

## Lesson #11 - Competitive Bids and Strategies

Abbreviations used: HCP = High Card Points, LHO = left-hand opponent, RHO = right-hand opponent

### What does an overcall show?

1. Definition: An overcall is simply a bid higher than the opponent's bid.
2. A 1-level overcall over 1-level bid shows 8-16 pts. With more than 16 pts, don't overcall, use a double instead.
3. An overcall at the 2 level over a 1 level bid by opponent shows 10+ pts and a good 5-card suit.
4. Because partner's overcall could be as low as 8 points, advancing the bidding by raising their suit to a higher level may require more than the minimum responding bid of 6 pts, especially if opponents keep bidding. Use your judgment.

### Overcalling a 1NT opening bid and how to handle the interfering bid:

1. An overcall of an opening bid of 1NT shows 13+ pts and a strong 5-card or longer suit. The point count depends on a player's personal preference and their risk-taking tolerance.
2. An overcall over 1NT can make it more difficult for opponents to bid and can be lead-directing if the overcaller's partner is on lead. It can make it difficult for you if you are the responder to your partner's 1NT opening bid and you have now lost your opportunity to use Stayman or Jacoby transfers. However, there is a solution to that.
3. After partner opens 1NT and opponent overcalls in a suit, a double by responder means "stole my bid." The double shows that the bid that responder wanted to use was "stolen," taken by the opponent. The "stolen" bid is showing a suit or a convention when bid by opponent, but the same bid will mean Stayman or Jacoby transfer if responder had used it. For example, opponent overcalls 2♣, and responder wanted to bid Stayman. Responder can double to say "stole my bid." Or, opponent overcalls with 2♦ or 2♥ and responder wanted to use that same bid as a transfer to hearts or spades. Responder can double to say "stole my bid."
4. Important: Using a double to communicate the message, "stole my bid," is used only by responder after an interfering bid by opponent when partner opened 1NT. This is the only time when the double means "stole my bid." It is important to have a discussion with your partner and come to a partnership agreement on this so you both have a solid understanding of what the double means in this situation.

## Take-out Double:

1. A double after opponent opens 1 of a suit means the player who doubles has:  
(1) shortness in opponent's suit and good support for the three unbid suits,  
(2) 4 cards in the unbid major, or (3) has 17+ pts (too strong for an overcall). Partner is forced to bid their best suit and the doubler will bid again if they have enough points to show that they have a stronger hand.
2. Occasionally, a double could be used to force partner to bid again in a situation when the doubler has enough points to bid higher, but is not yet sure of the suit or NT. In other words, the doubler just wants more information to make a decision. Trust your partner!
3. When you double an opponent's suit and your partner responds at the lowest level available in their suit, you must assume they could have very few points and, therefore, you should pass if you have a minimum-strength hand. You have forced them to bid, remember! They are bidding their best suit even if they have no points. To show a hand of 9+ points, the partner of the doubler should jump a level. Example: LHO opens 1♦, partner doubles, RHO passes, then 1♥ shows 0-8 pts, 2♥ shows 9+ points.

## Negative Double:

1. A negative double is useful to show 4 cards in the unbid major when partner opens the bidding in a minor suit, opponent bids a major suit and responder has 4 cards of the other major suit and enough pts to compete. It keeps the bidding lower and is forcing.

Example 1: Partner opens 1♦, RHO overcalls 1♠; you have 10+ pts — you should double to show 4 hearts or overcall 2♥ to show 5 hearts. A change of suit by partner in first round is forcing! Note: If you were a passed hand before partner opened 1♦, it is no longer the first round and partner can pass a 2♥ overcall.

Example 2: Partner bids 1♣, RHO bids 1♥; you should double to show 4 spades, but overcall 1♠ to show 5 spades. If you overcall in a suit, you should have five in that suit. That's why the double is important to show only 4 in the unbid major because an overcall shows 5 cards. This is a subtle difference that many beginners have difficulty with.

Example 3: Partner opens 1♣, opponent passes, you bid 1♠. Your 1♠ bid is NOT an overcall; it is a response to partner's opening bid. You are showing 4+ spades; you might have 5 spades or more, but you are guaranteeing only 4. Remember: "A change of suit in the first round is forcing" so partner will bid again. If you have 10+ pts, you may have an opportunity to use "new minor forcing" to show 5 spades, covered in Lesson 14.

2. Sometimes when responder has 5 cards in a suit which qualifies for an overcall, it may be better to use the negative double instead of bidding the suit. Judgment is required.

