

Better Bidding Through Partnership Discipline

Partnership Bidding Discipline means having an agreed purpose and strength for every bid that is understood and followed by the partnership. It requires partner to know you might often have to pass a good or even opening hand when your RHO opens or pre-empts - and trusting partner to protect you. "Protect" means partner makes a bid based on points she is assuming you might hold, not just on the hand she has.

This lecture will offer guidelines that cover several situations, most of which occur in competitive auctions. Partnerships may agree to do different things than recommended here – the main point is they should have agreements and follow them. Some of the ideas that follow are basic understandings shared by many experienced bridge players and some are based on Mike Lawrence's lectures at the BCA several years ago.

1. Overcalls and Takeout Doubles:

Your right hand opponent opens the bidding. You have opening or near opening values – should you overcall? *The purpose of such an immediate overcall is to either suggest a suit you think your side can compete and possibly play in or to tell partner what suit you want her to lead.*

Say you hold 10, J9852, AK6, AQ73 and your RHO opens 1C. Should you overcall 1H? Especially if partner is a passed hand you are likely to find the opponents playing in a spade contract. Do you want partner to lead the KH if she holds Kx? Better to pass smoothly and later consider whether a 2H bid is worth the risk if they stop at 1NT.

Partnership Discipline Agreement: *Having enough points does not mean you should overcall when you do not have a suit you want led.*

A hand such as KQ1062, 52. J1042, Kx makes a good 1S overcall of 1C, 1D or 1H but pass (smoothly!) with Q4, AQ, AQ64, 109632 if your RHO opens the bidding.

Say you hold K1063, Q, AQ642, K107 and RHO opens 1D. You have an opening hand but no suit worth an overcall. *Do not make a takeout double – your shape is wrong!!* Pass smoothly and wait to see what happens. If it goes P, P, *trust* partner to bid your points by balancing, If he bids 1H, you can bid 1NT. If he doubles, bid 2S or 3S.

Partnership Discipline Agreement: *You should only make a takeout double with the wrong shape when you are very strong and plan to next bid your very good suit or an appropriate level of NT.*

2. Free Bids In Competition

Bidding Your Own Suit after an Overcall : Minimum Requirements

- What are minimum requirements for a bid on the 1 level after partner is overcalled?
- What about the two level or higher?
- What bids are forcing

If you can bid on the 1-level you make the same bid you would have without interference (exceptions are that you double 1D with two 4 card majors and you double 1H when you have exactly 4S). Your bid is forcing but does not promise another bid.

If you bid a new suit on the two level, you have a minimum of 9+ points (but see the note below) and at least a reasonable 5 card suit when you bid a major. This bid is forcing 1 round but does not promise a rebid if partner bids 2NT or rebids her original suit.

If you bid a non-jump new suit on the 3-level you have at least 11+ points and a good 5 or more card suit. Again, it is forcing but you can stop in 4 of opener's minor.

Note: If you have good six or more card suit, or great shape, you can shade the minimum H.C. point requirements – but be aware that partner may double the opponents later in the auction expecting you to have some defensive strength.

Doubling an Overcall and then Bidding Your Suit

You may have a hand that has a good 5 or 6 card suit but does not quite meet the point requirements for bidding your own suit on the 2 or 3 level. If you can meet the requirements for doubling (counting distribution) given below and also bid your suit at a reasonable level after partner either bids another suit or rebids her opening suit, then double and follow with bidding your suit. This is **non-forcing** but partner knows you have the requirements for the double and a good suit.

Partnership Discipline Agreement: *Following these rules, you will pass many hands that undisciplined players often bid on and Partner must take that into account and "Protect" you when needed*

Negative Double Requirements After Partner Is Overcalled

- *What are minimum requirements for a negative double*
 - *When partner can bid a major on the 1-level?*
 - *When partner has to bid on the 2-level?*
 - *When partner has to bid on the 3-level?*
- *What do you need to make a negative double and then bid your suit after partner bids another suit?*

I recommend a partnership disciplined approach that puts fairly rigid requirements for most of the above bids (*and, therefore, you have to pass when you can't support partner, bid NT or meet the requirements for other bids - and partner has to protect you, if appropriate, by reopening with a double or a bid*).

