

Resumé of Competing in the bidding

Over the preceding 4 lessons, and also in our lessons on doubling, we explored competing in the bidding- the situation where the opposition get their bid in first, and we have to decide whether we can bid, or just pass throughout and leave the opposition to bid freely to find their contract.

Today we are going to revise and summarise what we've covered.

The first general points are

- If you can find a bid to compete, it is usually a good idea to do so rather than pass. It usually pays to err on the side of being slightly too aggressive than slightly too cautious.
- If you are going to compete in the bidding, do so at the first opportunity.

Options to compete when the opposition open 1 of a suit

- 1 **The take-out double:** holding an opening strength hand, shortage in the opposition's suit, and tolerance for the other suits. It asks partner to bid her best suit, even with nothing. If the next opponent passes the double, then doubler's partner is forced to bid. (The exception is when doubler's partner's long suit is the opposition's opening suit, when PASS converts the take-out double to a penalty double).

Since responding to a take-out double requires no points, if responder has some strength, say more than 7 points, she should respond at 1 level higher than the lowest - otherwise partner will take her as very weak. If the next opponent **does** make a bid after the double, then the doubler has another opportunity to bid, and doubler's partner is absolved from the obligation to bid. Therefore, if she chooses to bid, she is making a positive response, showing 8+ points, so there is no need to jump.

- 2 **Overcall of 1NT:** holding 16-18 points (or a good 15), and a stop in the opposition's suit. If you hold 19+ (rare, if the opposition has already opened!) first double, then rebid 1NT.

The responses to partner's 1NT overcall can be either **systems on** (Stayman and transfers apply, just as they do to partner's opening 1NT bid) or **systems off** (any 2-level response to the 1NT overcall is natural, and weak). I recommend systems off at this level, but it's up to you to agree with partner what you are going to play.

- 3 **Simple suit overcall:** you need at least a 5-card suit (**never overcall on a 4-card suit!**). Focus on the length and strength of the suit, rather than the overall hand, and use the Suit Quality Overcall Test (or SQOT). Add the number of cards in **your suit**, which is a minimum of 5 for a suit overcall, to the number of honours (A, K, Q or J) you hold **in that suit**. If the answer comes to the number of tricks you are bidding for, or better, bid it. So, for example, if your suit is ♠, and the opposition have opened 1♦, you can overcall at the 1-level, so your SQOT must come to at least 7. On the other hand, if the opposition open 1♠, and your suit is ♦, then if you overcall in ♦ it needs to be at the 2-level, and your SQOT must come to at least 8.

Don't worry too much about vulnerability – clearly you are going to be more cautious when vulnerable and overcalling at higher than the 1 level, but that judgement too will come later, with more experience.

So, when you make a simple suit overcall, you might have quite a weak hand, or quite a strong one—your overcall is unlimited in strength. Your partner will know you satisfy the SQOT for the suit you've bid and make no further assumptions.

Responding to partners' simple suit overcall

If you have fewer than three cards in partner's overcall suit, and no good suit of your own, you should just pass. However, if you have three or more, then you have at least an 8-card fit, since you know partner has at least 5 for her suit overcall. Then you should support partner's suit.

Partner's overcall doesn't tell you how strong she is, so you need to let partner know how strong you are, by distinguishing between supporting with a weak hand, or supporting with 10+ points.

If the former, ie with a weak hand, bid to the "level of the fit". Add the number of cards you hold in the suit to the minimum number you know partner must hold (normally 5), and bid for that number of tricks. For example, if partner overcalls 1 ♠, and you hold 4 spades, you should bid for 9 tricks, ie 3 ♠. This applies even if you have a very weak hand, because then the opposition are highly likely to have good HCP strength and a fit in their suit, and your aggressive bidding will make it much harder for them to find their fit and bid their game (or slam, even), and to chalk up a big plus score. Of course there are risks, and as you get more experience it will become easier to judge— especially if you are vulnerable and the opposition are not. But on the majority of occasions it works a treat – especially if you have useful shape such as a void or singleton, as well as the fit in your suit- giving you a lot more good scores than the occasional hand where it earns you a bottom.

