



Lesson 17 Introduction to Competitive Bidding

What is Competitive Bidding?

There are two partnerships at the bridge table. Just because one partnership opened the bidding, does not mean the opposing partnership should not bid. In fact the other partnership may have most of the points, and the hand belongs to them. Competitive bidding is coming into the auction after your opponents have opened the bidding.

Frequently both partnerships can make a part score, and you want to get into the auction so you and your partner can get to your best contract. Sometimes with distributional hands both sides can bid and make game, so the auction becomes very competitive.

Competitive Bidding Strategy

Competitive bidding puts pressure on the opponents by getting in their way and taking up bidding room. When opponents have limited room to exchange information, they make more mistakes, resulting in better scores for your partnership. Knowing when to compete and how high takes judgment as whether to be aggressive or to be cautious.

Why Compete?

There are three goals in competitive bidding:

1. If your partnership has most of the points, the hand belongs to you and you want to try and get to your best possible contract.
2. If the other partnership has most of the points, you want to disrupt the opponents by bidding. This takes away bidding room and thus makes it more difficult for them to find their best contract.
3. If your partner has to make the opening lead, your bid gives partner an idea of what suit is best to lead. Leading partner's bid suit is frequently the best opening lead. Good defense starts with competitive bidding.

Getting to your best contract puts pressure on the opponent's to decide whether to bid on or not. Sometimes you can push your opponents to a level where they get set, and so you can get a positive score even if you could not make the contract you bid. Frequently even if your bid is set, the opponents will get a worse score than they would by making their contract. Consider a case where the opponents can make 2♠ and your side can make 2♥. If the opponents bid to 2♠ there are three outcomes:

1. You can let the opponents play 2♠ and they will score 110.
2. You can bid to 3♥ and go set 1 trick so your opponents score either 50 or 100.
3. Your opponents bid 3♠ over your 3♥ bid, and go down 1 and you score 50 or 100.

As you can see competing on to 3♥ is better than leaving your opponents to play 2♠ even though you expect to go down 1 trick.

Be Cautious when Vulnerable!

Vulnerability affects the score. When a pair is vulnerable the bonus for bidding and making a game is increased. The bonuses for bidding and making a small or grand slam are also increased.

Conversely a pair will lose extra points if they fail to make a contract when vulnerable. If the contract is doubled the negative score may result in a worse score than letting the opponents make a part score. For example, down 1 doubled and vulnerable is -200. This is a poor score compared to the opponents' part score of +110 or +140. However, if you are not vulnerable, down 1 doubled is only -100 which is a better score. You should be cautious when vulnerable but can be more aggressive when non-vulnerable.

When you are playing duplicate bridge the vulnerability rotates and is pre-set with each hand and is indicated by a red highlight if you are vulnerable

How high to compete? Use the Law of Total tricks

Analysis has shown that if the high cards are fairly evenly split between the two sides, that your side is safe to bid up to the level of the number of trump held by the partnership, so:

- An eight card fit is safe to play at the two level
- A nine card fit is safe to play at the three level
- A ten card fit is safe to play at the four level

You may not make your contract, but you will often get a better score by bidding to this level rather than letting your opponents play at a lower level. You should always try to bid to the level of the number of trumps your partnership holds.

Entering the bidding after the opponents make an opening bid

There are three ways to make a competitive bid when the opponents have opened the bidding:

1. An overcall by bidding a new suit.
2. A weak jump overcall, by not only bidding a new suit, but jumping an extra level.
3. A takeout double, which is a convention to get your partner to bid. This will be covered in the next lesson.

The Overcall

An overcall is simply bidding a higher ranking suit (or notrump) at the same level, or a lower ranking suit at the next higher level. To make an overcall requires a 5+ card suit and 8-16 total points. A future lesson will cover what to do if you have 17 or more total points:

- When you have 8-10 total points, you can only overcall at the one level and you must have a good 5 card suit. Your bid is primarily lead directing for your partner, as you expect the opponents will get the bid.
- When you have 11-16 total points, you can have a weaker suit to overcall at the one level. When you have a stronger hand, there is a higher likelihood that the hand belongs to your partnership. You also have a strong enough hand to overcall at the two level in a lower ranking suit, but you should have a good 5+ card suit.
- Overcalling with 1NT shows 15-18 HCP with a stopper(s) in the opponent's suit. When you overcall with 1NT, you expect your side will play the hand, so both Stayman and Jacoby transfer conventions are to be used when advancer has a 4+ card major suit..

