

Lesson 9: Stayman

It is usually correct to play in a 4-4 major fit rather than in notrumps. The Stayman convention is a bid of 2♣ in response to a 1NT opener. It is used to find these 4-4 major fits. 2♣ is no longer used as a weakness takeout to clubs.

To use this 2♣ bid responder must have

either: at least one 4-card major suit and 11+ HCP

or: at least 5-4 in the majors with any point count

The fewer points responder has with this 5-4 shape in the majors the more important it is to use Stayman.

The 1NT opener **must** reply to the 2♣ Stayman bid

1NT – 2♣
?

Opener's rebid:

2♦ = no 4-card major suit

2♥ = 4 hearts and may still have 4 spades

2♠ = 4 spades and denies having 4 hearts

Responder's rebid options depend on his strength:

With 11-12 HCP responder can invite game by bidding 2NT, 3♥ or 3♠. Opener should decline the invitation with 12 or 13 HCP and bid game with 14 HCP.

With 13+ HCP responder must bid game

Examples

1. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ K 8 7	♠ A J 5 4	1 NT	2 ♣ (1)
♥ A Q 9	♥ K 8	2 ♦ (2)	2 NT
♦ A 8 6	♦ K J 7 3	3 NT (3)	Pass
♣ J 8 6 4	♣ 9 7 3		

1. East uses Stayman to look for a 4-card major.
2. West bid of 2♦ denies holding a major.
3. East now bids 2NT (as they know partner does not have a major). This bid shows 11-12 HCP and is invitational to 3NT. West bids game 3NT with 14 HCP.

2. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ A Q 9	♠ K 8 7 3	1 NT	2 ♣ (1)
♥ K 8 7 2	♥ A Q 5 4	2 ♥ (2)	4 ♥ (3)
♦ A 8 6 2	♦ K Q 7	Pass	
♣ J 8	♣ 9 7		

1. East uses Stayman to look for a 4-card major.
2. West bids 2♥ showing 4 cards (may still have 4 spades).
3. East jumps 4♥ showing a game hand (13+ HCP) and a 4-4 fit.

3. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ A Q 9	♠ K 8 7 3	1 NT	2 ♣
♥ K 8 7 2	♥ A Q 5	2 ♥	3 NT
♦ A 8 6 2	♦ K Q	Pass	
♣ J 8	♣ Q 7 3 2		

1. East uses Stayman to look for a 4-card major.
2. West bids 2♥ showing 4 cards (may still have 4 spades).
3. East jumps to 3NT to show game going points and no heart fit! By implication East has shown 4 spades and game values.

4. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ A J 9 2	♠ K 8 7 3	1 NT	2 ♣
♥ K 8 7 2	♥ A 6 5	2 ♥	2NT
♦ A 8 6	♦ K 5	3 ♠	Pass
♣ 9 8	♣ Q 7 3 2		

1. East uses Stayman to look for a 4-card major.
2. West bids 2♥ showing 4 cards (may still have 4 spades).
3. East bids 2NT to show 11-12 points and no heart fit.
4. West has a minimum 12 HCP so converts to 3♠ as East has shown 4 spades. With 14 HCP West would have bid 4♠.
5. East passes.

5. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ A 9	♠ K 8 7 3 2	1 NT	2 ♣
♥ K 8 7 2	♥ Q 5 4 3	2 ♥	Pass
♦ A Q 6	♦ 3 2		
♣ J 8 2	♣ 9 7		

1. East uses Stayman to look for a 4-card major.
2. West bids 2♥ showing 4 cards (may still have 4 spades).
3. East passes (with a weak hand) – happy with the fit.

Stayman can also be used when responder is weak (0-10 HCP) and is 5-4 or 5-5 in the majors.

6. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ A Q	♠ K 8 7 3 2	1 NT	2 ♣
♥ K 8 7 2	♥ J 5 4 3	2 ♥	Pass
♦ A 8 6	♦ 7 3		
♣ J 9 8 2	♣ 9 7		

Without Stayman East would take out West's 1NT into his 5 card spade suit. But now he can bid Stayman and is delighted when West shows four hearts. If West had bid 2♦ East would have bid 2♠, just as he would have done if not playing Stayman. Here, instead of East playing in a 7 card spade fit, West will play in an 8 card heart fit.

