

Developing good

PARTNERSHIP

AGREEMENTS

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Developing good partnership agreements

What are partnership agreements in the first place? As I am not a native English speaker, I may use or even invent new expressions instead of finding the right word for what I mean. So, let me explain.

I think of partnership agreements as the difference when you sit down and play with a new partner compared to when you play with your regular partner.

If you have some time to talk and prepare with a new partner, you will decide on basic methods, a few conventions, perhaps exchange your written system notes and take it from there.

However, while you play, many situations will come up in the bidding that your preparations didn't cover. With a partner you don't know or at least have not played many times with, you have to bid and play what you think standard methods mean to your partner.

What you can't do with a newfound partner is enjoy the practical experience of using the methods you play. Even though you agreed on some conventions, you cannot be sure you both handle them the same way.

Partnership agreements are what a regular pair should develop. If you play a lot, learn from your misunderstandings and have ambitions to do better next time, you don't even have to read books like this.

Many problems have already been sorted out by a regular partnership because they either have discussed the situation before or have empirical knowledge. On the other hand, there are also risks with many or complicated agreements as you both have to remember them.

A problem that can arise is that you disagree about right and wrong. Even worse, if you fight over *who* is wrong. However, the worst scenario is when you don't talk to each other at all.

I will walk you through the general rules you need to strengthen your partnership. Even if you don't have a partner right now, you can collect some advice on how to work when you get one and even how to reason to determine what is standard.

I will talk about how to make good agreements and perhaps discuss what the current standard is.

As I write this introduction, I am not sure about the format. One possibility is that I submit it step by step to introduce each chapter here on BW and then offer a downloadable PDF for the full chapter (and eventually the complete book).

Doubles and redoubles - Introduction

When writing the book 'Absolute Doubles', I had an idea. When I started to learn bridge, most doubles were what they sounded like, interest in penalties. You doubled for penalties when your partner opened with one notrump and opponents were daring enough to interfere. Since responder could not make a takeout double, he could bid 2NT as a 'takeout bid' to find a fit.

It may be hard to believe for young bridge players, but all the doubles we take for granted as takeout, negative, responsive, or just showing values have all changed over time. Still, late in the last century, you could hear players discuss in the form of: Do we play takeout doubles over pre-empts, partner? Responsive doubles? Negative doubles?

As times went by, experts agreed on more and more doubles to be for takeout. My reason for writing a book about doubles was to suggest that we discuss and agree which doubles are for penalties instead of which were for takeout.

I think we now all agree on most doubles. The standard has changed over the years, and we don't have to discuss doubles in detail playing with a new partner.

It would be ridiculous in our time to ask partners: Do we play responsive doubles, partner?

Let me begin by presenting how I reason in the upcoming book. Say we are discussing penalty doubles (versus takeout).

This is the auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	pass
1♠	Dble	2♦	Dble

What is South's double? Is it a takeout double with 8+ HCP and 4-4 in then unbid suit, or is it a good hand with diamonds?

I think the standard answer here is penalty double. Or, at least, it should be. Why then? North showed interest in the unbid suits, and thus there is not much need for a takeout double. We can bid a suit if we want to compete and perhaps use 2NT or a cue-bid with a fit in both the unbid suits.

Perhaps West has bid 1♠ with a weak hand because he is short in diamonds or in order to deceive us from finding a game.

South can have the following hand:

♠ A10xx ♥ Jx ♦ KQ10x ♣ xxx

If you agree or not is not the vital question here. What about similar auctions? If we change the suits, is there any difference?

Perhaps there is no difference as long as the response was in a suit and opener rebids the opening suit.

How about this auction?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	pass
1NT	Dble	2♦	Dble

This auction is different. There is more to say for using double as takeout with three unbid suits. Responder is not often very short in diamonds. Maybe it is better to use a different meaning for double in this situation but should we? How about if the opening suit was hearts? Or spades? Would that change matters?

There are, of course, many more possible variations. Perhaps partner has bid a suit instead of double, or opener bids a second suit like in the following auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	pass
1♠	Dble	2♣	Dble

Does this double show clubs? Or perhaps good diamonds, Or both!?

If you discuss these things with the partner you always play with, it may be better to make a general agreement. If we have a good hand and pass over an opening bid we often have length in opener's suit.

The above was just a short version of how I will discuss different aspects of the problems we run into in the auction. The idea is also to suggest what a partnership agreement can look like. In this situation, I might propose something like one or more of these alternatives:

(1X)-pass-(1Y)-some bid; (2X)-Dble

Your double is for penalties

If there are three unbid suits, the double is for takeout

If opener bids a second suit, double shows length in the opening suit

To discuss: Here I can add a comment

Or whatever rule you agree on with your partner. It will not work like a dream every time, but you will know what double means when it comes up.

If one of these situations comes up with a new partner, you don't have an agreement. That can be the case with the ordinary partner too if you haven't talked about the actual situation. When that happens, you have to ask yourself what your partner thinks about this? What do other people do here?

If you like my idea , you are welcome with suggestions and ideas. As I already am warming up for the first chapter, I promise to be back soon!

Introduction - redoubles

As you already know, my ambition is to help you with good partnership agreements. By reading the comments to my last post, I learned that they could also be called meta-agreements if I understand it correctly.

We have to use our judgment; estimate, presume and speculate in the bidding even when we know what all the bids mean. If we also must guess the meaning of our partner's bid, that is not any help.

Searching for agreements, whatever we call them, is really looking for a way to avoid guessing. When I work with my partner and our system, I try to find similarities in auctions that are comparable but different.

I will try to present candidates in the field of possible agreement and try to find differences that you might want to consider. It is up to you to use these leads in shaping your agreements with your partner. Then we have to wait and see if it works!

I know most of my readers don't need many examples to understand what we are talking about. That is why I often discuss the ongoing auction without presenting a hand and I will only add some example hands when I think it is appropriate.

I will usually withhold my personal opinions about what to decide. but as this kind of work with your system is new to many, I will sometimes reveal how the agreements look in my own notes.

I am not yet sure what to include in this book. I will try to find auctions that do not involve any conventions to make it interesting to as many as possible.

My idea is to start by discussing penalty doubles. When we make agreements on various penalty doubles, it concerns redoubles too. So that left me with the starting point.

Penalty oriented redoubles

This part concerns mainly redoubles that show strength (values). There are many other types with some special meaning. One is the SOS-RD, others help to find the right spot when the opponent's double our artificial bids, but I will leave them aside for now.

Traditionally a redouble at a low level is a signal to partner: We have most of the high cards: Let us consider doubling the opponents as an alternative to playing something ourselves. That is why this type of redouble eventually will lead us to discuss penalty doubles.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Dble	RD		1♥

Using penalty doubles when the opponents try to escape is standard. Opener has 11/12+ and responder something like 10+ HCP, usually without a heart fit. It is true that we also can redouble with 10 points and 3-card support, but then we are planning to rebid 2♥, so let us forget about that hand for a moment.

When we make a redouble like the one above there is an unwritten rule that we shouldn't let the opponents play any undoubled contract below 2♥ (two of the opening suit). If any of the opponents bid a minor now, pass is forcing from both North and South.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Dble	RD	2♦	1♥ ?

South can double with four decent diamonds. If South passes, North can make a penalty double or bid something but not pass. Let us look at some different auctions:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Dble	RD	2♠	1♥ ?

The difference here is that East has bid above 2♥. If South passes, it isn't forcing. Even if North-South has a little more HCP than the opponents, they shouldn't be obliged to play at the 3-level if they can't double 2♠.

One interesting issue with redoubles seems to be whether they define a forcing level. If they do, and the opponents bid below that level, we have to bid again.

We usually talk about a forcing pass when discussing game-forcing auctions or when the opponents sacrifice over our game. We can also use the forcing pass after a strong redouble (or double), and the difference is that at low levels we may set an upper limit (in the case above the upper limit is 2♥).

