

**Q & A**

**Doubles**

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# Take-Out Doubles

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

## Q1: Basic Requirements?

To make a Takeout Double in this situation, we require:

- Opening strength (or something close)
- A suitable holding in any unbid major

And what would an unsuitable Spade holding be?

- Let's not double with 5+ Spades!
- And let's not double with only 2 (or fewer) Spades!  
4 is ideal, but three is OK if there is no better alternative.

In other words, a typical Takeout Double here contains 4 Spades (occasionally 3)

But there are a couple of exceptions ...

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

## **Q1: Basic Requirements (cont.)**

### **Exceptions:**

#### **No Trump Hands**

- With 15-18 and a good Heart holding we can overcall 1NT (after which you may want to play “systems on”).
- With 19+ and good Hearts we can double first, then bid NT

#### **Strong One-Suited Hands**

When we are very strong (let’s say 17+) and are not suitable for a Take-out Double, nor a 1NT overcall, we can double anyway, regardless of our shape, and clarify our hand next time around.

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

## Q2: Do these hands qualify?

We'll look at 7 hands and decide the best course of action for each.

Here is the first one:

♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ 5,   ♦ K Q 7 6,   ♣ Q 10 9 7

This one is easy! What do you bid?

*South West North East*

**1♥ ??**

**♠ A 10 4 3, ♥ 5, ♦ K Q 7 6, ♣ Q 10 9 7**

11 HCP and 4 Spades. So, not quite opening strength, but the perfect shape makes it worth a Double.

South West North East  
1♥ ??

How about these two hands?

♠ A 10, ♥ 5, ♦ K Q J 7 6 2, ♣ A Q 10 9

♠ A 10, ♥ 5, ♦ K Q J 7 6 2, ♣ A K 10 9

What are the choices? And what's *your* choice?

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

♠ A 10,   ♥ 5,   ♦ K Q J 7 6 2,   ♣ A Q 10 9

♠ A 10,   ♥ 5,   ♦ K Q J 7 6 2,   ♣ A K 10 9

These are a couple of strong one-suited hands, each with 4 losers. Borderline between either overcalling 2♦, or doubling first (and bidding Diamonds next time around).



*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

Next, take a look at:

♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ K Q 7,   ♦ A 5,   ♣ Q 10 9 7

♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ K Q 7,   ♦ A 5,   ♣ A Q 10 9

What's your bid?

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ K Q 7,   ♦ A 5,   ♣ Q 10 9 7

♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ K Q 7,   ♦ A 5,   ♣ A Q 10 9

Both hands have the right number of Spades and both are plenty strong enough for a Take-Out Double.

- With the first hand, because of the 4 Spades, some might prefer to make a Takeout Double, but we suggest a simple 1NT overcall (15-18). Thereafter, your Partner can play “systems on” if she wants to seek a Spade fit.
- The second hand is too good for a 1NT overcall, so the prescription here is to double first, then bid NT (19-20) (or raise Spades if Partner bids them).

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

Finally, how about these two specimens?

♠ A 10 4 3 2,   ♥ 5,   ♦ K Q 7 6,   ♣ Q 10 9

♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ 5,   ♦ Q 10,   ♣ A K Q 10 9 2

*South*   *West*   *North*   *East*  
1♥   ??

♠ A 10 4 3 2,   ♥ 5,   ♦ K Q 7 6,   ♣ Q 10 9  
♠ A 10 4 3,   ♥ 5,   ♦ Q 10,   ♣ A K Q 10 9 2

The first is obviously a 1♠ bid. On the second, the Spades say "Double" but surely 2♣ is the bid. With any luck, you can bid Spades later.

# Take-Out Doubles

## Q3: How high?

Suppose that the opponents open with a preempt. How high before our Double ceases to be for takeout, and becomes card-showing or penalty-oriented?

They open 2♥: Double still takeout, subject to similar rules as above.

They open 3♠: Still takeout-oriented, but may be less “pure” (more likely to have only 3 Spades, for example).

They open 4♥: At this level our Double becomes more value-showing and less take-out. Good guessing is useful here!

They open 4♠: At this level (and higher), Partner will usually pass the Double, but can bid on with exceptional distribution.

# Take-Out Doubles

## Q4: Balancing doubles

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♥	Pass	Pass	??

Balancing doubles can be made on substantially weaker hands. The general rule for balancing actions is to pretend you have an extra King and bid accordingly.

What balancing action would you take with these hands?

♠ A 10 4 3,    ♥ 5,    ♦ Q 7 6 2,    ♣ Q 10 9 7

♠ A 10,    ♥ 5,    ♦ K Q J 7 6 2,    ♣ A 10 9 8

♠ A 10 4 3,    ♥ K Q 7,    ♦ A 5,    ♣ Q 10 9 7

♠ A 10 4 3 2,    ♥ 5,    ♦ K Q 7 6,    ♣ Q 10 9

## Q4 (cont.): Balancing doubles

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	Pass	??

