

Learning Points – Preempts in Competition.

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Bidding Level: BASIC

This is part IV in a 4 part series on basic preempt bidding. Having covered our Opening Preempts and our Weak Jump Overcalls, what's left? Let's consider these 5 remaining cases:

They Preempt

1. They preempt.
2. We open, they preempt.
3. We open and respond, they preempt.

We Preempt

4. We open, they compete, we preempt.
5. We overcall/double, we preempt.

They Preempt – We have not opened the bidding

Opponent's 3N opening might be gambling, natural or another convention – ask! Their opening 4N might be ace asking or a convention – Ask! Opening bids 5♥ and above are slam invitations focused on missing AK of Trump (bid 6 with 1, 7 with both, pass with neither). 5N invites 6 or 7 NT with 1 or 2 aces. Except for a few die-hard Roth-Stone players almost no one opens a weak 2♣. Forcing ♣ pairs often use 2♣ as an intermediate opening bid with ♣ length and a possible side major suit. Ask!

We focus on preempt suit bids of 2♦ - 5♦. When they preempt before we open, we might own the hand. They have stolen the initiative, so we work with the competitive bidding side of our convention card.

A **takeout double** shows the same kind of hands as if they had made a 1-bid: **support for 3 suits and level-safe HCP, or a hand too strong to make a simple overcall.** Avoid off-shape or “Equal Level Conversion” approaches over their preempts. Off-shape doubles are too risky (partner will often bid your short suit) or take up too much room needed for stronger hands. Since they have removed levels of bidding, the rebid of a new suit after making a takeout double is reserved for a strong (18+ HCP) hand.

Generally, a takeout double of 2♦ or 2♥ can be made with perfect shape and 10/11 working HCP (not Quacks – points in Queens and Jacks). A double of 2♠ should be 12 HCP. Additional HCP are needed to compensate for less shortness in opponent's suit. Takeout doubles promise at least 4-3 in the majors, unless strong enough for a free rebid (generally 17+ HCP).

With ♠ H4 ♥KQ34 ♦ K103 ♣AQ109 prefer a takeout double over their 3♠ preempt. (H= A, K, or Q). It's just too hard to find a 4-4 fit in the other major when we start out with 3NT. (It's generally better to make a takeout double with 4432 and 15-17 HCP and 2 in their suit as major suit fit is of interest). Do not make an imperfect takeout double just because you have 14+HCP. Pass. Have the major suit(s) partner expects (over 2♦ have at least 43 in majors, otherwise pass). **When fixed, stay fixed. The 1st rule when you get in a hole? STOP DIGGING** (Thanks, Marty).

They Preempt	Your Hand	Action
2♦	♠ KQ76 ♥K1034 ♦4 ♣Q1096	Takeout double
2♠	♠ 4 ♥K1034 ♦ KQ76 ♣Q1096	Pass - TOO WEAK. (A good T.O. Double of 1♠)
2♣	♠ 4 ♥KQ34 ♦K1076 ♣KJ96	Double – Just right
2♠	♠ Q4 ♥KQ34 ♦ J103 ♣AQ109	Double. (Don't count the ♠Q, it's not working).
2♦ or 2♥	♠ Q4 ♥KQ34 ♦ J103 ♣AQ109	Pass. Off shape doubles are too risky choice.
3♦	♠ KJ76 ♥KJ103 ♦4 ♣KJ96	Double. Perfect minimum.
3♠	♠ 4 ♥K1034 ♦ KQ76 ♣QJ109	Pass. Weak (Many will double).
3♣	♠ 4 ♥KQ34 ♦KJ76 ♣KQ96	Double.
3♠	♠ Q4 ♥KQ34 ♦ K103 ♣AQ109	Double. (Don't count the ♠Q, it's not working).
3♦ or 3♥	♠ Q4 ♥KQ34 ♦ K103 ♣AQ109	3NT. 16 HCP and stoppers. (Play partner for 8 HCP)

