

# 1NT Openings, Stayman and Transfers ...

## ... when playing a strong NT

### For the Intermediate Player

#### Forward

The intention of this book is to define a complete set of responses to 1NT. The basic responses of Stayman and Jacoby transfers are well established, but the meaning of bids thereafter is not uniformly defined.

It is perhaps possible to devise a better scheme if you make fundamental changes, but I prefer to keep the well established conventions such as Stayman and transfers.

Many of the concepts are simple and well known, such as the Jacoby Transfers and Stayman mentioned. Others may be rather new and perhaps complex, but they are well worth mastering. Examples of the latter are the Shape Asking Relays after Stayman (SARS), Quest transfers, Advanced SID and many more indispensable conventions for the more advanced player.

This book defines a *complete* bidding system after an opening 1NT, where virtually every possible bidding sequence in an uncontested auction is defined. It is also intended as a reference manual, and, to this end I have included a number of summary charts at the end of the book.

Terrence Quested, in the Land of Smiles. Hot season, 2004

#### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all members of the Pattaya Bridge Club (past, present and transient/visitors) for supplying me with the incentive and material to write this book.

When I refer to 'the club' I mean the Pattaya Bridge Club (I am the director/administrator) from where I have picked up much of the material in this book.

#### By the same Author: -

- 1NT Openings, Stayman and Transfers ... when playing a weak NT.\_

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## Introduction

Why did I write a book on bidding after 1NT? Surely it's quite straightforward? Stayman and Transfers. Yes, but what happens after that? How many books have you picked up that answer these questions: -

- What does 3♦ mean in the sequence 1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - 3♦?  
Is it forcing?  
Does responder have 4♥'s?
- What does 3♦ mean in the sequence 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♦?  
Is it forcing?  
Is it a ♦ suit?  
Does responder promise a 4 card major?
- What does 2♠ mean in the sequence 1NT - 2♦ - 2♥ - 2♠?  
Is it forcing?
- How do you show a responding hand which is 5-4 (or 4-5) in the majors that is ..  
Weak?  
Invitational?  
Game forcing?  
Do you use Stayman or transfer?
- How do you show a responding hand which is 5-5 in the majors that is ..  
Weak?  
Invitational?  
Game forcing?  
Do you use Stayman or transfer?
- If you open 1NT with say 5♥'s and 2♠'s (so 2533) and partner transfers into ♠'s, how can you subsequently find a possible 5-3♥ fit if partner has game values and, say, 5332 shape? I bet you would be playing it in 3NT?
- Does responder guarantee a 4 card major in the sequence 1NT - 1♣ - 2♦ - 2NT?

And just have a look at all of the question marks on the next page. How many can you confidently answer - and be sure that your partner gives the same answer? How many gaps will you leave?

And it's not good enough to give an answer like 'weak' for 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 2♠?, how many♥'s in responder's hand, and how many♠'s?

It's high time that all of this was clearly defined.

So here it is, all in one book. And you will find the completed charts at the end of the book, so you know that **everything** is covered. And if you want to know what 3♦ means in the sequence 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♦, just look it up in the bidding index.

## Stayman Sequences

1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - pass = ?  
2♥ = ?  
2♠ = ?  
2NT = ?  
3♣ = ?  
3♦ = ?  
3♥ = ?  
3♠ = ?  
3NT = ?  
4♣ = ?  
4♦ = ?  
4♥ = ?  
4♠ = ?  
4NT = ?

1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - pass = ?  
2♠ = ?  
2NT = ?  
3♣ = ?  
3♦ = ?  
3♥ = ?  
3♠ = ?  
3NT = ?  
4♣ = ?  
4♦ = ?  
4♥ = ?  
4♠ = ?  
4NT = ?

1NT - 2♣ - 2♠ - pass = ?  
2NT = ?  
3♣ = ?  
3♦ = ?  
3♥ = ?  
3♠ = ?  
3NT = ?  
4♣ = ?  
4♦ = ?  
4♥ = ?  
4♠ = ?  
4NT = ?

## Major Suit Transfer Sequences

1NT - 2♦ - 2♥ - pass = ?  
2♠ = ?  
2NT = ?  
3♣ = ?  
3♦ = ?  
3♥ = ?  
3♠ = ?  
3NT = ?  
4♣ = ?  
4♦ = ?  
4♥ = ?  
4♠ = ?  
4NT = ?

1NT - 2♥ - 2♠ - pass = ?  
2NT = ?  
3♣ = ?  
3♦ = ?  
3♥ = ?  
3♠ = ?  
3NT = ?  
4♣ = ?  
4♦ = ?  
4♥ = ?  
4♠ = ?  
4NT = ?

And, of course, the same sort of thing after a minor suit transfer.

## Terminology and Abbreviations

When indicating the shape of a hand, for example 3433, this means exactly in the order ♠♥♦♣. If I mean the suits in any order, then I say 4333 type hands.

