

Symmetric

The Symmetric Relay Contract Bridge
Bidding System Made Easy by
Andrei Sharko

Symmetric
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PREFACE

In 1980 Walter Jones and Roy Kerr published a book called *Symmetric Relay*. It was nothing less than a work of genius. It described a bidding system ahead of its time. With their methods it was possible within just a few bids to describe the exact hand shape you held. In fact their system was so far ahead of their time that their work did not attract the attention it deserved. A reading of their book, however, reveals authors that were not out to convert but rather share the fruit of their labour.

By the 1990's it became apparent that the time was overdue for a second edition of *Symmetric Relay*. Not that there was anything fundamentally wrong with *Symmetric Relay*. Rather the years of experience playing *Relay* have resulted in a natural evolution of refinements.

What I hope to achieve in this book is a basic repetition of the core of *Symmetric Relay* with those refinements. Also some aspects are left out. One such area is some of the theoretical discussion. That has its place and I recommend the original *Symmetric Relay* to anyone with an interest in bidding theory. There is also a practical aspect: by understanding the reasons for a particular sequence the bidding can be more easily memorised. My intention is that the explanation of bidding sequences is limited only to their practical value. The emphasis in this book is to *teach* *Symmetric Relay*. There is accordingly an emphasis on simplicity. I hope to present *Symmetric* in a form to demonstrate that such an advanced bidding system is not difficult to master.



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1. INTRODUCTION

What is Symmetric? Symmetric is a big club system with five-card majors. There is a resemblance to Precision in that some of the opening bids are similar. The feature that distinguishes Relay from other big club systems is the scheme of responses. The basic thing is simply that by playing the relay one player gets to know exactly what partner holds, rather than both players knowing a little.

The theoretical justification of the system that virtually every hand shape can be shown below the level of 3NT; and second, only one hand need give the other information. So after an auction of say 1♣ – 1♥, the 1♣ opener always bids ‘one up’, and waits for partner to describe his hand. So in this case opener bids 1♠ and responder further describes his hand.

This has some extraordinary advantages. The first is a serious saving of space. Following on from that, within a few bids, and almost always below 3NT responder describes his exact shape. It is then a simple matter for opener to pick the right contract. A second advantage is that more often than not declarer’s hand is totally unknown to the defence. There is another really great reason to play Symmetric – it is a lot of fun.

This book is divided into nine sections as follow:

1. This **Introduction**.
2. **Structure**: this is a description of the opening bids and how the relay is started. Except for the 1♣ opening bid responder initiates the relay. After a 1♣ bid, responder bids 1♦ with 0 – 8 hcp and all other responses are automatically relay.
3. The relays starting with the **1♣ Relay**.
4. The **Other Relays** for the opening bids from 1♦ to 2NT.
5. **Extending the Relay**. Some interesting issues are dealt with here. These include ‘weak relays’ and problem hands that responder may have. Sometimes opener will stop relaying but responder would like to continue. This can happen when he has an extreme shape or has extra values.
6. **Cue Bidding**. In this section is a description of what happens after the shape has been shown.

7. **Intervention.** How does the relay cope with intervention by the opposition? Quite well as you will find out!
8. **Non-Relay Constructive Bidding.** While this book is a description of the Symmetric Relay bidding system there are certain consequences even when not relaying. The primary consideration is that where one has a game-forcing 1NT relay response to a 1♠ opening, for example, does it follow that all other bids are non-forcing?
9. **Appendix.** Refer to this for a list of abbreviations and a glossary of terms of art. Also there is a list of differences between this version of Symmetric and the original.



2. STRUCTURE

Opening Bid	Strength	Description	Relay commenced by responding
1♣	16+	Any shape	1♥ or higher
1♦	11 – 15	2 suited	1NT
1♥	11 – 15	5+ Hearts	1NT
1♠	11 – 15	5+ Spades	1NT
1NT	12 – 15	Balanced	2♣
2♣	11 – 15	6+ Clubs	2♦
2♦	11 – 15	6+ Diamonds	2♥
2♥	6 – 10	6 Hearts	No relay
2♠	6 – 10	6 Spades	No relay
2NT	11 – 15	Majors	3♣

Table 1

1♣ is the standard big club familiar to many. All other opening bids contain less than 16 hcp. The 1♦ bid is of particular interest and is described more fully later. Suffice to say here that it is part of a coherent system and not a 'catch-all'. The range of 1NT is 12–15 hcp. 2♣ and 2♦ are basically single-suited hands. 2♥ and 2♠ are weak twos. The 2NT bid is different in that it is used to show a pronounced major two-suiter.



3. 1 CLUB RELAY

INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of relays but they are all based on the 1♣ relay. So once one has learned that relay the others all follow – they are said to be ‘symmetric’.

So how does relay work? The basic idea is that one hand describes its shape while the other player marks time with a waiting bid, or as it is referred to, he *relays*. With just a couple of exceptions the relay is the next available bid.

Generally the hands are described in the following way. First just bid your suit or suits. Then tell partner what your short suit is. Then say which shape type you hold. So a *1534* shape is bid by bidding hearts, then bidding clubs, then showing a spade shortage, then showing a *5431* shape.

The one club relay is itself broken into four different relays. After partner opens 1♣ the first step is to make the response that fits in with the hand type of which there are only four:

1. Single-suiters;
2. Two-suiters;
3. Three-suiters;
4. Balanced hands.

Two-suiters are divided into two sub-categories: short-legged two-suiters and long-legged two-suiters. Quite what the origin for this quaint terminology was I do not know, but it has stuck. Short-legged two-suiters contain one four-card suit. Long-legged two-suiters are at least five–five. Balanced hands do not include *5332* shapes even if it is a minor.

Single-suiters are:	5332	6322	6331	7222	7321	7330.
Short-legged two-suiters are:	5431	5422	6421	6430	7420	7411.
Long-legged two-suiters are:	5521	5530	6511	6520.		
Three-suiters are:	4441	5440.				
Balanced hands are:	4333	4432.				

There are other hand shapes of course; those containing eight-card or longer suits and really huge two-suiters, six-six or more. These are known as extreme shapes and are dealt with separately later.

The remainder of this chapter describes the relay, ie how to show your exact shape. It is done by:

1. Showing your suits with your first bid/s;
2. Then showing your shortage/s;
3. Then nominating the shape.

KEY CONCEPTS

Before going further there are a few key concepts and principles that are essential to Symmetric.

The first key concept is the *Relay*. **Table 1** shows how it commenced. The relayer keeps relaying, or asking, by bidding the minimum available bid. The exceptions are (i) *weak relays* that are dealt with separately later; (ii) a bid of 3NT is never a relay; and (iii) any six-level bid or higher is not a relay.

The second concept is *Running On*. Perhaps it is best understood by a common example, Key Card Blackwood. 4NT asks for key cards and the responses are:

- 5♣ 0 or 3 key cards;
- 5♦ 1 or 4 key cards;
- 5♥ 2 key cards without the trump queen;
- 5♠ 2 key cards with the trump queen.

An inefficient method would be for 5♥ to show two key cards without reference to the trump queen. A further inquiry thereafter of 5♠ would ask about that card with 5NT denying that card and 6♣ showing it. In Relay terms the 5♠ bid showing the trump queen *runs on*. Clearly there is a saving of space. That saving is not entirely without cost as responder may have a hand that cannot tolerate passing 5♥ with only two key cards. In Symmetric it is a matter of fine-tuning where running on is permitted.

The next concept is *Implication*. Take for example 1NT – 2♦ (transfer); 3♣. Opener has apparently not accepted the transfer by bidding 2♥. He

could super-accept by bidding 3♥. In fact all bids above 2♠ implicitly are a super-accept. The concept of implication is closely related to running on and is frequently used in Symmetric.

Shortage and Length. A shortage can be a void, singleton or doubleton. When showing shortages a shortage in a higher suit would be shown before a shortage in a lower ranking suit. This is said to be showing shortages from the ‘top down’. Length can include three card suits. When showing length it done in the opposite way to showing shortages. Length is shown from the ‘bottom up’.

FIRST BIDS

Here’s how to make the first response to 1♣.

1♣	With 0-8 hcp	Bid 1♦, the ‘negative’ response
	Single-suiter	Bid the suit, ie 1♥, 1♠, 2♣, 2♦
	Minor two-suiter	Bid 2♥ or higher
	Other two-suiter	Bid one of the suits, ie 1♥ or 1♠
	Three-suiter	Follow one of two special sequences
	Balanced hand	Bid 1NT.

