THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS

ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

N
♠ K 7 5
♥ A K 8 4
♦ 6 3
♣ J 8 3 2

W
♠ Q T 8 6
♥ J T
♦ Q J 5 4
♣ Q T 9

E
♠ A J 9 4 3 2
♥ 5 2
♦ K 9 8 2
♣ 7

S
♠ Q 9 7 6 3
♥ A T 7
♦ —
♣ A K 6 5 4

E/W vulnerable

Total trumps
N/S have a nine-card fit in hearts.
E/W have a ten-card fit in spades.
Double-fit
Total trumps = 19

W	N	E	S
4♠		2♠	
-	5♥	-	4♣
			-

What happens?
On an opening diamond lead - quite likely on this bidding - declarer will be held to eleven tricks. However, the lie of the cards would not have to be very different for him to go two down in which case a score of -500 would be a minor disaster. West can make nine tricks for a loss of 200 if doubled - an excellent result. There are in fact twenty total tricks against best defence. North is making his contract. If he were not making his contract then E/W would be making a vulnerable game and the result would be even better for N/S.

Total tricks
N/S can make nine tricks in spades.
E/W can make eleven tricks in hearts.

Total tricks = 20

4♣ by South is 'Leaping Michael's' promising 5-5 (or thereabouts by partnership agreement) in the bid suit and the other major. North can see a nine-card fit his way and a ten-card fit for his opponents. Nineteen total trumps suggests that he should compete at the five-level, particularly at favourable vulnerability. However, he can also see the presence of a double-fit thanks to his partner's informative overcall. There are likely to be at least twenty total tricks on this deal. He must compete at the five-level, and it will cross his mind to sacrifice at the six-level if necessary.

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CHAPTER 1

THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS

BACKGROUND

As soon as the auction becomes contested the goalposts move. No longer are you just concerned with finding out how many tricks you can make and then bidding to that number. You also need to know how many tricks your opponents can make, and whether or not it would pay to bid on for a sacrifice.

There is an incredibly useful guideline available here. It is not important that you understand every detail of how it works - it is important that you are able to use it intelligently.   And this helpmate is called 'The Law of Total Tricks'.

WHAT IS THE LAW?

Of course, this is not a law in either the legal or the scientific sense. It is basically an observation that seems to work on a great number of occasions. Stated more or less as simply as possible it says that:-

The total number of tricks available on a hand is equal to the total combined trump holding of the two sides.

Don't worry if you don't understand that sentence immediately, nor if you cannot see how this could possibly be of any help. First of all an example to show what the statement means.

An example

Suppose that you and your partner have a nine-card fit in your prospective trump suit, and that your opponents have an eight-card fit in theirs. (Incidentally, if you have a nine-card fit your opponents will always have at least one eight-card fit.)

That is a total of seventeen trumps.

The law of total tricks states that there are a total of seventeen tricks available on the hand.

> Perhaps you can make ten tricks in your trump suit. If so the opponents can make seven in theirs;
> if you can make nine then they can make eight;
> if you can make eight then they can make nine.

N ♠ A Q T 5 4 ♥ 3 2 ♦ K 8 4 3 ♣ K J 8 6 5 **W** **E** ♠ J 7 ♠ K 2 ♥ K Q 8 ♥ J 9 6 5 4 ♦ A T 5 ♦ Q J ♣ 3 2 ♣ A Q 9 **S** ♠ 9 8 6 3 ♥ A T 7 ♦ 9 7 6 2 ♣ T 7 4	On an unadjusted count, N/S have seventeen points and a nine-card fit in spades. E/W have twenty three points and an eight-card fit in hearts. N/S would expect to make seven tricks in spades, losing one spade, two clubs, one heart and two diamonds. E/W would expect to make ten tricks in hearts losing one spade, one heart, and one diamond. Total trumps 9 + 8 = 17 Total tricks 7 + 10 = 17 Move the ♠K from the East hand to the West hand, and then N/S make eight tricks and E/W make nine tricks - but the total is still seventeen.

Just to give an idea why this might work, suppose that all four players at the table hold balanced hands:-

> *with the points dividing twenty - twenty* and a seven-card fit being the best available to each partnership they would broadly speaking each expect to make seven tricks in their trump suit;
> of course, if a particular finesse works one pair might make eight tricks, but equally this trick will not make for the other pair and so they will score only six;
> if there is a particularly poor trump split then you might make one less than anticipated, but when your opponents play the hand they will make an extra trick in your suit;
> if you are lucky enough to be able to take a ruff in the hand with the short trump suit you might make an extra trick, but your opponents will either lose a trick to a ruff in this suit if it is a side-suit or hit a bad trump split if it is the trump suit - so they are likely to make one less;
> *if the points divide twenty three - seventeen* rather than twenty - twenty then you would expect to make an extra trick, and your opponents one less;
> in all of these variations the total number of tricks available between the two sides is fourteen - the same as the total number of trumps.

And if you have an eight-card fit and your opponents still have a seven-card fit then you would certainly have hopes of making an extra trick, but your opponents will still hope to make the tricks as before in their contract. The additional trump has boosted the number of total tricks to fifteen.

Exceptions to the law

It has been observed since the law was originally formulated that certain specific circumstances lead to the inevitable exceptions.

The double-fit

The most important of these circumstances occurs when a partnership has a substantial combined holding in a second suit in addition to the fit in the prospective trump suit.

That second suit will generate more tricks than you might anticipate from a simple point-count. Quite simply, those small cards in the second suit will represent winners, whereas in a poorer fit their potential will be far less.

Furthermore, if one partnership has substantial holdings in two suits then the other partnership will inevitably have substantial holdings in the other two suits increasing their trick-taking potential as well.

This situation will clearly lead to a greater number of tricks being available on the deal.

For example if each partnership has a nine-card fit then the law of total tricks would suggest that eighteen tricks are available on the deal, and this will be the case if the other two suits are more or less equally distributed between the four hands.

N ♠ A Q T 5 4 ♥ T ♦ A K 8 ♣ Q 9 3 2 **W** **E** ♠ 9 6 ♠ 8 7 ♥ A K 9 8 6 ♥ Q J 3 2 ♦ J 7 3 2 ♦ Q T 6 ♣ T 7 ♣ A J 6 5 **S** ♠ K J 3 2 ♥ 7 5 4 ♦ 9 5 4 ♣ K 8 4	N/S have a nine-card fit in spades, and E/W have a nine-card fit in hearts. N/S can make nine tricks; E/W can make eight tricks (nine if they can set up a diamond for a club discard). Total trumps 18 Total tricks 17/18

However if each partnership also has a substantial holding in a second suit then this total might easily reach twenty or even more.

There are two ways in which this second suit holding might appear.
The first is when one member of the partnership holds length in the second suit

N ♠ A Q T 5 4 ♥ T ♦ A K Q J 8 4 ♣ 8 **W** **E** ♠ 9 6 ♠ 8 7 ♥ A K 9 8 6 ♥ Q J 3 2 ♦ T 6 5 3 ♦ 9 ♣ K 6 ♣ A Q J 9 3 2 **S** ♠ K J 3 2 ♥ 7 5 4 ♦ 7 2 ♣ T 7 5 4	N/S have a nine-card fit in spades, and E/W have a nine-card fit in hearts. N/S can make eleven tricks; E/W can make ten tricks (more if the defence do not take their winners at once). Total trumps 18 Total tricks 21 And there is little doubt where these extra tricks have come from. In each case they come from the long minor side-suits held by North and East.

Note that the quality of the suits is important - if they contain top losers then the extra tricks might not be available.

The second way in which this can happen is when the holding in the second suit is split between the two hands.

N ♠ A Q T 5 4 ♥ T 9 ♦ A K J 8 4 ♣ 8 **W** **E** ♠ 9 6 ♠ 8 7 ♥ A K 8 6 5 4 ♥ Q J 3 2 ♦ T 6 ♦ 9 5 ♣ K J 6 ♣ A Q 9 3 2 **S** ♠ K J 3 2 ♥ 7 ♦ Q 7 3 2 ♣ T 7 6 4	N/S have a nine-card fit in spades, and E/W have a ten-card fit in hearts. N/S can make eleven tricks; E/W can make nine tricks. Total trumps 19 Total tricks 20 Change the East and West diamond and spade holdings to 1-3 and 3-1 rather than two cards each in each suit, and E/W will be able to make eleven tricks, for a total of twenty two. The reason lies in the double-fit. This time the holding in the second suit is divided between the two hands. N/S have an excellent second suit fit in diamonds, as do E/W in clubs.

A defensive holding

A second way in which the total tricks will be affected is when the hands are particularly 'defensive'.
The effect is far less dramatic than the presence of a second suit, but in this scenario the total tricks are likely to be decreased by one, or possibly two.
By 'defensive' hands I mean hands with a flattish shape, and with a tendency for the honours points to be held in the shorter suits.

N ♠ A 9 8 5 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ 9 5 3 **W** **E** ♠ K T ♠ Q J 6 ♥ K T 7 6 ♥ J 5 4 2 ♦ A T 7 5 ♦ J 6 3 ♣ Q 4 2 ♣ K J 7 **S** ♠ 7 4 3 2 ♥ Q 3 ♦ 9 8 2 ♣ A T 8 6	N/S have an eight-card fit in spades, and E/W have an eight-card fit in hearts. N/S will be happy to make seven tricks; E/W can make eight tricks. Total trumps 16 Total tricks 15 Four particularly flat hands tend to leave the total tricks one short, although the play on these hands could vary considerably, and the outcomes will be far from uniform.

These hands will not feature so prominently in the analysis that follows but the concept is none-the-less important.

In the next chapter I shall give a brief overview of why this law, and its exceptions, are important to you as you judge the level of your bidding in a competitive auction.
In chapter three I shall make a much more detailed analysis of the effect of such decisions,
and in chapter four I shall look briefly at the various ways in which you might choose to let these considerations affect your tactics, and indeed your partnership methods.

CHAPTER 2

WHY IS THE LAW USEFUL?

'All very interesting, but so what?' would be an understandable reaction to the theory in chapter one.

In this chapter I shall look very briefly at the basic implications of the 'law'. In the next chapter I shall follow this with a much more detailed analysis.

Bidding to the level of the fit

Suppose that your partnership has a nine-card fit and your opponents have an eight-card fit for a total of seventeen. Suppose also that there is no reason to suspect a substantial combined holding in any second suit, and that your holdings do not appear to be unduly defensive.
In this case the total trumps amount to seventeen, and the law would suggest that the total tricks will also come to seventeen.

So, what should you do if your opponents have bid to the two-level.
Putting aside the possibility of a penalty double for the moment, you have to compete at the three-level, don't you.
And don't worry that you might not make your contract.

If you can make exactly nine tricks then your opponents will be making eight - you have competed to the correct level.
If you are making only eight tricks then your opponents are making nine. It will again pay to compete to the three-level (unless vulnerable and doubled.)
And what if you can only make seven tricks. Well - in that case your opponents are making ten. If that is in a major suit it will again pay you to go two down rather than let them bid and make their game except in the specific case of when you are doubled, and vulnerable against not.

What I have outlined above is the underlying argument behind the exhortation to bid 'to the limit of your fit'. In this case, to compete to the three-level on a nine-card fit.
Note that this has very little to do with how many tricks you can actually make. Of course, if you think that your side has enough to make a game contract then you must bid it (with a few exceptions which we shall come to in due course), and if there is no competition from your opponents then you should bid to a level which you can make (although sometimes even then it might pay to bid to the level of the fit), but if you find yourself in a contested part-score auction then this principle guides you as to how far you should compete irrespective of how many tricks you can actually make. Bidding either one level lower or one level higher is likely to lead to an inferior score.
Vulnerability will affect the theory to some extent, but do not assume that you will always be punished with a penalty double. In particular if your opponents do not know the extent of the trump fits and the bidding has risen rapidly to great heights they are likely to compete one further for what they hope is their rightful contract. Whether you and/or your opponents have found a major-suit fit or a minor-suit fit will also be an important consideration on occasion.

And if you have good reason to think that you have better than the nine-card fit suggested above (perhaps a ten-card fit each way) then you should compete to the four-level at least because you will know that there are also a greater number of tricks available on the deal. If you are going one or two down then they will certainly have a game their way.

How do I know the level of the fit?

As with all aspects of bridge you have to piece together as many conclusions as you can from the various snippets of information which come your way. Your conclusions may not be exactly correct, but this approach is far superior to choosing not to utilise any evidence which is available.
But first a few generalisations.
The smallest possible number of total trumps is 14.
This corresponds to each partnership having a seven-card fit at best.
Usually this will correspond to four very flat hands, and the bidding will normally centre around no trumps. Only rarely will such a deal lead to a contested auction. Although I shall consider this situation in the analysis which follows it is peripheral to the main discussion.

Much the same is true if holding an eight-card fit facing a seven-card fit giving fifteen total trumps.

The majority of contested part-score auctions will feature sixteen, seventeen or eighteen total trumps. (Anything from two eight-card fits to two nine-card fits.) As soon as the total trumps reaches nineteen then one pair has at least a ten-card fit. It will be rare that neither partnership is bidding game with hopes of making when this is the case.

Knowledge of your own fit will depend to an extent on system methods, and I will say more about these in chapter five, but initially you should assume that your partner's opening one of a major shows a five-card suit (even if you play four-card majors) - that a

raise of that suit to the two-level shows three-card support and that a raise to the three-level promises four-card support. It is not quite so easy to read an opening minor suit, but certainly a raise by partner to the two-level should promise at least four-card support. Sometimes the situation will be much clearer as one of you opens a weak two or a weak three.

Overcalls should be assumed to be five-card - you might even assume six-card for an overcall at the two-level in a minor suit - and a re-bid suit will be six-card most of the time.

Similarly you will need to know a little about your opponents bidding agreements, but as a general rule if they compete to the three-level (as opposed to bidding a contract which they are confident of making) you may assume that they hold a nine-card fit. More clues may come to light as the auction progresses, but you should always be trying to interpret this sort of information from their bidding.

Numerical deductions

A simple piece of arithmetic will cast further light on the situation.

Suppose that you have an eight-card fit.
That leaves five cards in the suit for your opponents. They must then hold twenty one cards in the other three suits.
This might comprise three seven-card fits, but it is far more likely that they will have an eight-card fit between them somewhere.

Suppose that you have a nine-card fit.
This time your opponents hold twenty two cards between the other three-suits. This can only happen if they have at least one eight-card fit.

Suppose that you have a ten-card fit.
Your opponents now have twenty three cards outside that suit. This time they hold either two eight-card fits, or a nine-card fit.

You will see that the greater your side's fit then the more likely it is that your opponents also hold a big fit.
In the absence of further information;
if you have an eight-card fit then assume that your opponents also hold an eight-card fit for sixteen total trumps;
if you have a nine-card fit assume that your opponents hold an eight-card fit for a total of seventeen total trumps;
if you have a ten-card fit assume that your opponents hold a nine-card fit for a total of nineteen total trumps.

A gross over-simplification of these assumptions, but a useful rule of thumb none-the-less, is to assume that your opponents hold a fit identical to your own.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSING YOUR ACTIONS

In the appendix I shall analyse numerous different situations, and attempt to determine the theoretically correct action in each case. From these I shall try to distil a few general guidelines - that is the purpose of this chapter.
First, though, let us look briefly at where these conclusions come from.
The table which follows is taken from the appendix, as an example.

