

# Responses to a 2 NT Opening

Superseded by *EZ-Expert Bidding Tools*

[Pete Matthews Jr](https://3nt.xyz) - <https://3nt.xyz> - © August 14, 2024

Over our 2 NT opening, bidding room is cramped, and we do not have the wealth of options that we have over 1 NT. This article compares systems over our 2 NT opening, differentiated by the form of Stayman used:

1. Standard Stayman (the only one the author plays);
2. Puppet Stayman, including the muppet variant;
3. Semi-puppet Stayman; or
4. 5-card-major Stayman.

## Standard Stayman System

This standard Stayman system, updated in my *Bidding Tools* book, provides a basis for comparison with the other approaches.

Discussion of interference is omitted, but is in the book.

R1	<b>Standard Responses to Our 2 NT Opening</b>
3 ♣	Stayman, at least one 4-card major, or a 6-card minor.
3 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards.
3 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards.
3 ♠	Relay to 3 NT for crosswood or both minors.
3 NT	To play.
4 ♣	Gerber: respond 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, 5-4 minors & 2-2 majors.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative).
5 NT	Forcing grand slam invitation.
Higher	To play.

### Advantages:

- This system should work without fuss for many partnerships.
- Handles responder's 5-4 majors (either way) with Smolen.
- Handles responder's 5-5 majors with transfers: spades then

hearts for game-only, and hearts then spades for slam.

- With a long minor, responder may ask for keycards.
- With a long minor, responder may invite slam, whether or not holding a 4-card major.

### Disadvantages:

- We cannot discover a 5-3 fit in opener's major suit.
- We may miss a 4-4 spade fit, when opener also has four hearts and responder invites slam in a minor.
- Exposes information about opener's other major to the opponents.

### Standard Stayman

O2	R2	Responses to 3 ♣ Standard Stayman
3 ♦		No 4-card major.
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Smolen: 5+ cards in the other major.
	3+NT	Natural.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
3 ♥		Four hearts (possibly four spades).
	3 ♠	Artificial slam try; hearts are trump.
	3+ NT	Natural, four spades but fewer hearts.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
3 ♠		Four spades, and not four hearts.
	3+ NT	Natural, four hearts but fewer spades.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
	4 ♥	Artificial slam try; spades are trump.

The Stayman 3 ♣ response *promises holding a 4-card major suit or a minor suit of at least six cards*. Opener bids a 4+ card major suit (3 ♥ with both) or 3 ♦ – no other bids are defined.

Delayed Texas does not apply – use Smolen with 5-4 or 6-4 majors.

Over any of opener's bids, with a 6-card or longer minor, responder bids it, cancelling the promise of a 4-card major. Unfortunately, it is possible to miss a 4-4 fit in spades, when holding a 6-card minor (with 4-4 majors, opener bids hearts first).

Use Stayman to search for a 4-4 major fit; our rule applies over 2 NT as over 1 NT:

*A transfer to a major suit is used only when a 4-4 fit in the other major is not an issue.*

**Note:** Responder's minor suit, after bidding Stayman, could be played as asking for keycards in the *other* minor – and holding a major.

## Transfers

### Texas Transfers

Responder's jump to 4 ♡ is a Texas transfer to 4 ♠; likewise, 4 ♦ is a transfer to 4 ♣. Responder promises a suit of at least six cards and expectations of making game. Opener completes the transfer and usually plays there. However, responder – *or opener* – may drive to slam, but only by asking for keycards.

### Jacoby Transfers

Responder's 3 ♦ is a transfer to 3 ♣; likewise, 3 ♡ is a Jacoby transfer to 3 ♠. Responder promises a suit of at least five cards, but possibly no points. Opener usually completes the transfer. Holding strong trumps and maximum values, opener *super-accepts*, jumping to game or bidding a control.

Over the completed transfer, responder may pass or bid notrump at the appropriate level with exactly five cards in the major. With six or more cards in the major, responder may raise to game (a mild slam try, because Texas was not used), or bid a new suit (natural and forcing). *Responder has no bid to ask for aces or keycards immediately over a completed three-level transfer* – that comes only when a fit has been disclosed. Texas provides the keycard capability.

Responder's new suit is natural and forcing. If a major, it will be five cards, because Stayman was not used.

