

An overcall is any bid made when the opposition has made the first bid in an auction. In this example 2♣ by East is an overcall:

North	East	South	West
1♠	2♣		

An overcall always shows at least five good cards in the suit that is bid. An overcall at the one level shows 8+ points. An overcall at the two level shows 10+ points. It is common to be unable to bid because your longest suit has only four cards. There are two alternatives to a suit overcall but they both require at least an opening hand.

Alternatives to an Overcall in a Suit

There are two main alternatives. If you double it is for take out - you are forcing your partner to bid if the next player passes. You need to have an opening hand (13+ points), **a shortage in the suit bid by the opponents** and tolerance for any suit bid by partner. If you bid 1NT you are showing a balanced hand, 15-17 points and at least one stopper in the suit bid by the opposition.

Weak Jump Overcall

A weak jump overcall bids at the next higher level to a standard overcall. For example:

North	East	South	West
1♠	3♣		

The 3♣ bid shows at least 6 cards in the suit and 5-9 points. The points should be mostly in the suit that is bid. It is primarily disruptive - forcing the opponents to a higher level early in the auction. Use with care!

Breaking the Rules

The main reasons why we overcall are:

- To try to win the contract
- To make it harder for opponents to reach their best contract
- To indicate a suit to lead to partner
- To make the opposition think twice before bidding no-trumps

Don't overcall with fewer than five cards in the suit is a rule you should not break. With a longer suit you can overcall with slightly fewer points than in these notes. It is your choice whether you do a simple overcall or a jump overcall with marginal hands.

Responding to an Overcall (not a Weak Jump Overcall)

This is easier than responding to an opening bid. Follow these guidelines:

- 3 card trump support is good enough to raise an overcall at the one level or the two level using the same point counts as responding to an opening bid.
- Bidding no-trumps shows more points, say 9-12 points for 1NT and 13-14 for 2NT in response to a one level overcall - the dustbin bid is not done in this situation. You need 11-12 points for 2NT and 13-15 for 3NT in response to a two level overcall
- To bid a new suit after a one level overcall by partner you need 8+ points and a good suit - six cards or five very good ones. Prefer to support partner if you can - unless you have a major and they have bid a minor
- Bear in mind that the opposition have opened the bidding - that should mean that your partner and you have at most 28 points between you. Bidding and making game in a suit will require a long trump suit and shortages elsewhere. Bidding and making 3NT will require you to have most of the rest of the points.