

Your 2C Bidding Structure

http://home.comcast.net/~kwbridge/bb/b_2c.htm

Part 3 -- Choosing Your Responses to 2C

Think about the last time you filled out a convention card with a new partner. You might have gotten into long, involved conversations about once-in-a-lifetime conventions, but when you came to the part of the card for 2C opening bids, the discussion may have been over in two seconds. Typically, one person will say "2D-semiauto" (or some other shortened version of an agreement) and you're done with it. Even serious partnerships often devote little time to this aspect of their systems. But since 2C openers seem to come up about once a session, it pays to know your options and to have some clear agreements about these auctions with your partner.

One important area for discussion is responder's conventional responses and rebids. The once-common 2D negative response (which showed 0-7 points) is used by few players today. Modern bidding has given us lots of new choices, each with advantages and disadvantages.

When designing your system, it's often helpful to find out which conventions and treatments are popular among good players. Some interesting answers came from a survey of players who read the Usenet newsgroup rec.games.bridge on the Internet computer network. This group isn't representative of bridge players as a whole (their average age is 37), but most are fairly experienced players who have studied bidding theory. Those who answered the survey ranged from intermediate-level players to world champions.

When asked what general structure they used for responses to a strong 2C in their favorite partnership, they offered the following answers (with the percentage of "votes" for each):

- 36% -- 2D semi-positive, 2H immediate double negative
- 25% -- Control-showing step responses
- 21% -- 2D waiting, cheaper minor second negative
- 10% -- 2D negative, 2H balanced positive
- 4% -- Point-count step responses
- 4% -- Other artificial systems

Here's a quick look at the three most popular responding structures:

2D waiting (or "semi-automatic")

With this widely used approach, responder almost always bids 2D to give the 2C opener maximum room to describe his hand. Exceptions are rare; responder bids his own suit only when it's very strong and he has otherwise positive values. Most partnerships also include a way for responder to show an ultra-weak, "second-negative" hand later -- usually by bidding the cheaper minor (some also use cheapest suit or 2NT). The advantages of 2D waiting are that it's simple and it saves bidding space. The drawback is that responder has fewer opportunities to describe his strength and suit length, and may find it difficult to catch up later in the auction.

Control-showing responses

This approach is popular because it allows responder to show his most important cards (aces and kings) immediately, all in one bid. Counting each king as one control and each ace as two, responder makes one of the following step responses:

- 2D = 0 or 1 control
- 2H = 2 controls
- 2S = 1 ace and 1 king (3 controls)
- 2NT = 3 kings (3 controls)
- 3C = 4 controls

There are many variations, including one that incorporates point-count into the first two steps -- both 2D and 2H show 0 or 1 control, but 2D limits the hand to 0-4 points and 2H promises 5+ (or some players use 0-5 and 6+ point ranges). 2S becomes the 2-control response and the other steps are modified accordingly.

The disadvantages of control responses are that responder loses the ability to make a natural call at his first turn and may use up extra bidding space, which can make the later auction somewhat tricky. But since the higher steps show slam-oriented responding hands, most partnerships don't worry too much about losing an early level of bidding.

A few players define the steps by just point-count, but this has little value because it makes no distinction between jacks and aces. The 2C opener seldom has any need for knowing his partner's total points; information on aces and kings is much more helpful.

2D semi-positive; 2H double negative

This is similar to 2D waiting, with the exception that responder uses an immediate 2H response to show a "double-negative" hand (fewer than 2 queens). A response of 2D, then, is semi-positive, promising at least two queens or a king.

This offers several advantages. Responder's 2H gives opener immediate information about game prospects and makes it easier for you to stop in a part score when it's right. Since the 2D response shows forcing-to-game values, both partners can keep the auction low. Also, there's no need for a second-negative response later, so all of responder's rebids are natural.

Since 2H isn't available as a natural call, 2NT is used to show a positive response with hearts (5+ cards to 2 of the top 3 honors). A better alternative to this is "reverse transfers", where 2S shows a heart positive, and 2NT shows a spade positive. This makes the strong hand declarer if responder's suit becomes trumps.

Defining your other responses

If you've decided to use control-showing responses, responder has few other choices for his first bid. Those who have adopted other systems need to discuss the meanings of all the other possible bids responder might make.

For those who play 2D as waiting, negative or semi-positive, here are the standard meanings (and some popular variations) for responder's other bids:

- **Suit response** (2H, 2S, 3C, 3D): Most partnerships require responder to have a near-perfect hand for this bid: at least 5 cards, two of the top three honors, and otherwise positive values. AQxxx and out isn't enough, especially if it's a minor.
- **Jump in a suit** (3H, 3S, 4C, 4D): Many pairs haven't discussed responder's jump, but some play it as a 6-card or longer suit headed by AKQ. A more useful agreement is to define it as a long, strong suit missing the ace or king, with no outside controls (something like a good weak two-bid).
- **2NT**: This usually shows a balanced 8-10 or 9-11 points (or, for those who play 2D semi-positive and reverse transfers, a good spade suit). In practice, it's rarely used as a natural bid because it eats up so much space. Several of the Usenet players said the only time they would respond a natural 2NT would be with a hand with good tenaces, soft values and few controls.
- **3NT**: Although the standard definition is a balanced 11-12, many of those surveyed said they would never respond 3NT. Instead, some use it to show an unspecified long, solid suit.

Note that few players use the old "game-in-hand" requirement anymore, so an opening 2C isn't 100% forcing to game. You should, however, agree that unless the 2C opener rebids 2NT, the auction is forced to at least 3 of a major.
