

OVER CALLS & DOUBLES

Of course, all four players are permitted to bid on any hand. This is referred to as 'competitive' bidding. Whilst there can only be one opener on a given hand, either opponent may intervene - this is referred to as an 'over call'. You do not require an opening hand to over call, simply a good enough reason. The partner of the over caller is referred to as the 'advancer'.

OVER CALLING AT THE 1-LEVEL

There are several reasons to over call. You may hold an opening hand for yourself or you may simply want to direct partner to lead a particular suit in case your side becomes the defenders.

The general guideline for a 1-level overcall is;

- 5+ card suit (in majors or minors)
- 8+ HCP at 1-level
- 12+ HCP at 2-level
- a reason to bid (either a suit with 3+ honour cards or an opening hand)

YOUR OPPONENT OPENS 1♦. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR BID ON THESE HANDS?

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|-----|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| (1) | ♠AJ972 ♥Q2 ♦A94 ♣Q63 | (2) | ♠4 ♥AKJ103 ♦982 ♣J984 | (3) | ♠762 ♥A2 ♦K53 ♣AQJ92 | (4) | ♠743 ♥982 ♦J9 ♣AQJ74 |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|

- (1) You hold 13 HCP. As you would have opened 1♠, you should over call 1♠.
(2) You hold 9 HCP only but you would like partner to lead hearts. Over call 1♥.
(3) You hold 14 HCP. Your 2♣ over call promises 5+♣ and 12+ HCP (2-level)
(4) You hold 8 HCP. A good suit but not enough HCP for a 2-level over call. Pass.

THE 1NT OVERCALL

A 1NT overcall in 2nd seat is very similar to a standard 1NT opening bid except that we broaden the point range to 15 – 18 HCP. **You must also have a stopper in the opener's suit.** A stopper means at least one protected honour card in the opponent's suit (Ax, Kx, Qxx, Jxxx). Responder plays the same system as they would after a 1NT opening (Stayman and transfers).

ADVANCING (RESPONDING) TO AN OVERCALL

When responding to a 1-level over call, the partner of the responder (advancer) must take into account that the over call may be less than an opening hand. The advancer should adjust their responses accordingly. General guidelines are;

- with 0-7 HCP, advancer should pass
- with 8-11 HCP, advancer can bid at the 1-level
- with 12-14 HCP, advancer may invite to game
- with 15+ HCP, advancer should insist on game

If the over call was at the 2-level (12+ HCP), advancer bids game with an opening hand.

IF PARTNER OVER CALLS 1♥ AFTER A 1♣ OPENING BID, WHAT DO YOU BID?

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|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|
| (1) | ♠KQ98 ♥J2 ♦K94 ♣8742 | (2) | ♠K8 ♥AQ3 ♦9862 ♣9842 | (3) | ♠Q95 ♥A6 ♦108432 ♣982 | (4) | ♠Q102 ♥Q2 ♦AJ92 ♣J942 |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|

- (1) Enough to respond to an over call at the 1-level. Bid 1♠
- (2) Despite the 10 TP, your hand is not strong enough for 3♥ after an over call. Bid 2♥
- (3) 6 HCP is not enough to respond after partner over calls. Pass
- (4) No-trump responses increase when responding to an over call. Bid 1NT (8-11 HCP)

THE TAKEOUT DOUBLE

As an over call promises at least 5 cards in the suit bid, what if you are dealt an opening hand without a 5-card suit? This is where a special bid that we have not yet encountered appears. The bid is called 'double'. A double promises the following;

- 12+ HCP
- Shortage (less than 2 cards) in the suit being doubled (very important)
- Typically, no 5-card major suit

YOUR OPPONENT OPENS 1♦, WHAT IS YOUR CALL?

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|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| (1) | ♠KQ72 ♥Q953 ♦84 ♣KQ6 | (2) | ♠K984 ♥KJ72 ♦6 ♣K872 | (3) | ♠Q65 ♥AK976 ♦2 ♣A842 | (4) | ♠K62 ♥Q2 ♦AQ4 ♣KQ972 |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|

- (1) You have 12 HCP but no 5-card suit. With shortage in opponent's suit, you 'double'
- (2) You have the hand shape to double but lack the HCP. Pass.
- (3) You have 13 HCP. Over call 1♥ as double would deny a 5-card major suit.
- (4) Your choices are 2♣ or 1NT. As 1NT shows a balanced 15-17 HCP, bid 1NT.

WITH LENGTH IN THE OPPONENT'S SUIT

If an opponent opens the bidding before you and you hold 4+ cards the suit in the bid suit you often are faced with a difficult problem. One thing that should reassure you is the fact the hand is probably a misfit for your opposition. That means that it will also be a misfit for yourself and partner. If the HCP are evenly divided it is normally best to defend on these hands.