If you have 3+ support for partner's overcall suit and are not weak (ie you hold 10+ points), you need a completely different approach, in order to let partner know your strength, as you and partner might well have a genuine contract of your own- rather than just bidding to spoil. In this case you don't bid up in partner's suit, you bid the **opposition's opening suit** at the lowest available level. This is called the Unassuming Cue Bid, or **BOSS** (Bid Opposition Suit with Support). If her overcall was based on a weakish hand, and the opposition don't bid on, she will duck out by bidding her overcall suit at the lowest level, and that's the end of the bidding from your side. But if her overcall was based on a strong hand, she can bid on to a higher level – either bid game herself, or bid her suit at one level above the lowest available, to invite you to go on if you want. In that case, if your BOSS bid was "minimum", ie just 3 cards and 10 HCP, you will decline the invitation and pass. But if you have extra values, then you can bid on.

The Unassuming Cue Bid, or BOSS, is a very useful convention, and I strongly recommend it.

4 Weak Jump Overcall

Similar to a weak two opening bid, this is a very useful weapon, but of course it requires you and your partner to agree you are playing it. When opponents open 1 of a suit, and you overcall in a new suit **one level higher** than the minimum (eg they open 1 ♦, and you overcall 2 ♠) you are showing a weak (ie limited strength hand) with a good suit of at least 6 cards. Its pre-emptive effect really cuts down the opposition's options. Your partner will know you are weak and won't get carried away.

Playing WJO, you keep standard suit overcalls for the circumstances in 3 above, and play them as unlimited. You should play Weak Jump Overcalls for the sort of hand you'd have opened with a Weak 2 if you'd been dealer. However, if to make a Weak Jump Overcall you need to go to the 3 level (eg 1 ♠ – 3 ♦), then you need a 7-card suit – the sort of hand you'd have opened with a pre-emptive 3-level bid.

Options to compete when opposition open a pre-empt

1 Opposition open a weak two

- Holding an opening strength hand, shortage in the opposition's suit, tolerance for the other three suits, and no good suit of your own, double for take-out.
- With a good suit of your own (6+ cards), bid it at the lowest available level. The strength required will depend on the vulnerability, and your shape.
- With 16+ points, balanced or semi balanced, and a stop in opposition's suit, bid 2NT.
- 3NT – you want to play in 3NT!

2 Opposition open a 3 level pre-empt

A 3 level pre-empt describes a weak hand with trick taking potential in that suit, but very little defensive value if defending in another suit. So you can afford to be aggressive in finding your fit and contract.

- Holding an opening strength hand, shortage in the opposition's suit, tolerance for the other three suits, and no good suit of your own, double for take-out.
- With a good suit of your own (6+ cards), bid it at the lowest available level. The strength required will depend on the vulnerability, and your shape.
- 3NT – you want to play in 3NT!

Options to compete when opposition open a weak 1NT

1 Doubling the opposition's opening 1NT

This is very different from doubling an opposition 1 of a suit opener, which is for take-out.

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!

Sometimes, of course, the opposition will open 1NT, your partner will double, and opener's partner passes (probably holding 7 or 8+ points and or a good suit, and feeling quite happy for partner to play in 1NT doubled). You are sitting there with a very weak hand. If you pass, you will be defending 1NT doubled, and you strongly suspect the opposition will make, perhaps even with an overtrick. 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.

2 Using the Landy defence

Playing Landy defence to 1NT, you overcall 2♣, to show 5/4 or better in the majors.

Any other overcall over an opposition opening 1NT 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 that major.

If you do make a 2♣ Landy overcall, partner's responses are

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.

This is all reasonably intuitive, which makes Landy one of the most straightforward systems for dealing with an opposition opening 1NT. The only part which requires memorising responses is the (fairly unusual) case where responder has an opening strength hand, and bids 2NT in response to your Landy 2♣. What do you do now?

The answer depends 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

Because the opening 1NT is such a common occurrence, then I recommend learning Landy, which is much more effective than relying completely on any overcall being natural. However, if you don't have a regular partner, it might be better for now just to stick to natural overcalls.

