

Natural 3-Level Preempts and Overcall Preempts

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A preempt (or pre-emptive bid) in duplicate bridge is defined as a high-level opening bid or overcall, usually made by jumping, designed to disrupt the opponents' bidding while describing a hand with a long suit (6-8 cards) with limited high-card points (HCP). Its primary aim of the preempt is to prevent the opponents from finding their best contract by taking up valuable bidding space.

An effective preempt depends upon several factors: Suit Length (6, 7, 8 cards), Suit Quality (As, Ks, and Qs), and Suit Strength/Trick-Taking Ability: (HCPs, and ODR (Offense to Defense Ratio), Seat Position: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd and Vulnerability: Vulnerable or non-Vulnerable.

Overcall preempts (weak jump overcalls) are made after the opponents have bid. Their goal is to interfere/obstruct the opponents' bidding and depend upon the same factors as preempts.

Both preempts are excluded from the fourth seat. Fourth seats bids are normally constructive and show a good hand; there is nothing to disrupt.

- A 2-level opening bid shows about 10-13 points and a good 6-card suit.
- A 3-level opening bid shows about 10-14 points and a good 7-card suit.

Playing 2/1, preemptive bids are normally made at the 2/3/4-level. While most pairs use 2 and 3-level suit bids as preemptive bids, this may not be the case for 4-level opening bids.

The ACBL requires that a Natural weak 2-level bid normally shows a 6-card suit with at least 4HCP (less than Near Average Strength) and a range not greater than 7HCP (e.g., 4-10HCP (10-4=6+1=7), 5-11/6-12). An Artificial 2♣, 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ may be used to show an artificial known 5/6-card suit or two known 5-4 card suits require **average strength (10+HCP)** and must be alerted in the 1st or 2nd seat and be made with only Near Average Strength in the 3rd or 4th seat (no pre-alert is required). A preempt does not promise at least average strength.

Because of their frequency (about 25%) much of the bridge literature is concentrated on making and responding to weak 2-level preemptive bids for an overview follow the links:

<https://www.bridgetastic.com/blog/weak-two-bid-bridge-guide>

web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/education/intro_to_bridge/Class_14/C14_F2F_Manual.pdf

However, the more difficult and less addressed situation is hand evaluation for making 3-level preemptive opening bids, 3-level overcall preemptive bids, and responding to these bids.

Regarding 3-level preempts, the late Terence Reese disliked weak preempts and was frequently quoted as saying “a preempt that is known to be always weak is blunt tool”. His statement implies that he liked to employ what is called random 3-level preemptive as does the ACBL.

The ACBL only insists that any 3-level opening suit bid is natural; but that a 4-level bid may be natural or artificial and shows at least 6-cards and that any opening bid showing a strong 20+HCP hand is allowed.

For this bridge tip, I will assume that a pair agrees to use a solid preemptive style preempts vulnerable and a random style when non-vulnerable. I do not support the wild preemptive style of bidding preempts by some pairs.

Hand Evaluation for Preemptive Hands

For a 3-level preempt one needs at least 4HCP and normally at least a 6+card suit. However, to make a 3-level contract you need a total of 9-tricks so that going down three tricks not vulnerable yields a score of 500 points for the opponents and going down two tricks vulnerable is also 500 points for the opponents.

Thus, a preempt requires at least 6-tricks in your own hand non-vulnerable and at least 7-tricks vulnerable since partner may provide zero tricks. We must estimate the trick-generation potential of our hand which depends on Honors, Suit Quality, Suit Length, and Distribution.

Recall that Quick Tricks for a suit are counted: A=1, K=0.5, AK=2, KQ=1, AQ=1.5, and AKQ=3. However, a singleton K/Q, or Qx has less value. But suit length beyond 4 has trick-taking potential. Finally, Voids, Singletons, and at least two doubletons improve the trick taking-generation of a hand.

Previously I have shown that one should open a hand if their Optimal **HL** points are at least 12.0 because Aces are undervalued and Qs and Js are overvalued and 10s have no value using HCP.

However, with preemptive bids we must also include Distribution Points where a void=4, a singleton =2, two doubletons=1, and one doubleton = 0. We have added Distribution to the criteria since partner may contribute no tricks to the contract.

The rule for making a 3-level preemptive bid in the first seat is as follows. Make a 3-level preemptive bid:

**If the Optimal HLD points \geq 13 non-Vulnerable or \geq 15 Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable;
Otherwise PASS.**

Do not make a 3-level preemptive major suit bid when holding at least 4-cards in the other major. More generally do not make a 3-level minor suit preempt with two quick tricks having a 4-card major suit. Why? It may preempt you partner who has yet to bid (e.g., do not preempt with a hand like \spadesuit xxxx \heartsuit x \diamondsuit AKxxxxx \clubsuit x).