A reasonable question: Is a double still for penalties? If the opponents bid above the 'forcing pass' level, we can use that as an excuse to play differently.

What about this relatively common auction?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1NT	Dble	RD

Whether East's double shows a strong hand or is a defensive convention against 1NT doesn't matter. South's redouble shows a good hand and suggests penalizing the opponents as an alternative.

How do you play in this auction? Is the redouble forcing to the 2NT-level?

I am sure that some of you play that South only has to bid over two of a minor but can pass if opponents are in two of a major. One reason for that treatment: It is more dangerous to double a major because of the game bonus if it makes.

If you play that way, you can not pass over a minor, but you can over a major. Does that make a difference to what double means in the different scenarios?

It seems to be important information whether we have agreed that a redouble in a specific situation requires us to bid at a certain level or not.

A pretty standard convention among experts is for responder to use transfers in the following situation:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♠	Dble	?

Playing transfer from 1NT (to clubs) and up is a popular treatment. What to do if you don't have support and no suit to transfer to? I am not sure everybody has the same agreement about redouble, but to pass with up to 9 HCP is somewhat inactive, and therefore redouble is discounted to about 8 HCP.

The next auction in defensive bidding is similar:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	1♥
Dble	RD		?

When you overcall, and the next hand makes a negative double, there are different ways to use a redouble. One is that it shows a top-honor in partner's suit (Rosencrantz). If you play the redouble as showing some high cards, I doubt you have decided that this redouble is forcing you to make another bid.

Thus, it is apparent that some of the redoubles that admittedly show strength should not impose further bidding from our side.

A common situation is that you already have stopped in a part-score and the opponents reopen with a balancing double:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
Dble	RD		

When you redouble a reopening double the standard is that it shows extra values and one of our options should be to penalize the opponents. Whether this redouble force us to bid is to be discussed with your partner. The next redouble is different in several ways.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
pass	2♥	Dble	RD

We have already found a fit, and that seems to make takeout doubles dispensable. The question to address here is if this redouble is only inviting to 3♥ or is forcing to at least that level.

I want to mention one special redouble. Support doubles and redoubles are popular conventions. This is an example:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♣
pass	1♥	Dble	RD

South shows 3-card support in hearts. This redouble is neither a strong bid nor forcing to a specific level. However, if you don't use support redoubles, South shows a good hand. If that is the case, you may want to discuss if the redouble is forcing to a specified level or not.

There are always new situations at the table. Auctions that we never have discussed and not even dreamed of come up all the time. How can you prepare for all these possibilities?

To play often and discuss a lot with your partner is helpful. It is also beneficial to agree on some general rules that cover similar bids and bidding situations even if you do! It is time to mention a few possible agreements.

- Which redoubles define a forcing pass level? And what level?

If you have not already covered this question in your system notes, you can begin by looking at my examples above. That work can help on how to handle the situations we looked at and many more.

If you think this is too much work, or you don't have that kind of partnership, don't worry about it. There is a way to handle that also.

Next comes another effort. The following is a list of situations you might want to include. Each situation needs a Penalty/Not Penalty/No agreement.

- When do we use penalty doubles after a 'strong redouble'?

- 1) Always (I guess never is also possible)
- 2) The opponents' bid is below our defined level
- 3) The opponents' bid is above our defined level
- 4) We redouble a reopening double
- 5) Our redouble is at the X-level
- 6) We have already found a fit
- 7) The opponents have a fit
- 8) We have not defined any level

What you see here is that the forcing pass level can have relevance. When you have agreed upon these items, you can write down the meta-agreements you have after a redouble!

The last point is essential. It is good to have a general agreement for situations where you don't have one! Then you can add something like this:

- If we have no idea if the redouble defines a level or not (e.g. you don't have an agreement), all doubles are for takeout (or all doubles are for penalties)

In my system notes, following sentence summarizes a lot of auctions, and also some that we never have talked about:

- *When we can pass out opponents' bid, double is for takeout*

That is the sort of meta-agreement I like best because it easy to remember.

Before advancing to the next chapter, let us look at a few more redoubles:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	2♥	Dble	RD

If North's 2♥ is a normal weak two-bid, the standard is that partner's doubles are for penalty since there is no need for takeout doubles. South's redouble doesn't change that and we still use penalty doubles after the redouble.

The difference is that the redouble involves partner in the process. He can cooperate and double with a maximum, perhaps with some length in the bid suit or good defensive strength. I think it is logical that he doesn't double when he is short in opponents' suit, and I hope you agree.

Most of the time, North should pass when he can't double but he can make a bid when he has a special hand, say KQJ10xx in his suit or a 6-4 hand with a singleton in the bid suit.

If South wants to make a penalty double whatever North has, he should pass and double at his next turn in order to not risk that partner bids again.

As all my readers aren't experts, let me also explain how it works if not all your doubles are for penalties. Will using double as takeout in some circumstances not make it impossible to punish the opponents when you should?

Let us look at this auction again, and for the sake of my point, assume penalty doubles over two of a minor, but takeout doubles over higher bids:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1NT	Dble	RD
2♥	Pass	Pass	?

Let us sit down behind South. He has this hand:

♠ Axx ♥ Jx ♦ K10xx ♣ J10xx

Even if the agreement says that South now can pass, he will not often do that. I guess the redouble shows about 7-8 HCP as a minimum and it should often be possible to find a makeable contract.

With this hand, South can make a takeout double. In that way we may penalize the opponents even when using takeout doubles because opener will often pass with four hearts. Otherwise, North-South will play 2♠ on a 4-3 fit or have a 4-4 fit in a minor.

If South instead has this hand:

♠ Ax ♥ xxx ♦ K10xx ♣ J10xx

Pass is reasonable but an alternative is to bid 2NT if it shows the minors. However, it is also possible to double, and if partner bids 2♠, bid 2NT, which perhaps more clearly indicates the minors.

Let us look at the situation from opener's side:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1NT	Dble	RD
2♥	?		

How should he reason in this situation? Perhaps we also have to consider the vulnerability here. If East-West are vulnerable, North should double with almost any hand with a doubleton in hearts to cater to the possibility of South wishing to make a penalty pass.

What should North do with this hand?

♠ Ax ♥ AQx ♦ Jxx ♣ KQxxx

Being red against white, he should aim for a game instead of thinking of penalties. North can bid 2NT (or perhaps 3NT). I don't know if you have made the same observation that I have; it is easy to overestimate the value of your cards in defensive play. My non-vulnerable opponents often get away with 300 or 500 even when we can make a game. Defense is difficult!

This technique to not always use penalty doubles after a redouble can be thought of as reversed penalty doubles, as we then must double to enable partner to make a penalty pass. One disadvantage with reversing the doubles is that you will probably not be able to double the opponents when you both have length in their suit.

This is it for today, I will discuss penalty doubles in the next chapters.

Penalty doubles

In the previous chapter, we looked at redoubles. I decided to start there because a strength showing redouble often is a signal to penalize the opponents. I advised you to discuss with your partner which redoubles define a forcing pass level. A few other subjects are also related to the penalty double, namely the penalty pass and the forcing pass.

I expect most of my readers to be experienced bridge players. You will have to forgive me for being boring and state what seems to be obvious facts. However, they may not be obvious to everybody.

Many doubles are penalty-oriented, and most of them are easy to identify. Other doubles show values, ask for a lead, or want partner to cooperate.

There is a group of doubles that I call activity doubles in my recent books. They are similar to lead-directing doubles. The difference is that an activity double asks partner to participate in the bidding while the lead-directing double doesn't. This is an example:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Dble	2♥*	1♥ Dble

*A good raise in spades

South's double here is a penalty double by definition, but there is no reason to use the double that way as we know the opponents will not play there.