Normally our **simple overcalls** are 6-16, or 8-17 or 7+ HCP or a similar range. Once opponents have preempted we need values and trumps suits consistent with the level we're bidding at. **We no longer**

compete with less than 10 working HCP. Over weak 2's, we need 10 HCP and a 5+ card suit to bid a major at the 2-level, 12 HCP and 5 cards for a major or 6 cards for a minor at the 3-level and 14+ at the 4 level with a good suit. Useful shortness is a plus. Avoid 4-card suit overcalls after preempts. **Overcalls at the 4- and 5-level should be within 1-2 tricks of the contract (V-NV).** No room for wishful thinking.

Level	Overall	Takeout Double
2	10-16 HCP 5+ Cards	10+ HCP 3 suits 17+ Overall
3	14-16 HCP 5+ Cards	12+ HCP 3 suits 17+ Overall
4	16-19 HCP 5+ Cards	14+ HCP 3 suits 20+ Overall

At the 4-level, Marty Bergen recommends a takeout double through 4♠ - a strong 3-suiter (17 HCP+) willing to play in the best fit. Then 4N is a two suited takeout and 5 bids are strong 1-suited hands within 1-2 tricks of the contract. Many play 4N as general takeout over 4♠ and a double as penalty. Be sure you and partner are together.

A **2NT overcall** generally shows 16-18 HCP in a balanced hand with a sound NT stopper. Ax, Axx, and particularly Axxx or longer is NOT a sound NT stopper. Prefer KQx or QJx. **You want your aces working in your long suits, not theirs.** 3NT is to play and is generally based on a source of tricks with a positional stopper or better in their suit.

A 3 level cue bid always forcing to game or the 4-level and 1st asks advancer for a positional stopper intending to play 3NT. Advancer will bid a new suit without a useful stopper at the 4 level if necessary (minors preferred since partner did not make a takeout double). Cue bidder will pass advancer's 3NT. Cue-bidder will bid their own suit simply with no fit for advancer's non-NT call. If cue-bidder rebids a major, they show a 2-suited hand – if the cue-bidder has a strong hand with 1 suit, they make a strong jump overcall or a takeout double 1st, not a cue bid). A jump cue bid (not at 3 level) shows a void in a 3-suited hand too offensively oriented to make a takeout double (you don't want to defend their partial doubled because you suspect a slam). Advancer will pick the best fit and suggest a level.

Jump Shifts are STRONG, generally 6+ Cards and 15-17 HCP. (Stronger hand will double first). Some opponents use conventional treatments for a jump shift over your weak 2 bid (Leaping Michaels showing a Major-minor two-suiter (or both majors over 2♦)). Ask! **Never preempt the preemptor.**

Balancing seat is the player who owns the 3rd and final pass. Generally the values and shapes for a takeout double or a simple overcall remain the same. However with 10 HCP, 2 defensive tricks, and shortness in their suit, balancer will stretch to double in case partner had a penalty pass. Game bids play.

Over their 2♦:	Action	Comment
♠KQ1076 ♥K103 ♦4 ♣Q1094	2♠	Minimum overcall
♠KQ1076 ♥K1034 ♦4 ♣Q109	Double	Prefer double to a 2♠ overcall (show both majors).
♠KQ107 ♥1093 ♦A ♣J1094	PASS	♦A is not working. This hand is worth about 8 WPs.
♠KQ107 ♥K10 ♦943 ♣AQ94	PASS	Double needs 2 majors (at least 4-3). 3♦s warn many losers.
♠AQ1076 ♥AK10 ♦4 ♣KQ103	Double	Planning to raise partner's rounded suit 1 level or ♠s 2 levels
♠AQ10876 ♥AK10 ♦4 ♣K106	3♠	STRONG Jump Shift
♠AQ10876 ♥AK10 ♦Q4 ♣J106	2♠	Your ♦Q is worthless!
♠A8 ♥K10 ♦94 ♣AKQ J1062	3♦	Looking for a ♦ stopper and 3NT
♠AK1082 ♥K10 ♦9 ♣AK J106	3♦	Strong 2-suiters begin with a cue bid.
Over their 2♠:		
♠4 ♥K103 ♦KQ1076 ♣Q1094	PASS	Too weak for 3♦.
♠4 ♥KQ1076 ♦K103 ♣Q1094	PASS	Too weak for 3♥ (Don't make a takeout double with 5♥s).
♠4 ♥K10 ♦KQ1076 ♣Q10943	PASS	2N NOT Unusual – 2N = 16-18+ balanced with stoppers.
♠AQ10 ♥AK10 ♦KQ54 ♣QJ10	Double	21 HCP Balanced – plan to rebid NT. With 22, dbl then cue.

