

# Solow53 Convention: Find Every 5/3 Fit After Opening 1NT

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## 1. Introduction

In ancient times, bridge hands with 15 – 17 high-card points and a 5-card major were opened one of the major to try and find an 8-card fit in a major.

Unfortunately, opening one of a major with 15 – 17 points can cause re-bid problems for the Opener. To address this problem, the modern approach is to open 1NT with a 5-card major and a balanced 15 – 17 HCP. This, in turn, causes problems in finding a major-suit fit. Many attempts have been made to rectify this problem, including transfers, Stayman, and puppet Stayman.

However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is no system to guarantee reaching the "ideal" contract in which:

1. The contract is in a major suit at the appropriate level if there is at least an 8-card fit in the major and in NT (or a minor suit) otherwise.
2. The Opener is the declarer to ensure that the lead comes up to the strong hand.
3. The final contract never ends in game with fewer than 25 points.

While it is likely that no such system exists, the **Solow 53 Convention** has the following desirable features:

- It *guarantees* finding a major-suit fit, if there is one, whenever the Opener and Responder have a combined total of at least 25 HCP.
- With two exceptions, whenever there is a major-suit game fit, the Opener becomes the declarer, thus ensuring that the lead comes up to the strong hand.
- The bidding system is logical and intuitive so players who use Stayman and transfers, need only a small amount of additional memorization.

The explanation below assumes that the goal is to reach at most a game in a major suit, with no slam interest. Handling slam interests requires certain modifications to the system that are described separately. The proposed system for game-level bidding can only be used if both of the following hold:

- Opener has 15 – 17 HCP.
- Responder has at least 8 HCP (with the exception of transfers, which can be done with any number of HCP).

Prior to bidding, Opener and Responder each determine whether they have minimum (min) or maximum (max) point counts, as follows:

- Opener: min = 15 HCP; max = 17 HCP (with 16 HCP, Opener “rounds up or down” according to personal choice and lives with the consequences).
- Responder: min = 8 or 9 HCP; max = 10 or more HCP.

## 2. Bidding Game with Solow53

The bidding in Solow53 is based on modifications and extensions to transfers and Stayman. Assuming Responder has no interest in the minors (which are addressed in Section 3), Responder’s first bid is a transfer, Stayman 2♣, 3♣, or 2NT / 3NT, depending on the maximum number of cards Responder has in a major.

### Transfers

Responder’s first bid is a transfer to a major with one of the two following types of hands:

1. A 6+ card major. This is a “standard” transfer in which Responder uses a Texas transfer at the four-level with game but no slam interest or else transfers at the two-level and then rebids the major suit at the three-level (invitational) or at the four-level (with slam interest).
2. A 5-card major and 3- (3 or fewer) cards in the other major. In this case, after the transfer, Responder shows point count by bidding 2NT with a min and 3♣ with a max. This allows the Opener to show a 5-card major other than the one being transferred in, if there is one. (If Responder bids 2NT instead of 3♣, Opener can only show a 5-card major with a max.) Subsequent bidding is standard.
3. With two 5-card majors, Responder first transfers to hearts and then bids 2♠ and the rest of the bidding is clear. In the event that the final contract is in spades, Responder is the declarer.

**Note:** Transfers can be done with any number of points. It is possible to play four-way transfers but doing so requires special handling, as discussed in the section on Drawbacks.

### Stayman

Responder’s first bid is Stayman 2♣ with at least one 4+ card major (and includes 4-4, 4-5, and 5-4 in the majors). The responses by Opener are the standard 2♦ or 2♥ / 2♠, thus making it possible to play Garbage Stayman.

1. A bid of 2♥ / 2♠ by Opener over Stayman indicates at least 4+ cards in the bid suit. If Responder's major is a match, the rest of the bidding is standard. If Responder's major does not match, Responder shows point count by bidding 2NT with a min and 3♣ with a max (as is done above with a transfer). This allows Opener the ability to rebid his/her major to show a 5-card suit. (If Responder bids 2NT over 2♥ / 2♠, Opener can only rebid a 5-card major with a max.) The rest of the bidding is clear (noting that if Opener has both majors, Opener can first bid 2♥ and then convert a 2NT / 3♣ response to spades).
2. A bid of 2♦ by Opener over Stayman indicates no 4+ card major. Responder now shows a 5-card major by bidding 2 of the opposite major (as in Smolen) or 2NT / 3NT to deny a 5-card major. The rest of the bidding is clear.

