



## Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions.  
Send your questions to [askjerry@jerryhelms.com](mailto:askjerry@jerryhelms.com).

**Dear Jerry:** My partner and I play 2/1 Game Force, and we had the following auction with these two hands:

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ Q 5 3	♠ A K 8 7 2
♥ A K 7 2	♥ 5
♦ A K Q 8	♦ 3
♣ 9 4	♣ A Q 8 7 5 3
OPENER (ME)	RESPONDER
1♦	2♣
3NT	4♠
4NT	5♦
Pass!	

After partner responded 2♣, I didn't think partner would have a major suit, so I jumped to 3NT to show my extra strength. I wasn't sure what 4♠ meant, so I bid 4NT. Partner thought this was Blackwood and responded accordingly—showing three keycards. I was confused, and passed! Should I have bid 2♥ instead of 3NT?

—S. L., Oak Ridge, TN

**Dear S. L.:** Your 1♦ opening started describing the hand well. With 18 points, you were too strong to open 1NT. Partner's 2♣ response was also correct. With good hands, you want to bid as naturally as possible, longer suit first. Once the partnership is forced to game there will be lots of time to show the spades.

Playing 2/1 Game Force provides an opportunity to put a "Jerryism" into practice:

### JERRYISM

Go slow 'til you know where to go; consume space when the opponents need it.

Your idea for bidding 2♥ instead of 3NT was good. There's no need, playing 2/1, to describe your strength at this point. Again, there will be time later to do that.

Although partner probably doesn't have an interest in hearts or spades, partner could have a distributional hand and merely be bidding the longer suit first—as on the actual deal.

Let's see what might happen if you rebid 2♥. Partner could now bid 2♠. This tends to be a descriptive bid, showing spades, since there's no need for an artificial "fourth suit forcing to game" bid once you are already forced to game.

Now you could further describe the shape of your hand by bidding 2NT. Again, no need to jump. You are already forced to game. This gives partner an opportunity to rebid 3♠. Bidding spades twice shows a five-card suit, and since partner bid clubs first, partner must have six clubs and five spades—eleven cards in the black suits.

At this point, you know there is an eight-card spade fit, and with all that extra strength, you can expect that there is a slam if the partnership has enough key cards—aces and the king of the trump suit. You can check by bidding keycard Blackwood. When your partner shows two aces and the ♠K, you might even consider a grand slam, but when partner has no kings outside of the trump suit, you can settle for a 6♠ contract.

Incidentally, while you generally avoid bidding Blackwood holding two low cards in an unbid suit, it's okay when partner has bid the suit—clubs in this case.

Whether your 2♥ bid shows extra strength after a 2/1 response—because it sounds like a "reverse"—is a matter for partnership discussion. With my regular partners, we play that it does not promise anything extra. The expert community, however, is divided on this point.

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**Dear Jerry:** Do you give yourself a point for a five-card suit when you have a balanced hand?

—T. K., Pittsburg, PA

**Dear T. K.:** I always "notice" length. I'm aware that 4-3-3-3 distribution is not good. It's better to be 4-4-3-2. It's even better to be 5-3-3-2. And, or course, it's better still to hold a six-card suit.

So a balanced hand with a five-card suit is typically stronger than a hand with no five-card suit and should be upgraded accordingly. Adding 1 point for a five-card suit is a reasonable approach, although I like to also use other factors for upgrading, such as 10s and 9s and honors that are working together.

So I'd consider a hand with 14 high-card points and a five-card suit suitable to open 1NT. Although, if the five-card suit is weak and I don't like the rest of the hand, I may choose not to open 1NT.

Similarly, if I have 17 high-card points and a balanced hand including a five-card suit, I'd usually avoid opening 1NT. I'd upgrade the hand as being too strong to open 1NT.

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**Dear Jerry:** Would you open 1NT with two doubletons?

—U. J., Las Vegas, NV

**Dear U. J.:** Sometimes! ♠ K 3  
If I open this hand 1♦, ♥ A J 6 2  
I'd have a tough rebid ♦ K J 7 5 3  
if partner says 1♠ or ♣ Q J  
1NT. 2♥ would be a "reverse." I prefer 1NT. However, if I have a five-card major and a four-card side suit, I'd open the major. I'd only open 1NT with a five-card major when the hand pattern is 5-3-3-2. ♦

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