

Penalty doubles and exceptions

It's a penalty double if:

The opponents have overcalled a natural notrump.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Us</th> <th>Them</th> <th>Us</th> <th>Them</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1H</td> <td>1NT</td> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1D</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1S</td> <td>1NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Us	Them	Us	Them	1H	1NT	DBL		1D	Pass	1S	1NT	DBL			
Us	Them	Us	Them														
1H	1NT	DBL															
1D	Pass	1S	1NT														
DBL																	
We've established a game-force.	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1S</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2C *</td> <td>2H</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* 2-over-1 system (2C forces to game)</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1H</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2NT *</td> <td>3C</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Jacoby 2NT forcing heart raise</p>	1S	Pass	2C *	2H	DBL				1H	Pass	2NT *	3C	DBL			
1S	Pass	2C *	2H														
DBL																	
1H	Pass	2NT *	3C														
DBL																	
We've made a natural notrump opening, response or rebid.	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1NT</td> <td>2S</td> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1C</td> <td>1H</td> <td>1NT</td> <td>2H</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	1NT	2S	DBL		1C	1H	1NT	2H	DBL							
1NT	2S	DBL															
1C	1H	1NT	2H														
DBL																	
Partner has made a preemptive bid.	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>2S</td> <td>3H</td> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>1H</td> <td>3C</td> <td>3H</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2S	3H	DBL			1H	3C	3H	DBL							
2S	3H	DBL															
	1H	3C	3H														
DBL																	
We've already found our trump fit.	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1S</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2S</td> <td>3C</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	1S	Pass	2S	3C	DBL											
1S	Pass	2S	3C														
DBL																	
We've previously made a card-showing double.	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1D</td> <td>2D *</td> <td>DBL</td> <td>3H</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Michaels overcall (majors)</p>	1D	2D *	DBL	3H	DBL											
1D	2D *	DBL	3H														
DBL																	
We've previously made a card-showing redouble.	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>1S</td> <td>DBL</td> <td>RDBL</td> <td>2C</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBL</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	1S	DBL	RDBL	2C	DBL											
1S	DBL	RDBL	2C														
DBL																	

	<table border="1"> <tr><td>1D</td><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td><td>DBL</td></tr> <tr><td>RDBL</td><td>2C</td><td>DBL</td><td></td></tr> </table>	1D	Pass	Pass	DBL	RDBL	2C	DBL									
1D	Pass	Pass	DBL														
RDBL	2C	DBL															
We've previously made a penalty double (or penalty pass of a takeout double).	<table border="1"> <tr><td>1S</td><td>2C</td><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td></tr> <tr><td>DBL</td><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td><td>2D</td></tr> <tr><td>DBL</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	1S	2C	Pass	Pass	DBL	Pass	Pass	2D	DBL							
1S	2C	Pass	Pass														
DBL	Pass	Pass	2D														
DBL																	
The opponents have bid a suit that we've shown with a takeout or negative double.	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>1C</td><td>DBL</td><td>1S</td></tr> <tr><td>DBL</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>1D</td><td>DBL</td><td>Pass</td></tr> <tr><td>1H</td><td>2C</td><td>DBL</td><td></td></tr> </table>		1C	DBL	1S	DBL					1D	DBL	Pass	1H	2C	DBL	
	1C	DBL	1S														
DBL																	
	1D	DBL	Pass														
1H	2C	DBL															
There is no unbid suit.	<table border="1"> <tr><td>1D</td><td>Pass</td><td>1H</td><td>Pass</td></tr> <tr><td>1S</td><td>2C</td><td>DBL</td><td></td></tr> </table> <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>1H</td><td>2NT *</td><td>3S</td></tr> <tr><td>DBL</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> <p>* Unusual 2NT (clubs & diamonds)</p>	1D	Pass	1H	Pass	1S	2C	DBL			1H	2NT *	3S	DBL			
1D	Pass	1H	Pass														
1S	2C	DBL															
	1H	2NT *	3S														
DBL																	
The bid is above our agreed level for negative doubles.	<table border="1"> <tr><td>1C</td><td>4S</td><td>DBL</td><td></td></tr> </table>	1C	4S	DBL													
1C	4S	DBL															
It's our third double of the auction.	<table border="1"> <tr><td>1D</td><td>1H</td><td>DBL</td><td>2H</td></tr> <tr><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td><td>DBL</td><td>Pass</td></tr> <tr><td>3D</td><td>3H</td><td>DBL</td><td></td></tr> </table>	1D	1H	DBL	2H	Pass	Pass	DBL	Pass	3D	3H	DBL					
1D	1H	DBL	2H														
Pass	Pass	DBL	Pass														
3D	3H	DBL															

Popular exceptions

In all of the above auctions, the standard interpretation is that the last double is penalty-oriented, not takeout. Some of these meanings change if you play conventional doubles (negative, support and responsive doubles, for example). There are also situations where modern pairs have agreed to adopt different meanings. Here are some of the most widely played exceptions:

- ♣ **Interference after our opening 1NT:** After you open 1NT and an opponent overcalls a suit, a double by you or partner is takeout if it's *under* the hand that has shown length in that suit. It's penalty if the doubler is sitting *over* that hand.

1NT - [2H] - DBL = **Penalty** (the doubler is sitting over the heart length)

A Good Rule for Penalty Doubles

The best bridge lesson I ever had was from Tony Glynne who said, "You're the dummy one quarter of the time. You're the declarer one quarter of the time. That means you're defending half the time. If you're not doubling, you're not getting enough matchpoints to win."

So my partner and I decided to double much more often. My only rule is, "You can't play this game scared." So don't be scared to double. However, many of our doubles went bad and I always had a problem determining when to double and when to keep bidding.

A couple of years ago I read a book by Mel Colchimaro which gave me a wonderful guideline for doubling, so here's Mel's rule. It is not well known, so I really hate to pass it on, but just for you folks I'm going to. Please don't tell anyone else!

Here's Mel's RULE OF NINE:

1. Take the level of the contract.
2. Add the number of the opponent's trump suit you hold.
3. Add the number of honors you have in that suit.
4. If it comes to nine, DOUBLE!

It works most of the time if you defend carefully. Try it. You'll like it.