SOFTWARE & TECH

25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know

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Introduction: Mastering the Language of Bridge Conventions

For any serious bridge player, moving beyond simple bidding into the world of conventions is like learning a new language. Conventions are artificial bids that carry specific meanings, allowing partners to exchange detailed information about their hands while keeping the opponents in the dark. While there are hundreds of conventions in existence, mastering the essentials is what separates casual players from skilled competitors. If you want to improve your partnership communication and elevate your game, **25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know** provides a solid foundation for success at any level. These are the tools that allow you to describe your hand with remarkable precision, often within just a few bids.

This article explores these essential conventions, explaining not only what they are but also why they work and when to use them. Whether you are a relative newcomer or an experienced player looking to refine your system, understanding these conventions will transform your approach to the game. Let us begin with the absolute must-know conventions that every partnership should have in its toolkit.

Essential Conventions for Every Partnership

Some conventions are so fundamental that playing without them puts you at a severe disadvantage. The following are the building blocks of modern bidding systems, used by beginners and world champions alike.

1. Stayman

After a partner opens 1NT, a 2&c bid asks the opener whether they hold a four-card major suit. This is perhaps the single most common convention in bridge. If the opener has a four-card major, they bid it; if not, they bid 2&f. The responder then knows exactly how to proceed, often settling in a major suit fit or returning to notrump. Stayman is your first line of inquiry after a notrump opening.

2. Jacoby Transfer

Still in the realm of notrump openings, Jacoby Transfers allow the responder to show a five-card or longer major suit. After a 1NT opening, a bid of 2&f shows hearts, and a bid of 2&e shows spades. The opener must accept the transfer by bidding the shown major. This puts the strong notrump hand as declarer, protecting high cards from the opening lead. It is a subtle but powerful advantage.

3. Blackwood

When a partnership is exploring slam, Blackwood (4NT) asks partner how many aces they hold. The responses are simple: 5&c shows 0 or 4 aces, 5&f shows 1, 5&e shows 2, and 5&` shows 3. This convention prevents you from bidding slam when two aces are missing. For most players, Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) has replaced standard Blackwood, as it also asks about the king of trumps.

4. Gerber

Gerber (4&c) serves the same function as Blackwood but is used after a notrump bid when 4NT would be a quantitative invite rather than an ace-asking bid. It asks for aces with step responses similar to Blackwood. Many partnerships use Gerber only when the last bid was notrump, making it a specialized but invaluable tool for slam bidding.

Descriptive Bids That Shape the Auction

These conventions allow you to describe specific hand types with great accuracy, often in a single bid. They are the workhorses of advanced bidding systems.

5. Michaels Cue Bid

After an opponent opens, an immediate cue bid of their suit shows a two-suited hand. Typically, this shows at least five cards in each of two suits. Over a minor suit opening, it shows both majors. Over a major suit opening, it shows the other major and a minor. This is an aggressive convention designed to disrupt the opponent's auction while describing your own hand.

6. Unusual Notrump

Similar to Michaels, the Unusual Notrump shows a two-suited hand, but here the notrump bid itself carries the message. A jump to 2NT over an opponent's opening shows the two lowest unbid suits. For example, after 1&e, a 2NT bid shows clubs and diamonds. This is a powerful preemptive and descriptive tool, especially when you have length in the minor suits.

7. Splinter Bid

A splinter bid is a double jump in a new suit that shows a game-forcing hand with four-card or longer support for partner's last bid suit, plus a singleton or void in the bid suit. For instance, after 1&e, a bid of 3&` shows heart support and a singleton spade. This immediately tells partner where your values are concentrated and helps assess slam potential.

8. Jacoby 2NT

After partner opens a major suit at the one level, a jump to 2NT shows a game-forcing raise with at least four trumps. The opener then describes their hand further by showing shortness, a strong side suit, or a balanced hand. This convention replaces the old-fashioned game-forcing raise and allows the partnership to explore slam with great precision.

Conventions for Advancing and Inviting

These tools help you and your partner decide the correct level of the auction, especially in competitive or marginal situations.

9. Drury

When partner opens a major suit in third or fourth seat (a light opening is possible), a 2&c response by a passed hand shows a limit raise with three or more trumps. This prevents the partnership from getting too high when the opener has a sub-minimum hand. The opener can sign off in 2 of their major or continue if they have a full opening.