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Not vulnerable against vulnerable
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			gains if not doubled
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses if doubled, or opposite a minor
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains opposite a major, loses opposite a minor if doubled
	You are making nine tricks			7	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			double if you dare
	You are making ten tricks			6	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses if doubled
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
		You compete at the four-level	-150/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			8	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			7	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M620/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-800x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the four-level	-150/-500x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			8	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			double

Note that the context of this table - sixteen total tricks - will in general suggest that you hold an eight-card fit with your partner.
From this table you will see that, *in the particular circumstance of sixteen total tricks and when not vulnerable against vulnerable*, it is nearly always correct to compete at the two-level unless you expect to make nine or more tricks when a penalty double will yield greater rewards - that it is rarely correct to compete at the three-level - and that if you are confident that you can make eight tricks then you should double any bid by your opponents at the three-level or higher.

Ideally I would like to summarise my findings relating to every possible set of circumstances in this manner, but such rules will never be more than guidelines. Apart from anything else there will be too many situations and too many rules to be worth committing to memory.

Similarly it would be a waste of time and energy to attempt to memorise each and every line of these tables.

However, I believe that it will not be a waste of your time to study at least some of the tables in the appendix and their accompanying summaries, seeing how the logic works, and how the conclusions are affected by 'total tricks' and vulnerability. Once you have done this you will be in a position to think in a similar, appropriate, and (most importantly) effective manner at the table.

In principle, thinking along the lines shown in the analysis of these tables will be a better option than trying to remember a 'rule' for each and every situation.

In these tables I have categorised my investigation in terms of the number of total tricks.

Frequently this will equal what you believe to be the number of total trumps, but the findings should be applied after suitable adjustments have been made.

For example, if you believe your partnership to have a nine-card fit in you primary trump suit together with another nine-card fit then you have a massive double-fit and you can be certain that your opponents also have eighteen cards between them in the other two suits.

Although you might believe the total trumps to be eighteen, this hand will certainly have more than eighteen total tricks and you should base your actions on a total of, say, twenty or twenty one total tricks.

General considerations

Note first of all that the theoretically correct action isn't always the practically correct action. Opponents don't always make the correct decision, any more than you do. If you tempt them to bid one level higher when they should have doubled you for penalties then your decision will be correct on that occasion, in practical terms if not in theoretical terms. The immediate corollary to this is that if you are playing against a pair which never doubles in anger, or one which will always bid one level more, then it will usually be correct to compete to a higher level than I have suggested in my analysis.

Also the decisions based on my analysis assume complete and accurate information, but your assumptions will only rarely be that certain. With any luck your opponents' information will be even less precisely determined thanks to your superior methods.

Note that some of the differences indicated are minimal. A score of 110 rather than 100 is not worth bothering about in a teams context and might incur a considerable risk. On the other hand it could be the difference between a 'top' and a 'bottom' in a pairs competition. The same applies to a borderline double which might turn 50 into 100, and even more so if it turns 100 into 200 at the risk of giving your opponents a vulnerable game. That is why most of the tables contain the entry 'double if you dare' on occasions when you expect to take your opponents just one down - in general such doubles will pay in the long run in pairs provided that you have based your action on sound assumptions but they are not recommended in teams.

Competing at the two-level

To be honest, this is something of a red herring.

It is nearly always correct to compete to the two-level on an eight-card fit.

There are situations in which a double will yield a marginally better result, but these always occur when the total tricks are unusually low. Usually these hands will revolve around a no trump auction, and your actions will be dictated more by points than by shape.

Bear in mind that opener or overcaller will, frequently, not have any idea about the extent of the fit until he has heard partner's response, and this will inevitably put him at the two-level before he can even start thinking about what all my tables might suggest and the possibility of further competitive efforts.

A further important consideration is that two-level contracts are only rarely doubled for penalties.

With these points in mind compete to the two-level whenever you believe your partnership to have an eight-card fit, even if vulnerable against not. The two exceptions to this are first, when you hold a particularly defensive hand, and secondly, when the only support bids which you have available imply a degree of high-card strength which in no way resembles your actual holding.

Competing at the three-level

The first few tables in the appendix make it clear that you should not compete at the three-level if there are less than seventeen tricks available on the deal, but that it will pay more often than not if there are seventeen or more tricks available.

This is more or less in line with the mantra 'bid to the level of the fit' but we can refine this guideline slightly. Usually you will assume that there are seventeen total tricks when you hold a nine-card fit, but the conclusions are equally valid if you have only an eight-card fit but have good reason to place your opponents with a nine-card fit.

There are exceptions to the general rule in the specific case of *a seventeen-card* fit.

In this situation a penalty double will sometimes score better. Be particularly tempted by the double when your opponents are vulnerable. In the present instance, if you believe that you are making nine tricks and your opponents compete to the three-level vulnerable it will pay you to double.

Note however that if there are *eighteen or more total tricks* in the deal then the double becomes less attractive and it will almost always be correct to compete to the three-level.

It should be noted that my conclusions relating to the correct action in each situation assume that you will be doubled if you compete rashly at the three-level. This will be increasingly the case as you compete at higher levels of competition, and particularly in pairs competitions. If you feel that a double is unlikely then be rather more prepared to compete to one level higher.

Note that there are circumstances in which competing at the three-level is not the best option.

With a total of seventeen tricks it will be a poor choice if you are making only eight tricks vulnerable and even non-vulnerable if you are making only seven tricks. Even with eighteen total tricks it will not be the winning choice if vulnerable. Some authorities extend the aforementioned guideline to 'bid to the level of the fit if non-vulnerable, and one less if vulnerable', with these situations in mind, but it is not quite that simple.

However, with nineteen or more total tricks it will almost invariably be correct to compete to the three-level.

Competing at the four-level

First I must draw a distinction between bidding to make a game contract, and competing either for a part-score or as a sacrifice.

You can make game

If your agreed suit is a major and you are making ten tricks then there is a game premium available your way.

It will be rare that it is not correct to bid such a game.

If you are vulnerable you will only be able to improve on the 620 game score by doubling your opponents at the three-level or higher when they are vulnerable and there are just sixteen total tricks, or when they compete vulnerable at the four-level when there are seventeen total tricks. In any other circumstances you must bid your vulnerable game.

Things are not quite so clear *when you are not vulnerable*. There will frequently be a 500-point penalty available to outdo your 420-point game.

With only sixteen total tricks it will pay to double your opponents whenever they compete at the three-level, and even when they compete at the two-level vulnerable, although this is a particularly risky strategy.

With seventeen total tricks, the only time when it will pay to double their non-vulnerable intervention will be when they bid to the four-level, but when they are vulnerable you must double them whenever they venture to the three-level or beyond.

However this situation will arise with far greater frequency when there are eighteen (or more) total tricks, and in this circumstance the only occasions on which you will double for penalties rather than bid your non-vulnerable game will be when your opponents have competed to the four-level vulnerable. With more total tricks than this do not even consider doubling below the five-level.

You are not bidding to make game

The alternatives which we have to consider are the possibilities of competing at the four-level with a minor-suit fit, or alternatively a likely nine tricks at best.

It should be borne in mind that at this level you will almost certainly be doubled when you overstep the mark in both pairs and teams events, and by opponents of a wide range of experience and achievement.

With only sixteen total tricks on the deal you should double rather than compete at the four-level whenever you are making eight or nine tricks and they bid to the three-level, and you must consider a risky double even if you are making only seven tricks and they bid to the four-level. Indeed, in this very special case of sixteen total tricks it never pays to bid at the four-level unless you have hopes of making a game. You would after all usually be bidding to two beyond the level of the fit.

With seventeen total tricks on the deal we are entering a slightly more likely scenario for such competitive bidding.

The only time it will pay to compete at the four-level (given that you do not have a making game) is when you are making precisely seven tricks and are not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents.

If you are making eight or nine tricks then you should be looking for a double whenever they bid to the four-level.

You might also give it some consideration when you are making nine tricks and they have bid to the three-level vulnerable.

With eighteen total tricks you must bear in mind that if you cannot make nine tricks your way then there is every probability that your opponents can make a major-suit game.

For the first time it now pays to compete to four of a minor if you expect it to make when your opponents are not vulnerable. A double will still score better if they are vulnerable.

It will also pay you to sacrifice in 4♠ against their 4♥ game contract when you are making exactly eight tricks, but with nine tricks you should always consider doubling any four-level bid, depending on how much risk is attached.

Nineteen total tricks

For the first time at this level the penalty double has all but disappeared over the horizon.

There are just a couple of specific exceptions which you can find in the tables in the appendix, but broadly speaking, if you have the opportunity to compete at the four-level when there are nineteen total tricks it will usually be the best choice.

Competing at the five-level

The traditional mantra is that 'the five-level belongs to the opposition'. This is a good basic guideline.

Do not even consider competing at the five-level unless there you believe there to be at least nineteen total tricks.

In this situation you must bid a vulnerable game if it is making. There are also situations in which it will pay you to compete against your opponents' making game when not vulnerable.

If you are vulnerable you must wait for a likely twenty total tricks before it will pay to compete at this level. Almost invariable this will be in a double-fit situation.

Competing at the six-level

I shall be less helpful than you might have hoped at this point.

Certainly the principles above will apply to an extent - you will certainly not compete to go down unless there are a tremendous number of total tricks in the deal - say twenty one or more. Certainly you should be thinking of a penalty double if you are not certain of your contract and you have no reason to suspect an inordinately high total-trick count.

However, when it comes to the decision whether or not to bid a contract to make, or whether you should prefer to pass or double in the hope of a penalty, it now becomes more important to place a value on individual high cards, and to assess the likelihood of their making (opposite possible voids) both in attack and defence.

Sorry - there are no easy answers. We are in the land of expert methods and judgement.

A summary of guidelines

The traditional rules of thumb are:-
   i)   bid to the level of the fit;
   ii)   bid one-level less if vulnerable;
   iii) the five-level belongs to the opposition.

These are good guidelines, and are consistent with the findings of this analysis up to a point and in most situations. If a quick decision is needed and there is insufficient information on which to base an alternative choice then following these guidelines will serve you well and will lead to the correct decision most of the time.
However, if you have the time and the information then these simple rules can be refined and added to.

   i)   If your opponents have a better fit than you it will sometimes be correct to bid to the level of your opponents' fit.
         This will be particularly true if you have an eight-card fit and your opponents have a nine-card fit. Assuming that there are seventeen total tricks available on the hand it will pay you to compete to the three-level in this situation, unless you are making exactly nine tricks your way and your opponents are vulnerable in which case you might risk a double at pairs.
   iv)   As a general rule you should bid a making contract at game-level or above.
         If there are less than eighteen total tricks in the deal it might pay you to double their vulnerable bid at the four-level or thereabouts, especially if you are not vulnerable, and there are situations when such an action will pay as they bid to the three-level - but these situations are rare. Your opponents will not usually be this competitive unless they hold a good trump fit in which case there will usually be more total tricks in the deal.
   iii) Broadly speaking you should bid a making game at the five-level when vulnerable.
         Also, it will not be uncommon to sacrifice at the five-level over your opponents' four-level game.
         This will particularly be the case if there are nineteen total tricks and you are not vulnerable or there are twenty total tricks and you are vulnerable.
         Competing once your opponents have reached the five-level will be much rarer. In general there will be at least twenty total tricks in the hand - preferably more. This will usually be indicated by the presence of a double-fit.

But having made these points, I cannot deny that the best decisions will be those based on a careful analysis of the specific situation. The guidelines above might direct such analysis, and the thinking behind the tables in the appendix and the summary of findings at the start of this chapter will be the same thinking which underlies such analysis.

CHAPTER 4

CHOOSING YOUR BIDDING METHODS

Everything to date has been about judgement in bidding, but accurate judgement in bridge bidding (some would add 'as in the politics of national and international affairs') depends on the quality of the intelligence on which it is based.
The question arises 'to what extent should we adapt our bidding methods so as to gain the maximum possible amount of information regarding the extent of the trump fit and the possible presence of a side-suit fit?'.

It is true that non-fit hands are more common than fits and double-fits. Whether or not to bid to 3NT will be a more frequent problem than whether or not to double your opponents at the four-level. However, 3NT contracts can be bid with relatively simple methods, and in general these hands will not produce the most significant swings. Broadly speaking, match points and imps can be lost on such hands rather than gained. Most of the rest of the room will be in the same contract and it is up to you to find either an accurate declarer play or a winning defence.
It is on the fiercely contested fit auctions that there will be the most variation in the contracts reached, and it is on these hands that the big swings will be recorded. In teams play in particular it is important that you maximise your chances of making the correct decision on such hands and with that in mind there is much to be said for refining your methods so as to give the maximum information regarding the extent of the trump fit and the possible existence of a useful side-suit.
In doing so you might have to sacrifice alternative interpretations for some bids. There will be situations in which you will be less well informed than you were previously. Sometimes you will rue not having a particular bidding convention in your repertoire any longer, and you will have to resort to an alternative decision-making process. It might even involve something of a guess. If that sounds bad remember that I am allowing a lack of precise information in one area of bidding so that I can increase the precision in some other area. The underlying principle is to put the guesses where they matter least, and the informed decisions where they matter most. Bidding systems will never show every possible hand exactly.

Bidding quickly to the limit

It is not at all uncommon in club bridge to hear an overcall, and then for that same player to repeat their suit at a higher level, sometimes two or more times.
Even if they have not competed too far they have left the way clear for their opponents to put together a constructive bidding sequence at the end of which they stand a greatly increased chance of judging the situation correctly. Occasionally this method will lead to a pair playing a contract one level lower than they might have expected, but this will prove to be a poor strategy if at any point you should find yourself competing in a higher standard of competition.
A basic maxim should be to 'bid to the limit as quickly as possible'. This will put your opponents on a guess which they won't always get right, and it will certainly make it more difficult for them to find any fit of their own. To make a competitive bid in a suit and then to make a subsequent higher level bid in the same suit is almost always incorrect.
Of course, such action might occasionally be correct if it is based on further information. You might for instance have opened one of a major, and in a competitive auction partner might have raised to the three-level on what is likely to be four-card support and quite possibly minimal high-card values. In doing so he has implicitly assumed that your opening bid was based on a five-card suit. If by any chance you started with a six-card suit then by all means raise to the four-level on what is now clearly a ten-card fit.

The aims of modified methods

We have before us the following principles as we decide whether or not to include new meanings for some of our bids into our bidding armoury:-
    to show partner the extent of our trump fit, whether or not we have a good holding of high-card points;
    to show whether or not this support is backed up by high-card points;
    to bid to the appropriate competitive level as directly as possible;
    to investigate the presence of a second-suit fit in addition to the primary fit;
    to bear in mind that any auction is 'potentially contested' and so to get in before our opponents do;
    to bid constructively when appropriate despite our opponents' most malicious efforts;
    to be able to punish our opponents when they compete too far.

THE METHODS AVAILABLE

Even those of you who had previously never heard of 'the law of total tricks' may be surprised to learn that you already use a number of methods which, if not based historically on this law, are certainly consistent with it.
If the bids which I discuss first below do not exactly break new ground for you, note how they all emphasise the length of a suit at the earliest possible point whilst giving information about the type of hand, and then bear with me until I come to some less common conventions.

OPENING BIDS

Preemptive three-level opening bids

There are very few bridge players who do not use an opening three-level bid to show a weak hand with a seven-card suit.

When you hold a seven-card suit partner will hold two-card support more often than not. That means a nine-card fit. What better way to bid rapidly to what is likely to be the correct level in an auction which is potentially contested, before your opponents get started?

Weak single-suited two-level opening bids

Such bids in the major suits are now ore or less commonplace.

