

Whilst our early bidding lessons are usually with an uninterrupted auction, it doesn't take long for students to learn that everybody is allowed to join in the auction – and that is much more fun than passing all the time. The way we bid when overcalling after an opponent has opened one of a suit, is not the same as the way we bid when we are opening the bidding. Look at this hand:

♠ A J 7 With 13 balanced points, this hand is just right for a 1NT opening bid. But if our right hand
♥ K 7 4 opponent opens 1♥, is it just right to overcall 1NT? The answer is NO! This may seem
♦ 7 4 3 2 illogical but the position is not the same. When we open 1NT we know nothing more about the
♣ A J 2 hand. But when an opponent has opened, we know a lot more. For a start a heart will be led and
when our ♥K has been driven out, opponents will have heart winners to cash.

There are 40 points in the pack. When we have 13 of them, the other three hands share the remaining 27 points. On average they will have nine points each and we can expect our side to have about 22 points and the opponents to have 18. So we have a good chance of making seven tricks when we open 1NT.

But if our right hand opponent opens the bidding, you can expect at least 13 points there. That means the two other hands are now only sharing 14 points, 7 each, and our side will only have a combined 20 points.

Worse still, the next hand to bid knows his partner has an opening bid. If he holds, say, 10 points, he knows you are likely to be going down. He can tell his partner the good news by saying DOUBLE.

Doubling any no trump contract expresses the desire to collect a penalty.

| Undertricks | Not vulnerable Score undoubled | Not vulnerable Score doubled | Vulnerable Score undoubled | Vulnerable Score doubled |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | 50 | 100 | 100 | 200 |
| 2 | 100 | 300 | 200 | 500 |
| 3 | 150 | 500 | 300 | 800 |
| 4 | 200 | 800 | 400 | 1100 |

You don't have to remember the actual numbers, they are written on the back of the double card in your bidding box. Just remember that danger lurks whenever you make a 1NT overcall and you can protect against this danger by only overcalling 1NT on a stronger hand, say one with 16-18 points rather than 12-14.

♠ A Q J I was very pleased when Russell remembered my lesson and overcalled 1NT this 17 point hand.
♥ K Q 4 Probably the ♥ K Q will win two tricks and when he gets the lead, Russell can play on
♦ Q J 10 9 diamonds to set up two winners. Even if partner holds nothing, he is likely to win two hearts,
♣ Q 8 2 two diamonds, one or two spades and a club. Nothing is certain but making 1NT or only going
one down seems a likely result.

♠ 10 6 5 Russell's wife Sylvia had this hand opposite. She reasoned that if 1NT showed 16-18 points, she
♥ 3 2 could go straight to game with 10 points, since $16 + 10 = 26$. We bid over a 1NT overcall
♦ K 7 3 2 exactly as though 1NT had been opened but four fewer points are needed for responses. With
♣ A K 10 9 the ♣J instead of ♣K, Sylvia said she would respond 2NT, asking Russell to go 3NT with a
maximum.

The class discussed how other responses would change when the 1NT shows 16-18 points.

♠ Q J 10 6 5 Over a 1NT opening you would just bid 2♠, but when partner overcalls 1NT you must bid
♥ 3 3♠. This shows a 5-card suit and offers partner a choice of games. With a sixth spade you
♦ K 7 3 would bid 4♠, to play in the spade game. With a spade less and a diamond more, you would
♣ A 6 4 3 bid 2♣, if you had learned Stayman (or wait a few lessons more and you will learn it).

♠ 9 7 6 5 4 3
♥ – And it is still right to bid on some hands with no points. This hand will be worth more tricks if
♦ 8 7 3 played in spades. Make a weakness takeout to 2♠, whether it's an opening 1NT or an
♣ 10 6 5 3 overcall.

Summary

In second seat, a 1NT overcall shows 16-18.

Responder bids as to a 1NT opening but remembers that partner is four points stronger.

The same responses are used to a no trump overcall as a no trump opening.