

The Strong 2♣ Opening

Why Do We Open 2♣?

We open 2♣ because we have a very strong hand and we are afraid partner may pass if we open at the one level. With our very strong hand, we might be able to make a game contract even if partner has not much at all.

Let's say you have a four loser hand and partner has ten losers. If you were to open one of a suit, partner would most likely pass. Yet, your combined loser count is fourteen which equates to ten winners, enough for a major suit game.

The 2♣ opening says nothing about clubs. It is just a way of telling partner you have a very strong hand. Being an artificial bid, it must be alerted and partner should not pass.

What is a Very Strong Hand?

As we already know from the session on balanced hands, we open 2♣ with a balanced hand and 23 or more high card points. Now, we are looking at hands that are not balanced.

A very strong hand is one with four or less losers and four or more quick tricks. All this is irrespective of the number of high card points. Hands meeting these criteria should be opened 2♣. If the hand is single-suited in one of the minors, it is best if the hand has three or less losers

Hands with 21 or more high card points should also be opened with 2♣ even if they do not meet the above criteria.

Another indication that a hand is worthy of a 2♣ opening is the "two queens test". Imagine that your partner has two queens and no other honours. If that is the case, is it possible you can make game? If the answer is yes, open 2♣.

Some examples.

Your Hand
♠ A K J 9 6 4
♥ A K
♦ Q T 5 2
♣ 4

Four quick tricks and four losers. Only 17 hcp but still a 2♣ opening.

If partner were to have a couple of spades, the ♦J, the ♠Q and no other high cards, game is almost certain.

Your Hand
♠ A K Q 9 6
♥ K 7 4
♦ A Q 5
♣ A 4

This hand has four losers. It has 22 hcp but 2NT is not an option because of the five spades. Open 2♣.

Your Hand
♠ A
♥ K 4
♦ A Q 2
♣ A Q T 9 5 4 2

Four and a half quick tricks and three losers. Enough for a 2♣ opening with the long minor.

Your Hand
♠ A K Q 9 6
♥ K 7 4
♦ A 5 2
♣ A 4

Five losers, four and a half quick tricks. With five spades, the hand is not suitable for a 2NT opening. Despite the 20 HCP, open 1♠.

Responding to the 2♣ Opening

While the 2♣ opening has solved one problem, it has created another. By forcing partner to bid at the two level, it is easy for the auction to get too high before a fit is found.

There are many different response systems in common use. They vary from the very good to the adequate to the truly awful. The method described here is very simple. It may not be the absolute best but it is still effective.

In fact, it could not be more simple. After partner's 2♣, bid 2♦ no matter what your strength or shape. This is called a **waiting** bid. Partner's 2♣ may be based on many different types of hands and you are waiting to find out more. Furthermore, the use of the waiting bid means there is every chance that the strong hand will be playing the contract.

Like the 2♣ opening, 2♦ is an artificial bid. It must be alerted and partner should not pass.

After the 2♦ Response

Opener describes the hand more fully with one of the following bids.

- 2NT A balanced hand and no five card major with 23-24 hcp
- 3NT A balanced hand and no five card major with 25 or more hcp
- 2♥ or 2♠ A four or three and a half loser hand with a long major.
The hand may have a second suit of four or more cards.
- 3 of a suit A three or less loser hand with a long suit.
The hand may have a second suit with four or more cards.

Examples

After 2♣ – 2♦:

Your Hand
♠ A K J 4
♥ A K
♦ K Q 5 2
♣ K 7 4

Bid 2NT with a balanced 23 hcp.

Your Hand
♠ A K Q 4
♥ A K
♦ K Q 5 2
♣ K J 4

Bid 3NT with a balanced 25 hcp.

Your Hand
♠ A K Q 9 6
♥ K 7 4
♦ A Q 5
♣ A 4

Bid 2♠. A balanced hand in the 20-22 range but an opening 2NT was ruled out because of the five card major.

Your Hand
♠ A
♥ K 4
♦ A Q 2
♣ A Q T 9 5 4 2

Bid 3♣. A three loser hand.

Your Hand
♠ A K Q 9 6 4
♥ A 2
♦ A K 5 2
♣ 4

Jump to 3♠. A three loser hand. Even if partner has almost no points, game is very likely. For example, (a) partner may have four diamonds that will provide a third diamond trick or (b) the queen of diamonds that will give a third diamond trick or (c) just two diamond allowing a diamond ruff in dummy.

After 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT

Partner has a balanced hand with 23-24 hcp. You can:

- Pass with a very weak hand.
- Bid 3NT with no interest in the majors and values for game.
- Use 3♣ (Stayman) to look for a 4-4 major fit
- Use 3♦ and 3♥ as transfers to 3♥ and 3♠ respectively.
- Bid game in a long minor.
- With 10 or more hcp, investigate a slam.

♠ A K J 4
♥ A K
♦ K Q 5 2
♣ K 7 4

After West opens 2♣ and East responds 2♦, West rebids 2NT to show a balanced 23-24 hcp.

Now, East bids 3♣ (Stayman) and when West shows spades, East raises to 4♠.

♠ 9 5 3 2
♥ 6 5 4 2
♦ J 7
♣ A 6 3

After 2♣ - 2♦ - 3NT

Partner has a balanced hand with 25 or more hcp. You can:

- Pass with a very weak hand.
- Use 4♦ and 4♥ as transfers to 4♥ and 4♠ respectively.
- Bid game in a long minor.
- With 8 or more hcp, investigate a slam.