YOU HOLD 12-14 HCP & 3+ CARDS IN OPPONENT'S SUIT

These are the most common hands - the ones where you don't have an easy entry into the auction. If you have a 5+ card suit on the side you may choose to overcall with that. If you do not normally your best option is to pass first and then see how the auction develops.

| | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Example | ♠KJ86 ♥9 ♦QJ74 ♣AQ82 | Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with 1S. With no 5-card suit, you cannot overcall. You have an opening hand but no shortage in opponent's suit. No Bid |
|---------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

YOU HOLD 15-17 HCP

Once your hand becomes stronger one of the things to consider is the possibility that your side can make game. To pass with balanced hands of 15+ HCP is a dangerous proposition. With hands in this range, you should endeavour to become declarer.

Example ♠KQ54 Your opponent opens 1C. Whilst you may have two doubletons it is best to break the NT rule. This may be slightly off-shape but the hand is best described by overcalling **1NT**.

 ♥AK

 ♦K2

 ♣Q9872

YOU HOLD 18+ HCP

To make a simple over call would not be wise with so many high card points. Start with a double and then bid no-trumps if you are balanced otherwise bid your long suit.

ADVANCING (RESPONDING) TO A TAKEOUT DOUBLE

When partner doubles, they are requesting you to bid your best suit. If responder passes following the double, it is imperative upon advancer to call. This may require advancer to bid with 0 HCP. If responder passes, advancer should bid as follows;

0-9 HCP – bid your best suit (not opponents' suit) at the lowest level available*

10-12 HCP – jump in your best suit (not opponents' suit)

13+ HCP – bid to game in your best suit or 3NT

*a 1NT bid by advancer shows 6-9 HCP

PARTNER DOUBLES A 1♦ OPENING BID, RESPONDER PASSES, YOUR BID?

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|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| (1) | ♠KJ982 ♥832 ♦Q842 ♣7 | (2) | ♠Q84 ♥Q6 ♦985 ♣AK632 | (3) | ♠A95 ♥K96 ♦KQJ8 ♣985 | (4) | ♠932 ♥J872 ♦94 ♣J972 |
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(1) With 6 HCP, advancer should stay at the lowest available level. Bid 1♠ (0-9 HCP)

(2) 11 HCP means game is close (double shows 12+ HCP). Jump to 3♣ (10-12 HCP)

(3) Enough HCP to bid game. Your best suit is the opponents'. Bid 3NT

(4) You cannot pass as double forces you to respond. Bid 1♥ (0-9 HCP)

IF RESPONDER PASSES OVER DOUBLE, WHY MUST ADVANCER BID?

When three passes occur after a double, the final contract becomes 'doubled'. This increases the stakes. If the contract fails, undertrick penalties increase in the defender's favour. If the contract makes, however, declarer will be given a higher score than if the contract was played 'undoubled'.

CLICK EACH HAND DIAGRAM FOR CARD-BY-CARD ANALYSIS

HAND 1 – Over calling at the 1-level

| | | |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| | N undefined ♠ 83 ♥ K843 ♦ K10742 ♣ J4 | W N E S (Empty) |
| | W undefined ♠ QJ1064 ♥ Q6 ♦ J5 ♣ K965 | E undefined ♠ K975 ♥ J10 ♦ 98 ♣ Q10872 |
| | S undefined ♠ A2 ♥ A9752 ♦ AQ63 ♣ A3 | |

HAND 2 – Over calling at the 2-level & 'advancing' to game

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|--|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| | N undefined ♠ Q73 ♥ 87 ♦ KJ5 ♣ AQJ73 | W N E S 1♠ |
| | W undefined ♠ J10982 ♥ KQ4 ♦ A7 ♣ K62 | E undefined ♠ 64 ♥ 96532 ♦ 8632 ♣ 95 |
| | S undefined ♠ AK5 ♥ AJ10 ♦ Q1094 ♣ 1084 | |

HAND 3 – Responding to ‘double’ with a weak hand

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | N undefined ♠ Q8 ♥ J952 ♦ AQ93 ♣ KQ4 | W N E S 1♠ |
| | W undefined ♠ AKJ52 ♥ 63 ♦ J64 ♣ AJ5 | E undefined ♠ 964 ♥ KQ104 ♦ 105 ♣ 10962 |
| | S undefined ♠ 1073 ♥ A87 ♦ K872 ♣ 873 | |

HAND 4 – ‘Advancing’ to double with a strong hand

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|  | N undefined ♠ 6 ♥ K654 ♦ AK93 ♣ Q1042 | W N E S 1♠ |
| | W undefined ♠ AKJ103 ♥ J102 ♦ J65 ♣ A8 | E undefined ♠ Q752 ♥ 8 ♦ Q10842 ♣ 965 |
| | S undefined ♠ 984 ♥ AQ973 ♦ 7 ♣ KJ73 | |