

Suit Overcall/No-Trump Overcall/Takeout Double

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When the opponents make an opening one level suit bid in the first seat playing the 2/1 Bidding System, they normally have between 12-19HCP or 30% - 50% of the total HCP in the deck using the 4-3-2-1 system.

After an opening suit bid is made, the probability of holding a hand with 0-8 HCP, 9-14HCP, or 15+HCP (strong/power hand) are about 45%, 50%, and 5% respectively in the 2nd seat. Clearly the optimal range is 9-14HCP.

The probability within the ranges is: 0-5HCP 15% and 6-8HCP 25%; and within the optimal 9-11HCP is 30% and 20% with 12-14HCP.

After the opponents have bid, your hand value and shape determine whether or not you should enter the auction. Your tool kit may include Simple Overcalls, No-trump Overcalls, Takeout Doubles, Power Doubles, Roman Jump Overcalls, Two-suited Cue Bids, Weak/Intermediate/Strong Jump Overcalls, NAMYATS or other tools/conventions.

By bidding, the opponents have already gained a significant advantage. However, **the above probabilities suggest that for a suit overcall/no-trump takeout overcall/takeout double, depending on your agreement, that a positive action (double or bid) should be made holding 9/10-14HCP.** This strategy allows a pair to enter the auction about 50% of the time.

Some may be tempted to **increase the range to 6-14HCP** when **non-vulnerable** (to increase one's participation to 75%) since it may reduce the opponents bidding space or suggest a good lead which may reduce the success of the opponents' final contract. However, a review of over 100 overcalls in competitive auctions from recent world championships suggests that the strategy resulted in a successful result for the opponents in less than 5% of the deals. Why? The opponents capitalized on the information provided.

While HCPs are useful in determining whether or not one should enter a bridge auction, to improve upon one's success one must also include point count adjustments for suit length, suit quality, distribution, and make additional adjustments for length and honor holdings in the opponents bid suit and for outside suit shortness. HCPs alone for entering the bidding may not suffice since success is only profitable when you play and make your final contract or defeat their contract.

To correctly evaluate your hand when making an overcall or takeout double, requires an accurate method of Hand Evaluation. Recall that when opening a bridge hand, one normally IGNORES suit shortness since partner has yet to provide support for your bid suit; however, this is not the case when the opponents overcall with a bid since now both your strength in their suit or shortness elsewhere becomes critical and is known. What is needed is an **ADJUSTED Hand Evaluation** method to decide if action is warranted.

Let's look at a simple example where both sides are vulnerable and the opponents open the bidding 1♠ and you hold the following hand:

♠985 ♥QJ964 ♦A976 ♣7

with only 7HCP and 3-spades in the opponent's suit; many may pass with this hand even with 5-hearts but with no lead directing controls (A/K) in hearts when vulnerable.

But suppose partner has the following hand:

♠7 ♥AK10 ♦KQ54 ♣10984 where the bidding may go:

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass

You may have missed your 4♥ game!

West's Hand has 10.5 AHLD points where **AHLD = Adjusted Honor Length Distribution** points and shroud make the overcall bid of 2♥.

Adjusted Honor Length Distribution (AHLD) Points

Honors(H) A=4.5, K=3.0, Q=2.0, J=1.0 when accompanied by an Honor =A/K/Q/J/10

Isolated Q/J: 1.5 or 0.5 so **Qx=1** and **Jx=0**

Associated 10: K10=0.5 and J10/Q10=1.0 so **Q10=2.0** and **J10x=2**

Length(L): Add +1 point for each card past 4 provided the suit is headed by a K/QJ, for 7th on add+2 without K./QJ and 6-card suit +1pt

Quality(Q): Add +1 point 3-honors in the 5-card suit or +2 pts with 3-honors in a 6-card suit, add +1 pt for 3Ks +1pt or +2 pts for 4Ks

Distribution(D): -1 point for 2 Honor doubletons AQ, AK, KQ, QJ
Or for Hands with **NO** A (opening hand only)/K/Q or **flat** 4333 hands

Void: 4pts, **Singleton:** 2pts, **Two Doubleton:** 1pt, **One Doubleton:** 0pts

Points Adjustments for Length/Honors/Distribution

xx in their suit	no adjustment
xxx in their suit	-1L point = -1 point

xxxx in their suit	-2L point = -2 pts.
xxxxx in their suit	-3L points = -3 pts.
Axx in their suit	-1H point = 3.5 pts.
Axxx in their suit	-1H point = 2.5 pts.
K/Kx in their suit	-1H point = 2pts. (from 3pts).
KQ in their suit	-1H point = 3pts. (from 4 pts)
Q/QJ/Qx in their suit	no adjustment
J10 in their suit	no adjustment
J in their suit	discount the 0.5 D point
x not in their suit	+1D point = 3 pts. (from 2D pts).
Void not in their suit	+1D point = 5 pts (from 4D pts).

Applying these rules to the above example: ♠985 ♥QJ964 ♦A976 ♣7

AHLD=10.5 or where QJ=3 + 1L for 5-hearts + 4.5 for A + 3D for singleton = 11.5 – 1L for 3-spades in their suit = **10.5**.

This suggests that for a one/two level simple overcall or a takeout double requires 10+AHLD points. However, for the takeout double one must have at least 3-cards in the unbid suits and never have 4333 distributions.

An improved strategy is to use the no-trump overcall bid (1NT*) in place of the takeout double since it forces the opponents to the 2-level. Now a DOUBLE is a Power Double showing 16+AHLD points.

Returning to the example, partners hand has 15.5 fit points with hearts or a total of 10.5+15.5= 26 total points for their heart game!

What if you held the hand: ♠K85 ♥QJ964 ♦A976 ♣7 with 10HCP?

The AHLD=2+4(QJ+1L) + A=4.5+3D-1 for 3spades=12.5 points so bid 2♥. Both methods warrant an overcall bid.

Let's look at two more examples where both sides are vulnerable and the opponents open the bidding 1♥ and you hold the following hands with 10HCP.

Hand 1: ♠Q76 ♥K64 ♦KQ765 ♣74 10HCP

Hand 2: ♠AQ10654 ♥7 ♦542 ♣KJ3 10HCP

Hand 3: ♠J653 ♥72 ♦K84 ♣AQ74 10HCP

Hand 1 has 9.5HLD points with no A - 1 for 3-hearts -1 for ♥K = 7.5AHLD pts so **do not** bid 1♦.

Hand 2 has 15.5**HLD** points + 1 more for the singleton heart = 16.5**AHLD pts** so **bid 2♠**.

Hand 3 has 10.5**HLD** points so bid 1NT* as takeout overcall which forces the opponents to the 2-level. This is not the case when using the more commonly used takeout double.

Bridge books have been written about Takeout Doubles and Overcall. Two Bridge 2nd Edition Classics by Master Point Press were written by Mike Lawrence;

Lawrence, Mike (2009), "The Complete Book on Overcalls".

Lawrence, Mike (2013), "The Complete Book on Takeout Doubles"

Or you make look on the web and follow the links below.

<http://www.fernside.com/bridge/TheOvercallStructure.html>

<https://www.bridgetastic.com/encyclopedia/concepts/overcalls>

<https://bridgechampions.com/learn/bidding/takeout-doubles-bridge-complete-guide>

Most bridge books and internet links fail to address the complicated topic of Hand Evaluation as described in this bridge tip which adjusts for suit length, suit quality, and distribution for overcalls and doubles.