


 BY LARRY COHEN
 larryco.com

Bidding Basics

The opponents open and we overcall

Overcalling at the one level

A one-level overcall shows at least a five-card suit, very rarely a great four-card suit. The high-card point range is approximately 8–17. With more, don't overcall – start with a double. Here are some examples after the opponents have opened 1♣:

♠A Q 7 6 2 ♥K 10 2 ♦6 5 4 ♣8 6

Overcall 1♠. This is a minimum. If vulnerable, it is borderline, but would be clearer if the spades were better, something like: ♠A Q 10 9 7.

♠K J 4 ♥Q 5 4 ♦J 6 4 3 2 ♣Q 2

Pass. This is a five-card suit and 9 HCP, but judgment is needed; the suit is lousy and the hand is lousy.

♠A 4 ♥K J 9 7 6 5 ♦A K 3 ♣J 2

Overcall 1♥. This is a maximum, but not strong enough to double and then bid hearts.

♠6 5 4 ♥A Q 7 6 2 ♦A K Q 2 ♣3

Overcall 1♥. Yes, there is shortness in the opponent's suit, but doubling will lead to a 1♠ contract opposite, say:

♠Q 7 3 2 ♥K J 3 ♦8 6 ♣J 7 6 5.

Overcalling 1NT shows a hand that would have opened 1NT but must have the opponent's suit stopped. Overcall their 1♠ with 1NT holding:

♠K J 9 ♥K 6 3 ♦K 7 4 ♣A Q J 9

or

♠Q 10 6 ♥Q 9 ♦K Q J 10 3 ♣A Q 9.

Overcalling at the two level or higher

A two-level overcall has a higher minimum than a one-level overcall. It is roughly opening bid strength and the suit should be decent. Don't overcall with a so-so five-card suit and a so-so

11-count. Examples after their 1♠:

♠5 4 ♥4 3 2 ♦A 2 ♣A K J 9 8 7

This is a fine 2♣ overcall in all respects.

♠Q 5 4 ♥K J 7 6 5 ♦Q 5 4 ♣K 2

This is a pass. Don't overcall 2♥ with this mediocre hand and suit.

At the three level or higher, you want to have even a little more; at least opening bid strength and a decent suit would be typical. After their 2♠, overcall 3♥ with:

♠A 2 ♥A Q 10 7 6 ♦8 6 ♣A Q 3 2,

but pass with:

♠J 4 2 ♥A J 7 6 5 ♦K 10 2 ♣K 2.

Jump overcalls

An overcall that skips a level is weak. A jump overcall to the two level is like a weak-two opening, and a jump overcall to the three level is like a preemptive three opening. Examples after they open 1♥:

♠K Q 9 8 6 3 ♥3 2 ♦K 3 2 ♣3 2

Jump to 2♠. If vulnerable, you might want to have a little more, such as:

♠K Q J 10 8 4 ♥3 2 ♦K 3 2 ♣3 2.

Jump to 3♣ with:

♠4 ♥3 2 ♦7 6 3 ♣K Q J 10 8 7 6

If vulnerable, you might want to have a little more:

♠4 ♥4 ♦J 10 7 6 ♣K Q J 10 8 7 6.

Versus preempts

Use the same guidelines as above. You can't "preempt a preempt." Accordingly, jump overcalls show intermediate hands and decent six-plus card suits. Over their 2♥, bid 3♠ with:

♠A Q J 10 9 8 7 ♥A 2 ♦K 3 2 ♣2.

2NT and 3NT overcalls of a preempt are natural. A 2NT overcall shows roughly 15–18 with their suit stopped. Over their 2♥, overcall 2NT with:

♠K 2 ♥K J 9 ♦A Q 10 7 4 ♣K J 9.

A 3NT overcall of their weak two-bid is "to play" – a very strong hand that wants to be in 3NT. Over their 2♠, overcall 3NT with either of these hands:

♠K 2 ♥K 2 ♦K 2 ♣A K Q 10 7 6 2

♠K Q 9 ♥K 2 ♦A Q 10 6 3 ♣A K Q.

If they preempt at the three level, 3NT is also to play. It could be made with either of the hands just shown, or much less, for example:

♠K J 9 ♥K 2 ♦A Q J 10 5 ♣A 10 7

After a four-level preempt, double shows a good hand (intended as take-out). A 4NT overcall of any preempt shows a good hand and a two-suiter with at least 5–5 (presumed to be the minors).

Two-suited overcalls

This series is meant to be basic, but curious readers can Google "Unusual Notrump" and "Michaels" bids to explore conventional two-suited overcalls. In a nutshell, these conventions employ a way to show at least 5–5 in two suits. A *jump* overcall of 2NT shows the two lowest unbid suits. A cuebid (bidding their suit) shows the majors (1♣–2♣ or 1♦–2♦). If 1♥–2♥ or 1♠–2♠, the cuebid shows the other major and either minor.

Bidding Basics quiz on page 52

BIDDING BASICS

continued from page 51

Bidding Basics Quiz

What is your call after their 1♥ opening with:

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

What is your call after their 2♦ (weak) opening with:

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

What is your call after their 3♥ opening with:

- 6) ♠K 8 7 6 2 ♥K 5 4 ♦Q 5 ♣A 3 2
- 7) ♠A Q ♥K 3 2 ♦A K Q J 7 ♣J 4 3

What is your call after 1♦-Pass-1♠ with:

- 8) ♠A 2 ♥K Q 10 8 7 6 ♦A 2 ♣J 7 6

Bidding Basics Quiz Answers

- 1) 1♠. A normal minimum.
- 2) Pass. Not enough hand or suit to overcall at the two level.
- 3) 2♠. Like a weak two-bid.
- 4) Pass. Not enough for a two-level overcall.
- 5) 3♠. Intermediate (you can't preempt a preempt).
- 6) Pass. Not enough for a three-level overcall.
- 7) 3NT. Hopefully partner has a little something.
- 8) 2♥. This wasn't exactly covered above, but overcalling in this situation follows the same rules. This is enough for a two-level overcall.