

Modern Competitive Bidding

When to bid more. When to bid less.



by

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MODERN COMPETITIVE BIDDING

The general trend in today's game is to be much more aggressive, especially in competitive auctions. It isn't winning bridge to let the opponents comfortably find their best contract. The idea is to put pressure on the opponents by getting in their way and taking away bidding room. The more decisions the opponents have to make with limited room to exchange information, the more mistakes they are likely to make. In competitive auctions, it is sometimes best to bid a lot with very few values.

At other times, however, the winning strategy is to be more cautious when holding a strong hand. There are times, for example, when the winning call is to pass even with enough points to open the bidding.

The key is to know when to be aggressive and when to be cautious. This requires good judgment, and this material is designed to help improve that judgment through carefully constructed examples and deals.

When it comes to modern bidding, everyone plays a role: opener, responder, intervener – the takeout doubler or overcaller –, and advancer – the partner of the intervener. Let's take a look at each in turn.

1. Opener's Role

Notrump Opening Bids

The range for an opening 1NT has been decreasing steadily. It used to be 16-18 points, but nowadays the popular range is 15-17, and the trend is toward an even lower range of 14-16. If the partnership range is 15-17, the expert opinion is that any excuse to upgrade a hand to put it into the notrump range is a good idea. Consider this hand:

♠ A 9 5
♥ Q 10
♦ K 9 6
♣ K Q 10 8 2

The hand is balanced, and there are 14 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card club suit. That brings the total to 15 points, and the modern style would be to open 1NT¹. The 10s and 9s are also factors in upgrading the hand to a 1NT opening.

Length points are also counted when opening the bidding at higher ranges.

♠ A 10
♥ K Q 6
♦ A K J 9 4
♣ Q 10 3

This hand has only 19 high-card points, but adding 1 length point for the five-card diamond suit puts it in the range for opening 2NT if the partnership range is 20-21.

Five reasons to prefer opening 1NT rather than one-of-a-suit:

1. The preemptive effect.

Although the 1NT bid announces a reasonably strong hand, it also has a preemptive effect. The opponents can't come into the bidding at the one level. Consider the first hand above. If the opening bid is 1♣, the opponents can overcall 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠, making the auction competitive. Over the 1NT opening, it may not be so easy for them to enter the auction at the two level.

2. The partnership rarely gets to the wrong contract.

After a 1NT opening, the partnership is on firm ground. Responder knows almost the exact strength of opener's hand. Responder can assume opener has about 16 points and never be wrong by more than 1 point. The partnership should rarely get to the wrong level: partscore, game, or slam. Also, the partnership has a number of familiar conventions, such as Stayman and Jacoby transfers, to help reach the best contract.

¹ Since some players prefer the range to be stated in terms of high-card points, it's acceptable to announce a range of 14+ - 17 points, where the + indicates some reason to upgrade the hand, such as a five-card suit.

3. The stronger hand is hidden.

The 1NT opening also keeps the stronger hand hidden when responder has a weak hand. That can be an advantage in the play. The opening lead comes up to the strong hand, and the defenders don't know which high cards declarer holds.

4. Opener's rebid is more straightforward.

Opening one-of-a-suit can sometimes lead to an awkward rebid problem. Consider this hand:

♠ 9 4
♥ K J 8 7 5
♦ A J 8
♣ K Q J

An opening bid of 1♥ would lead to an awkward rebid problem after a response of 1♠. Even though this hand has a five-card major and a worthless doubleton, the modern choice would be to open 1NT.

Here's another example of another hand, though slightly unbalanced, that is a good candidate for opening 1NT:

♠ A 5
♥ Q 10 7 4
♦ K J 8 5 3
♣ A J

If the opening bid is 1♦ and responder bids 1♠, opener doesn't have a satisfactory rebid. It's not quite strong enough for a reverse into 2♥, and a rebid of 1NT would be an underbid. Best to open 1NT and describe the essential features of the hand.

5. The opening lead could be more challenging for the defenders.

If the defenders have little or no information about the suits held by the 1NT opener, they may get off to the wrong lead. For example, if opener has a five-card major and opens 1NT, the defender made lead that suit when holding four or more cards in the suit.

Opening 1NT

- balanced or semi-balanced hand (could include a 5-card major)
- 14+ - 17 valuation points (include length points)

Opening Suit Bids at the One Level

In First and Second Chair

The traditional guideline for opening the bidding at the one level is 13 or more points. This is a combination of high-card points plus distributional points. The modern style is to count distributional points for length rather than shortness when opening the bidding. The hand can be revalued for shortness once a fit has been found.

The 13-point requirement for opening the bidding is only a guideline. The modern style is to be more aggressive. Consider this hand for opener:

♠ A Q 10 6 3
♥ A 10 9 7 4
♦ 8
♣ 7 3

Only 10 high-card points plus 1 length point for each five-card suit, for a total of 12 valuation points. Yet the current style is to open 1♠ with this hand. A popular guideline for such borderline hands in first and second position is the Guideline (Rule) of 20:²

Guideline of 20

Add the high-card points to the number of cards in the two longest suits.
If the total is 20 or more, open the bidding; otherwise pass.

With 10 high-card points plus 5 spades and 5 hearts, this hand would qualify as an opening bid of 1♠.

Consider these two hands in first or second position:

1) ♠ K 8 6 3
♥ K J 8 2
♦ 9 4
♣ A J 5

2) ♠ K 8 6 3
♥ K J 8
♦ 9 4 2
♣ A J 5

Both hands are balanced and have 12 high-card points. The first would be opened 1♣ according to the Guideline of 20: 12 points + 4 spades + 4 hearts. The second would be passed: 12 + 4 spades + 3 hearts (or diamonds or clubs). The Guideline of 20 reflects that having two four-card suits as possible trump suits, along with a doubleton, is slightly more powerful than having a perfectly balanced hand with no shortness and only one four-card suit. Most experienced players devalue hands with 4-3-3-3 distribution.

There are other factors that can be used for judging when to open the bidding in first or second position. Aces and kings are more powerful than queens and jacks, and tend to be undervalued in the point-count system. 10s and 9s have no point count value, but they improve the trick-taking potential of the hand. Honors working together in the same suit, such as ♥ K-Q-J are more powerful than unsupported honors in separate suits. However, the bottom line is: "Would partner also open this hand?" Both partners should have an expectation of what an opening bid of 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠ shows.

² Some experts recommend the 'Rule of 22'. The extra 2 represents the additional requirement that the hand has at least two 'quick tricks'. An ace is a quick trick; a king is half a quick trick; an ace-king together is two quick tricks.

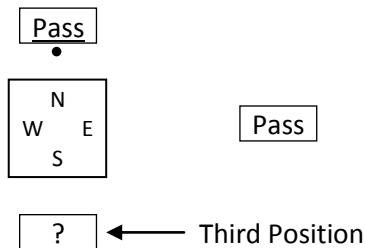
In Third Position

It has long been accepted that opening bids at the one level in third position can be a little lighter than in first or second position. The reason behind this is that partner has already passed. Since partner is a passed hand, a new suit response is no longer forcing. Opener can pass a response, hoping for a small plus score. If the dealer has 11 points, and partner in third chair has 11 points, and neither can open the bidding, a lot of potential partscore contracts would be lost.

How much lighter can the opening bid be in third chair? Typically, only 1 or 2 points. Opener should have at least 10 high-card points. Partner will initially assume opener has a full opening bid, and respond accordingly. So opener has to be prepared for whatever responder might do.³

Opening in Third Position
After two passes, a hand can be opened in third position with 1 or 2 fewer points than in first or second position. (The Guideline of 20 does not apply.)

Consider the following hands after the first two players have passed:

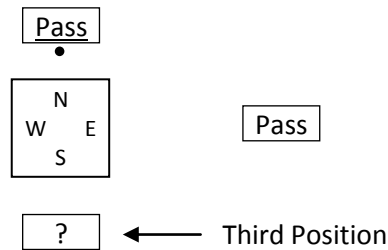


♠ 8 7 4 1♥. This hand would be a normal 1♥ opening in third position, even though the
♥ A Q 10 7 2 hand would probably be passed in first or second position. A decent heart suit,
♦ Q 9 8 and opener is prepared to pass any response by partner to show a 'light' opening
♣ Q J bid.

♠ Q 9 8 6 3 Pass (1♠). This hand is not so clear cut. After an opening bid of 1♠, the partnership
♥ K 6 5 may land on its feet, but a response of 2♦, for example, would leave opener poorly
♦ 4 placed. Many experts would pass, and look for a chance to come in later.
♣ K Q 7 2

³ There are also conventional responses – such as Drury after a third or fourth position major suit opening – that can be used to avoid getting too high when the third hand has less than a full opening bid.

Opening in third chair can also be done for tactical considerations. The partnership may not win the auction when neither player has an opening bid. If the opponents buy the contract, it may be valuable to get the partnership off to the best opening lead. Consider this hand after two passes:



♠ 10 5 3
♥ A K J 10
♦ K 9 4
♣ 9 8 2

1♥. With 11 high-card points, the hand could be opened light in third chair. With no five-card major, the standard opening bid would be 1♣. However, with such weak clubs and such strong hearts, a better choice would be to open 1♥. If the partnership ends up defending, it certainly looks better to have partner lead a heart rather than a club. The 1♥ opening takes away more bidding room than an

opening bid of 1♣, and it may deflect the opponents from reaching a notrump contract, fearful that opener has a five-card or longer suit. If partner does raise hearts with three-card support, the contract may be okay and is unlikely to be doubled when the opponents don't have many high cards in the suit.

In Fourth Position

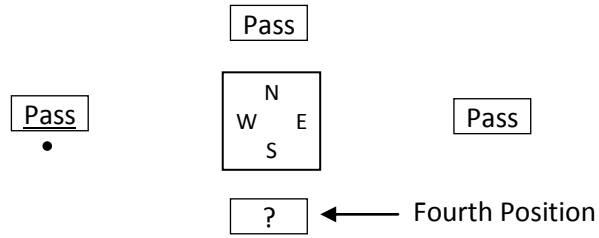
The strategy with borderline hands in fourth position is a little different. There is the option of passing the deal out. So the bidding should only be opened with the intention of getting a plus score, either by bidding and making a contract, or defeating the opponents if they compete in the auction. With a borderline hand of, say 11 high-card points, the 29 missing high-card points are likely to be evenly divided among the other three hands. Otherwise, someone would likely have opened the bidding. That means that both partnerships have approximately equal strength, and the auction is likely to become competitive.

In a competitive auction, the partnership that has the spade suit has an advantage. It can outbid the opponents at any level with contracting for more tricks. For example, if one side is in a contract of 2♥, a competing bid of 2♠ will either win the auction or force the opponents to go a level higher to buy the contract with hearts as trumps. This concept has been incorporated in the Guideline (Rule) of 15, sometimes referred to as Pierson points, with a borderline opening in fourth position:

Guideline of 15

Add the high-card points to the number of spades. If the total is 15 or more, open the bidding. Otherwise, consider passing the deal out.

Consider these hands after the first three players have all passed:



♠ K 8 4 2
♥ Q 7 4
♦ A Q 8 5 3
♣ 3

1♦. This hand has 11 high-card points. It also has 4 spades, for a total of 15 Pierson points (11 + 4 = 15). So the guideline would be to open 1♦.

♠ 3
♥ Q 7 4
♦ A Q 8 5 3
♣ K 8 4 2

Pass. This hand also has 11 high-card points, but it only has 1 spade, for a total of 12 Pierson points (11 + 1 = 12). So the guideline would suggest passing. If the bidding is opened 1♦, it's likely that the opponents will compete in spades. Of course, partner may have spades, but there are two opponents and only one partner, so the odds favor the opponents.