Table 2

The point to note at this stage is the order of the suits; 1 – hearts, 2 – spades, 3 – clubs, and 4 – diamonds. The relative lengths are established at the next turn. This is important for the two-suiters. For example a heart suit, even if four cards in length is bid before a five-card spade or minor suit. Here is a list of the first bids:

1♣	1♦	0-8 hcp	The negative response
	1♥	Hearts	May have another suit/s
	1♠	Spades	May have a minor suit
	1NT	Balanced	
	2♣	Clubs	Or minor 3 suiter
	2♦	Diamonds	Must be single suited

Table 3

You will see from **Tables 2 and 3** that minors are a special case. What happens is that the minors are shown by *implication*. In Symmetric there is a lot of information passed by implication and each situation will be dealt with as it arises. For present purposes, if the first response is 2♥ or higher, that is to say responder has not bid even one suit, then that

shows both minors. **Table 4** is a list of how to show the various single and two-suiters.

Suits	First Bid	Second Bid
Hearts only	1♥	2♠ or higher
Spades only	1♠	2♠ or higher
Clubs only	2♣	2♠ or higher
Diamonds only	2♦	2♠ or higher
Hearts and Spades	1♥	1NT
Hearts and Clubs	1♥	2♣
Hearts and Diamonds	1♥	2♦ or 2♥
Spades and Clubs	1♠	2♣
Spades and Diamonds	1♠	2♦ or 2♥
Clubs and Diamonds	2♥ or higher	2NT or higher

Table 4

From this table it can be seen that single-suiters are shown in two stages. The first step is to bid the suit, and the second is to make a bid of 2♠ or higher. By not bidding a second suit below 2♠ you identify your hand as a single-suiter.

Bidding both suits below the level of 2♠ shows a two-suiter. But there are two points to watch out for. The first is the two-suiter with both minors. This is shown by an immediate bid of 2♥ or higher. The second is what is known as a 'reverser'. A reverser is simply a short-legged two suiter where the four-card suit is higher ranking than the longer suit.

When bidding two-suiters (including the minors) it is essential to sub-categorise them as (1) long-legged; or (2a) short-legged; or (2b) as a short-legged two-suiter that is a reverser.

Bidding a long legged two-suiter is simple. Just bid 2♠ after having bid both suits. If you have both minors – bid 2♠ direct! Reversers are almost as simple. Bid 2♥ after having bid both suits. But if the second suit is diamonds then after having bid the first suit bid 2♥. This shows diamonds by implication. Again, if you are 5-4 in the minors and clubs are longer bid 2♥ directly over 1♣.

To make the point clearer here is **Table 3** again but now it is extended.

1♣	1♦	0-8 hcp
	1♥	Hearts
	1♠	Spades
	1NT	Balanced
	2♣	Clubs
	2♦	Diamonds
	2♥	Minors (short legged, reverser)
	2♠	Minors (long legged)
	2NT	Minors (short legged, not reverser)

Table 5

Three-suiters are begun with one of two special sequences. (There is a logical reason for the sequences, namely that after 1♣ and a positive response every permutation of bidding but two are ascribed to single or two-suiters, or balanced hands. These two remaining sequences are used to show three-suiters.) It is easiest to learn them by rote. Those sequences are:

1♣	1♥		1♣	2♣	
1♠	1NT		2♦	2♥	Minor 3 suiter
2♣	2♦	Major 3 suiter			

Table 6

SHORTAGES AND SHAPE

SINGLE-SUITERS

2♠	High shtg	_____	
2NT	Mid shtg	_____	
3♣	Even shtg	_____	7222
3♦	5332	_____	
3♥	6331	_____	low 3
3♠	7321	_____	mid 3
3NT	7330	_____	high 3

Table 7

Table 7 is one of the key tables. You will recall that the method establishing a single-suiter was to bid the suit then bid 2♠ or higher. It is for that reason the single-suiter table begins at 2♠. Say your shape was 2533. The bidding commences 1♣ – 1♥, opener relays 1♠ and now you would respond 2♠. This bid shows a ‘high shortage’, that is to say the shortest

suit is the highest of the three remaining suits. This relay would finish with 2NT – 3♦. This latter bid identifies the hand as 5332 shape.

So all one needed to know was the following: 1- Heart suit; 2- Spade shortage; 3- 5332 shape. There is only one hand that meets these three criteria and that is a 2533 hand.

If you held 1633 the bidding would have only one different element. The suit would be the same, the shortage would be the same, but the shape would be shown as 6331. The bidding would be 1♣ – 1♥; 1NT – 2♠; 2NT – 3♥.

How would the hand be bid if one had a diamond shortage, ie a 3523 shape? Answer: in the same way except for the shortage bid. The bidding would be 1♣ – 1♥; 1NT – 2NT; 3♣ – 3♦. Have a look at **Table 7** and you will see that responder's second bid (2NT) is the 'mid shortage'.

Now what if the shape was 3532? This hand has a 'low shortage'. This time the bidding would be 1♣ – 1♥; 1NT – 3♦. 1♥ showed hearts, and the 3♦ bid showed the 5332 shape. The low shortage is not shown, or rather it *is shown*, but is shown by *implication*. This is a rule of general application in Relay. Shortages are shown from the top down and low shortages are bid in one step less. Remember the basic method? 1- Bid the suits; 2- Bid the shortages; 3- Nominate the shape. There has already been one major exception to this rule. When holding both minors one skips the first step. This is now the second major exception. When holding low shortage one 'runs on' to the third step of nominating the shape.

The next thing to learn is how to show 'even shortage'. If you are blessed with two or three doubletons you have an even shortage hand. The key bid is 3♣. (That is to say a 3♣ bid made after only one suit is announced). This identifies the hand as even shortage. 6322 and 7222 hands qualify as even shortage. It is therefore apparent that there are four hands one could hold: 7222, or 6322 with low, mid, or high three-card suit. The precise method depends on whether one holds 7222 or 6322. 7222 hands are shown by bidding 2♠ then 3♣. 6322 hands are shown by bidding 3♣ then stating where the three-card suit is. Take the following four hands:

(a) 2227		(b) 2236		(c) 2326		(d) 3226	
1♣	2♣	1♣	2♣	1♣	2♣	1♣	2♣
2♦	2♣	2♦	3♣	2♦	3♣	2♦	3♣
2NT	3♣	3♦	3♥	3♦	3♠	3♦	3NT

Table 8

In each case the first three bids are the same. 1♣ is the opening bid showing 16 + points, 2♣ shows clubs and a positive response. 2♦ is the relay. Now in hand (a) 3♣ identifies it as an even shortage. The 2♠ is temporarily ambiguous. It could be either high shortage in a 5332, 6331, 7321, or 7330 hand, or it could be a 7222 hand. After the 2NT relay responder now bids 3♣ identifying the hand as even shortage.

In hands (b), (c), and (d) the 3♣ identifies the hand a 6322. The last bid shows whether the three-card suit is the high, mid, or low of the three remaining suits. It is important to note the method for determining the order of the three-card suits. Length is shown from the bottom up.

The remaining point to note is for 7321 hands. No distinction is made between the two and three-card suits. They are bid in the normal fashion. 1- Bid the suit; 2- Bid the shortage; 3- Bid 3♠. In a 7123 hand for example opener will not know whether there are two clubs and three diamonds or the other way around. The relay could accommodate this but the wisdom of experience is that it rarely seems to make a difference and the bidding space saved is more usefully employed in showing the strength of the long suit – more on that topic later!

TWO-SUITERS

2♥	Reverser				
2♠	Long legged				
2NT	High shtg				
3♣	Even shtg		high shtg		
3♦	5431		even shtg		
3♥	6421	7411	5521		
3♠	6430	5422	5530	5611	
3NT	7420		5620	6511	
4♣			6520		

Table 9

This is the second key table. Again the basic strategy applies. Bid the suits, bid the shortage, and then identify the shape. With two-suiters there are two additional points to cover compared with single-suiters.

First it is necessary to say what type of two-suiter. And second, is how to bid the minors.

The types of two-suiter are (1) Long-legged and (2) Short-legged.

First step: bid the suits. **Table 3** contained the fairly natural methods for showing the suits. Let's try a major two-suiter, say *6412*. The bidding is in **Table 10**, hand (a):

(a) 6412	(b) 4612	(c) 6142	(d) 4162
1♣ 1♥	1♣ 1♥	1♣ 1♠	1♣ 1♠
1♠ 1NT	1♠ 1NT	1NT 2♦	1NT 2♥
2♣ 2NT	2♣ 2♥	2♥ 2NT	2♠ 2NT
3♣ 3♥	2♠ 2NT	3♣ 3♥	3♣ 3♥
	3♣ 3♥		

Table 10

1♣ is the opening strong club, 16 + hcp. 1♥ shows hearts. Spades are not bid first because the suits are bid in the order ♥ · ♠ · ♣ · ♦. 1♠ is the relay and 1NT shows spades. The suits have now been shown. Second step: show the shortages. Opener relays again with 2♣. Our hand has one diamond and two clubs, which is a high shortage. Now follow the bidding from **Table 9**. Bidding 2NT shows high shortage. Third step: identify the shape. 6421 is shown with a bid of 3♥. This is now sufficient information to show the *6412* shape.