♠ A 10 4 3,     ♥ 5,     ♦ Q 7 6 2,     ♣ Q 10 9 7  
Only 8 HCP's but a fine balancing Double

♠ A 10,     ♥ 5,     ♦ K Q J 7 6 2,     ♣ A 10 9 8  
Two options here. You could jump to 3♦ showing strength and good Diamonds (in the balancing seat this is *NOT* a preempt!) Or, you could add an imaginary King to the hand, in which case, despite the doubleton Spade, it might qualify for a Double followed by a bid of those lovely Diamonds. Our choice would be 3♦.

♠ A 10 4 3,     ♥ K Q 7,     ♦ A 5,     ♣ Q 10 9 7  
Suitable Spades, but better to bid 1NT. In the balancing seat this shows 11-15 or thereabouts.

♠ A 10 4 3 2,     ♥ 5,     ♦ K Q 7 6,     ♣ Q 10 9  
Overcall 1♠.

# Negative Doubles

Partner opens one of a suit, your RHO overcalls, and you double. It's your basic Negative Double, known to all.

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	1♥	??	

- Double here is Negative, of course, showing some values (let's say at least 5 or 6 HCP's with no upper limit) and exactly 4 Spades.
- 1♠ here shows 5+ Spades and, again, at least 5-6 HCP's with no upper limit.

## Q5: How high?

Up to 4♥ is a common treatment, in which case:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	4♥	??	

Dbl here is Negative

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	4♠	??	

Dbl here is values

Generally speaking, the higher the preempt the more likely we are not to have an ideal major suit holding. For example:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	1♥	Dbl	

Exactly 4 Spades

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	3♥	??	

Suppose North holds: ♠ A 7 6, ♥ J 5, ♦ A K 8 5, ♣ J 7 6 5. Despite having only three Spades, North makes a Negative Double, it's the only sensible bid in the circumstances.



# Negative Doubles

## Q6: How strong?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	
1♣	1♥	<b>Dbl</b>	North has at least 5 HCP
1♣	2♥	<b>Dbl</b>	North has at least 7 HCP
1♣	3♥	<b>Dbl</b>	North has at least 9 HCP
1♣	4♥	<b>Dbl</b>	North has at least 11 HCP

Those HCP numbers are highly subjective, there is plenty of scope for good judgment, especially on distributional hands.

Also, remember that the Negative Double has no upper limit.

# Negative Doubles

## Q7: 5-card majors?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	
1♣	1♥	<b>DbI</b>	NEVER a 5-card Spade suit

But suppose that the auction starts:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♣	1♠	??

North holds: ♠ 8 7 2, ♥ A 7 6 5 4, ♦ K 8 2, ♣ 3 2.

This is not good enough for North to bid 2♥, that needs a slightly stronger hand. So North makes a Negative Double:

- Either 4 Hearts (no upper limit in terms of strength)
- Or 5+ Hearts but too weak for a direct 2♥ (such a bid would require about 9+ HCP and would be forcing for one round).

What the Negative Double does not show in this situation is 5+ Hearts *and* a good hand.

# Negative Doubles

## Q8: Two unbid majors?

Here are some auctions which cause confusion:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♣	1♦	<b>Dbl</b>

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♣	1♦	1♥ (or 1♠)

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♦	2♣	<b>Dbl</b>

So the question is: “What has North shown in each of these auctions?”

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♣	1♦	<b>Dbl</b>

In this auction, North's Double shows BOTH majors ... usually 4 cards in each. It's conceivable that North might have a 5<sup>th</sup> Heart, but she is most unlikely to have a 5<sup>th</sup> Spade.

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♣	1♦	1♥ (or 1♠)

Once you accept the fact that the Double shows BOTH majors, then it follows that the second auction does not guarantee 5 cards in the bid major. Otherwise, how would you bid, for example, a 3-4-2-4 type of hand?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
1♦	2♣	<b>Dbl</b>

In this auction, we have been forced to the two-level. Now, we need more latitude in finding a fit. So, a Double by North does not show both majors, but it does guarantee at least one major. A second major is not guaranteed. If South has no 4-card major, hopefully there will be safety in South's minor.

# Support Doubles

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
??			

If N-S are playing Support Doubles then:

- Double here shows 3-card Heart support
- A direct raise to 2♥ shows 4-card support (once in a while, even more)
- Any other bid (or Pass) shows less than 3 Hearts

## Q9: How strong?

A Support Double says nothing about strength. Opener could have a rock-bottom minimum or a really super hand. All that the Support Double says (in our example auction) is “I have three Hearts.”

## Q10: Is it mandatory?

Suppose that you held: ♠ K 7, ♥ J 7 6, ♦ A 4, ♣ A K Q 8 3 2

Tempted to bid 3♣ with this assortment? Don't be! Better to dutifully make the Support Double, notwithstanding the weak Hearts and the splendid Clubs, otherwise Partner will never believe you have 3-card support. So, yes, make the Support Double mandatory whenever the situation arises.

# Support Doubles

## Q11: How high?

Support Doubles (and Support Redoubles) are only made at the one-level and the two-level. But watch out for this auction:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	Pass	1♥	2♠
??			

