

THE amBIGuous DIAMOND system

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INTRODUCTION

Most currently popular American bidding systems have characteristics that adversely affect partscore bidding accuracy, close doubling of partscore contracts, and overtrick prevention. While these factors are of major importance in a matchpoint contest, they don't mean much with International Matchpoint (IMP) scoring, in which the primary concern is the bidding of hard-to-reach but reasonable games and slams that the opposition may miss. Perhaps because of the greater prestige of IMP events, American systems cater more to IMP than to matchpoint goals. Besides, most players are too lazy to come up with different systems for matchpoint and IMP contests.

Here are a few of the shortcomings of current systems in a matchpoint contest:

-- Five-card major systems require that a minor suit as weak as 432 (or even 32!) be opened when lacking five cards in a major, and major "suits" like 5432 are bid the same as AKQ2. The consequent reluctance to raise with three-card support means that good major suit partscores with 4-3 fits are seldom found (although bad ones sometimes are). Good minor suit partscores are also difficult to find, resulting in an over-reliance on bidding notrump. While notrump contracts are desirable at matchpoints, superior minor suit contracts should not be overlooked.

-- Bidding short and/or weak suits does not help partner to choose an opening lead, the most important play of all at matchpoint scoring. The practice is also detrimental for determining "fit" for both contract determination and doubling decisions.

-- After a five-card major opening, it is seldom possible to play a 1NT contract (a 1NT response is usually forcing), a highly desirable matchpoint landing place.

-- When not using weak notrumps, hands such as S-J832 H-AQ9 D-KJ3 C-Q102 are opened with 1C, a bid that does nothing to describe the notrump nature of the hand. With notrump so important at match-points, notrump type hands should bid notrump.

-- In systems using weak notrumps, 1NT openings are often required with hands that are more suit-oriented than notrump-oriented. Notrump bids should not be made with hands such as S-AK54 H-75 D-864 C-AK32, yet some systems require a 1NT opening with this hand. If 1NT must be passed, there is likely to be a better suit contract. Isn't it better to bid clubs and spades, then let partner decide on a contract? Whether bidding offensively, doubling for penalties, or making an opening lead, partner cannot count on the 1NT opener to really have a notrump-type hand.

-- "Big Club" systems take away the most valuable natural opening bid in matchpoint games. A natural 1C opening keeps the bidding low, avoids rebid problems, and is frequently useful for lead direction.

-- It is often impossible to play a safe notrump contract when opener has a strong hand and responder is weak. The 2NT opening with 20 HCP and the jump rebid to 2NT with 18 HCP are overbids made necessary by other systemic requirements. One might say with IMP scoring, "As long as there is no game, who cares?" With matchpoint scoring, however, bidding the right partscore can earn a top.

-- After a one-over-one response, the forcing nature of a reverse and subsequent forces by responder require either extreme underbidding or overbidding with some unbalanced 16-17 HCP hands. There is little reason

to play reverses as one hundred percent forcing, since a jump reverse is available with hands that must be in game.

-- Three-card minor suit openings allow the opponents to enter the bidding at a low level. They not only get into the bidding more easily and more accurately, but also may shut out major suit bidding space for the opening side. All sorts of gimmicks, such as negative doubles and support doubles, are needed to combat such interference. Accuracy in low-level business doubling is lost.

Since it is unlikely that a bidding system can be designed to satisfy all the needs of both types of scoring, it seems obvious that a partnership should use different systems for IMP and matchpoint scoring.

The amBIGuous DIAMOND system is designed for matchpoint competition. It combines the advantages of real-suit bidding and the bidding of notrump with all notrump-type hands (and only notrump-type hands). It permits, nay, it features, four-card major opening bids.

The author's personal bidding handbook on his web site (www.marvinfrench.com) is a useful accompaniment to this book. It includes a more detailed comparison of the advantages and disadvantages associated with four-card major and five-card major opening bids. Also see the article "Why Four-Card Majors?" included in the *Bridge Topics* section of the web site.

OPENING BID SUMMARY

- A 1C opening is natural, with four-card minimum length expected (but not promised)..
- A 1D opening (forcing) shows a notrump hand of 16-22 HCP or a very good natural opening bid in diamonds, with five or more diamonds.
- Four-card majors may be opened, with emphasis on both lead direction and ease of rebid. Minimum strength usually Q10xx. We avoid bidding very weak major suits, enabling partner to lead the suit or raise with three-card support..
- A 1NT opening shows 12-14 HCP non-vulnerable, 13-15 vulnerable, and strongly implies a hand better suited to notrump play than to suit play. If desired, the 12-14 HCP range can be played vulnerable too. Also, playing 11-13 HCP in fourth seat is reasonable. With both opponents passing, partner is unlikely to be very weak. Passing out such a hand is probably bad, but a raise by partner would be unwelcome. With this range partner is barred from raising in the absence of competition.
- A 2C opening is the standard strong artificial bid, used for notrump hands of 23+ HCP and game-going hands that are suit-oriented.
- A 2D opening shows at least five diamonds (six with no four-card major), 12-14 HCP (or a "bad 15").
- A 2NT opening shows both minors, nominally 5-5, maybe 5=6, opening bid strength, but not strong enough for a 1D opening.

Note that all notrump-type hands either start off with a notrump bid or bid notrump safely after a forcing opening. Conversely, hands that are more suit-oriented than notrump-oriented (strength concentrated in two suits, or containing a weak doubleton, especially in a major) are usually opened with a suit bid.

While not an integral part of the amBIGguous DIAMOND, the use of weak two bids in the majors fits in well.

THE ONE DIAMOND OPENING

A 1D opening is forcing, showing a notrump hand with 16-22 HCP or a very good natural opening bid in diamonds. When 1D is based on a diamond suit, partner will count on opener for at least five diamonds and 16 HCP, but a "good 15" is okay. With a game-going hand, it is usually better to start with 2C instead of 1D, but 1D is okay if game is not fairly certain or opener has a second suit in which he can make a forcing rebid.

