

FORCING VS. NON-FORCING BIDS

Knowing which bids are forcing and which are not is paramount to good partnership communication. A firm understanding of the concepts and rules discussed in this paper is essential to being a reliable bidder. Whether you are a beginner or an advanced player, you should ask this question of every new bid you learn – “Is it forcing”?

If a bid is **FORCING (F)**, that player must be given another chance to bid. This means that the partner of the bidder **MAY NOT PASS**, unless their right-hand opponent acts.

If a bid is **NON-FORCING (NF)**, the partner of the bidder **MAY PASS**.

Other terms to be familiar with:

GAME-FORCING (GF) – If a bid is defined as game-forcing, neither player may pass until the partnership reaches a game (or slam) contract.

ONE-ROUND FORCE (F1) - If a bid is a one-round force (also known as “forcing one-round”) the bidder must get at least one more chance to bid, but a “game-force” has not been established.

INVITATIONAL (INV) – If a bid is invitational, the partner of the bidder is encouraged to bid but may *pass*. Invitational bids are **NOT** forcing.

SIGNOFF – This type of *non-forcing* bid says that partner is not only *permitted* to pass but is expected to do so. A signoff bid can be made only when partner’s hand is narrowly defined.

Every bid is either forcing or non-forcing. While in some cases the nature of a bid may depend on partnership understanding, this lesson will attempt to cover the “standard” definitions of most common bidding sequences. Each section of this paper begins with a listing of forcing & non-forcing bids, then includes some brief explanations.

CONSTRUCTIVE BIDS (bids without interference)

FORCING BIDS BY THE OPENER

- 2♣ Opening Bid
- Reverse
- Jump Shift
- New Suit or Jump after a 2/1 Response
- New Suit after a different suit has been agreed
- Any Bid below game, after a game force has been created

NON-FORCING BIDS BY THE OPENER

- Any non-jump bid after a one-level response (**including new suit**, unless reverse)
- Jump in own suit, or responder's suit, after a one-level response
- Any Notrump Bid (4NT or 5NT are usually exceptions)

2♣ Opening- Assuming your partnership uses Weak-Two Bids, 2♣ is the ONLY forcing opening bid, and is *usually*, but not always, “game-forcing” (opener rebidding 2N is a common exception). If opener starts with 2♣, and then names a suit, that is absolutely forcing.

Reverse- When is a new suit at opener's second turn forcing? If the opener's second suit is *above* two of his original suit, this is considered a reverse. A reverse is **forcing for one round**, and the opener should have at least 17 points to bid this way. For example:

1♣	P	1♠	P	The 2♥ bid is a reverse. Opener should have at least 4 hearts, longer clubs , and 17+ pts.
<u>2♥</u>				

BUT

1♦	P	1♥	P	The 2♣ bid is <u>not</u> a reverse, as the second suit is <i>below</i> 2 of the first suit. This bid is non-forcing (may be minimum, up to 18 HCP)!
<u>2♣</u>				

Opener's Jump Shift is GF - When the opener *jumps* in a new suit at her second turn this bid is **forcing to game!** In order to jump shift the opener should have 19+ HCP (or the equivalent in playing strength), as she is *guaranteeing game* even when responder is minimum. Any subsequent bid by opener or responder is forcing until game is reached. For example:

1♦	P	1♥	P	The 3♣ bid is Game-Forcing. Therefore the responder's “simple preference” to 3♦ is forcing. Responder need not jump, regardless of strength.
3♣	P	3♦		

New Suit or Jump after 2/1 Response - When the responder's first bid is a new suit at the 2-level (i.e., a 2/1) he promises at least 10 points (more if using 2/1 GF). If opener now names a new suit, even if not a jump shift or reverse, this is forcing. A jump is also forcing. For example:

1♠	P	2♦	P	The 2♥ bid is forcing. It would not have been forcing if the initial response had been 1NT.
<u>2♥</u>				

Note: This point is apparently moot if you are using 2/1 Game Forcing, but it is still worth knowing, as it would apply to a 2/1 by a PH or a 2/1 in competition, neither of which is GF

New Suit forcing, after a different suit is agreed- In general, any new suit after a different one has been bid and raised is **forcing**. For example:

1♥	P	2♥	P	The responder may not pass the 3♣ bid. Exactly what 3♣ should mean is another subject.
3♣				

Opener's jump in own suit or responder's suit is NF after a 1 level response - If responder's bid is at the 1-level, a jump by opener, in either her own suit or partner's, shows 16-18 points and is encouraging, but **non-forcing**. Be sure NOT to make one of these bids if you want to play in game opposite a minimum response (this is a common error) Examples:

a)	1♦	P	1♠	P	The 3♦ bid is non-forcing.
	3♦				
b)	1♦	P	1♠	P	The 3♠ bid is non-forcing.
	3♠				

FORCING BIDS BY THE RESPONDER

- **New Suit** (while there are several exceptions, the default is that a new suit by responder is FORCING!)
- Any below-game bid after opener has jumped, even if opener's jump was not forcing
- New suit after a different one has been agreed
- Any bid below game, after a game force has been created

NON-FORCING BIDS BY THE RESPONDER

- Any direct natural bid by a "Passed Hand"
- Raise of Opener's first or second suit
- Rebidding responder's suit (except when opener has jumped – see above)
- Any non-jump NT bid (4NT or 5N often an exception)
- New Suit, having limited hand with an initial 1N response (assuming suit could NOT have been bid at 1-level initially)
- New Suit after a 1NT rebid from opener (if lower-ranking than original suit)
- Jump Bids: Modern bidding usually treats jumps by responder as invitational. Though there are many exceptions possible by partnership agreement, this is what I would consider the default.