Preemptive Opening Bids

The trend toward more and more preemptive opening bids has been increasing over time. In early days, both two-level and three-level opening suit bids showed strong hands. Nowadays, everyone is familiar with preemptive three-level openings and with weak two-bids. Preemptive bids make the auction more challenging for the opponents, so they are an important aspect of modern competitive bidding. The partnership must not only know how to make maximum use of preemptive bids but also how to handle the opponents' preemptive actions.

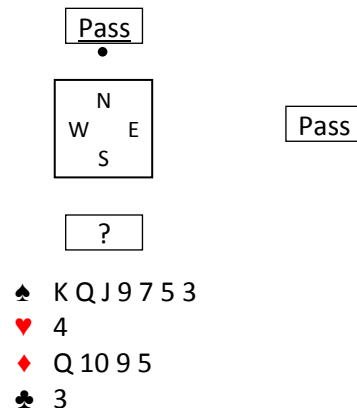
Consider these hands as opener when the partnership is non-vulnerable:

<p>♠ 5 ♥ K J 10 8 7 5 3 ♦ 8 4 2 ♣ 6 5</p>	<p>3♥. Most modern aggressive players would open 3♥ and take their chances with this hand. The disruptive effect of the 3♥ bid on the opponents' auction will usually more than offset the occasional poor result or any discomfiture for partner.</p>
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<p>♠ K 10 8 7 4 2 ♥ 6 4 ♦ Q 10 7 3 ♣ 8</p>	<p>2♠ or Pass. The spade suit in this example doesn't meet the usual guideline for two of the top three honors or three of the top five. However, many players would open 2♠ in first or second position, and a lot more would open 2♠ in third position.</p>
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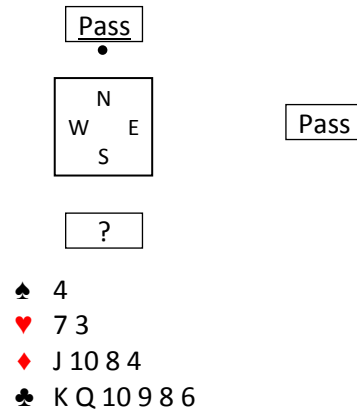
General Guidelines for Preemptive Opening Bids	
Two-level	Good six-card suit.
Three-level	Good seven-card suit
Four-level	Good eight-card suit
The length and quality of the suit can vary with the vulnerability and the position at the table. There is room for creative thinking.	

Consider this hand as opener in third position when non-vulnerable against vulnerable opponents:



When this hand was given to the Better Bridge panel, every expert opened the bidding 4♠, despite having only a seven-card card. The powerful playing strength with the 7-4-1-1 distribution, plus the favorable vulnerability and the likelihood of making things difficult for the opponents, were all factors in the panel's choice. That's the modern style!

Consider this hand after two passes when non-vulnerable against vulnerable opponents:



Although there are only six clubs in this hand, South would like to preempt to get in the way of the opponents and to direct partner to the best opening lead. South would like to start with a weak two-bid, but it's not available. So South might consider an opening bid of 3♣.

Tips for Opening the Bidding

- Look for reasons to open 1NT.
- Consider the position at the table.
 - Use the Guideline of 20 in first or second chair
 - Consider opening 'light' in third chair
 - Use the Guideline of 15 (Pierson Points) in fourth chair
- Look for opportunities to make preemptive opening bids.

DEAL: 1
DEALER: EAST
VUL: NONE

NORTH
♠ 5 4
♥ 6 4 2
♦ K J 9 5
♣ A Q 10 8

3NT

WEST
♠ K 6 2
♥ A Q 10 7 5
♦ 8 3 2
♣ 4 2

Pass	Pass
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EAST
♠ A Q 10 8 3
♥ J 9 3
♦ 4
♣ 9 7 6 3

Pass	Pass
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SOUTH
♠ J 9 7
♥ K 8
♦ A Q 10 7 6
♣ K J 5

1NT	Pass
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

After East passes, South values the hand for opening the bidding. South has a balanced hand with 14 high-card points plus 1 length point, for a total of 15. That puts the hand in the 1NT range.⁴ After West passes, North raises directly to game with 10 high-card points and no interest in a major suit.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 3NT, West would lead the ♥7, fourth from longest and strongest.

SUGGESTED PLAY

South wins the first trick with the ♥K and has nine more winners to take: five diamonds and four clubs. 3NT is made with an overtrick.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

There's nothing the defenders can do after West lead a heart. If West were to lead a spade, the defenders could take the first five spade tricks and East could then lead a heart, trapping declarer's ♥K, letting the defenders take five heart tricks. That would defeat the contract six tricks! But how is West going to know to lead a spade?

CONCLUSION

The 1NT opening bid is not only descriptive but it has a certain preemptive value. The opponents can't come in at the one level. That can sometimes result in a big swing, as on this deal, where both North-South and East-West can make a game.

If South were to open 1♦, West would overcall 1♥. Now the auction would become competitive. North would raise diamonds, and East would likely raise hearts. East might also bid spades. It's unlikely that East-West will actually get to game, but they can make either 4♥ or 4♠. They lose only a diamond and two clubs. If they do reach game, North-South might double and be very disappointed when they can't defeat the contract. Opening 1NT is likely to prevent this from happening.

⁴ Since the notrump range is sometimes expressed in terms of high-card points only, the partnership can state the range as 14+ - 17, indicating that it opens 1NT with as few as 14 high-card points when holding some additional values, such as a five-card suit or lots of 10s and 9s.

DEAL: 2
 DEALER: WEST
 VUL: N-S

NORTH	
♠	K 4 2
♥	8 6 5
♦	K J 10 5
♣	7 4 2

Pass Pass

WEST
 ♠ A 7 6 5
 ♥ Q J 10 3 2
 ♦ 8 4
 ♣ 9 6

Pass Pass

EAST
 ♠ 10 8 3
 ♥ 7 4
 ♦ 6 2
 ♣ A Q J 8 5 3

3♣ Pass

SOUTH
 ♠ Q J 9
 ♥ A K 9
 ♦ A Q 9 7 3
 ♣ K 10

3NT

SUGGESTED BIDDING

After two passes, East must decide what to do in third chair. East can't open a weak two-bid in clubs because 2♣ is reserved for strong hands. East only has a six-card suit, and a three-level preempt usually shows a seven-card suit. But with partner as a passed hand, it's likely the opponents have the values for game. Non-vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, East can try a preemptive opening of 3♣.

The 3♣ opening creates a problem for South. South might choose to make a takeout double, which will likely get the partnership to a partscore or game in diamonds. With a balanced hand and 19 high-card points plus 1 point for the five-card diamond suit, South is more likely to try 3NT.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

If East hadn't opened 3♣, West would lead the ♥Q, top of the solid sequence. When East bids 3♣, however, West should lead a club. With a doubleton, West should lead the top card, the ♣9.

SUGGESTED PLAY

After winning a trick with the ♣K, declarer has five diamonds winners and two heart winners. One more trick is needed. Declarer can promote two spade winners, and will make the contract if West has no club left to lead after winning the ♠A.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

East has no entry outside the club suit. When West leads the ♣9, East's only hope is that it is top of a doubleton. East should play the ♣J at trick one, forcing declarer to win the ♣K and leaving a club in the West hand. When declarer leads a spade, West can immediately win the ♠A and lead another club to defeat the contract. If East wins the ♠A at trick one, declarer will finish with an overtrick.

CONCLUSION

If East passes in third position, South will likely open 2NT with a balanced hand and 19 high-card points plus 1 length point for the fifth diamond. North will raise to 3NT, and that will end the auction. West will lead the ♥Q, and declarer will drive out the ♠A to make the contract.

Only by opening 3♣ can East get partner off to the best lead against a 3NT contract. South has no winning call over 3♣. 3NT can be defeated, and there are three tricks to lose in 5♦. However, East will still need to make a good defensive play at trick one, to back up the aggressive opening bid!

DEAL: 3
 DEALER: WEST
 VUL: N-S

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

Pass	2♠	Pass
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WEST
 ♠ 8 5
 ♥ Q 4
 ♦ 10 9 8 4
 ♣ J 10 9 5 3

Pass	Pass	Pass
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EAST
 ♠ A K Q 10
 ♥ 6 2
 ♦ 7 5 3
 ♣ Q 6 4 2

1♠	Pass	Pass
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SOUTH
 ♠ J 9 3
 ♥ A K J 8 5
 ♦ A Q J 6
 ♣ 7

2♥	4♥
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

After two passes, East must consider whether to open 'light' in third chair. The vulnerability is favorable: North and South are vulnerable, East and West are not. However, an opening bid of 1♣ is not likely to be effective. It won't get in the way of the opponents, and it is unlikely to get partner off to the best lead. A more effective opening bid is a lead-directing bid of 1♠, planning to pass whatever partner responds.

If East opens 1♠, South will overcall 2♥. North might raise right to game, but is more likely to start with a cuebid of 2♠, showing interest in game in hearts. With extra values, South will accept any invitation.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

If East didn't bid, West would likely lead the ♦10 or ♣J, top of one of the solid sequences. If East opens 1♠, West would lead the ♠8, top of a doubleton in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has three spade losers and a potential heart loser. On gaining the lead, declarer plans to draw trumps as quickly as possible. If the opponents don't lead spades, declarer can discard a spade loser on dummy's extra club winner and will lose only two spade tricks.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

If West does lead a spade, East wins the first three spade tricks. West can discard a low diamond on the third round, showing no interest in that suit. Now East can lead a fourth round of spades. Declarer has no winning reply. If declarer ruffs low, West overruffs. If declarer ruffs with the ♥A or ♥K, West can discard and will later get a trick with the ♥Q.

CONCLUSION

Only a spade lead defeats the 4♥ contract. On any other lead, declarer will finish with eleven tricks. West will likely lead a spade only if East makes the imaginative opening bid of 1♠ in third chair. West has only a four-card suit but would really like partner to lead a spade. Nothing terrible is likely to happen if East does open 1♠. The opponents are unlikely to double for penalty, and even if East goes down a couple of tricks, it will be less expensive than letting North-South bid and make a game.

DEAL: 4
DEALER: WEST
VUL: BOTH

NORTH
♠ J 6 3
♥ K 7
♦ A 10 8 4
♣ Q 9 5 2

Pass

WEST

♠ A Q 10 9 5
♥ 10 9 6 3
♦ 6
♣ K 8 4

Pass

EAST

♠ K 7 4 2
♥ A Q 8 4
♦ 9 3 2
♣ 10 7

Pass

SOUTH

♠ 8
♥ J 5 2
♦ K Q J 7 5
♣ A J 6 3

Pass

SUGGESTED BIDDING

After three passes, South has to decide whether to open the bidding in fourth chair. South has 12 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card diamond suit. The total of 13 is enough to open in first, second, or third position. In fourth position, however, South doesn't want to open the bidding if the partnership is likely to get a minus score. It would be better to pass the deal out.

The missing points are likely to be fairly evenly divided among the other three players. So it's likely to be a competitive auction for partscore. The key in such situations is the spade suit. The partnership that has a fit in spades can outbid the other side at any level.

A popular idea in fourth position is the Guideline (Rule) of 15, sometimes referred to as Pierson points. Add the high-card points to the number of spades held. If the total is 15 or more, open the bidding. Otherwise, consider passing the hand out. Here, South has 12 high-card points and only 1 spade, for a total of 13. Opening the bidding may lead to a poor result.

If South does open 1♦, West will likely overcall 1♠ or make a takeout double. Although North-South can make a partscore in diamonds, East and West are likely to find their spade fit and win the auction.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

If West wins the auction in a spade contract, North will likely lead the ♦A, the suit that partner opened.

