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IMPROVE YOUR GAME

# **When To Bid, When To Pass**

**1. Opening the bidding** 13 HCP: Always open; 12 HCP: Almost always open, but use the Highly Cutie Count

Below 13 HCP: Marty Bergen's Rule of 20: Add your HCP and the number of cards in your two longest suits. If the total is 20 or more, open with a 1-bid. This works on many hands, but also fails on some, suggesting an opening when you should pass and passing when you should open. This modification works well:

**Rule of 22:** Add your HCP (**HI**) + the number of cards in your two longest suits (LE for Length) + your quick tricks (Q/T). If the total is 22 or more, open with a 1-bid. (Shade it to 21 or more at favourable vulnerability.) **HI + LE + Q/T = Highly Cutie**

Quick tricks: A-K = 2, A-Q = 1½, A = 1, K-Q = 1, K = ½ (not king-singleton).

Upgrade for good features: Add ½ for the Q or J with two higher honours or J-10 with one higher honour. Downgrade for bad features: Deduct 1 for singleton K, Q or J, deduct ½ for A, K, Q or J in a doubleton suit.

## Exercise 1:

Which of these hands are worth an opening bid?

1.  
♠ K J 10  
♥ Q 8 7  
♦ Q J 6 3  
♣ K 6 2

2.  
♠ A K 6  
♥ 9 6 3 2  
♦ 6 3  
♣ A J 8 3

3.  
♠ 6  
♥ A K J 7 4  
♦ K 4 2  
♣ 8 6 2

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

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

**2. Responding to partner's opening:** Respond to a suit opening with 6HCP regardless of shape. Respond with 5 HCP and a 5+ suit or with 4 HCP and a 6+ suit.

## Exercise 2:

Partner opens 1♣. Next player passes. What do you do with each of these hands?

1.  
♠ Q 8 4 2  
♥ Q 5 3  
♦ J 7 4 2  
♣ 6 2

2.  
♠ A 8  
♥ 9 6 3 2  
♦ 7 4  
♣ J 8 5 3 2

3.  
♠ 6 5 4 3 2  
♥ 9 8 4  
♦ A J  
♣ 7 4 3

4.  
♠ Q 8 6 4 3 2  
♥ 9 6 3  
♦ 8 7 2  
♣ 2

5.  
♠ 8 7  
♥ K J 10 7 4 2  
♦ 9 7  
♣ 8 6 5

If below 11 points, remove 1NT to a suit at the 2-level with a 5+ suit and to 3♣ with 6+ clubs.

## 3. Accepting an invitation

If you have shown a minimum opening hand and partner invites you to go to game, accept with 14 HCP and reject with 12-13 HCP. However, if you have 13 HCP and some shape (singleton, two doubletons), accept the invitation anyway.

## 4. Overcalls

Overcalls in a suit are based on strongish suits, at least five cards long. The essence of the overcall is the long, strong suit. If your suit is strong, make an overcall even with as few as 8 or 9 HCP. Just how good must a suit be to qualify as a 'strong suit'? An

excellent guide for overcalls and for pre-emptive openings is the **SUIT QUALITY (SQ) TEST**: Count the number of cards in the suit you wish to bid. Add the number of honours in that suit (but count the J or 10 as a full honour only if the suit contains at least one higher honour).

The SQ total is the number of tricks for which you may bid that suit. Thus, if the total is 7, you may bid your suit at the 1-level. If 8, you may bid at the 1-level or the 2-level if necessary. If 9, you may bid at the 1-level, the 2-level or, if necessary, the 3-level.

A suit overcall at the 1-level shows a strong suit, at least 5 cards long (suit quality 7+), 8-15 HCP and 6-8 losers. If stronger, double first.

A suit overcall at the 2-level (not a jump-overcall) shows a strong suit, at least 5 cards long (suit quality 8+), 10-15 HCP and 6-7 losers. If stronger, double first.

A suit overcall at the 3-level (not a jump-overcall) shows a strong suit, at least 5 cards long (suit quality 9+), and 12-16 HCP (5-7 losers). If stronger, double.

Thus, an overcall might be as strong as a minimum opening, but it can be quite a bit weaker.

### Exercise 3:

RHO opens 1♦. What do you do with each of these hands?

