

BIDDING 16 - OVERCALLS

Why do we overcall?

- (1) To compete and possibly win the contract,
- (2) To get in the way of the opposition bidding, and
- (3) To suggest a lead to partner if we end up defending.

I generally play my overcalls within this structure in club bridge:

Overcall = 8-15 high card pts, 5+ suit

X and bid a suit = 16+ high card pts, 5+ suit

1NT = 16-18 with a stop in the opposition suit.

However, if the suit is very good quality, I will overcall at the 1 level on a 4 card suit. I would invariably overcall on AKQx as it points out a great lead to partner if we end up defending, and we are unlikely to come to too much grief if partner jumps about the place. I will normally overcall with AKxx, but this is a much riskier proposition (think partner propelling you to game with xxx in support....).

Requirements for a 1 level overcall:

Contrary to popular belief, you do not need any honours in the suit to overcall at the one level, particularly in a major, particularly in spades. Two of the purposes of overcalls are to steal the contract, or to get in the way of the opposition bidding. Majors (particularly spades) do this far more effectively than minors. I would unhesitatingly overcall 1S on this hand:

♠ 65432 ♥ AK3 ♦ Q98 ♣ 42

The only time I am a little more careful is if we are vulnerable and partner is a passed hand. With a diamond overcall, my suit quality is generally of the type that can stand a lead from partner as the overcall rarely gets in the way of the opponents.

Requirements for a 2 level overcall:

Things are different at the 2 level. It is much easier for the opposition to double you.

Suit Quality Requirement: 2 of the top 4 honours to 6, or 3 honours to 5. 10 counts as an honour if there are 2 higher honours. Suits of this sort of quality:

AQJxx

KQxxxx

Hand Strength Requirement: Not much less than an opening hand/10+pts. Generally shouldn't be a "weak NT" opening (12-14 flattish).

You can be a little more relaxed with suit quality if non-vulnerable or with stronger hands.

Examples:

Your right hand opponent opens 1D. What do you do with these hands?

♠ 987 ♥ AKQ2 ♦ 74 ♣ 5432

1H. The suit is of terrific quality and you are unlikely to get into too much trouble if partner jumps about the place.

♠ AKQ843 ♥ AK4 ♦ 9 ♣ Q98

X and bid spades next. This hand is too good for an overcall.

♠ 76543 ♥ QJ8 ♦ AQ ♣ 1098

1S unless vulnerable opposite a passed partner. Don't mind the quality of the suit, get in there and compete.

♠ A43 ♥ QJ8 ♦ K5 ♣ 98765

Pass. You don't have enough to takeout double and your club suit is poor quality.

♠ AK8765 ♥ Q54 ♦ 98 ♣ 43

2S. Always try to make the most descriptive bid which tells partner the most. Your weak 2S tells partner you have exactly 6 spades (and overcall is 5+) and you are limited to 6-9pts (an overcall could be stronger).

♠ A76 ♥ 7 ♦ 732 ♣ AQJ654

2C. Your suit is good quality and you have 11 points.

♠ AK ♥ A109 ♦ 96 ♣ K109876

2C. Your suit doesn't pass the suit quality test, but you have extra strength and your club pips are good.

♠ AK43 ♥ 1098 ♦ 8 ♣ AK9876

X. Give yourself every opportunity to play in a major fit as it is worth more than the minors.