


The Next Level: Week 21

Doubling

Probably the most under-used card in the bidding box is the Double card. When bridge was first invented, doubling was all about exacting a bigger penalty when you think opponents have bid too high, and cannot make their contract, ie the PENALTY DOUBLE. While the penalty double is still relevant, and we will talk about it in this lesson, as bridge as developed we have thought of many other purposes for the DOUBLE card.

To keep it as simple as we can, and yet very useful, we will focus on 4 main purposes:

1. The take-out double
2. The penalty double
3. The lead-directing double
4. The negative double (sometimes called the “sputnik” double)

With all these possibilities, isn't it confusing? The double is only one bid- how can we tell what partner means by “Double”? Yes, it can be confusing- and occasionally there will be a misunderstanding. But the benefits are HUGE, and greatly outweigh any downsides. Using  well is an ESSENTIAL part of good bridge!

So let's start with the most useful purpose of the . It's not what you might expect- penalties – it's the

TAKE-OUT DOUBLE.

It crops up a lot.

It only applies when opponents have bid a suit.

What it says is: partner,

- I have some strength (normally an opening strength hand), but not necessarily a long suit of my own to overcall with.
- I am SHORT in the opposition's suit, and have tolerance for all the others
- I want to compete in the bidding, and try to find a fit with you.
- Please bid your best suit.

For example, your RH opponent is dealer, and opens 1♥

You hold this lovely 15-point hand: ♠K Q 7 2 ♥6 ♦A Q 7 3 ♣K J 6 3

What can you bid?

You aren't quite strong enough to overcall 1NT, and anyway, crucially, you don't have a heart stop.

You don't have a 5 card or longer suit, so you can't overcall in a suit (REMEMBER – **minimum 5 card suit for a suit overcall!!!**). So without the take-out double in your toolkit, you're stymied, and would have to pass.

Here, playing take-out doubles, your bid is , a classic example of the take-out double.

The message it sends to partner is : I have an opening strength hand, I am short in their suit, ♥, I have tolerance for all the other suits, especially ♠, the other major. Please bid your best suit.

If you double opposition's opening suit bid, it is 100% for TAKE-OUT. It is NOT a bid showing strength in opponent's suit, it shows **shortage** in it. Therefore, you **shouldn't** double opponent's opening bid of a suit if

- You have a hand weaker than opening strength
- You DON'T HAVE A SHORTAGE IN OPPONENT'S SUIT
- You don't have tolerance for the other suits. If they have opened a major, you should have a decent holding in the other major, ie 4+ cards, or 3 with an honour.

Think about it. If opposition open 1-of-a-suit, you double, and the next opponent passes, your partner MUST* bid. If your partner mistakenly passes (say because they are very weak) the opposition is now playing in 1 of their suit doubled-very nice for them!

*there is always an exception, isn't there!

Say opposition open 1♥, you make a take-out double, your LH opponent passes, and it's over to your partner.

But partner has no decent suit of their own, except a long heart suit! What can partner do?

They can pass! That converts the take-out double to a penalty double.

Partner is saying "With my hand, I think defending 1♥ doubled is our best option. I have a shapely hand with a long heart suit."

Of course, if opener's partner bids after you make a take-out double, partner is off the hook and is not obligated to bid, since you now have a chance to bid again. THEREFORE If partner chooses to bid, then they are showing some strength, say 8+ points and a decent suit, and an interest in competing the hand.

But if opener's partner passes, your partner has to respond to your double in some way, even with absolutely nothing! With a weak hand, up to ~7 points, she will bid her best suit at the lowest level. If she has no decent suit, and no suit preference, she will bid NT at the lowest level saying to partner- "you choose a suit".

So if you make a take-out double, your LH opponent passes, and partner bids at the lowest level, you know they might have nothing – certainly no more than 7 points. So you don't get carried away.

We've seen that if opponents open a suit, your partner doubles, and your next opponent passes, your partner knows you are forced to bid even with nothing. So if you bid at the lowest level, your partner will take you to be very weak.

If you aren't very weak, say 8+ points, then you must respond to partner's double at **one level higher** than the minimum.

Example: opposition open 1♥, partner doubles, and opener's partner passes.

You hold ♠ A Q 6 5 ♥ 10 6 2 ♦ K J 4 2 ♣ 6 3

You have a good spade suit and 10 HCP. You know partner has an opening hand and decent spades for her double, so you jump respond with 2♠. Bidding 1♠ here would be a mistake- you must show your strength.

