

Defensive Bidding

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1 Overcalls

Reasons to overcall: make a contract, a sacrifice, push opponents too high, suggest an opening lead, hassle opponents. But only overcall when hand qualifies. Qualifications are very broad, but depend heavily on factors such as level of bidding and vulnerability.

1.1 Direct overcalls

When your right-hand opponent (RHO) opens the bidding, one way to enter the bidding is by making an overcall. Such an overcall is known as *direct*. Situations also arise when your partner has passed and both opponents have bid once. None of the overcalls are forcing.

1.1.1 ... at the one-level

- 9–17 points, good 5-card suit

With 18+ points, a takeout double is more appropriate.

Exceptions: A worthless 5-card suit or an amazing 4-card suit is OK with an otherwise strong hand. With as many as 19 points and a two-suited (5-5 or more) hand, a suit overcall is more appropriate due to bad rebids after a takeout double. After a 1NT opening, a much stronger hand is required (13–17 points and an amazing suit or exciting distribution).

1.1.2 ... at the two-level

- 9–17 points, good 5-card suit

A better hand is required for two-level overcalls. With minimal points, a substantial (6-cards and honors) suit is required, especially with unfavorable vulnerability.

Exceptions: Beware of overcalling with a doubtful hand and moderate length in enemy suit. At the three level, a few more points *and* a better and longer suit is required.

1.2 Invitational cue-bid response to direct overcalls

- 11+ points and support for overcaller's suit, or 13+ points in new suit.
- Weaker hands must use other responses.
- !! Jump cue-bid resp. is mini-splinter: 13+ points, 4 trump fit, singl./void.

1.2.1 Rebids by overcaller

Rebids should all be natural, subject to the following constraints:

- Pass only if RHO overcalls cue-bid and nothing constructive to say.
- Rebid original suit w/ minimum o/c, not forcing (don't need >5 cards).
- Rebid **below** original suit w/ minimum or maximum o/c, forcing.
- Rebid **above** orig. suit w/ good or maximum o/c, forcing if below game.

1.2.2 Rebids by cue-bidder

- Rebid overcaller's first suit w/ 11–12 points, not forcing.
- Raise overcaller's second suit (below game) w/ 13–14, invites game.
- New suit w/ 13+ points, 5-card suit, forcing one round.
- 2NT shows 13–14 points after 1-level o/c, 11–12 after 2-level, invites game.
- ! Repeat original cue-bid to show a natural suit, invitational if below game.
- Game bid is natural sign-off attempt.

1.2.3 In competition

If RHO bids after partner overcalls or doubles, invitational cue-bid is still on and typically shows fit in partner's suit and 11–12 points. If RHO bids a new suit, cue-bid *stronger* of the two choices (showing stoppers and helping partner reevaluate his honors).

1.2.4 From a passed hand

Shows 11–12 points and fit. May be otherwise if pass was after opponent opened bidding. If opponents have shown two suits, second is invitational cue-bid and first suit is natural long suit.

1.2.5 Other applications

Invitational cue-bids are on after weak jump raises, Michaels cuebids, and unusual NT.

1.3 Limited responses to direct overcalls

After partner overcalls and next opponent passes, you have the option to respond. The only strong/forcing response is the invitational cue-bid. Every other response (including jumps) is weak and non-forcing.

1.3.1 Raising partner's suit

- Single raise: 6–10 points, 3 trump fit.
- Jump raise (any level): preemptive, 5–8 points if below game, 4+ trump.

1.3.2 Responding in a new suit

- Nonjump: 8–13 points. (@1—5 cards; @2—strong 5; @3—6 cards)
- Jump: 11–13 points, strong 6-card or longer suit, invites game.

1.3.3 Responding in notrump

- Stopper in opponent's suit required
- 1NT: 8–11 points
- 2NT: 12–14 points after 1-level overcall, 9–11 after 2-level overcall
- 3NT: Better than 2NT (or expectation for 9 tricks)

Suggests balanced or semibalanced hand and stoppers in unbid suits, but not required.

1.4 1NT overcall

- 15–17 high card points, balanced hand.

All responses to this (including Stayman, Jacoby, and minor suit busts) are on, just as if partner had opened the bidding himself.

1.5 Weak jump overcalls

- Long strong suit, up to 10 points

With a weak hand, overcall preemptively, overbidding by two tricks with unfavorable vulnerability, three tricks with equal vulnerability, or three to five tricks with favorable vulnerability.

1.5.1 Responses

- Pass with most hands (even with poor support).
- Raise partner's suit with mediocre hand and (3+) trump support.
- Bid own long strong suit if better (independently) than partner's.
- NT with very strong hand, stoppers in other 3 suits, and good (3+) fit.
- cue-bid opponent's suit with powerful hand but uncertain of which game.

If opponents continue after partner's overcall, may still bid for part score battle or sacrifice. Consider how many tricks partner overbid by when deciding course.

Exceptions: Jump overcalls after a 1NT opening, after an opening preemptive bid, or in the balancing seat (without opponent part score) are *strong*, overbidding by at most one trick.

1.6 Unusual 2NT overcall over one of a suit

- Weak or strong: ≤ 12 points or ≥ 19 points; two-suited (5-5).
- Shows lowest two unbid suits (over $1\clubsuit \rightarrow \diamond\heartsuit$, $1\diamond \rightarrow \clubsuit\heartsuit$, $1\heartsuit \rightarrow \clubsuit\diamond$, $1\spadesuit \rightarrow \clubsuit\diamond$).

