

Lesson 7 – Use of Double

A “double” can mean several things depending on the bidding in each particular game. The card used for this in the bidding box is the one with the red X on it.

Note: RHO means right-hand opponent; LHO means left-hand opponent.

To keep it simple, I have listed some of the common meanings for doubles. The Take-Out Double is probably the most often used of all the doubles. If the bidding is not yet at game level, consider the “double” for take-out. It is forcing unless an opponent intervenes with a bid. If the opponents are at game level (4♠, 4♥, 5♦ or 5♣) or higher, the double is used for penalty, not take-out. A double of a 1NT opening bid may mean different things depending on what you and your partner agree to. Usually, it means penalty.

A **Take-out Double** is used after an opening bid of a suit by the opponent. In order to use this double, you should have at least opening points, a weakness in the suit bid by opponent (0-2 cards usually), support for the other 3 suits and no 5-card suit that could be bid. Partner must bid his/her best suit in response unless there is an intervening bid by the opponent. If you have a 5-card suit, you can overcall in that suit (see next lesson).

Take-out Double after 1 Level suit bid by opponent:

Opponent opens 1♥. You have support for the other 3 suits, only one heart, and 15 points. Your bid: “Double.” No matter which of the three unbid suits your partner bids, you have good support.



A take-out double is a forcing bid. The disadvantage is that your partner must bid, even with 0 points, so the point count can be difficult to ascertain. If partner has 10+ pts, s/he should jump a level when responding. If your LHO bids, your partner can pass. With at least 6 points, your partner should bid, even with opponent interfering, unless the bid puts the contract too high. The exception to that happens when your partner has length and strength in the suit bid by opponents (in the example shown, that would be hearts), so s/he can pass. In that case, the take-out double becomes a penalty double unless the opponents rebid. Another option for your partner is to bid 1NT showing stoppers in opponent’s suit and at least 6 points. You have shown stoppers in the other three suits by your “double” so there is no danger for your partner to do that.

What happens if your RHO opens with a suit that you are strong in? That is, the suit you would have opened in, if you were first to bid? Do not double! This will be interpreted by your partner as a take-out double, with support in the other 3 suits, and 0-2 cards in opponent’s suit. If they reach game level in that suit, then you can double for penalty. Sometimes, you may have to pass! It hurts, but you should not confuse your partner. Doubling the opponent’s 1 level bid means you do not have their suit. If you constantly change the meaning of your bids, your partner cannot trust you. Bridge is a partnership game!

Negative double after 2 suits have been bid: Your partner opened and your RHO bid; two bids are on the table in two different suits. You have 8+ points and do not have support for your partner's suit and you are also weak in opponent's suit. A "double" by you means that you have enough points to respond and good cards in the other two unbid suits, with at least 4 cards in the unbid major. If both suits bid were minors, you should have 4+ cards in both majors, but in that case, you could bid your best major instead.

Double after 1NT opening by opponent: If either opponent opened 1NT and you also have a No Trump hand, you can "Double." This is considered to be a penalty double, but could be used as a take-out double if partner has a long suit. This is one possible meaning of a Double after a 1NT opening bid by opponent. Please be sure to agree to this meaning with your partner. Some may use the double in this case as forcing.

If you do use a double to mean "I also have a NT hand," then "systems are on" for Stayman or Jacoby as appropriate. If the Responder bids, however, your partner is allowed to pass. If both the Responder and your partner pass, the take-out double becomes a penalty double. To use this double, you must consider that your opponent has 15-17 points. You should have slightly more points, at least 16-18 points to double a NT opening bid by opponent. There are at most 9 points left in the deck which might be shared between the two other players, making it unwise for either of them to bid anything. It is quite likely that neither one has enough points to respond and your double could be passed, remaining in place as a penalty double. You would like to defeat that contract, not help them get more points for making their contract.

Another hint on this: If opponents are vulnerable, sometimes it's best just to pass quietly. It is unlikely that the other two players will bid anything and you give away information about your hand if you double. The Declarer will know which opponent has most of the high cards!

Double for penalty: "Double" is used for **penalty** (not take-out) after a game contract or higher is reached by opponents. Be careful when using double for penalty. It can backfire and, instead of your gaining more points if the opponents cannot reach their contract, the opponents may receive even more points than they would have made without your double. If they are in a trump suit contract, consider that they may trump your Ace if they have a void in that suit, so your high cards may not be worth as much as you think. Also, it tells the opponents that you have a strong hand — it may help the Declarer when playing the cards to know which opponent's hand is likely to hold the high cards.

Double after a Weak Two Bid or 3-Level Pre-emptive Opening Bid: This becomes trickier. If your opponent opens 2♠, for example, and you double for take out, your partner is forced to bid at the 3 Level! However, you know that the opponent is weak (has fewer than opening points) and is trying to make it difficult for you and your partner to bid. If your opponent opened at the 3-level, consider that, if you "double," your partner must now respond at the 3 level, or possibly the 4 level.

Double meaning "Stole My Bid." This double can only be used after 1NT opening by Partner, followed by an intervening bid by RHO. For example, your partner opened 1NT and RHO bid 2♣ (showing a strong club suit). You have 8+ HCP and wanted to bid 2♣ (Stayman). Use the double! You are telling your partner that you wanted to bid 2♣. Another example: Partner opened 1NT and RHO bid 2♥ (showing a strong heart suit). You wanted to bid 2♥ for Jacoby transfer to spades. "Double!" Partner must then say "transfer." The same goes for 2♦ interfering bid when you wanted to transfer partner to hearts.

Double as a Lead-Directing Bid:

You may or may not wish to use a double as a lead-directing bid. The advantage is that, if your partner is on lead, s/he will know to lead your suit. The disadvantage is that your opponents now know which good suit you have and can use that information to help them when playing the hand. However, it is also important to know this bid in case your opponents use it. It can only be used after an artificial bid. Be careful if playing with other beginners or players you do not know well. They may not understand what you mean when you double in this situation.

Here are some examples:

(1) LHO opened 1NT. Partner passed. RHO bid 2♣ (Stayman), an artificial, forcing bid. You know that Opener will bid again — they have at least 22 HCP together and are looking for an 8-card major suit fit. "Double" to tell partner to lead clubs.



(2) LHO opened 2♣ (very strong hand), an artificial bid. Partner passed. RHO responded 2♦ (waiting), another artificial bid which does not mean diamonds. "Double" to tell partner to lead diamonds.



(3) LHO opened 1NT. Partner passed. RHO bid 2♦ (Jacoby transfer to hearts), artificial bid not meaning diamonds. Opener must bid again as it is a transfer and RHO has at least 5 hearts. "Double" to tell partner to lead diamonds.

Too many points for an overcall: If your RHO opens with 1 of a suit and you have 17+ points and a different, strong 5-card suit, "double" first, forcing your partner to bid. Another possibility is bidding 1NT with stoppers in RHO's suit. If you overcall by bidding the 5-card suit, you are telling partner you have 8-16 points and are limiting your hand to that point range.

Important: These bids are meant to keep it simple for beginners. There can be several different meanings for doubles and many can be very complicated. It is important that both you and your partner understand what is meant by the bids you use. This is called "partnership agreement."