

COMPETITIVE BIDDING JUDGMENT

At all times during the auction a presumption exists about which partnership holds the balance of the high cards. In principle, the bids made by that side are CONSTRUCTIVE and those made by the other side are DEFENSIVE. Some bids have the effect of switching the presumption and this may happen several times during the bidding.

CONSTRUCTIVE bids are governed by high card strength and a planned sequence. DEFENSIVE bids are characterised by playing tricks and good suits and are generally non forcing.

Making CONSTRUCTIVE bids when you know you do not hold the balance of strength risks ending too high in the auction.

The opening bid at the level of 1 sets up the initial presumption. The interventions of DOUBLE or 1NT switch the presumption.

1. Intervening Bids

This is the general term for bidding after a constructive opening bid by the opponents. After they have opened 1 of a suit, there is a general perception that you can bid on weaker hands than an opening bid but this is not always the case.

The 3 BENEFITS of intervening

- 1 Competition
- 2 Pre-emption
- 3 Lead Direction

The 3 RISKS of intervening

- 1 Punishment
- 2 Help to opponents in the bidding
- 3 Help to opponents in the play

It is important to weigh up benefits against risk before deciding whether to bid and what to bid.

1.1 When you should bid

Before you make an intervening bid ensure that at least one of the BENEFITS is applicable. Competition means that you may be able to compete to a makeable contract of your own or create the problem for the opponents in deciding whether to bid one more or not. Pre-emption is not just limited to high level opening bids or double jumps. An intervening bid of 1♠ over an opening 1♣ has a pre-emptive effect. Also, your partner may be able, by supporting your intervention, to cut out bids which the opponents might have wished to make.

Bidding a good suit can often be helpful as a lead directing tool. Beware of bidding poor suits which might have the opposite effect.

Punishment comes in the form of being doubled and conceding a penalty. This is more probable when there is some evidence of a misfit (eg opponents bid 2 suits) or when your trump suit is short or feeble.

Help for the opponents in bidding comes because after you make an intervening bid the opponents now have three bidding weapons available to them which they would not otherwise have had. First, there is not so much pressure on responding hands to bid with minimal values as both opponents get a second chance. Second, they have a double available. Third, they have a bid of your suit. They can also use your bid better to judge the quality of their own honour cards (eg they will upgrade an AQ when sitting over an intervening bid in that suit. Help in the play comes from needlessly giving an indication of your distribution which will enable your opponents to be more successful in the play of their own contract.

1.2 Take out double

This is a constructive intervention which reverses the initial presumption about the hand holding the balance of power. You should therefore have opening bid values. The bid should be made with 3 hand types:

- 1.2.1 Balanced hands unsuitable for a 1NT overcall but with tolerance for unbid suits or in excess of 18 HCP

Examples:

A 2 1♠ ?
K J 8 4
A Q 3
K 8 5 3

A Q 8 7 1♠ ?
K 3
A K 10 7
K 9 8

1.2.2 Three suited hands (4441) with a shortage in the bid suit. HCP should be 12+ but note that a slightly weaker hand may be held when the opening is in a low ranking suit. You can sometimes include 5431 or 5440 shapes if the 5 card suit is not the prominent feature of the hand.

7 1♠ ?
A Q 10 2
K J 8 6
K 10 7 2

A Q 8 5 1♣ ?
J 9 8 4 3
A J 2
6

1.2.3 Extremely powerful 1 suited hands (Acol 2 strength or better)

K 3
7
A K Q J 8 6
A K 8 3

Do not make a take-out double on 2 suited hands eg 5♠ and 4♥ even with extra strength. Better to intervene with your longest suit and then double on the next round.

Do not shade the requirements for a double after both opponents have bid. This should still have opening bid values (perhaps even more) even if you have good holdings in both unbid suits. When opponents have bid 2 suits (eg 1♥ P 2♣) this is the riskiest time to bid as there is not yet any evidence of a fit.

1.3 Overcalls

Suit overcalls are wide ranging. At the 1 level, if you have a good 5 or 6 card suit, you may intervene with as few as 9 HCP (check losers not more than 8). With opening values, the suit quality is less important and the HCP could be up to 18. Avoid 4 card suit overcalls.