A common agreement is that such a bid shows a six-card suit and is limited to a range of 5 to 9 points. (Some play 6 to 10). You can choose whichever points range appeals to you. An opening weak 2♠ is particularly effective. Everyone should include this bid in their repertoire via either a direct or a roundabout route. 2♥ is less effective, only very rarely keeping the opposition out of a game contract in spades. You may be able to find a better use for this bid, but it must be said that as a general rule these two bids appear as part of the same package.

Increasingly common is to play a weak opening bid in diamonds in the same manner.

It is recommended that you incorporate this meaning if you have no better use for the bid.

(Certainly it is a more effective use for the bid than the powerhouse interpretation given it by those who play a Benji-style system. Such a bid represents a wasted opportunity - it is unnecessary, it is only rarely used, and it is too easily interfered with. You will not find it in the armoury of experts.)

Length

The most common agreement is to play a single-suited weak two opening bid to promise a six-card suit as suggested above. In this case your partner is most likely to have two-card support and you will have competed to the correct level on a presumed eight-card fit. Increasingly many pairs now promise only a five-card suit. In this case partner will have three-card support more often than not and you will again have competed correctly on an eight-card fit. There is an immediate advantage in that you will use the bid more frequently and therefore disrupt the opposition more frequently.

The disadvantage is that you will also use it when you have a six-card suit, but partner will only be able to assume five.

When you promise a six-card suit, partner, with a weak hand, can raise immediately to the three-level with three-card support or to the four-level with four-card support.

When you promise only a five-card suit partner will have to wait for four-card support before raising to the three-level after which you can still bid at the four-level with six cards but it will have taken you two steps and your opponents might have exchanged sufficient information to make the right decision before this is completed.

With only three-card support partner will not be able to make the immediate raise to the three-level, and neither will you at your next turn when holding a six-card suit.

I must say that I am more comfortable with the six-card approach - I prefer to be able to make the effective high-level competitive bids with greater accuracy rather than the less effective lower-level bids with greater frequency - but I must also admit that the five-card approach is increasingly popular amongst good players - 'frequency of intervention beats accuracy of information' is a common theme in the modern competitive world. The choice is yours.

Weak two-suited two-level opening bids

These are also increasingly popular on the tournament circuit.

At their simplest they promise 5-5 shape in two suits and a range of about 5 to 9 points.

In addition to offering a possible 5-3 fit at the two-level they provide the possibility of a better fit in a second suit, together with advance information relating to a double-fit should the auction become competitive.

Typically an opening bid of 2♥ will promise 'hearts and a minor' and an opening bid of 2♠ will promise either 'spades and another' or 'spades and a minor'. My preference is for 'spades and a minor'. Limiting the second suit to just two possibilities will on occasion make life much easier for partner, and in any case a weak preemptive barrage is far less important if you have a holding in both major suits. As with the single-suited version of a weak two, the 2♠ bid is extremely effective - the 2♥ bid a littler less so.

Most partnerships which include these bids in their system will also play a **multi-2♦** opening bid to cover a number of possibilities of which weak single-suited hands in the majors will be two.

If you choose to play an artificial 2♣ bid to show either a strong single-suited hand in any suit or a no trump range, and a multi-2♦ to include weak twos in the majors (as above) and a no trump range, then you will have the option of including a third weak two-suited opening bid and this is the **weak 2NT** opening. As with the other two-suited openings above it usually promises 5-5 in two suits and about 5 to 9 points, but this time the two suits are specifically both minors. The preemptive effect of this bid is tremendous forcing your opponents to the three-level as they begin their search for a major-suit fit. A theoretical drawback is that partner will frequently have to choose a 5-3 fit at the three-level which may well be one too high, but it will be a rare occurrence for this to be punished with a business double - your opponents need to utilise every available bid as they search for a better contract their way.

If you have space to incorporate this bid into your system then it is strongly recommended. Note however that if you are playing your bridge under English Bridge Union regulations then this is a level-three convention and will not be permissible in some quarters.

Overcalls

Note that this section refers to the first call over an opening bid made by the opposing pair in either the direct or the protective seat. If made in the protective seat these bids are likely to stretch the constraints relating to both length and strength.

Weak jump overcalls

A few years ago these bids were more or less unknown except at the three-level. They are now commonplace. Their previous meanings which would show a powerhouse hand, or in some cases a strong one-round force, were an unnecessary use of a whole group of bids. Such hands are shown well by an immediate double followed by either a bid in a new suit or a bid in the opponent's suit.

Modern practice is to use these bids in a similar manner to a weak opening bid promising a suit of a specified length in a given weak points range and causing the maximum disruption to the opponents at the earliest opportunity.

Typically an immediate jump-overcall at the two-level will promise a six-card suit although it can be played as five-card by partnership agreement. A jump-overcall at the three-level would suggest a seven-card suit as was ever the case. As with the equivalent opening bids the aim is to bid to the level of the fit as rapidly as possible. Note though that if opener described his hand with any degree of accuracy then responder will be in a good position to punish a rash overcall. It is common practice to guarantee at least some degree of suit quality with these bids as something of a safety measure.

♠ A Q J T 9 6	Opponents open 1♣, 1♦ or 1♥.
♥ 7 4	Bid 2♠ - natural and weak.
♦ 8 5 3	Partner will only raise, either with spade support to increase the preemptive effect, or with a really strong hand.
♣ 6 2	

You should incorporate these bids into your system if you have not already done so.

Two-suited overcalls

This is another area of bidding which is becoming increasingly fashionable, but it is not yet in such universal use as the conventions discussed up to this point.

If used intelligently these bids taken together constitute an excellent weapon. As with natural single-suited overcalls overcaller should take suit-quality into account as well as vulnerability. He should also be aware of the level to which he is likely to drive the auction. Provided that he is happy on all these scores then he can cause considerable disruption relatively safely whilst giving partner precise information on which to base his next bid.

Shape

Many excellent players will use some of these bids on a 5-4 shape, and they might even extend their minimum requirement to 4-4 in the protective seat - particularly on those bids in which the available choices ensure that partner can show a preference at a low level. The increased frequency associated with such a policy will certainly ensure an increase in your disruptive offerings. In the following I shall assume 5-5 shape. Feel free to agree a different requirement as a partnership if you wish.

Strength

These bids will occur most frequently in a disruptive context on weakish hands of, say, 8 to 11 points. They can, however, be harnessed for use on stronger holdings as well. It would be wasteful to shun such an opportunity.

Many club players use these bids in a wide-ranging manner. The trouble with this is that partner is placed in an unenviable position if holding intermediate values. If for example he held nine or ten points his preferred actions would be very different when facing eight or seventeen points.

The best solution is, in my opinion, to play these bids as 'weak or strong - but not intermediate'.

With this agreement you would use these bids on ranges of 8 to 11 or 17+, for example. With a hand in the 12 to 16-point range you make a simple overcall, with every hope that the opportunity to bid your second suit will occur in due course. You will as a result use these bids with their instant preemptive effect far less frequently, but in constructive sequences you will be in a considerably better place. Partner will now be in a position to bid on the assumption that you have the weaker holding knowing that you will bid again if your hand is in the strong range -eg with up to about twelve points he will usually make a simple preference which you will pass with a hand in the weak range. If you have the stronger holding then you will bid again, and partner will be able to make his choice based on your known 17+ points.

The Michael's cue-bid

This very popular convention combines two different methods.

Over a natural opening bid of *one of a minor* by your opponents an immediate cue-bid of two of their suit promises both majors.

Partner will be able to make his choice of major suit at the two-level, and it will be rare that you are not able to come safely to rest at the two-level on an eight-card fit.

♠ A J T 9 6	Your opponents open 1♣ (or 1♦).
♥ K J T 7 4	Bid 2♣ (or 2♦)showing both majors.
♦ 8 5	You will pass partner's minimum response in either major.
♣ 3	

♠ A J T 9 6	Your opponents open 1♣ or 1♦.
♥ K J T 7 4	Bid 1♠.
♦ A 5	This hand is in the intermediate range which should not be shown with a two-suited bid.
♣ 3	You will frequently get another chance to show your heart suit.

♠ A K J T 6	Your opponents open 1♣ or 1♦.
♥ K Q T 7 4	Bid 2♣ (or 2♦)showing both majors.
♦ A 5	You will raise partner's minimum response in either major with this strong holding.
♣ 3	

If the opening bid was 1♣ then feel free to make this cue-bid on 5-4 shape. Partner can use the intermediate bid of 2♦ to ask which is your five-card suit - unless you prefer to use this bid in a more natural manner.

♠ A J T 6 ♥ K J T 7 4 ♦ 8 5 ♣ 9 3	Your opponents open 1♣. Bid 2♣. If partner has a four-card major he will bid it. With a three-card major he will bid 2♦ and you will re-bid 2♥ to show your five-card suit.

Showing both major suits with a cue-bid over a one minor opening should be adopted almost universally, whatever your choice relating to other two-suited take-out bids.

The other half of the convention is the cue-bid when your opponents open *one of a major*.
The Michael's cue-bid in these cases shows the other major together with an unspecified minor. All well and good - use this part of the convention if you wish - but I much prefer to show two specified suits with my one bid. There are many different ways of doing this. Typical of such agreements is that such a bid promises two suits of the same colour. You should feel free to pick and choose from the methods available.
My choice of simple agreement is that the immediate cue-bid over one of a major promises the other major and clubs. This can be thought of as the highest and lowest suits which is a method to be found in the 'Ghestem' convention.
At least it is easy to remember, and it is consistent with my suggestion in the next paragraph.

♠ K Q T 8 4 ♥ 8 4 ♦ J ♣ A T 8 4 2	If your opponents open 1♥ then overcall with 2♥ (Specific Michaels, or Ghestem). This bid promises spades (the other major) and clubs. You will pass partner's minimum response in either suit.

The 2NT overcall

First of all I should point out that an immediate overcall of 2NT over one of a suit is quite unnecessary in any natural sense. There is always an alternative route, usually doubling first then bidding in no trumps subsequently.
It is now commonplace to use this bid to show a specific two-suited holding. There are many variations on the market. Typically it will show two suits of the same rank or two suits of the same colour. My suggestion which is easy to remember and is consistent with my suggestions regarding the Michael's cue-bid is that you should use this bid to show the lowest two unbid suits. This is also consistent with the unusual no trump which may appear at other points in the auction.
You do not have to go along with my suggestion, but it would be wasteful not to give this bid a meaning other than the natural interpretation.

♠ 8 ♥ K Q T 7 4 ♦ K J 9 5 3 ♣ 9 2	If your opponents open 1♣ bid 2NT showing the two lowest suits. You will pass partner's simple choice of red suit.

A third artificial two-suited bid

Those who play the cue-bid and the 2NT overcall to show specific two-suited holdings will usually employ a third artificial bid to promise the third possible combination of two suits.
There are various possibilities.
A common method is to use 3♣ for this purpose, but this has has serious shortcomings when clubs is one of the two suits on offer.
Another approach is to incorporate the jump cue-bid in each suit, and a third variation is to include a jump bid in the other minor.
My suggestion is to use 3♦ over 1♦ and 3♣ over one of any other suit.
To be consistent with my two previous suggestions I will offer the mnemonic 'SpoDo' standing for spades and the other minor or diamonds and the other major. This is not a standard allocation of combinations to the available bids but it avoids most of the pitfalls.

♠ K Q T 8 4 ♥ 8 4 ♦ A ♣ A K J T 2	If your opponents open 1♦ then bid 3♦. This bid shows spades and the other minor in a strong hand. If your opponents open 1♥ then bid 2♥ (specific Michaels). You will raise partner's minimum response in either suit with this strong holding.

♠ A ♥ A K J T 2 ♦ K Q T 8 4 ♣ 8 4	If opponents open 1♠ then bid 3♣ showing diamonds and the other major. If opponents open 1♣ bid 2NT showing the two lowest suits. You will raise partner's minimum response in either suit with this strong holding.

RESPONDER'S FIRST BID

This is where most treatises on this subject begin. The principles associated with the law of total tricks will be most easily applied if partner is able to show the extent of his fit and his hand-type at the first possible opportunity, and the first such opportunity will come to responder.

The Uncontested Auction

2NT high-card raise of a major

As with the immediate overcall an immediate natural jump to 2NT is never necessary - there is always another route.
There are three alternatives in common use.

Baron 2NT

The oldest of these is the Baron 2NT showing a game-forcing balanced hand, and creating space for further exploration. This bid is waning in popularity and does not feature in my recommendations. It is not consistent with an emphasis on showing the extent of the fit which you have with partner.

Jacoby 2NT

This is probably the market leader in the expert world at the present time.
It agrees partner's opening suit with at least four-card support (if playing Acol) and is game-forcing. This creates considerable space for the partnership to search for a slam with their choice of control-showing cue-bids, long- or short-suit trial bids, control-asking bids, all-purpose invitational bids, or whatever.

2NT 'limit or better' raise

This is similar to the Jacoby bid above, except that it is forcing only as far as three of the agreed major.
It promises suit agreement 'to the three-level or higher' and as before it will frequently be followed by a sequence of cue-bids, trial bids, or something similar.

♠ A Q 8 6 ♥ T 5 ♦ K Q 8 5 ♣ 9 8 3	Partner opened 1♠. You have a seven-loser hand based on good high cards, so you will force to 4♠, but first you must show your hand-type. Bid 2NT - forcing and agreeing spades. If partner bids 3♠ then raise to 4♠.

Although in expert circles far above my level of achievement it is not quite as popular as the Jacoby 2NT, if you are new to this area of bidding then I would ask you to give serious consideration to including this bid. It will be used far more frequently than the Jacoby bid, it creates an alternative use for the direct raise to three (see below), and it is consistent with the method which will follow shortly, which is more or less standard in the contested auction.
You should include either the Jacoby 2NT or the 2NT 'limit or better' raise in your system - they are both good, and either will improve your ability to show your hand.

The direct raise to three

Once upon a time (long, long ago before.......) direct raises were so simple. A raise to the two-level promised four card support and about 6 to 9 points, and a direct raise to three promised four-card support and about 10 to 12 points. The second of these is 'the limit raise'.
Times have changed.
It is now commonplace to play a raise of *a major* to the two-level on three-card support (and about 6 to 9 points), even when playing four-card majors. You might make this bid on a four-card suit with a particularly defensive holding but your partner will play you for three cards.
If you have chosen the 2NT 'limit or better' raise above then a direct raise to three becomes available as a 'mixed' or 'semi-preemptive' raise made on four-card support and typically 6 to 9 points. In so doing we have found another opportunity to jump to what is likely to be the correct competitive level on a slightly weaker hand. The mixed raise of 1♠ to 3♠ is a particularly effective weapon.
If you chose the Jacoby option above then you will not have this option. The direct raise to three will then be the limit bid which may be passed or raised.

♠ T 9 7 4 ♥ 8 3 ♦ A J 8 5 ♣ Q 6 4	Partner opened 1♠. You have a ten-loser hand and very little defence in hearts. Bid 3♠. Just preemptive enough.

Inverted minor suit raises

The situation in the minor suits is not so clear-cut. Suffice it to say that many experts now play 'inverted minor suit raises'. In this method an immediate raise to three is a weak bid, typically with five-card support, and a raise to two is stronger - typically with four-card support, 10+ points, and forcing as far as 2NT.

♠ T 8 ♥ 8 5 3 ♦ K 9 4 ♣ K 7 6 4 3	Partner opened 1♣. Bid 3♣ - weak and not encouraging. Your opponents might well have a major suit contract. What better than an immediate raise to the limit of your holding.