Here are some explanations of the above "rules":

Any below-game bid by responder, after opener has jumped, is forcing - This absolute rule of Std. Bidding is often overlooked! When the opener jumps, although the jump itself may *not* be forcing, any bid the responder now makes IS forcing. For example:

1♣	P	1♠	P	The opener's 2NT bid is non-forcing, but the responder's
2NT	P	<u>3♠</u>		3♠ bid is forcing. Similarly, a 3♣ bid by responder would
				be forcing in this situation. If opener had jumped to 3♣
				instead of 2N, again 3♠ by responder would be forcing.

The above rule probably isn't intuitive. Normally, when a player rebids a suit without jumping it is limited and non-forcing. However, when the opener jumps, the partnership is already so close to game values (and often has slam) that it works better to define any bid by responder as forcing. The only way for responder to stop short of game after opener's non-forcing jump is to *PASS*.

Passed Hand- If the responder has a chance to open the bidding and did not, he is a passed hand. **No response is forcing by a passed hand (except an artificial bid)**, as the original pass limited the hand. In general, when your partner's hand is limited, you are allowed to pass any natural bid.

New Suit after opener's 1N rebid is NF- This special situation constitutes an **exception to the "rule" of a new suit being forcing by the responder**. Specifically, when the opener *rebids* 1NT, and the responder bids a new suit - lower-ranking than his first suit - it is merely an attempt to correct the contract. The opener is expected to either pass or to take a preference to responder's original suit. For example:

1♦	P	1♠	P	The 2♥ bid is not forcing. Responder must find another way to
1NT	P	2♥		force (jump in "old-fashioned" bidding; NMF in "modern" style)

This concept is part of Standard American bidding. In modern bidding, the above rule applies only to 1♠ followed by 2♥, as a new minor is used as an artificial forcing bid (NMF). Remember, this rule applies only when opener rebids 1N, not if opener had rebid a suit.

New Suit by responder, having initially responded 1NT, is NF

1♠	P	1N	P	
2♣	P	2♥		Whether or not you use 1NT Forcing, this 2♥ bid is non-forcing .

COMPETITIVE BIDS (both sides in the auction)

FORCING BIDS IN COMPETITIVE AUCTIONS

New Suit by Responder (partner of opener) when RHO overcalls in a suit

A CUEBID of the opponent's suit

New Suit by Advancer When Partner Overcalls the Opponent's PREEMPTIVE Opening

Takeout Doubles (usually)

NON-FORCING BIDS IN COMPETITIVE AUCTIONS

Overcalls

New Suit by Advancer (partner of overcaller) after a 1-level opening (some agree this is forcing)

New Suit at the 2-level When Partner Opens and RHO doubles*

New Suit Response When Partner Opens and RHO overcalls 1NT

Cuebids - When partner bids a suit which was first bid by the opponents (cuebids), this is Forcing. In some situations, the cuebid is specifically defined, e.g. 1NT - 2♦ - 3♦ is the equivalent of Stayman. Even if you have no idea as to the meaning of a cuebid, know that partner is forcing you to bid, so DO NOT PASS! (While there are some exceptional cases, where a bid of the opponent's suit *should* be treated as natural, those are outside the scope of this lesson)

Takeout Doubles- While takeout doubles are intended as forcing, on very rare occasions you may pass, but only if you have a “trump stack” and want to convert the double to penalty.

New Suits after partner overcalls - New suit responses to simple overcalls are generally not forcing. However, if the opponents open with a PREEMPT, our overcall is more like an opening bid, and a new suit is treated as forcing. E.g., (2♠) - 3♦ - (P) - 3♥ is forcing.

Partner opens at the one-level, and RHO doubles - It is assumed that responder will redouble whenever she has 10 or more HCP. It follows logically that a new suit, or jump bid, denies 10 HCP, and is, therefore, not forcing. For example:

1♥ (X) 2♣ The 2♣ bid is **non-forcing**. This is one of the **exceptions** to the general rule that a “new suit by responder is forcing”.

* There are exceptions to redoubling with all 10 HCP hands. A common agreement is that a new suit at the 1-level is forcing in this situation, but not at the 2 level. The new suit at the 1-level can be a minimum response yet is unlimited, so responder has that option.

Partner opens at the one-level, and RHO overcalls 1NT – Here, again, a new suit is not forcing. The logic behind this is the assumption that responder would make a penalty double with a strong hand (approximately 9+ HCP). For example:

1♥ (1NT) 2♦ The 2♦ bid is **non-forcing**, again an **exception** to the general rule.

Reminder: Unless covered by a specific exception, a new suit by responder (partner of opener) is forcing!!

Summary

When in doubt as to whether or not your partner's bid is forcing, it is generally preferable not to pass. Of course it would be ideal to always be certain, but even the best partnerships are not on the same wavelength 100% of the time. Overbidding may work out okay, but passing your partner in a forcing bid rarely does, and the downside is worse than that of getting a level higher.