

Competitive bids

- the Scanian way

A book by Mats Nilsland

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Feel free to tell bridge friends how to get it!

(but keep it away from your opponents)

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Some abbreviations that I use: (they are what I am used too)

Ma, mi	one of the majors, one of the minors
OMa, Omi	the other major, the other minor
U	the suit Under partner's bid suit, also called a transfer-raise
X, Y	X means any suit, Y means an unbid suit, other than X
4432	any 4432 distribution
=4432	exactly 4=4=3=2 or 4-4-3-2 from the top
NF, F1, GF	non-forcing, forcing for one round, game-forcing

Some other explanations:

(1?)	Bids in parenthesis are the opponents' bids and
1H-1S	The opponents' passes are usually hidden; 1H-(pass)-1S
pass/correct	asks partner to pass with that suit, or else correct to his suit
cue-raise	a cue-bid of the opponents' suit that promises support

FOREWORD

So first, what are 'competitive bids'?

A simple definition is that competitive bidding occurs when both sides, at some point, are involved in the auction (other than passing). As I see it, there are four situations that can be discussed in this book:

- we have opened the bidding and our opponents have interfered
- the opposition have opened the bidding, and we have entered the auction
- we consider entering the auction after the opponents opened the bidding
- we expect opponents to interfere even if they have not done so yet

The three first cases are obvious. The fourth is there because in bridge today we should also consider *pre-competitive* measures. Examples of such bids are preemptive opening bids and tactical responses on partner's opening bid. In the first round of an auction, we usually have agreements on how to handle contesting bids from the opponents. Which bids are forcing and which are not, and so on.

When the auction develops and becomes a competitive struggle for the contract, we are left to use our ability and judgment. At the three-level the bidding often is beyond our system agreements, and at the five-level we are fumbling in the dark.

I want to express my thoughts about the methods we use in competitive auctions, as well as some general observations. When I in the text say 'we,' I am referring to the methods I play with my partner, Björn Fallenius. By explaining both how we reason and why I recommend a particular way of handling a problem, I hope to make you think and discuss further in your partnership.

Throughout the book, I assume that we are playing a team game against excellent opponents. We all know, though, that the 'best' bid does not always produce the best result. That is, it does not produce the best results on every board, but I believe it does in the long run.

I want to share with you some of the experiences I have gathered over the years, but first and foremost, I hope you will enjoy reading my ideas. I also want to thank Olof Bergström and Björn Fallenius for their help.

In these dark times, when we, at least for the moment, can't enjoy playing our fantastic game because of the virus, I have decided that you can get this book for free. If you are compelled to stay at home, at least you've got something to read!

Mats Nilsland

INTRODUCTION

A striking difference between bidding and play is how we calculate the odds. As declarer, we have a very good idea of what the percentage play is, and we know that we take a risk when we deviate from the standard line. In the bidding, especially when it is competitive, it is entirely different: We haven't got a clue, we are just guessing! I think we can do better, perhaps this book can help!

The best players seem to have all the essentials of how to handle competitive situations intuitively. That intuition comes from their experience. Some players are better than others at listening to the auction. If you ask for my opinion, Peter Fredin is one of the masterminds in that department. He can make spectacular bids and plays but foremost: He knows when to pass! By giving the opponents a free run, we can figure out quite a lot of the whole hand. We can postpone the decision to come in or not. By keeping out of the auction, we can also avoid telling them about possible bad breaks.

My friend Nikos Delimpaltadakis told me a story.

He and his partner were playing against a young, not so experienced, mixed couple who in a competitive auction reached 4♠. Nikos then bid 5♣, primarily as a save, and the lady doubled. It was two down for 300, while 5♠ vulnerable could easily be made.

The lady then said: 'This is what I want to know, Mr. Delimpaltadakis. When should I bid more, and when should I double in all of these cases?' She asked, in her naivety, one of the most fundamental questions of bridge, as if she expected that there was something written in one paragraph to answer her question. Nikos had to answer the lady that we, after so many decades, are still trying to find these answers. We are continually building bidding frameworks, trying to get closer, but we still cannot answer that question with any certainty.

There are many factors to consider in competitive bidding: our position, the vulnerability, the information from both partner's and the opponents' bids. Finally, the most back-breaking task of all: our hand must be re-evaluated during the auction, very often re-evaluated several times thereafter.

In competitive auctions, we must think about tactics, and we also have to cater to the opponents' tactical bids! Can we really trust them?! In addition, we must understand not only what our partner is doing, which often is tricky enough, but also what the opponents' bids mean!

For sure, when we put all that together, is more complicated contrasted with an uncontested auction where we just bid with our partner and the opponents pass throughout the auction. You can, however, use this difficulty to your advantage.

As opposed to uncontested bidding, the methods for competitive bidding are not as well understood. Therefore, if you develop your partnership skills further in competitive bidding, you can improve your chances to beat your opponents in the bidding. That sounds easier than it is. However, I am going to help you!

My partner and I regularly look for ways and means to enhance the standard methods where we can. That to us is an ongoing process that seems never to end. We both like to discuss bridge, and we often find out that we have similar thoughts about how to solve a problem, be it with the standard methods or our own.

I have filled the book with 'wisdom' from my own experience. That includes knowledge about hand evaluation and understanding the flow of information in the auction. My ambition with this book is also to tell you why and how we use a specific way of handling a competitive situation. I think perhaps I can help you to improve your partnership interaction in the bidding. Even if you do not adopt a single treatment that we suggest, you will probably find a thing or two that you have not already thought about to discuss with your partner.

Let me first introduce you to the chapters in the book.

The standard methods

We will go through the basics of competitive bidding today. That includes the most frequent overcalls and doubles from both sides, and we will look at standard defenses against opening bids other than one of a suit. I also make comments about current trends and try to foresee what is to come. The chapter is nothing near a complete description but serves as a platform from where we can take off.

Then before we rush into my favorite mission, talking about designing bidding methods, I want to see if I can improve our judgment. I think it's doable!

Extended hand evaluation

Milton Work's 4-3-2-1 scale for counting HCP is still the foundation when we value our hand in uncontested auctions. We can make adjustments depending on fit, distribution, and how good our honors look in the context of the auction. When the opponents take an active part in the auction, we have many more clues to consider. The value of our hand can easily change because of what the opponents are doing. This chapter contains numerous examples of that.

I think the extended hand evaluation is an essential thing to master.

My next task is to explain how we can estimate the odds for different actions in the bidding, even if we cannot calculate them accurately.

The flow of information

Here the topic is how to improve our choices between pass or bid or when we can choose between several possible bids. The information conveyed by every pass or bid may work either for us or against us. Can the 'balance of strength' theory help us to give partner our story but the opponents as little as possible?

Finally, when that has been covered, I can begin to talk about our methods.

Our competitive methods

This is where I describe our efforts to improve on the standard methods and try not to overlook the small details. We stress the differences in the auction tempo: When all the players bid, I usually refer to it as a *live* auction. Then there is no time to waste. However, if in a competitive auction, an opponent passes, we can often take over the bidding. Most of our ideas can easily be added to standard competitive methods. Before you do, be sure to understand the logic behind them.

The competitive struggle

It is time to take the contest to the next level and take a look at the aspects of competitive bidding that are not handled well by our basic agreements. We believe that teamwork often is necessary to get a good result, and we must interact with our partner with cooperative bids. When we fight at the four or five-level, we are often in trouble whatever we do, but we have some small suggestions that can help.

Defense against proxy bids

We are regularly up against adversaries who use many bids with artificial meanings and thus are substitutes (proxies) for natural bids. When the opponents are strong, we don't have to worry much. But in today's bridge, our opponents also use transfer responses and a bunch of other substitute bids with weaker hands.

The useful 2NT

The 2NT bid is probably the most used *and* misused proxy bid in competitive auctions. Most of the players who use Lebensohl and Scrambling have probably had misunderstandings about when to use them or not. I know I have. We like to stipulate sharp, precise rules and we do so regarding the use of the 2NT bid. In that way, we can avoid mishaps and dare to use the bid more frequently.

Conventions and partnership agreements

If you are interested to know more about our methods, or perhaps try to play them, you will find in this chapter at the end of the book a detailed description of our methods.

THE STANDARD METHODS

Throughout the history of bridge, many great players have developed our game. The methods we all use are the result of their many years of experience. The standard methods for doubles and overcalls when the opponents open are well established, as are responses when the opponents contest over our opening bids. This chapter is by no means a complete description, but I believe that I have included the most frequent situations. You can see it as a summary of what I think is standard competitive bidding. It can also serve as a background for the ideas that we have, and which I will present in the text. There are some ongoing trends among experts, which perhaps would lead to small changes in the future, and I will tell you the ones I have observed.

So, this is what I believe is the current 'standard' among good team players:

Our RHO opens one of a suit

When our right-hand opponent opens the bidding, we usually say that we are in the *second position*, no matter if there were earlier passes.

One-level overcalls

To enter the auction at the one-level in second position shows 8-16 HCP and by default at least a five-card suit, occasionally, a strong four-card suit is permissible. In earlier days, the perception was that vulnerability and suit quality should be the deciding factors for overcalling or not. We were told that we should have a good suit to make a bid and to be careful when we are vulnerable. The current trend is moving towards getting into the auction even with a weak suit, and to not consider the vulnerability when we are at the one-level. If we have roughly opening strength or better it is too passive to pass, and the modern way is to value opportunity more than risks.

What about this hand:

♠ Qxxxx ♥ Ax ♦ KQx ♣ J10x

The spade suit is meager, but we consider the hand to be worth an overcall at the one-level because we have opening values.

Overcalls with a four-card suit are seldom 'necessary' but can work very well, especially when it makes the opponents take the wrong decisions.

After 1♥, you hold this collection:

♠ KQ10x ♥ xx ♦ QJxxx ♣ Kx

The alternatives are pass, double, 2♦, and 1♠. Take your pick!

The standard procedure with 17 HCP or more is to double first and show extra strength by bidding again. With excellent playing strength, like in the following hand, most players prefer to double even with fewer points.

♠ AKJ10xx ♥ xx ♦ AKxx ♣ x

With this hand, we have the values for a double followed by a spade bid. We can, occasionally, make a one-level overcall with more than 16 HCP, as some hands are difficult to describe if you start with a takeout double. The risk is that we get passed out, but if we get to bid again, we will survive.

One-level overcalls - responses by advancer

Advancer will usually bid with 8 HCP or more not to risk missing a game. He can bid with less with a fit and pass with more but without a suitable bid. The standard responses include a new suit as forcing for one round. A cue-bid of the opening suit usually promises a fit for partner's suit and a hand stronger than a single raise. Jump raises are preemptive. Other bids, like jump bids in new suits, and a jump to 2NT, are not as standardized and depend on partnership agreements or where in the world we live.

If third hand, opener's partner, makes a bid, it is more difficult to identify any standard procedures. What I can say is that a double from advancer is a takeout double over a suit-bid, and a bid in a new suit is probably no longer forcing. After a negative double, a redouble is very often used to show a top honor in partner's suit, but some experts instead use it to show values.

The takeout double

The minimum double contains about 11-16 HCP and fit (at least three cards) for all unbid suits. The ideal distribution is 4441, with shortness in the opening suit. With 17 or more HCP, we can, in principle, double with all distributions.

Some players double with as little as 10 HCP holding the perfect distribution:

♠ Q10xx ♥ x ♦ K10xx ♣ AJ9x

This hand will be enough over 1♥. If we reverse the majors in the bidding as well as in the hand above, I think most players will pass over 1♠.

Most players like to have four cards in the other major when they double 1Ma with minimum hands, and some players even refuse to double with less than four cards in the unbid major. Others double with four cards in the unbid major regardless of what they have in the other suits, but none of these treatments are standard.

A current trend is to double even with a doubleton in the unbid minor.

This can occasionally lead to a poor result but passing rather than getting into the auction can also lead to a bad result. An example hand:

♠ QJxx ♥ KQxx ♦ xx ♣ AQx

We have no diamond fit, but with 4-4 in the majors, it is often better to double 1♣ than to hold back with a pass. If the opening suit is short, like a Precision 1♦, or when 1♣ that promises only two clubs, the main focus is on the majors, and the double doesn't promise much about the unbid minor.

As already mentioned, with strong hands, we can double without having a fit in all unbid suits, and plan to show the additional strength with our rebid.

♠ Kxx ♥ A ♦ AKQxxxx ♣ xx

We have 16 HCP but a tremendous source of tricks. We can double 1♥ or 1♣, and over 1♠ another option is undoubtedly to take a chance with 3NT.

The takeout double - responses by advancer

Since advancer may only pass in exceptional circumstances, a preference between the unbid suits can be very weak but also up to 10 HCP without an alternative bid. If there is a bid from the third hand, though, we can pass with a weak hand.

The standard responses are that a single jump to the two-level shows 8-11 HCP, and very often a five-card suit. When we jump to the three-level, that bid is a little stronger, but none of the jump responses are forcing. The double jump to 3Ma, however, at least among experts, shows a long suit and about 6-8 HCP.

♠ Kxxxxx ♥ xxx ♦ Qxx ♣ Q

When partner doubles 1♥, our instinct says we want to take a chance with 4♠, but when third hand passes, we should be a little careful with hands like this. Advancer has to cater to the possibility that the doubler has the strong (17+) hand, where he then wants to make another bid and often doesn't have a fit in all unbid suits. Therefore, we show this hand with 3♠ and give our partner some space.

The strong response is a cue-bid in opener's suit, which is forcing for one round, and promises a rebid, but is not game-forcing. The notrump responses are natural. 1NT shows around 8-11 HCP but can be a little weaker over 1♠. When third hand bids, there also are some standards: After a redouble, jump bids are weak, while a pass doesn't have to be. Over a raise, advancer can use a *responsive* double to show values. If third hand bids a suit, a double in the past used to be for penalties, but now the trend is that it is a takeout double.

The one notrump overcall

Overcalling 1NT after an opening bid shows 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand. The bid also promises a stopper in the opened suit (if that suit was natural). If the opening bid is 1♠ 18 HCP is possible, not wanting to risk a double followed by 2NT. I believe a trend here, at least among younger experts, is making a notrump overcall with semi-balanced hands, or even with a singleton honor in an unbid suit, prioritizing to show the strength over the distributional flaws.

In responding to the notrump overcall, the normal thing to do is to use your ordinary responses to your one notrump opening. Also, when opener's partner bids, it is standard to use the same responses as when the opponents overcall your opening bid 1NT.

Two-level overcalls

The overcall at the two-level in second position shows about 10-16 HCP with at least a decent five-card suit. As with the one-level overcall, it is possible to have even more strength if the hand is unsuitable for a takeout double. An overcall at the two-level, especially vulnerable, is dangerous, but it is also a risk to pass with opening values. The trend is to look more to the possible gain than the danger of a misfit.

Players handle the distributions 5-4-3-1 and 5-3-3-2 (with shortness in the opening suit) in different ways. I think most players prefer to bid the five-card suit at the one-level if that is possible. When we have to bid at the two-level, it is the other way around, and the majority will double. However, I believe the quality of the long suit will often decide the matter for good players.

♠ Qxx ♥ AKxxx ♦ Kxx ♣ xx

We bid 1♥ over 1♣, but exchange the black suit holdings, and many players will prefer a double to 2♥ over a 1♠ opening because the two-level bid is riskier.

Two-level overcalls - responses from advancer

Bids in a new suit, as well as cue-bids, are forcing for one round. A difference is that the cue-bid doesn't promise real support. The 2NT response is natural and invitational (perhaps forcing over a minor suit overcall for some players).

Apart from that, I can't see much of a standard, and if third hand bids, the only treatment experts agree on is that doubles are not for penalties.

Showing two-suiters

All bridge players know that a jump to 2NT, when RHO opens, shows the two lowest unbid suits. A cue-bid of a minor shows a two suiter, usually both majors. The cue-bid of a major usually shows the unbid major and one of the minors, but some players also use 3♣ as a two suiter to be able always to show two specified suits. The cue-bid then shows one combination of the other major and a minor and 3♣ the other. A third, now perhaps outdated, option is to use a jump cue-bid instead of 3♣ to show the third combination of two suits.

Even though conventions like the Unusual 2NT and Michael's cue-bid have been standard for a long time, I don't think the strength of these bids is as standardized. Some players use the bids as being constructive while others also use them with weaker hands. When using Michael's over a minor, I think some players may only require 5-4 in the majors, but the standard is that it promises 5-5 in the suits.

One of the modern trends is to open 1♣ with only two cards, and that affects the bids showing two-suiters. A 2NT overcall shows the two lowest *unbid* suits, but if the opening bid shows only one, two, or three cards in the opening suit, it is possible to regard the suit as unbid. It is up to you and your partner to decide.

The problem is similar when using the cue-bid, and the opened suit can be short: When is a suit bid, and when is it unbid? When is the cue-bid *not* a cue-bid but a natural overcall? The standard system doesn't address these questions yet, but they probably will in the future, as we have agreements for them in our system notes.

Let us briefly look at the responses to the two-suited overcalls. Here North's 2♥ shows 5-5 in spades and one of the minors:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♥	pass	?

♠ x ♥ Kxxx ♦ xxxx ♣ xxxx

We want to sign-off and play in partner's minor. Should we ask with 2NT? The *pass/correct* convention is probably standard here among good players. South can bid 3♣, and partner will correct to 3♦ if diamonds is his minor. The reason for this treatment is that we also can have a better hand like:

♠ x ♥ Qxxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ Qxxx

Using *pass/correct*, we can agree that 2NT is asking partner to show the minor, but also promises some values, and the overcaller can bid at the three-level with a minimum, but more when he has a good hand.

Jump overcalls

I don't think there is any standard in this department. The experts do not agree on what is the right hand to have for a preemptive jump overcall. The foundation for the preemptive jump overcall in a suit was, in older days, to count 'playing tricks' or to use the 'Rule of 1-2-3'.

The trend among younger experts is to regard the risks less and make the bidding more of a guessing game. Other players still use more constructive jump bids, and there are also other variations where jump bids show two-suiters. The most difficult preempts to handle for the opponents are the direct jumps to the four-level or even higher.

Defense to other opening bids

When the opening bid is 1NT or a higher bid, there isn't any agreement among experts on how we should handle that specific bid. I will, however briefly, go through the frequent opening bids and mention what I believe experts agree upon.

Defense to 1NT

There is no such thing as a standard defense to 1NT. The closest to standard is probably 'BBO Expert Standard,' using 2♣ as both majors and double as strong. There are probably more than fifty different defenses to a notrump opening. We all have our favorite defense, and I am sure you already use the best one!

Defense to weak two-bids and other natural preempts

Double is for takeout, while 2NT is natural with 15-18 HCP. Suit overcalls are natural. After 2NT, it is common to use the 2NT-system that we use when we open with 2NT. The standard methods suggest that we overcall or make takeout doubles with about the same strength as at the one-level. However, at the two-level, the vulnerabilities become more critical. Also, it pays to be more cautious when partner is a passed hand. After a raise, advancer's double is responsive and not a penalty double.

The use of jump bids to 4mi as *Leaping Michael's*, to show a two-suiter is quite widespread, but maybe not standard. Nor is the meaning of a direct cue-bid of opener's suit. Many experts also use non-leaping Michael's, which means they use the same bids without jump over three-level preempts.

After the opponent's preemptive opening bids, most experts agree on an important principle: We shouldn't make weak overcalls against weak openings. A 4NT overcall after a high-level preemptive opening bid shows two suits. It is more flexible in this situation and not always the lowest unbid suits. Against higher preemptive bids double is for takeout up to 4♥. Above that level, double is more showing general strength, and we often must guess the rest.

Defense to Multi 2 diamonds

Against Multi 2♦, the standard defense is that double shows either a balanced hand with 12-16 HCP or strong hands (17+). After the first double, a double from partner is takeout, and a repeated double shows the strong hand. The 2NT overcall shows 15-17(18) HCP. When we have an unbalanced hand and shortness in one major, we can pass and later make a takeout double of that major.

♠ x ♥ K10xx ♦ AKxx ♣ Axxx

We pass over the 2♦ opening and hope to be able to double a spade bid next.

Defending special opening bids

When we are up against special opening bids, like strong openings or bids that show weak hands with two suits, there is no standard that I know of. Perhaps you could say it is common that, when the opponents play a strong club, most players have some agreed defense. However, there is no standard defense!

Reopening in fourth position

When our left-hand opponent opens the bidding, and two passes follow, we are in a reopening position (also called protecting or balancing).

Overcalls and takeout doubles

In the reopening position, bids can be weaker, but the principles are the same. It is impossible to say precisely how much weaker, as the willingness to bid may depend on the length in the opened suit.

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	pass	pass	?

♠ Jxx ♥ K10xx ♦ Kx ♣ Axxx

With four hearts and not so many spades, I think most players would pass.

♠ KJxx ♥ xx ♦ Qxx ♣ Axxx

This hand is weaker, but this a standard reopening double. As we often reopen with weaker hands, a takeout double followed by a bid in a new suit in this position shows from 15 HCP or more.

In reopening position, the jump overcall is constructive, and not preemptive. Overcalling 2Ma then shows about 13-16 HCP with a good six-card suit while a jump to 3mi often is a seven-card suit, inviting partner to bid 3NT.

Against two-level opening bids and higher preemptive bids, the only standard agreement is that reopening bids can be slightly weaker than the same bid in the position directly after the opening.

Reopening with a notrump bid

The main difference from overcalls in second hand is that a jump to 2NT is not used as a two suiter. Instead, it shows a notrump hand with around 19-21 HCP. I don't believe there is a common opinion about 1NT in the reopening position. My best guess is that 1NT shows roughly 12-16 HCP and doesn't require a full stopper.

A widespread variation is that 1NT over 1Ma shows 12-16 HCP, but over a minor about 14-16 HCP, but for some players the range is 12-14 over a minor. When the bid shows 12-16, most experts will then rebid 2NT with 15-16 over the Stayman 2♣ response.

A cue-bid in reopening position

The meaning of a cue-bid can be discussed. Long ago, it was used as a strong cue-bid, to avoid a penalty pass of a double, but I guess is that it nowadays is more often used as Michael's cue-bid.

Both the opponents have bid

Overcalls and doubles in this position are not standardized and are often based on tactical decisions. We call this the 'sandwich' position as we are squeezed in between two opponents that already have bid. The risk is higher, and we, therefore, should look more at the vulnerability. It is not unusual that we are a passed hand in this position. Then our hand is, of course, limited in HCPs, but we can still bid if we have a good reason.

What I *do* know is standard is this:

- a cue-bid of responder's suit is often played as a natural bid
- a 1NT overcall is natural, often with a 5+ card minor as the risk is higher
- an overcall with 1NT from a passed hand show a two-suited hand
- a jump to 2NT shows the two lowest unbid suits
- a cue-bid in opener's minor is natural if opener hasn't promised a real suit

I think most expert pairs have many more agreements. However, they are not yet standardized.

The trend is that we now also sometimes must defend against transfer responses. After reading this book, you will have a defense for those methods too!

We open, the opponents double

There is not much consensus on how a takeout double, or an overcall, should affect our responses. In my summary here, I presume we play five-card majors even if I know that is by no means universal. If you don't, there may be comments in this section that are not valid for you, but I can not handle both methods here. I will shortly go through the most frequent situations and look for standard treatments that the experts agree on.

Some players use bids in a new suit as non-forcing, and therefore must redouble with all strong hands. I don't think that treatment is common today. After a strong redouble, the bidding gets crowded after a preemptive bid from the advancer.

If there is something that perhaps is standard my guess is:

- redouble shows strength, about 10 HCP, and usually no support.
- two-over-one bids are only forcing for one round
- a jump to 2NT shows support, and is usually invitational or better
- single raises show about 5-10 while jump raises are preemptive

There are several methods here, and I will refrain from further guessing!

We open, the opponent's overcall

The negative double

I think that we should only call the double 'negative' if the overcall is at the one-level or at the two-level in a lower suit, that is, not a jump overcall.

This is a standard negative double, promising four spades:

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	1 ♥	Dble

When a double of 1 ♥ shows exactly four spades, 1 ♠ shows five or more spades, but not everyone uses this extension.

A standard requirement for a negative double is to hold four cards in all unbid major suits. That works well at the lowest levels since responder often can find another bid when the hand is not suitable for a negative double.

A raise of a major with Hx as support can be a last resort, as can a raise of a minor with only four cards. Even a raise of diamonds on a good three-card support is possible if you follow the rule to open 1 ♣ with 3-3 in the minors. Opening 1 ♦ then shows four cards, except with 4-4 in the majors (=4432).

Another option can be to make a two-over-one bid in a minor with only four cards, as that bid is forcing for one round. Some experts play differently. If the double doesn't promise the unbid major, then opener's rebid of an unbid major at the two-level shows extra values.

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	1 ♠	Dble

Double promise four hearts, but with some strong hands without alternative bids, as the following hand, we can double as the least of evils.

♠ Jxxx ♥ AKx ♦ Kxx ♣ Axx

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	1 ♠	Dble

The above double shows length in the minors, and with a limited hand, South will often have at least four cards in both minors.

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	2 ♣	Dble

This situation is the most uncomfortable start if you play the negative doubles as promising both majors. If South indeed has 4-4 in the majors, all is well, but there are many other hands he can have. Would you pass with this hand?

♠ KJxxx ♥ xx ♦ xxx ♣ Axx

You have no good alternative bid except for a pass. If you double anyway, perhaps you can bid 2 ♠ over 2 ♥, but what if partner bids 3 ♥, or even 4 ♥? And with reversed majors, you definitely can't use the negative double.

Double of jump overcalls

We should call the double takeout, and not negative when the overcall isn't at the lowest level. We can then use the 'normal principles' for takeout doubles: If we have a minimal hand, we have a fit for the unbid suits, but with extra values, we can have other distributions.

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	2/3 ♠	Dble

South doesn't promise four hearts with this takeout double, as some hands would be impossible to handle if it did.

Bidding a new suit after an overcall

A new suit is forcing for one round. Playing the two-level bids as non-forcing (negative free-bids) is an alternative, but not standard. Jumps in a new suit are preemptive in most standard systems. When we can bid a suit at the one-level, the bidding proceeds as without the interference, but when we bid at the two-level, we must decide how far the bid is forcing.

Can we pass if opener rebids his suit? Or is a two-over-one forcing to at least the three-level in responder's suit? I think, but I am not sure, the standard is that responder can pass over 2NT and a rebid of the opening suit. When responder rebids his own suit, that is certainly a non-forcing bid.

Natural notrump bids after an overcall

All the natural notrump bids promise at least one stopper in overcaller's suit. Bidding 1NT shows 8-11 HCP, but not everyone requires the extra values. After a minor suit opening, 2NT is natural, and 2NT has been played as natural also when the opening was in a major suit, but that is not standard anymore. There is a clear trend towards using 2NT as showing support when partner has a major suit. A jump to 3NT is 'to play,' but doesn't need to be a balanced hand.

Supporting opener's suit after an overcall

In the (very) old days, a cue-bid of the opponents' suit was just a forcing bid, but in the modern systems, it shows support and at least invitational strength. The jump to 2NT, as a response to 1Ma, usually shows support after an overcall. Raises of the opening suit are natural, whether it is in a minor or a major, but a single raise to the two-level now can be done with 5-10 HCP. In some standard systems, a raise shows more in uncontested bidding. Jump raises are regarded as preemptive and not limit (10-11 HCP), but I am not sure that's a universal treatment.

Other bids by the opponents

When the overcall is 1NT, the standard method is to double with strength while bids in a new suit are non-forcing. A trend is perhaps that the double is more of a takeout double, and thus competitive, rather than for penalties. Many experts play 2♣ over the notrump overcall as 'takeout' for majors.

When the opponents make a jump overcall or show a two-suited hand, there is no such thing as a standard treatment. A double of a preemptive bid is takeout, as we already mentioned, and a new suit is forcing. Some players use transfers after jump overcalls. When the overcall is showing two suits, like the Unusual 2NT, a double generally shows interest to double the opponents for penalties (or just values) while bidding a minor shows either support or the unbid major, but the methods vary for this.

EXTENDED HAND EVALUATION

In almost every competitive auction, hand evaluation is critical for the result. We are regularly adjusting the value of our hand in terms of honors and suit lengths, and when the opponents are involved in the auction, it doesn't get easier. As we want to improve as bridge players, I think the *extended* hand evaluation is an essential subject to study and discuss.

In a competitive auction, there are these additional factors to evaluate:

- the honors in the opponents' suit(s)
- the length in the opponents' suit(s)
- the defensive and offensive strength
- the position of our honors

In competitive auctions, the opponents usually have bid a suit (or two). In other cases, they have shown strength with an ambiguous or two-way opening bid, or perhaps with a takeout double. In my experience, the holding in the opponents' suit(s) often is a crucial factor for the evaluation of my hand. Frequently even decisive for whether I should pass or bid.

Honors in the opponents' suits

In a competitive auction, less HCP strength in the suits bid by the opponents is relatively better for our side. Generally expressed, honors in their suits suggest defending. Both honors and length suggest defending even more strongly.

East-West are vulnerable, and we hold as South:

♠ Qxx ♥ K109x ♦ xxx ♣ Kxx			
West	North	East	South
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥	?

Our partner overcalled, and he would probably like us to support him when we have nice support like Queen to three. Should we not then raise to 2♠? Very often, we should, but not automatically. I am sure you also have experienced something like the following: When we bid 2♠, opener bids 4♥, and our partner finds to sacrifice in 4♠. It turns out that 4♥ wasn't making, and I guess 4♠ will go at least two down; or opener bids 3♥ and partner, with short hearts, continues with 3♠.

The problem here is the heart holding, which often is worthless in a spade contract but is good in defense. It is better if we are careful and pass with these hands with marginal values and good defense.

If we pass over 2♥, one of these things can happen: opener also passes, and then my partner will often bid again as he is short in hearts, if partner doubles, we will get to 2♠ anyway. Alternatively, opener bids again, and then we will defend against a heart contract. Finally, if everyone passes, I think we can live with that too. I prefer these options. Sometime my pass will work out poorly, and then I may have to apologize to my partner!

How about this?

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?
♠ KQxxx ♥ xx ♦ QJxx ♣ xx			

Our hand is weak, but 1♠ is doubtless an excellent tactical bid. Bidding 1♠ over a minor has its own merits because it has a preemptive effect. Responder can show hearts with a negative double, but when he doesn't have hearts, he may have a problem. With a limited hand, he then has to pass if he doesn't have a spade stopper and can't raise his partner's suit. Another aspect is that responder can have five hearts and not enough strength to bid 2♥, and when that happens, the opponents may not find their 5-3 fit in hearts.

An additional factor in this situation is that it is easier for West to raise clubs if East shows some length in clubs. Therefore, we can afford to be more aggressive when 1♣ shows only two cards or when it is a two-way bid.

The more natural the 1♣ opening is, the less annoying is it if we overcall with 1♠, but if our bid forces responder to pass with values for a bid, it is a tactical advantage.

If we move the suits around, the situation is different:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?
♠ KQxxx ♥ QJxx ♦ xx ♣ xx			

With the hand above, I would hesitate to overcall even white against red. If West supports hearts, there is a danger that our partner will bid too much, being short in hearts and thus often having spade support. I agree that pass is a boring bid. Bridge is more fun when you participate in the bidding. I don't mind weak and aggressive overcalls, but I am careful with them when there are evident warning signs.

The following hand is from a team tournament in Sweden.

West	North	East	South
	pass	1 ♥	?

All vulnerable, South had this hand:

♠ KQxxx ♥ Q108x ♦ xx ♣ Kx

The strength and the suit quality are adequate for South to overcall with 1♠. So why should he not bid? The heart holding is a red flag, but most players would look the other way, and perhaps think: Why pass when North can have short hearts and spade support, and we can even make a game. But how likely is that? Partner is a passed hand, and he is still there if LHO should pass. The whole hand was:

All vulnerable

♠ Axx		
♥ x		
♦ KJxxx		
♣ Q10xx		
♠ J9x		♠ 10x
♥ Kxx		♥ AJ9xx
♦ 109x		♦ AQx
♣ A9xx		♣ Jxx
	♠ KQxxx	
	♥ Q108x	
	♦ 8x	
	♣ Kx	

When South chose to bid 1♠, the bidding went:

West	North	East	South
	pass	1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♥	3 ♥	pass	3 ♠
All pass			

At the other table, South passed, and the auction was:

West	North	East	South
	pass	1 ♥	pass
2 ♥	Dble	pass	2 ♠
All pass			

On the actual hand, it is reasonable to be in 2♠, even if it won't make on a trump lead, but it wasn't fantastic to get to 3♠ since East-West can't even make 2♥. One deal proves nothing, I know!

