


Defensive Bidding Judgment


This lesson pertains to defensive bidding — auctions in which the bidding is opened by an opponent. It presumes a basic understanding of overcalls and takeout doubles, and the methods of responding to these. The purpose is to explain the strategy and tactics necessary to be successful.

Four Card Suit Overcalls

A suit overcall *shows* a five-card or longer suit and partner should bid accordingly; but it does not always *produce* one. There are times when your best action is to overcall in a four-card suit at the *one level*. Look for these characteristics:


1. A good suit, such as A-K-J-x or K-Q-10-x
2. Opening-bid values but a hand that is unsuitable for a takeout double

♠9 7 2		♠A Q J 8	West	North	East	South	Notice that partner makes no allowance for the possibility of a four-card suit; he raises routinely with three trumps. This means you will sometimes play a 4-3 fit, for which a good suit is desirable.
♥A K 9 8 5		♥4 3		1 ♣	1 ♠	Pass	
♦9 7 2		♦A K 4 3	2 ♠	Pass	Pass		
♣8 3		♣9 4 2					

A 2♣ overcall on Q-7-6-3-2 is unattractive. Also note that overcaller does not bid clubs the second time as it might cause partner to give a preference to 2♥, resulting in a 4-2 fit.	West	North	East	South	♠A Q 9 7 5		♠3
	1 ♠	1 ♦	1 ♥	Pass	♥4 3		♥A K 10 2
		Pass	1 NT		♦9 7 6 3		♦A 8 2
					♣K 5		♣Q 7 6 3 2

Shape Doubles

A takeout double shows opening-bid values, but it is a good strategy to shade this when you have excellent support for each unbid suit. It may be your only opportunity to get into the bidding and compete. **A takeout double may be made with as few as 9 or 10 HCP with 4+ cards in each unbid suit.**

♠K J 7 4 3		♠Q 8 6 5	The light double leads to an excellent sacrifice that would otherwise be missed. The suggested bidding would be doubtful at unfavorable vulnerability.			
♥4 3		♥2				
♦Q 9 7 2		♦A K 4 3				
♣4 3		♣10 9 8 2				

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Dbl	4 ♥

4 ♠

The final contract is ambitious (probably down one), but without the takeout double the opponents would have played in 1 NT and probably made it easily. **If only two unbid suits exist, you should have at least 5-4 shape to warrant a “light” double.**

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

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Dbl	Pass	3 ♥	

♠10 2		♠A 8 6 4	The double allows partner to compete in clubs on an auction in which most pairs will sell out to 2♦. The light double would not be recommended with only 4-4 shape in hearts and clubs.	
♥A 9 7 5 4		♥3 2		
♦7 2		♦K 9 3		
♣K Q 8 3		♣J 10 7 2		

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠
Dbl	2 ♦	3 ♣	

Two-Suited Hands

Hands with 5-5 or greater shape are difficult to describe with a takeout double as partner is unlikely to bid one of your suits; thus you will have to guess what to bid at your next turn. Here is the recommended way to show a two-suiter: First decide if your hand qualifies for the “unusual notrump” or the Michaels cue-bid. The Michaels cue-bid shows two suits with one bid. If you use it, great! If not don't worry about it for this lesson.

♠A Q 8 7 4
♥3
♦9 7 2
♣Q 8 7 2



♠2
♥A K 10 7 6
♦K J 10 8 3
♣4 3

Note that the unusual notrump overcall always shows the two lowest of all the unbid suits; hence, with clubs bid by the enemy, it shows diamonds and hearts. **If you cannot describe your hand in one bid, it is best to overcall in one suit (usually the higher), even with as much as 20 points.**

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	2 NT	Pass
3 ♦	Pass	Pass	

turn to show his two-suiter. Note that if East doubled first, it would take two more turns to show both his suits and that opportunity is unlikely to occur.

