

Balancing

What's the big deal with balancing? Who needs it? You sure don't unless you want to:

1) Compete with players as advanced as expert who would be balancing themselves. Get better scores.

2) Play more hands (the chances of a better board when you are declarer are significantly increased)

3) You want to push your opponent up 1 level to where they have a better chance of not making their contract.

Any of this sound good to you? Let me give you another reason, reason number 4! It is exciting! Yes, you could compare this to a skier doing a big jump, a taxi driver picking up a movie star, or a fisherman catching a whopper!

Let's start at the beginning with what makes a hand you can do this “balancing act”. We all know the deck has 40 points. We know that when a player opens the bidding they have somewhere around 13 points and when their partner answers he should have at least 6 points. So 13 and 6 make 19 points and let's say they have an auction that is ending after just a round of bidding. Let's say 1 Diamond and then 1NT by the responder and p,p to you. It could also be 1 Heart, 2 Hearts and p,p to you. Both of these auctions are dying at a low level and this is a chance for you to balance. If you have the “right” hand. What do I mean by the right hand? You need to have a suit of your own or at least 3 of the unbid suits (preferably 4).

What do I mean by balance? This means you have a good idea that your side has about $\frac{1}{2}$ the points and probably a fit in one of the unbid suits or that you have a 5 card or longer suit you could balance with. What if you only have 7

or more points? Then you are counting on partner for some pretty good points. You are bidding or doubling and knowing partner has these points.
You are bidding for both of you!

That brings me to a very important point about balancing. Your partner must never think, "Oh, my partner has a GOOD hand over there because he bid or doubled". Instead he must think, "My partner is counting on my hand to make this bid and for that reason I must not bid other than this one time and pass if he has bid a suit". In other words, after the balance, **do not raise** the bid another level unless you have a very unusual and unexpected holding. Remember your purposes in balancing and going for a telephone number is not one of them!

Let's talk about some different kinds of balances that could happen while you are playing and then start on some hands.

#1 **Simple Balance** when the auction is dying at the 2 level or even the one level. You double for partner to bid or bid a 5 card or longer suit. Occasionally you might even bid a 4 card suit.

#2 **Balancing Seat at the 1 level and you balance with 1NT.** We all know this is not a regular NT and shows 11-14 points. You can decide with partner if you want NT systems like Stayman, Transfers, and Gerber on.

#3 **Balancing over a Preempt.** Partner is a passed hand and holds the right distribution but very few points (this is a minimum hand for this). You could have a good hand and balance here with a double, but you are protecting your partner's holding (he may have had to pass with some pretty good values). Remember to bid in direct seat over a preempt you need better than opening.

#4 **Pre-Balance.** This is when you come into a live auction (you may be a passed or unpassed hand) and show partner you can support the unbid suits. You may do this with as little as 8 points.

There are other situations that come up with balancing opportunities, that may not fit into one of these categories.

Let's start with some hands now and if you have a questions about the hand we are working on that is fine, but let's not stray off the subject.

1D p p ?

Here is your hand:

3
AJ6432
KJ5
J65

How many are bidding Hearts here? How many are passing? The author of this particular hand was Mike Lawrence and he wants you to think about who has the Spade suit. Should you balance? So many aspects of things to think about. Are you simply going to open the Spade suit up to the opps?

1S p p ?

Here is your hand:

3
AQ64
KJ53
Q642

How many are bidding on this one? How many are doubling? Here are a few thoughts about this holding and who has what:

- 1) A double here shows support for all the unbid suits
- 2) E/W are in their best place to play
- 3) N/S have a fit somewhere
- 4) N has some strength

5) W has opened so should have 13+ points and E has < 6 points
After thinking it through, what would you like to do?

Balancing takes logical thinking and using your math skills!

1S p p ?

Here is your hand.

3
AQ6
KQ9853
Q64

What bid would you like to make and why? Is 3NT possible on this hand?

1C p 2C ?

AJ53
KJ42
J53
64

A double here is a pre-balance. You are not in balancing seat and the auction is not necessarily over for the opps. Yes, it could be a bit dangerous (vulnerable, too risky). You have great distribution and it might help with defense if the opps go to 3 Clubs. A double here strongly implies BOTH majors.

Balancing over a Major suit opening and raise can be a bit more difficult. Why? Balancer must be prepared to play at the 3 level. Partner will know you have good support for the unbid suits.

1H p 2H p
p ?

You hold:

AJ54
5
KT72
JT43

Looks pretty nice for a balancing double. Most likely the opps will bid 3 Hearts or might double(watch the vulnerability when pushing to the 3 level). Another thing to watch out for are opps that are playing constructive raises of partner's major suit opening. They have good cards to give this raise (like 2 honors like Aces or Kings). If your opps do give a simple raise, check their cc(convention card) before balancing.

1C p p ?

Here is your hand:

8765
KT93
QJ82
3

Like it? Would you balance? According to Make Lawrence this is a fine balance! Good spade and he says values that are working!! It is a bit skimpy for my taste!

What is another advantage to balancing? It can assist your side on the defense. How? Because you have such a good idea of your partner's

distribution. Let's look at the example on the white board:

Dlr: E
VUL: N/S

	74	
	AT62	
	865	
	KQ73	
AJT86		93
84		KQJ9
KQT7		AJ432
A2		J8
	KQ52	
	753	
	9	
	T9654	

The Auction:

E	S	W	N
1D	p	1S	X
p	2C	2S	p
p	p		

What category does this balance fall into? Partner led the K of Clubs. Declarer took the A and led a Heart to the King and the 9 of Spades off dummy. When South played low he played the Ace followed by the Jack of Spades to South's King. Now South knew exactly what to do and led a club to partner's Queen and partner returned another Club. How many Spades does declarer have now? Declarer played another Spade and South won and played another Club. Partner still got the Ace of Hearts and we took the small trump and the last Club out of the South hand. Down one. Did knowing each other's hands help? It sure did!

Here are a couple examples from Edgar Kaplan back in 1965:

A)

KJxxx

xx

KJx

xxx

B)

Qxx

xx

Qxxx

AQxx

The opps are passing out the hand at 2 Hearts. With hand A bid 2 Spades and with Hand B, double for partner to bid. Any questions about these 2 examples? Does A seem light to you? Would you be watching the vulnerability?

In 1958 Alvin Roth and Tobias Stone wrote that PROTECTING partner is what balancing is all about. Here are some auctions where the bid is dying out and they suggest balancing(then called protection) rather than let the opps play at a low level. So what if you set them one or two tricks when you could make a part score.

1H p p ?

p p 1H p
2H p p ?

1H p 1NT p
2H p p ?

p p 1S p
2H p p ?

1NT p p ?

They say to watch:

Vulnerability

The likelihood of being doubled!

The probability of your partner taking a dangerous action! HA

The style and astuteness of your opps!

The next time it goes:

1C p p ?

It seems pretty automatic that the pass out seat most players pass and hope that the Club bidder is missing a better contract(NT or a fit with partner). Pretty tricky to know if you should bid or double here. You could judge the right decision by looking at the Clubs you hold. Have lots of them? Have just a few? Either of these cases could be reason to pass. Do you have a full opener? This is a very hard decision and only you can judge each hand. There are 53,644,737,765,488,792,839,237,440,000 different combinations that can happen at the bridge table!!

Will you fail occasionally when balancing? Yes, but your success will far outweigh your failures! Hope you are on your way to some exciting times in balancing!!