Responses

The 1D opening is forcing. All one-level responses, and 2C, are artificial.

With a bad hand, responder usually bids 1H. A 1H response says, "I doubt that we can make a game, even if you have as much as 20 HCP." Opener can now play a safe 1NT contract with up to 20 HCP.

A response of 1S shows about 6-9 HCP. It says, "Perhaps we have a game." Five HCP are enough with a good five-card or longer suit.

A response of 2C is game-forcing. Responder wants to be in game no matter what sort of hand opener has.

A response of 1NT also says "I'm very weak," but shows length in both minors or both majors. Opener usually takes his choice of the minors at the two level, which responder passes or corrects to 2H.

A response of 2NT shows the minors only and is either a little stronger in high cards (but still weak) or more distributional: 6-6 or 5=6. Game may be possible if opener fits one or both suits, especially if he has 19-22 HCP, but most of the time he will bid 3C or 3D.

Responses of 2D, 2H, or 2S show a fair six-card suit and a weak hand. Typical suits for this bid: KJ9xxx, QJ9xxx, A10xxxx, with nothing outside. When the suit is weaker, it is better to bid 1H and hope that the suit can be shown later. When it is stronger, the hand is good enough for a 1S response. The suit should be reasonably playable opposite a singleton, since opener will usually pass with a diamond-type opening bid and a singleton in responder's suit. Opener also passes with a 16-18 HCP notrump hand, and will pass with 19-20 HCP if he lacks a good fit with responder's suit. With 21-22 HCP he will of course raise. The suit's strength requirement may be shaded for a 2D response, since opener must have at least two diamonds.

A jump to three of a suit shows a weak hand with a seven-card suit similar in strength to the two-level responses. A 3C bid, however, may be based on a six-card suit (since a 2C response is artificial). A jump to four of a major shows a semi-solid (AQJ., KQJ., AK..) seven-carder. Opener then bids what he thinks he can make. With a minor, bid 1S to avoid bypassing 3NT. Accordingly, it is logical to play transfer responses at the four level, diamonds-to-hearts and hearts-to-spades.

When in doubt about the proper response with a borderline hand, responder should make the weaker response with very short diamonds. The diamond shortness will not be an asset if opener has a diamond-type opening.

Rebids by a One Diamond Opener

-- After a 1H response, opener clarifies his hand:

With a 16-20 HCP notrump hand, he rebids 1NT. All conventions are *off*.

With a 21-22 HCP notrump hand, he rebids 2NT. All conventions are *on*.

With a "good diamond hand" opening, he rebids diamonds or shows a second suit. He rebids 2C to show hearts and 2H to show clubs. The natural rebids of 1S and 2D are not forcing, since powerful hands are opened with 2C. Opener may choose to rebid a strong five-card diamond suit rather than show a weak four-card club suit (a 2H bid forces responder to the three level in order to prefer a minor).

The reason for switching the 2C and 2H rebids is to allow hearts to be shown easily, as it is more important to show hearts than clubs. These artificial rebids apply only after a 1H response, and only when the opponents have been passing.

A jump shift is forcing for one round.

A jump rebid in diamonds is highly invitational, not forcing.

-- After a 1NT response, he bids his better minor (preferring clubs with equal length). If responder then bids 2H, he usually passes or bids 2S (preferring hearts with equal length), even with 20 HCP. Opener prefers the lower ranking suit with equal length, so responder might chance this bid with a 4=5 holding in the two suits instead of the more usual 5-5.

With 21-22 HCP, opener can rebid 2NT, whereupon responder's 3C or 3H rebid commands opener to "pass or correct" to the next-higher suit. With some values she might bid 4C or 4H to give the same message.

-- After a 1S response, opener clarifies his hand:

With a diamond-type opening, he rebids diamonds or shows a second suit. These bids are not forcing, so if opener wants to be in game opposite a minimum 1S response, he must jump. All jump rebids in a suit, even to 3D, are forcing to game.

With a 16-18 HCP notrump hand, he rebids 1NT ("systems on").

With a 19-20 HCP notrump hand, he rebids 2NT ("systems on").

With a 21-22 HCP notrump hand, he rebids 3NT, with transfers and Stayman applicable, but not Gerber.

-- After a 2C response, opener clarifies his hand:

With a diamond-type opening, he rebids diamonds or shows a second suit. Any rebid is forcing, since the 2C response is forcing to game, but opener may choose to make a jump rebid if that will describe his hand better.

With a 16-18 HCP hand, he rebids 2NT ("systems on").

With a 19-20 HCP hand, he rebids 3NT, with transfers and Stayman applicable, but not Gerber. A 4S bid by responder is Minor Suit Stayman and 4NT is invitational, but "four-suit transfers" are also logical.

With a 21-22 HCP hand, he rebids 4NT, invitational, with transfers and Stayman applicable. A 5S bid by responder is Minor Suit Stayman and 5NT is invitational, but "four-suit transfers" are also logical.

-- After a two-level response in a suit other than clubs, opener usually passes. With a fine fit in responder's suit and a strong hand, he bids what he thinks will make.

-- After a 2NT response, he usually bids his better minor (preferring clubs with equal length). With a good fit in one or both minors and/or 19-22 HCP, he can raise to an appropriate level or even bid 3NT with great minor-suit holdings, remembering that responder may have zero HCP if she is very distributional.

-- After a three-level jump response, opener also bids or passes in accordance with his strength and fit in responder's suit, remembering that a 3C response may be based on a six-card suit.

Rebids by a One Heart Responder

Since the 1H responder is very weak, his second bid (if any) at the two level is natural and non-forcing. All notrump conventions are *off* if opener rebids 1NT, enabling the bidding to stop at 2C or 2D:

Opener	Responder
1D	1H
1NT	2 any - natural sign-off

With 19+ points (including ruffing values if unbalanced), opener can raise with good trump support.

