

The "2 Over 1" ("2/1") Bridge Bidding Convention: Responses to Partner's "2/1"-Eligible Suit Opening Bid¹

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<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

Some Partnerships find it helpful to use a system in which Responder, in Responder's first bid, immediately after the Responder's first bid tells Partner Opener the "**positive**" information that (1) both Partners have 13+ high card points (HCPs) and may have at least a game-going Board AND (2) tells Opener about some distribution features of Responder's hand. Conversely, when the Responder holds *fewer* than 13 HCPs, in the "2/1" system the Responder also immediately with the Responder's first bid publishes this "**negative**" information to the Opener.

The primary, super-ordinate ultra-priority of "2/1" is for Partners to show their respective point counts, and not to support Partner's opening bid suit, even if you hold support in Partner's opening bid suit.

Partners playing "2/1" will find themselves in 1 of 3 possible scenarios:

1. There are **exactly 6** pairs of bids (e.g., North: 1**S**, East: Pass, South: 2**C**) within the Partnership that show both Partners holding 13+ points, and are within the "**Positive 2/1**" rubric.
2. There are exactly **3** pairs of bids (e.g., North: 1**D**, East: Pass, South: 1**NT**!) within the Partnership that show the Opener Partner holding 13+ points, and the Responder

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¹ For a very helpful series of videos, do an Internet web search for "YouTube LearnBridge.NYC", and watch the video: "2/1 Game Forcing and 1NT Forcing." Of course, this 30 minute video can be (a) paused, (2) rewind, and (3) re-watched repeatedly:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=learn+2+over+1+game+forcing+learnbridge+nyc>

Partner holding 6 to 12 points, and are within the "Negative 2/1" rubric.

3. Every other bidding sequence than one of these 6+3=9 sequences is not part of the "2/1" system, and is bid in the Partnership's usual fashion.

The "2/1" system also encourages considerable *further discussion* within the Partnership to further describe each other's hands in the "positive" situation where both Partners hold opening hands.

A fundamental principle when bidding in duplicate is that **you should talk the most when you and your Partner have the most to talk about!!!** Once you know you are going to at least a 3NT contract, **keep bidding (even side features) until you as a pair arrive** at the suitable final contract. Thus, the "2/1" system can also be very helpful in exploring not only the best contract, but also having sufficient discussions to help evaluate whether you have slam potential.

The "2/1" bidding sequences have the following purposes:

1. Making a prudent "stop" when a successful game contract is unlikely. A good "stop" under appropriate circumstances is just as important as bidding for a game score when instead a successful game contract is possible.
2. Bidding at least game (or slam) when making a game (or slam) contract is likely, thus avoiding an ill-advised "stop."
3. Keeping the Partnership's conversation **active as long as possible**, and as *low in the bidding space* as possible, when the Partners know from selected bidding sequences that the Partnership has 26+ points, and therefore is going to end up, at a minimum, with a bid somewhere between 3NT and 4S, inclusive.

Common Misconception²

A common (**WRONG**) *misconception* is that when two Partners bid one of the 6 "2/1" "positive 2/1" bidding sequences the Partnership then must bid some game contract. "2 Over 1" **does NOT force to**

² Just how "common" is this misconception? Study the title of the YouTube video recommended above in Footnote #1. Does the video title include the phrase "2/1 Game Forcing," even though "positive" "2/1" is not not not always game forcing????!!!!

game in a *Minor* contract. "2 Over 1" only game forces if the correct contract turns out to be 3**NT**, 4**H**, or 4**S**. So, if the Partnership discovers best fit in Clubs or Diamonds, the bidding can be stopped at either 4**C** or 4**D**, although of course the Partnership may decide that they should instead bid 5**C** or 5**D**.



Esther says...

"When (1) Opponents are silent throughout the auction and (2) Partner opens 1D**, 1**H**, or 1**S** and (3) you as Responder bid a 'positive' '2 Over 1' response (e.g., Partner: 1**D**, Responder: 2**C**) both Partners know that together they hold 26+ HCPs and a 'game' bid is *very* likely. But the Partners may hold a 'fit' in Clubs or Diamonds and (1) insufficient HCPs and/or (2) insufficient distributions to set a 5**C** or 5**D** final contract. Of course, a 3**NT** 'game' contract is *likely* possible. Usually, but not always!"**

Conditions for Invoking "2 Over 1"

1. BOTH "positive" and "negative" "2 Over 1" ("2/1") are **ON** only if neither Partner in the Partnership has first Passed.
2. "2 Over 1" is **ON** if, and **only if**, the Partner Opener opens with one of the following 3 bids: (1) 1**D**, (2) 1**H**, or (3) 1**S**, and for no other opening bids.
3. The "2 Over 1" system is **off** if the Opener's left-hand opponent (LHO) interferes by bidding anything other than Pass over the Opener's bid.

