

NEGATIVE DOUBLES

The old-style traditional action over the opposition's intervening overcall is to double for penalty, based on a useful holding in the over-called suit. However this situation is fairly rare, and also the penalty exacted is usually insufficient.

A better method is to use the double as a take out – the so called 'Negative Double' (sometimes referred to as a 'Sputnik Double' – invented in 1957 by Alvin Roth and Tobias Stone). This has far more frequency and is much more effective.

Example (bracketed bids show opposition bidding):

♠ 984
♥ AJ65
♦ Q942
♣ 103

after 1♣ (partner) - (1♠); playing traditional methods this is almost impossible to bid (you either pass, or fudge a 1NT bid). But playing Negative Doubles, you merely double to show the other suits (but the emphasis is on the major).

There are a number of styles of Negative Doubles, but one common feature is that they show four cards in an un-bid major, and in principle, tolerance for a minor. Another advantage is that they allow the auction to stay at a comfortable low level if opener has a minimum hand with a fit for one of responder's suits:

e.g. 1♠ – (2♣) – 2♦ is forcing
whereas 1♠ – (2♣) – dbl – 2♦ is not forcing

This is very much a bid where it important to develop a 'feel' for the situation.

The detailed requirements are:

Responder's Action

General – at the one-level you require the same minimum strength as a one-level response - 6+ points, and at the two-level you require the values for a two level response – 9+ points (with experience you may reduce this to 8 points).

- 1. If the overcall does not prevent you from making the bid that you would normally make – then:**
 - a. With a five card major, bid the major.
 - b. With a four card major, in principle, prefer a **DOUBLE** (but see 7 below).
- 2. If the overcall prevents you from making the bid you would otherwise have made, then with four or more of the other major and sufficient points - DOUBLE** (6+ points if you are at the one-level; 9+ points at the two-level). The ideal take-out situation is to have two 4-card unbid suits – and partner will bid on this basis. However, without the 4-card minor you can correct later.

To illustrate that even with modest values you can still reach the same (correct) contract, with or without opponent's overcall, consider:

(South) ♠ Q863
 ♥ 75
 ♦ 864
 ♣ AK97

With no opposition bidding, a typical auction would be:

(North) 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 3♣

With an opposition intervening bid of 2♦, and using negative doubles, the auction would be:

(North) 1♥ - (2♦) - dbl - 3♣

3. **Even though the overcall prevents you from making the bid you would otherwise have made, and you have a 5+ card major, you can still only bid at the two-level with 9+ points** (e.g. 1♦ - (1♠ overcall) - 2♥).
4. After a sequence 1♣ - (1♦ overcall), a double requires 4-4 in the majors, and is preferred to a 1♥ bid.
5. After a sequence 1♦ - (2♣ overcall), a double requires at least one 4-card major.
6. After a sequence 1♥ - (1♠ overcall), a double ideally requires 4-4 in the minors, but can be done on a single long minor (and insufficient points to bid at the 2-level).
7. **If partner's preference to your assumed minor suit would cause a re-bid problem, then bid a 4-card major instead of doubling** (see examples (k) and (m)).
8. A 1NT bid (7-9 points) should contain a partial stop in the overcalled suit. (With 5-6 points, pass, and if partner re-opens with a double, you then bid 1NT).
9. If playing a strong 2NT (e.g. Jacoby), this should still apply over the overcall, so with a balanced 10-11 points - double, and then bid 2NT (example (h)).
10. Otherwise pass (even with a hand which you may wish to double the overcall for penalties).
11. Negative doubles should be played up to and including 4♥ overcall - you need to cope with pre-emptive and weak-jump overcalls. (Whilst developing these techniques, you may prefer to use only up to overcalls of 2♠).

Examples:

(after 1♦ - (1♠ overcall))

a)	♠ 82 ♥ K752 ♦ Q94 ♣ Q1083	b)	♠ 82 ♥ AK52 ♦ QJ94 ♣ K83	c)	♠ 82 ♥ K8532 ♦ 943 ♣ KJ8	d)	♠ 82 ♥ AK532 ♦ A94 ♣ 1083	e)	♠ 8752 ♥ AK53 ♦ Q94 ♣ 83
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- a) Double - you would have bid 1♥ without the overcall, but have been prevented from doing so with the overcall. You're still at the one-level, so with 7 points - double.
- b) Double - as (a) but a much stronger hand. You can show your extra strength on your next bid.
- c) Double - whatever opener responds, bid 2♥, showing a 5-card suit and less than 9 points (otherwise you would have bid 2♥ initially).
- d) 2♥ - 5-card suit and more points than (c). You have the necessary 9+ for the bid at the two-level.
- e) Double - showing the 4-card heart suit. If opener bids 2♣ you can convert to 2♦.

(after 1♥ - (1♠ overcall))

f)	♠ K983 ♥ K7 ♦ Q652	g)	♠ 983 ♥ K7 ♦ Q652	h)	♠ KJ32 ♥ K7 ♦ Q652	i)	♠ AQ1074 ♥ 76 ♦ 632	j)	♠ 96 ♥ A987 ♦ AQ64
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♣ 732

♣ K732

♣ Q73

♣ Q43

♣ A76

- f) 1NT - an immediate 1NT shows the upper end of the 6-9 point range.
 g) Double – 4-4 in the minors.
 h) Double. You can't bid 2NT directly (this would be Jacoby). So double first, and bid 2NT on your next bid.
 i) Pass. If opener doubles (see below), you can then pass.
 j) 2NT – Jacoby.

