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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Acol edition



CHAPTER 10

Overcalls and Takeout Doubles

Competing when the opponents open: overcalls, 1NT and the takeout double

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1. When the opponents open

Not every hand is yours to open. When an opponent opens the bidding before you, you can still compete. The two main tools are the **overcall** (bidding your own suit) and the **takeout double** (asking partner to choose a suit).

2. Simple overcalls

Overcall at the one level: a good **five-card or longer** suit and about **8–16 points**.
At the two level: a good **six-card** suit, or a very strong five-card suit, and about **10–16 points**.

The quality of the suit matters more than the points. An overcall also tells partner what to lead if the opponents win the auction, so overcall in suits you would like led.

In these examples the opponent on your right has opened **1♦**.

♠ K Q J 8 4
♥ 7 2
♦ 8 5 3
♣ A 6 3

10 points and a good five-card spade suit: **1♠**.

♠ K 5
♥ J 8 4
♦ 7 3
♣ A Q J 10 6 2

11 points and six good clubs: **2♣**.

3. The 1NT overcall

1NT overcall: 15–18 points, balanced, with a **stopper** in the opponent's suit (a holding that will win a trick in it, such as A-x, K-x-x or Q-J-x; a bare K-x is risky, because the opener may hold the ace).

♠ K J 6
♥ A Q 4
♦ K J 5
♣ Q 10 8 3

16 points, balanced, and ♦K-J-5 will stop diamonds: **1NT**.

4. The takeout double

A double of an opening bid at the one level, when partner has not yet bid, is not for penalties. It says: "I have an opening hand, **short** in the suit you opened, with support for the **other** suits. Partner, choose one."

Takeout double: 12+ points, shortage in the opponent's suit (a singleton is ideal, a doubleton is the most you should have), and at least three cards in each unbid suit, especially the majors. Typical shapes are 4-4-4-1, or 4-4-3-2 with the doubleton in their suit.

♠ A J 8 4
♥ K Q 6 3
♦ 5
♣ K 10 7 2

13 points, a singleton diamond and four cards in every other suit: the perfect **double**.

♠ Q 4 ♥ K 7 3 ♦ K J 10 6 2 ♣ A 8 5	**13 points**, but your length is in *their* suit, and you have nothing to overcall. **Pass**, and see what happens.

A double can also be made with a very strong hand (about 17 or more) that is too good for an overcall, planning to bid your own suit next time.

5. Responding to partner's takeout double

When partner doubles and the next player passes, you **must bid**, even with nothing: partner has asked you to choose. Bid your best suit, preferring a major, at a level that shows your strength:

Your points	Bid
0–8	your best suit at the cheapest level
9–11	jump one level in your best suit
12 or more	bid game in your four-card major (12 opposite partner's 12 or more is enough)
6–10, balanced, with a stopper in their suit	1NT

♠ J 7 6 3 ♥ Q 5 2 ♦ 8 6 4 ♣ 9 7 3	1♦ – double – pass – ? Only **3 points**, but you must bid: **1♠**.

♠ K Q 6 5 ♥ A 7 4 ♦ 9 8 2 ♣ J 6 3	1♦ – double – pass – ? **10 points** and four spades: jump to **2♠**.

6. Summary

Your hand (after they open)	Bid
Good 5+ suit, 8–16	Overcall at the one level
Good 6+ suit (or a very strong 5), 10–16	Overcall at the two level
15–18 balanced, stopper in their suit	1NT
12+, short in their suit, support for the others	Double
Length in their suit, nothing to show	Pass

7. Test yourself

1. ♠ A Q 10 7 3
♥ 8 4
♦ K 6 2
♣ J 9 5

2. ♠ K J 7 4
♥ 5
♦ A Q 8 3
♣ K 10 6 2

3. ♠ A 6
♥ K J 5
♦ K Q 9 4
♣ A 10 7 3

4. ♠ Q 3
♥ A Q 10 9 4
♦ K 7 5
♣ J 8 2

5. ♠ 8 6 5 2
♥ J 7 3
♦ Q 9 4
♣ J 6 2

6. ♠ A Q 7 4
♥ 9 5 3
♦ K J 6 2
♣ K 5

1–4: The opponent on your right opens 1♥. What do you bid? 5–6: 1♥ – double (partner) – pass – ?

Answers

1. 1♠. 10 points and a good five-card suit.

2. Double. 13 points, a singleton heart, four cards in each other suit.

3. 1NT. 17 points, balanced, with ♥K-J-5 as a stopper.

4. Pass. Your length is in their suit.

5. 1♠. Only 4 points, but you must bid: choose the major.

6. 4♠. 13 points and four spades opposite partner's opening hand: bid game.

Next: Chapter 11, Slam Bidding for Beginners. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

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