A bid such as 2♣/♦ means either 2♣ or 2♦

ASID	= Advanced Stayman In Doubt.
Blackwood	= Easley Blackwood. Amongst his numerous achievements he is credited with the Blackwood convention which asks partner for aces.
BST	= Broken Suit Transfers. The direct jumps to 3♦/♥ are used as transfers to the majors and indicate a broken suit with slam ambitions.
Captain (and Crew)	= In most auctions one player usually limits his hand at some stage. His partner then knows the combined strength and is 'in charge'. He is called the captain and his partner is the crew. A player who bids Blackwood always becomes Captain.
Cue bid	= A bid in a suit in which the partnership does not wish to play. After trumps have been agreed such a bid is often a cue bid, usually showing 1 <sup>st</sup> round control. Further bids (other than the trump suit) are also generally cue bids.
Crawling Stayman	= A variation of Garbage Stayman that is meant to make it easier to find a fit with very weak hands. We do not use it.
The club	= I am referring to the Pattaya Bridge Club.
DRKCB	= Double (two-suit) Roman Key Card Blackwood.
EDRKCB	= Exclusion Double Roman Key Card Blackwood.
ERKCB	= Exclusion Roman Key Card Blackwood.
Four-way Transfers	= In addition to the 2♦/♥ Jacoby transfers to 2♥/♠ one can also play 2♠/NT as transfers to 3♣/♦. This complete scheme is called 4-way transfers.
Garbage Stayman	= Stayman after 1NT. The most common variation is when responder has no points requirement and it is sometimes referred to as Garbage Stayman.
HCPs	= High Card Points
IMP	= International Matchpoint. A form of scoring on a sliding scale used in team matches. Over tricks and the 10 extra for playing in NT as opposed to a major etc are insignificant. It is different to Matchpoint scoring.
Intermediates	= 10's, 9's and 8's. These have no point count but are often more important than lower cards.
Jacoby Transfers	= After partner's 1NT opening, bids of 2♦/♥ are transfers to 2♥/♠ resp. The same can be done one level higher after a 2NT opening. A further extension of the transfers over 1NT is using 2♠ and 2NT as transfers to 3♣/♦ resp.
Key cards	= These are defined as the 4 aces and the king of trumps. They are normally associated with RKCB but are also specific to some other conventions.
Kickback	= A variation of RKCB whereby the suit above the trump suit (4NT in the case of ♠'s) is used as the key card ask.
The Law of Total Tricks	= Often simply called 'The Law'. It states that the total number of tricks available to both sides is equal to the total number of trumps. So in it's simple form, all things being equal, you can compete to the level of combined trumps that your side holds.
Limit raise	= The exact definition is a raise that specifies the point count, i.e. limits the hand. We usually use the term specifically for a limit raise of an opener's suit to the 3 level (i.e. +11 points) or opener's 1NT to 2NT (i.e. 8-9 pts).
Matchpoints	= The scoring method used in pairs competitions. It is different from IMP scoring in that overtricks are important and even the extra 10 points for making 3NT+1 as opposed to 4♥ exactly is very significant. I assume IMP scoring in this book.
Puppet	= An artificial bid that demands that partner makes a specific bid (normally the next bid up). Lebensohl is the most well known example. A puppet is sometimes used in order to transfer captaincy so that the captain can become the crew and can describe his

	hand.
Puppet Stayman	= Puppet Stayman asks for both 4 and 5 card majors. The most important version is 3♣ over a 2NT opening and this works extremely well. There are also variations over a 1NT opening (either 2♣ or 3♣) but neither are really satisfactory. Note that with Puppet Stayman, the artificial 3♣ (or 2♣) bid is in fact a relay and not a puppet.
Quacks	= Queens and Jacks.
Quest transfers	= A convention used after the sequence 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ whereby a jump to 3♦ or 3♥ is a transfer to the suit above and shows 5 cards in the suit transferred into and 4 in the other major. This is an improvement on Smolen.
Relay	= An artificial bid that seeks information about partner's hand. The most common examples are Blackwood and Stayman.
RKCB	= Roman Key Card Blackwood. An improved form of Blackwood where the king of trumps is given equal importance to the four aces – thus giving five 'key cards'. Special significance is also allocated to the queen of trumps.
SARS	= Shape Asking Relays (after Stayman).
SID	= Stayman in Doubt. A convention to check on shape duplication after a major suit fit has been discovered using Stayman. We use a considerably enhanced version (ASID).
Smolen	= A convention used after the sequence 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ whereby a jump to 3♥ or 3♠ shows 4 cards in the major suit bid and 5 in the other major. We do not use it as it has been superseded by Quest transfers.
South African Texas	= A variation on Texas transfers whereby 4♣/♦ are the transfer bids to 4♥/♠ resp.
Splinter	= A jump in a new suit to a level that is one more than the forcing bid is often splinter, showing shortage (singleton or void). It usually agrees partner's last suit (normally a major) as trumps. We can splinter to the 3 level over a 1NT opening to offer one of the other 3 suits as trumps.
Stayman	= Samuel Stayman. The convention named after him is a 2♣ bid after partner's 1NT opening (or 3♣ after a 2NT opening) which asks opener to clarify his major suit holdings. There are numerous variations of the convention.
Tenace	= A holding such as Kx or AQ which is vulnerable to a lead from RHO.
TexasTransfer	= After partner's 1NT opening, 4♦/♥ are transfers to 4♥/♠.
Transfer	= An artificial bid that shows length in a specific suit. The most common example is Jacoby transfers over NT.

## About Kickback

'Everybody' these days plays Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB), and quite right too – it is far superior to the standard version and it is what we shall be using in this book. However, whenever you use Blackwood (whatever variety you choose) there is always a problem with the lower ranking suits as trumps because the reply may get you too high. In fact, you may even have a problem with RKCB when ♥'s are trumps: -

West	East	West	East	
♠ KQ62	♠ J	1NT	2♦	(1) RKCB ??
♥ KQ8	♥ AJ109765	2♥	4NT (1)	(2) two key cards + ♥Q
♦ AJ54	♦ KQ	5♠ (2)	? (3)	
♣ 107	♣ KQJ			

Don't worry about the 2♦ transfer, we will cover that later. The point is that 4NT does not work as RKCB when ♥'s are trumps. East justifiably had visions of slam but now 5NT at (3) would be asking for kings and we are too high! The problems are even worse with a minor suit and you may also get problems when asking for the trump queen. The only real way to solve this is to ensure that you have 4 steps between your Blackwood asking bid and the trump suit.

