

Doubles and Responding to doubles

Double (X) is the most versatile and flexible bid in bridge. It's used more and more these days at all levels. When the opponents have started the bidding (making the auction competitive), double gives you a new bid. It doesn't take up any bidding room, and works well when other bids are not practical. It usually shows a hand with points but without a clear cut long suit that you could have overcalled in.

Most doubles at low levels are for take-out, meaning that the doubler wants their partner to bid. The opposite is a penalty double, meaning "don't bid!"

The Classic Takeout Double shows

- an **opening** hand (add extra for shortage)
- **shortage** (ideally two or fewer cards) in the opponent's opened suit
- **support** for the suits not opened by the opponents (eg they open 1♥, you double to show at least three cards in ♣, ♦ and ♠, probably four ♠).

A double is forcing, unless the next hand bids after it, and asks partner to bid their longest suit, even with no points. The higher the level opened (e.g. preempts at the two+ level), the stronger the doubler needs to be. But, with very few cards in the opponents' suit, you should try to enter the auction with a double. The more points you hold, the less important is the shape requirement.

Responding to a Takeout Double

- 0-8 points, bid your longest or best suit, especially a major, at the cheapest level (e.g. 1♣ X pass 1♦/♥/♠).
- 9-11 points, jump a level bid in your best suit (e.g. 1♣ X pass 2♦/♥/♠). Shows four+ cards
- 12 + points, bid to game or cue bid the opener (e.g. 1♣ X pass, 4♥/♠: or 1♣ X pass 2♣)

Doubler's Next Move

The doubler must remember that partner, who was forced to bid, may be weak. So, after partner's response to your double,

- Pass with minimum 13-15
- Raise one level with 16-18
- Jump raise with 19-20

Coping with Doubles

As a general rule, most **jump bids** in competitive auctions show **weak** rather than strong hands. (e.g. 1♥ X 3♥ = less than 8 points, with four trumps). The idea is to stop the doubler's side finding a good two level fit, and playing there.

The way to show a stronger hand, is to **redouble**, which shows 10+ points, and denies a fit for partner.

To show a good hand **with** a fit, bid 2NT – Truscott (1♥ X 2NT) = 10+ points and a fit.

Other popular takeout doubles are **Negative**, **Support**, and **Responsive**.

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Defensive Signals

(1) Attitude

The defenders use the same techniques as declarer to develop tricks, i.e. promotion, length, finesse, the trump suit, and discarding losers on winners. Because the defenders can't see each other's cards, defensive signals help.

The card you play to the first trick and the first discard, provided you're not trying to win that trick (and winning the trick is your first priority) will be a signal, known as an attitude signal.

So, if the first trick has already been won, by either your partner, or dummy, the card you play at your turn should show partner whether you liked their lead or not.

Decide whether to play **low** or **high encouraging**. This means, if **low** to encourage, the smallest card you can afford will tell partner you liked the lead, and more importantly, that you would like that suit continued. **High** is the opposite, the highest card you can afford says you would like that suit continued. Make sure you and partner are on the same page with this!

*NB: The person who leads simply follows the recommended guidelines. It's the leader's **partner** who signals their "attitude" to the lead. Partner leads the ♥3, dummy wins the ♥A, and you have ♥K92. You would like hearts continued, hoping to win your ♥K. If playing low to encourage, the correct card to play is the ♥2. If playing high encouraging, it's the ♥9.*

Partner will expect an attitude signal when you can't win the first trick, and on your first discard too.

(2) Count

Sometimes it's better to show partner how many cards you hold, instead of liking a suit and/or wanting it continued. This occurs mainly when declarer is playing their long suit. Perhaps partner holds the ace and wants to break declarer's communications with dummy by winning their ace when, and only when, they know declarer will have none left to reach dummy.

Play high-low to show an even number of cards, and low-high to show odd. eg you hold 9853. Play the 9 followed by the 3, to show an even number. With 983, play the 3 first, followed by the 9, to show an odd number. It's important to recognise when the situation calls for attitude or count. Attitude should have priority.

(3) Suit Preference

Sometimes your partner needs to know how to reach your hand later in the play, i.e. where's your entry. This is important when giving partner a ruff, or to know how to reach partner's hand to take long suit winners at no trumps. Your card will ask partner to return either the higher-ranked suit, or the lower-ranked suit.

The play of an unnecessarily high card asks for the higher ranked suit to be returned, and a low card asks for the lower suit. (McKenney and Lavinthal are suit preference signalling methods).

Although these signals are often helpful, there is no substitute for using your own logic at the table. Take notice of what's in dummy, how declarer is playing the contract, and realizing that sometimes you don't need a signal at all!

The defender uses the same techniques as declarer to develop tricks. The promotion length, hence, the trump suit and discarding losers on winners. Because the defender can't see each other's cards, defensive signals help.

