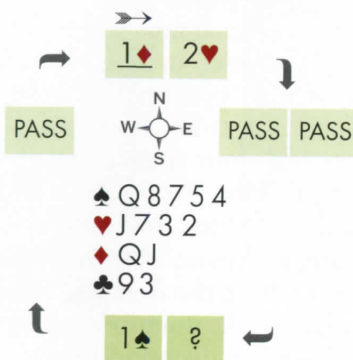




Well-known teacher and player Jerry Helms answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: I held this hand as South and the auction proceeded:



Partner didn't jump shift and, with such a poor hand, I passed. When I put down the dummy, partner seemed upset and, after she made ten tricks, she commented that I had passed a forcing bid. Did I?

—S.T., New York, NY

DEAR S.T.: I think you did and, obviously, so did your partner who 'reversed.'

The modern trend is to treat a reverse as a one-round force. The fact that you did not understand the implication of the auction above is fairly common, since many people do not really understand reverses.

Opener 'reverses' by introducing a higher-ranking second suit at the two level after a one-over-one response. Contrast these two auctions:

- | | | |
|----|--------|-----------|
| 1) | OPENER | RESPONDER |
| | 1♥ | 1♠ |
| | 2♦ | |
| 2) | OPENER | RESPONDER |
| | 1♦ | 1♠ |
| | 2♥ | |

The first auction allows responder to take a preference to opener's first suit at the two level, while the second auction requires responder to take a preference to opener's suit at the three level. Therefore the second auction is a reverse.

In the first auction, opener doesn't promise any extra strength, although opener could have up to about 18 points, not quite enough for a jump shift. Opener's hearts are presumably as long, or longer than, opener's diamonds. This auction is not forcing. Responder can pass with only 6 or 7 points and a preference for opener's second suit.

In the second auction, opener is showing unbalanced distribution along with about 17 or more points. It is rare to reverse in suits of equal length, so most of the time opener's first suit will be longer than the second. Here, opener will have longer diamonds than hearts with the majority of values concentrated in the two suits. Since opener could have 19 or more points, the reverse is forcing for at least one round.

A typical minimum hand your partner may have held would be:

♠ 3
 ♥ AKQ6
 ♦ AK874
 ♣ J82

Despite having 'only' 6 points, your ♦Q-J and four-card heart support gave you a very good hand. If opener has a strong hand and we find a major-suit fit, game is forced. I would jump to 4♥ with your hand.

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Playing reverses as forcing creates problems when responder is very weak, so many partnerships have a firm set of agreements about how to slow the auction down. A relatively simple method is this:

1. Unless a fit has been found, responder's first obligation is to rebid a five-card or longer major suit. After this, if opener bids 2NT or three of the original suit, responder may pass. If opener does anything else, the auction is forcing.
2. To show weakness and deny a five-card or longer suit, responder artificially makes the cheapest available bid, which is either the fourth suit or 2NT. After doing this, responder can pass if opener bids 2NT or three of the original suit. If opener does anything else, it is forcing.

The corollary is that the partnership is forced to at least game if responder doesn't send a weakness signal and supports either of opener's suits directly.

By the way, I have a Jerry-ism that would easily have solved your problem. Anytime you hear a bid and you are not sure if it is forcing, I recommend:

ASBAF
ALL STRANGE BIDS
ARE FORCING

Incidentally, I would be inclined to keep any partner who says, "Thank you" when I have erred, and who is polite when later discussing disasters at the table. —JH

FOR INFORMATION ON JERRY'S UPCOMING FESTIVALS AND CRUISES VISIT: WWW.JERRYHELMS.COM