



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(313) Responding to 1NT with an Invitational Hand

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Level: 2

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General

When partner opens the bidding with 1NT, and we hold a hand with invitational values (about 8-9 points) then we are faced with a challenge. We need to both let partner know our values (by making a bid that invites game) and search for a possible fit. We must accomplish both of these while attempting to keep the auction at a relatively low level. If Opener has minimum values, and declines our invitation, we do not want to reach a contract that is higher than we can make. Balancing our desire to explore game, find a fit, and keep the auction at a relatively low level requires the development and effective use of good bidding tools. Let's look at how we use our tools (conventions) to describe our invitational hands to partner.

Invitational Hand with a Long Major

With a 6+card Major suit and a hand with invitational values (about 8-9 total points), we transfer to our Major suit and rebid that suit at the 3-level.

Example 1

♠ x

♥ AJxxxx

♦ Qxx

♣ xxx

1NT 2♦*

2♥ 3♥

___?

Now partner can decide whether to pass (with a minimum) or go to game, either 3NT or more likely 4♥ (with a maximum).



With a 1-suited hand containing only a 5-card Major suit and invitational values, we transfer to our Major invite game (show our values) by rebidding 2NT.

Example 2

♠ xx
♥ AJxxx
♦ QJx
♣ xxx
1NT 2♦*
2♥ 2NT
___?

Partner can now pass or bid 3♥ with minimum hands or choose a game with a maximum, 3NT or 4♥.

Note: Partner actually has several more options in this auction. With a minimum hand and a good 5+card minor, they can signoff in that suit by bidding 3-minor. With a maximum hand and 5-2-3-3 distribution, Opener can bid 3♠, which accepts our invitation and asks us to choose between 3NT and 4S.

Example 3

♠ x
♥ AJxxx
♦ Jxxx
♣ Qxx
1NT 2♦*
2♥ 2NT
___?

Here, even with a 2-suited slightly unbalanced hand, we bid the same as we did with a balanced hand.

Invitational Hands with Length in Both Majors

When we hold invitational values and length in both Major suits things are even more complicated. Here we must determine if we have a fit in either Major and if we have enough values to play game.

Example 4

♠ Q8743
♥ AQ95
♦ 854
♣ 4
1NT 2♣
2♦ 2♠
___?

Here we use Stayman to search for a 4-4♥ fit first. If that does not help us find a fit, then we show both our invitational values and a 5-card ♠ suit by bidding 2♠.



Example 5

♠ AQ87
♥ Q8743
♦ 43
♣ 94
1NT 2♦*
2♥ 2♠
___?

First, we transfer to ♥ to show our 5-card suit, and then rebid 2♠, showing our 4-card ♠ suit and invitational values.

Both of these auctions attempt to find a fit in both ♥ and ♠, while keeping the auction at a low level – both 2♠ bids are invitational and non-forcing in these auctions.

Invitational Hands with a 4-Card Major

With only a 4-card Major (one or two of them) then we use Stayman to search for a fit. If we find one, we re-evaluate our hand and raise to either 3M or 4M. If we do not find one, then we bid 2NT.

Example 6

♠ 65
♥ A974
♦ T54
♣ AJ32
1NT 2♣
2♥ 3♥

Here we find a fit, so we raise to 3♥ to invite game.

1NT 2♣
2♦/2♠ 2NT

If Opener rebids 2♦ or 2♠ then we do not have a fit, so we invite game by rebidding 2NT.

Example 7

♠ 43
♥ A843
♦ J3
♣ K8743
1NT 2♣
2♠ 2NT

Here we must rebid 2NT to invite game, even though we have a 2-suited hand. We cannot bid our long ♣ suit now, as it would be forcing.



Balanced Invitational Hands with No Major Suit Length

With a balanced hand, no 4-card or longer Major, and 8-9 pts, we simple invite game. We do so by bidding 2NT (if it is natural). If we play 4-Suited Transfers, then we must “go through Stayman” in order to invite and cannot bid 2NT directly.

Example 8

♠ A84

♥ Q5

♦ K643

♣ 8743

1NT 2♣

2♦ 2NT

Playing 4-Suited Transfers, we invite game by bidding Stayman and then rebidding 2NT.

Minor Suit Oriented Invitational Hands

With an invitationaly valued, 1-suited hand with a 6-card minor, we simply transfer to that minor. Playing 4-Suited Transfers partner will then have a way to tell us if they like their hand (more specifically if they like our holding in their suit).

Example 9

1NT 2♠*

___?

Here 2♠* is a transfer to ♣. Let’s assume that our agreement is that 2NT is partner’s “normal” bid and that bidding 3♣* is how they say they “like” our ♣ suit.

♠ 7

♥ 973

♦ Q83

♣ AJ8743

If partner says they like ♣, then we bid on (bidding 3NT or making other descriptive bids, like 3♠ showing shortness). If partner does not say they like our ♣ suit, then we sign off in 3♣.

With an invitationaly valued minor suit 2-suiter (4/5 or 5/5) in the minors, we do not have a great way to describe our hand. We simply must invite as we would with a balanced hand (by bidding Stayman and then rebidding 2NT).

Note: Some partnerships have a gadget 1NT – 3♣ to show a hand with 5-5m and invitational values. although this convention is not as popular as it was some years ago.*



Conclusion

When we hold a hand with invitational values opposite a 1NT Opener we must work hard to thread the needle between finding the right strain to play in (our fit) and finding the right level to play. We must attempt to locate a fit as well as invite game (in case partner has a maximum for a 1NT Opener), but we simultaneously must attempt to land in a reasonable partscore (in case partner has a bad 1NT Opener). Work hard to be confident and comfortable with your tools so that you can describe these delicate hands well.