



THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

Responsive doubles

Suppose you hold this hand:
 ♠Q 10 6 3 2 ♥K Q 10 7 4 ♦6 4 ♣6
 and it is your bid in the following auction:

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1♣ | 1♦ | 2♣ | ? |

You and partner may very well have a fit in one of your majors, but you are not strong enough to bid 2♥ or 2♠ (and bidding either one would be a complete guess). Raising partner with a weak doubleton is not appealing. In other words, you'd like to act, but have no convenient bid. Fortunately, there is a tool you can add to your toolkit that helps.

What and why

A responsive double is a (takeout) double by responder after the opponents have bid and immediately raised a suit and partner has acted either by overcalling or doubling. When the opponents have bid and raised a suit, it is more likely that the double would be useful as takeout rather than as penalty. For partnerships used to playing negative doubles, the responsive double convention is not much different. It is simple and effective, and the chances to use it occur frequently. It is popular among tournament players.

When and how

Some general guidelines are needed. How high do you play responsive doubles? In what situations do they apply? What strength do you need?

Most partnerships play the responsive double only after the same suit has been bid and raised.

Consider this example:

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1♣ | Dbl | 2♣ | ? |

This is a classic auction for a responsive double. Normally you would have at least 4–4 in the majors and a minimum of 6 or 7 high-card points.

Contrast the above with this example:

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1♣ | Dbl | 1♠ | ? |

A double would not be responsive since the same suit was not bid and raised. In this case, a double would promise spades, either five of them or a good four-card suit. If you hold hearts and diamonds and enough HCP to act, you can simply bid 2♥ (and bid diamonds the next time if you choose to).

Some partnerships play responsive doubles through whatever level they play negative doubles. If that level is 3♠, then they also play responsive doubles through 3♠. This consistency makes it easier to remember.

The strength you need to respond depends on the level of the raise. If the suit bid and raised is to the two level, you can make a responsive double with 6 to 8 HCP. If the suit bid and raised is to the three level, you should have at least 9 HCP.

Double trouble, some examples

Assume you've agreed to play responsive doubles through 3♠. What would you do with each of these hands and the auction given?

Example #1

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------|----------|
| ♠ J 8 6 3 | ♥ K J 4 3 | ♦ 8 3 | ♣ Q 10 3 |
|-----------|-----------|-------|----------|

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1♦ | Dbl | 2♦ | ? |

Answer: This one is easy. Make a responsive double. You have too many points to pass, and your support for both majors should convince you to act. You don't care which suit partner bids and you can show your hand in one call.

Example #2

| | | | |
|-------|-------------|-------|--------|
| ♠ K 5 | ♥ Q J 8 6 3 | ♦ 8 3 | ♣ 10 3 |
|-------|-------------|-------|--------|

and the action is the same:

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1♦ | Dbl | 2♦ | ? |

Answer: Bid 2♥. Do not make a responsive double. That will mislead partner. Double says you have support for both majors. Suppose you double and the opening bidder rebids 3♦. Partner may bid 3♠, expecting you to have more length than a doubleton.

Example #3

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------|----------|
| ♠ J 8 6 3 | ♥ K J 4 3 | ♦ 8 3 | ♣ Q 10 3 |
|-----------|-----------|-------|----------|

and the auction is:

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1♦ | Dbl | 3♦ | ? |

Answer: This hand is the same as example #1 above, but in this case you have to pass. You have the proper distribution for a responsive double, but your hand is too weak to compete at the three level. If you double and partner has enough strength for you to make a three-level contract, he may very well bid game, perhaps down one. Pass and hope partner can double a second time.

Example #4

| | | | |
|-------|-----|-------------|-------------|
| ♠ Q 4 | ♥ 8 | ♦ K Q 7 4 3 | ♣ A J 8 5 3 |
|-------|-----|-------------|-------------|

and the auction is:

| West | North <i>Partner</i> | East | South <i>You</i> |
|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 2♥ | 2♠ | 3♥ | ? |

Answer: Double. This hand shows why the responsive double convention was invented. You want to compete, but are not sure which suit to bid. If partner doesn't have support for either of your suits, you can stand for him to retreat to his suit. Even though the opponents started with a weak two-bid, you can still use the convention. □