

FORCING VS NON-FORCING BIDS

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Knowing which bids are forcing and which are not is paramount to good partnership communication.

Whenever you believe your side has the values for game (or slam) you must either bid game or make a forcing bid. Since often you won't know which game to bid, or whether the hand might have slam, forcing bids are key to scientific bidding.

Whether you are a beginner or an advanced player, you should ask this question of every new bid you learn – “Is it forcing”?

Today we will discuss various concepts and examine a few commonly misunderstood situations.

These slides and complementary lecture notes will be available at paloaltobridge.org/lecture-series/

If a bid is **FORCING (F)** that player must be given another chance to bid. This means 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.

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 bids are usually exceptions)

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

Any below-game bid by responder, after opener has jumped, is forcing!

When the opener jumps, although the jump itself may *not* be forcing, any bid the responder now makes IS forcing.

The above rule probably isn't intuitive. Normally a rebid of a previously bid suit is NOT forcing. However, this is a standard exception and worth learning.

Let's look at an example.

**REBID OF
OWN SUIT
AFTER
OPENER
JUMPS**

♠AQ7643

♥T93

♦T

♣AK2

RESP		OPENER	
		1♦	P
1♠	P	3♦	P
?			

Responder does not know what strain or level to play. Rather than guess, the first thing I'd want to do is rebid spades and see if partner can support.

A 3♠ bid here *should* be forcing. The theory behind this is that we are always at least close to game values when opener jumps. Rather than catering to a weak hand with long spades and trying to stop on a dime in 3♠, it is more useful in the long run to define this rebid as forcing, making it easier to get to the best game or slam.

NON-FORCING BIDS BY THE RESPONDER

- Any direct natural bid by a “Passed Hand”
- Raise of Opener’s first or second suit
- Rebidding 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
- New Suit after a 1NT rebid from opener (usually specifically 1♠ followed by 2♥)
- Jumps: Modern bidding usually treats jumps by responder as invitational.

**NEW SUIT
BY
RESPONDER
AFTER 1NT
REBID**

♠ Q7643
♥ KJ932
♦ T
♣ 32

RESP		OPENER	
		1♦	P
1♠	P	1N	P
?			

Responder can bid 2♥ with a minimum responding hand because it is NOT FORCING after a 1N rebid. Responder guarantees at least five spades, at least four hearts and LESS THAN INVITATIONAL VALUES. Opener is expected to either PASS or correct to 2♠.

The theory behind this is that, when opener rebids 1N, we always have a reasonable fit in at least one major so don't want to leave partner in 1N with a weak unbalanced hand. Responder must use some form of New Minor Forcing (by agreement) with invitational or better values and 4+ hearts.

NOTE: If opener's rebid had been 2♦ a new suit would be forcing and therefore, like it or not, responder would have to Pass.

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 an Overcall of a 1-level opening
- New Suit at the 2-level when partner opens and RHO doubles
- New Suit Response When Partner Opens and RHO overcalls 1NT

**NEW SUIT
AT THE 2
level BY
Responder
In COMP**

CASE 1 – AFTER A SUIT OVERCALL

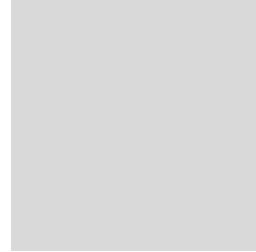
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	2♣
?			

♠ 3

♥ T9

♦ KQT982

♣ JT32



**NEW SUIT
AT THE 2
level BY
Responder
In COMP**

CASE 1 – AFTER A SUIT OVERCALL

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	2♣
?			

♠ 3

♥ T9

♦ KQT982

♣ JT32

DO NOT BID 2♦. A new suit is forcing here,
representing 10+ points.

Options are Pass or a Weak Jump Shift to 3♦ if agreed

**NEW SUIT
AT THE 2
level BY
Responder
In COMP**

CASE 2 – AFTER A TAKEOUT DOUBLE

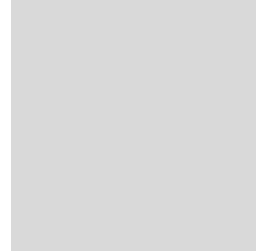
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	X
?			

♠ 3

♥ T9

♦ KQT982

♣ JT32



CASE 2 – AFTER A TAKEOUT DOUBLE

**NEW SUIT
AT THE 2
level BY
Responder
In COMP**

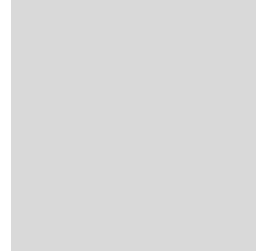
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	X
?			

♠ 3

♥ T9

♦ KQT982

♣ JT32



Here you can and should bid 2♦! A new suit at the 2 level is non-forcing here and represents LESS THAN 10+ points.

Responder would redouble with 10+.

**NEW SUIT
AT THE 2
level BY
Responder
In COMP**

CASE 3 – AFTER 1NT OVERCALL

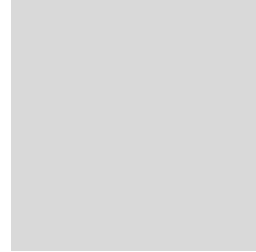
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	1NT
?			

