

English Bridge August 2001

When you started learning, your teacher kindly gave you deals where the opposition did not bid. It's hard enough to get to the right contract without opposition bidding to put you off. But real life is not like that; opponents want to join in too. We want to bid for lots of reasons:

- To show a good suit so that partner finds the best lead if our side defends
- To win the contract – even if we get a minus score it can be a good result
- To make life difficult for the opening side – why should they have it easy?
- To win the contract for our side. We can have a making contract even if they have opened.

Bridge allows us to overcall an opening bid of 1♣ with any call from 1♦ to 7NT. Of course some of these bids occur more often than others.

♠ A
♥ A
♦ A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5
♣ A
Thirteen unbeatable tricks, you can overcall 7NT (dream on).

♠ K Q J 10 9
♥ 4 2
♦ 8 7 6 5
♣ K 6
Back to reality – you are more likely to hold this nine point hand with five good spades. If you bid 1♠ over 1♣ you will take away some space from opponent's bidding. If you defend you want partner to lead a spade and maybe partner will have a hand good enough to raise your spades. Bid 1♠.

My students were shocked when I told them to bid 1♠ on just nine points. 'We wouldn't open this hand, how can we overcall on it?' I explained bridge is a war game, the opponents may have struck the first blow but we need not give in tamely. We open the bidding with about 13+ HCP because the deal is likely to belong to our side, but we often do so on a weakish suit. We can overcall with fewer high cards but we will have a stronger, longer suit. Both hands will have about 4 or 5 tricks to take but opening bids are more often based on high card tricks where overcalls are based on long suit tricks.

♠ K Q J 10 8 7
♥ A J 2
♦ 6
♣ K 10 9
Fourteen good points, six good spades. Now you will want to show partner you have a hand with a 6-card suit where game is possible. You are not just bidding to interfere, you really want to bid. Bid 2♠ showing opening bid values, say 12-16 HCP, and a 6-card suit with about 6 or 7 playing tricks.

♠ K Q J 10 8 7 3 2
♥ 4 2
♦ 6 4
♣ 2
This hand has an 8-card suit, worth seven tricks even if partner has nothing. You must bid. But you would mislead partner if you bid 2♠, which shows high cards as well as a strong suit. Bid 3♠ if you are vulnerable, it's just like a 3♠ opening bid, you won't go more than two down. Not vulnerable bid 4♠.

♠ K Q J 10
♥ A J 2
♦ Q 8 6
♣ K J 10
Sometimes we get dealt a hand that is strong in points. Our having 17 HCP does not stop the opponents having an opening bid too. We want to tell our partner about our strong values because the deal could belong to our side. Overcall 1♣ with 1NT on this hand showing 16-18 HCP, about 4 HCP stronger than you would have to open 1NT.

What should the overcaller's partner do when partner overcalls?

- With a fit (and that need only be three cards as overcaller has shown at least five) give a limit raise as you would over an opening bid.
- Pass without a fit unless you have a strong hand, in which case a no trump bid may be best. Imagine partner has ten points when deciding how many no trumps to bid, so proceed with caution.
- If you have a good long suit and values, then bid it. If you can't support partner, maybe she can support you.

Overcalls are exciting – don't be afraid to bid even with less than ten points.

All you need is a suit worth bidding.

Competitive bidding when opponents open with one of a suit

Hand shape	Points	Possible action	Take note
Competing with balanced hands			
Balanced, with no 5-card suit	0 - 13	Pass	A balanced 12-14 may open 1NT but it is best to pass with this hand as overcaller.
Balanced with a 5-card suit that can be bid at one level	8-15	Overcall if the suit has two or more honours	With 13+ HCP the suit quality may be not so good, but with 10 points or less, you should have a good suit.
Balanced with stop in opponents suit	16-18	Bid 1NT	Respond to a 1NT overcall as if 1NT was opened
Balanced, but too good for 1NT overcall	19+	Double first	Doubler bids no trumps next round
Competing with unbalanced hands			
Shortage in openers suit	13 up	Double for takeout	This bid asks partner to bid their best suit from the other three.
One long suit of 6+ cards	8-12	Overcall the suit if it has at least one honour	
One long suit of 6+ cards	13-16	Jump bid in your suit	
One long suit of 6+ cards	17 up	Just bid game in the suit. Or Double first and then bid your suit.	Sometimes just bidding game in a major is best. If you double, you must bid again on the next round. This shows a strong hand.
Very good hand of any shape	21+	Double	Jump bid on next round