Negative Double Minimum Requirements

When you double an overcall of partners opening bid here's what you should have:

- a) **If Partner can bid an unbid suit on the 1-level: you only need a minimum response (6 H.C. points) and exactly 4 cards in the unbid major(s). Over 1D, with 4 cards in only one major, bid it. With 4 cards in both majors, double. With a 5 card (unbid) major – bid it instead of doubling. But remember that the auction 1C – 1H – 1S guarantees at least 5 spades!**
- b) **If Partner has to bid on the 2-level to show any suit you might have: you need a minimum of 8 points and a hand that has a rebid if partner bids an unbid suit you are short in. You are not promising another bid.**
- c) **If Partner has to bid on the 3-level: you need a minimum of a 10+ points and a hand that has a rebid if partner bids a suit you are short in. You are not promising another bid after partner bids on the 3-level so partner has to bid on the 4 level with extra values.**
- d) **If Partner has to bid on the 4-level: You need about an opening hand with a rebid if partner bids a suit you are short in.**

Note: For each level beyond the 1– level you that are forcing partner to bid at, you need about an additional 2-3 H.C. points .

Examples: You hold **K1052 102 J642 Q83 and partner opens 1C. If RHO bids 1D you bid 1S. If RHO bids 1H you double. If RHO bids 2D or 2H you pass and hope partner reopens. If you have a 5th spade you do the same on all the above except that you bid 1S over 1H instead of making a negative double. With **Qx K1042 J642 Q83** you have minimum requirements for doubling a 1S overcall but not enough to bid over a 2S jump overcall. Replace the spade Q with a small spade and you pass a 1S overcall (*expecting (hoping) partner to reopen if the next hand passes*).**

Remember – you don't have to bid on weak hands – you can rely on partner to protect you and that way you make sure when you do bid, you clearly show you have something! *You must pass in reasonable tempo to leave partner's options free. In duplicate, partner should reopen with a double or make a suit or NT rebid on pretty much any hand but a minimum opener that is long in the overcalled suit or a minimum*

that cannot stand the highest unbid major and has no good suit to run to if partner bids that suit.

3. Disciplined Pre-empts (First or Second Position).

You want to avoid pre-empting your partner when he hasn't had a chance to bid. So, I recommend you only open weak 2-bids with reasonable suits and no side 4-card majors when in first or second seat – the same is true for 3-level pre-empts. In 3rd or 4th seat bid according to you and your partner's style.

General Rule: *When you pre-empt you have told partner your story and you should not bid again unless forced to. It's up to partner to make decisions about sacrificing or defending.*

4. Bidding After An Opponent Opens a Weak 2-Bid

- **Takeout Doubles**

- 15 + H.C. points in immediate position and a follow-up bid (including pass) for whatever partner bids – don't double just because you would have (barely) been able to double an opening 1-bid! If you double in the immediate position on slightly weaker hands that you can't bear to pass, be aware partner may expect you to be stronger.
- 10 + H.C points in 4th position (protecting partner who might have passed holding a minimum range opening hand). When partner does double or bid in the balancing position – try not to punish him for bidding your points!
- Don't double in the immediate position with a hand that wants to defend and punish the weak 2 bid – pass and hope partner reopens with a double (likely, if you are long in the weak 2 suit) and you can pass for penalties.

- **Bidding 2NT or 3NT**

- 2NT shows 15-18 points and 1 or more stoppers in the weak 2 suit. May have to do it on Kx in the weak 2 suit if unsuitable for a double – but don't do this on minimum NT hands unless you have a good source of tricks!
- 3NT is the next range NT or a good hand with stopper(s) and a source of tricks (like an AKQxxx suit, for example).

- **Cue Bids**

- By agreement, many partnerships play a 3 bid in the weak 2 suit asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper. This goes for both the immediate and balancing position.

- **Overcalls**

- A solid opening hand with a very good 5-card suit (or a 6 or more card suit) should overcall in the immediate position. You can overcall with slightly less when you have a very good suit. However, do not “pre-empt a pre-empt” – which means do not overcall a weak 2-bid in the immediate position with a hand that would have opened a weak 2-bid (or would have pre-empted) in first position.

- In the balancing position, relax overcall requirements since you are now also bidding partner's assumed values and trying to compete.
- **The difference between bidding in the immediate or the balancing position:**
 - In the immediate position you bid just your cards. You consider the vulnerability and the fact that partner may have to bid a bad hand at the 3-level if you make a takeout double. If you overcall recklessly the partner of the weak 2 bidder may have a good hand and make a penalty double.
 - In the balancing position, you are bidding both your cards and what you hope partner has (protecting partner and not "selling out" even though it might be risky).

