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CONVENTIONS by JEREMY DHONDI

Responding to 1 No Trump

The 1NT opening is a very important part of the armoury of any bidding system. Most players use Stayman and some form of transfer responses, and the principle is the same whether you play a weak or a strong no-trump opening. This article will assume your 1NT opening is 12-14. If it is 15-17 then just adjust the number of points by about three. When you respond to 1NT you have to cover a variety of hand types: | Hands that are weak and seek a haven of safety | Hands that are invitational | Hands that look for the best game | Hands that have slam interest There are many different methods and some of them are quite complex and thus a strain in the memory. You can develop the method suggested below further, if you like complexity or feel you are able to handle it, but probably only with a regular partner. As with most systemic agreements it only takes one 'forget' to ensure it will be many hundreds of hands before you show a profit.

The basic scheme

I suggest you use what are called foursuit transfers. That means you can transfer to any of the suits. The scheme of things is:

2♣	Stayman (asks partner to bid a 4-card major or 2♦ without one)
2♦	Transfer to Hearts
2♥	Transfer to Spades
2♠	Transfer to Clubs
2NT	Transfer to Diamonds
3♣/♦/♥/♠	Natural, 6 cards, slam try
4♦	5-5 in the Majors with (only) game values

Using Stayman Stayman is one of the first conventions that players learn. When it was invented 75 or more years ago there were a number of players who had a similar idea. For example, a leading Acoll player in England, JCH Marx. There is a story that Sam Stayman visited England when he was quite elderly and played a game at the Young Chelsea Bridge Club. Someone had organised all the

participants to explain a 2♣ response to a 1NT opening as 'Marx'. History records he was a bit puzzled, but not whether he was amused or not. You might use Stayman when you are looking for a major suit fit or when you wish to raise to 2NT with or without a major. You can't just bid 2NT as this would be a transfer to diamonds. It often seems to me that there is a basic misunderstanding about Stayman. It doesn't necessarily show anything, rather it asks for a major suit. Sometimes this suggested version is called 'non-promissory Stayman', but even amongst players who play almost no methods, they might use a 2♣ response to 1NT as a way to bale out to a minor, and hence not have a major. Whatever type it is when you are announcing, you say, 'Stayman' and nothing further. You might bid 2♣ on any of the following hands:

Type A Weak

A hand diagram showing a 4-card major (K10832) and a 4-card minor (54). A diamond symbol is shown with N, S, E, W labels.

♠	K 10 8 3 2
♥	Q 9 5 2
♦	7 3
♣	5 4

In this example, if partner bids 2♥ or 2♠ you pass and if he denies a major by bidding 2♦, you bid 2♣. All you are seeking to do is improve the contract. You may not succeed, but you will gain more often than not by removing 1NT.

Type B Raise to 2NT

This time you may or may not hold a major:

A hand diagram showing a 5-card major (KQ65) and a 3-card minor (J3). A diamond symbol is shown with N, S, E, W labels.

♠	K Q 6 5
♥	Q J 5 4
♦	K 9 4
♣	J 3

You respond 2♣ and if partner shows a major, you raise to three invitationaly. If he denies a major, you bid 2NT inviting him to bid 3NT if he likes his hand.

You might also have:

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♠ Q 9 4
♥ K 7 5
♦ A 10 6 4
♣ K 10 6



Now, whatever partner responds to 2♣, you will bid 2NT to show a raise and invite him to bid 3NT. One advantage of this method is that you know whether you have a fit or not, but the opponent on lead does not know whether you have a major. Be aware of this hand type as responder:

♠ K J 9 5
♥ 4 3
♦ A J 8 5
♣ K 7 5



You respond 2♣ to partner's 1NT opening and he bids 2♥. If you bid 2NT you are showing an invitational raise without a major, so on this hand you bid 2♣ forcing for one round and partner may bid 2NT or 3♣ with a minimum hand, and 3NT or 4♣ with a maximum.

