



# Adventures in Bridge

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## (29) Overcalls: Interferer's Options

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Robert S. Todd

[robert@advinbridge.com](mailto:robert@advinbridge.com)

### General

When an opponent opens the bidding and we want to interfere, we have many tools including and beyond overcalls at our disposal. The goal of this lesson is to examine these choices and help us understand the advantage of each.

### Types of Hands that Compete in the Bidding

Now we should focus on when we compete (and what we use to compete) with each of our different types of hands. First, we will focus on the shapes of our hands

- *1-Suited Hands*
  - With a 5-card suit and normal strength (7-18 points at 1-level) we make a simple overcall.
  - With a 6+card suit and 5-10 points we make a *jump overcall* (to the level of our suit – Weak Jump Overcall.) If we qualify for either an overcall or a jump overcall, we should make the more specific call of a jump overcall.
  - With 19+ points we double and then bid our suit. This shows a hand that has a long suit and was too strong to start with an overcall.
- *2-Suited Hands*
  - With two suits to show (at least 5-4) we generally bid our longest suit first if we are strong enough to overcall. If we have two equal length suits, 5-5 or longer, then we overcall the higher-ranking suit first.
  - We also use Special Bids – *see below*.
- *3-Suited Hands*
  - With 4441 we make a takeout double if we have enough values.
  - With 5440 and a 5-card minor we also make a takeout double.
  - We can make an overcall with 5440 hands and a 5-card Major. We do this when we have a decent 5-card Major or not enough values to make a takeout double.



## **Desire to Compete in the Bidding**

### ***Notrump Overcalls***

When we have an extremely good hand, 15+ points, and a stopper in the opponent's suit, we have more bidding options. If we have a long suit we can still overcall, but if we have a balanced hand (with or without a long suit) then it is usually best to describe our hand in one call if we can. If we have 15-18 points we can overcall 1NT. Notice that this 1NT overcall is a bit stronger than a 1NT opening bid. This is because one of the opponents has already opened the bidding. This makes it easier for the opponents to penalize us and thus we want to have a little extra for our 1NT overcalls.

### ***Problem Hand***

The classic problem hand has 12-14 points with length in the opponent's suit. We have enough points that we want to take some action, but no action looks appropriate (assuming we do not have a long suit to overcall.) With this hand we have lots of defensive values – since our points are in our short suits or the opponent's suit. Thus, we should choose to defend – and pass! Many players have difficulty making themselves pass with an opening hand, but the opponents beat us in the race to open the bidding so we pass and wait to see what happens.

## **Interfering Options We Often Must Choose Between**

### ***Double vs. 2-Level Overcall***

When we are 5332 or 5431 we have a choice between overcalling our 5-card suit OR making a takeout double (assuming that we have 12+ points.) Let's look at what kind of hands choose which action:

- When we have 5332 with a 5-card Major we usually overcall our 5-card suit – the Major is the most important thing. (We may choose a takeout double if we have an extremely weak 5-card Major.)
- With a 5-card minor we usually make a takeout double (when we have a normal hand, points spread throughout our hand.) If all of our points are concentrated in our 5-card suit, then we overcall it.
- With 5431 distribution and a 5-card minor we usually make a Takeout Double (unless maybe all our points are in our longest suit, but often best even then.)
- With 5-3-4-1 we usually overcall our 5-card Major if the opponent opens 1♣.
- With 5-4-3-1 when the opponent opens 1♣, we have a difficult decision. With a minimum hand we usually make a takeout double – this allows us to get our entire hand off our chest. With extra values (about 14+ HCP) we overcall our 5-card Major and reopen the bidding with double to try to compete in the bidding and find our fit in our second suit.



### ***Overcalling Suits vs. Overcalling Notrump***

When we have a 5332 shape and the proper range for a 1NT overcall we have two options – show our suit or show our hand. Let's look at when we might do each of these things:

- When we have a balanced 5332 with 15-17 HCP (or possibly 18 HCP) we usually overcall 1NT when we have 3 cards in the opponent's suit and a stopper there.
- With 5332 and 2 cards in the opponent's suit we usually overcall our suit or make a takeout double (see above.) With AQ or Kx we might overcall 1NT because of our positional values (we have a strong desire to be the declarer.)
- We tend to overcall our 5-card suit when we have a very strong suit, no stopper in the opponent's suit, and/or no positional values.

### ***Simple Overcall vs. Jump Overcall***

When we have a 6+card suit and 8-10 HCP we have an option of overcalling simply or making a jump overcall. A simple overcall shows 7-18 points and a 5+card suit, while a jump overcall shows 6-card (or 7-card suit at 3-level) and 5-10 HCP.

- Let's examine the risk and reward of each of these two bids.
  - Jump Overcall
    - Risk – Getting too high; getting doubled or just going down too many.
    - Reward – Eat up bidding space from opponents and fully describe our hand.
  - Simple Overcall (1-Level)
    - Risk – Poorly describes our hand, both in strength and length.
    - Reward – Less risk than a jump overcall.
- A jump overcall is a much more specific call and describes our hand more precisely than a simple overcall. So we generally choose to make a jump overcall to the 2- or 3-level over a simple overcall at the 1-level.
- A time that we might choose a simple overcall, or a 2-level jump overcall on a 7-card suit, is when our suit is not strong enough to risk a jump overcall.



### (Advanced) Special Bids

These are a couple of common conventions that are used to show 2-suited hands. Both of these conventions are only used in the direct seat (in their classic uses.)

- *Michaels Cuebid*
  - If the opponents open with 1-minor, we can use a direct cuebid to show both Major suits – at least 5-5. This will usually be a weak hand, 5-10 points. But occasionally we will have a very strong hand, 16+ points. Partner will always expect to us to have the weak hand when we first make our cuebid.
  - If the opponents open with 1-Major, a direct cuebid can be used to show 5-5+, with 5-cards in the other Major and some 5-card minor. This has the same strength requirements as above.
- *Unusual Notrump*
  - We also have a way of showing the two lowest ranking suits. This is usually the minors (or it can be hearts and the unbid minor.) We do this by jumping to 2NT after the opponents have opened the bidding. Unlike Michaels, this is always a weak hand with 5-10 points.

*Note: The best way to think of this is a preempt with two suits, not just one.*

### Conclusion

Interfering in the bidding has many purposes. These range from constructively communicating with partner in an effort to win the auction all the way to just trying to make life difficult on the opponents. As you can see, we are armed with many tools to accomplish these goals, but knowing what our bids mean and what we are trying to accomplish is the key to effectively competing in the bidding.