



Checkback

In relatively old fashioned Acol, a 1NT rebid showed 15-16 HCP. Then, players learnt of a convention called Crowhurst, which checked on hands after a 1NT rebid and some switched to playing a 12-16 rebid. This has gone out of fashion and now a 15-17 rebid has become more popular, so you deal with balanced or fairly balanced hands in the following way:

- 12-14 Open 1NT.
- 15-17 Open 1-of-a-suit and rebid 1NT.
- 18-19 Open 1-of-a-suit and rebid 2NT.

This method will also work if you play a strong no-trump opening (15-17). You just reverse the first two auctions so that a 1NT rebid shows 12-14.

An opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦ followed by a 3NT rebid is reserved for a good hand with a long, solid or nearly solid minor.

Once your partner has rebid 1NT, you may have a hand suitable for:

- playing there or you can think of nothing better.
- playing in a suit at the two level with no ambition.
- inviting game.
- playing in the best game.

Given the slightly wider range of the 1NT rebid, it is useful to have a method to not only find out if you have a fit, but whether you should play game.

Suppose you hold:

	♠ QJ1075
	♥ J43
	♦ A97
	♣ 97

The auction starts:

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
1NT	?

If partner has:

- a maximum with three spades, you want to play a spade game.
- a maximum with five hearts, you want to play a heart game.
- a maximum without either three spades or five hearts, you want to play 3NT.
- a minimum, you want to stop at the two level.

If you don't have a way of asking, this sort of hand is quite difficult.

The answer is to play a 2♣ response to a 1NT rebid as a 'checkback' which is a way of asking partner about his shape and also his strength.

The scheme of rebids after 2♣ is:

- 2♦ a minimum with no fit.
- 2♥ a minimum with five hearts (possibly three spades also).
- 2♠ a minimum with three spades and not five hearts.
- 2NT a maximum without anything significant in the majors.

Bids at the three level are basically natural and show a maximum so a sequence such as:

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
1NT	2♣
3♠	

shows a maximum with three spades and not five hearts. With the majors, you bid 'up the line' ie with a suitable holding in both, you bid the cheaper.

It's worth saying at this point that some players don't bother with showing minimums or maximums and others jump to the three level only

under very specific circumstances. All that should tell you is that if you choose to play this method, you need to agree the detail because with one bad board after a disagreement, it will take you some time to get it back.

So far, you have improved your definition with regard to hands which might or might not play in game, so you can find a fit if you have one. Have you given up anything? Well you can't play in 2♣ any more, but as with most agreements it is a matter of frequency and 2♣ will rarely be the best spot, especially at pairs.

If you have a weak hand where there might be a better contract than 1NT, you can bid at the two level so that the sequence:

Partner	You
1♣	1♠
1NT	2♥

shows a hand with no ambition for game with 5 spades and 4 or 5 hearts. Opener should pass or correct to 2♠. He should never bid higher than this. Responder might have:

	♠ Q7532
	♥ K9765
	♦ 642
	♣ Void

He probably won't be pleased if you start raising him in either major and the sarcasm factor if you go one down in three won't bear listening to.

As an aside, it helps to know and agree what suit your partner will open with a balanced hand outside the no-trump range. This enables you to ▶

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rule out some hand shapes. Suppose you always open the four-card major, as in traditional Acol, then, if partner opens 1♣ (playing opening 1♠ or 1♥ with a four-card major and a four-card minor) and the auction goes:

Partner	You
1♣	1♠
1NT	

you know he has not got a 3-4-2-4 or 2-4-3-4 shape because if he had, he would have opened 1♥.

Partner	You
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♥	

You know he has five diamonds and four hearts and is not worth a reverse because if he were 4-4, he would have opened 1♥.

It surprises me when those who play regularly in tournaments have not the faintest idea what their partner opens with a choice of suits. Not only haven't they agreed anything but they haven't noticed either. Suppose you have:

♠ K J 9 4 3
 ♥ J 6
 ♦ K 7 5 4
 ♣ 7 6

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♣	?

