

**Introduction:** Many card games have a method for penalizing players who fail to make what they are required to do; bridge is no different in that it originally used the double for this purpose. However today with hands suitable for this occurring infrequently, especially at low levels of bidding; the double has become a constructive tool to keep the bidding low and to give special meanings. This article surveys the major doubling situations often encountered. There are subtleties and nuances which are beyond the scope of this article, which you should research and discuss with your partners. Books have been written on **What Do You Mean: DOUBLE?** some of the doubles. You should also discuss subsequent bid and rebids after the double with your partner as these are beyond what I intended for this article.

**Definition Law 19:** A **DOUBLE** may only be made of a preceding bid (specifying a denomination and number of tricks) by an opponent. Remember a pass is not a bid, but a call, so passes may occur after a bid and before a double.

**Partnership Agreement is paramount as how these doubles are being used and through what level. In addition understanding the opponent's system, asking or looking at their convention card is crucial as to whether a double is an appropriate call.**

**Player definitions in this article:**

- ♠ **Opener:** the first player to make a bid (specifying a denomination and number of tricks) regardless of position at the table; dealer is the first player to call; if he passes, he has called but not bid so he is not Opener.
- ♥ **Intervenor:** the Left-Hand-Opponent (LHO) of the Opener, also known as direct seat.
- ♦ **Responder:** the partner of Opener.
- ♣ **Advancer:** the partner of Intervenor or Right-Hand-Opponent (RHO) of Opener, also known as 4<sup>th</sup> seat or position.

A **DOUBLE** is **TAKEOUT** when:

- ♠ Opener has bid; and you, the Intervenor, have;
- ♠ Decision to make a **TAKEOUT DOUBLE** is based on:
  - ♥ The respective vulnerability.
  - ♥ The rank of the suit of the opener.
  - ♥ The position at the table.
  - ♥ Shape and distribution.
- ♠ A hand worth an opening bid and at least 3-card support in all the other unbid suits:
  - ♥ Have from a good 10 HCP to 16 HCP per partnership agreement and the proper shape:
    - ♦ No appropriate overcall, 5+-cards in a suit of your own.
    - ♦ Short (0-2 cards) in opponent's suit. Downgrade quacks (queens and jacks) in their bid suit.
    - ♦ Have support for the unbid major(s) and maybe for the other unbid suits.
    - ♦ No shortness in an unbid major. If possible, overcall instead, otherwise pass.
    - ♦ No void in an unbid suit. If possible, overcall instead, otherwise pass.
  - ♥ May be used with 17+ HCP with these conditions:
    - ♦ Have at least 17 HCP, a hand too good to overcall, and lacking stoppers in the bid suit to overcall 1N.
    - ♦ "Proper shape" is not required as in the regular takeout double; i.e. 3-cards may be held in the bid suit.
    - ♦ Announce this type of hand on next turn by bidding your own suit instead of normally supporting your partner's answering bid. Rebid is forcing.
- ♠ The suit bid is at the maximum-level agreed and noted on the convention card or lower, **AND** your partner has not yet made any bid.
- ♠ Responding to:
  - ♥ This is a forcing bid you must not pass the takeout double except as noted below, no matter how horrible your hand, except:
    - ♦ Very strong trump holding, general values, and no biddable suit converting the takeout double into a penalty double.
    - ♦ Pass should never be made on a weak hand that wants to be excused from bidding. It especially should not be

made on a weak hand with a handful of little trumps.