♠ T 8 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ K 9 4 ♣ K 7 6 4 3	Partner opened 1♣. Bid 2♣ - forcing. If partner bids anything other than 3♣ you will search for a no trump contract, happy that he knows about the club fit, and you might do so anyway.

The splinter bid

I include this mainly so that it can be dovetailed with the suggestion which follows.

A splinter bid agreeing partner's suit and promising either a void or a singleton in the splinter suit is now a more-or-less standard part of the bidding armoury. As with all of the bids in this section it satisfies the aim of showing support for partner, and defining the type of support.

Typically the bid will be a double-jump in a new suit and will be game-forcing.

In a more modern setting, if you play no further support bids then there is no reason not to play mini-splinters, making only a single-jump in the splinter suit. You can after all create a forcing situation either with one of the 2NT and inverted minor suit bids already considered or with a simple change of suit.

The reason why this does not happen more often is because of a relative new-comer on the scene.

The fit-jump

We shall meet this again shortly, and much more importantly, when we look at the contested auction.

With the ongoing aim of jumping to the correct level with a fit hand whilst also showing the nature of the support, these bids show a fit for partner together with a good side-suit. If opener has a big hand this could be a vital piece of information in the search for a slam. On the other hand, if there is the potential for enemy intervention, this bid gives partner early information about the existence or non-existence of a double fit and paves the way for an appropriate degree of competition.

Typically, in the non-contested auction, this bid will be saved for a single jump in a new suit, and will be played as game-forcing. (There is an argument for playing it as non-forcing so that you can jump to an appropriate competitive level on a weak hand, but with only one level available for the bid this argument loses some of its impact.)

There are variations in style. Many play it as showing 5-4 shape in the two suits. A good alternative would be at least four-card support for partner and five cards in the side-suit. With my regular partners I play it as 5-4 or 4-5 shape when partner opens one major, but I always promise a new five-card suit when I make a fit-jump in a major suit over partner's one minor. In this case I am suggesting an alternative trump suit rather than just a source of side-suit tricks.

Whichever of these approaches you agree, your side suit must be of good quality - five little cards in a side-suit will not help him to make his contract. A typical guideline would be that the suit is headed by two top honours, although I would stretch this to include KJT in combination.

♠ 8 4 ♥ Q 9 7 4 ♦ A K J T 5 ♣ 8 6	Partner opened 1♥. You have a seven-loser hand with heart support, but the main feature of this hand is the diamond suit. Bid 3♦ - and raise partner's response of 3♥ to 4♥.

♠ 9 8 ♥ Q J 4 ♦ K J 6 3 ♣ A K Q 6	You opened 1♣ and partner responded 2♥ - game-forcing, promising five hearts and four clubs. If you see the chance of a slam then clubs may well be the best denomination in the 4-4 fit. However, for the moment you will be pleased to reach game at the four-level, so bid 3♥ to show your fit and see where partner goes from there.

The fit-jump in the non-contested auction is not widespread at the present time. Incorporate it if you like, but there are many alternatives from which to choose for a constructive approach to the non-contested auction. However, when I reintroduce this convention shortly in the context of the contested auction it will be with the strong recommendation that it should be part of your bidding armoury.

The Contested Auction

It is when partner opens and RHO overcalls that the support bid assumes its full importance.

The two sides are now in a race to describe their holdings, and the pair which can reach their optimum contract first will be at an advantage. More than in any other situation, knowledge of the extent of the fit will now be critical so that correct decisions can be made in the context of the likely number of total tricks available.

All of the following assume at least some degree of fit for partner's suit. Without such a fit you will in general keep quiet with a weak hand, and either make a negative double or a simple forcing change of suit with a stronger holding.

Raising partner's suit

Provided that you have most of the bids which follow available to show support in a stronger hand then all direct raises can be used to show a weak hand. Typically, 'weak' in this context will mean hands of up to about seven or eight points, but there is some scope for judgement and partnership agreement on this matter.

Your underlying guideline will be to bid to the level of the fit - thus assuming partner's opening one of a major to show a five-card suit you will raise to the two-level with three-card support, the three-level with four-card support, and the four-level with five-card support. You may choose to bid one level less if vulnerable (particularly if vulnerable against not) and you might also temper your exuberance if you have a particularly defensive hand-shape, but the principle above will be the starting point for your assessment of the appropriate level.

♠ 8 3	Partner opens 1♥. Opponents overcall 2♣.
♥ K 7 2	Bid 2♥.
♦ 9 6 5 2	Show your three-card support in a weak hand.
♣ K 8 4 2	

♠ 8 3	Partner opens 1♥. Opponents overcall 2♥ (showing spades and clubs).
♥ K 7 4 2	Bid 3♥ unless you think you are good enough for a direct 4♥.
♦ 8 7	Show your agreement as fast and as high as you dare without suggesting any more than a modicum of defence.
♣ K 8 4 2	

2NT following a suit overcall

2NT opposite partner's major suit opening still shows a high-card raise to the three-level or higher based on four-card or better support. This is common practice even amongst those who play the game-forcing Jacoby version in the uncontested auction.
2NT opposite partner's minor suit is usually played as natural - about 10 to 12 points and with cover in the opponents' suit.

♠ K 8	Partner opens 1♥. Opponents overcall 1♠.
♥ 8 7 4 2	Bid 2NT, forcing to 3♥.
♦ Q J 5	With a seven-loser hand you will raise partner's response to 4♥, and if your opponents continue in spades your partner knows that you have some defence making a penalty double a possible option.
♣ K Q 4 2	

2NT following a double

It is now even more important to show your fit before the opposition locate theirs, with every possibility that they hold the balance of points. As above, 2NT is played as a high-card raise to the three-level or higher promising at least four-card support, but this time it is common practice to use it opposite partner's opening minor suit as well as his major.

♠ 8 5	Partner opens 1♦ and the opponents double.
♥ J 5 2	Bid 2NT - a full-value high-card raise to 3♦ or more.
♦ K Q 8 4	The bidding cannot stop below the level of 3♦.
♣ K J T 2	

The cue-raise

This bid is used by different partnerships in slightly different ways. In all cases it promises some values, but it is not the rock-crusher of earlier times.
The interpretation which I assign here is in quite common use, and fits well with the other bids which I have recommended.
When partner's opening one of a suit is followed by a suit overcall from RHO then a cue-bid of the opponent's suit promises support for partner's suit together with fair high-card values - say 9+.
If partner opened one major and the 2NT bid is still available to show four-card support then this bid will promise precisely three-card support (or just possibly four-card support in a particularly uninspiringly flat hand).
If partner opens one minor, or the bidding has already passed the level of 2NT then this bid will promise four-card support.
In either case it can be thought of as a sound raise to the three-level or higher. This bid is not game-forcing, but there is nothing to stop you bidding again after your show of support if you have any more to say.

♠ K 8	Partner opens 1♣. Opponents overcall 1♠.
♥ 8 7 2	Bid 2♠.
♦ Q J 5	2NT is not available as a support bid opposite partner's minor suit so you must show your sound raise to 3♣ or more with an immediate cue-bid.
♣ K Q 6 4 2	An alternative is 5♣ but this understates the defensive potential of the hand.

♠ 8 3	Partner opens 1♥. Opponents overcall 2♣.
♥ K 7 2	Bid 3♣.
♦ Q J 5 2	Show your excellent three-card raise along with invitational values and good defence.
♣ K 8 4 2	This is a minimum holding for this bid. See if your partner agrees with it.

Three-card raise following a double

Surprisingly few club players are equipped with a tool for this situation.
There are some high-powered methods on the market, the best of which are probably those which incorporate a transfer principle.
I have chosen a simpler method. It is effective as far as it goes, simple to remember, and a vast improvement on no method at all.
It is also frequently to be found in the writings on non-Acol methods and is far less uncommon in the American game. Quite simply,

if you have three-card support for partners opening bid of 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠, together with fair high-card values then sacrifice the natural bid of 2♣ and use this bid to promise a good three-card raise to the two-level or higher.

Clearly you are no better off if partner's opening bid was 1♣, but it is a significant step towards being able to deal satisfactorily with a not uncommon situation.

♠ K 5 4	Partner opens 1♠, and the opponents double
♥ Q 7 6 4	Bid 2♣.
♦ 6 4	This bid says nothing about clubs - it shows three spades and fair values.
♣ K Q 6 2	You may well choose to follow this with a bid of 2NT.

The splinter bid

There is no difference in the meaning of a splinter bid since we last met it in the uncontested auction.

It still shows four-card or better support for partner, it still shows at most one card in the splinter suit, and it is still game-forcing. The difference lies in when it applies. To create more space for the fit-jump in the contested auction the splinter bid is now confined to the opponents' suit and is shown by a single jump in that suit.

♠ 8	Partner opens 1♥. Opponents overcall 1♠.
♥ K 7 4 2	Bid 3♠ (splinter in opponents' suit).
♦ Q J 5	You have a seven-loser hand -
♣ K 8 4 2	agree hearts to the four-level and show your spade shortage.

The fit-jump

Now that your opponents have either overcalled or doubled it has become increasingly important to give the most useful information to partner in the event of a highly competitive auction. With this in mind all jumps in a new suit are now fit-jumps. The same constraints apply as when RHO had passed, except that these bids are no longer played as game-forcing. You bid to the level at which you wish to compete at your first opportunity. If you were considering bidding one further later in the auction then you should have bid one higher in the first place.

♠ A 8 7 2	Partner opened 1♠, and RHO overcalls 2♥.
♥ 8 2	Bid 4♣ - showing an offensive raise to 4♠ with a good side-suit in clubs.
♦ 6 3	With a seven-loser hand you have every hope of making this contract even on a low point-count.
♣ K Q T 6 3	

♠ Q 8 7 2	Partner opened 1♠, and RHO overcalls 2♣.
♥ 6 3	Bid 4♦ - showing an offensive raise to 4♠ with a good side-suit in diamonds.
♦ K Q T 6 3	3♦ would also be a fit-jump on this hand but my choice is to bid up.
♣ 8 2	

♠ 6 4	Partner opens 1♦ and your opponents double.
♥ K Q 7 4 2	Bid 4♥ (not forcing once you have reached game-level).
♦ Q J 5 4	Show your raise to 5♦ along with a decent five-card heart suit.
♣ 8 2	Partner will not assume too much defence for your fit-jump.

ADVANCER'S FIRST BID

I shall keep this section relatively short.

It is just as important that advancer can give a full description of his support as quickly as possible to his partner (overcaller) as it was for responder. With this in mind he has almost the full array of support bids at his disposal - weak raises, 2NT raise of a major suit, cue-raise (also known as the unassuming cue-bid in this context), splinter raise in the opponents' suit(s), fit-jumps.

The exact application will be changed ever so slightly now that partner is known to have at least a five-card suit, and it must be borne in mind that overcaller is likely to be rather weaker than an opening bid.

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You	
♠ Q 8 4 2	1♥	1♠	2♥	?	Bid 3♠.
♥ Q 5					This still shows four card support in a weak hand.
♦ T 9 7 3					
♣ 8 5 4					

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You	
♠ Q 5 4 2	1♥	1♠	2♥	?	Bid 2NT.
♥ A 8					This still shows a sound high-card raise to 3♠ or higher.
♦ K T 8 3					
♣ A T 9					

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You	
♠ Q 8 3	1♥	2♠	-	?	Bid 4♣. (fit-jump)
♥ 8 4					4♠ might not make opposite a minimum, but you will certainly give it a
♦ A Q 8					try, and here you can take the opportunity to show the quality of your
♣ A K Q 8 3					side-suit in case of further competition.

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You	
♠ Q 5 4 2 ♥ 8 5 ♦ A K J 9 3 ♣ K 9	1♥	1♠	-	?	Bid 3♦. Let partner know about your trump fit and your side-suit. Many would bid 4♦ on this hand.
♠ Q 5 4 2 ♥ 8 5 ♦ A K J 9 3 ♣ K 9	1♥	1♠	2♥	?	Bid 4♦. Show your spade support and your excellent side-suit. 3♦ is still an alternative possibility. It would show a good suit with at least tolerance for partner's spades.
♠ Q 5 2 ♥ A 8 ♦ K T 8 3 ♣ A T 9 6	1♥	1♠	-	?	Bid 2♥. Show your sound high-card raise based on three-card support.
♠ A K 9 ♥ J 8 7 ♦ T 7 ♣ Q J 8 5 4	1♦	1♥	2♦	?	Bid 3♦. Show a good three-card raise to at least 3♥. 2NT is still available to show a good four-card raise.

Bidding for the lead

There is however one further consideration. When you hold a weak hand as advancer it is likely that your partner will be on lead defending against an opposition contract. This is particularly the case when responder has a made a bid which suggests that the hand might belong to the opposition.

With this in mind advancer must take suit quality into account.

Any form of raise of partner's suit should indicate at least one top honour in the suit so that partner knows that it is safe to attack that suit, and it will sometimes be more helpful to make a simple change of suit or a fit-jump rather than an immediate raise of partner's suit simply to indicate the best attacking lead in defence.

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You	
♠ K 7 4 2 ♥ 9 5 ♦ T 9 3 ♣ 8 7 5 4	1♥	1♠	2♠	?	2♠ by RHO is a cue-raise agreeing hearts. Bid 3♠. Partner will hope for more, but at least he will feel safe leading away from his AQ of spades.
♠ J 7 2 ♥ 9 5 ♦ K 9 7 3 ♣ K 7 5 4	1♥	1♠	2♠	?	Once again RHO has shown heart support in a good hand. Pass. So much more this time, and 3♠ would certainly not be a crime, but do you really want partner to lead away from his broken spade holding?
♠ J 7 2 ♥ 9 5 ♦ K 9 7 3 ♣ K Q J 4	1♥	1♠	2NT	?	2NT by your opponents shows a good raise in hearts. Bid 3♣. You have sufficient to support spades, but it is more important to show the club suit for a lead. Remember, partner will know that you have tolerance for spades when you bid a new suit at the three-level.

Later in the auction

It is tempting to maintain this battery of bids as the auction proceeds, but in general that would be a mistake.

Opener needs to be able to make natural re-bids in no trumps and bids in a fourth suit or in the opponents' suit(s) with a more general forcing meaning.

Cue-bids will always be forcing and may on occasion hide some form of support in a particularly strong hand, but your first assumption should always be that these bids either show, or are searching for, a no trump stop.

Similarly jump bids could be used in all sorts of clever ways, but as often as not opener will need these in his repertoire just to make a natural re-bid and create a game-forcing situation.

The exceptions are that opener can show splinter support for responder's initial change of suit in the uncontested auction, as can overcaller for advancer's change of suit.

On the subject of bidding methods

Although some will find this chapter both substantial and daunting it is no more than a skim across some of the bidding methods available in this context. There are many alternative methods. and there are various treatments of those methods which I have included. On the whole I am not trying to recommend particular methods against other alternatives. The aim is to bring an awareness of the existence of such methods and to encourage you, as a partnership, to adopt methods which will help you to gauge the extent and type of partner's support in the contested auction.

It should also be noted that when discussing the methods available to overcaller and responder I have only done so in the context of an opening bid of one of a suit. It is at least equally important to consider your methods in the context of other opening bids - particularly those of a weak and preemptive variety. Some of the example hands in the next chapter will touch on such methods.

