

## NEGATIVE DOUBLES

After an opening bid of 1 of a suit, the next hand will frequently make an overcall in a different suit. In many cases the responder can just ignore the overcall and make the bid that he would have made without the intervention. In other cases the overcall does affect responder's choice of action.

### RESPONDER'S VARIOUS OPTIONS AFTER AN OVERCALL

In general, an overcall will prevent responder from making certain bids that would have been available without the intervention. For example, after a 1♦ opening, a 1♠ overcall makes it impossible for responder to bid 1♥. But the overcall does introduce another option: responder may **double** the overcall.

### WHEN SHOULD RESPONDER DOUBLE AN OVERCALL?

In general, when the final contract is doubled the penalty for going down is increased and the reward for making the contract is also increased. Thus many doubles are classified as "penalty doubles" that suggest that the contract is likely to be defeated. In the early days of bridge all doubles of overcalls were interpreted in this way.

In practice it is often difficult to collect a worthwhile penalty against a low-level contract, so doubles of overcalls are nowadays treated differently. They instead show certain types of hand that would otherwise be difficult to show. Doubles of overcalls are generally termed "negative doubles", although they are in effect a form of takeout double. Opener is expected to bid something unless he has length and strength in the suit overcalled.

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR A NEGATIVE DOUBLE

The strength required for a negative double varies according to the overcall and the nature of responder's hand, but a simple guideline is shown below:

- A negative double of a 1 level overcall shows 6+ points;
- A negative double of a 2 level overcall shows 8+ points;
- A negative double of a 3 level overcall shows 10+ points;

Although there is no upper limit for a negative double, it denies the ability to make a responding bid, so is less common when responder has game-going values.

There are also some important constraints on distribution. A negative double is usually encouraging the opener to bid an unbid major, so responder needs to be prepared for this. Detailed distributional requirements for negative doubles of simple overcalls are shown in the next few sections.

## DISTRIBUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS WITH TWO UNBID MAJORS

When the opening and overcall are both in minor suits, the double shows at least one 4+ card major. When the overcall is at the 1 level, responder is showing **both majors**. Some sequences:

|         |         |          |   |
|---------|---------|----------|---|
| S<br>1♣ | W<br>1♦ | N<br>dbl | This particular double promises at least 4-4 in the majors. |
| 1♦      | 2♣      | dbl      | Responder has 4+ cards in at least one of the majors.       |

If responder has 10+ points with 5-4 (or longer) in the majors it may be better to bid naturally by responding in the longer major, rather than make a negative double.

## DISTRIBUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS WITH ONE UNBID MAJOR

When there is just one unbid major, the double shows 4+ cards in the unbid major. When the overcall is 1♥, responder is showing **exactly** 4 spades: with more he should ignore the overcall and respond 1♠. In all cases responder is not promising any particular length in the unbid minor. Some sequences:

|         |         |          |  |
|---------|---------|----------|--|
| S<br>1♣ | W<br>1♥ | N<br>dbl | This particular double shows exactly 4 spades.                             |
| 1♦      | 1♠      | dbl      | Responder has 4+ hearts.   |
| 1♠      | 2♣      | dbl      | Responder has 4+ hearts. He also won't normally have 3 card spade support. |

In the last two cases responder should normally prefer to show his major at the 2 level if he has a 5+ card suit and 11+ points.

## DISTRIBUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS WITH NO UNBID MAJOR

When the opening and overcall are both in major suits, the double shows at least one 4+ card minor. Some sequences:

|         |         |          |   |
|---------|---------|----------|---|
| S<br>1♥ | W<br>1♠ | N<br>dbl | Responder has 4+ cards in at least one of the minors.       |
| 1♠      | 2♥      | dbl      | Again responder has 4+ cards in at least one of the minors. |

In both sequences responder won't normally have 3+ card support for opener's major suit.

## DOUBLES OF OTHER OVERCALLS

Negative doubles apply over jump overcalls up to 3♠ (some partnerships also play them against higher overcalls). Responder should aim to satisfy the distributional requirements summarised above, although he will sometimes need to double just to show some values if no alternative bid is available.

If an opponent overcalls with a Michaels Cue Bid or other conventional bid, a double just shows some values. Responder might be interested in penalising the opponents when they bid one of their suits.

After a 1NT overcall a double is for penalties, showing 10+ points.

## EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE DOUBLES

|         |         |          |  |   |
|---------|---------|----------|--|---|
| S<br>1♦ | W<br>1♠ | N<br>dbl | North<br>♠ Q 8 3<br>♥ K J 8 2<br>♦ 8 7<br>♣ 10 9 7 6 | It is very useful to be able make a negative double after a 1♣ or 1♦ opening and a 1♠ overcall. There's no other way to show 4 hearts, since a 2♥ response would show 5+ hearts (and also 11+ points). This hand is minimum for a negative double of a 1 level overcall, so will probably pass on the next round. |
| S<br>1♣ | W<br>1♥ | N<br>dbl | North<br>♠ Q 10 8 3<br>♥ K J 8 2<br>♦ A 5 4<br>♣ J 3 | Here responder makes a negative double to show exactly 4 spades, which can be useful information if the auction becomes competitive. Responder's 11 points are enough for a further bid: for example, he'll continue with 2NT if opener rebids 2♣.  |
| S<br>1♣ | W<br>1♦ | N<br>dbl | North<br>♠ A Q 10 3<br>♥ J 8 7 5 2<br>♦ 5 4<br>♣ J 6 | Without the intervention this hand would happily respond 1♥, but after the 1♦ overcall a negative double describes the hand better.   |
| S<br>1♥ | W<br>2♣ | N<br>dbl | North<br>♠ Q J 7 3<br>♥ 5 2<br>♦ K Q 8 5 4<br>♣ J 3  | Responder doubles to show 4+ spades and about 8+ points.  |

## EXAMPLES OF HANDS UNSUITABLE FOR A NEGATIVE DOUBLE

|         |         |        |  |   |
|---------|---------|--------|--|---|
| S<br>1♦ | W<br>1♠ | N<br>? | North<br>♠ 3<br>♥ A K J 8 2<br>♦ 8 7<br>♣ A 10 9 7 6 | It would be possible to make a negative double with this hand, but with game-going values and 5+ hearts it's better to make a natural response of 2♥. This will leave North much better placed if East makes a pre-emptive raise to 2♠ or 3♠.       |
| S<br>1♣ | W<br>1♥ | N<br>? | North<br>♠ Q J 10 8 3<br>♥ J 8 2<br>♦ A 5 4<br>♣ J 3 | Here responder makes the natural response of 1♠, which after the 1♥ overcall shows 5+ spades. This can be useful information if the auction becomes competitive.  |
| S<br>1♣ | W<br>1♠ | N<br>? | North<br>♠ K 9 4 3<br>♥ K Q 2<br>♦ J 5 4<br>♣ 8 6 3  | Responder can't double because he has only three hearts, but he can make a natural response of 1NT instead. A NT response after an overcall only denies 4 cards in an <u>unbid</u> major.   |
| S<br>1♠ | W<br>2♣ | N<br>? | North<br>♠ 3<br>♥ K Q 2<br>♦ J 5 4 3<br>♣ K J 9 6 3  | Responder can't double the 2♣ overcall because opener wouldn't interpret it as for penalties. Instead responder just passes. There's a fair chance that opener will reopen with a takeout double, which responder would happily pass for penalties. |

## OPENER'S REBIDS AFTER A NEGATIVE DOUBLE

Opener generally rebids naturally. If opener rebids his suit or bids NT at minimum level, this shows a minimum hand.

Opener may also bid a new suit, but the meaning of this is dependent on whether or not responder has guaranteed length in this suit. If so, opener should generally rebid as if responder had bid that suit, so opener's rebid should be interpreted as a "raise" and not a new suit.

If opener rebids in a new suit that responder hasn't guaranteed, this should be interpreted as a second suit. If above the level of 2 of opener's suit this is a reverse, showing 17+ points and forcing for one round.

Opener may cue bid the opponent's suit if he has enough for game opposite responder's minimum strength. Responder is encouraged to bid NT with a stopper.

Opener may pass the negative double at the 2 level with 5 cards or a strong 4 card holding in the opponent's suit.

