

# Lebensohl (After a 1NT opening bid)

Lebensohl is a bidding convention used when the opponents interfere over 1NT. After partner opens 1NT and the next opponent doubles or bids up to 2♠, a 2NT bid is an artificial relay bid asking partner to bid 3♣. Responder then clarifies his hand with his second bid.

The entire convention is as follows. If you start feeling dizzy, I know how you feel.

## Responder's Bids

**Double** -- A double of the opponents' overcall is for penalty. It typically shows 4+ cards in the opponents' suit. Responder may choose to double instead of inviting or bidding 3NT in the following scenarios (particularly at favourable vulnerability):

The hand is too weak to invite game but is strong enough to collect a penalty from the opponents. For example, the opponents overcall a 15-17 1NT with 2♥. Double with ♠Q2 ♥KQ952 ♦873 ♣842.

The hand is too unbalanced to invite game. For example, the opponents overcall a 15-17 1NT with 2♠. Double with ♠KQJ5 ♥T ♦843 ♣KT532.

A penalty double looks more profitable than game. For example, the opponents overcall a 15-17 1NT with 2♦. At favourable vulnerability, it looks right to double with ♠AQ ♥T5 ♦AJ976 ♣QT53.

**Redouble** -- This is up to partnership agreement, and not part of Lebensohl. I'm only including it for the sake of completeness. Typically, a redouble after an artificial double shows interest in penalizing the opponents, whereas a redouble after a penalty double is part of an escape system (see Meckwell Escapes as an example).

2 ♣/♦/♥/♠ -- Natural, 5+ cards in the bid suit, non-forcing. Minimum HCP depends on the 1NT range and vulnerability.

2NT -- This is the heart of the Lebensohl convention. It is artificial and shows one of the following hand types:

- A one-suited hand that wants to sign off in 3♣/♦/♥/♠
- A one-suited hand that wants to invite game
- A Stayman-type hand (at least one 4-card major with game-forcing values) with a stopper in the opponents' suit
- A hand that contains a stopper in the opponents' suit and wants to sign off in 3NT

3 ♣/♦/♥/♠ -- A new suit (not a cuebid) shows 5+ cards in the bid suit, and is forcing to game. Responder may need to make a jump bid to force game. For example, a 2♠ bid over an opposing 2♦ is non-forcing, but a 3♠ bid would be game-forcing.

**Cuebid of the opponents' suit** -- This is used as Stayman, showing at least one 4-card major with game-forcing values. It asks partner to bid a 4-card major suit. It denies a stopper in the opponents' bid suit.

3NT -- shows a hand that would have normally bid 3NT in the absence of interference but denies a stopper in the opponents' suit. Partner is expected to run to a cheaper suit if he/she does not hold a stopper, either.

**Note:** That the mnemonic device for remembering a direct 3NT bid (as opposed to 2NT, followed by a 3NT rebid) is "slow shows". In other words, bidding 2NT and then rebidding 3NT "shows" a stopper in the opponents' suit.

# Opener's Rebids

After responder bids 2NT and the next opponent passes, opener must rebid 3♣. This is artificial and asks responder to clarify his hand type.

After responder cue-bids, modified Stayman responses apply:

- If the cue-bid is 3♣, then a 3♦ rebid by opener denies a 4-card major. A 3♥ rebid shows 4+ hearts (and does not deny 4 spades), while a 3♠ rebid shows 4+ spades (and denies 4 hearts).
- If the cue-bid is 3♦, then opener must rebid 3♥/♠ with a 4-card major, or 3NT without a 4-card major.
- If the cue-bid is 3♥, then opener must rebid 3♠ with 4 spades, or 3NT without a 4-card major.
- If the cue-bid is 3♠, then opener must rebid 4♥ with a 4-card major, or 3NT without a 4-card major.
- After responder makes a game-forcing jump bid, e.g. 3♥ over a 2♦ overcall, then opener's rebids are natural.

# Responder's Rebids

After opener rebids 3♣, responder's rebids are:

Pass - Shows 6+ clubs and less than game-invitational values. This is a signoff bid.

3♦/♥/♠ - This is either:

1. A natural signoff if responder could not have bid the suit at the 2-level. For example, after a 2♥ overcall of 1NT, a 2NT Lebensohl response followed by a 3♦ rebid is a signoff. This shows 6+ cards in the bid suit and less than game-invitational values, such as ♠T5 ♥93 ♦KQT853 ♣A32. OR...
2. A natural invitation to game if responder could have bid the suit at the 2-level. For example, after a 2♦ overcall of 1NT, a 2NT Lebensohl response followed by a 3♥ rebid invites game (3NT or 4♥). This shows a good 5+ cards in the bid suit with game-invitational values. Playing a 15-17 1NT, an example hand is ♠T98 ♥KQT872 ♦K2 ♣52. With a weaker hand, responder would simply bid 2♥ directly over the opposing overcall. OR...
3. A cuebid of the opponents' suit - Stayman. Unlike a direct cuebid, it promises a stopper in the overcalled suit. If the overcall was in a major suit, then a cuebid asks opener to bid his 4 cards in the other major at the cheapest level. If the opponents have bid a minor, then this asks opener to bid his lowest 4-card major at the cheapest level. In either scenario, opener can rebid 3NT if he does not have a 4-card major.

