

Preempts!

The Preempt

- **Why do we preempt?**

We preempt to eat up bidding room for the opponents when we feel comfortable doing so. In particular:

- Our hand is weak and concentrated enough that partner is unlikely to need to know much else about our hand than that we have a long, good suit
- Our hand is not so bad that we are likely to get a bad score simply by preempting (based on vulnerability, suit quality, etc.)

- **With what hands do we preempt?**

Opinions differ on what makes a “good” preempt. The most important thing is to have clear agreements with your regular partners on what a preemptive bid shows. Features you should consider include:

- Suit length: How many cards am I promising in my suit when I preempt? Am I allowed to have more than the minimum?
- Suit quality: How many top honors must I have for my bid?
- Point Count
- Other Distributional Considerations: May I have a side four card suit? Side four card major? Void?
- Do these rules vary with vulnerability and seat?

Stick to your agreements! Your partner will need to make bidding and defensive decisions based on what your bid shows. If you don't have what you show, your partners will not be able to trust you and they will not be able to do the right thing.

Example Hand:

T73	N (You)	E	S(Partner)	W
K4			2H	2S
KQJ	Pass	4S	All Pass	
T7432				

If your partner's 2H bid has shown a good suit, you can comfortably lead the king of hearts, with any luck scoring two hearts and a trump promotion plus 1 or 2 minor suit tricks.

However, if partner routinely preempts on "anything," the lead of the king of hearts could be a disaster, and you may opt for a safer diamond lead.

This is also something to think about when making agreements with partner...the more wide ranging your preempts are, the more often you get to "get in the bidding;" but your partner will have a harder time knowing the right thing to do!

- **A Good "Standard" Treatment (In My Opinion)**
 - A 2-level preempt shows 6 cards and a decent quality suit: 2 out of the top 3 honors vulnerable, 3 out of the top 5 not vul
 - Good five card suits can be preempted in third seat
 - Side four card suits are allowed, but only if hands are otherwise "perfect" (Very good suit)
- **The general theme—ask yourself: Is this the best way to describe my hand? Does the space I am eating rate to be valuable to my opponents? Am I likely to go for a numer?**

Responding to Partner's Preempt

Raising Partner—"Furthering the Preempt"

Many of you may be familiar with the Law of Total Tricks:
"The Total Number of Tricks is Equal to the Total Number of Trumps."

This means that on a good day, you will get the best result available on a hand by contracting for the number of tricks equal to the number of trumps your side has (the 4-level if you have 10 trumps, etc.)

However, this should be used not as a Law, but as a Guideline.

- If you lack in shape, you may want to be conservative (You may want to treat 4 trumps with a 4333 shape as only 3, for instance)
- Pay attention to vulnerability!

- If your hand has a lot of “slow tricks” (KQ..., QJ...) that will take tricks on defense but may not reduce your partner’s losers on offense, you may want to bid less
- Conversely, if you can envision making game across from a typical preempt, you may want to bid it with only 2 or 3 trumps
- **Avoid “slow rolling:” if you would raise partner if left hand opponent competes, raise her now!**
 - Letting the opponents bid may clue them in to a huge fit they would have missed otherwise or allow them to make a killing lead
 - When partner preempts, righty passes, and you have support, you are very rarely going to “buy it” at a low level; lefty is going to bid most of the time

Bidding New Suits

- **Experts virtually universally agree that new suits in response to partner’s preempt should be forcing and show good hands**
 - Usually a good six+ card suit, looking for the best game
 - You can also bid a new suit with support for partner as a lead-directing bid
- **With no support, a bad (or medium) hand and a suit of your own, just pass!**
 - Partner rarely has more help for your suit than you do for theirs, and bidding a new suit forces you to higher levels
 - If your hand is weak, your opponents will often rescue you by bidding
 - If partner gets doubled, THEN you can escape (usually by redoubling)
- **If righty bids or doubles, new suits should be non-forcing but still constructive**
- **Weak 2-double-redouble shows values looking for penalties**
- **A good convention over weak 2s is 4c “special keycard.”** Since partner has less than an opening hand, they cannot have most of the normal RKC responses! Instead:
 - 4d: No keycards
 - 4h: 1 keycard, no trump queen
 - 4s: 1 keycard+ trump queen
 - 4n: 2 keycards, no trump queen

- 5c: 2 keycards+ trump queen

This will allow you to stop at the 4 level instead of the 5 level with some hands where you would like to look for slam

- However, don't play this convention if you or your partner is likely to forget it! 😊

2NT Responses: Two Methods

Feature Ask: Asks partner to cuebid an outside “feature” (A or K) or rebid their major without a feature

- Some people play that you only show a feature with a maximum preempt; discuss this with your partner

Ogust: Asks partner to describe their hand more generally:

3C: Bad hand, bad suit

3D: Bad hand, good suit

3H: Good hand, bad suit

3S: Good hand, good suit

3N: Solid suit (AKQxxx)

A “good suit” is normally 6 cards, two of the top three honors

A “good hand” is 8+ points (i.e. a side feature of some kind)

(You can suit these to your own partnership style...if your 2 level preempts always promise a good suit, there's no need to be able to show a bad suit!)