Opener	Responder
1D	1H
1S	2C/2D/2H weak sign-off

In the second auction, opener has shown diamonds and spades. With great support for one of opener's suits, an appropriate raise is okay. Remember that a 2D bid at this point is a preference, not a raise. To raise, (unlikely, in view of the 1H response) responder must jump to 3D.

Rebids by a One Spade Responder

The 1S response says, "Maybe there is a game." After a 1NT (16-18 HCP) or 2NT (19-20 HCP) rebid by opener, all notrump conventions are *on*. If opener rebids 3NT (21-22 HCP), all conventions other than Gerber are available, including Minor Suit Stayman.

When opener shows a diamond-type opening, responder's new suit bid is forcing, showing at least a five-card suit and 8 HCP (maybe a little less with a good major suit). An invitational 2NT rebid also requires 8-9 HCP, a suit raise 8-9 *points* (i.e., including ruffing values).

Opener	Responder
1D	1S
2C	2H/2S - forcing 2NT/3C/3D 8-9 points

Note that responder must bid 3D, not 2D, to raise diamonds when opener rebids 2C. A 2D bid would be a preference, not a raise. With a hand too weak for these rebids, responder must prefer one of opener's suits (or pass a 2D rebid). If opener jumps in a suit (including diamonds), responder must find another bid even with a minimum 1S response.

Rebids by a Two Club Responder

The 2C response is forcing to game, so responder can thereafter bid his hand leisurely without fear of being dropped short of game. If opener rebids 2NT, all notrump conventions apply. If he jumps to 3NT, showing a 19-20 HCP notrump hand, Stayman and major suit transfers apply, and 4S is Minor Suit Stayman. With 21-22 HCP he jumps to 4NT, with the same conventions available at the five level.

Opener	Responder
1D	2C
3NT	4C - Stayman
	4D/4H - transfer bids
	4S - Minor Suit Stayman
	4NT - notrump raise

If opener rebids in a suit, showing the strong diamond sort of opening, all jump takeouts in a suit by responder are splinter bids, since non-jumps are forcing. This includes a jump to 4D when opener rebids some other suit:

Opener	Responder
1D	2C
2H	3D - forcing (a "new" suit)
	4D splinter, good hearts

Splinter bids show at least some extra high card strength over what is required for a 2C response. With a minimum 2C response, just raise opener's suit instead of splintering.

When 1D Gets Doubled

If the 1D opening is doubled, probably showing diamonds, responder passes with a normal negative (1H) response, redoubles with a normal 1S response, and bids 1H (game forcing) with a normal 2C response. A 1S response shows a five-card suit (perhaps a very weak six) in a hand too weak for a redouble or 2S bid. Any two-level response, including 2C, shows a fair six-card suit and a bad hand, as usual. In this case the jump to 3C shows a seven-card suit, like other three-level jumps.

If the double shows diamonds, a 1NT response remains artificial, weak, but shows both majors only. A "cue bid" of 2D is forcing to game. More descriptive than a redouble would be, the cue bid implies a void in diamonds and at least 10 HCP. If the double does not show diamonds, 2D is not a cue bid and the 1NT response retains its usual meaning: both majors or both minors.

When a double gets passed around to opener, he bids 1NT with a notrump hand, even with 20 HCP. Suppose opener has a diamond-type opening (unlikely, if the double shows diamonds)? He either passes (if he likes 1D doubled) or bids a second suit.

If responder has redoubled (6-9 HCP), opener rebids 1NT with 16-18 HCP, 2NT with 19-20, 3NT with 21-22, or makes the normal rebid (or passes) with a diamond-type opening.

If responder has bid 1H, the artificial game force in this situation, opener bids 1NT with a 16-18 HCP notrump hand, 2NT with 19-20, 3NT with 21-22, or makes his normal rebid with a diamond-type opening.

When LHO Overcalls With 2C or a Lower Bid

When a 1D opening is overcalled by opener's left hand opponent (LHO) at the one level, or with 2C, responder passes if he was going to bid a negative 1H, and generally doubles ("positive double") if he was going to bid a positive 1S. A bid in the next higher ranking *suit* (not notrump) is an artificial game force, equivalent to a 2C bid in the absence of competition. Minimum *natural* suit bids are not forcing.

South	West	North
1D	1H	Pass - negative, 0-5 HCP Dbl - positive, 6-9 HCP 1NT/2NT - weak, both minors (as over a pass) 1S - artificial game force 2H- cue bid, game force 2C/2D/2S - weak, fair six-card suit 3C/3D/3S - weak, longer suit (as over a pass)

The cue bid is used with a 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 game-going hand, with shortness in the opposing suit and at least 10 HCP. Note that the two-level responses have the same meaning as over a pass, except for 2C.

The 2D response may be based on a weakish five-card suit, since opener usually has diamond support. The other non-forcing suit responses should be based on a better suit, preferably six long, since opener may have to pass with a singleton. With 18 HCP or more opener is permitted to bid after a non-forcing response, so responder should not be too weak.

South	West	North
1D	1S	Pass - negative, 0-5 HCP Dbl - positive, 6-9 HCP 1NT/2NT - weak, both minors 2C- artificial game force 2D/2H - as over a pass 2S - cue bid, game force 3C/3D/3H - as over a pass

Here, too, the cue bid shows a three-suited game-going hand.

When the overcall is 2C, similar principles apply:

South	West	North
1D	2C	Pass - negative, 0-6 HCP Dbl - positive, 7-9 HCP 2D - artificial game force 2H/2S/3D - as over a pass 3C- cue bid, game force 3D/3H/3S - as over a pass

Note that a positive double at the two level requires at least 7 HCP.

