

Tools of the Trade (1) - Checkback

Suppose your partner opens 1♦, you respond 1♠ and partner bids 1NT. This is your hand.

♠ A J 7 6 2
♥ 6 4 2
♦ T 3
♣ Q J 2

Partner has shown 12 to 14 HCP, so you know you do not have enough for game. Still, is it better to be in 1NT or 2♠?

If you pass 1NT, partner may have three spades; if you bid 2♠, what if partner has only two card support?

With this balanced hand, pass is probably the best option. If partner has three spades, your five card suit will still be useful in no trumps.

Again, your partner opens 1♦, you respond 1♠ and partner bids 1NT. Suppose your hand is a little stronger.

♠ A J 7 6 2
♥ 6 4 2
♦ A 3
♣ Q J 2

You have 12 HCP. If partner has 13 or 14 there is enough for game. But which game? Spades or no trumps?

If partner has three spades, you would prefer to be in spades. Otherwise, no trumps would be better.

Let's make your hand stronger still.

♠ A Q 7 6 2
♥ A 4 2
♦ A 3
♣ K Q 2

If partner has maximum and spade support, we should be looking for slam. Without spade support, maybe we can make 6NT. If partner is minimum, game is enough.

How do we resolve all of these issues?

The Checkback convention is often the key.

Checkback

When partner opens one of a minor, you respond one of a major and partner rebids 1NT, 2♣ is the **Checkback** convention. It is an artificial bid asking for information about partner's majors and overall strength.

To use checkback, responder should have a five card major and at least game invitational values – so ten or more HCP. Being artificial, the 2♣ bid should be alerted.

Replying to Checkback, the priorities are (1) support partner's five card major with three cards in the suit, (2) bid the other major with four cards in that suit and (3) deny interest in the majors. The bids available to accomplish this are:

- 2♦ Minimum hand with no help in the majors
- 2♥ Minimum hand with hearts
- 2♠ Minimum hand with spades

- 2NT Maximum hand with no help in the majors
- 3♥ Maximum hand with hearts
- 3♠ Maximum hand with spades

All of the responses to Checkback should be alerted.

Some examples.

<p>♠ Q 6 2 ♥ A 5 ♦ K Q 4 2 ♣ K 8 7 3</p>	<p>West opens 1♦, East responds with 1♠ and West rebids bids 1NT. Now, East bids 2♣, checkback.</p> <p>West has three card support and 14 HCP. This is maximum and so West bids 3♠. East raises to 4♠.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 3 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>
<p>♠ Q 2 ♥ A 7 5 ♦ K 9 4 2 ♣ K 8 7 3</p>	<p>The same auction up to East's 2♣, checkback.</p> <p>West has only two card support this time and a minimum hand. West bids 2♦ which East converts to 2NT.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 3 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>
<p>♠ Q 2 ♥ A Q 7 5 ♦ K 9 4 2 ♣ K 8 3</p>	<p>The same auction up to East's 2♣, checkback.</p> <p>West has only two card support and a maximum hand. West bids 3♥ in case East has four hearts as well as five spades. East hasn't so bids 3NT.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 3 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>
<p>♠ Q 2 ♥ A Q 7 5 ♦ K 9 4 2 ♣ K 8 3</p>	<p>The same auction up to East's 2♣, checkback.</p> <p>West has only two card support and a maximum hand. West bids 3♥. This time, East does have four hearts and bids 4♥.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 3 ♥ J 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q 2</p>
<p>♠ Q 2 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ K Q 2 ♣ K 8 7 6 3</p>	<p>West opens 1♣, East responds with 1♥ and West rebids bids 1NT. Now, East bids 2♣, checkback.</p> <p>With three card support and a maximum, West bids 3♥. East raises to 4♥.</p>	<p>♠ 7 6 3 ♥ K Q 6 3 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>

Checkback after Opener's 2NT Rebid

When opener bids 1♦, responder 1♠ and opener 2NT, opener is showing 18-19 HCP. Checkback applies here as well. Opener's 2NT bid has a very narrow range. There is no question of minimum or maximum. It is just a case of looking for a major suit fit.