There are a few solutions; 4-of-the-minor as Blackwood for minor suits is one of them. But probably the best is Kickback; this uses the suit above trumps as the key card ask and it is what we shall be using in many situations.

Also, of course, because we have opened 1NT, we often need 4NT as a quantitative bid.

## About Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB)

We use RKCB in this book as the ace (or rather keycard) ask, but 4NT is not always the RKCB bid.

Because of the problems involved when a minor suit is trumps (and also when one of two suits may be trumps) we have various different methods for the key card ask. It is Kickback for ♥'s and ♠'s. But with a minor suit it may be 4 of the minor or Kickback, depending upon the sequence, and this is fully explained when it occurs.

Also I have assumed the 0314 variation of RKCB, it's up to you if you prefer 1430.

Note also that in a sequence such as 1NT - 2♦ - 2♥ - 4♣, the 4♣ bid is often referred to as Gerber, or Roman Key Card Gerber. I think that this is misleading; when I refer to Gerber it is always an ace ask with no trump suit agreed. The 4♣ bid here is simply RKCB with 4♣ as the asking bid.

In many circumstances there are two suits that are very important and then we use Double (or two-suit) RKCB, or DRKCB. Sometimes asker may have a void, then it's Exclusion RKCB or ERKCB. And if there are two key suits and asker has a void then it's Exclusion Double RKCB or EDRKCB. These are all fully described later.

## Matchpoint or teams scoring?

The type of scoring may affect the decision for your final contract. For example, a 75% 6NT may well actually score better than a 95% 6♥ at pairs (matchpoints). This is not 'real' bridge and I assume teams scoring (IMPs) or rubber bridge.



# 1 The 1NT opener

The very first thing to be decided is the range of your 1NT opening. Of course there are numerous possible ranges but the most popular two are the strong NT (15-17) and the weak NT (12-14). Another aspect that is nowhere near so important is whether you play a 5 card major system or if you can open a 4 card major.

When I set about writing this book I had to decide which range to adopt, but since everything is applicable to both ranges I decided to write two parallel books. Virtually the same but one has all the examples for a strong NT and the other for a weak NT.

Since you are reading this book and not the weak NT one, I assume that your range is 15-17. Everything in this book is equally valid if you play a weak NT – in the examples, give responder 3 of opener's points. So no problem even if you play another range.

First of all, lets have a look at aspects of a hand that may influence your decision to open 1NT or not.

## Tenaces

Hand A	Hand B	You are playing a strong NT. What do you open?
♠ KJ9	♠ A97	Hand A is a lovely 1NT opener, if you end up as declarer
♥ KJ9	♥ A65	(often the case when you open 1NT because of Stayman,
♦ KJ9	♦ A87	transfers etc) then the opening lead is almost certain to help.
♣ KJ92	♣ A932	With this Hand A you most certainly want to be declarer.

What about Hand B? This is the complete opposite, it has no tenaces to protect. Most contracts will be better played by partner. So open 1♣? Unfortunately you cannot. What is your rebid? Partner will never place you with a balanced 16 count if you do not open 1NT.

It is usually best to be declarer with holdings such as AQx, KJx and Kx etc.

I also include Qx, let us consider this particular holding a little further, especially as regards a NT contract. If you hold Qx as declarer opposite Axx then the suit is immune from an opening lead without conceding 2 tricks to you. But what if partner has Kxx, surely it does not matter who plays the hand? Perhaps, but it is much better to have the three card holding on table and the two card holding in hand. If the suit is initially lead, you duck in dummy and if your Q wins, you still have a stop if the ace is with LHO or is you can keep LHO from the lead. With the doubleton on table you have no such option. Obviously the same is true with Qxx opposite Kx, declarer should protect his doubleton. Ax is different; this is no problem in dummy as playing low does not leave a stiff K or Q to be felled next lead.

## Hand Evaluation

Hand C	Hand D	I do not intend to write pages on this (well, not in this book), suffice it to say that the value of the hand is not simply the addition of the HCP's. I would open a strong 1NT with both of these hands.
♠ Q954	♠ AJ109	When I state point counts, for example 8-9 for an
♥ AQ6	♥ QJ10	invitational hand, I mean the value of the hand after evaluation.
♦ AQ3	♦ KQJ10	I will generally deduct a point for 4333 type shape, add on for
♣ KJ2	♣ 98	good 5 card suits, intermediates, etc.

Before we move onto some specific hand shapes, let's consider a few general examples of NT openings from the club which generated discussion: -

If you open 1 of a suit, you must always have a rebid. If you open 1NT you have said it all.

Hand E was opened with 1♦, the opener being unhappy about the ♥'s.

Hand E His partner considered 1NT the correct opening and I was asked for my considered opinion: - If you open 1♦, then you would appear to have no

♠ AQ109 rebid problem. If partner bids 1♥ then you bid 1♠ and if he bids 1♠ then  
♥ 92 you support. But what do you rebid if partner bids 2♣?