## EXAMPLES OF REBIDDING AFTER A NEGATIVE DOUBLE

|                                |  |   |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| S W N E<br>1♦ 1♠ dbl pass<br>? | South<br>♠ A Q 3<br>♥ K J 8 2<br>♦ Q 10 7 4<br>♣ 7 6 | Rebid 2♥. Responder has guaranteed 4 hearts, so opener is essentially making a single raise of responder's suit. It would be wrong to rebid 1NT, which would deny 4 card heart support. |
| S W N E<br>1♣ 1♠ dbl pass<br>? | South<br>♠ Q 8 3<br>♥ 2<br>♦ K Q 5 4<br>♣ K Q J 8 3  | Rebid 2♣. Responder hasn't promised any particular length in diamonds, so it would be unsound to rebid 2♦.  |
| S W N E<br>1♣ 1♠ dbl pass<br>? | South<br>♠ Q 8 3<br>♥ A<br>♦ K Q 5 4<br>♣ K Q J 8 3  | Rebid 2♦. This reverse, forcing for one round, corresponds to the unopposed sequence 1♣-1♥-2♦.  |
| S W N E<br>1♥ 1♠ dbl pass<br>? | South<br>♠ J 3<br>♥ A Q 9 7 6<br>♦ K 4<br>♣ Q J 8 3  | Rebid 2♣. If responder doesn't have clubs he'll remove to 2♦ or 2♥.   |
| S W N E<br>1♦ 1♥ dbl pass<br>? | South<br>♠ A 3<br>♥ Q 9 7<br>♦ K 10 6 4<br>♣ Q J 8 3 | Rebid 1NT, showing 12-14 balanced as usual.   |
| S W N E<br>1♣ 1♥ dbl 2♥<br>?   | South<br>♠ Q 9 8 3<br>♥ A 7<br>♦ K Q 10 6 4<br>♣ 6 3 | This hand is minimum, but is still worth 2♠, since partner is guaranteeing 4 cards in the suit.   |
| S W N E<br>1♦ 1♠ dbl 2♠<br>?   | South<br>♠ A Q<br>♥ 7<br>♦ A K Q J 6 4<br>♣ Q 8 6 3  | 3NT. On the likely spade lead this hand will take eight tricks. Partner has shown length in hearts.   |

## OPENER'S ACTION IF RESPONDER PASSES OVER AN OVERCALL

After an opening bid and an overcall responder may have to pass if he has length in the opponent's suit. If fourth hand also passes, opener should bear in mind that responder might have wanted to make a penalty double, but was unable to do so. He should therefore normally reopen if he is short in the opponent's suit.

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| S    W    N    E<br>1♦ 1♠ pass pass<br>? | South<br>♠ 3<br>♥ K J 8 2<br>♦ A Q 9 7 3<br>♣ K 7 6  | South's hand is essentially minimum, but he should reopen with a takeout double. North might sometimes be able to pass the double for penalties. If not, South has support for both unbid suits. |
| S    W    N    E<br>1♠ 2♣ pass pass<br>? | South<br>♠ A 10 8 7 4 3<br>♥ A K J 2<br>♦ K 3<br>♣ 6 | South's hand is suitable for defence, so he should reopen with a takeout double in preference to rebidding 2♥ or 2♠. If responder bids 2♦ South can bid 2♥ on the third round.                   |
| S    W    N    E<br>1♠ 2♣ pass pass<br>? | South<br>♠ A Q J 4 3<br>♥ J 2<br>♦ K Q 10 8 3<br>♣ 6 | This hand isn't so suitable for defence, so South just shows his second suit by rebidding 2♦.  |

## NEGATIVE DOUBLES SUMMARY

After a **suit** (not NT) overcall (up to 3♠) of partner's one-level opening, double is for takeout.

**After a non jump overcall the negative double shows specific holdings as follows:**

1. If there is exactly **one unbid major**, double promises 4+ cards in that major.

|    |    |     |  |
|----|----|-----|--|
| 1♣ | 1♠ | dbl | promises 4+ hearts                                   |
| 1♣ | 1♥ | dbl | promises exactly 4 spades<br>(with 5+ spades bid 1♠) |

2. If there are **two unbid majors**, double promises 4+ cards in one of the majors (may have both majors but only guarantees one) **except** after 1♣ 1♦ when double shows 4+ cards in both majors.

|    |    |     |                             |
|----|----|-----|-----------------------------|
| 1♦ | 2♣ | dbl | promises at least one major |
| 1♣ | 1♦ | dbl | promises both majors        |

3. If **both majors** have been bid, double promises 4+ cards in one of the minors (may have both minors but only guarantees one).

|    |    |     |                             |
|----|----|-----|-----------------------------|
| 1♠ | 2♥ | dbl | promises at least one minor |
|----|----|-----|-----------------------------|

After a jump overcall or a conventional overcall (e.g. Michaels, Unusual NT) the double is less specific and just shows some values but not enough to bid.

**Point counts required for negative double (there is no upper limit):**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| At the one level (i.e. after a 1 level overcall)   | 6+  |
| At the two level (i.e. after a 2 level overcall)   | 8+  |
| At the three level (i.e. after a 3 level overcall) | 10+ |

Note: After a **1NT overcall** double is for penalties (10+ points), not a negative double