1. **"Positive 2/1" Bidding Sequence: Opener Bids ONLY Either (1) 1**D**, (2) 1**H**, or (3)**

1S, and Responder Also Has An Opening or Better Hand

Responding Partner shows Opener (1) at least opening points and (2) at least 5 cards if the Response bid is 2H, and 4+ cards if the Minors are bid at the 2 level by Responder, in each of (and only) the following **6 (and ONLY exactly 6) "Positive 2/1" bidding sequences:**

1. 1S, 2H ["I have 5+ Hearts, 13+ points."]
2. 1S, 2D ["I have 4+ Diamonds, 13+ points."]
3. 1S, 2C ["I have 4+ Clubs, 13+ points."]
4. 1H, 2D ["I have 4+ Diamonds, 13+ points."]
5. 1H, 2C ["I have 4+ Clubs, 13+ points."]
6. 1D, 2C ["I have 4+ Clubs, 13+ points."]

None of these 6 responses have to be Alerted!, because none of these 6 bids are artificial (i.e., they all show real card holdings in the bid suits).

*Note that a Responder's "2 Over 1" bid in a suit different from Opener's bid suit does not deny a 3-card fit with Opener's first-bid Major. Because the Partnership knows they are going to end up in a contract of at a minimum 3NT, the Responder can later show 3 of an Opening Major by bidding Hearts or Spades later, because **both Partners** know they are **GOING TO KEEP TALKING** until they get to a bid of 3NT or higher. A later bid by Responder of Opener's major at the Responder's **second bid** shows trump support (3 if Opener only shows 5 trump cards, 2 if Opener by re-bidding the Major later shows 6 trump cards in a Major).*

Each of the 6 "2/1" responses claims the (1) point and (2) card counts noted previously, but also ****demands**** that Opener **immediately answer the query:** "Partner, do you, or do you not, hold one or more extra cards in your originally opened suit?" After Responder shows an opening hand, if Opener holds 1 more card than originally claimed by the opening bid (6 or more of the Opener's first-bid Major, or 5 or more Diamonds), Opener **MUST** then immediately re-bid the opening bid suit to publish the extra card(s). If Responder shows an opening hand, and Opener does not have at least 1 extra card in the originally opened suit, Opener instead must bid 2NT or a side feature suit, to give Responder the "negative" information that holding extra cards in the first-bid suit is denied, and to share additional

information about fit, now that at least game-going potential has been established, and there is still plenty of low bidding space available to KEEP TALKING.

2. Opener Bids ONLY Either (1) 1D, (2) 1H, or (3) 1S, and Responder Does Not Have An Opening Hand or Better

Some Responses Not Part of "2/1": Responder "Supports" Opener's Bid Major Opening (3+ of the Major; <13 HCPs)

If Responder has fewer than 13 points, but **3 or more cards in the Opener's bid Major suit** and 8+ HCPs, then Responder bids the Opener's original suit in the usual fashion, showing either a "constructive raise" (3 of Opener's bid Major, and exactly 8 to 10 HCPs), or a "limit raise" to the 3 level in the opened Major showing 10+ points and probably 4 of the Opener's bid Major. If Opener bid 1D, if Responder holds fewer than 13+ HCPs and 4 or more Diamonds, the Responder bids Diamonds in the usual fashion played by the Partnership. These sequences are not part of "2/1."

If, and only if, Responder makes a "constructive raise" in the Opener's bid Major, Opener may wish to use the "Rule of 5" to decide whether to then immediately bid game, and/or bid "Help Suit Asking," if your Partnership is playing "Help Suit Asking." "Help Suit Asking" is controversial, because it alerts your Partner, but also your Opponents, as to exactly where you need help, and is not explained here.

The "**Rule of 5**" says, if you as Opener open bidding by bidding a 1-level Major, and your Partner gives you a "constructive raise" showing 3 cards and 8-10 HCPs, you can pretty safely bid a Game-level contract, if your count of missing Aces, Kings, and Queens **across all 4 suits** is 5 or less.³ If your count of these

³ The Savannah Club Grand Life Master who some members call "Yoda" taught me this Rule, but she could not remember who taught it to her. Note: Compute the "test value" for the "**Rule of 5**" taking into account distribution and adjusting for missing honors in "short" Suits. For example, Esther as Opener bidding 1S recently held:

S: A K T 8 7 6 H: K 9 8 D: A K C: A 3

and she counted as "missing" "top" Honors 1 Spade, 2 Hearts, 0 Diamonds, and 1 Club = $1 + 2 + 0 + 1 = 4$ and she then bid 4S. See "**40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'**":

missing honors is 7 or more, it is very unlikely that you can make a Game contract, and you should instead stop at a part-score contract. If your count of these missing honors is 6, you may or may not be able to make a Game contract.