### Responder Has 5-5 Majors

When bidding 5-5 majors, it is normal to transfer to spades, and then bid 4 ♣. Opener passes, or picks spades, and the auction ends in game.

To transfer to hearts and follow with 3 ♠ saves space and shows slam interest. (The 3 ♠ and 3 NT responses could be inverted, so that opener declares spades – a big risk for a rare event.)

O3	<b>5-5 Majors, Slam Interest: 2 NT - 3 ♠; 3 ♥ - 3 ♠; ?</b>
3 NT	Offer to play, non-forcing. [If a possibility, 2-2 majors.]
4 ♣	Hearts are trump, the best hand, forcing to 5 M.
4 ♠	Spades are trump, the best hand, forcing to 5 M.
4 ♥	Hearts are trump, not the best hand.
4 ♠	Spades are trump, not the best hand.

## Relay to 3 NT with Minors; 5-4 Minors

The 3 ♠ response is a relay. Opener is required to bid 3 NT, so responder can move toward a minor-suit slam.

**Single minor.** Responder may take charge with a single, long minor suit (contrast this to Stayman and a minor, above):

- 4 ♣ Asks for keycards in diamonds (crosswood).
- 4 ♠ Asks for keycards in clubs (crosswood).

**Both minors.** Responder may show both minors with slam interest.

- 4 ♥ At least 5-5 minors, with heart shortness (splinter).
- 4 ♠ At least 5-5 minors, with spade shortness (splinter).
- 4 NT Two cards in each major suit (5-4 minors, non-forcing).

Opener's least encouraging action is to bid (or pass) 4 NT, an offer to play there. Opener may also pick a minor at the five or six level.

## 5-4 Minors, Slamming

As over 1 NT, the jump to 4 ♠ shows 4-4 or longer minors with slam interest. Opener can bid 4 NT, 5 of a minor, or 6 of a minor. Since 4 ♠ is forcing, it could be employed with a stronger hand than via the 3 NT relay.

## Puppet & Muppet Stayman Systems

Many partnerships prefer that 3 ♣ ask for a 5-card major over 2 NT, and sometimes it works well for them. Puppet Stayman and its muppet variant are the prominent such systems.

R1	Overview of <i>Puppet Responses to Our 2 NT Opening</i>
3 ♣	Stayman, one or two 4-card or 3-card majors.
3 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards.
3 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards.
3 ♠	(a) Relay to 3 NT for crosswood or both minors.
	(b) Relay to 3 NT for crosswood, both minors, or to play.
3 NT	(a) To play.
	(b) 5 spades and 4 hearts, non-forcing (pit trap).
4 ♣	Gerber: respond 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, 5-4 minors & 2-2 majors.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative).
5 NT	Forcing grand slam invitation.
Higher	To play.
Meanings of responses that differ from standard are shaded.	

### Advantages:

- Discovers a 5-3 fit in opener's major suit.

### Disadvantages:

- (a) Responder cannot show 5 spades and 4 hearts at the three-level; or (b) responder's 3 NT shows 5 spades & 4 hearts, which one partner or the other may forget.
- With 5 hearts and 4 or more spades, responder transfers to hearts and bids spades, declaring if a spade fit is found. This auction no longer promises either 5-5 or slam interest.
- A slam try in a long minor suit can be shown via Stayman, but only when holding a 4-card major.
- Exposes opener's other major information to the opponents.
- More complicated.

## Puppet Stayman

O2	R2	O3	R3	After 3 ♣ <i>Puppet Stayman</i>
3 ♦	No 5-card major, but at least one 4-card major.			
	3 ♥	Four <i>spades</i> .		Common continuations:
	3 ♠	Four <i>hearts</i> .		
		3 NT	To play.	
			4 ♣	Natural slam try, long suit.
			4 ♦	Natural slam try, long suit.
		4 M	To play.	
		Other	Control-bid, slam-worthy hand.	
	3+ NT	Natural, no 4-card major.		
	4 ♣	Both 4-card majors, at least some slam interest.		
		4 ♦	RKB hearts.	
		4 ♥	To play: 4 ♠ is RKB (kickback).	
		4 ♠	To play: 4 NT is RKB.	
		4 NT	RKB spades.	
		5 ♣	Hearts are trump: 5 ♦ is a transfer.	
		5 ♦	Spades are trump: 5 ♥ is a transfer.	
	4 ♦	Both 4-card majors, no slam interest.		
3 ♥	Five hearts.			Common continuations:
3 ♠	Five spades.			
	3+ NT	Natural, no fit.		
	oM	Slam try in opener's major.		
	4 ♣	No fit, natural slam try, long suit.		
	4 ♦	No fit, natural slam try, long suit.		
	4 M	To play.		
	Other	Fit, cheapest control, slam interest.		
3 NT	No 4- or 5-card major.			
	Pass	To play.		
	4 ♣	Natural slam try, 4+ clubs.		
		4 ♦	Natural slam try, 4+ diamonds.	
		4 NT	To play.	
		Other	Control bid, club fit.	
	4 ♦	Natural slam try, 4+ diamonds.		
	4+ NT	Natural, no fit.		

