

DOUBLES vs. OVERCALLS vs. NO TRUMP

Remember:

- 1) When you overcall a suit (bid it after the opponents have opened the bidding), you absolutely promise 5 (or more) cards in that suit. You also promise 7 (or more) HCP at the 1 level, 10 (or more) HCP at the 2 level. [Yes, there are exceptions. People will occasionally bid a 4-card suit such as AKQx, particularly at the one level, because they want the lead. Partner should always assume you have 5 cards!]
- 2) When you double, you promise (at least minimal) support for all the unbid suits and an opening hand in HCP. (A standard “take-out double” promises minimal support for all 3 unbid suits.) You usually guarantee either 4 cards in the unbid major (when there is only one) or else a hand with lots of HCP. If you double a minor, you will usually be at least 3-4 (or 4-3) in the major suits.
- 3) When you overcall one NT, you promise 15-18 HCP and **guarantee** a stopper in the suit the opponents have opened. (A stopper can be Ax; Kx; Qxx; or Jxxx in desperation.) If the opponents open a Weak Two Bid, a 2NT overcall by you shows the same 15-18 HCP and guarantees a stopper in the Weak Two suit.
- 4) If you have a weak hand, you must make a JUMP overcall. If, for example, you were intending to bid a Weak Two in hearts and the opponents open 1C, bid 2H. It is much more descriptive than 1H! If the opponents open 1S, do NOT bid 2H unless you have 10 or more HCP.
- 5) If you double and then bid a suit of your own, you are showing a HUGE hand and asking partner to go to game with just about anything!
- 6) It is OK to double with some “off-shape” (nonstandard hands). For example, the opponents open 1 spade and you hold xx AKxx AKxxx xx. Many people will double with this hand (to guard your possible 4-4 heart fit). If partner bids clubs, they will “correct” to diamonds. This is an exception to Item #5 (above), so you must use your judgment in many cases.
- 7) Remember that a “balancing double” (in the pass-out seat) can be done with much less (8-10 HCP) than a normal take-out double.

RESPONDING

- 1) When your partner overcalls a suit, raise him/her just as you would an opening hand. Bid two of a major with 6-10 HCP and 3-card support.
- 2) To make a limit raise of your partner’s major (when it is an overcall), you must cue-bid the opponent’s suit. That shows a limit raise—or better.
- 3) When your partner overcalls a major and you jump to three, it is NOT a limit raise. (Cue-bid is the limit raise.) A jump to 3 by you is WEAK and preemptive—should show lots of trump and not many high card points.
- 4) When your partner makes a take-out double, if you have 9 or more HCP, you should JUMP.
- 5) When your partner makes a take-out double and you have at least 9 HCP and are 4-4 in the majors, you can cue-bid the opponent’s suit to tell partner to pick a major. (Remember partner might have 4 in one major and only 3 in the other major. You want to find your 4-4 fit.) But partner will expect that to set up a game force. You can try to get out with only inviting, but partner will accept with any decent hand. Other option is to jump in your better 4-card major and hope it works out.
- 6) Play ALL SYSTEMS ON (Stayman, Jacoby transfers, etc.) when your partner overcalls 1NT. It is as if the opponent never bid and your partner opened 1 NT. [Systems are OFF if your opponents bids AFTER your partner bids 1NT. Thus, 1C by LHO; 1NT by your partner; pass by RHO—systems are ON. However, 1C by LHO; 1NT by your partner; 2S by RHO—systems are OFF.]