♠ 3

♥ T9

♦ KQT982

♣ JT32



CASE 3 – AFTER A 1NT OVERCALL

**NEW SUIT
AT THE 2
level BY
Responder
In COMP**

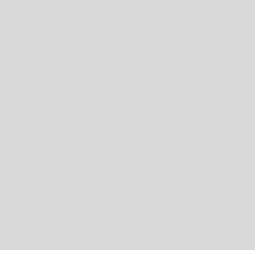
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	1NT
?			

♠ 3

♥ T9

♦ KQT982

♣ JT32



Here again you can and should bid 2♦! A new suit after their 1N overcall is NOT FORCING. Responder would make a penalty double with a better hand.

**NEW SUIT
AT THE 1-
level BY
Responder
after a
takeout
double**

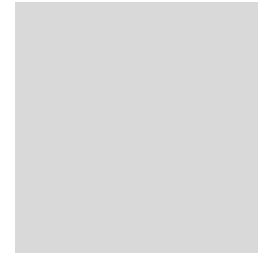
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♣	X
?			

♠KQ5432



♦KQT98

♣T2



Must responder always redouble with 10+ points?

No. Common practice is to treat a new suit at the 1-level as F1 after a double.

Responder would like to start bidding suits with a shapely hand and can start with 1♠. Though 1♠ is F1, as it would be without a double, it could still be bid with a minimum responding hand. This concept can be confusing – a new suit at the 2-level is NF, but at the 1-level is unlimited and F1! Can you figure out the logic behind this?

Keep in Mind: When partner makes a forcing bid and RHO acts (bids or doubles) you are “off the hook.” For example:

♠432
♥T9
♦KQ982
♣AK2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	1♠	2♥	2♠
?			

Like it or not (NOT), if South had passed you would have been FORCED to come up with a bid because 2♥ is forcing. There is no good bid.

When South bids 2♠ you can let out a sigh of relief (not audibly!) and Pass. Partner gets another chance! Thank you, RHO! (don't actually say it..)

Is a new suit forcing after WE overcall?

A) When we overcall after the opponent's 1-level opening, I prefer for a new suit by advancer to be non-forcing.

For example: (1♦) - 1♠ - (P) - 2♥ is NOT forcing.

This is a matter of partnership agreement and some experts do treat this as forcing.

B) When we overcall after the opponent's PREEMPTIVE opening, it is standard for a new suit by advancer to be forcing.

The logic is that our overcall is more like an opening bid, and we can easily have game or even slam, so we prefer to treat the new suit is treated as forcing.

For example: (2♦) - 2♠ - (P) - 3♥ is forcing.

ADVANCED – ARE SOME BIDS MORE FORCING THAN OTHERS?

IF YOU PASS THESE YOU MAY NEED A NEW PARTNER:

AN ARTIFICIAL BID, SUCH AS A SPLINTER OR CUEBID OF OPPONENT'S SUIT

A 2♣ OPENING FOLLOWED BY A NEW SUIT

In general, when partner is *UNLIMITED* never consider passing a Forcing bid

ADVANCED – ARE SOME BIDS MORE FORCING THAN OTHERS?

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU PASS ONE OF THESE, PARTNER MAY END UP HAPPY YOU DID:

OPENER'S JUMP SHIFT: Let's say you dredged up a response with the sub-minimum hand to the right, in an attempt to find a better strain. It is then reasonable to pass a jump shift.

Partner opens 1♦ and RHO passes. You could pass with only 2 HCP, but I recommend a 1♥ response. Now let's say partner jump shifts to 3♣. While this is a forcing bid, and partner may be able to make a game, I'm happy enough to have partner play 3♣ instead of 1♦! Partner is at least somewhat limited by their failure to open 2♣ in the first place.

1NT Forcing: This is another ostensibly forcing bid that I have seen strong players occasionally pass. While I don't recommend doing this it is reasonable to consider when you've opened 1M with a dead minimum hand and have no good rebid. This assumes the 1N response denies a game forcing hand.

♠ T843

♥ QT93

♦ 2

♣ T432

ADVANCED-Creating a game force without interference

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♣	P
1♥	P	2♣	P
2♦ = F1	P	2NT	P
3♣ or 3♥ = GF			

If, at their second turn, responder bids a new suit which is forcing one round (3rd suit) and then follows with supporting partner's suit or rebidding their own suit, this should be game forcing. The principle is that we want to ALWAYS have a way to make a forcing bid in our own suit or partner's suit. If we have already created a game force via a 2/1 or 4th suit forcing bid, this is clearer, but that is not always possible.

ADVANCED- Cuebid to create a GF in comp

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♣	1♥
1♠	P	2♣	P
2♥ = GF	P	2NT	
3♣ or 3♠ = F1			

Same would be true if a 2/1 in comp or a negative double. These are Forcing one round. A subsequent cuebid by either opener or responder should create a GF.

Follow-ups to 2/1 in competition require more discussion.

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 GETTING A LEVEL
HIGHER.

WHEN IN
DOUBT DO
NOT PASS