If we use a Support Double this high, and Partner is weak with only 4 Hearts, we might end up at the 3-level in a shaky 4-3 Heart fit. So, the suggestion is: "Support Doubles are only on up to two of Partner's suit." Therefore, they are off in this auction.

## Q12: What if they bid NT?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	Pass	1♥	1NT
??			

Is this a Support Double situation, or would Double be for penalty? No right answer, our own preference is that it shows support, if only for the sake of consistency. It doesn't pay to litter up the convention card with lots of special cases.

However, if the 1NT bid is the Sandwich No Trump (apparently some people still play that), then the double would always be support, regardless of other agreements.

# Maximal Doubles

You open 1♠ holding: ♠ A Q 10 9 6 5, ♥ 9, ♦ A J 5, ♣ 5 3 2.

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♠	2♥	2♠	3♥
??			

South wants to compete to 3♠, based on her extra Spade and the singleton in the enemy suit. With a slightly stronger hand, she would no doubt want to invite game, but here, as we said, she just wants to compete. Enter Maximal Doubles.

## Q13: What is a Maximal Double?

The requirements are a competitive auction in which:

- We have bid and raised a major suit
- The opponents are bidding the suit just below ours (Hearts if we're bidding Spades, and Diamonds if we're bidding Hearts)
- They have competed to the three-level

All these conditions apply in the example auction, and now:

- 3♠ by North is merely competitive. North typically has minimum HCP's for her opening bid, but a sixth Spade and/or shortness in the enemy suit
- Double is Maximal, inviting game if Partner likes her hand.

## Q14: Why only with touching suits?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♠	2♦	2♠	3♦
??			

This is NOT a Maximal Double situation, because the suits being bid are not touching. If South wants to make a game-try she can bid 3♥.

# Responsive Doubles

## Q15: When do they apply?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♥	<b>DbI</b>	2♥	??

The opponents have bid and raised a major, and Partner has thrown in an intervening Takeout Double. That being the case, East can make a Responsive Double which in this auction:

- Denies 4 Spades (East would bid the appropriate number of Spades if she had 4 of them)
- Shows both minors

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♦	<b>DbI</b>	2♦	??

Here the opponents have bid and raised a minor, and now the Responsive Double by East shows *both* majors. With just one major East would bid that suit.

## Q16: How high?

Up to 3♠, Responsive Doubles should be relatively pure, which is to say that they should adhere to the length requirements for the unbid suits. But the higher the bidding gets, the more the Double morphs into a strength-showing Double, possibly with length deficiencies in the unbid suits. So, perhaps it is best to mark the convention card as “Up to 3♠”, though “Up to 4♦” is also quite popular.



# Responsive Doubles

## Q17: Strength?

Not surprisingly, the higher the level, the more strength we need to enter the auction:

- At the two-level, let's say 8+ HCP
- At the three-level, 10+ HCP

## Q18: On after Partner overcalls?

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	1♠	2♣	??

Yes, Responsive Doubles are still on. Here it would show 4 Hearts, preferably also with another place to play: either the unbid Diamond suit, or tolerance for Partner's Spades (two of them in other words).

# Penalty Doubles

Not all low-level Doubles are takeout oriented. Once in a while the opponents will find themselves in trouble, but all too often we let them off the hook.

On the other hand, it's not much fun to whack them for +500 when we are cold for a 630 game.

## Q19: A sample hand

You are South, holding: ♠ A 10 9 8, ♥ 6 5, ♦ K J 10 7 6, ♣ 8 2

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
		1♥	1♠
1NT	Pass	2♣	2♦
Dbf	2♠	Pass	Pass
??			

This is an obvious Penalty Double. And if they run to 2♠ then South will double that.

What makes South's double of 2♦ (and later 2♠) so irresistible?

- Spades are sitting over East's Spades
- Diamonds are sitting over East's Diamonds
- Tens in both their suits (each worth a trick)
- E-W appear to have only a 7-card fit
- We cannot make game, so even if the opponents miraculously wriggled out for down two you have a good board.

The next slide shows a possible layout and the carnage that might ensue in 2♠ doubled.

	♠ 6 5 ♥ K J 10 9 2 ♦ 5 2 ♣ A Q J 3	
♠ J 2 ♥ Q 8 7 4 ♦ 4 3 ♣ K 9 7 6 5	<i>North</i>  <i>West</i> <i>East</i>  <i>South</i>	♠ K Q 8 4 3 ♥ A 3 ♦ A Q 9 8 ♣ 10 4
	♠ A 10 9 8 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 10 7 6 ♣ 8 2	

The auction calls for a trump opening lead, and the best choice is the Spade Ten. Now, Declarer is held to 5 tricks. But leave the E-W hands in place and switch the N-S hands. Now N-S have lost their positional advantage and E-W may scrape up 7 tricks in 2♠ doubled. Maybe even 8 tricks if the defense slips up! If you not only switch the N-S hands but also take away the N-S Tens, then E-W no doubt *will* make 8 tricks!

# Conclusion

**Q20: Were the first 19 questions helpful?**

I do hope so!