

Simple overcalls

Overcalls are different to opening bids

Opening bids are made in the hope that the partnership's assets are sufficient to make game. Overcalls are made for a number of different reasons:

- To rob opponents of bidding space, i.e. preemption.
- To reach either a makeable contract or a good sacrifice.
- To suggest a good lead to partner.

Therefore there are hands which could be opened but which are not suitable for overcalls and vice versa.

A one level overcall should show:

- **A good five card suit:** A four card overcall should be very much the exception to the rule. Given that the opponents have opened, any contract that we can make is likely to be based on distributional strength, not points. Also, whereas partner will often lead your suit if you have made an opening bid, he will almost always lead your overcalled suit. Therefore, you need to make sure that it is a good suit for him to lead.
- **8-15 high card points:** With a hand stronger than this, start with a double. Doubling and then bidding a suit later shows a hand too strong for a simple overcall. Besides, it makes overcaller's partner's job rather difficult if the range for the overcall is much bigger than this.

A two level overcall requires a few more points, typically about 10HCP. The suit quality is more important at the two level too, requiring either a very good five card suit or a six card suit.

Protective overcalls are different to immediate overcalls.

If a pass would end the auction, you are in the protective position. Reading about both overcalls and doubles, you will see that partner, in the immediate overcalling position, may have to pass with hands up to 15HCP. In the protective position, this needs to be taken into account. Indeed, after 1♥, Pass, Pass, partner is likely to have some values. Therefore be prepared to make a simple overcall with up to a king less than you would require in the immediate position. Partner should take this into account.

1NT overcalls

In the immediate position, a 1NT overcall shows 15-17 high card points and good stoppers in the opponents suit. In the protective position, 1NT shows 12-14 points. Partner should reply to 1NT overcalls in the same way as if they were opening bids, i.e. using Stayman and transfers if the opponents do not intervene

Responding to overcalls

As overcalls are very different to opening bids, so are partner's responses. After partner bids 1♥ over opponents 1♣ opening bid, your responses are:

- **2/3/4♥**: Direct raises are preemptive and usually based on the total number of trumps. So a raise to 3♥ should show a hand with four hearts (making the total to nine, for nine tricks) and not too much strength.
- **1♠/2♦**: Natural and non-forcing. Should show at least 10 points. Should not be used as a rescue bid. A rule beginners are often taught regarding responding to an overcall is 'put up or shut up', i.e. either support the overcall or say nothing. I would not go this far, but any change of denomination requires at least 10 points.
- **1NT**: 10-12 points with a stop in the opponents suit. No more than two cards in partner's suit.
- **2NT**: 13-14 points.
- **3NT**: 15+ points.
- **2♣**: The *unassuming cue bid*. As immediate raises of an overcall are preemptive, we need a bid to show a good raise. The opponent's suit provides this bid. It should show 11+ points and at least three card support for partner. Partner rebids his suit at the lowest level to show a minimum overcall. An intermediate overcall is shown by a jump rebid, by showing another suit or by bidding 2NT. A maximum overcall is shown by either bidding directly to game or by bidding opponent's suit again. So

1♣, 1♥, Pass, 2♣
Pass, 3♣

is game forcing. *There is also the question as to what to do with strong hands that do not have support. Many would also use this cue bid of the opponents suit for this purpose.*

When partner has made an overcall in the protective position, it is important to realize that the overcall may be up to a king lighter. Therefore the responses must take this into account.

Takeout doubles

Takeout doubles are used on two different types of hand:

- Hands with support for each of the unbid suits. With a suitable hand, this call can be made with 12 high card points in the immediate position. (In fact I've seen opponents do it with less.) In the protective position, a double can be made with upto a king less.
- Hands that are too strong for an overcall. So with a single suited hands, say in spades, and 16+ points you will start with a takeout double. When you continue

by bidding spades over partner's response, you complete partner's picture of your hand. Similarly, with 18+ points and good stoppers in the opponent's suit, start with a double and then continue with no-trumps.

There will be hands where you can run into difficulties. For example, after opponents open with 1♦ and you have:

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

Suppose you double, which is a reasonable action, and partner replies 2♣. What do you do now?

You must pass. If you bid 2NT you show partner 18+ points. If you bid the spade suit - which you carefully avoided doing on the first round due to the poor quality of the suit - you show 16+ points, i.e. a hand too strong to overcall 1♠ on the first round. Remember that partner's 2♣ bid may have been made on a hand with no honor points at all.

Weak jump overcalls

We play weak jump overcalls at any vulnerability. This means that a jump overcall at the two level, e.g. 2♥ over a 1♣ opening bid, shows the same sort of hand as a [weak two](#). A single jump overcall at the three level, e.g. 3♣ over a 1♥ opening bid should ideally be like opening 3♣, although I would be more likely to relax the demand for a seven card suit in this situation. A double jump overcall, e.g. 3♥ over 1♣ should be exactly the same as an opening preempt, showing a seven card suit.

Note that a weak jump overcall is the *same strength* in the protective position as in the immediate position.

When partner makes a weak jump overcall, your most likely response is either to pass or to raise. After partner overcalls 1♣ with 2♥, 3♥ is a preemptive raise, showing three card support but little else. 4♥ may be purely preemptive, based merely on 4 card support or based on strong cards. This can make it very difficult for the opponents to know when they can safely double.

At present responding in a new suit is natural and non-forcing, as it is over a weak two opener. 2NT is natural, not the convention it is over a weak two. *If we want a conventional response, a bid in opponents suit would be the bid. However, we have not yet agreed what this bid should mean.*