

## The Simple Suit Overcall

### By Neil H. Timm

In contract bridge, many claim that a “simple overcall” requires between 7 and 17HCP. Is this the best strategy?

Let’s look at an example. With all nonvulnerable, the opponents open 1♣ and you hold the following hand: ♠KJ985 ♥7♦K83 ♣10954. A hand with a 5-card suit and 7HCP or only 9 optimal points (+1 for Quality suit, +1 for suit length, +2 for singleton and -2 for no A or Q) and you overcall 1♠.

The bidding goes:

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♠
2♥	2♠	3♥	Pass
4♥	X	Pass	?

All appear to have their bid. Now do you bid 4♠ or pass partner’s X?

Because South had a very minimal bid many may pull the X and bid 4♠.

Bidding 4♠ doubled even if it were right does not result in a significant number of master points (e.g., -500 vs. -590). And if 4♥ happens to fail, the swing would be from a top to a bottom board. So do not try to save your partner! The deal follows and 4♥ does not make.

		♠	Q103		
		♥	KQ10		
		♦	109762		
		♣	J3		
♠	A2	N		♠	754
♥	A9642	W E		♥	J853
♦	J54	S		♦	AQ
♣	K87			♣	AQ62
		♠	KJ1985		
		♥	7		
		♦	K83		
		♣	10954		

What went wrong for those who would bid 4♠?

**The range of the overcall should NEVER be 7-17HCP!**

**Instead, one should overcall with 10-15 “optimal” points and a good 4/5-card suit (2 of the top 3 or 3 of the top 5 honors) or a 6-card suit at the 1-level. At the 2-level 11-15.**

**By agreement some play 3-level bids as 12-15 and others play 3-level bids as preemptive with 6-10 and a 7-card suit. You must also discuss how you play 4-level overcall bids.**

**With more than 15 one must X and then bid a major. However, with a 5-card minor and a 4-card major one needs only 12/13+.**

**A 1NT overcall should have 15-18.**

Consider the following hand flat 4333 hand: ♠KJ7 ♥AJ10 ♦K864 ♣Q63. Would you overcall 1NT after the bid of 1♣?

Many will say no with a flat hand and only 14HCP. However, you have 16 “optimal” points and a club stopper! so overcall 1NT! How to count KJ7=4, AJ10=6.5, K864=3, Q63=1.5 and -1 for 4333 = 16.

Let modify the above example hand to: ♠KQJ97 ♥73 ♦Q1095 ♣32. A hand with a 5-card suit and 8HCP.

Looking more carefully at the hand, the spade suit is a quality suit, and the hand contains two doubletons, the Q109 is a great second suit and no Ace. Adding 1 for a quality suit, 1 for two doubletons and 2.5 for the Q109, subtracting 1 for no Ace, we may upgrade to 11.5 optimal points, hence one must overcall 1♠.

You hold ♠KQJ97 ♥983 ♦K5 ♣A72. Do you overcall or X? You have only 13HCP!

But you have 15.5 optimal points (13.5 + 1 Quality + 1 for length = 15.5).

Do not overcall, but X. If partner bids hearts, you may bid 2NT with the club stopper.

An overcall is not a forcing bid, but the partner is encouraged to raise the suit with three or more cards in support.

A “Fit” is thus evidenced when Partner is supported with 3-card support.

- a) With 6-10 “optimal fit” points raise a one-level overcall to the 2-level.



**SEMI-FIT (F)**

**Add +1 if you hold an honor doubleton Kx/Qx/J10/Jx doubleton (other than the Ace) in partners long suit (5+cards). Applies to both the opener and the responder make the +1-point adjustment with 2-card suit support.**

And you must adjust when having misfit knowledge:

**MISFIT POINTS (F)**

Opposite a long 5-card suit in Partners hand you must subtract -3/-2/-1 for void /singleton/doubleton in the corresponding long suit.

Finally, if you're bidding agreement allows for splinters or mini splinters, this allows one to evaluate hand strength opposite length or shortness.

Recall that honors in long suits lose value opposite a singleton or void in partner's suit and conversely a suit without an honor opposite a singleton or void has NO wasted value! Knowing this as the bidding progresses, adjustments are made:

**WASTED HONOR ADJUSTMENTS**

Honors (excluding Aces)	<b>Opposite a singleton</b>	<b>-2 points</b>
	<b>Opposite a void</b>	<b>-3 points</b>
<b>No Honors</b>	<b>Opposite a singleton</b>	<b>+2 points</b>
	<b>Opposite a void</b>	<b>+3 points</b>
<b>Axx</b>	<b>Opposite a singleton</b>	<b>+1 point</b>