The following table summarizes the overcall bids:

1-level overcall	8 -16 total points plus a good 5+ card suit. The stronger your hand is, the weaker your suit can be.
2-level overcall	11-16 total points plus a good 5+ card suit
1 NT overcall	15 -18 – With a stopper in opener's suit Stayman and Transfer conventions are on

Overcall Examples

For the following hands, your Right Hand Opponent (RHO) has opened 1♦:

♠ 9 8 3 ♥ A Q J 9 3 ♦ 10 7 ♣ 9 7 6	Bid 1♥. (8 points minimum with a good suit)
♠ A Q J 6 2 ♥ 9 5 ♦ A 4 ♣ A 6 5	Bid 1♠. (16 points maximum with a good suit)
♠ 6 4 2 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ 8 2 ♣ K Q J 10 7	Bid 2♣. (11 points minimum with a good suit)
♠ Q 10 8 7 4 ♥ 9 7 5 ♦ A 4 ♣ K Q 5	Pass. (Poor suit)
♠ K 10 8 7 ♥ K 7 5 ♦ A J 4 ♣ K Q 5	Bid 1NT (16 HCP + good stoppers in ♦)
♠ 6 4 2 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ K Q J 9 2 ♣ 8 2	Pass. (11 point minimum but opponents' suit)

Weak Jump Overcalls

A jump overcall is made with a hand that is weak in HCP, but has a 6+ card suit. It is primarily used to disrupt the opponent's bidding by taking away their bidding space. When you have a weak hand, and the opponents have opened the bidding, it is likely that the hand belongs to the opponents. The weak jump overcall makes it tougher for the opponents to find their best contract.

The requirements for a weak jump overcall are the same as opening a weak 2 bid:

- A good 6 card suit with two of the top three honors, or 3 of the top 5 honors
- 5-11 total points

Example weak Overcall

For the following hands, your Right Hand Opponent (RHO) has opened 1♦:

♠ K Q J 8 7 4 ♥ 9 7 5 ♦ T 4 ♣ Q 5	Bid 2♠. (Weak jump overcall)
♠ Q 7 4 ♥ 9 7 5 ♦ 4 ♣ K Q J T 8 5	Bid 3♣. (Weak jump overcall)

Advancing the Overcall (Advancer)

The partner of the overcaller is called the advancer. When advancer has a small hand (6-10 total points) and a fit (3+ card support) they should bid to the level of total trump, using the Law of total tricks:

- 3-card support raise partner to the 2 - level
- 4-card support raise partner to the 3 – level
- 5-card support raise partner to the 4 – level

When advancer has a larger hand (11+ total points) and a fit, then a forcing bid must be made. This is done by cue bidding the opponent's suit. This bid forces partner to bid again. This cue bid is also rarely made with a game forcing hand and a strong suit of your own.

Lacking a fit, the advancer can bid their own suit at the 1 or 2 level. This retains much the same meaning as if partner opened the bidding, except that advancer should have a 5+ card suit.

Bidding a new suit denies a fit with partner:

- New suit at the 1 level 6+ points and a 5+ card suit
- New suit at the 2 level 10+ points and a 5+ card suit

Note that if the hand is a misfit it is often best to pass!

Advancer Examples:

You are in 4th seat and the auction has gone:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♦	1♥	pass	?

What is your bid?

♠ 6 4 2	♥ A 9 3	♦ K 9 8 2	♣ 6 5 3
♠ 6 4 2	♥ A 9 4 3	♦ K 9 8	♣ 6 5 3
♠ 6 4	♥ A 9 8 7 3	♦ K 9 8	♣ 6 5 3
♠ 6 4 2	♥ A J 8	♦ A Q 9 8 2	♣ 6 3
♠ K 4 2	♥ A 9 8 3	♦ A K J 2	♣ 6 3
♠ A K 9 4 2	♥ Q 5	♦ 9 8 7 2	♣ 9 8
♠ Q T 9 4 2	♥ Q 5	♦ 9 8 7 2	♣ 9 8

Bid 2♥ with the known 8 card fit

Bid 3♥ with the known 9 card fit

Bid 4♥ with the known 10 card fit

Bid 2♦ (cue bid). A fit plus 12 dummy points.

Bid 2♦, then raise ♥s inviting game.

Bid 1♠. Denies a fit in hearts.

Pass. Not enough points to bid your suit.

Advancer NT Bids

When advancer bids notrump, they MUST have the opponent's suit adequately stopped:

RESPONDING TO PARTNER'S OVERCALL WITH NOTRUMP	
8-11 points	Bid 1NT
12-14 points	Jump to 2NT
15-16 points	Bid 3NT

Some examples:

You are in 4th seat and the auction has gone:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♣	1♠	pass	?

What is your bid?

♠ 7 3	♥ A 9 5	♦ K 10 8 2	♣ Q J 9 5
♠ Q 4	♥ K 8 4 3	♦ K 4 3 2	♣ J 9 5
♠ 8 5	♥ A K 9	♦ K 10 8 2	♣ Q J 9 5
♠ 8 5	♥ A K 9	♦ K 10 8 2	♣ K Q 9 5

Bid 1NT.

Pass. No stopper, no support, no 5 card suit

Bid 2NT.

Bid 3NT.