

SIMPLE SUIT OVERCALLS



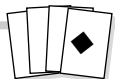
There are many players who practically always hold poor hands, and their only defense, up to now, has been to reduce their losses by not bidding and by letting the other side win.

Florence Irwin, Auction Highlights, 1913.

Once the opponents have opened the bidding, there are only two ways in which you can get into the auction — by doubling for takeout or by bidding something yourself, which is termed overcalling. We shall deal with takeout doubles at some length later in this book; for now, we'll just assume that you know what they are (if you don't, we suggest you take a quick skim through Chapter 6 before continuing). First, let's talk about the kinds of hand on which you might want to get into the bidding with an overcall, and why.

BY THE WAY

You might also, as a result of your overcall, find a cheap sacrifice in the event that the opponents bid to a game (or slam) they can make, but this is usually a minor consideration in deciding whether to enter the auction in the first place.



When would you want to make an overcall?

The answer to this question is very similar to the answer to, “When should you open the bidding?” — when you have either a good hand or a good suit. If you have a good five-card suit or better, you probably want to make an overcall (we’ll worry about hand strength a little later). However, to judge whether a hand is worth an overcall, it is important to understand what you are trying to achieve by bidding. There are three main reasons for making an overcall (often, a hand will justify overcalling for more than one of these reasons).

1. You have a good hand or a good suit so you wish to compete for the partscore or perhaps even look for game if partner has some values and a fit.
2. You want to harass the opponents, either by using up their bidding space or by pushing them to bid too high.
3. You want to suggest a good lead to partner in case your LHO becomes declarer.

These reasons for overcalling are listed in order of importance. You may be surprised to hear that the most important reason to make an overcall is constructive — you want to try to play the hand. For years, overcalls were viewed as merely obstructive maneuvers. That is no longer the majority view, but it is still a widely-held belief in some circles that an overcall shows a bad hand, and that if you have an opening bid or better you must start with a takeout double. However, as we shall see, it is now common practice to overcall on quite strong hands, with the intention of bidding again later to show extra values.

What does an overcall look like?

First, let’s define our terms. We are going to start with one of the basic building blocks of competitive bidding — the simple overcall, which means an overcall that is made at the lowest possible level of the suit you bid (you can also overcall in notrump, too, but we’ll be talking about that later on). These auctions are both examples of simple overcalls:

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You | LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♣ | 1♥ | | | 1♥ | 2♦ | | |

In both cases, partner has bid his suit at the lowest level that he could. By comparison, look at these auctions:

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You | LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♣ | 2♥ | | | 1♥ | 3♦ | | |

In both cases here partner has made what is called a **jump overcall** (he has not bid his suit at the lowest possible level) and as you might suspect, this kind of overcall shows a somewhat different type of hand. We’re going to ignore jump

overcalls for now, and come back to them in Chapter 5.

When an opponent opens the bidding, he is announcing that the hand belongs to his side. What's more, he is probably right. The enemy probably does have more points than your side. It is also now less risky for them to double you if you bid too much, since they already know that they probably have the balance of strength. In fact, if they are looking at trump tricks as well as a good hand, they will find it very easy to double. However, when you have a strong suit for your overcall, it will be more difficult for your opponents to double you, since they will not have good trumps. Your first requirements for overcalling are therefore:

1. *A good suit, at least five cards in length* **or**
2. *A good hand (an opening bid or better)* **and preferably**
3. *Both.*

So when deciding whether or not to overcall, it is not just a matter of counting your high-card points. Indeed, there are many 14-point hands on which you should pass, while there are plenty of 8-point hands on which an overcall is clearly correct. The key is to have a suit that is good enough to take some tricks if it is the trump suit, or to have enough high cards instead. For example:

♠ A Q J 10 7 ♥ 10 9 6 4 ♦ 4 ♣ 8 6 3
 ♠ J 10 6 3 2 ♥ A K 4 ♦ A K 4 ♣ 6 3

Both these hands are very reasonable 1♠ overcalls if your RHO opens, say, 1♣. You would not dream of opening one spade with the first hand — you have only 7 HCP! However, it is a perfectly respectable overcall. Now look at this example:

♠ K J 7 ♥ A J 10 ♦ K 8 6 4 ♣ Q 6 3

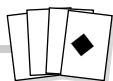
You have 14 HCP and would not consider passing if you were the dealer. However, you cannot make an overcall (or any other positive bid) once RHO opens, say, 1♣. You have no five-card suit, and (as you will see when we get to Chapter 6) you cannot make a takeout double with three cards in the enemy's suit. If you were a little stronger, you might consider a notrump overcall (again, we'll get to that in a later chapter), but you don't have enough points for that bid. So like it or not, you must pass.

The point is that when you are thinking about overcalling, playing strength is more important than high-card points. 'Playing strength' is a way of talking about the capacity of your hand to take tricks, which comes from a combination of your high-cards and your long-suit tricks. Compare the three hands above; the first, with only 7 HCP, has much more playing strength than the third, despite its 14 HCP. On the first hand, you can expect to make four spade tricks (if they are trumps). On the third example hand, though, what tricks are you going to make? The ace of hearts and maybe a couple more in the wash, but that's about it.

'Suit quality' is another important factor, which relates not just to the high cards in your suit, but also the intermediate spot cards. A suit like ♠QJ1098 is clearly much better in terms of trick-taking potential than ♠QJ432 and yet both

BY THE WAY

Finally, you need to consider the vulnerability. Overcalling is always risky and, even with a perfectly sound overcall, it is possible that you will be doubled and give up a large penalty if the hand lies badly for you. There are no guarantees, therefore, but always make sure you have a good suit when vulnerable; if you are not vulnerable and they are, you can be a little more frisky if you feel like it.



count as 3 HCP. Look at your spot cards in the suit you plan to overcall, and ask yourself, “How many tricks can I count on in this suit if it ends up as trumps and partner has only two or three small ones?” If the answer is, “Not many,” you should be reluctant to overcall without aces and kings elsewhere to compensate.

What if you have a really good hand?

As we shall see in a later chapter, one special meaning of the takeout double is that you have too good a hand for a simple overcall. How good is ‘too good’? Modern style is to start with an overcall on quite strong hands, especially if your good suit is one of the main features that

you want to tell partner about. Remember that you will often get the chance to show your extra values by taking a second bid later in the auction. As a very rough guideline, we shall say that you can overcall on a hand with up to about 18 points.

