

**Esther Discusses "The Art of the Reverse
by the Bridge Opener and
Responder's 'Lebensohl 2NT' Bidding Option"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will talk us through "**The Art of the Reverse by the Bridge Opener**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther, because I am so "warm and caring"!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

Esther: Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, would you begin by defining what a bridge "**reverse**" is?

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¹ 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, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Larry Cohen in his "Bridge with Larry Cohen" website posting, "Reverses",² notes that:

"Basically, a '**reverse**' is when opener's rebid (2nd bid of the auction) meets both A & B:

A) Opener's rebid is in a HIGHER ranking suit than his first suit

B) Opener's rebid is at a HIGHER level than responder's response (*but never a jump!*)...

So, these are reverses:

1♣-1♥-2♦

1♣-1♠-2♦

1♣-1♠-2♥

1♣-1NT-2♦

1♣-1NT-2♥

1♣-1NT-2♠

1♦-1♠-2♥

1♦-1NT-2♥

1♦-1NT-2♠

1♥-1NT-2♠

In all auctions above, the last bid is made by the [O]pener, of course. Each bid is natural and promises extra values (approximately **17-20 counting useful distribution**). Reverses are *forcing [for] one round*--the responder can not [sic] pass. However, reverses are not forcing to game." (emphases and italics added)

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, is a "**reverse**" the same thing as a "**jumpshift**" by the Opener?

Esther: Well, Bruce, *absolutely, positively, no!!!* A "**reverse**" "shows" **17+** HCPs and is "**forcing**" for 1 Round of bidding, and is not "**Game Forcing**"! But an Opener's "**jumpshift**" (i.e., Opener both "jumps" an extra level and "shifts" to a new Suit), on the other hand, is **Game Forcing** and shows **19+**

² See: <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/reverses>

HCPs. An example of a "jumpshift" is the following auction in which both Opponents remain silent:

YOU	Partner
1D	1H
2S	

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, what does a "reverse" bid by Opener "show" about the Opener's Hand "shape"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, a "reverse" shows that your Hand (1) is "unbalanced" (thus making a NT bid unreasonable) and that (2) your 1st bid Suit is "longer" than your 2nd bid Suit. As Jeff Tang notes in his "Reverse Bids" posting³ on his excellent "BridgeBum" website:

"You can make a reverse bid when ALL of the following criteria are met:

1. You open the bidding with 1-of-a-suit and partner responds at the 1-level.
2. Your hand is unbalanced so you can't rebid no-trumps.
3. You lack 4-card support for partner and therefore can't raise her.
4. You have a second suit whose rank is higher than your first suit...
5. Your second suit is shorter than your first suit.
6. You have a strong hand worth 16+ (or 17+) points."

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, would you give us a concrete example of a Hand that meets all of Jeff Tang's 6 criteria?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here is a variation on a Hand presented in Jeff Tang's article that certainly suggests a "reverse" bid by the Opener:

YOU	Bidding			
NORTH (17)	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
♠ K	1♦	PASS	1♠	
♥ A K 6 3	2♥			
♦ A K 7 5 3				
♣ T 9 4				

³ See: https://www.bridgebum.com/reverse_bids.php

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, are there any situations where a "reverse" bid is "off" by Partnership Agreement?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. Larry Cohen's preference is to play "**reverses**" only when *both* Partners' first bids are only at the 1 level. Thus, "**reverses**" are "off" if Opener bids 1**D**, 1**H** or 1**S** and Responder, for example, makes a 2-level "**2 Over 1**"⁴ response.

Lebensohl 2NT "Puppet Bid Request" by the Responder

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, is there anything else you wish to say?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. Obviously, when your Partner, the Opener, executes a "reverse" Partner obviously holds ~17+ HCPs and a 2-Suited Hand. Because Partner is "strong" you obviously may be somewhat "weak". For example, if Partner opened 1**D** and you as Responder bid 1**H** it is conceivable that you hold (1) 5+ Hearts with (2) some Heart Honors, but you might hold as few as 6-8 HCPs. Do you agree, Bruce?

