

Doubles

A double is a very useful call in a competitive auction, with a number of different meanings, depending of the bidding until then.

Take-out Doubles:

If the opposition open the bidding and you or your partner doubles, this will generally be a take-out bid, asking for their partner to bid another suit, and the level of the response will depend on the strength of the responder's hand. The doubler should generally have at least 3 cards in every other suit (at least 4-4 if there are only 2 other suits) and an opening hand, a good 5+ outside suit and 16+ HCPs (bid your suit over partner's response), or a hand too strong to overcall 1NT initially such as 18-19HCPs (bid NTs over partner's response unless you strongly raise the response). Typical responses are as follows:

Non-jump response will tend to show the suit bid and 0-7 HCPs, unless the RHO makes a bid and then it will be a free-bid and show 5-7 HCPs.

- Jump response shows 4+ cards in the suit bid and 8-10 HCPs.
- Double-jump response shows 5+ in the suit bid and is forcing to game.
- Cue-bid shows 11+ and asks opener to describe their hand, and will generally show at least one 4-card major, both if the opened suit was a minor.
- 1NT shows 7-10-, a stopper in the opened suit and generally no outside major suit.
- 2NT shows 10+ -12, a stopper in the opened suit and generally no outside major suit.
- 3NT shows 13+, a stopper in the opened suit and generally no outside major suit.

An exception to the above definition of a hand suitable for a take-out double occurs when the opponents are using transfer responses to a 1C opening. Then double shows the suit bid as a transfer, and cue-bidding the suit shown by the transfer is for take-out.

Negative Doubles:

Negative doubles generally apply when your partner opens the bidding, the next hand overcalls a suit, and it is your turn to call. If you double you are generally showing the other two suits, and if a major has already been bid you are definitely showing the other major. If you could have bid this major at the 1-level, you are showing exactly 4 cards by the double, but if spades were overcalled, you have either only 4 hearts, or less than the required 10 HCPs to freely bid 2H.

The more interesting auction occurs after partner opens 1C and your RHO overcalls 1D. If you now double, you are showing at least 4-4 in the majors, and maybe even 5-4 either way. Conversely if you respond 1H or 1S, you are showing a minimum of a 4-card suit and denying the other major. An exception would be if you hold 6-4 in the majors, it is generally better to bid the 6-card suit first, especially if it is hearts and you are strong, as you can reverse with spades later.

Support Doubles:

Support doubles are made by opener after partner responds in a major suit, RHO overcalls, and you have 3-card support. A direct raise shows 4-card support, so a double after the overcall shows 3-card support, and any other call denies even 3-card support. If RHO doubles rather than overcalls, then redouble shows the 3-card support for partner.

Balancing Doubles

If partner opens the bidding and your RHO overcalls in a suit that you are strong in, you cannot double for penalties, but you can either bid some level of Notrumps, or pass and wait for partner to reopen with a balancing double, in which case you can pass for penalties. This does not always work as some hands that partner can have are not suitable for a double, eg a shapely 2-suiter. However if partner has a shortage in the suit overcalled and support for the other suits they should strain to double.

Lead Directional Doubles

If the opponents bid a suit as a transfer or as a response to an Ace-asking bid, the next player to bid can double this to suggest a lead for partner when the final contract is known. At a low level this double shows length and strength in the suit and suggests a possible sacrifice. At a higher level it is merely suggesting a safe lead.

Lightner Doubles

If the opponents get to a slam and the partner not on lead doubles, this is generally asking for a lead of the first suit bid by the dummy. If dummy did not bid a suit, lead your weakest suit, but generally do not lead a suit that you and/or your partner has bid unless the slam is a sacrifice.

Double of a freely bid 3NT

If the partner not on lead doubles the final contract of 3NT this can mean many things, but a common meaning is asking the partner on lead to lead a Spade.

Passing the Take-out Double

It is rare for responder to pass when their partner makes a take-out double. This is because the trumps stacked against declarer are covered by declarer's trumps and thus they need to be stronger to overcome the position. If the double is passed out, unless the doubler has a strong lead of their own or a void in trumps, it is normal to lead a trump to facilitate the drawing of declarer's trumps.

It is more common for a balancing double to be passed out. This is because the trumps stacked against declarer are sitting over them having maximum effect, especially if the doubler is able to lead a trump through declarer. It can be frustrating if you are sitting over the over-caller waiting for the double and it does not come! At least if partner bids another suit or rebids their first suit you can retreat into NT for a reasonable score, but if they pass the chance is lost. The motto is: If an overcall is passed back to you, make every effort to reopen with a double as it is likely partner is waiting to pass for penalties.