Here is an example of a pretty good hand on which you should nevertheless start by overcalling:

♠ A Q 8 7 ♥ 9 ♦ K Q J 9 6 4 ♣ K 3

RHO opens 1♣. You have three features you want to show: really good diamonds, a secondary spade suit, and a good hand. In a competitive auction, there is some risk that the bidding will be uncomfortably high when you next get a chance to speak. You therefore need to get the main features of your hand described as fast as possible. Although you have a very good hand here, it is still best to start with a 1♦ overcall. You will probably get a chance to bid your spades later, and at the same time to show your extra values just by taking a second bid.

How does my overcall make life difficult for the opponents?

You’ll remember that we gave three important reasons why you might decide to overcall. We also mentioned that often, more than one of them will apply. Suppose your RHO deals and opens 1♣, and you have:

♠ A J 10 8 7 ♥ A 4 ♦ 9 8 7 5 ♣ 8 6

There are two advantages to making a 1♠ overcall. First, you may be able to buy the contract — maybe both sides can make nine tricks in their best suit. Since you hold the boss suit, you can outbid your opponents whatever their best suit happens to be. You have the spades and it is up to you to bid them — after all, you cannot expect your partner to bid the suit with only ♠Qxx, for example.

However, a second reason for overcalling is that you are taking away the opponents' bidding space. Without your overcall they might have a happy, undisturbed auction such as:

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| | | 1♣ | pass |
| 1♥ | pass | 1NT | pass |
| 2♣ | all pass | | |

By sticking in a 1♠ bid, you can take the whole one-level away from them. If LHO has the right kind of hand, he may be able to use a negative double to help describe it (see our previous book, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* if you are not familiar with Negative Doubles), but even then it will be hard for them to stop in 2♣, and that may be their best contract. Things get even worse for them if your partner happens to be able to raise spades (we'll talk about what kind of hand he would have for this in the next chapter). Now the auction might go:

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| | | 1♣ | 1♠ |
| dbl | 2♠ | ? | |

Do you see what has happened? You and your partner have just taken the two-level away from the opponents as well as the one-level, and you may even steal the hand in 2♠ if opener feels the three-level is too high for him. Even if they can make three of a suit, it may be hard for them to figure that out.

Making life difficult for the opponents by using up their bidding space is a major reason for choosing to overcall. Bidding 1♠ over a 1♣ opening can be very disruptive. However, notice that the reverse is also true. If you bid 1♦ over their 1♣, or 1♥ over their 1♥, you're not taking up any of their room, so you had better be overcalling for one of our other two reasons — either you think it may be your hand, or you want to suggest a lead.

When should you overcall for the lead?

We have dealt so far with hands on which you overcall with at least some expectation of competing for and making a contract, or are trying to take up some of the opposition bidding space. But what if you hold:

♠ A Q J 10 6 ♥ 4 3 ♦ 8 7 5 ♣ 10 7 6

You can be fairly frisky at the one-level, since you won't often get doubled there, and it's certainly worth bidding 1♠ over 1♣ or even over 1♦ since it takes up a good chunk of their space. What about over a 1♥ opening, though? You have few enough high cards that it seems likely that the opponents will play the hand, probably in hearts or in notrump. You are only going to get one chance to suggest that partner lead a spade and, if LHO declares 3NT, you are not likely to have much chance of beating it except on a spade lead. So you should overcall 1♠ on this hand even if they open 1♥, for the third of the three main reasons

— you want to make a strong suggestion to partner about what he should lead.

Obviously, the main requirement for this kind of overcall is to have a really good suit — probably not worse than the one in this example.

What about overcalls at the two-level?

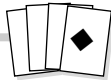
| | | | |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| | | 1♠ | 2♥ |

We pointed out at the start of the chapter that this 2♥ bid is still a simple overcall, since this is the lowest level at which you could bid hearts. However, in contrast to the situation when you bid, say, 1♥ over 1♣, you are now committing your partnership to the two-level, and you won't be surprised to learn that the requirements to do this are a touch more stringent.

You should realize that the two-level is much more dangerous than the one-level — you are more likely to be doubled and you are a trick higher. It is therefore wise to resist the temptation to overcall at the two-level on a poor suit, particularly when vulnerable, although avoiding large penalties is only one reason for this. You should have at least a good five-card suit and a hand on which you would open the bidding. Many players insist on a six-card suit for a minor-suit overcall, and there is good reason for this. When you overcall in a major, the most likely game contract, if the hand belongs to your side, is in your suit. However, when

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Many partnerships promise a decent six-card suit for any vulnerable two-level overcall, and that is not a bad rule.



you overcall in a minor, the best game contract is very likely to be 3NT. Having a strong six-card suit that will provide tricks is therefore a major asset. These hands would be good examples of sound two-level overcalls over an opponent's 1♠ opening:

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|---------|---------------|--------|
| ♠ 8 3 | ♥ K Q 10 9 8 | ♦ A 4 3 | ♣ A J 7 | Bid 2♥ |
| ♠ A 3 | ♥ 9 8 3 | ♦ 7 4 | ♣ A K J 9 7 3 | Bid 2♣ |

If you're feeling aggressive, here is a hand where you might think seriously about overcalling 2♣ over a 1♦ opening, even though it has relatively few high card points:

♠ J 9 8 3 ♥ 8 ♦ 7 4 ♣ A K J 9 7 3

You'd hate to pass and have LHO get to 3NT without suggesting to your partner that a club is the best lead. In addition, 2♣ takes up a great deal of bidding space. With five tricks or so in your own hand, you are unlikely to get damaged too badly in 2♣, and you may even get a chance to show your second suit if partner shows signs of life. Especially not vulnerable, most good players would overcall with this hand.

That is not the case, however, with our final example:

♠ K Q 5 ♥ A 5 ♦ A 7 3 ♣ J 8 6 4 3

If RHO opened 1♦, overcalling 2♣ on this hand would be an atrocity. Yes,

you have 14 HCP and yes, your overcall uses up lots of the opponent's bidding room, but because your suit is so bad, it won't be worth many extra tricks as a trump suit. You will take just about as many tricks on defense as you would if you played the hand. So it doesn't seem likely the opponents can make much (although from time to time they'll enjoy defending 2♣ doubled!). The most likely consequence of your overcall is that the opponents will stay out of a contract that would fail or, if they don't, that partner will lead a club and let them make it. Remember, that when you overcall, partner will almost certainly lead your suit; now look at the hand and ask yourself which suit you least want led!

Are the rules any different if both opponents have bid?

