

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES

TAKEOUT DOUBLES – in the direct seat

These are of two kinds:

- “normal” with 13 to 18 points
 - 13 to 15 = minimum
 - 16 to 18 = maximum
- “strong” with more than 18 points

A normal takeout double promises support for all unbid suits.

The ideal distribution needed for making a takeout double is 4-4-4-1 with the singleton being in the suit doubled. The assumption is that your side has a fit since you have four-card support in whichever suit partner bids.

To make up the minimum 13 points you need for your hand to qualify for a takeout double you can add on “***dummy points***” on the assumption that your side has a fit. One fairly common method of evaluating dummy points is to add

- five points for a void;
- three points for a singleton; and
- one point for a doubleton.

My recommended way of catering for a hand which lacks the ideal distribution is that you need one extra point for each distributional impurity. For example, with a 4-4-3-2 hand shape you need at least 14 points to make a takeout double.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES

NEGATIVE DOUBLES

There are many forms of negative doubles. The simplest form might look like this:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♣
1♠	Dble		

North's double is not for penalty but is takeout. While it does not absolutely guarantee four cards in the unbid major (hearts) it is generally taken as showing a heart suit. Generally what North is saying with this *negative double* is: "My bid has been taken away from me. I can't bid 2♦ or 2♥ because that would show at least ten points. I can't bid 1NT because my hand is not balanced or does not contain a spade stopper."

The strength requirement for a negative double is as follows:

- six or more points at the one level;
- eight or more points at the two level; and
- ten or more points at the one level.

In the above example, North is promising at least eight points since South is obliged to rebid at the two level (in a suit).

If the auction starts 1♣ – [1♦] – ? a double promises at least four cards in both majors.

In contrast if the auction starts 1♠ – [2♣] – ? a double might be made with length in just one of the majors.

If the auction starts 1♣ – [1♥] – ? the general view is that a double promises precisely four cards in spades, leaving a 1♠ response to promise at least a five-card spade suit.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES

RESPONSIVE DOUBLES

Doubles made after the first round of the auction are mostly still for **take-out**. Calling them “*responsive*” or “*cooperative*” is just another term sometimes given to them. There are too many variations for us to list them all here but our play examples should feature some instances.

Here is one situation that frequently arises:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1♣	Dble	2♣	Dble

South’s double says to partner, “you choose”.

And here is another one:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	Pass
Pass	1♦	1♠	1NT
2♠	Dble		

North’s double says to partner, “please help”. In other words, North probably has five diamonds and at least three cards in each of the two unbid suits, clubs and hearts. North doesn’t want to sell out to 2♠.

And a real poser (IMPs, N-S vulnerable):

You South hold ♠ K Q ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ 8 7 4 ♣ A 10 9 6 2

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	1♠	Pass	1NT
2♦	2♥	3♦	?

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES

SUPPORT DOUBLES

These are made by the opening bidder and confirm three-card support for a major suit bid by responder

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♣
Pass	1♥	1♠	Dble

South's double here is a *support double*, promising three-card heart support. That leaves a rebid of **2♥** to promise four-card support and any other bid, including *Pass*, to deny as many as three hearts in opener's hand. A support double says nothing about the strength of opener's hand. With a medium or maximum opener has to wait for subsequent rounds of bidding to get that message across.

Support doubles are usually played up to **2♠**. In the following sequence South's double still promises three-card support – in spades.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♣
1♦	1♠	2♦	Dble

If East doubles North's major-suit response in either of the above examples, then a **redouble** by South promises three-card support for responder's major suit. That is called a "*support redouble*".

Both support doubles and support redoubles are helpful in determining the combined length of the opening side's major-suit fit. Without interference, opener's raise of responder's major suit, while usually promising four-card support, may sometimes be the best rebid even when opener only holds three-card support.

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MAXIMAL DOUBLES

These extend a game invitation and go hand in hand with the *One-Two-Three-Stop* concept of shutting out the opposition.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	3♥

South's 3♥ rebid shows a minimum opening hand with a sixth heart. It is merely designed to make it harder for the opposition to back into the auction. That often goes under the name of *One-Two-Three-Stop*.

If South wants to invite game, then South can rebid 2NT with a balanced hand unsuitable for a 1NT opening bid or make a *long-suit trial bid*. That is “standard” but of course a partnership might agree on its own approach to inviting game. Common methods include *help-suit trial bids* and conventional 2NT rebids.

The same general concept applies if there is interference:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♥
Pass	2♥	3♣	?

If South rebids 3♥ that again shows a minimum opening hand with a sixth heart. As before, it is “competitive”, not “invitational”.

