

The relay structure

Early relay systems were tough to learn. Modern *symmetric* relay has changed that.

Take a common hand pattern like 5431. With a symmetric structure, all 24 *permutations* of this pattern are revealed with the same final bid – 3♦. If you pick up a 5431 hand and partner starts relay, you will bid 3♦ at some point to show that shape. The earlier responses name the suits, say which suit is longer and where the shortage is. (See the last page of the book)

Types of hand

For relay purposes, there are three types of hand:

1-suiters, 2-suiters and balanced hands

- 1-suiters have six or more in the long suit.¹
- 2-suiters have 5-4 shape or better. The genuine 3-suiters, which we call Roman, are included here.
- Balanced hands comprise 4432, 4333, all 5332s.

Core and Residue

A suit of 4+ cards is part of the *core* of the hand.

The shortish suits form the *residue*, what's left.

If you have six spades as the core of a 1-suited hand, the residue can be split in two ways:

6 - 3 3 1 or 6 - 3 2 2

There are three permutations of the first pattern:

6-1-3-3, 6-3-1-3, 6-3-3-1

We *resolve* the residue by looking at the short suits. The hand with a singleton heart has **high shortage** (HS) a shortage in the high-ranking side suit. The next hand has **middle** shortage (MS) and the third has **low** shortage (LS).

Resolving 1-suiters

With a 1-suited hand (6+) show the suit then jump to 2♠ or higher if partner asks about shape.

The Scamp 1♦ opening shows spades. Responder bids 1♠ to relay.

This is the 1-suited structure:

Asker	Describer		
	1♦	spades	
1♠ ^R	2♠	1-suiter,	high shortage
	2NT	"	middle shortage
	3♣	"	semi-balanced ("even")
	3♦	6-3-3-1	with low shortage
	3♥	7- <u>2</u> -3-1	" "
	3♠	7-3- <u>2</u> -1	" "
	3NT	7-3-3-0 ²	" "

This table is one of about 10 that need to be learnt by rote.

One way to remember the order of shapes is to think of them as numbers. 7,231 is a smaller number than 7,321 and comes first. The bigger the number, the higher you bid.

With low shortage, you show the exact shape in one go – a direct 3♦ shows low (club) shortage and 6331. This is *zooming* – you zoom ahead to answer the next implied question.

Here's a 1♥ opening in Scamp:

♠ K 7 6 ♥ A J 7 5 4 3 ♦ 8 ♣ Q J 9

If partner relays with 1♠, jump to 2NT to show six hearts and a diamond shortage – diamonds being the middle side-suit. If partner asks again by bidding 3♣, complete shape-showing with 3♦:

WEST	EAST	
	1♥	
1♠ ^R	2NT	6+♥s, middle shortage
3♣ ^R	3♦	3-6-1-3

If you had a singleton spade instead, you would stop off at 2♠ (HS) before bidding 3♦. With 3-6-3-1, you would bid 3♦ directly. All 6331 hands end up at 3♦.³

¹ Some relay methods treat 5332s as 1-suiters

² We don't cater for 8-card suits. Distort to a less extreme shape.

³ **Nearly** all. See *Chapter 6 – The Strong Club* for the exception.

Semi-balanced hands

1-suiters with 6-322 or 7-222 shape are semi-balanced. (Or even)

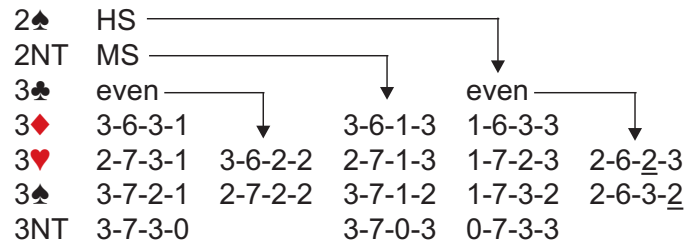
The bid to show an even hand is 3♣. Half the time you stop off at 2♠ along the way to show "relatively" high shortage.

