

(Natural) Notrump Bidding Sequences — Opening suit bids and rebids are natural when a suit bid shows length in a suit and a willingness to play in the suit bid. Opening notrump bids and rebids are natural when they show a balanced hand and a willingness to play in notrump.¹

Most modern bidding systems such as Standard American (Std Am) or Two Over One Game Force (2/1) play natural notrump bids that allow the opener to define the size of the notrump hand. For example, in the Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC) version of Standard American an opening bid of 1Nt shows a balanced hand with 15 to 17 high card points (hcp); an opening bid of 2Nt shows a balanced hand with 20 to 21 hcp; and an opening bid of 3Nt shows a balanced hand with 25 to 27 hcp. Each of these bids natural notrump bids also shows a willingness to play in notrump.

Most bidding agreements are subject to different usage and interpretations. While bidding notrump may seem pretty standard, many modern bidding systems such as Two-Over-One Game Force may change notrump bidding sequences by first bidding 2♣ and then rebidding some level of notrump instead of bidding notrump directly. In addition, systems such as Kaplan-Sheinwold may flip the meaning of certain notrump bidding sequences. It is imperative to discuss and have a partnership agreement on how you will play natural notrump bidding sequences.

Opening bids in notrump (1Nt, 2Nt or 3Nt) are special bids. The opening bid should give as much information as possible to partner about the strength and distribution of opener's hand. One of the best descriptive opening bids is the notrump bid. To understand the uniqueness of notrump it is important to understand the concept of balanced and unbalanced hands.

Balanced Hand: A balanced hand does not have disproportional shortness and/or length in any suit. Shortness in a suit is considered to be a void (no cards in a suit), a singleton (1 card in a suit) or a doubleton (2 cards in a suit). A balanced hand, therefore, will have no voids, no singletons, and not more than one doubleton; thus by inference, this also means a balanced hand will not have a 6-card suit and not more than one 5-card suit. Balanced hands will have a shape of 4-3-3-3 (square hand), 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2. A hand with 2 doubletons (5-4-2-2 and 6-3-2-2) is commonly considered semi-balanced. Any hand with a singleton or void is unbalanced!


Since notrump hands cannot trump in side suits, notrump contracts must guard against all suits. In addition, since a notrump hand has no trumping (ruffing) value, notrump hands usually require more strength (total points) to take the same number of tricks as a suit bid at the same level. To make game in a notrump contract (3Nt) requires the partnership to take 9 tricks and experience demonstrates that to fulfill this contract will require 25 to 26 combined points – the same number of points that will usually win 10 tricks in a suit contract.

Since a notrump contract requires more strength to take the same number of tricks, it therefore, should take more points to open in notrump than a suit contract. Depending on partnership agreements most Std Am systems play that an opening 1Nt usually shows 15 to 17 hcp.

But what do you do if your hand does not fit within the defined ranges of 15-17, 20-21 or 25-27 hcp? Say you have 14 hcp or 19 hcp or 22 hcp and a balanced hand ... what do you do now? Most systems today incorporate natural notrump rebidding sequences to cover all level of


notrump hands including a 12 to 14 point range, an 18 to 19 point range and a 22 to 24 point range. After an opening bid, a rebid of 1Nt shows 12 to 14 hcp and a jump to 2Nt to show 18 to 19 hcp. To show a 22 to 24 point hand, first open the bidding with 2♣ and then rebid 2Nt. In addition to the points specified, each of these three bids also shows a balanced hand and a willingness to play in notrump.

Using opening notrump bids and rebids a partnership can describe any balance hand.

 (Natural) Notrump Bidding Sequences	
Opening Bid	Point Count
· Rebid of 1Nt	- 12 to 14 hcp
· 1Nt	- 15 to 17 hcp
· Jump to 2Nt	- 18 to 19 hcp
· 2Nt	- 20 to 21 hcp
· 2♣ and rebid 2Nt	- 22 to 24 hcp
· 3Nt (or 2♣ and rebid 3Nt) ²	- 25 to 27 hcp (or shows 25+)

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Remember **Bridge should be fun!**

 (Natural) Notrump Bidding Sequences is part 1 of a 4 part series on the Introduction to New Minor Forcing. (also see **Systems On**, **1Notrump Rebid** and **Introduction to New Minor Forcing**) This document can be downloaded or printed at <http://www.onent.com/library.htm>.

See American Contract Bridge League (ACBL): Standard Yellow Card System Booklet, also referred to as Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC) http://www.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/sayc_book.pdf, April, 2003 and Max Hardy: Standard Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century (ISBN 1-58776-0495) pp. 16-18. Thanks to my friend and partner Marty Nathan for his help and review of this document.

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¹ A notrump bid is conventional (*i.e.*, not natural) when the bid has a defined meaning and is not intended as a willingness to play in notrump (*e.g.*, Unusual Notrump).

² The bid of 2♣ and rebid of 3Nt preserves the opening bid of 3Nt for conventional bids.