You should be more careful about getting into the auction when the bidding is opened on your left and RHO responds. The primary reason for this is that the danger is greater (because both opponents have shown values) and the bidding may even be at an uncomfortably high level. We will deal later with overcalling when LHO opens and the next two players pass — this is called **balancing**, and is covered later on. For now, let us assume that RHO does respond to his partner's opening bid.

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♣ | pass | 1♥ | ? |

When responder bids a new suit at the one-level, you must be more careful than when the opening bid is on your right. If you come in now, you are entering a live auction in which both opponents have already shown some strength. It is now unlikely that it is your hand, since LHO has at least 13 points or so and RHO at least 6.

You can still overcall with the same kind of hand on which you would make the bid in second seat. However, when deciding whether to come into this type of auction, remember that the preemptive value of your bid is greatly reduced — you're not really taking up much bidding space if any, and they have already exchanged some information. So you should usually have some expectation of outbidding the opponents to offset the risk of entering the auction when both opponents have shown values. Remember also that when LHO has opened the bidding and RHO has bid a new suit, both hands are unlimited in strength. Responder could have as few as 6 HCP but he also could have much more, so you should be very cautious. In these auctions, the opponents can double you for penalties much more easily than they can when only one of them has bid.

This situation is slightly different, but many of the same warnings apply:

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♥ | pass | 1NT | ? |

Even in this auction, where RHO has shown a fairly weak hand (6 to 9 or 10 points), entering the bidding is still dangerous. RHO is certain to have length in

at least one of the minors and, quite probably, in both. Remember, he could not bid 1♠, so he has at most three of those, and he could not raise hearts, so he is short there too. To come in with a 2♣ or 2♦ overcall, you need at least a strong six-card suit and a decent hand. Even then, there is no guarantee of safety.

Finally, what about this kind of auction?

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♥ | pass | 2♣ | ? |

When responder bids a new suit at the two-level, it is a guarantee that your side is outgunned. Opener has shown 12+ points, and responder has suggested at least 10 (or a full opening bid himself if they are playing the modern Two-over-One style). Even if you have a good hand, say 15 points or so, how many do you think partner will have? Right — not many.

To enter the fray now, you must have a decent hand with plenty of distribution — in other words, what we earlier called ‘playing strength’, which in this case is going to mean the ability to take tricks without necessarily having many high cards. A strong six-card suit or five cards in each of the unbid suits would be a minimum. Remember that partner will produce little in terms of high cards. If you do not find a good fit, even a two-level overcall could lead to a substantial penalty.

Summary

- ✓ Overcalls at the one-level show at least a good five-card suit, but may be made on fewer high-card points than would be required to open the bidding.
- ✓ An overcall does not imply a poor hand. You can overcall with quite a good hand (up to about 18 HCP), intending to bid again later to show your extra values, if that is the most descriptive bid available to you.
- ✓ Because overcalls tend to show good suits, partner will strain to lead your suit if your LHO becomes declarer. Holding a good suit and little else, you may therefore consider overcalling at the one-level solely to direct the lead.
- ✓ Overcalls at the two-level show opening bid values and at least a good five-card suit. If the overcall is in a minor suit, it should be a six-card suit.
- ✓ Overcalling after RHO responds to the opening bid is much more dangerous. You must therefore have both a good hand and a strong suit.

Simple Suit Overcalls

NOW TRY THESE...

[To Answers](#)