(after 1♦ - (1♠) overcall	1♣ - (1♥)	1♦ - (2♣)	1♦ - (2♣)
k) ♠ 75 ♥ KQ72 ♦ J4 ♣ AK873	l) ♠ Q65 ♥ K72 ♦ J843 ♣ 1094	m) ♠ K842 ♥ AJ65 ♦ 103 ♣ Q94	n) ♠ 9842 ♥ AJ65 ♦ 103 ♣ Q94

- k) 2♣ - you could double with four hearts, but the 'responder reverse' of 2♣ followed by 2♥ is far more descriptive of the strength and shape of the hand.
 l) Pass. If opener doubles (see below), then bid 1NT showing the lower end of the 6-9 points range.
 m) Double - both majors
 n) Pass – both majors, but insufficient points to take action at the 2-level.

(after 1♣ - (1♥ overcall))

o) ♠ K983 ♥ 972 ♦ Q6 ♣ K732	p) ♠ K983 ♥ 972 ♦ Q63 ♣ K73	q) ♠ K983 ♥ K72 ♦ Q6 ♣ 10873
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- o) 1♠. If you were to double, and partner with four diamonds, bids 2♦, you don't have a realistic re-bid.
 p) Double. Similar to (k), but if partner now bids 2♦, you now pass (albeit playing in a 4-3 fit).
 q) 1♠. If you were to double, and partner with four diamonds bids 2♦, what would you rebid? A possible alternative bid is 1NT, but you may well miss a 4-4 spade fit (particularly if playing 5-card majors with a short club).

Opener's Rebids

(after responder's **double**)

The basic principle is that you respond as if partner had bid a 4-card major at the lowest level, i.e. in the sequence 1♦ - (1♠) – dbl – (pass) - ?, bid as if the auction had started 1♦ - (pass) - 1♥ - (pass) - ?

11. **With 4+ of the unbid major give support in this major.** Jump support on 16+ point – e.g. 1♦ - (1♠) - dbl - 3♥. Responder should then pass with 6 or 7 points, and raise to game with 8+ points.

If opener had originally opened 1♥ or 1♠, and responder's rebid (after his double) is 2NT, this would show 10 or 11 points, (he couldn't bid 2NT originally – Jacoby or Baron). See (h) above.

12. With less than 4-card of the unbid major, and 4+card of the unbid minor give support in that minor.

Examples: (after 1♦ - (1♠ overcall) – dbl)

r) ♠ 742 ♥ AQ63	s) ♠ K742 ♥ 63	t) ♠ KQ74 ♥ 63	u) ♠ 74 ♥ 63	v) ♠ 7 ♥ AQ63
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♦ AKJ85
♣ 10

♦ AQ832
♣ K5

♦ AQ832
♣ AJ

♦ AQ832
♣ AK54

♦ AK8532
♣ A4

- r) 3♥ - partner has shown hearts with his double. With the singleton and the fit you are just worth a jump bid (the equivalent of 16 points).
- s) 2♦ - if partner had bid 1♥ (without the overcall), you would have bid your spades. But this is the overcalled suit. You are not strong enough for 1NT, so settle for 2♦.
- t) 1NT – similar to (p) but stronger.
- u) 2♣ - partner possibly has four clubs. If not, he should correct to 2♦.
- v) Auction: 1♦ - (1♠) - dbl - (2♠) - ?. Bid 4♥, knowing that partner has four hearts.

(after responder's pass)

13. With 14+ you should bid. With a shortage in the overcalled suit - **double** - responder may have passed with a hand wanting to make a penalty double. He will then readily pass your double.

Otherwise make your 'natural bid', bearing in mind that partner will probably have less than 6 points.

Examples: (after 1♥ - (2♣ overcall) – pass)

w)	♠ A8	x)	♠ A87	y)	♠ A87
	♥ AKJ83		♥ AKJ83		♥ AJ863
	♦ 104		♦ K104		♦ 104
	♣ K954		♣ 54		♣ K54

- w) 2♥ - just worth the bid. Partner is unlikely to have a hand wanting to double 2♣, nor will he have many points, but you need to be competitive.
- x) Double – there is a possibility that partner has clubs. If not, he can correct (2♦ or 2♥), which would then be passed.
- y) Pass – partner is unlikely to have a hand wanting to penalise 2♣, so has very few points, and you're too weak to compete.

Responder's Rebids

(after original pass and opener has doubled) – you must bid unless you have length/strength in the overcalled suit.

14. With the overcall suit and sufficient length, leave the double in for penalties (i.e. the hand that would have doubled for penalty in the traditional approach).

15. With an 8 count and a 6-card minor (i.e. not enough points to originally double or bid at the 2-level), jump to 3 minor.

16. Otherwise bid any 5-card suit – partner will then know you are weak and will bid accordingly.

17. As a last resort with a poor hand < 6 points, you may have to bid a 4-card suit, or bid 1NT (with a stop in the overcalled suit).

Examples: (after 1♣ - (1♠ overcall) – pass – dbl)

z)	♠ AQJ74	aa)	♠ Q742	bb)	♠ 7432	cc)	♠ 743	dd)	♠ KJ42
	♥ Q52		♥ 52		♥ AJ532		♥ 653		♥ 532
	♦ 98		♦ AQ9832		♦ 98		♦ Q983		♦ 983
	♣ 765		♣ 7		♣ 65		♣ 765		♣ 765

- z) Pass - converting opener's point-showing double to a penalty double.
- aa) 3♦ - not strong enough for 2♦ initially, but now competitive.
- bb) 2♥ - not strong enough to double originally.
- cc) 2♦ - no other bid, but surely the opposition will re-enter the auction.
- dd) 1NT – too weak to bid 1NT originally.

AFH