

PREEMPTIVE BIDS

ABOUT THE DEALS

You may be either Opener or Responder, but you will always be in the South position.

The first page or two of each Deal shows only your hand. The initial bidding is given and you are asked to decide what you would bid, then click **BID**. The subsequent page will then appear telling you what you should have bid and continuing the auction. On the final page of each Deal partner's hand will be shown.

PREEMPTIVE BID SUMMARY

Dictionary.com defines preemptive as:

taken as a measure against something possible, anticipated, or feared

When you pick up your Bridge hand and see that it has a long suit, but overall is weaker than an opening hand, you realize it is **possible** the hand belongs to the opponents. You **anticipate** that they will be able to open the bidding and you **fear** they will bid and make a game.

So you mess with their heads by making a Preemptive bid.

If the hand really did belong to them you will have robbed them of some valuable bidding space which may cause them to reach a bad contract. Of course if your partner happened to have such good cards that the hand belonged to your side, then you have used up some of your own bidding space. But this isn't a complete waste because at least partner has gotten a good description of your hand.

Look at this hand:

♠ K Q J 10 9 3 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 5 2

It only has 9 points. Not enough to open the bidding under normal circumstances. But look at it another way - If ♠s happened to become trumps then this hand would easily win 6 tricks. Of course, if some other suit happened to become trumps then the hand could probably win 1 trick at most, and possibly none at all.

So, when you have this type of hand, one long suit and not much strength in the other suits, it will be to your benefit if you can make your suit trumps. You do this by making a Preemptive Bid, you open at the 3-level. It is like a preemptive strike in the military, you attack first to try to get the advantage.

With the example hand above you would open 3♠.

Imagine what this might do to your opponent, who was looking at this hand while waiting for his turn to bid:

♠ A 4 ♥ A J 8 6 3 ♦ K 7 5 ♣ J 6 4

He had 14 points and planned to open 1♥. But when you said 3♠ he had to change his plan in a hurry. He is nowhere near strong enough to start bidding at the 4-level so he will just have to pass. He thinks you are stealing something from him and he is correct – you are stealing his bidding space.

Preemptive bids are very powerful tools. If you happen to find partner with a good hand they can lead you to a good game or slam contract. But much more frequently, when the opponents have the good hands it can cause them to miss good contracts.

Requirements for a Preemptive Bid:

REQUIREMENTS FOR A PREEMPTIVE BID
Less than opening hand strength.
A 7-card or longer suit which is headed by 2 of the top 3 honors or by 3 honors altogether.
Be bolder not-vulnerable, more cautious vulnerable.

It may seem strange to say that you might be too strong to make a certain bid but it is true. While starting off with a 3 (or 4) bid may interfere with the opponent's bidding, it also makes it difficult for partner to make her bids. If you preempt with hands that should be opened with a 1-bid then your partner will be confused and you will miss games that should be bid.

The second requirement insists that you need a decent suit. The specific honor requirements in the table aren't always followed strictly, but you should stick to the concept of not preempting with a really ragged suit, such as J 9 7 6 5 4 2.

The third requirement is there just to keep your preemptive bids from going out of control. It is fun to make preemptive bids but remember that it can also be expensive!

Mathematical Interlude: Skip as much as you want.

At Duplicate or Chicago scoring, an opponent's 4♥ game is worth either 420 or 620, depending on the vulnerability. At Rubber Bridge scoring the value is not so clear, because sometimes when you make a sacrifice to stop them from completing a 500 Rubber they get it on the very next hand anyway. So we will assume that the games have about the same value as they do at the other forms of scoring.

At all scoring:

Doubled Not-Vulnerable undertricks are 100 - 300 - 500 - 800

Doubled Vulnerable undertricks are 200 - 500 - 800

Let us assume that they really can make a game but that our preempt will keep them from finding it.

Let us also assume that they will double us to try to get even.

The **Rule of 2 and 3** (also called the **Rule of 500**) says:

Estimate how many tricks your side can win.

Then, if Vulnerable, make a preemptive bid 2 tricks higher than the estimate.