1. On each of these hands, your RHO opens 1♣. Neither side is vulnerable. What is your next bid?

a ♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ K 6 5 2
♣ 3 2

b ♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ A K 5 2
♣ 3 2

c ♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ K Q 8 4
♦ 3
♣ 8 5 4

d ♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ K Q 4
♦ 3
♣ A 8 5 4

e ♠ K J 4 2
♥ 4
♦ K Q J 8 6
♣ 8 5 4

f ♠ A K 4 2
♥ 7 4
♦ J 8 7 6 3
♣ Q 4

2. On each of these hands, your RHO opens 1♥. Neither side is vulnerable. What is your next bid?

a ♠ K Q J 4
♥ 9 7
♦ A Q 8 6
♣ K J 4

b ♠ A Q J 4 2
♥ 4
♦ Q J 8 6
♣ A 9 3

c ♠ 4 2
♥ 4
♦ A K J 8 6 3
♣ K 8 6 5

d ♠ Q J 4 2
♥ 4
♦ A K J 8 6 3
♣ 6 4

e ♠ K Q 2
♥ K 4
♦ J 8 6 3 2
♣ A 8 5

f ♠ A K Q 9 7 5
♥ 8
♦ A K 7 5
♣ A 4

3. Neither side is vulnerable. What is your next bid on each of these hands?

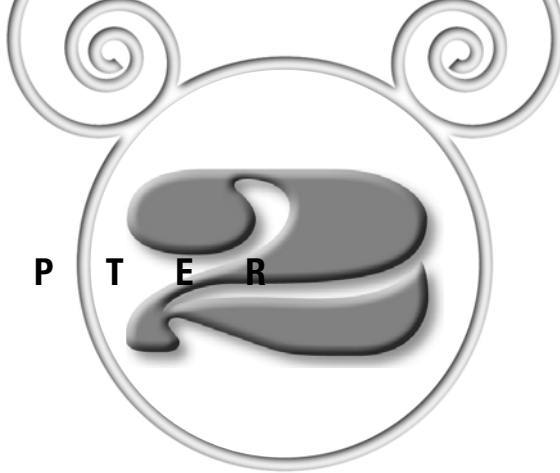
a ♠ K Q 4
♥ 4
♦ K Q 10 6 3 2
♣ K 7 5

b ♠ Q 5 4 2
♥ 4
♦ K J 8 6
♣ A J 6 5

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| 1♥ | pass | 1NT | ? |

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| 1♥ | pass | 1♠ | ? |

- 1 a** 1♠ It may be your hand if partner has some values and a fit, but this is essentially an obstructive (and lead-directing) overcall.
- b** 1♠ This time you have more expectation of buying the hand. Anything else would be wrong at this point.
- c** 1♠ Were you tempted to make a takeout double because you have both majors? Wrong for two reasons: your double promises support for *all* the unbid suits, and your best fit is likely to be spades.
- d** 1♠ For similar reasons to those given for 1(c) above, 1♠ is again correct. If the opponents compete you may be able to do something on the next round that will show your extra values.
- e** 1♦ An overcall shows a good five-card suit, and your spades don't qualify. You may get the chance to bid spades later.
- f** pass Bidding 1♦ over a 1♣ opening shows a decent hand and/or a really good suit, as it takes up no room. This hand has neither. You have marginal values and a poor suit — best to keep quiet.
- 2 a** dbl You have support for all three unbid suits. Overcalling 1♠ would show five spades, and there's no reason to suggest that this will be your best trump suit anyway. If partner has three spades and four diamonds, you obviously prefer to play in the minor.
- b** 1♠ Although you have support for all unbid suits, doubling is wrong. You probably belong in spades, and partner will not bid spades in response to your double with only three of them. You should be able to show your extra strength on the next round.
- c** 2♦ You have a good suit, and you should be pleased if partner advances towards game, whether it be 5♦ or 3NT.
- d** 2♦ It would be a mistake to double in the hope that partner will bid spades. More likely, he will bid clubs (they always do!). You may get a chance to bid spades on the next round anyway.
- e** pass Although you have an opening bid, your hand is the wrong shape for a takeout double and your moth-eaten diamonds are not even close to being good enough for an overcall.
- f** dbl This time you are too strong for a simple overcall. Double first and then bid your spades on the next round. This shows a very good hand with at least six good spades (see Chapter 6).
- 3 a** 2♦ You have a strong suit but, without aces, you still have a minimum. Even 2♦ could get doubled and suffer a large penalty.
- b** pass You are risking much to gain little if you double; you are more likely to find the minors with LHO than with partner. What do you think your partner's longest suit is? Right — hearts!



RAISING PARTNER'S SUIT



To pass when you can raise is to shirk your responsibilities; but raising your partner's bid properly requires a perfect knowledge of the raising rules.

Florence Irwin, Auction Highlights, 1913.

In our opening chapter, we looked at the various reasons for making an overcall. Now let's move around the table — LHO opens the bidding and partner makes an overcall. What do you do now?

In an uncontested auction, where only your side is in the bidding, you can often adopt a strategy designed to describe your hand accurately in two or even three bids. You cannot afford such luxuries in a contested auction — by the time you get a second turn, the bidding may already have reached an uncomfortably high level. Your objective is therefore to describe the nature of your hand immediately. It is vital that you make sure your partner knows what is happening as quickly as possible. In particular, if you have support for your partner's suit, tell him right away. In other words,

Support with support!

Your objective when you have found a fit is twofold — to reach your best contract, and to do so as quickly as possible, denying the enemy the time and space to explore for a contract of their own. What follows is a general guide to

the meaning of various bids that show support for partner. The point counts given are only approximate since, as before, playing strength is more important than high cards in deciding how good your hand is.

When do you just raise partner's suit?

You should rarely pass when you have a fit for partner's overcalled suit. As we saw in the first chapter, he could have quite a good hand (up to 18 HCP or so) and still only have made a simple overcall. Remember too, that partner shows at least a good five-card suit with his overcall, so you should not be shy about supporting with only three trumps. However, it's also important to be able to tell partner how good a hand you have so he can make an intelligent decision about bidding on. We're going to divide the possible hands into two groups: those where you have limit raise values or better (in other words, you at least want to invite partner to bid game) and those where you have less than a limit raise. To qualify for a limit raise, you should have 10+ points and at least three-card trump support.

Let's look at the weaker hands first.

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | ? |
| ♠ Q 9 7 | ♥ K 8 7 6 | ♦ 8 7 | ♣ 9 7 6 4 |

Just as you would if partner opened 1♠, you should raise to 2♠. Admittedly, this rather unappealing collection is a minimum, but you should always try to find an excuse to bid if you have support. As we saw in the first chapter, owning the spade suit means never having to say you're sorry — every time you bid it, you take a whole level of the auction away from the opponents.

Extra length in partner's suit is a liability defensively. It is easy to see why... Let's say your partner overcalls on a suit such as ♠AKQ74. If the opponents end up playing hearts and you have a singleton spade, then the odds favor partner's being able to cash two or three spade tricks. Now let's say that you have four spades. How many spade winners is partner likely to make? He may get two on a very good day, but one is more likely and perhaps even none. If you have five spades, at most your side will take one trick in the suit on defense. The more cards you have in your partner's suit, the more likely it is that his winners will be ruffed if your side ends up on defense. ***So the more cards you have in support of partner, the less suitable your hand is for defending.*** Reread that. Again.

All direct raises of partner's suit show hands that are weaker than a limit raise — hands in the 6-9 point range. How do you decide how high to raise partner? Easy — you just count trumps! The more you have, the higher you raise. We've seen that, with three-card support, you can give a single raise. Even though you may have relatively few high cards, you can afford to be very aggressive when you hold four-card (or longer) support for partner's five-card suit. So with four-card trump support, jump raise partner's suit.

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | ? |
| ♠ K 9 7 3 | ♥ K 8 7 | ♦ 8 7 | ♣ 9 7 6 4 |
| ♠ J 9 7 3 | ♥ K 8 | ♦ 8 | ♣ 10 9 7 6 4 2 |

Bid 3♠ with either of these hands. It is important to remember that your jump to 3♠ is not invitational and does not show a good hand. This is a preemptive raise — you are simply trying to make life difficult for the opponents by using up bidding space. (Although this method is now very commonly played, it is still something that you must agree on with your partner and it must be alerted when it comes up.)

It is easy enough to see why preemptive jumps in response to overcalls have grown in popularity. If taking the two-level away from the opponents made life tough for them, imagine how disruptive it is if you can also steal the three-level. You have no idea who can make what, but the chances are that the hand belongs to the enemy. **Make the opponents take the last guess!**

With even more trumps, you can take extreme liberties...

| | | | |
|-------------|-----|-------|-------------|
| ♠ K 7 6 4 2 | ♥ 7 | ♦ 8 2 | ♣ 9 7 6 5 4 |
|-------------|-----|-------|-------------|

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | dbl | ? |

You do not want to defend a high-level contract with hearts or diamonds as trumps, so you must make life as difficult as you dare for the opponents. You have at least a ten-card spade fit, so you should contract for ten tricks. Bid 4♠.

What if you have a good hand with support?

Very simple. Since we have said that all direct raises (single and jump raises of partner's overcall) are used on relatively weak hands, largely for preemptive purposes, you start with a cuebid (a bid of the opponents' suit) on any good hand with support.

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| ♠ K 7 4 | ♥ A 8 7 3 | ♦ 8 7 | ♣ K 6 4 2 |
|---------|-----------|-------|-----------|

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | 2♦ |

As a rough guide, a cuebid shows 10+ points (including distribution) with at least a three-card fit for partner. Note that the cuebid is unlimited — it shows a sound limit raise or better. If partner has a good opening bid or better for his overcall, game is quite possible. However, it is also possible that eight tricks are the limit of the hand.