To invite game opener bids a new suit (3♦) or makes a double. Such a double is called a *maximal double*. Obviously it is not for penalty. Responder retreats to 3♥ with a minimum raise and bids game (4♥) with a maximum raise.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES PENALTY DOUBLES

My favourite mantra is that all doubles are for **take-out** – unless *obviously for penalty*. That means I have never yet lost a post-mortem. 😊

Up to what level should take-out doubles be played to? My favourite teacher, Larry Cohen, says to “infinity”, for which he uses the symbol ∞ on his convention card. That makes a lot of sense, since if the auction starts $1\diamond$ and your RHO jumps to $5\clubsuit$, say, then how many times are you going to have a hand where you want to penalise $5\clubsuit$? The chances are that RHO has nine clubs and hopes to escape for just one or two down. More likely is that you have a good hand and that you might even be able to envisage your side making a slam – but you only have two or three diamonds and length in both majors. In that scenario you’d prefer to be able to double in order to find out more about opener’s hand.

There are of course some exceptions to the rule that double is always take-out (no rule ever lacks exceptions):

- partner opened 1NT (whatever range) and RHO overcalls;
- partner opened pre-emptively and RHO overcalls;
- partner opened and RHO overcalls naturally in notrumps;
- partner opened, RHO doubled, you redoubled (to show 10+ points) and either LHO or RHO makes a bid that comes back to you;
- your side bid game voluntarily and opponents bid higher (you must double to protect your score or bid one level higher yourself).

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES

PENALTY DOUBLES (*continued*)

Note that in all these cases partner's hand is known. That is, partner's hand has been pretty well defined by the auction to date.

Sometimes a responsive double gets the fancy name of a *DSIP double*: do something intelligent, partner. Usually you can't go wrong by coming up with another bid – as long as you steer away from passing. Of course, sometimes you might be dealt a hand where you can be confident of defeating the opponents' contract, in which case passing is fine. That way you have managed to convert a take-out double into a penalty double.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – DOUBLES SLAM DOUBLES

If your side is investigating slam and the bidding has reached the five or six level, a double is often used to deny first-round control of the suit that the opposition has bid.

Example from the Canadian teams open championship from 2017 (dealer East, nil vulnerable). At one table North-South stopped in 5♥ after South overcalled 1♠ over 1♣ and was very lucky indeed to get a second chance. 12 tricks were made. At the other table the bidding went as follows:

The screenshot shows a bridge bidding interface with the following components:

- North Hand:** ♠Q, ♥A10975, ♦109873, ♣K3
- West Hand:** ♠J9763, ♥, ♦Q642, ♣Q965
- East Hand:** ♠5, ♥42, ♦AKJ5, ♣AJ10872
- South Hand:** ♠AK10842, ♥KQJ863, ♦, ♣4
- Bidding Table:**

	W	N	E	S
			1♣	2♠
	Pass	4♥	4NT	6♥
	7♣	Pass	Pass	7♥
	Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass
- Score Display:** 0 (North), 0 (South), with a 7♥x North indicator.

After West raised the ante to 7♣ North should double 7♣ to deny first-round control. When North failed to do that, South bid the grand slam in the belief that North held a club void or the ace. East doubled – but now had to find a lead.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING

BALANCING

The most important concept of competitive bidding that goes hand in hand with a pass by partner after an opening bid on your left lies in the need for you if you are the last player in an auction that threatens to die – in the balancing seat – to protect partner by straining to enter the auction in the pass-out seat.

When the bidding starts with 1♥ on your left, pass from partner, and pass on your right, your goal should be to stretch as much as possible to keep the bidding alive. With the opposition not being particularly challenged to take seven tricks in a one-level contract your goal should be to not make life too easy for the opposition.

Your partner might have as many as 15 points and yet not have been able to find a good descriptive bid over 1♥, maybe having the wrong hand shape for a take-out double, no good five-card suit to overcall, or not quite the right strength or a heart stopper to be able to compete with 1NT.

While a bid at the one level can be made by partner with a king less than normal opening bid strength a bid by you now in the balancing seat can be made on two kings less, that is just seven points. You can even bid 1♠ now with just a four-card suit.

With a balanced hand and a stopper in opener's suit, you can bid 1NT which in the style of Mike Lawrence shows 12 to 16 points over a major-suit opening but just 12 to 14 points over a minor-suit opening where you have more options available for bidding a suit at the one level.

With any good hand, usually 13+ points, it's probably better to start with a take-out double which does not need to fulfil the same requirements as a take-out double in the direct seat. The general concept of balancing can be extended to the two level which again does not normally present a challenge in the play.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING

BALANCING (*continued*)

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♥
Pass	Pass	?	

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	..	..	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	Pass
?			

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
..	Pass	Pass	1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
?			

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – QUIZ

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

1.

With neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and opens 2♥. What is your call holding:

♠	KJ2
♥	QJ5
♦	KJ876
♣	Q2

Choose One:

- (1) Pass
- (2) Double
- (3) 2NT
- (4) 3♦
- (5) Other

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – QUIZ

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2.

You are vulnerable against not. RHO deals and opens 1♠. What is your call holding:

♠	Q765
♥	KJ6
♦	KJ4
♣	AJ2

Choose One:

- (1) Pass
- (2) Double
- (3) 1NT
- (4) Other

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – QUIZ

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

3.

With neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and opens 1♥, what is your call holding:



Choose One:

(1) Pass

(2) Double

(3) 2♣

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – QUIZ

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

4.

With neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and opens 3♦. What is your call holding:

♠	KQ95
♥	K2
♦	AJ10
♣	K1098?

Choose One:

- (1) Pass
- (2) Double
- (3) 3NT
- (4) Other

COMPETITIVE BIDDING – QUIZ

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

5.

You are South.

South deals, EW vul, Matchpoints.

You hold:

♠ A864 ♥ K83 ♦ QJ82 ♣ 92

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			Pass
Pass	1♦	1♥	Dbl
2♥	Dbl	P	?

What is your call?

Your Choice:

- 2♠
- 2NT
- 3♦
- 3♥
- 3NT
- Other

Competitive bidding – quiz answers

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

1.

With neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and opens 2♥. What is your call holding:

♠ KJ2
♥ QJ5
♦ KJ876
♣ Q2

Choose One:

- (1) Pass
- (2) Double
- (3) 2NT
- (4) 3♦
- (5) Other

Not even close to what is needed for a three-level overall.

Wrong shape for a double.

Not strong enough for 2NT.

Pass is not a dirty word.

Competitive bidding – quiz answers

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

2.

You are vulnerable against not. RHO deals and opens 1♠. What is your call holding:

♠	Q765
♥	KJ6
♦	KJ4
♣	AJ2

Choose One:

- (1) Pass
- (2) Double
- (3) 1NT
- (4) Other

Yes, you are in the HCP range for a 1NT overcall.

If you are brave and don't mind an occasional *minus 1100*, then 1NT is for you.

With this flat garbage overcalling 1NT is far too risky.

Pass does not deny a decent hand.

Competitive bidding – quiz answers

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

3.

With neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and opens 1♥, what is your call holding:



♠ K3
♥ KQ2
♦ K94
♣ J7652?

Choose One:

(1) Pass

(2) Double

(3) 2♣

Yes, you have an opening hand.

And yes, you have a five-card suit.

To make a two-level overcall you need at least 13 HCPs.

To make a two-level overcall you need a good suit.

This hand fulfils neither of those criteria.

Remember, you have a partner.

Competitive bidding – quiz answers

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

4.

With neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and opens 3♦. What is your call holding:

♠ KQ95
♥ K2
♦ AJ10
♣ K1098?

Choose One:

- (1) Pass
(2) Double
(3) 3NT
(4) Other

You have too much to pass this time.

You have too few hearts to make a take-out double (and too many diamonds).

“Hamman’s rule” says if you have a number of alternatives to choose from and one of them is 3NT, then go for that one. On this hand ideally you need a king more to bid 3NT – but the pressure of the pre-empt sometimes forces you to make bids that are not perfect.

Competitive bidding – quiz answers

with thanks to “Bridge with Larry Cohen”: larryco.com

5.

♠ A864 ♥ K83 ♦ QJ82 ♣ 92

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1♦	1♥	Pass
2♥	Dbl	P	Dbl
			?

Current No of Bidders: 1327

BID	LC READERS	AB PANELISTS
2♠	40.69%	22%
2NT	13.49%	42%
3♦	37.91%	16%
3♥	2.49%	8%
3NT	3.39%	4%
Other	2.03%	8%

Comment(s) - 136

Larry said, "3♥. Too strong for anything lower, but I also don't want to barge into the wrong game. If partner 'temporizes' with 3♠, I can then try 3NT to show doubt. If he does anything else, we can head towards game or slam in diamonds."

Others receiving consideration: 3♠, 4♦, 4♠

3♥ "I feel I'm sort-of forced into this since my choice of 3S is not listed. We are too strong for 3D or 3S and one stopper is not enough for a NT rebid, particularly when partner probably just holds a singleton. Partner's responsive double shows extra values, so we really ought to have a combined point count that is sufficient for game." -**Oliver, Auckland, New Zealand**

3♦ "My guess: South's X was asking N if she has 4S. North's reply X says no (may have 3). So south bids 3D showing 4D support. (South is uncertain of his KH will be a control.) North as the 3rd seat opener makes the final decision." -**ALICE LANGLEY BC**