



Take-Out Doubles

Part 1

Double of a one-level suit bid is for take-out and, unlike an overcall, shows at least the values of an opening bid. The perfect shape for a take-out double of 1♥ is shown by Hand A or B, where you have four-card support for whichever suit partner chooses. These hands also demonstrate the minimum point count expected if you have perfect shape.

The less suitable the shape, the more points you need. The lack of a fourth spade in Hand C is regrettable but with 13 points a double of 1♥ is justified. With a 4-3-3-3 hand with 16 points you may have to double if you have no stopper in their suit.

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ Q 10 7 6	♠ Q 10 7 6	♠ Q 10 7
♥ 5	♥ Void	♥ 3 2
♦ A Q 4 3	♦ A Q 4 3	♦ A Q J 6
♣ K 9 7 6	♣ K 9 7 6 5	♣ K J 8 2

Hands D and E form an interesting contrast. Should you double 1♥ or bid your five-card suit?

Hand D	Hand E
♠ K J 8	♠ Q 9 7 6 5
♥ 3	♥ 3
♦ A Q J 6	♦ A Q J 6
♣ Q 9 7 6 5	♣ K J 8

You should double with Hand D, and ask partner to choose the suit. You might miss a 5-3 club fit, but if you bid 2♣ with this ropery suit you may well miss a far better fit in diamonds or spades.

Hand E is very different. Your five-card suit is a major and can be bid at the one level. There is an important piece of theory here. Compare Auctions F and G which look at a very likely development of the auction.

Auction F				
West	North	East	South	
1♥	1♠	2♥	Pass	
Pass	Dbl	Pass	2♣	

Auction G				
West	North	East	South	
1♥	Dbl	2♥	Pass	

Whether you start with a 1♠ overcall or a take-out double, if the auction returns to you with your opponents in 2♥ you do not want to sell out. They have a fit in hearts so you almost certainly have a fit somewhere, and you want to find it. Partner must have some points, otherwise why are opponents passing out 2♥? You can make a take-out double on the second round with Auction F without promising extra values. However, you cannot proceed with 2♣ (Auction G) without showing a very strong hand, as I will explain in the next section. If you start with a double you end up not bidding your spades and you are very likely to miss a 5-3 spade fit. This explains why, when given a choice, experts prefer to overcall a major at the one level rather than make a take-out double. Note also a method of thinking that distinguishes experts from the rest. The club player considers what he should bid now. The expert weighs up alternatives by considering how the auction might develop and how his choice now affects his future options.

Take-out doubles without support for all the other suits

The point about a take-out double is that you are asking partner to choose. Suppose you do this and then overrule partner?

If you ask your partner to choose the denomination with a take-out double and then overrule him you are showing a very strong hand.

Hand H	Hand J	Hand K
♠ K Q 10 9 6	♠ A 4 3	♠ A Q J 7 6 3
♥ A 9 2	♥ A Q 9	♥ 7
♦ A Q	♦ A K J 9	♦ K Q 2
♣ A 9 7	♣ Q 10 9	♣ A K J

Auction L				
West	North	East	South	
1♣	Dbl	Pass	1♦	
Pass	1♠/1NT/2♠			

With Hand H, you double and then bid spades at the lowest level, showing at least five good spades and more than the 16 points that is the maximum of a 1♠ overcall.

With Hand J, you double and then bid no-trumps at the lowest level, showing more than the 18 points that is the maximum of a 1NT overcall. 1NT after the double shows 19-21 points.

With Hand K, you double and then bid spades with a jump, showing at least six good spades and more than the 16 points that is the maximum of a strong 2♠ overcall.

I would comment that for some

pairs there are sequences where double followed by a change of suit shows the other two suits when the change is at the same level. It is called 'Equal Level Conversion'. It is beyond the scope of this article and I would comment that if you look it up and decide you like it you must decide how you deal with stronger single suited hands.

Responding to a take-out double

If partner asks you to pick a suit you cannot opt out because you are weak. Suppose partner doubles 1♦ and the next hand passes.

Hand M	Hand N	Hand P
♠ 8 7 6 2	♠ 8 7 6	♠ K J 7 6
♥ 7 5 4	♥ 7 5 4	♥ 8 6 3
♦ 8 5 4	♦ 8 5 4 2	♦ A 7 6
♣ 10 7 5	♣ 10 7 5	♣ 10 7 5

With Hand M you must bid 1♠. No points is not an excuse for passing. If you think otherwise just look up the score for 1♦ doubled, making with four overtricks.

Hand N is a nightmare. You just have to bid 1♥ and hope. Some eminent older authorities used to argue that 2♣ was better because 1♥ would excite partner too much. I can see no sensible reason to push the bidding to the two level unnecessarily with this rubbish.

Hand P is a maximum for a 1♣ response.

