



# Bidding Basics

BY LARRY COHEN larryco.com

## A tour of the bidding box for newer players

In the old days, all two-level openings were strong. With the advent of weak two-bids, only 2NT and 2♣ remain for strong hands.

### Balanced hands

A 2NT opening should be played as 20–21 balanced. If you have more than 21, you have to start with 2♣. Each balanced hand below has 22 or more HCP, so is opened 2♣:

♠A Q J 8 ♥A K 7 6 ♦A Q 3 ♣K 4  
 ♠A K 7 6 5 ♥A J 3 ♦A K Q ♣J 3  
 ♠K Q ♥A K Q 8 ♦A K Q J ♣Q 5 4

Why not open 3NT with the balanced 26 HCP in the final example? It is hard to have a good auction after such a start. If you prefer to keep things simple and open 3NT to show 25–27 HCP, so be it. More on this in a future article.

### Unbalanced hands

What about unbalanced hands? While in the old days you could open big hands 2♦ with diamonds or 2♥ with hearts and 2♠ with spades, nowadays those all get lumped into 2♣. Each hand below must be opened with 2♣:

♠A K Q J 10 2 ♥A K Q 10 ♦A 2 ♣3  
 ♠A K ♥A K Q 10 8 7 6 ♦K J 2 ♣Q  
 ♠A Q ♥A 2 ♦5 ♣A K J 10 9 6 5 4

Those hands are so strong, that they can't be opened on the one level (where it might go Pass–Pass–Pass). Don't be concerned with counting high-card points (the actual totals of each hand

are 23, 22 and 18). There is no exact high-card requirement for unbalanced strong 2♣ openings. With each hand, the opener will next bid his long suit (forcing). The follow-ups will be covered in a future article.

But what is the cutoff point? Can you open 2♣ with:  
 ♠K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 ♥3 ♦5 ♣5?

Legally, you could, but it's not a good idea. Your partner will expect a slam if she has, say a pair of ace-kings. Without giving an exact number of points, let's just say that you should have at least two aces and two kings, in addition to eight or nine sure tricks in your hand.

Let's take away an ace from each of the example hands:

♠A K Q J 10 2 ♥A K Q 10 ♦8 2 ♣3  
 ♠K 3 ♥A K Q 10 8 7 6 ♦K J 2 ♣Q  
 ♠A Q ♥A 2 ♦5 ♣K J 10 9 6 5 4 2

With the first hand, 2♣ is still correct. You have "only" 19 HCP, but basically 10 tricks in your hand. You'd hate to open 1♠ and play there.

With the second hand, while 2♣ wouldn't be "wrong," I prefer 1♥. You don't have game in your own hand and have only 17 HCP plus a potentially useless singleton queen.

The third hand has a lot of tricks (I'd say eight and a half of them, planning

2

The definition of a modern 2♣ opening bid is:

If *balanced*, more high-card points (22+) than a 2NT opener (20–21). If *unbalanced*, some strong hand: no exact high-card range. It is artificial and says nothing about clubs.



on six club tricks and the ace-queen-ace). Still, partner will expect more high cards from a 2♣ opener.

Don't open 2♣ with a hand containing a running long suit and nothing on the side. For example, open 4♠ with:

♠A K Q J 8 7 6 5 ♥4 3 ♦4 3 2 ♣—.

What if you had something like:

♠A K Q 10 8 7 6 5 ♥K Q 10 ♦3 2 ♣—?

Sure, you want to be in 4♠, but don't open 4♠ (a preemptive bid) nor 2♣ (not enough high-card points). Open 1♠. It won't go all pass (there are too many high cards and too much shape out there). You can bid 4♠ on your next turn to show this kind of hand.

### Three-suited hands

With 4–4–4–1 shape and a choice between opening one of a suit or 2♣, I recommend opening on the one level. It is hard to describe a three-suited hand after starting on the two level. So open 1♦ with each hand below:

♠K Q 7 6 ♥A Q 7 6 ♦A K Q 2 ♣3  
 ♠A J 7 6 ♥3 ♦A K Q J ♣A J 3 2

## BIDDING BASICS QUIZ

On each hand below, you deal with neither side vulnerable. What is your call?

1. ♠A J 7 ♥A K 6 ♦8 7 6 5 ♣A K Q
2. ♠A 2 ♥K Q 8 7 6 ♦A K 3 ♣A Q 6
3. ♠A K ♥K Q 6 ♦A K J 3 2 ♣A J 6
4. ♠6 5 ♥K J 10 8 7 6 5 4 3 ♦K 2 ♣—
5. ♠K J 10 5 ♥A Q J 10 9 8 7 ♦— ♣K 2
6. ♠A K 7 6 ♥A Q 7 6 ♦A Q J 6 ♣2

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### Answers

1. 2NT, showing 20–21 balanced.
2. 2♣, intending to rebid 2NT to show 22–24 balanced.
3. 2♣, intending to rebid 3NT to show 25–27 balanced.
4. 4♥. There's not enough high-card strength for 2♣.
5. 1♥. There's not enough high-card strength for 2♣, but it's too strong for a 4♥ preempt.
6. 1♦. It's easier to have a good auction starting low with a three-suiter. Don't open 2NT with the low singleton club.