

Weak 2-bids

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In the first 30-40 years of contract bridge, all two-level openings were strong and natural. Then, sanity prevailed. Now, 2♣ (artificial) is used for all (rarely-dealt) strong hands, freeing up 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ for more practical use. Today, only dinosaurs use strong 2-bids (although ACOL and other systems where 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ have special meanings are prevalent in certain areas of the world).

What should a weak two-bid show? Typically a 6-card suit and about 5-10 HCP. Within that definition there is lots of room. I wouldn't open 2♠ with:

♠K Q J 10 9 8 6♥--♦A 4 3 2♣6 5 2--This hand is way too good—it is a 1♠ opening.

Meanwhile, I'd gladly open 2♠ with:

♠K J 10 9 8 6♥4♦10 8 7 4♣3 2--Even though it is out of the HCP range.

There is lots of room for judgment. Vulnerability and position are crucial. If you are vulnerable, try to have a good suit and to be at the upper end of the HCP range. If you are in second seat (a bad position to preempt because the contract could easily belong to your side), be very sound. In all situations, be aware of suit quality. I don't think it is a good idea to preempt with a suit of jack-empty-sixth.

It is important to know your style and to know partner's.

Here are the "top-three" questions students ask me about weak two's"

1. Can you open a weak two-bid with a void?
2. Can you have a side four-card major?
3. Do I need 2 of the top 3 honours?

My answers:

1. Side voids?

Absolutely possible. I wouldn't preempt if the void made the hand too good for a preempt (see the first example in this article). But, if the hand is in range, why not have a void? I can't imagine not opening 2♠ with, say:

♠K J 10 9 4 3♥--♦Q J 2♣9 8 6 4.

2. Side majors?

You can preempt with a side 4-card major. But, I wouldn't open 2♠ with, say:

♠Q J 8 7 6 5♥A Q 10 3♦5 4♣3. We could easily belong in hearts, and I'd be afraid of preempting our side out of that suit.

However, I'd proudly open 2♠ with, say,

♠K Q J 10 8 7♥8 7 4 3♦3 2♣2. Who cares about the hearts when my spades are so good and my hearts are so bad?

3. Top honours?

Not really important. Rather than focus on the top honours, I care more about the intermediate spots. I'd much rather have Q J 10 9 8 7 than A K 5 4 3 2. The cards in the middle are what make the suit of "good quality" for preempting.

Here are a few (relatively easy) examples. Note the vulnerability and position. Assume you are playing a "normal" style (not super-conservative, not crazy aggressive). Answers at the end of the article:

What would you open as dealer, nobody vulnerable?

1)	2)	3)	4)
♠ 10 9 6 5 4 2	♠ 6 5	♠ 8 3	♠ --
♥ A 7 6 2	♥ K Q J 8 5 3	♥ 2	♥ 8 7 2
♦ A 2	♦ 7 6 2	♦ 8 7 6 2	♦ K J 10 9 8 2
♣ 2	♣ 5 4	♣ K Q J 10 8 2	♣ Q 8 7 2

What would you open in second seat, vulnerable against not?

5)	6)	7)	8)
♠ Q 4 2	♣ 5 3	♠ 2	♠ A 10 7 6 5 2
♥ K J 8 6 5 2	♥ 2	♥ K Q 10 9 7 2	♥ Q 4 3
♦ 5 4	♦ A Q J 10 9 8	♦ K 9 8 2	♦ Q 9 8
♣ 6 2	♣ 10 9 6 2	♣ 4 3	♣ J

Answers:

1. Pass. No weak two for me with that awful suit.
2. ♥. If you are waiting for ♥ K Q J 10 9 8, you'll never get to preempt. This is a textbook weak two (albeit a minimum).
3. ♣. Since there is no weak two-bid in clubs, we sometimes have to open 3♣ with only a six-card suit.
4. 2♦. The side-void doesn't bother me. The side four-card club suit is no problem. The suit is excellent. So, why not 2♦?
5. No. It's not so much the side major that is the problem. It is the poor heart suit. Maybe with ♥ K J 10 9 x x we could talk. But, second seat unfavourable calls for extreme soundness.
6. 2♦. Great suit, great shape—no reason not to preempt.
7. ♥. Sure. Why not?
8. Pass. Terrible suit for a weak two, especially in this seat at these colours.