

An opening bid is generally 12+ points and any shape. In Standard American there is a restriction that an opening of 1♥/♠ must be 5+ cards.

Overcalls and take-out doubles are different. The reason is that an opponent has already advertised that he has at least around $\frac{1}{3}$ of the deck's high cards, and so we do not compete with weakish flat hands (you learn this the hard way when you go for 800 a few times with nowhere to run to). We usually need a distributional hand to compete over a normal opening bid. There are two options; an overcall or a take-out double.

Now in the early days of bridge a double always meant just that – that you thought that the contract would go down (because you had a stack in the suit opened) and so wanted to double it. It was soon realised that this situation rarely happened at the low levels and so they decided upon another use. Initially the double was used to say 'I too have an opening hand'. But it was soon discovered that that too was unsatisfactory and then the 'take-out' double was born – whereby a double of the opening bid indicated shortage in the suit bid and asks partner to bid another suit. So there is often a difference between an opening hand and a hand that can double an opening bid. Thus these days we have:

A take-out double. Generally short in the suit opened and playable in the other 3 suits. Take out doubles should be close to an opening hand in values. There are also other meanings for the take-out double and I'll cover them in future weeks. But responder should assume that a take-out double is short in the suit bid unless doubler says differently subsequently.

An overcall. At least a 5 card suit (usually 6 or a very robust suit if at the two level). As few as 7 points are allowed, but with a minimum hand like this then the suit should be a good one. If the overcall is at the two level then it should be equivalent to opening values (around 11+ points). So at the 1 level it's 7-16 and at the 2 level it's around 11-16. With more than 16 you have to double first – I'll cover this in a later article.

- Hand 1 This hand 1 is a clear opener (1♣).
If RHO had opened anything in front of you then you should pass.
- ♠ K7 You cannot overcall without a 5 card suit and cannot double with just 2 ♠'s.
♥ K653 A 1NT overcall would be 15-18 points and I'll cover that next week.
♦ AJ2
♣ Q754
- Hand 2 This hand 2 is clearly not good enough to open.
If RHO had opened in front of you with either 1♣ or 1♦ then an overcall
of 1♥ is perfectly acceptable
If RHO had opened the bidding with 1♠ then you have to pass as it's not
good enough for a two level overcall.
♠ 87 And if RHO had opened 1♥ in front of you then you have to pass. You cannot
♥ KQJ53 bid 2♥ (bidding the opponent's suit is never natural these days) and a double
♦ Q2 would be for take-out.
♣ 9754
- Hand 3 This hand is not quite good enough to open by most people's standards.
But if RHO had opened the bidding with 1♦ then I think that a double is
acceptable – it's close enough to opening values and ♦'s with the opponents
improves this hand.
- ♠ A874
♥ KQ95
♦ 8
♣ Q754
- Hand 4 This hand is obviously a clear 1♣ opener.
If RHO had opened the bidding with 1♦ then that actually enables you to
show your hand in one go with a classic take-out double.
♠ AQ74 If RHO had opened the bidding with either 1♥ or 1♠ then you have to pass,
♥ KQ95 if you double (take-out) you cannot cope if partner responds with a likely 2♦.
♦ 8
♣ QJ54

As you see, there are hands which you cannot open but may overcall, and there are also hands worth an opening but are not suitable for an overcall or double.
Fine. I'll come on to what you do with stronger hands at a later date, but for now let's see how you do with these questions: -

Hand 5

♠ K743
♥ K653
♦ 2
♣ J754

Hand 6

♠ J109
♥ 98
♦ KQJ85
♣ J102

Hand 5: (a) What would you open?

(b) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♦?

Hand 6: (a) What would you open?

(b) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♣?

(c) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♦?

(d) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♥?

Hand 7

♠ KQ43
♥ KQ53
♦ 42
♣ Q74

Hand 8

♠ A109
♥ Q106
♦ KJ5
♣ QJ72

Hand 7: (a) What would you open?

(b) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♦?

(c) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♥?

Hand 8: (a) What do you open?

