

Negative Double Bridge Convention - Bidding and Responses

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The negative double (aka "Sputnik") is a conventional double used by responder after opener starts the bidding with one-of-a-suit and the next player makes a suit overcall. The double always promises 6+ points and, depending on the auction, at least four cards in at least one of the unbid suits.

If one major suit is unbid, the negative double always shows that suit. If both majors are unbid, then the double shows both majors at the one-level. After an opposing 2-level overcall, the double only promises one major.

A negative double usually shows 4 cards in the unbid suit(s), although it may also be made with a 5-card or longer suit in a hand too weak to bid it directly (see below). Note also that a negative double usually denies support if partner has bid a major.

Examples of negative double sequences:

Opener	Overcaller	Responder
1 ♣	1 ♦	Dbl

Usually shows 4-4 in the majors. With 5-4 or longer distribution, responder should bid his longest major first. With 5-5 distribution, responder should bid 1 ♠, planning on rebidding his hearts.

Opener	Overcaller	Responder
1 ♦	2 ♣	Dbl

Shows at least one 4-card (or longer) major suit. Note that if responder has a 5-card (or longer) major, he must have fewer than 10 points. Otherwise, he should bid his 5-card major immediately.

Opener	Overcaller	Responder
1 ♥	2 ♦	Dbl

Shows 4 spades with 6+ points or 5+ spades with 6-9 points. Again, with 5+ spades and 10+ points, responder would bid 2S instead.

Opener	Overcaller	Responder
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1 ♥

1 ♠

Dbl

Shows at least 4-4 in the minors.

Rebids by Opener

With 4+ cards in partner's shown suit, opener can bid it at the cheapest level with a minimum hand. Lacking 4 cards, opener can do one of the following:

- Rebid a 5-card (preferably at least 6-card) suit.
- Bid notrumps with a stopper in the enemy suit.
- Bid a new suit naturally (a reverse still shows a strong hand).
- Cue-bid the enemy suit with a strong balanced hand that lacks a stopper in that suit.
- Bid partner's shown suit with only 3 cards (last resort).

Examples of opener's rebids:

West

♠ AQ93	West	North	East	South
♥ K54	1 ♦	1 ♥	Dbl	Pass
♦ KT764				
♣ 7	1 ♠			

Shows 3+ spades (usually 4) and 11-14 points.

West

♠ KQJ6	West	North	East	South
♥ J	1 ♦	1 ♥	Dbl	Pass
♦ AKQ74				
♣ 865	2 ♠			

Shows 4 spades and 15-17 points.

West

♠ AKQ7
♥ K5
♦ QT7532
♣ A

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♥	Dbl	Pass
3 ♠			

Shows 4 spades and 18-19 points.

West

♠ AQJ2
♥ A865
♦ AKQT
♣ 6

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♥	Dbl	Pass
4 ♠			

Shows 4 spades and 20-21 points.

West

♠ KJ3
♥ QJ6
♦ AT
♣ K8642

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♠	Dbl	Pass
1NT			

Shows less than 4 hearts, a spade stopper, balanced or semi-balanced distribution, and 11-14 points (if playing a 15-17 1NT).

West

♠ AJ
♥ AJ5
♦ K92
♣ KQT76

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♠	Dbl	Pass
2NT			

Shows less than 4 hearts, a spade stopper, balanced or semi-balanced distribution, and 18-19 points (if playing a 15-17 1NT).

West

♠ KQ
♥ 5
♦ K754
♣ AJ9763

West
1 ♣
2 ♣

North
1 ♠

East
Dbl

South
Pass

Shows 6+ clubs and 11-16 points.

West

♠ J53
♥ AK
♦ 7
♣ AKJ9832

West
1 ♣
3 ♣

North
1 ♠

East
Dbl

South
Pass

Shows 6+ clubs and 17-19 points.

West

♠ J7
♥ 6532
♦ AKQ5
♣ AKQ

West
1 ♦
2 ♥

North
1 ♥

East
Dbl

South
Pass

Strong and artificial, a cue-bid is a one-round force. It should only be used when all other bids look unattractive. In the above hand, West cannot support spades, bid no-trumps (lacking a heart stopper), or show any other suit naturally. Hopefully partner can do something useful like rebid 2NT.

How high to play negative doubles is a matter of partnership agreement. If an opponent makes a 3 ♠ jump overcall, for example, is a double negative or penalty? Some popular limits for negative doubles are 2 ♠, 3 ♠ and 4 ♦. In other words, negative doubles are off if the opponents bid higher than that.

Origins

Negative doubles were popularized by the late American expert Al Roth, who coined the convention "Sputnik" in reference to the first Soviet satellite to be launched into space in 1957. The implication was that the double was the start of a space age in bridge. The general bridge population, however, eventually settled on the term "negative double".

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