

Keeping Up With Conventions

Doubles

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This series of articles looks at how to fill out the standard convention card. Previous articles in the series can be found by visiting www.AudreyGrant.com.

The left-hand, or back, side of the convention card focuses on competitive auctions. The first section covers the partnership agreement about the meaning of a double in various situations:

SPECIAL DOUBLES

After Overcall: Penalty _____
Negative thru _____
Responsive thru _____ Maximal
Support Dbl. thru _____ Redbl
Card-showing Min. Offshape T/O

This section can be confusing since a double is used in many situations ... both by the side that opens the bidding and the side that is competing. A partnership needs to discuss this section step by step.

The Penalty Double

Suppose partner opens 1♦ and the opponent on your right overcalls 1♠. ♠ A K J 9 7 3
♥ 4 2
What call do you ♦ 6 2
make with this ♣ A J 7
hand? At one time, it was common to make a penalty double in this situation. After all, you expect to defeat 1♠ by several tricks and to collect a large penalty.

In today's game, this approach is rarely used ... at least at low levels. There are two main reasons. First, the situation doesn't arise often. An opponent typically has length and strength in the overcalled suit. Even if the overcall is made with a poor

suit, it may be difficult to collect a large enough penalty to compensate for the score your side would make playing the hand. Second, a double at this point warns the opponents that they are in trouble. They may be able to find a better spot. What if the opponents run to 2♥, for example? It's often better to wait until they have nowhere to go.

With this hand, most players would pass. The auction isn't over. If the opponent on your left passes, partner may double for takeout with shortness in spades. You would pass a second time, converting the double into a penalty double.

So, double of a low level overcall can be used for takeout. It's now so uncommon for a partnership to agree that responder's double of an overcall is for penalty that you would have to indicate this by checking the box marked 'Penalty':

After Overcall: Penalty _____

Since this is in red, the double would have to be alerted by opener.

One exception is the double of a notrump overcall. This is for penalty in standard practice, so you don't need to indicate this agreement on the convention card.

The Negative Double

If the double of an overcall isn't used for penalty, it can be used for takeout. Suppose your partner opens 1♦, the next player overcalls 1♠, and this is your hand. It is more likely to be the type of hand you might hold as responder after an overcall.

You were planning to respond 1♥ but the overcall got in the way. You don't have enough strength to bid a new suit at the two level, you don't

have support for partner, and a bid of 1NT is unattractive with nothing in spades. Still, you have enough to compete for the contract and would like to send this message to partner.

Most partnerships use a double by responder to show exactly this type of hand ... enough strength to compete and support for the two unbid suits. This form of takeout double is called a *negative* (non-penalty) *double*.

If the partnership agrees to use negative doubles after an overcall, there must also be agreement on how high they apply. The standard agreement is through 2♠. This means that a double of any suit overcall up to and including 2♠ is for takeout. A double of a higher level overcall, such as 3♣, is for penalty. This would be indicated like this:

Negative thru **2S**

Since this is standard practice, negative doubles do not need to be alerted. Many partnerships prefer a higher range for negative doubles, such as through 3♠. Mark the appropriate level on the card. However, if you use negative doubles higher than 4♠, such doubles *are* alertable.

The Responsive Double

Suppose you are South and the auction begins like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Double	3♣	?

Partner has made a takeout double of 1♣, the opponent on your right has jumped to 3♣, and you have this hand:

♠ Q J 6 3
♥ Q J 7 4
♦ K 5 2
♣ 8 3

You are the advancer—partner of the takeout doubler—and have enough to compete for the contract. But which suit should you bid?

Partner could have four-card support for both hearts and spades, but there is no guarantee. Partner might have four-card support for one major but only three-card support for the other. You don't want to guess wrong and land in a 4-3 fit at the three level.

When left-hand-opponent opens, partner doubles, and right-hand opponent raises opener's suit, a double in standard methods is for penalty. However, many partnerships prefer to use the double for takeout. It is called a *responsive double* and asks for the takeout doubler's help in choosing the suit.