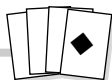
This, however, is where things get a little trickier than they are in an uncontested auction. Partner can have quite a wide range for his overcall (anything from 7 to about 18 HCP), while your cuebid has, so far, merely promised at least about 10. We're going to have to do some fancy footwork to get to the right spot from here.

BY THE WAY

If RHO bids, usually by raising opener's suit, the simplest way to deal with it is to ignore him! In other words, make your usual raise if you have support for partner's overcall. If you have a hand worth a limit raise (less likely now), you can still cuebid; for example:

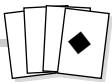
| | | | |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | 2♦ | 3♦ |

You are still showing a limit raise or better in spades by bidding 3♦.



BY THE WAY

If you are a passed hand, your cuebid shows exactly a limit raise, since you cannot have more than that or you would have opened the bidding.



How does the auction continue after a cuebid?

Partner assumes that you have 10-12 for your cuebid, until further notice. With a minimum hand, partner will simply rebid his spades. (Remember, your cuebid shows at least three-card support, so partner can happily rebid his five-card suit.) If either of you has more than advertised, then taking one more bid is usually the way to get the message across. The best way to see how this works is by looking at some examples. Here are some typical auctions, with hands to match:

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| | Partner | | You |
| | ♠ A Q J 8 3 | | ♠ K 7 4 |
| | ♥ 9 6 | | ♥ K 8 7 3 |
| | ♦ J 5 3 | | ♦ 8 7 |
| | ♣ Q 7 3 | | ♣ K 6 4 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | 2♦ |
| pass | 2♠ | all pass | |

Partner has little to spare for his overcall, so he simply repeats his suit at the lowest available level. You have a bare 10 points for your cuebid, so you pass.

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| | Partner | | You |
| | ♠ A Q J 8 3 | | ♠ K 7 4 |
| | ♥ 9 6 | | ♥ K 8 7 3 |
| | ♦ A 5 3 | | ♦ 8 7 |
| | ♣ Q 7 3 | | ♣ K 6 4 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | 2♦ |
| pass | 3♠ | all pass | |

This time partner has extra values, so he bids more than just 2♠. He is not quite strong enough to commit to game facing a balanced 10-count though, so he invites game by jumping to 3♠. Again however, you have a minimum, and you pass.

| <i>Partner</i> | <i>You</i> |
|----------------|------------|
| ♠ A Q J 8 3 | ♠ K 7 4 |
| ♥ 9 6 | ♥ K 8 7 3 |
| ♦ K 5 3 | ♦ 8 7 |
| ♣ A Q 3 | ♣ K 6 4 2 |

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | 2♦ |
| pass | 4♠ | all pass | |

With this hand (17 points) partner is happy to play game even if you have a minimum limit raise. As he also knows that you have at least three-card spade support, there is no need to investigate alternative contracts, and he jumps directly to 4♠.

Now let's make your hand a little stronger...

| <i>Partner</i> | <i>You</i> |
|----------------|------------|
| ♠ A Q J 8 3 | ♠ K 7 4 |
| ♥ 9 6 | ♥ A Q 7 3 |
| ♦ J 5 3 | ♦ 8 7 |
| ♣ Q 7 3 | ♣ K 10 4 2 |

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | 2♦ |
| pass | 2♠ | pass | 3♠ |
| all pass | | | |

Partner again has a minimum overcall, and so he rebids 2♠. You are worth one more effort though, and invite him to bid on by raising to 3♠. This sequence, a cuebid followed by an invitational raise, typically shows around 13-14 points. On this hand, partner is still not quite strong enough to bid game, so he passes.

Here's one last sequence:

| <i>Partner</i> | <i>You</i> |
|----------------|------------|
| ♠ A Q J 8 3 | ♠ K 7 4 |
| ♥ Q 6 | ♥ A K J 3 |
| ♦ J 5 3 | ♦ 8 7 |
| ♣ Q 7 3 | ♣ K 6 4 2 |

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | 2♦ |
| pass | 2♠ | pass | 3♠ |
| pass | 4♠ | all pass | |

Partner's values are scattered, and also somewhat soft — he doesn't know whether those queens and jacks will be really useful. He does not want to venture beyond 2♠ facing a balanced 10-count — hence the 2♠ rebid. However, once you show extra by inviting with 3♠, partner is happy to accept the game try.

Summary

- ✓ If you have support for partner's suit, tell him so immediately. Since partner's overcall promises a good five-card suit, you have a fit any time you have at least three of his suit.
- ✓ Direct raises, both single raises and jumps, show about 6-9 points. They are primarily defensive bids intended to get in the opponents' way. Make a single raise with three trumps and jump raise with four.
- ✓ Even with relatively few high-card points, you can afford to raise to the level of the number of known combined trumps.
- ✓ With good hands containing support for partner's suit (10+ points), start with a cuebid.
- ✓ In response to a cuebid, overcaller makes a minimum rebid to deny extra values. Repeating his suit does not show extra length in it.
- ✓ If RHO bids over partner's overcall, make your normal bid, including cuebidding opener's suit if you need to show a limit raise or better.

RAISING PARTNER'S SUIT

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

What is your next bid on each of these hands (neither side is vulnerable)?

1 ♠ J 4 2
♥ 9 8 7 6 3
♦ K 6 5 2
♣ 3

LHO 1♣ **Partner** 1♠ **RHO** pass **You** ?

2 ♠ J 10 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ K 8 6 5 2
♣ 3 2

LHO 1♣ **Partner** 1♠ **RHO** pass **You** ?

3 ♠ J 9 7 4 2
♥ 4
♦ J 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4

LHO 1♣ **Partner** 1♠ **RHO** pass **You** ?

4 ♠ A J 4
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ 3 2
♣ 9 8 5 4

LHO 1♣ **Partner** 1♠ **RHO** pass **You** ?

5 ♠ K J 4
♥ 4
♦ K J 8 6 4
♣ A 8 5 4

LHO 1♣ **Partner** 1♠ **RHO** pass **You** ?

6 ♠ A K 4 2
♥ A 4
♦ K J 7 6 3
♣ Q 4

LHO 1♣ **Partner** 1♠ **RHO** pass **You** ?

7 ♠ K Q J 4 2
♥ 8 4
♦ 8 5
♣ K 8 6 3

LHO pass **Partner** 2♦ **RHO** 1♦ **You** 1♠ ?