CHAPTER 5

EXAMPLE DEALS

1. BGB Autumn Sims pairs
9th October 2008
Board 25
Dealer N
E/W vulnerable
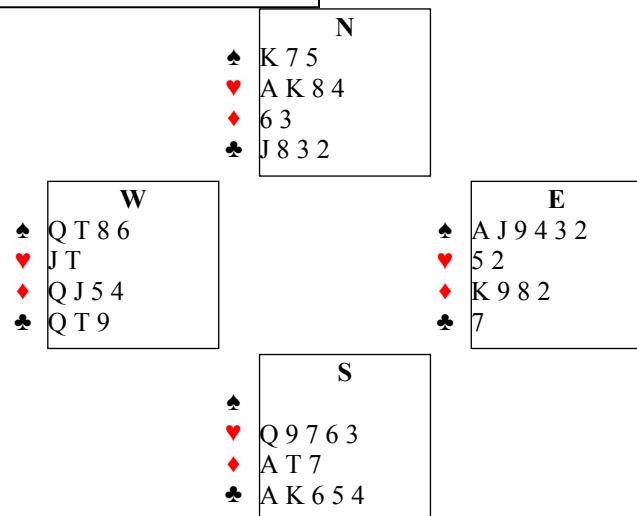
```
                            N
                      ♠ K 7 5
                      ♥ A K 8 4
                      ♦ 6 3
                      ♣ J 8 3 2
         W                              E
   ♠ Q T 8 6                      ♠ A J 9 4 3 2
   ♥ J T                          ♥ 5 2
   ♦ Q J 5 4                      ♦ K 9 8 2
   ♣ Q T 9                        ♣ 7
                            S
                      ♠
                      ♥ Q 9 7 6 3
                      ♦ A T 7
                      ♣ A K 6 5 4
```

Total trumps	**Total tricks**
N/S have a nine-card fit in hearts.	N/S can make nine tricks in spades.
E/W have a ten-card fit in spades.	E/W can make eleven tricks in hearts.
Double-fit	
Total trumps = 19	**Total tricks = 20**

W	N	E	S	
	-	2♠	4♣	2♠ by East is a natural weak two promising a six-card suit.
4♠	5♥	-	-	4♣ by South is 'Leaping Michael's' promising 5-5 (or thereabouts by partnership agreement) in the bid suit and the other major.
-				West, who can see a ten-card fit increases the preempt (after some consideration of the vulnerability).

2♠ by East is a natural weak two promising a six-card suit.
4♣ by South is 'Leaping Michael's' promising 5-5 (or thereabouts by partnership agreement) in the bid suit and the other major.
West, who can see a ten-card fit increases the preempt (after some consideration of the vulnerability).
North has to decide. He can see a nine-card fit his way and a ten-card fit for his opponents. Nineteen total trumps suggests that he should compete at the five-level, particularly at favourable vulnerability.
However, he can also see the presence of a double-fit thanks to his partner's informative overcall. There are likely to be at least twenty total tricks on this deal.
He must compete at the five-level, and it will cross his mind to sacrifice at the six-level if necessary.

What happens?

On an opening diamond lead - quite likely on this bidding - declarer will be held to eleven tricks. On any other lead it is possible for declarer to make twelve tricks, but he will have to take three minor-suit ruffs and count on the trumps splitting 2-2. Not a sound contract.

West's raise to 4♠ is borderline. He can make nine tricks for a loss of 200 if doubled - an excellent result. However, the lie of the cards would not have to be very different for him to go two down in which case a score of -500 would be a minor disaster. I favour the bid, both for the fact that it gives the opponents the opportunity to make the wrong decision, and also that the potential loss is not as great as the potential gain.

There are in fact twenty total tricks against best defence. North is making his contract, and with so many tricks available this is the correct contract.
If he were not making his contract then E/W would be making a vulnerable game and the result would be even better.

2. S & S.C.B.A. Bearn Final
April 2009
Board A18
Dealer E
N/S vulnerable

```
                              N
                        ♠ A 9 3 2
                        ♥ K
                        ♦ A Q 8 4 3
                        ♣ A T 2

        W                                    E
  ♠ K Q J T 8 5                        ♠ 7 6
  ♥ A 9 4                              ♥ Q J T 8 7 6 3
  ♦ 6                                  ♦ J 5
  ♣ 6 5 4                              ♣ K J

                              S
                        ♠ 4
                        ♥ 5 2
                        ♦ K T 9 7 2
                        ♣ Q 9 8 7 3
```
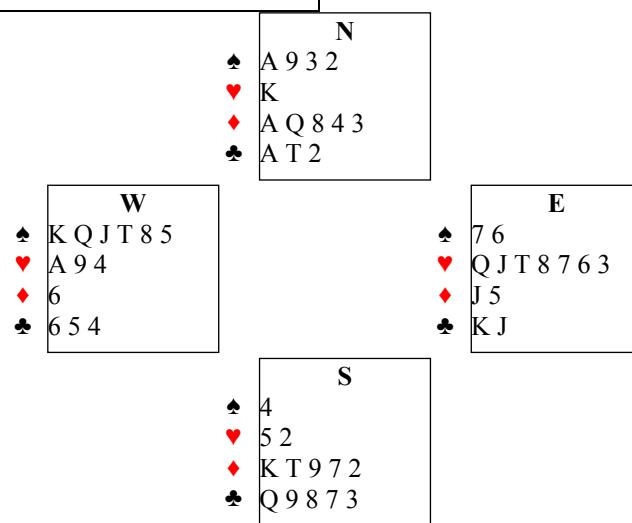
Total trumps	**Total tricks**
N/S have a ten-card fit in diamonds.	N/S can make eleven tricks in diamonds.
E/W have a ten-card fit in hearts.	E/W can make ten tricks in hearts.
West and South each hold a second long suit.	
Total trumps = 20	**Total tricks = 21**

W	N	E	S	
		3♥	-	First of all West must recognize the importance of supporting his partner in the known ten-card fit rather than getting carried away by his wonderful side-suit.
4♥	x	-	5♣	In the sequence shown North's double is the most important bid. It is in principle for take-out but should have some defence in case partner has nowhere to go.
5♥	-	-	-	South's hand is not defensive. In the simple method shown South bids his cheaper five-card suit. Some partnerships would bid 4NT at this point offering a choice of two suits.

West knows that N/S are likely to have at least a nine-card fit to go with his own ten-card fit making at least eighteen total trumps. A strong side-suit has the same effect as a double fit with partner. There will be a greater number of total tricks on this deal. West should treat it as about twenty total tricks and compete at the five-level, particularly not vulnerable against vulnerable.

What happens?

E/W can make ten tricks in hearts, provided that declarer takes the right view at every stage - eight or nine seems more likely in practice.

N/S might make eleven tricks in clubs, provided that the defence fails to take out three rounds of trumps before he ruffs a heart in dummy. Meanwhile, 5♦ is cast-iron.

Certainly if N/S locate their best fit there are twenty or twenty one total tricks on the deal. Even if they only locate clubs as above there will nineteen or twenty.

With every chance that N/S will make their game West must find the five over five sacrifice. It goes against one of the guideline mantras, but with so many total tricks available, and particularly at this vulnerability, it is a must.

3. Friendly match - Stone v Stafford
June 2010
Board 3
Dealer S
E/W vulnerable

	N
♠	T 9
♥	4 2
♦	T 8
♣	A Q J 9 8 7 2

	W
♠	A Q 6 4 2
♥	J 9 6 3
♦	A K 9 4
♣	

	E
♠	K J 8 7
♥	A K 8 5
♦	7 6 3
♣	T 3

	S
♠	5 3
♥	Q T 7
♦	Q J 5 2
♣	K 6 5 4
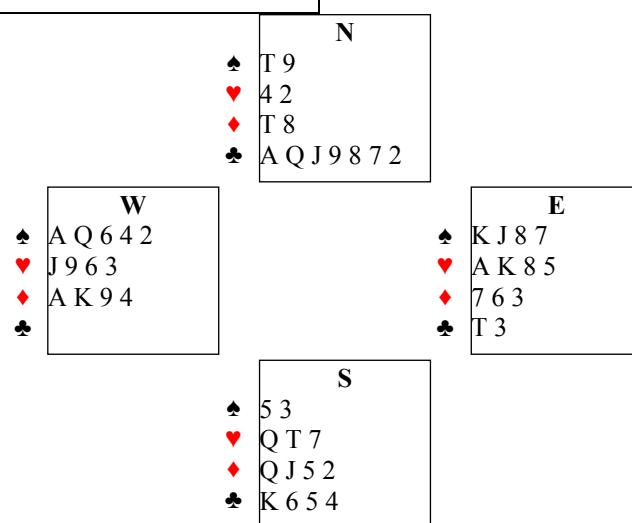
Total trumps

N/S have an eleven-card fit in clubs.
E/W have a nine-card fit in spades.
N/S have a particularly flat shape outside the trump suit.
Total trumps = 20

Total tricks

N/S can make seven tricks in clubs.
E/W can make eleven tricks in spades.

Total tricks = 18

a weak jump overcall

W	N	E	S
			-
1♠	3♣	4♣	5♣
?	-	-	-

1♠ from West will be routine, as will a weak 3♣ overcall from North if N/S do not use this as a two-suited take-out.
The first question is how East should show his support.
It is far from clear to East that ten tricks are making but it would be criminal not to compete to this level. However a direct jump to 4♠ could be made on a much weaker hand. The cue-raise shown suggests a reasonable high-card holding and therefore suggests additional defence.
South raised to five on what appeared to be an eleven-card fit.
West must choose between competing with 5♠ and doubling for penalties.

b simple overcall

W	N	E	S
			-
1♠	2♣	2NT	5♣
?	-	-	-

If N/S use the 3♣ bid as part of a system of two-suited overcalls then North will have to content himself with a simple overcall.
East now has a much easier bid using 2NT to show a good raise in spades to the three-level or higher.
Once again South jumps rapidly to the five-level and West has the same choice.

What happens?

5♠ by West makes eleven tricks, losing just one heart and one diamond for a score of 650.
In clubs the defence can take six tricks in the side suits, scoring 800 to N/S in 5♣x.

There are twenty total trumps on the deal, but rather surprisingly only eighteen total tricks, due mainly to North's even distribution outside the club suit.

With an expectation of twenty total tricks West should bid on if he feels that there is a chance of making.
This would leave nine tricks for N/S leading to a penalty of 500 - not enough to compensate for a vulnerable game.

The winning choice on the day is the penalty double, but my expectation is that bidding a making vulnerable game contract in this situation will show a profit more often than not. At this vulnerability the double will only be correct if there are eighteen or less total tricks, and that is not what is expected on this deal even though it turns out to be the reality.

4. Friendly match - Stone v Stafford
June 2010
Board 10
Dealer E
Both sides vulnerable

	N
♠	Q 9 6
♥	
♦	K J T 6 5 2
♣	J 4 3 2

	W				**E**	
♠	A 7			♠	5 2	
♥	8 7 6 5			♥	K Q T 9 3 2	
♦	Q 9 4 3			♦		
♣	Q 6 5			♣	A K T 9 8	

	S
♠	K J T 8 4 3
♥	A J 4
♦	A 8 7
♣	7
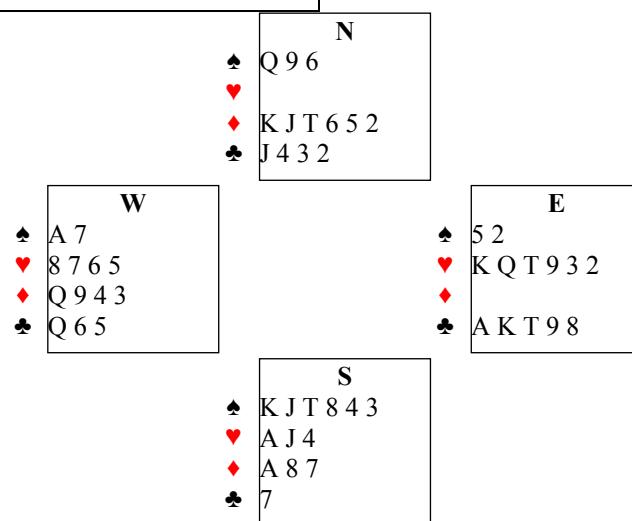
Total trumps	**Total tricks**
N/S have a nine-card fit in spades.	N/S can make eleven tricks in spades.
E/W have a ten-card fit in hearts.	E/W can make ten tricks in hearts.
North and East each hold a second long suit	
Total trumps = 19	**Total tricks = 21**

W	N	E	S
		1♥	1♠
3♥	3♠	4♥	-
-	-		

East will usually open 1♥ and South, who is not quite good enough to double first, will make a simple overcall of 1♠. West, with two stronger bids available is happy to make the mixed raise in hearts promising four-card support and about six to nine points.

The obvious bid for North is to raise spades. He would like to show his side-suit. A bid of 4♦ would show this feature and promise at least tolerance for spades, but it does not really promise the extent of the spade fit, and suggests a few more points. Instead, he can do little more than make a competitive raise.

East would also like to show his side-suit, but with hearts already agreed this would require a jump. With little prospect of a slam he merely competes one level higher.

What happens?

This is a double-fit deal. If either side can identify this feature then the bidding will continue to dizzy heights as there are a lot of tricks available.

E/W are making ten tricks in hearts.

Meanwhile N/S are making eleven tricks in spades.

6♥ from E/W will provide the optimum score, even when doubled, but this would be a brave bid.

We did rather well in the match when we were doubled in 5♥ for -200.

Meanwhile at the other table our pair were allowed to play in 4♠x making an overtrick for a score of 990.

On such deals are matches won and lost.

5. S. & S.C.B.A. Phoenix Trophy
August 2010
Board 13
Dealer N
Both sides vulnerable

```
                              N
                         ♠ J T 9 7 5
                         ♥ 9 6 2
                         ♦
                         ♣ A Q T 7 2

              W                              E
         ♠ K 8 6                        ♠ A Q 4 3
         ♥ J T 8 5                      ♥ Q
         ♦ T 7 6 5 2                    ♦ A Q J 4
         ♣ 4                           ♣ 9 8 5 3

                              S
                         ♠ 2
                         ♥ A K 7 4 3
                         ♦ K 9 8 3
                         ♣ K J 6
```

Total trumps	Total tricks
N/S have an eight-card fit in hearts.	N/S can make nine tricks in hearts.
E/W have a nine-card fit in diamonds (seven-card fit in spades).	E/W can make ten tricks in diamonds or eight tricks in spades.
Each partnership has a significant second suit fit.	
Total trumps = 17 (15)	**Total tricks = 19 (17)**

W	N	E	S	
	-	1♠	2♥	Many will open 1♦ on this East hand. My choice is always the major, fully prepared to re-bid in no trumps if partner responds 2♥ at which point the ♥Q regains its full value.
2♠	4♣	-	4♥	North must choose between competing further in hearts, or hoping to take a penalty in spades. A raise to three would reflect the low point-count, but partner might also hope to find a fourth heart and a heart honour in your hand. You are not strong enough to show a high-card raise to either the three- or the four-level with either a cue-bid or 2NT.
-	-	-		Holding a seven-loser hand my choice is either a direct jump to game, or a fit-jump as shown to help partner in the event of further competition.
				I have shown South signing off in 4♥, but you could hardly blame him if he started looking for a slam based on the excellent club fit.

What happens?

N/S should always make nine tricks in hearts, losing one spade, one diamond and two hearts.
However declarer is unlucky with the heart split, and would expect to make ten tricks more often than not.
Meanwhile E/W will usually make eight tricks in spades, although there is the possibility of ten tricks if they ever locate their diamond fit.

In the tournament two pairs stopped in 3♥, scoring a top on the day, and three pairs bid the game - two of them going one off and one going two light.