What about preemptive overcalls? None vulnerable the start is:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?
♠ x ♥ J10xx ♦ xx ♣ KQxxxx			

I would not consider a preemptive overcall in second position with this hand, but I know that many players would bid 3♣ without blinking. They may be right though, as I can't say I have much experience with the outcome of such overcalls. I think some bad things can happen if we preempt with this hand. Apart from being doubled and having many losers when 4♥ was going down, they may bid 3NT instead of 4♥ (or 4♠). They may stay out of a slam that doesn't make because a preemptive bid warns them about bad breaks. If partner were a passed hand, would perhaps consider bidding 2♣ with this hand to give the opponents the wrong idea about my hand.

About stoppers

It often matters that we play the contract from the right side, and when the opponents have bid, we quite often know much better which side is the right one. If we have no other clues, it is usually better for us to have the player with the long suit as the opening leader. When we have the stopper in one of our hands only, though, the hand with the stopper should be declarer. An interesting fact is that when we both have honors, it is better to play from the hand with the *shortest* stopper, no matter which opponent holds the length in the suit. When we consider playing 3NT in competitive auctions, we have to expect that they often will lead their bid suit. Therefore, we have to ask: Do I have a suitable stopper in their suit(s)? A stopper can be anything from Qxx or Jxxx to AKQ, and for success, it may be essential to have the right kind of stopper and play from the right hand.

If we have nine tricks as soon as we get the lead, the type of stopper does not matter much. However, more frequently, we have to work to set up nine tricks. When we have to let the opponents come in one or more times, it does matter what our stopper looks like. Besides, when we have the length in the opponents' suit, it will very often be better to have our partner as declarer.

Let us say that, after 1♥ from my RHO, our hand is:

♠ K10x ♥ Axxx ♦ Ax ♣ KQxx

We have 16 HCP and a balanced hand, but Ace to four is a terrible stopper since we cannot hope for much help in dummy's holding. With an unsuitable stopper and useless extra length in our opponents' suit, I will say no to overcalling 1NT. So, what then is a 'suitable' stopper? When RHO opens the bidding with a natural one-level bid, we expect him to have an entry outside the suit. Therefore, we now may need a double stopper or nine quick tricks to be able to make 3NT.

When they open with a preemptive bid, the opener may not have a side entry, and we can manage with a single stopper. Holding Ax or Kxx is better than Qxx or Kx. The reason is that we then can 'duck' the suit once if necessary. Sometimes you need Axx to be able to duck twice. When the opponents have bid and supported a suit, Qxx is a dubious stopper. It matters whether the opening leader or his partner has the length in the suit. Let us study some layouts where West is on lead and South has Qxx or Q10x:

♠ KJxxx	♠ xx	♠ Axx
	♠ Qxx	

We can't stop defenders from taking five tricks.

♠ Kxxxx	♠ xx	♠ AJx
	♠ Q10x	

The ten helps us to stop the suit from running but only when East has the Jack.

♠ KJx	♠ xx	♠ Axxxx
	♠ Qxx	

Here, the defense can take five tricks only if East has a side entry.

♠ Jxxxx	♠ xx	♠ AKx
	♠ Qxx	

When East has AK we have a 'sure' stopper. (Q10x would be worse!)

The critical factors when you value a stopper can be:

- how is the length distributed in the opponents' hands
- how is the strength distributed in the opponents' hands

The above examples are very basic but illustrate what we have to consider when we have to judge whether to bid notrump or not in a competitive auction. When we have a dubious stopper, partner's values will sometimes help.

When we have Qx opposite Jxx, it's a stopper in combination, although neither is a stopper in its own right. Holdings like these are called half stoppers or partial stoppers. Sometimes we have Qx opposite Jx, but that's just Murphy's law. Let us look at a hand after 1♠ from RHO:

♠ Axx ♥ KJxx ♦ Jx ♣ AQJx

Is this a problem? This looks like a completely normal 1NT overcall! However, I believe it is wrong to bid 1NT with this hand. I have four cards in the unbid major, and the spade stopper is *unsuitable* for being declarer in notrumps. If my partner has some help in spades, that help would often be killed by the lead through dummy. A hold-up play may not help as RHO opened the bidding, and usually has an entry to his suit. I am sure that a takeout double is better than bidding 1NT (and I also know that another experienced player, my friend Gunnar Hallberg agrees).

If I double and partner responds 2♣ or 2♥, I think we have enough to raise, since we can make stronger raises via a cuebid. If partner bids 2♦ I have to pass and take the blame, but even if partner has a terrible hand I am not sure 1NT will be better:

♠ xxx ♥ xxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ xxx

Should he have five diamonds, playing 2♦ would surely be better than 1NT.

Our partner can also have a good hand, like one of these:

♠ Jxx ♥ Ax ♦ K10xxx ♣ Kxx

♠ Jxx ♥ Ax ♦ KQxxx ♣ 10xx

If I choose to bid 1NT over 1♠, we will end up in 3NT and very often go down. With both those hands, however, 3NT can make if partner plays the hand. With the second example hand, the chances of making are excellent. If we, instead of the dubious 1NT overcall, choose to make a takeout double, partner with both the above hands will bid 3♦.

That will lead to us to playing 3NT from the right hand:

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
pass	3 ♦	pass	3 ♠

As 3 ♦ is only an invitational bid, South's 3 ♠ shows extra values (with either a balanced or an unbalanced hand) and gives North a choice between playing 3NT or, perhaps, five in his minor. With at least Jxx or Qx in spades, North will try 3NT, but with a singleton spade, he should aim for a suit contract. With two or three small spades, he will have to guess if there are nine quick tricks in 3NT or not. When North rebids his diamonds at the four-level, South is allowed to pass.

If South has a strong unbalanced hand for his 3 ♠, he will not pass over 3NT. By that reasoning, it follows that I as South should avoid bidding 3 ♠ without spade help, except when I am going to bid again over 3NT.

West didn't support spades in the first round of bidding, but he may double 3 ♠ to show a top honor in the suit:

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
pass Dble	3 ♣	pass	3 ♠

West will perhaps double 3 ♠ for the lead, holding Qx or Kx in spades:

	♠ Jxx	
♠ Qx		♠ K10xxx
	♠ Axx	

But not if the spades are:

	♠ Jxx	
♠ xx		♠ KQ10xx
	♠ Axx	

If East has KQ of spades, North should declare the hand, but if West holds Kx/Qx it is better that South plays 3NT (West would often lead the honor). If you promise not to tell anyone, I will reveal a secret. If West doubles, that will actually help us to get the contract right-sided! When a stopper-asking bid is doubled, we use the 'Mancoff' convention, and this will help us in this situation.

Should West double, North can pass with either a full stopper or a partial stopper, like Qx or Jxx. South can then bid 3NT, knowing that North can help with the spades. In a way, we can say that 3♠ asks the opponents to help us choose declarer! Alternatively, when South has nothing in spades, he can redouble, which asks partner to bid 3NT only if he has a full stopper.

Below you can find all the Mancoff responses after the double of 3♠:

pass	either a full stopper or a partial stopper (Qx or Jxx)
3N	a good stopper, perhaps something like AJx
RD	xx, Jx or xxx in the suit
bid	(other bids) a singleton in spades
4♠	void in spades

In a few situations, we regularly have to bid notrumps without a stopper or with a semi-balanced hand. The next auction occurs frequently:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♠	Dble	pass	1N

We can look at a few hands.

♠ xxx ♥ Qxx ♦ Kxx ♣ AKxx

With this hand, there are no good alternatives, so we have to bid 1NT without a stopper. Even if we are left to play there, we can still make it.

♠ Kx ♥ Qx ♦ KQxx ♣ Kxxxx

Here we also can bid 1NT if we think the option to bid 2♣ with a bad five-card suit seems worse. Since, with some hands, we have to bid 1NT without a stopper, we might as well agree that 1NT doesn't promise a stopper.

North can have this hand:

♠ xx ♥ AKxx ♦ Axxx ♣ QJx

There is no reason to jump to 3NT when partner may lack a spade stopper. North can bid 2♠ to ask for more information. I don't know exactly where that would lead, but hopefully, we can avoid 3NT when we have no stopper.

West	North	East	South
			1♣
2♠	Dble	pass	2N

This is a comparable situation. If South has a completely balanced hand, he may have no alternative but to bid 2NT without a stopper. This situation is complicated since I think that all 2NT bids over a takeout double should be forcing!

Length in the opponents' suits

We can't always say that length in the opponents' suit is either good or bad, but as already mentioned, in my experience, having *both* length and honors is a definite warning sign. Say we have this hand, non-vulnerable, after 1♥ from RHO:

♠ Qx ♥ K10xx ♦ AJxxxx ♣ x

It is tempting to think that partner is short in hearts and perhaps has diamond support, but the holding in the opponent's suit suggests defending. We can't know what is right in the actual deal; we can only make a guess. In the long run, I think pass will be better as the hand is quite weak, and it can just as well be our LHO who has short hearts and long diamonds. If you consider your holding in the opponents' suit to be a vital factor, I am sure you will guess better.

The standard requirements for the 1NT overcall are 15-17 HCP and a stopper in the opponent's bid suit. If the opening bid is a weak two-bid, we can venture to bid 2NT with the same strength. It sounds easy to follow, but it is not that simple!

Holding many small cards in the opponents' suit is quite often a flaw for notrump play. Sometimes, solely the number of cards in their suit changes the value of our hand. I think, with some hands, that we should refrain from overcalling 1NT even when we have the stipulated strength, distribution, and stopper.

This is a matter of hand evaluation. The play in a notrump contract often depends on setting up a suit or two, and then you need length in those suits. When you have one or two extra small cards in the opponents' suit, they on the contrary, are often useless - there is little or no chance to set up long card tricks in the opponent's suit. Therefore, when we consider a notrump overcall, not only the honors but also our length in the opponents' suits are essential factors.

After 1♥ from RHO, should we overcall 1NT with this hand?

♠ KJx ♥ AJx ♦ AJxx ♣ J9x

This is a normal hand for a 1NT overcall, even if the hand is a minimum, so the answer is yes, but let us now change just one small card:

♠ KJx ♥ AJxx ♦ AJx ♣ J9x

Without a four-card suit other than hearts, the bid suit, I think this hand is no longer worth a 1NT overcall. Holding worthless length is a handicap. Maybe you are wise enough to sometimes deduct an HCP when you have a boring 4333 hand? This hand now looks more like 3333! In this case, I would pass or make a takeout double, without guarantees that any of those choices will work out better.

A similar example from practical play, all vulnerable the bidding started:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?

♠ KJx ♥ AKxx ♦ Qxx ♣ Q9x

South has a minimum for 1NT. If we move a small heart to any of the other suits, the hand has better trick-taking expectation - a fourth card in any of the other suits might set up, but the fourth card in hearts almost certainly will not. If RHO opens with any other suit, the hand, as it is, would be better.

South chose to ignore that and had to write minus two hundred on his scorecard.

A horror example from a recent Nordic Junior Championship:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♥	pass
pass	Dble	pass	pass
2♣	pass	pass	3NT
All pass			

South's hand was:

♠ Jx ♥ AK9xxx ♦ xx ♣ Axx

3NT went three or four down around the field. The heart holding was great for defending a heart contract but terrible for playing 3NT. Here South, knowing that hearts were badly distributed, should have been more cautious.

When West retreated to 2♣, I think South should have bid a non-forcing 2♥ or settled for an invitational 2NT. In the light of the known bad distribution of the heart suit, this hand is no longer as good as its HCP value - there is little prospect of developing extra tricks in the opponent's suit. Holding length in the opening suit should always be a warning sign for declaring.

What we are talking about here is length in the opponents' suit when we consider whether to overcall or not. In that case, length in their suit is often a drawback. In other situations, such length does not matter much and can even be good: When you know about a fit, and know you have many trumps between the two hands, it can be an asset to have length in the opponents' suit. You can perhaps then deduce that your partner is short in the suit, especially when the opponents bid and raise their suit.

Ulf Nilsson, a friend of mine, is really addicted to abstaining from making overcalls when holding four (or more) cards in the opponent's opening suit. He showed me a deal, which I now don't remember exactly, but here is the story.

After East's opening bid, should we overcall or not?

West	North	East	South
		2♣*	?

* Precision, 5+ clubs, 11-15 HCP.

We are South, white against red with this assortment:

♠ AK9xx ♥ Qx ♦ xx ♣ A10xx

I am almost sure that you will not agree, but pass can, in practice, be the best bid with this hand. We are non-vulnerable, and it seems obvious to bid 2♠. Length and honors in the opening suit is a warning sign, but the Ace in clubs, of course, is a better honor than a lower honor.

Ulf claims that pass is the winning action, and who am I to contest that. When I think about it, if the bidding ends up in 2♣, I won't mind. We will have to wait a few decades, though, to see if Ulf's effort has created a new trend.

Offensive/defensive values

You don't have to be an expert to understand how different two hands with the same point count can be. That doesn't mean that one of them always is better or always worse. That depends on the bidding and the final contract.

Some hands are excellent for declarer play and bad for defense, and on the contrary, other hands are better for defense and bad for declarer play. When we are lucky, we get a hand that is good both on offense and defense, as in the next example from a team game.

West	North	East	South
5♥	pass	1♥ pass	4♠ Dble

All vulnerable and this was South's hand:

♠ AJ10xxxx ♥ x ♦ AKxx ♣ x

After making a preemptive opening or overcall, we usually don't bid again. An exception can be a hand like this. South's hand is good for both declaring and defending. His double shows that he wants us to either double the opponents or bid again. Most hands cannot so clearly be judged as either offensive or defensive. One fact that we can establish is that values in long suits are more offensive in nature, whereas values in short suits and the opponents' suit are more defensive, but that is a very broad generalization.

Another hand with the same distribution, but with a different texture:

♠ KQ10xxxx ♥ x ♦ KQJx ♣ x

This hand is probably at least as good when declaring 4♠, but the defensive value is perhaps nothing when the opponents play a heart contract.

With less distribution, the difference between offensive and defensive values is not often that large.

Compare these two hands:

a)	♠ K10xx	b)	♠ KJxx
	♥ x		♥ x
	♦ Kxxx		♦ KQxx
	♣ AKxx		♣ Axxx
West	North	East	South
2♥	3♣	1♥ 3♥	Dble ?

Should we bid again? We can see that hand a) is better for offensive play, while hand b) is better for defense. Perhaps we can bid 4♣ with hand a), but we should definitely pass with hand b). I think you get the point.

Positional factors

When your RHO opens with a strong club, the typical reaction is to think that our side has no game. Many players take a defensive view and use methods to interfere with the opponents bidding with weak or distributional hands, trying to disturb the auction for the strong-clubbers.

I think that strategy sometimes will backfire, and our bids may even help them to find the right strain, but here I want to make another point: When we have an opening hand, placed behind the strong club bidder, we can often upgrade the value of our honors. East opens 1♣, 16+, and we have as South:

♠ KQxx ♥ AJ10x ♦ x ♣ KJxx

Only 14 HCP, but we may have a game even if partner is very weak. It can be enough that we find a nine-card fit in a major, and that partner has some entries to his hand. Perhaps as little as this:

♠ J10xxx ♥ Qx ♦ xxxx ♣ xx

With this three-count, we hardly need more than that opener has Ace-Queen of clubs and the King of hearts for 4♠ to at least have a chance.

Common uses of a double against a strong club is to show clubs, both majors, or perhaps some distributional hand. I don't think that scares the opponents much. We use the double of 1♣ to show a good opening hand with at least three cards in both majors. In that way, the opponents cannot steal the board away when we have a game. I know this chapter is not about our system, but I couldn't resist telling you this here! Sometimes, being weak is even better than being strong!

West	North	East	South
1♦*	pass	1NT**	?

♠ QJ9xxxx ♥ xxx ♦ x ♣ xx

* Precision (11-15)

* 6-9 HCP, no major

The hand is weak in HCP, but the chances are excellent that we can make a contract. If you think about it, all the missing points are an asset. Our partner has at least 13 HCP, and his cards should work well, sitting behind the opener. So why did he pass after 1♦? There are two possible explanations. He may have one of these hand types:

♠ Axx ♥ KJx ♦ Jxx ♣ A10xx

or

♠ x ♥ KJxx ♦ AJxxx ♣ A10x

I would bid 2♠ and not a preemptive 3♠ here. Since I know that my partner has some cards, I hope he will work out that I have bid on distribution, and not strength. In a practice match, East-West vulnerable, my hand as North and dealer was:

♠ 10 ♥ AKQ9 ♦ 108xxx ♣ xxx

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♠	Dble
pass	2♠	3♠	pass
pass	?		

I could easily bid a forcing 2♠ since I was a passed hand. I was going to bid 3♦ if partner bid 3♣, but opener unexpectedly bid once more. What to do? I doubled 3♠, hoping that partner could now make the right decision, and he passed.

This hand includes many of the principles in the extended hand evaluation. I have good honors and short spades, and my *offensive/defensive* ratio is good. The *position* factors are even excellent. Partner knows I am a passed hand, and I know the honors in the minors my partner must have are well placed *behind* opener's honors. The opponents are *vulnerable*, and we are not.

This was the full hand:

♠ 10
♥ AKQ9
♦ 108xxx
♣ xxx

♠ 8xx
♥ xxxx
♦ J9x
♣ Qxx

♠ KQJ9xxx
♥ 10x
♦ Kx
♣ A10

♠ Ax
♥ J8x
♦ AQx
♣ KJ9xx

South led the Ace of spades and switched to a small heart. After a club return, we could have managed to take 500. Unfortunately, we messed up the defense, and the contract was only one down, but I like our bidding!

By the way (here I go again), in this sequence, we have a feature that I will tell you more about when we talk about special 2NT bids. If opener had passed over 2♠, South could show a hand with precisely four hearts with 2NT. My partner would have bid 3♣, as he didn't have four hearts, and we will then play 3♦.

The lead-directing purpose of an overcall is often used as an excuse to bid on meager values, but it may come back to haunt you since you also tell the opponents about what lead you want – or even worse, what lead you are going to make! The least risky position to make a lead-directing overcall is directly after the opening bid.

When both opponents have bid, they know more, and so the risk of being doubled has increased. On the other hand, the need for helping partner with the lead is also higher because, statistically, opener declares more hands than responder.

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	2♣	?

♠ 10x ♥ KQJxx ♦ Axxx ♣ xx

When the opponents are in a game-forcing sequence, it is extremely dangerous to enter the auction without a good hand (or reason). If not red against white, I would for sure consider bidding 2♥ for the lead in this situation. I have got a good suit and a side entry, and it would often be critical to lead hearts to beat 3N.

We need a different strategy for each state of the 'balance of strength' since information is the key. Even if we often have to work with hypothetical odds, we still should keep in mind that giving away information may work either way.

An interesting question is: Should we prepare for the defensive play when our opponents have the majority of the high card points? How much should we risk in order to give our partner a hint about what to lead? I don't think there is an answer to that. My partner usually makes the right lead when I pass throughout the bidding. You are perhaps not that lucky, but maybe you should give him the opportunity!

In my opinion, an overcall in second hand *only* for a lead-directing purpose is a dubious action as we don't know much about the full deal in that position. When you are in fourth hand, you know more and can make better tactical decisions.

THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Most of the bids we make at the table contain information that we intend as a message to our partner. Since we have to explain the meaning of our bids to the opponents, they get the same message. Information is the key. The knowledge that players acquire in the bidding can be used both in the continued bidding and later in the play. The more we know about partner's hand and the distribution of the opponents' cards, the better we can judge what contract to play and from which hand. As declarer, we can take advantage of all the competitive bids that revealed details about strength and distribution in each of the defenders' hands. In the same way, the other side can use information in the opening lead and defense.

More than fifty years ago, the French bridge theorist Jean-Paul Vernes' published research on a significant number of deals from more or less all the earlier Bermuda Bowl's. He proved that when the same contract was played at both tables, the side that used the fewest bids to arrive at the contract had an edge. The reason was, of course, that it is harder to find the right lead and defense with less information.

When Vernes' findings were translated to Swedish by Alvar Stenberg, I decided that the streams of information and what I call, the *balance of strength* is an essential factor in the bidding. I am sure that a decisive skill in competitive auctions is to understand how the flow of information works. All conclusions are relative, but bridge is a game of statistics.

In theory, using the balance of strength is very easy. It is all about points, and these are the possible configurations:

- we are the stronger side
- the opponents are the stronger side
- the strength is about roughly divided

The obvious question when we are weaker is whether *to bid or pass*. When there is a choice of different bids, we should look for a bid that tells partner what he needs to know and the opponents as little as possible! The latter is, in fact, important, whatever side is the strongest.

Generally speaking, the stronger side is best positioned to use all the data from the bidding. In case one side has 21, and the other 19 HCP, it would be difficult to prove any difference. However, if one of the sides has about 24 or more HCP they will frequently win the auction and thus declare the hand. I am convinced that the stronger side can often use information in the bidding better than the weaker side. They can have a choice of different contracts and paths to get there, but they can, of course, also make mistakes.

I think a frequent mistake is to give away details about their hands in the search for the perfect contract. You are South, all vulnerable, and the bidding so far has gone:

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	1♠
Dble	2♥	pass	?

♠ AK10xx ♥ x ♦ Qxxx ♣ AJx

You have a very nice hand for 1♠ and your partner's 2♥ shows a good raise to 2♠. You have a singleton in opener's suit, and your hand is far too good for 2♠. What about bidding 3♦, a natural trial-bid? The game may well depend on the diamond fit, and that's how South reasoned when the board was played.

After 3♦, his partner jumped to 4♠. The full deal was:

♠ QJx
♥ Axxx
♦ Kx
♣ 10xxx

♠ xxx
♥ Jx
♦ Jxxx
♣ KQxx

♠ xx
♥ KQ10xxx
♦ A10x
♣ xx

♠ AK10xx
♥ x
♦ Qxxx
♣ AJx

West, on the lead, figured out that, as 3♦ showed diamond length and he had Jack to four, a trump lead could be right. He expected the dummy to have only three spades. After the inspired trump lead, the game went down. If South would have bid 4♠ right away, West would more often lead partner's suit, and the game would have made.

What about this situation. East-West vulnerable, should we overcall or not?

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♣	?

♠ Qxx ♥ AJxxx ♦ xx ♣ Qxx

Would you bid 1♥ in this situation? If you do, I have a question for you. What is the point of bidding? As I see it, there is none. As partner is limited by his pass, we must realize that this board belongs to the opponents. Bidding 1♥ is saying: Just telling you, if you are going to play 3NT, I will lead a heart. If you are the weaker side, you should have a *purpose* for bidding.

What if you pass, and the opponents bid 3NT with your partner on lead? Surely lead-directing bids are important? I can't argue with that, but in my experience, opener will be the declarer in 3NT more often than responder. If I am right about that, lead-directing is more crucial in the fourth seat.

What is wrong here is that South doesn't have enough strength to hope to win the bidding with a passed partner. To make an overcall of 1♥ is against the odds, and as we have a weak suit, we don't even know if a heart lead from partner is the best lead. The odds are in favor of the opponents gaining from the information. As it happened in a recent team game, one South-player passed while at the other table, South bid 1♥.

This was the full layout:

East-West vulnerable

♠ xxx
♥ Kxxx
♦ Q10xx
♣ 10x

♠ KJ10
♥ Qx
♦ A9xx
♣ KJxx

♠ Axxx
♥ xx
♦ KJx
♣ Axxx

♠ Qxx
♥ AJxxx
♦ xx
♣ Qxx

.	West	North	East	South
		pass	1♣	1♥
	2♥	3♥	pass	pass
	Dble	pass	?	

East decided to bid 3♠, where after West raised to 4♠. The contract was easily made as both minor suit finesses worked. With the East hand, an alternative option is to pass over the double, and this time, that would collect 500. At the other table,

where South did not enter the bidding, nothing could stop East-West from getting to the normal 3NT, and the result was one down. What happened here was that the stronger side had a choice of games. When their opponents found the heart fit, they looked for an alternative, better game.

I think that is a good example of what the balance of strength is all about: When the odds are against winning the auction, pass is often the best bid. So be careful out there, the opponents are listening!

The balance of strength

Experience tells us a few things that hardly can be contested:

When our opponents are the stronger side, we should be cautious and not give away too much information to them. They can use it both in the bidding and in the play.

When our side is stronger, we should avoid giving away excessive information. It is often a good idea to choose the probable game quickly rather than looking for the perfect one and thereby helping the opponents with the opening lead and the defense.

As we discussed, a crucial decision at the table often is whether you should bid or not! Should we get involved in the auction, or should we stay out? If we bid, the opponents can use the information against us, and perhaps we may have to pay the price since we couldn't resist bidding. If we pass, it can too for sure be wrong.

We should try to assess the risk versus the reward of a bid. The risk part is two-fold; the danger of being caught is one, and that of giving away information is another. The ultimate reward is finding a game, but there may also be other possibilities that are lost if we pass. Sacrifices, putting pressure on the opponents, finding a good fit, and helping the defense, just to mention a few.

Should I advise on what to do with marginal hands, it would be to look closely at your holding in the opponents' suit and consider the balance of strength. If you rate to be the weaker side, you should have a *good motive* for bidding.

Sometimes we know which side has the majority of high cards. In other cases, we can only guess based on the hypothetical odds and our understanding of the auction so far. When we are not sure which side is stronger, we should carefully try to show the features of our hand. When we know that the opponents are substantially stronger, there is a more significant risk if we talk too much.

I want to discuss considerations of how our *strength* should influence whether to contest the opponents bidding or not.

If we only look at our own strength and the information we have about the opponent's strength, this is what we have to consider:

- the HCP strength of our hand
- what we know about partner's strength (perhaps he is limited by a pass)
- what we know about the opponents' total strength

Of course, we must also take into consideration what we know about the distribution. Our decision may depend on that.

Say that your RHO has opened the bidding with 1♣. The club opening can have several meanings, depending on what system the opponents play. Then the club length, as well as the strength, is of importance.

There are lots of different methods out there. I can think of these:

- a natural bid (three+ or four+ clubs)
- a '2+ club'
- a two-way club (17+ or a balanced minimum)
- a strong club (17+)

When we consider whether to overcall on a marginal hand or not, the odds for success can depend on the meaning of the opening bid. The less exact information responder has of his partner's hand, the more damage our overcall can usually do.

A widespread view is that you should be aggressive against strong openings, but I think that will sometimes come back to bite you when the opponents are good players. When they have the balance of strength, they will just welcome that you have revealed details about your hand and act accordingly.

To me, it is evident that it is the two-way club and the 2+ club that are most vulnerable to intervention. I think that a close decision about to pass or overcall should depend on the meaning of the club opening.

♠ KJxxx ♥ xx ♦ Qx ♣ Kxxx

The above hand is such a hand for me. I can live with both a pass and a bid, but the club length speaks more for a pass if the club opening is natural.

In second position

Finding a fit is a decisive factor in competitive bidding. When the auction is a struggle between the two sides, the side who finds a fit first should occupy as much bidding space as possible.

That would be the right tactics in these cases:

- when the opponents are still looking for a fit
- if the opponents don't know their combined strength

How far should we then go to be the first side to find a fit? Should we also bid with weak hands? Should we show two suits or only one? To answer questions like these, I think we have to consider 'the balance of strength' theory.

There is a trend towards more aggressive responses to a suit opening. That means it is now more dangerous to pass in second position with good hands. Traditionally players have been cautious with overcalling on bad suits even when we have strength for a bid. Do we have to think differently now?

One aspect is:

- if we can't have game, we don't *have* to get into the auction

That is a fuzzy statement. Why can't I make it easier and say the opposite: 'When a game is possible, we should overcall.' There is a reason that I don't: Just as there can be many different motives to *make* an overcall, there can be many reasons *not* to make an overcall even if game is possible.

A reason to pass can be:

- we have no bid that describes our hand
- our partner is still in the bidding
- our honors are misplaced
- we can easily get in later if we want

The above may sound like I am very negative to overcalls in general but don't misunderstand me, I just want to get the 'buts' out of the way. With that done, I can say: It often pays to be active and aggressive in competitive bidding!

We should consider the balance of strength when we know that one side has about 24 HCP or more and clearly is the stronger side. We don't often have that much information, though, from just a one-level opening bid from our opponent to the right. If partner is a passed hand, we know much more.

When our opponents have the best cards (as in Rubber bridge), we have to weigh what we do more carefully. Our bids should have a *purpose*. Depending on vulnerabilities, that purpose can be lead-directing, trying to find a fit, or being preemptive. Let me show you an example.

Our RHO opens with a strong club, and we have, non-vulnerable:

♠ QJxxx ♥ x ♦ KJxxx ♣ xx

The expert 'strong club' players declare that they welcome the opponents' efforts to disturb their bidding. The information they get from the opponents' bids gives them compensation for the reduced space to exchange data in their own bidding. That doesn't mean that we never should bid after a strong club, but it is still a factor to consider.

If we have a bid that shows both spades and diamonds, that's an option, and otherwise, we could also pass, bid spades, or perhaps even just bid diamonds. What is the risk, and what is there to gain from the different choices? Let's do the maths. We have 7, and opener has at least 17 HCP. That totals 24, and there are 16 left to the other two players. Give each of them 8 HCP, and the opponents have 25 or more, thus often enough strength for game. We are statistically favorite to be the weaker side. The above perhaps sounds very theoretical, but it is simple arithmetic!

I don't intend to pass because the hand has an attractive distribution. I will bid 1♠ and hope we have a spade fit. Showing a two-suiter can be right when we have a super-fit in diamonds, but the risk of showing two suits is that we tell the opponents too much about the whole hand. There can also often be an unexpected gain from bidding 1♠. If partner doesn't support spades and the opponents continue to 3NT, I will lead a diamond!

The standard requirements for overcalling at the two-level, at least vulnerable, say that we should have roughly around opening values and a six-card suit or a very good five-card suit. Let us examine a few borderline hands.

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

♠ x ♥ KJx ♦ Axx ♣ KJxxxx

The suit is hollow, but I think bidding 2♣ is a must with an opening hand and no other weakness.

With a better suit, we also can make the same overcall with a hand as the next one:

♠ x ♥ xxx ♦ Axx ♣ KQJxxx

With both these hands though, the overcall is probably against the odds when our partner is a passed hand. I would hesitate to overcall being vulnerable against not since the risk then is more significant. When we have only five cards in our suit, an overcall at the two-level is more dangerous. Waiting for a possible penalty pass, after both LHO and partner pass, and opener reopens with a double, gives no pleasant feelings. Should we put our fear aside and enter the auction here?

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

♠ Jx ♥ Kx ♦ Axxx ♣ AJxxx

In a poll, the vast majority chose to pass, which I fully understand. Ulf Nilsson, a Swedish bridge theorist, and writer, claims that when we have strength, we should not hesitate to overcall 2mi with a bad suit. In an article, *the suit quality paradox*, he offers some quite logical reasons. He says that holding a bad suit, in fact, can be better than a good suit.

Ulf gives the following reasons:

- we get into the auction (to see the flop)
- we have enhanced chances for finding good support
- our other honors are placed behind the opener
- if we get caught, our hand is worth more if partner runs
- the opponents may misjudge as a result of our bid

In the light of the ongoing changes in bridge today, I think Ulf is on the right track. Strength is more important than distribution and suit quality. If we pass these hands, we give the momentum to the opponents. On the actual hand above, I hesitate primarily because of the spade Jack! If my partner has a spade honor, the Jack may be a vital defensive card. With the diamond Jack, instead, I am sure I would bid 2♣. I decided to try Ulf's theory with this hand:

♠ xxx ♥ AK10 ♦ 10x ♣ A108xx

In second seat, all vulnerable, I decided to bid 2♣ after 1♦ from RHO. The suit was for sure bad, but I had good values with Ace plus Ace-King. One of the points Ulf makes is that if we are caught, our partner should more often run, and if that should happen, the hand was not so bad.

The hand is from a practice session, and the full deal was:

North-South vulnerable

♠	xxx	♠	KJ10x
♥	AK10	♥	J9xx
♦	10x	♦	xxx
♣	A108xx	♣	xx
♠	Ax		
♥	Qx		
♦	KQJxxx		
♣	Kxx		
		♠	Qxxx
		♥	xxxx
		♦	Ax
		♣	QJx

	West	North	East	South
.	1♦	2♣	pass	3N
	All pass			

As you can understand from my partner's 3NT bid, this hand was not what I usually would have for my 2♣ bid. He had a good club fit, and bidding tough games is what we normally do to put pressure on the opponents. I am sure Ulf's partner has to be more cautious and probably settle for 2NT, which on this occasion would have made. At the other table, North made a takeout double. The outcome there was that South played in 2♠, down one. A push. Peculiarly, we could say that the experiment succeeded. Or could have!

I got the following hand from Olof Bergström, my distinguished help-writer, and again it is a borderline decision, North-South being vulnerable.

