

Lesson 7 – Use of Double For Beginners

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. Partner can respond as if you also opened 1NT.

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 (12+). It usually shows 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), but you should double instead with 17+ pts.

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. Partner should bid their best suit, choosing one of the three unbid suits. The disadvantage is that your partner must bid, even with no points, so the point count can be difficult to determine. When you force your partner to bid by using a double, accept their suit unless you have 17+ pts. They may have 0 pts. You forced them to bid, remember!
- ◆ If partner has 10+ pts, they should jump a level when responding.
- ◆ If your LHO bids, your partner can pass and this is often wise when partner has very few points. The double has been cancelled, so to speak. However, with at least 6 points, your partner may wish to bid anyway, especially if they are also short in opponent’s suit. Then you will know for sure that partner wants to compete and does have some points.
- ◆ When your partner’s best suit is the opponent’s suit, they can bid 1NT to show opponent’s suit has been stopped. This does not show stoppers in the other three suits; partner will assume you have those stoppers.
- ◆ Partner could also pass when having a strong suit in opponent’s suit. This would leave your take-out double in place but it now changes it to a penalty double, which will give your side more points if the opponents cannot make their contract. This can be risky, though. Partner must realize that you will not likely get another chance to bid as there could be three passes now. Whenever a player passes their partner’s double, it should be assumed it will be left in for penalty, unless opponents bid again, which is unusual if they do. Opponents can re-double if they think they can make their contract.

Double after a Weak Two Bid or 3-Level Pre-emptive Opening Bid by Opponent:

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. It can be even more difficult when your opponent opens at the 3-level because, if you double, your partner must now respond at the 3 level, or possibly the 4 level and that might be too high to find your best suit to compete. As you gain more experience, you will become better able to judge these situations.

Problem:

What happens if your RHO opens with a suit and you have length and strength in their suit? You might have been ready to open in that suit. This can be frustrating, but do not over-react to that. For example, opponent opens 1♠ and you have 5 or 6 spades and 12+ points. Another example: Opponent opens 1♦ and you have 5 strong diamonds and 12+ pts. Do not double! This will be interpreted by your partner as a take-out double, with support in the other 3 suits, and shortness in opponent's suit. If opponents reach game level in that suit, you will have an opportunity to double for penalty. Usually, they will find another suit or NT once they realize their partner does not have that suit. Sometimes, it's just better to pass! Doubling the opponent's 1 level bid usually means you do not have their suit. If you constantly change the meaning of your bids, your partner will lose trust in you and will not be able to depend on your bidding. If you have 15-17 pts, you can overcall with 1NT showing stoppers in opponent's suit.

Take-out Double instead of an Overcall: This will be covered more in Lesson 8. If you have 17+ points and a 5-card suit, you should not overcall (bid a suit at a higher level). To show 17+ pts, use a take-out double, regardless of the shape of your hand. After partner is forced to bid (you won't know how many points partner has, maybe even 0 points), you can bid again. This will show partner that you have a strong hand and partner can use that information to assess whether to bid higher or not. An overcall limits your hand to 8-16 pts, so use a double if you have 17+ pts.

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. You are making the judgment that the opponents cannot make their contract and you want to penalize them for bidding too high, which will give you double the points if they don't make it. NT contracts are rarely doubled for penalty. If opponents 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, the penalty double gives some information to the opponents. If your pass will be the third consecutive pass, they will not get another chance to bid. If you double, they may decide to bid again and change their suit. They can also re-double (not covered in these beginner lessons). If they are missing some high cards, it may help them decide on strategy when playing the hand.

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."