Opener's top priority is to bid a 5-card major. Otherwise, opener bids 3  $\diamond$  with one or both 4-card majors, or 3 NT with no majors.

Responder's bids are designed to allow opener to declare a major suit contract most of the time.

## Muppet Stayman

Muppet Stayman starts with puppet plan (a). Opener's 3  $\heartsuit$  and 3 NT responses are swapped, to provide a method for responder to show five spades and four hearts without as prominent a pit trap.

O2	R2	O3	After 3 $\clubsuit$ Muppet Stayman
3 $\diamond$	No 5-card major, but at least one 4-card major.		
	(same continuations as after puppet Stayman)		
3 $\heartsuit$	No 4- or 5-card major.		
	3 $\spadesuit$	Asks opener to bid 3 NT.	
	3 NT	Show five spades and four hearts (pit trap).	
	Higher	(Same as after 3 NT response to puppet Stayman)	
3 $\spadesuit$	Five spades.		
	(same continuations as after puppet Stayman)		
3 NT	Five hearts.		
	Pass	To play.	
	4 $\clubsuit$	Transfer to hearts, slam interest.	
		4 $\diamond$	RKB hearts.
		4 $\heartsuit$	To play. 4 $\spadesuit$ is kickback.
	4 $\diamond$	Transfer to hearts, no slam interest.	
	4+ NT	Natural, no fit.	
Meanings of responses that differ from puppet are shaded.			

### Advantages (compared to puppet):

- Handles responder's five spades and four hearts hand without a pit trap at responder's direct 3 NT response.

### Disadvantages (compared to puppet):

- When opener shows five hearts at 3 NT, 3  $\spadesuit$  is unavailable to agree hearts. 4  $\clubsuit$  (slam try) and 4  $\diamond$  (play 4  $\heartsuit$ ) are required to assure that opener declares hearts. The partnership could only have slam tries in long minors by employing higher bids, or by replacing Gerber.

- Responder's delayed 3 NT to show five spades and four hearts is a pit trap.
- Responder has no minor suit capability when opener shows five hearts at 3 NT. If relying on this in general, responder is reduced to inviting in notrump.
- Even more complicated.

### **Who is playing muppet Stayman?**

*Jim Henson invented it. After his death, I think Kermit and Miss Piggy played it for several years. – Richard Pavlicek*

### **Do strong players play puppet Stayman?**

GLM Stephen Gladyszak remarked at the table that strong players do not play puppet Stayman. I decided to ask a couple of other strong players, to confirm. I asked the question, "Do you prefer to play puppet Stayman over a 2NT opening?" GLM Mark 'Shark' Aquino replied:

*A lot of folks do prefer this, but I think having Smolen available after { 2N – 3♣; 3♦ } is much more valuable.*

I sent back "Thanks – I agree."

A while later, GLM Adam Grossack sent:

*I like to play semi-puppet. Responder must have a 4-card major to bid Stayman.*



## Semi-Puppet Stayman

Adam Grossack's outline is expanded below. The 2014 WBF system for Adam with brother Zach is the only mention online – presumably, they invented it.

Semi-puppet Stayman *promises holding a 4-card major*. Given that restriction, It contains no pit-traps, includes Smolen, and finds a 5–3 fit in opener's major.

The chart below permits semi-puppet Stayman with a 6-card minor, with or without a major. This plan has a rough edge: when opener answers 3 NT, with spade support, a responder who signs off in 4 ♠ will declare that contract.