Note that a take-out double also applies when opponents open a suit at higher than the 1 level – a pre-emptive opening 3 level bid, or a weak two opener.

- A double of an opposition weak two opener is for take-out.
- A double of an opposition pre-emptive 3-level opener is for take-out

The Penalty Double

Let's now move on to **PENALTY DOUBLES**, the next most common use of the X card.

	I	II
—1	100	200
—2	300	500
—3	500	800
—4	800	1100
—5	1100	1400
—6	1400	1700
—7	1700	2000
—8	2000	2300
—9	2300	2600
—10	2600	2900
—11	2900	3200
—12	3200	3500
—13	3500	3800

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Let's refresh on what the penalties are for going down in a doubled contract. If you pull out a X card from a bidding box, and have a look at the back, this is what you'll see.

The middle column, usually in green, column shows the penalty for going down **doubled NON VULNERABLE**.

The right hand column, usually in red, shows the penalty for going down **doubled VULNERABLE**

(The back of the Pass card similarly shows the penalties for going down

UNDOUBLED, non-vulnerable and vulnerable).

It's a good idea to get familiar with these numbers, especially the first 3 rows: 1 down doubled, 2 down doubled, and 3 down doubled, as they're the ones that crop up most often.

For example, the opposition are bidding a vulnerable game in spades. Let's assume their contract is going to make, so they would score 620 for 10 tricks. If you "sacrifice" in 5♥, and they double you, you can afford to go 3 down for -500 if you are not vulnerable, but 3 down would be a disaster if you are vulnerable, as you'd score -800. Remember, your aim in duplicate bridge is to achieve a better score than other pairs playing in your "direction", ie if you are EW, all the other EW's. So if you score -500 when other pairs score -620, you're onto a winner.

If you score -800 when other pairs score -620, you have done very badly on the hand.

Let's look at another example.

You and partner are vulnerable, and the opposition is non-vulnerable. You have confidently bid to 4♠, and expect to make at least 10 tricks for +620. But the bidding has been competitive, and the opposition have located a heart fit. They overcall your 4♠ with 5♥. You pass, and they play in 5♥. Let's assume your 4♠ would have made 10 tricks for +620. How many can the opposition afford to go down and still get a better score than their -620 if they'd left you in 4♠?

Answer- ZERO TRICKS!

If they score zero tricks, they are 11 down in 5♥. It is 50 points for each undoubled non-vulnerable undertrick, ie -550. So their sacrifice in 5♥ pays off however few tricks they make, if you fail to double!

If you double, they can only go a maximum of 3 down (for -500) and do better than their -620 for you making 4♠. If they score 4 down or worse, their sacrifice works out badly. So if the opposition steal your contract, you should decide either to bid on, or to double their bid. Pass is not usually a wise option.

So, how do you know when your partner's **X** is meant for PENALTIES?

- Double of an opposition NT bid is for penalties. A common example of a **double for penalties is when opposition open 1NT**. If you double, that is ALWAYS for penalties. You need a good hand to double: 16+ points (or a very good 15 points).
- And if they try to escape into a suit contract after 1NT doubled, then a double of whatever they escape into is also for penalties.
- In a competitive auction, ie both sides have been bidding, a double of opposition's bid above the 3♣ level is for penalties. (In a competitive auction, you and/ or your partner will have already shown a suit)
- Double of an opponent's overcall of what would otherwise be your final contract is for penalties.

The Lead Directing Double

So far, we've talked about take-out doubles and penalty doubles, the two main types of **X**

Here's another useful one, the **LEAD DIRECTING double**. It doesn't come up that often, but when it does, it's really handy.

In this type, we're not trying to take-out to compete in the bidding, nor are we trying to double for penalties. We are expecting the opposition to end up declaring, but we want to give information to partner about what to LEAD.

The only time we can do it is when the opposition make a CONVENTIONAL bid, ie a bid which doesn't indicate the suit being bid. Examples are when they bid 2♣ Stayman, which says nothing about clubs, or make a transfer bid eg 2♥, which doesn't show a heart suit but is transfer to spades.

If you double the opposition's CONVENTIONAL bid, you are saying "partner, please lead this suit".

Here's an example.

All vulnerable.

W(dealer)	N (your partner)	E	S (you)
1NT	pass	2♣	?