When partner passes an overcall, opener's takeout double or cue bid shows a hand based on diamonds. It implies shortness in the overcall suit(s) and support for the unbid major(s). Holding four spades and five diamonds, opener has a choice of reopening with 1S or a takeout double when there has been a 1H overcall.

She should prefer the takeout double with very short hearts, especially if the spades are weak or she has three or more clubs.

Holding a notrump hand opposite a passing partner, South usually reopens with 1NT after a one-level overcall. It is permissible to pass, however, with a minimum (16 HCP) notrump hand, especially when vulnerable. It is also permissible to pass with a diamond-type opening when no safe rebid is available, especially with length in the opposing suit.

After a positive double opener makes a normal rebid. With a notrump hand she must bid notrump, ignoring any unbid major for the moment, even when lacking a stopper in the opposing suit. A cue bid implies an extra good diamond opening with shortness in the opposing suit:

South	West	North	East
1D	1H	Dbl	Pass
1S	- diamond-type opening, spade suit too		
2C	- diamond-type opening, club suit too		
1NT	- 16-18 HCP notrump hand		
2H	- diamond-type opening, strong cue bid		
2NT	- 19-20 HCP notrump hand		
3NT	- 21-22 HCP notrump hand		

The 1S and 2C rebids are not forcing, so opener must jump to force. All the notrump conventions (Stayman, Jacoby, etc.) apply when opener shows a notrump-type hand following responder's double, except that Gerber is not available over a 3NT rebid. They do not apply when opener rebids notrump opposite a passing partner:

South	West	North	East
1D	1S	Pass	Pass
1NT	Pass	2C is natural, not Stayman	

The cue bid response to a double is useful with very strong hands based on a diamond suit opening:

South	West	North	East
1D	2C	Dbl	Pass
3C			

This cue bid is forcing to game. South has S-AQ87 H-AQ3 D-AQJ97 C-4. He chooses to cue bid because 2S could be passed and 3S could lose the heart suit if North has five hearts.

When responder has length in the overcall suit, he may choose to pass rather than double:

South	West	North
1D	1S	Pass

North has S-AQ1087 H-742 D-32 C-J86, with favorable vulnerability, and hopes that South, who will usually reopen after a one-level overcall, will make a takeout double. South can then pass again, expecting to defeat 1S. With a better hand than this, say 9 HCP or more, the game-forcing 2C bid is preferable to a pass (because opener might also pass).

When a "negative passer" later doubles a raise of the overcall, that is for takeout:

South	West	North	East
1D	1H	Pass	2H
Pass	Pass	Dbl - takeout	

North could hardly have long hearts, so this double is for takeout, showing short hearts and no doubt four spades.

Doubles of higher level bids, or of a suit rebid by RHO, are for business:

South	West	North	East
1D	1S	Pass	2H
Pass	2S/3H	Dbl - business double	

Suppose opener doubles a two or three-level raise made over partner's positive double:

South	West	North	East
1D	1S	Dbl	2S/3S
Dbl - takeout			

This is a responsive double, implying a diamond-type opening, shortness in the suit doubled, and support for the unbid suits. A double of one major strongly implies four-card support for the other major. A double of a new suit bid or higher-level raise by RHO is for business:

South	West	North	East
1D	1S	Dbl	2C/4S
Dbl - business double			

When LHO Overcalls With 2D or a Higher Bid

When the overcall is 2D or higher there is no artificial game force (other than a cue bid), so the double becomes unlimited:

South	West	North
1D	2D	Pass - negative
Dbl - positive, 7 HCP & up		
2H/2S/3C - not forcing		
2NT - stopper, 8-9 HCP, not forcing		
3D - cue bid, game force		
3H/3S - forcing		

When the overcall is a natural bid in diamonds, as above, South will show a four-card major in response to the double, even with a notrump hand. Usually this would imply a diamond-type opening with a secondary major suit, but in view of the diamond overcall responder can assume that opener has a notrump hand. When the overcall is not in the diamond suit, opener must rebid in notrump with a notrump hand, possibly bypassing a major.

When responder doubles a two-level overcall, opener (unless she chooses to pass) will have to bid 2NT to show a 16-17 HCP notrump hand, since 1NT is not available. We can't use 2NT to show 16-18 HCP because

a three-point range is too wide for a 2NT bid. With an 18-20 HCP notrump hand, opener jumps to 3NT. It may be best to pass the double rather than bid notrump with three small in the opposing suit, but go ahead and bid notrump with Qx, treating that as a stopper. If you open a notrump type 1D with Jx or worse in a suit, a poor practice when playing this system, you may be in trouble here.

Notrump conventions still apply at this level if opener shows a notrump-type hand in response to a double. Use the same conventions as over a 2NT opening:

South	West	North	East
1D	2S	Dbl	Pass
2NT	Pass	3C - Stayman	

North's hand: S-32 H-K542 D-763 C-AQJ8 Without the queen of clubs she would pass 2NT. Without the ace of clubs she would have to pass instead of doubling. A double with 6 HCP is too dangerous at this level, considering that opener might have only 16 HCP.

With a notrump-type hand and enough to continue after a 2NT response, opener can use a cue bid to ask for a major on the way to 3NT:

South	West	North	East
1D	2S	2NT	Pass
		3S - implies four hearts and a notrump hand	
		3C - diamonds and clubs	
		3H - diamonds and hearts	
		3D - long diamonds, a dislike of notrump	

When the overcall is at such a level that a minimum major suit response must be at the three level (or a minor at the four level), that has to be forcing:

South	West	North
1D	3C	Dbl - 8 HCP & up
		3D - not forcing
		3H/3S - forcing

A three-level (or higher) double requires 8 HCP. If responder has the sort of hand that would not relish a penalty pass by opener, he can cue bid instead of doubling:

South	West	North
1D	2H	3H

North has S-K1097 H-4 D-QJ64 C-AQ62. A double of 2H could result in a missed slam if opener passes, so responder makes the game-forcing cue bid instead.