Consider vulnerability for weak overcalls, and note approximate point ranges.

1.6.1 Responses

- Takeout to one of partner's suits shows preference, no game interest.
- Jump takeout to partner's suit shows good support, preemptive or game.
- Cue-bid enemy suit is game or slam try, forcing.
- New suit is independent, not forcing; 3NT is to play, 4NT is Blackwood

1.6.2 Rebids by unusual NT bidder

- Bid or raise one of own suits with extreme shape, natural and not forcing.
- Strange action (cue-bid, NT, fourth suit, double) is strong (17+ points).
- After strange rebid, may sign-off in part-score or game, or encourage.

1.6.3 Other applications

- Over strong two-bid, 2NT is weak two-suiter (note artificial suits unbid).
- Over 1NT (opening or response), 2NT shows any strength two-suiter.
- Over any forcing response, 2NT shows any strength two-suiter.
- Over single major raise, 2NT shows any strength two-suiter.
- In balancing position (-P-P-2NT), 2NT is unusual only by a passed hand.
!! 2NT is **natural** in balancing position by an unpassed hand.
- !! 1NT in direct position is **unusual** only by a passed hand.
- !! 3NT is natural unless overcalling 2NT, or by a passed hand.

1.6.4 Unusual 4NT overcall

Over a preemptive bid, from an unpassed hand, shows intermediate or better two-suiter. Otherwise, implies a weak hand. All these assume partner has not bid or doubled, and you have not bid.

- Over $4\spadesuit$, shows all unbid suits, or just $\heartsuit\diamond$ (clarify later), 13+ points.
- Over $4\heartsuit$, shows minor suits, intermediate strength (13+ points).
- !! Over $4\clubsuit\diamond$, is **Blackwood**.
- Over lower bid (below 4-level), shows two lower unbid suits.

Exceptions: If you have already bid or doubled, and enemy bids 4-of-a-major, 4NT is unusual. $4\spadesuit$ -4NT shows all unbid suits (with strong preference for bid suit, if applicable). $4\heartsuit$ -4NT shows both minors.

1.7 Michaels cue-bid

- Weak or strong: $\lesssim 12$ points or $\gtrsim 19$ points; two-suited (5-5).
- $2\clubsuit\Diamond \rightarrow$ both majors, $2\heartsuit\spadesuit \rightarrow$ other major and an unspecified minor.

Michaels cue-bid is a direct cue-bid after a natural opening bid of a suit. Simplified versions exist (colorful cue-bid shows both opposite-color suits, higher-suits cue-bid shows the two highest remaining suits). Cue-bid weaker hands (< 10 points) only with equal or favorable vulnerability. Note *approximate* ranges.

Exceptions: Over a minor, may show a good 4-card major (3 honors).

1.7.1 Responses

- Bid a known suit with preference (3 trumps), no game interest.
- 2NT after a major asks partner to bid minor.
 - also $4\clubsuit$ (not forcing) or 4NT (forcing), but 3NT always natural.
- Jump in a known suit with good trump support, preemptive (or game).
- Cue-bid is game or slam try, forcing.
- New suit is independent, not forcing; 3NT to play; 2NT after minor invites game.

Always assume cue-bid is weak when responding. Invite with 9–13 points.

Exceptions: Commonly (but not standard) $3\Diamond$ after $1\spadesuit\text{-}2\spadesuit$ invites game in hearts.

1.7.2 Cue-bidder's rebids

- Bid or raise one of own suits with extreme shape, natural and not forcing.
- Strange action (cue-bid, NT, unrevealed 3rd suit (w/ 5530), or X) is strong.
- After strange rebid, may sign off in suit/NT, or $4\clubsuit$ (correctable). Asking for minor w/ 4NT (not Blackwood if minor unknown), or any other bid, is encouraging.

1.7.3 Other applications

These assume enemy opened, partner never bid or doubled, cue-bid suit was natural, and this is your first opportunity to bid.

- Over 1NT response ($1\Diamond\text{-}P\text{-}1NT\text{-}2\Diamond$), Michaels is any strength.
- Over new suit resp. ($1\clubsuit\text{-}P\text{-}1\spadesuit\text{-}2\clubsuit$), Michaels in *opener's suit* is any strength.
- !! Over new suit response ($1\clubsuit\text{-}P\text{-}1\spadesuit\text{-}2\spadesuit$), *responder's suit* is **natural**, strong suit.
- After Jacoby transfer ($1NT\text{-}P\text{-}2\Diamond\text{-}2\heartsuit$), Michaels in real suit is any strength.
- After two passes ($1\spadesuit\text{-}P\text{-}P\text{-}2\spadesuit$), Michaels is invitational or better (13+ points).
- Over preemptive bid ($2\spadesuit\text{-}3\spadesuit$), Michaels is invitational or better (13+ points).
- Over a 2-level *non-preempt* ($1\heartsuit\text{-}P\text{-}2\heartsuit\text{-}3\heartsuit$), Michaels is usually weak ($\lesssim 12$ points).
- From a passed hand ($P\text{-}1\clubsuit\text{-}P\text{-}1NT\text{-}2\clubsuit$), Michaels is always weak (≤ 12 points).

2 Takeout Doubles