With a good heart suit, opener may want to double for the lead, but since he already has promised five hearts, there is another possibility. South can have:

♠ Ax ♥ AQ10xxs ♦ xx ♣ QJx

South can double to show a decent minimum hand with six hearts. Activity doubles are informative rather than penalty doubles, so I save the discussion about them to later chapters.

In this book, I do not often tell you about the agreements I have with my partner. I want to help you make your own decisions by presenting the different alternatives to choose from.

We have to start somewhere, and why not with a pass.

The penalty pass

The penalty pass is not a double, but it must be a part of this chapter because I want to discuss what happens if the opponents run to another suit. Does a penalty pass create a forcing situation when the opponents escape to another suit? That is the standard treatment, but let us look at possible exceptions.

All penalty passes don't promise any strength, as in this auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1NT	Dble	Pass	Pass

This is not an ordinary penalty pass. South, would sometimes want to pass as a last resort with a weak hand and to bid something simply looks worse. If you agree and West bids something, and North passes, South can pass too.

More penalty passes can be very weak. Look at this auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♣	Pass
pass	Dble	pass	Pass
2♦			

South can be weak with a long club suit. When the opponents run from 2♣, perhaps it shouldn't be a forcing situation when the penalty pass can be very weak.

These examples show the difficulties of making meta-agreements. It is difficult to formulate rules for every possibility and you sometimes need to define a rule with exceptions.

This is a possible shortlist for what happens after a penalty pass:

- *If opponents try to escape, the doubles that follow are for penalty*
- *An exception is when the penalty pass can be a last resort*

Another subject to discuss is this: Is pass still a penalty pass after a redouble from the opponents?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♣	Pass
pass	Dble	RD	?

The question here is if South can pass without a penalty pass? One way to do it is to decide depending on the level. A widespread agreement when the opponents redouble is this: A pass at the one-level means nothing, but a pass above that level is for penalties.

What about this auction?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥ RD	Pass Pass	Pass Pass	1♦ Dble ?

West's redouble shows a good hand, but what about North's pass? Is it no longer possible to make a penalty pass? Instinctively, we suspect that North has some hearts here! The question is: can West redouble to tilt your methods?

The following situation is both alike and different:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦ RD	Pass Pass	Pass Pass	Dble ?

However, in my mind, the pass from North after the redouble doesn't transmit the same vibrations and North probably just has a weak hand.

Next is an entirely different auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1NT	Dble	RD	?

It is against the odds that South has a good hand, and you have to decide if this pass has any meaning whatsoever. South may want to bid, but perhaps it is better to let partner decide if you don't have a good suit? If your opponents play a weak notrump and the redouble is artificial, it is another story, but I will stop there.

Here are a few points to deliberate over:

- *If the opponent redoubles, we use penalty passes from level X*
- *Is there a difference between when we open and defensive bidding?*

Logical penalty doubles

What I think of here is when you double a bid or a final contract, and it is evident to everyone that the double is for penalties.

There are also situations where we instinctively know that a double is for penalties, and I can name a few:

- *We have made a game-forcing bid*
- *Partner opens with a pre-emptive bid, showing a one-suiter*
- *In later rounds: partner has shown a one-suiter or two-suits*
- *Following doubles after a penalty double*
- *The opponents sacrifice over our game*

It would be too hard even to begin discussing possible exceptions. I could make this list longer, but I think you understand what I mean. When we all know that a double is for penalties, there is not more to discuss.

Forcing pass

Whether the forcing pass is at a high level or we have a forcing situation at a lower level, the standard is to use double for penalties. The question here is how to define forcing passes.

If we start with the lower levels, we have already discussed that some redoubles can initiate a forcing pass up to a defined level. We have to agree on: which and to what level. It is the same with doubles. But more difficult.

When our first double is a penalty double, it is standard that it also creates a forcing pass and that we can double for penalties if the opponents run to another suit.

However, we can perhaps not use the same rule when our first double just shows values:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1NT	2♣*	Dble

* 2♣ is artificial, showing majors or something else

In situations like the above one, you should know what double is. You can play it as clubs, but some players use double to show strength. If you also do that, you ought to discuss if the double is forcing to a specific level or not. That is not an easy decision because you may even want to make different agreements depending on the explanation of the 2♣ bid.

When the opponents overcall with an artificial (proxy) bid, you also can pass and double in the next round as a penalty double. That, of course, is if you can be sure that there will be a next round!

This is an example of how the system notes may look:

- If 2C shows majors, double=values and forcing to X. Doubles are for penalties
- If 2C shows something else without identifying a suit, double is Stayman
- If 2C shows a specified suit ..., and so on

Another situation:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♥*	Dble

* 2♥ shows spades and a minor

Assuming your double shows some HCP and not heart support, the question is: Do we have to bid again, and to what level? The 2♥ bid can show two specified suits, but the problem is the same.

In the previous example, our partner opened 1NT and here with 1♥. The difference is that 1NT shows hands with a narrow interval, often 15-17 HCP, while the suit opening in standard methods is less limited and can be from 11 up to around 20 HCP.

If you play all these doubles to be strong enough to create a forcing level, you cannot double on hands where you want to give partner a hint that you have some, albeit limited, values. That may be just what the unlimited hand needs to know to bid again.

The following overcall shows a two-suiter, usually the minors:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2NT	?

I think most of us have agreements about what cue-bids in the minors show, but what are your agreements about the double?

It is not easy to make a meta-agreement about all possible auctions similar to the above. Let us look at the facts when we double an artificial overcall that shows something about other suits.

- 1) The opponent's bid (usually) shows a two-suiter.
- 2) Your partner has 15-17 (if 1NT) and 11 or more (if a suit opening)
- 3) You know what level we are at, and perhaps one or both the opponent's suits

Here are a few possible agreements to make if you want to define a forcing level:

- *Double always creates a forcing pass to the level of X*
- *When opponents overcall after 1NT, our double is forcing to level X*
- *When opponents overcall after a suit opening, our double shows values, but we don't have to bid again*

When you have agreed on this, you are ready to decide about the meaning of doubles. If you have a forcing pass situation and use penalty doubles, it is less of a problem since you can double for penalties or pass to let partner decide.

If you agree that you don't have to bid again when a double shows values, you need to decide what to do next. You can still use penalty doubles, or perhaps the reversed method, that is to say, you double as takeout to check if partner has a penalty pass.

Alternatively, you can play double for penalties when your position is directly behind the bidder, but as takeout in balancing seat. You are the boss.

Here are some lines you can cross out or work with:

- *In a forcing situation, doubles are for penalties*
- *If the opponents bid higher than our defined level, a double is ...*
- *If we don't know what the level is, doubles are ...*
- *When we just show values, doubles are ...*

You may want to add something about the position of the doubler.

Before leaving the low-level forcing passes, let us look at this:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
Dble	2NT*	3♣	

*2NT shows support and at least an invitational hand

Whether North's 2NT is forcing to game or just invitational, North-South will never let the opponents play in 3♣ as the 2NT bid is forcing to at least 3♥. In this kind of situation, it is possible that we want to double the opponents, but that has not much to do with the forcing pass, and I will come back to situations like this later in the book.

I also want to discuss high-level forcing passes as a part of penalty doubles. The situation here to discuss is when the opponents bid over our game, and sometimes you don't know which side can make a contract. Making the right decision at game or slam level can decide many IMP's.

I am sure the basic rule always applies: in a game-forcing auction, you don't let the opponents play undoubled. There is a difference between forcing to game and to bid a game:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2/3♣	4♥
5♣			

South may have bid 4♥ because he thinks it will make, leaving the opponents with less bidding room to do the right thing. He may also have a weaker hand and preempt for the same reason. If East bid is a pre-emptive 3♣ instead of 2♣, would that change anything?

Some players regard forcing passes as a delicate issue and prefer to lean back on their good judgment rather than having dubious agreements. The difficulty of devising good meta-agreements about forcing pass makes players doubtful.

