

DOUBLE TROUBLE



Lecture Presented at Palo Alto Bridge
Center Sept 24, 2026

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Today's focus is on the *definition* of double in a variety of contexts.

Our main goal is to avoid misunderstandings as to whether double is takeout or penalty.

Specifics of when to use each type of double is for another day (actually many days!).

Slides and additional notes will be available at
paloaltobridge.org/lecture-series/

BASIC DEFINITIONS

TAKEOUT DOUBLE

Double asks partner to bid. The doubler typically has support for all unbid suits, though there are exceptions.

PENALTY DOUBLE

Double asks partner to pass. The doubler wants to defend the opponents' contract doubled.

PLEASE USE BIDDING BOXES
ON YOUR TABLES TO SET UP
THE EXAMPLE AUCTIONS

This may help with processing
the discussion

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS TAKEOUT

Double of a natural suit bid at your first turn when partner has not yet acted. *Examples:*

A) 1♣ **X**

B) 3♦ P P **X**

C) 1♠ P 3♠ **X**

D) 1♦ P 1♥ **X**

E) 4♥ **X**

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS TAKEOUT

Double after 1 of a suit – P – 1N *Examples:*

A) 1♣ P 1N **X**

B) 1♦ P 1N **X**

The same applies after a weak two bid

C) 2♠ P 2N **X**

These doubles are all takeout of the suit opened.

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS TAKEOUT

Reopening doubles by the opening bidder.

Examples:

A) 1♣ 1♥ P P
 X

B) 1♠ 3♦ P P
 X

Also a direct seat double by opener after responder passed

C) 1♦ 1♥ P 2♥
 X

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS TAKEOUT

Double by the overcaller when partner has not bid.

Examples:

A) 1♣ 1♠ 3♣ P
 P X

B) 1♦ 1♥ 1♠ P
 2♠ X

Is double still takeout when there is only one unbid suit?

Question from previous slide: Is double still takeout when there is only one unbid suit?

B) 1♦ 1♥ 1♠ P
2♠ X?

Answer: Yes, double is takeout even though there is only one unbid suit. Examples:

♠3

♥AK983

♦QT98

♣AJ3

OR

♠A3

♥KJ9832

♦A3

♣KT3



Whenever you are in
a competitive auction
and not sure what to
do always at least
consider DOUBLE

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS TAKEOUT

Repeat Takeout Double..... even if partner has bid.

For Example:

1♣	<u>X</u>	P	1♠
2♣	<u>X</u>		

Here the doubler typically has extra values (17+) and exactly 3 spades, though other hands are possible.

If you make a takeout double of a suit and then double the same suit later it is still takeout!

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS PENALTY

If partner opens or overcalls with a Preempt (Weak 2 or higher) any double you make is PENALTY. *Examples:*

- A) 3♣ 3♥ X
- B) 1♦ 2♠ 3♦ X

While in some cases it is reasonable to “pull” partner’s penalty double, these doubles are expected to always be passed. The preemptor has described their hand.

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS PENALTY

If partner opens with 1 of a suit and RHO overcalls 1NT your double as responder is PENALTY. *Example:*

1♣ 1NT **X**

This is 100% standard but for newer players this is often confused with a negative double.

Negative doubles apply after a suit overcall.

It is okay to double Notrump on POWER. Here responder normally has 9+ HCP (some prefer 10+). With an unusual hand opener *may* bid in this situation, unlike after a preempt.

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS PENALTY

After your side has made one penalty double, all subsequent doubles by your side are also penalty.

Example:

1 ♦	1NT	<u>X</u>	P
P	2 ♣	P	P
<u>X</u>			

When your opponents are in trouble and attempt to escape, you want to have the option of continuing to double for penalty.

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS PENALTY

After a strength showing redouble, all subsequent doubles by the redoubler or partner are PENALTY. *Examples:*

A) 1♣ X XX 1♠
 X

B) 1♥ X XX 2♦
 P P X

Even at the 1-level, it can be profitable to double for penalty. A strength showing redouble (10+ HCP in this case) is often made with this purpose in mind.

DOUBLES CLEARLY DEFINED AS PENALTY

If PASS would be FORCING double is PENALTY.

Examples:

- A) 2♣ 2♥ X
- B) 1♥ P 2♦ (GF) 2♠
- X

There is no need for a takeout double when one can pass, knowing partner will bid again. The pass effectively serves as a takeout double.

