

BASIC BIDDING REVIEW: -- Competition

I. When the Opponents Open

Annoying, isn't it? You had just decided that you were going to open the bidding with 1♦, when your opponent opens 1♠ in front of you. What to do?

When both sides are bidding, your objective is to get the best score possible. Game is unlikely, unless there is a good distributional fit. Finding an eight card major suit fit is still very important, since playing in a major will usually produce the best score.

Having a hand you would have opened is no reason to bid now. Your strategy has changed. *There are only four reasons to bid once the opponents have opened:*

1. **Balance of the Power.** Our side might have most of the strength.
2. **Lead Direction.** It could be important to tell partner what to lead.
3. **Sacrifice.** We may have a good sacrifice versus their game, slam, or partscore.
4. **Obstruction.** Our bidding may make it hard for them to get to the right spot.

The tools at our disposal for competing once the opponents have bid a suit are:

1. The **no-trump overcall**
2. The **simple suit overcall**
3. The **take-out double**
4. The **jump overcall**
5. Various **2 suited bids**

II. Hand Evaluation in a Competitive Auction

Never forget to keep reevaluating your hand during the auction. Particularly important is your holding in the opponent's suit. Tend to discount queens and jacks in their suit completely, unless you have higher honors or length with a no-trump bid. Either devalue or upgrade their king, depending on who you think has the ace.

Shortness in the opponents suit is a useful value, particularly once your side has a trump fit. If they have bid and raised a suit which you are long in, your partner will be short in it. Therefore *length in the opponents's suit is good, when both opponents also have length.*

III. Overcalling in Notrump

The reason to overcall 1NT is to let partner know that your side probably has the **balance of power**. Since the opponents have opened there is less room for accuracy, therefore the range of the notrump overcall is stretched to include a good fifteen. Write this on your convention card as 15+-18. Respond just the same as if partner had opened 1NT, in other words 2♣ is still Stayman. There is one new bid, the cue bid of the opponents suit (or the transfer to it). Most players use this for a good hand with some worry about the stopper in that suit.

There is one big difference between opening 1NT and overcalling 1NT - when you overcall you promise a stopper in the enemy suit. In other words, you guarantee that they cannot cash the first five tricks in that suit.

When you overcall 1NT, partner often knows immediately how high your side can compete and whether or not game is possible. Therefore make this bid whenever you can, with the proviso that bidding a decent five card major is more important.

The down side of overcalling 1NT is that your LHO is well situated to double for penalties with 10+ points. It is much easier to double when there is no trump suit to ruff away long suit winners. Your partner has the job of running for safety when this happens, this means bidding a 5 card or longer suit with a weak hand. Stayman and other conventions no longer apply, 2♣ may be a 5 card suit or may just be a weak hand with no long suit that will redouble on the next round if doubled.

IV. The Simple Overcall

The simple overcall is made on a hand with a five card or longer suit that would have opened the bidding, or a hand which is just a few points below that strength with a good suit. The reason to prefer to have a hand that would have opened, is to tell partner that your side may have *the balance of power*. The reason to shade this with a good suit is to *tell partner what to lead*. If partner has already passed, then you might overcall with an understrength hand to *look for a sacrifice or be obstructive*.

Having an opening bid is not an adequate reason to worry that your side has the balance of power. A good guideline is that with 15 or more points you should find a bid unless the opponents have opened your best suit. With less points, you can pass if there is no call that fits your hand.

When is your suit good enough to overcall understrength in points? Usually with two of the top three honors plus some intermediates. Imagine how you would feel if LHO responds 1NT and RHO raises to 3NT. If you would be very unhappy because you did not tell partner what to lead, then bid your suit now.

IV. The Take-out Double

Not all hands, that wish to compete after the opponents open, have a five card or longer suit to bid, and still fewer hands meet the requirements for a 1NT overcall. The most frequent hand type which wants to get involved is the hand with a minimum of 3 cards in each of the unbid suits which would like partner to pick one of them for a trump suit. This hand makes a take-out double. How does partner know that double is take-out? ***When double is the first bid made by our side and the opponents have opened in a suit below game level, then the double is take-out.***

Here are four examples of hands that would make a take-out double of the opponents 1♦ opening bid, arranged from most desirable hand pattern to least desirable.

A	B	C.	D.
♠ KJ104	♠ AQ7	♠ KQ8	♠ KQ8
♥ AQ98	♥ Q764	♥ J1075	♥ AJ93
♦ 2	♦ 6	♦ A9	♦ 1032
♣ K532	♣ KQ832	♣ A984	♣ K98

Hand A above is a classic example of the take out double. B and C are normal but suffer from having only 3♠ s. Note that it is fine to have a 5 card minor, but with a 5 card major prefer an overcall to a take out double. Hand D is the least desirable of all because of the lack of shortness in the opponent's suit. Only make a take out double on the 4333 hand pattern with too much strength to pass and a hand unsuitable for 1NT.

