

# Lebensohl: Simple situations where it helps to find the best contract

What do you do with these hands after partner has opened a weak NT (12-14) and right hand opponent has overcalled 2 ♠ ?

♠ 103 ♥ A8 ♦ 764 ♣ KJ10853	♠ 103 ♥ A8 ♦ KQ7 ♣ KJ10853
Hand A	Hand B

It would be nice to bid 3 ♣ with hand A and play there. With hand B, you'd like to bid 3 ♣ as well, in order to find the best contract.

But surely you can't bid 3 ♣ on both. How will partner know which hand you've got? You can fudge this a little by bidding 3NT with hand B and hoping for the best. Whenever I tried this, the defence always took the first 5 or 6 tricks.

The answer to the problem is to play Lebensohl.

Here's how it works after a natural overcall of 1NT. For example, after a 2 ♠ overcall of 1NT:

- 2NT = transfer to 3 ♣. Opener must complete the transfer. Over this a new suit (ie diamonds or hearts) is weak and to play.
- 3 ♣ / ♦ / ♥ are natural and forcing.
- X = invitational raise in NT. Normally 11-12 points.

A natural 2NT is lost, but this is replaced by double showing 11-12 points. Over this opener can bid 3NT with a maximum, bid 2NT with a minimum, or pass with suitable spades.

In the example above, Hand A would bid 2NT and then pass partner's 3 ♣ bid. Hand B can bid a forcing 3 ♣ which should allow the best contract to be reached.

This allows you to play compete at the 3 level in any suit or force to game, removing any ambiguity in the 3 ♣ bid.

One special case is this one:

1NT(2♥ overcall)

2♠=Weak and to play

2NT and the n3♠ over 3♣=Invitational

3♠=Forcing

Using Lebensohl allows you to bid 3NT via 2NT or 3NT direct. Consider these sequences:

1NT(2♥)3NT and

1NT 2♥ 2NT P

3♣ P 3NT

Here there are two ways of reaching 3NT. And one way should be used to show a heart stop, while the other denies one. Fast Arrival Shows Stop is the easiest method; a direct 3NT bid shows a heart stop, via Lebensohl denies one.

Let's look at some examples after partner opens 1NT which is overcalled by 2♥. What do you do with these hands playing Lebensohl?

♠KQ843 ♥J103 ♦52 ♣Q108	♠8 ♥873 ♦A2 ♣J1098642	♠K84 ♥Q104 ♦K1095 ♣K62	♠KQ7 ♥AJ8 ♦K7 ♣Q10842	♠KQ7 ♥642 ♦AKJ ♣J1084
Hand C	Hand D	Hand E	Hand F	Hand G

Hand C has an easy 2♠ bid.

Hand D now has a mechanism for playing in 3♣. Bid 2NT and pass partner's 3♣ bid.

Hand E should invite game in NT by doubling to show 11-12 points.

Hand F should bid a direct 3NT to show values for game and a heart stop.

Hand G should bid 3NT via Lebensohl. Bid 2NT and then 3NT to show game values but no heart stop.

Many people use Lebensohl in another situation in which it is useful to distinguish between a good hand and a bad hand. When the opposition opens a weak two and partner doubles for take out, Lebensohl is useful:

2♥ X P ?

This is a situation when you are forced to bid, hence it is useful to be able to get out at the three level when you have a weak hand. Here:

- 2♠ is weak and to play
- 2NT is Lebensohl, asking partner to bid 3♣ which normally shows a weak hand.
- 3 of a new suit = invitational.

Suits bid via Lebensohl are to play. This can be based on a very weak hand. The benefit of this is that partner knows you have a weak hand. Note the change from forcing to invitational for new suits at the three level. Partner has already shown support, so you can bid game with a suitable hand. You can show a balanced hand with a stopper without by bidding 3NT directly or via Lebensohl respectively. Here are some examples:

2♥ X P ?

♠KQ72 ♥108 ♦764 ♣9752	♠82 ♥963 ♦J109854 ♣Q3	♠KQ3 ♥AJ8 ♦Q74 ♣Q1063	♠KQ3 ♥1084 ♦AKJ83 ♣103	♠KQ3 ♥1084 ♦KJ83 ♣Q93
HandH	HandI	HandJ	HandK	HandL

HandH has an easy 2♠ bid. Partner knows you won't have much as you didn't jump.

HandI should bid 2NT (Lebensohl) and then correct partner's 3♣ to 3♦. This shows a weak hand. Partner must pass 3♦. (Compare this with standard methods – partners have a habit of bidding 3NT over 3♦ and this is not a success.)

HandJ can show values for 3NT and a heart stopper by bidding 3NT direct.

HandK can show values for 3NT and no heart stopper by bidding 2NT and then 3NT over 3♣. 3NT should prove easier than 5♦ if partner has a heart stopper.

HandL should bid 3♦ to show a good hand with diamonds. Non-forcing.

Lebensohl should help to reach the right level when 1NT is overcalled and after the opposition opens a weak two. It also helps to reach the best game. Next time some more sequences where Lebensohl allows you to show different types of hand.

### Some problems:

Playing Lebensohl what do you do after partner's 1NT is overcalled?

1NT    2♠    ?

♠KQ3 ♥A84 ♦763 ♣Q1094	♠106 ♥AQJ1084 ♦63 ♣J102	♠K863 ♥8 ♦QJ109652 ♣10	♠KQ5 ♥AJ82 ♦Q6 ♣Q963
Hand1	Hand2	Hand3	Hand4

What do you do after partner has doubled the weak two:

2♠    X    P    ?

♠1093 ♥85 ♦J10963 ♣763	♠K96 ♥84 ♦KQJ97 ♣A103	♠K104 ♥K983 ♦K1074 ♣J3	♠KJ1084 ♥Q8 ♦K83 ♣1074
Hand5	Hand6	Hand7	Hand8

**Answers:**

- Hand1: An 11 count. You cannot bid a natural 2NT, but double show this hand instead.
- Hand2: It looks like 3♥ should prove a good contract. Bid 2NT (Lebensohl) and when partner bids 3♣, correct to 3♥, which partner must pass.
- Hand3: Just like hand 2, bid to 3♦ via 2NT (Lebensohl).
- Hand4: Enough values for 3NT and a spade stop. Bid 3NT directly to show the spade stop.
- Hand5: Partner has forced you to bid. But you have a way of showing a weak hand. Bid 2NT and correct partner's 3♣ to 3♦, which he should pass. Without Lebensohl, could partner ever resist bidding again over direct 3♦?
- Hand6: A balanced hand with values for 3NT with a spade stop. Bid a direct 3NT to show these three features.
- Hand7: Bid 3♥ to show an invitational hand with four hearts.
- Hand8: Pass looks like the winner here. 2♠ double is not going to be easy.