Hand Q	Hand R	Hand S
♠ K J 7 6	♠ A Q 8 7 6	♠ K J 7 6
♥ 8 6 3	♥ 8 7	♥ Q 10 7 4
♦ A 7 5	♦ 7 5	♦ 9 8 3
♣ Q 7 6	♣ Q 10 7 5	♣ K 6

Hand Q is worth 2♠: roughly 9-11 points. Hand R is also worth 2♠. It has only eight points but good shape. (If South has more than eight points, he needs to jump to 2♠, jump to 3♠ with 9-11 points and 4♠ with 12+ points.)

With Hand S, you have a promising nine points and bearing in mind partner could be 4-3 in the major suits you would really like him to choose a

major. I would bid 2♦, a cue bid of your opponents' suit. Traditionally this was played as game forcing but nowadays most experts just stipulate that you promise another bid. The auction might develop with Auction T:

Auction T			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥ ¹	Pass	3♥ ²
Pass	4♥ ³		

¹North has four hearts. He might also have four spades. He is not necessarily minimum. He will keep the bidding low because you cannot pass 2♥.

²3♥ is a courtesy raise, showing about 9-11 points. North can pass this.

³North is not minimum.

Hand U	Hand V	Hand W
♠ 6 3	♠ 10 5	♠ 10 8
♥ A 5 4	♥ 7 3 2	♥ 7 3 2
♦ K 10 9 6	♦ A K 4 3 2	♦ K Q J 10 8 6
♣ J 6 4 3	♣ 7 5 4	♣ 7 5

Partner's double of 1♦ asks you to pick a suit but maybe you have good values in diamonds.

With Hand U bid 1NT, showing 6-9 points. You certainly need at least one diamond stopper and two is preferable because your stopper is likely to get knocked out quickly and it is highly likely that the 1♦ opening bidder will regain the lead. 2NT would show 10-12 points and 3NT 13-15 points. If you swap round the black suits you would have a close choice between 1♠ and 1NT. I would choose 1NT. The spades are poor and 1NT accurately shows my diamond stoppers and point count.

With Hand V 1NT is also best. Your diamonds may look good to you but they are not good enough to pass 1♦. In 1♦ doubled your ♦A-K will certainly take tricks but your opponents will use their better intermediate diamonds to draw your other diamonds. Your correct response is 1NT.

Your diamonds need to be truly outstanding to pass 1♦ doubled, as in Hand W. If you pass 1♦ doubled you are asking partner to lead a trump if he has one so that you can start drawing trumps. For that you need excellent

intermediates in diamonds, not just top cards.

Making a Free Bid

Your partner's double of 1♦ virtually forces you to bid unless your diamonds are very strong indeed. However, this isn't a ritual. The reasons you have to bid on Hands M and N is that whatever the problems you might face as a result of entering the auction on this rubbish, it is likely to be considerably cheaper than allowing 1♦ doubled with multiple overtricks. Look at Auction X. East has bid 2♦ so 1♦ doubled with overtricks is no longer a threat. If South has nothing to say, he is permitted to pass. 2♠ here is called a **Free Bid** and shows roughly 5-8 points.

Auction X			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	2♦	2♠

South could have Hand Y, and although it may offend the purists, in my opinion he could also have Hand Z.

Hand Y	Hand Z
♠ K 10 6 5	♠ K 10 8 5 4
♥ 7 5	♥ 7 5
♦ 9 8 7	♦ 9 8 7
♣ Q 10 6 3	♣ 6 5 3

To justify my desire to bid 2♠ with Hand Z, I would refer you back to my first article in this series, on overcalls. I started by explaining an essential principle of the competitive auction, namely that you should try to **bid to the level of the fit**. You certainly have an eight-card spade fit here and quite likely a nine-card fit, and if you have a nine-card fit, your opponents are also likely to have a nine-card fit. It is quite possible that your opponents can make 3♦, and you can make 3♠. I would suggest that the principle of bidding to the level of the fit should take priority over adhering to any particular point count. And I wouldn't let adverse vulnerability deter me. Look at the layout on the next page. If you pass, the auction might well continue as in Auction X2.

Do you really expect partner to compete further if you pass? He has shown his hand with his take-out double. Yet you easily make 3♠, while 3♦ makes (with an overtrick) for your opponents. I suppose you could protect with 3♣ over 3♦, but it is much more dangerous now.

♠ Q J 3 2
♥ A 8 6 3
♦ 3
♣ A Q 9 2

♠ A
♥ Q J 4 2
♦ A Q J 6 2
♣ K J 4

♠ 9 7 6
♥ K 10 9
♦ K 10 5 4
♣ 10 8 7

♠ K 10 8 5 4
♥ 7 5
♦ 9 8 7
♣ 6 5 3

Layout A

Auction X2

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♦	All Pass

When should the doubler raise his partner's choice of suit?

