

§4. The Weakness Take-out of 1NT.

By the end of this chapter you should understand the following terms:

Sign-off: A bid that compels your partner to Pass.

Weakness take-out: A response to a 1NT opening bid that tells opener that responder is weak.

In §2 we looked at balanced responses to an opening bid of 1NT. Generally speaking, with a balanced hand, responder had three options. He could Pass (leaving the contract in 1NT), he could raise to 3NT or he could choose the middle path and pass the buck with 2NT.

What, though, if responder does not have a balanced hand? What should he do? We will look later at cases where responder has a **strong** unbalanced hand – in this section we are concerned with what to do with poor, unbalanced hands. Bidding a suit at the two-level is called “**making a weakness take-out**” or “**signing-off**”. The very important idea here is that the “boss of the auction” (responder, of course) is deciding the final contract, simply because he is best placed to do so.

Some examples may make this clearer. In each case you are South. What do you respond to 1NT?

<p>Ex 1.</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 100px; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr><td>West</td><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>1NT</td><td>Pass</td><td>?</td></tr> </table> <p>♠ K J 9 7 5 3 ♥ 6 ♦ Q 8 ♣ 10 8 5 3</p> <p>You have 6 points, partner has 12-14, so you have a combined 18-20 points. No-trumps is anathema with a 6-4-2-1 pattern, so you should <i>sign-off</i> in 2♣. North will (or should) Pass this as you are telling him to shut up – the bid is neither consultative nor explorative. It commands a Pass.</p>	N				W		E			S			West	North	East	South		1NT	Pass	?	<p>Ex 2.</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 100px; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr><td>West</td><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>1NT</td><td>Pass</td><td>?</td></tr> </table> <p>♠ 8 ♥ A 10 9 7 4 2 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ J 9 7</p> <p>You have 5 points facing 12-14, so the opponents have more points than you do. Still, they don't know this, only you are privilege to that information. Remove 1NT (which is going to be a poor contract) to 2♥, which clearly will make many more tricks. 2♥ may go off – live with it. 1NT is sure to be defeated.</p>	N				W		E			S			West	North	East	South		1NT	Pass	?
N																																									
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The examples above show that a **weakness take-out** may be made on any hand with at least a five-card suit and insufficient values for game. In terms of strength, a weakness take-out shows 10 points or under – such a bid may have no points at all. The object of the exercise is to play in a better spot than 1NT – something that may be obvious to responder if he has a shapely hand unsuitable for No-trumps. Here, in some cases, for “better” you may choose to read “less bad”.

Note that:

- Opener does not bid again having opened 1NT. By making a **limit bid** he has made his pitch and described his hand. Subsequently he respects his partner's decision.
- Responder is sure of some support for his five-card or longer suit. Opener, after all, has a balanced hand. At worst the partnership will have seven trumps, which is more trumps than the opponents – an important consideration.
- Many weakness take-outs (if they win the auction) fail to make. *C'est la vie*. Going one off in, say, 2♥ is better than going two off in 1NT. This is a likely scenario with a long suit facing a 1NT opening bid.

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§4. Quiz on The Weakness Take-out of 1NT.

In each case you are **South**

1. Calculate how many points there are between you and your partner after he opens 1NT (12-14).
2. Decide whether you are better off in No-trumps or in a suit.
3. What do you respond?

1.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ None
♥ K 9 7 6 4 2
♦ Q J 5 3
♣ J 8 6

2.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 7 5 3
♥ Q 9 7 6 4 3
♦ 5 3 2
♣ 8

3.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 4 2
♥ K J 9 8 5
♦ A Q 4 2
♣ 5 3

4.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 8 7 6 4 3 2
♥ None
♦ 8 5 4 2
♣ 9 7 3

5.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 7
♥ 10 8 6 5
♦ J 9 5 3
♣ J 7 4 2

6.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 7
♥ 10 8 6 5 2
♦ J 9 5 3
♣ J 7 4

7.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 10 8 6 5 3
♥ 4
♦ 5 3 2
♣ A K Q 10

8.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ Q 8 7 4 2
♥ J 4
♦ Q 9 6 5 3
♣ 8

9.

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ Q J 9 7 5
♥ J 10 3
♦ K 5 2
♣ 4 2

10.*

N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	?	

♠ 4 2
♥ K 5 2
♦ J 10 3
♣ Q J 9 7 5

§4. Quiz on The Weakness Take-out of 1NT.