♦ AQJ9 The real problem is that you have not shown the strength nor the balanced  
♣ QJ9 nature of the hand. No, open 1NT. We do not worry about a small doubleton if 1NT is the most descriptive bid.

Hand F What about Hand F? Again a small doubleton, so do we open 1♥ or 1NT?

♠ 97 We have seen that a small doubleton does not deter us from opening 1NT  
♥ AKQ104 but in this case if we open 1♥ we have a very comfortable rebid (2♥).

♦ A73 Contrary to some people's belief, this does not guarantee a 6 card suit when  
♣ Q93 playing 5 card majors. So we open Hand F with 1♥, we come onto discussing hands with a 5 card major that should open 1NT shortly.

Hand G And what about this Hand G. When this hand occurred in a club competition the holder opened 1♣ and the bidding went (a) 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT ....

♠ 96 Obviously very silly as the 1NT bid here is the same as if it had gone  
♥ AKQ8 (b) 1♣ - 1♠ - 1NT .... and shows 12-14 points when playing a strong NT.

♦ 764 Now I asked around, and *everybody* out of a dozen or so said that they  
♣ AK75 would open 1♣ as they would not open 1NT with two very weak suits.

Noble sentiments, but surely that is better than subsequently lying about your strength by two points? And you are no better off if you play 4 card majors and choose to open 1♥; you have the same problem over a 1♠ or 2♦ response.

Only one of those I questioned had even thought about the rebid; he said that he would reverse into 2♥ after partner's 1♠ response to the 1♣ opening. Reasonable, but there are a few flaws: -

- (1) This hand is not really strong enough to reverse in the modern style.
- (2) A reverse promises greater length in the first bid suit.
- (3) You are still fixed if the bidding was as in sequence (a).

No, the only real solution is to open a strong NT. It's nice to have an honour in every suit, or in at least three suits, but it does not always turn out that way.

Shuffle Hand G around and it's a different story: -

Hand H	Hand J	With Hand H it's best to open 1♣ as you have an easy 1♠ rebid. But we have a problem with Hand J; if we open 1♦ and partner responds 2♣ then we have no sensible answer! 2NT would be 12-14 and 2♠ is played as a strong reverse by most players, promising more ♦'s than ♠'s. So with Hand J it's also best to open a strong NT.
♠ AKQ8 ♥ 96 ♦ 764 ♣ AK75	♠ AKQ8 ♥ 96 ♦ AK75 ♣ 764	
Hand K	Hand L	And Hand K is also problematic. If you open 1♣ then a 1♦ or 1♥ response poses no problem (support), but what after 1♠? I guess 2♣? You could open 1♦ with a view to rebidding 2♣ over a 1♠ response, but that would imply longer ♦'s than ♣'s. I would again prefer to open 1NT with this hand but I would agree that either 1♣ or 1♦ are quite reasonable. The same sort of problem with Hand L. If you open 1♦ then a 2♦ rebid is best over 1♠. A 1NT opener may work out best.
♠ 96 ♥ 764 ♦ AK75 ♣ AKQ8	♠ 96 ♥ AK75 ♦ AKQ8 ♣ 764	
Hand M	Hand N	With both majors it's often best to avoid opening 1NT. You always have a good rebid if you open 1♣ and the advantage is that you will always find a 4-4 fit that may be missed if you open 1NT and partner is too weak to respond. My personal preference is the 'short ♣' system and I would also open 1♣ with Hand N. But I realise that most would prefer 1♦ (but then you have a rebid problem over a 2♣ response).
♠ AKQ8 ♥ AK75 ♦ 96 ♣ 764	♠ AKQ8 ♥ AK75 ♦ 764 ♣ 96	

So, it's nice not to have two wide open suits when you open 1NT, but it's not guaranteed! If you have a balanced hand within your 1NT opening range, then open 1NT unless you have a comfortable rebid over any non-jump response.

## 1.1 Opening 1NT with a 5 Card Major?

Most players accept opening 1NT with a balanced hand and a 5 card minor. However, one of the main considerations to be considered when opening 1NT is if you allow a 5 card major. Opinion is divided on this subject; some never open 1NT with a 5 card major, some will allow a weak suit such as J7543, while others will allow virtually any 5 card major suit. Which philosophy shall we adopt? All three probably have equal merit, but we shall adopt the last (providing the hand *is balanced*, i.e. the doubleton is Ax, Kx or Qx and the major is not top-heavy) for a number of reasons: -

- 1- If you open 1♥/♠, then you will usually never be able to play in possibly the best contract of 1NT if you play a Forcing NT.
- 2- It is usually best to limit your hand as soon as possible, especially if relatively flat.
- 3- Once you open 1NT you never have a rebid problem. The hand is off your chest.
- 4- 1NT (and most other contracts) will be played from the strong hand. And a 1NT opening hand is the hand that is most likely to have tenaces that need protecting.
- 5- The defenders do not have it so easy defending against a 1NT contract as they do not know if declarer has a 5 card major or not.
- 6- Even if a 5-3 major suit exists, if partner is minimal 1NT is at a lower level.
- 7- If the hand belongs to the opponents, they are less likely to compete over a strong NT opening.
- 8- There is also the negative inference, that a major suit opening within our 1NT range is a good suit and/or unbalanced.