- ♥ Bids his longest unbid suit, or NT if a good hand. If having a 4-card unbid major and a 5-card unbid minor, bid the major suit first as you want to play preferably in a major than a minor.
- ♥ After interference:
  - ♦ Only bid with a 4 or 5-card suit and at least 4+ TP (total points)
  - ♦ If redoubled:
    - ♣ All bids are natural
    - ♣ Jump suit bids become preemptive, not strong, showing at least 5 cards and 0-8 points
- ♥ Showing strength:
  - ♦ Non-jump bid to show 0-7 TP (HCP [high card points] + DP [distributional points] as this is expected suit agreement) may be made with 3+ cards however usually 4+ cards.
  - ♦ Jump bid to show 4+ cards 8+ TP and is forcing.
  - ♦ Double jump to show 5+ cards 13+ TP and is forcing.
  - ♦ Cue bid to show 10+ TP, artificial and forcing; doubler's rebids are natural.
  - ♦ Notrump bids have opponent's suit well stopped and some outside strength, and no 4-card major
    - ♣ 1N shows 8-10 HCP
    - ♣ 2N shows 11-13 HCP
    - ♣ 3N shows 14+ HCP and signoff
- ♠ Double of weak 2-bids is takeout.
- ♠ Double is of 3- and 4-level opening preemptive bids:
  - ♥ Many players play these as takeout through 4♥ and some through 5♦, others **OPTIONAL DOUBLE** (see below).
  - ♥ If these are played as penalty, then they are **alertable**, following the rules when the alert is to be made.
    - ♦ Double of a bid lower than 3N, partner alerts when the double is made.
    - ♦ Double of a bid higher than 3N, the alert is delayed until the end of bidding.
- ♠ Double after previously bidding is never takeout, but penalty.

A **DOUBLE** is **NEGATIVE** when:

- ♠ An Intervenor has made a **suit** bid at the appropriate level, and Responder has no reasonable alternative bid.
- ♠ Negative doubles offer the advantage of assigning more specific meanings to free bids of new suits.
  - ♥ After an overcall, if Responder freely bids a new suit (instead of making a negative double), he promises at least a **5-card suit**. A new-suit free bid at the:
    - ♦ 1-level shows 7+ pts.;
    - ♦ 2-level or higher shows 10+ pts.
- ♠ When is the negative double "off"?
  - ♥ Responder holds a single 4-card major and the bidding has gone 1♣-1♦-?; with 6+ HCP Responder bids his 4-card major as if there was no intervening bid.
  - ♥ Partnerships decide at which levels of bidding negative doubles will apply. This agreement is to be noted on their convention card.
    - ♦ One popular agreement is that negative doubles are "on" if the overcall is through the level of 3♠, although some play through 5♦.
    - ♣ Thus Responder's double is for penalty if the overcall is higher than the agreed limit for a negative double.
- ♠ You, the Responder, need an appropriate strength **AND** a 4+card suit as defined below to double
  - ♥ An appropriate strength after the level of Intervenor's bid:
    - ♦ Extra playing strength is generally more important than HCP especially at higher levels.
    - ♦ 1-minor suit (m) or 1-Major suit (M), 7+ TP (high card points and distributional points).
    - ♦ 2m, 8+ TP
    - ♦ 2M, 9+ TP
    - ♦ 3m or 3M, 10+ TP
  - ♥ Card holding after the bid sequence has been
    - ♦ Minor suit – minor suit, **BOTH** unbid major suits have 4+ cards.
    - ♦ Minor suit – major suit, the other unbid major suit having 4+ cards.
    - ♦ Major suit – major suit, both of the minor suits have 4+ cards

♠ Opener's rebids

- ♥ Opener must make a rebid that describes both his strength and his support for the suit partner has shown with the double. In most cases, you'll bid your hand just as if partner had made a 1-bid in that suit:
  - ♦ With a **MINIMUM** opening (13-15 pts.), make your natural suit or notrump rebid at lowest level. If you have 4-card support for the suit partner has shown with the double, you should always show it.
  - ♦ With an **INVITATIONAL** hand (15-17 pts.), *jump one level* to show extra strength (1♣ by you - 1♥ overcall - DBL by partner - P - 2♠ by you).
  - ♦ With a **FORCING-TO-GAME** hand (18+ pts.), *jump to game*. (Or, if you're not sure of which game to play, *cuebid* the opponent's suit to force responder to tell you more about his hand.)

A **DOUBLE** is **RESPONSIVE** when:

- ♠ Intervenor has made a takeout double and Advancer wants to give Intervenor a choice of suits after Responder has raised Opener's suit.