Exercise 4. These hands are not take-out doubles after a 1♦ opener, explain why:

A	B	C.	D.
♠ KJ1042	♠ KJ7	♠ KQ8	♠ KQ8
♥ AQ98	♥ Q764	♥ J1075	♥ AJ
♦ 2	♦ K6	♦ Q92	♦ 10632
♣ K53	♣ Q832	♣ A98	♣ KJ98

Shortness rather than length is used to add points for your distribution since you expect to become the dummy, hopefully in a major. 13 points are required at low levels. Once your take-out double is forcing your partner to bid at the 3 level, 15 points are preferred, and at the 4 level, around 17. Play your partner for approximately 8 points when making the decision to bid and see if that is enough for the level you will play at.

Length	Points
0	5
1	3
2	1

The take-out double has a second use which is **all hands of 19+ points start by making a take-out double**, no matter what the hand pattern. Then on the next round of bidding this hand bids a new suit or notrump to indicate it is the strong hand type:

Next Bid after Double	Shows
cheapest NT	19-21
jump in NT	22-24
new suit	19+
jump in new suit	huge

Exercise 5. Your RHO opens 1♠, your bid is?

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠ A4	♠ 6	♠ AJ67	♠ 9	♠ KJ
♥ KJ109	♥ KQ542	♥ Q87	♥ QJ107	♥ A842
♦ QJ2	♦ AK53	♦ K43	♦ AKQJ3	♦ K6
♣ K542	♣ Q75	♣ QJ8	♣ 987	♣ 9652

VI. When Both Sides are Bidding

When your side has gotten involved in a competitive auction, an auction where both sides are bidding, *the best score available will not always be a plus score*. Sometimes you have to aim for a small minus. For example, going down one for a loss of 50 or 100 points is an improvement over letting the opponents make 110 or 140.

The law of total tricks (see the book [To Bid or Not to Bid the Law of Total Tricks](#) by Larry Cohen) is a good guideline for when to keep bidding and when to pass in a competitive auction. A simple rule of thumb based on the law is that ***your level of safety is to contract for the number of tricks equal to your partnership's total number of trumps.***

Here are a couple of simple guidelines for competitive bidding:

1. **Never let the opponents play in 2 of a major** when they have an 8 card fit.
2. **Think twice about bidding three over three.** Quite possibly both sides are going down at the three level.

VII Responding to an Overcall

When partner overcalls, you do not have to respond with less than 8 points since she is limited by her failure to double. However, remember your objectives, *tell partner when there is an eight card major fit*. With 3+ card support, raise on any excuse. When the next player passes, it is easiest to play that all your bids mean the same as they would have meant if partner had opened the bidding. The exception is that a response of 1NT is now played as real, balanced, 8 to a poor 11 points, with a stopper in the opponents suit. Thus new suits at the 2 level can be bid with as little as 9 points and are not forcing on a minimum overcall. Look at the following chart:

Response to an Overcall	Shows	Forcing?
raise to 2 level	6-10, 3+ support	no
1 of a suit	8+ pts, 4+ cards	1 round
1NT	8-10, balanced	no

2 of a new suit, non-jump	9+ pts, 5+ cards	constructive
jump in new suit	14+, 5+ cards	yes
2NT	11+-13-	no
raise to 3 level	11-12, 3+ support	no
cue bid	13+	yes
3NT	13+	to play

How does this change when your RHO bids as well? It is less urgent for you to respond unless your original reasons for competing come into play.

- Is there an eight card fit?
- Might it be your side's hand?
- Do you need to indicate a lead?
- Are the opponents in 2 of an eight card major?

Exercise 6. It is 1♥ 1♠ pass to you. What would you bid? And after 1♥ 1♠ 2♥?

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠ A4	♠ KQ6	♠ AJ67	♠ K97	♠ QJ4
♥ KJ109	♥ 2	♥ 7	♥ 97	♥ 42
♦ 92	♦ AJ753	♦ KJ743	♦ 87653	♦ 963
♣ J542	♣ Q75	♣ 865	♣ 987	♣ AK652
Pts _____				
Bid _____				
Bid _____				

Sometimes partner's overcall is at the 2 level, then the simple raise takes you to the 3 level. This raise is 8-11ish. With more you guess to bid game.

VIII Responding to a Take-out Double

When partner makes a take-out double, she is requesting that you pick a suit no matter how bad your hand is. With 0 points you must bid. The only time you pass is with length and strength in the suit opened, this is called converting the take-out to penalty.

Since you must bid with 0 points, a hand of 9 or more points is good news for your partner, so jump in your longest suit or bid notrump with a stopper. The cue bid, bidding the opponent's suit is used to show a hand of game forcing strength or better. Here is your table of responses:

Response to a Take-out Double	Shows	Forcing?
non jump suit bid	0-8 pts, 3+ cards	no
jump to 2 of a suit	8-10, 4+ cards	no
1NT	6-10, stopper	no
cue bid	13+	yes
jump to 3 of a suit	11+, 4+ cards	no
2NT	11+-13-	no
3NT	13+	to play

Note, that some players like to play that the cue bid is slightly weaker, only 11+, then the auction is forcing only until someone raises the other's bid suit.

Doubler must act conservatively over the possible 0 point response, raising when the opponents don't bid is 16+, while the double raise is a hand that would have bid game over a non-forced response.