

# Our Readers Ask



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Dear Eric,

Recently, you mentioned that you liked to respond very light, unless it was “hopeless,” as I think you wrote. A few questions:

(a) How light is light? What’s a hand you would barely pass opposite partner’s 1♥ opening?

(b) Can this approach be used to eliminate the strong 2♣ opening, freeing 2♣ to be weak, or is this not feasible?

Peter Leighton

There are no hands with a five-card major that I would pass in response to 1♣ or 1♦, and most 3- or 4-counts are clear-cut responses. Playing weak notrumps, a wide-ranging INT response to 1♦ traps opener when he has a strong notrump.

Our solution to this problem is to respond 1NT with 8 to 10 HCP (and no four-card major), so for us a 1♥ or 1♠ response to 1♦ may be only three cards if fewer than 8 HCP. How much fewer than 8 is in the eye of the beholder. As we also open 2♦ with a strong 18 to 20 balanced, we no longer have to worry about auctions such as 1♣-1♥; 2NT to show that range, so there’s less danger in that regard in responding light. And with (1 minor)-(1 major); (2 major) indicating four trumps and either 15 to 17 balanced or a shapely minimum, it becomes more attractive to respond to partner’s opening bid. I might pass 1♣ or 1♦ with a 4-3-3-3 hand with 2 HCP, but would never pass 1♥ or 1♠ with support or shortness. I might respond 1♠ to 1♥ with a terrible hand, normally with at least four spades. I would never pass with an ace or an honor in partner’s suit.

If I didn’t need 2♣ for strong hands, I would not use it to

introduce a weak hand with long clubs. Treating one-bids as forcing has a nice upside, but it creates a number of complexities in later rounds of bidding, and I would not recommend this treatment. Indeed, one of the leading Italian world champion pairs now reserves the right to pass an opening bid of 1♣ with fewer than 4 HCP where they used to start all their game-forcing hands with a multi-meaning 1♣.

Dear Eric,

I know the DONT convention, but an interesting variant came to mind last night at a club game. As 2♣ shows clubs and a higher ranking suit, what should/could 2NT be used for, as technically it does not exist? Some sort of extra strong and shapely two suited hand? Or ... ?

Greg Klinker

Precisely that. Finding an “or” is more difficult. That’s common usage, by the way — a big two-suiter. Some prefer to reserve 2NT for strong hands with both majors. Enjoy.

Dear Eric,

Playing with a relatively new partner who had agreed to play DONT over strong INT openings, I held as East:

♠AK9764 ♥AQ1084 ♦73 ♣—

Over North’s strong 1NT opening, I bid 2♥ to show both majors, which was passed out. Partner had a weak hand (6 HCP) with J-x-x-x of hearts and a doubleton spade. We had not discussed this situation earlier and could not reach a consensus afterward. If partner had raised hearts, I would have bid game.

Realizing that DONT philosophy is to compete for the partscore

rather than to bid close games, there are hands such as this one where game is possible, or even likely. Partner stated that he thought about raising to 3♥, but did not do so because he was so weak. I argued that he owed me a raise because of the fit, regardless of his hand strength. What do you think?

Allen V. Shaw

Although I believe in supporting with support, your partner’s argument is sensible, and most, if not all DONT fans would pass 2♥. It’s just a question of percentages. Often, when advancer has a fit and a poor hand, overcaller has quite a good hand and there are only eight tricks available to the intervening side while the opponents can’t logically re-enter the bidding. To raise with weak balanced hands defeats the stated purpose of the DONT convention.

An alternative you might wish to consider is to overcall 1NT with 2NT to indicate a strong two-suiter based on playing strength. Over 3♣ or 3♦ you would continue with 3♥ which would show both majors (over 3♣) or hearts and another suit (over 3♦). As it happens, this time your partner would have an easy raise. □