Others prefer to have rules to lean on, and admittedly I am in that group. Bridge is a partnership game, and in my opinion, we should at least try to come up with applicable agreements.

What are the possible rules? We have to look at a few auctions to find some clues.

The current vulnerability often has a strong impact in these situations:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♣	2NT*
3♣	4♥	5♣	?

*2NT shows support and at least an invitational hand

It is possible that both sides can make a game. If East-West are the only ones vulnerable, they probably believe that they can make 5♣, but if they are white against red, they have more often bid 5♣ as a sacrifice. You should consider if the vulnerability also should influence your agreements.

The next auction is different:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♣	Dble
3♣	Pass	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	5♣	?

East-West have stopped in 3♣, but when we bid 4♥ they bid 5♣. From their bidding you can conclude that 5♣ is a sacrifice and that reasoning can be considered in our agreements.

The idea of using a forcing pass at a high level is different from what we have talked about at lower levels.

We can use the forcing pass at the two- or three-level to cooperate and avoid letting the opponents play undoubled when we are able to punish them.

When a pass is forcing at higher levels, we must decide between passing, double, or bid again, and pass is still the cooperative choice.

If pass is non-forcing, you can have the following problem:

When *you* know that the choice should be either double or bid, you dare not pass if the risk is that your *partner* doesn't know.

If pass is forcing, the difference is that you can use a pass more constructively. Let us look at a hand:

Red against white, as dealer you hold

♠ Axx ♥ AK10xxx ♦ Axx ♣ x

You open 1♥, and when your LHO doubles, your partner bids 2NT to show at least a limit raise. The next hand now jumps to 5♣.

If pass is forcing in this auction, it would be my choice. If partner has wasted values in clubs, we should defend, and if not 5♥ should have a play. If we don't have a forcing pass, we don't have this option.

I am not saying that you definitely should use a forcing pass here; I am just talking about the difference!

There are situations where you can make a certain bid just to create a forcing pass situation.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♠	3♠
Dble	Pass	Pass	4♥
4♠			

There is a difference between bidding 3♠ and to bid 4♥ right away. If you agree, it should be more or less obvious to use a forcing pass in situations like this. We have to double or bid again.

Let us look at another auction. Is this the same thing?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♠
Dble	2♠	4♣	4♦
5♣			

South's 4♦ must show interest in more bidding. If opponents were silent, it should be some kind of slam try, but in the actual context, South is trying to cooperate with partner about what to do if the opponents like here bid again. Such a bid should probably not define a forcing pass.

The following are some plausible suggestions for agreements about forcing passes at game level. Just either delete or change them to your satisfaction:

- *We have forced to game*
- *We have bid a vulnerable game without using pre-emptive bids*
- *We have made an invitation to a game, and the opponents jump to the 5-level*
- *The opponents are obviously sacrificing*
- *The opponents make or have made a pre-emptive bid*

You probably also want to add comments about the vulnerability.

Before I leave the forcing pass, there is one subject left. Also at higher levels, the opponents can use proxy bids. This is an example:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♠
Pass	2♠	Dble	4♠
4NT			

The 4NT bid usually means that West has more than one suit and thus wants help to find the best fit. Compared to if West bids a suit, there are a few important differences.

The above auction is just one of many with the same problem. The opponents will not play in 4NT, and therefore this is automatically a forcing situation. How can we use that for the best?

I will give you our system notes about this situation, and perhaps you can find something useful there:

- 1) We are not in a forcing situation, and we have not even bid a game
 - *Double shows extra values but does not create a forcing situation*
 - *If we want to double something, we can pass first*
- 2) We have bid a game (but do not necessarily have values for it)
 - *Pass means we do not have a strong opinion on what to do*
 - *Double means from our side that we should either bid or double*
 - *Over their following bid then, pass from either of us invites to bid again*

A comment about the double:

We have to cater to not knowing what suit they will play when we double. That is why we have an invitational pass after the double. We don't want to bid when our partner wants to double.

- 3) We are in a game-forcing situation
 - *Double is a warning, but we still can make an invitational pass over their bid*
 - *Pass is invitational, as is a pass when they bid their suit*

There are many penalty doubles left, and I will soon get back with more.

Penalty doubles when we open

In this and the following chapters we will talk about *penalty doubles by agreement*. The difference from *logical penalty doubles* is that we will discuss doubles that we have agreed to be for penalties instead of just using our judgment. I think you already have many such agreements, but perhaps you can define some more from my examples.

As a parenthesis: In a comment to my last post, I was asked about my opinion on so called inverted pass-double in forcing pass situations. I didn't remember when I answered, but I have actually already tried that. Once!

It was a long time ago, 1974 in Las Palmas, and I played with Rolf-Eric Anderson in the World Pairs Championships. After many days of qualification and semifinal we were playing the final and was in about tenth place when this happened.

We played against a world-class pair and after a wild bidding they sacrificed at a high level. Rolf-Eric and I had decided to try a new convention. When opponents sacrificed, we doubled to show a forcing pass while a pass requested partner to double. As I remember it, I doubled as an invitation (correlative to a forcing pass) and my partner pulled to slam. We got it right, but our opponents did not believe we had this convention.

There was a protest and meetings with the jury, and we lost because we didn't have any documentation of the convention. That shows that it is useful to write down your agreements! We learned something from it but felt badly wronged and did not play well after that. And we skipped that convention!

It is essential to know which doubles are for penalty and which are not. There are many competitive situations where penalty is a possible meaning for a double, and we want to make sure to have the same opinion as our partner.

If your partnership finds principles and logic to agree on, you can not always think alike but improve. I hope to give you an idea about how and where to look and inspire you to find the rest yourself.

The idea with meta-agreements is to cover many situations with our agreement. To be able to do that, we must find comparable situations. The issue is that we have a lot of factors to consider, but I will give it a try.

We can find some clues depending on the current auction, the position, and what type of bid the opponent makes. In addition, we should differentiate between when we open the bidding and when we don't because there are not many opportunities for low-level penalty doubles when the opponents open the bidding.

These are some possible statements about how our auction has developed so far:

- *We have stopped in a part-score*
- *We have found a fit*
- *We have limited our strength (one or both of us)*

The following statements are about our position:

- *We are placed behind the overcaller*
- *We are in the balancing seat*
- *We have already passed (in the previous round) placed behind the bidder*

And finally, we know something about the opponent's bidding and the bid we are about to double. These are the cases I can think of:

- *The bid is an overcall by a solo-bidder*
- *The bid is showing support, e.g., they have a fit*
- *The bid is natural or not, forcing or not*
- *The bid is a pre-emptive bid, perhaps a jump bid*

I don't think we can find one statement above that solely defines the grounds for a penalty double, but if we combine two or more of them as building blocks, we can perhaps do better.

There is even more to consider. In some situations, we may not need a double for takeout or to show strength. We also know the current vulnerability, and that may matter in some cases but not in all.

Let us start with what has happened in our auction until now to sort this out.

We have stopped in a part-score

We have already talked about redoubles, and that when the opponents reopen with a double, a redouble is a signal about extra values. However, I will leave redoubles out in this chapter and assume you already have agreements about those.

If we don't agree otherwise, penalty doubles are probably standard when we have stopped in a part-score and the opponents make a reopening bid. Even if you prefer takeout doubles at low-level, I believe there must be exceptions from the rules whatever your preference is.

Let us start with an example:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	Pass	2♥	Dble

With a poll at bridgewinners.com, I tried to find out if there is a unanimous option about the double in some of my examples. This was one of them.

It is possible to argue for double being either for penalty or takeout here. South can have hearts, but also a maximum hand with both minors. The majority of the readers say penalty, but a little more than 20% say otherwise. As always, if you agree with your partner, all is well.

It is not easy to find a magic formula to help us in all these and other cases. We need to look for similarities if we want to make meta-agreements.

