

Can you spot the difference between these three hands? What would you bid on each of them when your right hand opponent opens 1♣?

♠ 6 2	♠ 6 2	♠ 6 2
♥ K Q 10 9	♥ K Q 10 9 2	♥ K Q 10 9 8 2
♦ A 8 4 2	♦ A 8 4	♦ A 8 4
♣ K 9 7	♣ K 9 7	♣ K 9
Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3

They all have 13 HCP, in fact the high cards are identical in the three hands. They all have hearts as their best suit. Did you consider overcalling 1♥ on each of them? Hand 1 will probably make four tricks as declarer in a heart contract but Hand 2 should make at least one trick more playing in hearts, and Hand 3 is worth a whole trick more than hand 2 because of the sixth heart. Clearly, the difference in trick taking ability is caused by the length of the heart suit. The longer the hearts the more the number of tricks available.

When overcalling the opening bid, we will want to show these different strength hands to partner in different ways, so that partner can judge whether to respond or not. How do we do this over 1♣?

Hand 1 would have opened 1NT had right hand opponent passed, but over 1♣ the correct bid is pass. As discussed way back in February, a 1NT overcall shows 16-18 HCP, so you can't bid that. In April we considered the takeout double but a double is not a great idea with this hand. It only has two small spades, the suit partner will surely bid. In June we considered one level overcalls, but agreed that a 5-card suit was shown by an overcall. So pass is all you can do when opponents open 1♣.

But hand 2 is ideal for a 1♥ overcall. With five or six fairly certain tricks, it is a very sound overcall. But if hand 2 is a sound overcall, what about hand 3 which is a whole trick better? The answer is to make a jump overcall of 2♥. In Standard English, we play intermediate jump overcalls, so 2♥ shows:

- A good 6-card suit, never four or five, only rarely seven.
- Opening bid values, about 12-16 HCP.

It is a constructive overcall, with about six or seven playing tricks, but it is not forcing, partner can pass with a weak hand.

Here are some examples I gave my students for practice:

♠ A Q J	♠ 9 8 6 3	Janice overcalled 2♥. Marion was unhappy about raising with only two hearts, but as they were good ones she bid 3♥ and Janice went on to 4♥. Janice won the club lead and took a spade finesse. She could cross back to dummy with ♥K to repeat the spade finesse. After drawing trumps, she played on diamonds, losing to ♦A and ♦K but making eleven tricks. If Janice had only overcalled 1♥, Marion might well have passed. It was knowing about the good 6-card suit that encouraged her to raise hearts.
♥ A Q J 9 7 2	♥ K 10	
♦ 10 7 3	♦ Q J 9 2	
♣ 8	♣ A 3 2	

♠ K Q J	♠ 10 8 6 3	After the 1♣ opening, Jan bid 2♦ and everybody passed. Her partner, who said she hadn't got a suit to show, seemed to have forgotten about bidding no trumps. In contrast, Peter optimistically jumped to 3NT over 2♦. Still 3NT made easily when opener had all missing the points – but maybe a 2NT game try is enough, in case Margaret only has 12 HCP.
♥ J 2	♥ K Q 8	
♦ A K J 10 7 3	♦ Q 4	
♣ 8 3	♣ Q 10 9 2	

♠ J 9 7 4 2	♠ K Q 10 8 6 3	On this deal South opened 1♦, West passed and North responded 1♥. Sue was going to overcall 1♠ but she realised that fourth hand could make jump overcalls too and said 2♠. South went 4♥, a contract that makes eleven tricks, but Barbara bravely bid 4♠ on her one point. As she said, 5-card support for a 6-card suit must be worth something. And indeed it was. With only one spade, one diamond and two clubs to lose, 4♠ made nine tricks. Losing 50 for one down was a much better result for E/W than losing 450 for 4♥ making. Sometimes going down a small amount is the best result possible for your side.
♥ 5	♥ A 7 6	
♦ 9 8 7 3	♦ 5	
♣ 10 8 2	♣ A 9 4	

## Responding to an intermediate jump overcall

Overcaller shows a good suit, there is no need to try and escape from it even with a void. So all responses should be looking for game. When the overcall is in a minor, consider playing in no trumps rather than the minor.

sx	J 7	West North East You
hx	5 3	1hx 2sx pass ?
dx	A Q J 4	Despite poor spade support, bid 4sx – partner has promised a good 6-card suit,
cx	A 10 9 3 2	
sx	J 7 3 2	West North East You
hx	Q J 9	1hx 3cx pass ?
dx	A 10 7	The clubs will make six tricks and partner must have some cards outside. Bid 3NT.
cx	Q 10 2	
sx	Q 8 6 4 2	West North East You
hx	4 3 2	1hx 2sx 3hx ?
dx	Q 9 7 5 3	Partner has six spades, you have five. With an 11-card fit, bid 4sx and expect to make. You have three hearts, so partner should only have one.
cx	–	
sx	K Q 9 8 6 4	West North East You
hx	2	1cx 2hx pass ?
dx	A 10 7	With a good 6-card suit offer spades as another place to play. Bid a forcing 2sx.
cx	Q 10 2	
sx	K Q 9 8 6 4	West North East You
hx	2	1cx 2hx pass ?
dx	10 9 7	Pass, you are too weak to bid. Partner has six hearts and maybe no spades at all.
cx	10 9 2	
sx	K Q 9	West North East You
hx	K 9 2	1cx 2dx pass ?
dx	7 6 3	Bid 2NT, not forcing but encouraging. With no aces and no help in diamonds, 2NT is enough.
cx	Q 10 3 2	