

DOUBLES

The most commonly used call in bridge aside from PASS, is DOUBLE. However, there are many meanings of DOUBLE, depending on the situation.

TAKEOUT DOUBLE

A TAKEOUT DOUBLE is used as a way of getting into the auction when the opponents have opened the bidding. The first situation occurs when your opponent has opened the bidding at the one level with one of a suit. Typically you will bid a 5-card suit at the one level or two level after opponents have opened the bidding. If you do not have a 5-card suit you can overcall 1 no trump if you have 15-18 points and at least one stopper in the opponent's suit. If you do not have a hand suitable for a 1 no trump overcall or a 5-card suit, but you have enough to enter the auction, typically with 12-21 points, you can double, asking partner to bid his best suit or 1 no trump. Ideally, when you make a takeout double, you will have the other three suits with shortness in opponent's suit. Or, if both opponents bid two suits before your turn, you can make a takeout double with 12 or more points and the other two suits.

Remember, however, in order to overcall in a suit at the two-level after your opponents have opened the bidding, you need at least 10 or 11 points and a decent 5-card suit. If you don't have a 5-card suit, you must double to enter the auction. If you and your partner are on the same page, he will know what you have and don't have.

Examples:

Right hand opponent (RHO) bids one club. If you have:

S. A J 6 3

H. K 10 7 5

D. K J 4 2

C. 6

Double. You have 12 high card points and support for the other 3 suits. This a perfect hand for a take out double. But you will seldom have the perfect hand. You could have

S. A J 6 3

H. K 10 7

D. K J 4 2

C. 6 3

Here you have support for the other three suits but only 3 diamonds. This is OK. If you double 1 club and your partner bids 1 diamond, with a minimum hand you can pass 1 diamond, expecting at worst a 4-3 fit. Partner is not likely to have a 4-card major suit, since he would probably bid a major suit in response to your takeout double. However, if partner has extra values – more than a minimum hand for doubling – he is likely to bid again over your one diamond response. He can bid his 4-card suits up the line to look for a fit.

Bear in mind that if partner only bids 1 of a suit in response to your takeout double, he is likely to have a minimum response. With a good 8 or more points concentrated in his 4-card suit, he can jump to 2 of that suit in response to your takeout double. This is because a takeout double is 90% forcing. The partner of the double must bid in response to the takeout double. Since partner must bid, even with zero points, he should show a decent hand with 8 or more points by jumping to the 2 level in his suit. In addition, if partner has 10-11 or more points and support for all three of the other suits, he should cue bid 2 clubs, the opponents suit, to show 10 or more points and support for your suits. If partner has enough points to make a constructive bid with stoppers in clubs and no 4-card suit, he can respond 1 no trump with 8-9 points, 2 no trump with 10-11 points or 3 no trump with 12 or more points. This is not unlikely, since opener can bid 1 club with a 3-card club suit and no stoppers.

When I said that a takeout double is 90% forcing, you should be aware of the other 10%. The only time a takeout double is not 100% forcing is when partner of the doubler has a trump stack in the opponent's suit, such as K Q J 6 4. In such case, partner of the doubler may pass for penalties or bid no trump. Which choice he makes depends on the vulnerability. If the opening bidder is vulnerable and you are not, the penalty double could be more valuable than a no-trump bid. However, if you have 10 or more points with your trump stack and are vulnerable, you may opt to bid a vulnerable game in no trump which is more valuable than setting the opponents 3 tricks doubled. Of course, to bid 3 no trump with your club stack, you should have at least another Ace of King, so your total points would be 10 or more.

NEGATIVE DOUBLE

A negative double is always made by the partner of an opening bidder after an intervening bid by RHO. It is also sometimes referred to as responder's takeout double, since it tells opener that responder has enough points to bid but does not have a 5-card suit of his own and is looking for a 4-4 fit or because responder has a 5-card suit, but not enough points to bid it at the 2 level because he lacks the 10+ points need to make a 2-level bid in a new suit. A NEGATIVE DOUBLE is not alterable, but if asked by opponents it should be described. Also, there is no upper point limit for making a NEGATIVE DOUBLE, since the responder could have a huge hand but no 5-card suit

and his NEGATIVE DOUBLE asks opener to bid a 4-card major if he has one, after which responder can take more aggressive action such as jumping to game in that suit with a 4-4 fit, cue bidding opponents suit to show a 4-4 fit with a limit raise or better in opener's 4-card suit.