What is the 2♣ bid saying? It is STAYMAN, an enquiry to try to find a major suit fit. East is saying nothing about having a good club suit – it is a CONVENTIONAL BID.

Let's say you as South hold

♠ 8 6 5 ♥ 7 6 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ A K 10 8 3

You aren't able to compete in the bidding with 7 points and only a 5-card suit. You suspect West will end up declaring, either in 3NT, or 4 of a major, with partner on lead. You very much want partner to lead a club, so you DOUBLE their 2♣.

This is called a **LEAD-DIRECTING DOUBLE**

It can't be for penalties- you know EW aren't interested in playing in clubs.

It can't be for take-out, as the 2♣ bid doesn't show clubs, so what would be the other three suits?

A double of oppositions' CONVENTIONAL BID is lead directing – a great example of using **X** simply as a COMMUNICATIONS TOOL.

The Negative Double

And now on to our final type of double- the negative, or Sputnik, double.

This is a very useful system to play, and you should include it in your toolkit!

What is it?

It occurs specifically when partner has opened one of a suit, you RH opponent makes a suit overcall, and it's you to bid.

eg Partner opens 1♦, RH opponent overcalls 1♠, and it's your turn to bid.

Say you hold ♠ 6 3 ♥ A 10 8 3 ♦ 6 5 4 ♣ K J 5 4

A common scenario. Without the opposition intervention, you'd have bid 1♥. But what now? The 1♠ overcall has made life difficult for you.

You have 8 points – not enough for a 2 level bid (Rule of 14!) and you can't bid hearts anyway at the 2 level with only 4 of them. So you're stuck to bidding 1NT, and failing to show your heart suit. **You might well miss a heart fit with partner.**

Playing negative doubles, the problem goes away. You DOUBLE.

Your double shows you hold the unbid major – hearts – with at least 4 of them (or possibly 5 but without the strength to bid 2♥). Note that it says NOTHING about the other unbid suit, in this example, clubs.

But what if you held this hand? ♠ 8 4 3 ♥ Q 8 7 6 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ Q 6 2

Same sequence: partner opens 1♦, RH opponent overcalls 1♠, and it's your turn to bid.

You do have 5 hearts, and are keen to show them, but with only 7 HCP you aren't strong enough to bid 2♥. (Rule of 14).

Again, the negative double is the solution. Your bid is **X**

How strong do you need to be to make a negative double?

- A negative double of a 1 level overcall shows at least 6 HCP
- A negative double of a 2 level overcall shows at least 8 HCP
- A negative double of a 3 level overcall shows at least 10 HCP

and all are **UNLIMITED**

If there is one unbid major:

Partner opens	Opponent overcalls	You bid	Meaning
1♣	1♥	X	you have exactly 4 spades, because with 5 or more you'd bid spades
1♣	1♥	1♠	you have 5 or more spades, because with 4, you'd make a negative double
1♦	1♠	X	you have at least 4 hearts
1♠	2♣	X	you have either 4 hearts, or if 5+ hearts, not enough points to satisfy rule of 14, AND you have not got support for partner's spades

We've seen that a negative double shows the unbid major. What if there are two unbid majors?

- partner opens 1♣, opponent overcalls 1♦. Double shows at least 4-4 in the majors
- partner opens 1♦, opponent overcalls 2♣. Double shows at least 4 cards in one of the majors

Negative doubles are a great tool, and everyone should try to learn how to use them. If you find it confusing, or want to learn a bit more, No Fear Bridge has a great explanation, with examples. Just Google

No Fear Bridge Negative Doubles

and you will find it. It's free to access the article.

SUMMARY

We have looked at four different uses of the **X** card. How can I tell whether my partner's DOUBLE is for take-out, for penalties, lead directing, or a negative double?

- Double of an opponent's NT bid is for penalties, and
- Double of an opponent's escape bid, after you've already doubled their NT bid, is for penalties.
- Double of an opponent's bid in a competitive auction, above 3♣ level, is for penalties. (In a competitive auction, you and/ or your partner will have already shown a suit)
- Double of an opponent's overcall of what would otherwise be your final contract is for penalties.
- Double of an opponent's suit bid, early in the auction, is for take-out. This includes opposition weak 2, and pre-emptive 3 level opening bids.
- Double of an opponent's *conventional* bid is lead directing.
- Double of opponent's suit overcall, after partner has made a suit opening bid, is a negative double, showing the unbid major

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February 2022