From the comments in the poll, David Burn suggests: *Not sure about standard, but I play that if we have finished bidding and they reopen, double is penalty. If we haven't and they don't, then it isn't.*

David Caprera adds this: *When we have come to rest, doubles over the bidder are penalty and under the bidder are card showing. I agree there is no standard.*

If you don't have an agreement like that, or want to specify your rules more, you have to look further. What leads can we find besides that one of the two sides may already have found a fit? The following is a possible agenda:

When we have stopped, and opponents reopen, double is for penalties when:

- *If we don't need double as a takeout double?*
- *If our strength is already narrowly defined (no need to show extra values)?*
- *If the opponents are at a certain level, perhaps the three-level?*

And you may want also to discuss:

- *Does the vulnerability matter for your agreements?*
- *The positional factor that David Caprera advocates above*

If you play penalty doubles as the norm when you have stopped in a part-score, it will probably be less work to set up agreements about which doubles are for takeout or showing values.

An exception from the rule is when partner hasn't bid anything as in this auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	2♣	1♥ Dble

This is a takeout double. Alternatively, if opener passes over 2♣ and responder doubles in the balancing seat: Is that a penalty double? What if we raise the level and say that the opening bid is 1NT?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	2♠	1NT Dble

My guess is that also here takeout doubles are standard from either of us, and a reopening double from North allows opener to make a penalty pass. Our low-level double is not often for penalties when one of us hasn't shown any strength.

Responder's double, however, can be a penalty double even if he is a passed hand as in the following auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass 2♠	Pass Dble	2♣	1♥ 2♥

What else could it be? I can not think of another explanation, but if West instead raises to 3♣, is the double still a penalty double?

In other situations we can use double either as penalty, takeout, or extra values.

Let us look at some auctions where we have several options:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
Dble	Pass	2♥	Dble

What is this double? West reopened with a double, and East bid a suit. South has about 6-11 HCP while North is more narrowly described to (11)12-14. Should the double show a good hand, close to maximum, or is it a penalty double?

South doesn't often have four hearts, but North may have four. Should double show extra strength? If East instead bids 2♦, South can have four or even five of them, while North probably has at most three diamonds if you play a standard system. Such small nuances may influence how you think about a double, but the problem still is: does your partner have the same view?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	2♦
Pass	Pass	2♠	Dble

What is a double here? South doesn't have four spades. Does a double show three spades and good defensive values with a singleton heart, or is it some kind of takeout double? And what about North's double if South passes?

A double of a suit where we have denied four or more cards is not a typical penalty double. Therefore, we cannot always abide by the simple agreements suggested by David Burn and David Caprera. There are situations where we should make exceptions or, at least, make additional rules.

- *What is a double when we have denied four cards in the bid suit?*
- *Does it matter if partner can have four cards in the opponents' suit?*

We sometimes get help from the opponents:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	Pass	Dble	Pass
2NT*	Dble		

*2NT is artificial, perhaps Lebensohl or more probably the minors

When the opponents use artificial bids, we get an extra opportunity. The 2NT bid is frequently used in defense as Lebensohl or pick-a-suit. A double of 2NT allows us to cooperate, and whoever doubles, you can decide if the following doubles are for penalties or not. This type of double resembles the possibility to redouble over a double, and you also can decide if such doubles define a forcing level or not.

We have found a fit

We have found a fit and the opponents overcall. What principles should we decide on then? Both position and vulnerability matter, but devising good agreements is complicated even beyond those factors. The following example could have been included above as we both have a fit and have stopped in a part-score:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♥
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	Pass
Dble	Pass	2 ♠	Dble

There are a number of situations where we theoretically can use double as penalty, takeout, or extra values. Here we at least should rule out the takeout double. As we already have a fit, we don't need to find another. However, we can still use doubles either for penalties or to show strength and enable partner to make a penalty pass. Here, you should also consider that North could have redoubled. If he redoubles, does that show a good hand for defensive play or is it an invitation to 3 ♥?

In the last chapter, I mentioned reversed penalty doubles. That is not something that is widely implemented, but they fit nicely into situations where we often want to penalize the opponents but are in a non-forcing auction.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	Pass
2NT	Dble	3 ♣	?

If responder's double of 2NT shows extra values, is it forcing you either to double the opponents or bid again? If opener or responder is short in clubs they will want to bid again. To use double for that hand is what is called reversed penalty doubles, which allow partner to make a penalty pass with good clubs. If none of them has short clubs, they can both pass. Whether that makes a difference I leave it up to you.

Next East makes an overcall in a live auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	3 ♣	?

We still have room below 3 ♠ to make invitational bids and we can, if we want, use doubles for penalties. East is a solo-bidder and can sometimes be heavily punished. What you have to decide is if double from North means extras or penalties.

If the overcall is 3 ♥, a standard treatment is to use the double of the suit just below ours as a game-invitation, but a penalty double would occasionally bring in all the money.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥	Pass
Pass	?		

If South can't double for penalties, a double from North should perhaps show a 3 ♠ bid with good defense and short hearts? If the opponents say that South took a few seconds to pass, it is nice to have such an agreement in writing, but South should be able to pass in a normal tempo anyway.

Another situation to handle is this:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2♣	2♠	3♣	1♠ Dble

When the opponents have a fit, the situation is not the same. Even if opener has four clubs, his position is not as favorable. If South instead has short clubs, he would probably want to bid again and double allows partner to make a penalty pass. You must decide between that and other options. It is good to have some general agreements in all the above types of auctions.

These are a few things to discuss when you have a fit and opponents overcall:

- *What is double when we don't need the double to invite a game?*
- *When does double show strength or even shortage in opponent's suit?*
- *If opponents also have a fit, what is a double?*
- *When does the vulnerability matter for your doubles?*
- *When do the positional factors decide the meaning of a double?*

When we are well on our way to game, or even are in a game-forcing auction, we still have to handle the possibility of interference bids. One difference can be that the opponents bid below our forced level:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
pass	2NT	3♦	1♠ ?

Whether 2NT is game-forcing or not, we at least will not let the opponents play in 3♦. Perhaps you already have discussed this situation, but I will give you some alternatives if not.

We often have a game, but you may want to use penalty doubles over a solo-bid. However, if the opponents have found a fit, you probably want to use the double for something else. In that context, perhaps also the opponents' voluntary response to a takeout double confirms a fit.

It also happens that the opponents bid at the 4-level:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2♣	2NT	4♣	1♠ ?

Whether 4♣, as here, is showing support or is a pre-emptive jump bid, you can have several decisions to make. Is double a penalty double or not, and if 2NT is only invitational, at what level can you let the opponents play undoubled?

It can be different depending on which major you have, the worst case being if you have hearts and the opponents have spades. Here is such a case:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	2♠	3♠	1♥
			?

If the 2♠ bid is invitational or better with support, I guess both North and South can pass now. The question still is, what does a double mean?

We already have talked about forcing pass agreements. Except for what doubles mean, you should discuss in which circumstances you can pass out the opponents' intervention, and it is not always as obvious as in the last example.

In addition to pass and double, you want to discuss the meaning of other bids in situations like this. I have included questions about other bids below to give you an idea of how to make your agreements.

Opponents overcall after your game-invitational or GF raise:

- *When can we pass out opponents' interference bids?*
- *Is double a penalty double over a non-jump solo bid?*
- *Does pass show a minimum or perhaps no control in the opponent's suit?*
- *If double isn't for penalties, does it show a control (or perhaps shortness)?*
- *What is 3NT? Perhaps a control (A or K) if double shows shortage?*
- *When does a cuebid show a void?*
- *Is a bid in a new suit a slam try or a way to prepare for a sacrifice?*

Not so easy, I guess, but nevertheless worth the effort.

Penalty by agreements -2

It is almost impossible to make only a few general agreements on doubles at a low level. When I look at what I have written so far, I realize that there is much to discuss with my partner.

We have discussed possible agreements for double when we open and either have a fit or have stopped in a part-score. Let us move on.