Spades must be the six-card suit because the higher ranking suit is always taken to be longer unless it is specifically nominated as shorter. If the hand were *4612* it would have been bid as a reverser. After showing the suits responder would bid 2♥ that simply says the higher ranking suit is a four-card suit. Compare the bidding of hand (a) and hand (b) in **Table 10** and the only difference is two additional bids: 2♥ from responder and the 2♠ relay from opener.

A major and minor two-suiter is bid the same way with one small difference when holding diamonds. Hand (c) is very straightforward. Look at the 2♥ bid in hand (d). Remember 2♥ is the reverser bid. If 2♥ is bid at the second turn then a diamond suit is shown by implication. Have another look at **Table 4** and you will see that a diamond two-suiter is shown by bidding either 2♦ or 2♥ at responder's second turn. Only if the hand is a reverser is 2♥ bid.

And now for something a little different; minor two-suiters.

(a) 1345	(b) 1354	(c) 3145	(d) 3154
1♣ 2♥	1♣ 2NT	1♣ 2♥	1♣ 3♦
2♠ 2NT	3♣ 3♦	3♣ 3♦	
3♣ 3♦			

Table 11

Note that all the relays start with a bid of 2♥ or higher. This is because minors are shown by implication. In hand (a) the first response is 2♥. This bid means two things: the hand has both minors (at least 5-4), and it is a reverser, ie it holds four diamonds and the club suit will be five cards or longer. 2♠ is the relay and 2NT announces high shortage, ie spades will be shorter than the hearts. After the 3♣ relay 3♦ fixes the shape at 5431. The information is complete. 1; We know the suits and their relative length. 2; We know the short suit is spades. 3; We know the shape is 5431. Again, only one hand meets these criteria – 1345.

Hand (b) is even more tersely described. The 2NT response means both minors, not a reverser, and high shortage. 3♦ fixes the shape and again this is also all that is needed to know. Hand (d) is very interesting. In one bid the precise shape is shown! It is important to understand why. If this one hand is understood then the essential kernel of Symmetric Relay has been mastered. The bid is understood with the notion of implication.

- ♦ No suits were shown so it must be a minor two-suiter;
- ♦ It is not long-legged as 2♠ was not bid;
- ♦ 3♦ was bid so it is a 5431 shape;
- ♦ It is not a reverser as 2♥ was not bid;
- ♦ There is no high shortage as 2NT was not bid.

Yet again all the information is there. 3154 is the only hand that meets these criteria. Quiz: what does the following bidding show; 1♣ – 3♥? If you can answer that then you are well on the way.

Even shortage; same story. Bid the suits, bid 3♣ to show even shortage, nominate the shape. There are only two even shortage shapes, 7411 and 5422. Let's try 2524. 1♣ – 1♥; 1♠ – 2♣; 2♦ – 3♣; 3♦ – 3♣. The first two rounds of bidding set the suits. 3♣ the fixed the hand as 'even shortage'. Finally the shape is nominated at 5422. Follow the bids through [Tables 4](#) and [9](#).

THREE SUITERS

Three-suiters are shown by two specific sequences. **Table 6** showed the ways of identifying a major and a minor three-suiter. **Tables 12 and 13** show how the relay is continued.

Majors

1♣	1♥		
1♠	1NT		
2♣	2♦	(Major 3 suiter)	
2♥	2♠	High shtg	
	2NT	4441	
	3♣	4450	4414
	3♦	4540	4405
	3♥	5440	4504
	3♠		5404

Table 12

Note:

The major and minor two-suiters are really bid the same way. The difference is that the minor two-suiter is up one step because it is shown at 2♥ whereas a major two-suiter is fixed at 2♦.

Minors

1♣	2♣		
2♦	2♥	(Minor 3 suiter)	
2♠	2NT	High shtg	
	3♣	4144	
	3♦	4045	1444
	3♥	4054	0445
	3♠	5044	0454
	3NT		0544

Table 13

BALANCED HANDS

These are only 4432 and 4333. 5332 shapes are bid as single suiters. 2♣ is the relay and responder bids 2♦ with two four-card suits of the same colour (or with 4333 with a four-card minor). He bids 2♥ with two suits of the same rank. After the relay bid of 2♥ or 2♠ respectively he then bids his doubleton. The doubleton is bid in the order ♠♣♦♥. If two odd suits, ie hearts and clubs or spades and diamonds are held then the response to 2♣ is to run on to the doubleton directly. 1♣ – 1NT; 2♣ – 3♦ shows 3424. 4333 hands are identified with a bid of 2♠. A major 4333 is bid at 2♠ directly over 2♣. A minor 4333 is identified by the sequence 1♣

- 1NT; 2♣ - 2♦; 2♥ - 2♠. One more step pinpoints the four-card suit. The way to remember which four-card suit is shown first is the principle that length is shown from the bottom up.

1♣	1NT		
2♣	2♦	Colour	
	2♥	Rank	
	2♠	4333	Via 2♦
	2NT	Short spades	
	3♣	Short clubs	3433 3334
	3♦	Short diamonds	4333 3343
	3♥	Short hearts	

Table 14

EXTREME SHAPES

The first thing that needs to be said is that this is the least important part of this book. Extreme shapes happen so rarely that they do not warrant much effort. Even when you do get an extreme shape either you or the opponents will be breaking the relay anyway. If you were dealt ♠KQJ87652 ♥85 ♦KQJ ♣void you would probably be opening the hand 4♠. For the sake of completeness how are the hands shown? It is done in two steps. First show a regular shape as recorded below:

- ♦ Show all extreme single-suiters as 5332.
- ♦ Show all extreme short-legged two-suiters as 5431.
- ♦ Show all extreme long-legged two-suiters as 5521.

Then if partner signs off one generally bids again by bidding the long suit or one of the long suits.



4. OTHER RELAYS

In Symmetric other opening bids can also utilise the same relay as after the 1♣ opening. But there are some differences. The most obvious is that it is responder who initiates the relay. So after a 1♦ opening responder can choose to relay or not. The relay bid is 1NT. So if the bidding begins 1♦ 1NT a game forcing sequence is begun and *opener* describes his hand. Any response other than 1NT is natural and non-forcing. Opener thereafter bids fairly naturally to describe his suit.

The 1♦ opening bid is one of the better features of Symmetric Relay. In most big club systems the 1♦ bid is a catchall. In Relay the 1♦ opening bid is specific. It is limited to the 11–15 hcp range; it shows an unbalanced two-suited or three-suited hand; it denies a five-card major. It may or may not hold a diamond suit. In terms of frequency the 1♦ bid usually shows a 5–4 two-suited hand. The list of shapes is:

- ♦ 4441 All
- ♦ 5440 Bu t not including a five-card major
- ♦ 5431 Bu t not including a five-card major
- ♦ 6421 Bu t not including a six-card major
- ♦ 6430 Bu t not including a six-card major
- ♦ 7411 Bu t not including a seven-card major
- ♦ 7420 Bu t not including a seven-card major
- ♦ 5521 Bu t not including a five-card major
- ♦ 5530 Bu t not including a five-card major
- ♦ 6511 Bu t not including a five or six-card major
- ♦ 6520 Bu t not including a five or six-card major

The following hands would all qualify for a 1♦ opening: *1444, 3154, 1346, 4405, 4225, 1174, 1147*. The following hand shapes would not: *3361* (single suited), *5134* or *1561* (five-card major), *1265* (too many cards), *3442* or *2353* (balanced). While responder does not initially know what two or three suits are held, by opener's second bid he will often be well placed.

1 DIAMOND RELAY

1♦	1NT	<i>(relay)</i>				
2♣	Hearts		<i>(or red 3 suiter)</i>			
2♦	Minors					
2♥	S and C		H and C			
2♠	Black 3 suiter		red 3 suiter	reverser		
2NT	S and D		high shtg	H and D	long legged	
3♣			even shtg	high shtg		
3♦			5431	even shtg	high shtg	
3♥	7411	6421		5431	even shtg	
3♠	5422	6430	7411	6421	5521	
3NT			7420	5422	6430	5530
4♣					7420	5620
4♦					6520	

Table 15

The relay has a clear similarity to the 1♣ relay. From the 2NT level onwards the shortages and shape are the same as the 1♣ relay. The differences consist of (1) a different method for describing the suits; (2) the relay for both minors is up one step from the usual relay; and (3) three-suiter are shown by a bid of 2♠.