Unfortunately, Stayman is not available after the 3NT bid because of the danger that partner may not have support for your major.

<p>♠ A K Q 4 ♥ A K ♦ K Q 5 2 ♣ K J 4</p>	<p>After West opens 2♣ and East responds 2♦, West rebids 3NT to show a balanced 25+ hcp.</p> <p>Now, East bids 4♦ (transfer to hearts) and West bids 4♥. East passes.</p>	<p>♠ 5 3 2 ♥ 9 6 5 4 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ A 7 3</p>
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After 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♥ or 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠

Partner has an unbalanced hand with at least a five card major and four or three and a half losers. Partner may have a second long suit.

- Pass with a very weak (11 loser) hand and tolerance for partner's suit..
- Bid 2NT no tolerance for partner's suit. 2NT may be very weak but it may also be stronger. Therefore, 2NT is a **forcing** bid.
- With support for partner and a ten loser hand, bid game. This is the **principle of fast arrival**.
- With support for partner and nine losers, bid three of the major. This shows a better than minimum hand with slam interest.
- With support for partner and eight or less losers, investigate slam.
- Without support for partner and a very good five card suit or a good six card suit, bid that suit at the cheapest level. This is **forcing to game** so the hand should have no more than ten losers. Subsequent bidding by both players is natural.

<p>♠ A K Q 9 6 ♥ A K 7 2 ♦ K T 2 ♣ 4</p>	<p>After West opens 2♣ and East responds 2♦, West rebids 2♠ to show a four loser hand. With no support for spades, East bids 2NT. West now bids 3♥ showing a second suit and East raises to four.</p>	<p>♠ 5 3 ♥ 9 6 5 4 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ A 9 7 3</p>
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After 2♣ - 2♦ - 3 of a suit

Partner has an unbalanced hand with at least a five card major and three or less losers. Partner may have a second long suit. This is a forcing bid.

- With no support for partner and a good five card suit, bid that suit.
- With no support for partner, bid a new four card suit at the three level.
- Bid 3NT with no support for partner's suit and no biddable suit.
- With support for partner and hand with ten or more losers, bid game.
- With support for partner and nine or less losers, look for slam.

<p>♠ A K Q 9 6 ♥ A K 7 2 ♦ K Q 2 ♣ 4</p>	<p>After West opens 2♣ and East responds 2♦, West rebids 3♠ to show a three loser hand. With no support for spades, East bids 3NT. West now bids 4♥ showing a second suit and East passes.</p>	<p>♠ 5 3 ♥ 9 6 5 4 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ T 9 7 3</p>
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Example 1

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

West	North	East	South
	2♣ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	2♦ ⁽²⁾
Pass	2NT ⁽³⁾	Pass	3♣ ⁽⁴⁾
Pass	3♠ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass	4♠ ⁽⁶⁾
Pass	Pass	Pass	

East leads the ♠5.

1. Four or less losers
2. Waiting
3. 23-24 hcp, balanced
4. Stayman
5. 4 spades, denies 4 hearts
6. Ten losers opposite partner's four losers is enough for game

Note that 3NT will fail if east leads a heart and west returns a diamond.

Declarer starts off by cashing the ace and king of clubs and ruffing a club in dummy. When the ♣Q falls, there is no need to ruff any more clubs. Trumps can be drawn and the hearts established. Declarer will lose one heart and two diamonds.

Example 2

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

West	North	East	South
		2♣ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
2♦ ⁽²⁾	Pass	2♠ ⁽³⁾	Pass
4NT ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	5♣ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass
5♦ ⁽⁶⁾	Pass	6♣ ⁽⁷⁾	Pass
6♠ ⁽⁸⁾	Pass	Pass	Pass

South leads the ♦2.

1. Four or less losers
2. Waiting
3. 5+ spades, 4 losers
4. 8 losers. Investigate slam.
5. 0 or 3 key cards
6. Do you have the queen?
7. Yes along with the ♣K
8. Missing just one key card.

The only lead that does not help declarer is the unlikely ♠J. As it is, declarer has eleven top tricks. Once the hearts break 3-3, there is a twelfth. If the hearts had not broken, declarer would have to rely on the finesse of the ♣K.

Example 3

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

West	North	East	South
			2♣ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	2♦ ⁽²⁾	Pass	2♥ ⁽³⁾
Pass	2NT ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	3♣ ⁽⁵⁾
Pass	5♣ ⁽⁶⁾	All Pass	

West leads the ♠4.

1. Four or less losers
2. Waiting
3. 5+ hearts, 4 losers
4. No support for hearts
5. 4+ clubs
6. Support for clubs. Nine losers so enough for game

Both 3NT and 4♥ will go down against best defence. 5♣ can make but it requires careful play. Win trick one with the ♠A. Cash ace and king of clubs. Now, a heart to the king, another heart back and lead the queen of hearts, discarding a diamond from dummy. West may ruff and lead back another spade. Ruff in hand. Ruff a heart in dummy and play back a diamond. East does best to duck but it does not help. Play the last heart from hand, discarding another diamond and now there is just one diamond loser.

Example 4

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

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

North leads the ♣K.

1. Four or less losers
2. Waiting
3. 5+ hearts, 3 losers
4. 11 losers. A brave bid with zero hcp but trust your partner!

A combined nineteen hcp but an easy game. Ruff the opening lead, cash two top diamonds and ruff a diamond in dummy. You now make ten or eleven tricks depending on how you take the spade finesse.