An easy way out can be to treat all doubles as takeout when you don't have an explicit agreement to do otherwise. That is probably what you would do playing with an unknown partner. In a serious partnership we must look for the exceptions from that rule. Furthermore, it is rewarding to discuss these competitive auctions with your partner as you then get to know each other's way of reasoning.

I will not talk about doubles in live auctions where we both are unlimited because there are many situations to discuss but very few need a discussion. I think you already have some general rules about a double when your partner has shown a one-suited hand or length in two suits. And I expect that when the aggression comes after responder's 1-over-1 in a suit, double is either a support double or another form of informative double.

In this chapter, I want to identify auctions where one (or both) of our hands are limited, but the bidding still is live. I want to discuss auctions that are reasonably frequent. One of the limited bids for most pairs is the 1NT response, showing a hand from about 5 to 12 HCP. Even if some play 1NT as forcing, many regards it as non-forcing or semi-forcing.

Depending on the opening suit, the 1NT response is more or less descriptive. After 1♠-1NT responder can have almost anything, perhaps including spade support and a weak hand. If the opening bid is 1♥ or 1♦ responder's hand is more limited in terms of distribution.

As usual, the worst case is when the opponents bid spades:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1NT	2♠	1♥ Dble

I included this example in the poll, and less than 30% said penalty. South cannot rebid his suit at the two-level, and we may need to use double as takeout. As this is a recurring situation, we should be sure to agree with out partner.

It may matter how you use the 2NT rebid from opener. Using the *Good-bad 2NT convention*, a three-level bid is constructive but non-forcing, while 2NT is either fighting for the partscore or is very strong. However, at least if double is a penalty double, you need a way to show a balanced hand with 17-19 HCP, and then 2NT is probably better used as natural.

Even if double is for penalties, something can be said for doubling with three good spades and using 2NT as a takeout bid, perhaps in the good-bad style. The current vulnerability also matters here, and if the opponents are non-vulnerable, you may want to prioritize finding the best game instead of looking for penalties.

What do you say with this hand?

♠ K10x ♥ AK10xx ♦ Axx ♣ Kx

Bidding 3NT is a little optimistic and 2NT seems more appropriate. However, if 2NT shows this hand, what then to do with:

♠ xx ♥ KQ10xx ♦ AQx ♣ AKx

Opener must consider the risk of being doubled by the opponents since his LHO often has heart length but he should find a bid with this strength. If available, a takeout double seems to be the best.

In this and many other situations, we already know that partner will not make a penalty pass after a takeout double as he doesn't have spade length. We also can expect that the opponents have a fit in spades. If opener wants to double 2♠ for penalties, perhaps he can pass and hope for a double by responder.

If we trust the majority, double should be for takeout. Whether to include 18-19 hands or not depends on how you use 2NT. Another question is how to find out if we have a spade stopper or not. An alternative may be to play penalty doubles when opponents are vulnerable and takeout doubles when we are.

To summarize, it seems to me that if double is for takeout 2NT, if natural, can promise a spade stopper. If double is penalty-oriented, we need 2NT to show other good hands and I don't think we can afford to play good-bad in either case.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1NT	2♠	1♥
Pass	2NT		Dble

If opener's double if for takeout, is then 2NT scrambling, Lebensohl, or perhaps natural with interest in 3NT? That is something to discuss.

You have some work to do if you don't have agreements in this and comparable cases.

We (one or both of us) are limited

Compared to the previous auction, the percentage for choosing the meaning penalty may be higher with reversed major suits as in the following example:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1NT	2♥	1♠ Dble

Is this double for penalties or a good hand with some fit in the minors? One difference here compared to the last auction is that partner may be able to make a penalty pass after a takeout double. If opener passes and responder is in the balancing seat, the meaning of a double may depend on what a double from opener would have meant.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass Pass	1NT Dble	2♥	1♠ Pass

What is the meaning of a double by responder if opener passes? In similar cases, a double can be used either for penalties or takeout by different arguments, but you have a problem if you don't agree with your partner.

In the previous chapter, we discussed situations where we have stopped in 1NT and the opponents reopened. Perhaps you want to synchronize your agreements if you think these auctions are similar to when opener passes and the opponents reopen.

I don't know what is best, and you have to decide what is most logical for you. Whatever agreement you have, you will sometimes not be able to penalize the opponents, but you can at least avoid misunderstandings about the double.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1NT	2♣	1♥ Dble

Responder often has length in both minors. Perhaps we can more often penalize the opponents, but East also knows that when he overcalls. Should this double show strength or what?

What about if East's overcall is conventional, perhaps showing clubs and spades? Or in the following example, if it shows clubs and a major or even both majors?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1NT	2♣	1♦ Dble

Since these auctions are frequent, you should consider some principles on handling interference in the sandwich position after the 1NT response. If you have a general principle, you should look for, and agree on, the exceptions. One aspect can also be: If we use takeout doubles when partner never has length in the suit, do we thereby make it less dangerous to overcall?

Possible agreements when opponents overcall the 1NT response:

- *In what situations are opener's doubles for penalties?*
- *What is responder's double in the reopening position?*
- *When does the vulnerability matter?*
- *What is a double of a bid that is not natural?*

To double for penalties when the opponents have found a fit is probably not your first choice, but what about this situation?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	1NT	2♠	1♣ Dble

North has promised something in spades, but is a double suggesting penalty, or is it just some form of takeout double? And while we discuss this auction, what is a double from responder when opener passes?

A frequent case for using penalty doubles is when responder passes over an overcall and doubles the next round. Responder is limited (if pass isn't forcing) but he still can have values for bidding if he doesn't have a suitable bid.

One reason for responder to pass in the first round is having a hand suitable for a penalty pass. Is the following double such a hand?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Dble		

This double sounds like a spade stack, and there is no need for a takeout double. There are many similar situations, though. What about this auction?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Dble		

Does the double still show a good hand with spades or perhaps clubs? Or both? We need some agreements about the second-round double to avoid trouble. If you trust your opponents, opener can perhaps look at his spade length to decide the matter. The following situation is comparable:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♦
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	Dble		

What is this double? For penalties with hearts or a reopening bid with length in the unbid suits? If you are willing to risk that, opener can often decide the meaning of this type of double by looking at his heart holding.

Another situation to discuss is when only opener has limited his hand:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	1♥	Pass	1♣
2♦	Dble		1NT

It is reasonable that responder here shows extra values and perhaps four spades when the bidding is live, even when opener has limited his hand with a notrump rebid. But what if all suits are bid?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1♥	Dble	1♣
2♦	Dble		Pass

Is there any need for a takeout double here? East usually has spades, but North can also have both majors. And what if East has overcalled 1♠ instead of doubling? Is double then asking opener to choose between hearts and clubs?

Are there any penalty doubles from responder when he has bid a suit, and if so, what are the criteria?

The situations we have discussed here are:

- *When is double not a penalty double when responder passes and doubles next?*
- *What is double in the second round when opener is limited?*

More agreements about double

When the opponents open, most of our doubles are for takeout. We need to use the double in different shapes to compete for the contract. When I look for penalty-oriented doubles in defensive bidding, I first think of the following:

- a) We have passed over a suit-bid and double next
- b) We double a natural 1NT bid
- c) Some doubles by advancer when all players bid

Not all of these are for penalties, and there are many cases to discuss before making agreements.

There is also another type of penalty double: the lead-directing double. When we double a suit-bid for the lead, the difference is that we don't think that the opponents will play that contract.

When we double an artificial bid without having an agreement, the double shows strength and usually also length in the suit.

Let us look at a few examples where double perhaps is better used for something else than just asking for a lead in the suit:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1NT	pass	2♣	Dble

When the notrump opening is strong this is nothing to argue about. South has clubs and wants partner to lead the suit. The double is not an invitation to partner to compete in clubs, but probably it happens that our partner bids anyway.