<p>♠ K Q 2 ♥ A 5 ♦ K Q J 2 ♣ K 8 7 3</p>	<p>West opens 1♦, East responds with 1♠ and West rebids bids 2NT. East bids 3♣ as checkback.</p> <p>When West shows three card support by bidding 3♠, East can investigate slam in spades.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 3 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ A J 2</p>
<p>♠ K 2 ♥ A Q 7 5 ♦ K Q J 2 ♣ K 8 3</p>	<p>The same auction up to East's 3♣, checkback.</p> <p>West has only two card support but does have four hearts. West bids 3♥ and with a much weaker hand, East is content to raise to 4♥.</p>	<p>♠ A T 7 6 3 ♥ J 6 4 2 ♦ 4 3 ♣ Q 2</p>

Deal 1

	North	
	♠ A 5 3 ♥ K 9 6 2 ♦ Q J 6 5 ♣ Q 8	
West		East
♠ Q 4 ♥ J 4 3 ♦ T 9 8 4 ♣ K J T 5		♠ J 8 7 ♥ Q T 8 7 ♦ 7 2 ♣ A 9 6 3
	South	
	♠ K T 9 6 2 ♥ A 5 ♦ A K 3 ♣ 7 4 2	

West	North	East	South
	1♦ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT ⁽¹⁾	Pass	2♣ ⁽²⁾
Pass	2♠ ⁽³⁾	Pass	4♠ ⁽⁴⁾
Pass	Pass	Pass	

- 12 to 14 HCP. Denies four spades.
- Checkback
- Minimum hand. Prefer three card support for partner to bidding your own major.
- Even with partner's minimum, there is enough for game.

There should be no problem making ten tricks. Lose two clubs and a spade.

Deal 2

	North	
	♠ K J 7 3 ♥ 9 5 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ T 5 4 3	
West		East
♠ A T 9 6 4 ♥ A T 6 3 ♦ 8 2 ♣ A Q		♠ 5 2 ♥ K Q 4 2 ♦ A T 4 3 ♣ K 7 2
	South	
	♠ Q 8 ♥ J 8 7 ♦ K 7 6 5 ♣ J 9 8 6	

West	North	East	South
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	1NT ⁽¹⁾	Pass
2♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	2♥ ⁽³⁾	Pass
4♥ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	Pass	Pass

- 12 to 14 HCP. Denies four spades.
- Checkback
- Minimum. Four hearts, Denies three spades.
- 14 HCP plus two fit points plus partner's 12 HCP is plenty for game.

This time, there are eleven possible tricks with careful play. After cashing the ace and queen of clubs, a diamond loser can be discarded on the king of clubs.

Deal 3

	North	
	♠ K J 4 ♥ Q J T 7 3 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ T 6	
West		East
♠ T 7 6 2 ♥ K 8 6 5 ♦ K J 8 ♣ 8 2		♠ A 9 8 ♥ 9 4 ♦ T 7 5 4 ♣ A 9 7 3
	South	
	♠ Q 5 2 ♥ A 2 ♦ 9 6 2 ♣ K Q J 5 4	

West	North	East	South
			1♣
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT ⁽¹⁾
Pass	2♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	2♦ ⁽³⁾
Pass	3NT ⁽⁴⁾	All Pass	

- 12 to 14 HCP. Denies four hearts and four spades.
- Checkback
- Minimum. Denies three hearts.
- With partner's 12 HCP there is just enough for game.

Establish the club suit first and then work on the hearts. Lose two spades, a heart and a club.

Deal 4

	North	
	♠ A 9 2 ♥ K T 6 5 2 ♦ 9 4 ♣ 8 7 6	
West		East
♠ K 4 ♥ A Q 8 4 ♦ K Q 8 2 ♣ A T 3		♠ Q J T 6 3 ♥ 9 7 ♦ 6 5 3 ♣ K J 3
	South	
	♠ 8 7 5 ♥ J 3 ♦ A J T 7 ♣ Q 9 5 4	

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT ⁽¹⁾	Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass
3♥ ⁽³⁾	Pass	3NT ⁽⁴⁾	All Pass

- 18 to 19 HCP, denies four spades
- Checkback
- Four hearts, denies three spades
- Just about enough for game

North has a difficult opening lead. Almost anything will help declarer. Declarer should establish the spades first and end up with at least nine tricks.