

BE ALERT! (no need to be alarmed)

What is an “alert”?

In any bidding system, there will be bids that are ‘artificial’ or ‘conventional’; they mean **something different** or **something more** than they say. A simple example is an opening 2C bid that does not mean “I have a lot of clubs and want to play in Clubs”, but rather simply states that you hold a strong opening hand. If your partner makes an artificial bid, you **MUST ALERT** that bid. i.e. you are alerting the opposition to the fact that the call may need an explanation.

How to alert

- If your partner makes an alertable bid, you must indicate this **immediately the bid is made**. (If you alert the bid after the next player has called, that player may have the right to amend his/her call, and should call the Director if he/she wishes to exercise that right.)
- Alerts are made by audibly saying “Alert” **and** circling the bid on the bidding pad; just putting a circle on the pad is not sufficient.
- **Do not explain** your alerted calls unless specifically asked to do so.

What bids need to be alerted?

- Any bid that means something other than “I want to play in this suit” is by definition a *conventional* bid and must be alerted. (But see exceptions below.)
- This includes bids that show the suit named plus another suit. So, for instance, if you play multi-2s, and an opening 2H bid shows hearts and another suit, that bid is conventional and must be alerted.
- It also includes bids that you are forced to make by convention; e.g. if you play the Lebensohl 2NT convention, a bid of 2NT (alerted) requires a response of 3C, and that response must be alerted.
- You must also alert any bid that has an unexpected point range – e.g. a bid of 2H in response to opener’s 1C, meaning “I have 6+ hearts and less than 6 HCP”; “inverted minors” where a single raise is stronger than a jump raise; negative free bids (i.e. non-forcing new suit over an intervening bid).

Exceptions – when you must not alert:

There are certain bids that are deemed to be “**self-alerting**”. This means that they are self-evidently unusual, and opponents should not need to be alerted to the fact that they may have a ‘hidden’ meaning. **Self-alerting bids must not be alerted**. Opponents may of course ask what the bid means.

What bids are ‘self-alerting’?

- Any **double** or **redouble** regardless of what it means.
- Any 4-level bid.
- A **2C response to 1NT**, whatever the meaning of 2C. **However**, this rule only applies in an **uncontested auction**. For instance, if the 1NT is an overcall then a 2C response must be alerted unless it shows a natural club suit.
- **Cue bids**; i.e. when your partner bids a suit already nominated by the opponents. (Note that this refers to a suit named or implied by the opponent. So if an opponent

opens 2NT showing both minors a bid of either minor by your partner is a cue bid and not alertable, whatever its meaning.)

Have you been paying attention? A quiz to test your knowledge.

(Answers below, but don't peek!)

In the sequences (a) – (g) does the last bid (in bold type) need to be alerted?

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
a.	1D	1NT	Pass	2C
b.	1D	1H	2C (not forcing)	
c.	1H	2C	3C	
d.	1H	Pass	3H (< 6 HCP)	
e.	1NT	Double	2C	
f.	1NT	Double	Redouble (transfer to clubs)	
g.	1NT	Pass	2H (transfer)	2S
h.	If you are paying Extended Stayman, which responses to the 2C enquiry need to be alerted?			

When things go wrong

- If your partner fails to alert your alertable bid, DO NOT remind your partner (don't make circling motions with your pen, or cough, ...). If your partner alerts your bid but gives an incorrect explanation, DO NOT correct your partner, or give any indication that there is an error. In either case, if you end up as Declarer (or Dummy), you should tell the opponents before the opening lead, and call the Director if necessary. If you end up as a defender, you say nothing until the end of play, then call the Director.
- If you realise that **you** have given a wrong explanation, you must call the Director before the opening lead, or earlier if you wish.
- Opponent opens 2H (weak) and partner overcalls 2NT. You know that partner's bid is alertable but you can't remember what it means. What do you do? Alert the bid. If asked what it means, explain that you can't remember what it means. The Director should be called immediately, and will probably send you away from the table so that your partner can explain the meaning of the bid to the opponents.
- Opponent opens 2H (weak) and partner overcalls 2NT. You haven't discussed this sequence with your partner and have no idea whether it is a natural strong overcall or conventional. What do you do? Nothing. If asked what it means, say "We haven't discussed it."
- In both these cases, DO NOT GUESS. Do **not** say, "I think it's for the minors", or "I'm taking it as natural". That gives unauthorised information to your partner.

One last thing

If your opponent alerts a bid, you may ask for an explanation. But observe the following rules:

- Do not ask if you don't need to.
- Do not ask if you intend to pass regardless of the answer. (Unnecessary questions may be more helpful to your opponents than to you, AND asking a question may convey unauthorised information to your partner.)

- You may ask about the meaning of the alert when it is your first turn to call after the alert. At a later stage, you may ask but you should then say “please explain the auction”, not drawing attention to one particular bid.

Quiz Answers

- Yes, unless it shows a natural club suit. Note that Stayman 2C must be alerted in a competitive auction, which this is.
- Yes. A new suit ‘usually’ requires opener to bid again. This is a ‘negative free bid’ promising less than 10 HCP, and partner may well pass.
- No. This is a cue bid, a bid of a suit named by an opponent, so is self-alerting, regardless of what it means. Of course, if North hadn’t bid clubs, 3C would be alertable if it was a Bergen response saying nothing about a club suit.
- Yes. This is an unexpectedly low strength for a jump raise. However, if North had made an intervening bid (say 2C), then 3H is **not** alertable. The alerting rules state that a weak jump raise is alertable only in an uncontested auction. Surprise!
- Yes. Same reason as for (a).
- No. Doubles and redoubles are never alertable whatever their meaning. But the 2C response must be alerted because it is a forced response and doesn’t show that the bidder has clubs.
- No. East’s bid of 2H shows a Spade suit, so 2S by South is a cue bid, a bid of a suit shown by an opponent. Notice that a bid of 3H by South would also be a cue bid, a bid of a suit named by an opponent. Perhaps you could work out a way of exploiting this to show different things with the different cue bids?!
- All responses to Extended Stayman carry information both about suit(s) held and strength, so all are alertable.

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