Or, if Not-Vulnerable, make a preemptive bid 3 tricks higher than the estimate.

That Rule is pretty good as a rule. :-)

But some Duplicate Bridge players may think they need more precision than saying that 500 points is "about the same" as 420 or 620. So they need to look at these four tables:

WE: Not Vulnerable :::: THEY: Vulnerable		
Their Game	Our down 3 doubled	Our down 4 doubled
620	500	800

WE: Not Vulnerable :::: THEY: Not Vulnerable		
Their Game	Our down 2 doubled	Our down 3 doubled
420	300	500

WE: Vulnerable :::: THEY: Vulnerable		
Their Game	Our down 2 doubled	Our down 3 doubled
620	500	800

WE: Vulnerable :::: THEY: Not Vulnerable		
Their Game	Our down 1 doubled	Our down 2 doubled
420	200	500

If you want to make a rule using this data you would have to call it the Rule of 1, 2 and 3.

At Favorable Vulnerability (we aren't, they are) you can go down 3.

At Equal Vulnerability (both the same) you can go down 2.

At Unfavorable Vulnerability (we are, they aren't) you can only go down 1.

End of Mathematical Interlude:

There are some problems with the mathematical basis above.

Maybe the most important is that it is very difficult for average defenders to double you for penalties when you open with a 3-bid. Most of the people we compete against play that a 3-level double is for take-out, not for penalty. So in fact, making 3- or 4- level preempts is much safer than the math would have you believe.

Another "problem" is partner's hand. And the problem is that you don't know how strong it is, or perhaps more important, how many of your suit he has. If you have read the Law

of Total Tricks you will remember that according to that wisdom you and partner should be able to compete to the 3-level whenever you have 9 trumps between you. Well, if you have 7 it is pretty likely that partner will have 2 of the remaining 6. This indicates that it would be wise to bid to the 3-level every time you have a 7-card suit of any kind!

Enough analysis! Here is our recommendation which you may take with as many grains of salt as you like.

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING A PREEMPTIVE BID	
Make an estimate of how many tricks your hand will actually take with your suit as trump.	
7-card suit	With a 5-trick estimate preempt at 3-level only if Not Vulnerable* With a 6-trick estimate preempt at 3-level at any Vulnerability
8-card suit	With a 6-trick estimate preempt at 3-level With a 7-trick estimate preempt at 4-level

* If Vulnerable, consider making a Weak 2-Bid with 7 cards.

Here are some examples of preemptive bids using these guidelines:

♠ K Q J 10 9 3 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 5 2

Bid 3♠. This hand is perfect. You expect to win 6 ♠ tricks. You have no outside defense against the opponent's best suit contract.

♠ 2 ♥ A Q 10 8 7 4 2 ♦ 6 4 3 ♣ 5 2

Bid 3♥. You estimate (guess) 6 ♥ winners, though you may be unlucky and lose both the ♥K and the ♥J. Estimating winners is not very scientific so we always err on the side that lets us bid.

♠ K Q 10 9 5 4 2 ♥ 4 ♦ 8 7 ♣ Q J 10

This hand will probably produce 7 tricks - 6 ♠s and you hope for 1 ♣ trick. Nonetheless, we would open 3♠ whether vulnerable or not. We don't preempt at 4-level with a 7-card suit.

Examples of hands which you should NOT preempt:

♠ 7 2 ♥ 4 ♦ J 9 8 6 5 4 3 ♣ K J 2

Pass. This suit is not good enough for a 3♦ opening bid.

♠ 2 ♥ A Q 10 8 7 4 2 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ 5 2

Bid 1♥. With 13 points you are too strong for a preemptive bid.

Responding to an opening 3-bid:

When your partner opens 3 of a suit you know that he doesn't have as many as 13 points. But he does have a decent 7-card suit. What he needs from you are not points, but fast tricks. So any Aces and Kings you hold are likely to be worthwhile to him, but your Queens and Jacks (Quacks) are probably useless. You should base your bidding on partner being able to win about 6 tricks; then add any you think your hand will take and respond accordingly.

