

Inverted Ghestem (Questem) - Two Suited Overcall

I assume that you are familiar with Michaels/UNT and also with Ghestem (if not you can look them up on this site). Now both are fine conventions (if not abused) but they both have their drawbacks as I indicated when I described them both. Just to summarise.

Using UNT/Michaels we have the problems: -

- 1- When we show a specific major and an unspecified minor partner may have a problem if he has mediocre support for the major and just one reasonable minor. Should he play it safe and bid the major or take a chance of finding an excellent minor suit fit?
- 2- We cannot show all hand types. Specifically, we cannot show a hand with ♠'s and a minor if the other minor is opened.

Using Ghestem we have the problems: -

- 3- You lose 3♣ as a weak jump overcall or whatever it normally means in your system.
- 4- If the opening bid is 1♣/♦ and we have a major two-suiter, then we have to bid 3♣ and are thus forced to the three level whereas it is a cuebid (and thus only the two level) using Michaels.

Now if you are prepared to use the 3♣ bid as conventional it certainly appears that Ghestem has the edge over UNT/Michaels. But this last point (4-) really is quite significant.

Hand A Consider this hand A. The definition of Michaels cue bids states that one need be only 5-4 (or 4-5) in the majors to cue bid an opening 1♣/♦, and many (most?) people play Michaels that way. Playing Ghestem the bid here is 3♣

♠ KJ84 and that necessarily puts us up at the three level with no idea if we have a

♥ K8742 resemblance of a fit. So this type of hand cannot be bid using Ghestem.

♦ 96

♣ 95

Is there a solution? Yes! We simply 'invert' the Ghestem cue bids and 3♣ bids. Thus the revised structure is as follows. For want of a better name, let's call it Questem: -

Direct cue bid = 2 highest suits
2NT = 2 lowest suits
3♣ = highest + lowest suits

So we now have, using Questem: -

Opening bid:	Overcall:	Meaning
1♣	2♣	♠'s and ♥'s (two highest)
1♣	2NT	♦'s and ♥'s (two lowest)
1♣	3♣	♠'s and ♦'s (highest + lowest)
1♦	2♦	♠'s and ♥'s (two highest)
1♦	2NT	♣'s and ♥'s (two lowest)
1♦	3♣	♠'s and ♣'s (highest + lowest)
1♥	2♥	♠'s and ♦'s (two highest)
1♥	2NT	♣'s and ♦'s (two lowest)
1♥	3♣	♠'s and ♣'s (highest + lowest)
1♠	2♠	♠'s and ♥'s (two highest)
1♠	2NT	♣'s and ♦'s (two lowest)
1♠	3♣	♥'s and ♣'s (highest + lowest)

There are just six of these two-suited combinations. Playing Questem we have: -

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5	Hand 6
♠ 6	♠ 6	♠ KQ942	♠ 6	♠ KQ942	♠ KQ942
♥ 95	♥ KQ942	♥ 6	♥ K8742	♥ 6	♥ K8742
♦ KQ942	♦ 95	♦ 95	♦ KQ942	♦ K8742	♦ 6
♣ K8742	♣ K8742	♣ K8742	♣ 95	♣ 95	♣ 95

Hand 1: Over an opening bid of 1♥/♠, bid 2NT. This shows the two lowest

Hand 2: Over an opening bid of 1♦, bid 2NT. This shows the two lowest
 Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 3♣. This shows the highest and lowest

Hand 3: Over an opening bid of 1♦, bid 3♣. This shows the highest and lowest
 Over an opening bid of 1♥, bid 3♣. This shows the highest and lowest

Hand 4: Over an opening bid of 1♣, bid 2NT. This shows the two lowest
 Over an opening bid of 1♠, bid 2♠. This shows the two highest

Hand 5: Over an opening bid of 1♣, bid 3♣. This shows the highest and lowest
 Over an opening bid of 1♥, bid 2♥. This shows the two highest

Hand 6: Over an opening bid of 1♣/♦, bid 2♣/♦. This shows the two highest

Hand 7 Now Questem (and UNT/Michaels or Ghestem) is basically pre-emptive. But most people play it may also be very strong. So with this hand we bid the 2NT over a 1♦ opening and then bid on over partner's reply.

♠ 6
♥ KQ942
♦ A
♣ AKQ642

But with this hand we have a slight problem if the opening bid is 1♠. If we make the systematic bid of 3♣ partner may pass! So in this particular situation (where a 3♣ bid is actually one of your suits and you have a huge hand) then you simply have to double.

Hand 8 As with Michaels and Ghestem, with Hand type 8 we also cannot use the system as it is neither weak nor very strong. So with intermediate hands like this we simply overcall.