The partnership has to agree how high responsive doubles apply. For example, the partnership can agree to play them through 3♦:

Responsive thru 3D

Using this agreement, South's double would be for takeout in this auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Double	3♦	Double

but is for penalty in this auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Double	3♥	Double

Some partnerships also agree to use responsive doubles for takeout after an overcall. For example:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	1♠	2♦	Double

With this agreement, South's double would be for takeout, not penalty.

Note: a responsive double only applies if responder raises, or jump raises, opener's suit. If responder bids notrump or a new suit after a takeout double, the standard agreement is that a double is for penalty.

The Maximal Double

Suppose you hold ♠ A K J 6 2
this hand as South.
You open 1♠ and the
auction continues:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♠
2♥	2♠	3♥	?

Now what? With 17 high-card points plus 1 length point, you have enough to invite game. Without interference you could show interest in game by bidding 3♦, but now there's no room.

You could bid ♠ A Q J 7 5 2
3♠, but what
would you do if
you held this hand? ♣ Q 4

Now you'd like to compete to 3♠ but don't want partner thinking you are inviting game.

To distinguish between the two types of hands, some partnerships play *maximal doubles*. South would double with the first hand, showing interest in reaching game. Partner could then bid 3♠ with a minimum and jump to 4♠ with a maximum. South would bid 3♠ with the second hand, showing enough to compete for the contract, but not enough to invite game.

If you have this agreement, check the appropriate box:

Maximal

Maximal doubles only apply if there is no room to make a game try. Suppose the auctions begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♠
2♦	2♠	3♦	Double

South's double is for penalty since 3♥ is available as a game try.

Support Doubles

As South, you open ♠ 9 5
the bidding 1♦ with ♥ Q 8 3
this hand and the
auction continues:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♦
Pass	1♥	1♠	?

Should you raise to 2♥, perhaps landing in a poor 4-3 fit if responder has a weak four-card heart suit? Should you rebid 2♦, perhaps missing a 5-3 heart fit and ending in a 5-1 diamond fit? Or should you pass and let responder decide whether to compete further?

Some partnerships use a double here to specifically show three-card support for responder's suit. A raise to 2♥ would promise four-card support. A pass or a bid such as 2♦ would tend to deny three or more hearts.

This approach lets responder know how many combined hearts the partnership holds, often making it easier to decide what to bid and

how high to bid. Using a double in this situation to show three-card support is called a *support double*.

This isn't standard practice, so support doubles must be alerted. Without this agreement, South's double would be for penalty in this auction ... showing length and strength in spades.

The partnership must also decide how high this convention applies. A typical agreement is up to and including overcalls of 2♥. The partnership can also use a redouble to show three-card support ... if East doubled instead of overcalling. Using support doubles, the card would be filled like this:

Support Dbl. thru 2H Redbl

Support doubles are not for a casual partnership.

Card Showing Doubles

You are South. As ♠ K J 8 6 2
responder, what would
you do with this hand ♥ 6 4
if the auction begins: ♦ K 6
♣ K 9 7 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♦	Pass	1♠
2♥	Pass	Pass	?

With 10 high-card points, you have too much to pass 2♥, but any bid might turn out badly. Most players would double with this hand. It isn't for penalty; it simply shows enough strength to take some further action. This is referred to as a *card-showing double* and is standard practice:

Card-showing

Takeout Doubles

What would you do ♠ A J 9 3
with this hand if the
opponent on your ♥ 10 3
right opens 1♥? ♦ K Q 7 4
♣ K 10 2

This is a standard takeout double, which doesn't fall in the SPECIAL DOUBLES category. However, if you would also double if the opening bid were 1♣ or 1♦, you need to check the box indicating that you make takeout doubles with a minimum offshape hand ... a hand without support for all the unbid suits.

Min. Offshape T/O