Answers

1.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ None
 ♥ K 9 7 6 4 2
 ♦ Q J 5 3
 ♣ J 8 6

2♥. The combined point count is 19-21, way short of game. With your unbalanced hand (a 6-4-3-0 pattern) it would be wrong to Pass and watch your partner struggle in No-trumps. You should select your long suit as trumps: 2♥ is a *sign-off*, obliging North to Pass.

2.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 7 5 3
 ♥ Q 9 7 6 4 3
 ♦ 5 3 2
 ♣ 8

2♥. Your combined point count is 14-16, so this is a deal that really belongs to the opposition. Still, don't Pass over 1NT out of fright – you will make more tricks in Hearts than North will in No-trumps. So *sign-off* in 2♥. North will Pass this if he wants to remain your partner.

3.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 4 2
 ♥ K J 9 8 5
 ♦ A Q 4 2
 ♣ 5 3

2♥. The combined point count is 22-24, close to game values but not close enough. With a 5-4-2-2 hand you should remove 1NT to 2♥, fully expecting to make your contract. With your unbalanced hand it would be wrong to Pass and watch your partner struggle in No-trumps.

4.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 8 7 6 4 3 2
 ♥ None
 ♦ 8 5 4 2
 ♣ 9 7 3

2♣. A ghastly hand, technically known as a *Yarborough*. With zero points your combined count is – er – 12-14 and 1NT, if left in, would play like a dog. At least you'll make some tricks with Spades as trumps, although West is surely about to enter the fray and outbid you.

5.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 7
 ♥ 10 8 6 5
 ♦ J 9 5 3
 ♣ J 7 4 2

Pass. Nasty. Although you are 4-4-4-1, and hence unbalanced, you don't have the haven of a five-card suit to run to. 1NT (with a combined point-count of 14-16) is going to suffer a nasty fate, but there's no better hole to lie in. Cross your fingers and hope for something good.

6.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 7
 ♥ 10 8 6 5 2
 ♦ J 9 5 3
 ♣ J 7 4

2♥. Not the best hand in the world but at least it has a five-card suit as a source of refuge (cf Q5). 2♥ will fail for sure, but not as badly as 1NT would. This is damage limitation. Anyway, with 24-26 points this deal belongs to East-West, who could probably make a game.

7.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 10 8 6 5 3
 ♥ 4
 ♦ 5 3 2
 ♣ A K Q 10

2♠. It's right to "pull" 1NT into Spades as 5-4-3-1 hands are not balanced. Don't be seduced by the relative qualities of the black suits, though. When seeking a trump suit (a **trump fit**) we are looking for *length* rather than *strength* – an important theme in this game.

8.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ Q 8 7 4 2
 ♥ J 4
 ♦ Q 9 6 5 3
 ♣ 8

2♠. Well, with a 5-5-2-1 hand it's certainly wrong to Pass 1NT. Which suit to bid as a sign-off, then? Spades or Diamonds? This is not so hard with experience – always opt for the better scoring suit, the **major**. Clubs and Diamonds are second-class citizens at bridge.

9.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ Q J 9 7 5
 ♥ J 10 3
 ♦ K 5 2
 ♣ 4 2

2♠. A combined point count of 19-21. No chance of game, so you must try to locate the best part-score. A close decision between Passing or bidding your five-card suit. With this type of hand it is usually best to play in a suit. North will respect 2♠ as a sign-off and Pass.

10.

N		E
W		S

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	?

♠ 4 2
 ♥ K 5 2
 ♦ J 10 3
 ♣ Q J 9 7 5

Pass. This may look perverse (it is the identical hand to Q9, after all) but it shows the difference between majors and minors. We strain to bid Spades and Hearts at this game, we treat Clubs and Diamonds with contempt. No-trumps scores 40, 30, 30 a trick, Clubs only 20.

