

Bridge theorists know a 4-4 major suit fit can add up to 1.5 more tricks than playing in NT. No wonder that one of the most universally used conventions is Stayman. Originally used to show an invitational or better hand with a least one major suit of 4 cards or more, Stayman has evolved over time. Here is a simple approach that will put your Stayman auctions on steroids. We recommend 4-suit Transfers, Smolen, and Texas Transfers as the framework to get the most out of Stayman.

Garbage Stayman (Over 1NT only)

Holding a disgustingly weak hand after partner opens a 15-17 1NT, getting to a safe suit will limit your losses.

Garbage Stayman applies with hands like these or weaker:

♠Q1087 ♥7652 ♦J864 ♣5 ♠Q108 ♥7652 ♦J8764 ♣5 ♠Q108 ♥7652 ♦J864 ♣75

You would prefer to play a suit, even a 4-3 fit so that small trumps in your hand can add to your side’s trick total. With any of these hands, pass partner’s response to Stayman. If opponents interfere, better to pass. Partner will expect inviting or game values if you make a Stayman call when opponents are bidding.

Crawling Stayman (Over 1NT only)

Similar to Garbage Stayman, you will not pass partner’s 2♦ response to Stayman. You have a weak hand with two 4-card majors and 3 or fewer diamonds. You pass partner’s major suit rebid, but bid 2♥ over partner’s 2♦ rebid. This approach gives up the traditional invitational meaning for the 2♥ rebid. Yes, partner denies a 4-card major, but you are so weak that you are directing partner to pass or correct to his 3-card major. This way you play in a 7-card fit with a chance of making small cards winners in your hand. If you have 2 likely entries and no singletons (5-7 HCP), then passing 1NT should work out fine. Here are hands (or any weaker) that merit Crawling.

♠Q1087 ♥7652 ♦J86 ♣54 ♠Q108 ♥7652 ♦J8 ♣765 ♠QJ108 ♥7652 ♦8 ♣7654

With 4 ♠s and 5 ♥s in an invitational hand, transfer to ♥s then bid 2♠. With the same pattern and a game forcing hand you bid Stayman then jump using Smolen (jump to your 4-card major showing 5 cards in the other major, right-siding that contract if partner has a 3-card fit). With 5 ♠s and 4 ♥s in an invitational hand, you will raise partners major or rebid 2♠ over partner’s 2♦ denial.

Invitational Stayman

Playing 4-suit transfers we use invitational Stayman whenever we have invitational strength or better and 1 or more 4-card majors. We also use invitational Stayman whenever we wish to invite 3N quantitatively, that is, we have 8-9 HCP and NO 4-card major. All of these hands would bid Stayman. The rebid depends on whether opener mentions our major or allows for the possibility s/he holds 4-cards in that suit.

- ♠Q1087 ♥KQ52 ♦J86 ♣54 – Raise partner’s major suit to 3 but bid 2N over partner’s 2♦
- ♠Q1087 ♥KQ5 ♦J862 ♣54 – Raise partner’s ♠ suit to 3 but bid 2N over 2♦ or 2♠ over 2♥ (denies 4 ♥s).
- ♠Q86 ♥KQ52 ♦J1087 ♣54 – Raise partner’s ♥ response to 3 but bid 2N over partner’s 2♦
- ♠54 ♥Q86 ♦KQ52 ♣ J1087 – Bid 2N over whatever partner rebids.
- ♠Q1087 ♥KQ52 ♦K86 ♣54 – Raise partner’s major suit to 4 but bid 3N over partner’s 2♦
- ♠Q86 ♥KQ52 ♦K1087 ♣54 – Raise partner’s ♥ response to 4 but bid 3N over any other bid
- ♠54 ♥ Q86 ♦KQ52 ♣ K1087 – Bid 3N immediately – no Stayman (See Anti-lemming bids).

Bid 2N to invite (never 2♥ – see Crawling Stayman or 3 of a minor see below). After your Stayman bid partner should alert your 2N “may have no 4-card major”.

Special Rebids by Responder

Suppose you hold the following hands and your auction goes 1N-2♣-2♥. What now?

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Hand A: ♠AQJ10 ♥Q52 ♦QJ986 ♣5 | Hand D: ♠AQ108 ♥KQ52 ♦QJ86 ♣5 |
| Hand B: ♠AQJ10 ♥Q52 ♦KQJ98 ♣5 | Hand E: ♠AQ10 ♥KQ52 ♦QJ86 ♣A5 |
| Hand C: ♠Q52 ♥AQJ10 ♦KQJ98 ♣5 | Hand F: ♠AQ10 ♥KQ52 ♦QJ86 ♣Q5 |

Responder rebids 3 of a minor 1N-2♣-2♥-3♣/♦ (Semi- or Unbalanced shape)

Old style Stayman - this bid is forcing to game promising 4 cards in the OTHER major. Today we are more flexible, showing **either** major. Some might play this as weak to play (A. Sheinwold was a big advocate of this approach) or

invitational with a long minor (a side major is ambiguous – might or might not be there). 4-suit transfers eliminates the invitational case. Keeping the game force is worthwhile.

