

Relay Precision

If your partner is wedded to 5-card majors – and/or 1♦ to show spades is currently illegal where you live – you might like to give Precision a whirl. Don't bother with Danielson's 1970s *Relay Precision*, unless your Greek is very good!

Relay Precision has been around for decades in various forms. The original *Kiwi Club* from the late 70s featured 5-card majors.

Until recently, relay systems were muzzled in America. This is from the **2015 ACBL General and Mid Chart**:

Disallowed: Relay (tell me more) systems

However, the ACBL's definition of a relay system was quaint:

Definitions: A sequence of relay bids is defined as system if, after an opening bid of one-of-a-suit, it is started prior to opener's rebid.

So 1NT and higher were exempt, as was a strong 1♣, since opener did the asking. Pairs were thus entitled to use about half a relay system. This changed in 2018. Now it's legal to relay over all opening bids in most American events.

The full Scamp structure over 1♣ is fine. How about 1NT?

Modern Precision pairs like to split the balanced hands between two openings – 1♦ & 1NT. Common is 1NT as 14-16, opening 1♦ with 11-13 balanced, as well as the unbalanced diamond hands.

Simplest is to go with traditional Precision two bids:

1♣	16+ any (17+ if balanced)	
1♦	11-13 bal; or 11-15 unbal (4+♦s)	2♣ = relay
1♥/♠	5-card suits	2♣ = relay
1NT	14-16 balanced, 5cM okay	2♣ = relay Stayman
2♣	6+♣s, or 5♣s & a 4-card Major	2♦ = relay
2♦	3-suited, short diamonds	2NT asks

There are other choices. Equally sensible is to remove 4-card majors from 2♣. Also to discard the rare 2♦ opening, perhaps replacing it with a Multi.

That's fine, though it becomes difficult to design a relay structure over the expanded 1♦ opening, which would have to house the club raptors², plus most of the 3-suiters. Could be a void.

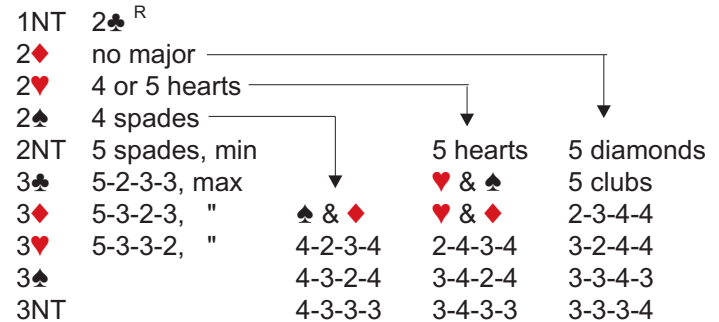
² Raptor - a hand with a 4-card major plus a longer minor

Try this over the 14-16 notrump, which could have a 5-card major:

1NT	2♣	Relay Stayman
	2♦/♥	major transfers
	2♠	raise to 2NT; or 6+ clubs
	2NT	6+ diamonds
	3♣	Puppet Stayman
	3♦+	various minor 2-suiters

This is the modern Australian suite of responses. 2♠ as a raise ensures that invitational Stayman hands will always have a 4-card major. 3♣ as Puppet isn't strictly necessary but it avoids giving away information and shuts out the fourth player.

Here is a possible relay structure:



- 2♣ functions as invitational (& promissory) Stayman.
- 2♥ over 2♦ is Garbage; 2♠ is the relay, dropping into the Scamp No Major structure, one step up.
- Stayman then 2NT should be invitational, so 3♣ is the relay after 2♠ by opener.

Relay Stayman unravels all shapes, allowing subsequent strength asks and DCB. SPs start at 8, Kontrols at 4.

Also, since strong hands go via 2♣, sequences like transfer then a new suit can be invitational if you wish. Or you might try Gladiator.

There's not much to learn for Scampers. The heart hands follow our relay principles – 5-carders; 44s resolving the club hands; 4333 at the end. Spade hands are similar but we hive off and split the 5-carders to allow responder to rest in 2NT opposite a minimum with five spades.

Major openings in Precision

Balanced 14-16 counts with a 5-card major can open 1NT, so balanced major openings will be 11-13.

Some choose to relay with 1NT, though that creates problems:

WEST	EAST	EAST'S HAND
1♠	?	♠ 8
		♥ K 10 6 5
		♦ A 7 3 2
		♣ Q 8 4 2

If 1NT is relay, I guess you bid 2♣ non-forcing with this. It's easy to see that turning out badly. Prefer the 1NT response to be natural-ish and semi-forcing, so responder uses 2♣ to unravel shape.

Compared to Scamp, you start two steps higher, which can't be good. To compensate, there are no flat or canapé hands to worry about, which save steps. Against that, there is no denied major.

If you are greedy, you can throw other hands into 2♣, such as invitational with clubs; maybe 3-card limit raise. To cater for those, opener zooms to 2NT+ with clubs:

	1♥/♠	
2♣ ^R	2♦	balanced; or other major
	2♥	& diamonds
	2♠	1-suiter (6+)
	2NT	& clubs, 5-5
	3♣	& clubs, HS
	3♦	5-2-2-4, etc

The 1-suiters are Up Two (yuk) and 2-suiters are Up One.

	1♠	
2♣ ^R	2♦	balanced or hearts
2♥ ^R	2♠	balanced
	2NT	& hearts, 5-5

Of course you note that 5-5 majors always opens 1♠. You save that step after a 1♥ opening, so 4-5 majors are Square.

