

Doubles – This is a collection of various articles from the news-sheets covering doubles.

Heard this two weeks ago: -

Ian: How could you pass my take-out double?
Ian's Partner: But I only had 3 points!
Ian: You must bid.
Ian's Partner: But I was not sure it was for take-out, and with just 3 points.....

An all-too-familiar story.

Ian asked me to try to clarify (for the benefit of all) which doubles are for take-out and which for penalties. To some extent, this is up to partnership agreement; but the following is a good general guideline:

A double by us is normally for penalties if: -

- 1) We double a natural no-trump bid.
- 2) Anybody at the table had made a natural no-trump bid.
- 3) Either of us has made an earlier penalty double or penalty pass of a take out double.
- 4) Either of us had made a value showing double or re-double earlier.
- 5) Either of us has pre-empted.
- 6) Either of us has made a lead directing double of an artificial bid.
- 7) Either of us has made a strong 2♣ or other strong bid.
- 8) There are no unbid suits (suits that have not been bid naturally or implied).
- 9) We have already found our fit.
- 10) The doubler's partner has already accurately described his strength and distribution.
- 11) When both opponents have limited their hands and yet reach a pushy game.
- 12) Partner has made a take-out double and RHO introduces a new suit.
- 13) If you previously passed when a double would have been negative.
- 14) You open, partner responds, and RHO overcalls in the Sandwich seat.

A double by us is for take-out if: -

- a) A double of an opening suit bid
- b) A double at a low level (below game) when the opponents have agreed a suit.
- c) You previously made a take-out double of the same suit.

There are a number of further things that we need to know. What sort of hand type do we need for a take-out double? What should doubler's partner respond? What if doubler's partner is virtually bust? Obviously there are volumes of material here and it is covered elsewhere. So here I'll concentrate on the meanings of doubles - take-out or penalty.

So, let's cover the points mentioned above: -

1) **We double a natural no-trump bid.**

A double of an opening 1NT or a 1NT overcall is for penalties.

2) **Anybody at the table had made a natural no-trump bid.**

Self-explanatory: - 1NT dbl 2♦ dbl both doubles are for penalties

But an exception is a sequence like 1♦ pass 1NT dbl where the double is a take-out of ♦'s.

3) **Either of us has made an earlier penalty double or pass of a take out double.**

2♠	pass	pass	dbl (1)	(1) take-out
pass	pass (2)	3♣	dbl (3)	(2) penalty pass
				(3) penalties

4) **Either of us had made a value showing double or re-double earlier.**

For example, when partner opens 1 of a suit and the next hand doubles (take-out), a re-double does *not* show support for partner's suit (with support for partner, raise to the appropriate level). A re-double should show 9+ points and is often a mis-fit for partner, i.e. we want to defend and are out for blood. We have the balance of the points and hope to set the opponents. Any pass by the bloodsuckers (us) is forcing and any subsequent double is to satisfy the vampire urge.

1♠	dbl	redbl (1)	pass	(1) 9+ points, usually poor ♠ support.
pass	2♥	dbl (2)		(2) penalties - a pass at (2) is forcing.

5) **Either of us has pre-empted.**

3♥	dbl (1)	4♥	4♠	(1) take-out
pass	pass	dbl (2)		(2) penalties

Opener should never pull this penalty double. The 4♥ bid is totally ambiguous; it could be a weak pre-emptive raise or a hand just short of slam. In this situation it was obviously a rock crusher. Note that a subsequent double (of a game contract) by the pre-empter shows a better defensive hand than the initial pre-empt told - indicating that partner should not sacrifice unless necessary: -

3♥	dbl (1)	4♥	4♠	(1) take-out
dbl (2)				(2) I have decent defensive values, so don't sacrifice unnecessarily

And there is no such thing as a negative double when partner has pre-empted: -

2♥ (1)	2♠	dbl (2)		(1) weak
				(2) penalties

Dbl here is definitely penalties and not a negative double. Playing negative doubles you penalise the opponents by passing and then passing partner's 'automatic' re-opening double. Having pre-empted, opener will never re-open and so dbl must be for penalties.

6) **Either of us has made a lead directing double of an artificial bid.**

1♠	2♣	3♦ (1)	dbl (2)	(1) splinter
3♠	pass	4♠	dbl (3)	(2) please lead a ♦
				(3) penalties

7) **Either of us has made a strong 2♣ or other strong opening 2 bid.**

e.g. 2♣ - 2♥ - dbl dbl indicates that responder considers 2♥ doubled will deliver a better score than a game if opener has a balanced 22+.