SUGGESTED PLAY

In a spade contract, West can take a heart finesse to lose only one trick in that suit, and can also lead toward the ♣K and then trump a club loser in dummy. Declarer would then lose only one heart, one diamond, and one club.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

If North and South buy the contract in diamonds, East and West can take a spade trick, two heart tricks, and a club trick.

CONCLUSION

This deal illustrates why it may be best to pass in fourth position, even with an opening bid. South's lack of major-suit cards is a warning sign that the auction is likely to become competitive and the partnership may be outbid. However, that may not deter many South's from opening anyway, hoping for the best.

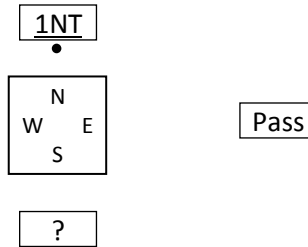
2. Responder's Role

After the opening bid, responder makes a decision about whether the partnership strategy should be:

- To bid constructively, trying to find the best contract, or
- To bid preemptively, when the deal may belong to the opponents, trying to stop the opponents from finding their best contract.

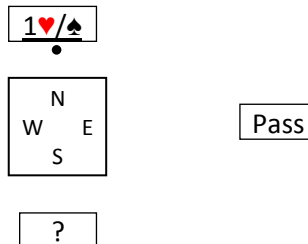
The Responder's Role in Non-Competitive Auctions

Responding After a 1NT Opening



After the strength-showing opening bid of 1NT, responder's role is to bid constructively, putting the partnership in its best contract. This is generally straightforward. With about 0-7 points, responder's decision is to be satisfied with the best partscore. With about 8-9 points, responder can move toward game. With 10-15 points, responder drives the partnership to a game contract. Familiar tools such as Stayman and Transfers are helpful.

Responding After a Major Suit Opening with Support



Responder decides into which of four main categories the hand belongs. Three of the categories are constructive:

- **Single Raise.** Hands with trump support but minimal values, where opener will need extra strength or distribution to be interested in anything other than a partscore.
- **Limit - Invitational - Raise.** Hands where responder wants to invite to game in opener's major suit.
- **Forcing Raise.** Hands with support and enough strength to take the partnership to at least game, and possibly a slam.

One category is preemptive:

- **Preemptive Raise.** Weak hands with long trump support fall into this category. Responder's raise is designed to make it more difficult for the opponents to enter the auction.

Point-Count Ranges

It isn't surprising that when point counts are assigned to each category, there is no agreement on specific ranges. There are only general guidelines. For example, some suggest a single raise is 6-9; others 6-10. Experts are flexible. A good 10-point hand could be promoted to the limit raise category; a poor 10-point hand would be in the single raise category.

What is a 'poor' or 'good' 10-point hand? Suppose partner opens 1♠, the next hand passes, and this is responder's hand:

1♠	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ Q 7 6 3	
♥ J 8 4	
♦ Q J 9	
♣ K J 3	

This hand has four-card support and 10 high-card points, but many experienced players would judge it to be worth only a single raise to 2♠. The 4-3-3-3 distribution is one reason for downgrading the hand. Also, the preponderance of queens and jacks, rather than aces and queens, is a negative factor.

1♠	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ J 10 9 3	
♥ 10 9 5	
♦ K 6	
♣ A J 10 4	

This hand has only 9 high-card points plus 1 dummy point for the doubleton diamond. Many experienced players would upgrade it to be worth a limit raise of 3♠. The ace and king are a plus value, as is the presence of the 10's and 9's, working together. The ♣A-J-10-4, for example, is a powerful combination. Also, the hand has some distribution, 4-4-3-2.

Length of the Trump Suit

The modern style is for responder to use different approaches depending on the length of the trump support. The better the trump fit, the more aggressive the partnership can be in deciding how high to bid or compete. Responder tries to describe the exact length of the support, although this is not always possible using standard methods. The following chart represents how responder can think about raising partner's major suit opening of 1♥ or 1♠ using standard methods.

RAISING PARTNER'S MAJOR SUIT: STANDARD AGREEMENTS WITHOUT COMPETITION		
	Three-Card Support	Four-Card Support
0-5 points	• Pass	• Pass
Single Raise 6-9(10) points	• Raise to the Two-Level	• Raise to the Two-Level
	Three-Card Support	Four-Card (or longer) Support
Limit Raise (10)11-12 points	• Bid a New Suit • Bid 1NT (forcing)	• Raise to the Three-Level
Forcing Raise 13+ points	• Bid a New Suit	• Use Jacoby 2NT • Use a Splinter Raise • Bid a New Suit
	Five-Card Support	
Preemptive Raise 0-10 points	• Raise to the Four-Level	

Examples of a Single Raise

Responder makes a single raise with 6-9(10) points with either three- or four-card trump support. Suppose partner opens 1♥, the next hand passes, and this is responder's hand:

1♥	
•	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ 8 6 ♥ K 7 6 ♦ Q J 8 5 ♣ Q 7 6 4	

This hand has three-card support and 8 high-card points plus 1 dummy point for the doubleton spade. Responder would make a single raise to 2♥.

1♥	
•	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ 9 6 2 ♥ J 8 6 3 ♦ A 10 7 4 ♣ 8 4	

This hand has four-card support. There are only 5 high-card points, but adding 1 dummy point for the doubleton club puts it in the 6-9(10) point category for a single raise to 2♥.

Examples of a Limit Raise

Limit raises distinguish between three-card and four-card or longer raises. Suppose partner opens 1♥, the next hand passes, and this is responder's hand:

1♥	
•	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ K 8 6 3	
♥ Q 9 7 5	
♦ 4	
♣ K 10 7 5	

This hand has four-card support and 8 high-card points plus 3 dummy points for the singleton diamond. That puts it in the range for a limit raise. With four-card support, responder would make an invitational jump raise to 3♥.

1♥	
•	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ K J 7 6	
♥ A 9 4	
♦ 8 4 2	
♣ K 5 3	

This hand has 11 high-card points, enough strength for an invitational raise of hearts. With only three-card support, however, responder starts with a new suit, 1♠, planning to show the support with a bid of 3♥ at the next opportunity. That will let opener know that responder has the strength for a limit raise, but does not have four-card support.

Examples of a Forcing Raise

Forcing raises also distinguish between three-card and four-card or longer raises. Suppose partner opens 1♠, the next hand passes, and this is responder's hand:

1♠	
•	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ K Q 8 3	
♥ 9 5 2	
♦ A J 7 5	
♣ K 6	

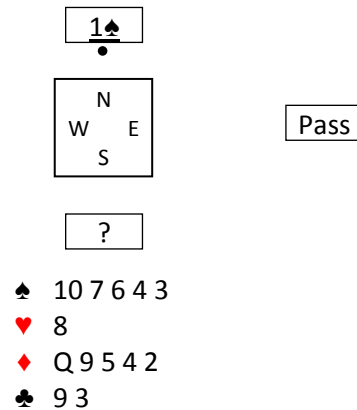
This hand has four-card support and 13 high-card points plus 1 dummy point for the doubleton club. That puts it in the range for a forcing raise. The modern style is to use an artificial response of a jump to 2NT—Jacoby 2NT—to show a forcing raise with four-card or longer support. Opener is then expected to show shortness by bidding a singleton or void at the three level. Without shortness, opener describes the strength of the hand: jumping to game in the major with a minimum hand, or rebidding the suit or 3NT with more than a minimum opening bid.

1♠	
•	
N W E S	Pass
?	
♠ Q 9 3	
♥ K 7 6 2	
♦ 4	
♣ A Q 8 7 5	

This hand has 11 high-card points and, with three-card support for spades, responder can add 3 dummy points for the singleton diamond. That's enough for a forcing raise of spades. With only three-card support, however, responder starts by bidding a new suit, 2♣, intending to take the partnership to game in spades later. Opener will then know that responder does not have four-card support, since responder didn't use the immediate jump to 2NT (Jacoby).

Example of a Preemptive Raise

Even when the auction is not yet competitive, responder can take preemptive action. Suppose partner opens 1♠, the next hand passes, and this is responder's hand:



With a weak hand and five-card support for opener's suit, responder should make a preemptive raise to 4♠. This has a two-fold effect. If opener has a good hand, the 4♠ contract may actually make, thanks to responder's distributional values. If opener doesn't have a good hand, the opponents may be able to make a game, or even a slam. The jump to 4♠ will make it difficult for them to get into the auction and judge how high they belong.

This is a competitive action, even though the opponents have not yet competed. The point is that if responder passes, or raises to only 2♠, the auction is likely to become competitive. The opponents presumably have a lot of high cards and shortness in spades, so they will bid if given enough room.

Responding After a Major Suit Opening Without Support

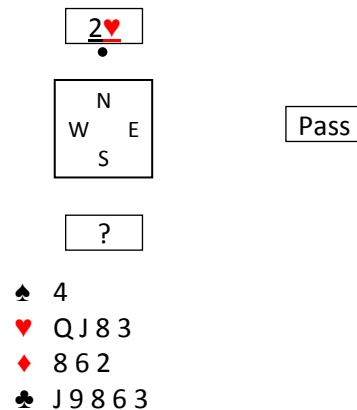
Modern bidding systems include 2/1 Game Force. In this adaptation of standard bidding a response of 1NT to a major suit shows about 6-12 points and is forcing one round. A new suit at the two level after the opening bid of a major suit shows 13 or more points and is forcing to game.

Responding After a Preemptive Opening Bid

Responder focuses not on high-card points but the number of tricks and the number of trumps.
Responder uses this two-step approach:

1. First count the sure tricks, and if there are enough for game, bid game. After a weak two-bid, consider that opener has about five tricks. After a three-level preemptive opening bid, consider that opener has about six tricks.
2. If there are not enough tricks to bid game, bid to the level of the number of combined trumps. This guideline is derived from the Law of Total Tricks.

For example:



With a weak hand, responder should further opener's preemptive action by jumping to 4♥. With so little defense outside the heart suit, it's likely the opponents can make a game or a slam. The jump to 4♥ may keep them out of the auction, fearful that responder has a strong hand. Even if they do come in, they have less room to find their best spot. Of course, responder would take the same action if East overcalled or doubled.

The Competitive Auction

The Law of Total Tricks

When both sides are competing for the contract, the Competitive Guideline derived from the Law of Total Tricks⁵ is useful in deciding how much to bid:

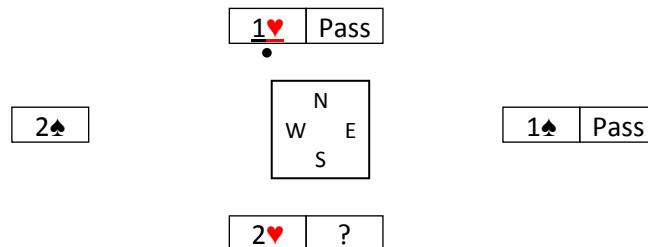
Competitive Guideline
Strive to compete to the level of the number of trumps held by the partnership.

All four players at the table (opener, responder, intervener, advancer) can make use of this guideline.

The previous examples of responder's preemptive raises essentially follow this guideline. With a weak hand and five-card support for opener's five-card major opening of 1♠ – a total of ten trumps –, responder competes to the ten-trick level, 4♠. Similarly, when opener bids 2♥, showing a six-card suit, and responder has four-card support and a weak hand, responder is willing to jump to 4♥.

Bidding in competitive situations is not always a matter of high-card points. It is dependent on the combined trump fit the partnership holds. Responder could bid a little with a lot with a little or a lot with a little. Here is an example of how responder can apply the guideline in a competitive auction.

