BRIDGE AT SEA LIBRARY

Bridge Bidding: The Next Step · Acol edition



CHAPTER 3

Negative Doubles

Partner opens, the opponents overcall: using the double to show your suits

Mike Smith

bridgescorer.com

1. When the opponents get in the way

Partner opens, and the next player overcalls. Very often the overcall takes away the bid you wanted to make. With a four-card major and a modest hand, you may have no sensible way to show it. The **negative double** solves this.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1♣	1♠	?

♠ 7 5 4
♥ K J 6 3
♦ A 8 4
♣ 10 9 3

8 points and four hearts. 2♥ would promise five hearts and more strength, and 1NT needs a spade stopper. Double.

2. The rule

When partner opens one of a suit and the next player overcalls in a suit, your **double** is for **takeout**, not for penalties. It shows the **unbid suits**, especially an **unbid major**, and about **6 or more** points (8 or more if partner must answer at the two level).

The most useful cases:

Auction	Your double shows
1♣ (1♦) X	both majors, at least four cards in each
1♣ or 1♦ (1♥) X	exactly four spades (with five, bid 1♠)
1♣ or 1♦ (1♠) X	four hearts (with five hearts and 10+, bid 2♥)
1♥ (1♠) X	the minors, or values with no good bid
1♠ (2♥) X	the minors, or values with no good bid

> In this book the negative double applies up to the level of 2♠. Some partnerships use it higher. Agree with your partner how far you play it.

♠ K J 8 5
♥ 7 3
♦ Q 6 4
♣ J 9 5 2

1♦ (1♥) ?: **7 points** and exactly four spades. **Double**.

♠ A Q 10 6 3
♥ 5 2
♦ K 4
♣ 8 7 6 3

1♦ (1♥) ?: five spades. Bid them: **1♠**.

♠ Q 5
♥ K J 10 4
♦ K 7 3
♣ 9 8 6 2

1♣ (1♥) ?: you have *their* suit, well stopped. Bid **1NT** (about 6–10 with a stopper). A double would promise spades.

3. Opener's rebid after a negative double

Opener treats the double like a bid of the suit it promises, and answers as if partner had bid it:

- With four cards in partner's major, bid it: at the cheapest level with a minimum, jump with 16–18, bid game with more.
- With a stopper in the overcalled suit and a balanced hand, bid no-trumps.
- Otherwise rebid your suit, or bid a second suit.

> **What if you want to punish the overcall?** If you hold length and strength in the overcaller's suit, you cannot double for penalties: that would be a negative double. Instead **pass**. When the bidding comes back to opener, opener should usually reopen with a double when short in the overcalled suit, and you can then pass for penalties.

4. Summary

After 1 of a suit and an overcall	Bid
Four cards in an unbid major, 6+	Double
Five cards in an unbid major	Bid it (at the two level: 10+)
Stopper in their suit, balanced, 6–10	1NT
Support for partner	Raise
Length and strength in their suit	Pass, and hope partner reopens with a double

5. Test yourself

1. ♠ K J 7 4
♥ Q 10 6 3
♦ 8 5
♣ K 4 2

1♣ (1♦) ? What do you bid?

2. ♠ 8 6 3
♥ A Q 7 4
♦ J 5
♣ K 10 8 3

1♦ (1♠) ? What do you bid?

3. ♠ 7 2
♥ K Q J 10 7 4
♦ A 6
♣ 9 5 3

1♦ (1♠) ? What do you bid?

4. ♠ K 10 7 5
♥ 8 4 2
♦ A 9 3
♣ Q 7 6

1♣ (1♥) ? What do you bid?

5. ♠ A 3
♥ 7 4
♦ K J 8 5 2
♣ Q 10 6 3

1♥ (1♠) ? What do you bid?

6. ♠ K 5
♥ K 10 6 3
♦ A Q 7 4
♣ 9 5 3

You opened 1♦. 1♦ (1♠) X (pass) ? What do you bid?

Answers

1. Double. Four cards in both majors.

2. Double. Four hearts and 10 points.

3. 2♥. Six good hearts and 10 points: bid them.

4. Double. Exactly four spades. 1♠ would show five.

5. Double. Both minors and 10 points, with no good natural bid.

6. 2♥. Partner has four hearts; so do you. With a minimum, bid them at the cheapest level.

Next: Chapter 4, Responding to an Overcall. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

About this guide. There are many versions of Acol, and clubs, teachers and books do not all agree on every detail. This chapter describes one common, straightforward version for learners. We do not claim it is the only or the best way: if your teacher or club plays something different, follow them. What matters most is that you and your partner agree.

© 2026 Mike Smith, Bridge at Sea. You may print and share this chapter for personal and club teaching use.