10. Reverse Drury

Reverse Drury is a variation where 2&f, rather than 2&c, is used as the artificial limit raise. This allows 2&c to retain its natural meaning or be used for other purposes. Many modern partnerships prefer Reverse Drury because it offers more flexibility and is less likely to be confused with a natural club bid.

11. Bergen Raises

After a major suit opening, Bergen Raises use 3&c and 3&f to show specific types of raises. Typically, 3&c shows a

limit raise (10-12 points with four trumps), and 3&f shows a constructive raise (7-9 points with four trumps). This allows the opener to judge the combined potential accurately, especially in competitive auctions.

12. Inverted Minors

In standard bidding, a single raise of a minor suit is weak, and a double raise is strong. Inverted Minors flip this: a single raise becomes strong (forcing), and a double raise becomes weak and preemptive. This allows the partnership to explore game or slam in a minor suit while also using the preemptive raise to disrupt opponents.

Conventions for Finding the Right Strain

Sometimes the challenge is not the level but the suit. These conventions help you find the best fit when the auction is ambiguous.

13. Fourth Suit Forcing

When three suits have been bid naturally, a bid of the fourth suit is artificial and forcing to game. It asks partner to describe their hand further, usually by showing additional length in one of their suits, a stopper in the fourth suit for notrump, or extra strength. This is a cornerstone of modern two-over-one bidding systems.

14. New Minor Forcing

After a 1NT rebid by opener, a bid of the lower unbid minor suit is artificial and forcing. It asks opener about their major suit holdings. For example, after 1&f-1&`-1NT, a bid of 2&c asks if opener has three spades or four hearts. This helps the partnership find a 5-3 major fit or a 4-4 heart fit when responder has invitational or better strength.

15. Checkback Stayman

Similar to New Minor Forcing, Checkback Stayman is used after a 1NT rebid or a 2NT rebid. A bid of 2&c asks opener to describe their major suit holdings. This is a versatile tool that allows responder to explore for major fits at a low level while keeping the auction manageable.

16. Wolff Signoff

After a 2NT opening or a 2&c-2&f-2NT sequence, a bid of 3&c by responder asks opener to bid 3&f. Responder can then pass or sign off in a suit below game. This allows the partnership to stop in a partial when game is not possible, or to explore for a 4-4 major fit. It is a safety valve for slam exploration and game bidding.

Defensive Conventions Over Notrump

When the opponents open notrump, you need a system to compete effectively. These conventions are the most popular choices.

17. Cappelletti

Also known as Hamilton, Cappelletti uses 2&c to show a single-suited hand (any suit), and 2&f, 2&e, and 2&` to show two-suited hands. Specifically, 2&f shows both majors, 2&e shows hearts and a minor, and 2&` shows spades and a minor. This is a straightforward and effective method for competing over 1NT.

18. DONT

DONT (Disturbing Opponents' Notrump) is another popular convention. A double of 1NT shows a single-suited hand. A bid of 2&c shows clubs and a higher suit. A bid of 2&f shows diamonds and a higher suit. A bid of 2&e shows hearts and spades. DONT is popular because it is easy to remember and allows the partnership to compete on many hands.

19. Landy

Landy is one of the simplest conventions over 1NT. A 2&c bid shows both major suits. All other bids are natural. This is an excellent choice for players who want a simple yet effective method for competing over notrump, especially at the club level.

Defensive Conventions and Doubles

Doubles are among the most flexible and powerful tools in bridge. These conventions refine their meaning in competitive auctions.

20. Lebensohl

After partner doubles an opponent's weak two-bid, or after an opponent overcalls at the two level, Lebensohl helps the partnership distinguish between weak and strong hands. A bid of 2NT is artificial, asking partner to bid 3&c. Responder can then pass or sign off in a suit. This allows the partnership to compete effectively while avoiding disasters when responder has a weak hand.

21. Negative Double

When partner opens and an opponent overcalls, a double by responder is negative, showing exactly four cards in the unbid major(s) and enough strength to compete. This is one of the most important conventions in modern bridge, allowing responder to show a suit they cannot bid directly. It is used at all levels of the game.

22. Responsive Double

After partner makes a takeout double and the next opponent raises the opener's suit, a double by you is responsive. It shows some values and asks partner to choose the best suit. This double does not promise any specific suit length but simply says you have enough to compete and want partner to make the final decision.

23. Support Double

When partner responds with a major suit and the next opponent overcalls, a double by opener shows exactly three-card support for partner's suit. This allows the partnership to find an 8-card fit immediately, even in

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