5. Bidding After An Opponent Opens a Pre-emptive 3 level Bid

- **Takeout Doubles**
 - 16 + H.C. points in immediate position (if very short in the pre-emptive suit, you can have a little less in H.C. count made up for in distribution). You should have a follow-up bid (including pass) for whatever partner bids – don't double just because you would have (barely) been able to double an opening 1-bid! Don't double just because you want to penalize the pre-emptor because partner will almost always pull the double.
 - 13 + H.C points in 4th position (protecting partner who might have passed holding a minimum range opening hand). When partner does double or bid in the balancing position – try not to punish him for bidding your points!
 - When you double 3 of a major your partner will expect you to have 4 cards in the other major. When you double 3 of a minor, partner will expect you to be no worse than 4-3 in the majors.
 - A good rule of thumb is to picture partner holding about 7 points.
- **Bidding 3NT**
 - Typically about 17 H.C. points and 1 ½ to 2 stoppers in the pre-emptive suit. May be less if the hand contains a good source of tricks – such as AKQxxx, for example.
- **Overcalls**
 - A 14+ H.C. opening hand with a very good 5-card suit (or a 6 or more card suit) should overcall in the immediate position. You can overcall with slightly less when you have a very good suit. However, do not "pre-empt a pre-empt"
 - In the balancing position, relax overcall requirements since you are now also bidding partner's assumed values and trying to compete.
- **Bidding 4NT**
 - Two suit hands are particularly hard to bid after pre-empts rob you of the room to show both your suits at a low level. A very good 2 minor suits hand can bid 4NT for partner to bid his best minor. With the strong major-minor 2-suiter you are best off bidding 4 of your major (but see the Cue Bidding bullet for another option).
 - If you wanted to bid 4NT as Blackwood, first double and then bid 4NT.

- **Cue Bidding**

- Discuss with your partner whether you want this to be a very strong 3-suit takeout bid or a very strong 2-suit hand (not both minors, since this is shown by bidding 4NT – so at least one of the suits is a major).

6. Bidding After An Opponent Pre-empts on the 4 level

- **Doubles** are still primarily for takeout and the requirements should be even more stringent than over 3-level pre-empts (for a double in the immediate position).
- **4NT** is a two suit takeout bid – partner should always bid 5C or 5D unless she has at most a one loser self sufficient suit.
- *A useful agreement is that partner will always bid after a double unless she has at least one trump trick in the pre-emptive suit.*

Partnership Discipline Rules For Bidding After An Opponent's Pre-empt

1) Don't pre-empt a pre-empt.

2) Doubling or bidding in the immediate position *shows good values* and is based on what you “see” in your hand

3) Doubling or bidding in the balancing position could be assuming partner most likely has some strength and you are protecting your combined hands by bidding.

4) “Payoff” to the pre-empt rather than do something that might be foolish just because you are afraid they stopped you from finding the right contract.

Example from a T/4 knockout event (East was an expert – Mike Cappellitti – playing with a client):

		AJ64		
		KJ3		
		5		
		AJ842		
		<u>NORTH</u>		
9832				KQ75
6	<u>WEST</u>		<u>EAST</u>	94
AQJ9642				K5
Q				107643
		<u>SOUTH</u>		
		10		
		AQ108752		
		873		
		K9		

With N-S vul and E-W non-vul, South opened 3H and West jumped to 5D. It went 5H by North and East doubled. Result: + 1090 for N-S. Post mortem: The 5D bid was pre-empting a pre-empt when it should have shown a very good hand. Cappellitti doubled thinking partner had cards and N-S was going for a big number! West must be disciplined and pass, despite the good diamond suit.

Summary of Several Partnership Discipline Rules

Do not pass a forcing bid (even when you are ashamed you opened a sub-minimum hand). This was not previously mentioned but occurs all too often even by experienced players.

Don't make a bid that shows strength and forces partner to bid to at least the 3-level just because an opponent pre-empted you from bidding on the one level (example is 1c – 1S – 2H on a hand that had a 5 or 6 card heart suit but less than 10 total points).

Have the right shape when you make a takeout double and the right strength when you make a negative double.

Have the right strength when you compete in the immediate position after an opponent pre-empt.

Protect partner when she makes a disciplined pass because of one of the above guidelines.

Don't pre-empt partner by making a weak 2-bid in first or second seat with a very sketchy 6 card suit or with a 4 card major side suit. The same holds for 3-level pre-empts.

When you pre-empt Partner becomes captain (you have already shown your hand). Only make bids in response to partner's forcing bids

Remember, however, that the important thing is for partnerships to discuss these situations and either follow these agreements or make their own agreements.