

What's Standard?

Using Grant Standard: Responding to 1NT — by David Lindop 

Previous articles in this series, the Grant Basic and Grant Standard Summary Charts, and corresponding convention cards can be found at www.audreygrant.com.

When responding to 1NT, the Summary Chart gives an overview of the methods we have available:

| RESPONSES | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2♣: | Stayman |
| 2♥: | 5+ hearts (transfer) |
| 2♠: | 5+ spades (transfer) |
| 2♠: | transfer to 3♣ |
| (to sign off in clubs or diamonds) | |
| 3♣/3♦: | 6+ suit; invite. to 3NT |
| 3♥/3♠: | Forcing; invite. to slam |

These are only our “conventional” agreements. We must still know the basic principles for responding to a notrump opening bid and we often have to exercise our judgment.

25+ Points for Game?

The traditional wisdom is that the partnership needs about 26 or more combined points for a game contract. The modern trend, however, is to be more aggressive and move the guideline down to about 25 points, especially for 3NT contracts.

The value of the game bonus more than compensates for the occasional loss from failing to stop in partscore. Also, even though the defenders get to make the opening lead, declarer tends to have the advantage. It's easy to get off to the wrong lead from the few clues available during the auction, and once dummy goes down, declarer knows where the strengths and weaknesses lie. The defenders have to guess or they have to communicate effectively through signals.

Using a guideline of 25 points for game, nothing changes when we move from a 16–18 point range for 1NT to 15–17. We still stop in

partscore with 0-7 points and get to game with 10 or more. No change for responder's guidelines!

Aren't we being too aggressive if the 1NT opener could have as few as 14 high-card points and be upgrading the hand to 15 points with the help of a five-card suit or some 10s and 9s? Not necessarily. The success of such leading partnerships as Meckwell—world champions Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell—is partly due to their aggressive game bidding ... putting opponents under pressure. Besides, the trend in expert circles is toward even lighter 1NT openings, perhaps as few as 10-12 points!

We still have to use judgment. As responder, we aren't forced to invite opener to game when holding a ratty-looking 8 points. Nor do we have to only invite game with a good-looking 9 points. We can jump to game if it feels right.

Handling Balanced Hands

With balanced hands and no interest in looking for a trump fit, responder uses a simple quantitative approach, following this guideline:

| RESPONDING TO 1NT WITH BALANCED HANDS | |
|--|---|
| 0-7 | Pass (signing off in partscore) |
| 8-9 | Raise to 2NT (inviting game) |
| 10-15 | Raise to 3NT (signing off in game) |
| 16-17 | Raise to 4NT (inviting a small slam) |
| 18-19 | Raise to 6NT (signing off in small slam) |
| 20-21 | Raise to 5NT (inviting a grand slam) |
| 22+ | Raise to 7NT (signing off in grand slam) |

In this chart, the signoff bids are in red (not to be confused with the red on the convention card for Alertable bids). Responder signs off in partscore, game, or slam when responder knows how high the partnership belongs.

♠ J 9 7 3 With only 4 high-card
♥ Q 8 4 2 points, we would pass
♦ 5 4 in response to a 1NT
♣ J 7 5 opening with this hand.

It's true we could land in a better contract if we used the Stayman convention and opener rebid 2♥ or 2♠, but that's risky. If opener were to rebid 2♦, we'd have nowhere to go. 2NT now would be invitational, likely getting the partnership too high.

♠ 3 We don't have to be
♥ 8 4 2 perfectly balanced to
♦ Q 8 6 3 pass 1NT. We would
♣ 9 7 5 4 2 exercise our judgment
and pass with this hand since we have no good alternative. We have a method to sign off in a minor suit—as we'll see shortly—but that would take us to the three level. That's unlikely to be an improvement over leaving partner to struggle for seven tricks in 1NT.

♠ K 9 3 There are only 9
♥ 10 8 2 high-card points, but
♦ 8 2 we can add 1 length
♣ A Q 10 7 4 point for a five-card
suit when responding as well as opening. The total of 10 points is enough to go for the game bonus. If partner opened with 14 high-card points and a five-card suit, we'll be in game with a total of 23 high-card points ... but we're not down yet!

♠ 10 3 Yes, the club suit is
♥ 8 2 nice, but there's no
♦ K 7 4 need to mention it.
♣ A K J 8 7 5 Raise right to 3NT.
With 11 high-card points plus 2 length points, we're headed for game, not slam. Don't give the defenders additional information. Nine tricks should be easier than 11 in 5♣.

♠ A J 5 A balanced hand with
♥ K J 6 18 high-card points.
♦ A Q 6 3 Raise right to 6NT.
♣ Q J 5 There's no need to ask

for aces. If partner were to show one ace, we'd bid 6NT. If partner were to show two aces, we'd also bid 6NT since the partnership doesn't have enough combined strength for a grand slam contract.