- ♥ Considerations that Advancer addresses
  - ♦ Shape of his holding having scattered values with distribution.
  - ♦ Level of the auction
  - ♦ HCP, values, Losing Trick Count.
  - ♦ Partnership agreement

♥ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1♣ (1♦)	X	2♣ (2♦)*	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both majors
1♣ (1♦)	X	3♣ (3♦)*	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both majors
1♣ (1♦)	X	4♣ (4♦)*	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both majors
1♣ (1♦)	X	2♣ (2♦)*	2♥ / 2♠	shows 4+-card support in the bid major by advancer
1♣	X	2♣	2♦	shows 4+-card support in ♦'s by advancer
1♣ (1♦)	X	1N	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both majors
1♥ (1♠)	X	1N	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both minors
1♥ (1♠)	X	2♥ (2♠)	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both minors
1♥	X	2♥	2♠	shows 4+-card ♠ suit
2♦	X	3♦	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for both majors

\*Particularly what is the opponent's bid saying: force, invitational, or weak?

- ♠ Intervenor has overcalled a suit and Advancer wants to give Intervenor a choice of the other two suits after Responder has raised partner suit.

♥ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1♣ (1♦)	1♥ / 1♠	2♣ (2♦)	X	<b>Responsive</b> showing 4-card support for the unbid suits

- ♠ Strength of Advancer's hand for the level of next bid by the Intervenor:

- ♥ 2-level            5+ TP
- ♥ 3-level            10+ TP
- ♥ 4-level            12+ TP

- ♠ The following doubles are generally **not** considered to be **Responsive**.

- ♥ Intervenor has made a takeout double and Responder has bid a new suit, then Advancer's double.

♦ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1♣ / 1♦	X	1♥ / 1♠	X	Not <b>Responsive</b> but showing 4-cards in Responder's bid suit since Intervenor has promised the majors.

- ♥ Intervenor has made a jump overcall and Responder has raised Opener's suit, then Advancer's double.

♦ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1♣ / 1♦	2♦ / 2♥ / 2♠	3♣ / 3♦	X	Not <b>Responsive</b> but Penalty

- ♥ Opener makes a pre-emptive bid 2+-level, Intervenor has made a takeout double, and Responder raises Opener's suit, then Advancer's double.

♦ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
Weak-2	X	3-level of suit	X	Not <b>Responsive</b> but Penalty

- ♥ Opener makes a 1-level bid, Intervenor bids 1N, and Responder bids a suit, then Advancer's double.

♦ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1-level suit	1N	2-level of suit	X	Not <b>Responsive</b> but Penalty

♠ The upper limit is to be noted on the convention card; most players use this through 4♦.

A **DOUBLE** is **Maximal** when:

- ♠ A game try suit is not available, so the **maximal double** becomes the game try.
- ♠ This double is made by the one originally opening the suit, overcalling the suit, or having made a takeout double which implied the suit.
- ♠ The suit is the higher ranking of touching suits: spades over hearts, hearts over diamonds.
- ♠ The opponents have raised to the 3-level.
- ♠ We have bid and raised our suit.
- ♠ We have not established a game force.
- ♠ Some examples

♥	Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer	
	1♠	2♥	2♠	3♥	
	X				invites game
	3♠				competitive

♥	Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer	
	1♦	1♥	2♦	2♥	
	3♦	X			invites game
		3♥			competitive

♥	Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer	
	1♥	X	2♥	2♠	
	3♥	X			invites game
		4♠			competitive

A **DOUBLE** is **Support** and **alertable** when:

♠ Used only by Opener when the following situations have occurred:

♥	Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
	1♣ / 1♦	Pass	1♥	1♠	
	<b>Double</b>				shows 3-card support for responder's suit
	2♥				shows 4-card support for responder's suit

♥	Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
	1♣ / 1♦	Pass	1♥ / 1♠	double (takeout)	
	<b>Redouble</b>				shows 3-card support for responder's suit
	2♥ / 2♠				shows 4-card support for responder's suit