§4. Example hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1 Dealer North

♠ A K 7 2
♥ 10 7 4
♦ A K 2
♣ 9 8 6

♠ Q 5 4	N	♠ J 10 9 8
♥ 5 2	W	♥ A K
♦ 10 9 8 5	E	♦ Q 7 6 4
♣ A K Q 2	S	♣ 7 5 4

♠ 6 3
♥ Q J 9 8 6 3
♦ J 3
♣ J 10 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	
2♥ by South		Opening lead: ♠A	

North opens 1NT as dealer with his completely balanced hand (4-3-3-3 pattern) and 14 points. South has a poor hand unsuitable for play in No-trumps and with a 6-3-2-2 shape. The hand, however, will make more tricks if Hearts are trumps than if played in No-trumps, so South should find a bid that tells his partner precisely that. The right action is to *sign-off* in a long suit – in this case by bidding 2♥. North is not required to think hard over his partner's *weakness take-out* as the bid is telling the opener to Pass. Against 2♥ West leads the ♠A to “have a look at the dummy”. When he finally gains the lead, declarer should play trumps as soon as he can. He will lose three Clubs and two Heart tricks – and that's all.

Hand 2 Dealer East

♠ J 9 8 5 4
♥ 3
♦ 5 3 2
♣ K Q 8 6

♠ A 10	N	♠ 7 3
♥ A Q 5 2	W	♥ J 10 9 8
♦ 10 9 8 7	E	♦ A K Q
♣ J 9 5	S	♣ 10 7 3 2

♠ K Q 6 2
♥ K 7 6 4
♦ J 6 4
♣ A 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♠	All Pass	
2♠ by North		Opening lead: ♦A	

After East Passes South describes his 4-4-3-2 hand of 13 points hand by opening 1NT. That makes North **boss of the auction** as he is the only player at the table capable of assessing his side's assets. Here, North can see that North-South have at most 20 points between them and therefore have limited ambitions. He can deduce that the hand should be played in a *part-score* and that Spades will be better (less bad, maybe) than No-trumps. Accordingly, North makes a *weakness take-out* into 2♠, a bid that South must Pass if he values his health. East leads his three top Diamonds, giving his side a good start, and follows with the ♥J. As soon as he gains the lead declarer should lead trumps, forcing out the ♠A.

Hand 3 Dealer South

♠ Q 10 8
♥ J 10 9 8 3
♦ K Q 7
♣ 9 4

♠ J 7 5 3 2	N	♠ A K 6
♥ 7 5	W	♥ K 6 2
♦ A 5	E	♦ 8 4 3
♣ Q 10 6 5	S	♣ K J 8 2

♠ 9 4
♥ A Q 4
♦ J 10 9 6 2
♣ A 7 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	Pass
2♠ by West		Opening lead: ♥J	

There are three Passes to East who describes his hand precisely by opening 1NT. West should add up what he can see in front of his face to what his partner has shown and come up with a total. Here, West calculates that his side has 19-21 points, so the deal should be played in a part-score. It *might* be tempting to Pass 1NT but, with a five-card Spade suit, it is usually best to remove 1NT and play in a trump contract. Thus, West bids 2♠, a *sign-off*, telling East that 2♠ is a better spot than 1NT. East Passes that, having been told to shut up. 1NT would struggle after a Diamond lead but 2♠ should make. West should cash the ♠A K and then set up Clubs.

Hand 4 Dealer West

♠ K J
♥ J 9
♦ J 8 5 4 2
♣ K Q 10 6

♠ 9 8	N	♠ 10 7 5 4 3 2
♥ A Q 6	W	♥ K 8 4
♦ A 10 7 6	E	♦ 9 3
♣ A 9 7 4	S	♣ 8 2

♠ A Q 6
♥ 10 7 5 3 2
♦ K Q
♣ J 5 3

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		
2♠ by East		Opening lead: ♦K	

East picks up a rubbish tip here and doesn't expect to become declarer until at least the next deal. *Oh ye of little faith!* When West opens 1NT on his 4-4-3-2 hand with 14 points East has to reassess matters. 1NT will surely play appallingly, so East rescues the partnership into a trump suit with a *weakness take-out* of 2♠, effectively silencing South. After the ♦K lead (a sort of a top-of-a-sequence lead) declarer is greeted by a dummy that is maximum but with minimal trump support. No matter. Provided declarer leads trumps at every opportunity, the enemy Spade honours will “crash” together on the same tricks. East loses just three trumps, a Diamond and a Club and emerges triumphant with eight tricks. Contract made.

§4. Example hands 5 to 8.