1. East uses Stayman to look for a 4-card major.
2. West bids 2♥ showing a 4-card major.
3. East happily passes.

The Stayman bid can also be used over a strong 1NT overcall, or over a 2NT opening. Obviously there will need to be an adjustment of point counts in these different situations.

7. WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ K Q	♠ J 5 3	2 NT	3 ♣
♥ A Q J	♥ 9 7 3 2	3 ♦	3 NT
♦ A Q 3	♦ K 8		
♣ K J 7 4 3	♣ A 10 6 5		

After a strong 2NT opener – East bids 3♣ looking for a 4-card major, West rebids 3♦ denying a 4-card major. East chooses 3NT as the final contract.

8. After South opens 1♦ – West has a strong 1NT overcall:

WEST	EAST	SOUTH	WEST	EAST
♠ A J 5 3	♠ Q 10 7 2	(1♦)	1NT	2♣
♥ A 5 4	♥ K 9		2♠	3♠
♦ A Q 4	♦ 8 7 6 2		4♠	
♣ Q J 10	♣ K 5 3			

East bids 2♣ looking for a spade fit, West rebids 2♠ showing 4 spades and denying 4 hearts. East invites with 3♠ and West, with a maximum, bids game.

Weak takeout into clubs

If you play Stayman, after a 1NT opening by partner, you cannot make a weak takeout into clubs by bidding 2♣. If you have a weak hand and 5 card club suit you have to pass. However, with a weak hand and reasonable 6 card suit or any 7 card club suit then you should bid Stayman followed by a rebid of 3♣, which partner must pass.

East	West	East
♠ 8	1NT	2♣
♥ 8 7	2 any	3♣
♦ Q 4 3 2	Pass	
♣ K J 9 6 4 3		

You need to make two more tricks in clubs than you do if playing in 1NT, and 7 tricks in No Trumps scores the same as 9 tricks in clubs. With 9-11 points it is probably better to play in 1NT, as responder has some values so should have entries to establish the clubs. With 12+ points and a running club suit it is probably better to bid 3NT. But things may not always work out well. It's a calculated risk.

Garbage Stayman (weak takeout – passing any response from partner)

After a 1NT opening by partner, a 2♣ response can be made a weak 3-suited hand that has at least five diamonds and at least three cards in each of the majors. In each case you are willing to play in whatever suit partner bids, as this will result in a 7+ card fit.

East	West	East
♠ 9 8 7 2	1NT	2♣
♥ 8 7 5		
♦ Q 8 4 3 2		
♣ 3		

After partner's opening 1NT it is possible that your LHO will bid, but he may double, and if you are vulnerable and are left in 1NT it might be very expensive. Bid 2♣ and pass any response from partner.

Flow chart of responses after 1NT - 2♣ Stayman

Opener	Responder's subsequent bids	Opener's subsequent bids
2♦ No major	2♥ Both majors weak (5♥/4♠ or 5/5) 2♠ Both majors weak (5♠/4♥)	Pass after 2♥ can correct to 2♠ (showing more spades than hearts)
	2NT Invitational (11-12)	Pass with minimum (12-13) 3NT with maximum (14 or 13 with a 5 card suit)
	3NT Enough for game	Pass
2♥ Has 4 hearts (can have 4 spades)	2NT Invitational (11-12), must have 4 spades	Pass with minimum (12-13) 3NT maximum no 4 card spades 4♠ maximum with 4 card spades
	3NT Enough for game, must have 4 spades	Pass if does not have 4 spades 4♠ with 4 card spades
2♠ Has 4 spades (denies 4 hearts)	2NT Invitational (11-12), must have 4 hearts	Pass with minimum (12-13) 3NT with maximum (14 or 13 with a 5 card suit)
	3NT Enough for game, must have 4 hearts	Pass