8 ♠ K Q 8 4 3
♥ K 7
♦ 8 6
♣ K J 4 3

LHO pass **Partner** 2♦ **RHO** 1♦ **You** 1♠ ?

9 ♠ A Q J 4 2
♥ 4 3
♦ A 8
♣ K Q 9 3

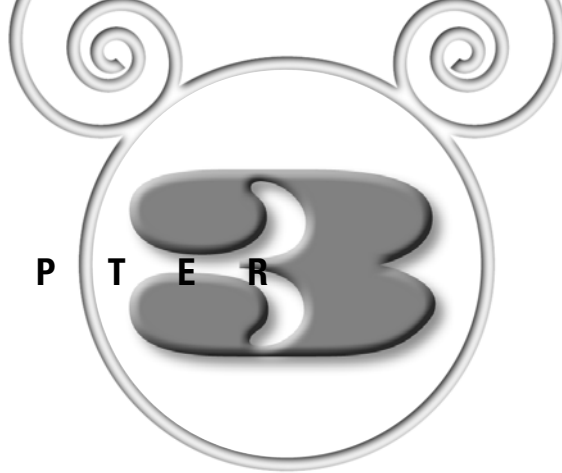
LHO pass **Partner** 2♦ **RHO** 1♦ **You** 1♠ ?

10 ♠ A Q J 8 4
♥ K Q 7
♦ J 6 3
♣ 6 5

LHO pass **Partner** 2♦ **RHO** 1♦ **You** 1♠ ?

- 1 2♣ You have a weakish hand with three-card support for partner's overcall. Make a defensive raise to make life difficult for opener to re-enter the auction.
- 2 3♠ You still have a weak hand, but this time you have four-card support for partner. Preempt the auction as high as you dare.
- 3 4♠ You have a terrible hand unless spades are trumps, and the opponents can surely make at least game if you give them room to find their best fit. You know your side has at least ten spades, so preempt to the four-level. You probably won't make 4♠, but the Law of Total Tricks (see Chapter 24) assures us that if they double you, the penalty will be less than the value of their game. Trust us, it works!
- 4 2♣ Cuebid the opener's suit to show a limit raise. This is a minimum hand for a cuebid, so if partner rebids 2♠, showing no extras, you will pass. If partner encourages by bidding 3♠, you will have a decision to make.
- 5 2♣ This time, you have enough to invite game. You should start with a cuebid, and then make one more effort — if partner rebids 2♠, you can raise to 3♠.
- 6 2♣ You plan to bid game, even if partner has no extra values. By starting with a cuebid, you can investigate slam prospects at a safe level.
- 7 2♠ You are minimum for your initial overcall. If partner is also minimum for his cuebid (a 10-count with three-card spade support), then there is no reason to expect that you can make more than eight tricks. Show your minimum hand by making the weakest rebid available.
- 8 3♠ You have extras this time. Game will be on if partner has anything more than a totally minimum cuebid. Invite partner to bid game by jumping to 3♠. More experienced players may consider bidding 3♣ here instead of 3♠. This descriptive game try allows partner to go on if he likes clubs.
- 9 4♠ Even opposite a minimum cuebid (10 points and three-card spade support) you want to play in game.
- 10 3♠ or 4♠. So do you feel lucky? This 14-point hand is right on the cusp; aggressive players will just bid game, while others will feel more comfortable just inviting. Who's right? Vulnerable, we would just bid 4♠ (remember that game bonus!), but we've gone down before, and probably will this time too!

C H A P T E R



RESPONDING TO OVERCALLS WITHOUT SUPPORT



But think, oh think, of those awful and numerous times when the hand does not fit! *Florence Irwin, Auction Highlights, 1913.*

In the last chapter, we looked at the various options you have available if you want to raise the suit partner has overcalled. But what if you don't have support for partner's suit?

First of all, you should not bid at all on a poor hand (less than about 8 points) if you have no support for partner. You must not introduce a new suit just because you want to rescue your partner.

| <i>Partner</i> | | <i>You</i> | |
|----------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| ♠ | Q 10 3 | ♠ | K 7 4 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 7 3 | ♥ | — |
| ♦ | 3 | ♦ | Q 9 8 7 6 4 |
| ♣ | A Q 8 | ♣ | 9 7 4 2 |

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♣ | 1♥ | pass | ? |

Here you hate hearts and you have a six-card suit of your own. However, bidding 2♦ would be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Looking at

both hands, it is clear that 1♥ is a much better contract than 2♦; to begin with, partner is going to make 1♥, while 2♦ is a very sick puppy indeed. Not only that but, as we shall see shortly, partner is not even allowed to pass 2♦ — it is forcing! Whatever partner bids over 2♦ will just get you into worse trouble.

When you do not like partner's suit and you have a poor hand, keep the bidding low by passing. If the hand is a misfit for your side, then it probably will be for the opponents too. Often they will bid again, with the result that they get into trouble, rather than you.

What if you have a decent hand, though?

If you have at least 8 points or so, you should try to bid something even without support for partner. After all, if partner can have as much as 18, you're now in a range where game is not out of the question, depending on how good his hand actually is. Since, as we saw in the last chapter, a cuebid promises support for partner's suit, you have only two options: bid your own suit or bid notrump.

You won't always have a convenient bid available but, if you have at least 10 points counting distribution and a reasonable five-card suit, you can bid it now. Let's take a look at some hands on which you should bid your own suit:

♠ K J 9 7 6 4 ♥ 8 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ Q 9 2

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | ? |

In this example, you have a decent suit of your own (decent means at least a good five-card suit), and sufficient values to expect that it will be your hand if a fit can be found. If partner has enough high cards, you may be able to bid and make 3NT even if you don't have a good trump fit somewhere. However, before we look at how the auction might continue, there is very important point to make: your new suit bid is forcing — partner is not allowed to pass. There is good reason for this — since a cuebid shows a good raise of partner's suit, you cannot also use it just to tell him you have a good hand if you do not have support. So there are going to be hands where you don't have support for partner, but have enough high cards that you don't want him to pass just yet. Perhaps these are the two hands:

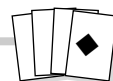
| <i>Partner</i> | | <i>You</i> | |
|----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| ♠ | 10 8 3 | ♠ | A K J 9 7 6 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 7 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | K 3 | ♦ | A 8 7 |
| ♣ | J 8 3 | ♣ | Q 9 2 |

| <i>LHO</i> | <i>Partner</i> | <i>RHO</i> | <i>You</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | ? | | |

Partner has a fairly minimum hand to overcall 1♥ over 1♦, yet it is enough to give you quite a good play for 4♠. You're not going to get there if he is allowed to pass your 1♠ response!

