

# Doubles in Duplicate Bridge

By Neil H. Timm

In duplicate bridge, doubles are bidding tools with multiple meanings depending on their context or when they are invoked. There are penalty doubles, takeout doubles, negative doubles, responsive and cooperative doubles, support double and redoubles, lead directing doubles and numerous conventional doubles.

In this bridge tip I will review some commonly used doubles in the game. The double is a complex tool used in the game, so that entire books have been written to illustrate their use. An archaic (\*) indicates that the double requires an alert.

## Penalty Double

Used when you (the doubler) expects to defeat the opponents' contract. In modern competitive bidding, many low-level doubles are played as **takeout or cooperative** rather than penalty.

## SOS Redouble

Named after the distress signal "Save Our Ship"; it is a conventional redouble used as a rescue mechanism when your side's contract has been doubled for penalty and you desperately need to escape and request partner to bid a new suit.

## Takeout Double

The most common conventional double. Made at low levels (typically through 3♠) when:

- Partner hasn't bid
- Shows opening hand strength or better
- Asks partner to choose a suit
- Typically shows support for unbid suits

## Cooperative Double

Also called a "card-showing double" or "optional double") is a flexible double that asks partner to use their judgment about whether to pass for penalty or take it out.

### The Concept

Unlike pure takeout doubles (which demand partner bid) or pure penalty doubles (which demand partner pass), a cooperative double says: "**Partner, I have some defensive**

**values - you decide what to do."** And is used in a competitive 3-level or 5-level auction asking partner to bid or pass for penalty

## Negative Double

Made by responder after partner opens and opponent overcalls. Shows:

- Cards in the unbid suits (especially majors)
- Enough points to respond
- Inability to bid naturally at that level

## Balancing Double

Also called a "protective double" or "reopening double") is a takeout double made in the pass-out seat when the auction is about to die at a low level.

## Responsive Double\*

After partner makes a takeout double and RHO raises, showing:

- Values to compete
- No clear suit preference
- Asking partner to choose

## Support Double/Redouble

When partner responds and opponent overcalls, double shows exactly 3-card support for partner's suit (redouble shows 3+ cards if they double).

## Maximal Double

After Opponents Bid And Raise (OBAR) in lower suit (e.g. hearts over spades), the double show game invitational hand.

## Snapdragon Double\*

Applies when **three different suits have been bid** by the first three players in the auction, and you're in fourth seat (also called "fourth-suit double" or "competitive double") is a bridge convention used to show the 5/6-card unbid suit with 2/3 card support in partners bid suit. Caution: it is normally over a 2-level bid and is not a penalty double.

## Rosenkranz Double\*/Redouble\*

Named after bridge theorist George Rosenkranz). This is a sophisticated partnership agreement used in competitive auctions.

**When It Applies:** After partner makes a suit overcall and RHO raises opener's suit.

**The Signals are used:**

**Rosenkranz Double\*** - Shows support for partner's suit WITH a top honor (A, K, or Q)

**Rosenkranz Redouble\***- (When they double partner's overcall) Shows support WITH a top honor

**Direct Raise** - Shows support WITHOUT a top honor (no alert needed).

## Mc Cabe Double after Weak 2-level 2M bid

Redouble shows strong hand

New suit at 3-level to play with no A/K

2NT\* forces 3♣. You want to play there or to sign off in a different suit at the 3-level or to bid partners suit at 3-level showing support without A or K.

3♥\*/3♠\* --- shows support with A or K (\*=alert)

## Equal Level Conversion Double

A “tool” that adds flexibility to takeout doubles by allowing the doubler to show a two-suited hand **without promising** extra strength. Typically, a weak opening hand without length in the opponents' major bid suit but with the other 4-card major and a 5-card diamond suit.

Without the other major, partner bids 2♣\* and the takeout doubler converts it to 2♦ with a weak hand!

## Lead-Directing Doubles

Doubles of artificial bids (Stayman, transfers, control bids) suggesting that suit as a lead. Specialized doubles follow.

**Fisher Lead-Directing Double** - The conventional use of a double requesting a Club lead over opponents' Notrump contract or a Diamond lead if opponents' made an undoubled 2C Stayman call. When opponents begin and conclude the auction in Notrump, the opening leader normally seeks a major suit lead. The Fisher Double is

intended to provide the opening leader specific lead instruction to beat the contract where a normal major lead would fail to set the contract.

**Lightner Double** is a lead-directing convention used specifically against slam contracts (6-level or 7-level). It was developed by Theodore Lightner.

## How They Work

### When to Use:

- Double a voluntarily bid slam (not a sacrifice)
- You expect to defeat it, but need an unusual lead from partner

**What It Means:** The Lightner double **forbids** a normal lead and demands an unusual one. It typically requests:

1. **Lead of dummy's first-bid side suit** (most common)
2. Lead of a suit you bid (sometimes)
3. An unexpected lead based on the auction

### What It Does NOT Request:

- Lead of trump
- Lead of a suit the doubler bid
- Lead of an unbid suit (unless that's the only logical choice)

For examples of doubles and books that discuss doubles follow the link

<https://www.bridgehands.com/D/Doubles.htm>

## Suggested Reading Path

1. **Start with:** Larry Cohen's "Larry Teaches Doubles" (accessible, quiz-based)
2. **Progress to:** Mike Lawrence's "Complete Book on Takeout Doubles" (comprehensive)
3. **Round out with:** Lawrence's "Overcalls" and "Balancing" books
4. **Add context with:** Cohen's "Law of Total Tricks" books

More on doubles

<https://bridge-tips.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Types-of-Doubles1.pdf>

<https://pfdubois.github.io/BridgeBidding/Doubles.html>

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/dba/Doubles.pdf>