Let's just check on when we should open 1NT with a 5 card major and when not: -

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
♠ AJ9	♠ AJ9	♠ Q97	♠ AK9	♠ AKJ74
♥ AQ984	♥ Q10984	♥ AKQ104	♥ AQ984	♥ Q98
♦ K7	♦ AK7	♦ A7	♦ J7	♦ K73
♣ Q93	♣ Q3	♣ J93	♣ Q93	♣ K3

- Hand 1: Open 1NT  
Hand 2: Open 1NT  
Hand 3: Open 1♥, the ♥'s are top-heavy  
Hand 4: Open 1♥, the doubleton is not good enough.  
Hand 5: Open 1NT, the short suits are just good enough and the tenaces may need protecting.

So that's fine, and we know when to open 1NT with a 5 card major and when not to. But does everybody know this? And do they know the criteria needed for 1NT? 5 card majors

Dealer: ♠ J752  
 West. ♥ 10985  
 Love all ♦ 97  
 ♣ A63

♠ KQ1043 N ♠ A6  
 ♥ AK6 W E ♥ J43  
 ♦ J43 S ♦ A10862  
 ♣ 108 ♣ K97  
 ♠ 98  
 ♥ Q72  
 ♦ KQ5  
 ♣ QJ542

are fine if they are not top-heavy, the hand should be balanced (in shape and high card distribution). Tenaces such as AQx, Kx, Qx should encourage one to open 1NT and the lack of such tenaces should be discouraging. Consider this hand from a 2003 international competition. What do you open as West? At the first table, West chose 1♠ and eventually ended up in 3NT by East. This received a ♣ lead by south and the contract was made. I am ashamed to say that the English West opened a weak 1NT, and after the ♥ 10 opening lead from North, the final 3NT contract stood no chance. Was West unlucky? Indeed he was! If this book had been published before this event,

he would have known that absolutely everything about the West hand is wrong for an opening 1NT. The points are concentrated in two suits, the doubleton is weak, the ♦'s are also very weak and the hand contains absolutely no tenaces; if NT is the best contract (as in this case), then the hand has to be played by East.

Let's have a slightly more memorable example of an unsuitable 1NT opening. This time the hand is from the 1998 Macallan International Bridge pairs. You have to be a top class player to even be invited to this tournament, and these players were 4 of the world's top. The N-S pair were playing a strong NT.

Dealer:	♠ 1072	West	North	East	South
South	♥ K2				
Both vul	♦ 875	-	-	-	1NT (1)
	♣ 97654	dbl	pass	pass	pass

♠ 6 N ♠ J983  
 ♥ 108 W E ♥ AQJ973  
 ♦ AKQ1096 S ♦ 2  
 ♣ AJ103 ♣ 82  
 ♠ AKQ54  
 ♥ 654  
 ♦ J43  
 ♣ KQ

(1) 15-17  
 West cashed the first 6 ♦ tricks, followed by the ♣A and then 6 ♥ tricks took the remainder. 7 down in a 1 level contract! Perhaps rather a graphic example, but the South hand really is unsuitable for 1NT.

## 1.2 Opening 1NT with two doubletons?

Now we have seen that we allow both 5 card minors or 5 card majors in our opening 1NT, provided the hand is balanced. But what about semi-balanced hands, e.g. hands with 2 doubletons (so a 5 and 4 card suit within your opening NT range). The general rule is that if the 5 card suit is higher ranking than the 4 card suit, then open the 5-carder and rebid the 4-carder. If the 4-carder is higher ranking and the hand is not good enough for a reverse, then open 1NT.

Hand 6	Hand 7	Hand 8	Hand 9	Hand 10
♠ K9	♠ KJ104	♠ K9	♠ K9	♠ A9
♥ KJ104	♥ AK642	♥ Q7	♥ Q7	♥ Q7
♦ AQ642	♦ Q9	♦ KJ104	♦ AQ642	♦ AK1064
♣ K7	♣ Q7	♣ AQ642	♣ KJ104	♣ J1094

Hand 6: Open 1NT. The hand is not good enough for a reverse and you will be fixed for a rebid if you open 1♦.

Hand 7: The long suits are in the same order, but you should not open 1NT with 9 cards in the majors. Thus 1♥. If partner responds 2♣/♦ you can then bid 2♠, but only if you have agreed that a reverse after a two level response does not show extra values. With no such agreement the hand is difficult and 2♥ is probably the best bid. If partner responds with a forcing NT then this hand shape is difficult and 2♣ is probably best.

Hand 8: Open 1NT, with these tenaces it's a much better bid than 1♣. The hand is not really strong enough for a reverse into 2♦ if you open 1♣.

Hand 9: Now this hand has the suits in the 'easy' order and you can open 1♦ followed by 2♣. However, I still prefer 1NT with these tenaces.

Hand 10: 14 points, but look at that ♦ suit. And the ♣ suit ain't bad for just one point. With the ♥Qx which may need protecting NT is very likely to be the best contract and is best played by this hand. The hand easily has the values for a strong NT opener.

Incidentally, Hand 10 is from a club tournament and after it had occurred I did a poll at the club and found that about 75% would open the hand with 1♦ regardless of the NT range – interesting; but I still maintain that it is a strong NT opener.

Hand A      How about this hand? It comes from the Marty Bergen book 'Marty Sez vol 2'. An opening of 1NT is recommended as the author maintains that you have a rebid problem after 1♠ from partner if you opened 1♣.

