

Conventional Doubles

9th July 2006

Here are some examples of some of the most common types of conventional doubles: -

W	N	E	S	
1♦	dbl			This double by North is TAKE-OUT , and asks South to pick one of the other three suits.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	dbl	2♦	dbl	This double by South is RESPONSIVE , and asks North to pick the suit. By inference showing equal length in the majors in this case.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	2♦	dbl	This double by South is a COMPETITIVE DOUBLE and asks partner to choose between the other two suits.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	2♦	2♠	
pass	pass	dbl		This double by East is a COOPERATIVE DOUBLE and gives partner the choice of passing for penalties or bidding on. Since East has limited values, it cannot be strictly penalties.

W	N	E	S	
1♠	2♥	2♠	3♥	
dbl				This double by West is a MAXIMAL OVERCALL DOUBLE and is simply a game try. There is no room left for any other game try, 3♠ would just be competitive.

W	N	E	S	
1NT	2♣	dbl		This double by East is penalties without agreement to the contrary. But it is quite sensible to play this as Stayman, especially if the 2♣ bid is not natural.

W	N	E	S	
1NT	2♥	dbl		This double by East is penalties. You can only apply the 'stolen bid' philosophy to a 2♣ (maybe 2♦) overcall. A double of any higher overcall of partner's 1NT opening (or overcall) should be for penalties.

W	N	E	S	
1NT	pass	pass	2♣	
pass	pass	dbl		This double by East is penalties. It cannot be Stayman as he could have bid 2♣ first go and it cannot be for take out as he would have bid Garbage Stayman last go.

Negative Doubles

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	dbl		This double by East is NEGATIVE , in theory it shows the other 2 suits. In practice, it generally promises 4 cards in the unbid major and may not have the other minor. See news-sheets 9 & 10.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	pass	pass	
dbl	pass	?		If East fails to bid or double the overcall and South passes, then West should normally re-open with a double so that East can pass for penalties. I call, this an AUTOMATIC RE-OPENING DOUBLE . If East cannot make a penalty pass now, any other bid by him is weak.

The only exceptions when opener is allowed another bid but the automatic double are: -

- (1) when opener has a very shapely/weak opener and cannot stand to defend the doubled contract, in which case he either rebids his suit or bids another suit.
- (2) when opener has a very shapely very strong hand (a near 2♣ opener). A jump rebid.
- (3) a weak hand with 3 or 4 of the overcaller's suit. With length in overcaller's suit it is less likely that partner has a penalty pass and some partnerships allow opener to pass under these circumstances.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♥	pass	2♥	
pass	pass	dbl		This double by East is penalties. Presumably he was happy to have passed a re-opening double by West (playing Negative Doubles). This is just an extra 2 or 3 hundred. It is a notable exception to the rule about opponents bidding and agreeing a suit. Negative doubles really are fun. Incidentally, I had this exact sequence a few years ago playing with an excellent Australian partner. She bid 3♣ over my double, claiming that my double was for take-out. Absolute nonsense, if I had a hand that could bid for take out over 2♥ I certainly would not have passed over 1♥ (a Negative Double?). Bridge is quite often simply a matter of logic.

The negative double is **ONLY** in the situation where opener's bid is overcalled directly; a double by responder is then the Negative Double. But there is an example of a situation where you could play something similar to a Negative Double: -

W	N	E	S	
1♣	pass	1♦	1♠	
dbl				This double by West is traditionally penalties. But a very sensible treatment is to play that it is similar to a Negative Double and shows 4♥'s. If you go along with this, then be sure that you know about Action Doubles by responder.

W	N	E	S	
1♣	pass	1♠	2♥	
dbl				But with no unbid major I would play this double by opener as penalties unless you play support doubles: -

Support Doubles

W	N	E	S	
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥	This double by West is a SUPPORT DOUBLE if you have agreed to play them and shows 3 card support for partner. With no such agreement the double is for penalties
dbl				

In general, a support double only applies when you could have raised partner to the two level. However, if partner has promised a 5 card suit, then you can still (by agreement) play a support double; thus distinguishing between 3 and 4 card support.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	2♥	2♠	This is a support double, showing 3 card ♥ support.
dbl				

If responder bids a minor suit at the two level, there is little point in playing a Support Double because
(a) responder does not guarantee a five card suit and
(b) who's interested in minor suit fits?

W	N	E	S	
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥	This double by East is an ACTION DOUBLE . It says that E-W have the majority of the points but that East has no clear bid. In fact, if playing Support Doubles it is very important to usually make this Action Double in case opener is sitting with a stack over South but could not penalise him because that would have been a Support Double.
pass	pass	dbl		

W	N	E	S	
1♦	pass	1♠	2♣	This is an interesting one. ♥'s are unbid and so you could play this as similar to a Negative Double to show 4 ♥'s. But partner has 'denied' 4 ♥'s and so the Support Double applies.
dbl				

Support Doubles and Action Doubles are more deeply covered in a separate leaflet.

Silly(?) doubles: -

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	2♠	4♠	This double by South is for penalties. In reality it is unlikely that South can set 5♦. It is, in fact, a STRIPED-TAIL APE DOUBLE . The theory is that if you feel the opponents have a sure slam, they may settle for a doubled game that scores less even with an overtrick. If you hear a re-double, you run like a striped-tail ape to 5♠ and opponents may double you there instead of bidding their certain slam (again good for you). Am I serious or not? Double Dutch? The Striped-tail Ape Double is, of course, tantamount to a psyche. Indeed, I would say it is a controlled psyche and illegal; certainly so in the Pattaya Bridge Club.
4NT	pass	5♦	dbl	

The Snapdragon Double

After an unfortunate (for us) incident when my partner forgot about Support Doubles, he muttered something about a **SNAPDRAGON DOUBLE**. Now I realise that you don't really want to know what this, but just for the record it a double by the *non-opening* side in some competitive situations (it shows five cards in the unbid suit and 3 card support for overcaller). Can't see much use for it myself.

Double for take-out or penalties?

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1NT	2♠	pass	One member asked me to indicate which doubles are for penalties and which are for take-out (he was upset when his partner converted his take-out double into a penalty by passing). He is of the opinion that virtually any low-level double is for take-out. I believe that I wrote a fair summary in new-sheet 17 and it is now expanded in the Double! section on the web. The culprit intended this double as take-out. It is not. It is penalties. It is impossible to have a take-out double if you have bid a natural NT. And the moral here? I guess that if you specifically ask me to write up something in the news sheets – then read it?
pass	dbl			

W	N	E	S	
1NT	pass	pass	2♠	And this one is from the club in 2006. This double is penalties – opener is max with an excellent 4 or 5 card ♠ suit.
dbl				

A double of opponents after they have found a fit is usually for take out.

A double of any bid after anyone at the table has bid no trumps naturally is usually for penalties.

W	N	E	S	
1♥	pass	1NT	dbl	This is a notable exception, the double is for take out of ♥'s. But be wary, you need a good hand as partner has passed, East has shown values and West is unlimited.

W	N	E	S	
1NT	pass	2♥	dbl	And the double of a transfer bid (or 2♣ Stayman) shows a good holding in the cipher suit, suggesting that lead should opener end up as declarer.

For a more detailed guide as to when a double is penalties or not, refer to the Double! leaflet or web page.