When RHO Overcalls the Response to One Diamond

If responder has made a negative 1H response, a double is for takeout:

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1H	2C
Dbl - takeout double			

A double by a 1H responder is also for takeout:

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1H	1S
Pass	Pass	Dbl - takeout, must have hearts	

A business double by a weak responder of a suit bid on the left would be unlikely, so this double is for takeout. When responder has shown some strength and the next hand butts into the bidding, a double by either partner is for penalties:

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1S/2C	2D
Dbl - business			

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1S/2C	2D
Pass	Pass	Dbl - business	

When an Artificial Response is Doubled

-- When a 1H response is doubled:

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1H	Dbl

With a 16-17 HCP notrump hand, South passes and North can pass, redouble (with nothing in hearts), bid 1NT (with something in hearts) or, if afraid of notrump, bid a five-card or longer suit. The redouble lets opener bid the notrump when responder has nothing in hearts.

With an 18-20 HCP notrump hand, South rebids 1NT instead of passing.

With a diamond-type opening, South makes a natural rebid. In the unlikely event that hearts is his second suit, he redoubles. Responder can pass the redouble or take it out, knowing that opener probably has just four cards in the suit. A 2H rebid by opener is a cue bid, showing a huge hand with short hearts. A 2C rebid is natural here, since opener can redouble to show hearts.

-- When a 1S response is doubled:

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1S	Dbl

With a 16-17 HCP notrump hand (or 18 HCP and no spade stopper), South passes. North must then redouble (any other call gets in the way), whereupon South will rebid 1NT and the auction proceeds normally.

With an 18-20 HCP notrump hand and spades stopped, South rebids 1NT freely over the double, and with 21-22 HCP rebids 2NT.

With a 19-22 HCP hand that has no spade stopper, opener passes first and then bids 2S (forcing to game) after responder redoubles. Common sense bidding follows until game is reached.

With a diamond opening, South makes a natural rebid, redoubling if the rebid would be in spades. An immediate cue bid of 2S over the double shows a big hand with short spades, game forcing.

-- When a 2C response (forcing to game) is doubled:

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	2C	Dbl

With a notrump hand, South passes. North must then redouble (any other call gets in the way), whereupon South with clubs stopped will rebid 2NT (16-18), 3NT (19-20), or 4NT (21-22) or with no club stopper 3C. After this delayed 3C rebid, commonsense bidding follows until game is reached.

With a diamond opening, South makes a natural rebid, redoubling if the rebid would be in clubs. An immediate cue bid of 3C over the double shows a big hand with short clubs.

When a Natural Response is Doubled

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	2D/2H/2S	Dbl

This is presumably a takeout double. South redoubles with a notrump hand. With a diamond-type opening, South takes whatever action is appropriate, which is usually a pass or raise.

THE TWO DIAMOND OPENING

Since a 1D opening shows a strong opening bid, we need a bid to show a weak to moderate opening with long diamonds. For this we use 2D, just as the Precision System uses 2C to show an opening bid in clubs. The 2D opening requires at least five diamonds. With only five, opener must have a major suit too. Partner can pass 2D with an unpromising hand, and should do so if weak and unable to raise diamonds preemptively.

The Natural Responses

A 2S response is invitational, showing at least five spades. A weaker hand must pass and hope for the best. To show clubs, a non-forcing 4C is necessary, because 3C is artificial. A raise to 3D tends to be merely preemptive, but opener can bid again in competition with a good hand.

The Two Heart Relay Response

After a 2H relay response, opener rebids 3D with a one-suited hand, or shows a second suit. A 2NT rebid shows hearts (open 1NT with a notrump hand), so a 3H rebid shows five hearts (and longer diamonds). The second suit can be clubs only if opener has six or more diamonds.

Opener	Responder
2D	2H - artificial relay
3D	shows a one-suited hand
2S/3C	shows a second suit (probably 6=4 if diamonds-clubs)
2NT	shows four hearts
3H/3S	shows a five-card major (and six diamonds)

Responder's rebid of a "new suit" is forcing after a relay response, but a raise or 2NT rebid is only invitational, and a diamond preference is a signoff:

Opener	Responder
2D	2H - artificial relay
2S	3C/3H- is forcing (new suit)
	3D is a sign-off (preference)
	3S/4D is invitational (raise)
	2NT is natural, invitational

The 2H response can be a little light when holding diamond support.

Responding with Hearts

Since a 2H response is artificial, responder must have another way to show a heart suit in an invitational hand. We do this in two ways:

Opener	Responder
2D	3C shows at least 5 hearts. If only 5, has diamond support

Opener can now bid 3D, 3H, or 4H. Responder does not have four spades, so a 3S rebid tends to show a five-card suit, as does a 5C rebid. He should not bid 3NT, because responder may not have enough strength to support that contract.

There being no other way to show an invitational hand with five hearts and four spades, we use a 2NT response (not forcing) for this important shape. With game-going strength, responder should relay and then bid the hearts (game-forcing) if opener doesn't have spades. With five spades and four hearts, responder must just bid 2S. Then 2NT by opener shows a heart suit, as it does in response to a 2H relay:

Opener	Responder
2D	2S - five or more spades, may have four hearts
	2NT - four hearts, short spades, not forcing

Inviting With a Major Suit

A new major suit bid is forcing after a 2H relay response, so how does responder make a merely invitational major suit bid? Here's how:

Opener	Responder
2D	2S - invitational
Opener	Responder
2D	3C- showing hearts, at least invitational
3D	3H - invitational

The 2S and 3C responses, showing spades and hearts, respectively, tend to deny holding the opposite major. Opener should not pass 2S or raise hearts without three-card support.