6. Worcestershire v Staffordshire
November 2010
Board 1
Dealer N
Neither side vulnerable

	N
♠	9 5 3 2
♥	5
♦	A 5 4
♣	K T 7 3 2

	W
♠	Q 6 4
♥	K 4 3
♦	Q J T 9 8 3
♣	6

	E
♠	A K 8
♥	Q J T 9 8 6
♦	K 2
♣	J 4

	S
♠	J T 7
♥	A 7 2
♦	7 6
♣	A Q 9 8 5
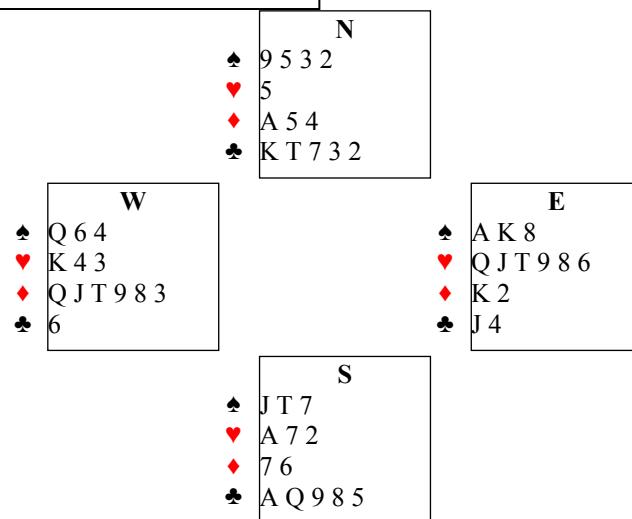
Total trumps

N/S have a ten-card fit in clubs.

E/W have a nine-card fit in hearts.

West holds a significant long side-suit, lacking top honours.

Total trumps = 19

Total tricks

N/S can make nine tricks in clubs.

E/W can make ten tricks in hearts.

Total tricks = 19

W	N	E	S
	-	1♥	2♣
3♣	5♣	?	-
-	-		

Pass from North and 1♥ from East will be more or less universal, and at this vulnerability South will usually compete.

West has a difficult choice between a weak competitive raise to 3♥, and the cue-bid promising a sound three-card raise. His points are a little light for the cue-raise, but with an eight-loser hand and every intention of making 3♥ I favour this approach.

North will raise to at least 4♣ on a fit which is known to be at least ten-card. With every possibility of six clubs in partner's hand, the knowledge that 4♣ will not keep the opposition out of 4♥, and a poor defensive holding, my preference is a direct leap to 5♣.

East can see every possibility of a nine-card fit his way and an eleven-card fit for N/S giving twenty total tricks. If this is the case it will usually be correct to compete at this vulnerability. If there are only nineteen total tricks then he should find a penalty double now that partner has shown some defensive values.

What happens?

E/W are making 4♥ whilst N/S will usually make nine tricks in clubs.

North's jump to 5♣ was excellent.

In the match only one E/W pair were allowed to play in 4♥ scoring 420 for a clear top, two E/W pairs made ten tricks in a heart part-score (rather sadly), whilst one pair bid and made nine tricks.

At all the other tables N/S competed correctly to 5♣.

At two tables this was doubled for 300 to E/W; at two tables it was passed (excusably) for 100 to E/W; and at the remaining three tables N/S competed to 5♥ getting a poor score on the board on the day.

7. S. & S.C.B.A. mixed pairs
June 2008
Board 7
Dealer S
Both sides vulnerable
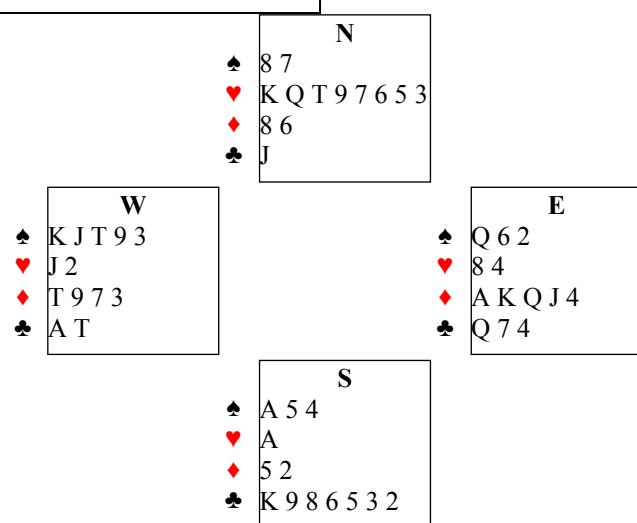
```
                        N
                  ♠ 8 7
                  ♥ K Q T 9 7 6 5 3
                  ♦ 8 6
                  ♣ J

        W                           E
  ♠ K J T 9 3                 ♠ Q 6 2
  ♥ J 2                       ♥ 8 4
  ♦ T 9 7 3                   ♦ A K Q J 4
  ♣ A T                       ♣ Q 7 4

                        S
                  ♠ A 5 4
                  ♥ A
                  ♦ 5 2
                  ♣ K 9 8 6 5 3 2
```

Total trumps	**Total tricks**
N/S have a nine-card fit in hearts.	N/S can make nine tricks in hearts.
E/W have a nine-card fit in diamonds.	E/W can make ten tricks in spades.
Each partnership has a second eight-card fit but N/S's is weak.	
Total trumps = 18	**Total tricks = 19**

W	N	E	S
			1♣
1♠	2♥	4♦	-
4♠	-	-	-

Some will preempt on this South hand, with the extra points compensating for lack of suit quality. Another possibility is to pass initially and compete later - sometimes as effective as a preemptive opening in a minor suit. Most Wests will compete with their spade suit.

North would love to jump in hearts, but this would be a fit-jump promising support in clubs. Instead he must content himself with a simple forcing change of suit in the first instance.

East must describe his hand as best he can. My choice is the fit-jump as shown. Qxx in spades is sufficient support opposite partner's overcall, and that diamond suit is certainly the main feature of the hand.

West will correct to 4♠, and would bid again if forced to do so on the known double-fit.

What happens?

4♥ by North will usually make nine tricks, and 4♠ by West is making ten tricks.
The optimum score therefore arises when N/S compete to 5♥ and are doubled for two down.

The effect of the fit-jump is interesting. With anything less North or South will probably bid again, and West will not know to compete to the four-level. However, it also produces the possibility that West will compete too far should N/S bid again. It certainly found the best contract for E/W but on another day it might not score so well.

8. Warwickshire v Staffordshire
September 2006
Board 30
Dealer E
Neither side vulnerable
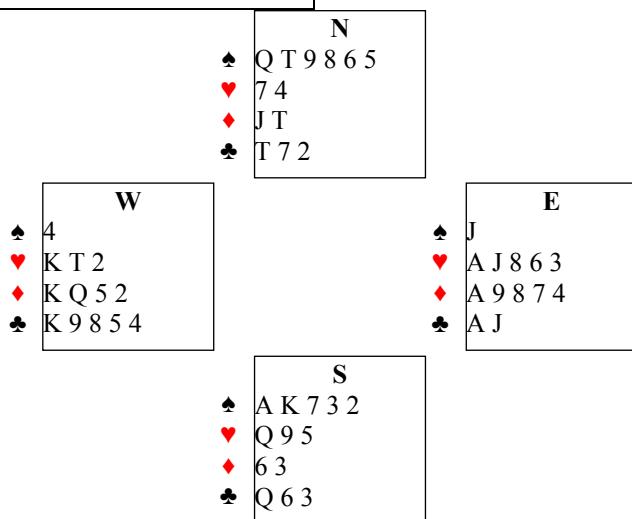
```
                                 N
                         ♠ Q T 9 8 6 5
                         ♥ 7 4
                         ♦ J T
                         ♣ T 7 2
          W                                      E
    ♠ 4                                    ♠ J
    ♥ K T 2                                ♥ A J 8 6 3
    ♦ K Q 5 2                              ♦ A 9 8 7 4
    ♣ K 9 8 5 4                            ♣ A J
                                 S
                         ♠ A K 7 3 2
                         ♥ Q 9 5
                         ♦ 6 3
                         ♣ Q 6 3
```

Total trumps	Total tricks
N/S have an eleven-card fit in spades.	N/S can make seven tricks in diamonds.
E/W have a nine-card fit in diamonds.	E/W can make twelve tricks in hearts.
E/W have something of a second suit in hearts.	
Total trumps = 20	**Total tricks = 19**

W	N	E	S
		1♥	1♠
2♠	4♠	x	-
-	-		

It is rare that I can't find a two-opener with fifteen points (on a raw count) and 5-5 shape, but East's suits are so hollow that even I cannot find a way of counting eight playing tricks.

West has the first decision. He really needs an extra heart and an extra diamond to find a fit-jump, or a fourth heart for a splinter in spades, so a high-card raise with three-card support it has to be.

Should North go straight to five spades for the maximum preemptive effect? You probably play this as some kind of slam try but with both 2NT or a cue-bid available the preemptive interpretation is not silly. On the other hand even 4♠ has considerable preemptive effect.

East, who can see only eighteen total tricks on the bidding, must find a penalty double now that partner has shown some defensive values.

What happens?

In the match hearts made eleven tricks at both tables for a flat board. It should really make twelve if you can place the ♥Q with South for his bid.

Meanwhile a spade contract is losing two hearts, two diamonds and two clubs to make seven tricks.

In 4♠, three off doubled scores -500 for a small swing, but a bid at the five-level by North is beginning to look expensive.

9. S. & S.C.B.A. Bearn Final
April 2009
Board B25
Dealer N
E/W vulnerable

```
                        N
                    ♠ Q 9 8 7 4
                    ♥ 9 4
                    ♦ 6 3
                    ♣ T 9 8 6
        W                           E
    ♠ T 5 3                     ♠
    ♥ A 6 5                     ♥ Q J T 7 2
    ♦ A K J 4                   ♦ 9 5 2
    ♣ K 5 3                     ♣ A Q J 7 4
                        S
                    ♠ A K J 6 2
                    ♥ K 8 3
                    ♦ Q T 8 7
                    ♣ 2
```
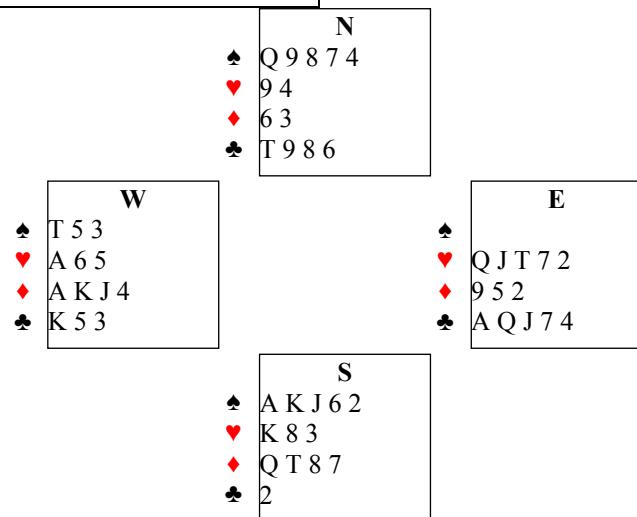
Total trumps	Total tricks
N/S have a ten-card fit in spades.	N/S can make seven tricks in diamonds.
E/W have an eight-card fit in hearts.	E/W can make thirteen tricks in hearts.
E/W have secondary fits in the minors.	
Total trumps = 18	**Total tricks = 20**

W	N	E	S	
	-	1♥	1♠	A 1♥ opening on the East hand will be more common than pass, and an overcall in spades by South should be the norm. West's hand is excellent for a cue-raise after which North should jump to 4♠ on a ten-card fit, particularly at this vulnerability. I pass at this point on the East hand, but there are arguments for both 5♥ and 5♣. West can hardly do less than double at which point the bidding should grind rapidly to a halt.
2♠	4♠	-	-	
x	-	-	-	

What happens?

With finesses working in both red suits East will usually make all thirteen tricks in a heart contract.
6♥ + 1 would score a magnificent 1460, but I cannot see a convincing route to this contract.
5♥ + 2 is more likely, scoring 710.

Provided that West keeps leading trumps at every opportunity South will be held to seven tricks in spades for a penalty of 500 in 4♠x.
An excellent sacrificial jump by North to gain a top on the board.

10. Leicestershire v Staffordshire
February 2009
Board 23
Dealer S
Both sides vulnerable

```
                              N
                         ♠ 7 4
                         ♥ A 7
                         ♦ K 7 6 5 2
                         ♣ K J 5 2

         W                                    E
    ♠ A K J T 9 8                         ♠ Q 6 5 3 2
    ♥ Q T 8                               ♥ 6 5 2
    ♦ 4                                   ♦ Q 8 3
    ♣ Q T 6                               ♣ 9 4

                              S
                         ♠
                         ♥ K J 9 4 3
                         ♦ A J T 9
                         ♣ A 8 7 3
```
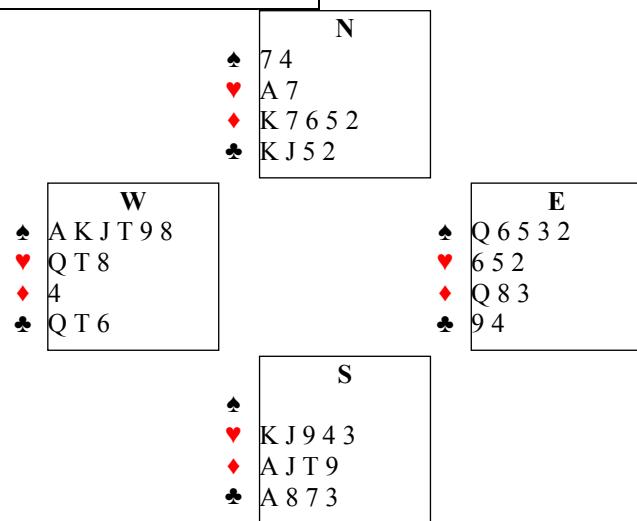
Total trumps	Total tricks
N/S have a nine-card fit in diamonds.	N/S can make thirteen tricks in diamonds.
E/W have an eleven-card fit in spades.	E/W can make eight tricks in hearts.
N/S have something of a club fit.	
Total trumps = 20	**Total tricks = 21**

W	N	E	S	
			1♥	South's opening is routine.
1♠	x	4♠	5♣	West would like to have a stronger bid available, such is the quality of his suit, but it is not strong enough for 'double and take-out'. In any case 1♠ over 1♥ has minimal preemptive effect and so will normally be full-value.
-	-	-		Double from North is again routine and East has the decision. Five-card support suggests a raise to the four-level - vulnerability suggests a level lower. The fact that N/S are also vulnerable will be a consideration. My inclination is to take the risk and maximise the preempt but I cannot promise you that this will always be the best strategy. South, who can see the possibility of a double-fit in the minors, chooses to bid on and picks the lower of partner's suits just in case his double did not show both of them. West passes with the same vulnerability considerations as East despite holding an extra trump, and two further passes will complete the auction.

What happens?

South collects all thirteen tricks in clubs or diamonds when the hearts split and both minor suit queens finesse. Should a slam be bid against this spade barrage?
You will need more refined methods than I have in my armoury to do so with any certainty, but you might well find it if East only raises to three at his first opportunity. After that, a cue-bid in spades by South before reverting to a minor might be all that is needed.
In the match 'five-of-a-minor' was bid at ten tables, eight making twelve tricks and two making thirteen.

Meanwhile West is making eight tricks in spades. E/W competed to exactly the right level at the right time.