Suppose North opens 1♥, East overcalls 1♠, South raises to 2♥, and West bids 2♠. The auction is now passed back to responder, who must decide whether to pass and defend against 2♠ or compete further to 3♥.



♠ 9 5 4
♥ K 8 3
♦ K J 7 5
♣ Q 9 8

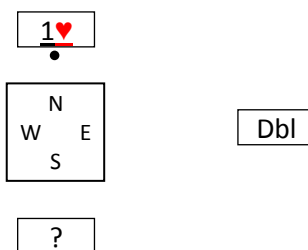
Here responder has a near maximum in high-card points for the raise to 2♥, 9 high-card points, but only three-card support. Assuming opener has only a five-card suit, the partnership has eight combined trumps. The Competitive Guideline suggests passing. There are not enough combined trumps to compete to the three level, and that takes priority over having maximum high-card points for the raise.

♠ 9 5 4
♥ K 8 3 2
♦ Q J 7 5
♣ 10 8

Here responder has only 6 high-card points, a near minimum for the raise to 2♥. However, responder has four-card support for hearts, giving the partnership a nine-card fit. The Competitive Guideline suggests competing to 3♥. This may make, or may push the opponents higher, or may be defeated less than the value of the opponent's partscore.

⁵ A concept developed by René Vernes in his 1968 book, *Bridge Moderne de la Defense*.

Responder's Role After a Takeout Double – With Support



After a takeout double, when responder can support partner's suit, responder can make a single raise by supporting at the two level.

If, however, responder has a limit or forcing raise, responder has two new options:

1. To redouble with 10 or more high-card points, and later support the suit.
2. To bid 2NT, which is artificial and shows four-card or longer support⁶ and the values for a limit or forcing raise – 10 or more points.

Because of this, responder can now make a preemptive raise after a takeout double with four-card support by jumping to the three level and with five-card support by jumping to the four level. This is based on the Law of Total Tricks.

Responder's Role After a Takeout Double – Without Support

The Redouble

When the opening bid of one-of-suit is doubled for takeout, the meaning of responder's bids change. The auction has become competitive, and responder has a new bid available, the redouble. The redouble is typically used when responder has 10 or more high-card points. It announces that the partnership presumably had the majority of strength. After starting with a redouble, responder plans to take one of the following actions at the next opportunity to bid:

- Double the opponents' contract for penalty. This is a common reason for redoubling.
- Bid a new suit. This is forcing for at least one round, showing 10 or more high-card points.
- Support opener's suit⁷ or bid notrump. Responder will do this with a hand unsuitable for doubling the opponents' contract for penalty. A bid at the cheapest level is non-forcing, showing about 10-12 points. With a stronger hand, responder can jump or cuebid the opponents' suit.

With a normal opening bid, opener will generally pass the auction back to responder to see which action responder wants to take. Opener will only bid with a very distributional hand, or to double the opponent's bid with good defensive prospects.

⁶ If partner opens 1♣, responder typically needs five-card support to make a limit raise since opener might have only a three-card suit.

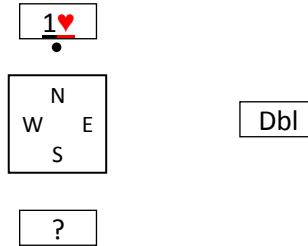
⁷ Many partnerships use a jump to 2NT by responder after a takeout double to show four-card or longer support for opener's suit and the strength for a limit raise or better - the Dormer, Truscott, or Jordan convention. In that case, a redouble followed by a raise of opener's suit typically shows only three-card support.

The Impact of the Redouble

The major impact of the redouble is how it colors the meaning of responder's other bids. While a new suit at the one level is still forcing, the standard agreements are:

- A jump raise of opener's suit is now preemptive. Responder would have redoubled with 10 or more points – or bid 2NT to show a limit raise.
- A new suit at the two level is non-forcing. Again, responder would have redoubled and then bid the suit with 10 or more points.

For example, suppose opener bids 1♥ and the next player doubles:



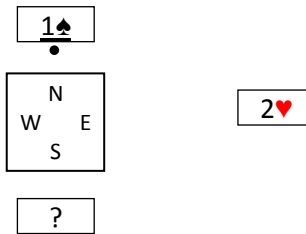
♠ 8 3
♥ K J 7 4
♦ 7 2
♣ 9 8 6 4 3

With this hand, responder can make a preemptive raise to 3♥. The objective is to make it more difficult for the opponents to reach their best contract. Responder is again following the Competitive Guideline of competing to the level of the number of combined trumps held by the partnership (5 + 4 = 9).

♠ 8 6 2
♥ 4
♦ A Q J 8 6 3
♣ 9 6 4

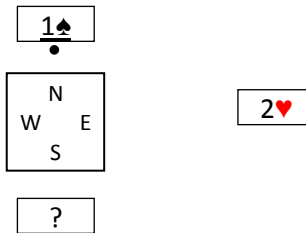
Here responder can bid 2♦. The double has actually helped responder describe the hand. If East had passed, responder would not have enough to bid a new suit at the two level, and would have had to bid 1NT. Now responder can show the diamonds.

Responder's Role After an Overcall – With Support



When responder's right-hand opponent makes an overcall after the opening bid, it also has an impact on the meaning of responder's bids. Again, the auction has become competitive. Some bidding room has been taken away from responder, but as compensation responder has two new bids available: the cuebid and the double.

Responder can still make a single raise with 6-9 or 10 points. With a limit raise or a forcing raise, the cuebid is typically used to show support for opener's suit. The upshot of this is that a jump raise of opener's suit can now be used as a preemptive bid. For example, suppose opener bids 1♠ and the next player overcalls 2♥:



♠ Q 10 7 5
♥ 5
♦ 10 8 6 2
♣ Q 9 6 3

With this hand, responder can make a preemptive jump raise to 3♠. This stops West from making a raise to 3♥ or a cuebid of 2♠ to show a good fit for East's heart suit. For example, West may have to choose between passing and overbidding to 4♥ with a hand worth only a raise to 3♥. Once again, responder is following the Competitive Guideline by competing to the three level.

♠ A J 7 3
♥ 9 5 4
♦ K Q 7 5
♣ 7 6

Since a jump raise to 3♠ would now be preemptive, responder can cuebid the opponent's suit, 3♥ to show the values for at least a limit raise. With a minimum, opener will return to 3♠ and the partnership can stop in partscore. With enough to accept a limit raise, opener can jump to 4♠, getting the partnership to game.

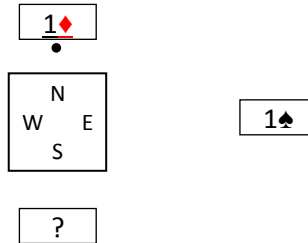
Responder's Cuebid

Responder's cuebid after an overcall shows a limit raise or better of opener's suit.

Responder's Role After an Overcall – Without Support

Responder's Double – The Negative Double

Responder's double of an overcall is commonly used as a takeout – negative – double. It shows at least enough strength to compete, and ideally support for the unbid suits. Responder will typically have four-card support for an unbid major suit, and be prepared if opener bids an unbid minor suit. For example, suppose opener bids 1♦ and the next player overcalls 1♠:



♠ 8 7 3
♥ K Q 8 5
♦ 9 4
♣ K 10 8 2

This is the prototype for a negative double of the 1♠ overcall. Responder would have bid 1♥ if East had passed, but doesn't have enough strength to bid a new suit at the two level after the overcall. The overcall actually helps responder describe the hand: support for both unbid suits, hearts and clubs, and enough strength to compete to the two level.

♠ K 7
♥ A J 10 8
♦ Q 9 4
♣ A 8 6 3

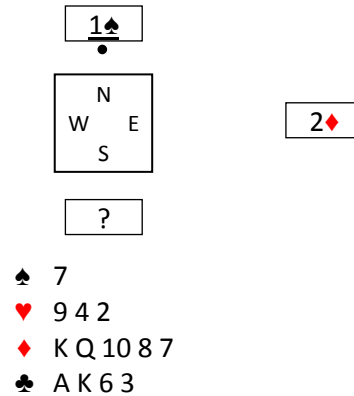
Here responder has enough to take the partnership to game but will still start with a negative double to first look for a heart fit. If opener bids 2♥, responder will take the partnership to game in 4♥. If opener bids something else, responder will still get the partnership to at least a game contract.

♠ 10 7 6
♥ A 10 8 5
♦ Q 9 6 3
♣ 8 5

Responder would also make a negative double with this hand. If opener bids 2♥, responder has found a fit and will pass, just as though East had passed, responder had bid 1♥ and opener had raised to 2♥. If opener bids 2♣, under the assumption that responder has support for that suit, responder will 'correct' back to 2♦, showing support for that suit.

Making a Penalty Double of an Overcall

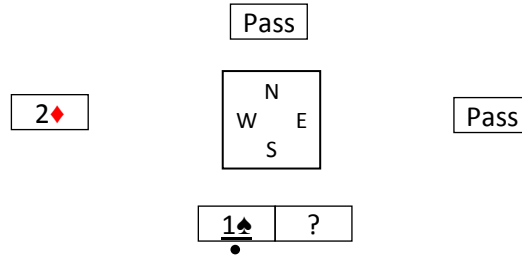
When the partnership agrees to use negative doubles, it may seem that it has given up on the penalty double of an opponent's overcall. That's not the case. It simply requires a different approach. Suppose opener bids 1♠, the next player overcalls 2♦, and this is responder's hand:



Before the days of negative doubles, responder would simply make a penalty double of the 2♦ overcall with this hand. However, since a double would be for takeout, responder must pass instead! That's difficult to do with all that strength, but the auction isn't over. The bidding will come back to opener who will presumably be short in diamonds. Being aware that responder likely has some length and strength in diamonds, opener is expected to double. Opener's double is a reopening – takeout – double of diamonds. However, responder will now pass, converting the double into a penalty double.

As in the good old days, East's overcall will be effectively be doubled for penalty. In fact, this approach has a slight advantage. If South were to double 2♦ for penalty right away, East might choose to run to a better spot. When North makes a takeout double of diamonds, East doesn't know that the contract is in trouble until South passes. Now it's too late for East to run to another contract.

Looking at the situation from opener's perspective, suppose opener bids 1♠, the next hand overcalls 2♦, and this is followed by two passes:



♠ A Q 8 6 3	South has a minimum opening bid, but with shortness in diamonds must not pass.
♥ A 10 7 3	South makes a takeout double of diamonds. This will allow responder to pass with a penalty double of diamonds. If responder doesn't have a penalty double of diamonds, responder will bid something, and the partnership should land in a reasonable fit.
♦ 5	
♣ Q 8 2	

♠ A Q 8 6 4	Here opener has a much stronger hand but isn't short in diamonds. Responder won't have a penalty double of diamonds. With shortness in diamonds and some values, responder would likely have raised spades or made a negative double.
♥ A J	Since responder hasn't bid, it is likely responder has a weak hand with little or no fit for opener's suit. Reopening with a takeout double is likely to get the partnership to a poor contract. Opener's best choice is to pass and defend 2♦. With good defense against diamonds, that should get the partnership its best result.
♦ K Q 9 3	
♣ 7 6	

partnership to a poor contract. Opener's best choice is to pass and defend 2♦. With good defense against diamonds, that should get the partnership its best result.

This is another example of using judgment to bid a lot with a little, or a little with a lot.