3NT - Natural, to play. Promises a stopper in the opponents' suit.

# Over Artificial Interference

Here are some general suggestions if the opponents make an artificial **overcall**.

- RHO shows a two-suiter, but only one suit is known
- RHO may make a DONT 2♣ bid showing clubs and a higher suit. Or a Cappelletti 2♥ bid showing hearts and a lower suit. In this case, Lebensohl is on. Bid as if the opponents have only shown one suit.
- RHO shows a two-suiter, and both suits are known
- RHO may bid something like a Cappelletti 2♦ showing hearts and spades. In this case, Lebensohl needs to be modified because a Stayman cuebid is no longer needed. Responder also needs a way to show a stopper in one particular major suit. Over 2♦, responder can:
  - "Cue-bid" 2♥ to show a heart stopper and interest in no-trumps
  - "Cue-bid" 2♠ to show a spade stopper and interest in no-trumps
  - Bid 2NT followed by 3NT to promise stoppers in both suits
  - Bid 3NT immediately to deny stoppers in both suits (very unlikely if responder has enough values for game)

The same principle applies if the opponents make a DONT 2♥ bid promising hearts and spades. Responder just has to cue-bid 3♥ to show a heart stopper.

Examples

Opener	Responder
♠AJ42	♠987
♥65	♥A87
♦AQ53	♦K42
♣AQ2	♣K9853

Opener	Opp 1	Responder	Opp 2
1NT	2♥	2NT (1)	Pass
3♣ (2)	Pass	3NT (3)	Pass
Pass	Pass		

- (1) 2NT is Lebensohl, artificial.
- (2) 3♣ is an artificial relay.
- (3) 3NT is natural and shows a heart stopper.

Opener	Responder
♠AT42	♠98
♥KJ93	♥Q54
♦AQ2	♦K8764
♣JT6	♣KQ9

Opener	Opp 1	Responder	Opp 2
1NT	2♠	3NT (1)	Pass
Pass (2)	Pass		

- (1) 3NT is natural but denies a spade stopper.
- (2) Pass shows a spade stopper and willingness to play 3NT.

(3) Examples

Opener	Responder
♠KQ4	♠J62
♥AT8	♥KJ432
♦J42	♦T9
♣AK92	♣843

Opener	Opp 1	Responder	Opp 2
1NT	2♣	2♥ (1)	Pass
Pass	Pass		

(1) 2♥ is natural, showing 5+ hearts and no interest in a game contract.

Opener	Responder
♠QJ6	♠A942
♥AK92	♥Q3
♦J4	♦KT2
♣AT86	♣Q432

Opener	Opp 1	Responder	Opp 2
1NT	2♦	2NT (1)	Pass
3♣ (2)	Pass	3♦ (3)	Pass
3♥ (4)	Pass	3NT (5)	Pass
Pass (6)	Pass		

(1) 2NT is Lebensohl, artificial.

(2) 3♣ is an artificial relay.

(3) 3♦ is Stayman, and promises a diamond stopper.

(4) 3♥ shows opener's cheapest (and in this case, only) 4-card major.

(5) 3NT is a signoff. This may or may not make; such is life.

(6) Pass denies 4 spades. Opener knows that responder must have 4 spades if he/she used Stayman but was not interested in playing in hearts. If opener had 4 spades, he/she could correct to 4♠.

Opener	Responder
♠K42	♠A8
♥AT32	♥KQJ4
♦62	♦T73
♣AKQJ	♣T642

Opener	Opp 1	Responder	Opp 2
1NT	2♦	3♦ (1)	Pass
3♥ (2)	Pass	4♥ (3)	Pass
Pass	Pass		

(1) 3♦ is Stayman, and denies a diamond stopper. Game-forcing.

(2) 3♥ shows opener's cheapest (and in this case, only) 4-card major.

(3) 4♥ places the final contract.

## Examples

Opener	Responder
♠QJ6	♠A94
♥AJ92	♥KQ3
♦J4	♦932
♣AQ86	♣J532

Opener	Opp 1	Responder	Opp 2
1NT	2♦	3NT (1)	Pass
4♣ (2)	Pass	Pass	Pass

- (1) 3NT is natural but denies a diamond stopper.
- (2) 4♣ is a scramble bid. Lacking a diamond stopper as well, opener bids his cheapest 4+ card suit.

## Origins

Lebensohl was originally attributed to a successful bridge player in the 70's named Ken Lebensold. He denied any responsibility though, possibly foreseeing the thousands of Lebensohl bidding accidents to come. The true origin of the strange appellation is therefore unknown.