

Shotgun



One of the most frequent bidding challenges at the table is continuing after one minor-one major-1NT. Typically, this shows a 12-14 HCP balanced hand, which we can easily show is among the most common opening hands in bridge (see “*I Like Those Odds*” in *Table Talk* issues of October 1, 2017 and April 1, 2018). Also, the sequence one minor-one major-2NT is very common and has similar challenges. In these situations, many players use “Checkback Stayman” and/or “New Minor Forcing.” These are perfectly respectable conventions, and are quite effective, although perhaps not the best. XYZ (what a terrible name!) refers to three successive different-suit partnership bids beneath the 2 level, and is a convention that improves upon Checkback Stayman and New Minor Forcing. What I present below is, dare I say, a *better-named* and particularly effective version of XYZ. I then recommend another approach for minor-one major-2NT, see the “Rifle” (at bridgequarterly.org, and in *Table Talk* issue April 1, 2018)

Shotgun is a direct translation of the Icelandic word *tvíhleypan* (a double-barreled gun), while Rifle is my choice for the Icelandic *einshleypan* (a single-barreled gun). These are effective, yet quite intuitive and not highly complex approaches, promoted by Icelandic world champion Guðmundur Páll Arnarsson (GPA).

The core elements of the Shotgun are its two artificial bids (the two “barrels” of the weapon), 2♣ and 2♦. In sum, after one minor-one major-1NT (e.g. 1♣-1♠-1NT, 1♦-1♥-1NT), *and*, more generally, after *any* 1X-1Y-1Z:

2♣ = invitational, (almost) any distribution

2♦ = game forcing

This allows the partnership plenty of space to deal with invitational hands (for opener to show minimum or maximum, etc.), and it establishes a game-forcing sequence at a very low level with abundant space to find the best game, or to explore slam. The other major benefit of these artificial bids is that (almost) **all other suit bids are natural and clearly defined**. Notrump rebids can be used as you want. Certainly, 4NT should be quantitative, 3NT is to play, and 2NT is available for whatever you feel you need (since NT invitations can go through 2♣). I offer two variations of Shotgun, one simple and one advanced, for players at different levels and/or frequency of play.

NOTE 1: In the variations offered here, **Shotgun is off as soon as opponents interfere** (see future issues of *Table Talk* for how to turn the opponents’ pesky interference against them); and

NOTE 2: You can (and should) use Shotgun in any situation where three suits have been bid by the partnership below the 2-level, just like in XYZ. For example, after 1♣-1♦-1♠, Shotgun is **ON**.

In its simplest form, you use Shotgun to show most invitational hands by rebidding 2♣, and force to game by rebidding 2♦. This leaves **all other bids as natural and non-forcing**, (including non-forcing game bids such as 3NT and 4NT), which is very simple and easy to remember.

Basic Shotgun: The version of Shotgun that I recommend to beginning/intermediate players, or infrequently playing partnerships, could look something like this:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣ = 8-12 HCP, invitational other than as outlined below
	2♦ = (11)12+HCP, game forcing, any distribution

ALL other bids are natural and non-forcing!

2♥ = weak with 5♠ + 4♥

2♠ = weak to play

2NT = balanced invitation to 3NT

3♣ = to play, longer ♣ than ♠*

3♦ = invitation with at least 5♠ + 5♦

3♥ = invitation with at least 5♠ + 5♥

3♠ = invitation with good ♠ suit (e.g. AKxxxx, AQJxxx)

3NT = to play

* The only way to play part score in ♣

After 2♣ invitational and 2♦ game forcing, opener and responder bid naturally. In the latter case, obviously, the bidding cannot stop before a game has been reached.

Advanced Shotgun: This is the version of Shotgun that I recommend for advanced/expert players. It is only one possible structure. There are other variations, and there is plenty of flexibility to tailor your particular version of Shotgun to suit your own preferences:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣ = 8-12 HCP, invitational, demands 2♦ by opener*
	2♦ = (11)12+ HCP, game forcing hands other than those defined below
	2♥ = weak, with 5♠ + 4♥
	2♠ = to play
	2NT = game forcing, 4-4-4-1, and possibly some 5-4-4-0 shapes**
	3♣ = to play, longer ♣ than ♠***
	3♦ = game forcing, with 5♠ + 5♦
	3♥ = game forcing, with 5♠ + 5♥
	3♠ = game forcing, with good ♠ suit (at least AKQxxx/AQJ1098)
	3NT = to play

* Responder passes for a part-score in ♦

** Since balanced invitations go through 2♣, 2NT is available for other uses. It is convenient to use it for three-suited hands that are otherwise difficult to describe. Opener asks about partner's shortness with 3♣. In response, 3♦ = singleton ♦; 3♥ = singleton ♥; and 3♠ (responder's first suit) = singleton ♣. If you include 5-4-4-0 hands in 2NT, subsequent jumps to 4 can be used to show voids, typically with a 5-card minor (e.g., 1♦-1♠-1NT-2NT-3♣-4♥ shows 4=0=4=5)]. Another different idea is to use 2NT here as Blackwood or RCK in opener's suit! This allows exceptional room for slam exploration.

*** The only way to play part score in clubs

Bidding following 1 minor-1 major-1NT-2♣-2♦, and 1 minor-1 major-1NT-2♦ are natural and invitational, or game forcing, respectively.