♥	Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
	1♣ / 1♦	Pass	1♥ / 1♠	1N	
	<b>Double</b>				shows 3-card support for responder's suit
	2♥ / 2♠				shows 4-card support for responder's suit

♠ Opener's second call:

- ♥ These **Doubles** are termed **Support Doubles**.
- ♥ Two of Responder's suit shows 4-card suit support, so they have at least a 4-4 fit or better.
- ♥ After 1N whether a "Sandwich 1N" (distributional hand with the unbid suits) or a natural 1N most players maintain this **double** as a **Support Double** for simplicity and consistency knowing they will occasionally miss a good penalty.
- ♥ Shows only length of card support (3-cards) and nothing about strength of Opener's hand.
- ♥ If Opener has a strong hand 17+ TP,
  - ♦ With 3-card support doubles first as this is priority and shows strength later.
  - ♦ With 4-card support bids game or other forcing bid.

♠ These are in red on the convention card and thus all of Opener's possible calls are **alertable**.

♠ The upper limit is to be noted on the convention card; most players use this through 2♠.

♠ Advantage gives clarity to the holdings: knowing a 4-4 fit or a 4-3 fit for further bidding.

♠ Generally not used when responder has bid the other minor as 1♣--P--1♦--1♥ / 1♠.

A **DOUBLE** is **BALANCING** when:

♠ You are in the balancing position when, if you pass, the auction is over and the opponents have stopped bidding at a

low level indicating that the HCP are about equally divided between the two sides, 20-23 to 17-20.

♠ When to take action in this position?

♥ Best:

- ♦ The opponent's have stopped at a 1- or 2-level suit contract, establishing trumps.
- ♦ You're short in the opponent's suit.
- ♦ You have length and high-card strength in the other three suits.
- ♦ You have a good 5-card or longer suit.
- ♦ You're not vulnerable (if you can't make your bid, the penalty will be lower, and may be even less than the score you would have lost if you had defended the one-bid).

♥ Worst:

- ♦ You have a very weak hand (fewer than 8 pts.) and/or a weak suit.
- ♦ You have a strong holding in their suit.
- ♦ You suspect they have a better contract available.
- ♦ Your honor cards are in the opponents' suits (especially the suit bid on your left).
- ♦ The opponents haven't found a good trump fit (they've stopped in INT or the auction suggests a misfit).
- ♦ You're vulnerable. If you can't make your bid, the penalty may be more than their contract value.

♠ Typical balancing situations:

♥ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1 of suit	Pass	Pass	?	Should you bid or pass?
♥ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1 of suit	Pass	2 of same suit	Pass	
Pass	?			Should you bid or pass?

♠ What is needed to make a **Balancing Double**:

- ♥ The requirement is less than in the direct seat after the opener, the Intervenor, in the above situations.
- ♥ Since partner could not bid, he may have a decent hand but not suitable for direct action, so the common practice is for the player in the balancing position is to add 3 HCP to his holding, i.e. overbid by 3 HCP so that the hand value is now like that for a direct seat bid or double.
  - ♦ Bidder continues bidding as if he has the overbid values.
  - ♦ Partner of bidder deducts 3 HCP from his hand in subsequent bids, such that an 8-10 HCP would warrant a jump bid after a takeout double must now be treated as 5-7 HCP and only a minimum bid is warranted.
  - ♦ Partner may convert to penalty if he has strong trumps over bidder.
- ♥ With shortness in the bid suit and support for the other three suits, it is prudent to double asking partner to select a suit which doubler will pass with less than a strong hand.
- ♥ With strong hands 17+, you need to double first and then bid you suit over whatever partner responds; otherwise you are showing a weaker hand if you overcall.

