

What's Standard?

Grant Standard — by David Lindop



This is the fourth article discussing what is meant by “standard” when referring to modern bidding methods. The previous articles can be found at www.audreygrant.com.

The previous article introduced Grant Standard, which adds some popular conventions to the minimal set of agreements that comprise Grant Basic:

- Jacoby transfers (extended)
- Jacoby 2NT
- Splinter raises
- Reverse Drury
- Second negative after 2♣
- Fourth suit forcing

The first four were discussed in the last article. Let's cover the remaining two before moving on to competitive bidding, leads and signals.

Second Negative After 2♣

Strong balanced hands of 22 or more points and strong unbalanced hands with about nine or more playing tricks are opened with an artificial 2♣. With about 8 or more points, responder can make an immediate *positive* response:

- 2♥, 2♠, 3♣ or 3♦ show a *good* five-card or longer suit.
- 2NT shows a balanced hand.

The definition of good suit varies among partnerships, but a reasonable guideline is two of the top three honors for a five-card suit, three of the top five for a six-card or longer suit. For example, ♥A Q 9 7 5 and ♥K J 10 7 6 3 would qualify. After a positive response, the partnership is committed to at least game and will be looking for a possible slam.

Most of the time, responder has a hand that doesn't meet the requirements for a positive response. With these hands responder makes an artificial *waiting* response of 2♦, leaving opener the maximum amount of room to describe the nature of the 2♣ opening.

If responder bids 2♦ and opener rebids 2NT, showing a balanced hand of 22 to 24 points, responder may pass with a very weak hand since the 2NT rebid is not forcing. 3♣ by responder is Stayman, 3♦ is a transfer to hearts and 3♥ is a transfer to spades, similar to the responses to 1NT. (Note: If opener rebids 3NT, 4♣ is Stayman and 4♦ and 4♥ are transfers.)

The situation is different if responder bids 2♦ and opener rebids in a suit, showing a strong, unbalanced hand. Responder can't pass; opener's rebid is unlimited and forcing. The classic way for responder to show a weak hand at this point is to bid notrump at the cheapest level. The disadvantage is that responder will become declarer if the partnership plays in a notrump contract and the strong hand will be face up on the table as the dummy.

To minimize this possibility, Grant Standard uses “cheaper minor as second negative” after a 2♣ opening and 2♦ response:

- If opener rebids 2♥ or 2♠, 3♣ by responder shows a weak hand.
- If opener rebids 3♣, 3♦ by responder shows a weak hand.
- If opener rebids 3♦, 3NT by responder shows a weak hand.

If opener rebids 3♦, responder still becomes declarer with the weak hand when the partnership plays in a notrump contract, but we'll have to live with that.

This approach does allow the partnership to stop short of game if opener simply rebids the same suit after the second negative response. If opener rebids anything else, however, the partnership is forced to at least game.

“Second” negative is a bit of a misnomer since the initial 2♦ response is only a waiting bid, not necessarily a negative response.

Fourth Suit Forcing

Suppose the auction begins like this:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♥	1♠
2♣	?

By the time opener has made two descriptive bids, responder will usually be able to place the contract. With a minimum hand of 6 to 10 points, responder can give preference back to 2♥, rebid 2♠ or pass 2♣. With an invitational hand of 11 to 12 points, responder can jump to 3♥ or 3♠, bid 2NT or raise to 3♣. With 13 or more points, responder can jump to game in one of the partnership suits or bid 3NT.

There are times, however, when responder needs a forcing bid. Responder may be unsure of the best game contract or may want to investigate slam possibilities. A bid of 2♦, the fourth suit, would be forcing in standard methods, but would show diamonds. The modern style is to treat a bid of the fourth suit by responder as forcing but artificial. A bid of 2♦ here would say nothing about diamonds; it would ask opener to make a further descriptive bid.

This approach is referred to as “fourth suit forcing,” although what is really meant is “fourth suit artificial” ... and forcing. More important, however, is whether the bid of the fourth suit is forcing for only one round of bidding or all the way to game. In Grant Standard, we're going to adopt the style of *fourth suit forcing to game*. Responder will need enough strength to commit the partnership to the game level to bid the fourth suit, but the partnership may relax thereafter and take time exploring the best game or slam contract.

There is one exception:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♦
1♥	1♠

Responder's bid of the fourth suit at the one level is natural—showing a four-card spade suit—and forcing, but doesn't commit the partnership to game. Responder has to jump to 2♠ in this specific sequence as the artificial fourth suit forcing to game.