♠ J4      Sure, a 1NT rebid would be an underbid, but I see nothing wrong with

♥ AK102      rebidding this ♣ suit. A 1NT opening is, in my opinion, a distortion of this

♦ J6      hand with two worthless doubletons and should be avoided if you have a reasonable rebid

♣ AQ1073      (as here). When you open 1NT you always run the risk of missing a 4-4 major suit fit; this is not so important if your hand is balanced but would be a disaster on this hand if partner had 4♥'s and was unable to bid over a 1NT opening. Be wary of opening 1NT on hands with a 5 card minor and a 4 card major, only consider it with decent doubletons (preferably tenaces).

Hand B Let's change Hand A slightly, what do we open with this Hand B? Again we have to think about the rebid. If you open 1♣ then what is the rebid over partner's 1♠? A 2♣ rebid is perhaps acceptable, but if you open 1NT you get the strength of the hand off your chest immediately. Two doubletons is not ideal for a 1NT opening but you certainly have no further problems. This is a borderline case. My personal preference would be to open 1♣ because of the pathetic ♦'s and the risk of playing in 1NT with a 4-4 ♥ fit. But you can only do this if your partnership style allows you to occasionally rebid a decent 5 card ♣ suit (I have no problem with that).

Hand C Hand D Swap the red suits of Hand B to get Hand C then 1NT is a far better opening than 1♣ (or 1♦!). But if you swap the major suits of Hand B to get Hand D you should open 1♣ as you always have an easy 1♠ rebid.

West	East	West	East	But make Hand D top-of-the-range such as our West hand here and there may be trouble. The problem is that West's 1♠ rebid shows anything from 12 to 17 points and game (or slam in this case) may be missed. So with 4225 shape there is a case for 1NT when max.
♠ AK102	♠ QJ93	1♦	1♥	
♥ A10	♥ KJ83	1♠	4♠	
♦ 76	♦ KQ43	pass		
♣ AJ1073	♣ K			

Let's have a summary of what you should open with 5422 type shape within your 1NT opening range. For argument's sake, let's assume that the doubletons are Kx and that the hand is a reasonable 15 count and not good enough for a reverse or jump rebid: -

- 5422 1♠. You have an easy 2♥ rebid. Do not open 1NT with 9 cards in the majors.
- 5242 \*\* 1♠. Over 2♥ you will have to bid 2♠ unless 3♦ does not show extras in your style.
- 5224 \*\* 1♠. Over 2♦/♥ you will have to bid 2♠ unless 3♣ does not show extras in your style.
- 4522 1♥. Your rebid may be tricky, but do not open 1NT with 9 cards in the majors.
- 4252 \* 1NT or 1♦. You may have a problem if you open 1♦ and get a 2♣ response.
- 4225 1♣. You have a comfortable 1♠ rebid (unless maximum).
- 2542 1♥. You have a comfortable 2♦ rebid.
- 2524 \*\* 1♥. Over 2♦ you will have to bid 2♥ unless 3♣ does not show extras in your style.
- 2452 \* 1NT. If you open 1♦ you have no good rebid over 1♠/2♣.
- 2425 \* 1NT. If you open 1♣ you have no good rebid over 1♠.
- 2254 1NT.
- 2245 1NT.

\* note. See previous page. Only open 1NT with good doubletons as you may miss a 4-4 major suit fit. If you do open the minor then you may have to rebid it.

\*\* note. 1NT is a very reasonable option if the doubletons are tenaces.

You do not have to remember all of this and it is a general guideline. You simply have to think 'do I have a good rebid'? if you open 1 of a suit.

Some of the above may change depending upon the high card holdings and suit quality.

Now not everybody will be happy with all of my suggestions; I'm used to that, no problem. Perhaps it's the 2254 shape? Lets have an example from the club: -

Hand E I held this hand in a club competition, what would you open ?

♠ 85 I opened 1NT. That lovely ♦ suit is worth way more than 5 points and the  
 ♥ K6 ♣ suit more than 6. With two tenaces that may need protecting I chose a  
 ♦ KQ1098 strong 1NT. Let's look at the complete deal :-  
 ♣ AQ98

Dealer:	♠ QJ10732	<u>Table A</u>			
South	♥ 75	West	North	East	South (me)
Both vul	♦ A4	-	-	-	1NT
	♣ K105	pass	2♥ (1)	pass	2♠
		pass	4♠	pass	pass
		pass			

♠ 96 N ♠ AK4  
 ♥ J109832 W E ♥ AQ4  
 ♦ 632 S ♦ J75  
 ♣ 64 ♣ J732

		<u>Table B</u>			
		West	North	East	South
	♠ 85	-	-	-	1♦
	♥ K6	pass	1♠	pass	1NT (2)
	♦ KQ1098	pass	2♠	pass	pass
	♣ AQ98	pass			

2♥ at (1) was a Jacoby Transfer, if you play Texas Transfers then 4♥ (instructing partner to bid 4♠) is the bid. An easy 4♠ was missed at all the other tables, Table B was typical. The problem is that South does not have a decent rebid at (2). 2♣ is possible but 2♠ would again be the final contract.

I don't know how to continue at (2) after opening 1♦ with this hand when playing a strong NT. If you open 1♦ then what is your rebid over 1♥/♠? 2♣ is a bit feeble and a game forcing 3♣ is certainly too much. A 1NT rebid is 12-14 (this hand is too good) and 2NT is 18-19. That is why it's usually best to open 1NT when your hand is within your NT range and (semi) balanced.

Playing a weak NT then this Hand E is also a bit of a problem (maybe more so). It is too strong for a weak 1NT and so you open 1♦. If partner responds 1♠ then you obviously rebid 1NT (15-16), but if partner responds 1♥ then 1NT is not so nice with these ♠'s (\*).