A **DOUBLE** is **OPTIONAL** when:

♠ Double is of 3- and 4-level preemptive bids:

- ♥ Partner has the option or passing for penalty depending:
  - ♦ Pass decision says that our score will be higher via penalty.
  - ♦ Bid decision says that our score will be higher if we compete.
- ♥ Hand strength for double
  - ♦ 16+ HCP with 3.5+ Quick Tricks
  - ♦ Balance or semi-balanced
    - ♣ After minor suit bid, 3-4 in the majors
    - ♣ After major suit bid, 4-4-3 with the second major protected

♥ Some examples:

Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
● 3/4♣ (3/4♦)	X	Pass	?	Should you bid or pass?
● 3/4♣ (3/4♦)	Pass	Pass	X	
Pass	?			Should you bid or pass?
● 3/4♥ (3/4♠)	X	Pass	?	Should you bid or pass?
● 1♣ (1♦)	Pass	4♥ (4♠)	X	

	Pass	?		Should you bid or pass?
♠ A Double after both partners have passed is not an Optional, but Penalty:				
♥ Opener	Intervenor	Responder	Advancer.	
1♣ (1♦)	Pass	4♥ (4♠)	Pass	
Pass	X			Penalty

A **DOUBLE** is **PENALTY - LEAD DIRECTING** when:

- ♠ It's a double of an artificial bid.
- ♠ Your partner is on lead and you have doubled a 3N contract:
  - ♥ You have the suit length and controls to regain the lead to run suit you want led.
  - ♥ Asks for lead of Dummy's suit
  - ♥ Asks for lead of your suit if you have bid.
- ♠ Your partner is on lead and you have doubled a **voluntary** slam contract:
  - ♥ A double of a slam asks for an unusual lead.
  - ♥ If neither you nor your partner has bid,
    - ♦ Lead the non-trump suit bid by either opponent, as partner is expected to be void.
    - ♦ If opponents have bid two non-trump suits, generally lead the longest of these suits.
    - ♦ If opponents have not bid any non-trump suits, generally lead the longest of your suits.
  - ♥ If you have bid, your double asks partner not to lead your suit.
  - ♥ This double is also known as a Lightner Double.
- ♠ Your partner is on lead and you have doubled a **sacrifice** slam contract:
  - ♥ This double does not ask for any specific lead.
- ♠ Generally lead directing doubles are not made against suit contracts.

A **DOUBLE** is **PENALTY** when:

- ♠ A direct double of a natural notrump bid,
  - ♥ Made in direct seat or Intervenor as he is over the bidder.
    - ♦ The Capelletti convention for interfering with natural notrumps uses the double as penalty and suit bids announcing specific suit holdings.
      - ♣ Some play this only over weak 1N opening or in direct seat of strong nontrump openings.
  - ♥ Rarely should be made in 4<sup>th</sup> seat or Advancer, since he is under the bidder and leads will be going through this position of strength.
    - ♦ The D.O.N.T. (Disturbing the Opponents No Trump) eliminates this possibility as a double announces an unspecified long suit and other suit bids announcing specific suit holdings.
      - ♣ Some play this over 15-17 opening 1N in all seats.
      - ♣ Some play Capelletti in direct seat, and this in 4<sup>th</sup> seat.
- ♠ A natural notrump has been bid earlier in the auction.
- ♠ An earlier penalty double (or a penalty pass of a takeout double).
- ♠ A card-showing double or redouble has been called earlier.
  - ♥ The card-showing doubles are negative, responsive, support as they indicate a specific length in one or more suits.
- ♠ An earlier lead-directing double of an artificial bid has been made.
- ♠ Opponent overcalls or balances and we have an established a fit and we are not playing support doubles through an agreed to level (see above).
- ♠ It's made late in the auction and provided it does not have a specific meaning via a convention after interference.
  - ♥ Interference is slam bidding after Gerber or Blackwood whether standard are keycard:
    - ♦ DOPI means double with none and pass with one of the appropriate response.
    - ♦ DEPO means double with even number and pass with odd number of the appropriate response.
- ♠ The doubler's partner has accurately described his strength and distribution.
- ♠ When in doubt:
  - ♥ Default #1: if the double is *over* the bidder, i.e. your RHO, it's penalty. If it's *under* the bidder, i.e. your LHO, it's takeout.
  - ♥ Default #2: A double is penalty if the doubler had an earlier opportunity to describe his strength and distribution.
  - ♥ Default #3: A double is penalty if the doubler had a good alternative.