From Table 15 it will be seen that the two suiters are shown as follows:

	1 st reply	2 nd reply
Hearts and clubs	2♣	2♥
Hearts and diamonds	2♣	2NT or higher
Spades and clubs	2♥	2NT or higher
Spades and diamonds	2NT or higher	
Clubs and diamonds	2♦	

Table 16

It may help to remember the initial bids by remembering that suits are bid in the order ♥ ♠ ♣ ♦. There are no major two-suiters as they are opened with a bid of 1♥ or 1♠. The three suiters are identified by a bid of 2♠ and thereafter go in a stepped response. Table 17 shows the three suited responses. They are easy to memorise when one realises that the steps follow the normal principles; shortages shown before shape, more common shapes shown first, and length is shown from the bottom up.

2♠	2 NT	<i>(relay for black 3 suiter)</i>	
3♣		high shtg	
3♦		4414	
3♥		4405	4144
3♠			4045
3 NT			4054

Table 17

2♠	2NT	<i>(relay for red 3 suiter)</i>	
3♣		high shtg	
3♦		4441	
3♥		4450	1444
3♠			0445
3nt			0454

To give a few examples:

(a) 1345	(b) 1354	(c) 3145	(d) 4117
1♦ 1NT	1♦ 1NT	1♦ 1NT	1♦ 1NT
2♦ 2♥	2♦ 2♥	2♦ 2♥	2♥ 2♠
2♠ 2NT	3♣ 3♦	2♠ 2NT	3♣ 3♦
3♣ 3♦	3♥	3♥	3♥
3♥			

Table 18

Hands (a) – (c) are the same hand shapes as in **Table 11**. Note the differences: It is now opener who is describing his hand shape. The initial bids to show the suits (1♦ – 1NT; 2♦) are different. Also the relay is up one step. The bidding thereafter follows the same pattern. Shortages and shape are shown, albeit one level higher. Hand (d): 1NT starts the relay. 2♥ shows four spades and longer clubs, 3♣ shows even shortage ie 2-2 or 1-1 in the other suits, and 3♥ fixes it at a 7411 shape.

1 HEART RELAY

The 1♥ opening bid is similar to the precision 1♥. It shows five or more hearts in the 11-15 range. There can be a longer minor suit. Where a major-minor two-suiter is held that includes a five-card major it is appropriate to open with the major suit even if the minor suit is longer. All long-legged major two suiters are opened 2NT.

Responder can game force with a 1NT response. This commences the relay and **Tables 19 – 21** describe the various relays. Again as with a 1♦ opening the relay is essentially the same as over the 1♣ opening.

SINGLE-SUITERS

1♥	1NT	(relay)	
2♠		High shtg	_____
2NT		Mid shtg	_____
3♣		Even shtg	_____ 2722
3♦		5332	_____
3♥		6331	2623
3♠		7321	2632
3NT		7330	3622

Table 19

A 1636 hand would be shown as follows: 1♥ – 1NT; 2♠ – 2NT; 3♥. The 2♠ announced the hand as a single suiter and either 7222 or high shortage. 3♥ fixed the shape at 6311.

TWO-SUITERS

1♥	1NT	(relay)		
2♣		Clubs		
2♦		Diamonds		
2♥		Spades		
2♠		Long legged	_____	
2NT		High shtg	_____	
3♣		Even shtg	_____	high shtg
3♦		5431		even shtg
3♥		6421	7411	5521
3♠		6430	5422	5530 5611
3NT		7420		5620 6511
4♣				6520

Table 20

This relay is virtually identical with the 1♣ relay – see Table 9. About the only difference is that the 2♥ bid specifically shows spades. From Table 20 it can be seen that there is not the facility to show a long-legged two suiter. It is for this reason that these two suiters are shown with a 2NT opening bid.

One of the things the relayer has to watch out for is long-legged two suiters. It is possible for the relay to pass 3NT. To take a practical example: 1♥ – 1NT; 2♦ – 2♥; 2♠ – 2NT; 3♣ – 4♣. Often passing 3NT is not a problem. If it could be a problem then responder has to watch out when he hears the 2♠ bid. At that point he can break the relay by bidding, say, 3NT. If

he chooses to relay with 3♣ he risks a 4♣ response. In this sequence 4♣ shows 2605. A 3NT response to 3♣ would have shown 2506. (Incidentally this is one reason why length is shown from the bottom up. Three No Trumps is not passed where the minor suit is longer.)

THREE SUITERS

1♥	1 NT	
2♣	2♦	
2♥	2♠	
2 NT		0544
3♣		4504
3♦		4540

Table 21

This is a specific sequence. It can be remembered in this way: The 2♥ bid cannot be a reverser because there are no reversers after 1♥ or 1♠ opening. One practical consequence of this is that the 2♣ bid should be alerted at the table. On inquiry the answer would be along the lines '2♣ shows either clubs or any heart three-suiter'.

The three-suiter has to be 5440. It cannot be 4441 because you have just opened a five-card major. The short suit is established in a step response and is easily remembered with the principle that shortage is shown from the top down.

1 SPADE RELAY

SINGLE-SUITERS

2♠	High shtg		
2NT	Mid shtg		
3♣	Even shtg		7222
3♦	5332		
3♥	6331	6223	
3♠	7321	6232	
3NT	7330	6322	

Table 22

There is no difference between the 1♥ and 1♠ relays.

TWO-SUITERS

1♠	1NT	<i>(relay)</i>			
2♣	Clubs				
2♦	Diamonds				
2♥	Hearts				
2♠	Long legged				
2NT	High shtg				
3♣	Even shtg		high shtg		
3♦	5431		even shtg		
3♥	6421	7411	5521		
3♠	6430	5422	5530	5611	
3NT	7420		5620	6511	
4♣			6520		

Table 23

THREE SUITERS

1♠	1NT	
2♣	2♦	
2♥	2♠	
2NT		5044
3♣		5404
3♦		5440

Table 24

1 NO TRUMP RELAY

Symmetric has a weak no trump. The range is 12 – 15 hcp. Initial reaction may be that a four-point range is a disadvantage. In fact that is not the case. This is one of the more difficult bids to compete against. So an immediate advantage of the four-point range is that one gets to open 1NT more often. Partner occasionally must exercise care in deciding whether to invite to game with a larger range opposite. But as against that it is a little harder to defend against an opening bidder who has a four-point rather than a three-point range.

The hand shapes are 4333, 4432, and 5332 where the five-card suit is a minor. 5332 hands with a five card major must be opened 1♥ or 1♠.

It is not essential to play a relay over 1NT. There are two schools of thought. One is that balanced hands are less in need of the relays and

existing methods are good enough. The other view is that responder's hand does not have to be balanced and if anything the relays are more important due to the high frequency of 1NT openings. A more practical reason for not learning this relay is that it is not the same as the relay after 1♣ - 1NT. This is due to the fact that the relay after 1♣ - 1NT does not accommodate 5332 shapes. Some players have devised schemes to allow for this but the further consequence is that these schemes do not make provision for a stayman inquiry. Given that there is already enough to learn it is initially better not to play a relay over a 1NT opening bid. Later when the core of Symmetric has been mastered a relay can be played. **Tables 25-27** describe a relay shown to me by Wayne Burrows that accommodates five-card minors *and* the stayman convention.

1 NT	2♣			
2♦	2♥	(relay)		
2♠		Clubs	_____	
2NT		Minors	_____	
3♣		2353		2335
3♦		3253	2344	3235
3♥		3352	3244	3325
3♠		3343		3334

Table 25

1NT	2♣			
2♥	2♠	(relay)		
2NT		Majors	_____	
3♣		Clubs	_____	
3♦		2443		4423
3♥		3442	2434	4432
3♠		3433	3424	

Table 26

1NT	2♣			
2♠	2NT	(relay)		
3♣		Clubs	_____	
3♦		4243		
3♥		4342	4234	
3♠		4333	4324	

Table 27

2 CLUB RELAY

The 2♣ opening bid shows a six-card or longer club suit. It can include a four-card diamond suit but not a four-card major. If there is a diamond suit it will be exactly four cards in length. The relay response is 2♦. The relays after a 2♣ or 2♦ opener are very easy to remember. The main thing to remember is that there is no 5332 shape in the single suited relay. That hand would be opened 1NT. Accordingly the 6331, 7321, and 7330 shapes are all down one step. Likewise the two-suited relay does not have a 5422 shape as that shape is opened with a 1♦ bid. The consequence of that is that there is only one two-suited even shortage shape and that is shown via the sequence 2♣ – 2♦; 2♥ – 2♠; 3♣.

2♣	2♦	<i>(relay)</i>	
2♥	Reverser	_____	
2♠	High shtg	_____	_____
2 NT	Mid shtg	_____	high shtg
3♣	Even shtg	_____	2227 1147
3♦	6331	_____	6421
3♥	7321	2236	6430
3♠	7330	2326	7420
3 NT		3226	

Table 28

2 DIAMOND RELAY

The 2♦ opening bid shows a six-card or longer diamond suit. As with the 2♣ opening bid it cannot contain a four-card major. Nor can it include a club suit. It must be single-suited. All two-suited hands with diamonds are opened 1♦. The relay is commenced with a bid of 2♥ and is very similar to the 2♣ relay. The only difference is that it can never be two suited.

