

# Common Sense Bidding: Balancing In Bridge

# What is Balancing in Bridge?

- You are in the balancing seat when:
  - You or your partner have not entered the auction.
  - The last bid has been made by your LHO.
  - When you pass, the auction will end.
- When you are in the balancing seat, it sometimes pays to enter the auction with values weaker than would be required in the direct seat.

# When Should You Balance

- You might balance when:
  - A one level suit bid is passed to you.
  - The opponents have a fit and are willing to stop at the two level.

# Balancing Hand Strength

- When the auction is right for a balance, a rule of thumb is to imagine your hand is 3 points stronger than it actually is.
- In other words imagine you have an extra king in your hand and bid accordingly.

# One of a Suit is Passed to You

North east south west  
1♠ pass pass

West's hand

♠ 4 2

♥ A Q 9 3 2

♦ K J 5 (10 points)

♣ 9 7 3

- In the direct seat, it would be pushing your values to make a two-level overcall with this hand.
- In the balancing seat, you definitely should bid 2♥.
- Your partner has 8-10 points and very likely some hearts.

# Balancing Example 2

North east south west  
1♦ pass pass

West's hand

♠ A Q J 4 2

♥ 3 2

♦ 8 5 (16 points)

♣ A K Q 3

This is a difficult hand to handle.

- In the direct seat, you would make a simple overcall with this hand.
- You don't have the distribution to make a takeout double.
- In the balancing seat, the situation is different.
- You should double. If partner bids hearts, you will bid your spade suit.
- There's a logic to this bid.

# Balancing Example 3

North east south west  
1♥ pass pass

West's hand

♠ 8 4 2

♥ K 10 2

♦ A Q 10 5 (13 points)

♣ K J 3

- In the direct seat, a 1 nt overcall shows 15 to 17 points.
- In the balancing seat, a 1nt overcall should show 11 to 14 points and, of course, a stopper in their suit.
- Balance with 1nt with this hand.

# Balancing Example 4

North east south west  
1♥ pass pass

West's hand

♠ A 4 2

♥ Q J 2

♦ K Q 10 (17 points)

♣ A J 9 3

- When you have a full no trump overcall, in the balancing seat, double first, then after partner bids, bid 1nt.
- Of course, you must have a stopper in the opponent's suit.



# Balancing Example 5

North east south west  
1♥ pass pass

West's hand

♠ A J 10

♥ K 5 2

♦ A Q J 8 (20 points)

♣ A J 3

- In first seat, you would open 2nt.
- In second seat, you would double first, then bid 2nt. 2nt in second seat would be *unusual*.
- In the balancing seat, you and partner must decide how to play this strong hand.

# Balancing Example 6

North east south west  
1♥ pass pass

West's hand

♠ 10

♥ 5 2

♦ A Q J 8 5 (10 points)

♣ Q J 8 6 3

- If you play the unusual no trump in the balancing seat, you would bid 2nt.
- If not, you would bid 2♦, then if the opportunity came up, show your club suit.

# Balancing Example 7

North east south west  
1♦ pass pass

West's hand

♠ A J 5

♥ A 9 2

♦ J 8 5 (12 points)

♣ Q 10 8 6

- To make a takeout double with this hand, in the direct seat, would be a bad idea.
- However, you should double in the balancing seat.
- Double and bid no more.

# Balancing Example 8

North east south west  
1♦ pass pass

West's hand

♠ A 10 5

♥ K 2

♦ K Q J 8 5 (13 points)

♣ 9 8 6

- You will probably beat 1♦.
- Of course, you cannot double, because partner will surely bid something.
- A pass might be your last chance for a plus score.

# Balancing Example 9

North east south west  
1♠ pass pass

West's hand

♠ 10 5 3

♥ 9 2

♦ K 8 5 4 2 (7 points)

♣ A 8 6

- You don't always bid in the balancing seat.
- Even if you give yourself 3 imaginary points, this hand does not qualify for a balancing bid at the two level.

# Balancing When Opponents Have a Fit

## Example 10

North	east	south	west
1♥	pass	2♥	pass
pass	2♠		

East's hand  
♠ 10 8 5 4 3  
♥ 9 4 2  
♦ A Q 8  
♣ Q 6

(8 points)

- Of course, you did not overcall spades in the direct seat.
- Now that your opponents are willing to stop at the two level, you know partner has some values.
- You should bid 2♠.
- Partner will not get excited about your hand, knowing you passed originally.