11. Staffordshire v Lincolshire
6th February 2011
Board 10
Dealer E
Both sides vulnerable

```
                              N
                         ♠ A T 7 4
                         ♥ T 9 4
                         ♦ A 6
                         ♣ K T 9 6

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

                              S
                         ♠ K Q 8 2
                         ♥
                         ♦ Q J T 5 4 2
                         ♣ A 5 2
```
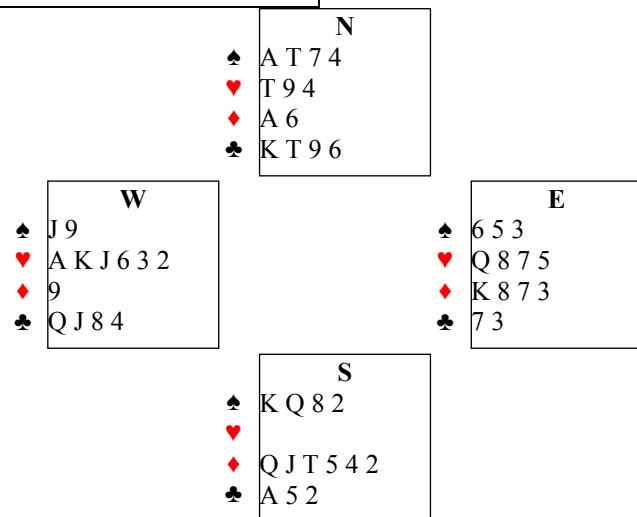
Total trumps	Total tricks
N/S have an eight-card fit in spades.	N/S can make twelve tricks in spades.
E/W have a ten-card fit in hearts.	E/W can make eight tricks in hearts.
South has a significant side-suit in diamonds.	
Total trumps = 18	**Total tricks = 20**

W	N	E	S	
		-	1♦	South's opening bid will be more or less standard, as will West's overcall (being too good for a jump overcall and not quite good enough to double first). Double from North shows, in principle, the other two suits. East must compete now, even vulnerable. A jump to 3♥ shows his four-card support.
1♥	x	3♥	4♥	
-	4♠	-	-	Most Souths will now jump to 4♠, but if he can see the possibility of more then 4♥ is the way forward. Similarly North will choose 4♠ as often as not, but with points to spare a jump to 5♠ or even 6♠ would not be totally ludicrous.
-	-			West must not compete beyond 4♥. He can read E/W for a ten-card fit and N/S for an eight-card fit. With a likely eighteen total tricks he should not bid beyond the level of the fit when vulnerable.

What happens?

There are twenty total tricks on the hand.
E/W are making eight tricks in hearts, and N/S will make twelve tricks in spades for the loss of just one diamond.
Whether or not N/S should find this slam in the bidding is not so clear.

In the match six pairs made eleven or twelve tricks in a spade game. One pair sadly scored only 170 making ten tricks in a part-score, and finally one West bid one too far for a loss of 800, and a clear bottom on the board.

CHAPTER 6

APPENDIX

Flat-Hand deals

In this first section I am including hands with fourteen or fifteen total tricks.
I include them only for completeness.
They represent shapeless deals on which the bidding, if any, will usually revolve around no trumps.
Intervention of any sort will be relatively rare, and, certainly, decisions relating to whether or not to compete beyond the two-level will be almost non-existent.

Fourteen total tricks

In principle both pairs will have a seven-card fit. Typically the bidding will be either in no trumps, or an opening one of a major will have been raised to the two-level on three-card support.
It should be noted however that with an eight-card fit facing a seven-card fit for a total of fifteen total trumps it will frequently be the case that the holdings are defensive in nature and there may well be only fourteen tricks available.

Neither side vulnerable

Fourteen total tricks				Neither side vulnerable
		You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level				
You are making six tricks			8	M110/m90	
	You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			gains only if not doubled over a major
You are making seven tricks			7	-50/-100x	
	You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			loses, double if you dare
You are making eight tricks			6	-100/-300x	
	You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			double
You are making nine tricks			5	-150/-500x	
	You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			double
You are making ten tricks			4	-200/-800x	
	You compete at the **four**-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making four tricks			10	M420/m130	
	You compete at the four-level	-300/-1400x			loses if doubled

Some of these situations are most unlikely. Making ten tricks and competing at the four-level, for example, implies that you have chosen a suit contract on a seven-card fit with two flat hands. Don't attach too much weight to such abstruse bits of theory.
In the very specific circumstances relating to this table the conclusions are clear-cut.
If neither side is vulnerable on a flat deal, do not compete at the two-level or higher unless you think your side can make eight tricks.
Competing can only gain if you are playing at pairs, if you are competing at the two-level over their major, if you are making exactly six tricks, and if you are not doubled.
If your side can make eight or more tricks then your best action will be to find a penalty double of their contract at the two-level or higher.
The same is also true in principle if you can be certain that you are making seven tricks.
Not-vulnerable against vulnerable
There is no need for a new table.
Your scores for making a contract are unaltered from the table above, and the penalties when your opponents fail are greatly increased.
If your side is making eight tricks then find a penalty double.
If your side is making seven tricks then in principle it will also pay to double a two-level contract by your opponents.
Vulnerable against not

Fourteen total tricks				Vulnerable against not
		You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level				
You are making six tricks			8	M110/m90	
	You compete at the two-level	-200/-500x			loses

Fourteen total tricks					Vulnerable against not
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level					
You are making seven tricks			7	-50/-100x	
	You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			loses, double if you dare
You are making eight tricks			6	-100/-300x	
	You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			double
You are making ten tricks			4	-200/-800x	
	You compete at the **four**-level	M620/m130			double

Nothing has changed.

If you are making eight tricks then double, if you are certain that you are making seven tricks then double, and if you are making less than this then keep seriously silent.

Perhaps most surprising is that this same advice applies even if you are making a vulnerable game your way and your opponents compete to the two-level or higher. 620 might sound attractive, but it doesn't begin to compete with 800. However, before you rush into doubling your opponents for penalties whenever you have a vulnerable game available, remember that this conclusion applies only in this particular context of fourteen total tricks - a rare phenomenon.

Both sides vulnerable

Still no significant change.

With one specific exception the two tables shown so far in the context of fourteen total tricks consider only the situation in which your opponents compete at the two-level. Of course, if they compete to a higher level then the penalties will increase accordingly and the argument for finding a penalty double becomes increasingly persuasive.

Fifteen total tricks

As in the previous sub-section, this will generally correspond to an eight-card fit facing a seven-card fit. Once again the bidding will frequently be orientated around no trumps, and the auction will only occasionally be contested.

However it will not be uncommon for two eight-card fits to exist in a flattish deal with only fifteen total tricks available.

This is a situation to watch out for.

Neither side vulnerable

Fifteen total tricks					Neither side vulnerable
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level					
You are making six tricks			9	M140/m110	
	You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			gains if not doubled
	You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses
You are making seven tricks			8	M110/m90	
	You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains, unless doubled over a minor
	You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
You are making eight tricks			7	-50/-100x	
	You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains, unless you double over your minor
	You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			loses
You are making nine tricks			6	-100/-200x	
	You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			double
You are making ten tricks			5	-150/-500x	
	You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the three-level					
You are making six tricks			9	M140/m110	
	You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses

Fifteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Neither side vulnerable
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making seven tricks			8	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			7	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			double
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making five tricks			10	M420/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-250/-1100x			loses

This time it will pay you to compete to the two-level, expecting not to be doubled at this level.

This is an example of bidding to the level of your fit on an eight-card fit.

However, competing at the three-level is always a losing choice. The only exception is when you are making exactly seven tricks and you feel that you might get away with 3♥ over 2♠ undoubled.

If you believe that there are eight tricks available to you then it will pay to double their three-level bid.

Not vulnerable against vulnerable

Fifteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Not vulnerable against vulnerable
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making six tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			gains if not doubled
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains, unless you double over a minor
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			7	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			double if you dare
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			loses
	You are making nine tricks			6	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			5	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making six tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			8	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			7	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			double
	You are making nine tricks			6	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			5	-400/-1100x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double

Fifteen total tricks				Not vulnerable against vulnerable	
		You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the four-level					
You are making five tricks			10	M620/m130	
You compete at the four-level		-250/-1100x			loses if doubled

You should still compete at the two-level if you are making six or seven tricks, on the assumption that usually you will not be doubled, and you should not compete at the three-level.
The only difference is that you should double their two-level bid if you are confident that you are making eight or more tricks.

Vulnerable against not

Fifteen total tricks				Vulnerable against not	
		You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level					
You are making six tricks			9	M140/m110	
You compete at the two-level		-200/-500x			loses
You are making seven tricks			8	M110/m90	
You compete at the two-level		-100/-200x			loses, unless not doubled over a major
You are making eight tricks			7	-50/-100x	
You compete at the two-level		M110/m90			gains, unless you double over your minor
You compete at the three-level		-100/-200x			loses
You are making nine tricks			6	-100/-300x	
You compete at the two-level		M140/m110			double
You are making ten tricks			5	-150/-500x	
You compete at the four-level		M620/m130			bid a major, double otherwise
Opponents bid at the three-level					
You are making eight tricks			7	-100/-300x	
You compete at the three-level		-100/-300x			double
You are making nine tricks			6	-150/-500x	
You compete at the three-level		M140/m110			double
You are making ten tricks			5	-200/-800x	
You compete at the three-level		M170/m130			double
You compete at the four-level		M620/m130			double

Not quite as clear-cut as earlier.
Note that this is still in the context of a very flat deal, and most of the competitive auctions covered in this table are relatively improbable.
It no longer pays to compete at the two-level if you are making only six or seven tricks.
If you are making eight tricks there is a tiny gain if you bid your major to the two-level - otherwise you should double.
If you are making nine tricks you should double,
and if you are making ten tricks you should bid game in a major if they compete to the two-level, but double if you hold a minor or they compete to the three-level.

Both sides vulnerable

Fifteen total tricks				Both sides vulnerable	
		You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid at the two-level					
You are making eight tricks			7	-100/-300x	
You compete at the two-level		M110/m90			double

Fifteen total tricks		You score	They are making	They score	Both sides vulnerable
Opponents bid at the two-level					
	You are making ten tricks		5	-200/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			double
Opponents bid at the three-level					
	You are making nine tricks		6	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks		5	-400/-1100x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			double

Once again you should double their bid at the two-level or higher if you are confident of making eight or more tricks.

Summary

To summarise this section on flat deals, a generalisation of my findings is that you should compete to the two-level if not vulnerable, although on occasion this will depend on not being doubled.

However, if your opponents are vulnerable it will in general pay to double provided that you are confident of making eight or more tricks in your contract, or even seven in some cases.

BUT, I must reiterate that these represent rare and improbable situations. The more important findings come in the next two sub-sections.

Competitive Part-score deals

With this sub-section we enter the very heart of the competitive auction.

We are dealing with those situations in which each partnership has either an eight-card or a nine-card fit. The total tricks will lie in the range from sixteen and eighteen and decisions as to whether or not to compete at the two-, three-, or four-level will be commonplace and frequently critical.

It is well-worth reiterating a point made earlier.

If you believe your partnership to have a combined eight-card fit somewhere then in the absence of further evidence it is reasonable to assume that your opponents also have an eight-card fit for a combined sixteen total tricks.

If on the other hand your partnership has a nine-card fit then your opponents must have at least an eight-card fit, and will not infrequently have a nine-card fit of their own for a combined total of seventeen or eighteen total tricks.

Sixteen total tricks

Note that this almost invariably places you with an eight-card fit.

Neither side vulnerable

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Neither side vulnerable
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			gains if not doubled
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses if doubled
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains opposite a major, and opposite a minor if not doubled
	You are making nine tricks			7	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
	You are making ten tricks			6	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses unless not doubled over a major
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
		You compete at the four-level	-150/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			8	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			7	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-150/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M420/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-800x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the four-level	-150/-500x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			8	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			double

Appendix

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Neither side vulnerable
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making nine tricks			7	-150/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-200/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double

My conclusions have not changed significantly.

In general it will pay to compete to the two-level, although this might depend on not being doubled.

As a general rule it will not pay to compete at the three-level unless you are playing against a pair who never double.

If you are making eight or more tricks it will usually pay to double any contract at the three-level or higher by your opponents, but you should bid your major suit game rather than leave them in a doubled two-level contract.

Not vulnerable against vulnerable

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Not vulnerable against vulnerable
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-100/-300x			gains if not doubled
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses if doubled
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains opposite a major, loses opposite a minor if doubled.
	You are making nine tricks			7	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			double if you dare
	You are making ten tricks			6	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the three-level	-150/-500x			loses if doubled
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			8	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			7	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M620/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-800x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the four-level	-150/-500x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			8	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			double

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Not vulnerable against vulnerable
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making nine tricks			7	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-400/-1100x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double

Still very similar.

Note that it always pays to double rather than compete if they are not making their contract.

Vulnerable against not

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Vulnerable against not
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-200/-500x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	-100/-200x			gains if not doubled
		You compete at the three-level	-200/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
	You are making nine tricks			7	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
	You are making ten tricks			6	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the three-level	-300/-800x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-200/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			8	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			7	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-150/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M420/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-400/-1100x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the four-level	-300/-800x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			8	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			double
	You are making nine tricks			7	-150/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-200/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			double

You will usually though not invariable gain by competing at the two-level, and you will almost always lose by competing at the three-level.

Note in particular that if you are making ten tricks you should bid your major-suit game rather than double unless your opponents compete to the four-level in which case a double will reap greater dividends.

Both sides vulnerable

Sixteen total tricks			You score	They are making	They score	Both sides vulnerable
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-200/-500x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	-100/-200x			gains if not doubled
		You compete at the three-level	-200/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
	You are making nine tricks			7	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			double if you dare
	You are making ten tricks			6	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the three-level	-300/-800x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-200/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			8	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			7	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			double
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making six tricks			10	M620/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-400/-1100x			loses
	You are making seven tricks			9	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the four-level	-300/-800x			double if you dare
	You are making eight tricks			8	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			double
	You are making nine tricks			7	-300/-800x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			double
	You are making ten tricks			6	-400/-1100x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			double

The main difference now that your opponents are again vulnerable is that if you are making ten tricks you should double whenever your opponents bid to the three-level or higher.

Seventeen total tricks

Usually you will have a nine-card fit, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary you will assume that your opponents have an eight-card fit.

If you have only an eight-card fit then you will only assume a nine-card fit for your opponents if there is evidence to suggest that this is the case.

Neither side vulnerable

Seventeen total tricks					Neither side vulnerable
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making seven tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
	You are making nine tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
	You are making ten tricks			7	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making seven tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled
	You are making eight tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
	You are making nine tricks			8	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
	You are making ten tricks			7	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making seven tricks			10	M420/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-150/-500x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			9	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			8	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			double
	You are making ten tricks			7	-150/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double

The increase to seventeen total tricks has made a significant difference.

It is now usually correct to compete to the three-level in this particular circumstance of neither side vulnerable. As you will usually have a nine-card fit in this scenario this is consistent with the exhortation to bid to the level of the fit, but note that you should also be competing to the three-level as a general rule if you have only an eight-card fit but you believe your opponents to have a nine-card fit.

Doubling has now become a far less attractive proposition.

If you are making a major-suit game you should now bid it rather than double except when your opponents compete to the four-level, and if you are making nine tricks it will pay you to compete at the three-level, doubling only when they compete to the four-level.