2♦	2♥	<i>(relay)</i>	
2♠	High shtg	_____	_____
2NT	Mid shtg	_____	_____
3♣	Even shtg	_____	2272
3♦	6331	_____	
3♥	7321	2263	
3♠	7330	2362	
3 NT		3272	

Table 29

2 NO TRUMPS

Shows 5-5 or better in the majors with 11 – 15 hcp. 3♣ is the relay.

2NT	3♣	<i>(relay)</i>	
3♦		High shtg	
3♥		Even shtg	┌
3♠		5521	└
3NT		5530	5611
4♣		5620	6511
4♦		6520	

Table 30

This relay is one step up from the 1♣ relay (after a 1♣ opening a 2♠ bid shows the long-legged shape). A 3♥ or 3♠ response invites game in that suit. To sign-off in three of a major bid a conventional 3♦. This requires opener to bid 3♥ which will be passed or corrected to 3♠.

Third or fourth in hand it is probably preferable to open 1♠, especially if only 5 – 5. A passed hand cannot initiate a relay.



5. EXTENDING THE RELAY

SECOND FORCE RELAY

So far the relay over club has proceeded on the basis that there has been a positive response to 1♣. But can the relay be played over a 1♦ negative? The short answer is that it can. Table 31 shows how this is accomplished. 1♥ is used as a second force showing 19 or 20 + hcp. 1♠ becomes the second negative. From there the relay is the same apart from being two steps up.

1♣	1♦	
1♥	1♠	2 nd negative
	1NT	Hearts
	2♣	Spades
	2♦	Balanced etc. Same except 2 steps up.

Table 31

The issues are first, whether you actually want to do this; and second, in that event there are some other consequential differences. These relate to *controls*, *cue bidding*, and dealing with *intervention*. These differences do not affect the shape apart from the obvious raise of level and are dealt with elsewhere.

Playing Relay brings home the value of bidding space and utilising the relay two steps up is not something to be taken lightly. The critical level of 3NT is passed sooner. As against that, this is an area where big club systems have it all over the so-called natural methods that open a big 2♣. The very strong hand often only needs one or two particular bits of information. A strong club system and Symmetric in particular is the most effective way of finding out. Even with a strong 20+ hand it is not compulsory to use the 2nd force and so the only real downside is the loss of a natural 1♥ bid.

What qualifies as a second positive? The rule of thumb is that it contains a minimum of five high-card points and at least one control. All hands that do not meet these criteria make a second negative bid of 1♠.

WEAK RELAYS

One of the most useful relays is the *weak relay*. Sometimes during a relay sequence the relayer is not sure whether to continue relaying or to sign off in game. He may think that if he continues to relay and partner shows nothing extra then he may be doing no more than giving information to the opponents. This is where the weak relay comes in. During a relay sequence a two-step bid is a weak relay. So even 1♣ – 1NT; 2♦ is a weak relay. What it says is simply this: ‘partner are you minimum or maximum? If you are minimum bid one step up, otherwise continue the relay’. So in the example given responder with a minimum hand will bid 2♥. If he has a maximum hand he will continue the relay. In the latter event the relay is pushed up two steps. Game bids are never weak relays. Compare [Table 32](#) with [Table 14](#).

1♣	1NT	
2♦	2♥	Minimum, ie up to about 12 hcp
	2♠	Max, and 3 + controls, (colour)
	2NT	Max, and 3 + controls, (rank)

Table 32

What counts as a maximum? This is a matter of partnership agreement but a good starting point is a hand that is a full trick stronger than it could be. So if partner could take an ace (not a king) away from his hand and still respond 1NT in the example above then he would have a maximum. In addition an extra control must be held. The matter of controls is dealt with in Section 6.

RESPONDER CONTINUES THE RELAY

It may happen that after opener signs off in that responder wishes to continue. Say opener has opened 1♣ and responder has shown a 1255 shape and opener has bid 3NT. If responder has x xx AKQxx KQJxx there may well be a slam. The shape was shown at a bid of 3♥. Opener may have bid 3NT because (1) there is no fit and that is the only playable game; (2) he is minimum and wants to stop; (3) there is a fit but a nine trick game may be better than five of a minor. In cases (2) and (3) there may well be a slam. Opposite two aces and three card support one would like to investigate slam. A grand may be cold as well. So one continues to bid. The question is what does one bid? In this situation responder shows his controls starting at three. In this example you hold four controls so would bid 4♦. What this says is first that you hold four

controls; and second, that you have extra values. Opener now bids 4♥ starting Denial Cue Bids or signs off. A bid of 4NT would be to play.

One should take care before advancing in this fashion. The above example is clear cut. In less obvious situations you may be guided by the opportunity partner has had to make a weak relay. If he has had that opportunity and perhaps the space below 3NT to inquire about controls you would need quite a bit more than an extra ace.

One matter that may encourage you to bid after a sign off is the strength of your long suit. Ax Kx Kxxxxxx Kx is not as strong as Ax Kx KQJ10987 xx.



6. CUE BIDDING

After the shape is shown the relay continues. But before the cue bidding is launched the number of controls is established, and only then are the location of the high cards identified. It is done by a method of cue bidding known as *denial cue bidding*. These procedures can run on from one to the other. The method of denial cue bidding is efficient and operates in a stepped response. It works like this: after shape and controls are shown responder cue bids his suits in order of length. So a 1453 hand will show his high cards in diamonds first, then hearts, and then clubs. Singletons are not cue bid. With this method Aces, Kings, Queens, and often Jacks are shown in all suits.

CONTROLS

Here are the basic rules for numbers of controls:

- ♦ An opening hand (eg 1♥) must have at least two controls.
- ♦ A positive response to 1♣ must also have two controls.
- ♦ After a second force a second positive must include one control.
- ♦ To give a positive response to a weak relay three controls must be held.

When counting controls include a singleton ace, a singleton king, and a doubleton ace-king. After learning responder's shape opener may sign off. Normally he will check for controls but for a number of reasons may choose not to do so. In that event responder may have a strong hand and be disappointed that opener has not asked to show the number of controls. Responder can continue the relay by showing the number of controls in a stepped response starting at three. A few examples:

1♣	1♥	The 3♦ bid showed 3532. Opener relays with 3♥. That bid continues the relay by asking for controls. Responder bids 3♠ to show two controls. Why exactly two controls? Because that is the minimum number for of controls for an opening bid. Had responder held three controls he would have bid 3NT. With four controls he bids 4♣.
1♠	3♦	
3♥	3♠	

1♣	1♥	Opener has signed off in 3NT. He probably decided that he did not want to risk bypassing 3NT by asking about controls. A 4♣ response with only four controls may be too high. However if responder has a good hand with, say, five controls he can bid 4♥. The first step of 4♣ would show three controls, 4♦ would have shown four etc.
1♠	3♦	
3NT		

One issue a partnership must agree upon is running on with controls. The basic rule in Symmetric is that you always run on to the next part of the relay. However, after showing shape it is optional whether you run on to show controls. Most times there is not the choice. In the examples above the single-suited relay ended at 3♦ so if opener wanted to continue the relay he had to bid 3♥ to ask for controls (or 3♠ a weak relay). But what if responder's shape was 7330? This relay ends at 3NT – or does it? Say responder has 3730. 1♣ – 1♥; 1♠ – 3NT would be the anticipated auction. The next part of the relay is announcing the number of controls so by playing the 'run-on' the 3NT bid would show exactly two controls. The sequence 1♣ – 1♥; 1♠ – 4♣ would show 3730 and exactly three controls, 4♦ would show 3730 and four controls and so on. This is efficient and saves bidding space. The downside is that sometimes 3NT can be passed unintentionally.

The obvious shapes to watch out for are 6332 with high 3, 7330, 7420, 5422, 6520 with low shortage, 6511 with high 6, 5440 with high 5 in 1♣ relays, 4432 with short hearts, 4333. These are all end-of-the-line shapes. So there are apparently two ways of playing this: (1) never run on to show controls; or (2) always run on to show controls. There is not too much risk in the latter course. It is important to bear in mind that the relayer can break off the relay at any time. After gaining a little experience in relay responder will be able to decide whether he wants to take the risk before he commits to another round of relay bidding. Second, it is often only the more extreme shapes that automatically bypass 3NT and they tend to be played in suit contracts in any event. Third, relayer can sometimes use the *weak relay* in situations where he does not want to pass 3NT.

In fact it is possible to have a compromise solution. One method is never to run on for balanced hands, and always to run on for other types. Another method is to run on but not past 3NT. Yet another compromise is to run past 3NT only when five or more controls are held. My current method is to run on only if a maximum is held. This, and the combina-

tion of other factors above mean that 3NT is virtually never bypassed unless there is sufficient strength, shape or both to justify the course of action. This may seem to be cutting things rather fine. That is a fair point but it is an issue that crops up a lot in play especially where the relay is pushed up a step.

