

LEARN TO PASS

By Larry Matheny

We all love to bid and duplicate bridge is certainly a bidder's game. So why am I talking about the green Pass card? Because I have received several questions and seen many disasters that involved situations where pass was the solution. To review some of these problems, I have divided them into three groups. The first category is a result of players thinking that once they enter the auction, they have the right to continue bidding regardless of the strength of their hand.

GET IN AND GET OUT

A simple rule to follow is that if you are not forced to bid again, if you don't pass you are showing extra values in either high card strength, distribution, or both. For example:

♠Q87 ♥K4 ♦KJ93 ♣KJ85

YOU	OPP	PARD	OPP
1♦	P	1♥	1♠
??			

You have a minimum hand, no support for partner, and flat distribution. While a pass seems obvious, some players rebid 2♣. The partners of these aggressive bidders should expect something extra and it isn't there. So, when this next hand comes up:

♠AQ ♥8 ♦KQ983 ♣KJ1065

and again they rebid 2♣ their partner will not know which hand is being bid.

Here is another hand to consider:

♠KJ2 ♥AJ7532 ♦J2 ♣Q5

YOU	OPP	PARD	OPP
1♥	1♠	P	2♣
?			

You liked your hand when you opened but since then your spade honors are very likely in the wrong position and the club queen is likely worthless. Your 12-point hand has turned into a lot less, yet some feel they need to rebid a 6-card heart suit. It should be clear your partner is broke, so don't give the opponents a target to double...Get Out!

Here is a common bidding sequence:

♠A63 ♥Q4 ♦J932 ♣Q1065

PARD	OPP	YOU	OPP
1♠	P	2♠	P
P	DBL	P	3♥
P	P	?	

You raised your partner and have nothing more to say. You don't have a fourth spade to compete to the 3-level, your heart queen is likely worthless on offense, and you don't have the defensive tricks to double. It is time to pass. It is amazing how many players will not give up in these auctions.

Here's another one with no one vulnerable:

♠KJ9 ♥A74 ♦KJ2 ♣AJ86

YOU	OPP	PARD	OPP
1NT	2♥	P	P
?			

You have described your hand and unless you are playing negative doubles here, it is time to pass. Partner is the captain and it is up to him to act. Get out!

BID IN TEMPO

The second category of problems occurs when players hold values but no realistic bid and again, they just won't pass. Or, even worse, they finally pass after a long hesitation. Let's look at an example that occurs frequently.

♠K107 ♥94 ♦KJ9 ♣AQ1097

You are ready to enter the auction when your right hand opponent opens 1♣. Since you not strong enough to bid 1NT and you certainly can't make a takeout double with only two hearts, you must pass. It is important that you do this without pondering a long time telling everyone that you have a club suit. Besides giving valuable information to your opponents, you may put your partner in an ethical dilemma. Rather than feel bad about this, be happy your opponent may be getting into trouble instead of you.

But all is not lost; here's one that shows the Pass card can be used to obtain a big return.

♠AQ2 ♥94 ♦KJ8 ♣KJ983

PARD	OPP	YOU	OPP
1♥	2♣	?	

With everyone vulnerable in a pairs game, your partner opens 1♥. You are considering your response when your right-hand opponent overcalls 2♣. You see a huge number will be possible if you can defend this hand doubled. Again, it is important that you pass in tempo. If you go into the tank before finding the Pass card, you place your partner in an ethical predicament. An important component of the Negative Double convention is that opener cannot pass in this auction unless he has length in the suit overcalled.

After recording +1100 in your score card for that hand, you pick up this one with no one vulnerable:

♠KQ2 ♥J5 ♦K87 ♣A9872

Your right-hand opponent is at it again this time opening 3♦. While you have the values to bid at the one-level, you are stuck here. Even if your hand was stronger, you can't make a takeout double with two small hearts and you certainly don't want to introduce that club suit at the 4-level. Again, you must pass in tempo. Hopefully your partner can balance but won't if you hesitate before finding the Pass card.

This is perhaps a good place to explain tempo when it comes to preemptive bidding. The rule is to hesitate around 8-10 seconds after your right-hand opponent has made **any** jump bid. This last hand shows you why. You have the strength for an opening bid but at the 3-level, you should pass. This forced pause gives you time to consider your action. It is also important to understand that a fast bid delivers as much information as a slow pass.

BID BECAUSE YOU SHOULD, NOT BECAUSE YOU CAN

The last type of problem hands is particularly difficult for newer players. There are so many times when your hand qualifies for a bid, but the auction should convince you otherwise. This hand is a classic example:

♠6 ♥KQ1063 ♦54 ♣AQ1076

OPP	PARD	OPP	YOU
1♠	P	2♦	?

It seems tempting to double to show both suits but let's examine the bidding up to now. Your left-hand opponent has opened, your partner has passed, and your right-hand opponent has made a 2/1 call. That doesn't leave much for your partner, does it? In fact, if you enter the auction you may be lucky to not go for a huge number or, at the very least, tell your opponents how to play the hand. They will play you for most of the missing high cards and will also be aware you are probably short in their suits and will finesse accordingly. Yes, you can bid, but you should grab the Pass card instead.

Here is a similar problem with no one vulnerable:

♠62 ♥KJ9863 ♦A54 ♣76

OPP	PARD	OPP	YOU
1♠	P	2♣	?

A 2♥ overcall might be OK for lead directing purposes, but you may go for a big number and a diamond lead might be better. Remember, your partner figures to be broke. In addition, if you are silent and your left-hand opponent has a minimum hand with only a 5-card suit, all he can do is rebid spades or perhaps 2NT. Your overcall would give him the option to pass to show his hand. The bottom line is that you gain little and risk a lot. Use the Pass card.

Let's face it - the average bridge player bids a lot. Unfortunately, this tendency is seldom tempered when confronted with adverse vulnerability or poor suit quality. The more experienced players who have been burned by opponents eager to double are more cautious.

Look at this hand in the South position vulnerable in a team game:

♠QJ10 ♥K5 ♦AJ1092 ♣987

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
P	P	1♠	?

Some would not hesitate to overcall with this hand but in a bidding quiz, all but one of seventeen experts chose to pass. In fact, they were adamant. Here are some of their comments:

“It would not occur to me to bid.”

“Bidding 2♦ is dangerous.”

“I try not to overcall at the two-level with a five-card suit.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“Pass and more pass.”

“There is no compelling reason to bid immediately.”

Here’s a very interesting problem.

♠KJ ♥AQ105 ♦A932 ♣987

OPP	YOU	OPP	PARD
4♥	?		

Even if this is money bridge, before you double and plan your next cruise, it is important to recall what agreement is on the back side of your convention card under **VS OPENING PREEMPTS DOUBLE IS**. Most play takeout doubles through 4♥ or 4♠. Unless you have a lower contract as your cutoff, a double would be for takeout. Are you really prepared for your partner’s reaction when he bids 4♠ and you place this dummy on the table? Instead you should pass in tempo and hope your partner can reopen with a double.

I will close with a list of the reasons to enter a live auction:

1. To buy the contract.
2. To suggest a lead.
3. To impede the opponents.
4. To suggest a sacrifice.

With a hand that doesn’t achieve one of these goals, use the Green Card.