

# The Jacoby Convention

March 2019

## 1 Major fits

Bidding has the purpose of getting a partnership to the best contract. The best contract can be either: a contract that makes, or a contract that stops opponents from finding their optimal spot. The goal is to get the highest number of points: sometimes this is a plus score (e.g. when you bid and make 3NT for +400); sometimes the best you can do is a small minus score (e.g. when you go off in a part score and score -50, but opponents could have given you a score of -110).

### 1.1 The problem

Partner opens 1♥ and you hold:

Hand A	
♠	5
♥	KT942
♦	KJ962
♣	87

This hand has good heart support and a good shape. You cannot be sure whether 4♥ makes or not. If partner has a maximum opening bid it will probably make. The problem is that opponents are likely to have a long fit in a black suit and they might compete in the bidding to find their best contract. In other words, this hand has a good playing strength and potential, but it does not have many high card points (HCPs).

With this sort of hands the best bidding strategy is to take a two-way shot: bid at high level soon in the auction. If partner has a good hand, you have a fighting chance to score a plus. If partner does not have a good hand, then



opponents have a high number of points and a fit, but your high bid will have made it difficult for them to share information, because you have taken away the bidding space.

In practice, you would like to bid 4♥. However, in the standard Acol system an immediate raise to 4♥ is normally used to show 13+ points so partner might expect you to hold a hand like the following:

Hand B	
♠	KT
♥	KJ75
♦	AQJ6
♣	984

We thus need a new bid in our system, in order to distinguish between hands that want to bid game pre-emptively because of their shape, and hands that want to bid game because of their high number of HCPs.

## 1.2 Jacoby

The Jacoby convention addresses precisely this problem. The Jacoby convention is a bid of 2NT in response to partner's 1 of a major (1M) opening.



Jacoby shows a fit with partner and enough points for game, i.e.:

- 13+ HCPs.
- 4+ cards in partner's major.

So with Hand B above the bidding would start:

W	N	E	S
1♥	P	2NT	P

On the other hand, with hand A above the bidding would start:

W	N	E	S
1♥	P	4♥	P

If your partner and you agree to play Jacoby, the 2NT response takes the meaning of the traditional 4♥ response. As a consequence, when playing Jacoby, a 4♥ response shows:

- Up to 10 HCPs.



- A nine-card fit or longer.
- An unbalanced hand.

If you play Losing Trick Count, you can use a 4♥ response to show hands with the appropriate number of losers, although they do not meet the traditional HCP threshold for game.

### 1.2.1 Additional considerations

When introducing Jacoby in your bidding system, consider what happens to your existing agreements to show major fits. The following are common changes which may need to be tailored to your specific system.

**Splinters** The sequence 1M-4m usually shows a splinter, i.e. responder has 4+ cards in opener's major and a shortage (singleton or void) in the minor bid, with enough strength to support game. For instance, responder can jump to 4♣ after a 1♥ opening, holding:

Strong splinter	
♠	KT2
♥	KJ75
♦	AQJ65
♣	4

After introducing Jacoby, this sequence shows the same shape and fewer high card points. It thus becomes a pre-emptive bid, rather than a constructive one. For instance, playing Jacoby, responder would jump to 4♣ after a 1♥ opening, holding:

Weak splinter	
♠	KT2
♥	KJ75
♦	Q10965
♣	4

This can help make better decisions in high level competitive auctions, when opponents bid over you: more accurate knowledge of the points and shape will enable you to decide whether to double them or bid higher.

**2 over 1** The sequence:

W	N	E	S
1M	P	2m	P
2om / 2M	P	4M	



had two meanings in traditional Acol.

1. The first one shows a game forcing hand with 3 cards in opener's major.
2. The second one shows a hand too good to bid 4M straight away, i.e. a hand with 15+ points and 4-card support.

In case (2) opener would know to keep the bidding open with a good hand as slam might still be possible. The conflation of these two types of hands easily leads to problems, as opener cannot know responder's shape exactly. This impacts one-sided auctions as well as competitive ones. On the one hand, the length of the fit is a major factor in making accurate slam bidding decisions. On the other hand, in the case of competitive auctions, when opponents sacrifice, the lack of certainty about points and shape distribution across the table makes it difficult to choose between bidding higher or doubling.

Playing Jacoby solves this issue, as hands falling into category (2) would bid Jacoby straight away. The sequence above would thus exclusively show type (1) hands, i.e. with a 3-card fit and game values.