Bid 2♠ first with 6-2-2-3 & 6-2-3-2.

Asker	Describer	
....	2♠	high shortage
2NT ^R	3♣	even; then
3♦ ^R	3♥	6-2-2-3 (high-middle)
	3♠	6-2-3-2 (high-low)

With the other two shapes, bid 3♣ directly then split them if partner asks. (6322, the smaller number, comes before 7222)

Here is a chart with every shape in the 1-suited structure: (with 6+♥s in this case)



In resolving shortages, the order is always the same:

high – middle – low

If you bid 2NT to show middle shortage, it will always be a singleton or void. High shortage could be a doubleton if semi-balanced.

Some examples

Responder bids 1♠ over a 1♦ (spades) or 1♥ opening to ask about shape.⁴ Opener then jumps to 2♠ or higher with a 1-suiter:

♠ 8	♥ A J 9 7 5 4	♦ 8 7 4	♣ A Q 5
	1♥		
1♠ ^R	2♠	6+♥s, high shortage	
2NT ^R	3♦	1-6-3-3	

⁴ Works the same if you if you open 1♦ with hearts and 1♥ with spades.

♠ 4 3	♥ Q 10 8 7 6 5	♦ A J 6	♣ A 3
	1♥		
1♠ ^R	2♠	6+♥s, HS	
2NT ^R	3♣	even	
3♦ ^R	3♠	2-6-3-2 (high-low)	

♠ A Q 10 5 4 3 2	♥ 6 5	♦ Q J 3	♣ K
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	1♦	spades
1♠ ^R	3♥	7-2-3-1 (2-3 comes before 3-2) ⁵

♠ K Q J 8 6 5 4	♥ A 4 3	♦ —	♣ 8 6 3
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	1♦	spades
1♠ ^R	2NT	6+♠s, MS
3♣ ^R	3NT	7-3-0-3

In most strong club systems, the 2♣ opening is natural and often denies a 4-card major. The 1-suited structure works the same way.

♠ Q 8	♥ A 4	♦ A 8	♣ K 10 9 6 5 4 3
	2♣	5+ clubs, no major	
2♦ ^R	3♣	semi-balanced	
3♦ ^R	3♠	2-2-2-7	

Canapé

For most people, opening 1♥ and rebidding 2♦ shows a hand with more hearts than diamonds, or maybe 5-5.

In the 1940s, Frenchman Pierre Albarran devised *canapé*, a method that often requires the shorter suit to be bid first. Playing canapé, the usual opening bid on a hand with four hearts and five diamonds is 1♥.

In Scamp, you always show the **higher-ranking** suit first, irrespective of length. For instance, if partner opens a strong 1♣ and you have a positive with the majors, you show spades first, even on a hand with six hearts. (Opposite of *Honeymoon*)

⁵ Some pairs don't split 2-3 from 3-2, bidding 3♥ with both of them.

Two Suiters

This is the way we show a second suit after a 1♦ (spades) or 1♥ opening, both of which deny four cards in the other major:

	1♥	hearts
1♠ ^R	1NT	& diamonds, not balanced
	2♣	balanced
	2♦	& clubs, with 5+♥s
	2♥	& clubs, canapé
	2♠+	1-suiter (6+)

These are the stages in describing a 2-suiter:

- name the suits
- say whether the second (lower-ranking) suit is longer
- show the shortage
- resolve the shape

If the first suit is longer, zoom to say where the shortage is.

With low shortage, zoom to complete resolution, as per usual.

Here is the 2-suited structure, common to all openings:

....	2♦	Roman (3-suited)
	2♥	canapé (second suit longer)
	2♠	5-5 or better
	2NT	high shortage ⁶
	3♣	5422 "even"
	3♦	LS, 5431
	3♥	LS, 6421
	3♠	LS, 6430
	3NT	LS, 7411 ⁷
	4♣	LS, 7420

The shortage order is "hellish": **high - even - low resolving**

For us, "canapé" means that the second (lower-ranking) suit is longer. (Another term for canapé is *reverser*)

The structure is symmetric. All canapé hands go via 2♥ before resolving; all 6421 hands "come out" at 3♥ etc.