A 3H (see below) response is the preferred response when holding 5-5 in both majors. Accordingly, in the following sequences the last bid shows a stopper, not a real suit:

South	West	North	East
2D	Pass	2S	Pass
3D	Pass	3H - hearts stopped	

South	West	North	East
2D	Pass	3C	Pass
3D	Pass	3S - spades stopped	

In both cases, North is probably looking for a 3NT contract if South has clubs stopped. The 2S response was not forcing, so North's move toward game seems a bit illogical. He probably has diamond support and

expects that four diamonds will make if South cannot bid 3NT. North's hand: S-A10874 H-Q103 D-A52 C-J10

The Three-Heart Response

We are left with no way to be sure of showing both majors with an invitational hand. We must (reluctantly) invent a response for this purpose. A jump to 3H shows both majors, not forcing. Opener can pass, prefer spades, bid 3NT, bid game in a major, or (with a very fine diamond suit and shortness in both majors) bid 4D. With equal length in the majors, he prefers hearts.

The Three-Spade Response

A 3S response shows clubs and requires more strength, of course, than major suit invitational bids, since opener is forced to a higher level. Opener can bid 3NT, 4C, 5C, or 4D. Responder may pass opener's 4C rebid, so opener should jump to game with particularly good support. The 3NT bid is okay here, since a 3S response has a higher minimum than a 3C response.

Game Responses

Jumps to game are standard preemptive responses. With slam interest, responder does best to start with a 2H relay and then make a forcing or obviously slam-oriented bid:

South	West	North	East
2D	Pass	2H	Pass
2S	Pass	4H - slam	invitational

Since North was not looking for a spade fit, his jump certainly shows slam interest. Otherwise, why not just bid 4H over 2D? Splinter bids are not available after a 2D opening, by the way.

Bidding in Competition

If there has been an overcall, artificial responses do not apply. Responder employs the negative double tool over an overcall. A takeout double is ignored, except that a redouble is standard, a strong hand. An artificial response over a double does not deny a strong hand, however.

Negative Doubles

Negative doubles apply after a 2D opening, through 4H. A double of a major suit overcall implies at least four cards in the other major, and a double of a club overcall suggests at least 4-4 in the majors, or one major plus diamond support. A double must include enough strength to provide reasonable safety for any rebid that opener may have to make (including a pass).

All new major suit bids are natural and non-forcing over an overcall, but a 3C response is natural and forcing. To force with a major suit, double and then bid the major. Opener's 2NT response to a double is natural, not heart-showing.

When Two Diamonds Gets Passed Around

Suppose the 2D opening gets passed around to fourth seat, who reopens with a bid or double:

South	West	North	East
2D	Pass	Pass	2H/2S/2NT/3C/DbI

Over a reopening double, a redouble by opener shows three defensive tricks plus extra good (and long) diamonds.

If opener doubles a reopening overcall in a suit, that is of course a takeout double. A double of a major suit overcall practically guarantees four of the other major in what is probably a 5-4-3-1 or 6-4-2-1 hand. A double of 3C would ideally show 4-4 in the majors, but 3=4=5=1 is okay (responder will bid hearts with 4-4 in the majors).

Similar principles apply when an immediate overcall of the 2D opening is passed back to opener:

South	West	North	East
2D	2H	Pass	Pass
DbI - takeout, probably 4-1-5-3 or 4-1-6-2			
2S - natural bid, more than a minimum opening			
2NT - unusual notrump, 6=4 in the minors			
3C - probably 6=5 in the minors			
3D - extra suit quality, good hand			

When a reopening overcall gets passed around, a double by opener's partner is for takeout, not business:

South	West	North	East
2D	Pass	Pass	2S
Pass	Pass	DbI - takeout	
		2NT - natural	

Here, too, a double of one major guarantees at least four cards in the other major, and a double of 3C shows at least 4-4 in the majors. The natural 2NT bid is not illogical, despite having passed on the first round, since a natural 2NT response to 2D is not available.

Avoiding the Two Diamond Opening

The 2D opening is obviously the weak point in this system, and should be avoided. Some avoidance measures:

- Just pass with a marginal opening, especially if the diamond suit is weak (S-KQ42 H-5 D-Q9763 C-AJ9).
- Open 1H with four strong hearts and weak diamonds (S-A42 H-AQ103 D-K8653 C-7), treating the diamond suit as a four-carder.
- Open 1S with four strong spades, trump support for hearts, and weak diamonds: S-AKJ3 H-KJ7 D-108765 C-4 There is no rebid problem, since you can raise a 2H response.

Since a two-suited hand with clubs and diamonds may be opened with 2D only with 6=4 in diamonds-clubs (at least six diamonds, at most four clubs), other distributions of the minors present possible problems.

With 2=2 in the majors, consider opening 1NT

With 4=5 in the minors, open 1C, then rebid 2C if the clubs are good. If the clubs are weak and you can't open 1NT, then raise partner's major suit response even with three small, pass a 1NT response, or rebid 1NT

With 5=4 too weak for 1D, choose from (1) pass, (2) 1NT (2-2 in the majors), (3) a good three-card heart suit, (4) 2D (with strong diamonds, pretending to have six), or (5) 1C (strong clubs, weak diamonds)

With 5=5 or 5=6 open 2NT

THE ONE NOTRUMP OPENING

Values for Opening One Notrump

The amBIGuous Diamond uses a weak notrump opening. The recommended range is 12-14 HCP not vulnerable, 13-15 HCP vulnerable, although a partnership may want to play all such openings as 12-14 HCP. When using a 12-14 range, however, do not alter the 16 HCP requirement for a strong notrump hand. Instead, open most 15 HCP hands with one of a suit. The extra strength will usually overcome any rebid problems, such as the following hands present:

- 1) S-A82 H-KQ3 D-J874 C-AJ3
- 2) S-KQ84 H-32 D-AQ93 C-A84
- 3) S-A8 H-762 D-KJ87 C-AQJ3
- 4) S-K3 H-AQ8 D-J8742 C-AJ8

With hand 1) open 1NT even though it shows 12-14 HCP because this is a “bad 15.”