Example (1)

♠xx ♥KQJxxxx ♦Jxx ♣x

$$3+2+1+1Q+4L \text{ (7-card suit)} + 0.3=11.5\text{HL}+2\text{D} = 13.5\text{HLD}$$

Open 2♥ non-Vulnerable and pass if Vulnerable

Example (2)

♠AQxxxx ♥Kx ♦x ♣xxx

$$4.5+2+4L+3=14.5\text{HL}+2\text{D} = 16.5\text{HLD}$$

Open 3♠ Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable

Example (3)

♠x ♥x ♦QJ10xxxx ♣AJxx

$$2+1+1Q+4L+5.5=13.5\text{HL}+4\text{D} = 17.5\text{HLD}$$

Open 3♦ Vulnerable/n on-Vulnerable

Example (4)

♠K ♥x ♦QJxx ♣AJ10xxxx

$$2+2+4L+6.5=14.5\text{HL}+2\text{D} = 16.5\text{HLD}$$

Open 3♣ Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable

Example (5)

♠KQJxxxx ♥xx ♦xx ♣xx

$$4+1Q+4L=9.0\text{HL}+1\text{D} = 10.0\text{HLD}$$

Pass this dreaded 7-2-2-2 hand

Example (6)

♠KQJxxxx ♥- ♦xxx ♣xxx

$$6+1Q+4L=11.0\text{HL}+4\text{D} = 15.0\text{HLD}$$

Open 3♠ Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable

If in Example (6), suppose we add a card to spade (8-cards) and have one doubleton minor, then 4L becomes 6L with a 8-card suit so $HL = 13.0 + 4D = 17HLD$. Now one would open 4♠ non-Vulnerable, if Vulnerable you need 19+HLD points.

Hand Evaluation for making a 3-Level Overcall Preempt

As before one evaluates their bridge hand using optimal **HL** points; however, when the opponent's bid one must adjust your optimal hand count when holding cards in the opponents bid suit and adjust the value of key honors. For overcalls in the second seat following a one-level suit bid, you must adjust your calculation of optimal **HL points**:

- (1) Deduct 1/2/3 points for 3/4/5-cards in their bid suit.
- (2) Add 2-points for any singleton and 4-points for any void but increase these values by +1 if they are in their bid suit (to 3/5).
- (3) Deduct -1 for any isolated Kx or if holding a K in their bid suit and add +1 if holding the Q in their bid suit.
- (4) Deduct -1 point holding Two Doubletons (no adjustment for one doubleton).

These adjustments when applied consider the effect of Honors, Suit Quality, Suit Length, and Distribution and are your **ADP** points.

The rule for making a 3-level overcall preemptive bid follows. Make a 3-level preemptive bid

If the Optimal ADP points ≥ 13 non-Vulnerable or ≥ 15 Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable; Otherwise PASS.

Example (1) The opponents open 1♥ and you hold

♠AJ10xxxx ♥Kx ♦Kx ♣xx

$4.5 + 1 + 1 + 1Q + 4L + 3 + 3 = 17.5HL - 1♥K - 1$ (isolated King) $= 15.5ADP$

Overcall 3♠ Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable

Example (2) The opponents open 1♥ and you hold

♠Q10xxxxx ♥Kxx ♦AJ ♣x

$2.5 + 3 + 5.5 = 11.0HL - 1♥K + 3D$ for singleton $= 13.0ADP$

Overcall 3♠ non-Vulnerable

Example (3) The opponents open 1♥ and you hold

♠x ♥xxx ♦AQxxxxx ♣KJ

4.5+2+4L+4-1 for KJ doubleton =13.5HL -1 for 3-hearts +2D for singleton =14.5ADP

Overcall 3♦ non-Vulnerable

Example (4) The opponents open 1♠ and you hold

♠x ♥xxx ♦xx ♣AKQxxxx

4.5+3+2+1Q+4L =14.5HL -1 for 3-hearts +2D for singleton =15.5ADP

Overcall 3♣ Vulnerable/non-Vulnerable

Responding to 3-Level Preempts

When responding to Weak 2-level bids, a common convention used by 2/1 pairs is to bid 2NT which asks partner for a feature or playing OGUST it asks partner to further describe your hand.

What do we know?

Partner has at least 7-cards in his bid suit, so you have an 8-card fit having only a singleton in his suit and with 3-card support have a 10-card fit in the suit.

For a response of 3NT you need only 12HL points NV and 10HL points V with 3/4 tricks from you.

With a fit in partners suit you may advance the preempt or bid game. A bid of another suit would be forcing for one round.

Overview

When making a preempt in the 1st seat, one must be careful since your partner may have a very good hand. You want to preempt the opponents but not partner. If the opponents have passed in the 1st seat, game may be possible by either side.

If you are in the 3rd seat and the opponents have bid, be very aggressive with your preemptive bid since the opponent are likely to have game.

An analysis and review of strategies for preemptive bidding by seat has been done by Andrew Gunperz on Bridge Winners with discussion. The links follow.

<https://bridgewinners.com/article/view/better-preempts-iv-preempts-by-seat-position-part-1/>

<https://bridgewinners.com/article/view/better-preempts-iv-preempts-by-seat-position-part-2/>