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So if the first trick has already been won, by either your partner or dummy, the card you play at your first discard shows partner whether you liked their lead or not.

Decide whether to play low or high encouraging. This means, if low to encourage the smallest card you can afford will tell partner you liked the lead, and more importantly, that you would like that suit continued. High is the opposite, the highest card you can afford says you would like that suit continued. Make sure you and partner are on the same page with this!

Mr. The person who leads should follow the recommended guidelines. It's the leader's partner who signals with "attitude" to the lead. Partner leads the ♠, dummy wins the ♠ and you have ♠10. You would like hearts continued, hoping to see your ♠K. If playing low to encourage, the correct card to play is the ♠2. If playing high to encourage it's the ♠8.

Partner will expect an attitude signal when you can't see the first trick, and on your first discard too.

(2) Count
Sometimes it's better to show partner how many cards you hold, instead of liking a suit and/or winning it continued. This occurs mainly when declarer is playing their long suit. Perhaps partner needs the ♠ and wants to break declarer's communications with dummy by winning that ace when, and only when, they know declarer will have time left to reach dummy.

Play high-low to show an even number of cards, and low-high to show an odd number of cards. Play the ♠ followed by the ♣ to show an even number. With ♠8, ♣ play the ♠ first followed by the ♣ to show an odd number. It's important to recognize when the situation calls for attitude or count. Attitude should have priority.

(3) Suit Preference
Sometimes your partner needs to know how to reach your hand later in the play, i.e. when's your entry. This is important when giving partner a ruff, or to know how to reach partner's hand to take long suit winners at no trump. Your card will ask partner to return either the higher-ranked suit, or the lower-ranked suit.

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Opening Strong Hands

♠ AKQJ1095
♥ AK
♦ A62
♣ 5

This hand is too strong to open at the one level and risk partner passing with fewer than six points. Big hands like this (21 high card points plus 3 length points for the spade suit), were once opened 2♠, but with the advent of weak two-bids (which occur more frequently), things changed. Most people now use one bid only, 2♣, to describe their game force hands. The hand may or may not contain clubs. With the hand above, opener would start with 2♣ and rebid 2♠.

Responder

A 2♣ bid is forcing. Unless responder holds a good five+ card suit with at least an ace and a king (a "positive"), they make a **waiting** response of 2♦. This leaves room for opener to describe their hand. Positive bids – 2♥, 2♠, 3♣ or 3♦ promise five+ card suits with two of the top three honours. 2NT or 3NT shows 8-10, or 11+ points, without a five-card suit. With the following hands after partner opens 2♣:

Hand 1	Hand 2
♠ Q97654	♠ AQ10976
♥ 63	♥ 6
♦ 7	♦ 75
♣ 9863	♣ K863

You would respond 2♦ with Hand 1 intending to bid spades later if possible. This is a negative. With Hand 2 you would respond 2♠ to show a good five+ card suit and more than 7 points.

Once a trump suit has been agreed, normal slam bidding methods – Blackwood and Cue Bids – come into play. Since a raise of partner's suit is forcing, responder can show support for opener's suit with a very weak hand by jumping directly to game. This is the principle of "**fast arrival**", i.e. in a game force, the faster game is reached, the weaker is responder's hand. Conversely, the better the hand, the slower the bidding.

Opening Strong Balanced Hands

20-21 Open 2NT

22-24 Open 2♣ planning to rebid 2NT

25+ Open 2♣ planning to rebid 3NT

Points are all important. Going to 6NT (or 7NT) will depend on the combined high card points because neither hand will have a long suit. Blackwood is not used here; quantitative bids ask whether the strong hand is minimum or maximum.

Opening Strong Unbalanced Hands

If the 2♣ opener rebids a suit rather than no trumps, it's still forcing. These hands need to be very strong, either in points or playing strength. It's not just high cards that determine your opening bid. To open 2♣, you need aces and kings that will take tricks even if you're defending. Compare these hands, both of which have 3 losers. Hand (1) has 1 heart loser, 1 diamond loser, and 1 club loser. Hand (2) has 1 heart loser and 2 diamond losers.

(1) ♠ A
♥ AK10874
♦ AKJ4
♣ K4

(2) ♠ void
♥ KQJ108765
♦ QJ1097
♣ void

The first hand has both offensive and defensive potential and should be opened 2♣. With the second hand, you can take ten tricks by yourself if allowed to play in hearts, but you have no sure defensive tricks if the opponents compete in spades or clubs. Don't open 2♣. Open 1♥ or 4♥ and try to buy the contract at a suitable level.

A guide for deciding whether or not to open a hand with a game force or one bid is to open 2♣ if your quick tricks are greater than your loser count.

When investigating whether there are enough controls to bid to slam, use Blackwood, and/or Cue Bidding.