

Overcalling

When the opponents have made the opening bid and you want to enter the auction you are the overcaller and have the option of bidding a suit or NT at a legal level (overcall), but also the additional option of a double. Having opening points does not mean you have an overcall (or even a takeout double) and sometimes your correct bid is to pass with more than opening hand. A good suit can be a reason to overcall with less than opening values!

Hands with 19+ points should begin with a double and bidding the suit at their next turn. Therefore overcalls are limited to about 18 points and show a 5 card or longer suit. Suit quality is important especially if you do not have extra points or length to make up for it. A good quality suit has multiple top honours (A/K/Q/J/T) and ever better if they are touching. e.g. AKJxx = good quality, KQxxx = mid quality, J9xxx = poor quality. Note that "points" below are HCP but you can adjust the evaluation of your hand if you are advanced.

Reasons to overcall

- Lead directing - show partner suit to lead or switch to
- Competing in part score (or game) - show partner points and longest suit
- Sacrificing or offering possible sacrifice suit
- Interference - make it harder for opponents to describe their hands

NT overcalls - similar to strong 1NT opener but with a stopper in openers suit

- (1H)-1NT = 15-18 HCP with stopper. System on (e.g. stayman and transfers)
- (2H)-2NT = 15-18 HCP with stopper (over 2 level preempt) System on
- (3H)-3NT = 17+ HCP with stopper (over 3 level preempt)

1-level simple overcall - good time to bid even if lighter than opening hand - e.g. (1C)-1H

- 8-18 points. Can be less than opening hand. Lower end needs good suit quality.

2-level simple overcall - **be cautious especially when VUL** - e.g. (1S)-2C

- 11-18 points. Almost opening values. Very good suit quality needed if minimum

Preempt overcalls. Opponent is weak so stretch to bid with a good suit and some values.

- (2H)-2S = 11-18 points
- (3H)-3S = 13+ points
- (4H)-4S = 14+ points

Jump overcalls. Preemptive like normal opening preempts. Disruptive and can be suggesting a sacrifice to your partner. Must be a good quality suit when vulnerable.

- (1C)-2H = 6 card heart suit but weak hand
- (1C)-3H = 7 card heart suit but weak hand

Sandwich position after both opponents have made a bid is the same as simple overcalls, but you should have slightly better quality or points to be bidding now as the opponents have already described their hands. Game is unlikely so no top end to your range now.

- (1C)-(1H)-1S = 10+ points. Good quality suit and/or distribution.
- (1C)-(1S)-2D = 13+ points. Good quality suit and/or distribution.

In the balancing seat consider your partner may have points but was unable to bid.

Especially if you are short in openers suit it is often right to overcall light particularly if the opening bid was a preempt. **Advanced:** It is handy to change your 1NT range to 11-15 in the balancing seat but discuss this with your partner (must double first with 16-18).

- (1H)-P-P-1S = 9-18 points
- (1S)-P-P-2C = 12-18 points
- (3H)-P-P-3S = 13+ points but could be lighter when you are short in their suit
- (1C)-P-P-? = if short in clubs stretch to bid, with length 1NT/PASS are good options

Advancing

When advancing remember a 1-level overcall can be lighter than an opening hand. If you can support your partner's suit you should compete immediately, even without that many points. However, if partner's suit is a minor you should show your major or bid NT rather than support their minor with a suitable hand and enough points. Otherwise, if game is not likely then you should be limiting your hand by passing. Therefore all **new suits below the 3-level are constructive but non-forcing**. This allows your partner with a weak overcall to bail out. To make the auction **absolutely game force you must jump in a new suit**. If you want to Remember when you have a fit you should now be counting HCP plus shortage points (void = 5, singleton = 3, doubleton = 1). Suit quality is no longer a requirement when advancing.

After 1-level overcall with support. Similar ranges as if partner had opened (slightly better).

- Jump raise with 4 or 5 cards and a 0-7 points (preempt)
- Otherwise less than 7 points PASS
- Single raise with 7-10 points
- Cue raise (bid opponent suit) with 11+ points

Note: Overcaller should repeat their suit with a weak overcall after cue raise

After 1-level overcall without support. As if partner opens but add ~3 points to your ranges.

- Less than 8 points PASS
- 1 level bids = 8+ points 5 card suit (maybe 4) - forcing e.g. (1C)-1H-1S
- 1NT = 9-13 HCP and stopper in openers suit
- 2NT = 14-15 HCP and stopper in openers suit
- 3NT = 16+ HCP and stopper in openers suit
- 2 level new suit = 10+ points 5 cards e.g. (1D)-1H-2C

After 2-level overcall with support. Try to advance/compete if possible.

- Jump raise with 4 or 5 cards and a 0-7 points (preempt)
- Otherwise less than 6 points PASS
- Single raise with 6-9 points
- Cue raise (bid opponent suit) with 10+ points

After 2-level overcall without support. Similar ranges as if partner had opened.