Here's how you apply this thinking:

Suppose partner opens 3♦ and you have this hand:

♠ 7 4 ♥ A 10 5 ♦ A K 4 2 ♣ K Q 7 4

Don't count points, count tricks. Partner has just told you that he will win about 6 tricks as long as ♠s are trumps. You think you can provide 4 more, ♥A, ♦A, ♦K, and one more from the ♣K + ♣Q.

Partner's 6 plus your 4 = 10. So you bid 4♦.

If partner had that first hand we looked at,

♠ K Q J 10 9 3 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 5 2

he would be able to make the contract with ease.

When you first looked at your hand above, you might have considered bidding 3NT. It's easy to say, "Partner has the ♠s, I have the other suits, so why not bid 3NT?" And the answer is that partner's hand might well be useless unless ♠s are trumps. Just imagine trying to make 9 tricks at notrump with these two hands. The defenders will hold up on their ♠A for one round and you will no longer be able to get to all those good ♠s.

More examples. Assume partner has opened 3♥.

♠ 4 ♥ A 10 5 ♦ A K 4 2 ♣ Q 9 8 7 4

Bid 4♥. You expect to provide 4 tricks, three in high cards and one more by ruffing a ♠.

♠ Q 4 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ Q J 4 2 ♣ Q J 7 4

Pass. You have 12 points but only one trick. Your minor suit quacks are probably useless.

♠ 6 4 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ A 9 4 2 ♣ A Q 7 4

Guess! You have three sure tricks plus one maybe in the ♣Q. If your luck is running good, bid 4♥. If your luck is running bad, pass.

Of course a lot of the time you won't like partner's suit and some of those times you will have a suit of your own. As a general rule, don't bid it. You and your partner need to know in advance whether a new suit response is going to be forcing for you or not - we recommend not. If that is the way you plan to play it then be very cautious about bidding your own suit because partner may well pass.

♠ K J 9 8 6 5 4 ♥ 5 3 ♦ Q 2 ♣ J 4

If partner opens 3♥ just pass. Don't think about bidding your ♠s when you already know you have a 9-card ♥ fit.

♠ A K 9 8 6 5 4 ♥ -- ♦ Q 7 2 ♣ J 5 4

If partner opens 3♥ go ahead and bid 3♣. You can't be any worse off.

Preemptive bidding when the Opponents are also bidding:

If the opponents are the first to open the bidding you can hardly call a 3-bid a "preemptive strike" since you didn't get there first. But that doesn't mean you can't still make the bid and still get some great results by interfering with their bidding.

When you make this bid after the opponents open it is called a Weak Jump Overcall.

Here is the same hand we looked at before:

♠ K Q J 10 9 3 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 5 2

If you were the first to bid you would open 3♣.

But if your RHO opened 1♥ in front of you, you should overcall 3♣! Obviously the bid will have the same effect of disrupting their bidding, yet your great suit minimizes the risk to your side. Perhaps you need to be somewhat more cautious when making a weak jump overcall since the opponents have already announced some strength, but bidding with this type of hand is far more profitable than passing.

Following a Weak Jump Overcall to the 3-level partner should respond exactly the same as if it were a Preemptive opening bid, but with a little more caution.

Now suppose you open with a preemptive 3-bid and the opponents get into the bidding while Partner passes. There is a very important rule for this situation:

DO NOT PREEMPT TWICE WITH THE SAME HAND

In other words, don't bid the same values twice. Partner heard your first bid and she knows what type of hand you have. So she is the one who should decide whether to bid on or just let the opponents have the bid.

With this hand:

♠ Q J 10 9 5 3 2 ♥ 5 4 ♦ A 3 ♣ 5 2

You correctly open with 3♣.

The next two players pass and your RHO bids 4♥.

Under no circumstances should you now bid 4♣.

If you didn't have the hand to bid at the 4-level at your first turn you certainly don't have it

after Partner has passed. If the opponents make 4♥, so be it. But if you bid on you are running a serious risk of getting doubled and going down 800 or more.

12 practice Deals will be better than the entire Mathematical Interlude.
If you worry about Vulnerability, assume neither side Vulnerable on all Deals.

Deal 1