Tips for Responding

- Decide whether it is a constructive or obstructive auction.
- Consider the Competitive Guideline – The Law of Total Tricks – when the auction becomes competitive.
- Be ready to use the Responder's Double – The Negative Double – when an opponent overcalls.
- Use the cuebid to show a limit raise or better after an opponent's overcall

DEAL: 5
 DEALER: SOUTH
 VUL: NONE

NORTH
♠ Q 7 6 3
♥ J 8 4
♦ Q J 9
♣ A 8 3

2♠

WEST
 ♠ 5 4
 ♥ A 9 2
 ♦ K 8 6 3
 ♣ 10 9 7 5

Pass	Pass
------	------

EAST
 ♠ 10 2
 ♥ Q 10 7
 ♦ A 10 4 2
 ♣ K 6 4 2

Pass

SOUTH
 ♠ A K J 9 8
 ♥ K 6 5 3
 ♦ 7 5
 ♣ Q J

1♠	Pass
----	------

•

SUGGESTED BIDDING

South opens the 1♠ and West passes. North has four-card support for spades and 10 points. Should North make a simple raise to 2♠ or a limit of 3♠? A raise to 2♠ shows about 6-9 or 6-10 points. A raise to 3♠ shows about 10-12 or 11-12 points. With 10 points, responder is right on the borderline. In such situations, it is best to look at the good and bad aspects of the hand. The four-card support and the ♣A are good features, but the flat distribution and preponderance of queens and jacks are negative factors.

If North raises to 2♠, that will likely end the auction. No one has enough to bid any more. If North raises to 3♠, South has enough extra to accept the invitation and continue to game.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against a spade contract, West will likely lead the ♣10, top of the broken sequence.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has four heart losers, two diamond losers, and a club loser. When a club is led, declarer can try the club finesse, but East will win the ♣K. If the defenders don't take their two diamond winners right away, declarer can discard one diamond on the extra club winner in dummy. Declarer can try leading toward the ♥K, and later toward the ♥J, but neither finesse works. Declarer has to lose at least two heart tricks, and will probably lose three tricks. Declarer is likely to finish with only eight tricks

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

The defenders can get a club trick, two diamond tricks, and two heart tricks. If declarer is allowed to discard one of the diamond losers, the defenders may still come to a third heart trick by leaving declarer to play the suit.

CONCLUSION

There is no right or wrong in responder's decision on whether to raise to 2♠ or 3♠. A hand with 10 points and support for partner's major is somewhere between a single raise and a limit raise. The deal merely illustrates that it is usually better to be cautious with balanced distribution – no singleton or doubleton – and with a lot of queens and jacks rather than aces and kings. Valuing points alone cannot replace good judgment.

DEAL: 6
DEALER: SOUTH
VUL: E-W

NORTH
♠ Q 10 6 4 3
♥ K 10 5 2
♦ 9
♣ J 8 6

4♥

WEST
♠ K 7 2
♥ 7
♦ K Q 6 5 3
♣ Q 9 7 3

Pass	Pass
------	------

EAST
♠ A 5
♥ 8 3
♦ A 10 8 7
♣ A K 10 4 2

Pass?

SOUTH
♠ J 9 8
♥ A Q J 9 6 4
♦ J 4 2
♣ 5

2♥	Pass
----	------

SUGGESTED BIDDING

South opens the bidding with a weak two-bid, 2♥. West doesn't have quite enough strength to make a takeout double at the two level, especially with only three-card support for spades. West's suit isn't good enough to overcall 3♦.

North has a weak hand but four-card support for partner's suit. North can raise to the four level as a further preemptive measure. It's likely the opponents have enough combined strength for at least a game, and possibly a slam. This is in line with the Law of Total Tricks, which suggests being willing to compete to the level of the combined number of trumps. South has promised six hearts, and North has four, for a total of ten. So North should be willing to compete to the ten-trick level, 4♥. The auction isn't competitive yet, but will presumably become so if North leaves the opponents enough room.

After North jumps to 4♥, East has a difficult challenge. The partnership agreement is likely that a double would be for takeout, so East doesn't want to double with only a doubleton spade. A bid of 4NT would be 'unusual' bid, asking partner to pick a minor suit, but East can't be sure that the partnership will be safe at the five level. East may choose to simply pass and defend, hoping to defeat the contract.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against South's contract of 4♥, West would lead the ♦K, top of the touching cards in the suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has two spade losers, three diamond losers, and a club loser. Declarer can trump two of the diamond losers in dummy, so unless the defenders manage to ruff a spade before trumps are drawn, South will only be defeated one trick.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

The defenders can defeat 4♥ two tricks if East can manage to get a spade ruff, but that's not easy to do. It's likely that the defenders will take only four tricks.

CONCLUSION

The preemptive action by North-South may lead to an excellent result. "Down one is good bridge" is certainly applicable on this deal. East and West can make 6♣ or 6♦ but may not even reach game, let alone slam.

DEAL: 7
 DEALER: SOUTH
 VUL: E-W

NORTH	
♠	3 2
♥	K J 8 4
♦	A Q 6 5 2
♣	10 8

Dble	Pass
------	------

WEST
 ♠ **K** Q J 9 8 6
 ♥ 6
 ♦ J 10 8 7
 ♣ 7 3

2♠	Pass
----	------

EAST
 ♠ 10 7 5
 ♥ Q 7 3 2
 ♦ 9 3
 ♣ A 9 5 2

3♠	Pass
----	------

SOUTH
 ♠ A 4
 ♥ A 10 9 5
 ♦ K 4
 ♣ K Q J 6 4

1♣	4♥
----	----

SUGGESTED BIDDING

South has 17 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card club suit. That's too strong to open 1NT, and also the hand is unbalanced. So, South opens 1♣. West could overcall 1♠, but with a good six-card suit and 6-4 distribution, might choose to make a weak jump overcall of 2♠.

Whether West overcalls 1♠ or 2♠, North has the right type of hand to make a negative double: support for the unbid suits and enough strength to compete at the appropriate level. Even if West were to bid 3♠, North would probably choose to make a negative double, assuming the partnership has agreed to play negative doubles through at least 3♠.

After North doubles, East might choose to raise spades with three-card support. Whether or not East bids, South has enough extra strength to take the partnership to game. 'Knowing' North has four-card support for hearts – the unbid major – South bids 4♥. East and West are vulnerable, so they cannot afford to compete any further.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 4♥, West will lead the ♠K, top of the solid sequence.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has a spade loser, a heart loser, and a club loser. To avoid a heart loser, declarer can try taking a finesse for the ♥Q. If West has made a preemptive overcall in spades, East is more likely to hold the ♥Q. So declarer can play a heart to dummy's ♥K and lead the ♥J. When West shows out on the second round of hearts, declarer must be careful not to draw all the trumps before driving out the ♣A. Declarer needs to keep a heart to prevent the defenders from taking more than one spade trick. Once the ♣A is driven out, declarer can draw the remaining trumps and take the club and diamond winners.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

There is no way for the defenders to defeat the contract, provided declarer drives out the ♣A while still retaining a trump in both hands.

CONCLUSION

North and South can use the negative double to find their eight-card heart fit after the opponents intervene in the auction...whether at the one-level, two-level, or three-level.

DEAL: 8
 DEALER: EAST
 VUL: BOTH

NORTH	
♠	8 4 3 2
♥	5 3
♦	K 8 4 2
♣	J 10 2

Pass	Pass
------	------

WEST

♠ 5
 ♥ K J 9 7 6
 ♦ 10 9 7 3
 ♣ A Q 5

Pass	Pass
------	------

EAST

♠ A Q J 9 6
 ♥ 2
 ♦ A Q 5
 ♣ 9 7 6 3

1♠	Dbf
----	-----

SOUTH

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

2♥	Pass
----	------

SUGGESTED BIDDING

After East opens the bidding 1♠, South has to decide whether to enter the bidding with an overcall. South has an opening bid and a decent five-card suit. However, South is vulnerable and does not have many sure tricks. Most players would risk an overcall, but it is a risk. If South does overcall 2♥, West should pass. West has excellent defense against a heart contract but cannot double directly for penalty. A double would be negative, for takeout. West passes, and North passes. Now it is up to East. With a normal opening bid and shortness in hearts, East is obligated to reopen with a double when the partnership plays negative doubles. East's double is for takeout, but East is also allowing for the possibility that West wants to defend a heart contract for penalty. It's quite likely West has some length and strength in hearts when North passes rather than raising.

When East doubles, South passes, and West also passes, turning the takeout double into a penalty double. North has nowhere to run, and 2♥ doubled becomes the contract.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 2♥ doubled, West will lead the ♠5, the singleton in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Unfortunately, declarer will not have a happy time in 2♥. Declarer will be fortunate to take more than three or four tricks. All the cards are badly placed for declarer.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

On perfect defense⁸, declarer can be held to three tricks, for a penalty of 1400 points! It's unlikely East-West will defend perfectly, but even a penalty of 500 or 800 will be an excellent score.

CONCLUSION

South has a reasonable overcall. The point of the deal is that opener and responder need to know how to penalize an overcall when they are using negative doubles. West has to pass with a lot of points; East has to reopen with a minimum hand.

⁸ East wins the first trick with the ♠A and returns the ♠Q. West ruffs declarer's ♠K, and leads a diamond. East wins and plays the ♠J on which West discards a club. East leads a club. West wins the ♣A and ♣Q. West leads another diamond to East, and East gives West a club ruff. West leads a diamond and is still entitled to two heart tricks.

3. Intervener's Role (Overcaller/Takeout Doubler)

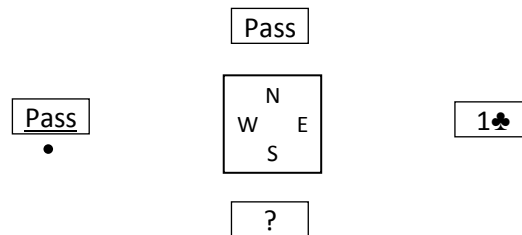
When the opponents open the bidding, the modern style is to intervene with an overcall or takeout double whenever possible. Competing for the contract will prevent the opponents from having a free run during the auction.

The Simple Overcall

There are three basic reasons for making an overcall:

- To compete for the contract. Opener's side doesn't necessarily have the majority of strength. By overcalling, the partnership may buy the contract or push the opponents to a level where they can be defeated.
- To interfere with the opponents. An overcall takes away bidding room from the opponents and may make it more difficult for them to find their best contract.
- To direct the lead. Even if the opponents do win the auction, an overcall may help the partnership to get off to the best lead on defense.

For example, consider the following hands for South after West and North pass and East opens the bidding 1♣:



♠ K 4
♥ A Q J 8 5
♦ 9 5
♣ K Q 7 2

1♥. South would overcall 1♥. Even though partner is a passed hand, it is still possible that the contract belongs to North-South, perhaps at the game level. An overcall at the one level covers a wide range of about 7-17 points.

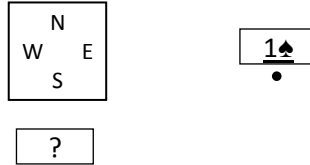
♠ K Q 10 7 4
♥ 9 3
♦ 10 9 6 2
♣ K 4

1♠. Here it's unlikely that North-South have the majority of strength. However, the modern style would be to overcall 1♠ with the South hand. Not only does it get the partnership into the auction, it takes away bidding room from the opponents. West can no longer respond 1♦ or 1♥.

♠ 10 9 8 6 4
♥ K 7
♦ K Q 10 6 5
♣ 6

1♦/1♠/Pass. The basic guideline is to overcall the higher-ranking of two five-card suits. When partner is a passed hand, however, other considerations, such as directing the lead, take precedence over constructive actions. When this hand was presented to the Master Solvers' Club (*Bridge World*, December 2011), the majority of the expert panel voted to overcall 1♦ rather than 1♠.

A simple overcall at the two level or higher shows a good hand: a six-card or longer suit or a good five-card suit, and the values for an opening bid or better. Suppose East opens 1♠:



♠ 9 3 2♥. Here South has a sound two-level overcall of 2♥. If the opening bid were 2♠, South would probably risk an overcall of 3♥. If the opening bid were 3♠, South doesn't have a strong enough hand to overcall 4♥.