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♠	?
♠ QJx ♥ AKxxx ♦ Q ♣ Q10xx			

Should we bid 2♥ or not? If our partner wasn't a passed hand, I think we have to take the risk, but now I hesitate. We have the strength for it, but the problem with this hand is the honors we have in the short suits, which can be worthless in offense and are more suitable for defensive play, particularly the spade honors.

Our success in a heart contract will often depend on partner's spade holding.

Partner can have one of these hands:

a)	♠ xxx	b)	♠ xx
	♥ Qxx		♥ Qxx
	♦ Kxxxx		♦ xxxx
	♣ Ax		♣ AKxx

Together with hand a), we don't even make 3♥. With hand b), we can perhaps even make 4♥, but we will probably stop in 3♥. However, at least if partner isn't limited, there are many hands partner can have where we can bid and make game. When the decision is close, we can and should try to compare risks and rewards. A vulnerable game can be worth 10 IMPs if we bid it. When we are unlucky, 2♥ costs 800. If we are non-vulnerable, we will win less when we are right, but also lose less when we are wrong. It is a close call, and you can hardly criticize any of the options here.

We have some ideas regarding responses to two-level overcalls, and I will get back to that in the chapter 'Our competitive methods'. Let us look at a frequent problem:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	?	
	♠ KJxx ♥ xx ♦ KQxxx ♣ Ax		

What should we do? Double, 1♠, or 2♦? I am not a fan of overcalls on four cards, and I would prefer 2♦. If I double, I may be in trouble over a 2♣ response. We don't play 'Equal level conversion', which would mean that 2♦ over 2♣ doesn't show any extras. For most players, double followed by a 2♦ rebid shows something more like:

♠ KQxx ♥ xx ♦ AKJxx ♣ Ax

If I, with the first hand, overcall with 2♦, the obvious risk is not finding the spade fit if partner can't bid. A convention that both we and some other Swedish experts use is *canapé jumps*. We also use these canapé jumps at the three-level after a weak two-bid or a Multi 2♦ opening, but then with a little better hand.

Playing canapé jumps, the jump to 2Ma shows a hand that has a four-card major and a longer minor. The bid shows 11-16 HCP. Using that, you will have to give up weak jump overcalls to 2Ma, but the advantage is showing the major suit at once, and that a two-level overcall in a minor not often contains a major. It doesn't work over a spade opening, though, and when I played with Peter Fredin, he told me about this idea; to use a jump to 3mi showing a six-card minor and four hearts.

In the 'sandwich' position

Another fundamental factor in competitive bidding is the *vulnerability*. In some of the examples in the book, I don't indicate the vulnerability because I don't think it matters in those cases. You may not agree, but now you at least know why it is not mentioned!

When at favorable vulnerability, we can bid even if the balance of strength implies that we should remain silent. The reason is that we may find a sacrifice against the opponents' game or slam contract. If we have a distributional hand, it can be wrong whatever we do, and only the result will tell. In the following auction, we adapt our tactics to the actual vulnerability.

We are South, and the bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	pass	2NT*	Dble

* East's 2NT shows heart support and at least an invitational hand.

South's double is for takeout, and promises at least four in spades. At favorable vulnerability, it would often suggest a possible save against 4♥.

But red against white, the double would show a much better hand where we think a game is possible: It would make no sense to suggest a sacrifice when already two down is too expensive.

At equal vulnerability, South thinks that both a game and a save are possible outcomes. When you overcall in the fourth position, the vulnerability is important, as the risk factor now is higher. Both opponents have bid, they know if they have a fit, and if they have a misfit, they more often will double you.

Also, when both opponents have bid, there is a good motive for lead-directing bids. Opener will more often declare the hand than responder. If we don't bid when we can, we can't expect partner to lead our suit against 3NT.

All vulnerable, the bidding has started with:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	pass	1 ♦	?

♠ KQ10xx ♥ xxx ♦ K9x ♣ xx

The board probably belongs to East-West. If I pass, and opener rebids some number of notrumps, I want a spade lead. Should I take the risk and bid 1♠? One risk is, of course, being doubled, but that's not the only risk. We want to know the odds for a spade lead being right, and that partner would not find it if I don't bid.

What are the odds that they, if I pass, steal 3NT? Against that, what are the odds for the opponents to gain from the information when I bid? My bid can lead to them playing a notrump contract from the right hand or finding a better contract. They may also play the hand better because they know about my spade suit. I must admit that we have no real clue to what the odds are here, and perhaps we should check who our opponents are instead.

To have a lot of HCP's is less important for an overcall in fourth position, and to have strength outside your suit can actually be a disadvantage.

Compare the last hand with this collection:

♠ K10xxx ♥ Qxx ♦ K9x ♣ Kx

This hand is a little stronger, but the spade suit is weak. Having more points can be a drawback when we have the opener behind us, as many of our honors can be worthless. Nor can we say that we absolutely want a spade lead - with this stronger hand, it can often be better if partner leads his own suit. For solely lead-directing purposes, I would prefer the weaker hand with a better suit. It is impossible to say if it right or wrong to bid 1♠, but I don't think it is an obvious choice. Maybe I can come in later if I pass and they stop in a part-score. The time I would most regret a pass is when the contract becomes 3NT since partner then is weak. He probably does not have a good suit of his own but perhaps Qxx of spades.

In a competitive situation, it should never be automatic to make a bid just because you can. In the next example, East-West is vulnerable.

West	North	East	South
1♣	pass	1♦	?

♠ Qxxxx ♥ -- ♦ AKxx ♣ 9xxx

It seems obvious to bid 1♠, but where are the hearts? None of the opponents has five of them. North can have a long heart suit, but as he didn't find a bid, white against red, he then is very weak. My conclusion is that we 'know' that our partner probably has precisely five hearts, don't we? We also suspect that he has less than 10 HCP since he didn't overcall. I think our chances of having a game are minimal. In a poll, about ninety percent said 'one spade, what is the problem?'

I think it is a good idea here to pass and let the opponents find their heart fit, and then, next time around, we can decide whether to act or not. I am sure that the opponents *can* find their fit even if I bid, but my bid can actually lead them to *prefer* 3NT when opener has a good spade stopper.

Say that opener's hand is:

♠ KJx ♥ KJxx ♦ Jx ♣ A10xx

He will certainly rebid 1NT on the power of the good stopper. That will then probably lead to 3NT if responder has something like:

♠ Ax ♥ Axxx ♦ Q109xx ♣ Kx

With that said, I know you will probably bid 1♠ anyway. It's more fun to bid, and who says that I have to be right about everything.

The following deal is from a European Open Championship. East-West was a successful Dutch pair, but this board wasn't something to write home about.

All vulnerable

♠ Jx
♥ Q9
♦ AQ10xx
♣ K10xx

♠ x
♥ 107xxx
♦ 9x
♣ AJ9xx

♠ Qxxxx
♥ Jx
♦ Jxxx
♣ Q8

♠ AK10xx
♥ AK8x
♦ Kx
♣ xx

West	North	East	South
pass	1♦	pass	1♠
1N	pass	2♥	Dble
All pass			

West was trying to confuse things for North-South by showing his weak two-suiter. The result was minus 1100. I am sure North-South thought that number was adequate compensation for a little confusion. So if you can't resist bidding, you are in good company!

My advice is, be a mouse sometimes!

Pre-competitive bidding

Pre-competitive is perhaps a new term for you. I use it to describe bids that are made to forestall an expected competition by the opponents. Often we know, by our position, that the opponents are the stronger side, and sometimes we even know they have the strength to bid a game. In these cases, we are tempted to make it more difficult for them. Our partner opens a natural 1♣, and RHO passes:

♠ Kxxxx ♥ xx ♦ xxx ♣ Jxx

Not so many years ago, pass was the apparent bid with these cards, but today the average expert would respond 1♠ without a second thought. We don't yet know that opponents are the stronger side, but it smells like that. The risk of going down when you get too high is evened out by the tactical effect of the bid.

As a junior player, I took a keen interest in bridge theory. I was fascinated by the books on *aggressive systems* published by some Polish bridge players. Several of the systems included a strong pass and a weak 1♦ opening, showing 0-7 HCP. The scientific idea of these methods was not that the strong pass or the weak 1♦ was effective. However, the range in-between, 8-12 is very frequent. So if you open all these hands, you have an aggressive system. The negative aspect of those often highly artificial systems, as I eventually came to realize, is that they give the users an unfair advantage. The reason is that they, as a partnership, will evolve more experience in the competitive auctions that arise after those opening bids than their adversaries, including the obstructive openings showing 0-7 HCP.

When I played systems like that, I didn't see it that way. I thought, as long as you play against players at the same level, everything should be allowed. Now I am not so sure, and therefore, I don't play them anymore. As a warning to the bridge world about what would happen if more and more extreme systems were allowed to pop up, Terence Reese at the beginning of the '60s invented 'The Little Major' where 1♣ shows at least four hearts and 1♦ at least four spades. But the vivid 'protest' quickly died out since Reese found the experiment so compelling that he continued to play the system with Boris Shapiro and later with Jeremy Flint.

Most of those devilish figments have vanished from the international bridge scene nowadays. However, I believe that these systems were *the precursor* in the field of pre-competitive auctions. As far as I know, the flora of such systems is long gone, but the pre-competitive bidding now is rising from the ashes; weaker opening bids, mini notrump openings, extremely weak preemptive bids, and so on. Good players nowadays are making more aggressive bids when the opponents yet haven't entered the auction. How do they reason? Some bids fit in as both preemptive and pre-competitive, but let us first look at the latter.

These are the possible advantages with pre-competitive bids:

- we may, occasionally, keep the opponents out
- we make them start at a higher level
- we can prepare for the defense with a lead-directing bid
- we can perhaps look like we have a hand that we don't have (with the risk that we instead fool our partner)

As you now know how the balance of strength works, you stand prepared to make more intelligent decisions also before the opponents enter the bidding. When we have a weak hand, and the auction starts with two passes, we know that our LHO probably has a good hand. As in many other bidding situations, we can make hypothetical assumptions about what is going to happen, and here we know that LHO will open if you pass. How can we use that information? You know the answer to that one already; we can make a preemptive bid or open light, or sometimes reluctantly pass, not to reveal anything about our hand.

In the following case, it is more dangerous to act:

West	North	East	South
	pass	1NT	?

♠ x ♥ AJxxxx ♦ QJx ♣ Jxx

After the opening bid from East, the risk for being doubled is higher. Perhaps more importantly, partner is a passed hand, and it is often counter-productive to give away information to the demonstrably stronger opponents. I might have bid with an unpassed partner, but as I now know that we both are limited, I would pass. I know some players would rather bid even 3♥ than pass, but that's what bridge is about: In these situations, no specific action is always better than another!

I don't think the average player fully recognizes the risk of bidding when the opponents have the balance of strength. Maybe the reason is that their opponents often aren't good enough to use the information against them. They haven't learned the hard way. However, perhaps you have lost a match against a stronger team even if you are not sure why? To defeat better players more often, you have to make smarter decisions in the bidding. In third hand, not vulnerable, we have got:

♠ x ♥ KQ10xxx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx

This is a perfect hand for a weak two-bid (or Multi if we play that). Just because our hand is so perfect, it might be a mistake to reveal it. We have five points, and partner is a passed hand. You certainly don't have to be a genius to realize that the opponents eventually will bid a game.

Our 'obvious' 2♥ opening can lead to several bad things. A common backfire is that the opponents play 3NT instead of a spade game, or instead of a spade slam that wouldn't make. Or even worse, make, since the spade length is pinpointed. You must understand that the information given by your weak bids is very often going to be used against you. Perhaps I have already mentioned that! What to do then, when you have the hand above? Why not pass and maybe bid hearts later. The opponents are smart, and they will not think you had a perfect hand for a weak two-bid when you didn't open with it. They will think that you have something else.

The position and vulnerability are often critical for our decisions. I think the typical behavior is to bid more aggressively when your partner is a passed hand, but sometimes it is better *not* to show your hand. Next hand is from the Swedish Open Championships:

West	North	East	South
?		1♣	pass

With North-South vulnerable, Arne Larsson as West had this hand:

♠ xx ♥ K109xx ♦ 9xxxx ♣ x

I believe that most of the players in this tournament bid an automatic 1♥ not to make it easy for the opponents - a typical pre-competitive action. Arne took it one step further and jumped to 2♥. With that bid, he actually promised a six-card suit but prioritized to raise the bidding level. This was the complete hand:

North-South vulnerable.

♠ KQxx
♥ Jxxx
♦ Kx
♣ Qxx

♠ xx
♥ K109xx
♦ 9xxxx
♣ 9

♠ 10xxx
♥ Q
♦ AQJ
♣ KJxxx

♠ AJ9
♥ Axx
♦ 10xx
♣ A108x

Why did Arne bid 2♥? I think he did because he presumed that this board belonged to the opponents. Good players, like Arne Larsson, that have imagination and understand how the flow of information works are usually successful. When the board was played, nothing special happened, though. North-South eventually played in 2♠ which could have made but didn't this time.

If you hold something like:

♠ KQ10x ♥ xxxx ♦ x ♣ Jxxx

If your right-hand opponent opens the bidding, the odds are that the other side is the stronger side. If you should avoid giving away information, should you then always pass with a weak hand like the one above? Pass is indeed often the winner, but if you feel for it, why not try 1♠? The information you give with that bid is only partly true, and if only information were at stake, I would say a lie is often better than the truth in this position. Unfortunately, there is also a risk, as you have a partner!

Something of record was set by Rolf-Eric Andersson (REA), who was my partner some 45 years ago. After 1♥ to his right, REA jumped to 2♠ with:

♠ 9xxx ♥ x ♦ xxxx ♣ xxxx

I can't remember the deal or exactly how the auction went, but I remember that I had AKQJ10 in spades and that everybody was surprised and amused when I put them down as dummy in a doubled spade contract.

One form of pre-competitive bids are preemptive bids, and we will discuss them more in the next chapter. If you look up the word preemptive in a dictionary, it is said to mean preventive. In my opinion, pre-competitive is also preventive, as the intention is to 'prevent' the opponents from proceeding with their normal auction.

What we in bridge more often mean when we say preemptive is bids that consume bidding space, intended to harm the opponents by reducing their space, and that is, of course, also preventive. The difference is that we cannot call a 1♠ response to partner's opening bid with a weak hand preemptive. That is only pre-competitive! Preventive bids come in many shapes, opening bids and responses, but also as overcalls and competitive raises in different forms. What is the best strategy concerning preemptive bids, if there is any? Should you overbid? Have something in reserve? Or perhaps have exactly the hand partner expects?

The correct answer is, unfortunately, not available! But we can take a look at them anyway:

Preemptive bids

Preemptive bids are nothing new, but it seems we don't use them in the same way as before. In the old days, we based them on playing tricks, which made them more cooperative should partner want to participate in the auction.

Today, for many players, that doesn't seem to matter anymore. Their partner has to guess as well as the opponents. Is that winning bridge? We don't know because some of the best players still use a more traditional approach. The trend with more undisciplined preempts originated from understanding how the flow of information and the balance of strength works.

All bids are informative to a certain degree, and if the odds are that the opponents are the stronger side, less information can be better than more. Cooperation from partner is sacrificed for the sake of other things. In real life, a preemptive bid, as well as a simple overcall, can make it more or less difficult for your opponents.

If you know how the balance of strength works, you are prepared to make more intelligent decisions also before the opponents enter the bidding.

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	pass	3 ♥

The auction is so far uncontested, but if South has a weak hand, he can expect his LHO frequently to want to come in. When one side has a fit, the other side very often has one too. Bidding 3♥ is both preemptive and pre-competitive. It is up to you to decide how a hand for 3♥ should look in your methods, but my advice is to be careful with deciding for only very weak hands. If we only preempt to keep the opponents out of the bidding, we will often be disappointed. Instead, our goal should be to make it difficult for them to find a fit in time and to stop in time. I don't want my preemptive bid to be preventive - I welcome them to bid on and perhaps make a mistake.

In close decisions, the majority of bridge players will choose to bid instead of pass. We can see the apparent evidence of this when we check up on preemptive bids. Who wants to be a mouse? As the dealer, none vulnerable, you have:

♠ Q10xx ♥ AJxxxxx ♦ x ♣ x

Everybody 'knows' that it is wrong to preempt having four cards in the other major, but how many players would pass with this hand? I think you have heard it before: 'I know you shouldn't have the other major when preempting, but this time...'

I cannot understand why pass always seems to be the last resource!

But think about it, what can happen if you pass? You have two singletons, and if the opponents try to play in one of those suits, your partner may have a surprise there. Next time around in the bidding, we will know more and can make a better tactical decision. And if we decide to bid later, the opponents may even have more difficulties coping with the interference as perhaps they are now beyond their systemic methods.

First hand, white against red, my partner recently opened 3♦ with this hand:

♠ xx ♥ J10xx ♦ Jxxxxx ♣ x

I don't like the bid, and the result was a lost board, but who can prove that he is wrong? I have seen preemptive openings on even worse hands from players that are usually very successful, so I guess they work most of the time.

A trend in modern bridge is to make preemptive four-level bids in a minor. Previously an opening of four of a minor often was used as 'South African Texas' (or Namyats), now many good players instead use them as natural preemptive opening bids. And also, if we are contesting the opponent's auction, the four-level preemptive bids are very difficult to defend against.

If our partner opens with a major, and next hand jumps to 4mi, we already have the feeling that this is going to be difficult. The psychological effect is the worst. We think that to double the opponents for penalties is perhaps to let them come out too cheap. They should at least have to sacrifice at the five-level! Even when we in this situation have support for partner's suit, we seldom have exactly the values for a game. Sometimes we only have a limit raise, and other times we are close to bidding or inviting a slam. We bid a game with all those hands. If we bid game with both, perhaps partner has a good hand, and he bids on, we may be too high; if he passes, we may miss a slam.

Unfortunately, we don't have any methods to help you out here. We just have to guess like everyone else.

Now let us look at how we try to improve the standard system.

The presentation in the next chapters contains the principles and examples of how we use our methods. If you are interested in the methods and want to study them more, you can find all the agreements in the 'Conventions and partnership agreements' chapter, but in that department, there are just the sequences and not much text.

OUR COMPETITIVE METHODS

I want to compare the competitive bidding to a game of chess. The opening side is white, and the contesting side is black. Each side makes their 'moves'. In chess, when we have a small positional advantage, we should attack, or else the position will eventually be evened out. In bridge, the advantage can be to find a fit before the opponents do. So that is our primary goal. In chess, we don't have a partner, so the comparison ends there. Of course, in bridge sometimes we have a long suit and can suggest a trump suit ourselves, but most of the time we need to interact with our partner. That is what this chapter is about.

When our opponents have made the first move, we try to enhance our defensive bidding. When we open, and they interfere, we look for countermeasures.

All methods are described in detail in this chapter, and are also summarized in 'Conventions and partnership agreements'.

If our partner overcalls, we are the 'responder' to the overcaller, and this position is called the *advancer*. The *responder* always refers to opener's partner.

Section 1 - Partner overcalls at the one-level

Look at this auction and put yourself in South's position:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♠	pass	?

When East passes, the situation is similar to responding to a 1 ♠ opening bid. An overcall can be weaker, but it also has a more limited maximum strength. There are a few other differences: the opponents have bid a suit, assuming the opening bid was a natural suit. If we now bid a one notrump response, we want to have a stopper in the opponent's suit. We can use a cue-bid of the opponent's suit in our responses and rebids.

When our RHO passes, we have *momentum*, and our side, at least for now, has taken over the auction. The tempo is *slow*. If RHO instead makes a bid, we call the auction *live*, and we have to anticipate more bidding from the opponents.

If we change the last bid, the auction is live:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♠	Dble	?

After the double, we want to be able to prioritize suggesting a lead, something that we would not consider much in the slow auction before. If we have a spade fit, we can perhaps make things difficult for the opponents by raising the bidding one or more levels. If not, the opponents may have a heart fit, and therefore we must quickly find a fit if we have one.

From advancer's position

Since minor suit openings are frequently made on short suits or can be completely artificial, a problem is: when should we call the opponent's minor a 'bid' suit, and when should we treat their suit as an 'unbid' suit? To answer that, we decided to make a few general rules. I think most players regard the opened suit as a 'bid' suit, whether it is natural or not. We have a slightly different approach:

- after 1♣, the club suit is unbid *except* when opener shows 4+ cards
- after 1♦, the diamond is unbid *only* when opener can have 0-2 cards

Independent of what system we are up against, these rules should give a definitive answer, and even if the rules are not perfect, at least it is less confusing!

Advancer's bids when responder pass

For tactical reasons, we think advancer's bid should be different when responder passes instead of making another bid or a negative double.

When responder passes, we use a method similar to the 'Drury convention'. There is a wide range from the minimum to the maximum strength for an overcall. To be better equipped to handle weak overcalls, we use 2♣ as a relay bid. That leaves plenty of space for investigation. We also have some other special responses from the advancer when we now seem to have taken over the bidding.

The short version of what we do that isn't standard:

- we use switched* bids and/or transfers, depending on the situation
- if partner overcalled in a major, we use *advancer's 2 club relay*
- if advancer replies with a new suit, opener can use *Einar's cue-bid*

* Switched bids means that we exchange the meaning of two bids.

Einar's cue-bid is a multi-meaning cue-bid of opener's suit that allows us to more accurately bid some difficult hands. A full description will be given very shortly.

Most of advancer's responses to the 1Ma overcall are 'shared,' i.e., the same bids, independent of which suit the opponent opened, or which major partner overcalled.

Here is a summary of responses that are common in all sequences:

(1mi/♥)-1Ma

- 1NT NF, about 8-13 HCP, usually with a stopper if the suit opened was natural
 2♣ F1, with one of the following:
 a) 9+ HCP with support, if 12+ HCP often balanced
 b) 9+ with Hx as support
 c) 13+ with a balanced or semi-balanced hand
 2/3Ma natural raises, 2Ma typically less than 10 HCP, 3Ma is preemptive.
 2NT invitational or better with support, and frequently an unbalanced hand
 3X (jump cue-bid) a mixed raise (or splinter if you prefer)
 3Y (unbid suit) invitational, with a good six-card (often good) suit

Let us look at a few hands where we have a choice between 2♣ and 1NT:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	pass	?

♠ Kx ♥ KJxx ♦ 10xx ♣ QJxx

With this hand, we bid 2♣. Without a diamond stopper, it is better to show the semi-support in partner's suit, but with the next hand we prefer a natural 1NT

♠ Qx ♥ Kxx ♦ K10xx ♣ Qxxx

After advancer's relay bid, 2♣, we use the 2♦ rebid from overcaller to show extra values, while most other rebids are more limited. I will soon tell you more about how we continue the auction after the relay.

Usually, bidding a new suit after an overcall shows at least five cards in that suit, but we prefer to bid 1♠ over 1♥, rather than 1NT with a hand like this:

♠ AJ9x ♥ x ♦ Qxxx ♣ AJxx

If you are used to playing 'support doubles', you can use them here too.

North can then double to show a raise:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♥	pass	1♠
2♦	Dble		

Advancer's bids can change in different sequences, depending on how the auction has started. Let us take a look at the bids which are not shared.

(1♣)-1♦

We don't have any special agreements here. Advancer's 2♣ is forcing even when the club opening is a short suit.

These are advancer's bids when partner overcalls 1♥:

(1mi)-1♥

- 1♠ F1, often a five-card suit but can be a four-card suit.
- 2♦ F1, shows *the* unbid minor (or *one* unbid minor if there are two)
- 2♠ NF with about 10-12 HCP and a good six-card suit

We will look at overcaller's rebids after 1♠ later in this chapter. We have decided that 2♦ also can show the opening suit when it, according to our rules, is an unbid suit. The 2♦ bid is forcing to at least the three-level in advancer's minor. When advancer can have either of the minors, overcaller's 3♣ is pass/correct to suggest playing 3mi.

When partner's overcall is 1♠ over a minor, we use switched bids, meaning that we exchange the meaning of two bids. In this case, the bids 2♦ and 2♥ are switched.

(1mi)-1♠

- 2♦ F1, switch, showing hearts, the strength depending on the heart length
- 2♥ F1, switch, *the* unbid minor (or *one* unbid minor if there are two)

As discussed above, overcaller can bid 3♣ as pass/correct when advancer can have either minor. Advancer can bid 2♦ to show hearts with as little as 8-9 HCP, if we have a long suit, to ensure that we don't miss a game in hearts. With only five hearts, the 2♦ bid shows roughly 11 HCP or more. With most minimum hands overcaller rebids 2♥. Advancer can then pass with a limited hand. Let's look at a few examples of the transfer:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	pass	2♦
pass	2♥	pass	?

♠ xx ♥ AQJxx ♦ xxx ♣ Kxx

With this minimum hand, South has no reason to bid again.

♠ Kx ♥ AQJxx ♦ xxx ♣ Qxx

With this holding South can rebid 2♠, which is a little positive but not forcing.

When both minors are unbid, we have agreed the following:

(1♥)-1♠

2♦ F1, natural (now opener's suit, 2♥, is Einar's cue-bid)

2♥ F1, with clubs

When our overcall is 1♦, we use the cue-bid 2♣ in the traditional way:

(1♣)-1♦

1Ma F1, often a five-card suit. The overcaller can use Einar's cue-bid

2♣ F1, in the traditional way, with natural rebids (2♦ shows a minimum)

2Ma weak, about 5-9 HCP with a good six-card suit

2NT at least invitational with support, often unbalanced

3♣ Splinter bid, with support

Overcaller's rebids

Let us take a brief look at the rebids when advancer bids 1Ma:

(1mi)-1X-(pass)-1Ma

1NT NF, natural with a stopper

2mi Einar's cue-bid

2X a six-card suit

2/3Ma natural raises, 3Ma is usually four-card support

2NT a multi-meaning bid, with either:

a) a maximum with good support

b) a good hand with 6-4 distribution (four cards in a lower suit)

Jump rebids show a good hand in playing tricks (with a maximum in HCP we bid 2mi)

Einar's cue-bid will be explained in the next section. I will tell you the story behind this nice convention: I had never heard of it some years ago. As I live in the South part of Sweden (Scania, in fact), it is very close to Copenhagen and Denmark. It was when I started to play there with Sören Christiansen that I learned about the convention. But no one knows where the name comes from.

Who is this Einar?

Some examples of overcaller's other rebids in this situation:

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♥	pass	1 ♠
pass	2 ♥		

When North rebids his suit with 2♥ he promises a six-card suit as he with fewer hearts always can find another bid. If not he can bid 2♦ as Einar's cue-bid!

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♥	pass	1 ♠
pass	2NT	pass	3 ♣

After 2NT, South's 3♣ is asking. With 6-4 distribution North bids 3♦ with four diamonds, and 3♥ with four clubs. Bidding 3♠ shows the strong support hand.

Einar's cue-bid

This convention is used when advancer bids a new suit after the overcall, and it is possible for overcaller to cue-bid opener's suit at the two-level. In this case, it doesn't matter if we treat the opening as natural or not. We only use this cue-bid when it doesn't prevent advancer from rebidding his suit. If the cue-bid is above that level, it is a strong cue-bid the traditional way.

These are the rules for when we can use the special cue-bid:

- advancer has bid (or has shown by transfer or switch) a new suit
- if advancer has a major; he must be allowed to rebid the suit at the two-level
- if advancer has a minor; he must be allowed to rebid it at the three-level

Einar's cue-bid is not a strong action, as a cue-bid is in many other situations. We can bid it *either* with a boring minimum with about 8-11(12) HCP *or* a maximum hands that are difficult to describe with other rebids.

The minimum hand is often 5332 without support but can also be 5422 or 5431 with a higher ranking suit. In case overcaller bypasses the cue-bid to rebid his suit, that guarantees at least a six-card suit. A direct jump to the three-level promises extra values, often in the form of distribution, while the overcaller instead can start with the cue-bid to show hands with a maximum in HCPs.

There is a third variation when advancer has responded 1♠.

When overcaller has a hand where he wants to bid two and a half spades, he can use the cue-bid:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♥	pass	1 ♠
pass	2 ♣	pass	?

When advancer bids 1 ♠, overcaller will just raise the suit with a minimum and support. We can bid 1 ♠ with four cards, and thus overcaller can use Einar's cue-bid to make a good raise to 2 ♠. We can also do that to show a three-card raise with extra values.

After 2 ♣, advancer, to begin with, assumes that overcaller has a minimum hand for his overcall. If overcaller has a stronger hand, he will bid again.

An example of continued bidding by advancer after Einar's cue-bid:

(1 ♣)-1 ♥-1 ♠; 2 ♣

- 2 ♦ F1, natural, can be a minimum hand or better
- 2 ♥ 8-13, a limited hand, often with only two hearts
- 2 ♠ 8-11, limited hand, typically with six spades
- 2NT NF, about 14 HCP (a natural invitation opposite a minimum hand)
- 3 ♣ F1, natural or semi-natural
- 3 ♥ invitational

In the continued bidding, we use our normal principles; notrump and already bid suits are non-forcing, and unbid suits are forcing.

Here are a few examples of the continued bidding:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♥	pass	1 ♠
pass	2 ♣	pass	2 ♥

South's 2 ♥ rebid shows a limited hand, probably with two hearts. If North has better than the minimum hand, he will continue bidding. Let's look at his options in this sequence:

(1 ♣)-1 ♥-1 ♠; 2 ♣-2 ♥

- 2 ♠ about 12-13 HCP with three-card support
- 2NT maximum with a balanced hand with a stopper
- 3 ♠ maximum with three-card support
- 3mi maximum with a side-suit (with 5-5 we also can jump to 3mi over 1 ♠)
- 3 ♥ maximum with a six-card suit

Also in the next auction, North can bid 2♥ as Einar's cue-bid:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	pass	2♦

South's 2♦ is natural here, and North can bid 2♥ when he doesn't have a better natural bid. It can be a minimum hand or a hand with extra values where we want to hear more from partner before deciding what to do. However, if South instead shows clubs with 2♥, it is impossible to use this convention since overcaller can't cue-bid at a comfortable level.

We use Einar's cue-bid also when we overcall at the two-level, as long as we can fit in the cue-bid into our rules for when we use the convention.

Advancer's 2 club relay

The most important reason to use our treatment of the 2♣ relay is that we can then check out our combined strength without going beyond the two-level. The reason that this method works is that responder passed, and we have momentum. We don't expect opener to bid anything, and if he does, we have shown at least 9+ HCP and, very often, at least Hx in support.

Our 2♣ is primarily a *strength-asking relay*.

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	?		

After 2♣, we use 2♦ as a general forward-going bid, showing 12+ HCP. With the exception of 2NT, all other bids show 8-11 and are fairly natural.

Here is a summary of overcaller's rebids:

(1♦)-1♠-2♣

2♦	12+ HCP
2♥	8-11 with four hearts
2♠	8-11, nothing special
2NT	(10+) six spades and a four-card side suit and not completely minimum
3X	8-11 with 5-5
3♠	8-11 with long spades

After the bids that show 8-11 HCP, the continued bidding is natural. The 2NT rebid is forcing to at least 3Ma. Advancer's 3♣ then is an asking relay, and overcaller shows his second suit. A rebid of the major shows a club side-suit:

West	North	East	South
		1♦	1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2N
pass	3♣	pass	?

♠ AJxxxx ♥ Ax ♦ x ♣ QJxx

When North asks for details on distribution, 3♠ shows six spades and four clubs and a limited hand. With clubs and game-forcing values, South can bid any bid, higher than 3♠, to show the same distribution. When South has a red suit, he bids it at the three-level as that is forcing for one round. Some example hands:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	?

♠ K10x ♥ AQxx ♦ xx ♣ 10xxx

We have minimum strength for bidding 2♣ with support (a single raise shows about 5-8 HCP). With this hand, we can rebid 2♠ over 2♦.

♠ Kx ♥ A9x ♦ 10xx ♣ KQ10xx

We have no diamond stopper, and 2♣ describes the hand much better than 1NT. We can rebid 3♣ over 2♦, showing five clubs and Hx in partner's suit. This shows better than a minimum and is forcing to game. With less we must bid 2♠ also with two spades.

♠ 10x ♥ KJ9x ♦ AJx ♣ A10xx

I think this hand is too good for 1NT, and because we use the jump to 2NT to show support, I must bid 2♣ also with hands like this. If partner bids 2♦, I want to be in a game. To check if we have a heart fit, I can bid 2♥ with only a four-card suit; with five, I would have used the transfer bid 2♦ directly over 1♠. My 2♥ now is forcing.

♠ Jx ♥ Kxx ♦ A10x ♣ KJ9xx

If we think this hand is too good for a direct 1NT, we start with the 2♣ relay. As we don't have four hearts, we then rebid a natural, invitational 2NT over 2♦.

Responder didn't pass

When our RHO, takes an active part in the auction, after our partner's overcall, we cannot afford the luxury of using the same methods as after a pass. There is less time and often also less space for us to exchange information, as opener will often bid again. As advancer we now have to be more tactical.