By overcalling 1 ♠, East is well-placed at his next

♠3
♥Q 8 7 6 4
♦9 6 5 4
♣J 10 5



♠A K 7 6 2
♥3 2
♦2
♣A K Q 7 3

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	2 ♦	3 ♣	

Trap Passing

If an opponent bids your long suit, you should *pass*, even with a very strong hand. If the auction is passed out, you will usually get a good score as the opponents are in a lousy contract. Otherwise you will have a chance to act at your next turn. **If you pass an enemy suit bid and later bid that same suit, it is a natural bid — not a cue-bid.**

♠10 7 2
♥K J 8 7 4
♦3
♣Q 7 4 3



♠A 8 3
♥2
♦A K J 8 7 4
♣K 10 8

East does not act over 1 ♦ since opener bid his best suit. Later he bids diamonds to show a real suit. **Be alert for penalty opportunities after you trap pass. The opponents may be in trouble.**

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 ♠	2 ♦	

I often see misguided players overcall 1 NT after the 1 ♥

opening, but the winning strategy is to pass. When partner balances with a takeout double, you convert it to penalty by passing again.

♠K J 9 7
♥3
♦J 10 8 5
♣A 7 6 3



♠10 2
♥A J 9 8 6
♦A Q 4
♣K J 8

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	Pass	

♠10 4
♥K J 9 4
♦10 4 2
♣Q J 8 2



♠A Q J 9 7
♥A 2
♦K 9 8 3
♣4 3

Any double of a notrump bid is penalty oriented once you pass an enemy bid. This suggests a “spade stack” so partner should lead the ♠10.

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	Pass	Dbl	

To Bid or Not To Bid

When considering whether or not to enter the bidding, experience has shown that distribution is more important than high cards. That is, you should be more concerned about the *shape* of your hand than the exact number of points you have.

Be conservative with:

Balanced hands, especially with 4-3-3-3 and 5-3-3-2 shape.

Poor texture in your trump suit, especially when vulnerable.

Secondary honors (king, queen or jack) in the enemy suit.

♠K J 8 7
♥A 10 2
♦3 2
♣9 7 6 2



♠A 6 4
♥K 5 4 3
♦Q 9 4
♣K Q 3

Note the pass over 1♦ with the dubious ♦Q and flat shape. Later, the reopening double is a routine balancing tactic. You and

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	2♦
Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass
2♠	3♦	Pass	

partner should sell out to 3♦.

Be aggressive with: A singleton or void in the enemy suit or extreme shape. Good texture in your trump suit. No secondary honors in the enemy suit.

♠Q 8 4
♥A 9 7 4
♦K 8 6 4
♣9 3



♠K 10 9 7 6
♥3
♦A 9 7 3
♣8 4 2

The aggressive 1♠ bid is warranted by the singleton heart and spade texture. This allows partner to compete to 3♠. If the opponents bid 4♥ they will likely be set.

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	3♥
3♠	Pass	Pass	

Preempt the Maximum

When making a weak jump overcall — just as when opening with a preemptive bid — it pays to bid as high as you intend to go in a single bid. Daring bids are often rewarded by stealing the contract or pushing the enemy into the wrong contract. Even *experts* cannot contend with preempts with any certainty.

To determine how high to bid you should estimate your playing tricks. It pays to think positive; e.g., with a suit holding of K-Q-10-x-x-x, I would figure six winners. Then: Overbid by 2 tricks at unfavorable vulnerability (you are vulnerable, the opponents are not). Overbid by 3 tricks at equal vulnerability (neither side or both sides vulnerable). Overbid by 4 tricks at favorable vulnerability (the opponents are vulnerable, you are not).

♠K 3
♥A 8 6 4
♦A 7 5
♣9 8 5 2



♠Q J 10 9 8 4
♥2
♦10 8 6 2
♣4 3

West	North	East	South
	1♣	3♠	

N-S Vul (favorable to you). Your hand is worth five playing tricks — four in spades and one likely in diamonds so bid for nine (5 + 4) to make it as difficult as possible. Partner should pass 3♠ since his three tricks only add to eight.

♠A 8
♥Q 10 9 7
♦K 8 7 3 2
♣9 2



♠4 3 2
♥8 3
♦4
♣A Q J 10 8 7 4

West

North

East

South

1 ♦

4 ♣

4 ♥

None or Both Vul. The daring 4♣ bid causes the opponents to go wrong (they belong in spades, not hearts). Note how easier it would be if you bid only 3♣.

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