A NEGATIVE DOUBLE is almost always but not necessarily used to ask for a major suit, but it always asks for the unbid suits, so that if opener bids 1 heart and RHO bids 1 spade, a negative double should show 4-4 in the minors (unbid suits). If partner opens 1 club and RHO bids 1 spade, a negative double will always show 4 hearts and should also show 4 diamonds.

EXAMPLES: Partner opens one club and RHO bids one spade. This is your hand:

S. 9 6

H. A Q 10 2

D. K 6 4 2

C. 9 8 6

You would like to bid diamonds or hearts to show your two suits; however, you don't have a 5-card suit, so you can't bid one of those suits which would promise 5. So you make a NEGATIVE DOUBLE, telling partner you have the unbid suits but you are unable to bid at the 2 level either because you don't have a 5-card suit or because you don't have 10 points or more, or both.

Another example. Partner opens one club and RHO bids one spade. This is your hand:

S. 9 6

H. A Q 10 3 2

D. K 6 4

C. 9 8 6

You would like to bid your 5-card heart suit, but you do not have 10 or more points, so you cannot bid hearts at the 2 level. Instead, you make a NEGATIVE DOUBLE. If opener bids 1 no trump, 2 clubs or 2 diamonds, you can now bid 2 hearts. This sequence specifically tells your partner that you have 5 or more hearts, 6-9 points and five or more hearts.

BALANCING DOUBLE

A balancing double is used by a passed hand after opponent's have bid twice and is preceded by two passes. It is made with 11-14 points and shows the other two suits. The purpose of the bid is to not allow the opponents to play at the one or two level. As always, observe the vulnerability and don't stick your neck out unless you are prepared to play a doubled contract.

EXAMPLE: pass 1 club pass 1 heart

Pass pass

You are a passed hand, opponent's have bid two suits and are in the pass out seat, meaning there have been two passes when it comes to you. You can make a balancing double with a hand like:

S. K Q 6 3

H. 9 8 2

D. A Q 7 6

C. 8 7

You have 11 points with a concentration of values in the two unbid 4-card suits. You can make a textbook balancing double, telling partner you have at least 4-4 in the unbid suits, 11-14 points and likely a concentration of values in those suits.

SUPPORT DOUBLE

A support double is always used when partner makes an overcall, RHO bids and you have specifically 3 card support for partner's suit.

Example: 1 diamond 1 heart 1 spade double by you shows 3 card heart support. With 4 hearts, you would bid 2 hearts and less than an invitational hand. With 4 hearts and an invitational hand (10-11) you would cue bid one of opponents' suits. With 4 or more points and a weak hand, you would bid 3 or 4 hearts preemptively.

SUPPORT REDOUBLE

A support redouble is always used when partner makes an overcall, RHO doubles

(usually a negative double) and you have specifically 3 card support for your partner's suit..

Example: 1 diamond 1 spade double redouble by you shows 3 card spade support. With 4 spades and less than an invitational hand, you would bid 2 spades. With 4 spades and an invitational hand or better, you would cue bid opponent's suit.

SUPPORT DOUBLES AND REDOUBLES ARE PLAYED THROUGH THRU 2 SPADES. A DOUBLE OR REDOUBLE AT THE 3 LEVEL IS TYPICALLY FOR PENALTY

RESPONSIVE DOUBLE

A responsive double is used when LHO bids a suit, partner overcalls in a new suit and RHO raises LHO's suit. It specifically says you have approximately 7-9 points and the two unbid suits, denying support for your partner's suit.

Example: 1 club 1 spade 2 clubs ?

With 4-4 or better in diamonds and hearts and less than 3-card support for partner's suit, make a responsive double.

MAXIMAL DOUBLE

Maximal doubles are used to let partner know whether you have a minimum or maximum when competing with opponents for a contract to determine whether to bid more or not. It applies only when opponents are competing in a lower ranking suit.

EXAMPLE: 1 heart 1 spade 2 hearts 2 spades
3 hearts ?

With a minimum hand, bid 3 spades, with extra values and a desire to compete to 4 spades, double.