**Other conventions** Trial bids and pudding raise can be played together with Jacoby, as they apply in different circumstances. Trial bids are normally used by opener to find out more about responder's hand. The typical situation is after a raise to 2M, following a 1M opening bid. New suit bids by opener at this stage are trial bids, looking for more information. This does not overlap with the use of Jacoby, which only applies when responder has a game forcing hand. It can thus be seen that whilst trial bids are used by opener to allow *responder* to describe their hand further, Jacoby works the other way around, enabling *opener* to describe their hand in more detail.

Some players use a direct raise to 3NT, after a 1M opening, to show a balanced hand (4333), with an 8-card fit in opener's major. This is called 'Pudding raise'. This convention does not interfere with Jacoby and both can be included in a partnership's system. When playing both conventions, opener needs to be aware that when responder bids Jacoby, they could have a number of game forcing hands, except the kind of balanced hand that is shown via a Pudding raise.

### 1.2.2 Opener's rebid

After the Jacoby 2NT response, opener has a chance to describe their hand, taking advantage of the bidding space available before reaching game. The possible responses are:



1. 3 of a new suit - to show a non-minimum opening hand and a shortage in the suit bid (singleton or void).
2. 3M - to show a non-minimum opening hand with 6 or 7 cards in the major suit, without a shortage (6322 or 7222).
3. 3NT - to show a 15-19 balanced hand.
4. 4M - to show any minimum opening hand.
5. 4 of a new suit below the trump level - to show a good side suit headed by AK or AQJ at least.

Opener needs to evaluate whether they have a minimum or a maximum, carefully considering the context of a game-forcing auction and in particular taking into account the possibility of making a slam. Good hands normally contain:

- Aces and kings, rather than queens and jacks.
- Points concentrated in the long suits, rather than the short suits.
- Queens are complemented by jacks and jacks are complemented by 10s.

In case (1), opener holds:

Hand 1	
♠	AQ764
♥	5
♦	KJ83
♣	A89

The bidding would start:

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2NT	P
3♥			

Responder now knows that opener has a fifth spade and a singleton heart and can more appropriately evaluate their hand, deciding whether to just bid game or explore slam.



In case (2), opener holds:

Hand 2	
♠	QJ2
♥	AKJ754
♦	A9
♣	T6

The bidding would start:

W	N	E	S
1♥	P	2NT	P
3♥			

In case (3), opener holds:

Hand 3	
♠	AQJ2
♥	AKJ7
♦	Q54
♣	T6

The bidding would start:

W	N	E	S
1♥	P	2NT	P
3NT			

In case (4), opener holds:

Hand 4	
♠	QJ542
♥	QJ86
♦	AQ9
♣	T

The bidding would start:

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2NT	P
4♠			

This is the most discouraging rebid for responder, as it suggests that opener has an extremely weak hand which does not see any slam possibilities.



### 1.2.3 Responder's second bid

After opener's rebid, responder has two options: sign off in game, or explore the possibility of a slam. For instance, responder holds:

Hand 5	
♠	K542
♥	AQ
♦	QJ97
♣	KQ6


The bidding starts:

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2NT	P
3NT	P	?	

3NT shows a 15-19 balanced hand. Now responder knows that the combined partnership strength is 32<sup>+</sup> HCPs. The continuation to explore slam depends on your partnership methods. The proposed auction below uses control cuebids:

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2NT	P
3NT	P	4♣	P
4♦	P	4NT	P
5♥	P	6♠	AP

4♣ and 4♦ show either a first or second round control in the suit.

 A **control** is one of the following: singleton, void, king, ace. Singleton and kings are called second round controls, because they allow you to win the second trick in the suit. Voids and aces are called first round controls, because they allow you to win the first trick in the suit.

In this auction, 4♣ could be any first or second round control. 4♦ specifically shows the king or the ace of diamonds, because opener's 3NT rebid showed a balanced hand. Responder thus finds out that they will not lose more than one diamond trick and can ask for aces.

In this example, responder holds:



Hand 6	
♠	QJ542
♥	AQ
♦	QJ97
♣	J6

The bidding starts:

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2NT	P
3♦	P	?	

Opener's rebid shows a shortage in diamonds. This is bad news for responder, because their QJ in the suit will not be helpful to set up tricks or to complement opener's values in the suit. This means responder should not explore slam, but just sign off in game:

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2NT	P
3♦	P	4♠	AP