With hand 2) a 1S opening is okay because the 15 HCP permit a rebid of 2NT if the response is 2H, or a raise if the response is 2C or 2D.

With hand 3) open 1C.

With hand 4), when not vulnerable choose between the slight overbid of 1D (intending to show a 16-18 HCP notrump hand) or the slight underbid of 1NT. This is a 1NT bid when vulnerable.

Avoid opening 1NT with a hand that is suit-oriented. The weak notrump ideally shows a hand with 4-3-3-3 distribution and honors in all suits. Naturally this is not always possible, but a suit opening is preferable when the hand is far removed from this ideal and has no rebid problem. With marginal strength and a weak doubleton, just pass.

- 1) S-AQ83 H-AQ98 D-65 C-Q32
- 2) S-Q765 H-Q432 D-32 C-AKQ
- 3) S-AK54 H-Q87 D-A432 C-65
- 4) S-AK54 H-65 D-A432 C-J107
- 5) S-65 H-Q873 D-KQ32 C-KQ3

Open hand 1) with 1S, 2) with 1C, 3) with 1S, 4) with 1NT, and pass hand 5). Hand 3) presents no rebid problem, since a 2H response can be raised (this does not show extra values, and a 2H response to 1S implies five hearts). Hand 4) must be opened (reluctantly) with 1NT because a 2H response to a 1S opening would cause a rebid problem (The hand is not strong enough to rebid 2NT). In third or fourth seat you can open 1S and pass a 2H response.

One type of suit-oriented hand that may be opened with 1NT is a 5-3-3-2 hand with a weak five-card major: S-J3 H-J8732 D-AQ2 C-AQ3. This hand is rather light for raising a minor suit response, and the hearts are too weak for a 2H rebid. As a least of evils, open 1NT, but open 1H in third or fourth seat, planning to pass a minor suit response. With a really marginal hand of this sort, just pass in first or second seat.

The principle of avoiding notrump with suit-oriented hands also applies to stronger hands. Open 1C, not 1D, with S-AKQ3 H-65 D-J103 C-AQ103. Avoid bidding notrump with a weak doubleton, especially in a major, or with two unstopped suits.

Responses

As with notrump rebids after a 2D opening, responder's conventional and natural actions are optional for the partnership. Various schemes for countering competition or escaping from danger are likewise not a part of the amBIGuous DIAMOND, and pairs can adopt whatever measures they wish.

OTHER ONE-LEVEL SUIT OPENINGS

General Principles

This chapter assumes that opener has decided not to open the bidding with 1D or 1NT:

-- Four-card majors may be opened provided there is a convenient call on the next round. Suit quality is emphasized. Light openings of 1C, 1H, or 1S are avoided in first or second seat, especially if the suit is weak. A three-card club opening is a last resort, when no other call is acceptable.

-- Up-the-line responding or rebidding is neither required nor encouraged, so very weak suits are often bypassed (especially with 4-3-3-3 hands, if a notrump bid is in order). A club raise does not deny a four-card major. The raise is preferable with a weak hand, perhaps allowing partner to compete at the three level. A club raise is also preemptive, preventing a one-level overcall by an opponent.

-- Major suit opening bids or responses may be raised with three cards, preferably J10x or better. We do play 4-3 fits occasionally, but we avoid bidding suits weaker than Q10xx, so it's okay.

-- Two-over-one responses do not promise another bid, so a 1NT response shows 6-9 HCP, is not forcing, and may bypass a very weak four-card major (as may a 1NT rebid by opener) with a balanced hand.

-- Opener implies extra values when he raises a two-over-one minor suit response or rebids 2NT after any two-over-one response. In a pinch (no better alternative) four cards or two of the top three honors in responder's suit constitute "extra values" for a minor suit raise. Raising a 2H response to a 1S opening does not require extra values. A raise of any two-over-one bid definitely shows extra values if responder is a passed hand, since opener can pass with minimum values. Raises of a two-over-one response are not forcing, although seldom passed.

-- A jump preference at the three level is a non-forcing raise, even after a two-over-one response, since a simple preference is not a raise:

South	West	North	East
1S	Pass	2C	Pass
2H	Pass	2S	preference
		3S	- raise, not forcing (just like 3♥)

-- Reverses by opener are not forcing on a one-over-one responder unless she has bid a five-card suit, and do not promise another bid if responder's next bid is of a minimum nature (but if she rebids a major, which she must with five, that's forcing). Use the jump reverse as an absolute force (to game). Reverses are forcing on a two-over-one bidder, but do not promise another bid.

-- A "high reverse" after a two-over-one response (e.g., 1S-2H-3C) does promise another bid, even if responder just rebids her suit or makes a simple preference.

-- Reverses by responder are forcing for one round only, but a subsequent raise of opener's suit is forcing.

-- A 1NT response to all natural suit openings shows 6-9 HCP. May bypass a fair diamond suit or any weak four-card major, especially with a 4-3-3-3 hand.

-- A 2NT notrump response to any natural suit opening is forcing to game (13-15 HCP). In competition, however, a 2NT response to a 1C opening (only) is not forcing (11-12 HCP).

Choice of Suit for One-Level Opening Bids

The following guides for opening 1C, 1H, or 1S assume the hand does not qualify for a 1D or 1NT opening:

Distribution:

4-3-3-3

With a strong four-card major and at least 15 HCP, open the major. Otherwise open 1C and rebid 1NT (do not rebid 1H or 1S, which guarantees at least four clubs). However, most 4-3-3-3 hands are opened with 1D or 1NT.