(b) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♣?

Hand 9

♠ J43
♥ KQJ53
♦ A2
♣ Q74

Hand 10

♠ AK98
♥ Q106
♦ 5
♣ QJ972

Hand 9: (a) What would you open?

(b) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♦?

(c) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♥?

Hand 10: (a) What do you open?

(b) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♣?

(c) What would you bid if RHO opened 1♦?

Quiz Answers

- Hand 5: (a) Pass.
(b) Pass, it's not strong enough for a take-out double and you need a 5 card suit to overcall.
- Hand 6: (a) Pass.
(b) 1♦. 7 points is good enough for a 1 level overcall with a decent suit.
(c) Pass. You cannot bid the opponent's suit (so 2♦) naturally, double would be for take-out and you are nowhere near strong enough for 1NT (15-18).
(d) Pass. It's not strong enough for a two level overcall.
- Hand 7: (a) 1♣
(b) Double, a take-out double
(c) Pass. You need 5 ♠'s to overcall 1♠ and if you double then you will be in problems if partner responds 2♦
- Hand 8: (a) 1♣
(b) Pass, it's not strong enough for 1NT and not suitable for a take-out double or overcall.
- Hand 9: (a) 1♥
(b) 1♥. Do not double if you have a 5 card major.
(c) Pass. You cannot bid the opponent's suit (that virtually always has a conventional meaning) and double would be take-out.
- Hand 10: (a) 1♣
(b) Pass. You cannot cope with a 1♦ bid from partner if you double. A take-out double needs to be short in the suit bid.
(c) Double. It's nice to have both majors when you double a minor, but 4 in one and 3 in the other is acceptable – you don't always have the perfect hand.

Double and then introduce a new suit

Hand 1	What do you do with a hand like this if RHO opens 1♥?
♠ AQJ764	It really is much too good for a simple 1♠ overcall (about 7-16 pts) and the way to show this type of strong single suited hand is to double first.
♥ KJ9	Partner will assume that it's a normal take-out double and suppose he responds
♦ K10	2♣. You then bid 2♠, that shows a hand that was too strong to simply initially
♣ A9	overcall 1♠.

Incidentally, some players would simply overcall 2♠ with this hand (the strong jump overcall) but most players play weak jump overcalls these days (I'll cover them at a later date) and so we double first with these strong hands.

The direct bid of 3NT

Now if RHO opens say 1♥ and you have 25+ points with ♥ stops then I guess that you could simply bid 3NT, but I would still double first and then bid NT (I cover that next page) - even with 25 points you probably won't make 3NT with a bust partner. So what is the best use of a direct 3NT bid?

Hand 2	What do you do with a hand like this if RHO opens 1♥?
♠ A4	Partner is probably bust and you have 9 tricks on any lead, so bid 3NT.
♥ K3	You all know me, why bother to mention ♣'s when 3NT is making?
♦ A7	The direct 3NT bid is virtually always this type of hand – a long running
♣ AKQJ965	minor suit with all other suits stopped.

The direct bid of 3 of the opponent's suit

Now a bid of the opponent's suit is hardly ever natural. So what does a jump to 3♥ mean?_

Hand 3	What do you do with a hand like this if RHO opens 1♥?
♠ AJ	You want to be in 3NT if partner has a ♥ stop, but how do you find out?
♥ 54	The answer is that a jump to the 3 level in the opponent's suit shows a long
♦ A7	running minor and demands that partner bid 3NT with a stop.
♣ AKQJ965	If partner has as little as ♠xxx ♥J10xx ♦xxx ♣xxx he must bid 3NT.
	And note the advantage of this bid if partner has something like ♥Kx; that is only a stop if he is declarer!

Double and then jump bid in NT

We have seen that with 15-18 points and a fairly balanced hand with stop(s) in the suit bid we overcall 1NT. And with about 19-21 points we double first and then bid NT. But what do we do on those rare occasions when we have 22-25 points?