In a live auction, i.e., when responder doesn't pass, we have to think about:

- possible defensive play, e.g., helping partner with the lead
- possible sacrifices against the opponent's contract
- more competitive bidding from all players
- making some other tactical bid

Now let us look at the different situations where responder doesn't pass:

Responder has bid a non-forcing 1NT

The auction is live, but with a slow tempo. That doesn't mean that we can take over the bidding, but the opponents are, at least for now, not looking for a fit.

Our double of 1NT is competitive, not for penalties, and bids in new suits are non-forcing. With trump support, we can, apart from natural raises, bid 2NT or a jump cue-bid as a 'mixed' raise. A cue-bid in opener's suit is forcing but does not promise support.

Responder has made a negative double

One difference when responder bids, instead of passing, is that we can pass if we lack a descriptive bid, knowing that we can bid in the next round.

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♠	Dble	?

We don't know where the bidding is heading, and to suggest a lead can now be more important than to show support. There can also be other tactical options to pursue, and looking for a fit is, of course, one of them.

After the negative double, a redouble promises a top honor in our partner's suit. We also play transfers from the 1NT bid and up to 2U* to be able bid a suit more often, either to compete or to suggest a lead in the suit.

* Bidding 2U, the suit below partner's major is a transfer-raise of partner's bid suit. In the auction above 2 ♦ would show hearts, while 2 ♥ shows a good raise in spades.

Here are some examples of our methods:

♠ Kx ♥ Qxxx ♦ xx ♣ Jxxx

I will redouble to show the top honor in spades. Also with the next, quite boring hand, I think redouble (or pass) is better than 2♠, so the redouble can be made with two-card support or a poor hand with three-card support:

♠ Qxx ♥ Qxx ♦ xxx ♣ Jxxx

With the next hand I have a choice:

♠ Jxx ♥ xx ♦ Jxx ♣ AK10xx

I can bid 1NT as transfer to clubs or show the spade support with a raise. I prefer to show the good club suit, and hopefully, I can bid 2♠ next. If I don't get more chances to bid, it can still be the right choice. If you use fit-showing jumps, 3♣ is an option, but we don't use them when partner has a major suit. Even if the negative double shows hearts, we can still transfer to that suit.

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	Dble	2♦

Here South shows a good heart suit, often a six-card suit.

We can also transfer to opener's suit, but that doesn't mean we have that suit:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	Dble	2♣

South's 2♣ is a transfer to the suit *bid* by opener, and shows about 12+ HCP with at least three-card support and usually a rather balanced hand. We use many bids to show support after an overcall, besides natural raises, also the transfer-raise, 2NT, and the transfer to opener's suit. The purpose is to give our partner the best possible picture of our hand before the bidding gets crowded. As South I can perhaps have this hand:

♠ Qxx ♥ AJxx ♦ xx ♣ KQ10x

I could bid the transfer-raise, 2♥, as a good single raise, but this hand is worth more, so I bid 2♣ to inform partner. One of the reasons for using three support-showing bids at the two-level is that we, with balanced hands, want to be able to stop in 2Ma when we don't get to play game.

If the hand is unbalanced, we use 2NT as a trump raise with at least invitational values. I will do so with both the following hands:

♠ Qxxx ♥ x ♦ Axxx ♣ KQ10x

Although this hand doesn't have as many HCPs as the last one, it has a good distribution. I wouldn't dare a splinter bid because 4♥ is ambiguous; as we never discussed it!

The next hand is much better, and I think that even a slam is possible. I start with bidding 2NT and intend to follow up with a cue-bid, or more.

♠ QJx ♥ Axx ♦ x ♣ AKJ10xx

A summary of advancer's bids after a negative double:

(1♣)-1♦-(Dble)

We have no special agreements here, and we can bid a major as natural even when double promises both majors. If double is a transfer and shows hearts we use our 'Defense against proxy bids'.

(1mi)-1Ma-(Dble)

RD	shows Hx in Ma or Hxx with a weak hand
1♠	natural, but not a bad suit (since double shows spades)
1NT	transfer to clubs
2♣	transfer to diamonds
2♦	transfer to hearts
2U	(the suit under the major) transfer to Ma, shows a good single raise
2♠	natural with a good suit and 10-12 HCP
2Ma	a normal raise
2NT	invitational or better, and very often an unbalanced hand
3X	invitational but in a 'bid' minor a splinter bid
3Ma	a preempt, but promising some values in the live auction

(1mi)-1Ma-(other bids)

When RHO bids again, such as a raise, or a new suit, we have agreed on some simple rules:

- 2NT always shows support and at least invitational values
- a double shows values and is for takeout
- a new suit is non-forcing (overcaller can pass with 8-11 and no fit)
- a cue-bid of opener's minor is forcing, even if the suit is an 'unbid' suit*
- a double of an artificial bid (such as a transfer) shows the bid suit
- a raise to 3Ma is cooperative (see chapter 'The competitive struggle')

* The cue-bid is forcing, but if advancer rebids the suit it is natural

Section 2 - Partner made a takeout double

Our methods when partner doubles for takeout are pretty much standard, so I will not waste much of your time with it. I want to mention a few things that we will come back to. Firstly, we have different agreements if the third hand makes an artificial bid, i.e., a transfer bid, with or without a takeout double from partner. You can find those agreements in the chapter 'Defense against proxy Bids.'

Secondly, we have some agreements for when the opponents have spades.

If the bidding starts:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dble	pass	2 ♠

Neither the double nor the cue-bid promises four hearts, and that is the reason for our agreements here. In this sequence (and after a responsive double of 2♠), we use a special rebid by the doubler. Bidding 2NT shows exactly four hearts!

The following situation is a variation on the same theme:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dble	2 ♠	Dble

After the responsive double, we need to find out if we have a heart fit. Therefore, we use the same rebids by the doubler here. In these two auctions, North can bid 2NT with four hearts regardless of whether he has a minimum or not. He may even have a longer minor suit. If he, instead, bids 3♥, that shows a game-forcing (17+) hand with five hearts. That treatment sometimes makes a difference.

In this auction we don't use the normal variation of Lebensohl. After 2♠ we can pass with weak hands, and we instead use Reversed Lebensohl, where 2NT is a constructive bid and forcing for one round. I will explain all the whys and hows in the chapter 'The useful 2NT.'

Finally, we should look at these sequences:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Dble	pass	3♥

A double-jump response to partner's takeout double is not an invitational bid. A jump to 2♥ shows about 8-11 HCP and usually a five-card suit. The risk is that North has a strong 17+ hand without a heart fit, so we shouldn't preempt our partner with a bid at the three-level with the same invitational hand. Instead, 3♥ here shows a six-card suit with 6-8 HCP.

If we change the opening bid, however, South has to jump to the three-level to show an invitational hand in a lower-ranking suit.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dble	pass	3♥

Here 3♥ is an invitational bid with about 10-11 HCP. South often has five hearts as he, with only four, can make an invitation via a 2♠ cue-bid. In the next case, the conditions are even worse, as we no longer can make a jump to the three-level.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dble	2♠	3♥

South's 3♥ is just competitive for us since we don't use Lebensohl when LHO has the length. In this position, we have to start with a responsive double. We can show an invitational hand with five hearts by doubling and rebidding 3♥. I will cover that later in the book in 'The useful 2NT' chapter.

Section 3 - Partner overcalls at the two-level

As I mentioned earlier, trends are changing, and I think we will see more two-level overcalls made with hands with opening strength but only a five-card suit. The reason is that our opponents today are smarter.

If we don't get into the auction, they will not always reveal that their hands are weak, and thus make it harder for us to get into the auction later.

♠ A10x ♥ xx ♦ AJxxx ♣ KJx

I can double 1♥, but over 1♠, I would bid 2♦. As we have discussed before, the bad suit is something that we perhaps should not worry so much about.

We have some ideas here that can be worth studying. In combination with our other agreements, we use 'Canapé jump overcalls' to show hands with a four-card major and a longer major. That treatment eliminates some, but of course not all, hands with a side-suit in a major from the two-level overcall.

Our responses to two-level overcalls in a minor are not standard. If responder passes, we use transfers and switched bids, depending on the situation. In all these transfer and switched bids situations after partner's overcall at the two-level, we don't think it matters if responder has made a negative double.

We use the same methods, whether responder passes or makes a negative double. When they double, that will only give us more options, such as to redouble with a honor in partner's suit and pass with doubtful values for a bid.

However, we don't use switched bids if advancer is a passed hand.

We use Einar's cue-bid also when we overcall at the two-level as long as we can fit in the cue-bid in our rules. I repeat the rules for when the cue-bid can be used:

- advancer bids (or shows by transfer or switch) a new suit
- if advancer has a major; he must be allowed to rebid the suit at the two-level
- if advancer has a minor; he must be allowed to rebid it at the three-level

To begin with, look at this bidding:

West	North	East	South
1♦	2♣	pass	?

When both majors are unbid, we use 2♦ and 2♥ as transfers and therefore, we have to use 2♠ as a 'cue-bid.' In combination with more aggressive overcalls, it is important to be able to stop in a major at the two-level, and that's the reason to use transfers after 2♣. As we play the canapé jumps, overcaller seldom has a four-card major. That affects our agreements about advancer's bids.

The transfer bids are still on, even if advancer is a passed hand.

Overcaller's rebids after the transfer are rather natural. An example:

West	North	East	South
1♦	2♣	pass	2♦/♥
pass	?		

With a minimum hand, North will complete the transfer with two, and with a boring hand even three cards in the major. With a singleton or void in the major he will try to find another bid.

In the auction above, I as North can have this hand:

♠ A10x ♥ xx ♦ Kx ♣ AQxxxx

If the transfer bid is 2♦, showing hearts, I will bid 2♥, but if partner shows five spades, I will jump to 3♠ because I think the hand now is better than a minimum.

A summary of advancer's bids in this situation:

(1♦)-2♣-(pass or double from responder)

- 2♦ transfer, five or more hearts, forcing only to the level of 2♥
- 2♥ transfer, five or more spades, forcing only to 2♠
- 2♠ forcing, and indicates support or a very good hand, forcing to 3♣
- 2NT natural and non-forcing
- 3♣ natural and non-forcing
- 3♦ a splinter bid with something like =4414 or longer clubs
- 3Ma GF with a five-card major and support in clubs

The jump to three in a major is game-forcing. If we should start with a transfer, it would be difficult to later show the support at a comfortable level.

When the opening suit is a major, we use another approach:

West	North	East	South
1Ma	2♣	pass	?

When responder passes and advancer bids a new suit, that is generally regarded as forcing in standard methods. We suggest the use of switched bids here to be able to stop at the two-level in the unbid major. This is very similar to what we do when the opponents overcall with 2♣ after our 1Ma opening.

Some examples of this method:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♣	pass	2 ♦
pass	?		

This is an example of the switched bids. South's 2♦ shows hearts. It is not a transfer bid because if the opening bid was 1♥, bidding 2♦ would show spades. This way, we can now stop at the two-level in advancer's major. North can bid 2♥ with an ordinary minimum hand with two hearts, and even with three hearts and a complete minimum. When advancer is a passed hand, switched bids are not used. We can then bid non-forcing suit bids because the previous pass limited our hand.

If North rebids 2♠, that is a normal forward going cue-bid. The rule for using 2♠ as Einar's cue-bid is: when advancer has a major suit, he should be allowed to rebid the suit at the *two-level*. Here South can't rebid 2♥ after 2♠! If the majors were reversed, it would work better. The 2♦ would have shown spades, and 2♥ could have been used as the cue-bid, as hearts is a lower suit than spades.

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♣	pass	2 ♥
pass	2 ♠		

With the switch, South's 2♥ shows diamonds and a good hand. When advancer has a minor, we can use Einar's cue bid if we allow advancer to rebid the minor at the *three-level*. That works here. North had to find a convenient rebid, and without a natural rebid, he bid 2♠ as Einar's cue-bid with this hand:

♠ Jxx ♥ Qxx ♦ Jx ♣ AKQxx

Here is a summary of advancer's bids in two different situations, demonstrating when the cue-bid can be used:

(1♠)-2♣

2♦	switch, shows at least five hearts
2♥	non-forcing
2♠	forcing, but not Einar's cue-bid as 2♥ is now bypassed
2NT	forcing for one round, natural or semi-natural
3♣	non-forcing
2♥	switch, five plus diamonds, 2♠ is Einar's cue-bid; advancer can bid 3♦
2♠	forcing, suggesting some kind of fit
2NT	natural NF
3♣	a natural, limited raise
3♠	a splinter bid

The bids that are different here:

(1♥)-2♣

2♦ shows at least five spades

2♥ Einar's cue-bid, since advancer can rebid 2♠

2♠ a natural bid, a minimum and two or three spades

2♥ forcing, suggesting some kind of fit

2♠ five or more diamonds, we can't use 3♥ as Einar's cue-bid

I hope this clarifies everything, the cue-bid is easier to use than to explain!

One last sequence where our methods deviate from the standard:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♦	pass	?

One of the important things about using artificial bids and conventions is that you must remember them when they appear. We have exchanged two bids here so 2♥ is a transfer bid, showing spades, 2♠ becomes the 'cue-bid.' We hope to remember this one when it comes up, but we are still waiting for it! This is how it works:

(1♥)-2♦

2♥ transfer, shows at least five spades

2♠ forcing for one round, usually with a diamond fit

Section 4 - We open, the opponents interfere

When we have opened and the opponents interfere, we must adapt to the situation. The methods we use in uncontested auctions are not always valid. There are several reasons, both tactical and strategic ones. The contesting bid means that we now have less time and space at our disposal; we need to hurry to find a fit, so using some of the responses artificially gives us more options.

I will tell you something you probably haven't thought about. A takeout double is generally stronger than an overcall. That indicates that the risk for preemptive raises from advancer are higher when RHO overcalls than after a takeout double. There is more than a fifty percent chance that the overcaller's partner has support for an overcall. In practical play you will seldom see a preemptive bid from a player whose partner made a takeout double, but often from the partner of an overcaller. That is something we consider in our strategy.

Even if you don't use transfers in the uncontested bidding, I recommend that you do so when the opponents double or overcall your 1mi openings. By using transfers and other proxy bids, we can postpone deciding who will be declarer, plus we have more ways to cope with the competition. Also, most notrump bids become artificial bids for us.

Let's look exactly how we cope with our opponent's intervening bids:

We open 1mi, second hand doubles

As you may know from my last book, we use transfers when the opponents double or overcall at low levels. Here are some examples of our methods after a double:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Dble	?

With balanced hands, we have the option to bid 1♠ to show a hand without a major as a transfer to 1NT. So, instead because the opponent's takeout double indicates the majors, bidding 1NT shows the unbid minor. After the diamond opening a hand like this is a minimum:

♠ xx ♥ Kxx ♦ Jxx ♣ KJ10xx

At unfavorable vulnerability we would need another card in clubs or a better hand.

After a double we can show both clubs and diamonds with 2NT as in this hand:

♠ xx ♥ Qx ♦ Kxxx ♣ AQxxx

We don't use very weak preemptive bids or raises in this situation. It is too late to make the opponents believe they haven't got a major suit contract. With the modern defensive bidding, we can't keep them out of anything. What we *can* do is to find out about our own fit, prepare for defensive play, and hope they will go overboard.

Some problems and possibilities are the same whether you use transfers or not. As an example, we give a special meaning to some bids in competitive auctions.

The bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
pass	1♦	Dble	?
♠ xx ♥ AJ9xx ♦ Kxxx ♣ xx			

Perhaps your system allows you to bid 2♥ as, what we call, a *fit-showing* bid. Even if East's takeout double indicates the majors, we can have a heart fit. In our system, we bid 2♦, as we use transfer fit-showing bids, but the idea is the same. Why is it then important to show two suits?

The reason is that the bidding is now competitive. We have to find our fit as soon as possible. Time is of the essence. We also use these bids with a passed hand, and in fact, then also without competition. If you play weak two-bids or Multi, a passed hand would not often have a long major suit in this situation. Therefore, we can use the jump to 2Ma (or with transfers 2♦ to show hearts and 2♥ to show spades) as showing both support and a five-card major suit instead of the normal weak jump shift.

In our methods, some of the two-level bids have the same meaning after overcalls as after a takeout double. You can see that in this summary of responder's options:

1♦-(Dble)

RD	shows four or five hearts (can be six hearts if weak)
1♥	shows four or five spades, as above
1♠	transfer to 1NT, usually a balanced hand
1NT	8+ with five clubs
2♣	a diamond raise
2♦	8+ with at least six hearts
2♥	8+ with at least six spades
2♠	invitational or better with support
2NT	8+ with five clubs and four diamonds
3♣	invitational with six clubs

Often we are looking for a fit, and there is no time to lose.

We open 1mi, second hand overcalls

As we use transfers also after low-level overcalls, some of the responses are quite similar or identical:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	?

Now a double shows hearts. 1♥ shows spades, and with a six-card major, we can transfer at the two-level, as over a double. After a takeout double, we use 1NT as clubs, and here we instead use 1NT to show both majors. You could say that 1NT replaces the standard negative double.

The two-level transfers to a major show a six-card suit after an overcall. We also don't use a cue-bid to show support (a cue-raise) when the opponents interfere at the one-level. Instead we always use 2♠ to show support and a good hand. The bids that differ from the situation after a takeout double follow here:

Because of the higher risk for preemptive raises from advancer after an overcall, we have some responses that show two unbid suits or support plus an unbid major. These bids are not weak, instead they are constructive in nature.

1♣-(1♦)

Dble	transfer, four or five hearts (can be six hearts if weak)
1♥	transfer, four or five spades (can be six spades if weak)
1♠	transfer to 1NT
1NT	8-11(+), F1 with 4-4 or 5-4 in the majors
2♦	8+ with six hearts
2♥	8+ with six spades
2NT	at least 5-5 in the majors, the strength depends on the distribution

When the overcall is 1♥, we use the same basics, and a double shows four-five spades while 2♥ shows six spades. The unbid minor is natural, but forcing only for one round.

When responder bids 1NT, he usually has 8-10 HCP with 4-4 or 5-4 in the majors. We usually prefer a transfer at the one-level with stronger hands. We use 1NT to protect us from preemptive diamond raises from the opponents.

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♦	1NT	pass	?

South assumes that responder has a minimum hand. With support in a major, he bids what he thinks he can make. Bidding 2♦ asks for the longest major. If South is unlucky he has a minimum hand with precisely =3334. He has no natural bid but can bid 2♦ and then pass when partner bids 2Ma.

Raises of opener's suit are natural but as some of the two-level bids are transfer bids 2♠ is 'always' the stronger, invitational 'cue-raise'.

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♥	?

The bids that differ from the situation after a takeout double:

1mi-(1♥)

Dble	transfer, four or five spades (can be six spades if weak)
1♠	transfer to 1NT
1NT	8+ with 4-4(+) in spades and partner's minor
2Omi	10+ natural
2♥	8+ with six spades
2NT	at least 5-5 in the unbid suits (spades and the unbid minor here)
3Omi	at least 5-5 in spades and partner's minor

When the overcall is 1♠, we use the negative double while 1NT is natural.

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♠	?
♠ xx ♥ AQxx ♦ KQxx ♣ Q10x			

Before East intervened, we were planning to show hearts first and then look for the best game. We can show hearts with the help of a negative double, but the future is more uncertain. Should we change our plans? If West makes a preemptive raise in spades, in the aftermath, it could have been better to start with showing support. For now, I don't think we can do anything better than the negative double.

When I was younger, a cue-bid of the opponent's suit showed a balanced game-forcing hand, but nowadays, we use the cue-bid as a cue-raise to show support.

♠ xx ♥ Jxxx ♦ KJxx ♣ Q10x

This hand is much weaker, and we can perhaps only make one bid. I think we should bid 2♦ and not double. There is no time to look for another fit if we want to be able to fight for the part-score. Without the interference, you perhaps can use 2♦ as a constructive and forcing raise, but you cannot afford to use that treatment in competitive bidding. After the overcall, we need to be able to raise with weaker hands, or we can't compete for a part-score.

A problem with our minor suit openings is that they only promise three cards. However, you have to be positive - three is better than two! If you, as we open with clubs holding 3-3 in minors, 1♦ is very often four cards or more.

In competition, the raises of a minor to the two- and three-level are natural, but also limited. The single raise shows about 6-10, and in my opinion, the raise to the three-level should show about the same strength.

You have this hand after 1♦ from partner and 1♠ from RHO:

♠ xx ♥ Jxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ K9xx

Without interference, South planned to bid 1NT, but that would promise a stopper in spades when opponents have overcalled 1♠. With this hand, the only alternative to pass is to raise to 2♦. There is, of course, a risk that partner has =4432 distribution, and we have to consider that, and perhaps look at the vulnerability when in doubt.

With the next hand, I can bid 3♦ to make it more difficult for the opponents:

♠ xx ♥ Jxx ♦ KQxxx ♣ Kxx

I don't think 3♦ should be very weak and only preemptive. We should use the raises as tactical bids, not to show specific strength. Therefore, a raise to 3♦ shows more distribution and playing strength than a raise to 2♦, and not more (or less) high card strength.

We use switched bids after a 1♠ overcall and thus exchange the meanings of bids in the unbid minor and hearts at the two-level. I have already discussed this in other situations.

The special bids here are:

1mi-(1♠)

2Omi	8+, switch with five (or more) hearts
2♥	10+. switch, an unbid minor, forcing to three of that suit
2NT	10+, at least invitational with 5-5 in unbid suits
3Omi	10+, at least invitational 5+ hearts and 5+ support

1mi-(2Ma)

2OMa	10+, F1, natural
2NT up	transfer, 10+ if transfer to a new suit, 8+ if support (a transfer to the bid major is GF with shortness in the opponent's suit)
3♠	GF with support

A special agreement

We have problems in the standard methods when we open with 1♦ and the opponents overcall 2♣. As already discussed, the negative double does not work well in this situation if responder hasn't got precisely 4-4 in the majors.

We have recently come up with another idea, and here are the basics:

1♦-(2♣)

Dble	a three-way bid, either
	a) a diamond raise, very often with 5-10 HCP
	b) the same as the negative double (both majors, usually only 4-4)
	c) a game-forcing balanced hand
2♦	shows five hearts from about 8 HCP
2♥	shows five spades, from about 8 HCP
2♠	at least invitational with diamond support
2NT	natural, invitational
3♣	at least 5-5 in the majors, and playing strength for the three-level
3♦	6-9 with support
3Ma	preemptive

Opener will bid as if the double was a limited raise in diamonds, and therefore, all bids other than 2♦ show extra values. Over opener's rebid 2♦, the 2♥ and 2♠ bids show both majors. 2♥ is limited with 6-10 HCP, and 2♠ F1, with at least 11 HCP.

West	North	East	South
	1♦	2♣	Dble
pass	2♦	pass	?

♠ KJxx ♥ A9xx ♦ 10xx ♣ xx

Responder can bid 2♥, showing the majors and a limited hand.

♠ KJxx ♥ AJxx ♦ 10xx ♣ Kx

This hand is stronger, so responder rebids 2♠ that is forcing for at least one round, invitational or better.

♠ Kx ♥ AQJx ♦ Qxxx ♣ K10x

Also with this hand responder can start with a double. If opener rebids 2♦ all bids from responder from 2NT and up are game-forcing. With this hand, the alternatives are 2NT and 3♦.

We open 1Ma, second hand doubles

A modern treatment when the opponents make a takeout double of our opening bid 1Ma is to use transfers; I think that's an excellent method. The takeout double shows strength, but nevertheless, we must be able to show strong hands as well as hands where we only want to compete for a part-score.

To use transfers is a good method that caters to both these needs. The transfer to a new suit can be weak and lead-directing, or a normal two-over-one bid. Opener completes the transfer with most minimum hands, and responder has to bid again with invitational values.

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Dble	?

♠ 10x ♥ xx ♦ AQ10xx ♣ 10xxx

Without the interference, I would bid 1NT. After the double, the opponents may take over the bidding, and perhaps our LHO bids some number of hearts. I can take the risk to bid 2♣ and show my diamonds.

♠ 10x ♥ Qxx ♦ A9xx ♣ Kxxx

After a double, we shouldn't pass with a hand like this. That would be too passive and make it difficult for our side to fight for a part-score.

Therefore, the redouble shows about 8 HCP or more. When the opponents are contesting, we can no longer bid 1NT with support. It is essential to show the support at once to be able to compete for the contract.

This is the summary of responses, including the support-showing bids:

1♠-(Dble)

RD	strength-showing, but only from about 8 HCP or more
1NT	clubs
2♣	diamonds
2♦	hearts
2♥	a transfer-raise, shows a good raise to 2♠
2♠	a normal raise
2NT	at least invitational with support
3X	invitational with a long suit
3♠	a preemptive raise
3NT	9-12 with good support and a singleton somewhere
4X	shows a void

After a one heart opening, we can also bid a natural 1♠, but we, of course, consider that double often shows spade length and may conceal our spades with a weak suit.

The transfer bids start from 1NT, and continue at the two-level, up to the suit below the bid major. This method gives us the advantage of having two raises at the two-level:

- a normal raise to 2Ma shows a weak, or uninteresting hand
- the bid 2U (under the major) shows a better raise or a nice hand

I don't think everyone who plays this convention uses it the same way. My idea is that it is not the point count alone that should decide if you should choose the raise or the transfer-raise. Let us look at a few hands:

♠ xxx ♥ Qxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ Axx

This hand is close to a maximum in HCP, but it doesn't look like a good raise to me. I will raise to 2♠.

♠ Qxx ♥ xx ♦ AQxx ♣ xxxx

This hand is weaker but more interesting. I would bid 2♥. The 'transfer-raise' says: partner, I don't mind if you bid at the three-level if they compete.

We open 1Ma, second hand overcalls

When the contesting bid is a suit bid, it can look like this:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	?

I believe the practice among players using standard methods, is to use 2NT as at least invitational with four-card support after a contesting bid by the opponents. They then often use a cue-bid, in this case, 2♠, to show only three trumps.

Our methods are a little different. I think that showing the exact number of trumps is of limited value, as the opponents get the same message. I believe it is more important is to help opener with what to do if advancer bids 3♠ or even 4♠.

Of course, it matters how many trumps we have, but our way is to consider the trump length as well as other distributional factors when we value our hand as responder. The fourth trump is usually worth at least one point extra, and often more if we have a singleton.

An example of our support-showing responses in this situation:

1♥-(1♠)

- 2♥ a single raise shows 5-10, but usually 5-8
- 2♠ a cue bid shows invitational values or a minimum hand for a game
- 2NT close to game-forcing (we can stop if opener has wasted values)
- 3♥ a maximum single raise, about 8-10
- 3♠/4mi a splinter bid
- 4♥ preemptive, undefined

It probably doesn't sound very clear when I say both 2♠ and 2NT can be invitational as well as game-forcing. The reason for that is our extended hand evaluation, and that we want to be prepared for more bidding from the opponents. We want to be more flexible and be able to use the information from the overcall. I will explain that in the next chapter.

All these bids promise *three trumps or more*. That doesn't mean we always bid a splinter bid with only three trumps, but it is still possible.

♠ x ♥ Kxx ♦ AQxx ♣ AQxxx

Only three trumps, but I don't see much wrong with bidding 3♠ as a splinter bid. If partner has a good fit, a slam is just around the corner.

Of course, a fourth trump wouldn't hurt, and we often have that. Is there any difference in the meaning of the double raise, depending on if East's bid is double or 1♠?

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Dble/1♠	3♥

In our system, there is. After a takeout double, we use transfers at the two-level, which means we can transfer to 2♥ to show a good raise. We don't have that possibility after the spade overcall.

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	2♠

The cue-bid of the opponent's suit is only forcing to the three-level, but can also be used with marginal balanced game hands that are unfit for higher contracts. After 2♠ here, we don't even have to bid over a possible 3♠ from the opponents.

When we don't have support, our rules after an overcall are rather simple

- a negative double at the one- or two-level doesn't promise a rebid
- we prefer to bid a natural suit response if that is an option
- a two-level bid in a new suit is F1 only. We can stop when opener raises, or when responder rebids his suit or makes a preference, but never in 2NT
- a jump to the three-level is invitational with a long suit
- a three-level bid in a second new suit is game-forcing from both hands

As a general rule, we always prefer to bid a natural, strength showing bid at the two-level when we can, instead of making a takeout double. That means if we double, and rebid a suit, we have less than invitational values.

Some possible bids without support:

1♥-(1♠)

Dble	competitive only but unlimited with balanced hands
1NT	6-10 with a stopper
2mi	F1, usually a five+ suit
3mi	Invitational

We have a special agreement in this case:

West	North	East	South
	1Ma	2♣	?

To be able to show more hands where we could have a game, we use switched bids here: 2♦ shows the unbid major and a bid in that major shows diamonds. The 2♦ bid shows about 10 HCP if we only have five, but from 8 HCP with six.

We have talked a lot about switch already, and I don't think I have to explain more.

THE COMPETITIVE STRUGGLE

It doesn't matter if you are an average player or an expert, or whether you use standard methods or some smart treatments. Sooner or later, we are all compelled to start the game of speculations in competitive auctions. When the systemic understandings end, we have to use our judgment.

We can guess, make tactical attempts, make more agreements, or we can try to improve our interaction with our partner. The problem with that is that it does not help if only *you* know how to do that. Bridge *is* a partnership game, and the way to improve is that both players evolve together.

Partnership development is not about using new and fancy treatments; you must also understand them all the way. I am sure that the result comes from both players using the same logic, that is, think the same way, because in competitive bidding there are always new situations.

I know that not everybody is lucky enough to be in a serious partnership, but next time you are, at least you will know where to start!

This chapter is a mix of competitive circumstances. I sometimes can give only a bit of advice and other times a suggestion of methods.

We have a fit

We have already discussed (as in I talk - you listen) methods in responding to partner's opening bid when the opponents interfere. There is, though, more to say.

If we find a fit before the opponents do, that gives us tactical possibilities and advantages. We can sometimes make it more difficult for the opponents. If both sides have a trump suit, the tactical situation is different, but we still may have an advantage if we find our trump suit first.

When we open a minor, the odds are not overwhelming for having five-card support, and thus we don't use many bids to show support. In uncontested auctions, we often even suppress support, trying to find more lucrative alternatives in notrumps or a major. In a contested auction, however, we should think differently. I may have said that before, but it's worth repeating.

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	1 ♠	?

♠ Jx ♥ Qxxx ♦ Ax ♣ AQxxx

If East had not bid, we would very likely show our hearts before revealing the support, or perhaps not show it at all. After 1♠, however, it becomes more urgent to support our partner. I think we should prefer the 'cue-raise', 2♠, to a negative double, as we then show both the support and the relative strength of our hand. That may prevent us from finding a heart fit, but in a competitive auction we must accept the current situation. We are not alone anymore.

When we open a major, we have more bids to choose from. We have already looked at the support-showing bids, but I want to repeat - and talk more about what I think is a very good agreement in our methods.

When the opponents overcall after 1Ma, and we have a good hand with support:

- a cue-raise is invitational *or* a minimum game hand
- bidding 2NT is *almost* game-forcing

I have a few comments about these rules because they sound mysterious.

The reason we need our bids to be flexible is the overcall. We both have to look at our hands again and evaluate our honors with the new information. After the overcall, we know more than in an uncontested auction. We also have got a hint that RHO has some values, and we know his suit. When we choose to bid 2NT, we establish a *forcing situation*, meaning that we now can *never* let the opponents play *any* contract undoubled. With the cue-bid, it is different, and we are not at all obliged to bid above 3Ma, even when the opponents bid higher than that level.

There can be several reasons to prefer the cue-bid:

- when our hand is limited
- our hand isn't suited to compete above 4Ma
- we think that 3NT can be an alternative contract

Some examples hands when the auction has started:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	?
	♠ x ♥ Kxxx ♦ A10xx ♣ Qxxx		

With four trumps, 2♠ can be rather weak in HCP. I think this is a minimum hand for 2♠. I only have 9 points but a singleton in the opponent's suit. With two spades in the hand above I would hesitate to bid 2♠, and rather have a maximum for 3♥.

We can bid 2♠ with three or more trumps, and when we only have three the hand should be a little better in HCPs:

♠ xx ♥ Kxx ♦ AJxx ♣ KJxx

Only three trumps, but stronger, is also acceptable for the invitational raise. The holding in the opponent's suit is a crucial factor. As it is in the next hand:

♠ xxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ Ax ♣ QJxx

With weakness in spades, as this hand, I think it is better to settle for a maximum single raise instead of making an invitational bid! I will raise to 3♥ which shows about 8-10 HCP, depending on distribution and how many hearts I have.

♠ Qxx ♥ KJxx ♦ Kxx ♣ KJx

I have the strength for a game-forcing 2NT, but I prefer 2♠ with this hand. I can bid game next if I want, but the overcall doesn't give me any good vibes. Also, if partner now bids 2NT, I will raise to 3NT instead of bidding 4♥, and perhaps we will play there.

