



## Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS ✉ askjerry@jerryhelms.com 🖨 jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

My partner and I have adopted 2/1 game force as our system of choice, with a limited number of conventions. We are using both Jacoby 2NT and splinter bids after major-suit openings, but sometimes we don't know which ones to use. I'm sure you have some advice.

Irene

Hi Irene,

Good question, and amazingly enough, I have a strong opinion, which I will be happy to share with you. Let's start with a pair of premises, which I think are extraordinarily important:

**Any time you intend to reach the level of game, you should do so in the most descriptive fashion possible.**

If your partner opens one of either major, and you hold four-card or longer support, with game-forcing values, there are only two options: Jacoby 2NT or splinter raise.

Simplistically, if your partner opened 1♠, this hand would be perfect for a Jacoby 2NT conventional raise.

♠K 7 4 3 ♥A 4 ♦K Q J ♣8 7 4 2  
1♠ 2NT

By agreement, the 2NT bid is defined as game forcing, four or more trumps, often with balanced distribution. The somewhat standard replies from opener:

3♣/3♦/3♥ = shortness in the bid suit

3♠ = no shortness, more than minimum opening values

4♠ = no shortness, minimum opening values

3NT = Extras, with a wide variety of opinions as to exactly what it shows!

4♣/4♦/4♥ = a second five-card suit headed by two of the top three honors

Holding the previous hand, if opener replied 3♣ to your Jacoby 2NT initial response, your hand becomes very strong because you know that all of partner's high-card strength is working in conjunction with your high-card strength. Jacoby 2NT allows responder to gain more information about opener's values and distribution.

If partner opened 1♠ and you held:

♠K 7 4 3 ♥A 6 4 2 ♦K J 8 5 ♣8,

you have a classic hand for making a 4♣ splinter raise, if available as an option. Devised by Dorothy Hayden (Truscott) in the late 1950s, she decreed that any unusual jump like this should show game-forcing values, at least four trumps, and either a singleton or a void in the bid suit. If your partner hears this, and holds nothing but small cards in the club suit, he knows all of his high-card strength is working in conjunction with your strength. Each of the following auctions would be examples of a splinter raise, and there are many others.

Opener

1♥

1♦

3♠/4♣

1♠

4♣/4♦

Responder

3♠/4♣/4♦

1♥

2♥

The general rule that I give to my students is that any unusual, unnecessary jump shift that sounds like it might be a splinter raise *is* a splinter raise!

So, back to your question: When should I choose a splinter raise and when should I use a Jacoby 2NT raise? My answer? You have to decide whether it is better to give or to receive! Examples:

1♥ ?  
♠8 7 5 4 3 ♥A Q 9 5 ♦5 ♣A J 4

Although your singleton diamond is important, for slam purposes, it would be great if partner were short in spades. For this reason, I would choose a Jacoby 2NT in an attempt to receive information.

Conversely, holding:

♠K Q 7 4 3 ♥A 9 5 2 ♦5 ♣K 6 4

With strength in all of the outside suits, I would prefer to give partner information about my shape and values by making a splinter raise to 4♦.

To reiterate, a Jacoby 2NT should be selected with a desire to receive information. A splinter raise is often a better choice to give information. ■