We open, they preempt.

A 2 level **free bid** promises 10 + HCP. Free bids force one round to the next level in opener's suit. The free bid denies a good fit with partner. Use the **support cue bid** with a limit raise or better (10+ HCP and trump support). The negative double promises at least one 4-card major or one 5+ card suit or longer if too weak for a free bid. Over preemptive sequences at the 2 level and higher, a negative double NEVER promises BOTH 4-card unbid suits – only one! (If you prefer negative or limit free bids, by all means adjust this dialog to adapt to your choice.)

Level	Free bid	Negative Double
2	10+ HCP 5+ Cards	8+ HCP 1 suit (focus: missing major(s)); 10+ NO 5 card suit
3	12+ HCP 5+ Cards	10-12 HCP 1 Suit; 12+ No 5cd suit
4	14+ HCP 5+ Cards	10-13 HCP 1 Suit; 14+ No 5 cd suit
5	16+ HCP Good Suit	12-15 HCP 1 Suit; 16+ No 5 cd suit

Playing negative doubles, responder will pass with a penalty hand and opener will tend to reopen with a double more often with weak hand and shortness than if LHO had simply overcalled. Note with HCP for a free bid, partner's negative double denies a 5 card suit. The Negative double handles hands too weak or too short for a freebid.

A 3 level cue bid always asks advancer for a positional stopper. P-2♠-3♠- Might be an attempt to play NT

looking for a stopper or a support double. Don't worry, partner will tell you which. Cue bidder will your stopper showing 3NT, or bid their own suit at the 3 or 4 level. Bidding a new suit at the 4 level implies extras. If the cue bidder supports opener (or asks for aces when you return to your original suit), then the cue bid was a forcing raise without shortness in their suit. A **jump cue bid** shows a splinter raise, even at the 5 level. 1♥-2♠-4♠- 1♥-3♦-5♦ 1♣-2♠-4♠ are examples. You'd make a jump cue bid with shortness in the preempt suit, good support and a King more than a normal splinter raise, something like ♠4 ♥KJ103 ♦KQ10 ♣AQ1094 could be a 4♠ jump cue bid over partner's ♥s.

A non-jump 4-level cue bid is a game forcing raise. 1♠-3♣-4♣ 1♥-3♦-4♦ are examples. This hand could cue bid as in either sequence: ♠AQ10 ♥K1072 ♦KJ32 ♣J10. (Yes you will sometimes cue bid with only 3 trumps for partner).

We Open and Respond, they preempt

We have exchanged enough information to know we hold at least 18 HCP and whether we an initial fit or not. Their 4th seat preempt leaves opener with several options.

A: 1♣ – P – 1♥ – 3♦ – Responder shows 5+ HCP. Total strength is indeterminate for our side. Pass is flexible and shows a minimum holding opposite a minimum response from partner.

B: 1♥ – P – 2♣ – 3♦ – Responder showed 10+ (Standard) or 12/3+ and a GF (2/1 Game Force). Opener's pass over 3♦ would be FORCING because we are in an invitational or better auction. If opponents bid above the level of 4♥ or 5♣, then we can use the Forcing pass convention to help determine whether to bid six.