- 2 level new suit = 8+ points 5 cards - forcing e.g. (1S)-2C-2H
- 3 level new suit = 12+ points 5 cards - forcing e.g. (1S)-2H-3C
- 2NT = 10-12 HCP and stopper in openers suit
- 3NT = 13-15 HCP and stopper in openers suit

After NT

- You need to discuss with your partner but my preference is to keep in place the same system you have after opening 1NT/2NT for overcalls of 1NT/2NT. For most people this will mean transfers and stayman are still on.

Other notes

- Take note if your partner has previously limited their hand (e.g. passed hand) as this now makes some constructive bids much less constructive!
- If your partner is bidding in a balancing seat they were forced to bid to keep the auction alive so you need to be more cautious when continuing the auction!
- When using cue raises then overcaller should make a minimum rebid of the agreed suit to show a weak hand. All other bids are natural and stronger than minimum, looking for game.
- Cue bidding the opponents suit (ref: Michaels Cue Bid) and overcalling 2NT (ref: Unusual 2NT) are normally not natural. Research these further yourself.

Overcalling Examples

One level overcall - you need a good suit or good points
RHO is dealer and opens 1H

8 points, v good quality suit ✓ overcall 1S	10 points, poor quality suit ✗ PASS	14 points, poor quality suit ✓ overcall 1S
♠ AKJxx ♥ xx ♦ xx ♣ xxxx	♠ Jxxxx ♥ Ax ♦ xx ♣ KQxx	♠ Jxxxx ♥ Ax ♦ Ax ♣ KQxx

Two level overcall - you need (near) opening hand and a very good suit is important,
especially when vulnerable
RHO is dealer and opens 1S

11 points, v good quality suit ✓ overcall 2C	13 points, mid quality suit ✗ PASS (esp when VUL)	16 points, mid quality suit ✓ overcall 2C
♠ x ♥ Jxx ♦ xxx ♣ AKQxxx	♠ Jx ♥ Axx ♦ Kxx ♣ KQxxx	♠ xx ♥ AKx ♦ KJx ♣ KQxxx

Other examples

RHO dealer opens 1D 14 points, no good bid ✗ PASS	RHO dealer opens 1H 16 HCP and stopper ✓ overcall 1NT	RHO dealer opens 3H 13 points, v good quality suit ✓ overcall 3S
♠ AJx ♥ xxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ AQx	♠ AJxx ♥ Axx ♦ Ax ♣ Kxxx	♠ AKQxxx ♥ xx ♦ xx ♣ Kxxx

RHO dealer opens 1S 13 points, good suit ✓ overcall 2H - bid higher rank suit if you have 2 suits	RHO dealer opens 1S ✓ overcall 3D - remember your preempts (must be a jump bid)	LHO opens 1C-P-P-? 12 points, balanced ✓ 1NT (advanced 11-15)
♠ xx ♥ AQxxx ♦ x ♣ KQxxx	♠ x ♥ xxx ♦ AQJxxxx ♣ Jx	♠ QJxx ♥ xx ♦ AQxx ♣ Qxx

RHO = right hand opponent (direct overcall)
LHO = left hand opponent (balancing)

Advancing Examples

Partner overcalled at the 1-level (1C)-1H-P-?

8 points, 5 card suit ✓ bid 1S	7 points, heart support ✓ raise 2H	13 points, heart support ✓ cue bid 2C
♠ QJxxx ♥ xx ♦ xx ♣ AJxx	♠ xxxx ♥ Axx ♦ xx ♣ Qxxx	♠ Qxxx ♥ Axx ♦ Ax ♣ Kxxx

11 points, 5 card suit ✓ bid 2D	8 points, no support ✗ PASS - limit your hand	12 points, no support ✓ bid 1NT (club stopper)
♠ Axx ♥ Qx ♦ KQxxx ♣ xxx	♠ AQxx ♥ xx ♦ xxx ♣ Qxxx	♠ AJx ♥ Qx ♦ Qxxx ♣ Kxxx

Partner overcalled at the 2-level (1S)-2D-P-?

7 points, 5 card suit ✗ PASS - limit your hand	13 points, support w stopper ✓ bid 3NT	9 points, 5 card suit ✓ bid 2H - show majors
♠ xxx ♥ AQJxx ♦ x ♣ xxx	♠ Kxxx ♥ Axx ♦ QJxx ♣ QJx	♠ xx ♥ KJxxx ♦ xx ♣ AJxx

10 points, no stopper ✗ PASS - no good bid	6 points, 3 card support ✓ raise 3D	11 points, support w/o stop ✓ cue bid 2S
♠ xxx ♥ Axxx ♦ Qx ♣ KJxx	♠ xx ♥ xxxx ♦ KQx ♣ xxxx	♠ xxx ♥ AJx ♦ QJx ♣ Kxxx

Other examples

(1S)-1NT-P-? ✓ 2D - transfer to hearts - discuss with your partner	(1S)-3D-P-? ✓ 5D - immediate sacrifice makes it hard for opener	(2S)-P-P-3H-P-? ✗ PASS - your partner has balanced and could be light
♠ xx ♥ KJxxxx ♦ x ♣ xxxx	♠ x ♥ AKxx ♦ KJxx ♣ xxxx	♠ xxx ♥ Kxx ♦ Jxx ♣ Axxx