DENIAL CUE BIDS

Denial cue bids are so named because you stop bidding when you do **not** have an honour in a particular suit. The bidding proceeds after the number of controls is established. The relayer continues to relay by bidding 'one-up'. Responder's first step is to show or deny an ace or king in his longest suit. Say opener has relayed with a bid of 4NT; then responder with a 3325 shape would bid 5♣ to deny the ace or king of clubs. A 5♦ response would say 'I have the ace or king (or both) of clubs but I do not have the ace or king of spades'. A 5♥ response would say I have ace or king of clubs, ace or king of spades but I do not have the ace or king of hearts. Here are some rules:

- ♦ Show ace or king in longest suit first, higher ranking before lower ranking if two or more suits of equal length.
- ♦ After going through each suit once, one goes through them again, now showing second top honour.
- ♦ The third pass through the suit will show or deny the Jack.
- ♦ Do not show 10s.
- ♦ Singletons not shown.
- ♦ 7321 hands: go through the doubleton and the trebleton twice. Also go through them in order of rank, (ie you treat it as two trebletons).

show	show	show	AKQ
show	show	deny	AK AQ KQ
show	deny	show	AJ KJ
show	deny	deny	A K
deny	show	show	QJ
deny	show	deny	Q
deny	deny	show	J
deny	deny	deny	

Table 33



7. INTERVENTION

Where the intervention is at a pre-emptive level then Symmetric players are in pretty much the same boat as everyone else. You need understandings as to what your doubles are and at what level. And you just have to exercise your bidding judgment as best you can. More frequently the intervention is at a low level. In these instances the intervention actually assists opener and partner!

How Symmetric handles intervention is dependant upon whether the intervention occurs before or after the relay is established. In the former situation the prime consideration is whether to begin relaying despite the competitive bidding. In the latter situation the intention is to continue the relay unless the intervention is too high. The point for partnership agreement is how high that intervention must be before the relay is automatically broken.

INTERVENTION BEFORE RELAY ESTABLISHED

Suit Openings

Over $1\spadesuit$, $1\heartsuit$, and $1\clubsuit$, the relay is commenced with a bid of 1NT. For reasons of simplicity it is probably best to retain that as the only means of establishing the relay. So the sequence $1\spadesuit - [1\heartsuit] - 1NT$ would begin the relay. After $1\spadesuit [1NT]$ the relay is blocked and natural bidding continues from thereon.

Likewise with $2\clubsuit$ and $2\heartsuit$ openings. The original game force relay commences with bids of $2\heartsuit$ and $2\spadesuit$ respectively. Keeping these as the relay means that the relay is immediately broken by all intervention apart from a double.

1NT

If you are playing a relay over a 1NT opening bid then it is a good idea to drop the relay over all intervention. This includes interference by second or fourth hand. This is simply a practical suggestion. One can continue relaying over this intervention but it is rather taxing. This is due to the additional considerations that arise from the fact that responder may not wish to relay at all. Opener is not aware of responder's intentions.

1 Club

1♣ openings are a special case. Intervention by second hand: The relay continues with intervention up to [1♥]. If the intervention is [1♥] then *double* shows hearts and opener continues the relay with 1♠. (Opener may choose to make a penalty pass). Intervention by fourth hand: After a 1♦ response and intervention by fourth hand the relay is dropped. After a pass by fourth hand and a 1♥ second force then the relay is established and continues over interference.

INTERVENTION AFTER RELAY ESTABLISHED

Once a relay has begun it now is a fairly simple matter to cope with intervention. There is one issue to decide and two things to do. The issue that needs to be decided by partnership agreement is how high the intervention must be before the relay is broken. The two things to do at the table following opposition bidding are (1) work out whether the relay is broken; and (2) make the appropriate bid.

The effect of intervention is one of three things (1) break the relay; or (2) to change the level of the relay; or (3) no effect on the level of the relay. Say the bidding has begun 1♣ [NO] 1♠ [1NT] the net result is that this 'interference' of 1NT will help opener because the level of the relay will now drop one step. This is an area that is well worth effort. Low level intervention is relatively frequent and more often helps you rather than the opponents themselves.

So how does the relay 'drop' one step? Consider this: every time the opponents intervene in a forcing sequence you are given two free bids – pass and double, or pass and redouble if the bid was a double. These bids were not otherwise available to you. It is now nothing more than a matter of arithmetic to determine whether the relay goes down, stays the same, or goes up. In the example above after 1♣ [NO] 1♠ [1NT] opener notes 'we lose *one* step because the [1NT] bid took up *one* bidding space (ie I cannot bid 1♠) ; but we gain *two* steps because we have pass and double available to us. Two minus one equals one.' The relay is now one step down.

There is only really important rule regarding intervention and it is this: *pass* is always the first step. Or rather, *pass* is always the first step if it is available. If you are in the pass-out seat then double or redouble would be the first step. There are two situations: does the intervention come in front of the relayer (eg the 1♣ opener after a positive response) or does

the intervention come in front of responder (eg the 1♥ opener after a 1NT relay from partner)? For the sake of clarity the first step is always the same. So the *relayer* must pass to continue the relay. Any other bid will break off the relay (but watch out for weak relays later). For responder pass will be the first step in making his response. 1♠ [NO] 1NT [NO]; 2♥ [X] NO – the last pass by relayer is the relay asking opener to continue describing his hand.

(There is one difference between the intervention coming in front of the relayer and coming in front of responder. When the intervention is in front of the responder he *immediately* gets the benefit of the two free steps. That to say *pass* is the first step in his relay response and *double* is the second. But when the intervention is in front of the relayer two steps are still gained but only one step is gained immediately. *Pass* is the relay and your side gets the benefit of the second free step when responder has *double* available to him for his first step response. The significance of this will be apparent later.)

After 1♣ [NO] 1♠ [1NT]; opener *passes* to relay and responder doubles as his first step (pass in not available to him). Compare hands (a) and (b) below:

(a)				(b)			
1♣	[NO]	1♠	[NO]	1♣	[NO]	1♠	[1NT]
1NT	[NO]	2♦	[NO]	NO	[NO]	2♣	[NO]
2♥	[NO]	3♦		2♦	[NO]	3♣	

Table 34

In hand (a) responder describes a 5341 shape. The 2♦ bid in hand (a) showed diamonds and happens to be two steps above the 1NT bid. In hand (b) the pass by opener is the relay and the 2♣ bid shows diamonds. It too is two steps above opener's last bid – double would have been the first step. Opener thereafter relays with 2♦ and it is apparent the relay is one step down.

The analysis above is an example of manually working out the intervention. Every time the opponents intervene you could work through it. However it is easier to simply look at the first bid add the steps it has taken, take away two steps and that is the level of the relay. So any double by the opponents will drop an established relay by two steps. A bid that is two steps up will leave the relay at the same level.

Let's try intervention in front of responder:

(a)				(b)			
1♣	[NO]	1♠	[NO]	1♣	[NO]	1♠	[NO]
1NT	[NO]	2♦	[NO]	1NT	[2♦]	x	[NO]
2♥	[NO]	3♦		2♥	[NO]	3♦	

Table 35

Responder hears the 2♦ bid and thinks: 'The 2♦ bid took up two steps – our relay must be at the same level. Therefore the relay is not broken. I was going to bid 2♦, a two-step bid, I now double as that is the two-step bid. Remember pass is *always* the first step. This holds for responder as well as opener.

So how high must the intervention be before the relay is broken? My recommendation is that if you are learning relay for the first time then the relay should not be pushed up at all. You may recall the discussions of the 1♥ second force and the weak relay. In those cases you pushed up the relay two steps with the use of those methods. It is quite playable to allow the relay to be pushed up. For example 1♣ [NO] 1♠ [2♦]: the [2♦] bid is three steps above the 1♠ bid. Three minus two equals one – the relay is up one step. The 5431 shape mentioned above would get shown at 3♥ rather than 3♦. So if opener wishes to continue to relay then *pass* would be the relay bid.

The two issues for partnership agreement are; first, do you continue to relay over *any* interference? And second if you do continue the relay, how high must the intervention be before the relay is automatically broken? The recommendation is that if the opposing bid is two steps or less above your bid then the relay continues. On that basis the relay does not get pushed up.