⁶ Careful. With 1-suiters, 2♠ shows high shortage. With 2-suiters, it's 2NT.

⁷ 7411s have high and low shortage, so you can either show them directly or via 2NT high shortage. We go directly with minimums, via 2NT with maximums.

Take the 5431 hands with red suits. Open 1♥, then rebid 1NT over partner's 1♠ relay to show diamonds. The four permutations are shown like this:

3-5-4-1	1NT – 2♣ ^R – 3♦ (LS, zooming to shape)
1-5-4-3	1NT – 2♣ ^R – 2NT (HS) – 3♣ ^R – 3♦
3-4-5-1	1NT – 2♣ ^R – 2♥ (canapé) – 2♠ ^R – 3♦
1-4-5-3	1NT – 2♣ ^R – 2♥ – 2♠ ^R – 2NT – 3♣ ^R – 3♦

5-5 hands

The 5-5 hands and 3-suiters have their own structures.

Having shown two suits, the bid to show 5-5 or better is 2♠.

For instance, with 5-5 in the majors:

....	2♠	5-5, then
2NT ^R	3♣	high shortage
	3♦	even (5- <u>6</u> -1-1 / <u>6</u> -5-1-1) canapé first!
	3♥	LS, 5-5-2-1
	3♠	5-5-3-0
	3NT	5-6-2-0 canapé first
	4♣	6-5-2-0

The structure follows the hellish pattern: high shortage – even – low shortage resolving. In this case, maybe don't bother memorising the actual bids, just the order of the hand patterns.

Roman Hands⁸

With a 3-suiter, show two suits then bid 2♦ to show a Roman hand.

This is how it works, again with spades & hearts as the two suits:

....	2♦	Roman, then
2♥ ^R	2♠	high third suit (diamonds in this case)
	2NT	low suit, 4-4-1-4
	3♣	4-4-0- <u>5</u> canapé first
	3♦	4- <u>5</u> -0-4
	3♥	<u>5</u> -4-0-4

Since the 1♦ (spades) and 1♥ openings deny length in the other major, the third suit is already known to be clubs. After those openings, go straight into full resolution.

⁸ Roman = 4441 or 5440, as in Roman Club, a 1960s system.

Two-suiter examples

Show the second suit – say whether canapé or not – which shortage – resolve.

♠ K 7	♥ K Q J 6 5 4	♦ A 9 7 6	♣ J
	1♥	<i>hearts, not spades</i>	
1♠ ^R	1NT	& diamonds	
2♣ ^R	3♥	2-6-4-1 (zoom with low shortage)	

♠ Q 7 6 4	♥ A 4	♦ 6 5	♣ K J 10 5 4
	1♦	<i>spades, not hearts</i>	
1♠ ^R	2♥	& clubs, canapé	
2♠ ^R	3♣	4-2-2-5	

♠ 6	♥ Q J 9 5	♦ A Q 10 6 4	♣ A 7 3
	1♥		
1♠ ^R	1NT	& diamonds	
2♣ ^R	2♥	canapé	
2♠ ^R	2NT	high shortage	
3♣ ^R	3♦	1-4-5-3	

♠ 4	♥ K Q 10 6 5	♦ Q 5	♣ A J 6 5 4
	1♥		
1♠ ^R	2♦	& clubs, with 5+♥s	
2♥ ^R	2♠	5-5	
2NT ^R	3♣	high shortage	
3♦ ^R	3♥	1-5-2-5	

♠ K 10 5 4	♥ 6	♦ A J 5 4	♣ Q 10 4 3
	1♦	<i>spades, not hearts</i>	
1♠ ^R	1NT	diamonds	
2♣ ^R	2♦	Roman (so clubs is the third suit)	
2♥ ^R	2♠	4-1-4-4	

Balanced hands

48% of hands are classically balanced. The bid to show a balanced hand is usually 2♣. The aim is to increase the chance that the known hand winds up as dummy. In simple Precision, responder to 1♣ bids 1NT to show a flat hand – not so great since the strong hand will be dummy in 3NT.

