

## OPENING 2♣, AND WHY YOU SHOULD HATE DOING IT!!

Admit it: You love picking up a strong hand. Why shouldn't you? They are great things to have, right?

But if you read bridge forums online, you will, at some point, see people posting a strong hand of some kind that arguably could be opened 2♣, but the person asking isn't quite sure if that's the right opening for it. Inevitably, a number of people will respond that they should open 2♣ because they have enough hcps, or so many tricks in their hand, or whatever reason they think justifies doing so and what could possibly be the problem?! Implicit in their statement is the thinking that, "If one can open 2♣, one should open 2♣". This is bad. Some people love to open 2♣. I am not one of them. By the end of this lecture, I hope you will not be one of them either.

**The 2♣ opener is for only when you absolutely have to resort to using it.** Let me explain.

Conventions are created to solve bidding problems. All conventions have a benefit and a cost to them. The 2♣ opener is no different. You have to decide if the solution to the problem a convention offers is worth the cost of using it. Let's look at it in these terms.

The benefit? Opening 2♣ has one and only one benefit: If you have a hand that is so strong that there is a real possibility of A) a non-forcing opening would get passed out and B) that would result in a bad score, 2♣ forces your partner to NOT pass.

You can't do without this benefit. It's required. All systems have at least one such forcing opening. But the cost it comes at? It's REALLY pricey:

1) 2♣ preempts yourself at a precise moment when you have a hand that you really don't want to be preempted. If you could force P to open with a one level opener, you would do it, but alas, we don't play Precision (1♣ == 16+ hcps, forcing and artificial). You know you might need the bidding room, but you are choosing to sacrifice it to get the point across that you have a monster.

2) Worse, it's artificial and therefore unwieldy. Describing your hand necessarily has to wait until your rebid, so now you've taken up even MORE bidding room that you would have liked to keep available.

3) They come up very infrequently. You don't get much practice in opening 2♣ and responding to it. 2♣ disasters happen to advancing players all the time.

**Three simple things to remember:**

A) Responder cannot pass 2♦. He likely owes opener not just one but TWO bids.

B) If opener shows a major suit with his rebid (ex: 2♣-2♦-2♥), and the responder has 3 card support for it and NOTHING else, he should immediately jump to game. With support and a normal raise for an opener of that major, he just raises. (So the immediate jump to game is weaker than a raise!)

C) After 2♣-2?-2N, Systems are on just as if P had opened 2NT. It's the same thing only bigger. Play whatever you play after a 2NT opener (transfers, stayman, etc). I suggest you treat 5-3-3-2 hands as balanced, even when you have a 5 card major (so they get a NT rebid). There are versions of stayman that will tell you if a NT opener has a 4 or 5 card major (Puppet, Muppet, etc).

### **Now the not so simple part.**

Here are some common agreements for responses to 2♣ openers, both good and bad, in the approximate order that bridge players get exposed to them. I present them simply to expose you to them now and speed your learning curve. You can decide which one works best for you.

**2♦ waiting:** One of the most common treatments. Found in combination with other treatments too (keep reading). Newbies play it. Experts play it better.

Responder bids 2♦ in response UNLESS he has something good to say about his hand. Typically that's 8+ hcps and a GOOD 5 card suit (good == trick taking possibilities, NOT Qxxxx). Remember, you are taking even MORE bidding-room away by responding 2♥ or higher, so you better mean it. NOTE: Responding 2NT to a 2♣ opening is typically a VERY BAD BID. Don't do it unless you are okay with the 2♣ hand being the dummy in 6NT!

**2♦ waiting + cheapest minor 2nd negative.** You also find experts and newbies playing this.

So you had the 2♣-2♦ auction, and opener rebids a suit. You always owe your partner a second bid in this auction. 2♦ denied a positive response, but it's still very wide ranging. Responder now bidding the cheapest minor available shows the "BUST" hand. It denies any aces or kings, and shows at most ONE queen. With two queens or greater, you respond 2♦. Remember this definition of a bust hand. It will come up again.