LEAD DIRECTING DOUBLES

In general doubles of artificial bids are asking partner to lead that suit.

The logic is that the opponents are not about to play in this contract, so neither penalty nor takeout really makes sense.

More specifics on Lead-directing doubles is a separate topic which I covered as part of the PABC lecture series back in 2015. You can find that handout on the website.

“VALUE” SHOWING DOUBLES

When partner opens, and the opponents make an artificial bid (usually Michaels or Unusual NT), a double simply shows VALUES. This is similar in principle to a redouble, when the opponents make a takeout double, saying “this is our hand”.

It is now expected that your side will either bid on, OR double the opponents for penalty.

After a value-showing double, any subsequent double by either player is clearly for penalty.

“VALUE” SHOWING DOUBLES

Example:

A) 1♠ 2NT X 3♦
 X

Responder's double of 2NT is "card-showing", with a minimum of about 10 HCP. Opener's double of 3♦ is Penalty.

If responder had passed over 2NT, opener could not make a penalty double of 3♦. In that case, with partner not having acted, double of 3♦ would be takeout. Double of 3♦ becomes penalty because of the value-showing double of 2NT.

“VALUE” SHOWING DOUBLES

Example:

B) 1♦	2♦*	<u>X</u>	2♠
P	P	<u>X</u>	

* Michaels showing 5-5 in Majors

Responder's double of 2♦ is "card-showing", with a minimum of about 10 HCP. Responder's double of 2♠ is then Penalty.

Note that the double of the artificial bid here is not lead-directional. This is an exception to the general principle that doubles of artificial bids are lead directing.

NEGATIVE DOUBLES

The term “negative double” applies when partner opens and the next player overcalls with a SUIT bid.

Examples:

A) 1♣ 1♥ X

B) 1♥ 4♦ X?

The convention card has a space to enter your agreement as to how high you play negative doubles. I recommend negative doubles through at least 4♥.

I usually agree that the double never becomes strictly penalty. It is always “negative”, but the higher the level, the more likely the double is to get passed.

RESPONSIVE DOUBLES

The term "RESPONSIVE DOUBLE" applies to advancer after partner has overcalled or doubled and RHO raised opener's suit.

Examples:

A) 1♥ X 3♥ X

B) 2♠ 3♦ 3♠ X

Conventional Doubles

In some situations, double is not for penalty yet has a more specific meaning than “takeout” or “values”.

Examples include:

- Support Doubles
- Maximal Game Try Doubles
- Systemic doubles after opponents’ 1N opening (e.g., DONT or WOOLSEY)

Most doubles are not alertable unless the meaning is considered unusual.

However, Non-penalty doubles of 1N ARE Alertable.

When in doubt
about the meaning
of a double modern
style leans toward
NOT penalty.

My agreement with most
partners is:

Below game doubles are not
penalty unless

- Standard or
- Obvious or
- Specifically Agreed

OTHER AUCTIONS TO DISCUSS

A) 1♠ P P **X**

 2♠ **X?**

B) 1♦ P 1N 2♥
 X

C) 1♦ 2♠ 3♦ 3♠
 X

When you have a competitive/takeout double available, generally use that rather than a cuebid.

For example:

♠43
♥Q982
♦KQ94
♣AK2

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

Responder needs to make a forcing bid. Cuebidding 2♠ would be forcing to game and responder has the values for that. However, a double also forces partner to bid and leaves more room. You can always cuebid 2♠ next round.



My students may get tired of hearing this

Whenever you are in a competitive auction and not sure what to do always at least consider DOUBLE.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS RIGHT HERE AT THE PABC

San Mateo Unit Fall Sectional: Saturday 9/26 - Sunday 9/27: [San Mateo Fall Sectional](#) Pre-registration required for Saturday.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 3 - 2026 US Mixed Team Champions Celebratory Unit game - meet and play against the champs: Saturday, October 3. 10:00AM presentation by Team about tournament; 11:00AM Pairs game/ PLEASE PRE-REGISTER

Palo Alto Bridge Unit October Sectional: 4 days of Silver on Thursday 10/22 – Sunday 10/25.

Halloween game: wear your spooky costumes, enjoy loads of Halloween goodies, and join in the fun! Friday, October 30 at 10:45AM. Save the date!