

Defending Against Interference

The awful truth—sometimes the opponents just won't keep their mouths shut.

Sometimes we can make them wish they had, by either doubling them and setting them a number of tricks; other times, we simply have to do the best we can with the space we have.

Remember: you don't always get to be scientific when your opponents have eaten up a bunch of bidding room...sometimes you are going to have to guess. That's part of why they bid!

Some Standard “Rules” when partner has opened and right hand opponent has bid a suit:

- Raising partner's opener to two shows 6-9 points and a confirmed 8 card fit (i.e., 3 cards in a major, 5 cards in a minor; you can bid 2♦ with only four if your hand has some shape and your diamonds are pretty good).
- If bidding three of partner's opener is a jump, doing so is preemptive. Raising partner to four of a minor is preemptive; raising partner to game in their suit should be based mostly on distribution, but you are allowed to have more points than you might normally for a preemptive bid (but not so much you are going to miss a slam)--maybe up to about 8 or 9 points with extreme length for partner (usually 5 or more cards).
- If the three level is the lowest level at which you can bid partner's suit, doing so shows decent support (definitely at least a sure 8 card fit) and 8-11 points or so.
- A cue bid (the cheapest bid available in the suit the opponent overcalled) shows a limit raise or better in the suit partner opened and a known 8+ card fit (unless the cuebid forces you to the game level—then it's a game force! :)).
- One level suit bids are similar to bids without interference. An exception is if the overcall is 1♥. In this case, 1♠ promises 5+ spades; double shows exactly four spades.
- Non-jumps to the 2 level in a new suit show at least 10 points and at least five cards in the suit. Non-jumps to the 3 level or higher in a new suit are game forcing with at least five cards
- If partner opened a minor and the overcall is a major or vice versa, double shows at least four cards in the unbid minor and some points depending on how high you are: around 8 points if you are forcing to the 2 level, 11 or so for the 3 level and above. However, it denies a hand good enough to bid the other major directly as described above
- If both previous bids are minors, double shows both majors, at least 4-4, one could be longer, with similar strength to the above. If both previous bids are majors, double shows both minors in a similar fashion.
- 1NT shows 7-10 or so points and a stopper in the opponent's suit. 2NT shows 11-12 and a stopper—even when it is not a jump. (If 1NT is unavailable, pass with most balanced 7-10 point hands.)
- 3NT suggests 3NT as a contract if partner has a “normal” opener (without significant additional shape or extras. We would like to have 13-15 balanced, but sometimes we get stuck:

Q9
AJ9
KQT984
73

North	East	South	West
	1♣	3♥	?

I would bid 3NT. Maybe left hand opponent has a running spade suit and will take the first 7 tricks. Maybe we are going to make 6 diamonds if I show my diamond suit. That's life! If I don't bid 3NT now, we don't get to play 3NT...and it often will be the only making game. So I will bid it and hope for the best.

- If you don't have a hand with a bid described here, you should probably pass. This includes balanced hands without stoppers in the opponent's suit, as well as “penalty pass” hands with length and strength in the opponent's suit

When partner opens one of a suit and right hand opponent doubles:

- One of a new suit is “normal”, one round forcing.
- Redouble shows at least 10 points.
- People play 2-level bids of new suits a number of ways. One suggestion: 2-level bids are good 5 or 6 card suits and 8-12 points or so (remember, your opponent claims to have length in this suit when they double!), and not forcing. If you have a game forcing hand without support for partner, you redouble first.
- In terms of hands with support for partner: two level raises are 6-9 or so with a known fit (inverted minors should be off in competition if you play them). 3 level raises are preemptive; 4 level raises are also distribution based. With 4+card support and limit or better values, bid 2NT (some call this “Jordan 2NT” or “Truscott 2NT”). With 3 card support for a major and limit+, start with redouble, and show your support later.

You may have noticed I failed to talk about jump shifts above.

The modern “standard” usage of jump shifts in competition seems to be weak. I do not like weak jump shifts for the following reasons:

- When you make a weak jump shift, right hand opponent already has bid their suit. When their partner has a fit for them, they can usually bid over the weak jump shift anyway without much impact.
- If left hand opponent doesn't have a fit for their partner, they are probably just as happy to pass anyway; unless you are lucky and catch partner with a fit in your suit, the hand is probably a misfit with neither side having a clear majority of strength. Unfortunately, you are the one committed to the 2-or 3-level with your bid!
- When right hand opponent has doubled instead, you are not much better off—left hand opponent can usually bid their suit with confidence whether or not you bid, and right hand opponent usually has some length in the suit you are bidding when they double!

This brings us to our first piece of nifty gadgetry...the **fit jump**.

Fit Jumps: All single jumps to new suits in any kind of competition where partner has bid exactly one suit show the new suit bid AND support for partner's suit, and are forcing one round. You should typically have at least 9 cards in the two suits (10 when partner opened a minor).

Note that despite the jump and the forcing nature of the bid, you don't necessarily have to have a great hand in terms of high card points to make it. The idea is that you have support for partner and are distributional enough that you probably will be okay at a reasonably high level anyway—either because you can make it, or as a sacrifice. This is better than just raising your partner's suit because partner can now evaluate the side suit cards in their own hand better and know whether to bid a game in one of our suits or take a sacrifice if the opponents bid onwards.

Consider this hand as east and the two following auctions (assume nobody is vulnerable):

84
AQ876
AKQ3
K6

North	East	South	West
	1♥	1♠	3♣
4♠	??		

Partner has shown long clubs to go with some heart support for you. This doesn't leave then with very many diamonds; with any luck you can win the first heart trick and cash three diamonds against 4♠-- and maybe even give partner a ruff. I would probably double; I certainly would not sacrifice in 5♥ when 4♠ has such good chances at going down.