Not vulnerable against vulnerable

Seventeen total tricks					Not vulnerable against vulnerable
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making seven tricks			10	M170/m130	
		You compete at the two-level	-50/-100x			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-300x			loses if doubled

Seventeen total tricks					Not vulnerable against vulnerable
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level						
You are making eight tricks				9	M140/m110	
	You compete at the two-level		M110/m90			gains
	You compete at the three-level		-50/-100x			gains
You are making nine tricks				8	M110/m90	
	You compete at the two-level		M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks				7	-100/-200x	
	You compete at the four-level		M420/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the three-level						
You are making seven tricks				10	M170/m130	
	You compete at the three-level		-100/-300x			loses if doubled
You are making eight tricks				9	M140/m110	
	You compete at the three-level		-50/-100x			gains
You are making nine tricks				8	-100/-200x	
	You compete at the three-level		M140/m110			double if you dare
You are making ten tricks				7	-200/-500x	
	You compete at the four-level		M420/m130			double
Opponents bid to the four-level						
You are making seven tricks				10	M620/m130	
	You compete at the four-level		-150/-500x			gains against a major
You are making eight tricks				9	-100/-200x	
	You compete at the four-level		-100/-300x			double if you dare
You are making nine tricks				8	-200/-500x	
	You compete at the four-level		-50/-100x			double
You are making ten tricks				7	-300/-800x	
	You compete at the four-level		M420/m130			double

Now that your opponents are vulnerable doubling becomes a far more attractive proposition, but it only gains if your opponents start bidding to a high level.
You should still bid your major-suit game rather than compete at the two-level.
Apart from this, competing at the two-level always pays and competing at the three-level usually pays.
Doubling for penalties only pays if you are making nine or more tricks and your opponents have bid to the three-level or higher, or if you are making ten tricks in a minor and your opponents have bid to the two-level.

Vulnerable against not

Seventeen total tricks					Vulnerable against not
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level						
You are making eight tricks				9	M140/m110	
	You compete at the two-level		M110/m90			gains
	You compete at the three-level		-100/-200x			loses if doubled
You are making nine tricks				8	M110/m90	
	You compete at the two-level		M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks				7	-50/-100x	
	You compete at the four-level		M620/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the three-level						
You are making seven tricks				10	M170/m130	
	You compete at the three-level		-200/-500x			loses
You are making eight tricks				9	M140/m110	
	You compete at the three-level		-100/-200x			loses if doubled

Seventeen total tricks					Vulnerable against not
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making nine tricks			8	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
	You are making ten tricks			7	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making seven tricks			10	M420/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-300/-800x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			9	-50/-100x	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			8	-100/-300x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			double
	You are making ten tricks			7	-150/500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor

This time bidding your vulnerable major-suit game is far more attractive, and is always the best option if making.
Competing at the three-level is in general a poor option unless you expect to make.
This is consistent with the rule-of-thumb that you should compete to one less than the level of the fit if vulnerable.

Both sides vulnerable

Seventeen total tricks					Both sides vulnerable
			You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level						
	You are making eight tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
	You are making nine tricks			8	M110/m90	
		You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
	You are making ten tricks			7	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the three-level						
	You are making eight tricks			9	M140/m110	
		You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
		You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
	You are making nine tricks			8	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			double if you dare
	You are making ten tricks			7	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the four-level						
	You are making seven tricks			10	M620/m130	
		You compete at the four-level	-300/-800x			loses
	You are making eight tricks			9	-100/-200x	
		You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			double if you dare
	You are making nine tricks			8	-200/-500x	
		You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			double
	You are making ten tricks			7	-300/800x	
		You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			double

The conclusions are almost the same.

In general you should bid your major-suit game if it is making when vulnerable - but there is now an exception. If your opponents are vulnerable and bid to the four-level then a double will repay you, whenever you are making nine or ten tricks, within the context of seventeen total tricks

Eighteen total tricks

This is a particularly common and important situation when aggressive competitive bidding is evident.
In general it will occur when each partnership has a nine-card trump fit, but we are entering the world of more shapely hands.
it will not be uncommon to find the situation in which one pair has a ten-card fit and their opponents an eight-card fit, and there will also be those situations in which there are only sixteen or seventeen total trumps combined with a fait to good second-suit fit.

Neither side vulnerable

Eighteen total tricks				Neither side vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	M110/m90	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	-50/-100x	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M420/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains against a major
You are making nine tricks		9	-50/-100x	
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			double if you dare
You are making ten tricks		8	-100/-300x	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			bid a major, double a minor

That eighteenth trick has made a tremendous difference.
Double now hardly appears in the table, and even competing at the four-level will gain if you are making exactly eight tricks and your opponents have a game available.
Note in particular that it now pays to bid even a non-vulnerable major-suit game if you believe it to be making.

Not vulnerable against vulnerable

Eighteen total tricks				Not vulnerable against vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	M110/m90	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains

Eighteen total tricks				Not vulnerable against vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	-100/-200x	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M620/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains against a major
You are making nine tricks		9	-100/-200x	
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			double if you dare
You are making ten tricks		8	-200/-500x	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			double

With your opponents vulnerable the double reappears, but only if you are making nine or ten tricks and your opponents have bid to the four-level, or they have bid to the three-level and you are making ten tricks in a minor.

Vulnerable against not

Eighteen total tricks				Vulnerable against not
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	M110/m90	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	-50/-100x	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M420/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			loses if doubled
You are making nine tricks		9	-50/-100x	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			double if you dare
You are making ten tricks		8	-100/-300x	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor

Not surprisingly you must bid your major suit game if it is making.
It always pays to compete at the two-level, but competition at the three-level will only pay off if you are making nine or more tricks.
Double will only gain if you are making nine or ten tricks, your opponents bid to the four-level, and you do not have a game available.

Both sides vulnerable

Eighteen total tricks				Both sides vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the two-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the two-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	M110/m90	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the two-level	M110/m90			gains
You compete at the three-level	-100/-200x			loses if doubled
You are making nine tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You are making ten tricks		8	-100/-200x	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		10	M620/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			gains opposite a major
You are making nine tricks		9	-100/-200x	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			double if you dare
You are making ten tricks		8	-200/-500x	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			bid a major, double with a minor

The most significant change is that you should now compete if you are making eight tricks and your opponents bid a major-suit game.

Summary

In general it will pay to compete at the two-level, but be reticent if you are only making six or so tricks and you are vulnerable on deals in this competitive range.
In general it will be better to compete at the three-level rather than pass if you are not vulnerable and making eight or more tricks, but in some cases a double will be better.
In general you should bid your major suit game if it is making, except when there are sixteen total tricks and your opponents bid to the three-level vulnerable or the four-level non-vulnerable, or there are seventeen total tricks and your opponents bid to the four-level vulnerable. In these situations a double will earn you more.
It is less compelling to bid your non-vulnerable game. Certainly it will usually pay to double your opponents if they compete as high as the three-level vulnerable and there are only sixteen or seventeen total tricks.
Double is now almost unknown below the four-level, particularly if your opponents are not vulnerable.

Game-swing deals

I am referring to deals with nineteen or more total tricks.
As a general rule either you or your opponents, and quite possibly both, will have a game available. Whether you pass, double, or bid on will frequently swing a lot of points, particularly in the teams context.

Although these situations will usually arise when at least one pair has a ten-card fit we are now entering the area where double-fits can be tremendously influential. Certainly two nine-card fits with significant fits in a second suit can easily lead to there being as many as twenty one total tricks on the deal.

I shall not include quite such a comprehensive set of tables in this section. The general gist will become clear quite rapidly.

Nineteen total tricks

If you have a ten-card fit your opponents will usually have at least a nine-card fit available.
If you have a nine-card fit your opponents will frequently have a nine-card fit, but ten-card is far from impossible.
It will be relatively rare, but by no means unknown for you to have less than a nine-card fit for this to apply.

Neither side vulnerable

Nineteen total tricks				Neither side vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		11	M450/m400	
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains
You are making nine tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains
You are making ten tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			usually gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		11	M450/m400	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains
You are making nine tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		9	-50/-100x	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major

What a difference.
Now it nearly always pays to compete at the five-level if your opponents have a making game.

Not vulnerable against vulnerable

Nineteen total tricks				Not vulnerable against vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		11	M650/m600	
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains
You are making nine tricks		10	M620/m130	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains

Nineteen total tricks				Not vulnerable against vulnerable
	You score	**They are making**	**They score**	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making ten tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			usually gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		11	M650/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major
You compete at the five-level	-150/-500x			gains opposite a major
You are making nine tricks		10	M620/m130	
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		9	-100/-200x	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		10	-100/-200x	
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			double

Even more so, you can afford to go three down against a making game, so compete to the four-level if you are making seven tricks and to the five-level if you are making eight or nine tricks.

Notice in particular that the double has almost totally disappeared from these tables. Only consider it if you are making nine or more tricks and your opponents have bid to the five-level.

Vulnerable against not

Nineteen total tricks				Vulnerable against not
	You score	**They are making**	**They score**	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making nine tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			loses
You are making ten tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			usually gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		11	M450/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			loses
You are making nine tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		9	-50/-100x	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			double if you dare
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		10	-50/-100x	
You compete at the five-level	-200/-500x			double if you dare

As you will expect by now you have to be far more circumspect.
You must bid your vulnerable game if you expect to make it, but you should not calculate to go more than one down against their non-vulnerable game - you will be doubled at this level.
Note that in general it will not pay to compete once your opponents have bid to the five-level.

Both sides vulnerable

Nineteen total tricks				Both sides vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making nine tricks		10	M170/m130	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			loses
You are making ten tricks		9	M140/m110	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			usually gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		11	M650/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-200/-500x			loses
You are making nine tricks		10	M620/m130	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		9	-100/-200x	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains with a major, double a minor if you dare
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			double if you dare
You are making eleven tricks		8	-200/-500x	
You compete at the five-level	M650/m600			gains
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		10	-100/-200x	
You compete at the five-level	-200/-500x			double if you dare

As expected, you must bid your vulnerable games if they are making. The only exception is when you are making eleven tricks and your opponents compete to the five-level. In this specific situation a penalty double will show a healthy profit.

If you are not making eleven tricks it will not pay to compete at the five-level. If you are making nine or ten tricks you should consider doubling your opponents bid at the four-level whenever you do not have a making game-bid available.

Twenty total tricks

We are now moving seriously into 'big hand' territory. Only if each side is basing its bid on a minor suit fit will we be in a situation where there might not be a game available to one side or the other, and more often than not one pair at least will have at least some hopes of a slam.

In principle we have something like a ten-card fit each way, but the exceptions are now becoming increasingly important. This situation will frequently arise with two nine-card fits and a significant double-fit.

Neither side vulnerable

Twenty total tricks				Neither side vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the three-level				
You are making eight tricks		12	M230/m170	
You compete at the three-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			loses
You are making nine tricks		11	M200/m150	
You compete at the three-level	M140/m110			gains
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains
You are making ten tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
You compete at the five-level	-50/-100x			gains
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making eight tricks		12	M480/m170	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major
You compete at the five-level	-150/-500x			loses

Twenty total tricks				Neither side vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M450/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
You compete at the five-level	-50/-100x			gains
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M450/m400	
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains
You compete at the six-level	-150/-500x			loses
You are making ten tricks		10	-50/-100x	
You compete at the five-level	-50/-100x			loses
You are making twelve tricks		8	-150/-500x	
You compete at the six-level	M980/m920			gains
Opponents bid to the six-level				
You are making twelve tricks		8	-200/-800x	
You compete at the six-level	M980/m920			gains
Opponents bid to the seven-level				
You are making thirteen tricks		7	-250/-1100x	
You compete at the seven-level	M1510/m1440			gains

For the first time I have incorporated competition at slam-level into the table.

Only when you are making exactly nine tricks will it pay you to contest their game bid at the five-level.

If you are making a slam it always pays to bid the slam rather than take the penalty, but you must bid the grand if it is available.

Not vulnerable against vulnerable

Twenty total tricks				Not vulnerable against vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M650/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-50/-100x			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		10	M620/m130	
You compete at the four-level	M420/m130			gains
You compete at the five-level	-50/-100x			gains
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M650/m400	
You compete at the five-level	-100/-300x			gains
You compete at the six-level	-150/-500x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		10	-100/-200x	
You compete at the five-level	-50/-100x			loses
You are making eleven tricks		9	-200/-500x	
You compete at the five-level	M450/m400			double
You are making twelve tricks		8	-300/-800x	
You compete at the six-level	M980/m920			gains
Opponents bid to the six-level				
You are making twelve tricks		8	-400/-1100x	
You compete at the six-level	M980/m920			double
Opponents bid to the seven-level				
You are making thirteen tricks		7	-600/-1700x	
You compete at the seven-level	M1510/m1440			double

The interesting entries in this table are all in relation to the penalty double.
If you are making eleven tricks and your opponents compete to the five-level then you should double.
Similarly, if you are making twelve tricks and your opponents compete to the six-level then the double will pay better than bidding and making the slam, and even doubling at the seven-level scores better than bidding and making the grand slam.

Vulnerable against not

Twenty total tricks	You score	They are making	They score	Vulnerable against not
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M450/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			gains opposite a major
You compete at the five-level	-200/-500x			loses
You are making ten tricks		10	M420/m130	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-200x			gains opposite a major
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M450/m400	
You compete at the five-level	-200/-500x			loses
You are making ten tricks		10	-50/-100x	
You compete at the five-level	-100/-200x			loses
You are making eleven tricks		9	-100/-300x	
You compete at the five-level	M650/m600			gains
You are making twelve tricks		8	-150/-500x	
You compete at the six-level	M1430/m1370			gains
Opponents bid to the six-level				
You are making twelve tricks		8	-200/-800x	
You compete at the six-level	M1430/m1370			gains
Opponents bid to the seven-level				
You are making thirteen tricks		7	-300/-1400x	
You compete at the seven-level	M2210/m2140			gains

Not surprisingly, with this many tricks available and non-vulnerable opponents the penalty double has disappeared from the scene. Competing when you are not making your contract will pay only if you can hold it to one off against your opponents' making game.

Both sides vulnerable

Twenty total tricks	You score	They are making	They score	Both sides vulnerable
Opponents bid to the four-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M650/m150	
You compete at the four-level	-100/-200x			gains opposite a major
You compete at the five-level	-200/-500x			gains opposite a major
You are making ten tricks		10	M620/m130	
You compete at the four-level	M620/m130			gains
You compete at the five-level	-100/-200x			gains opposite a major
Opponents bid to the five-level				
You are making nine tricks		11	M650/m600	
You compete at the five-level	-200/-500x			gains
You are making ten tricks		10	-100/-200x	
You compete at the five-level	-100/-200x			loses
You are making eleven tricks		9	-200/-500x	
You compete at the five-level	M650/m600			gains
You are making twelve tricks		8	-300/-800x	
You compete at the six-level	M1430/m1370			gains

Twenty total tricks				Both sides vulnerable
	You score	They are making	They score	
Opponents bid to the six-level				
You are making twelve tricks		8	-400/-1100x	
You compete at the six-level	M1430/m1370			gains
Opponents bid to the seven-level				
You are making thirteen tricks		7	-500/-1400x	
You compete at the seven-level	M2210/m2140			gains

Once again you must bid your making contracts, but you can now afford to sacrifice to go two light if your opponents are making game or better.

More than twenty total tricks

Clearly I could continue these tables up to twenty six total tricks.
There seems to be little point. The conclusions are becoming clear. At this level of competition the 'law' begins to lose some validity as the available contracts depend much more on whether or not particular cards are scoring in attack or in defence.

May I remind you that my broad conclusions from the information to be found in these table constitutes the essence of chapter 3 - 'analysing your actions'.