



Frequently Asked Questions

not be forcing. East doesn't want to jump to 3NT with nothing — *no stopper* — in diamonds. East doesn't want to support hearts with only two, since West has only shown a five-card suit, and East doesn't want to support clubs with only three cards, since West's second suit may be a four-card suit.

East needs a forcing bid to get more information, and the popular agreement is that a bid of 2♦, the fourth suit, is **artificial but forcing** — forcing to game in most partnerships. That makes the rest of the auction much more comfortable.

On the actual deal, West now bids 2NT with a stopper in diamonds. West isn't relying on responder to have anything in diamonds, since the 2♦ bid was artificial. East can now comfortably rebid the spades. The 3♠ bid is forcing because the 2♦ bid created a game force. With an invitational hand and six spades, East would simply have jumped to 3♠ on the previous round. West can now show some support for spades, and the partnership lands in the best contract.

Note that the bidding would go the same way even if the partnership is playing 2/1 game force. The 1♠ response was not a 2/1 bid, so the auction was simply following along standard lines.

But what if responder's initial bid is a 2/1 game forcing response? Now it would be redundant for responder's fourth suit bid to be an artificial game force. The partnership is already committed to at least game. So it now takes on one of two meanings:

FOURTH SUIT AFTER 2/1

Responder's bid of the fourth suit after an initial 2/1 Game Forcing response says either:

- Responder doesn't know what else to bid ... or
- Responder has a legitimate two-suited hand.

Responder's next bid will clarify the situation.

Consider this hand

	♠	Q 2
for the responder,	♥	Q 10 5
East, after the auction	♦	6 4 2
begins this way:	♣	A K Q 7 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	?

East's 2♣ response commits the partnership to game, but East still doesn't know *which* game after hearing opener's first two bids. The partnership may belong in spades, hearts, clubs, or notrump.

East doesn't want to bid 2♠, since that might put the partnership in a seven-card fit. Similarly, East doesn't want to bid 3♥, since that might be a seven-card fit. East doesn't want to rebid 3♣, since that would tend to show a six-card suit. And East doesn't want to bid notrump with no strength in diamonds.

So responder bids 3♦ as a 'punt' — "I don't know what else to do." Opener's next bid should help the partnership find its best spot. Let's see how the auction might continue.

WEST	EAST
♠ A K 8 4 3	♠ Q 2
♥ K J 8 6 2	♥ Q 10 5
♦ J 3	♦ 6 4 2
♣ 4	♣ A K Q 7 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	3♦
3♥	4♥

Pass

Once West rebids hearts, East knows exactly what to do.

The following questions are discussed in the context of the 2/1 game forcing approach, but many of the ideas can be applied to standard methods.



What does a bid of the fourth suit mean when it's no longer required as fourth suit forcing?

First, in standard methods, the bid of the fourth suit by responder is commonly used as an artificial game forcing bid ★. For example:

WEST	EAST
♠ J 5	♠ K Q 9 4 3 2
♥ K 8 7 6 3	♥ A 4
♦ A J	♦ 7 4
♣ K J 5 4	♣ A 9 6

WEST	EAST
1♥	1♠
2♣	2♦ ★
2NT	3♠
4♠	Pass

After West opens 1♥, East responds 1♠, and West rebids 2♣, East has a dilemma. With 13 high-card points plus 2 length points, East knows the partnership has enough combined strength for game, but which game?

East doesn't want to jump to 4♠ and find West with a singleton or void, and a jump to only 3♠ would

WEST	EAST
♠ K J 8 5 4 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 6 2	♥ Q 10 5
♦ J 3	♦ 6 4 2
♣ 4	♣ A K Q 7 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	3♦
3♠	4♠
Pass	

This time West shows the extra length in spades and East is now happy to raise to game.

WEST	EAST
♠ A 8 5 4 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 6 2	♥ Q 10 5
♦ 3	♦ 6 4 2
♣ J 5 4	♣ A K Q 7 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	3♦
4♣	5♣
Pass	

Here West shows the club support and the partnership once again lands in the best contract.

