

Inverted minors

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Inverted minors: Suppose your partner opens 1D and you hold xx, Qx, AQxxx, Kxxx – a pretty nice responding hand with 11 HCP. You don't have a four-card major to bid, and although you have the points to bid 2NT, the distribution is worrying – you may not have stoppers in either of the major suits.

In standard bidding, a 2D response would show a constructive raise (6-9 HCP, typically), so here you could bid 3D to show a stronger hand. But opener's diamonds may not be very good, and most of their HCP could be in other suits. 3NT may seem like a better contract than 5D. But how do you get there when you're already at the three level? This isn't a problem when you're supporting an opening bid in a major suit, because it's obvious you've got a good trump fit and the only question is how high the contract should be. But when partner supports an opening bid in a minor suit, it doesn't mean you necessarily want to play there. NT scores better, and you only need 9 tricks for game, not 11.

The inverted minor system reverses the meaning of the 2-level and 3-level raises. A 3-level raise is pre-emptive, showing good support (at least 4 diamonds in response to 1D or 5 clubs in response to 1C) but a weak hand. A 2-level raise also shows support but with 10+ HCP (no upper limit). This creates room for further bidding.

The inverted minor responses don't come up all that often, but when they do I find them very helpful.

IMPORTANT: both inverted minor responses should be **Alerted**. Also, they **absolutely deny** a 4-card major.

Examples of the 3-level raise:

- Your partner opens 1D and you have : xxx, Jx, KJxxx, Jxx – only 6 HCP but you mostly likely have a 9-card fit in diamonds. This a warning to partner to proceed at their own risk – opener may have a monster hand of some sort and could decide to go to 3NT or 5D – but with an ordinary opening hand they should pass.
- If you change a one of the diamonds to a club, xxx, Jx, KJxx, Jxxx, you can still make the 3D response, although it's a little riskier. Most of the time opener has four diamonds but sometimes they only have 3.
- Responding to a 1C opening bid, you should have 5 clubs because most of the time opener has three. For example: xxx, Jx, Kxx, KJxxx.

The purpose of the 3-level raise is pre-emptive – you suspect the opponents have better cards and you want to make life difficult for them.

Examples of the 2-level raise:

- As above, partner opens 1D and you hold xx, Qx, AQxxx, Kxxx. Respond 2D to say that you have good diamonds and 10+ HCP.
- In diamonds, a **good** 4-card suit is worth a 2-level response: xxx, Qx, AQxx, Kxxx

- In clubs, you should have five cards: xx, Qx, Axxx, AKxxx
- What if you have a long minor suit but they're crummy? Partner opens 1C and you have: Kx, Axx, KQx, xxxxx, 10 HCP. With this hand I would be more inclined to bid 2NT, since you have values in all the other suits. A 2C bid is possible, though, since you most likely have at least an 8 card fit. But 1NT scores better and you only need 7 tricks. Judgement call (aka guessing...)

The 2m response to 1m is **forcing** for one round. What are opener's rebids?

- 2NT shows a minimum opening hand with balanced distribution. Responder can pass (with 10 HCP to a weak 12), but can bid further with a stronger hand.
- 3m likewise shows a minimum hand with wariness about playing in NT (unbalanced distribution). This can also be passed by responder.
- 2H shows values in that suit – it does not promise four cards. Opener might have something like AQx (good!), KJx (pretty good), Kxx (a little iffy). With a holding like Kx or Jxx you should be wary of bidding 3H. Responses are “up the line” – so that bidding 3H doesn't say anything about your spade holding.
- Similarly, a 2S rebid shows values in that suit, but denies a decent heart holding.
- Opener's rebid of the other minor implies an unbalanced hand with little or nothing in the major suits and therefore wariness of playing in NT. Opener should have a little extra strength (or strong distributional values, eg 6-5) because you may well end up playing a three minor contract.

Further bidding is basically natural – remember, the point is to figure out whether you should go to 3NT or stop at some level in the minor suit.

Examples:

1D – 2D;
2S-3D Opener doesn't have heart stoppers, and neither does responder – best to stop in 3D

1C – 2C;
2H – 2NT Opener has heart stoppers; responder has spade covered but a minimum strength hand, 10-12 HCP. Opener can set the final contract

1C – 2C;
2H – 2S Responder has spade values, 10-11ish HCP, but is worried about diamonds. Opener can choose to play in 2NT or 3NT with diamond stoppers, but could stop in 3C without good diamonds.

1D – 2D;
2H – 3NT Once responder knows that opener has heart stoppers, they are happy to play in NT (spade and diamond values) and their hand is strong enough to go to game, a good 12 HCP or more.

1D – 2D;
3C Opener has an unbalanced hand with little or nothing in the majors:
e.g. x, Qxx, KQxxx, AQJx – since responder has already denied a 4-card major, both partners should be thinking that NT is probably not a good idea (maybe if responder has AKx in both suits...). Best to sign off in 3D (with a minimum responding hand, 10-12 HC), but 5D could be on with a strong hand and club values too – a double fit.

1C – 2C;
2D This also shows an unbalanced hand and wariness of NT. It's not really a reverse, since (1) responder has already shown 10+ HCP, and (2) opener bid clubs before diamonds, so probably has a 5-4 distribution in the minors or better. However, opener should have a good to strong hand and be prepared to play 3C. With a weaker hand, 2NT may be a safer choice.

A few points to note:

- Either bidder can choose a NT bid if they feel they have all the suits covered
- When opener rebids the other minor, they are showing an unbalanced hand and a fear of NT. But in borderline cases (eg Jxxx, Qx, AQxx, Kxx) opener should bid 2NT after 1D-2D, even with the dodgy major. When the bidding starts 1C-2C, it's usual to ignore diamonds and bid major suits when you can. When either bidder goes to NT they are saying they are not worried about diamonds.
- If responder is a passed hand, inverted minors are **ON**.
- If there's an intervening double or an overcall, most players opt for inverted minors to be **OFF**. After 1C – (1H), 2C should show a constructive raise (8-9 HCP); 2H cue-bid shows a stronger raise (10+ HCP). You still have the option of bidding 3C to show a weak hand with long clubs – this is a standard bid after interference.
- After an intervening double, redouble shows a good hand, 10+ HCP, with no biddable suit; may or may not have support in opener's suit. Again, this is a standard bid whether partner has opened 1M or 1m.