



Stayman

Stayman is the granddaddy of bridge conventions. It is arguably the most popular of any conventional treatment because it is simple, effective and flexible enough to be used with just about any system you care to play.

Stayman is used by responder to discover a possible major-suit fit after an opening bid of 1NT. This is important because an eight-card (or longer) trump fit is usually safer and will produce more tricks than the play in notrump. So in this auction

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| <i>Opener</i> | <i>Responder</i> |
| 1NT | 2♣ |

responder's 2♣ is Stayman, a conventional inquiry that says nothing about clubs. It simply asks the opener to reveal whether he holds a four-card major. If he does, he bids it. For example:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Opener</i> | <i>Responder</i> |
| 1NT | 2♣ ⁽¹⁾ |
| 2♥ ⁽²⁾ | |

- (1) "Do you have a four-card major?"
 (2) "Yes, I have four hearts."

If opener doesn't have a four-card major, he bids 2♦.

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Opener</i> | <i>Responder</i> |
| 1NT | 2♣ ⁽¹⁾ |
| 2♦ ⁽²⁾ | |

- (1) "Do you have a four-card major?"
 (2) "No."

What happens when opener has both four-card majors? Most pairs agree to bid the lower-ranking suit, hearts, first.

It's that easy! There are some caveats, however. After a strong 1NT opening, responder must gauge the combined assets of the partnership. Since game-level contracts generally require a minimum of 25 HCPs,

responder adds his points to those of opener's to determine how high the partnership should be. This table shows the general guideline when responder holds a four-card major:

| Responder's HCPs | Goal | Recommended action |
|------------------|----------------|--|
| 0-7 | Partscore only | Pass |
| 8-9 | Invite game | Stayman followed by 2NT or raising partner's major to the three level with a fit |
| 10 or more | Force to game | Stayman followed by 3NT or raising partner's major to game with a fit |

Stayman is typically used with hands that have invitational or better strength. If you and your partner play strong notrumps (15 to 17 HCP or 16 to 18), responder should have at least 8 HCP to use Stayman (with one exception we'll discuss at the end). This deal shows why this is recommended:

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| <i>Opener</i> | <i>Responder</i> |
| ♠ A J 6 4 | ♠ Q 2 |
| ♥ K Q 3 | ♥ J 10 5 4 |
| ♦ A 10 4 | ♦ K Q 9 7 |
| ♣ Q 10 8 | ♣ J 9 7 |

Opener begins with 1NT. Responder wants to know if opener has four hearts, so he bids 2♣, Stayman. Opener replies 2♠ to show four spades. Since this pair has agreed that opener would show hearts first if he had them, responder knows that opener doesn't have four hearts.

Now what? Since no major-suit fit exists, and since both hands are balanced, it's probably best to play in notrump. Responder, with 9 HCP, may now bid 2NT which sends this message: "Partner, I held four cards in the other major, and I have invitational strength." Opener may now

pass with a minimum or bid 3NT with a maximum.

If you play Stayman, the meaning of this auction is important to know:

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| <i>Opener</i> | <i>Responder</i> |
| 1NT | 2♣ |
| 2♥ | 3NT |
| ? | |

Responder is promising game-going values since he jumped to 3NT after the 2♥ rebid. But what else is he showing? Note that responder didn't jump to 3NT on his first turn — he wanted to know if opener held a four-card major. After opener showed hearts, however, responder bid 3NT. By inference, this means that responder must have four spades. If opener also holds four spades, he may correct 3NT to 4♠

to play in the 4-4 major-suit fit.

There is one special case where you may use Stayman with a poor hand. It happens when

you have a three-suited hand that is very short in clubs, such as
 ♠ 8 7 5 3 ♥ Q 8 4 3 ♦ J 9 8 2 ♣ 5.

Partner will probably not be happy playing in 1NT. The club shortness is worrisome. So when partner opens 1NT, you respond 2♣, Stayman. Your plan is to pass whatever partner bids. If he shows a four-card major, great! Even if he denies a four-card major with 2♦, however, you'll still pass and hope that partner has three or more diamonds. That contract will usually fare better than 1NT.

Did you know?

The Stayman convention was not invented by Sam Stayman! It was actually invented in the U.S. by George Rapée. Stayman, however, published an article about the 2♣ bid in June of 1945 in *The Bridge World*, and his name became associated with the convention.

In Britain, J.C.H. Marx devised a similar 2♣ convention in 1939, but publication of his idea was delayed by World War II.