TWO-OVER-ONE RESPONSES

Requirements for a two-over-one response cannot be stated simply. To say that it requires 11 HCP or more is a straitjacket approach that does not work for natural bidders. In good bidding there are hands with less points that call for a two-over-one response. These are the hands with distributional features that make them unsuitable for a 1NT response. A two-over-one implies at least 1-1/2 defensive tricks, however.

Notrump is a desirable landing spot, especially at match points. You get more points for a given number of tricks, and game is scored with fewer tricks. Accordingly, partner will believe you when you bid notrump, and will tend to leave you in notrump, or raise you, if at all possible. You must therefore avoid bidding notrump with hands that are unsuitable for notrump play. Use a five-card major system with a forcing 1NT response if you want to bid notrump with suit-oriented hands.

With a hand like ♠ 3 ♥ 732 ♦ AJ7632 ♣ K86, respond 2♦ to a 1♦ opening. A two-over-one response does not promise another bid, so you can pass if partner rebids 2♥ or 2♠.

Avoid bidding notrump with singletons, voids, 5-5 distribution, or a long suit. These features are desirable for suit play. Long suits are good for notrump, but only if they can be run. Bid your long suit and find out if partner fits your hand. A 1NT response is no help in finding a fit for a long suit.

Stretch a little to bid two-over-one after a 1♥ opening if your hand contains four or more hearts. A good heart contract might be missed if you respond 1NT and partner passes with 4-4 in the majors. With ♠ K6 ♥ J875 ♦ 83 ♣ KQ1093 respond 2♥ to a 1♥ opening. Partner may rebid 2♠, and you can stand a 2♥ rebid. If your hearts and diamonds were reversed, a 1NT response would be preferable.

One-Over-One or Two-Over-One?

With two (or more) suits and a choice of bidding at the one or two level:

-- If the longer suit can be shown at the one level, bid it.

-- If the longer suit must be shown at the two level, bid it only if the hand is worth a game try--11 points or more. If you will have to pass a minimum suit rebid by opener, prefer the one level response.

With ♠ 83 ♥ KQ84 ♦ 76 ♣ KJ753 respond 1♠ to a 1♥ opening. Add the ace of diamonds and 2♣ is the correct bid, planning to bid hearts on the next round. It is wrong to bid 1♠ with the stronger hand in an attempt to "keep the bidding low." If partner rebids 2♠, you would have to bid 3♣. Result: the bidding is higher, not lower, and opener has no information as to the relative length of the two suits.

-- If the suits are of equal length a one-level response is usually preferable, but there are exceptions. With ♠ AQ97 ♥ 73 ♦ 843 ♣ AK94 a 2♥ response to 1♠ is preferable to a 1♥ response. Suppose partner rebids 2♠ -- then you bid 2♦, aiming at a notrump contract. If partner then bids 3♣, supposing you have five clubs, you can bid 3♠ (forcing). But suppose you respond 1♥ to 1♠. The bidding might go:

Opener	Responder

1	1
2	3
3	Now what?

Choice of Suit for Two-Over-One

When a two-over-one response is indicated, and there are two suits to choose from:

-- Bid the longer suit first, but count a very weak minor suit as having one card less in length. Treat 108753 as a four-card suit.

-- With equally long five or six-card suits, bid the higher ranking first. With touching 5=6 suits, a strong five-carder may be considered equal in length to a mediocre six-carder, especially with a weakish hand. Respond 2 to a 1 opening with 3 AQ1097 K107642 8. With a stronger hand you could bid diamonds, then bid and rebid hearts, but this hand is not strong enough for that.

-- When choosing between four-card suits, do not choose hearts unless they are very strong (e.g., AKJ3, AQJ10). In a pinch opener can raise with three small hearts because you are supposed to have five. Also, he can jump to 4 with just three-card support. Can you bid a four-card heart suit with four of partner's spades and too much for a raise to 2 ? Only with a game-going hand. It is true that the hand will not play in hearts, but don't get trapped into this auction with a hand of just invitational strength:

Opener	Responder
1	2
3	3 is forcing!

With 986 AJ73 754 AQ9 respond 2 to a 1 opening. Partner will suppose you have a club suit, but you should be able to handle any development. If he raises clubs you can bid 3 (forcing) because he implies five spades and a good hand with that sequence.

In competition it is sometimes necessary to bid two-over-one with only a fair four-card heart suit when you are not playing negative doubles. What else can you do when partner opens 1 , next hand bids 2 , and you hold J3 AJ87 873 KJ97?

-- With two four-card minors it is often wise to bid the suit in which it would be undesirable for partner to have a singleton, when you don't plan to show both suits. Reason: partner will tend to devalue his hand when he has a singleton in your suit. Partner opens 1 and you have J43 Q5 A1087 KJ83. You have too much for 2 or 1NT, so you must bid a minor. Which? Bid 2 , because that is the suit where a singleton would be undesirable in partner's hand. For instance, she could have KQ9652 A43 Q65 7. When you eventually raise her 2 rebid to 3 , she will bid 4 if you responded 2 originally, and pass if you answered 2 . This is an example of how natural bidders can help each other in hand evaluation.

Of course with a hand like this you have no choice: J3 765 AKJ5 KJ87. You must respond 2 to a 1 opening, to prepare for a rebid (3) if opener rebids 2 . You would not want to reverse with a 4-4 holding in touching suits. It is only when you have a real choice that you can use judicial suit selection to assist partner.

When RHO Overcalls in Notrump

-- If the notrump overcall is artificial, showing two suits (e.g., unusual notrump), see section 12-7, Defense Against Two-Suited Conventions.

-- If the overcall is natural, a two-over-one response is not forcing, a double is for business, all raises are preemptive, a jump to three of a new suit is invitational. A cue bid in notrump is unusual notrump, asking opener to choose between the lower two unbid suits:

South	West	North
1	1NT	Dbl - business
		2 /2 /2 - not forcing
		2 /3 - weak, preemptive
		2NT - unusual notrump, clubs and hearts
		3 /3 /3 - invitational

The 2NT bid shows something like void Q10763 J3 A108432. Fourth hand is going to bid some amount of spades, so opener will have the information he needs for his next call. The jumps to three in a major imply a very long suit and a distributional hand, one that cannot double the overcall with assurance: KJ98763 K4 Q87 2 (RHO could have a long solid club suit.). A jump in a minor implies a long suit headed by AQJ, inviting a 3NT bid but not forcing.

When RHO Overcalls in a Suit

Free bids at the two level in a suit lower in rank than opener's suit requires no more strength than non-free bids. When the suit is higher in rank, however, and he may be forced to the three level, responder must have a good enough hand to provide a measure of safety at that level:

South	West	North
1	1	2 - may be light
		2 - promises a better hand

The nominal minimum for bidding 2 is 10-11 HCP, maybe less with diamond support. Neither North response promises another bid, so she may pass a minimum rebid by South.