Hand 4 What do you do with a hand like this if RHO opens 1♥?
You need very little from partner but you most certainly do need something -
♠ AJ4 3NT is only going to make if partner has a little something, a queen would
♥ KJ97 probably be enough and an ace would be fine. The hand is too strong to double
♦ AK2 and then bid NT at the lowest level (19-21) and so what we do is double and
♣ AKJ then jump in NT after partner's response. This shows about 22-25 points and partner should
bid 3NT with very little. Of course you are already in 3NT if partner's initial response was at
the two level.

Question time. I'll make it a 1♦ opening for all of the questions. So RHO opens 1♦, what do you bid? And
if it's a double, what do you do after a non-jump response from partner (suppose that he
bids 1♥)?

Hand 5	Hand 6	Hand 7	Hand 8	Hand 9	Hand 10
♠ A8	♠ A8	♠ Q98	♠ KJ8	♠ KJ8	♠ KJ8
♥ A8	♥ A8	♥ K98	♥ KQ8	♥ KQ8	♥ KJ
♦ K6	♦ 76	♦ AQ10	♦ AQ10	♦ AQ10	♦ AQ10764
♣ AKQJ765	♣ AKQJ765	♣ AJ97	♣ AJ97	♣ AKJ9	♣ J8

Hand 11	Hand 12	Hand 13	Hand 14	Hand 15	Hand 16
♠ AKQ76	♠ AKQ876	♠ QJ98	♠ KJ83	♠ KJ853	♠ KJ853
♥ K8	♥ A8	♥ KJ98	♥ K98	♥ K98	♥ KJ98
♦ Q6	♦ A6	♦ 10	♦ 10	♦ 10	♦ 10
♣ J765	♣ J76	♣ AJ97	♣ AQJ97	♣ AQJ9	♣ AQJ

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- Hand 5: 3NT. You are guaranteed 9 tricks on any lead provided that you are declarer.
- Hand 6: 3♦. You have the same 9 guaranteed tricks as hand 5, but you need partner to stop the ♦'s from running. So the 3♦ bid demands that he bid 3NT with a ♦ stop. Note that partner knows your hand type pretty exactly; with no ♦ stop he will convert to 4♣ and if he's got a few points (two major suit kings would be nice) with no stop he should bid 5♣. If he has a *very good* 5+ card major suit (with no ♦ stop) then he can bid it.
- Hand 7: 1NT. 15-18.
- Hand 8: Double, followed by 1NT over partner's 1♥ response. 19-21.
- Hand 9: Double, followed by 2NT over partner's 1♥ response. 22-25.
- Hand 10: Pass. You have the values for 1NT but it will play badly. This hand is much more suited to defend a possible ♥ contract and who knows, somebody may get a double in later in the auction.
- Hand 11: 1♠.
- Hand 12: Double, followed by a ♠ bid. This hand is too strong for a simple 1♠ overcall.
- Hand 13: Double, followed by pass over a non-jump 1♥ response as this is a minimal double and partner has not promised any points.
- Hand 14: Double, followed by pass. It would be nice to have both majors for the double but this hand is a bit too good for an initial pass. Note that you cannot 'correct' partner's 1♥ bid to 1♠ or 2♣ as that would promise a much stronger hand.
- Hand 15: 1♠. It's playable in the other three suits and so some would double, but I much prefer to overcall with a 5 card major than to double.
- Hand 16: 1♠. Now this is a tricky one and many would prefer to double, but the expert opinion these days is to overcall when 5-4 in the majors. I won't argue if you chose double.

The minimal response

Hand 1 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
You always assume that partner's double is take-out, if it turns out to be a strong hand type then he'll tell you that next go. So partner is short in ♥'s and is asking you to bid so it's simple – you have 4♠'s and so bid that suit. So 1♠. Note that this does not promise any values – partner has forced you to bid and a non-jump shows about 0-9 points.

♠ KJ64
♥ J97
♦ 764
♣ 765

Hand 2 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
And the same is true if you have to respond at the two level. If it's a non-jump then it still shows about 0-9 points, it's simply your cheapest 4+ card suit.