I said before: the 2NT response is almost forcing to game. We can occasionally stop below game after 2NT.

Let us look at an example where I have the South hand.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2NT	pass	?

♠ Kxx ♥ KJxxx ♦ KQx ♣ xx

The spade king is now a doubtful value, and 3♥ shows that my hand is now worth less than a minimum because of the spade holding. Even when responder intended to proceed to a game when he bid 2NT, he may now pass. Say he has this hand:

♠ Jxx ♥ AQxx ♦ Ax ♣ Q10xx

As you can see, even 3♥ may go down if the defense can manage to take the spade ruff. Perhaps we can make 3NT (with the Jack of clubs rightly placed). We may not find it, but we know that we both have values in spades, so why not?

I like to have rules also regarding high-level decisions. Even if our 2NT is not game-forcing, we thus have agreed not to let the opponents play any undoubled contract.

That has consequences if the opponents bid again:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2NT	3/4 ♠	1 ♥ ?

When East supports his partner, our system states that we have to either double or bid again. If East bids 4 ♠, I will double with a minimum or with wasted values in spades. With a very good hand, I can bid on myself, or else with a pass leave the decision to North. We will look more closely at forcing passes later in this chapter.

It is a well-known principle, at least among experts, not to use preemptive raises over preemptive bids from the opponents. In the following sequence, South believes that 4 ♥ is a fair contract, that is, he has values for the bid.

West	North	East	South
pass	1 ♥	3 ♣*	4 ♥

* a weak preemptive overcall

If I bid game in these situations, it means I believe we can make it. Actually, sometimes we need to stretch with a hand we would have invited with before the opponent's preempt, and then at least we hope we can make a game. After the preemptive bid, our only alternatives are 3 ♥ or game. Therefore, we have to guess and bid game if we think the hand is too good for 3 ♥. Even if West wasn't a passed hand, there is no reason to try to shut out West with a preemptive 4 ♥ bid after East's weak overcall.

What about bidding 4 ♣ (or 4 ♦) in this situation? If you haven't an agreement with your partner what these bids mean, I suggest you use our treatment. We use this method when possible after our opponent makes a preemptive jump overcall after our 1Ma. Meaning any three-level bid after 1Ma,

The idea is to differentiate between hands with or without control in the opponents' suit. We use these bids to show support after jump overcalls as follows:

- 4 ♣ shows at least game-forcing values and promises a control
- 4 ♦ shows some slam interest (about 15 HCP) without control
- 4Ma is natural, we don't have the values for the above alternatives

It doesn't matter which suit was bid by the opponents, our bids are fixed. There is an advantage to use 4♣ as the raise with control. We don't have to define the strength so well as our partner now can bid 4♦ as a 'last-train-bid', meaning: he is not negative, but not sure we have the basic strength for a slam. He is asking for some extra strength if we are going above the game level.

However, probably the best part of these methods is the 4♦ response, which guarantees that we don't bid a slam without control in the opponents' suit. If we aren't strong enough to bid 4♦, we have to be content with bidding 4♥.

The opponents interfere after our support-showing bids

Although responder promised a good hand with support, by making a cue-bid or bidding 2NT, our opponents do not always pass and let us finish our job peacefully. An annoying advancer may support his partner, make an overcall, or even make a preemptive bid. When that happens we have to be prepared.

When the opponents interfere after our 2NT or a cue-raise, we have additional rules concerning opener's rebids. Besides our general strength and distribution, we focus on our holding in our opponents' suit when responder is unlimited.

The basic principles are:

- a new suit is natural and cooperative, but not forcing above game
- if a pass is forcing, and if the opponents have a fit it also denies control
- if we still are able to bid 3Ma, that shows minimum with shortness in the opponents' suit, but is not forcing*

* Responder can pass with unsuitable values in the opponents' suit, knowing that those values are useless when opener is short in the suit.

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	2NT
3♦	3♥	pass	?
♠ Qx ♥ AQJx ♦ QJx ♣ 10xxx			

North's 3♥ isn't forcing, and I think South may pass with this hand.

We want to know for sure what our doubles mean. To know that, we try to identify what type of bid the advancer is making. Is he a solo-bidder, or do the opponents have a fit? Is it a preemptive jump or perhaps even a sacrifice in advance? Perhaps it is easier if I tell you our basic agreements.

This is what we do if the opponents bid at the three-level.

- double is for penalties when we double a solo-bidder at the three-level
- opener's double shows shortness when the opponents have a fit
- when double shows a singleton, a cue-bid shows a void
- a bid in a new suit is natural, and cooperative, but does not say anything about the holding in the opponents' suit
- opener's 3NT is never natural, responder's 3NT is always natural!
- we 'always' pass without a control, but pass doesn't deny a control!

When I say control, that can be Ace, King or singleton (or void). When RHO comes in with a preemptive bid or raises partner's suit to the four-level, but below our trump suit, we have special rules, which I soon will tell you more about. If they bid above our game level, double is a warning that we have a minimum, or wasted values.

These rules are logical to us, but perhaps not so easy to learn. I will go through some examples of how they work, and hope that makes everything clear.

The reason pass doesn't deny a control can be that we hope partner can double, and we want to make a penalty pass (when we cannot double for penalties). Opener's 3NT is never a natural bid and is somewhat complex as it has different meanings depending on the situation. I think we have to look at some examples:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♠	3 ♠	1 ♥ ?

We don't have to bid over 3 ♠. In this situation, opener needs to inform his partner about his ambitions. We use 3NT to create a game-forcing situation. Then we will have a forcing pass situation if they bid 4 ♠.

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♠	3 ♠	1 ♥ 4mi

When opener shows a second suit, it is natural, intending to help North decide what to do over 4 ♠. However, he doesn't have to do anything as our bid doesn't create a forcing-pass. We can just prioritize showing a second suit whatever holding we have in spades if we think that information is what partner needs. Our 4mi, therefore, doesn't promise or deny control in spades.

In the next auction, we already know what a double means:

West	North	East	South
pass	2NT	3♦	1♥ ?

We use penalty doubles from both hands. East made an overcall at the three-level. He is a solo-bidder, perhaps only bidding for the lead, and we want to punish him when he is wrong. This auction is, though, interesting also for other reasons. Without any kind of diamond control, we can pass over 3♦ since a pass is forcing to at least 3♥. As our pass denies a singleton or void in East's suit, our partner may want to make a penalty double. He can also want to suggest that we play 3NT!

If we bid a new suit, we just want to show it. Our partner is unlimited, and if the second suit is the essence of our hand, we want to show it. Therefore, if we bid a new suit, we don't promise anything in diamonds. Pass from opener doesn't have to be a weak bid, but if we do have a control or a singleton in diamonds, we don't often pass. As 2NT already established a forcing pass (as opposed to the cue-raise), we now don't need 3NT to do that. Here 3NT is just game-forcing values with a control.

All game-forcing rebids, except for a bid in a new suit, establishes a forcing pass if the opponents sacrifice against our game. These are our options:

pass	minimum without shortness or stronger without any control at all
Dble	penalties (solo-bidder rule)
3♥	minimum with shortness in diamonds
new suit	natural, cooperative, and does not promise anything about diamonds
3NT	game-forcing with a diamond control, but not shortness
4♦	extra values with short diamonds
4♥	non-descriptive with a control, sometimes we just want to bid a game

The next auction is a little different, but we can still double for penalties when East is a solo-bidder. However, double would show a short spade if 3♠ is a raise, or a response to a takeout double. We think the opponent's three-level response to a takeout double means that the opponents have found a fit.

West	North	East	South
pass	2NT	3♠	1♥ ?

2NT was forcing only to 3♥, but that changes when East makes a bid. Remember our rule: After 2NT, we will not let the opponents play any undoubled contract. It's a very simple rule to remember when a pass is forcing.

Here 3NT shows extra values with a spade control, but we don't know which type, as our bidding space is diminished, and we have to bid 4♥ with a minimum with a control. When the bidding is crowded, it is important that pass denies a control in the opponents' suit. Our partner is unlimited.

When the opponents bid at the four-level we have decided to use a *pass* (and cue-bids) to *show* shortness (or control) in their suit. The reason for that is to give us more options when we *have* a control of some kind in their suit. When we pass as opener, responder's double asks for extra strength. We must consider that our partner is unlimited, and therefore, our pass doesn't have to show extra values. Double shows a good hand, but without control. If neither of us has a control, we will stop in game. Some example hands where we can use this idea:

West	North	East	South
pass	2NT	4♦	1♥ ?

♠ Qxx ♥ AQxxx ♦ x ♣ Axxx

South can pass over 4♦, and North can then double like a last-train-bid to ask for extra values. Here we don't have that, so we have to bid 4♥ over the double.

♠ Ax ♥ AQxxx ♦ Qx ♣ AQxx

This hand is much stronger but without a diamond control. We can double 4♦ and hope our partner finds the courage to bid past 4♥ if he has a diamond control. All bids by him, other than 4♥, obviously promise a control. After a preemptive bid or raise, we no longer can show a second suit by opener.

A summary of our rebids as opener when the opponents make a preemptive raise or overcall to the four-level below our major suit:

1Ma-(2X or pass)-2NT-(4X)

pass	promises a control (A, K, or shortness) in the opponents' suit Dble ask for extra values
cue-bid	a control in the bid suit, and a control in the opponents' suit
Dble	extra values, but no control
4Ma	minimum, no control or a very bad hand for slam purposes

I am fully aware that our opponents are reading this book. Perhaps they now can always make a jump overcall, and thereby minimize the risk of being doubled? We can, however, even if our double has a special meaning, pass over such a double!!

Now a few examples where also the opponents have found a fit:

West	North	East	South
2♦	2NT	3♦	1♥ ?

This auction is not much different from where East made a solo-bid. The main difference is that we no longer use double for penalties. When the opponents have a fit, our double shows a singleton in their suit and extra values. Bidding 3♥ still shows the minimum hand with a singleton. Theoretically, we can still stop in 3♥, even if that probably won't happen very often.

More importantly: When the opponents have a fit, opener's pass denies shortness or control in diamonds, but he may have a hand for a penalty pass. A comment about the continuation when opener passes: responder doubles with shortness in these situations *only* if he wants to allow opener to pass for penalties. With slam ambitions, he instead makes a cue-bid. Responder's 3NT here is a natural bid! Remember that we can bid 2NT with balanced hands and only three trumps, and 3NT can be an excellent contract. Opener's 3NT, though, is only natural when responder suggests stopping in 3Ma.

When double shows a singleton, a cue-bid shows a void and 3NT is game-forcing with a diamond control, but this time Ace or King.

Without a control we have to pass, but we can, of course, raise to game or even make a slam try with a cue-bid if partner signs-off in 3♥. Our partner then knows he must have a control in the opponent's suit to accept.

When our opponents have a spade fit, we cannot stop below game level.

West	North	East	South
1♠	2NT	3♠	1♥ ?

Our options are limited when the opponents have the highest suit, but when they have a fit we can use the double as an informative bid,

This is what we can do:

pass	no spade control
Dble	shortness, singleton or perhaps void in spades
3NT	a control in spades and extra values
4mi	a second suit, doesn't promise anything about spades
4♥	a control in spades but a minimum

♠ QJ10x ♥ Qxxxx ♦ Kx ♣ Ax

If we have this hand as South, we can pass and hope that partner cooperates with a double and leads a trump. However, also depending on the vulnerabilities, if responder has slam ambitions, he may prefer a cue-bid.

About the Law

The *Law of Total Trumps* was first discovered in 1967 by the French theorist Jean-Paul Vernes, but was then forgotten. It was rewritten and made popular many years later by Larry Cohen from the USA. Vernes' original theory states that the total number of tricks are *on average*, the same as the total number of trumps. The later (Cohen) theory is based on that the total number of tricks on any given hand is *equivalent* to the total number of trumps.

This 'fact' was firmly debated by the writer team Mike Lawrence and Anders Wirgren in their book 'I Fought the Law of Total Trumps'. Their conclusion was: we shouldn't put all our eggs in Cohen's basket. The Law doesn't work on all deals but, on average, about 60% of the time. How well it works depends mostly on the fit in other suits.

Let me show you an example. You have this hand:

♠ AQxxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ x ♣ Jxx

Your partner can have:

a)	♠ Kxxx	b)	♠ Kxxx
	♥ Qx		♥ Qx
	♦ KQxx		♦ xxx
	♣ xxx		♣ KQxx

In both cases, we have, together with partner, 20 HCP and nine trumps. With hand a), we can take only eight tricks, but with b), we can take ten. By exchanging the holdings in two suits, there is a two-trick difference. As you can see, when we have a good fit, so do our opponents! In a perfect world, we can find out about the trump length and the fit, but the world isn't that nice to us.

Lawrence and Wirgren analyzed a great number of deals and presented numerous tables to prove their points. They emphasized the importance of the distribution in terms of short suits, and something called working points. They suggested that we should count our way to the right bid by using those figures to find the right answers. I am sure their research shows that it works, but I think it is too scientific for most players.

For me, it is obvious: The best part of the Law is if we know that our opponents follow it. Our bids are public property. We are not allowed to hide the meaning of them from our opponents. If we tell our partner the whole story, our opponents will also hear it. They will often be able to use that information both in the bidding and in the opening lead.

So, except for this short interlude, I will not talk much about the Law. When we have a fit, it is nice to know how many trumps we have, but how often is it the deciding factor for our bid? If your partner invites a game and shows support, do you care if he has four trumps and 11 HCP or three trumps and some extra points? I think not.

It can be counter-productive for us to reveal the number of trumps when we support our partner. That is, however, a question not only of tactics but also a strategic problem. If we design our bids to show an exact number of trumps, we have no other option but to follow our guidelines. To precisely reveal how many trumps we have is a losing option, at least in competitive bidding. That message may be useless for partner and useful for the opponents.

When both parties have established a trump fit, it is a clear advantage to have the highest suit. The opponents then have to bid at the next level to compete.

Everybody non-vulnerable the bidding starts:

♠ AQxxx ♥ xxx ♦ xx ♣ Jxx

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	1 ♠	2NT*	?

* 2NT shows heart support, at least invitational

In situations like this, it matters how many trumps East-West have. If we know they have at least *nine* hearts, our distribution is less boring since we then know that partner is short in hearts. We know that East-West probably is the stronger side, but we have the spade suit! Should we bid 4♠?

That bid will force the opponents to make a decision, and it is the correct bid if we trust the Law. Or should we perhaps pass, believing that showing our excellent support will make it easier for them to find a slam? There are a lot of options here. We can bid 3♠ to give partner at least a chance to bid again without revealing the excellent support. Or bid 3♥ to show a better spade raise, pretending to have general strength that we don't have at all. I think a straightforward 4♠ is best.

I don't promise five trumps with that bid, and my hand could just as well be:

♠ AQxx ♥ xxx ♦ x ♣ Jxxxx

Knowledge of the opponents' total trump length is better than knowing your own!

Fighting at the three-level

If we look at all competitive auctions, the most common situation probably is the fight for the contract at the three-level. Is it possible to develop any skills in that department? I am not sure, but let's find out how it works.

The outcome of the battle is often decided by:

- the vulnerability
- which side has the highest suit

When we are non-vulnerable, we often stretch a little extra to put pressure on our opponents. As do our opponents!

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♥
2♣	2♥	3♣	?

To evaluate this auction, we must know the vulnerability. One or two down non-vulnerable, is often an acceptable result, and overbidding in that situation is usually not so bad. What can we conclude from that in the auction above? Not much, if we don't know the vulnerability! If East-West are non-vulnerable, we don't know if East believes that 3♣ will make or if he bids it anyway. If East is vulnerable, he more often believes that he can make the contract. South will often buy the contract if he bids 3♥, as the opponents advancing to the four-level is not as frequent. But will he bid it? If North-South are vulnerable, going down costs more, and the cost of being doubled and failing is higher.

Even one down undoubled, being vulnerable, against a part-score, is at best only a very small win, and not worth taking chances for. The conclusion is: South would very often bid 3♥ when non-vulnerable if he believes East has values for his bid.

In competitive auctions at the two- or three-level a double is often takeout, and some players never double for penalties in these situations. This is an auction where both sides have a fit:

West	North	East	South
2♦	2♥	3♦	1♥ ?

South has no game-invitational bid when the auction is crowded. The solution for most players is to use double here as a game invitation. Double in competitive auctions often shows interest for unbid suits or, if there is only one, that suit as an alternative to partner's suit. But what is double when we already have a fit?

West	North	East	South
2♣	2♥	3♣	1♥ ?

We can now bid 3♦ to invite game, but what does a double mean?

I think there are two alternatives. East-West have a fit, but if the clubs are 4-1 or worse, it can still pay off to double them, especially when they are vulnerable. You can decide to play penalty doubles, at least when you are placed behind the long suit. However, in my opinion, it is better to use double as takeout, in principle, meaning that South wants to bid again and has shortness in the opponents' suit. Partner can then evaluate his hand and pass for penalties with a good holding in the opponents' suit.

We can have a similar situation after we have overcalled:

West	North	East	South
2♣	2♥	1♣ 3♣	1♥ Dble

Whatever you decide is also valid here.

If you decide, as we have, that double shows shortness, a double should show good offensive/defensive ratio, in the latter auction perhaps a hand like this:

♠ AKx ♥ Axxxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ x

It would be much more dangerous to double with:

♠ Kxx ♥ KQJxx ♦ KQxx ♣ x

I don't think my defensive strength is good enough to risk a double, but I have a good hand, and I will go with 3♦ instead. Even in 'defensive auctions', we need to be able to invite a game, and here 3♦ is the only option. If we can bid more than one suit to invite game, e.g. after 1♠-(2♣)-2♠-(3♣) where we have both 3♦ and 3♥ available, we usually bid the longest suit, as we then can evaluate either shortness or honors as help. If you use short-suit trial-bids in uncontested auctions, I don't think you should do so in competition. The odds aren't great that you will have a singleton in a suit other than the opponents' suit.

What about this double?

West	North	East	South
pass	2♥	3♦	1♥ Dble

If we look only at frequencies, it's probably best to use a double here as an invitation to 4♥. But the question is if there is perhaps more to win when South can double for penalties. We have recently changed our treatment here, and use penalty doubles after an overcall but double as invitational when the opponents have a fit. When East is on his own, chances are better for the contract to go down two or three, or perhaps even more. We then sometimes have to guess to bid a game or not, but the overcall may help us to judge.

Are there any principles to follow in this very frequent auction?:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♥	2♠	1♥ ?

Let us look at some possible hands that South can have:

♠ xx ♥ AQJxx ♦ Kxx ♣ Kxx

Non-vulnerable South may bid 3♥ even with a minimum hand without wasted values in spades. With a singleton spade, he can bid 3♥ also when vulnerable.

♠ xx ♥ AQJxx ♦ Jx ♣ KQxx

With a hand like this, it may be tempting to bid 3♣ to show the second suit. The problem with that is that we don't believe that we should bid game; bidding a new suit should be an invitation to game and to bid again over 3♠. What is a double from South here? South has a lot of other bids available.

I would like double to show a strong, balanced hand:

♠ xx ♥ AKJxx ♦ Axx ♣ KQx

3NT is not out of the picture here, and it can even be the only game we can make when the responder has something like:

♠ QJx ♥ Qxx ♦ 10xxx ♣ Axx

This is what our bids mean in this sequence:

1♥-(1♠)-2♥-(2♠)

pass	a boring minimum
Dble	strong balanced not suitable for 2NT
2NT	F1, invitational or better with a stopper (or opener won't pass over 3NT)
3mi	a second suit (a trial-bid), game try <i>or</i> occasionally a slam try
3♥	fighting for the contract
3♠	GF with short spades
4mi	GF with a strong two-suiter
4♥	to play

The bids 3♠ and 4mi establish a forcing pass situation and can even be some interest in a slam.

Interaction with partner

When we think about raising partner's suit, an important question is whether we want to make a bid that is *cooperative* or not. The word cooperative in this context means that we give partner information, as well as a mandate to bid again. When we are in a competitive auction, we often do not know enough about partner's hand to make a unilateral decision.

We want to take the decision together. Before there are misunderstandings, when I say cooperative, it is not the same as invitational. An invitational bid says you *want* partner to bid again while a cooperative bid is more like saying you *allow* partner to bid again. Which bids are cooperative and which are not? Bidding a game is not often cooperative. You may think it is better to make the subsequent auction a guess for everybody.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	bid	4♥

If we bid 4♥ in these auctions, we don't expect our partner to bid again. That's why we usually don't define any special meaning to game bids. If we expect the opponents to bid above 4♥, we may bid the opponent's suit or something else to make our bidding more cooperative.

A little different, though is this situation:

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	3♣*	4♥

* a preemptive raise with less than 8 HCP

We shouldn't use preemptive raises over preemptive bids from the opponents. In this sequence, we believe that 4♥ is a playable contract. Our bid then is more descriptive, and maybe in that sense, can be called somewhat cooperative. If East-West bids again, partner now has some idea of our hand, but it doesn't mean that we have to be interested in more bidding.

When we make a raise to the three-level in partner suit, it is not that clear.

The bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2NT	?

If East's 2NT is a game-forcing raise, there is no point in bidding 3♠ to play there since we know that won't happen. If we do bid 3♠, it is to invite partner to bid on, and thus our raise here *must* be a cooperative bid.

But what if 2NT only is an invitational raise? Say we have this hand:

♠ Kxx ♥ Jx ♦ Kxxxx ♣ Jxx

With this hand, we want to compete with 3♠ if they stop in 3♥. Should we then pass and wait? I think not, because if we do, we take our partner out of the decision if they don't stop. If West bids 4♥ it will be too late. In situations like this, 3♥ shows an 'optimistic' or invitational raise, perhaps with short hearts, while 3♠ indicates a less 'enthusiastic' raise. In this specific auction, I think that 3♥ is inviting to a sacrifice while 3♠ is a cooperative or a courtesy raise. In that way, our partner is still in the picture.

This kind of reasoning works only if both players find it logical, so be sure to discuss situations like this with your partner.

When all seems wrong, our honors are misplaced, our support is really awful, or we don't want our partner to lead the suit or bid again, we, of course, don't have to show support even when we can!

We have opened the bidding, and we see this auction:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dble	2 ♥*	1 ♥ ?

* East's 2 ♥ shows a good raise to 2 ♠.

Our opponents have already found a fit. Showing support puts pressure and raises the tempo. Our side has yet to find a fit, and we may be at a disadvantage here, but the negative double often shows both minors. Perhaps we have a fit in one of the minors? Even if we have a fit, we also have to find the right level. We can still have a game, but probably, most of the time, we only want to compete for the part-score. The problem is, though, how should we differ between competitive and strong hands with support in a minor? We have to cooperate with our partner.

We have decided to activate a method that, up to now, we only have used after a minor suit opening: When partner has bid at the one-level, and both the opponents bid, we use the 2NT rebid as the Good-Bad convention. That means that 2NT shows either (bad) a competitive or (good) a 18+ hand, while three-level bids show extra values, roughly about 14-17 HCP. An example:

♠ x ♥ AJxxx ♦ Jxx ♣ AQ10x

We can now bid 2NT, as we want to compete. Then responder has to bid 3 ♣ as pass/correct when he doesn't have game ambitions. When we bid 2NT it is not clear what we have. We can, exceptionally, have the really strong 18+ hand, but usually, we have a minimum hand with a fit in one of the minors, or perhaps six hearts. If West bids 3 ♠, we may never get to show what we have if partner cannot act again.

We think, however, that it is more important to be able to show good hands.

♠ x ♥ AKxxx ♦ Qxx ♣ AQJx

This hand is stronger, and we can bid 3 ♣ directly to let partner know.

We recently decided only to use the Good-Bad convention here when all four players bid, and use 2NT as natural with a strong balanced or semi-balanced hand with 17-19 HCP when only advancer bids.

For us it is different when we open a *minor* because we, in our system, open with 2♣ when we have balanced 18-19 HCP. Therefore, we don't often need 2NT as natural. However, with the same strength and a five-card major, we prefer to open with our major suit four times out of five.

In this auction, we can bid 2♠, a cue-bid in the opponent's suit, but we have not agreed upon any special meaning for that bid. We can, of course, double 2♥, and we will discuss doubles like this one in the next chapter, Defense against proxy bids. The next auction is comparable:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dble	2♠	1♥ ?

Here East made a natural raise, which often is quite weak. Now we can't make a cue-bid at the two-level, but instead, we can double for takeout. We use the same Good-Bad principles, and hopefully often have better hands!

Both sides have a fit

This chapter feels like a never-ending story, but I want to discuss more hands. The general advice I have given you before is this: If we expect partner to want to bid again, our raises should be cooperative.

When both sides have a trump fit we have to consider the balance of strength. Sometimes we know that we or the opponents are weaker, and other times we don't. There is a difference in the motive for bidding. The weak side can often at best hope to find a good sacrifice, or by tactical bids consume bidding space, suggest a lead or just disturb the bidding.

The somewhat futuristic bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♦*	3♠

* East's 2♦ shows a good raise in hearts (normally about 8-10)

You may actually never see this auction, as not many players use transfer-raises after our overcall, but if you don't mind, pretend you will see it in the future - it is only an example that I want to use for a discussion.

One of the most frequent decisions in competitive bidding is whether to sacrifice with 4♠ or not over a heart game. Is 3♠ a cooperative bid, or perhaps preemptive? Or even invitational? East-West already have found their fit, and so have we. It is not unlikely that West will bid 4♥ over our 3♠. We shouldn't jump to 3♠ if we have a lot of defensive values in hearts and hope to defeat 4♥. One of the reasons is that we have the spade suit.

But wait! South can bid 3♥ instead, if he wants to give partner a mandate to decide? Is it not better if 3♠ told partner to stop bidding, and thus leaving the problem to the opponents? Say we have this hand:

♠ Kxxx ♥ Q109x ♦ x ♣ Kxxx

I don't think it is a good idea to use unilateral bids when showing support, but it is very difficult to prove I am right. I can tell you how I reason, though.

To play 3♠ as purely preemptive would perhaps work if partner's hand were better defined. If we trust the opponents, our partner doesn't have a maximum in HCP's, but he can have extra values in the shape of distribution. I believe it is essential that 3♠, even if it is not directly invitational, shows a hand where partner with a suitable hand still can act over 4♥. In that way, I can both put pressure on the opponents and involve my partner in the decision. We can use bids like 2NT (if we use that to show support) and 3♥ if we want to invite to game but I don't feel I need any stop-bid. With the hand above, I think we should be content with a raise to 2♠.

Let us look again at how the bidding in our example started:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♦*	?

*East's 2♦ shows a good raise in hearts (normally about 8-10)

The reason I use this odd auction in my example is to have all these options to show support for partner's suit:

2♥	a point count raise, a good single raise
2♠	a courtesy raise, I have support, but no real interest
2NT	a game-invitation
3♥	*a mixed raise, or a splinter bid, or invitational if you don't use 2NT
3♠	a cooperative raise

* The exact meaning can depend on your style and methods.

In my world, we can have one of these hands for 3♠:

a)	♠ Kxx	b)	♠ Axxx	c)	♠ Qxxx
	♥ xx		♥ xxx		♥ x
	♦ 10xxx		♦ Kx		♦ Kxxxx
	♣ KQxx		♣ Jxxx		♣ xxx

With these three hands, we don't intend to let the opponents play in 3♥, and the odds that we will be allowed to play 2♠ are very small. *That* is the reason for bidding 3♠ right away, and not waiting until we are forced to do so. And that is what I think a jump raise here should mean. We have all those other bids to use if we have an invitational hand, and if we have three, four, or more trumps is our little secret.

This is a more basic and frequent start, which limits our options:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♥	?

There are some essential differences from the last auction: We will more often be allowed to play in 2♠, and we can no longer bid 2♥ to show a good raise. That makes 2♠ a more attractive bid. With some hands where we are willing to bid 3♠ over 3♥, we first want to see if they bid 3♥ or not. That is a tactical decision, though, and doesn't change the meaning of other bids.

With an invitational hand, we can bid 3♥. A jump raise to 3♠ perhaps shows more playing strength than in the last example but is still cooperative. As our 3♠ makes it impossible to invite game, it puts pressure on the opener. He will have to guess, and if he bids 4♥, our raise allows partner to bid again, either as a sacrifice or when he believes we can make 4♠. As I said before: If we expect partner to want to bid again, our raises should be cooperative.

The difference between 2NT as support-showing and other raises is that 2NT in general is a stronger raise, and tends to be an unbalanced hand. A double of 2♥ is takeout, while a double of the proxy bid 2♦ in the last auction would show the bid suit. East-West are vulnerable and the auction starts with:

West	North	East	South
1♥	Dble	2NT*	?

* 2NT shows support and at least invitational values

This is a different situation, but with the same message: We can't bid 3♠ if we don't want partner to be able to decide what to do over 4♥. Let us look at another situation where we need cooperation:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	pass
2NT*	3♦	pass	?

* 2NT shows support and at least invitational values

The intention with partner's bid is not clear. He could have bid 3♦ for several reasons, either with a good hand, or as lead-directing, or looking for a sacrifice.

We know the opponents won't let us play in 3♦, but East's pass temporarily gives us momentum. Can we make use of that?

Let us assume that I, as South, have support in diamonds. There are many tactical scenarios, depending on my holding and my intentions:

- I have defensive values in hearts and lousy support
- I only want to compete to 4♦ if they stop in 3♥
- I just want to show support and let my partner decide
- I really want to suggest a sacrifice (or a game)
- I don't know what partner has, but I have a fantastic hand, so I bid 5♦.

If I only want to compete to 4♦ if the opponents stop in 3♥, should I then pass until that happens to clarify my intentions? We have discussed this before: The risk of not showing support is that I may never get a chance to show it. As we don't know partner's hand, we should not take him out of the picture.

We can conceal our support if it is of poor quality, combined with defensive strength in the opponent's suit. Sometimes it is better not to wake the bear.

Let us look at the alternative bids and my view about them:

pass	I have my reasons
3♥	I am very interested in diamonds, but I don't know why you bid
3NT	I will tell you in a while
4♦	a courtesy* raise, I have support and no reason to conceal it
5♦	I am sure, let them guess

* The 4♦ bid is similar to the cooperative bids we have looked at before.

I can bid a new suit as some kind of fit-showing bid, but I don't often want to give the opponents vital information, as they are the stronger side.

The following auction is similar but, in some ways very different:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	pass
2NT*	3♦	3♥**	?

* 2NT shows support and at least invitational values

** non-forcing

Now, it's more complicated, as East's 3♥ isn't forcing. If I now bid 4♦, that could mean that I may believe it's our hand or it could mean that I want to invite partner to act over 4♥. How can we then distinguish between these two options? We have 'invented' a solution that we think works:

We don't think we very often need 3NT as a natural bid here. And would we ever be allowed to play it? In situations similar to the one above, where the opponents have the balance of strength and a major suit, and we have a lower suit, we have instead decided to use 3NT to show good support and interest for a sacrifice. That would of course not happen so often if we are red against white!

In the next auction, we already know that the opponents will not stop in 3♥:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	pass
2NT*	3♦	3♠	?

* 2NT shows support and at least invitational values

There is no chance that the opponents will let us play 4♦, and by showing my support, I tell North that it is fine with me if he bids over 4♥. Again, our bid is a kind of courtesy call, saying that I don't know what to do over their game. We can use 3NT for the same purpose that we talked about earlier - good support and interest in a sacrifice. We know we will not be allowed to play it.

A few hands South could have in this situation:

♠ Jxx ♥ 9x ♦ Axx ♣ K10xxx

With this hand I would raise to 4D if not red against white. If partner has a long diamond suit in a distributional hand we should perhaps sacrifice.

♠ Q10x ♥ x ♦ Kxxx ♣ K9xxx

This hand is a much better support hand, and I would bid 3NT. In unfavorable vulnerability, though, perhaps only 4♦, and if we are non-vulnerable and I had an extra diamond, I would consider bidding 5♦.

Preemptive raises

This section of the chapter could have been very short if my advice was just to follow the Law. But it isn't, and the reason is that I am very interested in how preemptive bids in general work.

According to the balance of strength theory, it is then not very important that we describe our hand perfectly since the opponents get the same information.

When we open with a preemptive bid, we hope that the board belongs to the opponents, and thus we want to deprive them of substantial bidding space. In competitive bidding, it is often different because both the responder and the advancer already have some knowledge of their respective partner's hand. That changes a lot regarding our tactics for preemptive bids.

By the way, what do we want to achieve with our preemptive bid? Is it to keep the opponents out? I doubt we should think that way. I believe we instead should hope that our bid can make the opponents bidding too high. That's the reason why I prefer to have something more rather than something less when I preempt.

