

CUEBIDDING THE OPPONENTS' SUIT

This lesson summarizes various definitions of cuebids of the opponents' bid suit. We start with situations I believe intermediate players should be familiar with. A few more advanced concepts are also covered later. Each of these situations is worthy of further study – this lesson is merely an overview.

Note that this lesson is NOT about “control-bidding” (showing controls for slam), which is (confusingly) also often referred to as "cuebidding".

NEVER PASS A CUEBID BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS!

NOTE: In the example bidding sequences, the CUEBID IS THE UNDERLINED BID. Opponents' bids are in parentheses ().

1) MICHAELS

<u>N</u>	-	<u>E</u>	=	
(1♣)	-	<u>2♣</u>	=	Both Majors – at least 5-5
(1♦)	-	<u>2♦</u>	=	Both Majors – at least 5-5
(1♥)	-	<u>2♥</u>	=	5-card ♠'s + 5-cards in an unspecified minor
(1♠)	-	<u>2♠</u>	=	5-card ♥'s + 5-cards in an unspecified minor

A DIRECT CUEBID of the opponent's one-level opening bid should be Michaels. While this is a convention you should discuss with your partner, it is fairly “Standard”, and is NOT alertable. More specific requirements, as well as follow-up bidding, is the subject of a separate lesson.

Note: If the auction starts (1x) – P – (1NT) – 2x should still be Michaels.

2) Cuebid = STAYMAN

<u>W</u>	-	<u>N</u>	-	<u>E</u>
1NT	-	(2♦)	-	<u>3♦</u>

When the opponents overcall 2-of a suit after your 1NT opening, a cuebid is the equivalent of Stayman, asking partner for a four-card major.

3) Cuebid = LIMIT RAISE OR BETTER

When partner opens with One-of-a-Suit and the next hand overcalls, a cuebid promises a limit raise or better in support of the suit opened (10+ *support points*). This is in keeping with the modern style of preemptive jumps in competition. For example:

	<u>W</u>	-	<u>N</u>	-	
a)	1♦		(1♠)		3♦ = Preemptive Jump Raise
					<u>2♠</u> = Limit Raise or better in ♦'s
			or		
	<u>W</u>		<u>N</u>		
b)	1♥		(2♣)		3♥ = Preemptive Jump Raise
					<u>3♣</u> = Limit Raise or better in ♥'s

When partner's opening bid is a major, responder's cuebid may be made with three-card support or better (unlike limit raises without interference, which promise at least four-card support).

When partner's opening bid is a minor, the cuebidder would ideally have at least five-card support (especially if clubs) but may sometimes have only four and no other descriptive bid.

4) Cuebidding as ADVANCER in response to partner's overcall

<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>
(1♣)	1♥	(P)	<u>2♣</u>

When partner overcalls a one-level opening, a new suit by advancer is NOT forcing. Therefore, while the cuebidder *usually* has a limit raise or better in partner's suit, she may, alternatively, have a very strong hand that wants to force partner to bid.

In some of the below situations, the cuebid is essentially *asking* partner for more information, without *showing* anything in particular. **As a rule, if partner cuebids and you do not recognize the context, assume that you should answer with your most natural descriptive bid.**

5) Cuebidding as ADVANCER after partner's Takeout Double

<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>
(1♦)	Double	(P)	<u>2♦</u>

When partner makes a Takeout Double (even at a higher level of bidding, e.g. 3♣ - X - P - 4♣), a cuebid is the *only* forcing response. A below-game jump in a new suit would be *invitational*, *not forcing*.

The cuebid in response to the Takeout Double does not promise anything specific, but is usually a good hand (at least game-invitational), which is unsure as to what strain the partnership belongs in. More details on bidding after a takeout double are outside the scope of this lesson.

6) Cuebidding to ASK for a stopper

In many situations, a cuebid of the opponent's suit is an attempt to get to 3NT if partner has a stopper. Even if you are not sure this is the cuebidder's intention, it is usually best, if it seems like that *might* be what partner is doing, to bid 3NT with a stopper. Essentially, this is simply making the most natural bid you can, when partner's cuebid is not specifically defined. For example:

<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>
1♥	(1♠)	2♣	(P)
3♣	(P)	<u>3♠</u>	

Responder probably wants opener to bid 3NT with a spade stopper.

7) Cuebidding to SHOW a Stopper

When the opponents have bid TWO suits, and you are looking for Notrump, a cuebid SHOWS a stopper in the suit bid. For example:

<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>
1♣	(1♦)	1♠	(2♥)
3♣	(P)	<u>3♥</u>	

This 3♥ bid is presumed to **show** something in hearts and asks partner to bid 3NT with diamonds covered. It is also possible that the 3♥ bidder has no intention of playing in 3NT and is using the 3♥ bid to elicit more information, or set up a game force.

