BRIDGE AT SEA LIBRARY

Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Standard American edition



CHAPTER 8

Opening 2NT and Strong Hands

2NT with 20–21, the strong 2♣ opening, and how to respond

Mike Smith

bridgescorer.com

1. Opening 2NT

Rule 1. With a balanced hand of **20–21 points**, open **2NT**.

♠ A Q 5
♥ K J 4
♦ A K 6 3
♣ K J 8

21 points, balanced: open **2NT**.

2. Responding to 2NT

Partner has 20–21, so with about **4–5 points** or more you are close to the 25 needed for game. The tools are the same as over 1NT, one level higher:

Your hand	Bid
0–3 points, balanced	**Pass**
4–10, balanced, no four-card major	**3NT**
A four-card major, 4+ points	**3♣** (Stayman)
Five or more hearts	**3♦** (transfer to hearts)
Five or more spades	**3♥** (transfer to spades)

After a transfer, continue as over 1NT (Chapter 3): pass with nothing, or bid 3NT with five cards and let opener choose.

♠ J 7 3
♥ Q 8 4
♦ 9 6 5 2
♣ Q 7 3

Partner opens 2NT. **5 points**: **3NT**.

♠ 9 8 4 2
♥ 7 6 3
♦ J 5 2
♣ 10 6 4

Partner opens 2NT. **1 point**: **pass**.

♠ K 10 7 4
♥ Q 6 2
♦ J 8 5
♣ 9 7 3

Partner opens 2NT. **6 points** and four spades: **3♣** (Stayman).

♠ 6 4
♥ J 9 6 5 3
♦ 8 7 2
♣ 8 5 4

Partner opens 2NT. **1 point** and five hearts: **3♦**, then **pass** 3♥. Some players simply pass 2NT with so weak a hand.

3. The strong 2♣ opening

In Standard American, **2♣** is the one strong opening. It is **artificial** (nothing to do with clubs) and **forcing**.

Rule 2. Open **2♣** with **22 or more** points, or any hand that can make game on its own or needs only one trick from partner.

After 2♣ – 2♦	Shows
2NT	22–24 balanced (partner may pass with nothing)
3NT	25–27 balanced
A suit	your long suit; forcing

♠ A K Q 6
♥ A K 5
♦ K Q 4
♣ Q 5 3

23 points, balanced: **2♣**, then 2NT.

♠ A K Q J 10 6 3
♥ A K 4
♦ A 5
♣ 7

Ten sure tricks in your own hand: open **2♣**, then bid spades.

Responding to 2♣

Your hand	Bid
Most hands	**2♦** (waiting)
8+ points and a good five-card suit	**your suit** (a positive)
8+ points, balanced	**2NT**

♠ J 7 4
♥ Q 9 3
♦ 8 6 5 2
♣ J 10 4

Partner opens 2♣: **2♦**.

♠ K 5
♥ A Q J 8 4
♦ 9 7 3
♣ 10 6 2

Partner opens 2♣: **2♥**, a positive. Slam is likely.

> 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ openings are **weak twos** in Standard American: a six-card suit and a weak hand. They come in Chapter 9.

4. Summary

Your hand	Open
Balanced 20–21	2NT
Balanced 22–24	2♣, then 2NT
Balanced 25–27	2♣, then 3NT
Game on your own	2♣, then bid your suit

5. Test yourself

1. ♠ K Q 7
♥ A J 5
♦ A K 8 4
♣ K 9 3

2. ♠ Q 8 5
♥ J 7 4 2
♦ 9 6 3
♣ 10 8 2

3. ♠ K 9 6 3
♥ 8 4
♦ Q 10 7 2
♣ J 6 5

4. ♠ K J 8 6 3
♥ 7 2
♦ Q 5 4
♣ 8 6 3

5. ♠ A K
♥ A K Q 9 7 4
♦ A K 5
♣ 4 3

6. ♠ Q 10 4
♥ J 7 2
♦ 9 6 5 3
♣ Q 8 4

1 and 5: What do you open? 2, 3 and 4: Partner opens 2NT. 6: Partner opens 2♣.

Answers

1. 2NT. 20 points, balanced.

2. Pass. 3 points.

3. 3♣ (Stayman). 6 points and four spades.

4. 3♥ (transfer), then 3NT. Opener chooses 4♠ or 3NT.

5. 2♣. 23 points and a strong six-card suit.

6. 2♦. The waiting response.

Next: Chapter 9, Weak Twos and Pre-empts. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

About this guide. There are many versions of Standard American, and clubs, teachers and books do not all agree on every detail. This chapter describes one common, straightforward version for learners. We do not claim it is the only or the best way: if your teacher or club plays something different, follow them. What matters most is that you and your partner agree.

© 2026 Mike Smith, Bridge at Sea. You may print and share this chapter for personal and club teaching use.