Opposite an invitational or better response, opener's pass is forcing – responder must double or bid (NT and cue bids by responder are possible below game). Responder doubles with length or wastage in opponent's suit, and bids with no wastage and sufficient strength. Tend to bid more not double with a void.

C: 1♣ – P – 1♥ – 2N – Ask! 2N is likely a two suited preempt. Find out!

D: 1♣ – P – 1N – 3♦ – Weak, less than invitational. Pass does not force and shows a minimum.

E: 1♣ – P – 1♦ – 2♥ – Indeterminate (Responder is 5+). Pass does not force and shows a minimum.

Some play that opener's double here shows 3-card support for responder's suit: Support Double). Be sure to ask.

Opener supports partner at the 3-level with sufficient values to bid 3 in the absence of the preempt in the indeterminate case, or with a minimum fit in the invitational case. Opener bids game with a good hand and no desire to defend (indeterminate case) or a hand with no extras for slam opposite an invite.

Opener's new suit is forward going and forcing one round. Opener makes a penalty double with a sound

hand (15+ HCP) and at least 3 cards in opponent's suit. Opener can bid 3NT with sound stoppers and tricks or strength opposite 6-7 HCP. Opener's cue bid should show a very strong GF hand that would have jump shifted except for the preempt. If the cue bid is at the 3 level (major) it asks responder for a positional stopper. A jump cue (rare) would be a splinter bid for responder's suit with enough strength to bid at that level (+1 King per level above game)

We open, they compete, we preempt

When opponents double or overcall after our 1-level opening bid, they hand us additional tools to make our bidding easier. Let's look at 1) their takeout double and 2) their simple overcall.

They make a takeout double

Raises are preemptive. In general you can raise to the level of your combined trump holding, subject to Rule of 2-3 when Vulnerable. (Beware 4333 and 5332 shapes). Short suits outside helps. New suits at the 1-level are forcing, at the 2 level nonforcing. Use Jordan 2NT to show partner a limit raise or better. Redouble with 10+ high card points no fit for partner and no clear direction. Make a forcing bid with clear direction. Game bids are to play.

A: 1♣ - Dbl – 2♣: Typically a simple raise. Some pairs might play this as an inverted minor raise.

B: 1♣ - Dbl – 3♣: Preempting with 5+ ♣s. Some pairs might play this as an invitational raise.

C: 1♣ - Dbl – 2N: Jordan 2NT – Limit raise or better with 5+ ♣s *Alertable Bid!*

D: 1♣ - Dbl – Redouble: 10+ implies no fit and no specific direction.

E: 1♣ - Dbl – 2♦/♥/♠: Weak Jump Shift (~4 – 7 HCP and 6+ cards. Points in suit).

F: 1♣ - Dbl – 3♦/♥/♠: Weak Jump Shift (~4 – 7 HCP and 7+ cards. Points in suit).

G: 1♣ - Dbl – 3N/4♥/4♠/5♣/5♦: Game bids are to play.

They make a simple overcall.

Double is negative, and a simple cue bid is invitational or better with support. Raises are preemptive according to total trumps, useful shortness and Rule of 2-3-4. Free bids are forcing 1 round to the next level of opener's suit. If 2, 3, and 4, level cue bids are available then, the 2 level shows balanced limit raise or better, 3 level cue asks positional stopper for 3NT, and 4 level shows a splinter raise – a singleton or void in their suit with great values (slammish).

Choose to play the 3 level cue bid as always asking for a stopper. Then if you have a stopper and bid 3NT, partner will correct with a game forcing fit hand. Notice, if the cuebid forces you past 3 of your major or 4 of your minor, then it cannot be invitational and must be game forcing.

We Overcall/Double (Advancer's Preempts)

When opponents have opened the auction and partner chooses to compete, advancer might want to preempt. This is more likely over partner's takeout double but can be effective over partner's simple overcall.