We can make preemptive bids to make it more difficult for the opponents to find a fit. When both sides have found a fit, the difference is that our preemptive bids have another mission, it is now only the level that matters. They already have a trump suit. One principle though is the same, whether they have a fit or not. We have to know if the bids we are considering are cooperative or not. None vulnerable the bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	Dble	?

Neither side has yet established a fit. Let us examine some support-hands, and talk about which hands are suitable for a preempt:

♠ Kxxx ♥ xxx ♦ Jx ♣ Jxxx

East-West can often make a game. Will 3♠ make it difficult for them to find their right game or even a fit? Perhaps, but I don't think we should bid it. If they bid 4♥ and my partner decides to sacrifice with 4♠, I think that will go down two or even three with my hand as the dummy. In short - if I bid 3♠ with this hand, I don't want partner to bid again; I just want the opponents to guess!

I think that can be poor tactics. As I see it, if my bid always is weak, they have a good chance to do the right thing. If they bid, that would probably be right, and if they don't, I am sure they have their reasons.

The deciding factor here is that East didn't pass! In a live auction, a jump raise of partner's suit should be *cooperative*. For me, cooperative means that we can work together with our partner. Of course, I can not be *sure* about what is the best tactics in the actual hand, but two players should be able to achieve more than just one of the players.

The same auction, but we now have:

♠ Kxxx ♥ Axx ♦ xx ♣ J10xx

I have some more HCP, and they may not have strength for a game, but they can bid and make 4♥ anyway. Or we can make 4♠. I actually prefer this hand for 3♠. I think we must consider that the opponents have not found a fit yet. A raise to 3♠ would then hurt them more than 2NT or 3♦, especially when we have some defensive values in reserve.

In a live auction, opener will more often find a bid over my preemptive raise, and then I want my partner to have a say if he wants to. As my partner can have anything from a balanced 5332 hand with 8 HCP up to 16 HCP with good distribution, the situation is surely complicated:

- we don't want to miss 4♠ when we can make it
- we don't want to sacrifice against 4♥ when 4♥ isn't making
- we may want to sacrifice when 4♥ is making and 4♠ is down 1 or 2

If we are unlucky, the sacrifice costs 500, or we could have beaten 4♥. On the other hand, if we bid 4♠ there is a chance that they bid 5♥ and go down.

This auction is different:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	pass	?

Here, because of East's pass, the tempo is different, and we don't expect West to bid at the four-level if we raise to the three-level. Therefore, we don't expect our partner to raise either, and our preemptive bids can be more ambiguous. There is, as I reason, a difference because of the tempo, which is now slow.

A look at the example hands from before again:

a)	♠ Kxxx	b)	♠ Kxxx
	♥ xxx		♥ Axx
	♦ Jx		♦ xx
	♣ Jxxx		♣ J10xx

Believe it, or not, now I think that hand a), is better for bidding 3♠, as I don't expect partner to want to bid again. And with hand b), it wouldn't be smart to go down in 3♠ if we could buy the contract in 2♠. If you have this hand, you can perhaps make a cue-raise to show a good raise while I in our methods can use our '2 club relay,' to show the good raise.

When you try to explain all this to your partner, be sure to blame me, or perhaps you will not have a partner anymore!

Non-vulnerable you hold:

	♠ A10xx	♥ Qxxx	♦ J10xx	♣ x
West	North	East	South	
1♣	1♥	1♠*	?	

* East's 1♠ is explained as: can be four, but often is a five-card suit.

Should we raise hearts or show support in some other way? Some players use 3♣ as a mini-splinter to show club shortness. Others prefer to bid 2NT or a cue bid to show the fit. What about these alternatives? I have 7 HCP and my partner, on average, 10-12 HCP. It looks like both sides here are about equally strong. West may have spade support or perhaps a long club suit.

What is going to happen next?

Showing shortness in clubs may help our partner to evaluate his hand, but it can give the opponents valuable knowledge in the bidding as well in the play. There are other risks with showing shortness in clubs. Even if partner likes the information, I don't think we should bid 5♥ over 4♠ (if they have a spade fit). Also, West may double 3♣ to show a real suit, and they can find a club fit. Even if that doesn't have to be bad, I have revealed how the suit is distributed.

The above is a live auction, and our raises should be cooperative. I don't want to stop the opponents from finding their spade fit, and therefore perhaps, I will settle for 2♥ even if the hand is worth 3♥.

I don't know for sure what is best, but I would rather have this hand for 3♥:

♠ xxx ♥ KJxx ♦ K10xxx ♣ x

With this hand, I have no problem if partner decides to bid again. For some players, 3♥ would show a hand like:

♠ 10xx ♥ Qxxx ♦ 10xxx ♣ xx

If we agree that a jump raise to 3♥ is a very weak bid, we tell the opponents:

'Dear friends, we have a nine-card fit in hearts, and I have a very weak hand. Use that information as you please!' I don't believe that's a good strategy.

Let us go back to the hand before, but change the bidding:

♠ A10xx ♥ Qxxx ♦ J10xx ♣ x

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	pass	?

When East passes, instead of bidding 1♠, it constitutes a change in the tempo. In my words: we have momentum. Does that make any difference? I think so. If we as South bid 3♥, we don't expect West to bid, and thus our raise to 3♥ doesn't need to be cooperative. It can be more non-descriptive, as it is still a preemptive and not an invitational bid.

This hand is perhaps too good for that. The risk that opener should bid 4♠ now is long gone, and the odds are better that the board belongs to our side. I guess that partner's average strength is now around 12 HCP, and we may even have the highest ranking fit.

If you play 3♣ as a splinter bid, I think that's now an excellent option. I am a little short in HCP, but my honors are nice, I have a singleton, and the support is excellent. If you don't play these splinter bids, I am sure you have some other bids to show the hand.

An attempt to summarize my wandering thoughts:

A preemptive raise to 3♥, when we have momentum is:

- not invitational, but partner, of course, can raise with a super hand
- not cooperative, and thus less defined in HCP and playing strength

We have to adjust our tactics depending on the auction tempo.

- in a live auction, I defined a raise to 3Ma as a cooperative bid
- in the slow auction, I just said 3Ma is preemptive

A slow auction, in my words, is when RHO passes. When that happens, we have more time to look for our best contract, as we don't have to expect as much more competition, compared with when RHO makes a bid that is unlimited. Also, when RHO makes a limited bid, the auction slows down a little, even if not that always will matter.

The situations we have discussed here all have in common that we found a fit before we know that the opponents have one. Our strategy should be to involve the auction tempo in our preemptive raises, as it influences many situations where both sides can compete for the contract. The key is information. If we expect the next hand to bid, we should consider that the bidding still is live, and partner needs information about our hand.

My bit of advice here: Use the advantage you have when you have found a fit before the opponents - but don't forget you have a partner!

The forcing pass

When the bidding is at a high level, our judgment is tested to the extreme. If we make mistakes at high levels, they often will be costly. The 'only' problem is that we can never master how to handle such situations perfectly, but we can perhaps improve.

As you know by now, I think having partnership agreements is generally a good thing. The difficult part, when it comes to high-level bidding, is to define rules for them. There are just so many situations, and they are not alike. In some competitive situations, though, we can create a cooperative status. I think you already know about what we call a *forcing pass*. If we can establish that status, we open channels for a better dialogue with partner if the opponents sacrifice. We then both know that we *have to bid again or double*.

So what happens when we are in those situations? What does it mean? The forcing pass affects the first of us to bid after the opponents sacrifice. A pass then says we are not entirely opposed to bidding more. If we double instead, that says we are more interested in defensive play. If we pass, our partner must either double or bid. He can not pass. How should you then know what to do if your pass is forcing? One method is to count our HCP's outside the opponent's suit.

When we have the strength we have already promised in honors in the other suits, it may be wrong to warn partner with a double just because we have a honor in their suit. The length in the opponents' suit can, of course, also be vital.

What do the experts agree on? I think perhaps only that pass is forcing when:

- we have made a game-forcing bid
- the opponents bid below the level we have forced to

In my partnership, this is an area where we have some different opinions. I like to have many rules for when a pass is forcing or not at the game level or higher. I think that improves the chances of making the right decision as a pair on the actual board. The downside: it is very hard to find exact definitions. My partner prefers fewer rules, and he is more comfortable with making the decisions at the table. When you and your partner do not agree, you should take the less complicated road. Better to agree upon less than to fight about more.

Let us start with the most frequent situation of them all, bidding 4♠ over 4♥.

None vulnerable, we opened 1♥, and everybody seems to have a good hand.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2NT*	3♥*	?

* North's 2NT shows support, and so does 3♥ from East.

In our system, North's 2NT says we won't let the opponents play undoubled, but for this discussion here, I assume that we use standard methods. Both sides have a fit and are preparing for more action. We don't know where this will end. In fact, all players may want to bid again! Since our opponents have the spade suit, they are extremely likely to bid 4♠ over our 4♥. We must already think about what we want to do then.

The questions you need to discuss and answer with your partner is this:

- which bids establish a forcing pass in these situations
- does the vulnerability matter for your rules
- how about 3NT or a bid in a new suit, is that natural or a cue-bid

Some very basic examples of high-level forcing situations:

West	North	East	South
		pass	1♠
3♣	4♣	5♣	?

North-South vulnerable, and as South, we have the following hand:

♠ AQJxx ♥ Kxx ♦ Kxx ♣ xx

Let's assume the 4♣ bid from partner is game-forcing with a club control. With this hand, South hasn't got any extra values, but a fairly good minimum hand. Partner is unlimited, so we should pass and leave the final decision to him.

Compare with this assortment:

♠ AQJxx ♥ Qxx ♦ 10xx ♣ Kx

This is a minimum hand, but one of the honors in the opponents' suit. We should double. That doesn't mean partner must pass. We are just giving him a hint about how our hand looks in the actual context.

North-South is vulnerable, and East's 3♦ is said to be a weak preempt.

West	North	East	South
pass	1♥	3♦	3♥
4♦	4♥	5♦	?

Is this auction pass from South is forcing by logic, no matter if you have rules or not. East-West are clearly sacrificing. We have to trust that our partner can draw the same conclusion, and we must decide if we want to encourage partner to bid again or not. What should we look for? For sure, we can't know if we make a contract at the five-level by only looking at our own hand.

The only thing we can do is to tell our partner what our hand looks like with the information we have. We know the opponents have diamonds, that East has many of them, perhaps with good distribution. We know our partner thought he had enough to bid game. He could have more or perhaps he already has stretched a bit.

Say we have:

♠ Axx ♥ J10xx ♦ x ♣ KJ9xx

This is a good hand in these circumstances. We have a singleton in diamonds, nice black honors, a possible source of tricks in clubs, and if we must take a trump finesse, it will often work. My first impulse is to bid 5♥, but as partner may have stretched to bid game, I would probably rather pass.

♠ Qxx ♥ A10xx ♦ xx ♣ K9xx

This hand is not at all that good. In fact, none of the above arguments for a pass fits in. We should definitely double.

When one of us is limited in strength, it is another story:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	pass	2♦
Dble	2♥	3♦	4♥
pass	pass	5♦	?

As South, our hand is:

♠ Axx ♥ KQ10xx ♦ xx ♣ Jxx

North completed the transfer over the double, which should mean that he has three hearts (as we play) but not a super fit. South, therefore, bid the heart game. We neither have extra values nor a singleton in diamonds. We have no wasted values in diamonds, but if we pass, we ask partner to bid five with a suitable hand. Therefore, we should double.

There are two varieties of forcing passes. The one we talked about here is at high-level (game or slam), but we can have a forcing pass at lower levels.

Let us take a look at the forcing pass at lower levels.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	Dble	RD

The redouble shows a strong hand, and we should not let the opponents play anything undoubled below 3♥. We already have a trump suit, and there is no point in using takeout doubles after this redouble, but what about this?

West	North	East	South
1NT	Dble	2♣	?

Our partner doubled 1NT, and East ran to 2♣. Is pass forcing? What is double? I suppose most players have rules for this. If you don't, I can give you ours. There is no guarantee that North-South has the majority of the strength here. Because of that, it can backfire to play a forcing pass. I suggest double show values, to establish that we are the stronger side.

The rule we use is that the *third* double is always a penalty double. There are exceptions though: If the same hand doubles three times is one, and when we double a raise it would be takeout even if it is our third double. We also do not count the first double of a Multi opening bid. And to complicate things a little more, when we redouble at the one-level, that counts as a double!!

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Dble	RD

This is different because we, after the redouble, know we have the balance of strength. I think most players treat this as a forcing situation, and doubles are for penalties, we differ, as we use takeout doubles after a low level redouble, but penalty doubles when we redouble from 2Ma and up. The main reason is that we want to have simple rules. One last example:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
2♣	pass	pass	Dble
pass	pass	2♦	?

Partner made a penalty pass and East decided to try 2♦. Is this a forcing pass situation? I don't think so, because our partner can have a weak hand with a lot of clubs. When we have made a penalty pass, double would be for penalties if the opponents run to another suit.

Four notrumps in competition

A bid that we often use in high-level competition is 4NT. There is some risk for misunderstandings when you use it, and at this level, they can be costly. One solution is to limit the possible interpretations and use it fewer times. That is not our way, though! A few examples of how we use 4NT in competition.

The deal is from a BBO session with the Swedish Senior Team:

All vulnerable

♠ x
♥ AJxxx
♦ A109x
♣ K10x

♠ K10xxxx
♥ KQxx
♦ xx
♣ x

♠ AQ9xx
♥ 10
♦ KQxxx
♣ J9

♠ J
♥ xxx
♦ Jx
♣ AQxxxxx

West	Nilsland North	East	Fallenius South
	1♥	2♥*	3♣**
4♠	4NT	pass	5♣
all pass			

* Michael's cue-bid, showing spades and another suit

** Natural but not forcing

My 4NT here shows a good raise to 5♣, and usually more slam interest than a direct game bid. Admittedly, I could (perhaps should) have had a much better hand for it, but I took an optimistic view. I guess I was so happy to get a hand for this agreement that I overbid a little! After all, partner could have:

♠ xx(x) ♥ x ♦ Kx(x) ♣ AJxxxxx

There is another point. At this level, we don't know who is making what.

With 2 Aces, I did not think we should bid 6♣ as a sacrifice against 5♠. I don't know if 4NT was indicating that too, but I hoped so.

Unfortunately, the contract went one down, doubled, while our team-mates competed to 5♠, down one at the other table. The point though is that instead of using 4NT as Blackwood, there are other ways to use 4NT. We have agreed that showing a good raise of partner's minor is a meaningful interpretation. However, when our suit is clubs, we have spiced it up a little!

Look at this auction:

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♥	3 ♣	4 ♥	4NT

The above auction is another example from a while ago, where I think 4NT should have the same meaning. You can argue that South may want to ask for Aces, but when clubs are trumps, I think an invitational 4NT works better to find a small slam, and to avoid playing a slam when two aces are missing. However, we have decided to use 4NT as 'optional' Blackwood when clubs are trumps. The bid means the same, but if partner accepts the slam invitation, all higher bids than 5 ♣ show Aces in this way:

5 ♦	0 or 3
5 ♥	2 without the trump queen
5 ♠	2 with the queen
5NT	1 or 4 without the queen
6 ♣	1 or 4 with the queen

Actually, we are so pleased with this invention that we have decided always to use these responses to Blackwood when clubs are trumps!

Another widespread use of the 4NT-bid is to offer a choice of suits when we have a two- or three-suited hand. An interesting idea about the use of 4NT was brought to my attention by Michael Kamil, who says it was an idea from his spouse Gabrielle Sherman.

West	North	East	South
			1 ♦
4 ♠	pass	pass	4NT

The standard treatment here is to bid 5 ♣ instead of 4NT with five-five or better in the minors while 4NT shows four clubs, or if we remove 5 ♣ to 5 ♦, four hearts. Gabrielle pointed out that it is better if 4NT shows five-five in minors *or* four cards in hearts while 5 ♣ then shows only four clubs. Using that, we more often get a club preference from partner, and thus more often can find the heart fit. Think about it, and you will see that she is right!

The same idea can also work in similar situations:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dble	4 ♠	1 ♦ 4NT

Now, 4NT either shows five-five in the minors, or is a slam try in hearts.

We can as well continue the discussion about when 4NT is asking for Aces or not. We have some rules that work some of the time in competitive bidding. Seriously we can not expect anything to work all of the time at this level.

I will give you the rules first, so that we can discuss them. We play that 4NT is Blackwood (RKCB) when:

- our partner has promised a long *and* good suit
- we have a fit, or we *indirectly* very often have a fit

What about this auction. Is 4NT Roman KeyCard Blackwood or not?

West	North	East	South
3 ♥	4 ♠	2 ♥ pass	Dble 4NT

South can make a takeout double of the weak two-bid on virtually any strong hand. The 4NT rebid then can maybe be natural with a strong, balanced hand. Or perhaps a very strong hand and =2245 distribution. How do we know?

To find the solution, we have to go across the table. What is 4 ♠? I think North has to anticipate the problem here. He shouldn't jump to 4 ♠ with a four-card suit in spades. If he has that, he can start with a responsive double. If we trust our partner to reason the same way, 4 ♠ here shows at least five spades, and therefore, I think 4NT should be Blackwood with spades as trumps.

West	North	East	South
4 ♥	4 ♠	2 ♥ pass	Dble 4NT

This is an even worse decision. I don't even know what I think is the best! Perhaps you should discuss that with your partner, as I certainly will.

In the next bidding, our partner has promised a long suit.

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	4 ♥	4 ♠	4NT

North has promised a long, hopefully not too bad suit. Is 4NT looking for the best minor, or is it Blackwood? Or is it perhaps a combination, meaning that South can invite slam in hearts by bidding 5 ♥ after a preference to a minor? We also have to consider that the opponents have not made a promise to pass the rest of the auction. West may bid 5 ♠ to confuse our decision even more.

Perhaps the vulnerability is a factor. When we are vulnerable, partner should have a good suit, and 4NT should be asking for Aces. What about if we are white against red? This is not an easy decision. We have agreed that we can bid a new suit as natural after partner's 4Ma, when he is white against red, but I think we have to give up on showing both minors here, and use 4NT as Blackwood.

As I said before, in these high-level situations, our rules only work some of the time. It is impossible to prepare for all the competitive situations that arise. We have to guess from time to time.

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	4NT

This is a little different, and now it is evident, as I see it, that 4NT is asking for Aces. There is only one unbid minor.

We don't use the Voidwood (or Exclusion Blackwood) convention because we believe it is better to use our judgment over bids that show a void. However, there are some situations where we could, as we don't use these bids for anything else.

Two examples:

a)	West	North	East	South
		1 ♥	2 ♠	4 ♠
b)	West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	2 ♣	5 ♣

Responder jumps directly above our game level.

To end this section, I want to tell you when we use the old fashion 4 Aces Blackwood. If we bid 4NT directly over partner's opening 1Ma, 2Ma or a preempt at the three-level, we don't want partner to count the King in his suit as an Ace.

Over a three-level preempt we use 4♣ (4♦ over 3♣) as mini-Blackwood. The responses are in steps:

1 step	no ace
2 steps	1 Ace
3 steps	1 Ace+trump Queen
4 steps	2 Aces
5 steps	2 Aces+trump Queen

Sometimes the opponents make it difficult for you to use Blackwood;

West	North	East	South
			1♠
2♥	2NT	5♥	?

When that happens we use 5NT as Blackwood. We can also do that in some other unusual sequences, when we no longer can ask for Aces with 4NT.

Other details to discuss is how you do when opponents double your Blackwood or your cue-bids. Say we have this auction:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♥	pass	3♥
pass	4♣	Dble	?

In standard methods a redouble from both hand short a first round control in clubs, Ace or void. The problem here can be to find out that we have the Queen in opener's hand when the cue-bidder has the King. You can read about how we do in the Conventions and partnership agreements chapter.

When RHO doubles a cue-bid from our partner, this is our agreements:
Pass asks partner to redouble with the ace, or else continue the slam bidding if he has a singleton or KQ in the suit. With only the King he should sign-off.

Redouble shows we have at least the Queen in the suit.

If we sign-off, we show just bad values, and if we have control of the situation, we can cue-bid or bid Blackwood ourselves.

DEFENSE AGAINST PROXY BIDS

I have chosen to call bids that have a message but don't have anything to do with the actual denomination, *proxy bids*. These bids come in many shapes. Transfer bids, switched bids, support-showing bids, and many more. To use artificial bids as a substitute (proxy) for natural bids is nothing new in bridge. Both Stayman and transfer responses over 1NT opening are standard since long ago. As is the use of 2NT over 1Ma to show support, and so on.

There are a lot of different methods, and we sometimes don't get a chance to prepare for the opponents' artificial bids. Some general rules may help.

Say we play against a pair that use a 2+ club and transfer responses:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣*	pass	1 ♠*	?

* East's 1 ♠ shows just some points and 'no 4-card major'.

I think most players have not given this much thought, and maybe just double with spades. What is 2 ♣, and what to do with a good hand without a spade suit?

In this chapter, I will make some suggestions about how to defend against some proxy bids that often occur.

When our opponents use this kind of bid, we can not always pass and sit back to wait for the defensive play. Just because a bid has a special meaning doesn't guarantee that the board belongs to the opponents.

The trend is moving towards using proxy bids with weaker hands. One example is that many pairs now use transfer responses after a club opening and sometimes they do so on very weak hands. If we are going to compete when both opponents already have bid, and the response is a proxy bid, the first, and probably most important question is: What does a double mean? Should it show the bid suit or general values? To start with, how should we define the double in this common situation?

West	North	East	South
1NT	pass	2 ♦/♥	Dble

These transfer sequences occur at every tournament. When the 1NT opening is strong, the standard defense is to use the double as lead-directing. The reason for that is that our chances of having game are remote when the notrump opening is strong.

A similar situation:

West	North	East	South
1NT	pass	2♣	Dble

Double shows clubs. However, when the notrump opening is weak, showing 12-14, or even 10-12 HCP, we ought to have another approach as long as the Stayman bid doesn't promise invitational values. The first thing is to know what the opponents are doing.

We should ask for the meaning of all alerted bids if we don't know the meaning for sure. Secondly, we ought to have either defensive agreements or some general principles of what to do against these bids. If we agree on what double is, I think we can survive.

Whether to ask for the meaning of an alert or not can be discussed. Some say, you should only ask if you intend to bid, as we may convey information to partner when you ask. I don't agree with that. If you only ask when you perhaps intend to bid, depending on the explanation, and you then pass this is also information to your partner. I think it is better to ask when you don't know what the bid means.

My partner and I have rules that are fairly easy to remember if you understand the logic behind them.

Double of proxy bids

If you don't have specific agreements in the situation that arises, I suggest that you go by the principles below. The situation is: Our LHO opened, and RHO has made a proxy response.

These are our basic rules for when double shows the bid suit:

- when we are limited in strength, like when we are a passed hand, our double of proxy suit bids shows the bid suit
- if the opening bid is strong, like 15+ or more, the simple rule is that double shows the bid suit
- if the opponents are in an at least invitational sequence, double of a proxy bid shows the bid suit
- when partner has doubled or overcalled, double shows the bid suit

When none of the above rules apply, a double is for takeout. It shows about opening strength and a hand where you have no obvious natural alternative bid. As mentioned, it's crucial to understand the opponents' bids. An example:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	pass	2 ♣*	Dble

* At least invitational values, but nothing about clubs. Double shows clubs.

There are two more variations of interest:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	pass	3/4 ♣*	?

* A 'splinter-bid' showing spade support

- Double of a splinter-bid can be a suggestion to sacrifice, but perhaps not if the vulnerability is wrong for that.

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	pass	2NT*	?

* Showing heart support

- Double of a proxy no trump bid is a takeout double, promising the unbid major(s). In this case, that agreement also applies if South is a passed hand.

Now we have some basic rules, so let us move on and try to use them.

Defense against transfer responses

A popular method in modern bridge is the use of transfer responses over 1 ♣, and new situations then emerge for the other side. If you play against that method quite often, it doesn't hurt to make some agreements.

Let us look at how it works if we use the general rules above.

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	pass	1 ♠*	?

*Showing 'no major'

After a normal opening bid and response by the opponents, we can not exclude game possibilities for our side. People open with less than 12 HCP and respond with less than 6 HCP. We can't trust the other guys anymore. If we use double as spades, we have no way to bid nice hands without a spade suit. That is why double is a takeout double showing values, and not spades. The rules also say: If we are a

passed hand, double shows a spade suit.

There is also a cue bid in the opening suit available, at least if the opening bid is natural. The cuebid, 2♣ here, is best used to show both majors. An option that we have agreed in our partnership is to use our defense against 1NT in this specific situation. We also do that after a natural 1mi-1NT. Another option that many players prefer is to play 2♣ as natural if 1♣ can be a short suit, but when 1♠ denies majors I don't think that is better.

What about when responder makes a transfer to a major?.

West	North	East	South
1♣	pass	1♦*	?

* Showing 4+ hearts

It is possible to play that a double shows diamonds and use 1♥ as some kind of takeout double. I think many players do so, but I prefer to use the agreements presented above. In that way, we have a firm ground. We use the double for takeout. Instead, we use the 1♥ cue-bid to show four spades with a longer minor with about 11-16 HCP in this specific case. The minor could also be clubs if the opening bid doesn't promise a real suit. The following would be perfect:

♠ KQxx ♥ x ♦ AKxxxx ♣ xx

Next hand is not that nice:

♠ KQxx ♥ x ♦ Kxxxx ♣ Axx

With the second hand, I prefer to double because of the weaker diamonds and three cards in clubs. Just as if the opponents have bid naturally 1♣-1♥, you also could agree on what the bids 2♣, 2♥, 2NT, and 3♣ mean. I think most experts play 2♥ as natural and 2NT as a two-suiter, and I leave this subject for now.

West	North	East	South
1♣	pass	1♥*	?

* Showing 4+ spades

Because we use double as takeout, we have to bid 2♥ to show heart suit. Therefore, we use 1♠ to show five hearts, and 2♥ then promises a six-card suit. If the opponents have a spade fit, that can be important. With only four hearts, we can often double 1♥ as takeout of spades.

In all auctions above, our partner did not participate in the bidding. What if he has taken part? After our partner's overcall, the opponents can use proxy bids:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♥	1 ♠*	?

* Showing 'no major'

Our rules say: When partner has participated in the bidding, double shows the bid suit. We can double to show spades, and use a cue-bid in clubs as forcing.

That means, when partner has made a takeout double, the same rule applies.

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	Dble	2 ♣/♦*	Dble

* Transfer (2 ♣ shows diamonds, and 2 ♦ shows a good raise to 2 ♥)

Also here, a double of the proxy bid shows the bid suit. As simple as that.

There are certainly other sequences you can come across in practical play, but I hope these examples give you an idea of how to defend. As I said, as long as you know what a double means, you can at least avoid misunderstandings.

Opener's double of proxy bids

I believe this is an area of competitive bidding where very few pairs have good agreements or any agreements at all. Let us see if we can change that! What do you think about the meaning of South's double in this situation?

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	pass	2 ♣	1 ♣ Dble

South's opening bid 1 ♣ for most players promises 2-3 cards only, but even so, we can be rather sure that the opponents play 2 ♣ as a cue-bid, showing support or strength (or perhaps a transfer to diamonds). In the auction above, our partner probably has a weak hand. It's likely that East-West has the balance of strength, and that West will play the contract. Our double should confirm a real suit and ask for a lead in the suit, or perhaps allow partner to compete in clubs when he has support.

It is practically impossible to have understandings in all situations where the opponents use proxy bids. It would be even harder if your agreements depend on the different meanings of 2♣ in this example. If you don't have a specific agreement, you have to hope that you and your partner think alike. I explain how I think, and hopefully that's logical to you and your partner.

There is a small, but essential, difference in the next bidding sequence:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♠	Dble	2♣	Dble

The situation is, in fact, entirely different. Our partner has made a negative double, showing some strength and (for the majority of players) four hearts.

In this auction, we are still competing for the contract, and we should use the double in that sense. But with what meaning?

If you play support doubles to show three-card support, I assume this is such a double if you have no other agreement. I think you should reconsider that. When the opponents bid the opening suit, and opener has not promised a real suit, I believe it is more important to use double to show a good club suit.

It could be this hand:

♠ xx ♥ Qx ♦ Kxx ♣ AQ9xxx

I don't have the strength to bid 3♣, but I want to give my partner an option to show support in further competition. When I have support for hearts, I can bid 2♥ with three or four hearts, and raise to 3♥ with a nice unbalanced minimum hand with four-card support. If I am stronger, I can make a cue-bid in spades, or use some conventional raise if that's available in the system.

Compare with this auction:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♦	1♠	2♦	Dble

Now there is no reason not to use support doubles if you play that.

Another proxy bid from the opponents could be this:

West	North	East	South
			1 ♣
1 ♠	Dble	2 ♥*	Dble

* Transfer-raise in spades

After the negative double, promising four hearts, East bid our partner's suit as a transfer-raise. In this auction, double should show heart support. It can be three or four hearts since there is no other bid when I have support in a minimum hand. My partner cannot expect four-card support here, as I will double with:

♠ xx ♥ KJx ♦ Kxx ♣ AJ9xx

Pass doesn't deny three hearts, though. When I have the following hand, I will pass because my major suits holdings are now less good.

♠ Qx ♥ Jxx ♦ KJx ♣ AJ9xx

When we already have shown a real suit with the opening bid, the need for a lead-directing double has diminished, as in the next auction:

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
1 ♠	pass	2 ♥	Dble

I have already opened with 1 ♥, and without better options partner will lead my suit. Partner's pass often is a weakish hand, but I still suggest that the double here should show a good hand and suggest that we still want to compete for the part-score. The vulnerability may matter, but a possible hand can be:

♠ x ♥ AK10xxx ♦ KQx ♣ Axx

If partner already has bid something the situation can be:

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
1 ♠	Dble	2 ♥	Dble

Also, when partner has indicated strength, our double should be constructive, denoting a good heart suit and interest for more bidding. Our hand can perhaps now be somewhat weaker than in the example above.

What about this double?

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♥	3 ♥	1 ♥ Dble

This one is clear cut, I think. Double is an invitation to 4♥. Of course, we can not know if the opponents then will bid 4♠, but the double should be exactly invitational and not suggest any action if the opponents bid game.

If we as South have a stronger hand and values to bid 4♥, we have a choice. We can simply bid the game and see what happens, but if we, as often is this case, expect the opponents to bid on to 4♠, we have other options.

If we bid four in a minor, that bid shows a second suit and says that we want to involve our partner in the decision what to do over 4♠. If we bid 3♠, we tell partner that we are not going to let the opponents play 4♠ undoubled, and we then establish a forcing-pass situation.

Defending against proxy opening bids

One example of such an opening is the 'Multi 2♦', but I am sure you have come across others like 2NT, showing both minors and some other bid that shows both majors. I will deal with some defenses in the 'Conventions and partnership agreements' chapter, and just give you a few examples here.

As a piece of general advice, there are two types of proxy bids to defend against

- bids with no connection at all to the bid suit (like a transfer preempt)
- bids that show something in the suit (like 2♥, both majors)

In the first case, double is something of a free bid. If you double 2♦ as Multi, it is possible but rare that the opponents are going to play that contract. If responder passes, you should ask what the pass means. Anyway, a double of this type of bid is less risky, and can in our methods be weaker than if the opening bid also contains the bid suit.

The standard defense to Multi is to double with balanced hands or when you have 17 HCP or more. If you are short in a major, you are advised to pass and get in later, presumably with a takeout double of the short suit. I see risks with that approach and recommend that you double even if you have a short major. The continued bidding will still reveal which suit opener has and you can't that easily be preempted out of the bidding,

How do you defend against this opening?

West	North	East	South
		2NT*	?

* Preemptive with both minors

A double of 2NT shows at least opening strength. We don't expect them to play in 2NT, and even if they could, they usually don't dare! When you have nine or ten cards in the majors, the odds are good for finding a fit but remember: you shouldn't overcall on weak hands after a weak bid. Our defense here is that 3♦ shows 5-5 in the majors while 3♣ shows 5-4 or perhaps 6-4. After 3♣, partner can then bid 3♦ to clarify.

If we bid 4mi it is leaping Michael's, while 3N probably is 'natural', as we haven't agreed anything else.

Another situation:

West	North	East	South
		3NT*	?

* Shows a solid minor and not much more

Our defense here is similar to what we play against 2NT above, but one level higher. Double is ambiguous, we have to double with many hands.

Bidding 4♦ shows 5-5 in the majors while 4♣ shows 5-4 or perhaps 6-4. After 4♣, partner can then bid 4♦ to clarify. To overcall 4Ma is, of course, natural while 4NT shows a strong two-suiter and 5mi is natural.

THE USEFUL 2NT

We have a lot of ideas about how to best use 2NT. Before I tell you about them, let us look at some ordinary problems in competitive bidding. In competition, we rarely bid 2NT to play it. Even when 2NT is a natural bid, we hope that our partner will bid again. That is because it is seldom right to play in exactly 2NT.

