 response strata for the bidding. In this system

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<sup>5</sup> "Honors" include the Suit Ten.

the Responder to Partner's "strong" 2C opening bid makes only 1 of 2 possible 1<sup>st</sup> response bids. Responder either (1) shows a "bust" Hand or (2) bids so that Opener can then subsequently "show" his "long" Suit or show a preference for playing NT.

#### "Level 1" Responses by Responder

1. 2D!: "Artificial," "positive" *game-going* response showing (1) 6+ HCPs and (2) at least 1 Ace or 1 "protected" King (e.g., K,x,x).
2. 2H!: "Artificial," negative response showing 0-5 HCPs, and no Ace or King (i.e., a "bust" hand). This 2H! response bid is not a transfer to Hearts bid and merely describes the Responder's hand to allow Opener to then make a more informed 2<sup>nd</sup>, but 1<sup>st</sup> "natural", bid.

#### "Level 2" Bids

After Responder's 1<sup>st</sup> bid and Opener in his 2<sup>nd</sup> bid has shown his "long" Suit or a preference to play a NT contract, bidding by both Partners then resumes in the usual fashion based on "fit". If the Responder holds 5+ Hearts with 2+ Heart Honors Responder can bid 3H at his 2<sup>nd</sup> turn within the auction.

#### Advantages and Disadvantages of the "Modified" Roth 2NT! Response System

Using the 2NT! "artificial" Roth response bid to "show" 5+ Hearts has the *disadvantage* that the Responder can *no longer* use a 2NT "natural" bid to say, "Partner, I think we should play NT. What do you think?" Of course, if Responder wishes to do so, he could bid 3NT at his 1<sup>st</sup> turn within the auction, but doing so will be *dangerous* because the Responder knows *nothing* about the Opener's hand except that Opener has 22-24 HCPs or 8 "Quick Tricks". More importantly, the 2NT! "artificial" bid to "show" Hearts "wrong-sides" the contract if NT emerges as the best contract.

But the primary *advantage* of using the 2NT! "artificial" Roth response bid is that doing so allows you when you hold a "bust" hand to tell Partner this by bidding 2H! to say, "Partner, I have 0 Aces or Kings!" Most of these 7 2C response systems do

not provide this opportunity,<sup>6</sup> and because Opener has a super “big” Hand Responder may sometimes indeed hold a “bust” hand.

### **Comparison of 4 2C Response Systems Using Empirical Bridge Simulation Research**

In his 2009 book, Win Bridge Tournaments with Innovative Slam Bidding, Irwin Landow, who invented his own (extremely complicated) 2C response system not discussed here, reported a bridge simulation research study investigating how well 4 2C response systems (i.e., Steps, Danish Controls, 2D Waiting, and Landow) worked. Landow generated 10,000 random bridge Boards with a 2C opening bid. After a contract was reached on each Board a Double Dummy Analysis was performed to determine what contracts were “makeable”. To insure that the results were independent of the Opponents’ Hands the Opponents’ Hands were also dealt an additional 19 times and Double Dummy Analyses were again performed to score each of the 4 2C response systems.

Over these  $20 \times 10,000 = 200,000$  combinations the results were scored in IMPs. The IMPs per Board were averaged and the averages were: Danish Controls: **-0.38**, Steps: **-0.27**, 2D Waiting: **+0.14**, and Landow: **+0.52**.

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<sup>6</sup> The “Danish ‘Controls’ Response System” does allow Responder to show a “bust” hand in the form of showing 0-1 “controls”.