### 3♣

Responder's first bid is 3♣ when Responder has no 4+ card major but does have a 3-card major and a max (as currently required with puppet Stayman). Opener then bids an available 5-card major (which Responder can accept or correct to 3NT) or 3NT without one. (**Note:** The remaining responses to Puppet Stayman are redundant and not needed.)

### 2NT / 3NT

Responder's first bid is 3NT when Responder has no 3+ card major and a max. With a min and no 4+ card major, Responder bids 2NT after which, with a max, Opener bids a 5-card major, if available or 3NT otherwise.

### After Interference

Over an interfering double or 2♣ bid in second position, systems are on as all bids by Responder are still available (Responder doubles 2♣ to bid Stayman). Solow53 is off after other interference in second seat or any interference in fourth seat, and bidding reverts to "natural".

## 3. Handling Minor Suits (Optional)

How Responder bids depends on whether Responder has a 6+ card minor or a 5-card minor (**Responder shows a 5-card minor only if Responder has a second 5-card suit and 10+ HCP.**)

**With 6+ cards in a minor**, Responder bids 2♠ over 1NT, which is the usual relay to 3♣. With a weak hand, Responder then passes or corrects to 3♦, which Opener must pass. Responder can also bid an invitational 4♣ / 4♦ or a terminal 5♣ / 5♦ over Opener's 3♣. With 10+ HCP and a 4-card major as well, Responder bids 3♥ / 3♠, which Opener can accept by bidding 4♥ / 4♠ or reject

by bidding 3NT (after which, Responder bids an invitational 4♣/4♦ or a terminal 5♣ / 5♦).

**With 5 cards in both clubs and diamonds**, Responder jumps to 3♠ over 1NT (and Opener can bid 3NT (to play) or a preferred minor at the 4-level with a min and at the 5-level with a max).

**With 5 cards in clubs and 5 cards in a major**, Responder bids an “optional” transfer of 3♦ or 3♥ (indicating 5 hearts or 5 spades, respectively, in addition to 5 clubs). Opener accepts the transfer with 3+ cards in that major; bids 3NT (to play); or bids 4♣ with a min and 5♣ with 3+ cards in clubs and a max.

**With 5 cards in diamonds and a 5-card major**, Responder first shows the major by transferring with 2♦ or 2♥ and then bids 3♦ (instead of 3♣), the diamond bid being “natural”. Over 3♦, Opener can bid four of the transferred major with 3+ cards in that major; bid 3NT (to play); or bid 4♦ with a min and 5♦ with 3+ cards in diamonds and a max.

#### 4. Drawbacks of the Game Version of Solow53

The only drawbacks of Solow53 that are known at this time are:

- The possibility of missing a major-suit fit only when both hands are minimums. In this case, the final contract might become 2NT instead of two or three of a major.
- The version of Solow53 described above does not use four-way transfers because a bid of 2NT by Responder over 1NT currently indicates 2 – 2 in the majors. However, it is possible to use four-way transfers by making the following modifications to Solow53. When using four-way transfers, Opener must bid 2♥ in response to Stayman 2♣ when holding 4+ cards in both majors (4-4, 4-5 or 5-4). After the sequence 1NT – 2♣ – 2♥, Responder can bid:
  - 3♥ / 4♥ with 4+ hearts and a min / max.
  - 2NT / 3♣ to show 3- hearts, 3- spades and a min / max.
  - 2♠ / 3♦ to show 4 spades, 3- hearts and a min / max. If Opener does not have 4+ spades, then Opener can bid 3♥ to show 5 hearts (but must have a max to bid 3♥ over 2♠).

**Note:** The sequence 1NT – 2♣ – 2♠ denies 4+ hearts by Opener.

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