Hand 5 Dealer North

♠ K 8 3
♥ 10 9 7 6 4
♦ 5
♣ J 8 5 3

♠ 10 7 5 2
♥ 5
♦ A K Q 8
♣ Q 10 7 6

N		
W	E	
		S

♠ J 6 4
♥ A K Q
♦ J 10 9 4 2
♣ 9 4

♠ A Q 9
♥ J 8 3 2
♦ 7 6 3
♣ A K 2

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
2♥ by North	2♥	All Pass	

After two Passes (that East hand with 11 points is not an opening bid) South opens 1NT on his 4-3-3-3 hand and 14 points. This is **not** music to North's ears. With only 4 points he knows his side are outgunned and, with a singleton Diamond, he knows No-trumps is likely to play horribly. To make the best of a bad job he "pulls" 1NT to 2♥ (or **signs-off** in 2♥), hoping for better things. Better things duly materialise when dummy, rather luckily, turns up with four-card trump support. Declarer loses three trumps, a Diamond and a Club but that's all he should lose. Making the rest means declarer makes his contract. Now observe what would happen to 1NT. East-West can take five Diamond tricks and three Hearts. Ugh!

Hand 6 Dealer East

♠ A 9 3
♥ K Q J 9
♦ J 7
♣ J 10 5 3

♠ K Q 7 6 4
♥ 10 5 3
♦ 10 9 6 3
♣ 8

N		
W	E	
		S

♠ J 10 2
♥ A 6 2
♦ A K 4
♣ Q 7 4 2

♠ 8 5
♥ 8 7 4
♦ Q 8 5 2
♣ A K 9 6

West	North	East	South
2♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♠ by West		Pass	Pass

East opens 1NT opening bid as dealer (14 points, a 4-3-3-3 pattern) and West has a miserable hand in response. With a 5-4-3-1 hand, though, he must not shirk his responsibility. 1NT may well prove to be a dog's breakfast of a contract – Spades should prove a safe refuge. Accordingly, West **signs-off** in 2♠ and East, of course, Passes rapidly. North leads the ♥K (top-of-a-sequence) and West has to make eight tricks. The first order of the day is to *draw trumps* by knocking out the ♠A. That task having been completed West must try to secure an extra trick in Diamonds. When he plays off the ♦A K and another Diamond he sets up a trick for the ♦10. In all, he loses a Spade, two Hearts, a Diamond and a Club.

Hand 7 Dealer South

♠ A 4 2
♥ J 9 8
♦ K Q 8
♣ K 5 3 2

♠ Q 9 7 5
♥ K 7 2
♦ 7 3 2
♣ A 7 4

N		
W	E	
		S

♠ J 10 8
♥ A 3
♦ A 10 6 4
♣ J 10 9 8

♠ K 6 3
♥ Q 10 6 5 4
♦ J 9 5
♣ Q 6

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
2♥ by South			2♥

Over North's 1NT, South has a marginal decision whether to bid 2♥ or to Pass. We have said that 5-3-3-2 hands are essentially balanced; so should you take out 1NT into a five-card major-suit with this hand? Statistics show that it is generally right to bid a five-card major-suit even with this type of 5-3-3-2 hand. If partner has four trumps it is certainly the right thing to do; if partner has three trumps 2♥ would probably be better spot than 1NT. Most players will remove 1NT into two of a major with a five-card suit but will Pass 1NT when holding a five-card minor. The reasons are a little subtle but in the meantime we suggest you go with the flow. Provided declarer leads trumps at every opportunity he should make 2♥

Hand 8 Dealer West

♠ K J
♥ K 8 6 2
♦ A 10
♣ 8 6 5 4 3

♠ 10 7 5 3
♥ 9 5
♦ K Q 7 4
♣ A K Q

N		
W	E	
		S

♠ 9 8 6 4 2
♥ J 10
♦ J 6 3
♣ J 7 2

♠ A Q
♥ A Q 7 4 3
♦ 9 8 5 2
♣ 10 9

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♠	Pass?
Pass	Pass		

2♠ by East Opening lead: ♠10

Over West's 1NT, East should bid 2♠ and try to look confident. If he were to Pass 1NT, would his Spades be worth anything? Surely not. However, in 2♠, the Spades may be worth one or two (even three!) trump tricks. That's certainly a good enough reason to contract for a level higher as declarer will get those tricks back (with interest) in return. Sure, 2♠ will probably fail but 1NT is sure to fail. This may well be a case of *damage limitation* (say, 2♠ down one against 1NT down plenty). As it is, this is a double whammy. South is silenced (would you jump into the water with 3♥?) and 2♠ actually makes. As declarer repeatedly leads trumps North-South discover that the ♠A K Q J are worth precisely two tricks.