You have asked partner to choose a suit with a double. Partner has done so. You are happy with his choice. Is that sufficient or might you still want to make a game try?

In Auction B, West must be aware that East's 1♠ is forced, he could have no points.

There is a nice rule of thumb here.

When deciding whether to bid on, West decides the level to which he would have supported East if West had opened the bidding in another suit and East had freely responded in an uncontested auction. He should bid one fewer.

♠ K J 9 6
♥ 7
♦ A J 8 3
♣ A K 6 2

♠ Q 10 4 3
♥ A 8 4
♦ Q 7
♣ 8 5 4 3

Layout A

Auction B

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Dbl	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♠	

In Layout A West reasons that if he had opened 1♦ and East had responded 1♠ West's rebid would have been 3♠, hence in Auction B he raises to 2♠. East recognises West's game try. He is maximum for 1♠ so he bids game.

Auction C

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Dbl	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	

♠ K J 9 6
♥ 7
♦ A K J 3
♣ A Q 6 2

♠ Q 10 4 3
♥ 9 8 4
♦ Q 7
♣ 8 5 4 3

Layout D

In Layout D West would have raised a 1♠ response to 4♠ (or made a splinter bid of 4♥) so he is worth 3♠ in Auction C. This might seem cautious but how easy is it going to be to make ten tricks if there are no entries to East to take finesses? East should appreciate his partner's strong bidding. Two queens might not seem much but they are entries as well as tricks so 4♠ is clearcut.

The balance changes if opponents compete further.

Auction E

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Dbl	Pass	1♠	2♥
2♠			

♠ K 9 6 2
♥ 7
♦ A 10 9 3
♣ A Q 6 2

♠ Q 10 4 3
♥ 9 8 4
♦ Q 7
♣ J 5 4 3

Layout F

In Layout F West would have preferred to pass 1♠, but now that South has competed with 2♥, bidding to the level of the fit becomes appropriate as in Auction E. ■

Take-Out Doubles Part I Quiz

by *Andrew Kambites*

1. At love all what should South call with these hands if East opens 1♥?

If you choose to double what will be your next bid if partner responds 1♠ to your double?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ K J 7	♠ K J 7 4	♠ K Q 10 6
♥ Q 4	♥ 4	♥ 4
♦ A Q 6 5	♦ A Q 6 5	♦ A K J 8
♣ 8 4 3 2	♣ Q 4 3 2	♣ A K 7 6

Hand D	Hand E	Hand F
♠ K Q J 7 6	♠ K 5 4 3	♠ A Q J 7 6
♥ 8	♥ 8	♥ 8 3 2
♦ A 9 8	♦ A 9 8	♦ K J 8
♣ K 5 4 3	♣ K Q 8 7 6	♣ A 6

Hand G	Hand H	Hand J
♠ A Q J 7 6	♠ K J 7	♠ K J 7
♥ A 3 2	♥ A 9 4	♥ A K 4
♦ K J 8	♦ A K J 4	♦ A K J 4
♣ A 6	♣ Q 6 5	♣ Q 6 5

2. At love all how should South respond to North's take-out double with these hands after Auctions (i) and (ii)?

Auction (i)

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	?

Auction (ii)

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	1♥	?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ 9 7	♠ 9 7	♠ 9 6 5
♥ 5 3 2	♥ 5 3 2	♥ Q 3
♦ K 10 9 5 2	♦ K 10 9 4 2	♦ K Q J 10 9
♣ 10 7 6	♣ A 8 6	♣ A 8 6

Hand D Hand E Hand F

♠ K 7 6 2	♠ K Q 7 6 2	♠ K 7
♥ K Q 5	♥ A 8 5	♥ K Q 6 5
♦ 9 4 3	♦ 10 4 3	♦ 8 5 4 3
♣ 6 3 2	♣ 6 3	♣ Q 10 9

3. With N/S vulnerable how should North continue with these hands?

West	North	East	South
1♥	Dbl	Pass	1♠
Pass	?		

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ K J 7	♠ K J 7 2	♠ K J 7 2
♥ 6 2	♥ 6	♥ 6 2
♦ A Q 8 7	♦ A J 8 7	♦ A K Q 7
♣ K J 7 6	♣ A K 6 5	♣ A K 6

4. With E/W vulnerable how should South continue with these hands after Auctions (i) and (ii)?

Auction (i)

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	?