Hand F	Hand G	If you play a weak NT and we change the hand to be in the 12-14 point range then I would open 1NT with Hand F but 1♦ with Hand G. But we do not have the same problem as (*) (Hand E when playing a strong NT) as a 2♣ rebid here is fine. Basically, a 2♣ rebid with 12-14 is OK but with 15-17 it's not so nice.
♠ Q5	♠ 85	
♥ K6	♥ K6	
♦ KJ987	♦ KJ987	
♣ A985	♣ AQ98	



### 1.3 Opening 1NT with a six card minor?

Hand A So we may well elect to open 1NT with two doubletons, especially with 9 cards in the minors, but what about opening 1NT with a 6 card minor?

♠ KQ9 Not usually, but there are always exceptions. If you have a 6 card suit, then  
 ♥ Q5 you have two doubletons (if balanced) and 1NT is not usually recommended.  
 ♦ Q98643 But with this hand, surely it is the best shot? If game is on, it is probably in  
 ♣ AQ NT which must be best played from this hand. Tenaces need protecting and  
 this hand should strive to be declarer.

Hand A was from a 2004 club competition: -

West	East	West	East	(1) Stayman
♠ KQ9	♠ 1053	1NT	2♣ (1)	
♥ Q5	♥ A963	2♦	3NT	
♦ Q98643	♦ AK72			
♣ AQ	♣ 32			

An excellent contract that is difficult to reach if you open 1♦. The board was played 6 times and only this pair reached 3NT (the final contract at all of the other tables was 3♦ or 4♦).

Hand B And how about this one? It comes from a 2003 club competition. There was considerable debate about this hand after the event. Let's have a look at the complete deal and the bidding at a couple of the tables: -

♠ AK8	Dealer	♠ AK8
♥ 109	West	♥ 109
♦ KJ10943	N-S vul	♦ KJ10943
♣ A5		♣ A5

#### Table A

West	North	East	South	♠ 1097653	N	♠ J4
pass	1♦	pass	1♥	♥ 76	W E	♥ KJ42
pass	1NT (1)	all pass		♦ Q7		S ♦ A85
				♣ K73		♣ QJ104

#### Table B

West	North	East	South	♠ Q2	♥ AQ853	
pass	1♦	pass	1♥		♦ 62	(1) 12-14!
pass	3♦	pass	3♥ (2)		♣ 9862	(2) forcing.
pass	4♥	all pass				

Now I am not arguing with the bidding at Table B, I think that the North hand is worth a 3♦ rebid. The experienced North player at Table A, however, maintained that it was not. Perhaps it's marginal, and in that case I said that North should open 1NT. North insisted that his bidding was correct (yes, he was playing a strong NT!). This 1NT rebid shows 12-14 and is ludicrous of course. It really is so simple if you open 1NT (1NT - 2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT - 3NT), in my opinion this North Hand B is not minimum for a strong 1NT!

OK, so we've covered which hands warrant a 1NT opening. You don't have to agree with me about everything. The main point of this book is not the opening bid, but the continuations after 1NT has been opened. So it's time to consider the responses to this 1NT opening.

Before we go into everything in detail, let's have a general guideline as to what responder needs for weak, invitational or strong hands. This is a rough guide and everything is covered in detail later.

#### 1.4 A Brief Overview of Responder's Options

This is a very brief summary and is by no means exhaustive of the options available – you get that in the rest of this book!

Responder's point range	Options available	Explanation
Weak hands  0-7	2♣	Stayman. Only make this bid on weak hands if you have both majors and can cope with any (2♦/♥/♠) reply.
	2♦/♥	Transfer. With a weak hand and a 5+ card major suit you can transfer and pass the expected 2♥/♠ reply
	2♠/2NT	Transfer to 3♣/♦ resp. With a weak hand you can transfer to a 6 card minor and play there.
	pass	With insufficient values to invite game and none of the above hand types, there is no other option but to pass
Invitational hands  8-9	2♣	Stayman. With invitational values and a 4 card major, start with Stayman. If partner bids 2♦, rebid 2NT. Raise partner's 2♥ response to 3♥ if you have 4♥'s; otherwise rebid 2♠ with 4♠'s or 2NT with no 4 card major. Raise partner's 2♠ response to 3♠ if you have 4♠'s; otherwise rebid 2NT.
	2♣ and 2NT next	Since we play 4-way transfers, a natural 2NT invitation has to go via a 2♣ bid.
	2♣ and 3♦/♥ next	Over a 2♦ response, these bids show an invitational or better hand with 45 or 54 in the majors. They are fully described later.
	2♦/♥	Transfer. With a 5 card major you first transfer and then make an invitational bid. The only invitational rebids are 3 of the major (indicating a 6 card suit) or 2NT. All other bids are game forcing.
	2♠/2NT	Transfer to 3♣/♦ resp. If you have a reasonable hand, you may wish to raise a super-accept from partner to 3NT.

