

Question: (1) What, technically, is an overcall?
And (2) Does an overcall always promise less than opening count since you could make a takeout double with opening count?

(1) Simple answer for the definition. When your partner has not made a call (other than a Pass); and either of the opponents open the bidding; and you then bid a suit, that's an overcall. Examples:

Opp	Part	Opp	You
1C	Pass	1S	2H

Or

Part	Opp	You
Pass	1D	1H

Those are both simple overcalls.

(2) And the point range of a simple overcall can be beyond opening count. For a 2-level overcall (like your 2H above) the range would be 10-16 HCP. For a 1-level overcall (like your 1H above) the range is about 8-16 HCP. For beginners, an overcall should always be a 5-card or longer suit. The overcall does NOT deny having opening count. Example: Opp opens 1C and you hold:

S A 5 H K J 4 D A Q 6 5 4 C 4 3 2

All of my panel folks would overcall 1D. So with opening count, you would sometimes overcall and sometimes double. The double GUARANTEES at least 3 cards in unbid majors (hence no double with that hand with only 2 spades). There would be some hands where you would have a choice, e.g., Opp opens 1C and you hold:

S A 5 4 H K J 4 D A Q 6 5 4 C 4 3

Now both 1D and double would be legal. I think my panel would opt for the double but I'll ask and report next week.