

## LESSON 8: STUDENT NOTES

# Contesting the Auction: Overcalls and Doubles

If opponents open the bidding and you then bid, you have **overcalled**. You are referred to as the **overcaller** – your partner, who may bid some more, is the **advancer**. When you overcall, your aims are different. You may be trying to:

- Win the contract (with both sides bidding, this will often be a part score contract)
- Obstruct the opponents (by consuming bidding space)
- Suggest a lead to partner (which may be critical to successful defence).

### Suit Overcalls

- The basic requirement is a **good** 5+ card suit (generally a minimum of 2 honours, preferably at least one of ace and king)
- At the 1-level it is acceptable to overcall with 8+ HCP, with most of the points in the suit if minimum, whereas at the 2-level you need 10+ HCP
- Keep the vulnerability in mind – you need a good hand to overcall when vulnerable and an even better hand when you are vulnerable but they are not, because of the risk of a significant penalty if you don't find a fit
- Overcalling when sitting over the opening bidder is safer than overcalling after responder has also bid – then you need more (HCP, aces, suit length).

### Suit Quality Test

- This is an easy way of assessing whether or not you have a **good** 5+ card suit
- Add the number of cards in your suit to the number of honour cards in that suit
- Although the honour cards are A, K, Q, J and 10, you can only count the last two if you also have one of the A, K or Q
- If the total is at least equal to the number of tricks you are trying to take, then it is reasonable to overcall.

### Examples

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	Hand D
♠987	♠Q5	♠KQ642	♠A765
♥AK983	♥J10984	♥85	♥J5
♦J72	♦63	♦96	♦AJ
♣87	♣AK32	♣AQ83	♣Q7542

If your right-hand opponent opens 1♣ or 1♦, hand A is a minimum 1♥ overcall – it has useful lead-directing value and (just) satisfies the suit quality test (5+2 = 7 tricks needed for a 1-level overcall). In contrast, hand B is quite unsuitable even though it has more HCP. It might get partner off to a poor opening lead and it utterly fails the suit quality test.

Hand C is a sound 1♠ overcall of any other 1-level suit opening. However, don't even think about overcalling 2♣ with hand D, even though it contains the same number of HCP. That is **not** a good suit and certainly does not satisfy the suit quality test.

## Bidding after Partner has made a Suit Overcall

As advancer, if you have support for partner's suit, you should raise to the "level of the fit" i.e. with 3-card support and limited values (say 6-9 TP) you raise to the 2-level (partner's known 5 cards + your 3 cards = 8 card trump fit so hoping to win 8 tricks [the 2-level] is reasonable). However, with 4-card support you should raise to the 3-level. This makes life difficult for your opponents but does not promise any extra values.

What about if you don't have a fit? You should usually pass, although with extra HCP you might show your own 5+ card suit, or perhaps bid notrumps.

## 1NT Overcall

In the direct position i.e. when you bid over the opening bidder, this is really not that different to a 1NT opening. However, the HCP range is usually extended to 15-18 HCP. Importantly, though, you also need to have control in the suit bid by your opponent (i.e. a top card or two) so that you can stop the opposition from running too many tricks in their suit. Such top cards are also referred to as **stoppers**.

Partner's responses can be exactly what you play after a 1NT opening.

## Takeout Doubles

Your right-hand hand opponent (RHO) opens the bidding with 1♣. You hold:

♠K76  
♥KQ54  
♦A962  
♣J6

What are you going to do? Although you have 13 HCP and want to get into the auction, you don't have a 5-card suit and can't overcall 1NT as you are not strong enough, nor do you have a stopper in clubs. The solution to this problem is what is known as a takeout double. Unlike a double of a higher-level contract, which often indicates you believe you can defeat the opponents and want to maximise the penalty, partner is expected to "take out" this low-level double and offer her/his suggestion about the contract in which your side should play.

### What sort of hand is suitable for a takeout double?

- A takeout double is typically made with 11+ HCP
- The hand should have support for the unbid suits and shortage in the enemy suit
- However, the double is major suit-oriented so over a minor suit opening should have at least 4-3 in the majors, while over a major suit should have 4 cards in the other major.
- With very strong hands (16+ HCP) the shape is less important.

### What should advancer do now?

That depends on shape and strength. Advancer should always show a 4+ major suit and should make an invitational bid with a sufficiently strong hand (some 9+ HCP). With that in mind, what would you do with the following hands after your left-hand hand opponent (LHO) opens 1♦ and partner doubles?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	Hand D	Hand E
♠9874	♠Q874	♠9874	♠A74	♠A765
♥AQ3	♥AQ3	♥J85	♥J103	♥95
♦87	♦K632	♦9642	♦K106	♦A10
♣J1087	♣107	♣87	♣QJ54	♣QJ542

With hand A, you bid 1♠ – this minimum response promises 4+ cards in the suit and 0-8(9) HCP. With hand B, you jump to 2♠ to show about 9-12 HCP – even though you have a stopper in diamonds you do not bid notrumps. With hand C you again respond 1♠ – if third hand passes, advancer **must** bid, even with zero points (with a very weak hand, you are allowed to pass if third hand bids, so if you bid you now promise at least 7 or 8 HCP).

Hand D is different – it does not contain a 4+ major suit but as it does have a stopper in diamonds, you can bid 1NT to show this and around 7-11 HCP (you would bid 2NT with 12-14 HCP). With hand E you again jump to 2♠ – remember that your priority is to bid a major suit, so you do **not** bid 3♣.

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