

Balancing

Balancing is an advanced topic, and it is a difficult one. Entire books have been written on the subject. It is difficult because:

- Requires some judgements- that comes with experience, and newer players may not have enough yet.
- Few rules, so that makes it tougher to judge when and how to balance.

Balancing is not the same as sacrificing.

NS Vulnerable, EW NV

W	N	E	S
	1S	P	2NT
P	4S	P	P
5C	X	P	P
P			

NS definitely have game in spades- worth 620. EW are hoping to go down 3 or fewer tricks for -500 which will be a better score for the board.

Balancing is when your bid is the final pass and the opponents will play that contract. The balancer hopes to find a contract that his side can make in order to get a better score. The other goals of balancing are to push the opponents up a level that may not make, or to go down with a score that is less than the opponents making their contract.

Consider this auction.

W	N	E	S
	1H	P	2H
P	P	?	

What do we know about North's 1H bid? 5 or more hearts, 12-21 HCPs, doesn't have a balanced 15-17.

What do we know about East's pass? Doesn't have a good 5 card spade suit to overcall, doesn't have a good 5 card minor and 10+ points to overcall. Doesn't mean East is broke. Didn't bid 1NT or make a takeout double.

What do we know about South's 2H bid? Has 3 or more hearts. Has 6-9 HCPs (maybe less and counting shortness points). Doesn't have a limit raise (10+ pts).

What do we know about West's Pass? Not much.

What do we know about North's pass? Probably shows 12-14 HCPs. With 16, they would invite.

So, NS have a fit in hearts and 18-23 HCPs (most times around 20). EW has 17-22 HCPs (most times around 20) and likely have a fit in another suit. 26 cards, 4-5 may be hearts, so 21-22 cards in the other three suits.

If EW let's NS play in 2H, they will most likely make it (and maybe an overtrick). So +110 or 140 will give them a good board (75%-100%).

If EW Balance, they may get a better result:

- They might bid a contract they can make (like 3C making 110).
- They might go down in a contract and give up less than 110.
- They might force NS to bid 3H, and that may not be as good a contract.

This situation is the same, but NS have found a 4-4 heart fit instead of a 5-3 or 5-4 heart fit:

W	N	E	S
	1C	P	1H
P	2H	P	P
?			

Not the same- no NS fit

N opens 2H

No opens 1H and rebids 2H

The best time to balance:

- You are short in the opponent's suit
- You have length and high card strength in the other suits
- You are not vulnerable.

The worst time to balance:

- You have a very weak hand
- You have length in the opponents' suit

- You are vulnerable
- Opponents suit is spades- means you will have to play at the 3 level.
- Opponents do not have a fit (opens 2H, or 1H-1S-2H means your side may have 7 cards in hearts and less chance for a fit).

How to balance

- In order to balance, you are allowed to enhance your hand by 3 points (add a King) to make it look better.
- Bid a 5 card or longer suit
- Double with at least 3 card support for the other suits.

Partner of balancer

- Partner has bid your values. Your hand is worth 3 points less than what you actually have.
- If partner doubles, bid your longest suit at the cheapest level. Poor form to jump
- If partner bid a suit, hope it is long enough to stand on its own. Don't bail partner out unless you have no cards in partners suit and a long suit of your own.
- Don't punish the balancer- if opponents bid 1 higher, balancer has done his job. You are both passed hands, so it is past the time to compete.

Example hands for balancing:

1H P 2H P P B

S KQxx

H x

D Kxxx

C Jxxx

Balance with a X

S Jxx

H x

D Kxxxx

C QJxx

Balance with 3D. With another club, Balance with 2NT.

OBAR balancing

1H P 2H B

S KJxx

H

D Qxxx

C Jxxxx

You know partner will have 4 or 5 hearts and will be short in some other suit. She will have a hard time balancing. You can balance now with a X. Partner must know it is a balancing bid since opponents have already shown about 20 points. If opponents go on to 3H or 4H, so be it. They were headed there anyway.

S Jxx

H

D Qxxxxx

C KJxx

Balance with 3D.

Balancing is tougher when opponents bid spades- forces you to the three level- and when your side is vulnerable since you can only afford to go down 1 trick to get a better score.

Balancing over a 1 level bid.

1X P P B

Now you know that responder does not have 6 points, so partner has something. Not sure if you have a fit, but try it. When balancing, your hand improves by 3 pts, so partner must reduce theirs by 3 pts. Double or bid a suit.

Balancing 1NT shows 11-14 and a stopper in opponents suit. Partner must respond accordingly. Stayman shows 11 HCPs.

What should you get out of this lesson?

Take some baby steps:

- If you are in the pass out seat, ask yourself these questions. If I pass, will my side likely get a good or a bad result? Is there anything I can do to improve our score? (Don't be foolish, but don't be timid).
- Whether you are vulnerable or non-vulnerable, don't let them play in 2H with a fit.

- If you are non-vulnerable, try not to let them play in 2S with a fit.
- See how that works to decide if you want to be more aggressive.