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♣	pass	2NT

South's 2NT here is for most players completely natural and not forcing, but I think you agree that it isn't our first choice to play there. When we bid 2NT in the auction above, we hope to get to 3NT, or else we hope that the overcaller retreats to his suit. Sometimes we have to accept to play in 2NT. If North has six clubs, he can have one of these hands:

♠ Jx ♥ Qxx ♦ xx ♣ AKJxxx

This hand is not strong, but with a good six-card suit, North will raise to 3NT.

♠ Jx ♥ Qxx ♦ Kx ♣ AJxxxx

The suit needs help, and North should bid 3♣.

I guess that you are familiar with Lebensohl and Scrambling and perhaps use them regularly without any in-depth discussions. These are the simple basics that most players use:

- we use Scrambling when we both know that we don't have a game
- we use Lebensohl when a game still is possible

When I say; *we both know*, how do we know? That is a question for each pair to discuss since the answer depends on your experience as bridge players.

To avoid a mix-up, we have to be careful and have some rules that define our 2NT bids. There are lots of situations where we can go wrong if we don't!

Let me introduce two basic rules in our methods:

- 2NT is always F1 as a response to a double of 2Ma
- we don't use any kind of Lebensohl when we have bid a suit

With these rules, we can avoid some misunderstandings.

The basic rules

I think we should decide that 2NT is always forcing as a response to a takeout double. There are numerous sequences where we want to use 2NT for some clever meaning. Clear rules make things a lot easier. There are very good reasons to decide not to use Lebensohl when our side has bid a natural suit.

Sometimes, 2NT doesn't fit as either Lebensohl or Scrambling:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	2NT

We passed over 2 ♠, but our partner reopens the bidding with a double. He often has a fit for both minors, but not so often 4-4 as he then must have =0544.

What is this 2NT? When *both minors* are the only two unbid suits, it seems best that 2NT offers a choice between the minors.

The next case is similar but with a significant difference!

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	2 ♣	2 ♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	2NT

Again we passed over 2 ♠, and often have a weak hand if we don't have a lot of values in spades. The important difference is: We now can have a fit in hearts.

North can have four hearts, but he can have less than four for his double. Perhaps something like a =1336 or =1345 distribution. Our idea is to, in some cases (when the opponent bids spades) use the 2NT bid to show hearts.

Another situation, and here we have opened the bidding:

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	2 ♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	2NT

We can use the same idea here. The bidding is always a little crowded when the opponents have the spade suit, and using both 2NT and 3 ♥ to show hearts will help us to decide where we are going. Both these auctions have in common that the partner to the doubler can have more than four hearts

Hence I call this treatment *the four-five hearts 2NT*. I will tell you more about this convention later in this chapter.

Two kinds of Lebensohl

We often use 2NT as Scrambling to find the best part-score. Scrambling is a vital feature to avoid playing in a bad contract on 4-3, or even in worst case 4-2 when we have a better contract.

The most crucial use of 2NT in a team game is, however, to find a game, and to find the best game. We often are up against a weak two-bid, or perhaps a Multi opening. We can perhaps then play either a part-score, 4Ma, or 3NT. My partner and I have decided that we need to improve how we use 2NT in many situations.

If we are going to play 3NT, we want the hand with the long suit to lead. That is generally better for us. Our stopper in the suit will often work better then, as we already discussed in the chapter 'Extended hand evaluation.'

Therefore, we don't use Lebensohl in a traditional way.

We use two separate variations: Lebensohl and *Reversed* Lebensohl. This is why: Our methods should be directed to find the right game, and we must accept that now and then we will play a bad part-score. Let's check the auctions again:

Compare these two bidding sequences:

a)	West	North	East	South
			2♠	pass
	pass	Dble	pass	2NT

South's 2NT is *normal* Lebensohl when *RHO has the long suit*. When South uses the 2NT bid, he is often limited. 2NT asks partner to bid 3♣, most of the time to play a part-score at the three-level. We have agreed that we only use this Lebensohl when we *have* to bid.

If South, instead of 2NT, bids a suit at the three-level, he has values for an invitation to game. If partner accepts the invitation, we can then look for the best game, and either hand can still be the declarer in 3NT.

b)	West	North	East	South
	2♠	Dble	pass	2NT

Now South's 2NT is *Reversed* Lebensohl, because now *LHO has the long suit*. The simple explanation of the 2NT bid is that it is 'natural but forcing for one round.' If South instead is weak, he has to make a natural bid at the three-level.

I think you now understand why I call it *reversed*.

Our rules and how we prioritize them

These rules look scary, perhaps even if you have a keen interest in the secrets of bidding theory. But don't give up yet - If you think about them while reading my text, you will find that they are rather logical, and thus easy to remember.

Basic rules

- 2NT is always F1 as a response to a double of 2Ma
- we don't use any kind of Lebensohl when we have bid a suit

Specific rules

Scrambling (2+ places to play)

- 1# 2NT is Scrambling when a game is out of the picture
- 2# 2NT is Scrambling when the two minors are the only unbid suits

Lebensohl (we may have a game)

- 3# 2NT is Lebensohl when we can't pass, and RHO has 5+ in the suit

Reversed Lebensohl (we may have a game)

- 4# 2NT is Reversed Lebensohl when LHO has 5+ in the suit
- 5# we can use Reversed Lebensohl when pass is an option

When rules #1-5 don't fit (special situations)

- 6# 2NT shows hearts in some situations when our opponents have spades
- 7# 2NT is just waiting or natural when we have no other agreement

We start from the top of the list and move downwards. The higher on the list, the higher is the priority when more than one item can be applied to the situation.

When you discuss the use of 2NT with your partner, it can be a good idea to make your own list and decide the priority order for your principles.

A summary of the conventions that are discussed in this chapter:

- Scrambling 2NT
- Lebensohl
- Reversed Lebensohl
- The four-five hearts 2NT
- The four hearts 2NT
- The Good-Bad 2NT

Now you know what is waiting for you!

Scrambling 2NT

When both players know that game is out of the picture, it makes no sense to use the Lebensohl convention. If then 2NT doesn't look like a natural bid, we can use 2NT as Scrambling with the meaning: I have more than one suit and want to find a fit in one of them.

In the following auction, we can use the Scrambling 2NT:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	pass	pass
2♠	Dble	pass	?

The double often shows a maximum for 1NT with a doubleton spade and at least three cards in the other suits, so usually a hand with the distribution 4432. Responder will bid his suit if he has only one suit, and a Scrambling 2NT with two or more suits. A similar situation, but now North has passed over 2♠:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	pass	pass
2♠	pass	pass	?

As we passed over 1NT, we don't want to invite 3NT now. We can bid 2NT as Scrambling to show a hand with two (or three) suits. If we double instead, that would be for takeout, but give opener a chance to pass with four good spades.

A reason to prefer 2NT, instead of double with three suits can be a lack of defensive values. The difference between a Scrambling 2NT and a takeout double is, that after 2NT, partner assumes the two lowest suits while a double allows partner to bid his longest suit right away.

If responder doubles, also opener can use 2NT as Scrambling. If we have a 4-4-fit, we will eventually find it.

As already discussed, we can use Scrambling when we already have bid a suit and both minors are unbid.

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♠	2♥
pass	pass	2♠	Dble
pass	2NT		

I would interpret 2NT in this auction as an equal length in the minors. South may very well have four cards in one minor and three in the other, and then we will find the 4-4 fit.

Lebensohl

To clarify again, when I say just Lebensohl, I refer to *normal* Lebensohl. We use Lebensohl when partner doubles, and we know that a game for our side is still possible. As mentioned, we only used it when RHO, seen from the 2NT bidder's perspective, has the length in the suit. That is, we are placed *behind* the suit.

Here are some typical Lebensohl situations for us:

a)	West	North	East	South
			1♠	pass
	2♠	Dble	pass	?
b)	West	North	East	South
			2♠	pass
	pass	Dble	pass	?

We use the standard treatment where South's response to the double is:

- 2NT shows a hand where we only want to sign off at the 3-level
- 3-level bids are invitational

If we start with 2NT and then bid cue-bid (or a bid above the opponents' suit), we use these bids as game-forcing in different ways, but I think you already know that if you use Lebensohl. We have no new ideas about that. The Lebensohl 2NT asks partner to bid 3♣, and we then can pass or bid our suit. If partner is strong (17+), he usually bids something else over 2NT.

Let us complicate things, What about this?

West	North	East	South
		2♦*	pass
2♥**	Dble	pass	?

* Multi (weak two-bid in a major)

** pass/correct

East's pass over the double shows hearts, which means that 2NT from South will be Lebensohl. RHO has the suit.

However, should East, instead of pass, bid 2♠, we can pass with a weak hand, and that means we no longer use 2NT as Lebensohl. Nor is 2NT now Reversed Lebensohl as the spade length is with RHO. As I told you, this is complicated, but not if you know the rules.

Reversed Lebensohl

Years ago, we wouldn't consider playing 3NT as North-South after this start:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dble	2 ♠	?

Nowadays, opening bids are more aggressive, and 2 ♠ can be weak too. The opponents may have as little as 14-15 HCP in this bidding.

As South here, we may want to bid a suit without promising many values. The bidding will often continue, at least if the opponents are non-vulnerable. That is why 'standard' Lebensohl doesn't really work here. If we have to bid 2NT to compete, we will probably not be able to show our suit. The 2NT bid in this situation is better used as a general invitational bid. If the opponents bid again, we are better equipped to handle that!

This is an example of where we use Reversed Lebensohl when we don't have to bid anything. As the case with Lebensohl, we use 2NT as Reversed Lebensohl only when we still can have a game. As this 2NT is a forward-going bid, we can also use it *when pass is an option*.

However, we use Reversed Lebensohl only if the following conditions are upheld:

- our LHO has the length
- the opponents have bid only one suit, and we haven't bid any suit

In the auction above, South's bids in a suit at the three-level are limited while 2NT is forcing for one round, the opposite from normal Lebensohl, where 2NT often is the weak bid. We can, in this case, make a responsive double of 2 ♠. That double can be a competitive bid, but also a stronger hand.

That gives us many possibilities and indicates that we have a stopper in spades when we instead choose to bid the Reversed Lebensohl 2NT. The responsive double, and continuation will be discussed in the section *the four hearts 2NT* in this chapter,

The most frequent situation for using the Reversed Lebensohl is in defense to weak opening bids at the two-level.

West	North	East	South
2 ♥/♠	Dble	pass	?

Here West is the LHO relative to South, so we play Reversed Lebensohl. When

East doesn't act over the weak opening, he would typically not have a good fit, so we *don't* promise a stopper to bid 2NT with an invitational hand.

In the next auction, we don't know the suit, but still, LHO has it:

West	North	East	South
2♦*	Dble	2Ma**	?

* Multi (weak two-bid in a major)

** pass/porrect

The methods for East-West here vary, but as East's bid does not show a suit of his own, South can bid 2NT as Reversed Lebensohl. Often 3NT is the only possible game, and if opener has a good suit, he seldom has any side entries. Sometimes we will play 3NT with a combined stopper or when we both have honors in the opponents' suit. In that case, it is generally better for us if the opponent with the long suit has to lead as that often will often improve the effectiveness of our stopper.

We want to agree on what double is in the above situation. Should it be takeout, values, or the bid suit? As the opponents haven't made any natural bids, we should use this double as showing values.

Another variation, because the opponent's methods vary:

West	North	East	South
2♦*	Dble	RD**	?

* Multi (weak two-bid in a major)

** Bid your suit

We use Reversed Lebensohl if East use RD as 'bid your suit', which I think is a common agreement after the double. We don't know which suit West has, but we know still know that West, our LHO has it.

Let us look at a few examples:

West	North	East	South
pass	2NT	2Ma pass	Dble ?

After 2NT, Reversed Lebensohl, from North, the rebids are in principle:

(2Ma)-Dble-(pass)-2NT (rebids from doubler)

- 3mi NF, a minimum double (up to about 13 HCP)
- 3Ma GF, 4-card other major
- 3OMa GF/ST, 17+ HCP and a 5+ suit
- 3NT natural, but may have 4-card major with a suitable hand for notrumps
- 4mi GF/ST, unbalanced 5(6)-card suit

We may bid 3Ma with a good three-card suit if we really hate bidding 3NT. Say with about 14-15 HCP with 5-4 in the minors and a singleton in the bid major. If we are prepared to take the risk of playing in a 4-3 fit, we can bid 3Ma instead of 3NT.

Finding a fit in the unbid major in this situation is not always rewarding. Even when we have a 4-4 fit, it may be more comfortable to take nine tricks in notrump. Besides that, the major suit is more often 4-1 in the opponent's hand after any kind of preempt than in an uncontested auction.

A new friend of mine, Wayne Burrows from New Zealand, has been a great help to me in improving this book. Wayne checked the odds by making a quick simulation. After an opponent shows a six-card suit the 3-2 break is still over 60%, but down a few percents from the 68% without the knowledge of the six-card suit. Not as much difference as I thought, but still may make 3NT more attractive!

Let us now look at what can happen next when we have the minimum double, and thus have to rebid our longest minor:

West	North	East	South
2♥	Dble	pass	2NT
pass	3mi	pass	?

As South, we can have one of these hands:

a)	♠ AQxx	b)	♠ KJx	c)	♠ Kxxx
	♥ xx		♥ xxx		♥ Qxx
	♦ Jxxx		♦ A10xx		♦ AKxx
	♣ Axx		♣ QJx		♣ Jx

With hand a), we bid 3♠, showing invitational values and four spades. With hand b), we can pass over 3♦, and bid a non-forcing 3♦ over 3♣. With c), we rebid 3♥, and show a game-forcing hand, often with four spades. If we bid 2NT because we perhaps were interested in slam if partner had more than a minimum, we can close the bidding with 3NT.

If we have a game-going hand without a heart stopper, we can bid 3♥ directly, instead of 2NT. Bidding 3♥ doesn't promise anything about spades, but partner has a chance to bid spades. It is more difficult to find hearts when the opponents' suit is spades, as our cue-bid then is 3♠, but no system is perfect.

One more example to end this section:

West	North	East	South
2♥	Dble	pass	2NT
pass	3♥	pass	3♠

North's 3♥ is game-forcing and shows (very often) four spades.

a)	♠ KQx	b)	♠ AKxx
	♥ Qx		♥ xx
	♦ Axxx		♦ QJx
	♣ QJxx		♣ AKJx

If advancer has four spades and just wants to play game, he often bids 4♠ and not 3♠. With hand a), I am willing to try 3NT if partner has help in hearts since we have the contract in my hand. If not, we can perhaps play in 4♠ on a 4-3 fit. With hand b), I somehow want to make a slam try in spades next. If partner bids a minor over 3♠, it is natural while 4♥ is a slam try.

When advancer has the strength for game and a balanced hand without four spades, but with a sufficient heart stopper, he will probably bid 3NT instead of 2NT. To bid 2NT and then 3NT when the doubler shows four spades indicates a less good stopper, maybe only a partial stopper.

Special 2NT bids

In this section, I will give you some ideas that we find helpful, even if they don't come up every day. The most troublesome case in all competitive bidding is when the opponents have the spade suit. This is not only because they put more pressure on us, but they consume more bidding space. By tradition, or perhaps by habit, we think of the 2NT bid as showing *the lowest unbid suits* or just *two suits*. If we have a game, though, it is often is hearts we should play.

Therefore, several of our agreements about the 2NT bid are directed to find a heart game. It sounds strange, perhaps, but you will soon understand!

The 'four-five-hearts' 2NT

When we don't use any kind of Lebensohl, or Scrambling, we have worked to give 2NT a significant meaning. When the opponents have spades, we often are in

trouble when we have hearts. Our idea is that 2NT, as a response to a takeout double of 2♠, shows at least four hearts, but only *if we can have five!*

Let us first take a look from the doubler's position:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	2♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	?

North can have a normal re-opening hand like this.

♠ x ♥ Qxx ♦ AKxxx ♣ AJxx

South can have a stack of spades and will then not be happy if North passes hands like the one above. But North can have a much better hand:

♠ x ♥ KQxx ♦ AKJxx ♣ AQx

In situations like this, North-South can have a fit in hearts. North probably has three or four hearts, and South can have four or more hearts if he isn't strong enough to act directly after 2♠. So if we have a fit, it can be 4-4, 5-3 or even 5-4. We use a set of rules, and one of them says: We don't use Lebensohl when we already have bid a suit.

That's why we can bid both 2NT and 3♥ to show hearts. We can bid 2NT and then rebid 3♥ as one option with five hearts. Let us look at more situations where we by definition, don't use Lebensohl (or Reversed Lebensohl). In the next two examples, North has bid a suit, so we don't use any form of Lebensohl. So what is 2NT?

a)	West	North	East	South
	1♠	2♣	2♠	Dble
	pass	2NT		
b)	West	North	East	South
	1♠	2♣	2♠	pass
	pass	Dble	pass	2NT

In a), North can have four hearts, but not five. South's double is a takeout double, and doesn't promise four hearts. South can have three, four, or five hearts. The question remains: What is 2NT? This auction doesn't seem to fit into any of our specific rules, but the ground rule says it is forcing. So perhaps it shows a spade stopper and invitational values.

In b), North makes a reopening double and usually has three or four hearts. South can have any number of hearts, even five or six, with a hand that isn't good enough to bid the first time. That means we use 'four-five hearts 2NT' here.

In most of the sequences where we use this convention, the auction is a fight for the part-score. But when we do have a heart fit, especially when it is a 5-4 fit, a game is often just around the corner. In these situations, if we bid 3♥, we show interest for game (or a maximum for our previous bids), and thus the 2NT bid is weaker. The HCP strength for 3♥ depends on if we have four or five hearts. If we have five, we can obviously have fewer points and still be interested in game.

Let me show you some more auctions where we use the 'four-five hearts 2NT'.

a)	West	North	East	South
				1♦
	2♠	pass	pass	Dble
	pass	2NT		
b)	West	North	East	South
				1♦
	1♠	pass*	2♠	Dble
	pass	2NT		

* When North has passed over 1♠ with 4 hearts, about 4-5 HCP is a maximum.

In these two auctions, we have basically the same situation. South's double doesn't promise four cards in hearts, and North can have four or more. We need to find out if we have a fit in hearts and values to bid game. The two auctions above are alike but different.

In a), North can have quite a good hand without bidding. He may even have a stack of spades, waiting for a double to make a penalty pass, Or he can have 8-9 HCP without having a bid. All that means that South has to reopen with just a good minimum hand with short spades.

In b), North is much more limited, and he will not often have the hand for a penalty pass when East makes a raise. South is not in a reopening position, and his double shows a good hand and that he wants to compete for the contract, even knowing that partner is rather weak. An example of the responses to the double:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	2♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	?

These are South's bids over the double:

- 2NT shows four hearts or a weak (minimum) hand with five hearts
- 3♣ NF, often weak, a preference
- 3♦ NF with at least five diamonds
- 3♥ interest in game with four hearts or five hearts with some values
- 4♥ really a maximum, or perhaps more than five hearts

South's strength in HCP depends on if the overcall was 1♠ or 2♠, as his pass is more limited when he passed at the one-level. This method doesn't solve all problems but it solves the most important ones.

Some more examples of the method:

West	North	East	South
		1♠	2♣
2♠	pass	pass	Dble
pass	3♥	pass	?

The direct 3♥ shows some values, very often with five hearts. If South has four hearts, we have found the fit, but what if his hand is this:

♠ x ♥ Qxx ♦ AQJx ♣ AK10xx

South really has a maximum but only three hearts. He can bid 3♠, to ask if his partner has a fifth heart.

An example from practical play:

South/All vulnerable

♠ Qxxx
♥ AK10xx
♦ x
♣ 108x

♠ AKJxxx
♥ xx
♦ Jxx
♣ xx

♠ 10x
♥ J9xx
♦ Qxx
♣ KJ9x

♠ x
♥ Qx
♦ AKxxxx
♣ AQxx

West	North	East	South
			1♦
2♠	pass	pass	Dble
pass	3♥	pass	4♣
pass	4♥	All pass	

South choose to double 2♠ despite having only two hearts. The reason was that he catered for North having a penalty pass. After the positive 3♥ South had a problem. He could have bid 3♠, as in the last example, to ask partner about the heart length, but with only Qx as support, five hearts may not be enough. South decided to instead make a natural 4♣ bid, and based on his good heart suit North tried 4♥ anyway. It was too late now for 3NT! In a way, a miracle happened because 4♥ made when the diamond suit was distributed favorably and the defense wasn't perfect. A spade lead and a club return makes it more difficult (but not impossible).

I close this section with a few more example hands:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	2♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	?

♠ Qxx ♥ Jxxx ♦ xxx ♣ 10xx

With this hand, a heart game is not realistic. I would just show a preference for clubs, even if 2NT is a possible bid.

♠ Jxx ♥ AQxxx ♦ 10xx ♣ Jx

With this hand, a game in hearts is possible, and I will bid 3♥. If the hand was just a tiny bit weaker, I would prefer 2NT.

♠ xxxx ♥ Qx ♦ AK10xx ♣ Jx

This hand is very good. I will not just bid 3♦. I can try 3♠ or perhaps 4♦.

Another sequence:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	2♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	2NT
pass	3♣	pass	3♥

When North rebids his clubs, he obviously doesn't have four hearts. For that reason, 3♥ from South now indicates a five-card suit but a limited hand since he didn't bid hearts directly.

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	2♠	pass
pass	Dble	pass	2NT
pass	3♥	pass	?

South shows four or five hearts but a limited hand with his 2NT. When North shows four hearts, South can take a chance and raise when he has a weak distributional hand with at least five hearts.

The four hearts 2NT

Before we start, what do you bid with these hands when RHO opens 1♠?

a)	♠ x	b)	♠ x	c)	♠ x
	♥ AJx		♥ KJ9xx		♥ AKJxx
	♦ KJxxx		♦ Axxx		♦ KJxx
	♣ A10xx		♣ AQx		♣ AQx

The takeout double is an option with all these hands. I prefer to overcall in my five-card suit with hands a) and b), while c) is too strong for that.

I could explain for a long time why I do what I do, but if you don't agree now, you probably will not agree whatever I say, and as usual, we can't *know* what is best. When that's said, let's move on.

The four hearts 2NT is only used in two very specific sequences. What do you think about 2NT is in this auction?

West	North	East	South
		1♠	Dble
2♠	Dble	pass	?

We would not often double 1♠ with a typical 12-14 HCP balanced hand with a good spade stopper. With a spade stopper and 15-17 HCP, we would overcall 1NT, and with more, 18-20, we can jump to 3NT over 2♠.

When the opponents have spades, we are constantly short of bidding space, and yet we may belong in a part-score, game, or even a slam. We have to find a trump fit or perhaps even play a game in notrumps.

The situation is almost the same after:

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
pass	2 ♠	pass	?

I don't think that North should jump to 4♥ with only a 4-card suit in any of these two auctions. Therefore, neither the responsive double nor the spade cue-bid denies four hearts. If we are going to play in game, though, it is evident that a heart game is the most probable one.

The difference between these two auctions is that in the latter, our side is more close to a game. Otherwise, they are quite similar, and so are the problems that we now have to solve. Our idea is to use 2NT from the takeout doubler to show four hearts, but only in precisely these two sequences.

These are the rebids we use as the initial doubler in both the above situations:

2NT	shows four hearts and we can have a longer minor
3♣/♦	natural without four hearts
3♥	17+ with five hearts (or more)
3♠	game-forcing, balanced or both minors
3NT	18-21 balanced
4♣/♦	17+ one-suited hand
4♥	17-19 with six hearts

We have an advantage from the standard treatment since we can exclude all hands with four hearts from the three-level bids, and bid 2NT with all of them.

As 2NT is forcing, we can bid it with strong hands, even with four hearts and a longer minor to find out if we have a heart fit. I don't think you use the 2NT anyway!

Let us see how the bidding can continue. The bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
pass	2 ♠	pass	2NT

North's rebids at the three-level are non-forcing, except for the 3♠ cue-bid. A jump to 4mi is forcing, and probably a slam try. The minimum strength of the non-forcing three-level bids depends on if North has made a cue-bid or a responsive double. In this auction, already the cue-bid, 2♠, shows at least invitational values.

If North after 2NT bids a non-forcing 3mi, the auction so far could be:

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
pass	2 ♠	pass	2NT
pass	3 ♣	pass	?

If about minimum, 2NT could be bid on one of the following hands:

♠ xx ♥ KJxx ♦ Axxx ♣ A10x

If partner bids 3 ♣ or 3 ♦, I will pass. We may then play the wrong part-score from time to time, but finding the right game is more important. What we, of course, hope when we bid 2NT is that we have a heart fit. When partner has four hearts and values for game, he can bid 4 ♥ by himself, so if he now bids 3 ♥, it is only invitational, and I will pass with the above hand.

♠ x ♥ KJxx ♦ KQxxx ♣ AJx

This hand is a little better, and if partner bids 3 ♥, I will raise to game. If partner instead bids 3 ♣, I will bid 3 ♦, and partner can bid again if he has an excellent fit, but usually, he will pass.

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
pass	2 ♠	pass	2NT
pass	3 ♣	pass	?

The auction is repeated for your convenience. South can occasionally have a strong hand with club support, perhaps one of the following hands:

- | | | | |
|----|--------|----|---------|
| a) | ♠ AJ | b) | ♠ x |
| | ♥ KJxx | | ♥ AKxx |
| | ♦ Axx | | ♦ AJx |
| | ♣ AQxx | | ♣ AJxxx |

We have decided that 4mi is a slam try from both hands, as both North and South here are unlimited. With hand a), we can raise to 4 ♣, and with hand b), an option is to bid 4 ♠ as a splinter bid.

Here are some hands where the doubler doesn't have precisely four hearts. Say the bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
		1 ♠	Dble
2 ♠	Dble	pass	?

The responsive double doesn't promise a rebid, and South is obliged to show extra values if we want to be in game.

♠ xx ♥ Kxx ♦ Axxx ♣ KQxx

This a minimum hand, and we have to bid 3♣. North will perhaps bid again, but for now, we cannot do more.

The following hand is much stronger than a normal double:

♠ xx ♥ AKJxx ♦ Ax ♣ AQxx

With a 17+ hand, we must make a strong bid. Thanks to our conventional 2NT, we can bid 3♥ to show five hearts and a strong hand.

Next, we have a balanced hand with extra values:

♠ Axx ♥ KJx ♦ A10xx ♣ KJx

Here we should bid 3♠. At least in my book, the spade stopper in hand is not suitable for a direct 1NT overcall. And it is still not suitable for a notrump bid.

Over 3♠ North will usually bid 3NT with a balanced hand, and we can hope that he, as declarer has some help in spades. We discussed a similar situation when we looked at suitable stoppers. Sometimes the opponents make a lead-directing double which, in fact, can help us to choose the right hand as declarer.

♠ x ♥ Kxx ♦ AKxx ♣ AKJxx

With a hand like this, we have to bid 3♠, but with the difference that now we do not intend to pass over 3NT. 4♣ after 3NT will show an unbalanced hand with five clubs, and indirectly four diamonds since we didn't jump to 4mi directly over 2♠. However, four times out of five, 3♠ shows the balanced hand.

That treatment sometimes makes a difference:

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dble	pass	3 ♥

Over the takeout double, our jump 3♥ is invitational with five hearts. With only four hearts, we bid 2♠ also with an invitational hand.

If West instead had raised to 2♠, though, the invitational 3♥ bid is no longer available. In that case, our 3♥ is just competitive and not invitational. With our methods, we can make a responsive double also with five hearts.

We have looked at this before, but I repeat it anyway:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dble	2♠	Dble
pass	3mi	Pass	3♥

North did not bid 2NT and has now denied four hearts, and hence our 3♥ now shows five hearts and invitational values. If we have game-forcing values, we can bid 4♥ because opener's 3mi shows a 'normal' double and, therefore, three hearts.

When North shows four hearts with 2NT, we can bid the game with good invitational values and five hearts as we now have a nine-card fit. The opening leader won't know about our fit and perhaps will lead a trump, which often is good against a 4-4 fit but too passive defense against a 5-4 fit.

The Good-Bad 2NT

A popular treatment is the *Good-Bad 2NT*. This convention can be used when the opponents overcall at the two-level, typically after a one-over-one response.

An example of how it works:

West	North	East	South
pass	1♠	2♥	1♦
			?

If South bids 3♣ or 3♦, he shows extra values with a middle hand (about 14-17 HCP). If South instead bids 2NT he has either:

- a hand where he wants to compete to the three-level in a minor
- a GF hand (18+ HCP)
- a hand with spade support and 16+ HCP

That is where the name comes from, 2NT is either good OR bad! In this situation, North often makes a preference between the minors if he doesn't want to bid a

game opposite a minimum hand. One reason that good-bad 2NT works well here is that we can double to show three-card support in spades, whether we have a minimum or a stronger hand.

As mentioned, we can use the convention when we open 1♥, namely if

- partner responds at the one-level or makes a negative double of 1♠
- all the three other players have bid something

Responder has to bid 3♣ over 2NT if he has limited values. Opener may want to compete with a minor, and responder doesn't know which one.

When we open with a minor suit, we use the Good-Bad 2NT also if our LHO passed, but the difference for us is that we, after 1mi don't have a balanced hand with 18-19 HCP. We thus have preserved the opportunity to bid 2NT with a strong balanced (or semi-balanced) hand when we open with a major and only fourth hand interferes.

A problematic 2NT

Here is a 2NT that still is open for discussion in our partnership.

West	North	East	South
			1♦
2♠	Dble	pass	2NT

I want us to follow the ground rule: 2NT is always forcing on partner's double! My partner, on the other hand, thinks 2NT has to be natural and non-forcing. I agree that my partner has a point, and for now, we play it as non-forcing.

What else can we bid but 2NT with hands like the following?

♠ Qxx ♥ xxx ♦ AKxx ♣ Kxx

Or even this:

♠ xxx ♥ xxx ♦ AKxx ♣ KQx

From these hands, it is evident that 2NT doesn't promise a stopper in spades, but our partner knows that and can bid 3♠ to ask for a stopper if he wants to. Playing exactly 2NT can be the only making contract or the least of evils, but I think we have to leave aside a natural 2NT for a better purpose.

I usually describe the system as I play it, but I think this question about 2NT is theoretically interesting, and I want to give you my input. Perhaps you like it more than my partner does!

First, I must remind you that this double of 2♠ is not a 'negative double.' It doesn't promise four hearts. There are many hands without four hearts that are impossible to show with another bid. This double is a takeout double.

So what does it show? North usually has roughly about 10 HCP, perhaps less with a good fit in the unbid suits. If he has a balanced hand or 4441, he is unlimited in strength.

What if we as North have this hand?

♠ x ♥ AJxx ♦ Qx ♣ AKJxxx

Should we double or bid 3♣? I think that if we double with strong hands, also with a five-card or longer suit, we may later face rebid problems. Let us say we double. If partner bids hearts, it is fine, but what if he bids 3♦ or 2NT? Before you answer that, say we instead have:

♠ x ♥ Axxx ♦ Qxx ♣ KJxxx

We must double 2♠ with this hand too. If partner then rebids 2NT, we don't want to pass. We want to bid a non-forcing 3♣. I believe that the possible rebid problem proves something. We shouldn't double when we can make a natural, game-forcing bid in our long suit. In competitive auctions, it is good to be able to both establish a game-forcing situation and show our longest suit.

Let us look at some hands where we don't have to bid 2NT over our partner's double. We can have any of these minimum hands:

♠ xx ♥ AQxx ♦ Qxxx ♣ Axx

I can bid a natural 3♥. Partner can have three hearts, but I hope he has four.

♠ xx ♥ Kx ♦ AQxxx ♣ Axxx

Just as easy to bid 3♣ here. And, of course, easy to bid 3♦ with the next hand.

♠ Qx ♥ xx ♦ AKxxxx ♣ Kxx

No problem at all to show unbalanced minimum hands it seems, but what if opener has a stronger hand?

The only forcing bid at the three-level in standard methods is the 3♠ cue-bid, but if we use that on all strong hands, we often have to guess in the next round of bidding.

That is the reason I want to give up to play 2NT as natural and non-forcing and use it as a two-way bid, showing either a minimum balanced hand or a hand with extra values.

Partner will assume the weak hand, and often bid 3mi, but he can show five hearts with 3♥, as with this hand.

♠ x ♥ KJxxx ♦ Axxx ♣ Jxx

Let us look at few strong hands that opener can have:

♠ x ♥ AQxx ♦ AJxxx ♣ Axx

This hand is very good, and with four hearts, it is tempting to bid game. Bidding 3♥ can perhaps be a good unbalanced minimum hand with about 13-14 HCP? If we could use 2NT as forcing, I would suggest that we bid 2NT and rebid 3♥. That would be a stronger invitation than the direct 3♥.