K Q J 9 5
10 8 3
K 7 4
3 2

Q 9 8 5 3
A J 2
K Q 10 8
3

A K Q 9 5
A J 7 3
J 2
K 3

Responding to an overcall should be as natural as possible. NT responses are natural and NF showing about 9-11 for 1NT, 12-14 for 2NT and 15-17 for 3NT. Raise freely with 3+ cards in support as defensive bids which could be weak. Bid the opponent's suit to ask for further information and use this as an 'unassuming cue-bid' which means that it need not show more than a constructive raise to 2. This bid should show not more than 3 cards in support (sometimes only 2).

Q 9 5 1♥ 1♠ 2♣ ?
8 2
K 8 5 4 3
10 7 3

K 3	1♥	1♠	2♣	?
9 3				
A Q 8 5 3				
K 8 5 3				

K Q 2	1♣	1♠	P	?
A Q 8 2				
9 7 4 3				
J 2				

Jump in the opponent's suit to show a constructive raise to 3 or more with 4 card support (can be a splinter if you prefer).

K Q 10 7	1♥	1♠	P	?
A 3				
K 9 6 2				
10 8 3				

K J 8 4	1♥	1♠	P	?
2				
A J 10 5 2				
A 10 2				

A new suit bid by an unpassed hand is forcing for 1 round so should have a good suit and constructive values (11+).

4	1♥	1♠	P	?
A 8 4				
K Q J 9 8 2				
Q 8 2				

Jump overcalls at the 2 level are generally played as WJOS (Weak Jump Overcalls). This is defined as a 1 suited hand type with a reasonable suit and 5-9 HCP.

Respond to a weak jump overcall of 2♥ or 2♠ as you would to an opening weak 2. Use 2NT as a forcing relay. A good scheme of rebids is to bid 3M with a minimum, new suit with a high card feature there and 3NT with a good suit (headed by two honours)

1.4 1NT overcall

Balanced with 15-18 – but remember there is no law which forces you to make this bid. It is a risky intervention and you should have a suitable guard (Q108x is better than AKx) and some likely playing tricks. Compare:

A 5 4	A 5 4
K 7 2	K Q J 9
A K 2	Q 10 8 3
Q 5 3 2	A 3

If RHO opens 1♦, hand 1 may make only 3 tricks whereby there are a probable 5 tricks on hand 2.

A good guide to apply is to consider if it is possible to anticipate your plan of play from your own hand alone. If so, the bid is likely to be safer.

Avoid 1NT overcalls on hands where both opponents have bid. The potential benefit rarely outweighs the considerable risk.

Respond to a 1NT overcall exactly as you would to an opening 1NT (with 3 points less).

If the opening bid is a weak 2 then 2NT is a natural overcall showing about 15-19 HCP. Again, you should respond as to an opening 2NT (this time with 3 points more).

1.5 Two suiters

Unusual NT, Michaels and Ghestem are popular methods and have benefits of pre-emption. However, they are risky to make sure that your suit qualities are fair.

A good guide is to imagine partner with Kxx in one of your suits and a singleton in the other. How will the hand play at the 3 level? If disastrously, then you should not bid.

4	1♥	?
Q 2		
K 10 9 6 3		
J 9 7 4 2		

Showing 2 suiters with these bids give enormous help to the opponents when they end up as declarer. This risk is a bigger one than the risk of a penalty.

If you do make a 2 suited overcall, take care that you don't bid your hand again by raising your partner's preference bid. That should show considerable additional playing strength.

4	1♠	2♠	P	3♥
A Q 9 8 3	P	?		
K J 10 8 3				
8 2				

I do not recommend Ghestem for the main reason that it obliges you to use a 3♣ overcall to show the highest two suits. This excludes you from nearly 80% of the hands on which you would safely be able to bid if your commitment was at the two level. A second problem with this bid is that it is impossible to make an invitational bid in response. Other problems are that you lose a useful natural overcall of 3♣ and that it is easy to forget.

A better system (and considerably simpler) is to use 2NT to show the lowest two suits, and a cue bid to show the highest two suits. If you are unable to show the other two two suiters, then you will find that life will still go on OK.

1.6 The 'Trap Pass'

This is a bit of a misnomer really because the intention is not to trap. It occurs when your RHO has opened or bid your best/longest suit. If you do not have a bid which expresses your hand, then pass whatever the strength. Examples are:

A J 7 3
 K Q J 9 4
 A 7 2
 4

RHO opens 1♥. Don't overcall 1♠ on a rropy 4 card suit, don't make an off centre 1NT overcall and discard any notion of a double.

The same might happen with 3 suited hands like:

K Q 7 3
A 10 7 3
2
A J 9 4

RHO opens 1♠. Best to pass. Best even to pass a 1♥ opening bid – I do not recommend 4 card suit overcalls.