Could we be missing two aces? It's possible. Although the partnership has a minimum of 33 combined points, partner might have opened 1NT with 14 high-card points and a five-card suit or a lot of 10s and 9s. If so, too bad. It's more likely that we're missing the ♣A K, for example. Asking for aces wouldn't help in that situation and it would risk getting the opponents off to the right lead.

Notrump slams are typically bid on straight power, not the refinements of having specific cards. There's no guarantee we'll make 6NT when we bid it. A key finesse could lose instead of win. On the other side, perhaps the defenders will get off to the only lead that will let us take 12 tricks. If we have about 33 or more combined points with two balanced hands, let's go for that big bonus ... and the added excitement!

The chart for responder's actions with balanced hands has two bids in **yellow**. These are invitational bids. Opener is expected to pass with a minimum of 16 or fewer points or accept the invitation with a maximum of 17 points ... or 16 points and a good excuse.

♠ K 5 8 high-card points
♥ 9 6 2 plus 1 for the five-
♦ A J 10 7 3 card suit make this
♣ 8 4 2 hand worth an invitational raise to 2NT over 1NT. If the ♦A were the ♦K, would this still be worth a raise to 2NT? That's a matter of judgment, not methods. We would need to take into account other factors such as the vulnerability, the type of scoring—rubber bridge, teams or matchpoints—and whether we needed a big swing.

♠ Q 9 5 With 16 high-card
♥ A 3 points, we would
♦ K Q 9 5 raise 1NT to 4NT.
♣ A J 10 4 **This isn't Blackwood.**

It's an invitational—*quantitative*—raise, asking whether opener has a maximum. Opener should pass with 15 or 16 and bid 6NT with 17 ... or 16 and a good feeling.

Opener should not show the number of aces held, even when accepting the invitation with a maximum. It only gives information to the defenders. In experienced partnerships, the bid of a suit at the five level by opener is looking for a 4-4 fit, perhaps when opener has a low doubleton in another suit. A jump by opener to the six level in a suit shows a five-card suit, giving responder the option of playing there or in 6NT.

The most interesting—and least known—line on the chart is the one in **green**, when responder has 20-21 points. A raise to 5NT is **forcing**. It asks opener to bid 6NT with a minimum or 7NT with a maximum.

♠ K Q 4 With this 20-point
♥ A Q 8 hand we would raise
♦ K Q 7 1NT to 5NT. Opener
♣ K J 10 2 would bid 7NT with 17 points, putting the partnership in its 37-point grand slam. With less, opener would settle for 6NT.

Since we would be disappointed if partner were to pass 5NT, we should simply bid 6NT with this hand if we're uncertain whether partner knows the meaning of 5NT.

Playing in a Suit Contract

We're often faced with the decision of whether to play in a suit contract or in notrump. If we have enough combined strength for game, for example, we need only nine tricks in 3NT rather than 10 tricks in 4♥ or 4♠ or 11 tricks in 5♣ or 5♦.

Experience shows that playing in an eight-card or longer trump fit will usually provide at least one more trick than in notrump, and often two or more tricks. The guideline, therefore, is to try **play in the major suit with an eight-card or longer fit.**

With a minor-suit fit, the situation is less clear. At the game level, **it is usually best to play in 3NT rather than 5♣ or 5♦.** The trump suit may not provide *two* more tricks and the trick score for minor suits is significantly less than for notrump or major suits. In partscore or slam contracts, however, it is usually best to choose the safety of the minor suit, although the trick score factor becomes a consideration in duplicate bridge.

In summary, lot of bidding theory focuses on finding eight-card or longer major-suit fits, and the responses to 1NT are no exception.

Putting Stayman to Work

Next to Blackwood, Stayman is the most well-known convention, and it is certainly more useful in terms of frequency of use. The mechanics are straightforward. In response to a 1NT opening, a bid of 2♣ asks opener to bid a four-card or longer major suit. Opener rebids as follows:

- 2♦ with no four-card major suit
- 2♥ with four or more hearts
- 2♠ with four or more spades

With four cards in both majors, Grant Standard is to rebid 2♥, consistent with bidding four-card suits “up the line.”

As a guideline, responder uses Stayman on any hand with 8 or more points and at least one four-card major suit. Let's see some examples.

♠ A Q 6 2 With 10 high-card
♥ K J 7 5 points, we know the
♦ 9 4 2 partnership belongs
♣ 8 3 in game. To check for

a major-suit fit, we respond 2♣. If opener rebids 2♥, we raise to 4♥; if opener rebids 2♠, we raise to 4♠; if opener rebids 2♦, we jump to 3NT.

♠ 6 4 With 9 high-card
♥ A J 10 5 points and a four-card
♦ K J 8 3 major suit, we bid
♣ 10 9 3 2♣. If opener rebids 2♥, we invite to game by raising to 3♥; if opener bids 2♦ or 2♠, we invite to game by bidding 2NT.

(In the next issue we'll look at some more complex auctions involving Stayman and then move on to using transfer bids.)