♥ A K J 8 7 4

♦ A 8 5

♣ 7 2

♠ Q 4 Pass. Although this hand has the values for an opening bid, the five-card suit is poor. Overcalling with so-so five-card suits at the two level is not generally a good idea, especially if the opponents are familiar with how to double for penalty. The ♥A Q 7 3 is also of dubious value. It is best to pass. The auction isn't over. There may be a chance to come back in later.

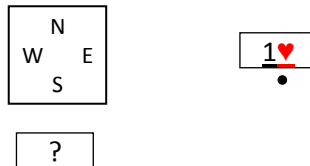
♥ 6 2

♦ A Q 7 3

♣ K J 8 5 2

Weak Jump Overcalls

In the early days of bridge, a jump overcall was treated as a strong- or intermediate-strength hand. In today's game, the vast majority of players treat jump overcalls as weak bids. For example:



♠ A J 10 8 6 3 2♠. Non-vulnerable, most players would make a weak jump overcall of 2♠ with this hand. A jump overcall to the two level is similar to a weak two-bid: a good six-card suit with little or no strength outside. Vulnerable, players would tend to be more cautious, perhaps overcalling 1♠. Still, aggressive players might still bid 2♠ to get into the way of the opponents...while risking a penalty of 800 points or more!

♥ 7 3

♦ 4

♣ J 10 8 2

♠ 8 3 3♦. The modern style would be to make a preemptive jump overcall of 3♦ with this hand when the vulnerability is equal or favorable. Vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, a bid of 3♦ would be risky. However, South can't overcall 2♦. A simple two-level overcall is constructive, promising a much better hand – about the values for an opening bid or more.

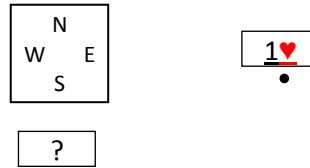
♥ 4

♦ A Q 9 8 7 5 4

♣ 9 6 2

Takeout Doubles

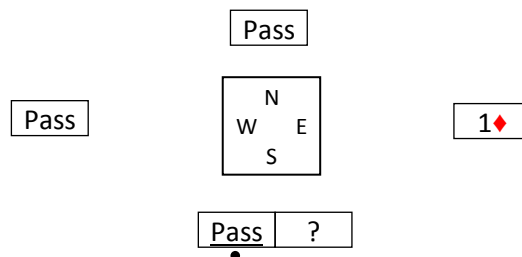
The takeout double has been around for a long time⁹. It typically shows the values for an opening bid or better and support for the unbid suits. It can also be used to show a hand too strong for a simple overcall. When valuing a hand for a takeout double, dummy points can be used – 5 for a void, 3 for a singleton, 1 for a doubleton. Consider the following hands after East opens 1♥:



♠ 8 6 4 2 Double. Only 10 high-card points, but South can add 3 dummy points for the
♥ 5 singleton heart. That's enough to make a takeout double. It's usually a good idea
♦ A J 8 2 to have four-card support for an unbid major since partner is likely to give
♣ K Q 7 3 preference to bidding a major ahead of a minor.

♠ K 9 3 Double. This hand is too strong for a simple overcall of 2♣. South can start with a
♥ 7 4 double, planning to bid clubs at the next opportunity. That shows a good club suit
♦ A K and about 18 or more points.
♣ A K J 8 7 5

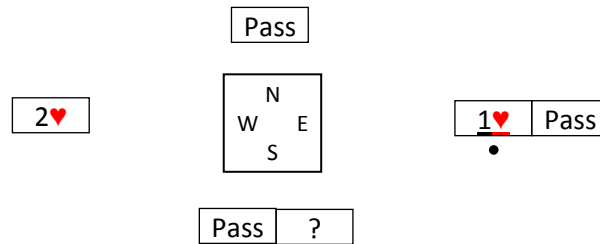
Intervener doesn't always need an opening bid or better to make a takeout double. Consider this example where South has passed initially and East opens the bidding 1♦:



♠ K 10 7 4 Double. Having passed originally, South can get back into the auction by making a
♥ Q J 8 3 takeout double. Partner isn't going to expect too much, knowing South didn't
♦ 7 4 have enough strength to open the bidding.
♣ A 8 2

⁹ England's prestigious Portland Club, however, didn't allow any 'conventions', including the takeout double.

In this next example, East opens 1♥, South passes, and West raises to 2♥. This is followed by two passes.



♠ Q 8 5 2
 ♥ 6 4
 ♦ K J 8 2
 ♣ K 9 5

Double. South doesn't have enough strength to make a takeout double when East opens 1♥. However, when West raises to 2♥ and this is passed back around, South can reconsider. South is in the balancing position. If South passes, the auction is over. North is marked with some strength since the opponents stopped in partscore. South can make a balancing double for takeout. North won't get too

excited since South didn't make a takeout double directly over 1♥.

Competing Against 1NT

In the days when a 1NT opening bid showed 16-18 high-card points, it was rare to intervene. As the strength for 1NT has gone down, it has become more and more popular to compete for the contract after a 1NT opening. Experience has shown that leaving the opponents to have a comfortable auction after an opening bid of 1NT doesn't usually lead to a good result. While competing has its risks, the occasional poor result is outweighed by the good results from taking the opponents out of their comfort zone.

It is dangerous to enter the auction over 1NT with just a five-card suit. If partner doesn't have a fit, the opponents may be able to double for penalty. If not, the bid may simply make it easier for them to play the hand if they buy the contract. It is safer to enter the auction with a good six-card or longer suit, or a two-suited hand. The better the suit, the less likely the opponents will double for penalty. With two suits, the odds improve that partner will have a fit for one of them. Once a fit is found, the opponents will be reluctant to double for penalty at a low level.

There are many conventional agreements that can be used over 1NT, such a Landy, Cappelletti, and DONT (Disturb the Opponents' NoTrump). Most focus one-suited and two-suited hands.

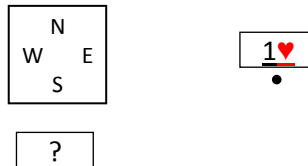
Two-Suited Overcalls

Most modern partnerships have some agreement on how to enter the auction with two-suited hands – two five-card or longer suits. The advantage of intervening with a two-suited hand is that partner is likely to have a fit with at least one of the suits. If partner has a fit with both suits, the partnership may even make a game on very few high-card values.

The unusual notrump convention has been around for nearly 50 years:

Unusual 2NT Overcall
 A jump to 2NT over the opponents opening bid of one-of-a-suit shows at least five cards in each of the two lower-ranking unbid suits.

The 2NT bid is available since it is rare that intervener has a balanced 20-21 points when the opponents open the bidding. Intervener can always start with a double if that's the case. Here are some examples after East opens the bidding 1♥, and North-South are non-vulnerable:



- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>♠ 4
♥ 3
♦ Q J 10 8 4
♣ K 10 9 7 6 3</p> | <p>2NT. A jump to 2NT typically shows a weak, distributional hand. It is a competitive bid, suggesting a possible sacrifice against the opponent's contract. Here South doesn't have enough to overcall 2♣, and an overcall of 1♦ might get the partnership to the wrong suit. A jump 2NT asks partner to choose between clubs and diamonds, the two lower-ranking unbid suits.</p> |
| <p>♠ 3
♥ –
♦ A Q J 8 7 3
♣ A K J 8 5 2</p> | <p>2NT. Although the unusual notrump is typically used with a weak hand, it can also be used with a very strong hand where intervener is prepared to bid again. Once partner bids one of the minor suits, South intends to raise to game, or perhaps cuebid along the way. If the opponents get in the way, South is prepared to double or cuebid to show a strong hand and ask partner to pick a suit.</p> |
| <p>♠ K 4
♥ 5
♦ A K J 6 2
♣ K J 7 6 3</p> | <p>2♦. It's generally not a good idea to use the unusual notrump with an in-between hand, where intervener won't be sure whether to bid again later. With a hand like this, a simple overcall of 2♦ is usually best. A jump to 2NT might get the partnership too high when there is no good fit.</p> |

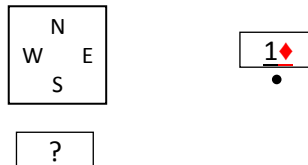
Once the basic idea behind the unusual notrump is understood, it can be used in other situations by the partnership. However, this requires some discussion beforehand.

A slightly more recent convention, but one that is quite popular among modern players, is Michaels:

Michaels Cuebid

- A direct cuebid of opener's minor suit shows at least five cards in both major suits.
- A direct cuebid of opener's major suit shows at least five cards in the other major suit and in one of the minor suits.

For example, suppose East opens 1♦:



♠ Q J 9 7 5
♥ K Q 10 6 2
♦ 5
♣ 4 3

2♦. Rather than guess which suit to overcall – perhaps landing in the wrong spot – South can make a Michaels cuebid of 2♦, showing both majors, asking partner to choose between hearts and spades. With a good fit for one or both suits, partner can compete to the three level, or even jump to game.

DEAL: 9
DEALER: EAST
VUL: NONE

NORTH
♠ A 9 7 2
♥ J 8 4 3
♦ K 7 4
♣ 4 3

Pass

WEST
♠ Q 10 5 4
♥ 9 6 5 2
♦ **10** 9 6
♣ 10 8

Pass

EAST
♠ K 6 3
♥ A
♦ A J 8 5 2
♣ K Q 9 6

1♦ Pass

SOUTH
♠ J 8
♥ K Q 10 7
♦ Q 3
♣ A J 7 5 2

2♣?

SUGGESTED BIDDING

After East opens the bidding 1♦, South has to decide whether to enter the auction. South has the values for an opening bid, but the long suit is poor for an overcall at the two level. If South does overcall 2♣, West will pass, and North doesn't have a suitable call other than pass.

Then it's up to East. East has 17 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit. That's a strong hand, but East doesn't have a satisfactory bid. A double would be for takeout, not for penalty, and East doesn't want to hear partner bid hearts. A bid of 2NT is also flawed since the hand is unbalanced and there is not a good source of tricks. West didn't raise diamonds or make a negative double, so it's likely that the opponents hold most of the missing strength. East's best option is to simply pass and defend. East has enough to expect to defeat the 2♣ contract, and that should be a reasonable result.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 2♣, West will lead the ♦10, top of the touching high cards in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has a spade loser, a heart loser, a diamond loser, and three club losers. Unless the defenders help out, the contract is likely to be defeated at least one trick.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

When West leads the ♦10 and a low diamond is played from dummy, East should let declarer win the first trick with the ♦Q, keeping the ♦K trapped in dummy. Assuming declarer leads a heart, East's best defense is to win the ♥A and lead a spade. West will eventually get on lead with a spade to lead another diamond, trapping dummy's ♦K. The defenders can then force declarer to ruff and lose control of the hand. With best defense, the 2♣ contract can be defeated two tricks.

CONCLUSION

Experienced players avoid overcalling poor five-card suits at the two level or higher, and this deal illustrates how it can lead to a poor result, even if the contract isn't doubled. An alternative for South is to overcall 1♥. South only has a four-card suit, but it's a fairly good one, and the suit can be bid at the one level. Overcalling 1♥ would work well on this deal. North would raise to 2♥, and that contract makes. East will likely compete with a takeout double, but that is likely to get East-West to a poor contract, giving North-South a plus score on the deal. That's better than going down in 2♣.