1.  
♠ A K J 4 2  
♥ 9 7 6  
♦ 8 6 5  
♣ 7 3

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

3.  
♠ 3 2  
♥ 9 8 6 4 3 2  
♦ A Q  
♣ K 7 2

4.  
♠ K Q  
♥ J 4 3  
♦ K Q J  
♣ J 9 8 4 2

5.  
♠ 9 3 2  
♥ Q J 10

♦ 7  
♣ A Q J 7 4 3

**5. 3rd Seat Openings:** Open in 3<sup>rd</sup> seat with 9-12 HCP on any hand that qualifies for a 1-level overcall.

## 6. Takeout doubles

There are three basic hand types which qualify for a takeout double:

**Type A double:** 12-15 HCP: To double with this strength, two conditions must be met: The enemy suit must be the shortest suit in your hand, and you must have 3+ cards in each unbid suit.

You may make a Type A double with 11 HCP and a 4-4-4-1 pattern or 10 HCP and a 5-4-4-0 pattern, because these hands have excellent playing strength if a trump fit is found. The 4-4-4-1 and 5-4-4-0 patterns are called the classical shapes for a takeout double since they have not only the shortage in the enemy suit but 4+ support for each of the unbid suits. 3+ support is enough but 4+ support is even better.

*If your hand does not justify an overcall and does not meet the requirements for a Type A takeout double, Pass even with 13+ points.*

**Type B double:** 15-18 points. Double with this strength unless it is suitable for a 1NT overcall.

If your hand fits 1NT (balanced, 15-18 points, stopper in the enemy suit), bid 1NT. If the hand does not fit, start with a double. The 15-point hand is borderline between the Type A and the Type B double. Upgrade a strong 15 into the Type B range.

The hand types within Type B are (1) Short in the enemy suit and 3+ support for the other suits, (2) The one-suited hand too strong for a simple overcall, and (3) The balanced hand which has no stopper in their suit and also the balanced hand which is 4-4 in the majors after they open 1♣ or 1♦.

**Type C double:** Any hand of 19+ HCP starts with a double.

## Exercise 4:

RHO opens 1♦. What do you do with each of these hands?

1.  
♠ J 6  
♥ A J 8 2  
♦ K Q 7 3  
♣ Q J 2

2.  
♠ K Q 7 6  
♥ 8 7 5 2  
♦ 9  
♣ A Q 8 2

3.

♠ A Q 7 3  
♥ K Q 8 7  
♦ A 3  
♣ Q 9 2

4.

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

5.

♠ J 9 7  
♥ A 2  
♦ 7 6 4 3 2  
♣ A K Q

**7. After a takeout double by RHO e.g. 1♦ : (X) : ?**

Bid if you would have bid over a Pass by RHO; Pass if you would have passed over a pass.

**8. After partner's takeout double and RHO bids e.g. (1♥) : X : (2♥) : ?**

Bid with 6-9 points, jump bid or bid 2NT with 10-12; Pass with 0-5 points.

**9. After partner's takeout double and RHO redoubles e.g. (1♥) : X : (XX) : ?**

Bid. Make the same bid you would have made over a Pass by RHO. Almost never Pass.

**10. After partner's negative double and RHO bids e.g. 1♦ : (1♠) : X : (2♠) : ?**

Bid to the 3-level only with 16-18 points. Pass with 12-15.

**11. Competitive bidding in the partscore zone**

Bid after they bid and raise a suit to the 2-level and stop there.

Bid 3-over-their-3-level bid if you have a trump fit and at least nine trumps.

Do not compete a partscore to the 4-level.

Bid again at the 1-level or 2-level if you are short in their suit.

Pass with length/strength in their suit.

Pass for penalties.

## 12. Competitive bidding in the game zone

Compete if you are short in their suit. Use takeout doubles after a pre-emptive opening or pre-emptive raise.

Bid one more if you are void in their suit. Bid one more with a freakish shape.

Pass or double with strength in their suit.

If your side has established a trump fit and you are short in their suit, pass the decision to partner whether to bid on or whether to defend.

**Tip on card play:** Whether declarer or a defender, always count the HCP in dummy and estimate where the remaining points are likely to be; always count the tricks needed to make or break the contract; as soon as a player shows out of a suit, count the number of cards held originally by that player and how the suit has split.