♠ J64
♥ J97
♦ 764
♣ Q765

Hand 3 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
Sometimes you may not even have a 4-card suit that you can bid! With this hand you simply have to respond 1♠. You cannot pass even though you have no points. Remember that a non-jump response promises zero points. You cannot bid 1NT as that shows 6-9 points.

♠ 964
♥ Q974
♦ 764
♣ J76

Hand 4 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
Now this is a bit better. You have a decent 7 points and presumably a 4-4♠ fit. But it is still in the 0-9 range, and although it's at the upper end it's still only worth a 1♠ (0-9) response.

♠ KJ64
♥ 74
♦ K64
♣ 9764

More than minimum

Hand 5 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
The best way of looking at it is to assume that partner had opened at the one level promising just 4 cards in your suit. So assuming that partner has about opening values with 4♠'s (and ♥ shortage) this hand is worth an effort and a jump to 2♠ is correct.

♠ KJ94
♥ A97
♦ J6
♣ Q654

Hand 6 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
You have the values for game and could simply jump to 4♠. This will normally work out fine but it may just be that partner has only 3 ♠'s. The best bid here is a cue bid of 2♥ and partner will bid 2♠ if he has a 4 card suit and you raise to game

♠ KJ94
♥ A97
♦ A64
♣ J65

Hand 7 This time LHO opens 1♦ and partner doubles, what do you do?
You have the values for game but simply do not know which major to pick. Partner may well have doubled on 4324 or 3424 shape, i.e. with only one 4 card major. The answer is again to cue bid and raise hoping for partner's major suit reply to game.

♠ KJ94
♥ AJ97
♦ A6
♣ 965

Bidding NT We saw that with Hand 3 you cannot bid NT without values. In fact a NT response is the same as to an opening bid from partner (6-9) with the very important exception that it must contain good stop(s) in the suit opened as you know that partner is probably short in that suit and you will probably get that suit led.

Hand 8 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
You have the ♥'s well stopped and 1NT is the best bid.

♠ J9
♥ AQ98
♦ 1083
♣ 10965

Hand 9 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
You have the ♥'s well stopped and can bid 3NT straight away. Replace the ♦A with the ♦J so it's only a 11 count and an invitational 2NT would be the bid.

♠ J9
♥ AQ98
♦ A108
♣ K865

Very Occasionally you can pass

Hand 10 LHO opens 1♥ and partner doubles, what do you do?
With solid trumps like this you can pass and thus convert partner's take-out double into penalties. Note that the solidity of the trump suit is all-important. If the ♥'s were ♥KJ864 then that would not be good enough as opener has all the cards to fill in the gaps sitting over you. With a ♥ holding like that you should bid NT at the appropriate level.

♠ J9
♥ QJ10986
♦ A108
♣ K8

Question time. With all of these LHO opens 1♦ and partner doubles, what do you do?

Hand 11	Hand 12	Hand 13	Hand 14	Hand 15	Hand 16
♠ K765	♠ KJ65	♠ KJ76	♠ J87	♠ 86	♠ 87
♥ Q765	♥ 76	♥ KJ76	♥ Q76	♥ 872	♥ 87
♦ 98	♦ K763	♦ 10	♦ AQ10	♦ K754	♦ QJ10964
♣ J76	♣ 9765	♣ AJ97	♣ 9874	♣ J973	♣ AQ8

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- Hand 11: 1♥. You do not have the values to push the level up by bidding 2♦ to give partner the choice of majors.
- Hand 12: 1♠. Give preference to showing a 4 card major rather than the ♦ stop.
- Hand 13: 2♦. This hand is strong enough to force to game, so let partner pick the suit.
- Hand 14: 1NT. 6-9 with a ♦ stop and no 4 card major.
- Hand 15: 2♣. Your cheapest longest suit. You cannot bid 1NT with only 4 points. Even if at the two level, it's still a non-jump and still shows 0-9 points.
- Hand 16: Pass. This type of hand, with long solid trumps, is the only time that you can pass partner's take-out double and thus convert it into penalties.