<p>Game hands i.e. hands that are not good enough to invite slam</p> <p><b>10-15</b></p>	<p>2♣</p> <p>2♣ and 3♣ next</p> <p>2♦/♥</p> <p>2♠/NT</p> <p>3NT</p> <p>4♦/♥</p>	<p>Stayman. With a 4 card major and no other suit of 5 cards or more, start with Stayman. There are numerous subsequent options available to discover fits etc.</p> <p>2♣ is initially Stayman. But a subsequent 3♣ bid asks about opener's shape and is game forcing.</p> <p>Transfer. With a 5 card major you first transfer and then make a game forcing bid. You may bid game directly (4 of the major – showing a 6 card suit, or 3NT which shows a 5 carder). A new suit shows 4+ cards in the suit and is game forcing and often mildly slam invitational.</p> <p>Transfer to 3♣/♦ resp. A transfer to a minor followed by another bid is game forcing, showing 5+ in the minor and 4 in the other suit.</p> <p>(semi)balanced with no 4 card major.</p> <p>Texas transfers to 4♥/♠. Weaker than a Jacoby transfer followed by 4 of the major.</p>
<p>Slam invitational</p> <p><b>15-17</b></p>	<p>2♣</p> <p>2♦/♥</p> <p>2♠/NT</p> <p>4NT</p> <p>3♣/♦/♥/♠</p>	<p>Stayman to start, but may simply be a prelude to shape asking.</p> <p>Transfer to 2♥/♠ resp</p> <p>Transfer to 3♣/♦ resp</p> <p>This is traditionally slam invitational, denying a 4 card major. However, since we have shape asking sequences this bid will normally be preceded by one of the previous bids. A direct 4NT bid needs to be very specific and is discussed later.</p> <p>Looking for slam. There are numerous options for these bids.</p>
<p>Definitely slamming</p> <p><b>18+</b></p>	<p>4♣</p> <p>5/6/7NT</p>	<p>Gerber, asking for aces.</p> <p>4♣ is RKCB or Gerber in most sequences that start with 1NT.</p> <p>Normally it is best to take things slowly and perhaps find out more about opener's shape, asking for aces later. With a flat hand one would typically start with 2♣ followed by 3♣ in order to get shape information.</p> <p>Typically 5NT invites and 6NT/7NT says we have enough for the slam. I think it makes sense to check on aces first.</p>

## 1.5 Passing partner's 1NT opening

Generally speaking we need about 25 combined points for game when both hands are relatively flat. If responder has 7 or less points then it's usually best to pass.

Hand A	Hand B	With Hand A there may be a 4-4 ♠ fit but we do not have a good enough hand to find out and have to pass 1NT
♠ Q962	♠ 985	
♥ J76	♥ 873	And Hand B may well play better in 2♣, but we cannot bid that as it has a forcing conventional meaning (Stayman).
♦ J982	♦ J2	
♣ 52	♣ AJ875	

But we do not always have to pass with very weak hands. I'll give a few examples here, it is all covered in much more detail later in this book,

Hand C	Hand D	With Hand C there may be a 4-4 ♥ or ♠ fit and with this shape we can actually look for a fit. We cover this later when we talk about Garbage Stayman.
♠ Q962	♠ Q9632	
♥ J762	♥ J762	
♦ J982	♦ J2	And we can also cope with Hand D. Again, this is covered in the Garbage Stayman section.
♣ 5	♣ 75	

Hand E	Hand F	With Hand E 2♠ will almost certainly play better than 1NT, even if there is only a 5-2 ♠ fit. We will cover transfers to the majors later
♠ Q9642	♠ 985	
♥ J76	♥ 87	
♦ J982	♦ J2	We saw that we could not play in 2♣ with Hand B, but add an extra ♣ and we can transfer into 3♣. Again, it's covered later.
♣ 5	♣ AJ8752	

Hand G	Hand H	Hand G will probably play better in a minor, but we have no way of finding a fit at a low level and we do not want to play at the 3 level with no fit when we could have been playing in 1NT.
♠ 982	♠ 98	
♥ 7	♥ 7	
♦ J974	♦ J9742	There is a convention to show a hand that's weak and 5-5 in the minors like Hand H but we use the bid for another meaning. Anyway, the opposition has usually said something when they have the majors. So we pass 1NT with Hands G & H.
♣ QJ875	♣ QJ875	

## 1.6 Raising to 2NT

With a reasonably balanced hand and 8-9 points we can raise partner's 1NT opening to 2NT. This is an invitation for him to bid 3NT if he is maximum.

**Note:** *As you will find out later, we play 4-way transfers and so we need the direct 2NT bid as a transfer to  $\diamond$ 's. Thus, we have to go via a Stayman  $2\clubsuit$  bid and then bid 2NT with all of these hands. It's fully covered later.*

Hand A	Hand B	With Hand A we simply raise 1NT to 2NT
$\spadesuit$ J76 $\heartsuit$ A96 $\diamondsuit$ K987 $\clubsuit$ J92	$\spadesuit$ J76 $\heartsuit$ A962 $\diamondsuit$ K987 $\clubsuit$ 105	With Hand B there may be a $\heartsuit$ fit and so we investigate that before bidding 2NT.
Hand C	Hand D	Hand C has a decent $\diamondsuit$ suit but we cannot mention it at an invitational level. So simply raise to 2NT
$\spadesuit$ J76 $\heartsuit$ A96 $\diamondsuit$ K9873 $\clubsuit$ 98	$\spadesuit$ 1076 $\heartsuit$ A9 $\diamondsuit$ K98763 $\clubsuit$ 98	And it's the same with a 6 card minor and invitational values, raise 1NT to 2NT.
Hand E	Hand F	With the majors it's different, but minors suits are usually better off in NT. Both of these hands should simply raise 1NT to 2NT.
$\spadesuit$ J76 $\heartsuit$ 9 $\diamondsuit$ K9873 $\clubsuit$ A985	$\spadesuit$ 76 $\heartsuit$ 9 $\diamondsuit$ K9873 $\clubsuit$ A9852	