It is the same in other auctions where the opening is strong, or responders bid is an artificial game-forcing relay bid. Double is then lead-directing.

However, if the opponents play a weak notrump, 12-14 or even 10-12, is double still clubs? If you let the opponents have the bidding for themselves, they can get away with theft. It is less risky to act over an artificial bid than to wait and get active later.

There is a reason for making a strength showing double directly over an artificial bid. If we wait and reopen later, partner doesn't know if we have a good hand or just have the right distribution to reopen. We don't want to be kept out of a game, and therefore you should look at your agreements when the risk is obvious to miss a game if you withhold information about a good hand.

In many cases, our opponents use artificial bid to show support. Is the following double for a club lead?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	Pass	3♣	Dble

(3♣ is some kind of heart raise)

When the opponents have found a fit, we are already in a precarious position. When responder shows support with an artificial bid, double should perhaps be takeout of hearts instead of showing clubs.

Also in the next auction we can discuss the use of a lead-directing double:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	pass	4♣	Dble

(4♣ is a splinter bid)

There are two ways to interpret this double. Either South shows clubs and suggests a sacrifice, or the double is for the lead. It is possible to agree that the doubler wants a lead in the next higher (or lower) suit, whatever you decide.

In this and similar auctions, the double can have different meanings depending on vulnerability. In favorable vulnerability, double is perhaps an invite to a sacrifice, but when vulnerable a stronger hand or only asking for a lead.

One last point:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2NT	3♣	1♥ 4♣	pass Dble

Whatever 2NT and 4♣ mean, this double is not lead-directing, and the simple reason is that South probably will lead himself.

What should we call a double of an artificial bid that is not lead-directing? I chose to call them Activity doubles. In my next post, I will come back to discuss lead-directing doubles and activity doubles.

Penalty doubles in defensive bidding

If a player who passed over the opening next doubles a one-notrump response, one-notrump rebid, or simple rebid in opener's suit, that is for penalties. That is what Bridge World Standard says, and perhaps how you play as well.

You have this hand when your LHO opens with 1♦:

♠ x ♥ A9x ♦ AQ109x ♣ AQxx

My guess is that you pass. The bidding may continue:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	pass
1♠	Pass	2♦	Dble

This is a perfect hand for a penalty double. However, I am not sure that this is the only way to play.

An alternative interpretation of this double is South has some diamond length and couldn't act directly with a takeout double because he is too short in spades.

South can perhaps have this hand:

♠ x ♥ AQ9x ♦ Axxx ♣ AQ10x

In a sense, I guess you can call it a penalty double since your partner can pass with the right values, but we can also call it a delayed takeout double.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Dble

What is a double if opener rebids 2♣? We have only one unbid suit, and maybe the double then is more penalty-oriented?

The problem with simple agreements is that there are so many variations in practical bidding. South can double also in this auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	pass
1♠	Pass	2♠	Dble

This is not a penalty double, but what is then? Is it one of the strong hands above, or do you also double with a weaker hand with the unbid suits if you don't expect your partner to reopen?

What about when we double 1NT as a delayed action? According to the previously mentioned standard, it is a penalty double, but I am not sure you agree.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Pass	1♦ 1NT	pass Dble

Is this a penalty double or does it show the unbid suits? When your partner has not participated in the auction, you more often have a hand where you couldn't double 1♦ than a hand for only penalties.

The next double is perhaps a candidate for a penalty double.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1NT	Pass	1♦ Pass	pass Dble

Since you didn't double 1♦, you don't want to make a takeout double now. I can imagine that some treat this double as a weak hand with 4-4 in the majors.

When deciding about penalty versus takeout, it is different if your partner has bid or not. Let me return to a few examples from the presentation of this series.

The difference from what we have discussed here is that North has bid something in the sandwich position:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Dble	1♣ 2♣	pass Dble

We are placed behind the opener and pass. Responder bids a suit (or 1NT), and partner bids or doubles. Whether there are one, two, or even three unbid suits, it is an easy way out to agree that this double is for penalties.

This is not all. We also have a third type of auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♣	pass
Pass	Dble	2♣	Dble

Partner reopens, and opener rebids his suit. Is this a penalty double or a responsive double? And what if East jumps to 3♣ in any of these examples?

We need some agreements. You have passed over a suit opening, and double the same suit next. Here are some of the questions you may want to talk about with your partner:

- *What is double if your partner hasn't bid anything?*
- *What is double if partner has bid in the sandwich position?*
- *What is double if partner has reopened?*
- *What is double if opener makes a jump rebid?*

If you discuss the double of the opener's rebid of the opening suit, you can at least handle that. Then you can make a more general agreement of the other possible cases; opener bids a new suit, raises partner's suit, or rebids 1NT.

In many of my examples you probably can, by looking at your hand, decide if a double is penalty or takeout. If you prefer that guessing-game you can save some time, but I am not sure how well that will work for you!

We can have the same problem when we pass over responder's suit response and double next:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	Dble		

North reopens with a double. Is it just a balancing action with the unbid suits, or is it a good hand with spades? We have the same problem and also here with many variables.

Let us now look at advancer's situation when partner doubles or overcalls. These are basic situations where you certainly already have good agreements.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	Dble	1♠	Dble

I am not sure, but I guess that the current standard still is that double here shows spades. However, I know that many play differently. Whatever you do, make sure you can handle continued actions, including doubles.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	1♦	1♠	Dble

This double is takeout and shows the unbid suit. If responder bids 1NT, what is double then? I guess it shows some good hand, but is it penalty-oriented and strong, or does it show interest in the unbid suits?

If Responder makes an artificial bid it is more difficult if you don't have any agreements. I will talk about those situations in the next chapter.

If you play double of a notrump opening as showing a good hand, you have to decide what your doubles mean if the opponents try to escape.

I think this area is already covered in your system notes and only want to make some reflections. The standard here is perhaps to use only penalty doubles.

When we looked at forcing pass situations, I asked if a pass from partner over your double promises any values in the following auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1NT	Dble
Pass	Pass	2♣	Dble

If North's pass can be just a weak hand, what is then South's double?

You should agree with your partner if (and when) a pass is forcing and, if so, to what level. Is this a possible auction in your methods?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1NT	Dble
2♣			

What do the subsequent doubles mean when the opponents escape from 1NT after a double? I can mention a few popular treatments where I come from, but you should make your own meta-agreement.

- *The first double when opponents escape is showing strength (or extra strength)*
- *The third double is always for penalties*

Is this a similar situation?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Pass	1NT	Dble

Perhaps this double is more takeout than a penalty double, but we still have to discuss what further doubles are if:

- a) Opener bids
- b) If West and North pass and East escapes in a new suit

Lead-directing and activity doubles

There are two kinds of lead-directing doubles. One of them is when we double the final contract to ask for a certain lead. It can be 3NT, a slam, or perhaps a double showing a void when you have made a pre-emptive bid. I will not discuss these doubles as I guess you all know all about them.

How do we know which other doubles are only lead directing? In the last chapter, we discussed the double of Stayman 2♣. When the notrump opening is strong, we show clubs and want partner to lead the suit. This double is not an invitation to partner to compete in clubs. There are many other cases where we instinctively know that double only asks for the lead. They have in common that the opening is strong or the opponents are in a game-forcing auction.

If you use double as card-showing over responses to a weak notrump, you still have to decide:

- *What interval is a weak notrump?*
- *Which are the artificial responses we can double to show strength?*

When we double an artificial suit bid, the traditional meaning is to call for a lead in the suit. In my last post, I discussed the similarity between lead-directing and what I call activity doubles. In most cases, double of an artificial suit bid shows length in the suit. If you double without having an agreement, the question is if your double asks for a lead or if it also invites partner to bid.

To make agreements for double to be something else than lead-directing, we must set up rules to clarify when we can do that. Perhaps make agreements to cover the most frequent situations, and make a general rule on how to defend in new situations.