We use these terms for balanced patterns:

<i>balanced</i>	includes all 5332s
<i>flat</i>	4432 or 4333 (no 5-card suit)
<i>square</i>	4333

There are three similar structures, according to the opening.⁹ The structures have these features in common:

- 5332s come first
- then the 4432s, resolving with clubs
- tack the square hands on the end

Balanced hands after a 1♦ or 1♥ opening

The same structure is used over both of them:

	1♥		
1♠ ^R	2♣	<i>balanced</i>	
2♦ ^R	2♥	five hearts	
	2♠	& diamonds	
	2NT	2-4-3-4	2-5-3-3 (HS)
	3♣	3-4-2-4	2-4-4-3
	3♦	3-4-3-3	3-5-2-3 (MS)
		3-4-4-2	3-5-3-2 (LS)

Likewise after a 1♦ opening. All the streams end by 3♦.

5332s are resolved by shortage in the usual order.

With balanced hands, it doesn't help much to associate a shape with a bid, because the structure is not symmetric. Instead, we find this mnemonic helpful:

“5 cards, diamonds, clubs-high, clubs-low, square”.

Diamonds, the higher ranking minor, comes first.

⁹ In the wider relay world, balanced structures vary quite a bit.

1NT Opening

Our 1NT opening shows 12-15 balanced, no four card major.

We sometimes open 1NT with 5+4 minors, when the long minor is weak. Could have a stiff major honour. For relay purposes, these extra shapes are tacked to the end of the relevant 5-card minor.

This is the relay structure over 1NT:

	1NT		
2♣ ^R	2♦	five diamonds	↘
	2♥	five clubs	
	2♠	2-3-4-4	2-3-5-3
	2NT	3-2-4-4	3-2-5-3
	3♣	3-3-4-3	3-3-5-2
	3♦	3-3-3-4	2-2-5-4
	3♥		1-3-5-4 (HS)
	3♠		3-1-5-4

"5♦s, 5♣s, both-high, both-low, square ♦s, square ♣s"

Balanced hand examples

♠ K10543 ♥ AJ7 ♦ 43 ♣ AQ3

	1♦	spades
1♠ ^R	2♣	balanced
2♦ ^R	2♥	5♠s
2♠ ^R	3♣	5-3-2-3 (MS)

♠ Q5 ♥ K1043 ♦ AQ54 ♣ Q43

	1♥	
1♠ ^R	2♣	balanced
2♦ ^R	2♠	diamonds
2NT	3♣	2-4-4-3 (HS)

♠ K63 ♥ A54 ♦ AJ43 ♣ Q32

	1NT	balanced, no major
2♣ ^R	3♣	3-3-4-3

♠ K ♥ A54 ♦ A9543 ♣ K832

	1NT ¹⁰	"balanced", no major
2♣ ^R	2♦	5 diamonds
2♥	3♥	1-3-5-4

Practice

There you have it. After you learn these structures you can describe 300 hand patterns. Okay, there is a bit left – shape-showing is a bit different after a 1♣ opening. See *Chapter 6*.

All these structures need to be learnt by rote. Try bidding plenty of hands at home, ideally generated by a computer program like *BGen* or *Borel*. Or set up bidding practice at *Bridge Base Online*.

A worked example

Here's a complete relay auction through the eyes of the asker:

♠ AK543 ♠ 8
♥ 102 ♥ AQJ953
♦ AJ93 ♦ K7
♣ K7 ♣ Q1053

WEST	EAST	
	1♥	hearts, 11-15 pts
1♠ ^R	2♦	& clubs, with 5+♥s

West starts relay and finds opener with clubs as well. 3NT looks best but there's no hurry.