Your Rebid having Doubled

This is the last in this series of 'the beginner's page' and it covers what one should do if you have initially doubled and partner has responded. Remember that if partner bid a new suit that is not a jump then it's 0 - around 8, he may have zero points!

With a minimal double

Hand 1 RHO opens 1♥ and you double. Partner responds 1♠, what do you do?
You must pass. You have 'forced' partner to bid and he may have zero points.
♠ KJ64 He may not even have a 4 card ♠ suit (say he's 3433 shape).
♥ 7 But what if partner had jumped to 2♠? Then he's promising around 8-10
♦ AJ64 points and 4 ♠'s. His jump is not forcing and with this minimal double you
♣ K965 should still pass

Hand 2 RHO opens 1♥ and you double. Partner responds 1♠, what do you do?
Your hand is a bit stronger this time but partner may still be bust. But you
should make an effort and 2♠ here is invitational; asking partner to bid game
if he's in the 7-8 range
♠ KJ64
♥ 7
♦ AQ64
♣ AQ65

Hand 3 RHO opens 1♥ and you double. Partner responds 1♠, what do you do?
It's much stronger this time but partner may still be bust. You should make
a big effort and 3♠ is strongly invitational here. It tells partner to bid game
if he's in the 3-8 range. Note that jumping to 4♠ directly is incorrect as
partner may be completely bust.
♠ KQ64
♥ 7
♦ AK64
♣ AQ65

Hand 4 RHO opens 1♥ and you double. Partner responds 1♠, what do you do?
This time you expect to make game even opposite a partner who is
virtually bust, so bid 4♠. Note that you really need a hand this good to
make the jump to game opposite a minimal response.
♠ KQ654
♥ -
♦ AK64
♣ AQJ5

Question time. With all of these RHO opens 1♦ and you double, what do you do if

(a) Partner responds 1♥?

(b) Partner responds 2♥?

Hand 5	Hand 6	Hand 7	Hand 8	Hand 9	Hand 10
♠ K765	♠ AKQJ65	♠ KJ7	♠ KJ97	♠ KQ7	♠ KJ97
♥ QJ65	♥ 76	♥ Q7	♥ Q7	♥ Q72	♥ KQ97
♦ 8	♦ 63	♦ AQ10	♦ AQ6	♦ K7	♦ 8
♣ AJ76	♣ AK6	♣ AKJ107	♣ AK74	♣ AKQ53	♣ AQJ4

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Hand 5: (a) Pass. Partner is 0-8

(b) Pass. Partner is around 8-10 but it's not enough for game.

Hand 6: (a) 1♠. You doubled initially because your hand was too strong for a simple 1♠ overcall; so a 1♠ bid now, having doubled first, conveys that message.

(b) 2♠. When partner has jumped then a 2♠ bid conveys the same message but you expect partner to bid on this time. There is no need to jump, 2♠ here is forcing.

Hand 7: (a) 1NT. You doubled initially because your hand was too strong for a simple 1NT overcall; so a 1NT bid now shows 19-20

(b) 3NT. 3NT is where you want to play opposite partner's +- 9 points.

Hand 8: (a) 1NT, same as for Hand 7.

(b) 2NT. This time it's slightly different. 2NT here shows the required 19-20 points but the fact that you did not jump directly to game indicates that you are not sure of the final contract. Here it's because partner may have 4♠'s. 2NT is of course forcing as it shows 19+ points opposite partner's 8+ (opener was presumably a bit light?)

Hand 9: (a) 1NT, same as for Hands 7 & 8.

(b) 2NT. A similar situation to hand 8. 2NT here shows the required 19-20 points but the fact that you did not jump directly to game indicates that you are not sure of the final contract.

Here it's because your ♦ stop is minimal and 4 may be a better contract if partner has 5♥'s.

Hand 10: (a) 2♥. Quite enough, this is game invitational and remember that partner may be bust.

(b) 4♥. When partner promises a 4 card ♥ suit and around 8-10 points then you have enough for a shot at game.