Even when you decide on some overall methods, it is also a question of judgment. The auction, the vulnerabilities, and if the doubler could have acted before, all of those can matter.

Activity doubles are an offspring of lead-directing doubles and occur when we use a double that sounds like a lead-directing double to show interest in further bidding instead. The increasing use of transfers and other proxy bids in competitive bidding necessitates considering countermeasures.

If we discuss doubles of proxy bids in general, the two main lines are.

- a) double shows values
- b) double shows something about the distribution

Some players find it challenging to defend against artificial bids. In many cases, just because they are not used to doing so. Sometimes you can use the opponents' system to your advantage. Let us say that our opponents use transfer pre-empts, and open with 3♦ showing hearts.

Against a normal pre-empt with 3♥, you have to double with a lot of different hands. When 3♦ shows hearts, you can:

- a) pass and double later
- b) double
- c) double and double again
- d) bid 3♥ as a cue-bid

You have four possibilities instead of one. That is if you have agreed on how to use them. If you haven't, it can create all sorts of misunderstandings instead!

A commonly accepted activity double is the double of weak artificial opening bids. One example is the double of the multicolored 2♦. To use double as lead-directing (or just diamonds) would be too passive, and the standard meaning is a balanced hand without a five-card major or a powerful hand.

The same applies in fourth seat if the response is the pass-correct 2Ma. We can not afford to use double for penalties as there are many hands we can have where we don't have a suitable alternative bid.

Compared with transfer pre-empts, the multi 2♦ opening doesn't show a specified suit. Therefore, an often-used strategy is to pass and thereby force the opponents to reveal their suit before you decide what to do.

However, that plan may backfire in several ways. The opponents may raise the level, and even if they don't, you perhaps can not differentiate between good hands and weaker hands with a good distribution for a balancing bid. If you double directly to show opening values, you can often, but not always, make the opponents reveal their suit.

To make your bidding work after an initial double of an artificial bid, you should agree on the meaning of the following doubles, cue-bids, and 2NT.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2♦	Dble	2♥	?

You will, of course, ask: What is 2♥? Does the answer help you?

If you don't want to risk being in a situation where you don't know what double is, it is good to make some general agreements. The standard written defenses I have looked at handle the opening bid and the pass/correct responses in a major, but I cannot find any meta-agreement reasoning for other sequences.

This is what you should discuss if you don't have agreements already:

- *How many doubles are for takeout?*
- *What is the meaning of 2NT if responder passes, RD, or bids 2M?*
- *What is a cue-bid if responder bids 2M?*

The advantage of meta-agreements is that it doesn't matter how the opponents play after the double, and you can use it also after other multi-colored bids.

Before giving examples of different situations to discuss, I want to ask what you call the following type of double. Maybe that is what you call an activity double?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	1 ♠	4 ♥
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Dble

South can have a lot of different hands for the pre-emptive 4♥ bid, even more as his partner here is a passed hand.

The question is how many defensive tricks we promise, because one of partners options is to pass. South can perhaps have this hand:

♠ x ♥ AKxxxxx ♦ AKx ♣ xx

Or could South have this hand?

♠ - ♥ KQJxxx ♦ AQx ♣ QJxx

If you don't play this double as penalty, it means: Please do something intelligent, partner; my hand looks like we should perhaps bid again.

Activity doubles of artificial bids

I will discuss some examples as there are too many different situations to cover. Is the following double of Drury 2♣ only for the lead?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass Dble

South is a passed hand, and the opponents probably have more strength than we have. A reasonable meaning of this double is that South shows a club suit or perhaps just wants a club lead. An alternative meaning can be that double is a takeout double of hearts or even showing spades. We probably won't have a game, so this is not making a big difference.

It is more important, though, that we discuss our agreements in situations where we still can have a game. If your opponents play transfer responses after a club opening, which are becoming more popular lately, you need to discuss the defense:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	Pass	1♥	?

What is the best defense if the 1♥ bid shows spades? If undiscussed, I assume that double shows hearts, and 1♠ is for takeout. Alternatively, double can be for takeout and 1♠ show something about hearts.

Some play transfers or switched bids after an overcall, and you should agree about what a double is if you don't want it just to show the bid suit.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	1♥	1♠	?

If 1♣ promises only two clubs and 1♠ is a transfer to 1NT, is then 2♣ still a cue-bid and double spades? Or is 2♣ natural and double takeout? I know that some of you do not get to play against such methods very often, but that shouldn't stop you from discussing it.

Opponents have a fit

When the opponents find a fit in the first round of the bidding, we are in a precarious position. Whether responder shows support with an artificial bid in a new suit or perhaps 2NT, you should discuss what a double means. There is a difference if the opponents have spades or another suit.

I have the pleasure of working as a system coach for one of the Swedish pairs in the open team. Our team didn't do well in the recent Bermuda Bowl, but they could handle the following auction better than others because of their agreement.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	pass	4♦	Dble

When Peter Bertheau could double 4♦ as showing spades, Simon Hult, with a good hand and 4-4 in the majors, could bid 4♠, which duly made. Their agreement is that such doubles show spades when the opponents have hearts, but if the opponent's suit is spades, double is takeout for the other suits.

A good agreement is that double is takeout of opponents suit when the opponents use proxy raises. If the doubler is a passed hand, you have to decide what difference that makes. A double could then be either lead-directing or also show interest in competing.

This is an example from my last post:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	Pass	3♣	Dble

You can use such a double either as takeout, spades, or clubs. If East raises to 2NT instead, you can use the activity double as takeout, or perhaps as only showing the unbid major.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	Dble	2♦	?

If your opponents play 2♦ as a good raise and 2♥ as a weaker raise, you should try to use the extra bid. You can double with diamonds or invent some other intelligent meaning for the double, while bidding 2♥ is the same thing as making a responsive double over a direct raise to 2♥.

Activity doubles when opponents bid our suit

We have briefly looked at the next example before; when our right-hand opponent makes a cue-bid in opener's suit:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♥	Dble

Compared with handling interference after a 1NT opening, opener is not narrowly limited when he opens with a suit bid and we need more cooperation.

Perhaps a double should show values without any natural alternative? On the other hand, showing support and limited values is an alternative that can be what partner needs to bid again. If you do not already have an agreement about this double, take your pick:

- *Double shows some values*
- *Double shows support*
- *Double is penalty oriented*

When you are the opener, the situation can be this:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Pass	2♣	1♣ ?

As your opening (in standard methods) doesn't show a real suit, you may use a double to confirm a real suit or a good suit. Whether it shows extra values or invites partner to bid is up to you.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Dble	2♣	1♣ ?

However, if partner like in this auction has bid something, there is more reason to use the double as an activity double to welcome partner to bid 3♣. If you use this double as a support double for hearts, perhaps that has priority.

When you have opened with a major, you have already shown a real suit, and then it may be unnecessary to double for the lead.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♥	1 ♥ Dble

Openers double of his own major should always be an activity double, inviting to the next level. If partner has passed, it shows extra values, but if partner has bid, the double would perhaps only show six hearts in a good minimum hand.

Finally, we can also use activity doubles when our partner has overcalled:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	2 ♥	3 ♥	Dble

Whether this double shows interest in 4 ♥ or just a top honor in hearts is up to you.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	2 ♣	4 ♣	Dble

This double should be interest in a sacrifice if 4 ♣ shows shortness.

When I decided to write this series, I underestimated the challenge in presenting alternatives for partnership agreements and the hardship even for serious pairs to go through all these situations. Furthermore, I did not realize how difficult it is to write about bidding while trying to withhold my opinion.

This post will be my last input about doubles, and as I am not sure there is interest in more subjects, I will stop here, at least for now.

When I find something else to write about, I hope it will be less tedious to read and write! If you want to continue your work with help from these posts, I offer the whole series to download as a PDF for free on my web page.