♠ Ax ♥ AJx ♦ AQ10xxx ♣ xx

Again a difficult hand in standard methods. Should we jump to 3NT? There is a risk that partner has five hearts. If we bid 2NT as forcing, partner will bid 3♥ with five, so that would solve that problem. If partner doesn't have five hearts he will make a preference between the minors, as if opener had 5-4. If partner bids 3♣ we can rebid 3♦ to show a hand that is too good for a direct 3♦.

♠ xx ♥ Ax ♦ AKJxx ♣ KQxx

This is a hand where we definitely would have to bid 3♠ with no other agreements. That would perhaps give partner a problem. Should he bid 4♥ now with five? We are in a much better position if we can start with 2NT. We might be forced to bid 3♠ next anyway, but we then we have more information about partner's hand.

There is a drawback with this method: If partner raises 2NT to 3NT we have to bid again with the strong hands. And also, we can't play 2NT, which I can live with.

CONVENTIONS AND PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Better bidding methods is only a minor part of winning bridge, but they can matter if we also use them well. And remember them! One problem is that nobody knows what methods are the best. Even if we knew, they would probably not be the best for all players, simply because we are not alike, and some players are more comfortable with a lot of conventions while others just want to have a nice game.

This chapter is a summary of the suggested methods in the book. All of these methods are what I currently play with my partner. If you want to know more about our methods, some of them are described more in detail, and can thus be studied further in this chapter. There are, though, not any explanations here, just the meaning of the bids, so be careful with trying to understand the logic in the methods before using it. Good luck!

I use the following abbreviations in this chapter:

NF	non-forcing or not forcing
F1	forcing for one round
GF	game-forcing
ST	slam Try
INV, INV+	invitational, at least invitational (forcing for one round)
LHO, RHO	left-hand opponent, right-hand opponent
4432	any 4432
=4432	exactly 4=4=3=2 (4-4-3-2) from the top
Ma, mi, OMa, Omi	any major, any minor, the other major, other minor

Other explanations:

Lissabon	clubs=hearts, diamonds=spades and vice versa
1♣-(1♦)-1♥;	bids in parentheses = the opponent's bids semi-colon = new round of bidding pass(es) is often not written out
1Ma-2♠	spade means that Ma was hearts and vice versa Ma = the same major OMa = the other major
1X/1Y	X means any suit, Y means any suit. but not X
1mi-2♣	the club bid means that mi was diamonds
1mi-2mi	in each bid the mi = the same minor
1mi-2Omi	the second bid Omi = the other minor

THEY OPEN, CONTESTING BIDS

Showing both majors

(1♣/♦)-2♦ (5-5 in majors, constructive, but can be weaker non-vulnerable)

2NT FG, relay
 3mi longest minor
 3Ma Slam try, sets the suit
 3Ma 6-5
 4mi void
 3♦ INV+ with support in both majors
 3Ma INV

Canapé jumps

(1X)-2Ma a) When both minors are 'unbid' suits

2NT F1, INV or better
 3mi minimum
 3Ma Lissabon, a maximum and often a 6-4 distribution
 3NT a solid 6+ minor
 3♣ pass/correct, to play the minor
 3♦ a proxy bid, FG, with support in the major
 3Ma shows the long minor with Lissabon
 3Ma INV
 2/3OMa F1, natural

(1mi)-2Ma b) when only one minor is 'unbid'

2NT F1, invitational or better
 3Omi minimum
 3X (any other suit) extra values
 3NT a solid 6+ minor
 3Omi (partner's suit) to play
 3mi (opener's suit) FG with support in the major
 3Ma invitational
 2/3OMa F1, natural

(2X)-3Ma (usually both minors are unbid suits, if not we have the other)

3NT natural, to play
 4♣ pass/correct
 4♦ FG Relay, asking
 4Ma Lissabon, showing the minor suit
 3/4OMa natural
 3/4X slam try in the major

Defense to 1NTIn second hand:

Double at least the same strength as the opening bid
 2♣ 5-4 in majors, but can sometimes be 4-4 or 4-3 plus a 5-card minor
 2♦ 5+ hearts
 2♥ 5+ spades
 2♠ a 6-card minor with a good suit and opening values
 2NT 5-5 in minors, or a very strong hand with 5-5 in majors
 higher preemptive

(1NT)-2♣

pass allowed with a bad fit
 2♦ relay, often without a 4-card major
 2Ma preference, 2♥ can be =13 in majors
 2NT F1, at least invitational, doesn't deny a major
 3♣ relay, maximum
 3♦ 5 diamonds, can be 4-3 in majors
 3Ma 5-card major, minimum
 3mi F1, natural
 3Ma INV, often 5-card suit

(1NT)-2♦/♥

2NT F1, invitational or better

(1NT)-2♠

2NT F1, INV+
 3mi minimum
 3Ma Lissabon, maximum
 3♣ pass/correct

(1NT)-2♣-(Dble)

pass club length
 RD asks partner to bid the longest major
 2♦ natural with long diamonds
 2Ma often a 4-card suit, but with =13 in majors we can bid hearts

(1NT)-2♦/♥-(Dble)

pass no fit in major
 RD top honor, but no fit

In fourth hand (reopening or balancing):

Double at least about 12 HCP

2♣ 5-4 in majors, but can sometimes be 4-4 or 4-3 plus a 5-card minor

2♦ multi with either

a) a weak hand with a (5)6-card major

b) a good hand with 5-5 in one major and one minor

2Ma natural, constructive, with about 12+ if unpassed

2NT 5-5 in minors, or a very strong hand with 5-5 in majors

higher preemptive

From a passed hand:

Double in all positions shows a 5-card minor and a 4-card major.

Agreements when we have doubled 1NT:

- further doubles takeout, but third double for penalties
- pass over 1NT doubled doesn't count as a penalty pass
- if we run to 2♣ we do not promise a real suit, while other bids do
- over RD or forcing pass, we bid directly if weak with a suit

Using the notrump defense in fourth hand:

(1mi)-(1NT) or (1mi)-(1♠) (transfer)

2♣ at least 5-4 in majors

2♦ multi with either

a) a weak hand with a (5)6-card major

b) a good hand with 5-5 in one major and one minor

2Ma natural, constructive, with about 12+ if unpassed

2NT 5-5 in minors, or a very strong hand with 5-5 in majors

Against strong openings

(1♣) (strong)

Dble 13+ HCP, a least three cards in both majors, we can have a game

1NT both majors

2NT both minors

(2♣) (strong)

Dble both majors,

2NT both minors

Defense to preempt with 3♠

4♣	6+ hearts
4♦	hearts+diamonds
4♥	hearts+clubs NF
4♠	minors
4NT	hearts+clubs strong

The same treatment is used after 1NT-(3♠), (1♠)-(3♠), and (2♠)-(3♠)

Defense to special opening bidsGeneral:

Our third double is for penalties, but the double of the opening doesn't count
4-level bids are leaping Michaels.

See also *Reversed Lebensohl*

However, after double in fourth position, we use normal Lebensohl

(2♣) multi (strong or diamonds) or (2♦) (normal multi)

Dble 12+ HCP, advancer can use Reversed Lebensohl

2♦ both majors (on 2♣)

3Ma canapé jumps

(2♦) both majors

2Ma natural

3Ma short major, both minors

(2♥) both majors

2♠ natural

3Ma short major, both minors+

(2NT) both minors

3♣ 5-4 or 6-4 in majors

3♦ 5-5 in majors

(3NT) weak minor or solid minor

4♣ 5-4 or 6-4 in majors

4♦ 5-5 in majors

Defense in the Sandwich positionSpecial agreements in sandwich position:

Tactical overcalls possible especially for the lead or when non-vulnerable.

(1mi)-P-(1♠)

From a passed hand: 1NT shows 5 hearts and a 4 +minor

(1♠)-(2♠)

2NT 5 hearts and a 4-card minor

(1♥)-(2♥)

2NT minors

X take out

2NT a diamond preference

Defense against proxy responses

(1♣)-(1♦) (transfer)

Dble takeout (except from passed hand or if partner has bid, then diamonds)

1♥ 4 spades and a longer minor

2♣ natural

(1♣)-(1♥) (transfer)

Dble takeout (except from passed hand or if partner has bid, then hearts)

1♠ 5 hearts, often with a 4-card minor

2♣ natural

(1♣)-(1♠) (transfer)

Dble takeout (except from passed hand or if partner has bid, then spades)

2X same as notrump defense in reopening position

(1♣)-Overcall or double-(transfer)

Dble shows the bid suit

2♣ F1

(1Ma)-(2NT) (support)

Dble takeout, promise four spades if Ma is hearts

THEY OPEN, RESPONSES FROM ADVANCER

Advancer responds to one-level overcalls

Our rules for when the opening suit counts as a *bid suit* or not:

- after 1♣, the club suit is unbid except when opener shows 4+ cards
- after 1♦, the diamond is unbid only when opener can have 0-2 cards

Advancer's bid (responder passes)

(1X)-1Ma-(pass)

- 1NT NF, about 8-13 HCP, often with a stopper in the opening suit
- 2♣ F1, with either:
- 9+ HCP with support, often balanced if INV+
 - 9+ HCP with Hx as support, either balanced or a 5+ minor
 - 13+ HCP, any 'balanced' hand without support
- 2Ma natural raise, typically with less than 10 HCP
- 2NT INV+ with support, and frequently an unbalanced hand
- 3X mixed raise (alternative splinter)
- 3Other INV with a long suit
- 3Ma natural, preemptive with about 4-7 with good support

(1♣)-1♦-(pass)

- 1Ma F1, often a 5+ suit. Overcaller can use Einar's cue-bid
- 1NT NF, about 8-13 HCP, often with a stopper in the opening suit
- 2♣ F1, natural rebids (2♦ minimum)
- 2Ma weak, about 5-9 HCP with a good 6-card suit
- 2NT INV+ with support, often unbalanced
- 3♣ Splinter, indicates long diamonds

(1mi)-1♥-(pass)

- 1♠ F1, often a 5+ suit but can also be a 4-card suit.
- 2♦ F1, shows *the* unbid minor (or *one* unbid minor)
- 2♠ NF with about 10-12 HCP and a good 6-card suit

(1mi)-1♠-(pass)

- 2♦ F1, switch, five plus hearts, strength depending on the heart length
- 2♥ F1, switch, shows *the* unbid minor (or *one* unbid minor if there is two)

(1♥)-1♠-(pass)

- 2♦ F1, natural
- 2♥ F1, with clubs

Continued bidding after advancer's response:

(1mi) -1♥-1♠;

- 1NT natural with at least a semi-stopper in mi
- 2mi Einar's cue-bid, see below.
- 2Omi 8-12, natural
- 2Ma 8-12 with 6Ma
- 2♠ 8-11 with support
- 2NT a two-way bid with either:
 - a) 13+ 6 hearts and a 4-card minor
 - b) 14+ INV, unbalanced with 4-card support
- 3mi/Omi INV with 5-5 (splinter with 10-12 HCP if bid suit)
- 3♥ INV with a good suit
- 3♠ 12-13 HCP, with 4 spades

(1mi) -1♥-1♠; 2NT

- 3♣ relay:
 - 3♦ 13+ 6 hearts and 4 diamonds
 - 3♥ 13+ 6 hearts and 4 clubs
 - 3♠ 14+ INV, with 4-card support in spades
- 3♥ NF, minimum

(1mi)-1Ma-1NT

- 2mi F1 with about 13+ HCP
 - Responses up to 2Ma don't promise extras
- 2Omi 8-12 natural
- 2♥ 8-12 natural
- 2Ma 8-12 with 6+Ma
- 2♠ F1 with 6(5) hearts and 4 spades
- 2NT a two-way bid with either
 - a) 12+ with 6Ma and a 4-cards lower side suit
 - b) FG game with 6 hearts offering a choice between 3NT and 4M
- 3mi/Omi INV with about 11-13 with 5-5
- 3♥ 6♠ and 4♥, close to FG (with 5-5 we shows both majors directly)
- 3Ma INV
- 3NT to play

(1mi)-1Ma-1NT; 2NT-3♣

- 3♦ 13+ 6 hearts and 4 diamonds
- 3♥ 13+ 6 hearts and 4 clubs

If the overcall is in spades: 3♥ 6 spades and 4 hearts, 3♠ 6 spades and 4 clubs

Advancer's 2 club relay:

(1mi)-1Ma-2♣ (the 2 club relay)

- 2♦ 12+ HCP, any distribution
- 2♥ F1, 4 hearts or weak 5-card suit
 - 2♠ F1, natural (unusual)
 - 2Ma NF, about 9-11 with Hx or real support
 - 2NT FG, either:
 - a) to find 3NT with a 5-3 fit
 - b) to find alternative contracts without support
 - c) interest of slam
 - 3mi (unbid) FG, 5+ minor and Hx in partner's suit
 - 3mi (bid minor) F1 seminatural or just forcing
 - 3Ma INV with support
 - 3NT about 13-15 balanced
 - 4X Splinter with 3-card support
- 2♥ 8-11/12, natural
- 2♠ 8-11 with 4 spades and 6 hearts
- 2Ma 8-11 HCP
- 2NT natural invitation
 - 3mi F1 with Hx in Ma
- 3Ma 8-11 HCP with 6-card Ma (not mandatory with a minimum)
- 2NT 10+ with 6Ma and a 4-card side suit
- 3♣ relay, asking about side suit (3Ma shows clubs)
- 3X 8-11, promise 5-5 if in an unbid suit

(1♥)-1♠-2♣;

- 2♦ 12+ HCP, most hands, as above
- 2♥ F1, artificial
- 2♥ 8-11, Einar's cue-bid
- 2♠ 8-11 with 6 spades
- 3♠ 9-11 with solid spades

(1mi)-1♠-2♦ (hearts)

- 2♥ the normal bid, 2♠ now NF with something like 5 hearts and 2 spades
- 2♠ natural with 6 spades or perhaps very short hearts
- 2NT F1, natural, extra values
- 3mi a cue-bid if bid suit, otherwise natural
- 3♥ INV

Other 3-level bids also show additional values

(1mi)-1♠-2♥ (unbid minor)

3♣ pass/correct if the minor is unknown

Einar's cue-bid:

Einar's cue-bid is used when following rules fit in:

- advancer bids (or shows by transfer or switch) a new suit
- advancer has a major, he must be allowed to rebid the suit at the two-level
- advancer has a minor; he must be allowed to rebid it at the three-level

The possible sequences that I can come to think of are:

- (1mi)-1♥-1♠; 2mi
- (1♣)-1♦-1Ma; 2♣
- (1♥)-2♣-2♦; 2♥
- (1♠)-2♣-2♥; 2♠

Einar's cue-bid shows any of these alternatives:

- 8-11/12 HCP without a natural rebid (typically =2533)
- about 12 HCP with 3 spades, a good raise to 2♠
- 13+ HCP, good hands that we cannot be described in another way.

A few examples of the continued bidding, after the cue-bid.

(1mi)-1♥-1♠; 2mi (Einar's cue-bid)

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2♦ | natural, can be a minimum hand or better |
| 2♥/♠ | minimum hands |
| 2♥ | 8-11, limited hand, often only 2 hearts |
| | pass the hands with 8-12 HCP without support |
| | 2/3♠ 12-13/14-15 balanced with 3-card support |
| | Other natural with 13-16 HCP |
| 2♠ | 8-11, limited hand, typically with 6 spades |
| 2NT | NF, about 12-14 HCP (a natural INV opposite the minimum hand) |
| 3♣ | F1, natural or semi-natural |

Advancer's bids (responder makes a negative double)

(1mi)-1Ma-(Dble)

RD	shows Hx in Ma or Hxx with a weak hand
1♠	natural, but not a bad suit (since double shows spades)
1NT	transfer to clubs
2♣	transfer to diamonds
2♦	transfer to hearts
2U	transfer to Ma shows a good single raise, about 9-11, but can be stronger with a balanced hand
2Ma	a normal raise
2♠	about 10-12 with a good 6-card suit
2NT	INV+, good raise, very often an unbalanced hand
3X	INV with a 6+ card suit, but in a 'bid' minor INV and splinter
3Ma	a constructive preempt

A transfer to the *opened* minor: 12+ HCP with 3+ support, often balanced

Advancer's bids (responder makes another bid)

(1mi)-1Ma-(bid)

When RHO bids 1NT, a raise, or a new suit we have agreed on some simple rules:

- 2NT always shows support
- a double shows values
- a new suit is NF (overcaller can pass with 8-11 and no fit)
- cue-bid in minor is forcing, but can be natural if 'unbid' suit
- when the opponents play 'transfer responses', a double shows the bid suit.

After our takeout double, The four hearts 2NT

(1♠)-Dble-(2♠)

2NT	Reversed Lebensohl
Dble	Responsive

(1♠)-Dble-2♠; and (1♠)-Dble-(2♠)-Dble;

2NT	F1, 4 hearts, undefined strength
3mi	NF, see below
3♥	NF
3♠	GF, not 4 hearts or perhaps too strong for 4♥
3NT	natural
4mi	GF 5(6)+ suit
4♥	to play
3♣	NF, natural without 4 hearts
3♦	NF,
3♥	INV, 5 hearts
3♠	GF, may have 5 hearts and slam interest
3♦	NF, something like =2353 or =1354
3♥	GF, 17+, with 5+ hearts
3♠	GF, balanced or both minors
3NT	natural with about 18-20
4mi	GF, 5(6)+ minor

2NT as above, and advancer bids 3mi

3♦	NF, natural
3♥	5 hearts and minimum, if you double with that hand
3♠	GF, balanced, often some help in spades
3NT	strong balanced (18-20 with 4 hearts)
4mi	ST, with support
4♠	ST, splinter

Advancer responds to two-level overcalls

(1♦)-2♣

2♦	transfer, 5+ hearts, forcing only to 2♥
2♥	transfer, 5+ spades, as above
2♠	forcing, indicates support or a very good hand, forcing to 3♣
2NT	natural and non-forcing
3♣	natural and non-forcing
3♦	a splinter bid with something like =4414 or longer clubs
3Ma	GF with 5-card major and support in clubs

(1♦)-2♣-2♦/♥ (transfer);

2Ma	about minimum, often 2/3 cards in the major
2NT	F1, extra values
3♦	asking for a stopper or more information
3Ma	better than a minimum, invitational

(1♠)-2♣-(pass or double)

- 2♦ switch, shows at least five hearts
 - 2♥ non-forcing
 - 2♠ forcing, but not Einar's cue-bid (hearts is now bypassed)
 - 2NT forcing for one round, natural or semi-natural
 - 3♣ non-forcing
- 2♥ shows five or more diamonds, 2♠ is Einar's cue-bid; advancer can bid 3♦
- 2♠ is forcing, often with some kind of fit
- 2NT is natural NF
- 3♣ a natural, limited raise
- 3♠ Splinter

The bids that are different here:

(1♥)-2♣-(pass or double)

- 2♦ switch, shows at least 5 spades
 - 2♥ Einar's cue-bid, since advancer can rebid 2♠
- 2♥ is forcing, often with some kind of fit
- 2♠ switch, five or more diamonds, we can't use 3♥ as Einar's cue-bid

(1♥)-2♦

- 2♥ transfer, shows at least 5 spades
- 2♠ forcing for one round, usually with a diamond fit

(1♥)-2♦-2♥ (spades);

- 2♠ about minimum, often 2/3 cards in the major
- 3♥ a forcing cue-bid
- 3♠ better than a minimum, invitational
- 4♥ splinter with spade support

Reversed Lebensohl

(2Ma)-Dble

Is used when the LHO, relative to the 2NT bidder, has the length.
Below, ♠ (spades) means that the major was hearts and vice versa.

- 2♠ NF, natural
 2NT Reversed Lebensohl, rebids and continuation:
 F1, INV+, if only INV not always a stopper in the opponents' suit
 3mi NF, a minimum double (up to about 13 HCP)
 3♦/3OMa NF
 3Ma GF, often shows 4-card other major
 3NT natural
 4mi Slam try
 3Ma GF with 4(+) card in other major
 3OMa GF/ST with 17+ HCP and at least a 5-card suit
 3NT natural, may have a major with a notrump hand
 4mi GF/ST, unbalanced with 5(6)-card minor
 3mi NF, not invitational
 3Ma GF, not interested in 3NT (but can be balanced without a stopper)
 3♥ NF, not invitational
 3♠ INV, often a 5+ suit
 4mi NF, INV unbalanced

(1Ma)-Dble-(2Ma)

2NT Reversed Lebensohl as above

(2♦)-Dble (Multi, example)

- 2Ma NF, natural
 2NT Reversed Lebensohl, rebids and continuation:
 3♣ NF, a minimum double
 3♦ GF, asking for majors
 3Ma 4-card major, Invitational
 3NT natural
 3♦ GF, asking for 4-card majors
 3Ma GF/ST, 17+ with 5+ major
 3NT Some extras with a suitable hand
 3♣ NF, natural
 3♦ GF, not suitable for 2NT
 3Ma INV with a 5+card suit

The four-five hearts 2NT

We use this when the opponents have spades, and the responder to a double of 2♠ can have four *or more* hearts.

Examples

1mi-(1♠)-pass-(2♠); Dble
 1mi-(2♠)-pass-(pass); Dble
 (1♠)-2mi-(2♠)-pass; (pass)-Dble

2NT at least 4 hearts, but a minimum
 3♥ at least 4 heart, maximum with 4, extras with 5.

WE OPEN, THE OPPONENTS ARE CONTESTING

We have put a lot of work into responder's bid in these frequent competitive situations. We use a lot of transfers, switched bids, and fit-showing bids. After Dble/RD at the one-level, our third double (incl. RD) is for penalties.

After 1mi-low level contesting bids

1♣-(Dble)

RD about 10+
 1♦ 5+ with 4+ hearts
 1♥ 5+ with 4+ spades
 1♠ 5+, transfer to 1NT, no major
 1NT 8+ with 5+ diamonds
 2♣ 5-9, natural raise with 4+ clubs
 2♦/♥ 8+, 5+ major (transfer) and 4+ support
 2♠ 10+, INV+ (10+) with support
 2NT 8+ with both minors
 3♣ 5-9, natural, preemptive raise, 5+ clubs

1♦-(Dble)

RD 5+ with 4+ hearts
 1♥ 5+ with 4+ spades
 1♠ 5+, transfer to 1NT, no major
 1NT 8+ with 5+ clubs
 2♣ 5+, transfer diamonds raise
 2♦/♥ 8+, 5+ major (transfer) and 4+ support
 2♠ 10+, INV+ with support
 2NT 8+ with both minors
 3♣ preemptive with clubs
 3♦ 5-9, natural, preemptive raise, 4+ diamonds

1♣-(1♦)

Dble	5+ with 4+ hearts
1♥	5+ with 4+ spades
1♠	5+, transfer to 1NT, no major
1NT	8-11(+) with at least 4-4 in the majors
2♣	5-9, natural raise with 4+ clubs
2♦/♥	8+, 5+ major (transfer) and 4+ support
2♠	10+, INV+ (10+) with support
2NT	10+, INV+ with 5-5 in majors
3♣	5-9, natural, preemptive raise, 5+ clubs
3♦	10+, INV+ with one 5+Ma and 5+ clubs

1♣-(1♦)-1NT; 2♦ (ask for longest major)

2♥/♠	hearts can be four, spades shows five If opener continues the bidding he has a GF hand, a raise is thou INV
hihger	4-4 in majors, GF

1♣-(1♥)

Dble	5+ with 4-5(+) spades
1♠	5+, transfer to 1NT, not 4 spades
1NT	6+ with at least 4-4 in spades and clubs
2♣	5-9, natural raise with 4+ clubs
2♦	10+. F1, natural
2♥	8+ with 6 spades
2♠	10+, INV+ (10+) with support
2NT	10+, INV+ with 5-5 in unbid suits
3♣	5-9, natural, preemptive raise, 5+ clubs
3♦	10+, INV+ 5+ spades and 5+ clubs

1♦-(1♥)

Dble	5+ with 4-5(+) spades
1♠	5+, transfer to 1NT, not 4 spades
1NT	6+ with at least 4-4 in spades and diamonds
2♣	10+. F1, natural
2♦	5-9, natural raise with 3+ clubs
2♥	8+ with 6 spades
2♠	10+, INV+ with support
2NT	10+, INV+ with 5-5 in unbid suits
3♣	10+, INV+ 5+ spades and 5+ diamonds
3♦	5-9, natural, preemptive raise, 4+ diamonds

1mi-(1♠)

Dble	5+, negative double
1NT	6-10, natural
2Omi	8+, switch, 5+ hearts
2/3mi	5-9, natural raises
2♥	10+. switch, unbid minor, F to 3 of that suit
2♠	INV+ with support
2NT	10+, INV+ with 5-5 in unbid suits
3♣	10+, INV+ 5+ hearts and 5+ support

1mi-(1NT) (natural, strong notrump)

Dble	10+, values
2♣	both majors
2♦/♥	transfer, 5+ major
2♠	good hand with unbid minor
2NT	good raise on minor
3mi	preemptive

After 1mi-other contesting bids

1♦-(2♣)

Dble	a) 5-10 with diamond support b) negative double, 4-4 in majors c) game-forcing opener's rebids if advancer pass 2♦ minimum 3♦ 13-15, long diamonds other shows about 16+
2♦/♥	8+, transfer with 5+ major
2♠	INV+, 4+ diamonds
2NT	INV, NF
3♣	8+, a least 5-5 in majors
3♦	5-9, preemptive

1♦-(2♣)-Dble-(3♣)

Dble	takeout, depending on strength and distribution
3♦	NF with support
3♥	4-4 in majors, NF
3♠	4-4 in majors, 11+ GF

1♦-(2♣)-Dble; 2♦ (11-15)

2♥ 5-9 with at least 4-4 in majors

2♠ 10+, F1 with 4-4 in majors

2NT and higher bids GF

1mi-(2mi) (showing both majors)

D 10+, after 2-suited bids, further doubles are for penalties

2♥ INV+ in clubs

2♠ INV+ in diamonds

2NT INV, natural but F1

3Ma Splinter

1mi-(2X) (natural jump overcall)

Dble 8+, values, usually more

2Ma 10+, F1, natural

2NT up transfer, 10+ if transfer to a new suit, 8+ if support

3U transfer to the opponent's suit, GF shortness

3♠ GF with support

Transfer to major that can be bid at the two-level shows 10+ and 6Ma

After 1Ma-low-level contesting bid

1Ma-(Dble)

RD 4+ spades

1♠ natural, doesn't promise 5 spades

1NT 8+, clubs

2♣ 8+, diamonds

2♦ 8+, hearts

2U good raise of major

2Ma normal raise

2♠ 6-9, 6 spades

2NT INV+ with support

3X preemptive

1♥-(1♠)

1NT natural

2mi F1

2♠ precisely invitational with support

2NT INV+ with support

3mi INV, long suit

2/3♥ normal/good single raise

1Ma-(1NT)

2♣	8-10, a good raise in major, promise top honor
2♦	8+, transfer to hearts
2U	competitive, 5-2/2-5 in majors
2Ma	normal raise
2NT	INV+ with support
3mi	preemptive

1Ma-(2♣)

2♦	8+ with 5+ in unbid major
2OMa	10+ with diamonds
2NT	INV+ with support
3♣	precisely invitational with support

1Ma-(2♦/♥)

2NT	INV+ with support
Cue-bid	precisely invitational with support

1♥-(2♠)

2NT	INV+ with support
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4mi slam try (after two-suited or preemptive overcalls)

This convention is used in several situations when we open 1Ma, see below.

When the opponents shows two specified suits

4♣	slam try, shortness in the lowest of their suits
4♦	slam try, shortness in the highest of their suits

When only one suit is known (also over 3X preemptive bid)

4♣	good raise to game with control in the opponents' suit
4♦	asks for extra strength
4♦	slam try without control
4Ma	natural raise, but if an opening hand, without control

They double our cue-bid, our bids directly after the double:

Pass	often no control, partner RD with Ace, cue-bid with KQ or shortness
RD	shows the queen or better
cue-bid	I can handle the situation

After 1Ma-higher contesting bid

1Ma-(2NT/3♣) (two specified suits, X=lower+Y=higher)

Dble values, further doubles are for penalties

3X F1, lowest suit shows the lower suit of partner's Ma and the unbid suit

3Y F1, highest suit shows the higher suit

4mi slam try

1Ma-(2Ma) (Michael's cue-bid, two suiter with other major and a minor)

Cue-bid in OMa is precisely invitational with support, 2NT INV or better

2NT INV or better with support

4mi slam try

1Ma-(2Ma) (unbid major and a specific minor=X)

Cue1 lowest cue-bid shows the unbid minor

Cue2 highest cue-bid shows a raise, precisely invitational

2NT INV or better with support

4mi slam try

1Ma-(3X) (natural preemptive)

3Ma natural raise

4mi 4mi ST

4Ma if opening strength, no control

1Ma-(4♣)

4♦ 15+ good raise to 4Ma

After 1NT-contesting bidsGeneral after any 2X

Dble competitive or better, doesn't promise rebid

2NT up transfers, at least mildly invitational

3U transfer to a bid suit, GF with shortness

3♠ GF, a two-suiter with 5-5 in the lowest unbid suits

Specific contesting bids:

1NT-(Dble) (artificial) System On, RD is strong

1NT-(2♣) (artificial) System On, double is Stayman

1NT-(2♣) (both majors)

Dble competitive, further doubles are for penalties

2Ma INV+ shows stopper in the bid suit

1NT-(2NT) (minors)

Dble values, further doubles are for penalties

3♣ Stayman

3♦/♥ transfer

1NT-(3♣)

3♦/♥ transfer

3♠ diamonds

4♣ both majors slam try

4♦ both majors

1NT-(3♦)

3♥/♠ GF in other major

4♣ both majors slam try

4♦ both majors

1NT-(3♥)

4♥ transfer

1NT-(3♠)

4♣ hearts

4♦ hearts+diamonds

4♥ hearts+clubs NF

4♠ minors

4NT hearts+clubs strong

Double after a jump overcall is takeout, but don't promise anything about the distribution since we may not have an alternative bid.

OPENER'S REBIDS, IN COMPETITION

Double of proxy bids

1mi-(1Ma)-pass-(2mi)	Double is lead-directing
1mi-(1Ma)-bid-(2mi)	Double shows a 6-card minor (or 5 good)
1Ma-(bid)-pass-(2Ma)	Double shows a 6-card major, 16+
1Ma-(bid)-bid-(2Ma)	Double shows a 6-card major, 14+

Good-Bad 2NT

1mi-(?)-bid-(2X) (also if second hand have passed)	
2NT	a) competitive with one suited minor or both minors after 1D opening b) 17+ c) if responder has bid a major, 16+ with support
3-level	shows about 14 good to 17

1♥-(bid)-bid-(2X) (all players bid)

2NT	a) competitive with one suited major or 5-5 with minor b) 17+ c) if responder has bid spades, 16+ with support
3-level	shows about 14 good to 17

Methods after 1Ma-support interventions

General rules:

1Ma-(1/2X)-2/3X	Cue-bid is only forcing to the three-level
1Ma-(pass/Dble/1X/2X)-2NT	We can't let the opponents play undoubled

Contesting after our single raise:

1Ma-pass-2Ma-(2/3X)	Dble Penalty double (also from responder)
1Ma-pass-2Ma-(Dble)	Rdble, forcing to 3Ma or penalty double
1Ma-(overcall)-2Ma-(support)	Dble, take out, invitational or better
1Ma-(Dble)-2U/Ma-(3OMa)	Dble, not for penalties, they indirectly have a fit

Examples, when responder shows invitational or better with support

1♥-(1♠)-2♠-(3♠)

pass minimum, non-forcing since 2♠ is limited
 Dble slam interest with spade shortness
 3NT establish a forcing pass situation if they bid 4♠

1♥-2NT-(3♦)

pass minimum, but forcing to at least 3♥ (or a penalty double)
 Dble a penalty double
 3♥ minimum, but short diamonds
 3NT establish a forcing pass situation if they bid over 4♥
 4♦ diamond control, and very often shortness in the suit

1♥-2NT-(3♠);

pass minimum, but forcing anyway
 Dble a penalty double
 3NT establish a forcing pass situation if they bid 4♠

1♥-(2♦)-2NT-(3♦);

pass denies shortness or control in diamonds
 3♥ minimum, but short diamonds
 Dble extra values, shortness in diamonds
 3NT extra values, diamond control
 4♦ void in diamonds

1♥-(1♠)-2NT-(3♠);

pass denies shortness or control in spades
 Dble spade shortness
 3NT extra values, spade control
 4♥ control in spades minimum

1♥-2NT-(4♦) (or a raise to the 4-level)

pass diamonds shortness or control
 Dble no control, but extra values
 4♥ no control, minimum

After pass, responder's double asks for extra values