Responses in the "Negative 2/1" Sequence (and Part of "2/1")

If Responder **lacks** both (1) 3 or more cards in Opener's bid Major suit (e.g., Responder holds 2 of Opener's bid Major), or 4 Diamonds if Opener's initial bid was 1D, and (2) an opening hand when the Partnership is playing the "2 Over 1" system, but **Responder has between 6 and 12 points**, Responder then bids 1NT.

There are exactly 3 "Negative 2/1" bidding sequences. **All 3** of them involve a 1NT bid by Responder. Here are some examples and what each Responder is saying:

1. North: 1D, East: Pass, South: 1NT South says, "I have 6-12 points, I deny 4 or more Diamonds, do you have 5+ Diamonds?"
2. East: Pass, South: 1H, West: Pass, North: 1NT North says, "I have 6-12 points, I deny 3 or more Hearts, do you have 6+ Hearts?"
3. South: 1S, West: Pass, North: 1NT North says, "I have 6-12 points, I deny 3 or more Spades, do you have 6+ Spades?"

In "negative" 2/1, when the opening bid is a Major, holding 6 of the opened Major, Opener must then re-bid the Major to show 6 cards, and if Responder then bids the opened Major, Opener now then knows that the Partnership has found a 6-2 trump split. With 8 trump cards, the Partners can safely play a 2-level part score contract in a Major, or, if Opener has a ginormous hand, Opener can then bid a game contract, even though Responder has <13 HCPs.

When not playing "2/1", a 2-level bid by Responder in a new suit after Opener has bid 1D, 1H, or 1S shows 10+ points and 5+ of the new suit. But *when playing "2/1"*, a 1NT bid by Responder does not deny an unbid suit holding, such as 5 Clubs, or 5 Diamonds, or 5 Hearts, with 10+ points! But following a 1D, 1H, or 1S opening bid by Partner sitting first or second, Responder

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

MUST NOT bid any 2-level bid that now in "2/1" claims 13+ (rather than 10+) points, unless Responder indeed has an opening hand, and thus Responder holding 6 to 12 points in "2/1" instead bids **1NT!!!!**

In "2/1" a **1NT** bid by Responder **MUST** be **ANNOUNCED** by Opener, who must immediately say either "Forcing!" or "Semi-Forcing!" "Semi-Forcing" means you and your Partner have a *Partnership agreement that the Opener usually will bid again after the 1NT response, but may Pass the 1NT response*. "Forcing" means the Opener must bid again, unless the Opener's RHO bids something first, before the Opener's second bid.

The Announcement also serves to alert your Opponents that you are playing "2/1." Other *natural* bids by "2/1" Responder (e.g., Opener: **1S**, Responder **2C**, or Opener **1H**, Responder: **2D**) do not have to be Alerted, because they show actual holdings in those suits, and thus are not artificial. Of course, if Responder bids such a "Positive 2/1" sequence, the Responder's LHO before bidding may ask the Opener, "Are you playing '2/1'?", even if this has not been announced via Opener saying "Forcing" or "Semi-Forcing" immediately when Responder bids **1NT**.

If the Responder bids **1NT**, and if the Opener has at least **6** cards in an originally bid Major suit, and the "2/1" "negative 2/1" bidding sequence is in play, the Opener **MUST** re-bid that originally-bid Major. Alternatively, after the Responder bids **1NT**, if Opener has only **5** cards in the originally bid Major suit, and the Partners are playing **1NT** as Forcing, the Opener instead must then bid a side suit or **2NT**.

If the Partnership is playing a **1D** opening as showing at least 4 Diamonds, and the opening bid by Partner sitting first or second was **1D**, and Opener has 5 Diamonds, then Opener can bid **2D** with this rebid of Diamonds showing the extra Diamond card.

To explore some of the subtleties of "**2 Over 1**", see: "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quiz #72: 'Some Nuances About the '2 Over 1' Bridge Convention: The *Most Important* Convention in Bridge, Especially for Newer Players":

https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0072_q.pdf

or "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quiz #82: 'Opener's *Rebid* Options After Responder Triggers '**2 Over 1**' During the Auction":

https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0082_q.pdf

Note. **Neil Timm** is a Professor *Emeritus* of Statistics at the University of Pittsburgh. One of his bridge publications is a 2018 6th edition book on the “**2 Over 1**” convention: The Two Over-One Game Force System. The book is *quite complex*, roughly 600 pages long, and includes *numerous topics far beyond* the “**2 Over 1**” convention, such as “splinter” bids, “auto/Self splinter bids”, and “Swiss” bids. Also, Esther does not agree with every aspect of Timm’s treatment of the “**2 Over 1**” convention. But the book is available *free* on the web, and you may wish to check the book out at:

<https://pitt.edu/~timm/BookGameForce.pdf>



Esther says...

“To *practice* bidding the ‘2 Over 1’ Convention as *both* Opener and Responder go to ‘Esther Bridge ‘Pop’ Quiz #330”:

https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0330_q.pdf