BY THE WAY

You will come across players who prefer to play that a new suit by overcaller's partner is not forcing. This is one of those gray areas we mentioned right at the start of this book. Neither method is right or wrong (although at IMPs or rubber bridge, forcing is definitely preferable), but you need to discuss all the implications with your partner whichever way you decide to play it. In this book, we're sticking to the 'new suit forcing' approach. Of course, as we'll see shortly, a new suit bid by a passed hand is never forcing.



How does the auction continue after you bid a new suit?

The answer is pretty straightforward: partner does what comes naturally to describe his hand. His weakest bids are a rebid of his own suit, or a single raise of yours:

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| | Partner | | You |
| ♠ | 10 8 | ♠ | K J 9 7 6 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 7 2 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | J 3 | ♦ | A 8 7 4 |
| ♣ | K 8 3 | ♣ | Q 9 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | 2♥ | all pass | |

With a minimum hand, and no support for you, partner simply rebids his suit. Notice that this doesn't promise extra length, or indeed anything much at all — he has to bid something, after all.

Here's a hand on which partner would raise your new suit:

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| | Partner | | You |
| ♠ | 10 8 3 | ♠ | K J 9 7 6 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 7 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | K 3 | ♦ | A 8 7 4 |
| ♣ | J 8 3 | ♣ | Q 9 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | 2♠ | all pass | |

Note again that your partner does not show any extra values when he raises spades. Since 1♠ is forcing, he has to bid something, even with this minimum overcall. When he holds a stronger hand in support of your suit, he must therefore do more than make a simple raise. Look at these two hands:

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| Partner | | You | |
| ♠ | Q 10 3 | ♠ | K J 9 7 6 4 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 7 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | 5 3 | ♦ | A 8 7 |
| ♣ | A J 8 | ♣ | Q 9 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | 3♠ | pass | 4♠ |
| all pass | | | |

This time, partner has a better than minimum hand and good support for your spade suit. Your singleton heart is not an asset, but you do have an extra spade so you decide to push on to game. You're probably going to need the club finesse to work but, since LHO opened the bidding, he figures to have most of the high cards too, and it probably will.

With a solid overcall, partner may be able to suggest playing in notrump:

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| Partner | | You | |
| ♠ | 3 | ♠ | K J 9 7 6 4 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 3 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | Q 10 5 3 | ♦ | A 8 7 |
| ♣ | A 10 8 | ♣ | Q 9 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | 1NT | all pass | |

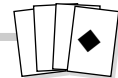
This time, you reach a safe haven even though neither of you has a fit for the other's major. Having shown some values with 1♠, there is no need for you to bid again. Of course, with a better hand you are allowed to raise:

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| Partner | | You | |
| ♠ | 3 | ♠ | K J 9 7 6 4 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 3 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | Q 10 5 3 | ♦ | A J 7 |
| ♣ | A 10 8 | ♣ | Q J 2 |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | 1NT | pass | 2NT |
| pass | 3NT | all pass | |

Notice that you reached an excellent game contract with only 24 HCP between you. This also brings us conveniently to the topic of bidding notrump after an overcall.

BY THE WAY

Often in competitive auctions, you can bid aggressive games on slightly less than the normal amount of high card points. This is because you may be able to judge that your high cards will be well-placed relative to the opening bidder, who will have most of the ones you are missing. This is very different from the normal 26-point game contract where the opposing high cards could be anywhere – they could be split 7-7, 10-4, 4-10, and so forth. If you know during the auction that all the kings are lying under your ace-queens, it's a whole new ball game.



What kind of hand do you need to bid notrump after partner overcalls?

When partner's suit is a major, you deny three-card support by bidding notrump. You also need at least one (and preferably two) stoppers in the opponents' suit, and you have a fairly balanced hand, probably without a good suit of your own:

| | | | |
|--|----------------|------------|------------|
| ♠ 8 4 ♥ K Q 7 5 ♦ Q J 8 6 ♣ K 10 3 | | | |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | ? |

Bid 1NT, showing about 8-11 HCP. The range for a 1NT bid as responder to an overcall is higher than it would be if partner has opened, because partner may have a lower point-count for his overcall than he would for an opening bid.

| | | | |
|--|----------------|------------|------------|
| ♠ J 4 ♥ K Q 7 5 ♦ Q J 8 6 ♣ A J 10 | | | |
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♠ | pass | ? |

Bid 2NT on this hand. You cannot commit to game when partner might have only 7-8 points. 2NT here shows around 12-14 HCP and is highly invitational. With extra values, partner will be happy to raise you.

Things are slightly different if partner has overcalled at the two-level, promising at least opening bid values:

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♠ | 2♥ | pass | ? |

Now 2NT by you would show about 8-11 HCP (the minimum range), as well as a balanced hand, fewer than three hearts, and a spade stopper or two. With a better hand, just bid 3NT right away.

Does any of this change if you are a passed hand?

If you had a chance to open the bidding and did not do so, there is the implication that you have neither a particularly strong hand nor a very good suit. Most players, therefore, treat a new suit bid by a passed hand as showing moderate values; however, it is no longer forcing.

| | | | |
|---|----------------|---|------------|
| | Partner | | You |
| ♠ | 3 2 | ♠ | A J 10 7 6 |
| ♥ | K Q J 10 3 | ♥ | 8 |
| ♦ | 10 5 3 | ♦ | 9 8 7 |
| ♣ | A 10 8 | ♣ | K 9 3 2 |

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | pass | pass |
| all pass | | pass | 1♠ |

BY THE WAY

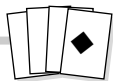
If you want to bid a new suit at the three-level as a passed hand, you have to pay some attention to safety, so you must have at least some tolerance for his suit.

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♠ | 2♥ | 2♠ | 3♣ |
| | | | pass |

Partner's two-level overcall has promised at least an opening bid, and you may be just shy of one.

Clearly, too, you have a good club suit. But what if partner doesn't like clubs and can't bid notrump?

You must be able to stand it if he rebids 3♥ — so you need a doubleton heart (with more you would just raise).



Partner has a minimum hand for his 1♥ overcall, and while he's not thrilled about spades, at least he has a couple of them. Since you are a passed hand, he's allowed to pass, and would probably do so happily.

What happens if RHO bids?

In the auctions we have so far discussed, opener's partner has passed over your partner's overcall. That will not always be the case.