DEAL: 10
 DEALER: EAST
 VUL: N-S

NORTH	
♠	K 10 5
♥	10 7
♦	K 10 5
♣	A J 8 6 3

Pass	3♣	Pass
------	----	------

WEST
 ♠ J 7 2
 ♥ K J 4
 ♦ J 7 3
 ♣ Q 10 7 5

2♥	Pass	Pass
----	------	------

EAST
 ♠ A 6 4
 ♥ A Q 8 3 2
 ♦ 9 4
 ♣ K 9 2

1♥	Pass	Pass	Pass
----	------	------	------

SOUTH
 ♠ Q 9 8 3
 ♥ 9 6 5
 ♦ A Q 8 6 2
 ♣ 4

Pass	Dbl	3♦
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

When East opens 1♥, South doesn't have a good enough hand or good enough suit to enter the auction. West raises to 2♥, and North isn't quite strong enough to make a takeout double since East might have a strong hand. However, East passes with a minimum opening bid, and the auction comes back to South.

If South passes, the auction is over. South is in the balancing position. East and West have stopped in partscore, so North is marked with some values. Holding a singleton club, South doesn't have the ideal hand for a takeout double. However, the other choices of overcalling 2♠ with a four-card suit or bidding at the three level, 3♦, are also less than ideal. Nonetheless, letting the opponents play comfortably in their fit at the two level is rarely a good result. Most experienced players prefer to take some action whenever possible.

The most flexible action is to make a balancing takeout double, hoping partner will bid spades or diamonds. On the actual deal, North bids 3♣, but South can 'correct' this to 3♦. Doubling and then bidding a new suit typically shows a strong hand. However, North should recognize that South didn't make a takeout double right away, and is only competing for the contract. North should pass 3♦.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 3♦, West will lead the ♥4, low from three or more cards in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has two spade losers and three heart losers. Declarer can plan to trump one heart loser in dummy before drawing trumps. Declarer can even make an overtrick by guessing which defender holds the ♠J and taking a finesse.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

East-West can't defeat a partscore in either spades or diamonds.

CONCLUSION

When the opponents have found a fit and stopped in partscore, it is usually best to compete for the contract whenever possible. The partnership might get to a contract that makes, push the opponents higher, or go down less than the value of the opponents' partscore. Competing successfully in such auctions may require imagination and cooperation between the partners.

DEAL: 11
 DEALER: WEST
 VUL: N-S

NORTH	
♠	K J 6 3 2
♥	K 10 8 6 4 3
♦	5
♣	10

2♦	Pass	Pass
----	------	------

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

1♦	Pass?	Pass?
----	-------	-------

EAST
 ♠ 10 9 4
 ♥ 2
 ♦ A K 10
 ♣ A 9 7 5 4 2

3♣	Db!?
----	------

SOUTH
 ♠ Q 8 5
 ♥ A J 9 7
 ♦ 9 6 3 2
 ♣ Q 6

4♥!	Pass
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

After West opens 1♦, with both major suits and good distribution North would like to enter the auction, even though North and South are vulnerable. However, overcalling 1♥ might get the partnership to the wrong suit if partner has spades, so it is much safer to show two suits and give partner a choice. If the partnership has agreed to play the Michaels convention, North can bid 2♦, a cuebid of West's suit, to show a distributional hand with both major suits.

How East handles the conventional 2♦ bid will depend on the partnership agreements, but East will likely show the club suit. South knows from North's conventional bid that the partnership has at least a nine-card fit in hearts plus an eight-card fit in spades. With a double-fit, South is likely to jump to game. South expects partner to have good distribution and some reasonable values for the vulnerable action.

The jump to 4♥ creates a challenge for East-West. West is unlikely to want to bid 5♣ with so many potential losers. East may not want to bid 5♣ with a weakish suit or support diamonds at the five level. East has to take some action if West passes, and may choose to double, expecting to defeat the contract after West opened the bidding.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

If South wins the auction in 4♥, West will likely lead the ♣3, partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

In 4♥, declarer only has to lose a spade, a diamond, and a club. After drawing trumps, North's spades can be established by driving out the ♠A.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

East-West can't defeat 4♥.

CONCLUSION

East-West can make 6♣ or 6♦. However, North-South's aggressive bidding may make it difficult to reach game, let alone slam. A partnership can bid aggressively when it has a good fit. The opponents are less likely to double, and even if they do, the penalty may not be too severe. Two-suited overcalls, such as Michaels or the Unusual Notrump, can often allow a partnership to compete effectively, even when the opponents have the majority of strength. At the least, they can lead to exciting auctions!

DEAL: 12
DEALER: WEST
VUL: BOTH

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

2♦	Pass
----	------

WEST
♠ Q 9
♥ A 7 3
♦ K J 10 6 3
♣ A J 5

1NT	Pass
-----	------

EAST
♠ J 10 8 4
♥ 6 2
♦ A 8 4 2
♣ 10 7 2

Pass	Pass
------	------

SOUTH
♠ 6 2
♥ K 10 9
♦ Q 9 7
♣ K Q 9 6 4

2♥

SUGGESTED BIDDING

West opens 1NT with a balanced hand and 15 high-card points plus 1 point for the five-card diamond suit. With two five-card major suits, North would like to enter the auction, but it is risky to overcall one of the suits. If North doesn't find a fit, the partnership may be in a poor contract, perhaps doubled. It is safer to enter the auction with a good one-suited hand, or a two-suited hand that lets partner help choose the best trump suit.

Aggressive partnerships like to compete over the opponent's 1NT opening bid, especially with both major suits, and there are many conventional methods that allow for this. One popular convention is Cappelletti, where 2♦ shows both major suits¹⁰. If the partnership has agreed to use this convention, North can bid 2♦, asking partner to choose a major suit. After East passes, South will bid 2♥, preferring hearts to spades. The 2♥ bid is likely to end the auction.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

If South is the declarer in 2♥, West may lead the ♦J, top of the touching cards from an interior sequence. Alternatively, West may choose to lead a trump.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Even if the defenders lead a trump, South will get to ruff one of North's spades, helping to establish the suit. A spade trick can be given up later if necessary. Declarer should lose only one spade, one heart, a diamond, and a club, making the contract with an overtrick.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

East-West can't defeat 2♥.

CONCLUSION

It's important for the partnership to have a reasonably safe way to enter the auction after an opponent opens the bidding 1NT. If North passes and leads a spade, West will make at least seven tricks in a notrump contract. However, overcalling on weakfish five-card suits can be dangerous. If North overcalls 2♠, that contract will go down. Conventional methods typically handle both one-suited and two-suited hands. That allows the partnership to compete successfully on deals like this.

¹⁰ Some other possibilities are Landy, where 2♣ shows both majors, or DON'T, where 2♥ shows hearts and spades.

4. Advancer's Role

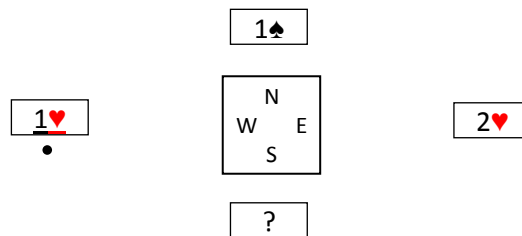
Advancer – the partner of the intervener – is also very competitive in the modern game after either an overcall or a takeout double.

After an Overcall

An overcall by partner shows a five-card or longer suit and interest in competing for the auction. With a fit, advancer can cooperate in a number of ways:

- A simple raise shows three-card or longer support and enough values to compete.
- A jump raise shows four-card or longer support and is preemptive.
- A cuebid typically¹¹ shows three-card or longer support and interest in reaching game.

Consider these hands for South after West has opens 1♥, North overcalls 1♠, and East raises to 2♥:



<p>♠ 8 7 4 ♥ 6 3 ♦ A 9 7 4 ♣ K 8 5 2</p>	<p>2♠. With three-card support for spades and 7 high-card points, South can raise to 2♠. North may have less than the values for an opening bid for a one-level overcall, but that doesn't matter. South is following the Competitive Guideline by competing to the level of the combined number of trumps (5 + 3 = 8).</p>
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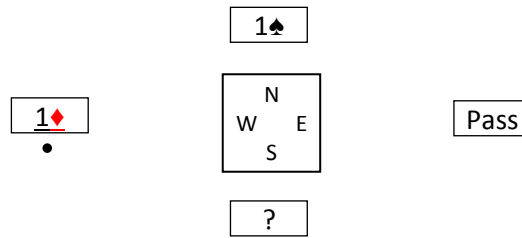
<p>♠ K 7 6 5 ♥ 6 2 ♦ Q 9 7 5 4 ♣ 6 2</p>	<p>3♠. With a weak hand but four-card support for partner's suit, advancer can make a preemptive jump raise to 3♠. Again, advancer expects to be protected by the Competitive Guideline (5 + 4 = 9). The jump will make it more challenging for East-West to decide how high to compete. If 3♠ is doubled, the penalty is unlikely to be more than the value of the contract the opponents could have made.</p>
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<p>♠ K Q 7 ♥ 9 4 2 ♦ A J 8 6 3 ♣ K 4</p>	<p>3♥. With a good fit for partner's spades and interest in reaching game, advancer can make a cuebid of 3♥. With a minimum overcall, North can simply rebid 3♠ and advancer will pass and settle for a partscore. With a good hand for the overcall, North can accept the invitation and bid game.</p>
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¹¹ If the partnership agreement is that a new suit advance of an overcall is not forcing, advancer may have to cuebid with a strong hand, to make sure intervener does not pass.

Without a fit for intervener's suit, advancer must proceed more cautiously. Although some players treat a new suit by advancer as forcing after an overcall, most do not. This is different from a new suit bid by responder, which is forcing unless responder is a passed hand. Even if a new suit is not forcing, it is usually played as forward-going. Intervener will only pass with a very minimal overcall.

Here are some examples of advancer's actions after West opens 1♦, North overcalls 1♠, and East passes:



<p>♠ 5 ♥ K J 8 7 3 ♦ 9 8 2 ♣ A 7 5 3</p>	<p>Pass. Advancer has 8 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card heart suit. With no fit for partner, however, it would be dangerous to compete with a 2♥ bid at this point. With interest in hearing about some suit other than spades, North might have made a takeout double. Best to pass and see if there are any further developments.</p>
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<p>♠ J 4 ♥ 7 5 2 ♦ K Q 9 3 ♣ A 10 6 2</p>	<p>1NT. With only a partial fit for partner's suit and good stoppers in the opponent's suit, advancer can bid 1NT. This is forward-going, not a run out from spades. Opposite an overcall, it covers a fairly wide range of about 6-11 points.</p>
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<p>♠ 8 3 ♥ K Q 10 8 5 2 ♦ A 5 4 ♣ Q 4</p>	<p>2♥. This hand is worth an advance to 2♥. If the partnership agreement is that it is non-forcing, that's fine. Intervener will only pass with a minimum overcall, making game unlikely.</p>
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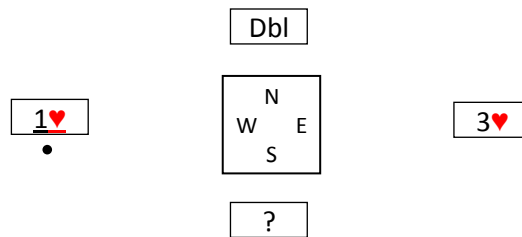
After a Takeout Double

The basic guidelines for advancer when partner makes a takeout double are:

- Bid at the cheapest available level with 0-8 points.
- Make an invitational jump with 9-11 points.
- Get to game with about 12 or more points.

The last point may seem a bit aggressive, but with most of the missing strength presumably located in the opening bidder's hand, the opponents will often have trouble taking tricks, and declarer will be able to play as though seeing all the cards.

