UNUSUAL NOTRUMP

Definition: A notrump bid that could not reasonably be considered natural. In general, an "unusual" notrump bid asks partner to choose between the lower two unbid suits. With equal length, she should select the lower ranking suit. Partner may not bid any suit other than the ones asked for, unless the suit is so good that it can play opposite extreme shortness.

Unusual 1NT

A 1NT overcall is unusual notrump when made by a passed hand directly over an opening bid (reopening 1NT bids are always natural):

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♦

1NT - unusual notrump, hearts and clubs
2♦ - Michaels, both majors

See section 8-5, Defensive Bidding by a Passed Hand.

Unusual 2NT

A jump to 2NT by an unpassed hand is natural, as is a 2NT overcall of a weak simple raise (but not an inverted minor raise):

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♠	2NT - natural

East has ♠KJ ♥J87 ♦AKQ1087 ♣AJ. West should raise to 3NT with a quick trick.

Any other 2NT bid made between two bidders is unusual notrump:

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	1NT/2♣	2NT - unusual notrump

Any 2NT bid made over a two-level opening is natural, except for a 2NT bid over a strong two bid, whether artificial or natural:

South	West	North	East
2♠	Pass	Pass	2NT - natural bid

South	West
2♣	2NT - unusual notrump if 2♣ is strong
	natural if 2♣ shows 11-15 HCP

Other unusual notrump bids:

-- Any 2NT bid by a passed hand:

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♠	Pass	Pass
2NT - unusual notrump			

-- A bid of 2NT when partner's takeout double has been redoubled:

South	West	North	East
1♣	Dbl	Rdbl	2NT

The 2NT bid shows the lower two unbid suits, hearts and diamonds, probably 4=6 in length, in a hand that might be quite weak. A 1NT bid is natural.

South	West	North	East
2♥*	Dbl	Rdbl	2NT - both minors
* weak			

-- A bid of 2NT when RHO overcalls partner's opening with 1NT:

South	West	North
1♦	1NT	2NT - hearts and clubs

The 2NT bid shows something like ♠ void ♥Q107632 ♦J ♣A108432. East is probably going to bid some big amount of spades, so opener will find this information useful for deciding on his next call.

A 2NT bid is not unusual when the bidder has previously opened the bidding or made a takeout double:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2♥	Pass	Pass
2NT - natural, not a 5=0=4=4 hand			

South	West	North	East
1♠	Dbl	2♠	Pass
Pass	2NT - natural, not a 0=3=5=5 hand		

However, a person who has previously denied the strength required for a natural notrump bid can bid 2NT as unusual notrump, even if he has bid before:

South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	2♥	2♠
Pass	Pass	2NT - unusual notrump	

North could have made a Competitive Double (see section 9-2), but prefers unusual notrump with a poor defensive hand: ♠ void ♥Q103 ♦Q9762 ♣Q10874.

Yet another occasion for the use of 2NT as unusual comes when partner has shown a minor in which you hold three cards, and you have five cards of the other minor:

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	2♣	2♠
Pass	Pass	2NT - unusual	

North probably has five diamonds, three clubs, and too much to pass. A similar auction:

South	West	North	East
1♥	Dbl	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♦	2♥	2NT - unusual

East has five clubs, maybe six weak, and probably a strong doubleton diamond. Having shown nothing so far, he bids 2NT to compete: ♠432 ♥874 ♦Q8 ♣A8763 West's 2♦ bid is not especially strong (♠AQ65 ♥10 ♦A107652 ♣K4), so East could not possibly have a real 2NT bid.

When the auction is such that partner is unlikely to take any precipitous action, unusual notrump can be based on the higher two unbid suits (but "not top and bottom"). If partner bids the lowest unbid suit, a takeout of his suit to the next one up clarifies the hand.

Unusual 3NT

A 3NT bid is unusual only in very obvious situations:

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	3♣	3NT

The 3NT bid is unusual notrump if North's jump is natural and strong, but is natural if the jump is artificial (e.g., a Bergen raise) or a weak natural preemptive response.

Weakish use of the unusual notrump is unwise when the suits are only 5-5, except in a reopening situation. Overuse of the convention is a good way to demoralize a partner. Too often she has the *other* two suits. Also, the bid tends to help the other side immensely in the play of the hand when they buy the contract.

The best use of unusual notrump is when you *must* do something. Instead of guessing which suit to bid, you can give partner a choice. The main idea of the convention is not so much to get into the bidding more often, but to get in more accurately.

Unusual 4NT

For use of the 4NT bid as unusual notrump, see section 8-6, Getting a Preference at the Five Level. Also see section 6-7, 4NT - Blackwood or Natural?; section 8-4, Notrump Overcalls; section 8-5, Defensive Bidding by a Passed hand; and section 10-8, Cue Bids in Notrump.