4-4-3-2

Bid the higher ranking of touching suits if it is a major, 1S with 4=3=4=2, 1C with four clubs. Most 4=2=4=3 hands qualify for a 1D or 1NT opening, so the undesirable 1C opening on three cards should be rare (example: S-8743 H-76 D-AKJ2 C-AQ3). With strong spades you can open 1S with 4=2=4=3 if the hand is good enough to rebid 2NT (15-16 HCP) when the response is 2H (or if responder is a passed hand and you can pass 2H).

4-4-4-1

Bid the first biddable suit below the singleton unless it is diamonds, but bid 1C with 4=4=1=4 regardless of the club strength. A "biddable suit" is Q10xx or better. With a singleton spade and a marginal opening, it is better to pass, hoping to make a takeout double on the next round. A 1♠ response would be unwelcome, as either rebidding 1NT or two of a minor would misdescribe the hand.

5-4-3-1

5-4-2-2

Bid the five-card suit, but with touching suits 4=5 bid the four-card suit first if it is strong and the five-card suit is weak. Always bid the five-card suit first, however, if you are strong enough to reverse (16 HCP or more).

5-5

Bid the higher ranking suit, but with weak spades, strong clubs, and a weak to moderate hand, bid 1C. After opening 1S with 5-5 in the black suits, rebid 2S after a red suit response unless you are very strong (3C is forcing and promises another bid). With two minors, open 2NT.

6-5

Bid the longer suit, but with 5=6 in touching suits bid the higher ranking if it is much stronger and the hand is near minimum. With both minors, usually open 2NT if not good enough for a 1♦ opening.

With a minimum opening, it is usually a good idea to treat a very weak five-card suit as if it were a four-card suit. Open 1C with S-85432 H-J3 D-AJ C-AQJ6.

A new suit response by a passed hand is not forcing, so the rules for suit selection, which are mainly aimed at providing a convenient rebid, can be violated freely in third or fourth seat.

The rules can also be ignored when the hand strength is such that no forcing response will be inconvenient. Open 1S with S-AKJ3 H-65 D-10765 C-AQJ, because the hand is good enough to bid 2NT after a 2H response, or to raise a minor suit response. Avoid bidding bad suits (which include any three-card club suit) with good hands.

With Clubs and Diamonds

Since a two-suited hand with clubs and diamonds may be opened with 2D only with 6=4 in diamonds-clubs (at least six diamonds, at most four clubs), other distributions of the minors present possible problems.

With 6=5, open 2D if the club suit is weak, although a club rebid supposedly shows four clubs. Partner will prefer clubs with equal length if you opening 2NT

With 5=5 or 5=6 open 2NT.

SUMMARY OF OPENINGS, RESPONSES, AND REBIDS

1C - natural, not forcing, rarely a three-card suit

1D - forcing, 16-22 HCP notrump hand or good diamond opening

1H - negative, 0-7 HCP

1S - diamonds and spades

1NT - 16-20 HCP notrump hand

2C - diamonds and *hearts*

2D - six or more diamonds

2H - diamonds and *clubs*

2NT - 21-22 HCP notrump hand ("systems on")

3C - natural, forcing

3D - strong but not forcing

1S - 8-9 HCP

1NT - 16-18 HCP notrump hand

2C - diamonds and clubs, forcing

2D - six or more diamonds, not forcing

2H - diamonds and hearts, forcing

2S - diamonds and spades, forcing

2NT - 19-20 HCP notrump hand ("systems on")

3 any suit - natural, forcing to game

3NT - 21-22 HCP notrump hand ("systems on" except Gerber)

1NT - very weak, both minors or both majors

2C - game force, 10+ HCP

2D - six or more diamonds

2H/2S/3C - second suit in addition to diamonds

2NT - 16-18 HCP notrump hand ("systems on")

3NT - 19-20 HCP notrump hand ("systems on" except Gerber)

4NT - 21-22 HCP notrump hand ("systems on" except Gerber)

2D - weak, may be a fairly good five-card suit

2H/2S - weak, fair six-card suit

2NT - weak, both minors, 6-6 or 5-6

3C/3H/3S - weak, fair seven-card suit

3D - weak, fair six-card suit

1H/1S - natural, not forcing, may be a four-card suit

1NT - weak notrump, 12-14 HCP not vulnerable, 13-15 HCP vulnerable

2C - artificial, strong, either a game-going suit-oriented hand or a 23+ HCP notrump hand.

2D - minimum to moderate diamond opening, 6+ diamonds if no four-card major

2H - relay

2NT - four-card heart suit

2S/3C/3D - natural rebid (3C guarantees 6+ diamonds, probably 4 clubs)

3H/3S - five-card suit, 6+ diamonds

2S - invitational, 5+ spades (to force, bid 2H then bid spades)

2NT - four-card heart suit

3C- club suit, 6+ diamonds, probably 4 clubs

3D - 6+ diamonds

3H - five hearts, six diamonds

Pass/3S/4S - according to the degree of support for a spade contract

2NT - invitational, four spades and five hearts

3C- 5+ hearts, invitational or better

3D - 6+ diamonds

3H - heart support, no extras

4H - normal raise, extras

3D - tends to be preemptive, not invitational

3H - both majors, 5-5 or better, invitational (to force, bid 2H first)

3S - club suit, not game-forcing

3NT - natural

4C- club tolerance, only five diamonds

4D - 6+ diamonds, no club support

4H/4S - five-card suit

5C- good club raise

3NT - sign-off

4C/4D - natural, invitational

2H/2S - weak two bids (or whatever)

2NT - both minors, 5-5 or 5=6

3 any - standard preemptive bid. In first or second seat 3C or 3D strongly implies no ace, certainly not in the bid suit (needs a fit to be useful in notrump).

3NT - A long solid minor with outside stoppers, with about 8-1/2 - 9 tricks for notrump

(The three-level openings may be redefined, as what is shown here is not an integral part of the system.)