8) **There are no unbid suits (suits that have not been bid naturally or implied).**

1♣	dbl	1♥	pass	the last double is penalties, partner has shown a big hand with ♦'s; so dbl cannot be take-out – no suit(s) left.
1♠	2♦	pass	pass	
2♥	pass	pass	dbl	

1♥	2♣	dbl	2♠	the 1st double is negative, showing the two unbid suits; (some play just ♠'s) either way, opener's dbl is penalties.
dbl				

9) **We have already found our fit.**

1♥	1♠	3♥	3♠	Penalties.
dbl				

There is one notable exception here. If the opponent's suit is ranking one below our major, then a double of a three level bid has to be a game try (there is no room left): -

				The opponents have robbed us of the space for a game try.
1♥	2♦	2♥	3♦	This double is a game try, inviting partner to bid 4♥ if max.
dbl				A 3♥ bid here would be competitive, not an invitation.

10) **The doubler's partner has already accurately described his strength and distribution.**

1♣	1♥	1♠	pass	Penalties. Cannot possibly be take-out (to what?). You know opener's hand: weakish with ♣'s.
2♣	2♥	dbl		

11) **When both opponents have limited their hands and yet reach a pushy game.**

1♣	1♥	1♠	pass	Penalties. Probably with an unpleasant trump holding such as ♠QJ109 (you should double with this holding regardless of the rest of your hand) – 2 unexpected tricks.
2♠	pass	3♠	pass	
4♠	pass	pass	dbl	

12) **Partner has made a take-out double and RHO introduces a new suit.**

1♠ db1 2♥ db1

The first double is take-out, showing a willingness to play in ♥'s (I personally would usually guarantee 4 ♥'s for a double of 1♠ unless a very big hand). The 2nd double is best played as penalties. This is a typical psyche situation and you need a double to expose a possible psyche (of course, nobody would psyche at our club – you all know the director's opinions).

13) **If you previously passed when a double would have been negative.**

1♣ 1♥ pass 2♥
pass pass db1

Penalties. Playing negative doubles the first pass could be anything but the double must be penalties as otherwise you would have bid something first time.

14) **You open, partner responds, and RHO overcalls.**

This topic is covered separately in the document 'Bidding in the sandwich Seat'.

And take-out doubles: -

a) **A double of an opening suit bid**

The standard take-out double. It should have at least 3 cards in the unbid suits with shortage in the suit bid, but there are exceptions which I will cover at a later date.

b) **A double at a low level (below game) when the opponents have agreed a suit.**

1♦ pass 3♦ pass
pass db1

take-out, too weak to bid first time. But when both opponents have limited their hands, partner must have values.

c) **You previously made a take-out double of the same suit.**

1♦ db1 3♦ pass
pass db1

both doubles are take-out.

d) **A delayed double.**

1♦ pass 1♥ pass
1NT db1

take-out. He did not double first time as he did not have ♥'s. This take-out double shows ♣'s and ♠'s

Responding to Partner's take-out double.

Take-out doubles and responses are covered in the Beginner's News-Sheets nos 130-134.

Let's have a couple of hands from the club where I was asked the correct bid: -

Bidding :- 1♦ dbl pass ?

- ♠ Q852 Your partner has doubled a 1♦ opening. What should you bid? The board
- ♥ KQ9 was played 5 times and game reached only twice. Alex's partner bid 2NT.
- ♦ K10 This is incorrect as it shows 10-12 points and is non-forcing. Also, of course,
- ♣ KQ86 it denies a 4 card major and so is doubly wrong. 1♠ and 2♠ are both also incorrect as they show 0-9 and 10-12 points resp and are non-forcing. 3♠ is a reasonable bid, but I prefer a 2♦ cue bid to establish a forcing auction. A subsequent ♠ bid would then be game forcing. I do not like a direct leap to 4♠ – partner may have only 3 ♠'s.

Bidding :- 1♥ dbl pass ?

- ♠ J73 Your partner has doubled a 1♥ opening. What should you bid? The board was
- ♥ Q62 played 5 times and 2♣ was bid twice. I can only repeat what I have said in
- ♦ KQ3 previous news-sheets; do not go out of your way to play in a minor suit.
- ♣ J1063 With this hand the correct bid is 1NT (6-9 pts). The hand is perfect for this bid. 2♣ went 1 down (a 4-3 fit). 1NT was bid just once and made with overtricks for a clear top.

Penalty Double?

- | | | | | |
|----|------|----|-----|---|
| 1♦ | pass | 1♠ | dbl | I was asked my opinion on the meaning of the 2 nd double. |
| 2♦ | dbl | | | It is penalties. Partner's double promised both rounded suits, and so this falls into categories 8 (no unbid suit) and also 10 (doubler's partner has described his hand) mentioned above and is for penalties. |

For more information on conventional doubles, refer to Conventional Doubles.