

## Defensive Bidding against 1NT

When the opponents open 1NT, what do we need to overcall against them?

First of all, it depends on the strength of their 1NT. This will be announced to you. Many British players play that an opening bid of 1NT shows 12-14 points, but you may find other people playing a different strength (eg 10-12 or 14-16 or 15-17).

Let us assume they are playing 1NT as 12-14 points. If their bid is stronger, then your overcall will have to be stronger too. If their bid is weaker, then your overcall does not need to be quite as good.

### Simple Suit Overcall

Generally, it is best to apply the suit quality test, which we have already covered, to check the suit in which you are going to overcall is as strong as the level of number of tricks for which you are going to bid. In other words, if you are going to overcall at the two level, then your suit needs to have a suit quality of at least 8.

Eg

♥ K Q T 7 3 which has a suit quality of 8 (5 + 3)

♠ A Q 8 7 4 2 which has a suit quality of 8 (6 + 2)

♥ K Q J 6 5 3 which has a suit quality of 9 (6 + 3)

♦ A J T 8 7 4 which has a suit quality of 9 (6 + 3)

However, because the opponents have announced their strength in a balanced hand, you also need to ensure that you have a reasonable hand alongside this suit (so that it is not too easy for your other opponent to double your bid for penalties). So you also need a reasonable number of points, and I would suggest that you have a good 11 points up to about a 15 count to overcall. In other words, about the same strength as the opening bid. Of course, if the 1NT is stronger, your overcall needs to be stronger too.

So, these are example hands which you could typically overcall an opponent's 1NT

♠ K 7

♥ A Q 8 7 4 2

♦ K 5 2

♣ 8 3

This hand has 12 points and a suit quality of 8 (6 + 2) so you can overcall 2♥

♠ K T 8 7 4 3

♥ A J 5

♦ 4

♣ K Q 3

This hand has 13 points and a suit quality of 8 (6 + 2) so you can overcall 2♠

♠ A

♥ K J 4 3

♦ A J T 5 2

♣ Q 5 4

This hand has 15 points and a suit quality of 8 (5 + 3) so you can overcall 2♦

However, I would not overcall (ie I would pass) on these hands

♠ Q 7 4

♥ A Q T 7 4 2

♦ 8 5

♣ 7 3

This hand has 8 points and a suit quality of 9 (6 + 3). You could overcall, particularly to give partner some idea of what to lead, but the hand is a little weak, and you may end up with problems.

♠ K Q 7 6 4

♥ A Q 3

♦ 9 5

♣ J 6 2

This hand has 12 points and a suit quality of 7 (5 + 2). I would not overcall as the suit is not really good enough.

♠ Q J 6

♥ 4

♦ K T 8 7 6 3

♣ K Q 5

This hand has 11 points and a suit quality of 8 (6 + 2) so you could overcall 2♦. However, the suit is not that good, and you have the minimum strength required. A very difficult decision. If the suit were spades, rather than diamonds I might be more inclined to overcall (as it has some pre-emptive value). I might also look at the vulnerability on the board. If it is favourable, then possibly overcall, if it is not favourable, then probably don't.

### When to Double

In general, if you double a suit bid, then it is for takeout. Your double implies strength and tends to imply the unbid suits, particularly the other major if you are doubling a major suit bid. You are expecting partner to respond to your double by bidding his best suit (or possibly making a penalty pass if his hand is fair with good trumps)

If you double a NT bid, it is a penalty double (in principle) and you are expecting partner to pass, and the contract to fail by a trick or two (or more!)

So, to double 1NT you need a stronger hand than the 1NT bidder, and ideally it should be reasonably balanced. Sometimes you have to use judgement if your hand is very unbalanced, but, usually with a good 15 points or more, then double for penalties. That, of course, applies to a 12-14 1NT. If they are playing, say, a 15-17 1NT, then you are going to need more points to double, say at least a good 18 or more.

Also, if you double their 1NT, you will be on lead. Do you have a good suit to lead?

I would double a 1NT (12-14) bid, rather than overcall, with these hands:

♠ K Q T 6 4

♥ A Q J

♦ 9 5

♣ K J 6

Here you have 16 points and a good lead against 1NT doubled, in the ♠K

♠ T 3 2

♥ Q J 7 6

♦ A K 6

♣ A Q J

Here you have 17 points. Double, and if it is left in, lead the ♥6

♠ A 3

♥ J 5 4

♦ K Q J T 6 3

♣ A 6

Here you have 15 points and a good lead against 1NT doubled, in the ♦K. You are almost certain to make 5 diamond tricks and two black Aces to get the contract off.

### How should your partner respond to the double?

The double is, in principle, for penalties, and partner with four or more points will know that your side has the majority of the points, with the strength behind the 1NT bidder, and should therefore pass.

If he has less than 4 points, particularly if then contract is redoubled, then he might make a weakness takeout into his longest suit.