There are many hand types which are best expressed by an initial pass followed by strong action later if appropriate.

A Q 4	1♥ P	1♠ P
K Q 10 7	1NT ?	
A		
Q 9 7 4 3		

A double now should show this sort of hand.

2. Low Level Doubles

By this I mean doubles at the part-score level. The double is perhaps the most useful weapon in competitive bidding but it should be used with care. Most low level doubles are not intended for penalty but sometimes your partner will judge that converting may be the most effective action to take. You should therefore be prepared for this. Best to avoid doubles when you have excellent support for partner or a very strong suit of your own.

2.1 The meaning of a double

A double of a natural bid by the opponents could have any one of a number of interpretations. It is important that you are familiar with each and it is worth constructing a set of simple rules to avoid misunderstandings.

2.2 The TAKE OUT double

This applies if your partner has not yet bid, and is either your own first action or follows an opening bid by you. The bid you are doubling is a suit bid by one of your opponents who

may have bid 1 or 2 suits. Your partner is expected to bid and will pass only with a strong trump holding.

2.3 The NEGATIVE double

This applies when your partner has bid but it is your first action. The bid you are doubling is an opponent's intervening bid. The general principles are that this shows the values to compete at the appropriate level and no suitable bid you can make. It is useful to incorporate some fixed rules about guarantees for major suit lengths. I recommend that if partner opens a major, then the double of an overcall promises 4+ cards in the other major. With 10+ points, prefer a natural bid if one is available.

There will be some 7-9 point hands on which you may have to pass, but the roof won't cave in if you do.

K 5 4 A J 9 4 J 8 2 10 7 3	After 1♣ 1♠, double
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7 6 A J 8 3 A Q J 9 7 5 2	After 1♣ 1♠, bid 2♦ natural and forcing rather than double.
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10 3 K Q 2 J 9 7 4 3 Q 9 2	After 1♠ 2♣, pass
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2.4 The COMPETITIVE double

This occurs whenever both sides have bid and you make a double for which the strict requirements for penalty doubles do not apply. The messages you convey are:

- a) You wish to show some extra values
- b) There is no natural bid available to you

Examples:

A Q 7 3	1♥	P	1♠	2♦
K 2	P	P	?	
8 4 2				
Q 7 4 2				

K 2	1♥	P	1♠	P
A Q 8 7 6	2♣	2♦	P	P
10 2	?			
A K Q 2				

A 2	1♥	P	2♥	3♦
A K 8 3	?			
J 10 5				
A Q 6 2				

Q 8	1♥	X	2♥	?
J 7 2				
A J 8 2				
Q 7 4 3				

Note that although competitive doubles are made with the intention of further competition, they may be passed for penalties when there is evidence of misfit.

2.1.4 The PENALTY double

A double made with the intention of punishing the opponents but partner is not forced to pass it if their hand is suitable for taking the double out.

You should compile your own list of penalty double situations, but here is a suggested list:

- A) Any double of a 1NT bid and any subsequent double
- B) A double of a suit repeated by your RHO when you passed first time
- C) A double which follows a strong redouble by you or your partner
- D) A double following your partner's competitive double
- E) A double following an earlier penalty double or the conversion of another double into penalties.

F) A double following your partner's weak 2 or 3 opening.

2.6 Doubles of ARTIFICIAL bids

Examples are doubles of STAYMAN, TRANSFERS or 4SF. It is hard to come up with a definite set of efficient rules here and you might have to take each type separately. However, this is a simple rule:

LHO has opened 1NT (weak), and you are an unpassed hand

2♣ (Stayman)	X = I would have doubled 1NT
2♦/♥ (Transfer)	X = I would have doubled 1NT
	Pass then X = Take out

In ALL other situations:

X = I have a natural overcall in the actual suit they just bid

Bidding the suit they show = I have a natural takeout of that suit.

K 3	1NT (12-14)	P	2♦ (Tfr)	X
A J 9 3	P	P	2♥	X (Pen)
A K 10 6				
Q 8 3				

2	P	1NT (12-14)	P	2♥ (Tfr)
K Q 10 9 4	X			
K 8 5 3				
J 9 2				

A Q J 7	1NT (12-14)	P	2♦	2♥ (TO of ♥)
2				
K Q 9 3 2				
K 7 2				

3. Balancing

One of the most important aspects of competitive bidding is balancing (or protecting). This means re-opening the bidding following 2 passes. In many situations this is considerably safer than initial interventions because the opponents' strength is limited. When they have also shown a fit, the dangers in balancing are far less – generally the biggest danger is that the opponents have misjudged their strength and take advantage of the balancing bid to push on to game.