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, yes, of course. Is there anything you as Responder can do to "show" Partner that your Hand is fairly weak?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. Some Partners agree to play a special "**Lebensohl**" convention.⁵ Generically, "**Lebensohl**" is an "artificial" bid of 2**NT** that has *different* meanings in *different* bidding sequences. For example, a "Lebensohl After Opponents 'Interfere' with Partner's 1**NT** Bid" is commonly used in Partnerships when an Opponent Overcalls Partner's 1**NT** bid by making a 2-level Suit bid. Another

⁴ Within "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Esther Bridge Conventions Lesson #1: The '2 Over 1' ('2/1') Bridge Convention":

[https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2 over 1.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2%20over%201.pdf)

⁵ The "Lebensohl" convention was originally misattributed to Ken Lebensold but apparently was created by George Boehm and first described by Boehm in a November, 1970 article in The Bridge World magazine but under the spelling, "lebensohl". See:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebensohl>

variation is "Lebensohl Over Opponents' Weak 2 Opening Bid".⁶

But there is a variation on "Lebensohl" called the "Lebensohl 2NT After a Reverse"⁷ which is used by Responders to tell Partner/Opener executing a "reverse" that although you as Responder bid a "new" Suit at the 1 level you nevertheless hold a relatively weak Hand. After Opener's "reverse", if the Responder makes a 2NT rebid Responder is saying, "Partner, I hold 5-7 HCPs and I want to stop in a 3-level partscore contract if, and only if, you as Opener have *minimum HCP values* for your 'reverse'." Because the "Lebensohl 2NT After a Reverse" bid is "artificial" this bid **must** be alerted to your Opponents.

The "Lebensohl 2NT After a Reverse" bid asks the Opener to make a "puppet" bid of 3C. A "puppet" bid requires/requests a "fixed" response from Partner. For example, a Jacoby Transfer bid after Partner opened 1NT turns Partner into a "puppet" by requiring a "fixed" bid of a particular Major.

Here are your options after the Opener makes the requested 3C bid:

1. If (1) the Opener did not bid Clubs and (2) you as Responder (a) hold **6+** card support in Clubs with "good Suit quality" and (b) no "support" for either of the Opener's bid Suits you may PASS.
2. If the Opener's 1st bid was Clubs and you hold a "weak" Hand with **3-4** card Club support you may PASS to show a preference for Opener to play a 3C contract.
3. If you hold **3+** cards in one of the Opener's two bid Suits you may then "correct" the Opener's "puppet" 3C bid to a 3-level partscore contract thus suggesting that you wish the Opener to play a contract in that Suit.

Although a "Lebensohl 2NT After a Reverse" bid asks you as Opener to bid 3C you may at your discretion bid *past* the "requested" 3C bid. Doing so says, "Partner, I hold 'extra'

⁶ See Marc Smith's "BridgeBum" website article, "Lebensohl Over Weak Two Openings":
https://www.bridgebum.com/lebensohl_over_weak_two.php

⁷ On Karen Walker's excellent website "Karen's Bridge Library" see her posting, "Lebensohl Over Reverses":
<https://www.kwbridge.com/rev-leb.htm>

strength and I *demand* that we keep bidding until we reach a Game contract."

Frequency of "Big" Hands and Ways to "Show" "Big" Hands

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, how frequently should I expect to hold a "big" Hand? In other words, how often will I be bidding a "reverse" if Partner and I play "reverses"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, if you and Partner play in **3** competitions per week, and you play **24** Boards in each competition, then you will be playing $3 \times 24 \times 52 = \mathbf{3,744}$ Boards each year. Here are (1) the probabilities for holding **16+** through **20+** HCPs and (2) how many times each year you will hold Hands with these point counts:

HCPs	Hands Per Year
16+	241.5
17+	153.2
18+	92.8
19+	54.3
20+	30.0

So, Hands with these point counts are rare but they do indeed happen. And when they happen it may be important to know how to handle the situation.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, I certainly agree with that. Would you briefly review some of the ways that Partner can show "big" Hands other than simply opening by bidding **1NT**, **2C**, or **2NT**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, although I will not cover these bids here in the present lesson, but here are some various ways to show Partner a "big" Hand:

Bid	HCPs
DOUBLE, then bid	16+
"Reverse"	17+
"Jumpshift" by opening and later bidding a "new" Suit at a higher level than necessary to make a "sufficient" bid	18+, 19+

Of course, Partners by Partnership Agreement may play with different HCP ranges.