Just as was the case when you had support for partner, the simplest way to proceed is to ignore RHO.

♠ Q 9 2 ♥ 8 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ K J 9 7 6 4

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
| 1♦ | 1♥ | 1♠ | ? |

With this hand, you can bid 2♣ just as you would have done if RHO had passed. There is, however, one common situation that we need to mention, which is when RHO raises opener's suit, and your hand is not really good enough to bid your own suit.

Using a Responsive Double

Throughout this book, we will be looking at numerous ways in which you can employ a double to help your competitive bidding. Many of you will be used to playing a double for penalties in most situations. As we shall see, that is often not the best use for the call.

♠ Q 2 ♥ K J 8 4 ♦ 9 4 ♣ K 10 7 6 4

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | 2♦ | ? |

On this hand, you would have bid 2♣ if RHO had passed, but 3♣ is something of a stretch. The answer, as those who have read our previous book will know, is to use a conventional double. This is called a **responsive double**, and it tells partner that you have support for both of the unbid suits, tolerance for his suit (usually), and sufficient values to compete — perfect! Think of it as a type of takeout double. Let's look at another example:

♠ K 7 ♥ A Q 6 3 ♦ K 6 3 ♣ Q 8 5 2

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | 2♦ | ? |

Without the intervention, you would have chanced 2NT, but the 2♦ call has given you the opportunity to tell partner a lot more about your hand. Perhaps he has four hearts and a minimum hand, in which case you can now get to play 2♥ instead of 2NT. So, make a responsive double and partner will know you have values and no clear-cut bid.

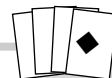
Now, what about this auction?

| LHO | Partner | RHO | You |
|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| 1♦ | 1♠ | 1NT | dbl |

Is this double still responsive? No, because RHO didn't raise opener's suit. This is a penalty double.

BY THE WAY

As you play more, you will encounter any number of sophisticated ways to use doubles in competitive auctions. Many experts would play the double of 1NT in this sequence as responsive, for example. In this book, we're going to keep things as simple and straightforward as we can, and allow you to explore more advanced topics elsewhere when you feel you want to do so.



Summary

- ✓ If you have support for partner's suit, tell him immediately.
- ✓ Do not attempt to rescue partner just because you have a bad hand with shortness in his suit.
- ✓ A new suit bid in response to an overcall by an unpassed hand is forcing. It shows 10+ points (including distribution) and a good five-card suit, and is a constructive move forwards.
- ✓ Overcaller does not show extra values when he makes a simple raise of your new suit. As your bid was forcing, he has to bid something, even with a minimum hand.
- ✓ Overcaller can show extra values with support for your suit by cuebidding or making a jump raise.
- ✓ Notrump bids in response to an overcall show more points than they would if partner had opened the bidding. Typically, bidding notrump at the minimum level shows 8-11 HCP.
- ✓ A new suit bid by a passed hand in response to an overcall is not forcing, but is still forward-going. If the new suit bid forces the auction to the three-level, it also shows a tolerance for overcaller's suit.
- ✓ If RHO bids over partner's overcall, make your normal bid if possible. If he raises opener's suit, you have the opportunity to make a responsive (takeout) double if you have the right kind of hand.

RESPONDING TO OVERCALLS WITHOUT SUPPORT

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

What is your next bid on each of the following hands?

1 ♠ Q 8 4
♥ —
♦ J 8 7 6 5 2
♣ J 9 3 2

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

3 ♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ 4
♦ A Q 8 7 3
♣ 8 5

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

5 ♠ K J 4 2
♥ 4
♦ J 10 8 6
♣ K 9 8 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

7 ♠ Q J 9 2
♥ 9 7
♦ A 9 6 3
♣ 10 7 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

9 ♠ K Q J 4 2
♥ 4
♦ 8 7 4
♣ K 8 6 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
pass 2♥ 1♦ 1♠
pass pass ?

11 ♠ K Q J 4 2
♥ A 4 2
♦ 8
♣ K 8 6 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
pass 2♥ 1♦ 1♠
pass pass ?

2 ♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ K J 5 2
♣ 3 2

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

4 ♠ A Q J 10 4 2
♥ Q 4
♦ K 3
♣ A 5 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

6 ♠ Q J 9
♥ 8 7
♦ A J 9 6 3
♣ A Q 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♣ 1♥ pass ?

8 ♠ K J 9 2
♥ 4
♦ K 10 9 7 3
♣ A Q 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
1♠ 2♥ pass ?

10 ♠ K Q J 4 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ 8
♣ K 8 6 4

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
pass 2♥ 1♦ 1♠
pass pass ?

12 ♠ K Q J 4 2
♥ 4
♦ K 10 7 4
♣ A 8 7

LHO **Partner** **RHO** **You**
pass 2♥ 1♦ 1♠
pass pass ?

RESPONDING TO OVERCALLS
WITHOUT SUPPORT

- 1 pass There is no reason to suppose that your side can make any contract, so keep the bidding as low as possible. With luck, the opponents will bid again, and then they will be the ones to get into trouble on this misfit.
- 2 1♠ You are just about worth a bid, although opposite a minimum overcall you may be turning a plus score into a minus by moving. Partner might have quite a good hand though and, if he also has a spade fit, then making game is not out of the question.
- 3 1♠ Although you have a good hand, there is no guarantee that you have a fit. Bid 1♠ and hope to get a chance to introduce your second suit cheaply too.
- 4 1♠ As this is forcing, there is no need to do more at this stage.
- 5 1NT This shows 8-11 HCP and denies a fit for partner's hearts. Do not be surprised if you cannot make anything, though.
- 6 2NT This time you have to make an effort to get to game opposite anything but a completely minimum overcall. However, you should still not be surprised if you find yourself too high sometimes.
- 7 pass Much though you'd like to take a bid in case partner has a really good hand, you have only 7 HCP, no heart support, no club stopper, and no five-card suit of your own.
- 8 3NT Partner has overcalled at the two-level, and should have an opening bid, so just bid game.
- 9 2♠ You don't promise extra spades since 2♥ was forcing. Don't even think about bidding 3♣ — that shows better clubs and serious extra values.
- 10 3♥ Again, you're not promising a rose garden, just admitting to three-card heart support.
- 11 4♥ This time you really like hearts; you have a ruffing value and your spades will produce some tricks even opposite a singleton.
- 12 2NT You have a good enough hand to make a move towards game, even if it isn't going to be in a major suit. This is just a natural, descriptive bid, and partner can do what he wants from here, including pass.