

How To Express Doubt In The Auction - III Advancer

For those of you who have never heard of this term before, don't worry. I had played for over 20 years before I recall hearing it. Basically the Advancer is the partner of the overcaller. So the pairs are Opener & Responder and Overcaller & Advancer.

In terms of a competitive auction, it's hard to beat thinking about the advancer. After all the auction must already be competitive before you can be in this position. One might think that there aren't that many situations that come up during the first round of the auction, but let's just categorize some of them:

- Opener preempted/opened 1 of a suit/some level of no trump
- Overcaller preempted/overcalled/doubled
- Responder raised/preempted/passed/bid new suit/bid no trump/doubled

Since we can combine most of the above options in various ways (without even thinking about artificial opening bids like Flannery) there's a lot of possibilities to cover.

Let's start with the most basic: 1 of a suit - overcall

1.	West	North	East	South
	1C	1H	1S	?

The basic actions south has are:

- Pass
- Raise
- Bid a new suit
- Bid NT
- Cue bid
- Double

With 3 suits bid, what kind of doubt could you have anyways? Most of the bids seem obvious, but let's go through them anyways.

Pass - seems pretty self explanatory. I've got nothing to say

Raise - Duh. A fit with less than invitational values

New Suit - The only new suit to bid is 2D. Hopefully that shows diamonds.

Bid NT - Bidding 1 NT seems natural and should predominantly promise a spade stopper.

Always doubt the minor until it's rebid.

Cuebid - There are 2 cuebids available, 2C and 2S. A cuebid tends to show a fit for partner and invitational or better values, so what should I do with 2 of them? Notice that cuebidding 2C allows you to stop in 2H, whereas cuebidding 2S forces you to at least 3H. I think that forcing to the higher level should show more trump, so 2C = 3 card raise and 2S = 4+.

Double - Doubt. Or I have points and I don't know what to do. In general, this should imply values (8+ at the 1 level) and a lack of clarity. A couple of possibilities come to mind:

J85 Q4 KJ32 Q853 (doubt about NT with no spade stopper)

53 K4 AQJ32 9743 (Heart tolerance and a nice diamond suit)

Basically, you want to do something and aren't sure what.

We can vary that auction by having responder bid NT

2.	West	North	East	South
	1C	1H	1N	?

Or responder might raise

3.	West	North	East	South
	1C	1H	2C	?

But the basic options remain the same:

- Pass - natural
- Raise - natural
- Bid a new suit - natural
- Bid NT - natural
- Cue bid - invitational or better with a fit
- Double - Doubt or points and no clear action

Double continues to show doubt and when you have doubt about 1N, you should be willing to what partner pass.

The first time things vary is when responder cuebids to show a limit raise. Then you've lost your most important option, namely raising partner's overcall.

4.	West	North	East	South
	1C	1H	2H	?

But the basic options remain the same:

- Pass - natural
- **Raise - Not available at the 2 level**
- Bid a new suit - natural
- Bid NT - natural
- Cue bid - invitational or better with a fit
- Double - Doubt or points and no clear action

Since what we most want to do is have a fit for our partner's overcall and tell them about it, we want to make sure we can do so. Therefore a double becomes essentially a "stolen bid" double and says "I would've bid 2H if they hadn't already."

You do not have to play this agreement, but I find I'm more likely to have a fit for partner when they have a fit and so want to be able to show that and not commit to the 3 level when partner merely overcalled.

Next let's consider if overcaller made a takeout double so that they already expressed doubt.

5.

West	North	East	South
1C	X	1S	?

This time the basic actions south has are:

- Pass
- Bid a new suit (i.e. raise)
- Bid NT
- Cue bid
- Double

Pass, bidding a new suit and bidding NT are all natural make statements about wanting to declare or defend. I.e. a lack of doubt.

There are 2 cuebids, but in this case we might want to make an exception about one of them. Since partner implies spades by doubling, 2S here seems like it should be natural.

So your doubt bids are 2C and double. Double says declare or defend are options and 2C says we should declare, but I'm not sure where.

6.

West	North	East	South
1H	X	1N	?

7.

West	North	East	South
1H	X	2H	?

In both of these auctions, bidding a suit is natural, double is values and cuebidding is strong.

When the opponents have bid and raised, defending becomes less appealing an option at the 2 level. So double in #7 tends to be more doubt about strain than doubt about declaring or defending. Also in both of the auctions 2N seems unhelpful as a natural bid, and would tend to suggest that we really want to declare, just not in spades (the highest unbid suit).

What about at higher levels?

8.

West	North	East	South
1S	X	2D	?

South can:

- Pass
- Bid a new suit (i.e. raise)
- Bid NT
- Cue bid
- Double

In this auction the opponents have tended to show at least half of the values and partner has shown doubt about where to play. So there's limited need to have bids that suggest doubt about level, instead the key questions are doubt about declare or defend, followed by which suit to declare in.

So pass and bidding a new suit seem pretty obvious and natural. What about bidding 2N? This is a thorny question, but I recommend not playing 2N as natural when both opponents have bid and at least one of them bid at the 2 level. The odds of wanting to take exactly 8 tricks is small enough to begin with and the window has gotten much smaller when you could just try and go plus by taking 6 tricks on defense.

This leaves bidding NT, cuebidding and doubling as your doubt bids. Following our general principles, double leaves open the possibility of defending. So it shows values with no clear action. Cuebidding 2S or 3D seem like extremely strong bids in that they are forcing you to at least the 3 level. It may seem counter intuitive, but probably the best agreement is that 2S (which allows you to stop in 3C) shows a game invitational 3C bid and 3D (which allows you to stop in 3H) shows a game invitational heart bid. If you recognize that these are strong bids that want to declare you're ahead of the game already.

Bidding 2N would then be takeout, but probably have enough length to want to play at the 3 level.

To be crystal clear, auctions like this take firm agreements to know what to do. If you do not have firm agreements remember the basics that

X = doubt about declare or defense

Bidding = declaring is better than defense

If the bid is not natural, it shows doubt, usually about strain.