Type C :: Looking for the best game

This time you have:

♠ K J 5
♥ A 10 7 3
♦ K Q 5 4
♣ J 5



You respond 2♣ to partner's 1NT opening. If partner bids 2♥ you raise to 4♥. If he bids 2♦ or 2♠, you bid 3NT. Note, that if you are worth game you will always have a major if you bid 2♣. This is because the 1NT opener may have this hand:

♠ K J 7 5
♥ A 9 6 4
♦ A 6 4
♣ Q 5



East opens 1NT and West responds with 2♣ over which East bids 2♥. Now West jumps to 3NT. West would not have bothered with Stayman if he had no interest in a major (and he has told you he doesn't have a heart fit) so you can bid 4♣ knowing you will have a fit.

Major suit transfers

Over partner's 1NT, you respond 2♦ to show at least five hearts and 2♥ to show at least five spades. Once again you might be:

Type A Weak

♠ K J 6 4 3
♥ 7 5
♦ 4 3
♣ J 10 4 2



You bid 2♥ and when partner bids 2♠, you give up. 2♠ is not guaranteed to play better, but any time partner has three or more spades it probably will.

Type B Invitational

♠ 7 5
♥ A Q 10 6 5
♦ A J 5
♣ 10 4 3



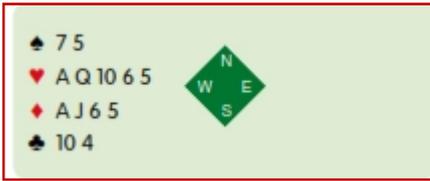
You respond 2♦ and over partner's 2♥ rebid, you now bid 2NT to show an invitational hand with five hearts.

If you have this hand:

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You bid the hand the same way. Why? Because a new suit at the three level is forcing to game and you are not worth 3♦.

Type C Game forcing
This time you have:



You transfer to spades after your partner's 1NT opening and then bid 3NT. He now has a choice of passing or bidding 4♠.

Fast arrival

If you have a second suit you can show it to help partner make his choice.



with all your points in two suits you want to tell partner that it may be worth considering an alternative.

The auction thus starts:

West	You
	1NT
2♥	2♠
3♦	

At the point where partner hears you bid like this he knows you are going to game but, of course, you may have slam in mind so there is an important principle to bear in mind called 'the principle of fast arrival'. This says that if you are already forced to game, then bidding game immediately is the weakest option and anything else is stronger.

Suppose you hold:



West	East
	1NT
2♥	2♠
3♦	?

You are minimum, but are happy to play in spades as you have three, so you bid 4♠ to show this. If you had a maximum with a spade fit, then you would bid 3♠ which gives partner the choice of raising to 4♠, with no ambition beyond game or, if he has a possible slam in mind, cue bidding (which is easier because he has more room). Self-agreeing splinters With a game forcing hand opposite 1NT there is a further opportunity open to you.

You hold:



You can transfer to spades and then bid 4♦ as a splinter. This directs partner to the possibility that a slam might be on if he has most of his points outside diamonds. If the 1NT opener held:

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He would be delighted to bid 4♥ as a cue bid knowing there are few wasted values in diamonds. You should then reach a slam on a combined 28 count with 12 top tricks. If, on the other hand, partner has:



He would regard his ♦K as wasted and sign off in 4♠. A slam, despite the fact you have a combined 30 points, would be very poor. A jump to the four level after a transfer is a splinter. Note that this includes:

West	East
	1NT
2♥	2♣
4♥	

This one can be very expensive if you and partner play it differently. You can show hands with 5-5 in the majors after a 1NT opening by other routes. My suggestion would be to respond 4♦ directly to 1NT to show this hand type with no ambition to play anywhere other than 4♥ or 4♠. You will never want to bid 4♦ naturally.

Summary

- A Stayman response does not promise a major (in this system), it asks for one and it may cover several hand types.
- A transfer to a major and then bidding a new suit is forcing to game in modern style.
- A transfer followed by a jump in a new suit is a "self-agreeing" splinter.
- A response of 4♦ to 1NT shows both majors (5-5) and a desire to play in a major suit game with the best fit.