♠ 6
♥ KQ942
♦ A5
♣ AQ642

Hand A And let's come back to Hand A. As with Michaels we need only be 5-4 (or 4-5) in the majors to cue bid an opening 1♣/♦, and many (most) people play Michaels that way.

♠ KJ84
♥ K8742
♦ 96
♣ 95

Playing Questem we do exactly the same and cue bid a 1♣/♦ opening with 2♣/♦ with this hand type.

But as with UNT/Miichaels and Ghestem, Questem also has drawbacks:-

- As with Ghestem, you lose your 3♣ as a weak jump overcall or whatever it normally is in your system
- In the situations where ♣'s is one of you suits you cannot use 3♣ as Questem when you have the very strong hand type (because partner may pass). This occurs in just 3 out of the twelve possibilities and so using Questem you have to double instead of bidding 3♣ in these situations. Since these two-suited bids are usually weak pre-emptive bids (the very strong hand type is not very frequent) this is not a big problem.

At this point I would like to make two observations, and these are borne out many times if you read through the news-sheets. The UNT/Maichaels (or Ghestem or Questem) are the most abused conventions out there. Mistakes that are very often made are: -

- 1- The requirement is 5-5 (or 4-5 or 5-4 with both majors). I have witnessed countless occurrences of people mis-using the UNT etc with 6-4 or other shapes.
- 2- Bidding UNT/Michaels (or Ghestem or Questem) and then bidding on shows a strong hand. Hands of type 8 are not good enough and should simply overcall as otherwise you get too high (you have pre-empted yourself!). This is an extremely common mistake and the real strong type hand for the convention is not very frequent. For example: -

♠ 94
♥ AK1095
♦ AQ94
♣ 8

This hand comes from news-sheet 144. The holder overcalled a 1♠ opening with 2♠ playing Michaels. Partner bid 3♥ and this hand raised to 4♥. This was promptly doubled and went for a number. This type of hand is nowhere near good enough for the strong conventional bid (whichever system you decide to choose). Simply overcall 2♥ and maybe get in ♦'s later.

So which scheme is really best – UNT/Michaels, Ghestem or Questem? Let's start by tabulating the final contract using each scheme; assuming a weak hand and no further opposition bidding. And see where we eventually end up: -

Your suits	Opening bid	UNT/Michaels			Ghestem			Questem			Notes
		Bid	FinalContract		Bid	FinalContract		Bid	FinalContract		
♣ ♦	1♥	2N	3♣	3♦	same			same			
	1♠	2N	3♣	3♦	same			same			
♣ ♥	1♦	2N	3♣	3♥	same			same			
	1♠	2♠	3♣	3♥	2♠	3♣	3♥	3♣	3♣	3♥	1, 4
♣ ♠	1♦	-	-	-	2♦	3♣	2♠	3♣	3♣	3♠	2, 4
	1♥	2♥	3♣	2♠	2♥	3♣	2♠	3♣	3♣	3♠	1, 2, 4
♦ ♥	1♣	2N	3♦	3♥	same			same			
	1♠	2♠	3♦	3♥	3♣	3♦	3♥	2♠	3♦	3♥	1
♦ ♠	1♣	-	-	-	2♣	2♦	2♠	3♣	3♦	3♠	2
	1♥	2♥	3♦	2♠	3♣	3♦	3♠	2♥	3♦	2♠	1, 3
♥ ♠	1♣	2♣	2♥	2♠	3♣	3♥	3♠	2♣	2♥	2♠	3
	1♦	2♥	2♥	2♠	3♣	3♥	3♠	2♥	2♥	2♠	3

- Notes: 1- The Michaels bid is ambiguous for the minors.
 2- Ghestem stays lower than Questem.
 3- Questem stays lower than Ghestem.
 4- We cannot bid Questem 3♣ with the very strong hand type.

So which scheme really is best? If you are loathe to give up your normal 3♣ bid then you have to use UNT/Michaels. But you have no bid in 2 situations and it's ambiguous in the minors in 4 situations. Very big minuses in my opinion.

Assuming that you are prepared to use 3♣ conventionally then it boils down to this: -

- Questem has the very big advantage that over a 1♣ or 1♦ opening you can cue bid to show both majors and rest at the two level. Thus making it fairly safe with 5-4 type hands in the same way as Michaels. Very handy for those of you who like to make noises with weak 5-4's.
- Ghestem has the advantage over Questem in that you can always bid 3♣ conventionally with the very big hand since ♣'s is never one of your suits. Since this comes up far less often than the weak 5-4 major suit type hands I think that Questem is to be preferred. Up to you.