

Competing in the Bidding Pt3 – when the opposition open 1NT

We love the weak 1NT opening bid, for many reasons: it is very descriptive, telling partner within quite a narrow range what you hold, it crops up a lot, it avoids the common issue of having to find a rebid, and it has good pre-emptive value, making it hard for the opposition to get into the bidding.

The trouble is, your opponents have the same tool in their toolbox, and you will very often face the frustrating situation where you have an opening hand, but you aren't dealer, and an opponent opens 1NT ahead of you. It makes it quite difficult for you to enter the bidding. As you'll already have seen, this comes up a lot.

If you wanted to overcall in a suit, it would need to be at the two level, and if you only have natural overcalls at your disposal, you'd really want a good enough suit, probably 6 cards or more. There will be lots of occasions where you don't have such a suit, but you still have a decent hand, and their 1NT frustratingly gives you no option but to pass, or to make a guess which might turn out badly. That's why there are lots of artificial systems invented to deal with the situation of competing over opponent's 1NT.

The system I like best is called Multi-Landy; if you know Cappelletti, it's almost identical, except the first two bids (2♣ and 2♦) are reversed in meaning. However, it is quite complicated and takes a bit of learning, and if you don't have a regular partner, it won't be terribly useful. We do cover it in the Advanced Series of lessons, if you are interested. But for this Intermediate course, it is better to stick to systems that are more straightforward; here, I am recommending Landy.

Doubling the opposition's opening 1NT

But before I come on to that, let's look at something which is pretty much universal when the opposition open a weak 1NT- the DOUBLE.

This is very different from doubling an opposition 1 of a suit opener, which, as we've seen in Lesson 20, is for take-out, not for penalties: we are showing an opening strength hand, shortage in the opponent's suit, and tolerance for the other suits. Our double in that situation asks partner to bid her best suit.

But when the opposition open 1NT, the **X** is ALWAYS for penalties. To double, you'll need a strong hand: say 16+ HCP, and/or a good running suit. Also, if the opponents retreat into a suit, and you double that, it's also for penalties: they've got themselves in a hole, and you're not going to let them escape lightly!

Sometimes, of course, the opposition will open 1NT, your partner will double, and opener's partner passes (probably holding 8+ points and or a good suit, and feeling quite happy for partner to play in 1NT doubled). You are sitting there with "tram tickets" (a hand of rubbish). If you pass, you will be defending 1NT doubled, and you might well think the opposition will make. You have an option to make a suit bid at the lowest level. This says to partner: I know you have 16+ points for your double, but I am weak, and the opposition will probably make their 1NT **X**. I think we'll score better playing at the 2 level in my suit. Please pass.

Landy

Landy is probably the simplest convention to play when the opposition open 1NT. It tries to find a fit in a major suit (rather like Stayman, except in defence of 1NT, rather than when PARTNER has opened 1NT). When playing Landy, a 2♣ overcall shows at least 5-4 in the major suits and 10+ points (though the point count minimum may be relaxed if non-vulnerable, or with better shape).

Any overcall over an opposition opening 1NT, other than 2♣, is natural, ie

2♦/2♥/2♠/3♣ shows 6+ cards, or 5 cards and extra strength.

3♥/3♠ shows a good suit, strong (12+ points) and invites game in the major.

This is simple and intuitive, so there isn't too much to have to remember.

Responses to partner's 2♣ Landy overcall

Again, this is mostly intuitive.

2♦	Artificial- I have no preference for either major, <12 points. Please bid 2♥ or 2♠
2♥ or 2♠	Natural, sign off
2NT	Artificial and forcing for one round. Doesn't guarantee major suit support. Shows 12+ points and asks partner to clarify her hand. (See below.)
3♥ or 3♠	10-12 points with 4-card support. Invitational to game.

If partner responds 2NT to your Landy 2♣ overcall, she has an opening strength hand, and is asking for more information to help find the best contract. Your response will depend on whether you are 5/4 or 5/5 in the majors, and on whether you are bottom of the points range for your Landy 2♣ overcall, or have extra strength.

3♣	<12 points, 5/4 in majors. Partner has option to bid 3♦ to ask for the 5-card major.
3♦	12+ points, 5/4 in majors
3♥	Minimum points, 5/5 in majors
3♠	Medium (10-11 points), 5/5 in majors
3NT	12+ points, 5/5 in majors

If the opposition overcall with a Landy 2♣

If partner opens 1NT, and opposition overcall 2♣, holding fewer than 8 points, pass. If you hold 8+ points, double their 2♣ bid.

Even Landy, the simplest of the systems for defence to 1NT, can seem a bit complicated. However, 1NT is such a common opening bid, it is well worth the trouble to get your head around it. With practice, it will become easier, and it will improve your results.