There are 3 main balancing situations:

3.1 Opening bid passed out

When an opening bid of 1 in a suit by LHO is passed by partner and RHO, there is a strong inference of extreme weakness on your right. All intervening bids have the same basic meanings as those made in 2nd position but can be approximately a King weaker. Thus, a TO double might be 9+ points, 1NT is like a 12-14 NT, and overcalls may be shaded. Of course, partner should subtract about a King from their hand evaluation to compensate (Principle of the transferred King).

The position is NOT the same when an opening 1NT is passed round. Here there is no such inference of weakness.

3.2 Opponents with a fit

When the opponents have indicated a fit AND have stopped below game is the safest time to balance. Some examples:

K J 7 4	1♥	P	2♥	P
10 4	P	?		
K 9 5 2				
Q 8 2				

9 2	1♥	P	1♠	P
A 2	2♠	P	P	?
Q J 9 6 3 2				
8 4 2				

3.3 Potential Misfits

In these cases, the opponents have stopped low but there is no evidence of a fit. In these cases, you have a bigger risk of balancing, but also a potential gain because you may be able to extract a penalty from them if the hand is a real misfit or push them too high.

A 8 6 4	1♦	P	1♥	P
K 10 9 5	2♦	P	P	X
3				
K 10 7 2				
4 2	1♠	P	1NT	P
K J 9 8 4 2	2♦	P	P	2♥
A 6 2				
9 2				
K 2	1NT	P	2♦	P
8 3	2♥	P	P	2NT
K Q 10 5				
Q J 7 4 3				

4. Dealing with Interventions

If opponents have intervened after your opening bid, this can be good news or bad news. Bad news because even if the bid itself hasn't had a pre-emptive effect, a later jump in support by intervener's partner may be around the corner. You are in a hurry therefore to communicate. The good news is that you can use a negative double, or a bid of the opponent's suit to convey additional information.

4.1 Constructive Interventions

Double a 1NT overcall with 10+ points or 8-9 with a good lead. Use a 2NT bid to show a 2 suiter – at least 5-5 with plenty of playing strength. Raises are natural and defensive and a new suit is defensive in nature – good suit and NF

Redouble a takeout double with 11+ points. Subsequent doubles are penalty by both sides and at least one member of your side must make a further bid at minimum level. (ie Pass is forcing over a non-jump bid by the opps). After partner's redouble, the opener should bid on if this describes his hand well. A rebid suit must be playable opposite a singleton and the hand should be defensively weak, not just minimum.

Bids are natural at the 1 level, but defensive and therefore NF at the 2 level. Raises are defensive and 2NT is generally used to show a constructive raise.

4.2 Defensive Interventions

After a suit overcall, double is negative (see above). Other bids are best used to retain their natural meaning except the cue in the opponent's suit which can show support and be GF (replacing 2NT). Do not strain to respond with 5-8 points unless your bid describes the hand well. NT bids are natural and show suitable guards.

5. Pre-emptive bidding

5.1 General principles

Often when you make a pre-emptive bid, you are unsure about who will be most damaged – opponents or partner. For this reason a difference exists depending on certain factors.

- A) Partner is unlimited (eg a non passed hand)
- B) Partner's hand is limited by his pass or bid

In case (A), you should be reliable about your pre-empts. For example, the ideal for an opening at the 3 level is a 1 loser 7 card suit and no other high cards. Do not depart substantially from the norm.

K Q 10 9 8 5 3 Ideal to open 3♠
2
10 8 3
8 3

disciplined with these bids if partner has not yet passed.
Have a 6 card suit – very rarely 5 or 7. Opposite a passed partner, you can vary the bids more because the constructive element has all but evaporated.

Q J 8 6 4 3
4 3
J 8 3 2
2

If you MUST open this hand, better to open 3♠ than 2.

K J 10 8 6 3
A 2
9 7 4
4 2

This is an ideal hand for a weak 2.

The WEAK 3

This is purely pre-emptive and the fewer defensive tricks you have the better. A 7 card suit is ideal, but you may open 3 with a decent 6 card suit or an 8 card suit. Watch the vulnerability and the level of the opening (3♠ more effective but risky than 3♣).