The Roman hands (5440s) are a bit awkward. Slot them in after the appropriate 5431, shunting and compressing the other shapes.

If all this offends, relay with 1NT instead and get used to passing 1M on those balanced-ish 6-9 counts with no fit.

Relays over a Precision 1♦

If you stick with the traditional Precision 2♣ and 2♦ openings, you are left with the following for the "catch all" 1♦:

- 11-13 balanced, so 2+♦s
- 1-suited diamonds (6+)
- both minors, 5-4 either way
- 5+♦s and a 4-card Major (Raptor)
- pure 3-suited (three of the 4441s)

Responder **could** relay with 1NT, giving up on 6-10 no Major.

(Bid 1♥ or 1♠ on a 3-card suit with those hands)

Some use 1♥ as "hearts or a relay".

More usual is to relay with 2♣, though the structure is predictably strained and asymmetric. There is a strong case for this relay to be virtually game-forcing, because most invitational hands can do something else – 1♥/♠ (forcing) or 2NT invite if no major.

Try this:

	1♦	2+♦s, catch-all
2♣ ^R	2♦	11-13 balanced
	2♥	5+♦s & a 4-card major (Raptor)
	2♠	& clubs, 5+♦s
	2NT	& clubs, canapé
	3♣	6+♦s, HS
	3♦	6+♦s, MS
		etc (Up Two)

The balanced and diamond Raptor hands have pushed the whole structure Up Two Steps. A pain but manageable.

Need to fudge a bit with the 2-suiters:

...	2♥	Raptor
2♣ ^R	2NT	5+♦s & 4♠s
	3♣	4441s, 3 shapes (show the shortage) ³
	3♦	5+♦s & 4♥s, HS
	3♥	2-4-5-2
	3♠	3-4-5-1
	3NT	2-4-6-1 / 3-4-6-0

3 Sneak 4-4-5-0 in here

Balanced hands follow the Scamp pattern, pushed up a bit:

	1♦	2+♦s	
2♣ ^R	2♦	11-13 balanced	
2♥ ^R	2♠	no 4-card Major	
	2NT	spades & a minor	
	3♣	hearts & a minor	
	3♦	4-4-2-3	
	3♥	4-4-3-2	
	3♠	4-3-3-3	
	3NT	3-4-3-3	

That is a bit tight, bunching a few shapes at 3NT. (Don't split those)
Opener might even have something like

♠ A Q J 5 ♥ 10 5 ♦ A 3 ♣ J 7 5 4 3

preferring 1♦ to 2♣, then distorting to show 4-2-3-4.

Natural auctions will flow better opposite "balanced or diamonds".
New suit rebids by opener show unbalanced hands; 1NT is 11-13;
2♣ is 5-4 either way; jumps show shapely hands.

Over a Precision 2♣

Don't like throwing 4-card majors in here but there isn't enough room in 1♦ to accommodate and describe these club raptors.

2♦ asks, over which 2NT+ show the 1-suiters, Up One. After opener shows a major over 2♦ (maybe 2♥ = ♠ for right-siding?) simplest is to use 2NT as the shape ask over both of them, Up One.

Over 2♦

Traditionally this showed 4-4-1-4 or 4-4-0-5. You would get about two per year. Normal is to add 4-3-1-5 and 3-4-1-5 if you feel like it, typically when the clubs are too shabby to open 2♣.

2NT relays, over which the approved order is 4-3, 3-4, 4-4.

These two openings aren't great but the 1♦ opening will thank you.

I'm sure you can do better. Have a go!

The issue is the differing shapes for the various openings, making symmetry and memorability more difficult to achieve. Too tough for me anyway.

This is not a book on Relay Precision. Go google.

Combination Theory

Relay attracts actuaries but all you need is a basic understanding of probability theory. When you can't be certain about partner's honours, go with the odds.

Occasionally you won't have room to nail down partner's holding in a critical suit. This can happen when describer has shown one honour in a shortish suit.

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

1♣	2♦	balanced, no major
2♥ ^R	2♠	5 diamonds
2NT ^R	3♣	2-3-5-3
3NT	4♠	12 SPs
4NT ^R	5NT	♦, ♥, ♣, ♠ - yes
?		

5NT is as far as East can go and there are no more relays, so you have a guess. Anyway, partner must have 3 SPs in each suit, which means ♠A, ♥A or KQ, ♦A, ♣KQ.

You'll have to decide whether you can bear reading the next Daily Bulletin: "The Australians had a slow relay auction to 7NT with an ace out ..."

Assuming you have understanding team-mates, you might bid 7NT anyway because ♥A-x-x is much more likely than ♥K-Q-x.

If partner has ♥K-Q-x, the x is 1 of 8 unknown heart pips. If he has A-x-x, he has 2 from those same 8 pips. This is where combination theory points the way. How many ways can you choose 2 pips from 8? This is the formula: $\frac{n!}{k!(n-k)!}$. In this case it's $\frac{8!}{2!(8-2)!} = 28$.

So there are 28 ways to be dealt A-x-x, compared to eight K-Q-x's. This means that ♥A-x-x is 3½ times as likely as ♥K-Q-x, making the grand 78%. Add a bit for North not having the ♥A and leading something else, when you will make whenever South has 3+ clubs. Explain all that to the editors.

Mostly you will be able to resolve this, either by asking for a second heart honour or choosing to ask for Kontrols instead.