You know partner has three spades, has not got five hearts and has a minimum. It is unlikely game is on so you can pass and play at the two level. Without checkback, you might well have been at the three level before you could stop and, of course, sometimes, you won't even be able to make 3♠. If partner bids 2♦ instead to show a minimum without a fit, you know he is 2-4 in the majors and you can play in 2NT. It is possible that 2♦ might be

better if you have a fit but nothing is perfect.

If you use checkback, partner knows you are invitational or better and looking for the best game. If you had no interest in finding a fit, you could raise to 3NT or bid an invitational 2NT.

The auction:

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
1NT	2NT

shows an invitational hand with no interest in a major suit fit. If your opponents play this method, you will be able to work out a little more about their hands before you lead. On the sequence above, you know that responder has an invitational hand with only four spades and without three hearts, otherwise he would have bid 2♣, checkback, at his second turn.

Suppose you hold a hand such as:

♠ K Q 9 5 2
 ♥ A 7
 ♦ A Q 5 4 2
 ♣ 4

You want to play in at least game and may have a slam on. The auction starts:

Partner	You
1♥	1♠
1NT	?

You can bid 3♦ to show at least 5-5 in your two suits and a hand forcing to game. Partner can bid 3♠ to agree spades and make a cue bid to agree diamonds or bid 3NT with no fit for either suit. This response guarantees 5-5 because if you had the same strength and 5-4, you would go via checkback. So you are adding more definition to your bidding sequences. All jumps to a new suit at the three level are natural and forcing. If you jump rebid your own suit eg:

Partner	You
1♦	1♥
1NT	3♥

This shows a six card suit and is ▶

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forcing. Opener will have the inference that you don't have a very big hand with six hearts, because if you did the auction would start:

Partner	You
1♦	2♥

If you had a six-card heart suit and an invitational hand you could bid:

Partner	You
1♦	1♥
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♥

Checkback can be useful in setting up a forcing sequence that will enable you to decide on 3NT or 5♣/5♦ or 6♣/6♦, because it takes the strain off knowing whether or not a sequence is forcing.

If the opener shows a maximum, you are always continuing to game. If the opener shows a minimum and, nonetheless, responder continues at the three level, then it is forcing to game.

Suppose you hold:

	♠ A
	♥ KJ965
	♦ A Q 7 6
	♣ 5 4 3

Partner	You
1♣	1♥
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♦

When partner shows a minimum without three hearts, you know you almost certainly have a minor suit fit. If he holds a hand with weak spades and he likely has not got four of them, then it is worth exploring other contracts. He may, of course, have been dealt ♠K-Q-x in which case 3NT will likely be fine. The auction above shows a measure of doubt as to whether 3NT is best or not.

What should you do if the opponents intervene? Mostly, ignore them. If they double 2♣, which is usually lead directing, then just continue as if they haven't, but be aware that you might choose to play 4♥ or 4♠ even on a 5-2 fit if neither of you has a club stop. If they bid, then any bid by you is natural and any double is for penalties.

As you might imagine, natural, Crowhurst and checkback all have their devotees. Some players, especially those who play five-card majors, are now playing two-way checkback, where 2♣ is usually an invitational hand and 2♦ a game-forcing hand. I learnt at some point that it was also sometimes called 'Ping Pong', when an 81-year old partner listed the conventions she wanted to play and asked, 'Do you play Ping Pong, dear?' The mists cleared eventually and that is what we played. ■

Summary

- After a 1NT rebid, 2♣ checks for range and major suit fit.
- You can use it on invitational, game forcing or slam going hands.
- If you have no major-suit fit, you can investigate whether a minor-suit fit might be better than playing 3NT.
- After a 1NT rebid, if responder bids a new suit other than clubs at the two level, then he has no ambition for game.
- It's a good idea to clarify what you open with a balanced hand outside the opening no-trump range with two four-card suits, because it helps you know more about partner's likely hand shapes.