4 LEVEL OPENINGS

Especially 4 of a major opening may be intended as a way of getting to your game and pre-empting the opponents out of their opportunities to compete or sacrifice. With highly distributional hands (freaks), it is very important to get yourself as declarer – don't worry too much about missing a slam with this type of hand:

None	7 5
A K Q J 10 8 6 4	9 7 2
K Q 8 5	A J 7
4	Q 10 8 6 3

Delicate bidding might identify this nice fit and enable you to bid 6♥, but you are more likely to end up defending 6♠X and

only getting 300 or so. Best to open 4♥ which may buy the contract. If the opponents bid 4♠, you can double and partner will remove to 5♥.

5.3 Weak Jump Overcalls (3 level)

These should show a hand similar to a 3 level opening. Bear in mind that they are not as effective a weapon as an opening 3 bid because the opponents have already commenced the information exchange. They are correspondingly more risky. Some unexpected side distribution is quite handy. Remember that pre-emptive bids often have the effect of driving the opponents higher than they would otherwise have bid, so some bite is handy.

Don't bother with weak jump overcalls after a 1NT opening because this bid has told its partner enough to make it easier to judge at that level.

7 6
3
Q J 10 7 6 5 4
K 7 2

Bid 3♦ over a major suit opening or 1♣ opening.

7 3
J 3
K 10 8 6 5 4 3
10 7

But not with this. If the opponents get too high, everything is breaking well for them. If they have no fit, the 3 level could cost you a telephone number.

None
K J 10 9 8 3
Q J 8 5 3
7 3

Bidding 3♥ over a 1♠ opening is better than employing your 2 suited weapon. If they bid too high, the bad trump break

may upset them. If they double, your side suit values may upset them even more.

5.4 Pre-emptive raises

Use pre-emptive raises of partner's suit as much as possible when you are in a defensive bidding situation (remember the presumption of high card strength). Make your pre-empt and then shut up. To pre-empt and then sacrifice gives the opponents the best of both worlds.

8 6 4 1♠ 2♣ 2♥ ?
3
A 8 7 5 3
10 9 5 2

Raising to 3♣ would not be wrong, but this is a defensive type of hand. You strongly suspect that 4♥ is making for the opponents and you will have to decide whether to save or not. Best to bid 5♣ now before they have even shown the heart support. This will transfer the judgment problem to the opponents.

The only pre-emptive raise you have when your partner opens the bidding and the next hand passes or makes a defensive intervention is to raise to game. Raising to the 3 level has the same meaning as if they had passed. (unless your system dictates otherwise)

Q J 8 5 3
2
10 8 3
10 8 5 3

Partner opens 1♠ and next hand bids 2♥. Your hand is worth 2♠, but you would like to pre-empt. Don't call 3♠ because this is a limit bid. Go the whole hog and call 4♠ which shows a weak superfit hand.

5.5 High Level Judgment

More IMPs and MPs are lost in sacrifice bidding than in any other part of the game. Follow these principles when sacrificing:

1. You expect to go only 1 down in your save. Don't try to find 500 saves against a vulnerable game.
2. Has the bidding revealed a double fit for each partnership? If so, a sacrifice may be justified.
3. Save for insurance purposes on a real freak.
4. If you have pushed the opponents to the 5 level, usually best to allow them to play there and to hope that they have misjudged. Don't give 2 bites at the cherry.

5.6 Defending opening 3 or 4 bids

Your priority when the opponents have pre-empted you and you have a good hand is to try at all costs to get a plus score. This sometimes means choosing the practical and pragmatic action rather than the technical.

3 3♣ P P ?
A Q J 8 4
A K Q 5 3
8 2

Bid 4♥ - a practical bid and what you think you can make.

If partner makes a take-out double of an opening 3 or 4 and you have a balanced hand with a few scattered values, just pass and accept a likely penalty. Don't start bidding weak 4 card suits at the 4 level.

10 8 3 3♠ X P ?
A 8 2
Q 8 4 2
K 9 2

Just pass – your most likely route to a plus score.
Occasionally they will make it and you'll lose 530. This will be easily balanced by the 300s, 500s and 800s you pick up.

Because of this, you should prefer to bid your suit in second position rather than to double when the suit is good.

A Q J 10 8 3♥ ?
4
A K 7 3
10 7 3

Bid 3♠, rather than double.

A K Q 10 9 5 3♥ ?
2
K Q 9 4
A 3

Bid 4♠. I know you may have a slam on here, but doubling may give partner a difficult decision.