When intervener doubles, the auction has become competitive, and responder will often bid before advancer gets to say something. Let's look at some examples after West opens 1♥, North doubles, and East jumps to 3♥:



♠ K J 9 7 5
♥ 8 4 2
♦ A J 5
♣ K 3

4♠. Advancer should not be distracted by East's jump raise. It's typically a preemptive bid. Advancer can ask if unsure. With 12 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card spade suit, advancer has enough to jump to game, 4♠.

♠ Q 10 7 3
♥ 9 7
♦ K Q 6 2
♣ J 6 5

Pass/3♠. Tough. With 8 high-card points, advancer was willing to compete to 2♠ if East had raised to only 2♥. Now advancer must choose between a timid pass and an overbid of 3♠. If advancer bids 3♠, intervener won't be sure whether it is just competitive or if advancer is inviting game. This merely shows the effectiveness of East's preemptive jump raise to 3♥. There's no right or wrong answer¹².

♠ Q 8 4
♥ K Q 7
♦ K J 5 2
♣ 8 6 2

Pass. 10 high-card points, but the ♥K and ♥Q are not too likely to be useful opposite partner's probable singleton. A competitive bid of 4♦ is too much. Better to pass and hope for a plus score with this hand.

♠ Q 5 2
♥ 8 4
♦ A J 7 3
♣ Q J 6 2

Double. With 10 'working' high-card points, advancer wants to do something, but a bid of 4♣ or 4♦ might land the partnership in a 4-3 fit at the four level. The modern style is to use a double here as 'responsive'. It is not a penalty double. It typically shows some values and two places to play, asking for help from partner. It's unlikely advancer has four spades in this situation, since advancer might have

bid 3♠. So intervener will usually bid clubs or diamonds, or choose to pass and convert the responsive double into a penalty double. No one said high-level competitive decisions were easy!

Summary

In modern competitive auctions, the players are much more aggressive than they used to be. There are many competitive gadgets used by the more experienced partnerships. Nonetheless, good judgment is usually the key to success. Sometimes it is right to bid a lot with a little; sometimes it is right to bid a little with a lot.

¹² Very experienced players may have discussed the use of the responsive double in this situation, but that is not for the casual partnership.

DEAL: 13
 DEALER: EAST
 VUL: NONE

NORTH	
♠	K 8 4 3 2
♥	8
♦	10 9 7 5 3
♣	8 6

4♠	Pass
----	------

WEST

♠ 10 6
 ♥ Q 10 4
 ♦ K Q 8
 ♣ 9 7 5 3 2

2♥	Pass
----	------

EAST

♠ 7
 ♥ A K 7 6 5 2
 ♦ A J 4
 ♣ A J 4

<u>1♥</u>	Db!?
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SOUTH

♠ A Q J 9 5
 ♥ J 9 3
 ♦ 6 2
 ♣ K Q 10

<u>1♠</u>	Pass
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

East opens the bidding 1♥, South overcalls 1♠, and West raises to 2♥. North has only 3 high-card points but has five-card support for partner's suit and a distributional hand. As advancer, North can make a preemptive jump raise to 4♠. The partnership has ten combined spades, so the Law of Total Tricks suggests that it will be safe to compete to the ten-trick level of 4♠. If the contract goes down, even doubled, the penalty should be less than the value of the opponents' potential contract.

North's jump to 4♠ creates a difficult challenge for East. With 17 high-card points plus 2 length points for the six-card suit, East was planning to jump to 4♥ after West's raise to 2♥. Now West must choose between bidding 5♥ or doubling and defending against the 4♠ contract. Not an easy decision. East's safest choice is to double. It should be easier to take four tricks on defense than eleven tricks in a heart contract. East's double will be followed by three passes.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 4♠, West will lead the ♥4, low from three or more cards in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has three heart losers, two diamond losers, and two club losers. Two heart losers and a club loser can be ruffed in the dummy, so declarer loses only one heart, two diamonds, and a club. Down one.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

East-West can't do better than take four tricks against a spade contract.

CONCLUSION

North's preemptive jump raise is highly effective on this deal. The best East-West can do is to double and collect a penalty of 100 points. That's not much compensation for their lost game bonus. In practice, East may choose to bid on to 5♥. That contract can be defeated one trick, losing a spade and two clubs, resulting in a plus score for North-South rather than a minus.

DEAL: 14
 DEALER: EAST
 VUL: N-S

NORTH	
♠	J 10 6
♥	A K
♦	J 8 5 3
♣	Q J 6 2

2♦	Pass
----	------

WEST
 ♠ Q 4 2
 ♥ 8 6 3 2
 ♦ 7 6
 ♣ K 9 5 4

Pass	Pass
------	------

EAST
 ♠ 7 3
 ♥ Q 10 9 5
 ♦ A K 10 2
 ♣ A 10 7

<u>1♦</u>	Pass	Pass
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SOUTH
 ♠ A K 9 8 5
 ♥ J 7 4
 ♦ Q 9 4
 ♣ 8 3

<u>1♠</u>	2♠
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

After East opens 1♦, South overcalls 1♠, and West passes. North has three-card support for spades, 12 high-card points, and 1 dummy point for the doubleton heart. If South had opened 1♠, North would take the partnership to game. Since an overcall can be based on less strength than an opening bid, advancer has to proceed more cautiously. North starts by making a cuebid of the opponent's suit, 2♦. This shows interest in reaching game and typically promises at least three-card support for partner's suit¹³. When East passes, South simply rebids 2♠ to show a minimum-strength overcall with no interest in game unless advancer has a very strong hand. After West passes, North accepts South's judgment and passes.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 2♠, West will lead the ♦7, top of the doubleton in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has a spade loser, a heart loser, three diamond losers, and two club losers. Declarer can plan on ruffing a heart loser in dummy and trying the spade finesse. Suppose East wins the first two diamond tricks and leads a third round, which West ruffs. If West leads a club to East's ♣A and East leads another diamond, declarer can't afford to ruff low or high. In either case, West would get a trick with the ♠Q. Instead, declarer should discard the remaining club loser – a *loser on a loser play*. West can ruff the diamond, but that's the last trick for the defense.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

The 2♠ contract can actually be defeated with perfect defense. East wins the first two diamonds and then leads the ♦2 as a suit preference signal, showing an entry in clubs. West ruffs. Trusting partner's signal, West leads the ♠K(!) and then a club to East's ♣A. Now when East leads the last diamond, declarer has no club loser to discard. Whether declarer ruffs high or low, West gets a trick with the ♠Q.

CONCLUSION

This deal illustrates advancer's use of the cuebid to help get the partnership to the best contract after partner overcalls. That's necessary because an overcall isn't an opening bid but does cover a wide range.

¹³ If the partnership agreement is that a new suit by advancer is non-forcing, then a cuebid may be the only forcing bid and may not guarantee support. However, overcaller should initially assume that it shows support.

DEAL: 15
 DEALER: WEST
 VUL: N-S

NORTH
♠ 8 6 5 3
♥ 6 2
♦ A J 10 4
♣ A K 9

Dbf	Pass
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WEST
 ♠ A K
 ♥ Q J 9 4 3
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ 8 6 5 3

1♥	Pass
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EAST
 ♠ 10
 ♥ 10 8 7 5
 ♦ Q 9 8 6 2
 ♣ Q 4 2

3♥	Pass
----	------

SOUTH
 ♠ Q J 9 7 4 2
 ♥ A K
 ♦ 5 3
 ♣ J 10 7

4♠

SUGGESTED BIDDING

After West opens 1♥, North has the right type of hand for a takeout double: support for the unbid suits, 12 high-card points, and 1 dummy point for the doubleton heart. East has only 4 high-card points but has a singleton spade and four-card support for hearts. East can make a preemptive jump raise to 3♥. With 10 or more points, East would start with a redouble, or bid 2NT as a conventional raise if the partnership has that agreement. South, as advancer, should not be deterred by East's jump. South has an opening bid opposite partner's takeout double and can jump to game, 4♠.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

Against 4♠, West would lead the ♥Q, top of the broken sequence in the partnership's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has two spade losers a diamond loser, and a club loser. The club finesse offers a 50% chance of making the contract, but the diamond suit gives even better odds. Declarer should plan to lead a diamond to dummy's ♦10. Although East wins the trick with the ♦Q, declarer later plans to repeat the finesse. This will work if West holds the ♦K, or ♦Q, or both the ♦K and ♦Q. It loses only if East has both the ♦K and ♦Q. That's a 75% chance.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

When West leads the ♥Q, East should make a discouraging signal of the ♥2, holding neither the ♥A nor ♥K. If declarer leads a trump, West can win and lead a club. If declarer wins in dummy and leads another trump, West can win and lead another club. That will establish East's ♣Q as a winner before declarer has created an extra winner in the diamond suit on which to discard the club loser.

CONCLUSION

After a takeout double, the meaning of responder's bids change. A new suit at the one level is still forcing, but a new suit at the two level is not. Similarly, a jump raise becomes preemptive rather than a limit raise. This is because responder has a new option available, the redouble, to show a hand of about 10 or more points.

When partner makes a takeout double, advancer typically bids at the cheapest level with about 0-8 points, jumps a level with 9-11, and gets the partnership to game with 12 or more points.

DEAL: 16
 DEALER: SOUTH
 VUL: BOTH

NORTH	
♠	Q 9
♥	Q 10 9 6 2
♦	K J 8 2
♣	K 5

Rdbl	2♥	Pass?
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WEST

♠ J 6
 ♥ A K 8 4
 ♦ A Q 5 3
 ♣ J 9 6

Dbl	Pass	Pass
-----	------	------

EAST

♠ 10 8 3 2
 ♥ 7 5
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ Q 10 8 7 4

2♣	Pass	Pass
----	------	------

SOUTH

♠ A K 7 5 4
 ♥ J 3
 ♦ 10 9 7
 ♣ A 3 2

1♠	Pass	2NT
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SUGGESTED BIDDING

South opens 1♠, and West makes a takeout double with an opening bid and support for the unbid suits. North has 11 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card heart suit. A bid of 2♥ would not be forcing after the takeout double. Instead, responder starts with a redouble, announcing that the partnership has the majority of strength. East, advancer, has only 2 high-card points but a distinct preference for clubs among the unbid suits. East should bid 2♣, even though it is a new suit at the two level. After the opening bid, double, and redouble, West won't be expecting partner to hold much. South doesn't know what type of hand North has for the redouble and passes, waiting to see what partner wants to do. It's possible North may want to double 2♣ for penalty, and South would be happy to defend. West also passes, knowing East's 2♣ bid is just trying to get the partnership to its safest spot.

When the bidding returns to North, North doesn't have enough in clubs to double for penalty. Instead North shows the heart suit. This is forcing. It's as though North would have responded 2♥ after South's 1♠ opening if West had passed. East passes and South, with only a doubleton heart, shows a minimum balanced hand by rebidding 2NT. North has a close decision over this. North might pass and settle for partscore, or continue to 3NT, hoping partner can make nine tricks.

SUGGESTED OPENING LEAD

East has shown a preference for clubs, so West will lead the ♣3, low from an honor in partner's suit.

SUGGESTED PLAY

Declarer has three sure tricks in spades and two in clubs. Three more tricks can be promoted in hearts, and declarer can also try taking a finesse in diamonds, hoping West has the ♦Q. Since declarer will have to let West in several times while developing tricks, declarer should hold up winning the first round of clubs. That way, even if South's clubs become established, there will be no entry to them.

SUGGESTED DEFENSE

If declarer fails to hold up in the club suit, the defenders can promote three winners in clubs to go with the ♥A-K and ♦A. Otherwise, declarer will come to at least eight tricks, likely nine with good timing.

CONCLUSION

Advancer's 2♣ with a weak hand bid keeps the partnership out of trouble. If East passes the redouble, West will presumably bid 2♦ or 2♥, and North will now start doubling for penalty.

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