MORE ADVANCED SEQUENCESA) NATURAL "Cuebids"

1- A "cuebid" should be *NATURAL* if the bidder passes originally over a opponent's bid of a suit, then bids that suit later, **without partner having bid**. For example:

<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>
(1♣)	P	(1♠)	P
(2♠)	<u>3♣</u>		

East's 3♣ bid is clearly natural. But if W had overcalled (2♥, in this case) 3♣ then would be a cuebid.

2- The discussion of Michaels (see page 1) assumed that the opponent's opening bid was natural. Sometimes the opening bid is alerted, in which case I recommend the following:

- If their opening bid is **completely artificial** (e.g., a Precision 1♣ opening), your "cuebid" of their suit (2♣, in this case) should be NATURAL - showing a club suit.
- If they announce "could be short", yet the bid promises at least two cards in that suit, treat it as a natural bid, which means that your cuebids would still be Michaels.

B) **Cuebids by the opening bidder**

<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>
1♣	(P)	1♠	(2♥)
<u>3♥</u>			

A cuebid by the opening bidder does NOT promise support for responder's suit. A jump to 3♠ by opener would not have been weak, so opener does not need the cuebid to show support in the same way responder does on an auction such as 1♠ - (2♥) - 3♥.

In the example auction, it is likely that opener has a strong hand with long clubs and wants partner to bid 3NT with a heart stopper.

C) **"Sandwich" Cuebids**

"Sandwich seat" means that you are in fourth position, and the opponents have both bid.

For example:

<u>Opener</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>Responder</u>	<u>You</u>
(1♦)	P	(1♠)	<u>2♦</u> or <u>2♠</u> ?

Nearly all experts would treat a bid of responder's suit (2♠ in this case) as a Natural bid in this type of auction. Some would also treat opener's suit (2♦ in this case) as Natural, leaving either double or 2NT as your only Takeout bids (some also play 1NT as T.O. here – "sandwich NT"- which I do NOT recommend). Others prefer for the cuebid of opener's suit to be a "Michaels" type bid (5-5 in the other suits). I strongly suggest you avoid making ANY of these bids unless you have explicitly discussed them with your partner in advance.

D) **Direct Cuebids when they open with a preempt**

	<u>N</u>		<u>E</u>
a)	(2♦) -		<u>3♦</u>
b)	(3♣) -		<u>4♣</u>
c)	(3♦) -		<u>4♦</u>

I recommend that any of the above cuebids show both majors.

If the opening is two or three of a *major*, the cuebid is less clearly defined. Old "Standard" bidding would have dictated that a cuebid such as (3♥) - 4♥ show *any* strong two-suited hand. These days I think most experts would treat it as spades and a minor. Without partnership agreement, I suggest you avoid cuebidding over their preempt. A convention called Leaping Michaels deals with competing over their Weak 2 bid.

E) **JUMP CUEBIDS**

The meaning will depend on the situation. Some examples:

A *jump* cuebid is often used as a Splinter Bid. If partner opens at the one-level, and RHO overcalls, Splinters should apply. For example:

- a) 1♠ - (2♣) - 4♣
 or
 b) 1♣ - (1♠) - 3♠
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How about a *DIRECT JUMP CUEBID*? Most experts play it as natural and preemptive in the minors, but as a “stopper ask” in the majors. Specifically:

- a) (1♣) - 3♣ OR (1♦) - 3♦ is natural and preemptive.
- b) (1♥) - 3♥ OR (1♠) - 3♠ asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in the opponent’s suit. The jump cuebidder has a good hand with a long minor and expects to take nine tricks if partner can bid 3NT. Without a stopper, the partner would bid 4♣ (or 5♣ with a better hand) to play in the jump cuebidder’s minor.
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How about a jump cuebid in response to partner’s one-level major suit overcall?

“**MIXED RAISES**” has become a nearly universal treatment amongst high-level tournament players. A “mixed” raise shows a mixture of high cards and distribution, with four-card trump support. The strength is too much for a preemptive jump raise, but not enough for a limit raise (about 7-9 pts.). This is an important hand type to show. For example:

<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>
(1♦)	1♥	(P)	<u>3♦</u>

South’s 3♦ bid shows four-card heart support, and about 7-9 HCP.

SUMMARY

Whenever you want to force partner to bid, but are not sure how to do so, consider a cuebid- provided the opponents have bid a suit, of course ☺. That said, often a double when available is a better choice, so consider that too!

Cuebids can be made in many additional auctions which have not been covered in this paper. While some cuebids have specific descriptive meanings, and it is important to learn and remember those, often a cuebid is a non-descript forcing bid.

When in doubt as to the meaning of partner's cuebid, assume she wants more information from you and make your most natural bid. This will often, but not always, be to bid Notrump with a stopper in the opponent's suit.

NEVER PASS A CUEBID BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS! Only pass if you are confident that you are in one of the situations where a cuebid is NATURAL.