O2	R2	O3	R3	Semi-Puppet Stayman: 2 NT – 3 ♣
3 ♦	No 4-card major.			
	3 ♡, 3 ♠	Smolen: 5+ cards in the other major.		
	3+ NT	Natural.		
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).		
3 ♡	Four or five hearts (not four spades).			
	3 ♠	<i>May be a slam try in hearts. How many hearts?</i>		
		3 NT	Four hearts.	
		Other	Five hearts (best hand bids a control).	
	3+ NT	Natural.		
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).		
3 ♠	Four spades (possibly four hearts).			
	3+ NT	Natural, four hearts but fewer spades.		
		4+ ♡	Natural (4–4 fit).	
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).		
	4 ♡	Artificial slam try; spades are trump.		
3 NT	Five spades.			
	Pass	To play, no spade fit.		
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).		
	4 ♡	Artificial slam try; spades are trump.		
	4 ♠	To play.		
	4+ NT	Natural, no spade fit.		

**Sorry:** the lists of advantages and disadvantages of semi-puppet Stayman have not been produced; nor have the features been included in the Comparison of Features coming up. This section was moved out of the book, and I'm focused on publication.

## 5-Card-Major Stayman

This plan, by Marshall Miles, gives us 5-card-major Stayman at 3 ♣, as over 1 NT.

R1	<b>5-Card-Major Responses to Our 2 NT Opening</b>
3 ♣	5-card-major Stayman: zero or one 4-card major; may have a 4-card major plus a 5+ card major playable opposite a doubleton.
3 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards, not 5-3-3-2.
3 ♠	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards, not 5-3-3-2.
3 ♠	Relay to 3 NT for crosswood, both minors, or to play.
3 NT	4-4 (5-4 with bad 5) majors, non-forcing (pit trap).
4 ♣	Gerber: respond 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, 5-4 minors & 2-2 majors.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative), 4-4 majors.
5 NT	Forcing grand slam invitation, 4-4 majors.
Higher	To play.
Meanings of responses that differ much from standard are in gray.	

### Advantages:

- Discovers a 5-3 fit in opener's major suit.
- Does not expose opener's other-major information to the opponents.
- A slam try in a long minor suit can be shown via Stayman, when holding a 4-card major.
- Handles responder's 5-5 majors with transfers: spades then hearts for game-only, and hearts then spades for slam.

### Disadvantages:

- With 4-4 (or 5-4 with a weak 5) in the majors, the initial response is 3 NT, which one partner or the other is likely to forget. It's a pit trap – fall in, and get eaten by cannibals!
- Unless holding a 4-card major, a slam try in a long minor suit cannot be shown.
- More complicated.

O2	R2	O3	R3	After 5-Card-Major Stayman
3 ♠	No 5-card major.			
	3 ♥	Four <i>spades</i> .	Responder's only major! Common continuations:	
	3 ♠	Four <i>hearts</i> .		
		3 NT	No fit. <i>Major suit has been checked, so:</i>	
			4 ♣	Natural, 5+ cards, plus 4 in oM.
			4 ♦	Natural, 5+ cards, plus 4 in oM.
			4+ NT	Natural.
		4 M	To play.	
		Other	Control-bid, fit (slam-worthy).	
	3+ NT	Natural, no 4-card major.		
	4 ♣	6+ (chunky 5) hearts and 4 spades.	<i>With 3-2, pick the long suit!</i>	
	4 ♦	6+ (chunky 5) spades and 4 hearts.		
3 ♥	Five hearts.		Common continuations:	
3 ♠	Five spades.			
	3+ NT	Natural, no fit.		
	4 ♣	Natural, no fit, 5+ cards, plus 4 in oM.		
	4 ♦	Natural, no fit, 5+ cards, plus 4 in oM.		
	4 M	To play.		
	oM	Fit, slam interest.		
No other responses are defined.				

Optional features recommended by Marshall Miles:

- Responder does not bid 3 ♣ with 4-3-3-3. Instead, bid 3 ♠ (and pass 3 NT).
- Responder does not transfer to a 5-card major with 5-3-3-2. Instead, bid 3 ♣, checking for a 5-4 fit.

## Comparison of Features

All systems are assumed to include responder's 3 ♠ relay to 3 NT for:

- crosswood in responder's long minor,
- slam try with both minors, or (when the system needs it)
- the way responder gets to 3 NT (or possibly higher NT).