So, if partner holds:

♠ K 4 3

♥ Q 3 2

♦ 9 8 7 5

♣ T 6 4

Here you have 5 points, so you should pass, knowing your side has the majority, and expect 1NT to fail.

♠ 4

♥ K 9 7 3

♦ Q 9 6 5 4

♣ K 4 2

Here you have 8 points, so you should pass, knowing your side has the majority, and expect 1NT to fail quite badly.

♠ 4 3

♥ J 3 2

♦ 9 8 7 5 2

♣ J 6 4

Here you have only 2 points, so although partner may be able to get 1NT off on his own, it is probably better to do a weakness takeout and bid 2♦, showing partner how you're your hand is.

## Conventional Defence to 1NT

There are various conventional defensive methods to use when 1NT is bid on your right.

These may be:

• Natural • Cappelletti • Ambra • Aptro • Astro • Pin-point Astro • Landy

(Wikipedia lists ca 65 options)

If opponents are playing something conventional against you, they will alert. If you wish to know what the bid means you are entitled to ask (don't ask if you have no intention of bidding). If you do ask, and they say that they are playing, say, Apstro, you are entitled to a full explanation of what their bid means. You may want to discuss with your regular partner what you are going to do if your 1NT is overcalled conventionally.

## How should you bid over their 1NT?

It is a good idea to keep things simple, and you might want to play a completely natural defence.

However, a very useful convention to use, which is very simple, and one that we would recommend, is to play Landy, showing both majors.

Using Landy:

Bids of 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ are still natural but

2♣ is conventional and shows at least 4-4 in the major suits (and 11-15 points), with usually 4-5, or even 5-5.

This also means that means 3♣ is needed to show a club suit overcall.

Requirements for a Landy 2♣:

• Opening points or equivalent (say 11+) • At least 4/4 in the majors • It is important that the two suits are strong (most of your HCPs there)

Eg Suppose your RHO opens 1NT (12-14) and you hold:

♠ K J 9 5

♥ K Q J 6

♦ A 7

♣ T 6 4

You are not strong enough to double, and you do not have a 5-card suit to overcall. If you were not playing Landy then you would have to pass this hand. However, playing Landy, you can bid 2♣.

Another good hand for Landy might be:

♠ A Q 7 4  
 ♥ K J T 5 4  
 ♦ K 3  
 ♣ 8 2

Here it is better to bid 2♣ (conventional) than just overcalling 2♥, because you might end up in a 5-1 heart fit, rather than a 4-4 spade fit.

**How should Partner respond?**

Suppose the auction goes:

E	S	W	N
1NT	2♣(Landy)	Pass	?

What should North bid?

With a four-card major (or more) and 0-9 points, then North can bid his major, safe in the knowledge that the partnership are in (at least) a 4-4 major fit.

Eg with

♠ 9 7  
 ♥ A Q 6 3  
 ♦ J 6 5  
 ♣ T 6 4 2

You can bid 2♥, and hopefully play there.

With a four-card major (or more) and 10-12 points, then North can invite game in his major, by bidding it at the three level.

Eg with

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

You can bid 3♥, and invite partner to bid the heart game if he is maximum.

If North is 3-1 in the majors, then it is usually best to bid the three card suit, which may end up in you playing in a 4-3 fit. Not good, but at least you may be able to do some ruffing of partners other major.

Eg with

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

Here you can bid 2♠, and if you have to play in a 4-3 fit, at least your hand may be able to ruff partner's hearts.

If North is 3/3 or 3/2 in the majors you want to find the better fit. Ideally 5-3 but possibly 5-2, the latter safer than playing a dangerous 4-3 fit (might lose trump control). In this case North should bid 2♦, conventionally, to ask if partner has a 5 card suit. Partner will reply 2♠ with 5 spades or 2♥ with 5 hearts or 4/4 (or 5/5).

So if North has:

♠ J 5 4  
♥ Q 9 8  
♦ 8 6 5 4 2  
♣ A 4

he can bid 2♦, conventionally to ask partner to bid his five card suit (if he has one), usually putting the partnership into a 5-3 fit.

North should not pass the 2♣ Landy bid, with the single exception that he holds a long weak club suit.

Eg if North has:

♠ 5 4  
♥ 7  
♦ Q 6 4  
♣ K T 7 6 5 3 2

then this time, it is probably best to pass the 2♣ bid.



So in summary - responding to 2♣ (Landy)

Pass = 7+ clubs, no game on

2♦ = relay - asks partner to bid his longer major

2♥/2♠ = 3+ cards in the major (0-9HCP) [ if 3 cards then short in other major ]

2NT = 11-13, no major suit interest , invitational ( usually 2/2majors, 5/4minors )

3♥/3♠ = 4+ cards in the major (10-12 points)

4♥/4♠ = 4+ cards in the major (13+ points)