Competitive Bids

Now let's move to the back of the convention card to look at competitive bidding, leads and signals. The chart gives a summary, but here are the main features that have been added to Grant Basic:

- Michaels
- Unusual notrump
- Responsive doubles
- Truscott 2NT

Michaels

It's rare to want to play in a suit opened by an opponent, so it's become popular to use the direct cuebid of an opponent's one-level opening bid in a suit as a two-suited takeout:

- Over 1♣, an overcall of 2♣ shows five or more cards in both majors.
- Over 1♦, an overcall of 2♦ shows five or more cards in both majors.
- Over 1♥, an overcall of 2♥ shows five or more spades and five or more cards in a minor suit.
- Over 1♠, an overcall of 2♠ shows five or more hearts and five or more cards in a minor suit.

After a 2♥ or 2♠ cuebid, advancer may bid 2NT to ask which minor partner holds.

This agreement, known as Michaels, is covered in more detail later.

Unusual Notrump

It's also uncommon to get a hand strong enough to overcall a natural 2NT when an opponent opens one of a suit. If you do get a balanced hand with 20 or more points, you can

always start with a takeout double. So, it's popular to use a jump overcall of 2NT over an opponent's one level opening bid as a two-suited takeout, showing at least five cards in each of the two lower-ranking unbid suits.

For example, if the opening bid is 1♦, a jump overcall of 2NT shows five or more hearts and five or more clubs. This is referred to as the unusual notrump.

Responsive Doubles

When opener's bid is doubled for takeout, responder often raises, perhaps preemptively. In standard methods, a double by advancer — the takeout doubler's partner — is for penalty. However, it's often more effective for advancer's double of responder's raise to be for takeout.

This is referred to as a *responsive double* and, in Grant Standard, it can be used after responder raises opener's suit up to and including 4♦.

Jordan 2NT

If opener's bid of one-of-a-suit is doubled for takeout, responder can redouble with about 10 or more points. That's usually ineffective when responder has four-card or longer support for opener's suit. Responder won't want to double for penalty and the opponents may preempt the auction before responder can show the support.

It's popular practice for responder to use a jump to 2NT over a takeout double to show support for opener's suit and at least the strength for a limit raise. This is called Jordan (or Truscott) 2NT. *(In the next issue we'll look at Grant Standard in practice.)*

COMPETITIVE BIDDING	
OVERCALLS & DOUBLES	ADVANCES
Simple Overcall: 7-17 (usually)	jump raise: preemptive new suit: non forcing (constructive) cuebid: forcing (one round)
Jump Overcall: preemptive; good 6- or 7-card suit (usually)	new suit: forcing cuebid: forcing (one round) raise: signoff
Notrump Overcall: 15+ to 18	2♣: Stayman 2♦: 5+ hearts (transfer) 2♥: 5+ spades (transfer) 2♠: transfer to 3♣ (to sign off in clubs or diamonds)
Overcall of Opponent's 1NT: all suits are natural	new suit: non forcing
Jump to 2NT: unusual 5+ cards in both lower unbid suits	3NT: to play cuebid: forcing (one round)
Direct Cuebid: Michaels 2♣ or 2♦: 5+ hearts & 5+ spades 2♥: 5+ spades & 5+ clubs/diamonds 2♠: 5+ hearts & 5+ clubs/diamonds	3NT: to play cuebid: forcing (one round) 2NT: asks which minor
Double: Takeout through 4♥ (or as agreed upon by the partnership)	cheapest level: 0-8 jump: 9-11 (invitational) cuebid: forcing (one round) double of raise: takeout thru 4♦
RESPONDER'S ACTIONS AFTER INTERFERENCE OVER 1♣/♦/♥/♠	
After an overcall: Jump raise: weak cuebid: limit raise or better in opener's suit Negative (takeout) doubles through 3♠	
After a double: Jump raise: preemptive New suit at one level: forcing New suit at two level: non forcing Redouble: 10+ points (no four-card or longer fit) 2NT: limit raise or better in opener's suit	
LEADS	
VERSUS SUIT CONTRACTS	VERSUS NOTRUMP CONTRACTS
Top of touching high cards (A-K-x)	Top of solid sequence (K-Q-J-x)
Top of a doubleton (7-x)	Top of broken sequence (Q-J-9-x)
Otherwise low (fourth highest)	Top of interior sequence (K-J-10-x)
(Avoid leading low from an ace)	Otherwise low (fourth highest)
SIGNALS	
Attitude: high cards are encouraging; low cards are discouraging.	
Count: high-low shows even number; low-high shows odd number.	
Suit Preference: high card is preference for higher-ranking suit; low card is preference for lower-ranking suit.	