

The Double of 1NT and how to get out of it

What do we need to double?

To double a 1NT opening bid we need to have more points than the 1NT bidder.

The double of 1NT is intended as primarily a **penalty** double and partner is usually expected to leave it and not take-out.

Most people on a Wed morning play a 1NT bid that is 12-14.

To double it therefore we should have at least a good 15 points (and preferably more).

Ideally we should have a decent suit to lead against the 1NT.

(If we are sitting under the 1NT bidder, ie in the 4th seat, we probably need even more points)

Most people who double 1NT are sitting behind the bidder and we need a good balanced hand of at least 15+ points with a good lead available to them.

You must not double 1NT with 12-14 points sitting behind the bidder because they have "taken your bid away". This is simply not strong enough.

If the 1NT bidder is playing stronger than 12-14 you need even more strength to double them.

Hands that you should think about:

♠ K J 4

♥ Q T 4

♦ A Q J T 7

♣ K 5

Double. You have 16 points and a good diamond suit to lead

♠ K J 4

♥ Q T 4

♦ A J T 7

♣ K 5 3

Pass. You were going to open 1NT 12-14 yourself. Not strong enough to double

♠ K J 4

♥ A Q 4

♦ K J 7

♣ Q J T 8

Double. You have 17 points and a good club suit to lead

♠ A 8 4

♥ A 6

♦ 9 7

♣ K Q J T 8 4

Double. Here you only have 14 points, but if you lead the King of clubs you will set up 5 clubs and two Aces for at least one off. Declarer can make at most five diamonds and the Ace of clubs before letting you in.

♠ A J 4

♥ Q T 3

♦ K J 5

♣ Q J 7 4

Pass. You were going to open 1NT 12-14 yourself. Not strong enough to double

♠ K Q J 9 8 7 4

♥ A Q J

♦ 5

♣ K Q

Do not double. If you lead the King of spades you will set up 6 spade tricks and the Ace of hearts for one off (with a strong chance of a club trick). However declarer may have five top diamonds and two Aces to make his contract. The correct bid here is 4♠, hoping that partner has a useful card or two.

What should openers partner do if 1NT is doubled?

Whenever the respective merits of the weak no trump and the strong no trump are discussed, the one real weakness of the 12-14 point 1NT opening bid is bound to be raised: sometimes it is doubled and the penalty can be severe.

Regular partnerships may wish to consider a way of escaping from this - there are several variations on a theme, but the attempt to escape is generally known as a "wriggle".

The idea is simple: rather than stay in 1NT doubled and concede a large penalty, you try to escape to an alternative contract. You hope that this will be better - or maybe the opponents might bid something, letting you off the hook.

The advantage of running are two-fold:

- You may be able to escape to a contract which either makes or only fails by a trick or so, giving the opponents an insufficient penalty
- They may not be able to extract a penalty from whatever you run to, either because they are unsure that they are in a position to penalise the new contract or because they have not discussed what doubles (and other bids) mean after you start running

A moving target is more difficult to hit!

Consideration should be given to the vulnerability when 1NT is doubled. Suppose you are doubled in 1NT and you are not vulnerable and the opponents are vulnerable. Suppose you go three off, making just four tricks. Not vulnerable this will cost you 500. **BUT** your opponents have made nine tricks in NT and probably could make 3NT. If they are vulnerable this would score 600, so going off is a better score from your point of view.

If the partner has a decent hand, say 8 or more points, then he can afford to leave the double of 1NT as it is likely to make.

If however the partner of the 1NT bidder is weak he wants to take out the double.

There are many possible methods to play but a simple one is to play **Exit Transfers**

This means that every bid made is a transfer, and the 1NT bidder is expected to transfer into the next suit up.

So: over 1NT - Double

Redouble	Is a transfer to clubs
2♠	Is a transfer to diamonds
2♦	Is a transfer to hearts
2♥	Is a transfer to spades

The advantage of playing transfers like this is that the better hand is concealed and the lead must come up to the better hand.

Different people play different methods. Do agree with your partner what you are playing.

♠ A 9 8 7 4 2

♥ 9 2

♦ 5 3 2

♣ 7 6

With this hand bid 2♥ which is a transfer to 2♠

♠ 7 4 2

♥ 9 7 6 3

♦ 5

♣ Q 8 7 6 2

With this hand redouble, which is a transfer to 2♣

♠ K T 6

♥ 9 7 3

♦ Q 8 5

♣ Q J 8 6

With this hand pass - you hope 1NT will make

♠ Q 7 4 2

♥ 9 7 6

♦ Q 7 6 5

♣ 7 6

This one is more difficult. 1NT will probably go off and so it is probably best to bid 2♠ (transfer to diamonds). The opponents may find it more difficult to double then. (You may be unlucky and this contract is worse than 1NTX)

♠ 9 8 4

♥ 9 7 6 3 2

♦ 5

♣ 7 6 3 2

With this hand you must bid 2♦ (transfer to hearts). Two hearts will probably go 2 or three off, but the opponents may not be able to double you and it will not be as bad as 1NTX. Partner will not thank you if you pass.

What should the doubler's partner bid if there is a pass from 1NT bidder's partner?

The opposition open 1NT and your partner doubles. Your other opponent passes. What do you do after: 1NT - double - pass - ?

The double of 1NT is primarily for penalties. Your partner will have at least a good 15 points balanced, and possibly more and he expects 1NTX to go off.

If you can leave the double in (by passing) it is usually best to do so.

If you have at least five points then your side has the majority of the points and the strong hand is sat behind the 1NT bidder. Even if you have less than five points partner may be able to take 1NT off on his own.

If you do decide to take the double out it will be because you have a very weak hand and a suit to bid. Your bid will be effectively a "weak take-out"

♠ J 8 4

♥ 9 7 6 3

♦ 8 5 3 2

♣ 7 2

Pass and hope! You don't like it, but if you bid your side may well be doubled and concede a large penalty. Maybe partner can beat 1NT doubled in his own hand. If it makes, too bad!

♠ 8 4

♥ Q 9 7 6 4 3

♦ 2

♣ 9 8 7 2

Bid 2♥. The enemy contract may well make, but facing 16+ points your heart contract is quite likely to make too. Even if partner has little support (and he may not be balanced) this is better than defending 1NT doubled.

♠ K Q J 9 8 7 4

♥ 6 3

♦ 9 2

♣ T 7

Bid 4♠. Partner is not about to lead a spade, and declarer may make too many tricks to give your side a worthwhile penalty. Remember that partner has at least a good 15 points balanced. You are very likely to make your contract - partner may even bid on.

One final thing to note: after a double of an opponent's 1NT opening bid, if they then bid a suit (as a rescue) a double is for penalties, else they may escape their fate.

West	North	East	South
1NT	double	2♦	?

South holds

♠ J 4

♥ K 7 4 3

♦ A J 6 2

♣ 8 7 5

If the 2♦ bid is natural then you can double for penalties. If it is an exit transfer, you can double, showing diamonds, but also implying a want to double their contract. If 2♥ is bid you can double it for penalties. Your hand does not look very good, but remember that partner has 16+ points. You have a useful diamond holding and enough values to suggest that the enemy are in trouble. Don't let them off the hook.