The next matter to consider is further intervention by the opponents. RHO may double and then LHO bids something. 1♠ [NO] 1NT [x]; NO [2♥] ? Does the 2♥ bid break the relay? No it does not. The double by RHO dropped the relay two steps. The 2♥ bid is three steps over opener's pass. That pushes the relay up one step. So overall the relay is still down one step. Let's say opener had 6124:

1♠	[NO]	1NT	[NO]	1♠	[NO]	1NT	[X]	1♠	[NO]	1NT	[X]
2♣	[NO]	2♦	[NO]	NO	[NO]	XX	[NO]	NO	[2♥]	NO	[NO]
2NT	[NO]	3♣	[NO]	2♥	[NO]	2♣	[NO]	2NT	[NO]	3♣	[NO]
3♥				3♣				3♥			

Table 36

INTERVENTION OVER 1 CLUB

- ♦ Pass is always the first step. ie – *for opener*: pass is the relay – *for responder*: pass is the first step if available. If pass is not available then double is responder's first step.
- ♦ Double (or redouble) is the second step for responder.
- ♦ Over 1♣ we continue the relay if the relay is not pushed up.
- ♦ If there has been no intervention, or if the previous intervention has not altered the level of the auction, then we continue the relay over intervention unless the intervention is three steps or more. Thus:

1♣	[NO]	1♦	[1♥]	
NO				not relay
X				not relay, take-out

Table 37

Pass is not the relay because a relay has not yet been established.

1♣	[1♥]			relay continues; but
1♣	[1♠]			relay breaks; and

1♣	[NO]	1♠	[2♣]	relay continues; but
1♣	[NO]	1♠	[2♦]	relay breaks

1♣	[X]	NO	0-8) ie relay
		XX	8+ hearts) is down
		1♦	8+ spades) two steps

1♣	[1♥]	NO	0-8	ie 1 st step
		X	8+ hearts	ie 2 nd step
		1♠	8+ spades	ie 3 rd step

1♣	[NO]	1♦	[1♠]	
NO				balanced or holding spades
X				natural, take out

1♣	[NO]	1♥	[1♠]	
NO	[NO]	X		spades ie 1 st step
		1NT		clubs ie 2 nd step
				(relay is down 1 step)

Table 38

INTERVENTION OVER 1 HEART

Here are some examples of intervention over 1♥.

1♥	[x]	1NT		relay
1♥	[1♠]	1NT		relay
1♥	[1NT]	x		relay broken, penalties
1♥	[2♣]			relay broken

1♥	[x]	1NT	[x]	
NO				relay 1 st step
XX				relay 2 nd step
2♣				relay 3 rd step (relay down 2 steps)

1♥	[1♠]	1NT	[2♣]	
NO				relay 1 st step
x				relay 2 nd step
2♦				relay 3 rd step (relay down 1 step)

1♥	[NO]	1NT	[2♣]	
2NT				even shortage

1♥	[NO]	1NT	[2♣]	
2NT	[3♣]	NO		relay

1♥	[NO]	1NT	[2♣]	
2NT	[3♣]	NO	[NO]	
x				2722

Table 39



8. NON RELAY BIDDING

Non-relay bidding is strictly outside the scope of this book. Nevertheless there are situations where the fact of playing relay impacts on non-relay sequences. What follows is a brief description of some of these areas. In addition a more detailed look at the non-relay bids after a 1♦ opening may be helpful.

1 CLUB

Generally the relay is played. But there are quite a few situations where it is not necessary or desirable to relay. If, for example, opener holds a flat 16 or 17 hcp and responder is a passed hand or gives negative responses, opener who is the strong hand will want to bid No Trumps first. It is a good idea to have a basic No Trump structure in place. **Table 41** is a suggested scheme. (Just note that it presupposes you are playing a 1♥ second force but not a 2♣ third force.)

1♣	1♦		
1NT		16 – 18	Stayman and Transfers
1♣	1♦		
1♥	1♠		
1NT		19 – 21	Stayman and Transfers
1♣	1♦	22 – 23	Stayman and Transfers
2NT			
1♣	1♦		
1♥	1♠		
2NT		24–25	Stayman and Transfers
1♣	1♦		
1♥	1♠		
3NT		26–28	4333

Table 40

Note:

After 1♣ – 1♦, 2NT there is no relay.

1 DIAMOND

After a 1♦ opening 1NT is the game-forcing bid that commences the relay. But if responder does not relay **Tables 42** and **43** are a suggested scheme of responses.

1♦	1♥	5 – 13	Hearts
	1♠	8 – 13	Spades
	1NT	13 +	Relay
	2♣♦	8 – 13	Natural
	2♥♠	8 – 13	Single suited 6+ card suit
	2NT	12 – 13	Balanced, must be <i>3334</i> or <i>3343</i>
	3NT	14 – 15	Balanced, must be <i>3334</i> or <i>3343</i>

Table 41

A response of 1♥ can be shaded if responder does not have diamonds and does not want to risk playing in 1♦. Occasionally you may risk a 1♥ bid on a three-card suit as it will be rarely passed. Holding *2344* and six points you can try 1♥ in response to 1♦ as partner with hearts and a minor usually does not raise but bids the minor suit which you can pass.

1♦	1♥	
NO		4441 minimum
1♠		Spades
1NT		Minors
2♣♦		Hearts and the minor
2♥		4441 not minimum
2♠/3♣♦		Splinters and maximum

Table 42

The 2♣ and 2♦ bids above are exceptionally useful. In practice they are invaluable in enabling partner to judge whether to continue – be it to compete to the three-level or to try for game in an uncontested auction.

1♦	1♠	
1NT		Minors
2♣		Clubs and hearts
2♦		Diamonds and hearts
2♠		Natural, tends to be minimum
2NT		Still minors but 15 or long legged
3♣♦♥		Splinters.

Table 43

1 HEART & 1 SPADE

The point to decide here is whether new suit responses are forcing. For example 1♠ – 2♣. There is some point in playing this as a one round force. Responder may have good support and wish to show the second suit before raising to enable opener to judge whether to try for game. But equally there is merit in playing it as non-forcing. The latter option is my preference but as with many aspects of bridge it is more important to have an agreement on a common sequence, even an inferior agreement, rather than no understanding. The same goes for the 2♣ and 2♦ opening bids.

1 NO TRUMP

The 1NT relay is a little tricky because it is initially ambiguous as to whether responder is relaying. The 2♣ bidder may only be interested in finding a major suit or he may wish to find out more. One has to be careful with non-relay responses here because some of the responses are relay. Whenever partner bids one-up it is relay, so the sequence 1NT – 2♣; 2♠ – 2NT would be relay. Also 1NT – 2♣; 2♦ – 2♥ is likewise not available to show a modest hand with both majors.



9. APPENDIX

GLOSSARY, ABBREVIATIONS, AND CONVENTIONS

<i>Controls</i>	Standard neapolitan controls, one point for a king and two for an ace.
<i>Denial Cue Bid</i>	An automatic system of cue bidding where bidding stops when a control is denied.
<i>Hcp</i>	A points system of hand evaluation devised to keep accountants out of game contracts.
<i>High shgt</i>	High Shortage. Used in the relay to announce that the highest ranking of the other two or three suits is shorter than the other or others.
<i>Italics</i>	Hand shapes in italics show the suits in order. A <i>5332</i> hand has five spades and two clubs, while <i>5332</i> can have any five-card suit and any doubleton.
<i>Long-legged</i>	A two-suiter where both suits are at least five cards in length.
<i>Mid shgt</i>	Middle Shortage. Used in the relay to announce that the middle ranking of the three other suits is the shortest.
<i>No</i>	Abbreviation for No Bid.
<i>Relay</i>	Symmetric or Symmetric Relay
<i>Relayer</i>	The player asking the question. That is the 1♣ opener or responder to another opening bid.
<i>Reverser</i>	A short-legged two-suited hand where the four-card suit is higher ranking than the longer suit.
<i>Running on</i>	Related to <i>Implication</i> . If Relay can be seen as three relays (Shape, Number of Controls, Placement of Honours) then one <i>runs on</i> to show the next type of information without waiting to be asked. Likewise within the Shape stage (Suits, Shortage, Shape) one can <i>run on</i> to show the next stage without being asked.
<i>Short-legged</i>	A two-suiter where one suit is exactly four cards and the other is at least five cards.
<i>Square Brackets</i>	Indicate opponents' bids.

<i>Symmetric</i>	This book.
<i>Symmetric Relay</i>	The original book written by Walter Jones and Roy Kerr.
<i>Top Honour</i>	Ace or King or Queen

OPTIONS

Symmetric is not as rigid as it seems at first blush. There are heaps of situations that can be bid differently. Here are a few options:

1. Third Force

After 1♣ – 1♦; 1♥ – 1♠; 2♣ can be the third force. 2♦ can be a third negative. Responder can show his suits with as little as a queen.

2. Denial Cue Bidding

In the first run-through of DCBs a ‘show’ shows ace, king, or queen. Advantage is space saving. There are more ambiguities but in practice almost all can be resolved.

Another useful option is to play a different relay for six-card or longer suits. This is because having a fair number of points and about half his cards in one suit a more efficient method of denial cue bidding is possible. Not only that but the strength of the long suit is more often the thing the Relayer needs to know first.