With *Hand A*, over 3♦ Opener can express doubt about NT by bidding 1N-2♣-2♥-3♣/♦-3♥. This does not promise 5-cards (even if you play 1N with a 5-card major) but implies a weakness in ♠ or ♣'s. 3♣ by responder then shows a ♠ stopper and if that scratches Opener's itch, opener will bid 3N. If not, then opener will retreat to 4♦ at which point responder should bid 4♥ expecting to play in the Moysian 4-3 fit. Responder can bid 4441 hands similarly.

With *Hand B*, responder starts with a 3♦ rebid, then bids naturally making a slam invitation. Over 3♥, 3♠ then 4♦ over 3N shows shape and slam interest. (We would NOT go past 3NT with a weaker hand and miss the low cost better paying game). Over 3♠, a 4♣ control bid might work well implying a ♠ fit. Over 3N, 4♦ suggests 4 ♠ cards and a good ♦ suit with interest in slam.

Responder rebids 3 of the Major 1N-2♣-2♥-3♥

This is a simple quantitative invitation showing 8-9 HCP or any 9 SUPPORT POINTS. (*Support Points = HCP + Shortness Points, where doubleton = 1, singleton = 3, and void = 5*)

Responder rebids 3 of the Other Major - With *Hand C and D* you bid 1N-2♣-2♥-3♠!! This shows slam interest and a "Hidden Splinter" in support of opener's major suit. The short suit is either a singleton or void. Opener rebids 3N to ask the shortness and responder answers 4♣=♣, 4♦=♦, and 4♥= the other major. (You can play the Step 1 relay as the ask, using 3♠ over ♥s. Then 3N shows spades). This allows opener to evaluate wasted strength in your short suit and get our side to slam when right. 4N by opener is RKB. Opener will ask for responder's shortness when holding suits with no wastage (xx, xxx, Jxxx) or Ace-empty suits (Ax, Axx, Axxx). Holding 2 or more intermediate honors in responder's short suit signals wasted values and a need to stop at game unless responder presses on. Note opener can bid game directly with no slam interest. This helps hide the short suit's identity from the opponents.

Responder bids 3N. Guarantees values for Game (9+ HCP) and promises 4 cards in the other major (♠s in this case). Opener usually corrects to 4 of the Other Major holding 4 cards. Some might play 3N if 4333 shape.

4♣ – RKB – Hand E - 1N-2♣-2♥-4♣...this is a Useful Space Principle approach to Key Card Asking. In the past this bid was traditionally Gerber. If partner's reply to Stayman was 2♦, 4♣ is Gerber. Some use 4♣ as a splinter. As RKB, we get keycard information at a much lower level. Remember, 4 of our agreed major is to play. Ask for Kings by bidding 5♣ please. We recommend specific Kings responses.

4♦ – Strong Quantitative Raise with 4 Trump Support - *Hand F*. 1N-2♣-2♥-4♦ This is a balanced ask showing 16+ HCP and promising a 4 card fit for opener's major. Responder denies a singleton or void. Opener's 4N is RKB. Opener can control bid (presumably holding a weak doubleton). Responder can bid on with greater strength.

When Opponents Double our Stayman Call

Their double shows ♣s. We want to right-side the contract in terms of ♣s and play NT only if we can stop ♣s. Opener redoubles to suggest playing in 2♣ redoubled (usually with 4+ ♣ cards and 2 honors). Opener makes the normal Stayman response holding a positional NT stopper in ♣s. The auction continues as normal. If doubler's partner bids ♣s at any point, responder's double is penalty if opener has shown a stopper and takeout otherwise.

With a partial ♣ stopper (Jxx, or Qx, 10xxx) or NO ♣ Stopper Opener passes. Then responder bids 2♦/♥/♠ to play, 2N to invite with a ♣ stopper (knowing the lead comes through Responder) or 3♣ to force game with a partial ♣ stopper (Treat as Stayman). Treat 3♥ or 3♠ as Smolen (Opener right sides the 5-3 major fit in terms of ♣s by bidding 4♣).

With no ♣ stopper and an invitational hand, responder redoubles, repeating the Stayman Call. Opener bids as if responding to Stayman. Then responder's NT rebids show a partial stopper. With ♣s unstopped we are headed for our best suit.

Over 2N (Strong) we recommend Stayman (Puppet if you must), Smolen (at the 3-level), and Jacoby/Texas Transfers, and Gerber. 2N-3♠ should be a transfer to 3N with a slam try in the minors following. Do the same things after partners 2N rebid (22-23/4 HCP) in a 2♣ auction.