## Lead-directing double:

1. Lead-directing double: A double of opponent's artificial bid means that partner should lead that suit, when and if they get the lead. Because the opponent's artificial bid is not bidding their suit and because the artificial bid is almost always forcing, this double is not for take-out. Both partners must be aware of what this double means or should not use this bid. The lead-directing double can also be used after Stayman ("Partner, lead me a club") or Jacoby transfers (to say, "Partner, lead me a diamond or a heart").
2. It is valuable to pay attention when opponents use a lead-directing double. As Declarer, you can identify where a strong suit is (for finessing or ruffing). It is also important for Declarer to realize that this double is not necessarily showing a lot of points, so do not be deterred from reaching game or a slam if you think you have enough points to do so. You should know what your partner's bids mean and you should know what the opponents' bids mean. The clues you get should help you play the hand more competitively.

## The Rule of 20:

This rule is used to decide if you should open the bidding or not when you have fewer than 12 total points. Count high card points (HCP) plus number of cards in two longest suits. For example, a hand with 10 HCP, 5 clubs and 5 diamonds ( $10 + 5 + 5 = 20$ ) qualifies to open 1♦. Open with 1 of a suit when the Rule of 20 applies. With 6 cards in one suit, some may open a hand as a "weak two," but if it meets the "Rule of 20," it is considered too strong for a Weak 2 opening bid. Judgment is needed sometimes when hands can be opened two different ways to show weakness or strength.

## The Law of Total Tricks (LOTT):

This "law" is usually used after partner opens with a weak or pre-emptive bid. It can also be considered when trying to decide whether to bid higher or stop when opponents are interfering in the bidding. The "Law of Total Tricks" means that you can bid to the level that matches the total number of cards in the trump suit in your hand and your partner's hand together (equated to tricks). For example, with 9 cards in a suit together, bid to the 3 level, expecting that you could take 9 tricks, even though you might not. With 10 cards together, bid to the 4 level. The number of cards is easy to count when one player opens with a pre-emptive hand (weak but showing the number of cards in one suit). Often, you will use the LOTT when your hand is also weak, so you know that the opponents have a good chance to bid and make game or even slam.

Vulnerability should also be considered since a pre-emptive bid is often used to prevent opponents from accurately assessing game level or slam level in their suit. The pre-emptive bid may result in your contract being defeated and receiving a negative score. It can be worth it if opponents could have made game or slam in

their suit. One should also consider that the opponents can double for penalty. Something you should consider: Can you lose more points than they can make if they bid to game?

The best scenario for using the LOTT is when you are not vulnerable and they are, but this is where judgment and analysis comes into play.

Experienced and competitive players memorize this table which shows how many points they could lose if doubled. This helps them decide whether to bid higher or stop.

Contract doubled:	Down 1	Down 2	Down 3
Not Vulnerable	-100	-300	-500
Vulnerable	-200	-500	-800

Another good way to learn this is through experience. 😊

### Rule of 17:

This rule can be applied when partner opens with a "Weak Two" bid and you have support for their suit and a good hand. Count HCP plus the number of cards in partner's suit. If it adds up to 17, then bid to game. If not, then use the LOTT to decide how high to bid. If neither applies, then pass.

Example: Partner opens 2♥. You have 14 points and 3 hearts (14 + 3 = 17). Bid to game, 4♥. Using the LOTT, you would bid only 3♥, so consider both options before you bid. If you had 4 hearts, you would bid to game anyway (LOTT).

### Fast Arrival:

An immediate jump to game in the first round is considered to be "fast arrival." The message you are sending to your partner is that slam is probably not possible and, even at game level, you may go down, but it could be a good sacrifice.

"Fast Arrival" means that a jump to game is made to discourage partner from considering slam and to deter partner from considering NT as an option. With enough points to consider game or slam, try to bid slowly but ensure you use forcing bids when necessary so partner does not pass too soon.

Example 1: Partner opens 1♠, you have 3 spades and 13+ points. Bid another suit at the 2 level (forcing), then bid 4♠. This is not "fast arrival." Example 2: Partner opens 1♠, you jump to 4♠. This is "fast arrival." You are showing a weak hand and five spades using the LOTT. Note: If one or both opponents interfere with the bidding, a jump to 4♠ may be necessary to deter them from finding their suit or their level and might not be "fast arrival." This depends on what the opponents bid and requires judgment.

## Michaels Cue Bid:

Bidding the same suit as opponent is called a cue bid. Michaels cue bid is used after an opening bid by opponent and shows five cards in two suits. Suggested point ranges to use for Michaels: 8-11 HCP or 16+ HCP, but this varies.

Recommendation: Keep it simple and use it for 10+ pts. If opponent opened with 1 of a minor suit, your cue bid of the same suit at the 2 level shows five cards in both majors. If opponent opened with 1 of a major suit, your cue bid of their suit at the 2 level shows five cards in the unbid major and five cards in one of the minor suits.