3. Submarine.

The opening responses to 1♣ are put down on level. A 1♥ response shows spades, a 2♣ response shows diamonds. This helps to keep the asking hand concealed. Great idea but adds to the mental workload.

4. 1♠ opening.

Long-legged major two-suiters can be shown in one of two other ways. First, as proposed earlier under the opening bid of 2NT. Second by building the long-legged two suiters into the 1♠ opening bid. This is a playable method and [Table 44](#) shows how this can be done. The downsides are that it can be a little more difficult to remember and *all* major two suiters are pushed up one step, not just long-legged. The 2NT bid can be retained for other purposes such a weak two suiter or a poor pre-emptive hand with an unspecified suit.

2♣	Clubs				
2♦	Diamonds				
2♥	Hearts				
2♠	Long-legged				
2NT	High shtg		long-legged		
3♣	Even shtg	high shtg	high shtg		
3♦	5431	even shtg	even shtg	high shtg	
3♥	6421	5521	5431	even shtg	
3♠	6430	5530	6421	5521	
3 NT	7420	5620	6430	5530	
4♣		6520	7420	5620	
4♦				6520	

Table 44

5. 2♣ Opening

It is a perfectly playable method to play this as a single suiter only – that is to say without the option of a short-legged minor two suiter. It is simpler and also drops the relay one step.

2♣	2♦	(relay)		
2♥	High shtg			
2♠	Mid shtg			
2 NT	Even shtg		2227	
3♣	6331			
3♦	7321	2236		
3♥	7330	2326		
3♠		3226		

Table 45

Note:

The relay is one level lower than the relay in Table 28.

DIFFERENCES

What follows is a list of differences between *Symmetric* (this book) and the original *Symmetric Relay*.

1. 2♥ Opening Bid

A third method of opening hands with 5–5 in the majors exists. In *Symmetric Relay* an opening bid of 2♥ was used to show these hands. This is still a playable method but weak twos are so popular and effective that in *Symmetric* 2♥ is retained as a weak two with hearts.

2. 1♦ Relay

In Symmetric Relay the relay over 1♦ was commenced with a 1♥ bid. The relay in Symmetric starts with a 1NT bid. The loss of a natural 1♥ bid can be quite inconvenient and the relay in [Table 15](#) is closer to the 1♣ relay.

3. Order of Shapes.

When showing shape Symmetric Relay had several exceptions to the normal rule of showing more common shapes at a lower level. Although theoretically justified the frequency of it actually making a difference is so small that it does not warrant the effort of having something else to learn.

4. Start Controls at Two

An opening hand showing controls made a first step of 'two or three' controls. In Symmetric the first step shows exactly two controls. There is merit in both methods but the less ambiguous option is superior when learning Relay.

5. Extreme Shapes

There are heaps of extreme shapes and *Symmetric Relay* had a specific method to show each. Save your energy for things that will happen more than once in a blue moon.

6. 6322 Relay

The single suited relays in Symmetric Relay showed the 6322 shapes in a different way. For some reason it was always difficult to remember. [Table 46](#) shows the original method. Compare with [Table 7](#).

2♠	High shtg		
2NT	Mid shtg	3♣ direct	3♣ via 2♠
3♣	Even shtg		
3♦			
3♥		7222	low 3
3♠		high 3	mid 3
3NT			

Table 46

BASIC RULES

1. Shortages are shown from the top down. That is show a high shortage before a mid shortage etc.
2. Length, ie suits, are shown from the bottom up.

3. Always run on to the next phase of the relay.
4. 3NT is never a relay.
5. More shapely hands are shown at a higher level than less shapely hands (but beware a couple of exceptions).

LEARNING SYMMETRIC

Symmetric does not have to be learned in one go. The core is the one club relay and should be learned first. My suggestion is to play the relay in the following stages:

1. 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 2♣, 2♦ relays;
Controls and Denial Cue Bidding but do not run on to show controls.
2. Learn how to continue relaying after intervention;
3. Play the weak relays, and relay after the 1♥ second force.
4. Optionally play a relay after a 1NT opening bid.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Below are a few practical examples of Symmetric:

You are dealt E W:

♠	AQ76	K54	1♣ ¹	3♠ ²
♥	863		4♣ ³	4♠ ⁴
♦	A9	KJT653	4NT ⁵	5♠ ⁶
♣	KQJ5	A642	6♣ ⁷	

1. 16 + hcp
2. Shows exact shape – see [Table 9](#).
3. Asking for controls. As 3NT is never a relay opener has to bid 4♣.
4. Four controls shown with neapolitan controls starting at two.
5. At this point in time opener can visualise Kxx Void Kxxxxxx Axxx. The Ace and Kings are located because there is no other permutation of controls given the heart void. He should probably simply shoot 7♣. This would be on the basis of four clubs, five diamonds, three spades and a heart ruff. But if opener is conservative he waits to find out about the queen of diamonds.
6. The 5♠ bid said 'I have ace or king of diamonds, ace or king of clubs, ace or king of spades, do not have the queen of diamonds. In this hand opener already knew about the other controls.

7. Declarer could still bid 7♣ as that is easy if both minors break 3-2 and one is still has chances if the minors break no worse than 4-1.

Here is the bidding if East is dealer:

	1♦ ¹
1NT ²	2♦ ³
2♥ ⁴	3NT ⁵
4♣ ⁶	4♠ ⁷

1. This is the opening bid with both minors.
2. This is the game-forcing bid to start the relay.
3. 2♦ shows both minors.
4. 2♥ is the relay, waiting for further information about shape.
5. 3NT shows the shape. Compare with the 3♠ bid when West was opener. The shape is shown one level higher because the relay with both minors is up one step in the 1♦ relay (Table 15).
6. Asking for the number of controls.
7. Showing five controls. West is now in the same situation as previously.

Changing one or two cards can make a lot of difference.

♠	AQ76	K54	1NT ¹	2♣ ²
♥	863		2♠ ³	2NT ⁴
♦	A9	KJT653	3♣ ⁵	3♦ ⁶
♣	KQ65	AJ42	4♦ ⁷	4♥ ⁸
			5♣ ⁹	5♦ ¹⁰
			6♣ ¹¹	

1. With only fifteen hcp the opening bid is 1NT.
2. Stayman or Relay. Opener does not know at this stage.
3. Opener shows his spade suit. This relay can be followed by tracing through the steps in Table 27.
4. Confirms the relay. Responder waits for information about shape.
5. Shows the club suit. At this stage opener can only be 4324 or 4234.
6. Relay
7. Very interesting! A 3♠ bid would have shown low shortage and therefore a 4324 hand. By running on opener has said that he holds a maximum and five controls. This 4♦ bid by opener is risky; after all he does not know what responder has. He is slightly emboldened by the fact that responder has (1) continued to relay; and (2) has not

used the weak relay. It does pass 3 NT so he could not be criticised for bidding 3♠.

8. Responder is now in a tricky situation. He could have bid 4NT to play but that would work out badly if opener has weak hearts. With the choice he has made he most likely cannot get to play 4NT because after a response of 4♠ a 4NT bid by him would be a further relay. What is more a 4♠ bid would deny the ace of spades and therefore must show the ace of hearts! Ace-King, Ace-Queen, or even Ace-Jack of hearts would mean there is a second stopper. So responder is not happy at this stage. If opener bids 4NT he will probably pass that.
9. This shows a control in spades (must be the ace), a control in clubs, (must be the king) and denies a control in hearts. Responder can now place opener with Axxx, xxx, Ax, Kxxx. He has also shown a maximum and so probably has two queens as well. Maybe a queen and one or two jacks but that is less likely given the comments at note 7 above.
10. Responder can make this bid without any strain as he is now committed to at least 6 clubs.
11. A four-step bid. Opener shows a diamond control (which by now responder already knew about), shows a second honour in spades (must be the queen) shows a second honour in clubs (must be the queen again) and denies a second honour in hearts.

Responder can now visualise AQxx xxx Ax KQxx. He also knows that opener cannot have another jack because that would take him to 16 hcp. Six clubs is probably enough as a heart lead will make it difficult when one of the minors breaks badly.

CHECKLIST

Relay things to agree upon with partner

1♣ relay		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Other Relays	1♦♥♠	<input type="checkbox"/>	2♣♦	<input type="checkbox"/>	2NT <input type="checkbox"/>
Run over 3NT for controls	Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maximum <input type="checkbox"/>
Relay after Intervention	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Intervention pushes up	0 steps	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 step	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 steps <input type="checkbox"/>
Second Force (1♥)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Third Force (2♣)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Weak Relays	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Denial Cue Bids	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
1NT Relay	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Denial Cue Bid up to ...	5 NT	<input type="checkbox"/>	6 NT	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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Symmetric
© 2004 Andrei Sharko
Phone: 64-6-8359519
Fax: 64-6-8359513
Email: andreisharko@xtra.co.nz