Auction (ii)

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ K 8	♠ 9 4 3	♠ 9 4 3
♥ K J 6 4 3	♥ 8 6 4 3	♥ A 7 5 4
♦ 6 4 3	♦ K J 5 3	♦ A 10 9 3
♣ 9 3 2	♣ 9 3	♣ 9 3

Answers to Take-Out Doubles Part 1 Quiz

1. At love all what should South call with these hands if East opens 1♥? If you choose to double what will be your next bid if partner responds 1♠ to your double?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ K J 7	♠ K J 7 4	♠ K Q 10 6
♥ Q 4	♥ 4	♥ 4
♦ A Q 6 5	♦ A Q 6 5	♦ A K J 8
♣ 8 4 3 2	♣ Q 4 3 2	♣ A K 7 6

Hand D	Hand E	Hand F
♠ K Q J 7 6	♠ K 5 4 3	♠ A Q J 7 6
♥ 8	♥ 8	♥ 8 3 2
♦ A 9 8	♦ A 9 8	♦ K J 8
♣ K 5 4 3	♣ K Q 8 7 6	♣ A 6

Hand G	Hand H	Hand J
♠ A Q J 7 6	♠ K J 7	♠ K J 7
♥ A 3 2	♥ A 9 4	♥ A K 4
♦ K J 8	♦ A K J 4	♦ A K J 4
♣ A 6	♣ Q 6 5	♣ Q 6 5

Hand A Pass. 12 points but the ♥Q is not really worth two points.

Hand B Dbl. Pass 1♠.

Hand C Dbl. There is no upper limit on a double. Raise 1♠ to 4♣.

Hand D 1♠. Show your five-card major. If opponents bid to 2♥ you can make a take-out double. If you double and then bid spades you are showing a very strong hand.

Hand E Dbl. You can afford to lose a 5-3 club fit. Pass 1♠.

Hand F 1♠. A maximum 1♠ overall.

Hand G Dbl. Intending to bid spades next. If partner bids 1♠ raise to 3♠.

Hand H 1NT. 15-18 points and at least one heart stopper.

Hand J Dbl. You are too strong for 1NT. Continue with 1NT over 1♠.

2. At love all how should South respond to North's take-out double with these hands after Auctions (i) and (ii)?

Auction (i)			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	?
Auction (ii)			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	1♥	?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ 9 7	♠ 9 7	♠ 9 6 5
♥ 5 3 2	♥ 5 3 2	♥ Q 3
♦ K 10 9 5 2	♦ K 10 9 4 2	♦ K Q J 10 9
♣ 10 7 6	♣ A 8 6	♣ A 8 6

Hand D	Hand E	Hand F
♠ K 7 6 2	♠ K Q 7 6 2	♠ K 7
♥ K Q 5	♥ A 8 5	♥ K Q 6 5
♦ 9 4 3	♦ 10 4 3	♦ 8 5 4 3
♣ 6 3 2	♣ 6 3	♣ Q 10 9

In Auction (i) South must bid unless he has truly excellent diamonds.

In Auction (ii) South can pass so any bid is a free bid.

Hand A (i) 1♥. Horrible, but not strong enough for 1NT.

(ii) Pass.

Hand B (i) 1NT. 6-9 points.

(ii) 1NT. Rely on partner to stop the hearts.

Hand C (i) Pass. Partner will lead a trump.

(ii) 2NT.

Hand D (i) 1♠.

(ii) 1♠.

Hand E (i) 2♠.

(ii) 2♠.

Hand F (i) 2♥.

(ii) Dbl. Although you do not expect your double to end the auction, this is a penalty double of a suit. As a penalty double of a suit contract below 3NT, it should be alerted.

3. With N/S vulnerable how should North continue with these hands?

West	North	East	South
1♥	Dbl	Pass	1♠
Pass	?		

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ K J 7	♠ K J 7 2	♠ K J 7 2
♥ 6 2	♥ 6	♥ 6 2
♦ A Q 8 7	♦ A J 8 7	♦ A K Q 7
♣ K J 7 6	♣ A K 6 5	♣ A K 6

Hand A Pass.

Hand B 2♠. You would have raised to 3♠ if South had responded 1♠ in an uncontested auction.

Hand C 3♠. Partner will raise to 4♠ unless completely useless. If he has nothing he will have no entries to hand to take finesses, so 3♠ is enough.

4. With E/W vulnerable how should South continue with these hands after Auctions (i) and (ii)?

Auction (i)			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	?
Auction (ii)			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Pass	1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
♠ K 8	♠ 9 4 3	♠ 9 4 3
♥ K J 6 4 3	♥ 8 6 4 3	♥ A 7 5 4
♦ 6 4 3	♦ K J 5 3	♦ A 10 9 3
♣ 9 3 2	♣ 9 3	♣ 9 3

In Auction (i) North would have raised to 3♥ if South had responded 1♥ in an uncontested auction. In Auction (ii) North has 19-21 points, too strong for 1NT over 1♦.

Hand A (i) 4♥.

(ii) 3♥. Showing five. Forcing. 2♦ would not promise five hearts. 3NT is a reasonable alternative.

Hand B (i) Pass.

(ii) Pass.

Hand C (i) 3NT. North will correct to 4♥ provided he has four.

(ii) 3NT. ■