

Reopening Double for Takeout/Penalty when playing the Negative Double

If you do not play the Negative Double, then a double of an opponent's overcall of your partner's opening suit bid is for penalties. However, if you play the Negative Double, a double of an opponent's overcall of partner's opening suit bid is for takeout.

So, if partner's opening suit bid is overcalled and you have a hand suitable for a penalty double, you cannot do so because partner will assume that your double is a Negative Double. You must pass, and partner should be prepared to double with the right type of hand if your LHO passes, offering you the choice of passing for penalty or bidding one of the two unbid suits. Your LHO has not supported his partner's spades so has fewer than three spades. He has not bid at all, so LHO is weak. You have not bid either, and RHO has not doubled or cue bid or made a jump overcall or bid 1NT, so can't be that strong.

If partner has shortage (0-2 cards) in the overcall suit there is a very good chance that you have good cards in the overcall suit, and some points, but are stuck for a bid. If so partner should double, giving you the choice of passing for penalties or making a takeout bid.

If partner has three or four cards in the overcall suit there is a good chance that you don't have a hand suitable for a penalty, so partner will assume you must be weak, otherwise you would have bid. Partner should pass or possibly bid No Trumps with stops in the overcall suit.

If South passes, the auction is over. In this position, *opener should double with shortness in the opponent's suit*, even with nothing extra for the opening bid. This is a very important principle when playing negative doubles. Opener's reopening double is for takeout, not for penalty.

West	East
♠ 5	♠ A Q 10 9 4
♥ A K 6 5 4	♥ J 7
♦ A 5 4 3	♦ Q 6 2
♣ K 6 5	♣ Q 9 7

S	W	N	E
	1♥	1♠	P
P	X	P	P

North has stolen East's bid. East can't double for penalties as they play the Negative Double, so East passes. West asks where are the points and the spades, and reasonably assumes that East has most of the missing ones and at least 7/8 HCP. West doubles for takeout / penalty as he has tolerance for the two unbid suits if partner decides not to leave the double in for penalty.

There is an advantage in making a penalty double in this manner. If you do not use the Negative Double then your double will be taken as a penalty double and will warn the opponents that they are in trouble, so they could take some action, perhaps running to a better contract. When the Negative Double is used, LHO does not know whether, after his pass, the doubler's partner is going to bid or pass for penalties. By the time LHO realises that they are in trouble, it is too late to run to a second suit. RHO still has a chance to act, but may have nowhere to go.

When opener is immediately overcalled and followed by two passes, opener has several options:

- Make a reopening double
- Rebid his suit
- Bid a new suit
- Bid No Trumps
- Pass

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	P	P
?			

A reopening double is made by opener after an immediate overcall and two passes. It is a form of takeout double.

If opener would have made a takeout double of the overcall suit if the overcaller had opened the bidding, i.e. shortage in the overcall suit and tolerance for the unbid suits, then opener's hand is suitable for a reopening double.

South

♠ 6
♥ K J 5
♦ A Q 6 3
♣ K J 8 5 2

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	P	P
?			

West may only have 8 HCP, and East could not muster up a response. North may have an 8 HCP balanced hand with no spade stop, or 9 HCP and 4441 with four hearts or four spades, or even 5 good spades, so is unable to bid. South should double for takeout.

If opener's hand is not suitable for a re-opening double, but opener would have been prepared to make a rebid after any response from partner, opener should bid again. It may be that his first suit is of rebiddable quality, or he has a second biddable suit, or 15+ points balanced with a stop in the overcall suit, in which case he can bid 1NT.

Otherwise opener should pass.

After the same auction: 1♣ - (1♠) - P - (P) - ? what should South bid next?

South

♠ A Q 7
♥ K Q 5
♦ Q 6
♣ K 9 8 5 2

This hand would not have been suitable for a takeout double of West's opening bid, so is not suitable for a reopening double.
It is not suitable for a rebid of the club suit, which is poor.
Bid 1NT. You have a good stop in spades, 16 points and a balanced hand. Do not worry unduly about diamonds.

South

♠ Q J
♥ A Q 7 4
♦ Q 6
♣ K 9 8 5 4

This hand would not have been suitable for a takeout double of West's opening bid, so is not suitable for a reopening double.
It is not suitable for a rebid of the club suit, which is poor.
It does not have the shape, strength or spade stop for 1NT.
PASS. This hand will play better in defence than as declarer.

Partner's response to opener's re-opening double

Partner must respond. After opener's double, partner should bid his longest suit on the lowest level with approximately 0-6 points, 1NT with 5-7 points and stopper in spades, (as he would bid 1NT immediately with 8-10 points), and jump in a suit with 7+ points. Finally, he can pass for penalties with 5 or more cards in spades.

Reopening doubles once showed extra values as well. With adoption of the Negative Double, however (a takeout double by responder), responder must pass with length and strength in the opposing suit. In order to protect against such situations, opener is obliged to double even with thin values, whenever his distribution is suitable. Some pairs even require opener to act somehow; responder's pass is forcing.

The Rule of 9 for responding to partner's Reopening Double

How partner responds to the reopening double can be guided by the Rule of 9. Partner should add his SQT in the overcall suit to the level of the auction. If the total comes to 9 or more responder should pass, converting the double to a penalty double:

- a reopening double at the 2 level should be passed for penalties if responder's SQT in the overcall suit = 7+
- a reopening double at the 3 level should be passed for penalties if responder's SQT in the overcall suit = 6+.

If the total comes to less than 9, partner should bid his longest suit (non-jump bid with 5-7 points, jump bid with 8+ points) or bid No Trumps with a good stop in the overcall suit.

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	P	P
X	P	?	

North

♠ K J 7 6 5
♥ J 4
♦ Q 6 5
♣ Q 7 6

Scores 8 (5+2+1) on the rule of 9. Do not pass. Bid 2♣.

North

♠ Q J T 3 2
♥ J 4
♦ Q 6 5
♣ Q 7 6

Scores 9 (5+3+1) on the rule of 9. Pass for penalties

South	West	North	East
1♥	2♦	P	P
X	P	?	

North

♠ Q T 7
♥ J 4
♦ K Q J 5
♣ Q 7 6 3

Scores 9 (4+3+2) on the rule of 9. Pass for penalties

North

♠ 9 8 7
♥ 9 6 5
♦ Q 7 6 4 3
♣ 7 6

Scores 8 (5+1+2) on the rule of 9. Bid 2♥

Sometimes when your side bids a Negative Double you will end up in a contract that will go off, but remember that you are in a competitive auction, where the Law of Total Tricks applies. You should bid to the level of your fit, and try hard not to let your opponents bid to the level of their fit unless you think you might be making a phantom sacrifice, where they are going to end up in an unmakeable contract. Just keep an eye on your ODR (Offence/Defence Ratio).

Partnership Understanding for the Negative Double

If you agree to play the Negative Double, you must remember that:

- A bid of 1♠ after your opponent overcalls with a bid of 1♥ shows five spades. With four spades you would bid the Negative Double.
- If you open the bidding and there is an immediate overcall followed by two passes, you **MUST** double. Your side probably has the majority of the points and partner probably has four or more good cards in the overcall suit but could not double. If partner does not have a hand suitable for a penalty double (see Rule of 9, above) he will take your double out.
- The Negative Double can be used as a route to rebidding a long suit, too weak to be bid directly. Doubler may not be particularly interested in partner's response.