2♥^R 2NT high shortage

Spades are out, as we half-expected. Check for six hearts:

3♣^R 3♥ 1-6-2-4

There's no reason to reject the 8-card fit. Slam is a chance opposite good hearts and the ♣A so West might continue relay, asking about strength and specific honours. That comes in *Chapter 7 – Relaying to Slam*. For now,

4♥ No

¹⁰ Rare but better than the alternative – 2♦ – with that poor suit.

This is the way we do it.⁴

1♣	1♦	0-7 pts (or a bad, flat 8-count)
	1♥	4+ spades, <u>not flat</u> , 8+ pts
	1♠	4+ hearts, not spades, not flat
	1NT	4+ diamonds, no major, not balanced
	2♣	<i>flat</i> with at least one major
	2♦	<i>balanced</i> with no major, <u>exclude</u> 2-2-5+4
	2♥	Roman, short in a major
	2♠+	club 1-suiter (6+)

A reminder that *flat* means 4432 or 4333.

You need to be awake – don't respond 1♥ or 1♠ with a flat hand, or a Roman hand with both minors.

This sleight of hand causes the unbalanced hands to fall into line. Some of the balanced and Roman hands are pushed up the line to make way for the major 2-suiters:

1♣	1♥	spades, not flat
1♠ ^R	1NT	& hearts (then 2♦ = Roman)
	2♣	& diamonds
	2♦	& clubs, with 5+♠s
	2♥	& clubs, canapé
	2♠+	1-suiter (<u>5+</u> spades)

With majors, the 1-suited structure is adjusted to accommodate the 5332s. Bid 3♦ with this shape, displacing the higher shapes while concatenating the 7321s. This is how:

1♣	1♠	hearts
1NT ^R	2NT	middle shortage
3♣ ^R	3♦	<u>3-5-2-3</u>
	3♥	3-6-1-3
	3♠	2-7-1-3 <u>or</u> 3-7-1-2 (don't resolve these)
	3NT	3-7-0-3

A 1NT response shows a diamond 1-suiter (6+), or both minors:

1♣	1NT	diamonds
2♣ ^R	2♦	& clubs, 5+♦s
	2♥	& clubs, canapé
	2♠+	1-suiter (6+♦s)

4 There are other structures on the market. See *Chapter 18 - Arithmetic*.

Some examples

♠ K 10 5 4 ♥ A Q 6 5 4 ♦ 4 3 ♣ J 6

1♣	1♥	spades, not flat
1♠ ^R	1NT	hearts
2♣ ^R	2♥	canapé
2♠ ^R	3♣	4-5-2-2

♠ 7 ♥ A 4 3 ♦ K Q 10 6 5 4 ♣ 7 6 5

1♣	1NT	diamonds
2♣ ^R	2♠	1-suiter, high shortage
2NT ^R	3♦	1-3-6-3

Flat hands

5332s with a major become 1-suiters over 1♣, which leaves us with the 4432s & 4333s. This is the structure:

1♣	2♣	flat with at least one major	
2♦ ^R	2♥	spades & a minor	└───┬───┘
	2♠	hearts & a minor	└───┬───┘
	2NT	4-4- <u>2</u> -3	& diamonds
	3♣	4-4-3- <u>2</u>	& diamonds
	3♦	<u>4</u> -3-3-3	<u>2</u> -4-3-4
	3♥	3- <u>4</u> -3-3	4-3- <u>2</u> -4

“Spades, hearts, both-high, both-low, square spades, square hearts.”

The response to show a balanced hand with no major is 2♦. This is like the 1NT opening, excluding the 5-4s. The relay structure is otherwise the same:

“5♦s, 5♣, both high, both low, square diamonds, square clubs”

Examples

♠ K 10 4 3 ♥ A J 4 3 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ 4 3

1♣	2♣	flat with a major
2♦ ^R	3♣	4-4-3- <u>2</u>