Over a takeout double assume partner has the unbid 4 card major. Assume partner's minimum T/O double is likely 10-11 HCP and a perfect 3-suiter. With useful shortness (a short suit NOT bid by the opponents) and 9-10 card fit with partner, bid to the level of your fit if NV. If you are vulnerable count tricks so you avoid -500 or worse against NV opponents. Shortness in opponent's suit after partner's takeout double probably means you're both short in the same suit. This does NOT help create extra ruffing tricks for your side. Beware. If you play off-shape takeout doubles or equal level conversion (a way to show the unbid major and diamonds) you might suppress your desire to preempt until you are sure which hand partner has. Playing disciplined takeout doubles enables effective preempting.

After partner's takeout double, a single jump shows any hand with constructive values 9-11 HCP and a 4 card suit. A double jump or more preempts, typically bidding to the level of the expected total number of

trumps. Since the 5-level should belong to the opponents, avoid bidding past game with a preempt. If partner bids a new suit (19+ HCP) after your jump shift, consider it forcing if not yet a game bid. Partner must have a hand too strong for a takeout double and either great support for you or a self-sustaining suit. Most partnerships advance with a cue bid when holding a strong game forcing hand after partner's takeout double (invitational or better after an overcall).

Similarly after partner's simple suit overcall, any raise is to play. Higher levels simply show more trumps when not vulnerable, particularly against vulnerable opponents. You're primary purpose is to cause opponents to make the final decision and take away valuable bidding space. Sometimes a simple raise can be enough. How many times have you opened to have the auction unfold: 1♥-1♠-P-2♠-?? Now you cannot be sure partner made a penalty pass nor can you be sure which of 3 strains your side owns. Advancer's 2♠ raise has made opener's decision more difficult since opener must continue at the 3-level.

You can preempt in your own suit after partner's overcall if your agreement is that a Jump shift by advancer is weak. You should have a 6-card suit at the 2-level, and a 7-card suit at the 3-level. Just don't expect a trump fit from partner. Check your agreements with partner!

Further Reading:

Bergen, M., Better Bidding with Bergen Volume Two Competitive Bidding, Fit Bids & More, Devyn Press, KY, 1986

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Cohen, L. To Bid or Not to Bid, The Law of Total Tricks, Natco Press 1992.

Lawrence, M., The Complete Guide to Contested Auctions, Lawrence & Leong, California 1992.

Keywords: Weak Jump Overcall, Total Trumps, HCP, Sacrifice, Vulnerability, Raises, New Suits, Jump Shifts, Rule of 2-3-4

2♦ _____ to _____ HCP	
Natural: Weak <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♥ _____ to _____ HCP	
Natural: Weak <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>
2♠ _____ to _____ HCP	
Natural: Weak <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Conv. <input type="checkbox"/>	2NT Force <input type="checkbox"/> New Suit NF <input type="checkbox"/>

JUMP OVERCALL

Strong Intermediate Weak

OPENING PREEMPTS

	Sound	Light	Very Light
3/4-bids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Conv./Resp. _____

SPECIAL DOUBLES

After Overcall: Penalty _____

Negative thru _____

Responsive : thru _____ Maximal

Support: Dbl. thru _____ Redbl

Card-showing Min. Offshape T/O

SIMPLE OVERCALL

1 level _____ to _____ HCP (usually)

often 4 cards very light style

Responses

New Suit: Forcing NFConst NF

Jump Raise: Forcing Inv. Weak

Level	Overcall	Takeout Double
2	10-16 HCP	10+ HCP 3 suits
	5+ Cards	17+ Overcall
3	14-16 HCP	12+ HCP 3 suits
	5+ Cards	17+ Overcall
4	16-19 HCP	14+ HCP 3 suits
	5+ Cards	20+ Overcall

Level	Free bid	Negative Double
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