Instead of crosswood, the partnership could play natural slam tries in the minors, which would change the chart below and rely on Gerber.

Capabilities of Stayman over 2 NT ● = full ○ = partial or responder may declare - = no	Standard	Puppet (a/b)	Muppet	5-Card-Major
Complexity (1=low, 5=high)	2	3	4	3
Finds 5-3 fit in opener's major.	-	●	●	●
Set opener's 5 ♥ as trump below game.	-	●	-	●
Set opener's 5 ♠ as trump below game.	-	●	●	●
Responder's direct 3 NT is to play.	●	●/-	●	-
Responder's delayed 3 NT is to play.	●	●	-	●
Conceals opener's other-major holding.	-	-	-	●
Supports delayed Texas	-	-	-	-
Responder shows 5 ♠ & 4 ♥ at 3-level.	●	-/●	●	-
Responder 5 ♠ & 4 ♥ without transfer.	●	-/●	●	●
Opener declares responder's 5 ♠ & 4 ♥.	●	-/●	●	●
Responder shows 4 ♠ & 5 ♥ at 3-level.	●	●	●	-
Responder 4 ♠ & 5 ♥ without transfer.	●	-	-	●
Opener declares responder's 4 ♠ & 5 ♥.	●	-	-	●
Slam sequence for responder 5-5 majors.	●	-	-	●
With 4-card major, invite minor slam.	●	●	○	●
Won't lose a major, inviting minor slam.	○	○	○	●
Without a major, invite minor slam.	●	*	*	*

\* Available with a Gerber replacement.

## Replacing Gerber

For the comparison, 3 ♠ is always a relay to 3 NT for crosswood or both minors, my strong preference.

However, Miles used 3 ♠, followed by a minor, for a slam try in the bid minor (or, by agreement, in the other minor). This may be the usual approach. Miles preferred step responses after the minor, for opener to show hand quality. This plan brings Gerber to the fore.

Crosswood is way better than Gerber, unless asker is looking at the king and queen of trump. So long as we can use crosswood, we don't need Gerber, and we could replace it.

Untested plans: I love cooking them up, but will we remember them?

### Long-Minor Slam Try

In this plan, 4 ♣ is a slam try in an unspecified long minor. This plan could be used with any of the systems presented in this article:

O2	R2	O3	R3	After 4 ♣ Minor Suit Slam Try
4 ♦	Accepts clubs.			
	4 ♥	My suit is diamonds.		
		4 NT	Rejects diamonds.	
		Other	RKB diamonds response (skip 4 NT).	
	Higher	RKB clubs response.		
4 ♥	Rejects clubs, accepts diamonds.			
	4 NT	My suit is clubs.		
	Other	RKB diamonds response (skip 4 NT).		
4 NT	Rejects both minors.			

### 4 ♣ with Diamonds; 3 ♠ with Clubs or Both Minors

This plan won't work, unless responder's direct 3 NT is to play.

O2	R2	After 4 ♣ with Diamonds
4 ♦	Waiting.	
	4 ♥	RKB diamonds.
	4 NT	To play.
Higher	Best hand, RKB diamonds response.	

O2	R2	O3	After 3 ♠ with Clubs or Both Minors
3 NT	Waiting, diamonds are better than clubs.		
	4 ♣	RKB diamonds.	
	4 ♦	RKB clubs.	
	4 M	5-5 minors, singleton or void in bid suit.	
4 ♣	Clubs are trump.		
	4 ♦	RKB clubs.	
	4 M	5-5 minors, singleton or void in bid suit.	
Higher	Best hand for clubs, RKB clubs response.		

## References

Detailed references will be in my book, *EZ-Expert Bidding Tools*.

**Puppet Stayman:** Marc Smith, [bridgebum.com](http://bridgebum.com). *Bridge Bulletin*, “The Bidding Toolkit.”

**Muppet Stayman:** Marc Smith, [bridgebum.com](http://bridgebum.com). Ron Koshoshek, [rec.games.bridge.narkive.com](http://rec.games.bridge.narkive.com). Bill Segraves, [bridgewinners.com](http://bridgewinners.com). Jeff Lehman, [bridgewinners.com](http://bridgewinners.com). John Stell, [stellar-bridge.co.uk](http://stellar-bridge.co.uk).

**5-Card-Major Stayman:** Marshall Miles, *Modern Constructive Bidding*, pages 144-146.