North	East	South	West
	1♥	1♠	3♦
4♠	??		

Partner has a fit for hearts with diamonds! We will be extraordinarily lucky to take even 3 tricks in 4 spades—at best we can get one heart, one club, and one diamond. Furthermore, with our two large fits, we don't have very many losers if we push on to 5 hearts—partner probably has a singleton in one of the black suits, giving us probably only 3 losers (2 in one black suit, one in the other). If partner has a singleton spade and the ace of clubs is the right place, we might even make five hearts, even if partner has nothing other than the king of hearts!

Note that (much like a preempt) analysis following a fit jump presumes that the fit jumper has values in their long suits. It is important that this be the case! If you have values outside your long suits but the right shape, simply raising partner's major is often better.

Gadget #2: Lebensohl

You may have heard of this one (or seen it on the convention card).

Many of us play some great systems over 1NT openers—stayman, transfers, and other conventions allow us to be very specific in getting to a good contract. When our opponents get in the way, though, we can run into problems:

North	East	South	West
	1NT	2♠	??

In this situation, we can't show all the kinds of hands with hearts we might want to show. Should 3♥ be forcing with five or more hearts? What do we do if we want to compete with a weak hand with hearts? What if we only have four hearts?

A popular way around this problem is called **Lebensohl**. Pairs that play Lebensohl give 2NT a special meaning when the opponents have bid a suit at the 2 level (specifically, 2♦ or higher) after our partner opens 1NT. In particular, a 2NT bid is a **relay** to 3♣, meaning we want our partner to bid 3♣ no matter what their hand is.¹

Now consider the above example again. We can bid 3♥ directly, or we can bid 2NT, and then bid 3♥ after our partner bids 3♣. Because partner always bids 3♣ over 2NT, we can safely assign two different meanings to these sequences. The standard approach is that a direct bid of 3♥ is forcing with five or more hearts and bidding 2NT and then bidding 3♥ shows a weak hand that wants to signoff in three hearts.

When you have to go to the three level to bid a suit, bidding it directly is forcing with 5 or more cards. Bidding 2NT and then bidding your suit (or passing 3♣ if your suit is clubs) shows a weak hand; partner should usually pass.

What about the times when we can still bid our suit at the 2-level?

North	East	South	West
	1NT	2♥	??

In this case, if we want to bid 2♠, we can do so. Thus, using Lebensohl 2NT shows something different.

When there is room to bid a suit at the two level, doing so is a signoff. Bidding a suit that you could bid at the 2 level at the 3 level is forcing with 5 or more cards. Bidding 2NT and then bidding that suit shows an invite with 5 or more cards.

¹ A “relay” is different from a transfer because a transfer promises cards in the suit that is being transferred to. In this case, the 2NT bidder is not promising length or strength in clubs—they may be planning on doing something else afterward that has nothing to do with clubs.

What about if we only have a four card major? Some people play a cue bid of overcaller's suit as a stayman bid of sorts, looking for a 4-4 fit in the unbid major[s]. Lebensohl can add some additional science to this as well. In particular, we can help partner decide what to if we *don't* find a 4-4 major fit.

A direct cuebid of the overcalled suit is game forcing stayman, but it also denies a stopper in the overcalled suit. Starting with 2NT and then bidding 3 of the overcalled suit is stayman without a stopper.

The 1NT opener now (hopefully) has most of the information she needs. If she has a four card major, she will usually bid game in that major. If she doesn't, and she feels comfortable about playing 3NT based entirely on her stoppers, she can bid 3NT. Otherwise, she can choose to play a 4-3 major fit, or bid 4 of a minor and try and find a minor fit.

We can also check for stoppers without showing 4 cards in an unbid major.

A direct 3NT bid denies a stopper in the overcalled suit. 2NT and then 3NT shows a stopper in the overcalled suit.

Similar to the stayman case, if the 1NT opener does not have the overcalled suit well stopped, she can bid 4 of a suit in an effort to find a place to play other than 3NT.

Some other items about defending against notrump interference:

- Sometimes the opponents bid on the three level, not the two level. In this case, 3 level suit bids should be forcing with five cards; with a weak hand you have to just pass.
- Consider playing a doubling style similar to when you open one of a suit—i.e., doubles by either player are for takeout. The situation is actually not that different: you will find you have hands suitable for takeout doubles much more often than you have the opponents dead to rights in their 2 or 3 level contract. Playing a negative/takeout style also allows you to deal with some awkward situations, such as when you don't have room to invite over their 2 level preempt or you need to check for a 4-4 fit over the three level preempt.
- Most people play systems are on over interference when it is double or 2♣ (in the latter case, double would then be stayman). This is fine, but for higher interference using the lebensohl type system shown above and playing negative doubles is better than playing stolen bid doubles.
- Sometimes the opponents will make a conventional overcall. When this happens, if the opponents have shown only one known suit, use that suit as the cuebid suit, even if their actual bid was something else. For example, if they overcall 2♦ as a transfer to hearts, 3♦ should be natural, and 2♥ should be the cuebid. If the opponents show two suits, you may want to use whatever “unusual over unusual” system you use for other two-suited overcalls.
- If you play texas transfers normally over 1NT, you can often still make them after an overcall. The rule: if bidding the suit at the three level was an option, then transferring to it at the four level still is in effect. In particular, over a 3♥ interference, 3♠ is natural and forcing; 4♥ is a texas transfer. Over 3♠, by contrast, texas transfers are off, since there is no room to show hearts at the three level.