LEAD DIRECTING DOUBLE

If the opportunity arises, you should double a bid made by your RHO if you want your partner to lead the suit.

Typically, it occurs in a no-trump auction where your LHO opens 1 no trump and your RHO bids Stayman 2 clubs or transfers with 2 diamonds, 2 hearts or 2 spades and you want that suit led. The inference here is that if you fail to double an artificial bid made by your RHO, you do not want the suit led, since if you wanted the suit led, you would have doubled. Lead directing doubles often make the difference between setting a contract or seeing it make because you fell asleep and failed to make a lead directing double when you had the chance.

A lead directing double can also enable you and your partner to find a fit which allows you to sacrifice when you are not vulnerable against opening opponents and get a good match point score.

There are also lead directing conventions you should know about.

DOUBLES OF NO TRUMP CONTRACTS

Not all no trump contracts result from bidding without interference. Occasionally, a no trump contract will be reached by opponents after you and/or your partner have bid a suit. In addition, your LHO opponent may have bid a suit. Depending on the bidding, if your partner has doubled the final contract when you are on lead, he is telling you what to lead. Since opening leads are one of the most difficult things to get right when you are defending a contract, absent a good natural lead, you should heed your partner's lead directing double. Here is a short list of the meaning of a double from your partner against a no trump contract when you are on lead.

1. If your LHO opponent has bid a suit and your RHO opponent is playing in a no trump contract, a double by your partner directs you to lead your LHO's first bid suit.

For example, if RHO opponent opened 1 club, LHO bid 1 spade, RHO bid 2nt and LHO raised to 3nt, a double by your partner directs you to lead a spade. He should have a spade stack and a sure outside entry to defeat the contract. If he doesn't double and you lead anything but a spade, declarer is more than likely to make his contract. Expect your partner to have a hand like this:

S. K Q J 10 5 H. 5 4 2 D. A x C. 7 6 4

2. If your partner has bid and you have not and your LHO is declaring 3 no trump, a double by partner directs you to lead his suit. He is likely to hold a hand similar to the one where dummy bid 1 spade and partner doubled the final no trump contract directing you to lead his suit.
3. If you have bid and your partner has not bid and you are on lead against a no trump contract, partner is directing you to lead your suit.

For example, if declarer opened the bidding with 1 club, you overcalled 1 spade with S. K J 10 6 4 H. 5 4 D. A 9 C. 6 5 4 2, and the final contract is 3 no trump with you on lead. If partner holds as little as Q x of spades, he should double for a spade lead, since his Q solidifies your suit. If partner doesn't double you are unlikely to lead a spade since declarer is likely to have the A Q of spades. And the lead of a spade will

give declarer an extra trick. When you fail to double, partner will draw the inference you do not have one of the top 3 honors in his suit and he will lead another suit.

4. If your LHO opponent has made an artificial bid following RHO's opening no trump bid and partner doubles the artificial bid, he is showing that suit, and you should lead it. However, if LHO makes an artificial bid, which partner does not double, but partner does double the final contract, he is asking you to lead his suit. Since you don't know what his suit is, put on your thinking cap and lead your shortest suit in an effort to find partner's suit.

For Example. Say RHO opens one no trump and his partner bids 2 clubs (Stayman), partner passes and RHO bids 2 spades, LHO bids 2 no trump < RHO bids 3 no trump and partner doubles. With short hearts (singleton or doubleton) , you should lead a heart since declarer denied having 4 hearts and LHO has only 4 hearts – partner has 5 or 6 hearts and enough to defeat the contract, but only if you lead a heart.

LIGHTNER DOUBLE

A Lightner Double made by partner when you are on lead against a slam contract in a suit, is a direction for you to make an unusual lead you would not ordinarily make. Typically, partner will have a void and an ace. So if declarer is playing 6 spades and partner doubles the final contract with you on lead, he could have the following hand:

S. 6 5 4 H. A 10 6 4 D. void C. Q 7 6 4 3 2

Partner is looking for a diamond ruff. So if you have a hand with 5 or 6 diamonds, you should think to lead a diamond. This is true even if partner has bid a suit. The Lightner double says not to lead what you would ordinarily lead which would be partner's suit if he has bid one. The Lightner double says not to lead his suit but to lead your long suit so he can ruff.