# Balancing When Opponents Have a Fit

## Example 11

North	east	south	west
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
pass	3♥	???	

East's hand

♠ 5 4 3

♥ 10 9 6 4 2

♦ A Q 8 (8 points)

♣ Q 6

- This is the same hand as example 10, but I've switched hearts and spades.
- Bidding 3 hearts is very questionable.
- No doubt partner has some points and some hearts, but you are at the 9 trick level.
- Not vulnerable maybe.

# Balancing When Opponents Have a Fit

## Example 12

North	east	south	west
1♥	pass	2♥	pass
pass	dble		

East's hand

♠ K J 10 8

♥ 2

♦ Q 8 5 2 (9 points)

♣ K 9 6 4

- You could not make a takeout double in the direct seat.
- But in the balancing seat you definitely should double.



# Balancing When Opponents Have a Fit

## Example 13

North	east	south	west
1♥	pass	2♥	pass
pass	2nt		

East's hand

♠ A 3

♥ 4 2

♦ Q 10 8 5 2 (9 points)

♣ K 9 6 4

- With 5-4 distribution, you could not use the unusual no trump bid in the direct seat.
- But in the balancing seat, it is right to do so.

# When Opponents Do Not Have a Fit

- Mathematically, when opponents have a fit, it is likely that your side also has a fit.
- It is also likely true, if the opponents have a misfit, your side also has a misfit.
- The point, here, is: Balance with a bit of caution when opponents' hands do not fit together.

# When Opponents Do Not Have a Fit

## Example 14

North	east	south	west
1♣	pass	1♥	pass
2♣	pass	pass	

West's hand

♠ 8 6 3

♥ Q 2

♦ K 10 8 5 2 (10 points)

♣ A J 6

- You might be tempted to bid 2♦ here.
- That might be okay, but your partner might be sitting on south's hearts and have very few diamonds.
- A pass here might be best.

# When Opponents Do Not Have a Fit

## Example 15

North	east	south	west
1♥	pass	1nt	pass
pass			

East's hand

♠ A 9 8 6 3

♥ K J 7 2

♦ 8 5 2 (8 points)

♣ 6

- If you bid two spades here, you might well find your partner with a doubleton and 5 clubs.
- This hand looks like a misfit for them and a misfit for you.
- There's no guarantee.
- Partner might have 3 spades.

# When Opponents Do Not Have a Fit

## Example 15

North east south west  
1♦ pass 1♠ pass  
1nt

East's hand

♠ 6  
♥ A 9 7 4  
♦ K Q 5 2 (9 points)  
♣ 6 5 3 2

- You have enough points to balance, but it is likely that your partner has spades...
- And, perhaps, your side does not have a fit at all.
- Again, no guarantees, but you should think about defending.

# When Partner Balances

- When your partner balances, do remember that she is slightly overbidding her values.
- She is bidding points she assumes you have.
- Therefore, you should under bid your hand just a bit.

# When Partner Balances - Example 16

North east south west  
1♥ pass pass 1♠  
pass

East's hand

♠ A Q 6

♥ A 9 7

♦ 10 5 2 (12 points)

♣ Q 5 3 2

- If partner had overcalled spades in second seat, you would cue bid hearts to show a limit raise.
- But partner is in the balancing seat.
- Under bid your hand just a bit.
- Call 2♠.

# When Partner Balances - Example 17

North east south west  
1♥ pass pass 1nt  
pass

East's hand

♠ K J 10

♥ J 9 8

♦ Q 5 2 (10 points)

♣ K 9 3 2

- If partner had overcalled 1nt in second seat, your correct bid (with 10 points) would have been 3nt.
- In the balance seat partner's bid shows 11 to 14 points.
- Your bid is pass.



# When Partner Balances - Example 18

North	east	south	west
1♠	pass	pass	dble
pass	2♥	2♠	pass
pass			

East's hand

♠ 7 5

♥ K J 10 5

♦ Q 5 2 (9 points)

♣ K 9 3 2

- This is a tough one, but you probably should pass.
- Partner's double was made, in part, on your assumed values.
- You probably should not bid.

# Final Thoughts

- We balance for two reasons:
  - To fight for a share of a partscore
  - And to push the opponents to a level where we might be able to defeat their contract.
- Always remember when your partner balances, she is bidding your assumed points as well as her own.
- When you are in the balancing seat and your opponents have stopped at the one or two level, you should look at your hand as if it has an extra three points.
- That's a rule of thumb, not a dictum from the gods.