So 2♣-2♦-2♥-3♣ shows the horrible awful no good very bad response hand.  
And 2♣-2♦-3♣-3♦ also shows the horrible awful no good very bad response hand.

NOTE: If you open 2♣ and rebid diamonds, not only can your partner NOT make such a weakness-showing bid, but your hand is likely to become dummy in a diamond contract!  
So you really need to have a game forcer to have the auction of 2♣-2♦-3♦. I'd recommend 3♥ being artificial and weak at this point but DISCUSS THIS WITH PARTNER.

**2♦ waiting/2♥ bust.** Popular with many flight B players but not many experts. Simple and effective.

2♦ is still waiting, but it denies the bust hand -- the one lacking an Ace, King or two Queens. If you have that, you immediately respond 2♥. It follows that a 2♦ response immediately creates a game force. So if the auction begins 2♣-2♦-2N, opener is balanced but he's actually still unlimited. He's just keeping the bidding low so you can bid 3♣ stayman or 3♦/3♥ as transfers. Forcing auctions provide for a lot of freedom in this regard.

**Point Step Responses: 2♦=0-3hcps, 2♥=4-6, 2♠=7-9, etc.** Popular with some NLMs.

"Point step Responses (to 2♣) is the worst convention known to man." -- Jeff Roman

I know it sounds neat but please JUST DON'T USE THIS. Nobody with a 2♣ opener will care about responder's jacks! If you want to do something like this, play control showing responses (it's what I typically play!)

**Control Showing Responses: 1 Ace = 2 Controls, 1 King = 1 Control.** Common in A and B games. Some experts occasionally too. Very effective and needs only a little memorization.

2♦ = 0-1 Controls

2♥ = 2,

2♠ = 3 but specifically one Ace and one King

2N = 3, but specifically 3 Kings (about the only type of hand you want to respond 2N with)

3♣ = 4, 3♦ = 5, etc.

Here, anything other than 2♣-2♦ is an immediate game force, so can play "cheapest minor 2nd negative" after 2♣-2♦ too. Best part of this auction is that the opener almost always immediately knows if a slam or grand slam isn't a possibility. You almost don't need blackwood after this sequence. Twice in my life, I've had the controls response auction of 2♣-2♠-7N. BOTH CONTRACTS MADE!

NOTE 2N == 3 Kings. You don't want the responder to declare NT unless he has 3 Kings!

If they interfere over 2♣? DOPI and ROPI apply (it's what you should be doing if the opps bid over your 4NT!), but keep 2NT always showing the hand with three kings!

**Kokish Relay: Many Flight A/X people and Experts play it.** It's very good and not too hard, but we don't have time to discuss it. I'm mentioning it in this writeup if you want to learn about it on your own or ask questions about it. It works with almost any of the agreements listed above after a 2♣-2♦ auction (but it is a little less useful with 2♥ showing a bust hand).

Normally 2♣-2♦-2N shows a 22-24 point hand which can be passed when our partner is totally broke. To show a balanced opener that's stronger, it would go 2♣-2♦-3N. But now what? Are transfers now on? Stayman? What does 4♣ show anyway? Heck if I know either! That's a long discussion. Kokish might be a little complicated, but it's sure easier than working THAT out!

Kokish says that 2♣-2♦-2♥ may or may not show hearts. It is either hearts or artificial. Either way, the responder must bid 2♠. Why? To save us some bidding room.

2♣-2♦-2N == Opener has 22-24 points balanced.

2♣-2♦-2♥\*-2♠\*-2N == Opener has a balanced game forcing hand, even opposite a bust.

Now you can be in a game forcing auction without ever going past 2NT!

If our partner rebids anything other than 2N, then the 2♥ bid was intended to be natural.

So 2♣-2♦-2♥\*-2♠\*-3♣ means that opener has a big and unbalanced hand with hearts and clubs.

2♣-2♦-2♥-2♠-3♥ shows hearts and MORE hearts.