Which is better?

- **Neither is strictly better**
- **If you can remember it, Ogust seems to be more useful in more cases**

General theme for responses: If you need more information, ask; otherwise, think about where you'd like to play the hand across from a “typical” preempt (either to make or as a sacrifice), then bid there—immediately!

Defending an Opponent's Preempt

The first thing to remember: Preempts work! You cannot describe your hand with as much accuracy starting at the two or three level than you can at the one level. That being said, there are a number of things you can do to make yourself more successful. Some things to think about:

- **Be careful with direct seat overcalls, especially when your LHO is not a passed hand. Not only can lefty be arbitrarily strong; unlike over a 1-level overcall, they also have a penalty double available!** Since there is no way to show how good your suit is, partner will not know if they should run to a suit of their own and you may go for a number even when you had a safe place to play.
- **A corollary: consider making take out doubles more often, even with hands where you might overcall at the 1 level (such as 5332 with a mediocre suit). Sometimes partner will be able to convert the takeout double on a misfit hand and defending will be your only route to a plus score; other times this will allow you to play a 5-3 fit rather than a 5-2 (or 5-1!) fit. You may also be able to learn more about partner's strength; more on this below**
- **In the balancing seat, more aggressive action is often necessary, especially if you are short in preemptor's suit. If game is cold across from a balanced 14 or 15 count, you need to bid! (Note that when you have length in preemptor's suit, you can pass more comfortably; if partner's hand were that good, they would have made a takeout double with shortness in the preemptor's suit; if neither of you are short in the suit, the hand may not play that well for you—preemptor's partner may be getting some ruffs, for instance)**
- **Some discussion of less common bids:**
 - Jump bids to the three level show very strong hands and good suits—don't preempt over the opponent's preempt! Jumps to game may be weaker in terms of high card strength but should be bid expecting to make across from some scattered values from partner
 - A 3 level cuebid of the opponent's weak 2 is a stopper ask, usually with 7, 8 or more running tricks in hand if partner can stop the preemptor's suit
 - Over a 2H or 2S preempt, jumps to 4 of a minor are "leaping Michaels": very strong hands with at least 5-5 in that minor and

the other major. (2D) – 4D shows 5-5 majors with a very strong hand.

Continuations after an overcall

- **Remember partner should have a pretty good suit for their overcall (and could have a pretty good hand).** With scattered values, consider raising their suit with only doubleton support rather than bidding NT or introducing your own suit.
- **New suits should be forcing.** A cuebid of preemptor's suit should be 2-way, either a strong raise of their suit or looking for a stopper for NT. (If they bid 3NT and you now bid something else, this means you had the strong raise)

Continuations after a double

- **Once again, don't forget partner may not have a "perfect" takeout shape, especially where the minors are concerned.** Consider bidding a good three card major over a bad four card minor, especially if it allows you to stay a level lower.
- When considering converting partner's takeout double for penalties, remember that partner may be stretching to bid in balancing seat, so passing may be dangerous in that situation, especially at IMPs. (At matchpoints, convert more aggressively against vulnerable opponents—you want a 1-trick set to be good enough for a good score!)
- Another difficulty is learning how strong partner is after we double, since we may already be at the three level! Luckily there is an excellent convention—**Lebensohl 2NT** (similar to Lebensohl over a 1NT opening) which helps clear this up.
- **Lebensohl 2NT applies when an unpassed player makes a takeout double of a weak 2, either in direct or balancing seat, and the next hand passes. If doubler's partner bids 2NT, this requests partner to bid 3C.* This gives us multiple sequences to show different strengths of hands.**
 - **If we could bid our suit at the 2-level (i.e. it outranks preemptor's suit) we have three choices on how to show the suit:**
 - Bidding at the 2 level shows a weak hand, 0-8 points

- Bidding 2NT and then bidding our suit over partner's 3C response shows constructive values, 9-11 or so
 - Bidding 3 of our suit directly shows 12+ and is game forcing
- **If we can't bid our suit at the 2-level, there are only two options available**
 - Bidding 2NT and then bidding our suit over partner's 3C response (or passing if we have clubs) shows a weak hand, 0-8 points
 - Bidding 3 of our suit directly shows a good hand, 9-11 or so
 - With a stronger hand, we either jump in our suit or cuebid the opponent's suit
- **This also gives us a few extra choices in terms of cuebids and 3nt bids.** One way to play them:
 - A direct cuebid shows any strong hand, as just described; 2NT and then cuebidding is a stopper ask
 - 3NT directly shows hope to make based on a long minor; 2NT and then 3NT shows a hand hoping to make on high card strength
- We gave up a natural 2NT. However, this is not much of a loss—with most hands with good stoppers in the opponent's suit and no suit of our own, we can pass partner's takeout double or just bid 3NT.
- *Remember that in addition to normal takeout doubles when partner doubles they may have a very strong hand (possibly with a suit of their own). They can show this over your 2NT bid by bidding something other than 3C. When they do this, they are essentially saying “my hand is too good to play 3C if that's what you wanted to play, even if you are weak!” (Typically 18+ points) They can bid 3 of a new suit to show that suit; or they can cuebid the preemptive suit with a very very strong hand of their own.