WEST	EAST
♠ K 8 5 4 3	♠ Q 2
♥ A K 6 2	♥ Q 10 5
♦ K 3	♦ 6 4 2
♣ J 4	♣ A K Q 7 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	3♦
3NT	Pass

With a stopper in the fourth suit — diamonds in this case — opener is expected to bid notrump with no other special feature to show. This is often exactly what responder is hoping opener will do. After all, responder could bid notrump with some values in the fourth suit. For example:

WEST	EAST
♠ A J 5 4 3	♠ 6 2
♥ A K 6 2	♥ 10 5
♦ 6 3	♦ K Q 4 2
♣ J 4	♣ A K Q 7 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	2NT
3NT	Pass

With stoppers in the unbid suit, responder can suggest a notrump

contract instead of bidding the fourth suit. With such moderate values, there is little value in bidding 3♦ as a natural suit. Opener has shown length in hearts and spades, so notrump is probably best.

With a two-suited hand unsuitable for playing in 3NT, responder clarifies the situation on the next round of the auction. For example:

WEST	EAST
♠ A 8 5 4 3	♠ 2
♥ A J 6 2	♥ 5
♦ K Q 5	♦ A J 10 7 3
♣ 4	♣ A Q J 8 5 3

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♣ ★
2♥	3♦
3NT	4♦
6♦	Pass

After East bids the fourth suit, West assumes partner is simply looking for the best place to play and bids 3NT to show the stopper in diamonds. Now East rebids the diamonds to show a real two-suited hand. West has excellent values opposite East's expected distribution and will likely take the partnership to slam. West might cuebid or use Blackwood, but a jump to slam gets the partnership to a reasonable spot.



After a 2/1 Game Force response, does opener's rebid of the original suit promise six or more cards?

This is an area of bridge theory that is somewhat controversial. When I started using 2/1, I didn't want to bid 2NT without a stopper in one of the unbid suits. That would mean that I would occasionally have to rebid a five-card suit.

Experience has convinced me, however, that having a rebid of opener's suit promise six cards is good practice. I've become comfortable rebidding 2NT without a stopper in one or both unbid suits, and many of my opponents have switched to this style. So I recommend:

OPENER'S REBID AFTER 2/1

A rebid of opener's original suit promises at least six cards.

WEST	EAST
♠ J 8 7 6 5 2	♠ Q 10
♥ Q 4	♥ K 5 2
♦ Q 3	♦ A K 9 5 2
♣ A K 9	♣ 8 6 2

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♦ ★
2♠	4♠

West's rebid of the original suit doesn't promise a *good* suit. It merely shows six or more cards, making it easier for the partnership to uncover an eight-card fit.

WEST	EAST
♠ A K J 7 5	♠ Q 10
♥ 10 6 3	♥ A 5 2
♦ K 3	♦ A Q 9 5 2
♣ J 7 5	♣ 8 6 2

WEST	EAST
1♠	2♦ ★
2NT	3NT

Although West has no stopper in either unbid suit, I think a 2NT rebid is more descriptive than rebidding the five-card spade suit. 3NT is an excellent contract. There are nine top tricks if the defenders lead anything except a club. Even if they do lead clubs, the missing clubs might divide 4-3 or the suit might be blocked when it is 5-2 or 6-1.

If West were to rebid 2♠, the partnership would likely land in 4♠, an uncomfortable spot which is unlikely to make unless the diamonds divide exactly 3-3.

It's important to note that when opener bids a second suit, it doesn't deny six cards in the original suit.

♠ K 2	Suppose West has
♥ A J 9 7 5 3	this hand as opener
♦ A Q 8 2	and the auction
♣ 4	starts like this:

WEST	EAST
1♥	2♣ ★
?	

A rebid of 2♦ shows at least five hearts and four diamonds. That's preferable to a rebid of 2♥ showing only the sixth heart. ❏

Previous articles in this series by world-class player and theorist Eric Rodwell, can be found at:

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